

Urban Exploration

- A Hacker's View

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Latest Slides: http://phreakmonkey.com/dc16-ue.zip

DISCLAIMER

Urban Exploration can be dangerous.

Trespassing can get you arrested, jailed, or killed.

Falling great distances can kill you.

Exposure to asbestos, dangerous chemicals, lack of oxygen, fire, electricity, or gang violence may be dangerous to your health.

Neither phreakmonkey nor mutantMandias advocate any behavior talked about, written about, photographed, or implied in this presentation.

Neither phreakmonkey nor mutantMandias are lawyers, and nothing in this presentation should be construed as legal advice.

Neither phreakmonkey or mutantMandias are physicians, and nothing in this presentation should be construed as medical advice.

In fact, phreakmonkey and mutantMandias are both full of shit - and nothing in this presentation should be construed as serious advice whatsoever.

Background:
What is Urban Exploration?

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

“This hobby consists of a lot more than just poking about in abandoned buildings and storm drains and hanging out on web boards trying to impress people. Being an urban explorer is a whole way of looking at the world, where every ladder, door, window, grate and hole in the ground is a possible portal to adventure.”
- Jeff Chapman (“Ninjalicious”), 2004

What do we explore?

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



Elementary School, Atlanta, GA



Prison, Atlanta, GA



Paint Factory, Atlanta, GA



Rail Car Factory, Atlanta, GA



Steam Tunnels, Atlanta, GA

Terminology

What Hackers Say	**What Explorers Say**
'leet, uber	epic
homeless person, bum	urban camper, **hobo**
script kiddie	tourist
exploit, 'sploit	PoE (point-of-entry)

The UrbEx Subculture

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

Birds of a Feather

What Urban Explorers and Computer Hackers have in common

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



... the latest technology



(pwned)

Birds of a Feather

What Urban Explorers and Computer Hackers have in common

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



(body by UrbEx)



Urban Explorers != Graffiti Artists



... but we do get to see some cool graffiti



damage done by copper thieves (aka scrappers)

So you want to be an explorer...

Safety

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

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



Structurally Sound?



Can you spot the warning signs?



How about here?

Safety: Rules to Live By

The "**do** list:"

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

Safety: Rules to Live By

The "**don't** list:"

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



What's odd about this picture?


PELIGRO
ASBESTO
PELIGRO DE CÁNCER Y
ENFERMEDAD DE PULMÓN
PROHIBIDO PASAR
SOLO SE PERMITE
INDIVIDUOS AUTORIZADOS
MÁSCARA RESPIRADORA Y ROPA
PROTECTIVA SE REQUIERE
EN ESTA ÁREA.
PhreakMonkey.com

Oops...

Safety: Health Hazards

- **Asbestos**
  - There is no known "safe level" of asbestos exposure
  - Mesothelioma develops > 10 years later
  - Deadly
- **Asphyxiation**
  - Enclosed spaces
  - Subterranean spaces
  - Often, no indications of "bad air" until you pass out
- **Disease Exposure**
  - Pigeon / Rat / Animal waste
  - Human Waste
  - Tetanus, Hepatitis A & B are all preventable with vaccines.
- **Chemical Exposure**
  - PCBs, acids, toxic waste all may be present in industrial locations
  - Research the facility before you enter the premesis

Wear protective clothing or masks when appropriate.



"Investigation Derived Waste" ... yummy!



To proceed, or not to proceed...

Legality*

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

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

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



No Lock Picks!



City Hall East (former Sears Warehouse), Atlanta, GA



City Hall East, Atlanta, GA



"Atlanta Assembly" Automobile Plant, Hapeville, GA



Aircraft Graveyard, North Carolina

When to Never Trespass

We don't advocate trespassing. That being stated, there are certainly some "gray areas" when it's hard to determine whether you are trespassing or not. The following are **not** examples of those times.
Do not trespass:

- On or adjacent to airport property.
- On or adjacent to active US military property.
- On active US Federal Government facilities or property.
- On active infrastructure or utilities (waterworks, electricity, &etc)

Very special consideration (or *permission*) should be granted to:

Financial institution property, former military or government property, *casino property* , &etc.

This is not an all-inclusive list. Use your head!



Some signs are to be taken seriously...

Stealth

- Appearance
  - Dress to look *convincing* , not *cool.*
  - Walk & act "casual, but confident."
- Credibility Props - coined by Ninjalicious.
- Alone vs. small groups vs. big groups
- Be aware of your visibility and act accordingly.
- Parking
- What to do when confronted.
  - Introduce yourself first.
  - Be friendly and *non-confrontational.*
  - Offer to leave peacefully.
- Oddly "I'm geocaching" is *never* a better proposition.

