

FORTY YEARS OF CYBERPUNK

The eight novels that founded the genre, the six writers who wrote them and five video games still telling it today. With the development notebook for PRECINCT 2099, our detective visual novel, out on 17 November 2026.

8

FOUNDING NOVELS

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WRITERS OF THE
MOVEMENT

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GAMES OF THE GENRE

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PAGES, FREE

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WHO SIGNS THIS

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TRANSPARENCY

Pages 17 and 18 are about PRECINCT 2099, a game of ours, and they run under the studio's yellow identity and a notebook stamp so that they read apart from the rest of the issue. The other four games are covered with no commercial relationship of any kind: nobody paid to be here and nobody saw these pages before publication.

FIGURES AND QUOTATIONS

Every number here has been checked against a traceable source: press coverage, genre encyclopedias, studio press releases and the listings on Amazon, Steam and the official sites. Quotations are attributed, with the place they were published. Where a figure circulates without a firm source, the text says so.

IMAGES

No screenshots from the games covered and no novel covers. The PRECINCT 2099 art is our own.

A PHOTOCOPIED SHEET IN AUSTIN

Before cyberpunk was a shelf in a bookshop, a look for advertising and a way of lighting cities on screen, it was a one-page fanzine whose editor urged his readers to pirate it.

The year was 1984, the town was Austin, Texas, and Bruce Sterling was typing both sides of a single sheet he called *Cheap Truth* and signed as Vincent Omniaveritas, from the Latin *vincit omnia veritas*. He gave it away. Where the copyright line belonged there was an open invitation to the “xerox pirates” to photocopy the thing and sell it wherever they liked. Lewis Shiner wrote for it under the pen name Sue Denim. Those sheets went after the comfortable science fiction of the day with a glee that would be hard to keep up in public now, and along the way they assembled a group: half a dozen writers who read one another, quoted one another and closed ranks.

That same year, in Vancouver, a Canadian by choice and a southerner by birth — William Gibson, out of Conway, South Carolina — was finishing *Neuromancer* on a portable Hermes 2000 from 1927 that had belonged to his wife’s step-grandfather. He rewrote the first two thirds a dozen times, worked without an outline and without knowing how the book would end, and later described the whole process as “blind animal panic”. When he saw *Blade Runner* in 1982 he was afraid of being accused of lifting the film’s texture; years afterwards he put the resemblance down to a debt they both owed Moebius. And to keep himself away from a sequel he finished the novel on a line that shut the door: he never saw Molly again.

The novel won the Nebula, the Philip K. Dick and the Hugo, a run nobody has matched since, and from there the label swallowed the Movement.

Two years later Sterling gathered twelve stories in *Mirrorshades* and used the preface to list the names the group had tried and dropped: radical hard SF, the outlaw technologists, the eighties wave, the neuromantics, the mirrorshades crowd. One of them stuck.

FORTY YEARS ON

What is left of all that in 2026? There is an industry billing the genre like a utility: *Cyberpunk 2077* stands at 35 million copies and 440 million dollars of accumulated cost, and its single prize at The Game Awards arrived three years late. There is a literary canon finally reaching prestige television, with Apple TV+’s *Neuromancer* series due in January 2027 and Gibson as executive producer. And there is, above everything else, a handful of small studios writing the best cyberpunk fiction of the decade with teams of one to four people, some of them going under while they do it.

This issue sorts the genre into five blocks: where the word came from, which novels founded it, who wrote them, which video games tell it today and what the genre is doing right now. Our own work sits in the fifth block with the sign hung where everyone can read it: *PRECINCT 2099* is our game, and those two pages are signed as a studio notebook.

Sterling’s sheet went out free and without copyright. This PDF downloads free and without sign-up. Forty years on, it is still the cheapest way to send something a long distance.

WHO NAMED IT CYBERPUNK

The word belongs to a Minnesota writer who wanted a title with a hook on it for a short story about teenagers with computers and a police record.

Bruce Bethke wrote that story in the spring of 1980 and went looking for a title that would stick. He later described the method with a frankness worth preserving: he took a handful of roots — cyber, techno and company — mixed them with the vocabulary of socially derailed youth and kept trying combinations until one of them sounded right. The story was called “Cyberpunk” and *Amazing Stories* published it in 1983.

The name held, and the group that would wear it for four decades had neither chosen it nor asked for it. Gibson spent the following years explaining that the label fitted him badly. Rudy Rucker put forward one of his own, transrealism, in a manifesto published in the bulletin of the American science fiction writers in the winter of 1983.

