

# ACCESS All AREAS

a user's guide to the  
art 01 urban exploration

bV Ninialicious

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For Liz

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## FOREWORD

Few people in life follow their passions with as much dedication and unabashed excitement as did Ninjalicious. Though he may have thought of himself as a humorist first, Ninjalicious, who was known in everyday life as Jeff Chapman, quickly became one of the great underground explorers of his time. He launched the influential infiltration.org website and the popular Infiltration zine in 1996 to a small but eager audience that would, over the years, swell to international thousands. These fellow explorers, curiosity-seekers and armchair tunnel rats would time and time again write in to Infiltration with the same refrain: "I'm so glad to hear other people are doing this. I thought I was the only one."

To say Ninjalicious spent a discrete amount of time working on *Access All Areas* would be somewhat misleading. The book that you are holding is truly a life's work. Not an explorer's tip or rooftoper's secret passed Ninj's purview without being deftly filed away in one of the many corners of his mind. His notes from the past decade, and conversations with anyone who knew him, speak to a lifetime not simply spent enjoying and refining the art of urban exploration, but of considering the ethics and worthiness of living a life off the beaten track, in pursuit of beauty and rich experience.

When Ninjalicious was diagnosed with terminal cancer - a related risk of a longstanding liver disease - in December 2004, he had already prepared much of the manuscript for *Access All Areas*. It became his last mission to complete the book, design it himself, and publish it so that he might pass on his years of accumulated, painstakingly examined knowledge to the explorers that would cross the thresholds of curiosity in his footsteps. Suddenly, creation of the book had taken a poignant turn, and Ninj worked almost tirelessly to make it everything he wanted it to be, despite his continually deteriorating health. The first copies of *Access All Areas: a user's guide to the art of urban exploration* were delivered to the author's hands fresh from the presses in Montreal in late July 2005. He would not live four more weeks.

To have great dreams is a blessing, but to live out those dreams, even in whatever small measures time allows you, is a greater blessing yet. That the world has been shortchanged the continued wisdom,



inspiration and humour of one of the world's finest explorers is a tragedy. But those who knew Ninj knew that no matter what strange, sad cards life dealt him, he always maintained the same inspired, fervent (if humorously lopsided) view of the world that he had taken throughout his life. He deeply loved the hidden realms that surround us all, and never wavered from his ambition to share what he knew of that beauty with anyone curious and open-minded.

This book, then, reads as more than just an instruction manual: it is the final love letter to a hobby and a series of magical worlds that fueled the passions of its author, and at the same time a social testament to the empowerment of thinking for oneself and of seeing the world through truly open eyes. Written with insight, humour, and an unflinching ethical grounding, this book is both lifetime achievement and graceful goodbye - a final act the likes of which anyone of us would be lucky to ever accomplish.

- Liz Clayton, Toronto, 2006

## STATEMENT

This book is a guide for hobbyists. It is intended to enhance and enlighten the reader's appreciation of his or her landscape, and is written with great respect for the sites described herein. We are staunch defenders of these sites and will battle for their conservation. Our tourism is not one of exploitation, but rather of reverence.

We are not doctors; we cannot guarantee your long-term safety in the face of certain environmental hazards you may encounter in your exploration. Similarly, we are not lawyers; we cannot advise you of the legality of various expeditions nor can we reassure you that the legal climate where you live will not contort your good or harmless intentions out of fear.

The safety and protection of those who practice the art of exploring, and the appreciation and preservation of those sites they explore, are the foremost concerns of this book.

# INTRODUCTION

This book is meant as an introduction to the hobby of urban exploration, a sort of interior tourism that allows the curious-minded to discover a world of behind-the-scenes sights like forgotten subbasements, engine rooms, rooftops, abandoned mineshafts, secret tunnels, abandoned factories and other places not designed for public usage. Urban exploration is a thrilling, mind-expanding hobby that encourages our natural instincts to explore and play in our own environment. Urban exploration inspires people to create their own adventures, like when they were kids, instead of buying the pre-packaged adventures too many of us settle for. And it nurtures a sense of wonder in the everyday spaces we inhabit that few local history books could ever hope to recreate. Perhaps because the hobby combines straightforward appreciation of a site's aesthetic beauty and historical significance with elements of risk and creative problem solving, explorers can feel a vivid, exhilarating awareness of the urban environment that can be almost overwhelming in its intensity during and following an enjoyable expedition. It's a rush.

For too many people, urban living consists of mindless travel between work, shopping and home, oblivious to the countless wonders a city offers. Most people think the only things worth looking at in our cities and towns are those safe and sanitized attractions that require an admission fee. Their alertness has atrophied due to the lack of any real adventure in their lives, and their senses have dulled to help them cope with the cacophony of noise and meaningless spectacle that surrounds them. It's no wonder people feel unfulfilled and uninvolved as they are corralled through the maze of velvet ropes on their way out through the gift shop.

Rather than passively consuming entertainment, urban explorers strive to actually create authentic experiences, by making discoveries that allow them to participate in the secret workings of cities and structures, and to appreciate fantastic, obscure spaces that might otherwise go completely neglected. There's certainly more to the hobby than just having a good time: the new and deeper perspectives explorers can get from standing atop the city, or peering up at it from underground, or just coming to appreciate the extent and complexity of the world behind the scenes, are truly incredible. But it's also just unbelievably fun. When you fully embrace the urban exploration mindset, the city becomes a won-

derful playground, and playing in it seems like working your way through a fun and challenging adventure game - except it's real.

Urban exploration is an incredibly enlightening hobby, and the world would be a better place if more people thought of themselves as urban explorers. In part, this guide is intended to encourage more people to engage in the harmless exploration of the urban environment I've always promoted in *Infiltration*. In addition, I hope this guide will help expand some people's definition of urban exploration, so that they can broaden their horizons and enjoy the hobby more. Since abandoned buildings are probably the most obvious and photogenic places explorers frequent, many have begun to think of the hobby as encompassing little more than exploring abandoned buildings, with maybe the occasional tunnel thrown in for good measure. As I hope to point out in this guide, such places are wonderful and beautiful, but they aren't the end-all-and-be-all of urban exploration. Structures and infrastructures are interesting in all phases of their life cycles, and places that are under construction or in use can hold as much wonder, beauty and opportunity for adventure as abandoned places.

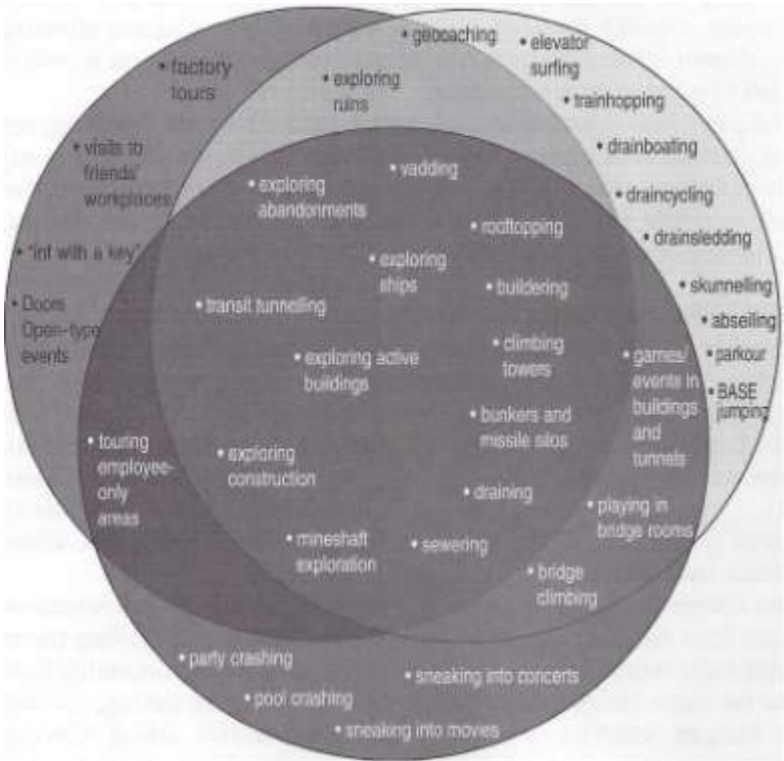
As I've disclaimed before, I don't pretend to be the world's most talented or most experienced urban explorer, just an enthusiastic chronicler and booster of the hobby. As well as spending a lot of time exploring a wide variety of settings myself, I've also spent a decade corresponding with a few hundred explorers worldwide and paying close attention to their expedition reports. Much of my advice in this guide is based on what I've heard from others. It's mainly written for people who are relatively new to the hobby, but I hope experienced explorers will get something out of it nonetheless, even if it's just the inspiration to write better guidebooks of their own.

## **Hey, What Are You Doing Down There?**

So, what is and isn't urban exploration? Speaking broadly, urban exploration consists of seeking out, visiting and documenting interesting human-made spaces, most typically abandoned buildings, construction sites, active buildings, stormwater drains, utility tunnels and transit tunnels, though with lots of other possibilities on top of those basics. The areas explorers are interested in are usually neglected by or off-limits to the general public, though there are some exceptions to this, and it's certainly not the case that urban exploration always involves trespassing. Explorers flock to opportunities to see interesting buildings and tunnels

that are temporarily opened to the public, and most are quick to take advantage of chances to visit special areas with permission from friends and relatives. Explorers are also quick to take advantage of legal grey areas, such as touring stormwater drains which in certain municipalities isn't technically illegal. So, exploring isn't synonymous with recreational trespassing.

While urban exploration is often grouped with or even called "infiltration" or "urban adventure", in reality those are three different activities that share a great degree of overlap. All three are great, and many people who enjoy one branch enjoy them all, but they have some distinctions.



urban exploration

infiltration

**D** urban  
adventure

Sneaking into a pool, a movie theatre or a concert is infiltration, but it isn't really urban exploration, since your primary goal isn't to see a place but to engage in or watch another activity. Often with infiltration the focus is on overcoming a human element, sometimes just for the strategic pleasure of doing so. Playing hide-and-go-seek in an abandoned building or climbing up a bridge for the joy of the climb is urban adventure, but it isn't really urban exploration, since it's more about playing somewhere cool rather than exploring somewhere cool. With urban adventure-type activities, the challenges (if there are challenges beyond having a good time) are usually self-imposed, rather than being simply the price one must pay in order to view a particular location. They're often more stunt-oriented and focussed on the fantastic final picture or story of the adventurer's achievement. On the previous page is a rough Venn diagram showing where different infiltration/urban adventure/urban exploration activities might fall in relation to one another.

While infiltration and urban adventure are both worth checking out (indeed, infiltration's even worth publishing a whole zine about, in my humble opinion), this book is primarily concerned with the activities that fall into the top left circle: those that are focussed on finding, exploring and documenting locations off the beaten path.

### **The Risk to Reward Ratio**

It's probably fair to describe urban exploration as a somewhat dangerous hobby, though it's less dangerous than many would have you believe. From what I've heard anecdotally, only a couple of self-described urban explorers have ever died while exploring, so statistically speaking urban exploration is slightly less likely to kill you than lawn bowling. But explorers do get injured or trapped from time to time, and if we weren't extremely careful we'd probably get killed every once in a while.

One common argument against urban exploration is that someone might get hurt and then society would be responsible for saving them, but if this logic worked for urban exploration, it would presumably hold true for far more dangerous activities like white water rafting, contact sports, bungee jumping, parachute diving, downhill skiing, driving, cycling or mountain climbing, which all have much higher fatality rates. Yet people do those things all the time, and as long as they get proper permission from the authorities, no one condemns them for risking their lives and the lives of those around them. What the people who say

urban exploration is wrong and bad because it's dangerous really mean is that it's wrong and bad because it's dangerous and they didn't get permission. This is a weird way to think.

**In** life, there are needless risks and acceptable risks. If practiced carefully, urban exploration need involve only acceptable risks, but all exploration activities should be evaluated in terms of the risk to reward ratio. This hobby isn't about stunts, and something doesn't become more worthwhile simply because it's more dangerous. It makes sense to run through a gauntlet if the reward awaiting you at the end is likely to be a really tasty slice of fresh, warm, homemade blueberry pie topped with high-quality ice cream with little bits of vanilla bean in it and everything, but it's foolish to do so if it's likely that all that's waiting for you at the end is a dried-up slice of generic, store-bought apple pie. You can get that anywhere. My parents buy it all the time. It's not that good.

Similarly, don't try to climb over a razor wire fence and run past a pack of hungry dogs unless you're confident that they're guarding something pretty incredible, because you're going to be really annoyed if you lose a foot just so you can stare at a nondescript electrical closet. While it's true that danger isn't the ultimate evil, this hobby isn't about the quest for danger so much as a willingness to accept certain levels of danger in the course of the quest to discover and document forgotten or neglected realms. You know, like Indiana Jones or Lara Croft, but without the stealing.

Conventional wisdom holds that tension is bad and to be avoided, so many people will suggest that a good way to choose the right risk to reward ratio is to do only what you feel comfortable with. **In** my humble opinion, this advice is on par with telling an aspiring Olympic athlete to exercise only until he or she feels tired. It is good and healthy to push yourself a little and to do things that make you slightly uncomfortable. If you continually stretch the boundaries of your comfort zone by doing things that make you a little nervous and a little uneasy, you'll gradually expand the range of activities with which you feel comfortable. (This is how that whole "gateway drug" business works, too, I think, but you should go exploring instead of doing drugs - both activities are addictive and mind-expanding, but exploration is cheaper.) Most people feel extremely nervous the first time they climb a fence into a construction site or stroll past an employee into an off-limits area. But after you've done these things a dozen times they become second nature, allowing you to save your stores of nerve for larger challenges.

To be clear, I'm not suggesting that you fully abandon your comfort zone and leap towards what terrifies you. If you're claustrophobic and afraid of the dark, don't try to cure yourself by single-handedly wriggling through a narrow drain without a flashlight late one night - the mantra "mind over matter" may lose some of its potency once you're enveloped in darkness and finding it difficult to breathe. Nor should you assume you're braver or more rational than you actually are: don't suddenly realize that your morbid fear of insane ghosts with chainsaws isn't as suppressed as you thought it was when you're deep in the tunnel system under an abandoned asylum. Rather, figure out with what you are and are not comfortable and gradually work on getting more comfortable with some of the things that make you nervous. This strategy works because when you have a realistic idea of your strengths and weaknesses, your common sense will function much more reliably. It's when you start deceiving yourself and telling yourself that you're the biggest bad-ass in town, when in reality you're easily shaken, that your common sense starts becoming unreliable. Get an honest picture of what you can and cannot handle, both mentally and physically. People get caught or hurt less because they were doing something that made them nervous or scared than because they did not have an informed and realistic sense of their capabilities.

A lot of people, including a lot of people I've gone exploring with, deny their own nervousness because they think it's embarrassing, but personally I much prefer to go exploring with people who get nervous and admit it. Nervousness is like fire. If it gets out of hand, it can consume and destroy you, but if you keep a little bit of it under your control, it can help guide the way. Look at the word itself: nerv-ous. It means fearful, but it also means full of nerves.

When you're exploring, your nerves are your allies. Being full of nerves makes you acutely aware of your surroundings, and that is both a very pleasant and a very useful state of mind. If you are keeping quiet and moving carefully, while looking and listening intensely, you are much less likely to fall into an unseen hole or run into an unexpected guard. One reason I hesitate to explore in large groups is that people tend to relax when they're around three or four friends, because they feel secure in a group and perhaps also because they don't want the others to see that they're nervous. But five relaxed people are a hell of a lot more likely to run into trouble than two nervous people.



# TRAINING

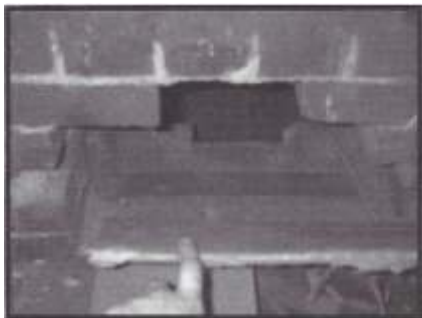
As tempting as it is to quickly gather up your ten closest friends and head into the subway tunnels on your inaugural expedition, that's a recipe for disaster. As in videogames, you should start with basic training missions to get a feel for the controls before you attempt "apocalypse"-level difficulty. While most explorers train themselves by just going out there and exploring, a little advance training doesn't hurt, and knowing what you're doing could keep you from making things worse for yourself and others later on. At the very least, it's a good idea to know what you and your cohorts are and aren't capable of before your skills are tested under more stressful conditions.

Training involves both off-the-job and on-the-job pursuits. Off-the-job, exercising and practicing certain exploration-related skills need not be tedious; if you do it with games and competitions, it can be a lot of fun in itself. On-the-job training is even more likely to hold your attention, since it is actual exploring, just in a setting where you're unlikely to face injuries or other punishments if something goes wrong. And sometimes you make some pretty interesting finds on those little practice missions before you level up.

## Fitness

Urban exploration isn't a sport - anything that requires so much nerdy research and geeky aesthetic sensibility doesn't fit with our culture's understanding of a sport - but it can occasionally require some physical fitness. Endurance, strength, speed, balance and flexibility are all useful to explorers. Endurance will take you those four kilometres up the storm drain to the waterfall, or get you up that 34th flight of stairs that takes you to the roof. Strength will help you pull open that door that's rusted shut, or hoist yourself up onto that ladder that's dangling two feet overhead. Speed will help you run away when the alarm sounds, or when someone decides to chase you. Balance will help you walk along the rafters without falling five storeys to your death. Being flexible and in good shape will help you make it through those awkward climbs and squeezes and make you less likely to strain muscles or otherwise injure yourself while exploring.

There's an additional benefit to exercise. While the world of public spaces is increasingly built to comfortably accommodate people who are



*Occasionally explorers have to squeeze themselves through inhumanly small spaces in order to get to their goal.*

between 50 and 100 pounds overweight, the world behind the scenes hasn't yet caught up to this exciting new trend. Being skinny is a major asset for an explorer. If you haven't done a lot of exploring you may not appreciate just how often you'll come across spaces where just a couple inches of surplus girth will make the difference between triumph and defeat. Explorers squeeze, or try to squeeze, their way through slightly ajar windows, between pipes in steam tunnels,

through narrow hatches, up air ducts, through tiny chatieres ("cat holes") carved into stone or bricks, between stairs in staircases, through the metal grates of storm drains and into all manner of tight tunnels never meant to accommodate people. In these situations, the only thing more frustrating than being the only one in your group who can squeeze through a particular opening is being the only one who can't. If you're significantly heavier than the rest of the people you go exploring with, you may want to bring a good book.

