You're listening to Imaginary Worlds, a show about how we create them and why we suspend our disbelief. I'm Eric Molinsky.

Eileen Gunn is a science fiction writer and editor. Around 45 years ago, she was beginning her career. She went to a writer's workshop in Oregon. She met another writer there. His name was Bill, Bill Gibson.

EILEEN: One of the other participants brought Gibson as a guest to workshop a story, and it was the, um, The Gernsback Continuum, which he had just sold. And so, we hadn't read it, it hadn't been published yet.

The Gernsback Continuum is about a 1930s vision of the future which gets overlaid onto modern day America, blending realities. It was like nothing Eileen had read before.

EILEEN: So that's how I got to know Bill, and Bill and I became friends and corresponded, uh, a lot, and he sent me the first draft or, or a recent, a newish draft of Neuromancer, which was fantastic.

Neuromancer – the groundbreaking novel by William Gibson that would kick off the genre which is now known as cyberpunk.

Neuromancer is about a hacker named Henry Case who lives in a futuristic city. Case was caught stealing from his previous employers. His punishment is that he got banned from a virtual reality space called the matrix. Then he gets hired to commit a heist. His new employers want him to steal a storage drive which contains the mind of someone who uploaded their consciousness. Taking the job can restore his access to the matrix.

Now this sounds like the plot of a book from 2024 not 1984. Hugh O'Connell teaches science fiction at UMass Boston. He says the ideas in Neuromancer and other works of cyberpunk:

HUGH: Like a virus, it just began to infect culture, and so much culture got rewritten through cyberpunk such that, you know, almost any mainstream show is going to have somewhere a plot about hacking. So many of the mainstream authors now are writing about uploading consciousness and ideas that were, you know, happening 40 years ago in cyberpunk.

Sherryl Vint teaches sci-fi at UC Riverside.

SHERRYL: He's writing Neuromancer on a typewriter and he's writing Neuromancer when he's never been in cyberspace because nobody's ever been in cyberspace because there's, there's not really a cyberspace to be in.

In fact, William Gibson invented the word cyberspace. Here is the actor Varick Boyd reading from Neuromancer.

READING: He still dreamed of cyberspace, hope fading nightly. All the speed he took, all the turns he'd taken and the corners he'd cut in Night City, and still, he'd see the matrix in his sleep, bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colorless void. He'd operated on an almost permanent adrenaline high, a byproduct of youth and proficiency, jacked into a custom cyberspace deck that projected his disembodied consciousness into the consensual hallucination that was the matrix.

When Neuromancer finally came out, Eileen was working at Microsoft just as they were launching Microsoft Word. All of this stuff about cyberspace made sense to her. But she worried:

EILEEN: Only a small group of people will even be able to follow the story, but it's amazing. And the language was so, hmm, delicious, let's just say it was, it was beautifully written and telegraphic. But I also thought it was a difficult story to read because you had to know so many things to get it, and there was no internet to look anything up on.

But the book inspired her to keep trying to write science fiction. She was feeling disillusioned.

EILEEN: Well, I did have the idea that I could do anything I wanted to do after reading Gibson. It gave me the feeling that it didn't, I didn't need to fit into the genre. I didn't need to write things that were like what everybody else was writing, because what he was writing was not like it, what everybody else was writing.

Hugh O' Connell says William Gibson was also disillusioned with the state of science fiction at the time. It was full of stories about conquering spacemen and alien invasions.

HUGH: And as a university student, he was planning on writing a dissertation on like 1950s science fiction and fascism Gibson, uh, famously says, you know, these science fiction works knew nothing about wars that we couldn't win. They knew nothing about

degraded, uh, planets. They knew nothing about, uh, environmental degradation. Uh, and so he wanted to write a science fiction that was reacting to this overly optimistic, jingoistic patriotic kind of, I, I think the, when we think about like the heroic muscular science fictions.

