

THE KILLING CLOUD

manual and novella



STUDIO
GLOVE

THE KILLING CLOUD

- THE NOVELLA -

'San Francisco, 1997 - not a good time to be a cop. With half the city under a hundred feet of toxic smog, it wasn't a good time to be anything, but at least we got regular holidays. In the eyes of the Black Angels, the only good cop was a dead cop - and that was one of the better sides to the job: at least with homicidal maniacs you knew where you were.'

The ochre stain of another toxic dawn oozed over the devastated city that once was San Francisco. Wake up, Sausalito, time to cringe from another day. Sausalito - that's my name, don't wear it out, and don't make cracks about it neither: I got enough to worry about. Another day, another dollar, another dead post in the smog. I mean, I'm not complaining - the streets ain't exactly busy these days, not since The Cloud came. An easy life, if not a wholesome one: you kinda forget about a green lifestyle when your whole city's encased in killer smog. No-one knows where it came from, or why. Only one thing was for sure - San Francisco wasn't so golden no more. One day the bay fog had rolled in, and stayed. Somewhere along the line it had mixed with some toxic gases: I guess five million cars and more industrial output than you could shake a health inspector at may have had something to do with it. Whatever it was, The Killing Cloud had arrived. Within days half the city was either dead or dying: the rest of us headed for the roofs. The whole city was covered - The Cloud just hung there, about 100 feet thick from top to ground, killing anyone or anything that took a lung-full. And it didn't look like it was going no place neither.

That was a few years ago, and the place has changed - we got a whole new life-style now. After The Cloud, any authorities left moved upwards - boy, you should have seen those builders move, constructing walkways and tramways, all up in the sky, away from the deadly fumes. Pretty soon we got used to the hi-rise life - if you could call it a life.

But then it got worse. A string of assassinations and we were a city without leaders; crime began to pay. Some had it that The Cloud was no natural phenomenon - like maybe someone had put it there, for a reason. But resources were scarce - civilians, cops, The Cloud didn't discriminate: 'Frisco was more of a village than a city these days. Now there was only a handful left, without the time or the manpower to find the answers. And didn't I just have to be one of them. I been at number six station house a month now, and I'm still on the streets: there's not much to do, no crime as such, but then when the streets are under a hundred foot of lethal smog, you'd kind of expect it, you know? I dug my automatic out from under a pile of discarded laundry, slipped it into its holster and opened the door. Instinctively I spread against the wall, gun out and cocked. One, two three - I crouched, rolled, and pitched up against the lift door. Left, right - no-one. Slowly I stood up, and lowered my piece. The click of the hammer was the only sound around, if you discount the wheezing of the purifier. It was clear - it always was, but you can never be too careful. One advantage of a police department with its back to the wall is they like to keep their cops close, and safe. They'd given me what they called an

apartment on the fiftieth floor of the old skyscraper that now housed The Station, which is handy for work, if not the shops. The elevator clanged to a halt and the door slid open. I was already out of sight, but it wasn't necessary - it was empty. We were trained well, and hard, but it left us with the feeling that even we were out to get us. I got in and pressed the button.

In seconds I had reached the top, and waited for the elevator to stop making the heavy industrial noises that were almost compulsory these days. I flattened against the wall as the door opened, and waited.

"Come out, Sausalito - jeez: for a traffic cop you sure are paranoid." The hoary voice of the Desk Sergeant ricocheted around the metal lift like a stray baseball. I relaxed, and peered out. He was at his desk, behind the 3" Armo-Glaze screen that made his 300lb battle-scarred body look more imposing than usual, if it was possible. I came out.

"Sorry Sarge - you can't be too...."

"For God's sake, Sausalito, shake it will ya - this is a station house, not a corner deli. We got more protection than the White House - they ain't gonna get in here, lad."

"No Sarge." He was right, of course. The roof bristled with everything from machine guns to Surface To Air Missiles, and the whole building was encased in three inches of metal sheeting. We didn't get much of a view, but you have to make some sacrifices.

"OK - now get down to Briefing: we got a live one on today. Who knows - maybe we'll get you off Traffic." The Sarge laughed - Traffic detail in 'Frisco was second only to Coast Guard as preferred Rookie fodder. I made for Briefing, and was stopped by a shout from behind.