## **Giving Up Smoking**

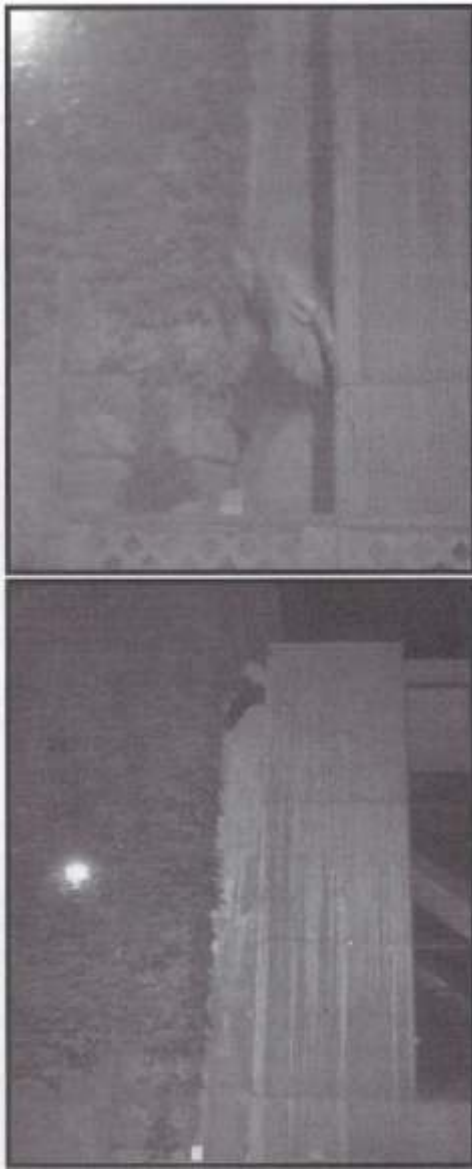
While it's certainly true that many explorers smoke, smoking and exploring aren't very compatible, for a number of reasons. People who insist on smoking while exploring can potentially create a number of problems for their group. Smoke and lit cigarettes reduce your stealthiness. Dropped ashes and cigarette butts leave clear signs that someone was present. Improperly extinguished cigarettes are a fire hazard in old wooden buildings.

Even smokers who are smart enough not to smoke while they're exploring face a few disadvantages. People who smoke regularly generally have diminished senses of smell, and tend to get out of breath more easily than non-smokers. Many smokers have coughs that are prone to happen at the wrong time. According to many scientists, smokers are at least four times as likely to suffer health problems due to asbestos as non-smokers - some estimates are a lot higher. So, smoking and exploring aren't ideally matched to one another.

## Climbing

The ability to climb fences and walls is among the most useful skills an explorer can cultivate, and it's not a tricky one to practice. Climbing trees is pretty fun, and it's also decent climbing practice, at least a decent warm-up to the more advanced practice you would have to pay to get in a climbing gym or at the Y. The basic concepts of searching for, finding, evaluating and then finally employing different hand- and footholds, while navigating a vertical path towards the top, are the same whether you're climbing a tree, a rock wall, a mountain or a building. If you dislike nature, or don't have access to it, you can practice your climbing skills in a playground. This doesn't involve just crawling up the tube slide backwards; there are also monkey bars to fool around on and swing sets to climb.

After you've graduated from this first level, grab a friend and find some fences that you won't get in trouble for climbing - maybe a wooden house fence, wire fencing around a local basketball or tennis court or the vertical steel bars fencing in a local school- and just practice safely hauling yourself up and over. Practice



*Ethan demonstrates the proper technique for chimneying up a building, with the back to the wall and his legs pushing.*

both solo climbing and climbing with the help of a friend. Experiment to see if a running start helps you or not. Pay attention to how your clothing and footwear affect your climb - if you find a wire fence with narrow spacing in which you simply can't get a foothold, try taking off your shoes and tucking in your socks between your big toe and the rest of your foot for an improvised set of tabi socks. Try sticking a board between the links in a chain link fence to make an *Ensure that you have hands*

improvised step. Try climbing with and *and feet before attempting a* without gloves. Notice how you occasional- *difficult climb.* ly need to employ different climbing tactics on different sides of the same fence: getting out isn't always as easy as getting in. Work on your speed - maybe have your friend pretend to chase you over the fence. Move from shorter fences to taller fences, and from easier ones to harder ones. If anyone comes along and asks what you're doing, just say you're practicing climbing - there's no law against that. (Throwing a ball over a fence also provides a good excuse for you to climb over and retrieve it, but you probably won't need an excuse.)

For your next trick, work on rope climbing. Even if you hated it when you were in gym like I did, you'll find that being able to shimmy up a rope can be a truly useful skill in situations where getting up to a second-storey window or a fire escape is the only possible way into a building. After you get to the point where you can use a knotted rope to help to climb up the side of a building without too much trouble, try free climbing the rope without bracing yourself on anything. Practice dismounting from the rope onto a staircase or fire escape. You can either work on this until you think you're good enough at it to do it while exploring, or just admit to yourself that you're not much of a rope climber. The one thing you don't want is to assume that you'll be able to climb a rope while exploring without any problems, only to find out you just don't have it in you when it's too late.



## Playing Games

Being successful in urban exploration requires a huge variety of skills, ranging from hiding to climbing to fast-talking, and sometimes it's helpful to cultivate those skills while you aren't actively exploring. Hobbies tan-

gentially related to urban exploration, such as trainhopping, geocaching, parkour and building (see Glossary for definitions), can all teach handy skills useful in exploration. So can simpler fun-oriented pursuits. Hide-and-seek is a classic urban exploration training game. The basic idea behind hide-and-seek is for one person, dubbed "it", to count to a preset number (say, 30) while all the other participants scurry off and hide anywhere they wish within a given area. Then they are sought. For explorers' purposes, this game works especially well when played indoors somewhere with multiple levels, and tweaked in such a way as to allow stealthy players to move from their hiding places and sneak back to "home" and become "safe" (this propagandistic terminology was clearly worked out by parents). In another hide-and-seek variant, played in the dark and sometimes called Bloody Murder, each person who is caught treacherously joins the "dark side" and aids her captor in seeking out her erstwhile colleagues in concealment. This game is totally awesome.

My friend Sean and I used to play a game of our own invention called Can't Be Seen. It probably should have had a cooler name, but oh well, at least it's memorable. Wearing dark clothes and equipped with two-way walkie-talkies and flashlights, we would attempt to travel across town by as direct a route as possible without anyone spotting us. There was no precise way to measure our level of success, since people who did see us probably didn't realize the greatness of their achievement and thus generally failed to tell us they'd spotted us. But we usually knew and admitted to ourselves when we'd screwed up and taken too long to dive behind the hedges or roll beneath the truck, and we kept a mental tally of our failures. This was not only one of the most fun games of all time, it was also a risk-free way to practice our skills at orienteering, running, hiding, scouting ahead, moving stealthily and communicating either silently or with walkie-talkies. Only its two-dimensional nature, and the difficulty of playing it in a highly populated urban setting, keep it from being the perfect urban exploration training game. It is, however, fun.

Laser tag is also fun. While urban exploration does not generally involve the use of futuristic weaponry, it does involve hiding, moving stealthily, navigating complex multi-level mazes and thinking three-dimensionally. Paintball, while a little more messy, painful and expensive, teaches many of the same skills as laser tag, including working as a team. The only big problem with the shooting games is their focus on aim. Aim is one of the few skills that's of not much use to explorers. An old-fashioned game of capture the flag, played in an urban setting, might

be better training. Capture the flag is cheaper and requires less silly clothing and expensive equipment, and it's damn good exercise, especially if you're competitive.

## **On-the-Job**

It would be nice if we could all train until we were in peak physical and mental condition, but of course it's tough to resist the temptation to get out onto, or under, the street and put your skills to the test in a realistic setting. Until such time as proper urban exploration training academies can be founded worldwide, you can improvise by on-the-job training through minor missions that aren't likely to result in anyone being hospitalized or arrested, but still provide useful experience in sneaking and seeking. (Please don't be an idiot and head into active subway tunnels on your first expedition.)

It's easy to arrange small missions that won't have any real negative consequences if you screw up. At your own school or workplace, or in any interesting buildings your friends or family can get you into legitimately, try to examine the interesting areas while not being seen by anyone. Hide your visitor pass or employee badge and then try to map out the whole building without being questioned. When you get a lapel pin at a museum, a hand stamp at a concert, a temporary visitor pass at an office or any sort of similar visible proof of valid admission, conceal it and then try to talk your way around its absence without showing your receipt or pass to anyone unless it is absolutely demanded. When you go out of town, sneak around your own hotel and, when dealing with employees, don't offer any proof that you're a hotel guest unless you must. These kinds of exercises offer you good practice at sneaking, looking innocent, fast-talking and dealing with stressful situations without actually putting you at risk.

While on-the-job training missions can certainly be quite challenging, the line between practice missions and real missions can be drawn at the point where the external obstacles become greater than the self-imposed obstacles. In those situations, do away with any artificial handicaps, prepare fully and focus on performing as well as you possibly can. You will not get additional shadowpoints because you wore a blindfold while you tried to sneak into a train tunnel at night - you will just get caught or hurt, thereby making things worse for not only yourself but for everyone else. By being careful while you're exploring, you're doing a favour to the whole urban exploration community.

## RECRUITING

It can be very helpful to find a few friends you can drag along on your expeditions. While one person can often do an excellent and thorough scouting job, in most situations you shouldn't do much intensive exploring alone, since the areas we visit are often areas where you won't be found for a while. There are a few exceptions, of course, and you'll probably find you make more and more exceptions the more you want to get somewhere and the less your friends do, but try not to make too many.

Besides the safety benefits of having someone else along to give you a hand if you get into trouble (or to go get help if you accidentally get into real trouble), there are also the exploratory benefits of having someone to give you a boost, to hold something open while you climb through or to keep an eye out while you do something suspicious. You also have someone else who can open something after you've loosened it. Having an extra pair of eyes and ears is extremely handy, and having someone else's common sense is invaluable, especially if yours, like mine, tends to get muted when you're excited about something. Many of the best expeditions I've been on wouldn't have been possible if I'd been going solo, and in quite a few other cases I've had a sense that I could have found some fantastic places if only I'd had someone else with me. Exploring is also more fun with a friend or two.

### Numbers

While I strongly recommend bringing one or two friends along, I'm not keen on exploring in large groups. There are plusses to such groups, sure: it's fun to be around a lot of people, and it feels safe knowing that you'll probably outnumber any unpleasant people you might encounter. (Whether or not it is actually any safer is debatable, but it certainly feels that way.) You can also draw upon a larger skill set if, for example, your group has an expert climber, an expert sneaker, an expert cartographer, an expert photographer, an expert fast-talker and an expert ... strong guy. (You don't need a cleric.) But when you enter in force it really feels more like an invasion than an infiltration. The sense of danger and stealth evaporates. The group can only move as quickly as its slowest member, sneak as quietly as its noisiest member, squeeze through openings as small as its largest member and, often, behave as intelligently as its stupidest member. It only takes one person deciding to see what a button does to ruin the trip for everyone! Similarly, if one person in the group

does something stupid like steal or break something, the rest of the group is likely to be punished more harshly on that person's account. It's tougher to keep a large group focussed, so people may hurry ahead to shine their flashlights on something they find interesting, wander away to have a smoke or hang back to take some flash photographs. It's common for larger groups to inadvertently break down into several smaller groups, making things more chaotic. Unless everyone in the group is experienced and focussed, the odds of six people sneaking past a guard without being noticed are very slim. Not surprisingly, large exploring groups tend to get busted disproportionately often.

There may be strength in numbers, but there is stealth in keeping those numbers small, and when you're exploring stealth beats strength any day.

Another consideration regarding numbers is the number of initiates one should bring along on expeditions. While it is certainly noble for you to share the joy of exploring with people who are new to the hobby, unless you're visiting somewhere quite simple and safe, I'd recommend not bringing more than one novice on any given expedition. On tricky trips, new explorers need to be watched and tutored carefully, so you can keep them quiet with frequent shushing, repeatedly remind them not to take or damage anything, warn them to conceal their flashlight beam, tell them to not to smoke while you're tunnelling, caution them about cameras and alarms, explain why it's a bad idea to take flash photographs on a rooftop at night, advise them not to take needless risks and so on. Things that seem like common sense to experienced explorers are often nowhere near as commonsensical as you might suppose, and you don't want to put yourself in a situation where you're worrying more about the people you're with than the obstacles of the place that you're exploring.

## Sex

A nice thing to be, if you are one, or a nice thing to bring along, if you can get one, is a girl. If you are a guy, you may want to ask a member of the fairer sex to come along with you when you explore inhabited buildings, particularly places like churches and hotels. Except in a few scenarios - such as at construction sites, or in monasteries - women generally come under much less suspicion than men, since it's a well documented fact that girls are made of sugar and spice and everything nice. Who would risk getting mud on that? For most people, the idea of a



woman deliberately going somewhere she's not supposed to be just doesn't make any sense. Capitalize on this ignorance! At the risk of making broad generalizations, women are also nice to have along since they tend to be better at fast-talking than men, and tend to have better instincts and intuition than men. While I don't believe in ESP or anything like that, I do believe that some people are better at picking up vibes than others, and personally I tend to trust those vibes. Trusting my own intuition and the intuition of others - especially women - has saved me from bad situations on multiple occasions.

If you are a woman, you may want to ask a member of the not-as-fair sex to come along with you when you explore unpopulated or highly underpopulated areas. This is not because you need someone else to act as your bodyguard, but simply because creeps are more likely to be creepy when they encounter a woman (or a group of women) without male accompaniment. It's tough to say exactly why this is, though it probably has something to do with sexism and cowardice. And, to keep things fair by making a broad generalization in favour of men, guys I've explored with tend to be better with three-dimensional spatial relationships than women I've explored with, and thus are generally better at navigating and mapping complex structures and systems. It's tough to say why this is ... maybe videogames?

## Age

Most active explorers are between the ages of 15 and 35, though there are many people older than this who occasionally dabble in the hobby, and most people get their first taste of wandering into storm drains, construction sites and abandoned buildings when they are kids, before their sense of adventure has been blunted and dulled by consumer culture. (It always saddens me when someone reads *Infiltration* and says to me, "Wow, this is so cool! I used to do this when I was younger, and it was the best!" They don't know why they stopped.

Most people are probably mature enough to start exploring by their early teens, and probably aren't too old until past retirement age, and then only because of the physical restrictions. I love looking at old buildings with old people, because they match, and older people often have great stories and a wonderful appreciation for the way places used to be. I generally don't go exploring with people under 18 any more, but this isn't because I don't enjoy exploring with them; it's just because I don't want to be charged with endangering a minor or corrupting the

youth. (So: youth, be obedient. Elders, come with me.)

Younger explorers face some advantages and some disadvantages. Obviously younger people have the advantage of near-endless endurance and enthusiasm, but they're also more likely to suffer from problems with impatience and overconfidence. These are all huge stereotypes, of course, but there's still something to them. On the plus side, a group consisting entirely of teenagers is much more likely to be casually dismissed as a bunch of bored kids than a group of people in their late 20s and 30s. On the minus side, a group of three or more teenagers is likely to attract some attention from guards, employees or nosy people generally, and is likely to get shooed out of places like offices or public buildings more quickly than older explorers might. Teenagers asking for directions, at a concierge or a security desk are much more likely to be treated with suspicion.

A group of explorers in their late 20s and early 30s, conversely, has a much easier time walking through hotels, convention centres, office buildings and most other occupied spaces without being noticed, because people are much quicker to assume that adults are somewhere on business - which is widely perceived to be the only legitimate reason to be anywhere - and to know what they're doing. The drawback is that when older explorers *do* get caught they're less likely to be dismissed as bored kids and more likely to be considered 'improperly socialized adults in need of reprogramming. They are thus more likely to have to explain themselves to authorities that can't imagine why anyone would do something as bizarre as wander around appreciating interesting structures. Middle-aged and older people probably get even more slack in this department, simply because they're more likely to be deemed harmless, sweet and grandparently.

## Appearance

It's sadly superficial, alas, but when you're visiting a populated place, it's not a good idea to bring along people who will get noticed. Biased and awful though it is, it just doesn't make sense to take people with attention-getting tattoos, piercings, haircuts, hair colours or clothes - unless, of course, they're willing and able to adapt and throw their personal style out the window for the evening. Unfortunately, this excludes a lot of cool people, but we can only hope that the joy they get from having a pink mohawk equals or exceeds the joy they would have taken from sneaking into a bank tower at night, because they can't have both.

Moustaches and beards, as distinguished or funny as they can be, aren't great accessories for urban explorers. Not only do they provide a handy distinguishing feature guards can look for when they're plucking your image off the surveillance videotapes, but people just naturally tend to regard men with facial hair with greater suspicion, wondering exactly what they have to hide. The bad cowboy always had a moustache. The good cowboy didn't. As a more practical consideration, respirators work better on clean-shaven faces, meaning that those utility tunnel explorers without moustaches and beards are less likely to die of asbestosis. Explorers who don't already have facial hair should probably stay that way, and those who aren't too attached to their moustaches, beards, permastubble, soul-patches, van dykes, goatees or mutton-chop sideburns may want to consider giving them up.

Those with hair flair are lucky to have the option of getting rid of it; unfortunately, some people are going to have a lot of trouble becoming great explorers of inhabited spaces through absolutely no fault of their own. Subtle or overt biases against dark-skinned people run pretty deep in many places, and biases against Middle Eastern-looking people are in the midst of an unfortunate renaissance. While no one should abandon the idea of going exploring based solely on their skin colour or ethnicity, people with darker complexions should be aware that they face longer odds of going through doors unnoticed. This is sad but undeniably true.

## **Ethics**

Beyond the "do not enter" signs and outside the protected zone, you and your friends are free to behave as you really are, and you don't want to disappoint yourselves. When you're considering potential exploratory partners, try to enlist people who you know have firm consciences. Keep in mind that these people will not necessarily be your traditional goody-goodies; a lot of people who usually behave well do so because they're mindlessly obeying rules and laws, not because they're carefully considering which actions are helpful and right and which are harmful and wrong. People who think laws are more important than ethics are exactly the sorts who will wander into an abandoned area and be so confused by their sudden freedom and lack of supervision that they'll start breaking windows and urinating on the floor. Law-free zone, right? That means they can do anything they feel like, right?

Wrong, of course, which is why it's important to seek out people with positive ethics, who will show respect for sites by not breaking

anything, taking anything, defacing anything or even littering while exploring. From what I've seen, people who don't use the law as a substitute for their own moral compass tend to develop stronger consciences and greater self-discipline simply through greater use - kind of like how trees that grow outside are stronger than trees that grow indoors, because they've been blown by the wind often enough that they've learned to stand straight on their own. Some people have the idea that urban explorers are generally troublemakers and ne'er-do-wells; on the contrary, I would say that urban explorers are generally better behaved, more considerate and more polite than the vast majority of the population, if perhaps slightly more inclined towards geekiness and social awkwardness. In any meeting of a group of experienced explorers, the conversation is likely to frequently turn to ethics, since explorers care a great deal about these issues and feel it's important to continually consider what is right and what is wrong.

So, when you're enlisting fellow explorers, it's a good idea to avoid people who seem more excited by the opportunity to be naughty and "anarchistic" than by the opportunity to discover and appreciate some cool places. People who have been vandals, thieves or all-purpose troublemakers in the past can certainly reform and make good explorers: a lot of people who engage in that sort of nonsense when they're younger aren't really eager to deface and destroy so much as they're eager to rebel and have some non-commercial fun. If you can show them the light, offer them a more constructive way to channel their energies and teach them the all-important skill of appreciating without tagging or taking, more power to you.

