

Urban Exploration

- A Hacker's View

phreakmonkey (K.C.)
mutantMandias (Mandias)

phreakmonkey.com

Background:

What is Urban Exploration?

Urban Exploration is the practice of discovering, exploring, and often photographing the more “off-beat” areas of human civilization.

“This hobby consists of a lot more than just poking about in abandoned buildings and storm drains and hanging out on web boards trying to impress people. Being an urban explorer is a whole way of looking at the world, where every ladder, door, window, grate and hole in the ground is a possible portal to adventure.”

- Jeff Chapman (“Ninjalicious”), 2004

What do we explore?

- Civil Buildings:
 - Hospitals, Schools, Institutions
- Industrial Buildings:
 - Factories, Transportation
- Utilities & Infrastructure:
 - Steam Tunnels, Storm Drains, Utility Corridors
- Residential
 - Hotels, High-rises, Houses (“Shanties”)

The UrbEx Subculture

- Jeff Chapman (“Ninjalicious”) coined “Urban Exploration” & operated the zine “Infiltration” from 1996 – 2005.
- Several web communities have sprung up over the last ten years.
 - UER.CA (mostly USA)
 - DegGi5.com (NE USA)
 - 28dayslater.co.uk (UK)
 - Others...
- Explorers vs. Tourists vs. Scenesters

Birds of a Feather

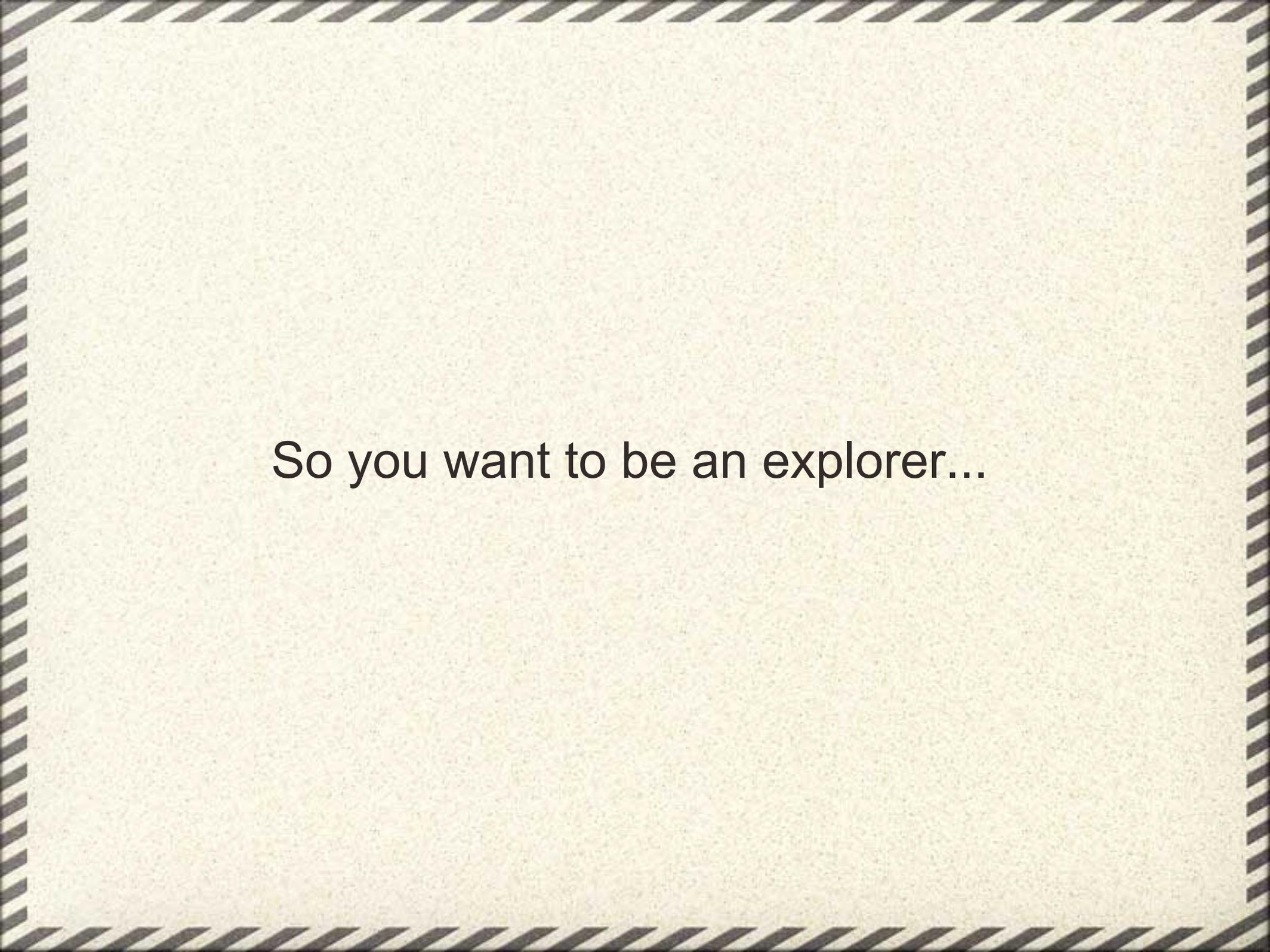
What Urban Explorers and Computer Hackers have in common