"Hey Sausalito - wait up!" I knew the voice - Ronson, Mr. Blue Eyed Boy. Three kills and a grilled gook in his first month had given him a promotion, a raise and an ego like the Empire State. But he was OK, I guess, if you like the ambitious type.

"Hey Howie - what's up?"

"Dunno yet - somethin' big goin' down out there I guess: chiefs are runnin round with their heads cut off."

"Hey you two," boomed the Sarge. "You got less than ten seconds to get your asses into Briefing or you get Traffic Detail for the rest of your natural."

"Feels like I did that already," I muttered to Ronson, who smirked.

"We're gone, Sarge," Ronson replied, with the eager edge to his voice that

had made him Officer Most Likely two months in a row. It was a front, of course, but a good one. We hit the corridor and jogged down to what used to be a Presidential suite, now the General Briefing Area: room service wasn't what it used to be!

Sgt. Danny Mackavennie smiled to himself as he dipped his bike's nose into the Cloud - this was his favourite stunt. The pylons and cables of the Golden Gate Bridge loomed massive on his viewing screen and howled as he swung through 90% on his way through one of the gaps in the submerged superstructure. The Cloud swirled menacingly around him, but allowed him through as he shot out and began the climb back up, back into the brilliant sunlight that only heightened the gloom that now coated the once-Golden City. He never made it. Four small explosions echoed either side of the bike's cockpit, and lines shot out of the greyness, whipping round the bike like a rocket-assisted bolero."27 to Control, 27 to Control - am under attack, repeat, am under attack!" But Control heard no more.

The Clouds squirmed and billowed as Mackavennie fought to control his machine, but it was no good - the lines were as strong as those holding up the bridge: he didn't have a chance. As tracer flew out of the struggling machine, the noise of power winches fought with the screaming, dying engine and the bike was slowly dragged into the trap like a determined but doomed fly. Finally the engines spluttered to a halt, and the bike hung limp and helpless at the mercy of its captors. Shadowy figures swarmed down on ropes from the bridge above, and poured over the trapped bike. Guns drawn, they ripped open the canopy and forced the unfortunate cop out of his bike. Standing up, he raised his hands above his head.

"Who the hell are you?" he stuttered angrily, but said no more - from above came a shot, followed by a laugh, and Sgt. Mackavennie fell silently into The Cloud, swallowed up by its impenetrable gloom.

"Now it begins: the time for The Black Angels has arrived," the assassin muttered to himself. A note of satisfaction might have been noted by anyone who knew him, but then, no-one did.

After a few seconds of hydraulic hisses, the elevator came to a halt. Ronson pulled the metal door aside, and we stepped out. We were now in the nerve centre of the whole station house - Briefing. No-one without a badge got in here and got out again outside a body bag. The room was dark, illuminated only by a stream of what passed for daylight through bullet-proof glass and a worn out Venetian blind. It was also smokey, but when your butt is on the line 24 hours a day, you gotta have some vices, you know?

"Looks like they started," I whispered to Ronson.

"Ah, Sausolito, you made it after all - so kind." The voice came from the lectern, full of the sort of irony that cuts glass. Sgt. Jeffries, a forty-year vet with an itchy trigger finger and a temper to match. Guess that's why they tied him to Briefing - even hardened criminals don't deserve Jeffries.

"Hi Sarge - got held up."

"I'll bet," he boomed. "Anyone we know?" The assembled cops laughed, and Jeffries turned on the lights to accentuate my embarrassment. Gee thanks, Sarge.

"Now, if you'll sit down," he oozed, "maybe we can begin, huh? Lights, Kopecki."

"We don't need the lights down, Sarge," came a whisper from the sidelines, "it's a video screen." Kopecki - lucky to the last, but with a deep hatred for the technically illiterate.

"LIGHTS!" You don't argue with tradition - nor Jeffries. The lights went down again, quickly.

"OK, gentlemen, today we go on a field trip. First slide, Kopecki. ['They're not slides, sir' - 'Whatever, just roll it will you?'] OK, this, as even Sausolito must know, is San Francisco - our fair city, or was. For three years now we been battling to keep the crime levels down, and losing. Two days ago I met with Intelligence, and they got news for us. It seems those gooks out there have organised: some kind of master gang or whatever, controlling all this stuff we been goin through recently. We don't know who they are, or where they are, but we do know they're out there. Word is they're keepin an eye on us, with some kinda surveillance robots, spottin our launches, beats, tactics - everything. Intelligence figures if we can nail one of those little suckers, we might get a lead on the rest of them. So, today we go in. Sausolito!"