Unfortunately, when a lot of people first start exploring they feel like they have to claim some souvenir or treasure from a site in order to make the experience real, or tangible, or worthwhile. They can't help it - they've been raised in a world built around gift shops. I was certainly guilty of this simple thinking in my younger days. But the broader urban exploration community has quite wisely adopted the Sierra Club's motto of "take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints." The advantages to this mindset, both to individual explorers and to the hobby as a whole, are innumerable. When you take a cool relic from a site, you not only vastly increase the potential charges against you if you are caught, you also up the odds that security will be increased in the future. More importantly, you diminish the experience for all future

explorers and damage the reputation of the urban exploration community as a whole.

There's no need to make exploration about souvenirs. What was cool about *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was not that dumb ark - it was the running through the tunnels and avoiding the traps and dodging the Nazis and sneaking into all those cool places. You don't need to take any souvenirs to make both the experience and the site your own; if anything, you diminish your ownership of the place by defacing it or taking away a piece of it. The quotation I use to explain this Zennish own-without-acquiring mindset is from comedian Steven Wright: "I have a large seashell collection which I keep scattered all over the beaches of the world ... maybe you've seen it?"

You share a similar collection of relics scattered all around the buildings of the world, and you won't make them any more yours just by depriving everyone else. You'll reduce yourselves into mere robbers in the eyes of anyone who catches you. So, make sure both you and the people you're with remember that ethics don't disappear on the far side of the "do not enter" sign - if anything, they become more important.

For this reason, it's not a good idea to explore with strangers. I'm not saying that I haven't done it, repeatedly - merely that it's not a good idea, as I've found from experience. You have no idea what criminal record a stranger might have, how crazy they'll be, how willing they'll be to compromise their ethics in "certain situations" (such as when they *really, really* feel like it - some ridiculous people actually think the intensity of their desire factors into the ethical equation) or what sort of bizarre reactions they'll have to a tense situation. (Abandoning you? Crying? Confessing? Panicking? Freezing up? They all happen.) It's much more difficult to tell a fellow explorer to go put something back or stop writing his or her name on the wall than it is if everyone just understands in advance that nothing will be taken or damaged, period. Go with people you trust, who you know will treat both the location and their fellow explorers with respect. Go with people whose reactions you can anticipate.

Christianity and most world religions sum up their moral principles with a "golden rule", usually summed up as "do unto others as you would have them do unto you". This is good, but I like the Jewish take on the rule even better: "Whatever is harmful to yourself, do not to your fellow person. That is the whole of the law, the rest is merely a commentary."

## SNEAKING

Sneaking around is a lot of fun, but it's important to remember that real-life sneaking is different from videogame sneaking. In games like *Elevator Action*, *Impossible Mission* and *Thief*, being seen is always bad so you should always be sneaking. In real life, where most people are not enemy agents or evil robots (or at least so they'd have you think), it's not so much being seen that's bad as being seen engaging in certain suspicious activities. Being seen walking down a public hallway or waiting for a passenger elevator is almost always fine, because people do that kind of thing. Being seen climbing a ladder or peering through a keyhole is bad, because people don't do that kind of thing unless they're up to something.

The trick, then, is to only be stealthy when you need to be. While it's always smart to have an idea whether or not there's someone behind you, you really don't need to keep looking over your shoulder unless you're getting ready to try a few doors, and you really don't need to tiptoe down a hallway unless... well, actually, you never need to tiptoe down a hallway. Tiptoeing is a scam invented by security forces so they'd be able to spot potential troublemakers more easily. You can walk quietly without making yourself look like a complete freak.

### Moving Silently

When most people think of stealth they think of crouching low and hiding in the shadows, but staying silent is just as important. If you spend a lot of time trying to move silently, you'll come to loathe certain types of floors, particularly creaky wooden floors. (And if you have to sneak around outside, you'll come to absolutely despise dry leaves and gravel.) Conversely, you'll find that while linoleum and plastic tiles may not look all that attractive, they certainly are good for sneaking about on. Rugs and carpets can also be good, provided they aren't resting atop creaky wooden floors. When you're dealing with a creaky floor, try to find the part of the floor that creaks the least - generally, floors and stairs are most secure near the walls and in the spots above floor joists (that is, where the rows of nails are). You move more quietly when your muscles are relaxed, so try to move fluidly and use all your joints. Wear shoes with soft soles if you're able. Try not to cough or sneeze. Pay attention to air vents that might carry your voice elsewhere. Turn off your cell phone and your radio.

No matter how much of a ninja you are, you're probably going to make at least some noise while you're moving about. This probably won't be a problem as long as you don't make noise in the steady, recognizable pattern of approaching footfalls, which millions of years of evolution have trained people to listen for. People working late at night can ignore the occasional click or swish as long as they don't hear a series of clicks and swishes that adds up to a mental image of someone stealthily moving down a darkened hallway toward them with a knife. If at some point you feel you've accidentally made too much noise, pause for a short while to give whomever you're sneaking past time to forget about it. If the people you're sneaking around are occasionally getting up and down, you may want to pace your movement so you're moving when they're moving, as they're unlikely to hear your quiet motion atop their own deafening activity.

### **Moving Stealthily**

As fun as it is to behave like a ninja, in my experience that whole stay-low-and -slinking-unseen - from-shadow-to-shadow business doesn't really have much practical application for urban exploration, except in a few situations, such as when one is approaching a building from the outside at night. While it would certainly be thrilling to constantly crouch, hide and slither along on your belly beneath the rug, for our variety of sneaking, spies make better role models than ninjas. In the sort of settings most explorers visit, moving stealthily mainly requires you to move slowly and steadily (since more rapid movement is more likely to attract the eye), keep to the darker parts of the passage or room, pay close attention to other people's possible lines of sight and choose those paths that will least expose you to any observers. Don't turn the lights on or off - leave them as they are. If the area is very dark and you don't want to risk bringing out a light source, just wait patiently for a few minutes and let your eyes adjust to the darkness. Pay attention to your shadows and your reflections. Walk near walls instead of out in the open, don't pass directly in front of windows, avoid being backlit and try not to look tremendously suspicious while you're doing all of this.

When you're sneaking through even a very sparsely populated area, you'll look very suspicious if it's obvious that you're constantly looking around and peering over your shoulder. Even in situations where you plan not to be seen at all, bear in mind that that is merely plan A, and that plan A disappears as soon as you realize you're on camera or some-

one's walking behind you. So, even while you're actively pursuing plan A, you should try not to jeopardize plan B, which is to hide in plain sight, being seen but ignored. This means that even as you attempt to move through the site unseen, you should try to avoid suspicious behaviour like crouching, hiding, climbing, checking doors or constantly looking over your shoulder. It's quite possible to walk quietly and stealthily without behaving in such a way that you might as well be wearing a bright yellow shirt that says SKULKER.

## Hiding

**In** some situations, acting like you're supposed to be somewhere, or like you're merely lost, isn't an option. When you hear someone coming but feel you won't be able to either explain your presence or get away, you may want to consider hiding. It's risky, since if you're caught you're really caught, but it normally works, since no one actually expects someone to be hiding unless they're in the middle of a game of hide-and-seek. Quickly slipping behind a door or ducking behind a machine has worked for me on many occasions. **In** most cases, the person who shows up has no interest in finding you or anyone else - they're just going about their business. By hiding, you're really doing them a favour, by keeping them from being distracted from their important task, and if you can just wait them out for a minute or two, you'll have no trouble either leaving or continuing your exploration unimpeded.

Of course, finding a decent hiding spot really only works when you have a moment of advance warning, as when you hear approaching conversation, or whistling, or keys jingling, or a door being opened. When someone just suddenly turns the corner ahead of you while you're in a darkened utility tunnel two levels underground, or suddenly appears at the far end of an unlit warehouse, don't run for non-existent cover: extinguish your light, stop moving and hope for the best. Movement is the first thing the human eye notices. The second is the human form, so attempt to disguise your silhouette and shadow if possible. If you're able, gradually put your gloved hands over your face or pull your hat down low to hide your eyes and most of your face. If the person leaves the area temporarily, then you have an opportunity to hide or get out of there, but otherwise just stay still until you're confronted. Then you can decide if you want to try to talk your way out of the situation or run for it.



## **Concealing Light**

Urban exploration involves a great deal of wandering around in unlit or insufficiently lit areas while looking for things, but it also involves a lot of trying not to stand out or be seen. For this reason, many explorers worry about methods to reduce or conceal light from their flashlights.

Those fancying themselves secret agents or covert operatives swear by multicoloured gels and filters, contending that using a red lens filter will make light from your flashlight less visible, less reflective and less likely to destroy your night vision. Others find that red light is really only ideal in pitch-black environments, while blue or green light works better in dimly lit areas or in the changing light conditions associated with buildings and tunnels.

Personally, I'm too cheap to go in for such solutions when I can get roughly the same effect just by squeezing a packet of McDonald's ketchup on the lens of my Maglite, even if I have to deal with the sweet tomato smell for the rest of the evening. If you don't care for ketchup, you can employ the simple and old-fashioned technique of just shining the light through the cracks in your fingers, which muffles the light and turns it red, and also gives you a great degree of control over exactly how much light you project in any given room. Placing a coloured balloon, a handkerchief or piece of cloth over the lens does the same trick. Obviously, you need only limit your light this way when you're near windows in a building at night; in a drain, tunnel, basement or enclosed area, you should aim to see all that you can see, and for this, bright white light is your friend. Bright white light also gives you the most realistic sense of perspective, which can keep you from falling down holes and the like, so don't play commando when you don't have to.

## **Don't Leave a Trace**

Naturally, it doesn't do much good to sneak around noiseless and unseen if anyone can just follow your footprints to find you. Although I've mentioned explorers use the motto, "take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints," you really shouldn't leave any footprints, either. If you're outside, favour hard surfaces like metal and rock over pliable surfaces like mud and snow. If you have to walk in mud or snow, try to walk inside the footprints other people have already left behind or leave a false trail. Once inside, dry your feet and do your best to keep them dry. If you go through a damp area, like a moist steam tunnel, try to avoid the puddles. When you can't avoid getting wet, dry your feet off

at the first opportunity so you don't leave a trail behind you. While it's true that your wet footprints will dry up fairly quickly in a hot steam tunnel, you will likely leave a distinctive foot-shaped clean spot on the floor even after the moisture evaporates.

Similarly, in a dirty construction or renovation site, try to avoid leaving handprints or footprints in the dust. When you emerge from the area, wipe away your dirty footprints, especially all around a door or any other sort of operable entrance, as there's no need to draw attention to where you went in or came out. If there's a mat, shaking it out is a good way to conceal footprints quickly.

Incidentally, people who patrol and work in buildings are nowhere near as careful about concealing their footprints as urban explorers tend to be, and these sorts of signs can be glaringly obvious and helpful pointers as to what entrances to use and what doors to pay attention to inside. They also give decent clues about which areas to avoid.

## SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Social engineering is a term urban explorers have adopted from the computer hacking community. Hackers use the term to refer to that portion of their craft that deals with talking to people offline, usually over the phone but occasionally in person, in order to get them to allow access or reveal information about their networks. Explorers use the term the same way, though most of our social engineering is accomplished in person, and we're after information about and access to physical systems rather than computer systems. Social engineering skills come into play when you're talking to an employee in the hope of finding out about some tunnels, trying to convince an archivist to allow you access to the blueprints of a particular site, bluffing your way into an event, scamming your way past the front desk, talking someone into holding the door open for you, explaining to a security guard why you're on the roof and in dozens of other similar scenarios. If you intend to explore where there are people present, you must become good at dealing with people.

The best advice I can give you about the ancient art of social engineering is to read and reread Dale Carnegie's classic book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Though it's slightly dated, having been written in the 1930s, Carnegie's popular guide provides useful, solid, sincere tips on how to be the kind of person that other people will like, trust and respond to. I strongly recommend you pick up a copy for yourself, but since I know most of you won't (you lazy bastards), I offer this quick summary of the book's most important concepts:

*People are self-interested.* To get someone to do something for you, show how doing so will help them help themselves. Because people are self-interested, letting them know how they will benefit will motivate them more than simply telling them how much you would appreciate it, how disappointed you would be if they don't or how it is fair. A big part of self-interest is laziness. As Liz once put it to me, "People have rules against everything, unless they like you and breaking the rules would make their lives easier."

*People crave attention.* Be a good listener and let the other person do the talking. The best way to make other people interested in you is not by convincing them that you are fascinating but by being genuinely interested in them. Always remember and use someone's name when you speak to them, and remember and refer to other details that are important to them.

*People crave appreciation and a feeling of importance.* Find what is good and interesting in other people (and there's always something), and then emphatically express your sincere appreciation with real compliments, not false flattery. Emphasize the other person's achievements. Attribute good ideas and successes to the other person when possible. Never criticize the other person directly.

*People want to be right.* Respond positively and reassuringly, and get them doing the same. Don't contradict or argue with people, since you can never really win. Instead, make yourself see their point of view and work out a mutually acceptable solution. Admit when you are wrong and take the blame yourself even when you could share it with others.

Yes, Carnegie would have you become a pretty humble and unassertive person, and this sort of advice might be difficult for you to take if you have a strong ego or a dominating personality. But a little humility can go a long way when you're dealing with people who want to feel important, and it's often easier to get what you want with diplomacy, politeness and subtlety than with stubbornness, intimidation and bluntness.

If a security guard tells you you're breaking the law by being somewhere and you know you're not, what good can it possibly do for you to argue with her? If she doesn't believe you, she'll be angry with you; if you successfully convince her that she's mistaken or foolish, she'll resent you. Realistically, what the law says is irrelevant. If she wants to punish you she'll find a way to do it, legally or illegally, and it's a pretty sure thing that she's going to want to punish you if you contradict her. Your best bet is to show her that you are humble and likable. Apologize. Say you didn't realize you were breaking the law but now you understand that you were in the wrong; convince her that she'll benefit from not punishing you and that her idea (well, technically yours, but who's counting) of letting you off with a warning makes sense, and that you're deeply grateful for her generosity in not going through the whole hassle of talking to her supervisor, writing up reports, calling in the police and all of that rigmarole. (And what's it like for her being a security officer here, anyhow? It sounds hard, but she must have a lot of good stories about catching dumb kids looking for tunnels and stuff.) In the words of a wise t-shirt, diplomacy is the art of letting other people have your way. People who are unable to check their egos are exactly the kind who are eventually going to wind

up locking horns with employees, guards or police officers, and they aren't going to come out ahead.

An additional tip I picked up from James Howard Kunstler, another author whose books are worth reading, although more for their thoughts on urban planning than their insights on social engineering, is that in any room containing 100 people, 99 of them each think that they are the only one in the room who doesn't have his or her act together. He's absolutely right, and bearing Kunstler's Law in mind will help you become the one person who does. Your attitude and bearing should express your absolute confidence in your right to be there. If you can't look like a regular worker, look like a visiting supervisor. In the wise words of explorer Wes Modes, "Look important and people will assume that you are."

### **Telephone Research**

As mentioned, for computer hackers, social engineering is usually something done over the phone with the goal of gaining information about or additional access to a given system. While urban explorers do most of our social engineering in person, there are some instances when a little advance research over the phone can be helpful, especially if one is trying to get into a more tricky occupied location. For example, you could call up a commercial building posing as a potential tenant to ask about security policies, the regular building hours and the hours during which services are provided for tenants. If you're going to bluff your way in, it might be helpful to find out the name of the building manager, or the name of a person coordinating an event on the premises. In most cases, knowing a name or two will get you ridiculously far. Once at the location, dropping the names of other employees, or casually using acronyms or other jargon that an authorized person would know, provides subtle reassurance that you are legit, while not actually requiring you to misrepresent yourself.

### **Appearance**

On most explorations you simply want to dress so that you don't stand out from the crowd, but on expeditions that will rely on social engineering you may need to do more than just blend in. You may want to actually appear a cut above the rest. If the circumstances warrant it and your age and appearance will allow you to pull it off, try to look like management, by grooming carefully and dressing in proper business

attire and nice shoes (a shoeshine kit is a great investment for people who explore a lot of active sites.) Enlightened as we believe ourselves to be, human beings simply can't help but judge people on their appearance. Guards and employees are more reluctant to hassle someone with the ability to punish them, and tend to let those who look powerful or influential go about their business unimpeded. At the very least, if they ask "Can I help you?" they're likely to actually be wondering whether or not they can help you, rather than simply using a polite euphemism for "What the hell are you doing here?"

### **Let Them Do the Talking**

While I'm a big advocate of properly researching a place to get the inside scoop on how to act like you're supposed to be there, sometimes it's also necessary, or at least fun, to fly by the seat of your pants. In such cases, you may suddenly find yourself questioned by someone, or needing to speak with someone in order to get through a particular barrier, without having any real idea what might be a plausible reason for you to be there.

In such a case, I recommend just stalling for time and letting the person you're talking to supply your excuse for you. People hate uncomfortable silences and confusing situations and will often rush to supply the information they're looking for themselves. Good stalling phrases include: "I hope you can help me"; "I'm not sure exactly what the procedure is here"; "Do I need to show you some ID?"; "I didn't even know I was going to have to speak to anyone about this" or something of that sort. After you say one of these lines, wait for a response. People generally want to believe that the people around them are rational, so they'll more or less tell you the most rational reason they can conceive of for your presence - "Are you here for the class?"; "You must be looking for Mark"; "Are you one of today's volunteers?"; "I guess you're looking for the way to the observation level"; etc. You don't have to come up with a good reason - you just have to agree to the one they devise for you. Once you perfect the skill of stalling without seeming like you're stalling, this will work for you quite often.

Sometimes sounding prematurely defeated or overly repentant works, by making the other person eager to reassure you. Your saying "I'm really sorry, I thought the lounge might be open to all hotel guests; this is embarrassing.... I'll just go", or "I'm so stupid, I don't know why it didn't occur to me that taking a shortcut through the basement was

a security problem, I was just trying to get to my car without going out into the cold and didn't realize, oh my god I probably set off an alarm, I apologize so much ... " is likely to prompt the person you're talking to to not only reassure you that you've done nothing wrong but to help you get exactly where you want to go as a way of demonstrating that there are no hard feelings.

## Smiling

I know what you're thinking. You're thinking: "Smiling? Smiling gets its own section? I know about smiling! I don't need to learn about smiling! This is an outrage! I want a section about [insert thing you want a section about here], not some section about smiling! Maybe I don't feel like smiling, because I am just a big, fat, complaining jerk!"

While I certainly respect your concerns, and I do admit that this point about smiling is quite straightforward, it is so crucial to your success as an explorer that it really does merit its own section, if only to stress the point.

Smiling is the human equivalent of tail wagging: it tells all those mean dogs you'll encounter out there not only that YOu're friendly and pleasant, but also that you're calm and confident about your right to be somewhere. A smile says you're at ease, your guard is down, you're on your home turf, you're safe and surrounded by loved ones, you're so very relaxed ... ahhhhh, naptime.

Okay I'm back. When you are exploring a populated area, it's usually a good idea to carry around a cheerful, contented expression on your face at all times, even if you don't feel that way at all.

