

■ Backgrounds

Who were you before you became a mercenary? Choosing a background provides setting-specific context for your character, along with additional proficiencies, extra equipment, and starting wealth.

□ Celebrity

You're famous (or infamous) with a large following of fans or supporters. The nature of your fame is up to you. Maybe you're a beloved actor or musician, a popular news media personality, an all-star athlete, an eccentric innovator, or a self-help guru.

Skill Proficiencies: Performance, Persuasion

Tool Proficiencies: Vehicles (Land)

Languages: Continental

Equipment: A luxury vehicle; a high-fashion fashion wardrobe; a luxury condo; a membership to an elite club; and \$25,000.

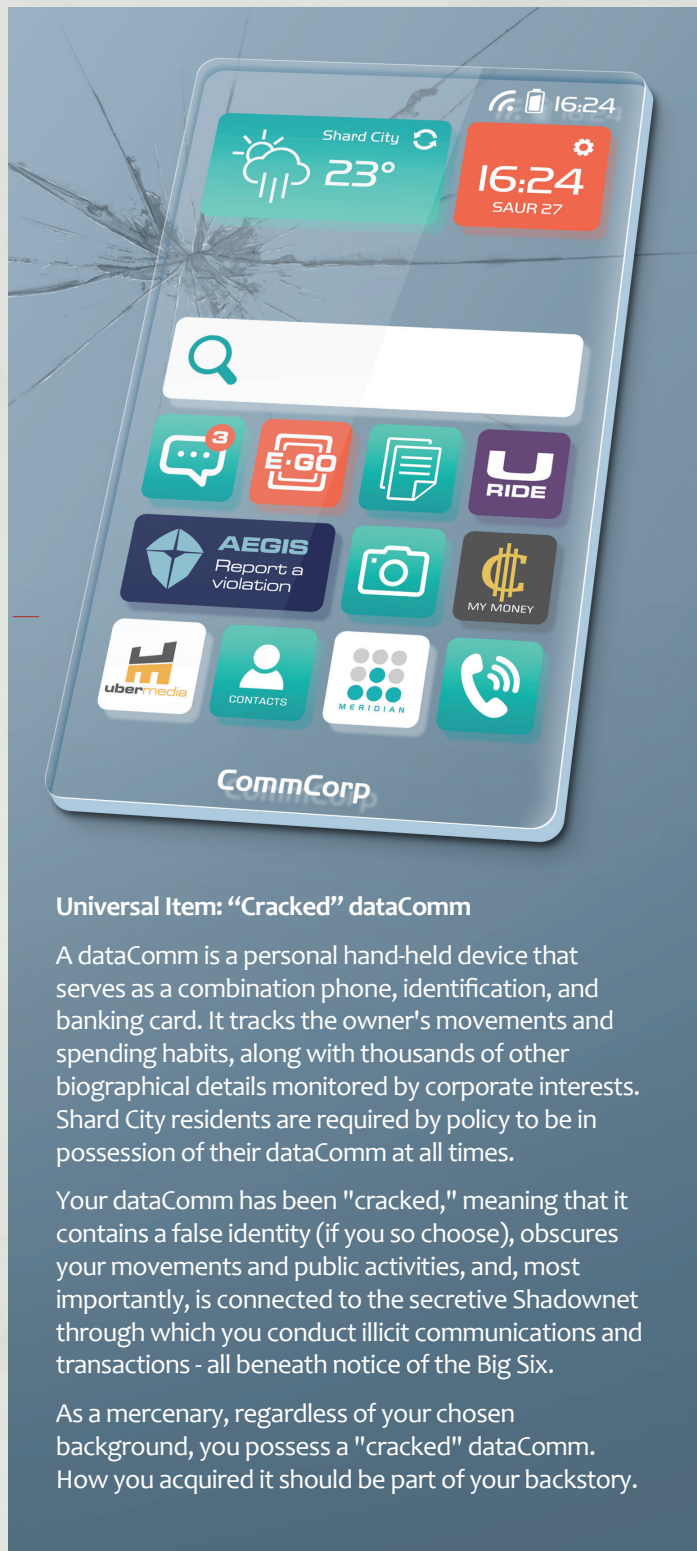
Feature: Don't you know who I am?

Your fame and influence grant you the benefit of the doubt in most situations, and can even occasionally shield you from the most serious consequences of your actions. Whenever you find yourself in a situation where you face punishment or censure, the GM may rule that you avoid the worst outcome on account of your fame. Don't get used to it, though.

□ Corporate Elite

You're an accomplished high-ranking executive or an otherwise high-caste member of a large corporate organization. You possess wealth and status beyond most others, and enjoy the respect and admiration – as well as the envious resentment – that brings.