The Transrealist writes about immediate perceptions in a fantastic way.

RUDY RUCKER • A TRANSREALIST MANIFESTO, 1983

THE MIRRORSHADES

Sterling fixed the emblem in the preface to *Mirrorshades*, in December 1986. Mirrored

sunglasses, he wrote, “preferably in chrome and matte black, the totemic colors of the Movement”, showed up story after story as a literary badge. On the same page he defined the genre with the formula that still gets quoted today: an alliance between the technical world and the world of organized dissent, and an unholy one at that.

... unholy alliance of the technical world and the world of organized dissent

BRUCE STERLING • PREFACE TO *MIRRORSHADES*, 1986

AND CYBERSPACE

The genre's other keyword turns up in 1982, in the story “Burning Chrome” that Gibson published in *Omni*, and goes worldwide two years later with *Neuromancer*. Asked about the coinage, Gibson gave an answer with no heroism in it whatsoever: the word had struck him as suggestive and hollow. Half the internet law written since has been built on that hollow word.

It seemed evocative and essentially meaningless.

WILLIAM GIBSON ON “CYBERSPACE” • *NO MAPS FOR THESE TERRITORIES*, 2000

FIFTEEN DATES IN THE GENRE

- 1968** Philip K. Dick publishes *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* at Doubleday. It ends up a Nebula finalist and wins nothing.
- 1980** John Shirley publishes *City Come A-Walkin'*, four years ahead of *Neuromancer*. Gibson would call it “the patient zero of cyberpunk”.
- 1982** *Blade Runner* opens in the United States on 25 June. In December Katsuhiro Otomo begins serialising *Akira* in the pages of *Young Magazine*.
- 1983** *Amazing Stories* publishes “Cyberpunk”, by Bruce Bethke, written three years earlier. Sterling starts *Cheap Truth* in Austin.
- 1984** Ace Books publishes *Neuromancer* on 1 July. It takes the Nebula and the Philip K. Dick that year and the Hugo the next.
- 1986** Sterling collects twelve stories in *Mirrorshades* and Walter Jon Williams publishes *Hardwired*, the novel that will feed the tabletop game.
- 1988** Mike Pondsmith publishes the *Cyberpunk* role-playing game at R. Talsorian Games. The *Akira* film opens on 16 July, with more than 160,000 animation cels behind it.
- 1988** Konami releases *Snatcher* for the PC-8801 on 26 November, designed and written by Hideo Kojima. Its western Sega CD version sold, according to its translator Jeremy Blaustein, “a couple of thousand copies”.
- 1989** Masamune Shirow begins *Ghost in the Shell* in Japan and FASA publishes *Shadowrun*, which crosses the genre with urban fantasy.
- 1991** Pat Cadigan publishes *Synners* at Bantam Spectra. It takes the Arthur C. Clarke Award the following year.
- 1992** Neal Stephenson publishes *Snow Crash*, coins “metaverse” and makes “avatar” standard usage for the rest of the century.
- 1995** Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* opens in Japan on 18 November, made on a budget of some 330 million yen.
- 1999** *The Matrix* takes the genre into the middle of commercial cinema on 31 March. The Wachowskis had screened *Ghost in the Shell* for producer Joel Silver to explain what they wanted to make.
- 2000** *Deus Ex* ships on 23 June from Ion Storm Austin: twenty people and twenty-eight months of production for the game that sets the grammar of playable cyberpunk.
- 2020** *Cyberpunk 2077* arrives on 10 December. By November 2025 it has 35 million copies behind it, and in 2027 the *Neuromancer* series will carry the canon of 1984 onto television, 43 years later.

WHY THESE EIGHT BOOKS

Eight books that can be read today without a footnote, and that explain where everything else comes from: the city, the implant, the corporation and the contract.

The criterion has been simple and arguable, like every criterion. Each title on this list brings the genre something it did not have before: a word, a structure, a setting or a kind of character. Two of them predate the Movement and come in as declared precursors. One is an anthology, because the cyberpunk canon was fixed in a table of contents before it was fixed in a novel. And the last one lands in 2002, when the genre had already been out of fashion twice and started working again.

WHAT IS MISSING AND WHY

There is no *Islands in the Net* and no *Schismatrix*, Sterling's own two novels, since he is already in the issue as anthologist and agitator. There is no *Software*, by Rudy Rucker, which does appear in his writer's file. And there are none of the great precursors of the sixties and seventies, from

Ballard to Delany, who would fill a whole other special.