The hero in Neuromancer is a computer nerd. That got the attention of a lot of, well, nerds.

EILEEN: What interested me at one point was the number of people at Microsoft that were really excited about cyberpunk. People would come up to me and say, uh, you, you write science fiction, right? And say, yeah. You know, William Gibson? I'd say, yeah. They were totally amazed by it because it romanticized, uh, the people that people working, you know, in the back room at Microsoft also romanticized.

1984 was also the year a rival tech company made their name known in a big way. And it was through a Super Bowl ad directed by Ridley Scott. The ad looks like a movie trailer for an adaptation of the novel 1984. But then a woman throws a hammer at Big Brother, and the screen explodes into a white light.

ANNOUNCER: On January 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you'll see why 1984 won't be like 1984.

We were on the cusp of a revolution. People felt it in the tech industry. This young generation of sci-fi writers knew it. But not many people understood how this technology was going to change us. William Gibson did. In fact, we're still trying to understand the future as he imagined it – the future we're living in.

So, in part 2 of our mini-series on iconic works from 1984, we're looking at how Neuromancer came to define a genre and how that genre has been evolving to keep up with reality.

SHIP STATION AD

As groundbreaking Neuromancer was, it didn't come out of nowhere. The term cyberpunk was already coined by another writer in the early '80s. Also feminist writers in the 1970s had begun to shift the narrative from conquering spacemen to issues around the mind, the body and personal autonomy.

That's actually a common critique I've heard of cyberpunk. It took the themes of feminist sci-fi from the '70s and made it macho by adding guys, guns, and sunglasses.

Professor Sherryl Vint thinks that may be true of the cyberpunk which came after Neuromancer.

SHERRYL: I sort of give Neuromancer more of a pass because if you actually read Neuromancer, Case is kind of like small and pale and not very good at doing things in physics. Like he's not really like, the cool swaggering heroic Cyberpunk hero that we get with all the like white hat kind of stuff that comes later with the film, and I presume video game tradition.

And she says Neuromancer stands out in a different way from the new wave of counter culture science fiction in the late 60s and '70s.

SHERRYL: The new wave period already been turning to sort of inner space as they like to say, instead of outer space, so psychological experiences. So, I think certainly that's an influence. But with the IT revolution, it's possible that these sorts of realms that previously had always been about like fantasy or hallucination or drug-induced states, these could be an actual scientific space in Neuromancer.

A lot of people marvel at the technology Gibson predicted, but Hugh says there's another aspect of the book which is sometimes overlooked.

HUGH: I hate to kind of talk about science fiction in terms of like what it got right. I don't think that's the best way to think about science fiction, but every time I go back, and I reread Neuromancer, I'm amazed at how much Gibson's ideas around cyberspace and AI were really about data harvesting and prediction of taking everything and finding those kinds of patterns and monetizing the patterns of information.

Monetizing patterns of information? That's how most websites and apps make money today. In this scene from the book, once again read by Varick Boyd, an AI program explains its motivations to the main character.

READING: I saw her death coming. In the patterns you sometimes imagined you could detect in the dance of the street. Those patterns are real. I am complex enough, in my narrow ways, to read those dances. I saw her death in her need for you, in the magnetic code of the lock on the door of your coffin in Cheap Hotel, in Julie Deane's account with a Hong Kong shirtmaker. As clear to me as the shadow of a tumor to a surgeon

studying a patient's scan. When she took your Hitachi to her boy, to try to access it -- she had no idea what it carried, still less how she might sell it, and her deepest wish was that you would pursue and punish her -- I intervened.

William Gibson has said he did not think he was writing a dystopian novel. He thought he was writing an optimistic view of the future because there was no nuclear holocaust. But it is definitely not a utopia either.

There's a term a lot of critics use when they talk about Neuromancer: neoliberalism. It's kind of misleading because it sounds like a progressive movement. But it's actually the opposite.