Psychological research has demonstrated that having a cheerful facial expression will actually help you *feel* happy; you wouldn't think emotions would flow from your face to your brain, but it turns out they do, so that shows what you know. Your face and brain should be on the same cheerful channel. The thought running through your head should be, "I'm happy, because I belong here." If you pass someone, offer a friendly nod or quick "hi", "good morning" or "how are ya". Don't go much beyond this - you don't want to leave much of an impression, or come off like a giddy freak. You just want to radiate calm contentedness.

Negative emotions have no place on your face. When you pass someone in the hallway and worry that they know you're not supposed to be there, you must smile at them. When someone suddenly stumbles

upon you in a slightly off-limits area and you're upset at being found, you must flash him or her a winning smile. When someone scowls at you and asks if they can help you and the first response that pops into your head is "only by minding your own business," you must strain to force those immensely heavy corners of your mouth aloft as you respond by thanking them and requesting directions. Your more natural nervous reactions -like keeping your eyes low, clearing your throat often, fidgeting, jumping at noises, abruptly turning away when you spot people or cameras, etc. - are much more likely to lead to trouble than just walking towards the potential trouble with a clean conscience, confidence and a cheerful disposition. Remember, you belong here and you're not doing anyone any harm.

This all probably seems obvious, and you probably assume that you would have kept on smiling whether I'd devoted a whole section to the subject or not. (Really, you need to get over that.) Indeed, you probably think you're smart enough to have figured out this smiling business all by your lonesome. But frankly I'm not so sure. Pay attention to yourself the next time you're lurking around some grey areas in a sub-basement and I think you'll find that your default expression is not really that cheerful or friendly, but rather a look of concentration or even wariness, perhaps changing to a startled expression if you encounter someone. I know these are my default expressions unless I really make a conscious effort to smile, and from what I've seen most other explorers are the same.

When I'm out with other explorers, I often find I have to remind them that we aren't doing anything wrong, because their body language is crying out that they feel timid and guilty. It's actually pretty tough to smile when you're feeling nervous and have your guard up, and especially tough to smile when you encounter people whom you regard as opponents in a tense strategic struggle. But it's a really good idea, so you should always try to remind yourself to do it.

## **Confidence**

Of course, there's more to projecting confidence than just smiling - it's quite possible to smile and still look nervous, and it's also possible to look unhappy while still looking confident. Fortunately, cultivating self-assured body language takes only slightly more effort than smiling. Basically, to look self-assured, you should try to behave like a stereotypical Texan. Walk big, with a bit of swagger. Smile and wave at people who



make even tentative eye contact. Gesture a lot when you speak and use broad gestures. Stretch your arms out to point at things. If you have occasion to speak with anyone, trim meek stalling phrases like "I guess" and "or whatever" from your vocabulary. Speak loudly and laugh frequently. Basically, make it clear as can be that you're not trying to hide or go unnoticed, but that you want to share all that you have to offer with the world. Obviously, you only need to behave like this when people who might question your presence are around, or when you're on camera.

Another important aspect of projecting confidence is looking like you know where you're going, especially whenever it's likely that you're being personally or electronically supervised. The basic trick here is to continually move forward at a steady pace -like a shark, but smarter. Don't enter a building and stand around looking confusedly for the coolest way to go, just pick a direction and start walking. It's not necessary that you move quickly, just steadily. You want to convey the idea that the building is basically a second home to you, so you should have no need to slow down to read a sign, take something in, do any double-takes or (especially) do any really elaborate, over-the-top spit-takes. You should look like it's all old news to you and you're sleep-walking through it just like everyone else. Don't try any doors that might be locked, or you'll look confused. Don't slow down to take a second look at a slightly ajar door unless you intend to walk right through it. Don't backtrack - act as if wherever you wind up is exactly where you wanted to go. Slip out of super spy mode and just let doors slam behind you instead of carefully easing them shut - careful people often look like they're up to something. If you wind up at a pay-phone or a washroom, pretend to use it. If you wind up at a dead end, whip out your cell phone and look like you were just seeking out a quiet corner from which you could make a call. As long as you always look like you know where you're going and what you're doing, it's unlikely that anyone will try to "help" you.

It's simple and cliché, but absolutely true: if you're confident you know what you're doing, they will be too.

### **Being Polite, Friendly and Helpful**

Being polite, friendly and helpful will take you pretty far. Being polite costs nothing but a few seconds of time, so there's really no reason at all not to be polite all the time. Like smiling and acting confidently, politeness may not come naturally, particularly if you're thinking of the

people you encounter as your adversaries. Being an outsider on someone else's turf, you may feel the need to project toughness, and you may even feel vaguely hostile and confrontational. But while it's true that the people around you are your opponents, you should treat them like your closest allies. Try complimenting the building in such a way as to give them credit for the place: "This is an incredible building you have here. I bet your roof has the best view in town." Asking a janitor you run into in a service corridor, "Excuse me, I'm sorry to bother you, but could you please tell me how to get to the atrium?" is so much more likely to yield positive results than "I need to get to the atrium" or "I'm looking for the atrium ... ?" While you'll probably get the information you need regardless of how you ask, if you ask politely you might get the longer version with additional helpful information, or at least get on the person's good side.

Being polite is a great start, but if you can go a step further and actually be outgoing, friendly and interested in the other person you'll be even further along. Obviously, this is a difficult task for more introverted explorers, but just try to think of it as working on your charisma score. Striking up conversations with people who have a more widely acknowledged right to be on site than you can provide you with a lot of useful information. Go a step beyond "Hi, how are you, nice weather" and actually get them talking. Simple leads like "Long day?"; "So, do people who work here still get lost?"; or "You must be fed up with people asking for directions all the time" express your friendliness and invite them to start talking (specifically, to start complaining, which is something most people love to do, and something which brings you at least slightly into their confidence). People with incredibly boring jobs, like custodians, ticket takers and security guards, may find it quite refreshing to have an opportunity to interact with someone who treats them like a human being.

Occasionally, you'll get a golden opportunity and see a worker who could use a hand. Whether it's something as simple as holding a door open for them or something slightly more advanced like helping them carry a ladder down the stairs, you should never pass up an opportunity to help a worker out. When you do this, the proper technique is not to say "Want a hand?" - an offer that most people will politely decline by instinct - but to simply grab hold and start helping. Not only will this eliminate any suspicion they might have felt towards you, it will make them feel like they owe you one. You don't actually have to cash

this favour in, of course, since being helpful is just a nice thing to do, but it's still nice to know it's there if you need it. And who knows, maybe you'll wind up carrying that ladder all the way down to the locked basement. It's often amazing who has the keys that open the magic doors. (And there's a good chance it will be the one person you piss off.)

When you're not in the mood to behave kindly, it does no harm to act a little with the goal of becoming sincere. Being polite, friendly and helpful with employees, guards and even just regular people using the building takes little effort, makes the world a better place and will occasionally help you with your explorations, so you may as well do it every time.

### **Credibility Props**

Credibility props are simple objects that in some way radiate believability and belonging. As an actor uses a stethoscope to indicate that he's a doctor or a gavel to indicate that he's a judge, explorers use props, like clipboards, key rings and tool belts, as a means of claiming to belong somewhere without having to say a word. Using simple credibility props, one can acquire near-universal trust and respect without doing a thing to deserve it and without making a false claim of any sort. And you may be surprised at just how authoritative holding a clipboard can make you feel.

There's no way to make an exhaustive list of useful credibility props, because the items that might prove useful vary drastically from place to place and situation to situation. You just have to get a sense of what will work where and get good at improvising. In a parking garage, a set of keys is a good prop. In a mechanical area, a tool belt and a well-stocked key ring work. In a field outside a patrolled abandoned building, a bird-watching guide is a handy thing to have in hand. At a construction site, a worn or carried hard hat or safety vest will help you blend in. At a TV or radio station, a clipboard clearly indicates your belongingness. If you're trying to get into a hotel pool, a towel is a good prop. Sometimes temporarily picking up a prop on location - for example, grabbing a broom or a mop to look more like a janitor - can work well, but you take the risk of being charged with theft if you happen to wind up in a confrontation with completely unreasonable people.

In places like hotels, corporate offices and similar institutions, it's often a good idea to carry a file folder or a blank sheet of paper around with you until you get the opportunity to trade up to an even better cred-

ibility prop, like a company prospectus, a map of the site or something written on a tenant company's letterhead. Or write down a fake name and room number on a piece of paper and carry that around until you stumble upon an actual company directory, and then trade up to a real name and room number. If you see a listing of daily events in a hotel, feel free to pick one that sounds fun; write down its name, location and time in your date book; and then refer to that entry as you ask a nearby hotel employee to show you how to get there. If you think it's necessary, arrive with fake business cards - either ones you've made for yourself, or just fun ones you've found in your travels. For some weird reason, people always feel more trusting of someone after that person has handed them a business card. As the *Kids in the Hall* once pointed out, it's sort of businesspeople's equivalent of smelling each other's crotches.

You should also consider the credibility issue when you're deciding how to carry your stuff. In most cases infiltration is easiest when you're carrying nothing, since people without baggage look less likely to be thieves or troublemakers, but often you'll want to bring along a tripod, a sandwich or something else that you don't want stuffed down your pants all evening. In such cases, think about where you're going. A backpack is great if you're poking around a college, but a briefcase or an attache case (either of which can be purchased for a couple of dollars at a garage sale or a thrift store) will blend in better if you're heading to a more businesslike setting. Even a shopping bag, preferably from an upscale store, will work better than a backpack in many situations, since a bag marks you as a moneyed consumer and therefore harmless. If you're out with a ratty backpack when the exploring urge hits, see if you can get a big bag from some rich person store, and then carry your backpack around in that. A small suitcase can be appropriate at a hotel or a transit hub. If you're heading to a more blue-collar site, a metallunchbox or small plastic cooler will easily store a camera, a flashlight, a first aid kit and more. Don't default to a backpack just because it's easiest for you.

Perhaps the most important credibility prop of all these days is the cell phone. Even though everyone on earth has one these days, if you're dressed appropriately, a cell phone can still help you convey the sense that you are important and businesslike and have way too many demands on your time to speak with every employee in the building who wonders if he or she can help you. Pagers and PDAs do the job of conveying importance, but they don't give you quite as much excuse to

seem completely oblivious to the world around you as a cell phone. When you're wandering through a lobby or looking around for an elevator, a cell phone gives you a perfect cover for seeming distracted, confused, irritable, curt or even entirely non-responsive, since most people who use cell phones a lot are annoying jerks. (An unfair generalization perhaps, but what are the odds that anyone who uses a cell phone a lot is going to read this?) People will generally not bother you while you're talking on a cell phone. On top of these advantages, being on a cell phone provides a good excuse for wandering away from noisy populated areas, down the stairs or off into the darkened hallways, or for looking for an area with better reception, like the roof. Even if you can't afford, or simply don't want, a working cell phone, you might still consider taking along a broken one as a credibility prop.

### **Be-Right-Back Props**

Speaking of broken cell phones, another sort of prop, with far less common applications, is the be-right-back prop. These are cheap items, obtained at garage sales or thrift stores for a dollar or so, that seem like the sort of item no one would leave behind, but that you can actually easily abandon. Obvious examples include a jacket, a book, a broken cell phone or a purse. Anything of perceived value that doesn't look like a bomb will do. If you leave your jacket or shopping bag on your chair in the waiting room while you wander away, the receptionist will just naturally assume that you're not going far and that you'll be back in a moment, while in actuality you're long gone, having snuck down to the basement and taken the steam tunnels halfway to Mexico. People such as receptionists, guards and other employees will generally worry less about the possibility of you wandering off if they think you've left some of your possessions behind as collateral, particularly if they assume that those possessions contain some **ID**. While these disposable props are only handy in a few fairly specialized situations, when they're handy they're really handy.

### **Disguise**

What can compare to the joy of slowly peeling off your fake head and confronting your archnemesis deep within the sanctity of his or her secret underground lair, after having duped him or her into thinking that you were his or her trusted henchperson? Not much, let me tell you, not much. And yet disguises need not be quite this elaborate to

be useful to an explorer. Indeed, most disguises explorers use are extremely simple, stopping well short of the phoney moustache, let alone the prosthetic face.

One basic variety of disguise that explorers use fairly often to some degree involves simply not looking like yourself, so that any video footage or eyewitness accounts of your exploits will not be connected back to you. This kind of low-level disguise can be useful if you're exploring your own school or workplace, for example, or if you're exploring a building from which you've been banned on a previous occasion. Merely wearing a different jacket than you normally would is a disguise of a sort. Most people recognize you by your eyes and hair, so temporary hair dye, sunglasses or weak non-prescription glasses can help you out; if you have the option, you could also temporarily grow or shave off some facial hair for the occasion. If you had long hair before, put it up and tuck it into a hat; if it was up, take it down.

Another sort of disguise is more geared to fitting in than to active deception. You're hardly committing fraud if you dress up like a student, a churchgoer, a businessman or a tourist in order to make people less inclined to notice you in your setting of choice. Such costumes take minimum effort and involve minimum risk.

Using the same sort of disguise, but to a greater degree, allows you to very strongly imply that you have permission to be somewhere, while still stopping short of actually making a dishonest claim or actually impersonating someone. While it is illegal in most places to disguise yourself as a cop or a security guard, it isn't illegal to look like a construction worker, an electrician or a maintenance worker. If you're wearing workpants and a tool belt and people assume you're a maintenance worker, well, that's tragic but it can't be helped. A few different-coloured hard hats, safety vests and jumpsuits can go a long way. Ebay and Goodwill are both very helpful in this regard, and you'll also often find hard hats and safety vests lying around a construction site. They're pretty cheap, so they aren't usually kept locked up. If you borrow such items, make sure you remember the "returning" part of the borrowing, and bear in mind that if you get caught before you've returned them you're probably going to be charged with theft rather than borrowing.

In theory, pizza delivery or courier company uniforms could be useful for getting past front desks, but I'm unable to confirm or deny that this works, having never heard any believable stories.

## Excuses

Know your story. Many infiltrations will involve at least some interaction with other people, so unless you're excellent at thinking on your feet, you should have a detailed, realistic story of what you're up to in mind before you get there, and anyone you're exploring with should have the same story. At the very least, you should know the name and location of the person or business you're pretending to visit. Again, writing this down on a slip of paper makes for a quick and simple prop.

Of course, there's more to this than just having everyone in the group memorize a clever story in advance. You need to be adaptable and adjust the story as you go along. If your plan is to look for the utility tunnel network under a particular building, "We're just looking for a shortcut to the parking garage" is a great story to start out with, but don't forget to change your story when you move on to try to seek out the pool, visit an abandoned wing, crash a party or look for the roof. Make sure everyone in your group knows the updated story and behaves appropriately. There's more to this than just having the excuse memorized: you should be in character. A group of three young men riding up an elevator with other people shouldn't just be smiling shyly and staring at their shoes, they should be talking to each other about the fake meeting they're going to. Similarly, two contractors walking around a construction site shouldn't be lurking quietly and giving each other subtle hand signals - they should be making notes, talking to each other loudly and confidently and pointing things out to each other. A little acting goes a long way.

Explorers get a lot of mileage out of the same handful of vague, tried-and-true excuses: trying to find the keys you dropped down this hole, looking for a washroom, here for the conference, looking for a payphone, looking for the exit, getting a little exercise, looking for the parking garage, waiting for a friend, on the way out, looking for Dr. Emil's office, heading to the vending machine, looking for a place to have a smoke, getting a breath of fresh air, lost... basically anything straightforward and hard to disprove will work. More concrete excuses involving false claims ("I'm a courier"; "I just got a job in your shipping department"; "I'm here for an appointment") are too easy for a guard or employee to check up on and disprove, especially if you see they're carrying a radio or phone.

When I go exploring with other people, I sometimes like to ask them out of the blue every now and then, "So if a guard came up to you

right now and asked you what you were doing here, what would you say?" All too often, they've got nothing ready and are totally unable to improvise. Perhaps half the time, they do have an excuse, but it's much too easy to disprove. "I'm staying in room 1310" is likely to generate one of the three following responses: (1) "May I see your room key, please?"; (2) "Can I have your name please, so I can just check that with the front desk?"; (3) "This hotel doesn't have a room 1310, please come with me." You're not *staying* at the hotel- that's too easy to disprove. You're visiting friends who are staying at the hotel, and have no idea what room they're in. You were coming for dinner at the restaurant in the hotel. You're at the hotel for the convention (provided you know the name of a convention happening in the hotel that day). You parked underneath the hotel on your way to a nearby show. Or something more straightforward, like, you wanted to show your friend how beautiful the hotel you stayed in was or you wanted to see the view of the city from the top of the hotel. Stick with excuses they can disbelieve, if they want, but that they will find difficult to prove false.

My general practice, which I would recommend to any explorer, is not to lie any more than you have to, even when it would be entirely legal to do so. This has some practical benefits, but mostly I suggest this just because I think it's lousy behaviour to abuse someone's trust. Yes, it curtails your freedom of action a little, but hey, that whole placing-ethics-above-laws dealie has to go both ways. (But, you ask, is there a real ethical difference between directly lying to people and merely deceiving them? Personally I think lying's considerably nastier than misleading, since it takes advantage of people's trust rather than people's assumptions, but I'll leave you to consider the issue for yourself.)

In my opinion, misleading can be a great substitute for lying if you're fairly quick on your feet, since doing a good job at being misleading can often save you the trouble of having to lie. Suppose you're riding up in an elevator with a bunch of businessmen who you've just piggybacked in with in order to bypass the security desk and one happens to ask if you work in the building. While your easiest and most obvious reply would probably be "I'm just a temp helping out in marketing" or something of that sort, it's preferable to respond with something misleading but not dishonest, like "Not when I don't have to!" (As an added plus, people never bust you once you've made them laugh ... even if it's only with the sort of lame humour that's only funny in the rarefied environment of an office building.) This sort of indirect



reply also eliminates the chance that they'll respond, "But this company doesn't have a marketing department", or "I thought Claire was on holiday this week" or something of that sort. Lying as little as possible also has the practical benefit of keeping you from mixing your story up and getting caught by your lies.

In many cases it will be to your advantage for you to initiate the conversation, rather than waiting for the other person to do so. One of the basic principles of chess, and most strategic games, is equally true of social engineering: take the lead and make your opponent react to you, instead of you reacting to your opponent. If you stroll right up to the security desk and politely but confidently ask how to get to the conference level, they don't *need* to stop you and ask you if you work there or if they can help you. You obviously know what you're doing, and they know how to give you what you want.

## Playing Dumb

While the old saying about how ignorance of the law is no excuse is completely ludicrous, considering how many thousands of irrational and non-intuitive laws there are and how frequently and arbitrarily they're changed, cops and security guards really, really take that saying to heart. They don't always know the laws that well themselves, but they sure as heck expect you to have them memorized - at least, all the ones that work against you. They don't mind if you don't know the ones about your rights and stuff. They usually don't know those ones, either.

While playing dumb is hard to do, it often beats the alternatives. You would usually be much better off saying you didn't realize you were breaking a rule or a law than you would be saying you knew what you were doing was technically against policy but didn't think you'd be hurting anyone. Most cops and security guards, at least those who take their positions seriously, *hate* the idea of people making a conscious and deliberate decision to ignore the rules, since such decisions challenge their conception of society's basic framework. A mere idiot, on the other hand, doesn't challenge their worldview at all, so they'd generally prefer to catch someone being stupid than catch someone being disobedient. Thus, you're probably better off saying that you didn't realize that taking a few quick pictures just inside the employees-only area would be considered trespassing, or that you didn't know that abandoned buildings were considered private property, or that you had

no idea storm drains were off-limits to the general public, or that it never occurred to you that roof access might be restricted and so on.