HOW TO READ THE FILES

Each file carries the title, the year and publisher of the first edition, the prizes the book actually won — which in several cases means none at all — and how an English-language reader gets hold of it today, from a paperback still in print to a second-hand copy. Where a Spanish edition matters to the story of the book, the file mentions it in passing, and where forty years have gone by with no Spanish edition at all it says that too.

ONE FIGURE TO CALIBRATE WITH

Of the eight titles, three won no prize whatsoever and two were finalists only. The genre now taught in law schools was built, to a large extent, out of books that lost.

NEUROMANCER, DICK, MIRRORSHADES

NEUROMANCER

WILLIAM GIBSON · ACE BOOKS, 1 JULY 1984 · ACE SCIENCE FICTION SPECIAL

Case is a burned-out console cowboy, locked out of the matrix, his liver wrecked by a Russian mycotoxin. Molly Millions carries retractable blades under her fingernails and mirrored lenses inset into her sockets. An employer who never shows his face hires the pair for a heist that turns out to be a jailbreak for an artificial intelligence. Out of that material Gibson assembled the grammar of the genre — the opaque corporation, the job taken by contract, the city as a layer of data and the body as a replaceable part.

It won the Nebula and the Philip K. Dick in 1984 and the Hugo in 1985. No other novel has taken all three.

NEBULA 1984

PHILIP K. DICK 1984

HUGO 1985

317 PAGES

SPANISH ED. MINOTAURO 1989

DO ANDROIDS DREAM OF ELECTRIC SHEEP?

PHILIP K. DICK · DOUBLEDAY, 1968 · LIBRARY OF AMERICA, 2007

The precursor everybody claims. Rick Deckard is paid to retire androids and saves up to buy a real animal, and the whole book turns on an uncomfortable question: what proof does anyone have of being human, once empathy can be measured with a machine? Dick died in March 1982, four months before *Blade Runner* opened and two years before *Neuromancer*.

It won no prizes; it was a Nebula finalist. After the film, some editions were retitled *Blade Runner*, a term that never appears in the novel. The Library of America took it into *Four Novels of the 1960s* in 2007, which is the edition to read it in now; Spanish readers have the annotated Cátedra edition of 2015, translated by Julián Díez.

NEBULA FINALIST 1968

DOUBLEDAY 1968

LIBRARY OF AMERICA 2007

NAMES THE PKD AWARD

MIRRORSHADES. THE CYBERPUNK ANTHOLOGY

BRUCE STERLING, EDITOR · ARBOR HOUSE, DECEMBER 1986 · 312 PAGES

Twelve stories and a preface that works as a manifesto. Inside are Gibson, Tom Maddox, Pat Cadigan, Rudy Rucker, Marc Laidlaw, James Patrick Kelly, Greg Bear, Lewis Shiner, John Shirley, Paul Di Filippo and two collaborations, one by Sterling with Gibson and one by Sterling with Shiner. The contents page is the founding document of the Movement, and also the map of who was inside it and who stayed out.

Cadigan is the only woman in the running order, with “Rock On”. The book remains the quickest door into the genre for a reader starting from zero, and Siruela's Spanish edition of 1998, translated by Andoni Alonso and Iñaki Arzoz, has kept it in that role in Spain.

12 STORIES

NO AWARDS

ARBOR HOUSE 1986

312 PAGES

SNOW CRASH, HARDWIRED, SYNNERS

SNOW CRASH

NEAL STEPHENSON • BANTAM BOOKS, 1992

Hiro Protagonist delivers pizza for the mafia and freelances as a data spy, in a United States carved up into sovereign franchises. The book began as a graphic novel with the artist Tony Sheeder, and Stephenson dropped that plan for purely technical reasons: to make the Mac do what the two of them needed, he would have had to write a great deal of image-processing software himself.

This is where “metaverse” is coined. “Avatar” already existed in the 1986 virtual environment *Habitat*, and this novel made it the standard. The list of debtors is long and documented: Second Life, Google Earth, the Xbox Live team, who made it required reading, and Facebook, which invoked the book in 2021 when it renamed itself Meta.

CLARKE FINALIST 1994

BANTAM BOOKS 1992

COINS “METAVERSE”

SPANISH ED. GIGAMESH 2000

HARDWIRED

WALTER JON WILLIAMS • TOR BOOKS, 1986

Cowboy runs a panzer through the corridors of a North America beaten by the orbital corporations, his nervous system wired straight into the machine. Williams had playtested the role-playing system Mike Pondsmith was building, and out of that relationship came the most consequential bridge between the literature and the games: R. Talsorian published *Hardwired: The Sourcebook* for its 1988 *Cyberpunk*.