Neoliberalism is what a lot of people in the '80s called Reaganomics. The idea was to stop the government from governing business. Let the market soar. Critics described it as trickle-down economics. Boosters said that a rising tide would lift all boats.

Gibson is writing Neuromancer at the beginning of Reagan's presidency. But he's writing it from Canada. Gibson moved there to avoid getting drafted in the Vietnam War and he stayed. When Hugh reads the book today:

HUGH: Where I think it's fascinating is the way that it depicts neoliberalism, which I think it does fantastically well, much better than realist novels of that time. Its ability to think about the immaterial circulation of financial capitalism as ones and zeros and give it metaphors such that we can kind of begin to kind of understand a world that is moving away from material production to the immaterial production of neoliberalism and Reaganomics, and this idea that now everything in the worlds of Neuromancer is just biz.

READING: *Biz here was a constant subliminal hum, and death the accepted punishment for laziness, carelessness, lack of grace, the failure to heed the demands of an intricate protocol. Because, in some weird and very approximate way, it was like a run in the matrix. Get just wasted enough, find yourself in some desperate but strangely arbitrary kind of trouble, and it was possible to see Ninsei (nee-SAY) as a field of data, the way the matrix had once reminded him of proteins linking to distinguish cell specialties. Then you could throw yourself into a high speed drift and skid, totally engaged but set apart from it all, and all around you the dance of biz, information interacting, data made flesh in the mazes of the black market.*

Again, Sherryl Vint.

SHERRYL: I think a lot of people criticize him because they feel he doesn't offer solutions to the things he illuminates and they feel maybe it's the, the role of the writer to both sort of identify some like emerging trend and then be like, this is wrong, or this is what we should do about it. And I don't feel he's a writer that does that. I think he's, he's a writer that illuminates things that are going on in the present in a way that you can start to have these glimpses of the trajectory we're on because of them.

Every year, Sherryl assigns the book to her students. And they often struggle with it. Some aspects of it are dated. A lot of cyberpunk including Neuromancer fetishized Japanese culture when Japan was ascendant as a high-tech superpower.

But when it comes to the technology in the book, Sherryl thinks one of the reasons her students struggle with it is because it's describing their reality in words they're not familiar with. And she knows when she's up there teaching her students Neuromancer:

SHERRYL: They're also like messaging somebody probably sitting three rows back from them and possibly watching a video on Snapchat at the same time or something like that.
Well, it's funny because you know there's a famous quote from Gibson where he said in the '90s the future is here, it's just unevenly distributed. I guess what you're describing is the future is here and it's evenly distributed.
SHERRYL: The future is here and it's like massively distributed, but it's also unevenly distributed in the way that sort of capital always develops unevenly, right? So, everybody's got a Facebook account and, and many people were on Twitter, but not everybody has the sort of benefits that come from owning shares in these sorts of big five media companies. So there, there's certain things that are still very unevenly distributed.

Hugh says when he teaches the book that's the part his students identify with the most – the part that we now call the attention economy.

HUGH: The fact that everyone is hustling in the way that they talk about that if you're not hustling, you're always in fear of sinking and just drowning, um, in these kinds of waves of biz. So, if we're not competing, we're not hustling, we're not moving. And so, they're kind of amazed that these kinds of ideas that they take as being very contemporary or very much of their moment date back to what they see as a very 1980s vision of the future.

Sherryl says cyberpunk didn't really take off as a cultural movement until about 2 years after Neuromancer. In 1986, Gibson's work appeared in an anthology of cyberpunk stories called Mirrorshades.

SHERRYL: And Mirrorshades kind of claims a punk history, but you know, by the time Mirrorshades is published, punk itself had already started to become a marketing category, right? And started to become like, you could go down to like Walmart and buy <laugh> your punk style clothing so that you could appear punk, but you just purchased something from like, you know, one of the most mainstay corporations in, in the world.