Your peers and your superiors are oblivious to your



Universal Item: "Cracked" dataComm

A dataComm is a personal hand-held device that serves as a combination phone, identification, and banking card. It tracks the owner's movements and spending habits, along with thousands of other biographical details monitored by corporate interests. Shard City residents are required by policy to be in possession of their dataComm at all times.

Your dataComm has been "cracked," meaning that it contains a false identity (if you so choose), obscures your movements and public activities, and, most importantly, is connected to the secretive Shadownet through which you conduct illicit communications and transactions - all beneath notice of the Big Six.

As a mercenary, regardless of your chosen background, you possess a "cracked" dataComm. How you acquired it should be part of your backstory.

mercenary double life, which is why you still enjoy the corporate elite lifestyle.

The nature of the organization you belong to and your elite role within it are details you can come up with in discussion with your GM.

Skill Proficiencies: History, Persuasion

Tool Proficiencies: Vehicles (Land)

Languages: Continental

Equipment: A luxury vehicle; an expensive wardrobe; a luxury condo; an executive assistant who will make routine arrangements for you; and \$25,000.

Feature: Friends in High Places

You've earned a few favours from the higher-ups in your organization. If you find yourself in trouble, such as with the authorities, you can try to call in one of those favours to get you out of it. At the very least, you might lessen the punishments awaiting you.

Depending on the severity and circumstances of your predicament, it may be that not even your powerful friends can help (a ruling your GM will make), so it would be best not to take this safety net for granted.

□ Exile

You've spent a significant amount of time living in the Edgelands - the crumbling settlements, sprawling wilderness, and marauder ruled wastelands beyond the walls of Shard City.

You were most likely exiled there, a fate shared by countless others who ran afoul of the Big Six's authority. You learned to survive, becoming hardened to daily hazards like food scarcity, disease, marauding gangs, inter-settlement skirmishes, and occasional ASEC raids.

Alternatively, you might have been born in the Edgelands, never having known any other kind of life, but hearing stories about the glass towers and technological wonders of the city inside the walls.

Regardless, you found your way back to civilization, perhaps having successfully navigated your way through the ancient subway system under the border wall and up to the streets of Shard City.

Skill Proficiencies: Perception, Survival.

Tools: None.

Languages: Continental, Edgespeak

Equipment: Two weather-worn outfits and \$1000.

Feature: Scrounger

You learned to survive in the Edgelands, where scarcity of food, medicine, clothes and equipment was a constant hardship. As a result, you became an expert at scrounging the things you need for survival from unconventional sources.

While in the Edgelands, or any wilderness area, you can find enough to clothe, shelter and feed yourself and up to 5 others by spending a few hours scrounging each day.

Scrounging is both a skill and an instinct, and therefore benefits you in the urban setting, too. Once a week, you can "acquire" commonplace gear and clothing by poking around in the right places. The GM will determine what items you can acquire this way.

□ Paramedical

You make (or made) your living in the medical industry, perhaps as a doctor, nurse, paramedic, physiotherapist, psychologist, medical researcher, chemist or biologist – or any other occupation concerned with medical science.

Skill Proficiencies: Investigation, Medicine.

Tools: Vehicles (land)

Languages: Continental

Equipment: An average wardrobe; a vehicle (costing \$25,000 or less); a medical kit with jet injector; a modest apartment, and \$5,000.

Feature: Access to Medical Supplies

Once in a while, you can make sure a few of your organization's medical supplies "go missing," and as long as you don't get too greedy, no one will notice or care. (If you no longer work for a medical organization, you have a loyal former colleague or two willing to do this for you.)

Once every few weeks or so, you can acquire medical supplies, including pharmaceuticals, and even medical equipment, such as jet injectors. The amount and type of such supplies available with each request is determined by the GM.

□ Paramilitary

You were a member of significant rank in a military, paramilitary or law enforcement organization where you distinguished yourself with your courage and commitment, and earned the respect of your subordinates.

Skill Proficiencies: Intimidation, Investigation

Tool Proficiencies: Vehicles (Land)

Languages: Continental

Equipment: An average wardrobe; a vehicle (costing \$25,000 or less); an emblem, signet ring, tattoo or other symbol denoting your membership in your former organization; a mid-class condo; and \$5,000.

Feature: Fraternity

You still have some clout among of the rank and file of your former organization and you stayed in touch with a few trusted former colleagues who will share inside information with you from time to time.

Such information might concern details about an upcoming operation, intel on a rival organization, or other potentially helpful behind-the-scenes info.

Your former colleagues won't do anything for you that carries significant risk to themselves, nor will they always have the info you seek, but neither will they betray your confidence.