You may have inadvertently passed a few warning signs in your travels, and the person questioning you may have noticed this. If they point out that you passed a "no trespassing" sign, you should simply respond that you weren't *trespassing*, you were just here looking for the washroom, or the payphone, or your friend, being careful to stick to the main hallway and not actually going into any of the rooms. If the sign in question reads "authorized personnel only", "unauthorized entry prohibited" or something of that sort, just explain that you thought since you were here to meet your friend (or had a ticket to the event, or had an appointment here, or paid for parking here, etc.) that you *were* authorized. You thought the sign was just to keep loiterers, bums and troublemakers out. Alternately, say that your authorization came from a guy who was in the area who said it would be okay, and you assumed he was an employee ... you think maybe he had brown hair and sideburns.

Occasionally you can get away with playing dumb even when you're caught somewhere obviously off-limits, like a subbasement or a steam tunnel, as long as there is at least one way to get there without passing a bunch of clear, obvious "do not enter" signs. And there usually is at least one such route. I often pass "authorized personnel only" or "no trespassing" signs but, once I'm on the other side of the signs, three out of four times I find another way that I could have come which wouldn't have involved passing any signs at all. I always keep careful track of these things in case I'm caught and need to explain how I got in. (They're almost like "save points" in videogames.) If you are reluctant to admit that you spent half an hour climbing and crawling around to get where you are, you can also claim that some nearby locked door was slightly ajar when you found it and you had just wandered through. This usually works, as long as what you suggest is physically possible and there's nothing on videotape to contradict you.

Pleading that you are lost also works, since many people - even those who aren't exploring - do get lost surprisingly easily. Looking flustered but grateful, you can claim you missed or misread a sign, or that some other person gave you bad directions to a shortcut, and that you were just trying to find your way out of the building or to the washrooms or back to the public area. Be polite. Apologize for your ignorance and the hassle and thank the employee or guard for his or her

help in getting you back on track. Ask about how to do things the right way in the future.

Attempting to portray yourself as an irrational or deranged person is unlikely to work even if you're not really exaggerating the case that much, since security guards tend to be less sympathetic than the average person and few will take pity on you just because you're deranged. Mentally stable or not, you're still annoying them, and that's what really counts. Acting like you don't speak English or whatever language the guards are using isn't a very good idea either, since it's quite possible that this will just make them more determined to make your life unpleasant. Nor should you think that threatening to make a scene is likely to help you out - guards generally have boring jobs and would welcome a scene. Furthermore, the more people who notice the incident, the less likely it is that the guard will decide to forget the whole thing.

### **Fast-talking**

Those who occasionally fib their way out of a tight situation - or into one - generally refer to the practice as "fast-talking", which certainly sounds much nicer than lying. While I don't like the idea of using euphemisms to cover up the act of abusing people's trust, I like the term fast-talking because whereas "lying" sounds like it requires nothing more than a willingness to deceive, "fast-talking" quite rightly sounds like a skill that needs to be developed, and like something that shouldn't be attempted by those who don't know what they're doing. And fast-talking is usually more about misleading, misdirecting, confusing and exhausting people's patience than about exploiting people's trust.

Some people have a natural talent for fast-talking, whereas others must develop it through practice or by watching people who are good at it. You probably have a rough idea of whether or not you'd be any good at fast-talking your way out of a delicate situation from your past attempts to squirm out of sticky situations with your parents, teachers, bosses and so on. If you know you're good at sounding earnest, sincere and convincing, and that you're good at thinking on your feet, you may have what it takes. If you turn red, stutter and say "umm" a lot when you're trying to make up excuses, you shouldn't try your skills out for real until you've practiced a while with a mirror or a video camera, or with friends - preferably with friends who *know* you're practicing on them.

When you're fast-talking in the field, don't make your story any more elaborate than it needs to be. A lot of amateurs seem to think that fast-talkers communicate a lot. This is wrong. They communicate very little, they just use a lot of words to do it. Don't concoct an epic tale, just reiterate the same four or five ideas over and over again, sounding more earnest and sincere each time, until the person gets sick of hearing your routine and sends you on your way. If you instead make up a long and complicated story, you're likely to paint yourself into a corner with inconsistent details. There's just no need for you to fashion a completely functional alternate reality. A total non-story will often work better than an interesting and creative tale, so feel free to be boring. "An older woman with brown hair and glasses said this was the way to the parking garage, or at least I thought she did" is much more likely to get you the results you want than "These three big Hispanic guys tried to mug me, and then started to chase me, so I ran in here to look for a 'place to hide'". If you were the guard who heard these two unlikely excuses, which person would you want to dismiss and which would you want to question in detail? In this case, the suggestion of violence in the second story would likely require that the excuse be taken seriously and the appropriate reports filled out whether the guard bought it or not.

While it's important not to make up a bigger story than necessary, it's true that throwing in small, irrelevant details can help make a story seem more realistic. Quickly creating believable scenarios and characters is a lot easier if you base them on real situations and real people - your tongue is probably going to be working faster than your imagination, so tell a real anecdote you're heard before, or describe a friend or co-worker rather than trying to invent a fictitious story or character on the spot. Whenever possible, use misdirection to change the subject, or stress the points that are least important. Act like you're defending yourself against an accusation of being stupid, or vandalizing, or stealing, or having done something embarrassing, rather than an accusation of having trespassed. If the person you're speaking with clarifies that they're actually accusing you of having trespassed, act baffled.

One key to fast-talking, as with all excuse-making, is to never admit to having broken any rules knowingly. You can certainly admit that you inadvertently did something wrong or something careless, having missed the "authorized personnel only" sign or not having understood the policies about rooftop access, but you should treat any suggestion

that you deliberately ignored a sign or disobeyed a rule with shock, confusion and indignation. Your reaction should be along the lines of "But why on earth would anyone ever do such a thing, except by accident?! It wouldn't make any sense!" Refuse to comprehend any suggestion that your story could somehow be considered questionable.

The other key to fast-talking, and to much interaction with other people, is to make good eye contact. Most people, even most explorers, are terrible at this. You don't want to stare at the person, but neither do you want to avoid their stare or lower or avert your eyes when you're embarrassed. This is a really important social engineering skill - right up there with smiling, really. Practice in the mirror and practice with friends. As you speak, focus on trying to read the other person, not on making sure they don't get a good, straight-on look at you. Let them look. You've done nothing wrong, damn it!

If you are a girl, and the person who catches you is a guy, a little flirting will riot hurt. In fact, it will probably get you out of a bad situation nine times out of ten. Unfortunately, the same is probably not true if the genders are reversed, unless you're an unusually easy-on-the-eye fellow. Girls also have the option of starting to cry to garner sympathy. Guys do not. The world is full of double standards.

## **Being Straightforward**

Just as it doesn't make sense to sneak around a building when hiding in plain sight will work best, it doesn't make sense to deceive or make up excuses when being straightforward will get you where you want to go just as well.

Sometimes you'll arrive at a place and find the area you're interested in is off-limits and guarded or supervised and that there doesn't seem to be any way to sneak past. If you get the impression that the person barring your progress just might have a drop of compassion, try approaching them and telling them that you've come a long way and that you'd be really grateful if they'd just let you take a quick look and grab a few pictures. Occasionally it works, if you're friendly and enthusiastic enough - indeed, occasionally it *really* works, and they'll give you the grand tour or even let you show yourself around. Other times they'll tell you who to talk to about getting a tour, or tell you when you might come back and try again. And still other times they'll just tell you to get lost.

Some explorers think exploring with legitimately gained permission somehow "doesn't count" (count towards what, I don't know). It's

true that getting permission does remove some degree of danger and excitement, but you can still discover and document a spot's little-known and neglected areas and enjoy its architecture and infrastructure, as long as it isn't one of those very closely guided tours that focus solely on those uninteresting parts of the building that have been deemed suitable for public consumption (such as the gallery of paintings of old, dead white guys). A loosely guided or do-it-yourself tour with permission can be a wonderful thing.

In my opinion it's ridiculous to think that you're exploring "for real" if you deceive your way in but not if you ask nicely. Urban exploration isn't about putting one over on The Man so much as it's about going beyond the safe, sanitized and commercial spaces that are generally the only areas open to the public. It doesn't become a "real" exploration because you threw yourself on someone's mercy and asked if you could use the washroom and then took off into the basement - that's just abusing someone's goodwill and making him or her likely to be less trusting in the future. I won't suggest that taking advantage of people is always wrong - it's fine and dandy to take harmless advantage of someone's stupidity, carelessness, incuriosity, laziness or forgetfulness - but no one is going to award you extra points because you took advantage of someone's trust. There's no cunning in that, just abuse. Trust is a pretty precious and easily damaged thing and you should play nicely with it.

Naturally, there are reasonable and unreasonable approaches to this whole straightforwardness business. Lines like "I was wondering if you could tell me how to sneak down to your steam tunnels" or "I'm hoping to trespass here, can you give me some tips?" are not likely to get you anywhere. On the other hand, equally truthful but more carefully phrased explanations like "I'm interested in church architecture and wondered if there was any way I could take a look at the bell tower" or "I've read a lot about your abandoned observation deck and I'd love to see it" are reasonable and good and may occasionally open a few doors for you.

In some circumstances, being straightforward can also be a good strategy when you're caught. If an employee or a guard spots you casually checking behind a door in a public area and asks what you're doing, you don't really need to expend any energy coming up with some long, convoluted excuse, unless you feel like it or think you could use the practice. You haven't done anything wrong, and honestly

explaining that you're "just curious" should do the job nicely. "I just wanted a picture" is another totally honest and usually totally sufficient excuse, provided you have a camera. People understand the hobby of photography a lot more easily than they comprehend urban exploration, even though a lot of people have trouble understanding why anyone would ever want pictures of tunnels or machinery. The guard or employee might direct you back to a more public area, but unless you've passed warning signs or are somewhere very obviously off-limits, you shouldn't put up with a lecture or anything of that sort.

While I usually recommend avoiding any admission of wrongdoing, it's okay to deviate from this slightly if you're caught somewhere that's only a *little bit* off-limits and you judge that the person who has caught you isn't on a power trip. Sometimes a simple "I'm sorry, I thought maybe I wasn't supposed to come down here, I was just curious, I'll take off" will get you further than a string of excuses. Try to read the person you're dealing with to determine if they're likely to reward or punish you for being straight with them. While a lot of security guards are frustrated bullies who live for the moments when they can inconvenience and intimidate people, others are real people who just needed some money and accidentally wound up being security guards. Some people will pounce on any admission of wrongdoing, but others will appreciate being taken into your confidence and treated with respect. In guessing which type of guard you're dealing with, your gut instinct is your best guide.

### **Sentence Yourself**

My favourite bit of the story "The Song of the South" is the bit where Brer Fox catches Brer Rabbit. Brer Fox isn't exactly sure what to do with his captive, so Brer Rabbit repeatedly cries, "Whatever you do, please just don't throw me into the briar patch!" until at last Brer Fox decides to make Brer Rabbit's nightmare a reality by throwing Brer Rabbit into the briar patch. This, of course, is what Brer Rabbit had wanted all along, because he knows how to navigate the briar patch without any problem at all. That is one smooth rabbit.

Like Brer Fox, many police officers, guards and nosy employees have no real idea what to do when they catch someone whose only crime is curiosity. They're trained to spot and deal with thieves, vandals, troublemakers, terrorists and other bad people - not people who desire nothing more than to see the basement or take a photo from the

roof. There is nothing in their manual to tell them how to deal with someone who is just curious, or who just wants a picture and who doesn't seem to be harming any people or endangering any property or even invading anyone's privacy. This gives you an advantage in a situation where you're caught and your opponent has no real idea what to do with you.

Although few people you'll encounter will ever actually *ask* you to suggest your own punishment - that's more of a dad thing - if you have an idea and they don't, they're likely to take your suggestion. This is especially true if you can avoid drawing attention to the fact that it's your suggestion and make them think that it's their idea or their organization's policy. People are lazy and slow so, in most cases, lines like "Sorry, well, I guess I have to go now ... I know the way out" or "I guess you have to ask me to leave now" work wonders. (Start nodding yes as you make your suggestion. Nodding, like yawning, is subconsciously catching.) Such sentiments aren't an admission of guilt, of course, just an expression of your willingness to avoid making things stressful for the other person. Since your presence is the only problem, your volunteering to leave should solve the whole thing. Volunteering this solution at the right time and in the right tone will almost always help keep the situation from being passed along to a supervisor, or otherwise becoming awkward or unpleasant.



## EQUIPPING

A lot of people watch James Bond or Batman movies not so much for the intense sex appeal of Roger Moore or Michael Keaton as for the treasure trove of cool gadgets. We love the pen that turns into a gun, the watch that turns into a hovercraft and the belt-buckle that turns into a refrigerator, and we dream of the day when we will have it all hanging from our own personal utility belt, preferably after a long, loud, Dolby-enhanced equipping sequence.

Gadgets are indeed neat, and when a lot of people first get into urban exploration they begin a mad scramble to equip themselves with as much secret agent swag as possible. In some cases, a team of explorers will divvy up their joint wish list and collect a communal stockpile of gadgetry, not resting until they have a veritable arsenal of flashlights and other battery-powered whatsits.

This is fun stuff, and there's absolutely nothing wrong with it if you can afford it, but please don't get the impression that it's necessary, or that the more gadgets you get the more of an explorer you will be. Most gadgetry is not only unnecessary but worse than useless outside of a few rare special instances. Often toys will just weigh you down, bulk you up and slow your progress on excursions that don't require any special equipment. Some equipment - night vision goggles, say - can cause you to look more suspicious and make it more difficult for you to convincingly plead your innocence if you are caught. Besides that, the less equipment you have, the more fun you'll have improvising and following in the proud traditions of the A-Team and MacGyver (the TV character, not the explorer of the same name, though he's good too). I normally recommend travelling with only the real basics, though I concede that a few more specialized supplies and tools have their uses in certain circumstances.

### The Basics

While no equipment is actually essential, there are three pieces of basic equipment that I regard as the explorer's best friends: the flashlight, the camera and the moist towellette. Because exploration opportunities can arise suddenly and at any time, I recommend having these three essentials on you not just when you go exploring but *at all times*.

Since its invention in 1898, the battery-powered flashlight has virtually put the kerosene-soaked-torch industry out of business. As you

get into urban exploration, it's likely that you'll come to think of your flashlight not so much as a piece of equipment but as a part of your body that you remove in order to shower. Flashlights are all-but-essential equipment for explorers who are interested in touring storm drains or unlit tunnels or visiting abandoned buildings at night, but they're also pretty important even if you're exploring somewhere more populated, like an open-for-business school or a hotel, because the most interesting areas are often unlit.

There are many types of flashlights out there. Some people like big, heavy, six-D-cell Maglites that can be used as baseball bats in an emergency (you never know when an impromptu baseball game is going to break out); other people, with a different set of unresolved childhood issues, prefer two-million-candlepower halogen spotlights that act as portable suns. Those who fancy themselves secret agents tend to favour tiny, slim penlights or key chain lights powered by long-lasting light-emitting diodes (LEDs) that are light and easy to conceal, while those more in the survivalist vein tend to prefer sturdy, waterproof flashlights that won't be damaged if you accidentally drop them in a storm drain and then run back and forth over them with a truck. Some, like me, like a few of each. Whatever you prefer, it's a good idea to keep at least one flashlight with trustworthy alkaline batteries (never rechargeables, as they die much too suddenly) on you at all times, just in case an opportunity arises unexpectedly, which is generally how opportunities work.

Take at least two flashlights with trustworthy batteries with you when you're touring storm drains or other locations where you could be stranded in the darkness if your primary flashlight breaks (and no, taking backup batteries isn't just as good as taking a second flashlight - sometime the batteries are fine but the flashlight isn't). Don't use a glow-in-the-dark flashlight for exploring. Oh, and definitely don't use one of those crank-powered survivalist flashlights. Sure, they'll be fun after the apocalypse, but in the meantime they're just noisy.

After a flashlight, the second most desirable piece of equipment you can take along is a camera of some sort. Cameras help capture vivid memories of a place and time and allow you to share your findings with others. Expedition photographs are not only enjoyable to reminisce upon or appreciate as works of art or slices of history, but can be useful aids to your future explorations or to the explorations of others, as someone will often see something in the pictures that you missed while you were there or will see the picture and be reminded of

some useful fact. Photos can also be a useful method of recording blueprints, maps and manuals you find on-site for later analysis at home. Even more importantly, explorer photos may also provide some of the only remnants of a place after it is destroyed. While taking a pen or pencil and some paper along is often a good idea as well, since these allow you to capture details a camera misses, photographs provide an excellent aid to later constructing written accounts of an expedition, and taking a photograph takes a lot less time than writing down a full description of a scene. Can you imagine if you had to write a thousand words every time you wanted to describe something? Your hand would get totally cramped. As mentioned, cameras are also useful as credibility props, since many people consider the hobby of photography to be more socially acceptable than the hobby of urban exploration, and tend to prefer the explanation "I was just taking pictures" to "I was just looking around". People's tastes in cameras differ even more radically than people's tastes in flashlights, with some preferring large, heavy, single-lens reflex film cameras with special lenses and tripods, cable releases, flashguns, flash reflectors and so on; others preferring tiny digital spy cameras with no features other than fitting comfortably in one's pocket (or cell phone); and still others preferring disposable cardboard cameras that they don't have to worry about dropping in sewer water.

My general advice on this front would be to scout with a smallish camera and, if you find that you're not satisfied with your snapshots and you feel that security won't be a problem, try to come back with a camera that will allow you to do justice to the location. Digital cameras are very well suited to urban exploration, since explorers will frequently take several dozen underexposed shots a month, and it's frustrating to pay to develop those. That said, most accomplished photographers agree that film still has an edge over digital, and that truly breathtaking shots deserve to be captured on film rather than in pixels.

Finally we come to the last piece of basic equipment, the moist towellette. Moist towellettes, sometimes known as Wet Naps, can be purchased at some pharmacies, or you can simply grab large handfuls of them at restaurants that sell fried chicken or other greasy food. They offer an extremely compact and portable method for transporting backup cleanliness. Moist towellettes are handy for washing dirt, soot, pigeon droppings, bacteria, sewage, blood or what-have-you off your face and hands and, although they're no substitute for soap, water and disinfectant, they're useful for getting dirt and germs out of

cuts. They're also good for tidying up clothing and polishing shoes, in those common situations where you need to pass through civilized, populated areas on your way back from tunnels, basements, mechanical rooms, rooftops and other dirty areas without looking suspicious. Moist towellettes allow you to instantly switch from a grime-and-mud-coated thug to a respectable-looking citizen incapable of naughtiness. For the explorer who likes to climb down from the attic and go back to the wedding reception, or to end a long night of tunnel running with a relaxing swim in the pool of a luxury hotel, moist towellettes are indispensable.