"Yes sir." I knew this was comin'. Can't afford to lose the top guys, so they send the rookies out on the little stuff. But, it was better than traffic I guess.

"Sausolito, you got yourself a bike - you're license up to date?"

"Yes sir - Class 3 pilot, passed last week Sir."

"OK, you, Ronson and Butler are goin robot hunting. Here's what you do. Next screen Kopecki." The city was suddenly divided into grids, street names and everything.

"One of the robots has been spotted here, in the financial district, so you're gonna need some cover - we can't give you none though. But you got nets, and of course PUPs."

Nets and PUPs - great. Like tryin to fight a tank with a duvet cover. But it was all we had, and we made the most of them. The nets at least were rocket boosted - like a heat-seeking gladiator. The PUPs were different - little computer-guided mobile holding pens that follow you round like, well, hence

the name.

"OK Sarge - how many I got?"

"You better only use a few - supplies are short, boy - you know that. Put 'em there and there, I'd say: cover your bases."

He pointed to various streets around the hi-rise area - I agreed, good choice. I guess he wasn't Sarge for nothing.

"OK, go get suited up and report to the hangar. Good luck, Officer. Now, Ronson - yours is over in Chinatown."

As he briefed the others, I stood up, and made my way through the dimly lit room; as I passed, some of the other guys whispered their best wishes. At the end of the day we were all on the same side, and our numbers were dropping rapidly - whatever our differences, we stuck together.

I quit the armoury and began to walk down the long dark, heavily armoured corridor that led to the roof-top hangar. I'd selected every scrap of ammunition the bike would carry: I wasn't taking any chances - if I was going out alone against some sort of west coast mafia, I was taking all the heat I could pack. By the time I reached the bike, she was loaded for buffalo. To call the XB500 a bike is rather like calling 1997 San Francisco a little misty - this was two thousand brake horsepower of solid muscle I was taking out, the result of an 'offensive policing' initiative put on hold by the coming of The Cloud. The brass wanted an attack chopper that could chase through shopping malls, and that's what the research boys gave them - a vertical take off corvette with more firepower than Arnie's glove-box, these babies did 0-60 before you could turn the stereo on. They couldn't have foreseen The Cloud, but it sure looked like it - a hermetically sealed jet fighter with enhanced parking capability: just what the rookie ordered.

I signed the forms and watched as my machine was hooked off the storage rack and hoisted towards me. In the enforced gloom of the hangar it looked even meaner than I remembered, the steel-blue neon light glancing off the armoured canopy as it rose to allow me in. This was it - operational, at last. Taking a deep breath, I walked over to the launch pad and climbed in. The Ergo-tex seat fitted me like a glove, but then it was supposed to.

My support suit connected with the electronics, and the console lit up like a shop-full of Christmas trees as the navigational and targeting computers took on their data from Central Command. This was the only trouble with the XB500 - it was only ever intended to be a prototype, and half the gadgets were never installed - moving maps, 100 mile radar, video communications links,

and all the other stuff the air force took for granted: none of it made it onto the XB. We had to make do with a direction indicator linked to Central - it told us where to go, but not where we were. Out there in The Cloud, you were on your own. There's nothing like technology, I say, and....well anyway. The headset crackled, and Control came on the line.

"OK 43, we are ready for systems check." I tutted - red tape. No-one went out without being ready, stands to reason: you're not ready, you're dead.

"XB500 stroke 43, ready for check."

"Weapons?" I punched the weapons systems up on the HUD and moved my head - the targeting followed. "Check."

"Navigation?" The indicators were flashing, so I guess they were on. "Check."

"Fuel?"

I gave the dial a flick, and it sprang into life: some things never change.

"Check."

"OK 43, checked and cleared - commence primary ignition."

The engines wound themselves up into their less than friendly whine as me and the bike were hauled high up into the roof to launch position. Up above the huge wheels began to pull the metal sheets aside, leaving a hole just big enough for us to squeeze into the murky city outside. We had to get out, but it didn't mean we let anyone else in.