□ Resident/Citizen

You were an average citizen, one of the mid-caste, a nobody. You lived most of your life asleep to the tyranny around you, and when you finally woke up, the magnitude of it both amazed and terrified you.

You can never go back, so you might as well move forward, with your eyes wide open.

Skill Proficiencies: Any two.

Tools: Vehicles (land)

Languages: Continental

Equipment: An average wardrobe; a vehicle (costing \$25,000 or less), a modest apartment, and \$5,000.

Feature: Mr. Nobody

You know how avoid attracting the attention of authority figures. Elites never had to think twice about such things, but you did. Keeping your head down, therefore, has become second nature to you.

Whenever you find yourself in a situation where coming under the scrutiny of authority figures, such as law enforcers or paramilitary operators, could pose a risk for you – which is probably always – you will sometimes be forgotten about or overlooked long enough to potentially slip away, as per the GM's discretion.

□ Technical

You work (or worked) for a large technology organization, perhaps as a software developer, an aeronautic engineer, an auto mechanic, an architect, or any of a thousand other technical occupations.

Skill Proficiencies: Computers, Engineering.

Tools: Vehicles (land)

Languages: Continental

Equipment: An average wardrobe; a vehicle (costing \$50,000 or less), a laptop computer; an upper-caste condo, and \$10,000.

Feature: Analytical Mind

You approach problems with an analytical mind, invigorated by the challenge and examining the issue from many angles as you devise a solution.

Whenever an investigation you're conducting or a mystery you're trying to solve seems to have hit a dead end, and you're struggling to come up with ideas for how to proceed, the GM may offer you a hint, presenting it as something that would occur to your character in particular.

□ Congregant

You're part of a movement organized around the worship of a supernatural entity, the observance of a philosophy, or the championing of an ideal, and you

abide by an accepted set of beliefs thereof.

Religious movements are rare in Shard City, partly because they can't compete with modern material gratification, but also because the Big Six, wary of any challenge to their authority, eventually infiltrates and dismantles them from within.

Nevertheless, every once in a while a new symbol of meaning captures the imagination of restless citizens who seek to fill the god-shaped hole in their lives, and a new religious movement is born. Perhaps the one you belong to will endure.

Skill Proficiencies: History, Religion.

Tool Proficiencies: None.

Languages: Continental

Equipment: An average wardrobe; a copy of your movement's doctrine as well as some sort of symbol denoting your membership in it; a vehicle (costing \$25,000 or less); a modest apartment, and \$5,000.

Feature: Visions

You have *visions*. You may not call them that, but sometimes you experience a sudden flash of insight, the occasional prophetic dream, or a genuinely weird intrusion into your reality – such as that breakfast cereal ad you would *swear* warned you about the ASEC raid you just narrowly evaded.

Regardless of the manner in which you receive them, the substance of your visions seem to offer helpful insight into your current challenges.

Of course, it's probably just coincidence, serendipity, or the intrusive thoughts of an overstressed mind.

Right?

□ Artist

You're an artist, a creative visionary. Whatever form your art takes – be it painting, drawing, sculpture, music, poetry, prose, oratory, dance, or any other form of creative expression – you feel compelled to put your ideas into the world.

What passes for art in Shard City is crafted by mega media corporations to have mindless mass appeal.

Simplistic murals, formulaic movies, and algorithmic music offer sterile distractions, and reflect a culture shaped by the Big Six to breed conformity.

Your art, on the other hand, is resonant, provocative and subversive. It inspires, and holds within it the potential for your fellow citizens to transcend the meagre existence imposed upon them – which is also what makes being an artist in Shard City somewhat dangerous.

Skill Proficiencies: Insight, Performance.

Tool Proficiencies: Any set of tools needed to produce your form of art, including up to 3 musical instruments.

Languages: Continental

Equipment: A modest wardrobe (but styled and accessorized with your unique flair); one set of artist's tools (including a musical instrument); a modest studio apartment; and \$1,000.

Feature: Patronage

People crave more of what you do, and they're willing to reward you as an incentive to keep doing it. Thanks to the patronage of your supporters, you can maintain a modest lifestyle.

In addition, however, your wealthier and more eccentric fans will occasionally send you unique and valuable gifts or offer special favours that might be useful to your mercenary activities. Every month or so, as determined by the GM, a new such reward may present itself.

Written and Illustrated by Joe Nittoly.

This material was designed originally for *NearFuture Shard City* when the game was intended to be a 5e-compatible module. However, *NearFuture Shard City* is now being developed as an original standalone TTRPG with its own d20-based core system. These 5e backgrounds are therefore offered as-is for your modern/sci-fi 5e adventures, for which I hope you will find them fun and useful.

Find out more at NearFuture.GamingGeek.ca

Find more free downloads at Joe.Nittoly.ca

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