## Clothing

To the outsider, most explorers probably seem quite casual in matters of fashion, but in reality explorers need to pay a great deal of attention to how they dress. On top of worrying about how good-lookin' they are, explorers must consider the utility, warmth, protection, durability, manoeuvrability, stealth, waterproofing and disposability of their wardrobe, as well as its appropriateness to their chosen setting.

*Utility.* The purpose of clothing is to hold pockets. This is clothing's function; it does not make sense to wear clothing that does not have pockets. If you're wearing a jacket, it's really not pulling its weight unless it has at least eight pockets. Vests filled with pockets are your friends. Wear pants with lots of pockets - in locations where you don't need to look businessy, cargo pants are great, since they can hold a regular-sized camera or a drink without too much discomfort. You may as well have pockets in your shirt. If you can get some pockets in your underwear or bra, go for it. If you have sufficient pockets, you can get away with carrying your flashlights, your camera, your moist towellettes, your cell phone, your pen and paper and your what-have-you, all without burdening yourself with a cumbersome and potentially suspicious backpack, purse or (*shudder*) fanny-pack.

*Warmth.* For those of us north of the south, warm clothes are essential for late-night expeditions in the chill of winter where you may wind up spending a lot of time outside, or in buildings so drafty that you may as well be outside. The best sorts of clothes are those that provide a lot of heat without adding a lot of encumbrance in the form of weight or bulkiness. Dressing in layers, as you may have heard before, is a very good idea. Long underwear, gloves and a toque can make you very happy; scarves not only keep you warm, they can even be used as

a rope substitute in some situations. If there's a chance you might get wet on a cold night, be sure to bring a change of clothes, since in cold weather wet clothing is worse than useless.

Of course, most explorers probably worry about being too hot more often than they worry about being too cold. Running around stairwells and steam tunnels and climbing buildings and ladders can be sweaty work. These problems are made worse when you visit someplace hot in the middle of winter and find yourself saddled with a heavy jacket you don't want. In these situations, it's often good to see if you can find a locker or a hidden cubby-hole somewhere you can stash your jacket and grab it later, since overheating is bad for your body and your brain, and greatly increases your chances of injuring yourself.

*Protection.* On hot summer days you may be tempted to go visit your local abandoned factory in nothing but shorts and a t-shirt, but that really isn't smart, as the place may be swarming with tetanus and other germs that would love to make your acquaintance. Wear jeans or durable pants and a lightweight long-sleeved shirt, take a lot of water and try to stay in the shade. In all situations where the temperatures you'll be encountering will allow it, it makes sense to wear long pants and long sleeves, as these will provide you with extra protection against cuts, scrapes, burns, bug bites, train derailments and the like.

*Durability.* While it makes sense for you to wear clothing that you can bear to see damaged, it's a bad idea to head out in cheap, flimsy rags. If you start out with jeans with big holes in the knees, you're going to be frustrated down the line when you find a really tempting crawl tunnel and can't see where it goes. In potentially scrapey situations, think thick. Denim is good; thin cotton or polyester clothes are bad. Leather pants are a bit much, but a leather jacket isn't a bad idea. Thick leather work gloves are ideal for crawling through tunnels or climbing slightly rusty ladders. Sturdy shoes or boots are so important that it's worth devoting not only extra time but even extra money to finding an ideal pair. Caterpillars and Terra Wildsiders are popular sturdy shoes with good grips. With boots, a steel toe is nice if you can afford it, but at the very least try to get ones with thick rubber soles, of the sort that won't allow rusty nails, bits of broken glass, crack pipes or used syringes to protrude into the soles of your feet. That can suck.

*Manoeuvrability.* While you have to dress for warmth and protection from the elements, it's also important to dress for manoeuvrability. In many locales, you'll need to make some pretty awkward climbs

and crawls and shove yourself through some pretty narrow holes if you want to see everything. You're not going to be able to do that if you're wearing overly bulky snow gear, a trench coat or tight jeans, or if you're one of those demented people who thinks it's a good idea to pretend your crotch begins at your knees. Wear clothing that fits snugly but comfortably, and that doesn't weigh you down more than necessary. Don't wear track pants, as they're baggy and offer heat but no protection. If you're likely to get wet, try to wear clothing that will dry off relatively quickly, as wet clothing can slow you down a lot. If you choose to wear a hat, get a tight-fitting one. Don't wear anything that's likely to fall off.

*Stealth.* Some people think of dressing for stealth and immediately conjure up images of black clothes, balaclavas and camouflage. While those things have their place (in movies, mostly, but also occasionally for sneaking into all-but-unpopulated areas), they have some significant drawbacks when one is exploring even sparsely populated areas. People dressed all in black tend to arouse suspicion, since thieves, vampires and other bad guys tend to favour dressing entirely in black. You do not want to be found in a utility tunnel wearing a black trench coat, as black trench coats have certain lingering connotations of deep psychological notgoodness. Similarly, people dressed in combat fatigues or military camouflage often earn themselves extra attention, since delusional, unstable people who think they're paramilitaries and the last true defenders of freedom often sport such attire. This is extra attention you don't need. Furthermore, should you happen to be caught on a rooftop while enrobed entirely in black or in camouflage, you're going to have a much harder time convincing someone you were just casually looking or just grabbing a quick breath of fresh air than you would have if you were wearing, say, a Charlotte Hornets jacket.

This isn't to say that I think you should go exploring in a Charlotte Hornets jacket - they're tacky, and besides, dressing in dark clothes when you're exploring dark areas makes a lot of sense. There's nothing suspicious about wearing black pants, black shoes and black socks, but with shirts and coats, you should favour dark blue, dark green or dark brown over black. Dark colours look black in the dark, but don't arouse suspicion in the light. Besides, they really bring out the colours in your eyes. I mean that.

When you're picking out jackets (or backpacks), make sure you don't accidentally get anything with a reflective strip, or if you do, make

sure you remove it. You don't want to be reflectin' nothin'.

Another part of dressing stealthily is dressing in quiet clothing. While you probably don't need to worry about the tiny creaks from your leather jacket that has not yet been fully broken in - unless you take a lot of pleasure in being anal retentive - you don't want there to be loud rustling, swishing or jingling noises while you're walking down a darkened hallway late at night. Don't wear vinyl clothing, or jackets or pants with jangly zippers or Velcro pockets. Don't wear shoes that squeak. Don't accessorize with clinking jewellery or chains.

*Waterproofing.* Guarding your lower body against *l'eau* is primarily an issue in drains and sewers, but it's a concern in flooded tunnels and basements as well. Don't bother picking up the \$15 eight-inch-tall boots they sell at Wal-mart or Zellers - you'll flood those almost immediately in almost any drain and quickly find yourself out \$15 for nothing. If you think you're going to spend any time at all in water tunnels or flooded sites, you may as well go straight for what my colleagues in Alberta call *uberboots*, thick rubber boots that come up to the knee or higher. The next step after this is to get a pair of hip waders, which some explorers actually do use. Those who spend time in wet and misty drains and sewers may even go a step further and sport raincoats as well, but usually the boots or hip waders will do the trick. A hat is also a good idea when looking at drains with icky stuff hanging from the ceiling.

*Disposability.* In many exploratory locales, including drains, tunnels, abandoned buildings, construction sites and basically any other site where one need not dress to impress, it makes sense to dress disposably, or at least to wear clothing that can get dirty or ripped. If you don't have anything like this handy, thrift stores like Goodwill can hook you up. In some exploratory situations, it makes sense to bring along some extra clothes to change into; after visiting a sewer or somewhere with a hearty helping of asbestos, if you spent less than \$10 putting the ensemble together, you may want to just throw your whole exploring outfit away. But don't do this unless you remembered to bring something else to change into. Wearing disposable clothing can also be helpful as an element of subtle disguise - if you're spotted on the roof in a dark brown shirt you bought for \$2 at a garage sale, just get rid of it and walk around in the Day-Glo orange shirt you had on underneath. Noone will recognize you.

*Appropriateness.* Since explorers are normally eager to avoid sticking out or creating an impression, we tend to dress the same way

most other people at a location will be dressed. In some cases, certain clothing will be chosen not so much for its utility as for its value as a credibility prop - as when you wear a suit to a fancy soiree, for example. In most situations involving live buildings, it's hard to overdress, short of wearing a tuxedo to a ball game. Employees simply don't have time to get to know you and determine if you're trustworthy, and so tend to assess you quickly based on what you're wearing. Explore the exact same office tower, once in jeans and a t-shirt and once in a suit, and see how much further the suit takes you. If you dirty and scuff your dress shoes a lot, like me, make sure your home Batcave is well stocked with shoe polish. In most businesses and institutions, nothing cries "I'm a harmless drone, ignore me" like a well-knotted necktie. When dealing with construction sites, on the other hand, it's important to think casual. Basically, you should try to dress like the people that *should* be visiting the site in question, or like a harmless and forgettable person in situations where this doesn't apply. When you're trying to blend in, don't wear a hat or sunglasses. Avoid wearing bright colours or shirts featuring words or distinctive logos. If you must bring along a bag, make sure it's indistinct and appropriate to the site.

### Supplies and Tools

What follows is neither a list of everything you should bring on every trip nor a list of everything you'll ever need. Rather, these are a few basic items - beyond the aforementioned flashlight, camera and moist towellettes - that you should consider packing if they seem appropriate to the site you're visiting and you don't think they'll weigh you down or bulk you up too much. Unlike gadgets, which people just like to buy and tend to justify their expenditures by pretending there is a need, the following items are often of actual use.

*Antihistamines.* If you have allergies or asthma, don't forget your pills, spray, inhaler, epi-pen or what-have-you. Many places you'll visit are dusty and full of allergens.

*Cell phone.* A cell phone is not only a great credibility prop but also a communication tool useful for calling friends and loved ones and telling them that you're trapped in a pit and you think your leg is broken. You may want to keep the numbers of some fellow explorers on hand in case you get into a situation that requires another explorer's help. Of course, you can't count on having reception when you're in the middle of nowhere or deep underground, but hey, cell phones



aren't really that heavy these days, so why not bring one along? Cell phone cameras, while they typically have pitiful resolution, can also provide a convenient means of taking pictures stealthily. Obviously, when you bring your phone, make sure you remember to turn the ringer off. And remember to charge your battery beforehand!

*Compass.* One of the primary tools of explorers since the late Middle Ages, the compass remains a useful navigational aid for explorers today. Knowing which way is north is invaluable when one is working from a map or creating a new one. The only problem with using compasses when exploring is that they may not be completely trustworthy in the presence of electricity and large quantities of metal, so take compass readings in utility tunnels with a grain of salt.

*Drinks.* Bringing along a bottle or two of water is a good idea on long trips, especially if you're visiting hot areas where you're likely to do some sweating. Gatorade and similar drinks serve basically the same needs as water, but have some salt, sugar and electrolytes to help out. Providing you don't have a problem with nervousness or shakiness, you may also want to bring along some caffeinated drinks to give you a little more energy and alertness. Bear in mind that caffeine is a diuretic, and thus might make you need to pee at an inconvenient time or in an inconvenient place. Save those empty bottles! Women will need to find other solutions. Sorry.

*Duct tape.* You certainly don't need duct tape on every trip, but you may find it figures into your planning every now and then, especially on longer and more complex trips where you're packing for many contingencies. Duct tape is not only handy for repairing anything that might ever break, it's also quite helpful for subtly keeping doors from latching, holding down buttons, blocking motion detector sensors and hundreds of other minor feats of creative engineering.

*First aid kit.* If you're visiting somewhere dangerous and slightly removed from civilization, such as an abandoned building, it's a good idea to have access to a stocked first aid kit. You don't necessarily need to bring this into the site with you; just store it somewhere you or someone in your group will have access to it if something goes wrong. At a minimum, your kit should contain a burn pack, bandages, several rolls of gauze and gauze pads, adhesive tape, alcohol or antibiotic ointment and a pair of sterile scissors. Don't waste space by bringing supplies you don't know how to use or will be too grossed out to use, like bone saws. Ideally, you should obtain basic first aid

training. Colleges, the Y and other places offer cheap courses.

*Gloves.* Gloves are handy in any location where you're likely to be climbing, crawling or handling gross stuff. They protect you from sharp objects and rope burns, keep wood splinters and shards of rusty metal out of your skin and provide a handy reminder that you shouldn't touch your face when your hands are coated with dirt and slime. They're very helpful for crawling along on rocks or climbing up rusty or hot pipes. The best gloves for the job are proper, sturdy work gloves, which sell in hardware and army surplus stores for about \$10-20, though the kind of gloves that are just designed to keep your hands warm are better than nothing.

*Grappling hook.* I'm almost embarrassed to add this one to the list of legitimate supplies, just because it sounds so spy-wannabe, but the fact is that at least a handful of explorers use grappling hooks to good effect when the only route into a building requires them to start one or more storeys above ground. These can't be purchased in most hardware stores, but some online retailers sell them. Obviously, grappling hooks are extremely suspicious, so only use these when there really appears to be no other way, and then don't keep them with you any longer than necessary.

*Hat.* Remember to bring a non-mesh hat when you go draining or sewerage. It will help keep nastiness out of your hair.

*Headlamp.* While many explorers purchase LED or incandescent light headlamps mainly because they're cool, headlamps can also be practical tools in a few situations, since they let you keep your hands free for climbing, photography or what have you. In general, however, a long-lasting, bright, durable, easy-to-aim, easy-to-conceal flashlight will serve you better than a headlamp, especially in situations where it's possible you might encounter people. Hands and wrists swivel much more freely than heads and necks, so a handheld flashlight has much more manoeuvrability than a headlamp. You're much more likely to shine a light right into your fellow explorers' eyes while using a headlamp than while using a handheld flashlight. Finally, if someone suddenly shows up, it's much easier to quickly and subtly slide a flashlight into a pocket or up a sleeve than it is to peel off a headlamp unnoticed. In almost all situations, you're better off planning to use a flashlight as your main light source, though a headlamp can be a handy specialized tool in certain situations.

*Identification.* You may have heard rumours that you'll be better off if you don't have ID with you when you are caught by security

guards or police, but nothing could be further from the truth. Not having **ID** is considered extremely suspicious behaviour, and is likely to encourage them to pay much closer attention to your case than they would have otherwise. **In** most cases, presenting your valid photo **ID** to the powers that be\* has a very powerful calming effect. They are reassured to see that you are a registered citizen in good standing, and they feel safe knowing they know how to get in touch with you if it turns out that the crown jewels have gone missing or anything like that. Assuming you were doing nothing more than trespassing, it is likely that your information will be discarded, misplaced or simply filed away and forgotten. Presenting fake **ID** is asking for a whole other crop of problems - don't do it.

*Insect repellent.* Abandoned buildings and drains are often filled with stagnant or slow-moving water, and this naturally means they're full of mosquitoes and related pests during the warmer months. If you don't like the idea of being itchy, or the idea of catching West Nile virus or something similar, you may want to bathe thoroughly in insect repellent. The non-aerosol kind is better suited to application in semi-confined spaces.

*Knee pads.* While knee pads are not something you want to pack for every trip, when you know you're going to be spending some time in crawl tunnels or undersized storm drains, and you think you might enjoy being able to walk afterwards, do yourself a favour and at least invest in some cheap knee pads. If you forget, you can improvise knee pads with towels or other similarly thick fabric. **In** cases where subtlety might be handy, consider wearing your knee pads under your pants or jeans.

*Pen or pencil.* While it's almost always easy to find some scrap paper (or scrap skin), it's often trickier to find something to write with, and it's likely that you'll want to take some notes about room numbers, building navigation and the like, or sketch out a quick map or two. Pens and pencils are also quite useful for temporarily propping open doors that might otherwise be inclined to lock behind you.

\* Note on terminology: I don't like the term "official" because it is meaningless (anyone with an office can honestly call themselves official, and a bathroom stall can be an office), and I don't like the term "authority", because explorers and other enthusiasts are often greater authorities on the buildings they explore than the legal owners and occupants. In this book, I usually refer to the people with the muscle and guns - or the people who pay the people with the muscle and guns - as "the powers that be".)

*Pocket knife.* A short-bladed pocket knife is a very handy tool for cutting rope, cutting clothing, turning screws, nudging deadbolts and more. Multi-function pocket knives, more commonly known as Swiss Army knives, have additional features, ranging from combs, clocks and corkscrews on the popular models to saws, magnifying glasses and lighters on the more advanced and sillier models. The main drawback to pocket knives is that if the powers that be take a real disliking to you and can't find any *real* crimes to charge you with, they may try to pretend that your pocket knife is actually a concealed weapon. It's a ridiculous position for them to take, of course, but that's not to say they won't get away with it.

*Maps.* Whether professional or explorer-made, maps are handy supplies to bring along even when you know where you're going. When you get lost, or get to a confusing area, it's handy to check it against the map and try to determine whether it's you or the original map maker who's confused. Amateur maps are likely to have some mistakes, and even professional maps often do a poor job with multi-level structures. You may be able to correct the map or add useful information that will help either you or other future explorers. In some situations, it may be helpful for you to maintain two different maps: at home, a full map with details about entrances, cameras, alarms, etc.; while exploring, a "travelling map" that shares no more information than you need it to, and doesn't stress potentially incriminating information or refers to it only in coded symbols. Transcribe your notes from the travelling map to the full map once you get home.

*Multitool.* Multitools, more commonly known by the trade names Leatherman and Gerber tools, are small-bladed pocket knives with bonus lightweight aluminum, stainless steel or tungsten carbide tools such as cross- and flat-headed screwdrivers, scissors, files, pliers, wire cutters and more. While multitools are considerably more expensive than regular pocket knives, they're also useful in many more situations. Some models fold up small enough to be carried on a key chain. Again, unfortunately, hostile police or guards may pretend that these short-bladed tools are actually concealed weapons.

*Respirator.* While dust masks or painter's masks are suitable for places where dust is the only concern, in a great many places you'll visit - particularly older steam tunnels and some abandoned buildings - you'll want to bring along a proper half face mask with a HEPA filter to guard against asbestos, fungi, lead dust and other airborne nastiness.

These half face masks only cost \$40 or so, and you can buy them online or at most hardware stores that sell paint. Look for a marking indicating that the mask uses high efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters, and then purchase filters that have either an N100, R100 or P100 rating (the "n" refers to "*no* oil", the "r" refers to oil resistant and the "p" refers to "oil proof"; the 100 refers to the rounded-up percentage of protection from airborne hazards).

You can also safely employ masks and filters that specifically mention that they are rated for asbestos. Bear in mind that neither the 95- nor the 99-rated masks provide sufficient filtering against asbestos fibres. Only use filters with a 100 rating (nitpickers will note that even the 100 filters have a minimum efficiency of only 99.97 percent, but c'mon, that's even better than Ivory soap). Pick up some replacement filters while you're there, and remember to replace your filters after every eight hours of use or so. It's a good idea to practice wearing your respirator while you're not actively exploring, so you get an accurate sense of how it impairs your ability to communicate and to take in a lot of oxygen quickly. Also make sure your respirator fits correctly - if it doesn't form a proper seal, it won't do you much good.