Pondsmith has said he had not read *Neuromancer* when he designed the game. The city of *Cyberpunk 2077*, forty years on, comes from here before it comes from Gibson. The Spanish edition, published by Martínez Roca in 1995, arrived with a Luis Royo cover.

LOCUS FINALIST 1987

R. TALSORIAN SOURCEBOOK

SPANISH ED. MARTÍNEZ ROCA 1995

SYNNERS

PAT CADIGAN • BANTAM SPECTRA, 1991 • NO SPANISH EDITION

Four characters and a new technology that plugs video straight into the brain, with a consequence the book chases to the last page: once a head is on the network, the network can fall ill as well. Cadigan writes the city from inside the bodies in it, which is why her cyberpunk has aged better than that of almost everyone else on the *Mirrorshades* contents page.

It won the Arthur C. Clarke Award in 1992. Cadigan won it again in 1995 with *Fools*, and remains the only person to have done it twice. In English the novel survives in second-hand paperbacks and in a digital edition; thirty-five years on, it still cannot be read in Spanish at all.

CLARKE AWARD 1992

BANTAM SPECTRA 1991

NO SPANISH EDITION

TWO-TIME CLARKE WINNER

THE BUDAYEEN AND THE SPARE BODY

Two books that widen the map: one takes the genre off the United States-Japan axis, and the other turns the body into a consumable.

WHEN GRAVITY FAILS

GEORGE ALEC EFFINGER · ARBOR HOUSE, JANUARY 1987

Marîd Audran scrapes a living in the Budayeen, the nightlife and crime quarter of a Middle Eastern city late in the twenty-second century, in a world where power has moved to the Arab-Muslim sphere while the United States, Europe and the Soviet Union have come apart into micro-states. The implants here are personality modules: you plug one in and you are somebody else for a few hours.

The title comes from a Bob Dylan song, “Just Like Tom Thumb’s Blues”. It was a Nebula finalist in 1987 and a Hugo finalist in 1988, and it won neither. Effinger died without finishing the fourth book in the series; the chapters he left behind were published in the posthumous collection *Budayeen Nights*.

NEBULA FINALIST 1987

HUGO FINALIST 1988

ARBOR HOUSE 1987

BUDAYEEN NIGHTS, POSTHUMOUS

ALTERED CARBON

RICHARD K. MORGAN · GOLLANCZ, 28 FEBRUARY 2002

Takeshi Kovacs is a former Envoy downloaded into somebody else’s body to investigate the suicide of a millionaire who does not believe he killed himself. The idea holding the book up has a perfect economic bleakness to it: once consciousness can be stored on a stack and moved from body to body, death becomes a budgeting problem.

It won the Philip K. Dick Award in 2003. Netflix premiered its adaptation on 2 February 2018 and added an anime, *Altered Carbon: Resleeved*, in March 2020. One production detail says a lot about the business: the artificial intelligence hotel went from a Jimi Hendrix theme to an Edgar Allan Poe one because of restrictions from the musician’s estate.

Morgan carried Kovacs through two more novels, *Broken Angels* in 2003 and *Woken Furies* in 2005. In Spain the first book circulates under two titles and two translations, *Carbono alterado* at Minotauro in 2005 and *Carbono modificado* at Gigamesh in 2016.

PHILIP K. DICK 2003

GOLLANCZ 2002

NETFLIX SERIES 2018

KOVACS TRILOGY

GIBSON, STERLING, DICK

WILLIAM GIBSON

CONWAY, SOUTH CAROLINA, 17 MARCH 1948

He left for Canada in 1967 to stay clear of the Vietnam draft, and ended up writing from Vancouver the novel that set the genre. He coined “cyberspace” in “Burning Chrome”, published in *Omni* in 1982, and spent four decades working the cyberpunk label off himself. The *Sprawl* trilogy: *Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986) and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988). He entered the Science Fiction Hall of Fame in 2008.

The future is already here — it's just not very evenly distributed.

ATTRIBUTED TO WILLIAM GIBSON • EARLIEST LOCATED FORMULATION, THE SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER, 19 APRIL 1992

SPRAWL 1984-1988

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER OF THE 2027 SERIES

BRUCE STERLING

BROWNSVILLE, TEXAS, 14 APRIL 1954

The ideologue. From Austin he edited *Cheap Truth* between 1983 and 1986, a free sheet with no copyright that invited readers to photocopy it, and in 1986 he anthologised *Mirrorshades*. His own generation called him “Chairman Bruce”. He won the 1989 John W. Campbell Memorial Award with *Islands in the Net*, ahead of Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Gold Coast*, and two novella Hugos in 1997 and 1999.