Some critics have argued that cyberpunk was never really that punk to begin with. I've heard the argument that a lot of early cyberpunk writers just wanted to overthrow the literary establishment so they could become the establishment.

HUGH: Some of the earliest people to call the death of cyberpunk were the cyberpunk writers themselves. They quickly turned apostate. And part of it was the way that cyberpunk moved from this punk outsider culture into becoming the science fiction mainstream rather quickly. It just exploded. And so, so many of the early authors began to kind of jump ship and kind of call sell out, um, or say that, you know, it's, it's impossible to be the outsider when you're on the inside.

And these days, cyberpunk has become more of a style. My YouTube page is full of cyberpunk synthwave mixes with retro futuristic graphics. There are high end cyberpunk fashion lines. You can buy cyberpunk clothes for hundreds of dollars.

But I found some indie creators who are bringing the genre back to its grittier roots – back to Neuromancer.

HENSON SHAVING AD

In case you missed the headlines -- cyberpunk is dead. In 1993 Wired Magazine ran a story called Cyberpunk RIP. Six years later, we got The Matrix. I found another article from 2008 declaring cyberpunk was quote "dead as Marley's doornail." A few years later, the novel Ready Player One came out. It sold 1.7 million copies. Steven Spielberg directed the movie adaptation in 2018.

In 2019 another article came out declaring cyberpunk was totally dead now. The next year, the video game Cyberpunk 2077 was released. It's sold over 25 million copies so far. And last year the game studio released an expanded storyline

starring Idris Elba. Yes, movie stars now act in video games with perfect CG likenesses. Keanu Reeves plays a character in the main version of Cyberpunk 2077.

Recently I discovered indie game creators who are using their own DIY aesthetic to reimagine cyberpunk. And they're looking at Neuromancer for inspiration.

In 2017, Chris Miller created an indie video game called Neofeud. He's working on the sequel right now. He discovered Neuromancer when he was in college.

CHRIS: It's definitely like a book that has stuck with me somewhat to, to the extent that, like, I met my, my partner through the William Gibson message board fan group. I actually met her at the same time as William Gibson. And then he was taken, so I married her instead.

<laugh>. Wait, wait. You met her the same time as William Gibson? Was he like on the message board?

CHRIS: He has like interacted a lot with the fans, like, so, and we, we were planning to go to one of these. It would, you know, that would be the first time I ever would ever have been to Canada. And so, I and Holly, who I've been talking to, you know, we were like, you know, relating through <laugh>, relating through Neuromancer and, uh, other, uh, uh, other cyberpunk science fiction. And we were like, hey, we should meet at this meetup in Vancouver. And, uh, yeah, he, he came to Kitano Beach and was just like, he's like a very chill, normal guy.

In fact, after the meet-up, Gibson went with his fans to see a movie.

Vancouver was a long way for Chris to travel. He's from Hawaii. He's actually Native Hawaiian. Now I tend to associate cyberpunk with imposing skyscrapers, narrow streets, gloomy skies, and neon signs. Those are not images that I associate with Hawaii. But Chris felt a strong identification with the book.

CHRIS: A lot of it is like, a lot of people come through it as computer nerds, which I am. And I'm like a game designer by trade, like I have a computer science degree, but then it's also kind of like, there's like a, there's the punk edge to it, which, you know, I mean, at least for me anyway. I'm from a very poor area of Hawaii, which the characters in Neuromancer are like Case, right? They're like the high tech, low lives. And that's kind of how I've, I've always felt like, I've always felt like I was from the same place that the people in the cyberpunk books are kind of from, and so I've always connected to that aspect of it.

As a kid, his parents got him into an elite school, and that made him starkly aware of the class differences in Hawaii. He is also not a fan of the tourist economy.

CHRIS: It's like a Westworld, except there's an actual culture that's kind of performing a fictional version of itself.

Also, a lot of tech moguls have built compounds in Hawaii. The state has been described as a billionaire's playground. He met several of them when he worked in the game industry. He was working crazy hours during crunch time.