Do No Harm

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

Life-cycle of an Abandonment

Secured

- Boarded up windows
- Chained doors
- Locked Fences

Infiltrated

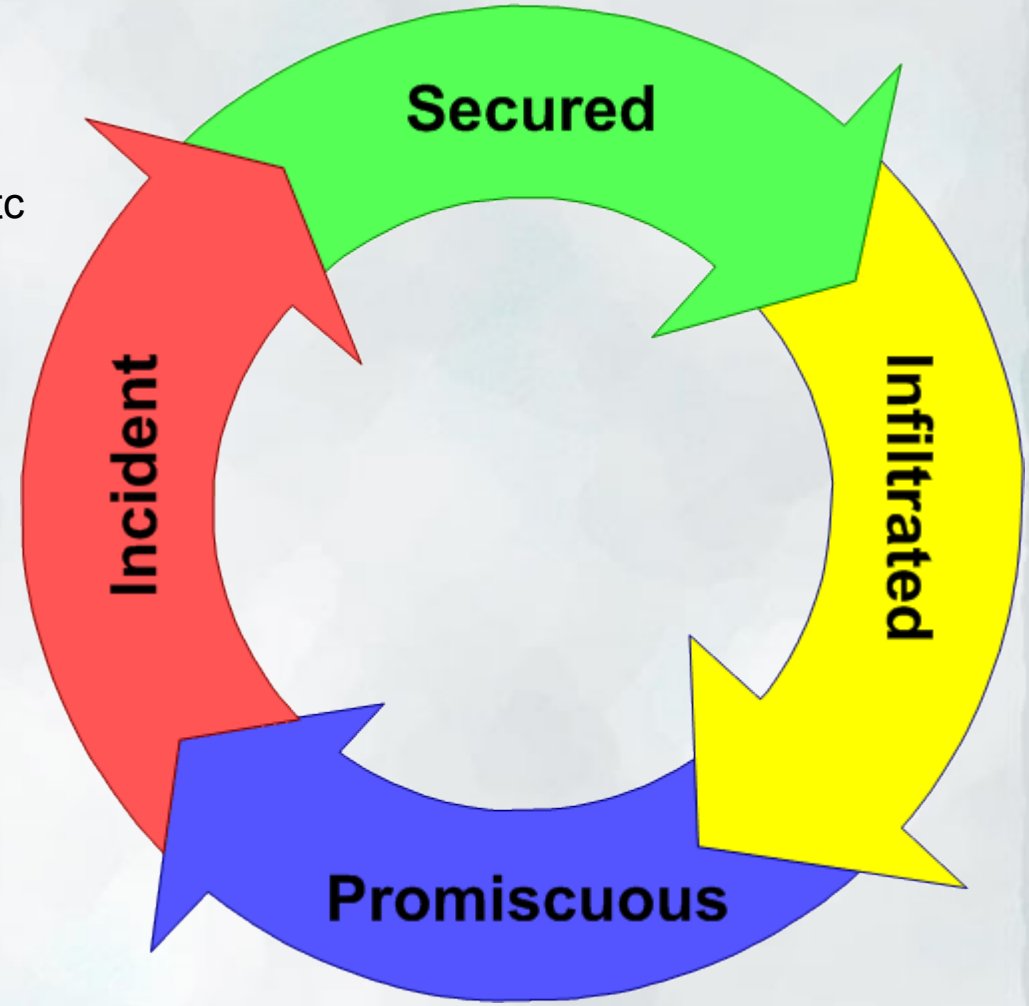
- Break-in by scrappers, taggers, homeless, &etc
- At least one Point of Entry (PoE)
- PoE possibly concealed from view

Promiscuous

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

Incident

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





Hmm.. how to get in...

Discovering Locations

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

For More Information

Access All Areas - Ninjalicious

Confessions of a Master Jewel Thief - Bill Mason

Infiltration Zine - infiltration.org

Urban Explorers: Into the Darkness
(a film by Melody Gilbert / Channel Z Films)

Cities of the Underworld (TV)
(UrbEx-esque documentary on the History Channel)

Music Videos? :-P



(I bet you do.)

Q&A / Audience Stories

Thanks! Enjoy DEFCON 16!

Love the quick profit, the annual raise, vacation with pay.
Want more of everything ready-made. Be afraid, to know your neighbors and to die. And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery any more. Your mind will be punched in a card and shut away in a little drawer. When they want you to buy something they will call you. When they want you to die for profit they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something that won't compute.

- excerpt from Manifesto:The Mad Farmer Liberation Front
  by Wendell Berry