His definition of the genre in that preface is still the most quoted one forty years on, and it names the politics the chrome was wrapped around.

CHEAP TRUTH 1983-1986

CAMPBELL 1989

HUGO 1997 AND 1999

PHILIP K. DICK

CHICAGO, 16 DECEMBER 1928 — SANTA ANA, 2 MARCH 1982

He stood outside the Movement, which without him would have had nothing to stand on. He died four months before *Blade Runner* opened, leaving thirty years of work devoted to what would obsess his heirs: reality open to manipulation, identity without proof, empathy as the dividing line. He won the Hugo in 1963 with *The Man in the High Castle* and the Campbell in 1975. The award that carries his name went to *Neuromancer* in 1984 and *Altered Carbon* in 2003.

Reality is that which, when you stop believing in it, doesn't go away.

PHILIP K. DICK • HOW TO BUILD A UNIVERSE THAT DOESN'T FALL APART TWO DAYS LATER, 1978

HUGO 1963

CAMPBELL 1975

NAMES THE PKD AWARD

CADIGAN, RUCKER, SHIRLEY

PAT CADIGAN

SCHENECTADY, NEW YORK, 10 SEPTEMBER 1953

She studied science fiction writing at the University of Kansas with James Gunn, co-edited the fanzine *Shayol* in the late seventies and went full-time as a writer in 1987. She is the only woman on the *Mirrorshades* contents page and the only person with two Arthur C. Clarke Awards, for *Synners* in 1992 and *Fools* in 1995. She has lived in London since 1996. In 2013 she won the novelette Hugo with “The Girl-Thing Who Went Out for Sushi”.

I simply gravitated to things that became identified as cyberpunk.

PAT CADIGAN • INTERVIEW IN CYBERPUNKS.COM, 8 AUGUST 2019

CLARKE 1992 AND 1995

HUGO 2013

ONLY WOMAN IN MIRRORSHADES

RUDY RUCKER

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, 22 MARCH 1946

A mathematician by training and a professor of computer science at San José State University between 1986 and 2004, he wrote the loosest and funniest cyberpunk of the lot. *Software* (1982) and *Wetware* (1988) both won the Philip K. Dick Award. In 1983 he published a manifesto of his own to explain that his work was something else, transrealism: writing about immediate perception in a fantastic key.

His story in *Mirrorshades*, “Tales of Houdini”, is the piece in the book that sits furthest from what people picture when they hear the word cyberpunk.

PHILIP K. DICK ×2

TRANSREALISM 1983

PROFESSOR OF COMPUTER SCIENCE

JOHN SHIRLEY

HOUSTON, TEXAS, 10 FEBRUARY 1953

The earliest of them and the least quoted. *City Come A-Walkin'* is from 1980, four years ahead of *Neuromancer*, and his story “Sleepwalkers” lies behind Gibson's “meat puppets” — Gibson, whom he also talked into selling his first stories and into taking the writing seriously. He sang in Sado-Nation and in the post-punk band Obsession, with a record on Celluloid Records, and won the 1999 Bram Stoker with *Black Butterflies*.

Cyberpunk is also a tone. It's very urban, dystopian.

JOHN SHIRLEY • INTERVIEW IN VICE MOTHERBOARD, 2 SEPTEMBER 2014

CITY COME A-WALKIN' 1980

A SONG CALLED YOUTH

BRAM STOKER 1999

HOW THESE FIVE WERE PICKED

Five games to tell the genre on screen: one enormous, one foundational, two made by minimal teams and ours, with the sign up.

Cyberpunk has been producing video games for close to forty years, from the *Snatcher* that Hideo Kojima designed in 1988 for the PC-8801 to this year's indie catalogue. For this issue we picked five titles on a declared criterion: that the weight of the work sits in what gets told and in how it gets told. That is why a visual novel set in a bar and a game of dice and debt are inside, and why two excellent Polish games, *Observer* and *Ghostrunner*, stayed out — they play their hands in horror and in the precision of movement.

WHAT EACH FILE CARRIES

Studio, city, year, platforms and the figures that can be checked: sales announced by the publisher, awards with a name and a date, team size where the number is public. Then the part that interests us most, which is the narrative decisions: why a

first-person camera, why dice, why a bar instead of a street.

OUR GAME IS MARKED

The fifth is *PRECINCT* 2099, which we are making ourselves. Its two pages run with the studio's yellow identity, a notebook stamp and an explicit disclosure, exactly as we do in the magazine *VN INSIDER*. The figures for the other four games come from their publishers and from the press; ours are ours, and they can be checked on Steam and on Amazon.