- **Perspective**
 - "Behind-the-scenes" view of the world
 - Ability to look at things abstractly
 - Willing to use non-standard entry points
- **Secrecy**
 - Built around a subculture with counterculture tendencies
 - Distrusting of newbies
 - Hesitant to allow outsiders in
 - Script Kiddies and Tourists
- **Gray Area Activities**
 - Do you use your powers for good or for awesome?
 - Sense of "moral superiority" while engaging in legally questionable behavior

Birds of a Feather

What Urban Explorers and Computer Hackers have in common

- Frighteningly similar lack of fashion sense.
 - Black t-shirts are the shiznit, yo!
- Social Engineering
 - Incredibly effective in UrbEx and Hacking
 - Higher stakes (walking away vs. county lock-up)
- Exploitation by others
 - Taggers vs. Website Defacers
 - Scrappers vs. Phishers
 - Drug labs, gangs, and k1dd1e-pr0n collectors.



So you want to be an explorer...

Safety

This is a hobby. We do it for fun. Dying is not fun.

- Off-limits areas do not have to meet safety codes.
- Abandoned buildings may not be structurally sound.
- Hazardous materials may be present.
- Hazardous *people* may be present.
- In the basement of an abandoned building, no one can hear you scream.
- Urban Exploring can be dangerous, even if you do everything right.

Safety: Rules to Live By

The "do list:"

- Tell someone exactly where you are going, and check in later.
- Carry a cellphone.
- Carry as many flashlights as you need + 1.
- Be very wary of water-damaged floors.
- Move slowly; look, then move.
- Wear well fitting, covering clothing that you won't mind tearing.
- Wear waterproof, sturdy shoes or boots
- Consider whether gloves, a mask, or other safety equipment are appropriate.

Safety: Rules to Live By

The "don't list:"

- Never explore alone.
- Do not step/crawl/move where you can't see.
- Do not put any body part you want to keep through a hole of jagged metal or broken glass.
- Do not climb anything unsteady.
- Do not move while looking through a camera.
- Do not let doors close behind you without checking their openability from both sides.
- Do not touch, taste, or smell unusual substances to figure out what they are.

Safety: Health Hazards

- **Asbestos**

- There is no known "safe level" of asbestos exposure
- Mesothelioma develops > 10 years later
- Deadly

- **Asphyxiation**

- Enclosed spaces
- Subterranean spaces
- Often, no indications of "bad air" until you pass out

- **Disease Exposure**

- Pigeon / Rat / Animal waste
- Human Waste
- Tetanus, Hepatitis A & B are all preventable with vaccines.

- **Chemical Exposure**

- PCBs, acids, toxic waste all may be present in industrial locations
- Research the facility before you enter the premises

Wear protective clothing or masks when appropriate.

Legality*

- Trespass laws vary state by state. Look yours up.
- There is nothing wrong with getting permission!
- Don't break the law! Avoid:
 - Theft
 - Vandalism
 - Breaking and Entering
 - Possession of Burglary Tools
 - The appearance of any of the above

Disregarding these rules not only puts you at risk, but makes life harder for the "legitimate" explorers.

* Disclaimer: I am not a lawyer, and nothing in this presentation is intended to be legal advice. If in doubt, consult an attorney.



No Lock Picks!

Stealth

- Appearance
 - Dress to look *convincing* , not *cool*.
 - Walk & act "casual, but confident."
- Credibility Props - coined by Ninjalicious.
- Alone vs. small groups vs. big groups
- Be aware of your visibility and act accordingly.
- Parking
- What to do when confronted.
 - Introduce yourself first.
 - Be friendly and *non-confrontational*.
 - Offer to leave peacefully.

Do No Harm

- Subscribe to the Sierra Club motto:
 - "Take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints."
- Vandalism or B&E increases your likelihood of criminal charges
- Creating new or obvious points-of-entry (PoE) invites graffiti, theft, squatters, &etc.
- Be respectful of property owners & future explorers by not changing anything.