"OK 43, you are cleared for launch - commence final ignition, and look lively out there, guy."

The turbines bit, and my body did its best to escape through the back of the seat as the bike whipped into another San Francisco morning. It didn't look much different to any other time of day - grey, wet and ghostly. I rolled left around the remains of an office block and headed east towards the familiar landmarks of the old financial district. They didn't make too much money there any more - those glittering post modern spires had mostly been appropriated as high-rise accommodation by the city's small but hardy band of post-Cloud survivors. Somewhere in there this so-called gang would be hiding. Maybe.

"43 away - see ya later Control." I flipped the set off: radio silence was compulsory these days - at least for anyone with a fondness for life.

The radio was shot, and the targeting didn't work too well, but it did fly. The Black Angel lieutenant pulled down the canopy and strapped himself in. It wasn't much different to a jet, and he'd flown a good few of those in his time. He fired a short volley into the air, and smiled.

"OK, all the good stuff's workin'," he said to no-one in particular. "Let's go for it." He gave the thumbs up, and the area rapidly cleared before being filled

with the sound of weary engines crackling back into life. It was better than the others they'd snatched - those would take weeks before they could be used again. These cops don't like their toys being taken away, he thought laconically as he rose slowly off the make-shift metal platform that was serving as a launch pad for the embryonic Black Angel Air Force. "Right, coppers - time you became an endangered species," he said to himself as the vectored thrust shoved the captured bike up and out into the San Francisco skies. The bridge became a speck below as he banked away and into the heart of the old city. There would be a serious party tonight.

I'd been assured that it was safe at the moment - 'better than an 80% non-aggression environment possibility', was how they put it. They would. It all meant the same thing - I shouldn't be shot at, but better be on the safe side. I dipped down to the harbour, keeping out of range of most of the buildings. If they're gonna take pot shots, better it was from a distance. The harbour clock tower punched belligerently through The Cloud, as if to reassure us that time was still there, Cloud or no Cloud. I rolled and banked, keeping the city on the other side of the tower. I liked the harbour: its now-ghostly piers and discarded machinery looked like they were just waiting for someone to set them free, eager to get back to work. Or maybe not - a month sitting out traffic detail from the back of an APC and anything was possible. I shook my head, pulled myself together. Get a grip, Sausalito - anything's possible, including the bouncy rooms, and you got a robot to catch. I just hope no-one's taping this stuff.

The peak of the Trans-America building told me I was on target - pushing the stick down I watched as the yellow arrow made up its mind. Five hundred, five fifty, four hundred, three, two: bye bye sky, it's Cloud time.

Going Under was the worst bit - like sky-diving into a bowl of mushroom soup: even the experienced guys say they never get used to it. The screen goes infra-red, and all you got between you and a submerged wall is a few grand's worth of transputers and the word of the police mapping department. There's only one way to fly under The Cloud - slowly.

The arrows were still showing the way, and I banked into what used to be the heart of San Francisco. It was all gone now - the earthquake had seen to that. The businessmen's pride and joy was looking more like a coral reef every day, the jagged peaks and maze of cables making a sub-cumulus lattice that no-one without nerves of steel and/or a navigation computer should try and fly round. Except for us cops, of course - we had no choice. Personally I hear good things about New York, but what the heck, a living's a living, and the bonuses are good.

The arrows changed direction, which meant I was getting close. But then they began to point up - what?! Don't tell me these suckers can fly! Pull back - hit the gas: we're going out again. 80% thrust and three near misses and I was out into the wide blue yonder again - the little critter must be on one of the walkways, maybe heading for the station house. Oh no you don't! I peered round the hi-rise intersections that had become our inter-penthouse lifeline, but there was no sign of the robot. These roads had been constructed within a year of the arrival of The Cloud, and now connected pretty well every building in the city. Add to those a network of high level power cables and supply pipes, all recently dug up and strung up for ease of maintenance, and you have who knows how many roads for a robot to walk down. Someone was playing games with me. All the arrows were pointing at the street below, but there was no sign. And then I saw it: not what I'd imagined - it looked like an old fire hydrant. Then it moved: I struck, quickly - there wouldn't be another chance. I'd grabbed a net from its moorings, and punched the key that sent it soaring over onto the robot. The weights hit concrete, and San Francisco was one robot short. It was PUP time. Within seconds the little buggy flew overhead, circled and dived down, homing in on the net's beacon. Now came the tricky part - not only did the PUP home in, but anyone else with a CB receiver: serious design flaw, but there was nothing we could do about it now. It was home time, but it wouldn't be an easy journey, knowing that every SAM missile in town might be waiting to join in the party.