AN UNCOMFORTABLE CLOSE

Of the four outside studios that appear here, one has just gone bankrupt and another has had its next game on hold since 2024. The best playable cyberpunk of the decade is being written by teams that cannot keep themselves afloat. Worth holding on to before you read on.

CYBERPUNK 2077

CD Projekt Red • Warsaw, Poland

01

Release

10 December 2020

Documented cost

436-440 million dollars

Platforms

PC, PS4, PS5, Xbox, macOS, Switch 2

Sales

35 million copies (Nov. 2025)

The game that carried the genre into the middle of the industry did it twice: first in December 2020, with a launch now taught in business schools as an example of what to avoid, and again across five years of patches, one expansion and an anime. The figure that sums it up best sits in the cost breakdown: 174 million dollars for the base game, some 85 for the *Phantom Liberty* expansion and 125 million in post-launch updates. One euro in every three was spent after the product had already been sold.

The world belongs to Mike Pondsmith, who licensed his 1988 *Cyberpunk* “from 2077 onward” and worked as a consultant. The first-person camera was chosen on purpose, so that the player could never step outside and watch themselves while the corporations rolled over them. The credits list 5,381 people, 1,966 of them voice actors, and around 500 developers worked on it inside the studio.

Recognition arrived late and through the service entrance: its first prize at The Game Awards was best ongoing game, in 2023, three years after release. In May 2025 CD Projekt confirmed that the sequel, working title *Orion*, is in pre-production in Boston.

WHAT THIS ONE TEACHES

A world licensed from a 1988 tabletop game holds up a 440-million-dollar production. What the genre had been waiting for all along was a budget of that size, and here it finally got one.

DEUS EX

Ion Storm Austin, Texas • Eidos-Montréal for Human Revolution

02

Release

23 June 2000

Sales

over a million copies by 2009

Team

20 people • 28 months of production

Franchise

12 million copies as of May 2022

Twenty people and twenty-eight months. With that, Warren Spector, Harvey Smith, Sheldon Pacotti and Alexander Brandon built the game that fixed what we now take for granted: that a corridor has three entrances, that a building can be solved without firing a shot and that conversations change the ending. Spector wrote the design rules down, and they read like a manifesto: problems to solve instead of puzzles to guess; no mandatory failure; players act and characters watch; areas with several ways in and several ways out.

It sold 138,840 copies in the United States by the end of 2000 and took nine years to pass the million. The three endings were held back to the finale on purpose, as an explicit choice, so that nobody would be trapped by a decision taken while they still did not understand the game.

The series got its second life in 2011 out of Montreal, with *Human Revolution*: 2.18 million copies in three months, Mary DeMarle reading up on transhumanism to write it and an art direction in black and gold with a lovely explanation attached, the black for the dystopia and the gold for the hope. The boss fights were outsourced for lack of time, and they were the most criticised part of the game.

WHAT THIS ONE TEACHES

Spector's rules were written in 1997 for a team of twenty people, and they remain the best checklist available to anyone writing a game with decisions in it.

VA-11 HALL-A

Sukeban Games • founded in Venezuela in 2012 • published by Ysbryd Games

03

Release

21 June 2016

Platforms

PC, macOS, Linux, Vita, PS4, Switch

Sales

over 600,000 units (Dec. 2020)

Team

five names in the credits

Jill pours drinks in a bar in Glitch City and listens. That is the whole game: you choose the drinks, and the drinks change what people tell you. Sukeban Games built its dystopia on first-hand experience, that of living in Venezuela, and out of it comes the decision that separates the game from almost everything else in the genre: its characters carry on with their lives and are as happy as anyone can be with what they have. The collapse stays in the set dressing, while the people inside it keep their jokes, their crushes and their Friday nights.

The visual references are declared and precise to a collector's standard: Japanese PC-98 games, *X-Girl: Cyber Punk Adventure* by Redzone above all, plus *Snatcher* and *Policenauts*, *Blade Runner*, *Neuromancer*, *Ghost in the Shell* and *Bubblegum Crisis*. The credits carry five names: Christopher Ortiz, Fernando Damas, Merengedoll, Juneji and Michael Kelly.

The follow-up, *NIRV Ann-A*, was announced in September 2018 for 2020 and remains stalled; Ortiz confirmed in September 2024 that it is “largely on hold”. The studio has put its strength into *.45 PARABELLUM BLOODHOUND*, declared content complete on 9 February 2026.