Life-cycle of an Abandonment

Secured

- Boarded up windows
- Chained doors
- Locked Fences

Infiltrated

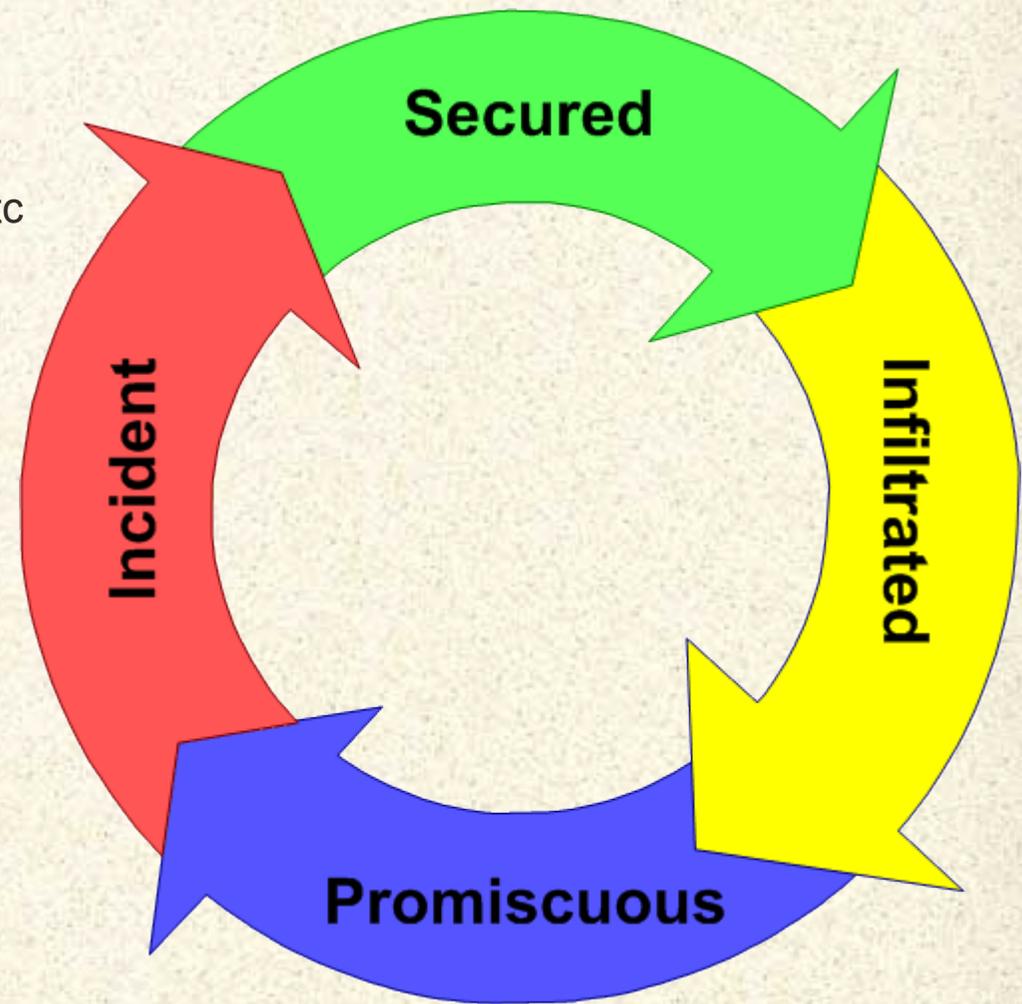
- Break-in by scappers, taggers, homeless, &etc
- At least one Point of Entry (PoE)
- PoE possibly concealed from view

Promiscuous

- Accessibility well established
- Multiple PoEs
- Regular occupancy by taggers, homeless, teenagers, explorers
- Rapid deterioration of site (graffiti, trash, theft, &etc)

Incident

- Injury, death, murder, or arrest made on site
- Police involvement
- Property owner contacted, cycle repeats.



Discovering Locations

- Open your eyes!
- Check likely areas of town for the types of facilities you are interested in.
 - Railroad tracks
 - Industrial Areas
 - Downtown Areas
- Commercial Property Listings
- Using the Internet
 - Google Earth / Satellite / Street View
 - Web searches. (ugh. I mean, really, do this last.)
- **Do not** ask explorers online "Where is that location?"
 - akin to emailing someone from #hack and saying "Can I have a 0day for xyz?"

For More Information

Access All Areas - Ninjalicious

Confessions of a Master Jewel Thief - Bill Mason

Infiltration Zine - infiltration.org

Urban Explorers: Into the Darkness

(a film by Melody Gilbert / Channel Z Films)

Cities of the Underworld (TV)

(UrbEx-esque documentary on the History Channel)

Music Videos? :-P

Q&A / Audience Stories