*Rope.* Rope is not necessary on most expeditions, but it's often handy in situations where tricky climbs or descents are likely. You can pick up sturdy climbing rope at hardware stores or outdoor-adventure-type stores. Avoid brightly coloured rope if you can. If you can't afford proper climbing rope, at least be sure to buy thick rope that can hold twice your body weight. A rope that's less than three metres (12 feet) long will rarely be helpful; on the other hand, it doesn't make sense to haul around 20 pounds of thick rope "just in case". Only pack long coils of rope when you know or strongly suspect you'll need it. Be sure someone in your group knows how to tie proper knots before you ever trust anyone's weight to the rope. Rope can also be useful for hauling up equipment, or dragging it behind you down narrow tunnels.

*Snacks.* While not as important as drinks, taking along a few salty snacks is a good idea if you're going to be exerting yourself for a few hours. Take snacks that won't produce garbage, like a resealable bag of trail mix or shelled peanuts.

*Survival gear.* When you're visiting somewhere far from civilization and worry that you might wind up staying a little longer than you'd like, it's a good idea to bring along an extra pack filled with food, water, matches, candles, a blanket, extra batteries and signalling equipment.

If you need contact lens solution or medication, bring that along as well, just in case. You'll probably never wind up needing these things, but it's worth the extra 10 minutes to pack them up if you're heading somewhere remote.

*Whistle.* I've never used this myself, but some fellow explorers suggested it and I think it was brilliant advice. A whistle would be very handy in a situation where you were trapped somewhere, especially if you lack strong vocal chords. And whistles are light, small and cheap.

*Wire ladder.* These easily portable ladders, also sometimes called cable ladders, are the sturdier modern version of the rope ladders of old. They fold up fairly small and light, and can be handy in drains, at abandoned buildings and in a variety of sites where some tricky climbing is involved.

## Gadgets

Tools and gadgets are both things you bring along in order to help you out while exploring; the difference between the two lies in your motivation for bringing them along. Whereas you bring along tools to help you overcome a particular hurdle, you bring along gadgets in the hope that you'll be able to find or engineer a way to use them, because you know it would be cool if you did. This isn't to dismiss or diminish gadgets - they *are* cool and fun - but simply to acknowledge that they're generally brought along *because* they are cool and fun, not because they're especially useful. In situations where extra gear might weigh you down, impede your movement or make you look suspicious, or in situations where you stand a decent chance of getting caught, you should be able to differentiate your gadgets from your actual supplies and tools, and leave your gadgets behind. All of the following are fun, but none of them are necessary.

*Binoculars.* Binoculars, as you've probably heard, let you see things clearly even though they're far away. While it's conceivable that this ability might actually be useful - if you were trying to see if there were workers on a distant rooftop, or tell whether or not a far-off door was ajar, for example - it's mostly just cool to be able to see things that are far away. A small pair of fold-up binoculars is an indulgence you might permit yourself, but don't waste a lot of weight on this one.

*Computers.* It's true, you *can* bring your palmtop or even laptop computers with you, and they can be handy places to store directions, maps, access codes and the like. But as thin and light as portable computing devices are getting these days, they still aren't as thin and light

as good 01' fashioned paper. Paper is also less likely to have a technical glitch and requires less electricity. If the need arises, paper is also significantly easier to swallow.

*Gels and filters.* Coloured gels, and the more permanent coloured filters, are designed to colour and shade one's flashlight beam so as to make it less detectable from a distance, or less damaging to one's night vision. Some companies have also begun selling flashlights powered by red, green or blue LEDs rather than the brighter white LEDs. These coloured lights look cool and are extremely popular among explorers who fancy themselves secret agents or paramilitaries, or who like buying things, but I've yet to be convinced that there is any real need for them - shining your flashlight beam through your fingers or through a piece of cloth usually does the trick. (I freely admit that I love my red, green and blue LED flashlights - I just won't admit that they're necessary.)

*GPS units.* Handheld units that use orbiting satellites to pinpoint your location on the globe using the Global Positioning System (GPS) are ridiculously cool, and can be a lot of fun when used for geocaching. Some explorers, eager to convince themselves that their GPS receiver is useful for something other than geocaching, manage to convince themselves that knowing the precise coordinates of entrances and other key locations will make life easier for themselves and future explorers. That may be, but waiting for a GPS unit to find the requisite satellite signals can be tedious, and "look for a manhole in the middle of the field" should be directions enough for any explorer.

*Night vision equipment.* Whether it be scopes or goggles, night vision equipment is perhaps the ultimate example of something you'd bring along because it's cool, rather than because it's useful. I have a scope myself, and while it is definitely cool, I acknowledge that it would take some pretty creative thinking for me to come up with a scenario in which it was actually useful enough to justify bringing it along - it would be much easier to think of a situation where, say, an elastic band or a handheld mirror would be handy. Night vision equipment has also been demonstrated to be unusually suspicious when found by the powers that be (thank you, Landmark Six). Unless you're just fooling around, leave it at home.

*Radios.* Radios, whether two-way walkie-talkies, radios employing the 14-channel Family Radio Service (FRS) or units on the more powerful General Mobile Radio Service (GMRS) are totally fun. They can

also be useful in certain specific situations, such as when one person is acting as a lookout for the rest of the group or when it is actually necessary for the group to temporarily break up and regroup. In the right hands and in the right situation, radios can also provide a decent credibility prop - though it is equally true that in the wrong hands or the wrong situation they can look suspicious and draw attention. Often people who use radios choose to use them with an earpiece or even a full headset, though in most circumstances a conventional pair of headphones would be much less conspicuous. Unfortunately, more often than not, radios do more harm than good, encouraging a group to break up unnecessarily in order to experience the joy of communicating by radio. In the wrong hands, radios breed noise, encouraging more and louder conversation than there would be if the group simply travelled together. Radios also often transmit or beep at inappropriate times, and their signals are not reliable. Legally, at least in the US, GMRS radios can only be used by people who hold licenses, and then only to communicate with immediate family members, so using them may compound the charges against you if you are caught. Overall, radios are a distraction, and should only be used when they offer real and obvious benefits.

*Scanner.* Scanners are entertaining devices that allow you to listen in on what police and various security forces are chatting about. A quick online search for your city name plus "scanner frequency lists" will probably turn up all sorts of interesting results, including lots of frequencies that might be especially interesting to explorers. Scanners are legal for home use in most places in North America (New York State being one significant exception), provided they aren't used "in furtherance of a crime". Unfortunately, in most places, using scanners in furtherance of simple trespassing counts, so it is not generally a bright idea to bring a scanner with you on an excursion. What might make more sense would be to have someone off-site listen to the relevant frequencies and warn the group by phone if there's a problem. There's no law against receiving useful advice over the phone.

### **Red-Flag Items**

Finally, don't just stuff your bag with your desired gear and go: start your packing from scratch, so you're well aware of everything you're bringing along, especially anything that would be awkward to explain. Common sense is your friend here. If you're going to try to play it casu-



al if you get caught, then don't brand yourself as a hardcore explorer. If you're caught, it won't do you any good if you're wearing a balaclava, a Cave Clan t-shirt and camouflage pants, or if your backpack is filled with detailed and labelled maps of entrances to the site, a few copies of *Infiltration* and a six-D-cell Maglite.

While it's a real shame when an expedition ends at a locked door just when it was getting good, it is not a good idea to bring lock picks on a trip. This isn't for any ethical reason - there's nothing even vaguely unethical about opening up a long-disused door in a deep subterranean tunnel - but for a practical reason. Carrying lock picks instantly escalates your potential punishment from a stern warning to a prison stay, throwing your risk-to-reward ratio severely out of whack. In the eyes of the police, those tiny scraps of metal identify you as a burglar, whether there's any possibility of you actually burgling or not (usually there is not), and make it likely that you will be charged with possession of burglar's tools. If you are found to have used them, you will likely be charged with breaking and entering, even if you haven't broken a dam thing.

For the same reason, and also because you should do no harm to a site, you should also leave your crowbars, bolt cutters, welding torches and wrecking balls at home.

Don't bring spray paint or thick markers. Making artistic graffiti pieces that beautify plain wooden hoarding or boring cinder block walls can be a creative and worthwhile pursuit, but tagging is generally stupid, and people who tag while exploring give more benign explorers a bad name. If you have nothing to say beyond a messy scribble of your name or your group's name, don't say anything at all. If you really can't suppress your instinct to mark your territory, please just wait until you get home and then urinate on your furniture until you get that weird evolutionary misfire out of your system. When you're exploring, respect the site and your fellow explorers by not marking the place up. Not only does tagging a site increase your odds of getting punished if you're caught, it also damages the character of a place and makes it much more likely that the owners or the government will have it sealed. (If the ethical argument doesn't persuade you, restrain yourself for selfish reasons. Spray paint fumes are full of neurotoxins that can wreck your nervous and immune system, so it's really stupid to tag up inside an enclosed space like a basement, a storm drain or a utility tunnel.)

It's an even bigger mistake to bring weapons when you go exploring. While it's true that you're leaving the protected zone and may occa-

sionally encounter people with an "off-the-grid" mentality, there are much friendlier ways to look out for yourself than with weapons. Defending yourself need not involve force: just being polite and respectful is almost always the right way to deal with squatters. (Note that I say "being respectful" rather than "acting respectful" - it's foolish to look down on someone just because they don't have a house.) On the extremely rare occasions when those tactics don't work, walking away or running and hiding is much more likely to keep you alive than brandishing a weapon. It's neither suspicious nor dangerous to carry a small pocket knife; just make sure you remember that it's a tool and not a weapon.

Finally, avoid overpacking. If you're heading into a situation where you're likely to wind up scaling fences, climbing ropes, squeezing through grates or trudging along for a few hours, do yourself a favour and pack lightly. Leave your enormous tripod at home and just try to find a flat surface for your long exposure shots. Forget the gadgets and stick with what you need.

## PREPARING

While unexpectedly stumbling upon a cool exploration site and touring the whole thing in one go is always satisfying, in most cases urban exploration trips require some degree of advance planning. This can be anything from "Tomorrow let's go see what we can see at the cathedral" to hours of searching through archives, finding blueprints, preparing maps, making up cover stories, choosing a date when there will be minimal moonlight, establishing code words, synchronizing watches, running through the plan repeatedly and the whole spy-movie deal. While it's easy to take it too far, a reasonable amount of advance planning can increase your chances of getting in and finding what you're looking for, decrease your chances of getting caught or injured and add to your overall enjoyment of the exploratory experience.

Some people prefer to find out all about a place in advance and then go scout it out, while others prefer to stumble upon something cool, scope it out and then figure out what its story is later. Either approach is fine, but in my humble opinion you're really skipping steps - and possibly cheating yourself out of both useful clues and full enjoyment of a place - if you don't do some research and scouting before you stage an in-depth infiltration of a place. After researching and scouting, you're ready to sit down with your friends and formulate an intelligent plan of attack.

### Legal Considerations

When people ask me if the zine *Infiltration* is about breaking into buildings, I say no, it isn't. I've never broken anything to get into a building and, whatever the law says, it's ridiculous to refer to walking through an open door as "breaking and entering". "Entering" just didn't sound sinister enough on its own, so they had to partner it up with "breaking" and hope it would come to sound evil by association. Personally, I don't think it's worked. To me, "entering" still sounds pretty damn harmless and natural and in keeping with the best human instincts.

Urban exploration revives an old and long-out-of-favour legal concept called *usufruct*, which basically means that someone has the right to use and enjoy the property of another, provided it is not changed or damaged in any way. Back in the day, before all property on earth came under the control of corporations, usufruct was a legal privilege that could be awarded or withdrawn by the powers that were. Today, urban

explorers see nothing unreasonable or disrespectful about claiming the same privilege for themselves and applying it to their utterly benign explorations of other people's property.

Unfortunately, relatively few states and municipalities see things this way. None, actually. If you're caught while exploring, you could potentially face some fairly serious punishments, if you're unlucky enough to be caught by an unfriendly cop and sentenced by an unsympathetic judge. It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with your provincial or state laws and municipal by-laws regarding trespassing and related offences, so you know what specific bizarre anti-trespassing laws are enforced in your area. These are often available online; if not, you can probably look them up in the library. Don't make the mistake of assuming your local laws are based on common sense! Even assuming that you have taken nothing, damaged nothing and neither harmed nor risked harm to anyone but yourself, some of the different things your local police may decide to try to charge you with include:

*Breaking and entering.* As mentioned above, "breaking and entering" is an utter joke of a name in that this crime requires no breaking, not even the breaking of a seal. Realistically, the crime should simply be called "entering", since it requires only the most minor application of pressure. ("I'm in for murder. How about you?" "I entered.") Even if you just gently blow on an unlocked and slightly ajar door to permit entry to a site, you can technically be charged with B&E. Any judge that would actually charge you with this would obviously be doing so in utter disregard for the *spirit* of the law, which is clearly intended to punish people for forced entry, but that's not to say it wouldn't happen. **In** more enlightened jurisdictions, the breaking and entering charge is only levelled at those who enter with the intention of committing a crime, but most locales will charge you with breaking and entering for simply pushing open a door they didn't want you to push open. The best defence against this charge is to go in through an already-open door, window or hole in the wall, rather than opening something yourself, whenever possible.

*Burglary.* Burglary is very similar to breaking and entering, except that the person who does the entering must be deemed to have done so in the hopes of stealing or committing some other crime, and the charge is normally only applied in situations involving active buildings. The easiest way to prove that someone entered with the intention of stealing something is if they did, in fact, steal something, but that's not to say you

won't be charged with burglary unless you take something, since confused cops and judges often attribute false motives to explorers. A burglary charge normally requires a demonstration that the person being charged either (a) intended to steal or commit some other crime on the premises or (b) brought a dangerous weapon onto the premises. Punishments can be more severe if the building is actually occupied at the time of entry. Identifying yourself as an explorer and demonstrating this to be true might provide you with a defence against a charge of burglary.

*Forgery.* Legally speaking, lying to people verbally is one thing; misrepresenting yourself via documents is another. Explorers who use fake IDs or register or sign in with phoney names render themselves vulnerable to a charge of forgery or the related charge of impersonation. The best defence against these charges is to simply avoid situations where you must identify yourself on paper. If you wish to make yourself business cards or something along those lines, use a generic title such as "photographer" rather than an obviously misleading and easily disprovable title such as "health inspector". And feel free to take advantage of the fact that people in certain occupations, such as actors and writers, frequently operate under professional pseudonyms without being guilty of misrepresentation.

*Mischief.* Mischief is a sort of grab-bag crime, a miscellaneous category just in case someone does something naughty that the powers that be forgot to outlaw. In many situations where the powers that be feel that punishing you with trespassing alone isn't serious enough, they may figure out a way to tack on an additional charge of mischief - rather than the more traditional "assorted wrongdoing and mucking about". Many definitions of mischief require that the person charged be responsible for some damage to property, but other broader definitions require only that one obstruct others from using property. For example, you might be charged with mischief if you were caught on the subway tracks - thereby potentially delaying the travel of a subway train and inconveniencing all its passengers. It's tough to keep yourself completely safe from a charge of mischief, but your odds of avoiding the charge are better if you avoid fiddling or tampering with anything.

*Possession of burglar's tools.* You can be charged with this crime if you are deemed to have been in the possession of any tool or instrument designed or commonly used to aid in forcible entry into a site. Some jurisdictions quite reasonably add that the person must also have intended to steal or commit another crime on the premises in order to

be charged; others, less reasonably, do not. Obviously, the best defence against this charge is to never get caught with lock picks on your person; the easiest way to do that is to not carry them.

*Trespassing.* Trespassing, as you might guess, is deemed to have occurred when one knowingly enters a property without the expressed or implied permission of the owner, or when one refuses to leave a property after having been asked to do so by the owner or one of his or her representatives. "Implied permission" is a tough thing to define, but it's generally tough to claim there was "implied permission" if there were a lot of "keep out" signs or if you had to climb a fence to get in. It's easier if you're at the mall or a train station. (Some jurisdictions - far too few, alas - add that a person must have caused at least a very slight bit of damage to the property to be guilty of trespassing. In most cases, unfortunately, this isn't necessary.) In most Canadian jurisdictions, a ticket for trespassing will set you back under \$100 and won't go on your permanent record as long as you pay it promptly. These tickets are roughly as serious as parking tickets. Penalties can be much more severe in parts of the US - research the current laws for your state and municipality online.

I won't mention anything about the penalties you face for vandalism or theft, except to say that they're appropriately harsh, and that often stealing something worth four and a half cents is punished exactly the same way as stealing something worth \$1,999. And while the powers that be are occasionally willing to give you a break if all you're guilty of is trespassing, this becomes far, far less likely if even minor theft or vandalism is involved. You really are better off if you just resolve here and now never to take any souvenirs, tag any walls or cause any damage while exploring.

The way citizen's arrest works varies dramatically from place to place. According to section 494 of the Canadian Criminal Code, any citizen can arrest anyone they see committing an indictable offence, or if they have reasonable ground to believe they were committing an indictable offence, or if they see someone being chased by someone with the authority to arrest that person. The laws on citizen's arrest in the US vary more widely from state to state - for detailed information on how it works in your area, try doing an Internet search.

Normally, citizen's arrest will only come into play when security guards try to stop you. As much as they like to pretend otherwise, security guards do not have the same powers as cops. Legally speaking, in

most jurisdictions, they can't arrest you unless they catch you red-handed, can't confiscate your property and can't detain you unless they place you under arrest. If the guards don't place you under arrest, it's probably because they realize they aren't legally able to do so. Be sure to ask them if you are able to leave - if they know and care about the law, they will likely be reluctant to say no, since they can face serious consequences for illegally detaining you. If they do place you under arrest, they're legally required to turn you over to the police immediately.

So, those are your legal rights with regard to security guards. While they're interesting as a matter of trivia, they won't necessarily make that much difference in the real world unless you're lucky enough to have some witnesses when you're caught. **In** reality, security guards can do whatever they can get away with, including driving you down to the beach, beating the crap out of you and leaving you there in a pile overnight. Don't be so naive as to assume that knowing your rights will keep you safe, and if detained by security aim to stay in the public eye as much as possible. When they ask you to accompany them back to the office, just politely refuse and say you'd prefer to stay in public. While it's certainly unfair and inaccurate to say that all guards are overgrown bullies, unfortunately, it is a profession that appeals to a lot of people who like the idea of intimidating and inconveniencing others for their own amusement.

As for the police themselves, their powers are a little more extensive. Police powers vary greatly from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, so this is only a very rough outline. **In** any police encounter, be polite, respectful and cooperative, while still being aware of your rights and invoking them whenever it is in your best interest to do so. A police encounter will often begin with the officer asking you for your name, address and identification; you should probably provide these whether you are legally compelled to or not. Officers can search you and your vehicle if they suspect you may have weapons (or drugs, in some areas), or if they are willing to claim they harbour such a suspicion, but you can and probably should refuse their search request otherwise. Make your refusal very polite - "I understand that you want to do your job, officer, but I do not consent to a search of my private property" - but do refuse. Don't listen if they say that you'll make things easier for everyone if you just consent to a warrantless search; you'll really only make things easier for them. Refusing to consent to a warrantless search is not only in the best long-term interests of society as a whole, but it can also benefit you in

the short term, since any potential evidence the officers subsequently turn up on you or in your vehicle may be legally inadmissible. While still being polite and respectful, determine whether or not you are being officially detained - officers sometimes like to be vague about this until they're asked directly. If you are not, you can be on your way. If you are, be careful about what you say without a lawyer present.