WHAT THIS ONE TEACHES

Five people, one bar and 600,000 copies. For a small visual novel studio, this is the comparable case worth keeping on the table.

CITIZEN SLEEPER

04

Jump Over the Age • Gareth Damian Martin, London • Fellow Traveller

Release

5 May 2022

Team

one person

Sequel

Starward Vector, 31 January 2025

Awards

Golden Joystick 2025 for best narrative

An artificial body on the run, legal property of a corporation that wants it back, survives on day rates aboard a battered space station. Each cycle you roll dice and spread them across jobs, contacts and faults in your own body, and the debt squeezes the way debt squeezes in life. Gareth Damian Martin wrote it and programmed it alone, starting from his own experience of the gig economy, and citing indie tabletop role-playing — *Blades in the Dark*, *Mothership*, *Heart: The City Beneath* — as his references ahead of any video game.

The sequel, *Starward Vector*, arrived on 31 January 2025 and took game of the year at the 2025 Indie Game Awards, best narrative at the Golden Joysticks the same year and Amnesty International's Code The Rights. Its author added more tabletop mechanics as an explicit answer to the people who had waved the first one off as “just a visual novel”.

It is the proof that cyberpunk holds up with no city, no rain and no neon, as long as the contract is still there.

WHAT THIS ONE TEACHES

One person, tabletop dice and two award-winning games. Narrative structure can be the mechanic, and it costs less than a city.

PRECINCT 2099

One night, one case, three endings. Kade Katano investigates a death in a penthouse sealed from the inside, in a city where the implant in his eye belongs to the company that pays him.

PRECINCT 2099 is a detective visual novel out on 17 November 2026 on Steam, at 7.99 euros and in four languages. The premise is the classic locked room carried forward to 2099: one victim, a penthouse sealed from inside, a narrow window of time and seven suspects who lie with data. Kade's ocular implant is there to scan the scene, and also to remind him at regular intervals whose property it is.

RELEASE	17 November 2026 · Steam, app 5045000
PRICE	€7.99, four languages
LENGTH	about two hours per run
STRUCTURE	1 case · 7 suspects · 3 endings
MECHANICS	scan the scene, read the people, roll the dice (2d6)

WHY DICE IN A VISUAL NOVEL

Because an interrogation runs on pressure, timing and how much the person across the table can stand. When Kade leans on a suspect, the roll decides whether he breaks, shuts down or hits back, and the player has to decide which piece of information to keep. It is the same family of decisions that made *Citizen Sleeper* work two pages ago, applied to a closed criminal case.

WHERE DEVELOPMENT STANDS

The character and background art has been remade from scratch this summer, the trailer is cut, the website is live in four languages with a codex of some thirty entries and the Steam page has been open since July. What is left between here and November is closing the localisation of the three endings, putting a full run through hands outside the studio and preparing the manual.

SCAN THE SCENE

The ocular implant marks what fails to fit: a door logging two openings, one clean glass too many, a time that will not square with the coroner.

READ THE PEOPLE

Seven suspects, seven versions. Kade sets what they say against what the file already knows about them and decides who to lean on.

ROLL THE DICE

Two six-sided dice decide whether the interrogation breaks for or against you, and which piece of information the player keeps for the final report.

7 SUSPECTS **2D6** EVERY PUSH **3** ENDINGS **~2 H** PER RUN

Disclosure · PRECINCT 2099 is a game by Thinking Lite Soft, the publisher of this special. These two pages are a studio notebook and sit outside the editorial criterion applied to the other four games.

THE CITY, THE TOWERS AND THE PEOPLE

The case takes one night, and behind it there is a city documented entry by entry: eight districts, six factions and a timeline that starts long before Kade reaches the penthouse.

WHO APPEARS IN THE CASE

Kade Katano carries an ocular implant that is not his and a service record his unit would rather not examine closely. Alma speaks to him from inside the system. Captain Genda signs whatever needs signing. Elias Veyr pays people like Kade to look the other way, and his bodyguard makes sure they do. Rooney Battallam knows too much about the building. Above all of them sits The Custody, an intelligence with no registered face, and below them the Digital Resistance, of which the archives hold only images wiped at source.

WHERE IT HAPPENS

The city reads in layers: the High City and the financial district, where the corporate towers decide; the Tech District and Kanda, where things are manufactured and forged; the Docks, with no camera coverage; the Synthetic Ghetto and Sanya, where the people holding all the rest of it up live. Each district has its own entry in the codex on the website, with a map and the factions that control it.