CHRIS: Working for these just unimaginably rich people. One of them had like 60 Maseratis and Porsches, and he has like several Teslas. And so that was like, I was like, this guy is a feudal, or a neo feudal king.

That's why he calls his game Neofeud. He left the industry to develop his own game. And he got a job as a social worker just like the main character in his game.

CHRIS: So, the main character in Neofeud is a social worker. He's a cyborg social worker with a robot arm that is falling apart. And he's like, he's, he's robot disabled. And you know, it's got, because in cyberpunk, it's always like you become like this super enabled post-human and like, you become the uber mensch, right? Where you're like, if I have, if I get all these augmentations right, I can like punch harder than, you know, like the Hulk and I can like shoot missiles out of my legs, or I can like run really fast and turn invisible. It's kind of like, but what if, like, what if getting your robot arm just like, makes you really, really disabled when it inevitably breaks? So, his arm is glitching out and he's trying to drive to a social worker drop, but his arm almost kills him in a car crash. And then it, like when he is trying to hold his id, it literally makes him drop it and then he almost gets fired. So, it's kind of like the main character being a social worker, having a lot of disabilities, which I have, and then not getting any help with that in a system that's getting more and more unequal working with like these, uh, these children who, uh, in the, in the Neofeud, a lot of them are cyborg. They're, they're robots. They're sentient machines, but they're like, you know, uh, basically treated like the marginalized people of, you know, of our day. And like in, in our place, which mostly they're non-white kids. They're obviously from the very poor areas. And then the robots, and then there are like half human, half animal chimera children that are being, you know, generated by these, uh, giant corporations, try to build the perfect human body that they can be immortal in. And then there's also floating palaces with princesses in them, so it's kind of like the floating palaces in Neofeud where you have like these giant levitating cities with the,

with feudal era palaces crossed with like glass skyscrapers, right? That's basically what Hawaii is.

Did you find it cathartic to make these games?
CHRIS: It is. I mean, yeah, it totally is. It's like, it's definitely like, it's definitely like, uh, a thing that, um, I think, uh, I might not be as sane <laugh> if I, if I didn't, I'm doing what I want to do in these games. I am pro creating the art that is based on my life, right? It's, it's my life, you know, Neofeud, it is my life in art.

On the other side of the world in London, another indie game designer created a cyberpunk game that brought the genre back to its roots. And like Chris, Gareth Damian Martin used to work for a large game company, except Gareth was a games tester at SEGA.

GARETH: It was really dystopian. They had 24 hour game testing. So, people would start at, I would start at 7:30 AM and I would go through to 3, but then someone would come at 3 and pick up and go through to midnight, and then someone would work the night shift midnight to 7:00 AM .It was pretty crazy. And they paid you incredibly badly. It was, it was just the, the idea was just to have a, as many people as possible testing the game.

They suffered a work related injury testing a prototype of a 3D game.

GARETH, And that caused me to, uh, have problems with my eyes because I was testing different, all these different types of 3D for like seven hours a day or whatever.

Damian has actually had a lot of jobs in the gig economy, and those experiences inspired their game, Citizen Sleeper. And they were thinking about Neuromancer.

GARETH: One of the, the kind of things that I wanted to do when I made Citizen Sleeper was trying to go back to Neuromancer and think about what I would do if I was trying to make something that followed on from Neuromancer but didn't know what cyberpunk was or didn't think of cyberpunk as a genre.

In Citizen Sleeper, you don't hear any dialogue. The interactions come through text exchanges with multiple options. The premise is that in the future, when people are severely in debt, they can put themselves into suspended animation. Their consciousness is downloaded onto a robot body which can work 24/7.

GARETH: While you are basically in cryogenic storage, this android that has your mind will basically work off this debt that you have to a corporation, and then theoretically one

day when the debt is paid off, you, you get to wake up and the android gets removed or deleted or demolished or whatever.