I felt like Jimmy Stewart walking out of a saloon with a dozen guns trained on his back.

As the PUP hugged the Cloud-Top on its way back to the Station I trod a more careful course, always above and behind it, watching for any interception. Sometimes they shot them down, other times they jammed their guidance systems. You could always tell - the PUP would start wagging its tail, then dive down to some hidden location. This time it all seemed OK. The PUPs hadn't been warmly received by the population at first, looking as they do like a small cruise missile, but they got used to them - they had no choice: it was either us or anarchy. Then it started.

The console started flashing at me, and I knew I had company. The arrows said left, so I pulled right, and down, into The Cloud. Whatever it was I couldn't see him yet, but he was there - the computers may be crude, but they're never wrong. I listened for the whirr of blades, or the hiss of a SAM, but nothing came. I raised the craft gingerly out of The Cloud for a look around - there had to be something, but - what the.....!? Like a ghostly doppeleganger, another XB slid out of the deadly smog and homed in on the PUP. So why was the

computer saying it was an enemy? I got on the radio smartish.

"Hey buddy - what you doin out here? Thought I was on my own on this one." No answer. "XB500/43 to control: please identify XB500 in Sector Four." The radio crackled, and then died - I was being jammed. "Calling XB500 - please identify yourself. Calling - holy mother of..." A stream of tracer screamed past the PUP as the other bike opened fire. OK, play-time's over buddy. I pulled up and round, and came in on the XB's rear. He didn't respond, at least not quickly enough, and in seconds he was in my sights. I hated to do it, but.....The bike fell out of the murky sky in a ball of flame as the PUP went into Auto-Evade and disappeared into The Cloud.

"43 to Control - man down in Sector Four, suspect flying XB500, presumed captured: please advise."

But the radio was still down - whatever ECM the guy had thrown had stuck fast. At least the guidance stuff was still operative. Finding the PUP still flying straight and true, I stepped on the gas, and in minutes the Station House loomed up out of the all-pervading smog. It was the work of seconds to initiate the docking sequence, another minute to get out of the craft. I was met by Lieutenant Hooker, and he didn't look too happy.

"OK Sausolito - what's going on?"

"Unidentified bike sir - jammed my radio then opened up on the PUP, sir." "You been through Detox lately, officer - The Cloud fried your brains or what?" I wasn't having this - ain't every day I bag a gook, and now I was getting hassled for doing my duty.

"Truth, sir - someone out there has captured a bike. Couldn't have been one of ours firing on a PUP - they must have stolen one: check with records, they'll know. We don't exactly have a massive squadron: guess they'd notice if one went missing. Sir."

The Lieutenant went red, and looked for a moment like he wanted to swing at me. I stood my ground.

"You're out of order, Sausolito - get out of here before I put you on Morgue Duty." I turned to go - his last shot came booming across the cavernous hangar.

"I want a report on this, mister - on my desk in half an hour - then get yourself into Briefing. AND RUN, MANI!" I ran.

"How was I to know it had a bug on it?"

I was in the Captain's office, and I wasn't up for a medal. OK, I'd warned them that the opposition had captured bikes, but I'd also brought the wrong robot into the station - it was bugged. It took an hour before anyone found it, and

by then it had transmitted enough information on our operations to wreck our security. This meant only one thing - evacuation.

"You could have looked - you get enough practise on all those abandoned cars you been hauling into the pound - you know it's their main weapon against us, or was, up till now."

I stared at the floor in silence - he was right, of course, but I still reckon I was getting it tough.

"This mean I'm off bikes, sir?" It'd be the shortest tour on record.

"No - not that I have any choice in the matter. We need all the manpower we can get, and that includes you, God help us."

"Yes sir." I was relieved, just. Was this good or bad, though? If they've got bikes, it ain't gonna be no picnic out there.

"OK Sausolito, that's all - get yourself some rest. Report back at 09.00 tomorrow."

"Yes sir - thank you sir." I waited for more, but he'd gone back to his writing. I blushed a little, and turned for the door.