THE NOVELS OF THE UNIVERSE

The Dragon Hunter, by Mark S. James, is five episodes of some forty minutes each that begin in Neo-Shanghai in 2092, seven years before Kade's case, and explain where his surname comes from. They are on Amazon in English and in Spanish. Kade's own novel has its cover locked and will be out before the game.

HOW TO FOLLOW IT

Development is told in the open from the studio's accounts, with new art, screenshots and design decisions explained along the way. The Steam wishlist is, by a wide margin, the thing that helps a small studio most on launch day.

PRECINCT 2099 · 17 NOVEMBER 2026

Steam, app 5045000 · €7.99 · Four languages · thinkinglitesoft.com · World codex at thinkinglitesoft.com/precinct-2099-codex

Disclosure · Studio notebook. Content about a game of our own.

FIVE FRONTS IN 2026

Where cyberpunk stands this year, with dates and with names, from prestige television to the law schools.

1 • THE CANON REACHES TELEVISION

Apple TV showed the first *Neuromancer* teaser at San Diego Comic-Con on 25 July 2026. Ten episodes, premiere on 22 January 2027, Graham Roland as showrunner, JD Dillard directing the first three and Gibson as executive producer. Anime opened the road: *Cyberpunk: Edgerunners*, from Studio Trigger, did 14.88 million hours viewed in its first week in September 2022 and took anime of the year at the Crunchyroll awards in March 2023.

2 • AAA IS MEASURED IN DECADES

Cyberpunk 2077 went from 25 million copies in October 2023 to 35 million in November 2025, and of those 440 million dollars of cost, 125 were spent after launch. The sequel team, in Boston, expects to grow to 160 people in 2027. The life cycle of a large cyberpunk game is now counted in five-year stretches.

3 • THE INNOVATION IS IN NARRATIVE INDIE

Citizen Sleeper 2, made by a single developer, won game of the year at the 2025 Indie Game Awards. *1000xRESIST*, four people in Vancouver, took a Peabody in 2025 for digital and interactive narrative. And on 29 September 2026 comes *Nivalis*

Nights, the everyday-life simulator from ION LANDS set in the *Cloudpunk* universe.

4 • AND IT IS FINANCIALLY FRAGILE

In June 2026 MidBoss, the studio behind *2064: Read Only Memories*, filed for bankruptcy with 823,272 dollars of liabilities against 2,560 of assets. Sukeban Games has had *NIRV Ann-A* stalled since 2024. The studios writing best are the ones holding on worst.

5 • THE GENRE BECOMES A FRAME OF ANALYSIS

On 7 January 2026, UCLA's institute for technology, law and policy ran a day-long event titled *Cyberpunk Legacies* on the genre's mark on art, industry and politics. Meanwhile solarpunk is growing as a reaction with real money behind it: the MMO *Loftia* closed a Kickstarter of more than a million dollars with 13,300 backers in August 2023, and finished its closed beta in May 2026.

A NOTE ON USAGE

Gibson's line about the unevenly distributed future has become the tic of this entire debate. The earliest formulation anyone can locate is in *The San Francisco Examiner*, on 19 April 1992, and the date remains disputed. Quote it with that caution attached.

CLOSE

THREE WAYS TO KEEP READING

This special downloads free as a PDF from thinkinglitesoft.com, with no sign-up and no data left behind. If it has been of use, the most useful way to return the favour is to read something from these pages and talk about it: one of the eight novels, one of the four games, or ours, which ships in November.

And if you have arrived at this page looking for somewhere to start, start with the novels from our own universe, on Amazon, where all five episodes are free on Kindle today.

THE DRAGON HUNTER · FIVE EPISODES

The prequel series to *PRECINCT 2099*, written by Mark S. James. *Neo-Shanghai, 2092*: a tower that appears on no plan, an investigator arrested for following an order nobody will admit to giving and an infiltrator carrying a credential that should not recognise him. Five episodes of some forty minutes each, in English and in Spanish, and all five are free on Kindle today.

amazon.com · ASIN B0HDLJJDSB (EN) · B0H DJ3PGD4 (ES)

PRECINCT 2099 · WISHLIST

The game ships on 17 November 2026 on Steam, at 7.99 euros and in four languages. Adding it to your wishlist before launch is what moves the needle most for a studio this size.

Steam · app 5045000 · thinkinglitesoft.com

VN INSIDER · THE VISUAL NOVEL MAGAZINE

Issue 01, with eleven games from Europe, North America, Japan and Korea, is available in EPUB and PDF, in English and in Spanish, free and with no sign-up.

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