The character you're playing is the android.

GARETH: So, you exist as this kind of offshoot. You're not a person legally you are, um, a person who's been placed into this, this physical body.

But that's the backstory. At the beginning of the game, your android character has already escaped their indentured servitude. Now they need to work for their own survival. They're working on a space station.

GARETH: You experience a kind of planned obsolescence. So basically, your body is falling apart because the corporation doesn't really want you to exist outside of its, its limitations. So, once you escape, you no longer receive the drug you need to keep your body functioning, uh, and your body starts rejecting your mind. And so, in order to survive, you have to, uh, find a way to afford the drug that, uh, keeps you alive that you can only get on the black market.

Beyond Damian's work experiences, the game is also personal in other ways.

GARETH: There's a lot of, um, the game where the, the Sleeper is kind of trying to understand their own physical experience and their own emotional experience, um, of having this, this kind of body that is not necessarily their own. And I guess for me, that that was drawing on my experience being non-binary, my experience of, of kind of dysphoria. And I think those kinds of particular relations of body autonomy seemed really important to me personally, but I think they're also something that I guess is very important to cyberpunk. I think it's a reason why a lot of people are drawn to cyberpunk is because it's almost a core factor or core contingent of the genre to explore the idea of bodies which are not necessarily 100% part of the self, or they're, they're, they're contestable. The, the body is adjustable and contestable and the, the self can, uh, relate to the body in different ways. And I think that that makes it, uh, something that relates to a lot of people's experience of, of their own bodies, even if those experiences are not necessarily to do with their gender, but also to do with disability and, um, health as well.

This was a common theme I heard in talking with modern day creators. They think cyberpunk veered too far from Neuromancer when it became too enamored with cyberspace even though the idea of cyberspace was introduced in Neuromancer.

BABBEL AD

Lincoln Michel is the author of a cyberpunk novel called The Body Scout. Like Chris and Damian, Lincoln was also inspired by Neuromancer.

LINCOLN: You know, William Gibson in Neuromancer, obviously it's about AI, it has cyberspace or coined the term cyberspace even. But from the very first pages, it's also very concerned with what these technologies do to the character's bodies. But obviously it opens with a famous line about the sky above the port was the color of television tuned to a dead channel. But then we have, you know, the character Case is in this bar.

READING: Ratz was tending bar, his prosthetic arm jerking monotonously as he filled a tray of glasses with draft Kirin. He saw Case and smiled, his teeth a web work of East European steel and brown decay. His ugliness was the stuff of legend. In an age of affordable beauty, there was something heraldic about his lack of it. The antique arm whined as he reached for another mug. It was a Russian military prosthesis, a seven-function force-feedback manipulator, cased in grubby pink plastic. "You are too much the artiste, Herr Case." Ratz grunted; the sound served him as laughter. He scratched his overhang of white-shirted belly with the pink claw.

LINCOLN: There's one thing William Gibson does so well that I always want personally from science fiction is show the ways in which technology is never seamlessly integrated. It's always a level of hierarchy and, um, and problems and, and fraught, and people adapt it or don't adapt it. And different groups do or don't according to their, you know, ideologies and backgrounds or financial means.

And that's how he approached writing this novel The Body Scout.

LINCOLN: We've already had all these novels, cyberpunk novels about virtual reality and artificial intelligence. So, I wanted to try to write one that was focused on what still feels like really emerging important technologies for good or ill of genetic editing and, you know, CRISPR case nine and all of that kind of stuff. Basically, I was like, well, can I write a cyberpunk novel that is not about cyberspace <laugh> but it's about the human body, and those kinds of questions.

His book takes place in a future where cybernetic enhancements and gene splicing are common. But the quality depends on how much you can pay.

LINCOLN: The main character, uh, Kobo is, has loans, basically medical debt from his cybernetic enhancements and which also are kind of jankily working, um, in certain

ways. So, he's got pain from that. Obviously, I'm a, I'm a millennial <laugh> and debt of various kinds is, is certainly, um, on my mind and my friend's minds.