If you are ticketed for trespassing, accept the ticket and leave. If it seems unfair, or you think the fine is too high, you can think about appealing the charge later. If you are arrested, you have a right to know why you're being arrested and a right to see a lawyer as soon as possible. Despite any suggestions they may make to the contrary, you shouldn't speak to the police about your alleged crime until you've spoken with a lawyer. Be especially certain to refrain from signing anything until you speak with a lawyer.

Being arrested isn't the same as being charged, so being arrested isn't necessarily anything to panic about. They may just be double-checking some details before letting you go with a warning or a ticket. Some less-than-decent police forces will arrest you and hold you without charging you for a time as a method of punishing you without ever having you appear before a judge.

## **Finding Sites**

While some people are content to follow in other explorers' footsteps and revisit sites that have previously been deemed interesting and photogenic, others take more pleasure in discovering uncharted realms, or at least discovering previously charted realms on their own. Of course there's nothing wrong with visiting sites revealed to you by other people, since a large part of this hobby is about aesthetic appreciation and sharing interesting finds, but I think your greatest exploratory-joys will come from finding new areas yourself.

A big part of finding new sites lies in acquiring the sensibility that potential places to explore are everywhere. With experience, you will realize that our urban environments are ripe, juicy melons, waiting to be squeezed and suckled, and that you just have to get through a tiny bit of flavourless rind to get to the good stuff. And what good stuff it is.

When someone in Toronto says they're at the northeast corner of Yonge and Bloor, they're being imprecise. There are lots of places to be at that corner, including 35 storeys up on the roof of the Hudson's Bay Centre; at various abandoned floors or mechanical rooms within the



tower; inside the tower's elevator shafts; in the pedestrian walkway under the street; at the abandoned movie theatres or the abandoned nightclub in the building's basement; in the mazes of service corridors, steam tunnels and storage rooms in the various subbasements; inside the small man-made cave accessed through those service corridors; in the subway tunnels, mechanical rooms and ventilation shafts under that; or in the storm drains, sewers and water tunnels under that. Oh, I suppose being at street level is also a possibility, though certainly the least interesting one.

If all that can be found at one dull-looking corner of one dull-looking intersection, you can just imagine how much more is out there waiting to be found by those who pull back the curtains and take a peek. It's true that finding out about all this three-dimensional potential in the first place can require a fair bit of effort, but really this is a good thing, as it keeps lazy, careless and uncreative people from dabbling in our hobby too much and spoiling it for those of us who are more determined. While any idiot can find an abandoned building to visit by searching an online database, only devoted explorers can experience the joy of discovering, forging their way into and ultimately unveiling fresh, new sites.

Part of finding exploration sites involves casting off a certain restrained mind set, in the manner of the protagonists of movies like *They Live*, *The Matrix* and *Fight Club*, and realizing that many of your boundaries are self-imposed, voluntary and, ultimately, illusory. Fish farmers - who, incidentally, have not yet been the focus of a single major motion picture - occasionally employ a clever trick to keep their stock penned up. They corral their fish into a certain section of the ocean and then surround the area with a curtain of air bubbles being released in a steady stream from a perforated tube or hose at the bottom of the corral. The fish perceive the air bubbles as a solid wall and believe they are helplessly penned in, though in reality no barrier stands in their way except a thin strand of colourless gas. The only thing stopping the fish from swimming to freedom and exploring all the infinite wonders of the ocean is a simple problem of limited perception.

It's the same with people. Many people think urban exploration is about bravely or foolishly defying "do not enter" and "no trespassing" signs, but in actuality most of the signs that keep people away from interesting places are much more subtle - a door that just *looks* like it's for employees only, for example, or a hole that you're *probably not* sup-

posed to climb down into. A lot of people equate the absence of a sign saying "sale" or "admission prices" with the presence of a sign saying "keep out". But these aren't real barricades - they're just air bubbles. (Incidentally, this is an important lesson in perception that you can take from urban exploration and apply to all of your everyday affairs: you set your own boundaries, and can expand them as you see fit.)

Once you're constantly on the lookout for places to explore, you'll find them. I've seen it happen to people - they go from having no idea that a secret world exists to having no time to check out all their leads. Basically, once enlightenment occurs, the blinders fall off and you relearn how to pay attention to your surroundings, at least temporarily.

Once you get the right mindset, you'll see countless opportunities every time you walk down the street. You'll see intriguing stories about new construction projects or factory closings every time you read the paper. You'll strike up friendly conversations with janitors, people poking their heads out of manholes, security guards and other employees and find out about the most interesting secret places they've found in their jobs. You'll talk to old people and hear about interesting areas that are no longer open to the public and how the city used to be laid out differently. You'll talk to squatters about interesting places they've found or heard about. You'll read local history books and pore over local topographic maps and come up with a checklist of dozens of different places you need to go check out. You'll visit your town archives and find boxes and boxes of delicious blueprints and maps and notes. You'll do web searches for your town name plus "tunnels" and "abandoned" and "underground" and "no longer in use" and turn up dozens of hits. You'll read minutes from municipal government meetings, paying special attention to the zoning, planning and transportation sections and get advance notice about all sorts of upcoming opportunities. You will seek and you will find. Your greatest challenge, as you get into the hobby for the first time, may be making sure it doesn't become your whole life. A lot of urban explorers are total geeks.

## **Research**

Knowing is at least half the battle, so learn all that you can in advance, especially if you're going somewhere dangerous or difficult. Ask people who've been to the site before for advice and warnings. Read any histories or descriptions of the area you can get your hands on. Track down whatever relevant maps you can find to locate as many potential

opportunities and threats as possible. Search online for satellite images of the area. If you can find pictures, maps or blueprints of the site in question, study them. Try to gather an idea of how well you'll be able to blend in. It's usually easy to go unnoticed at a large institution, but it can be more of a trick at smaller establishments - such as community churches or small schools - where everyone knows each other. Be aware of any special events or construction projects in the area you'll be visiting.

If you can, get a rough idea of what sort of security you're likely to face. If the site you're interested in features expensive equipment, or is populated with children, or is a potential terrorist target, expect a higher level of security. Also expect better security if the building was built or extensively remodelled within the past 15 years. If you can, find out what security company serves the building you're interested in and research that company's policies on arrests, carrying weapons and the like. If not, maybe you can pick up a few ideas about what you're up against.

## Scouting

It's a mistake to go somewhere risky if you don't have any idea what you're getting into, and it is for this reason that many explorers will devote at least one trip - and often several - to scouting out a tricky location before trying to infiltrate it.

Casing the joint is part of the fun of exploring, particularly for those with a bit of a private investigator or investigative journalist streak. Generally, you needn't make much of an effort to be stealthy on a scouting trip, since hiding in plain sight will work better. Because the scout doesn't do anything but look, he or she can usually take lots of pictures and notes or film lots of footage without worrying much about drawing attention. Subtlety is still useful, of course: obviously, you should attempt to seem more interested in the spectacular views and fancy decorations than in the elevator banks, security keypads or apparent trap doors in the floor. Taking along an opposite-sex friend and having the "couple" pretend to take pictures of each other, while actually taking pictures of various doors and signs and security measures, is one good trick; another is to bring along a video camera and leave it running after you pretend to turn it off. Of course, these tricks only work in those places where photography or filming are allowed; in more shy buildings, the scout has to find ways to do the job more

subtly. Pictures taken on such scouting trips can usually be forgiven for occasional blurriness or for being partially obstructed by a part of a hand or shirt.

On your scouting trips, you should determine, at least, the size and shape of the structure you're dealing with, where its entrances and exits are and whether any portions of it are alarmed, watched by closed circuit cameras, surveyed by motion detectors or guarded by any other sort of electronic access control. If you're dealing with an abandoned building or a construction site, note whether or not the perimeter is completely fenced in, and try to get an idea of what the lighting is like at night. If you're dealing with an occupied location, a construction site or an abandoned building near a populated area, it's also useful to note just how populated the area is at various times and by whom.

On top of these bare essentials, it's helpful to know roughly how many on-site security guards the place has, if any, and what their stations or circuits are, and any security checkpoints you find. If you can, note how they're equipped, so you know whether or not running away is a good option and have an idea how they'll communicate with others. Knowledge of any sensitive areas may be useful, as you'll know to avoid those areas or at least visit them only with great care. If you're just trying to determine whether security ever visits a particular portion of a site, leaving a few quarters on the ground and casually checking on them every now and then is a good way to find out. Similar tricks involve lightly dusting a floor with dirt and later checking for footprints, or putting a small marker such as a toothpick or a piece of tape in front of a door to see if and when it gets opened. But enough spy games. In reality, a scouting trip only requires the scouts to map the buildings, know the exits and get a pretty good idea of the hazards and opportunities. The information collected on the scouting trip or trips should be shared with everyone who intends to join in the actual exploration.

If you're too picky, or your town is too small, and you find you can't easily turn up places to explore, spend some time at your local library and town archives (if your town doesn't have a separate archives building, the archives will likely be located inside the town hall or courthouse). Look for material on local history or histories of construction, industry, transportation and health care in the area. Look for detailed maps from different time periods and look for puzzling changes like disappearing rivers or rail lines. Every time you find some-

thing hard to explain, look into it. If you aren't totally creepy and suspicious, feel free to ask the librarian or archivist for help. They usually love to talk about this stuff, or at least will know where you can find someone who does.

## Looking Online

While it's a huge mistake to rely entirely on the web, online resources can be pretty handy aids to your research. As mentioned, a search for your town name plus the type of site you're interested in can often give you a few useful starting points for further research. Aside from Google, some of the other big general-use sites can be helpful, especially if you happen to be part of the American audience that most of them target.

The Emporis Building Database (<http://www.emporis.com/en/bul>) provides useful statistics about buildings and structures in more than 7,000 cities worldwide and is a great place to look for interesting buildings or construction projects near you, and to find out more about places that have already caught your eye.

The Center for Land Use Interpretation's Land Use Database ([http://www.clui.org/clui\\_4\\_lludb/](http://www.clui.org/clui_4_lludb/)) is a free site that bills itself as a guide to "unusual and exemplary sites throughout the United States". CLUI's database provides relevant links and information about noteworthy mining sites, features of transportation systems and field test facilities for a variety of high-impact technologies. The Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund site (<http://www.epa.gov/superfund/>) provides similar information, including maps and addresses, for those who don't mind a little toxic waste with their abandoned factories. Seriously, you may want to search your area - sometimes the Superfund sites aren't *that* contaminated.

TopoZone (<http://www.topozone.com>) and Terra Server ([teraserver.microsoft.com](http://teraserver.microsoft.com)) are commercial services with some free features. They can display maps of almost any location in the US by a variety of methods, including some that are extremely useful to explorers, such as one-metre-scale aerial photo maps. The excellent Google Maps site (<http://maps.google.com>) now features up-close satellite images of addresses in the US and some of southern Canada. These scrollable images make it very easy to find storm drains and other potential exploration sites. Plus, you can look at your own house.

The National Register of Historic Places (<http://www.nationalreg->

*isterofhistoricplaces.com*) is another site primarily useful to Americans - it lists districts, sites, buildings and structures deemed historically important, many of which would be cool places to explore. The "vacant/not in use" section is of particular interest.

You may also find some major location urban exploration databases, such as those featured on Urbanexplorers.net (<http://www.urbanexplorers.net>). Urban Exploration Resource (<http://www.uer.ca>) or the Virtual Museum of Dead Places (<http://www.vimudeap.de>) to be of use, though their fill-in-the-blanks approach tends to lead to results that are less than moving. (There's never an "Emotions Experienced During Trip:" field in these databases.) If you, like me, enjoy a little local colour and personality along with your raw data, go directly to the source and visit the local web sites themselves. Many of these can be accessed through the links section on Infiltration (<http://www.infiltration.org>) or through the Urban Exploration Webring (<http://e.webring.com/hub?ring:=draining>).

Urban Exploration Resource has a very large and active message board that can be a good place to ask questions and share information on both localized and general subjects, especially for North Americans; many of the more local sites have fairly active and useful message boards as well. It's always a good idea to search the archives for keywords before you start a new conversation.

A variety of non-urban-exploration sites dedicated to mapping out places like historic sites, ghost towns, mines, "haunted" sites or airplane graveyards can also be useful.

## Communications

If you and your friends want to develop a complex system of code words and hand signals, have fun with that, but make sure everyone in your group really has your system down. You don't want to be hunched down around the corner from the guard trying to remember if your friend's clenched fist means he wants you to hold still or back off. For the same reason, if you go exploring with people outside of your regular group, don't assume that the strangers will intuitively pick up the bizarre gestures you and your friends have concocted. Give them a proper tutorial and quiz them before you go out. (Incidentally, as useful as practice is, don't communicate silently while you're walking around in the public areas of an active building. People walking along silently while occasionally gesticulating are

much more suspicious than people walking along talking, especially on camera.)

As fun as it is to play spy and make up code gestures, I've found that the universal gestures that almost everyone understands - nodding, shaking your head, shrugging your shoulders, putting your finger to your lips, pointing, holding up your hand in a blocking gesture - can be combined with a little basic miming and lip-reading to communicate almost everything when it's necessary to be silent. It may not be the most elegant or the most efficient method of communication, but it's the most universal and least likely to lead to misunderstandings.

In most situations where other people are around, you're better off avoiding whispering, since even if the other people can't make out your words, nothing attracts attention like the hissed "s" sounds of whispering. Speaking in a low but regular voice and phrasing things in a slightly roundabout way - saying "I'm gonna grab some fresh air; join me in couple minutes if you're free" rather than "Watch my back while I try to sneak away and climb out to the roof, and then if I haven't come back in a few minutes and the coast is still clear, follow me up" - will usually work much better than using hushed tones. If you're not whispering, people will just assume what you're saying is dull.

Radios, such as FRS radios and CBs, can be useful in certain situations, provided everyone knows how and when to use them and provided they work properly, but they can also be more trouble than they're worth. Unless you're exploring just the above-ground areas of a wooden building, you can pretty much count on the fact that there will be times when they don't work, because radios can have a great deal of difficulty with cement and metal, and don't work reliably underground. Sometimes slightly different systems don't synch up properly. Sometimes batteries fail. Sometimes people accidentally hit the "page" button or ask "are you there?" at exactly the wrong time. Many things can go wrong, so radio communication should be regarded as a potential aid rather than an integral part of your plan. In most situations, you're better off if your group just sticks together, or if you employ cell phones set to vibrate rather than ring.

Of course, there's more to communicating with your fellow explorers than just knowing your hand signals and having your radios set to the same channel. You and everyone you're with must be willing to put aside any macho posturing and actually behave as if you're concerned for your own safety and for theirs. I realize this is a pretty radical thing

to ask of some people who have made the appearance of apathy and toughness an art form, but you really should give it a whirl if you're in some place where there's a real chance someone could be hurt. This means warning people behind you if there's something to step over or duck under, rather than just dodging the hurdle silently and figuring they'll spot it too. It means assuming a pace that works for everyone, instead of racing ahead quickly to show how familiar you are with the location. It means telling your fellow explorers if you've ever had a problem with fainting or vertigo. It means asking people if they're okay if they trip, and making sure they mean it when they automatically say yes. It means checking on people to make sure they aren't exhausted before doing something physically demanding and checking that they aren't freaking out before doing something dangerous. It means sharing water and making sure no one is getting dehydrated. It also means admitting when you hit your head and it really hurts, or you're dizzy, or when you're feeling claustrophobic - it may be tough to admit your weaknesses, but the people you're with *have* to know that kind of thing to make informed decisions about what your group is capable of. You can put everyone at risk if you conceal these things until it's too late.

## **The Plan**

In many cases, you or your group will have a specific goal, like "get-to the top of the tallest roof" or "find the entrance to the steam tunnels". Such goals are handy, since clearly visualizing what you want to accomplish will generally help you achieve it, but try not to be too result-oriented. One of the main beauties of the hobby of urban exploration is that the main goal is just to see what you can see. It's frustrating when, after a fun afternoon of dodging cameras, climbing ladders and hiding from employees with some fellow explorers, someone acts as if an excursion was a failure because your group didn't get to the roof or the pool or whatever specific target you had in mind, when you thought it was a huge success because you had fun. While having specific goals is useful, you're more likely to feel contented and successful if your broader goal is simply to explore and maybe gather useful information for your next attempt. Often, exploring is what happens while you're busy looking for other tunnels.

Other aspects of your planning should be more detailed. You should pre-arrange a meeting place that everyone will be able to get to in case your group gets split up at any point, such as when you're run-



ning away from security. Based on where you're going and what your group is like, decide in advance if you're going to run, hide or try to talk your way out of the situation if you're caught - it's best that everyone in your group agrees on one solution. You may want to modify the game plan at various points during the expedition - for example, you may decide that in the basement you're better off trying to talk you way out of it, but once you get into the tunnels, you may decide that you're better off running for it if you encounter anyone. Again, make sure everyone is fully up-to-date on what the plan is every time you alter it.

If someone in your group wants to bail out, you should all bail out. It doesn't really matter how hard it was to get in, or even how once-in-a-lifetime this particular opportunity seems: the other people you're exploring with should always come first if you want to develop an enthusiastic team of explorers who trust each other. If someone really, truly doesn't want to go on (or wait somewhere safe), it shouldn't be put to a vote: they should just have veto power. Maybe knowing that they're able to bail out at any time if things get too strenuous or too scary will make them more confident on the next mission. Of course if the same person is always bailing out you may want to stop inviting that person along, but the time to discuss this is after you've left the dangerous situation, not while you're in the middle of it. Obviously it's frustrating to turn back in the middle of an expedition, but the potential long-term benefits of having a group that really trusts one another outweigh the short-term thrills of a cool trip.

Before going on any sort of dangerous expedition, always inform at least one other person who isn't coming along where you will be and when you expect to be back. If you're able, bring a cell phone so you can communicate with people outside the site if you should somehow become delayed or encounter other problems, if the reception gods are with you.

### **Getting There**

**In** all situations where you're able, it's best to walk, ride a bike or take public transit to the site, as cars and their associated license plates are headaches that often play a significant role in explorers getting busted. Cars can be easily traced to people, so if your car is parked outside of the place you're exploring, there's really not much point in you trying to make a break for it. Cars can also be stolen, vandalized, disabled, blocked-in or searched by the police or other gangs. While bikes are

also vulnerable to theft or vandalism, you can usually recover from the loss of a bike more easily than the loss of a car, especially if you invest in a junk bike for use in expeditions to questionable areas. Bikes are also quieter and easier to hide than cars. Public transit, while sometimes slow and unreliable, doesn't have any of these problems. A subway train is the ultimate getaway vehicle.

That said, a lot of places, particularly semi-rural abandonments, can only be accessed by car. In such cases, unless you want to take a cab (not unthinkable, if you're able to split the cost three or four ways), the best you can do is to park your car somewhere inconspicuous but in the public eye, even if the place you're visiting is kind of in the middle of nowhere. Not only is it worth a 20-minute walk from your car to the site in order to have some peace of mind about your car, it also avoids the problem of your suspiciously parked car alerting police or security guards to your presence. Please don't do anything silly like trying to cover your car with leaves and branches.

Okay. We're there. Everybody got their tetanus shots? Let's go!