Here's Varick Boyd reading from Lincoln's novel The Body Scout.

READING: We're all born with one body, and there's no possibility of a refund. No way to test drive a different form. So how could anyone not be willing to pay an arm and a leg for a better arm and a better leg? Sure, we're each greater than the sum of our parts. But surely greater parts couldn't hurt. Each time I upgraded it was wonderful, for a time. I had new sensations, new possibilities. I was getting closer to what I thought I was supposed to be. Then each time seemed to require another time. Another surgery and another loan to pay for it. Two decades of improvements and I still wanted more, but now I had six figures in medical debt crushing me like a beetle under a brick.

The Body Scout is also about baseball – a subject I'm actually quite passionate about but don't get to talk about very much on this podcast. Pharmaceutical companies are sponsoring baseball teams. And they pay for players to have incredible enhancements. I was very curious how the Red Sox were doing in his world. I kind of thought he'd call them the Moderna Red Sox, but they're the Boston Red Sockets – probably some off-shoot of Boston Dynamics and MIT.

The L.A. Dodgers are now the California Human Potential Growth Corp Dodgers. The character of Kobo has a brother who played for the Monsanto Mets – until he was murdered. Kobo is trying to figure out who killed his brother.

There were other ways that Lincoln wanted to honor Neuromancer while also doing something different to reflect our times. Typically in cyberpunk stories like Neuromancer, the corporations with all the power are in the background. If we ever even get to meet the CEO of the shadowy corporation, the person is elusive. The hero gets very limited access to them.

LINCOLN: I think one thing that I probably wanted to do was depict the billionaires themselves a little more directly. So, one of the main villains is a kind of Elon Musk-cyberpunk, Donald Trump-cyberpunk hybrid kind of character, because I think maybe some of those early cyberpunk books and related books focus a little more or have the kind of corporate power in the background is these kinds of forces that are maybe determining a lot of things but are not so in the present. And we do live in this reality even more so since I started writing the book where, um, you know, the kind of super rich and powerful our daily in our lives in the sense that Elon Musk is tweeting every day and Donald Trump was president.

Yeah, that's a really interesting point. That is a big shift that, you know, before you wouldn't even know, like, you know, who a lot of these people were. I mean, you have to almost go back to the gilded age where, sorry, everyone knew who JP Morgan was, but he was just mainly, you know, you didn't hear from him.
LINCOLN: And they demand our love in a weird way. Like, it, it seems totally bizarre to me that Elon Musk and so on spend their time like fighting on Twitter and like getting really mad that people don't think they're funny or something, and you would think in The Gilded Age, they would've just been happy to cruise around the world in their private, you know, steamships or whatever.

In fact, when Cyberpunk 2077 was in development, Elon Musk lobbied the game company to put him in the game as a character. They didn't, but he still loved it. When he praised the game several times on social media, the stocks of the game company soared. That's the state of cyberpunk today. The world's richest man who owns several tech companies can see himself as the hero of a cyberpunk story.

40 years after Neuromancer, I'm not surprised that cyberpunk can be a DIY movement of cultural criticism and a fashion line and a corporate marketing strategy. Neuromancer shows that you can sell anything, even populism mixed with a sense of fatalism, so we feel like no matter what we do, the house always wins.

It's easy to miss some of the underlying messages in cyberpunk when the world itself looks so cool. It's hard to see what's right in front of you when you're wearing Mirrorshades.

That's it for this week. Thank you for listening. Special thanks to Eileen Gunn, Hugh O'Connell, Sherryl Vint, Lincoln Michel, Gareth Damian Martin and Chris Miller, and Varick Boyd who did the readings. If you liked this episode, you should check out my episode on the novel Snow Crash that I did in 2022. It's called Snow Crashing The Metaverse.

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