"Oh, and Sausolito..." I turned to see him with an uncharacteristic smile flickering below his sweat-sodden moustache. "Good work on that enemy bike."

I smiled, and saluted. "Thank you sir," I replied, not-a-little proud, before exiting stage right. So, he did have a heart.

It's been three months since the bugged robot forced us to move station houses, and it's been tough. In all, five bikes have been stolen now, and six more shot down by our own ammunition. But there's a new threat in the city now: The Black Angels, as we now know them, have made their own machines out of stolen technology and what spare parts they can pick up from the streets, and pounds, and abandoned scrap yards. Huge, demonic versions of the XB500, all fins and teeth, that now dog our every move. The battle's getting messy, and we're losing it.

Oh, we picked up a few Angels, sure - we'd know nothing at all about them if we hadn't - but it isn't enough. We needed a big catch, and we needed it quick. I made Sergeant last week - seems the Captain got over my little gaffe with the robot. Had more to do with me being one of the few pilots with more than two months combat experience that ain't pushing up the daisies is what I think, but you don't look a gift bike in the exhaust. "Hey Sarge!" I didn't respond for a second - still feels kinda weird. "Sarge?" I turned round: looked like some rookie with more guts than sense to me, but I guess we've all been through it.

"Yeah - Johnson ain't?" "Yes Sir!" Bit too keen, but it don't hurt while he's still on the ground. "OK Johnson, cut the promotion drive for a second, will ya? Where's the fire, anyhow?"

"Sir, there's an emergency briefing in five minutes, Sir."

Now what - another goose chase no doubt. "OK - thanks. Oh, and Johnson...." The rookie turned, eyes wide in anticipation of some gem from the lips of his sergeant.

"Stop calling me Sir." I grinned at him. "Sir?" He didn't get it.

"Never mind, Johnson."

"Yes sir."

Rookies weren't what they used to be. OK, Briefing it is then.

It had been a good one - finally we had a lead: one of the Angels had flipped out and got hungry for power. Intelligence had reported that one Louis St.Paul, a former Angel Lieutenant, was apparently trying to make himself the top man, which might, if we're lucky, split the Angels apart - all the better for wiping them out. St.Paul was a nut of the old school - a religious maniac, he saw himself as the saviour of the human race, or at least San Francisco. But he wasn't the hair shirt and charity type - in his church he used a gun and a bucket in place of a collection plate. But if we could get him alive, or near enough, we might get a lead on the big chiefs, and put an end to all this madness. Time to get back in the air.

"Are you ready, my people?" Louis St.Paul was going on a crusade, liberating as much private property as he could: giving it to the poor wasn't an option. His band of 'disciples' were eager and ready to go, and were only waiting for their jacked-up mean machines to be blessed before they took off for the nearest supply of easily lifted cash.

"C'mon, reverend, let's move it on out, huh? Waddyasay? We don't get out there soon The Trinity's gonna have us for breakfast."

A bullet glanced off the man's canopy, and he decided his machine would be better off blessed anyhow.

"Never mention those foul abominations in my presence again, my son!" St.Paul snarled as he threw the last of the holy water, out of its half-pint bottle, onto the last machine, and climbed in behind his own console. The menacing canopy slid down, the engines fired, and the four hoverbikers of the apocalypse moved slowly up off the office roof they called home. Four men on a mission from God, or at least from his treasurer. The Big Guy Upstairs wouldn't have been impressed.

"XB12, do you copy?"

"XB12 - right behind you, Sir!"

"Oh God." The eager rookie had turned out to be an ace pilot, a rarity for anyone, let alone a nineteen year old. Been doin stunts in daddy's Lear Jet since he was twelve, no doubt: still, any pilot in a storm I guess. "OK Johnson - keep with it, huh? This ain't Cowboys and Indians."

"No Sir!"

"And stop calling me Sir." Silence - hero worship: I can deal with it I guess. The Cloud drooled slowly along below as I headed the team down into Nob Hill. The peaks and spires of the old money area jutted out of the slimy mist, a last reminder of the glory of times past. The area was clear of trouble so far, at least that part of it covered by the computer, and we hit the unmistakable mire of The Cloud top. Word was St.Paul was headed for Grace Cathedral and its crypts full of church gold. The crypts were under The Cloud, but the rest of the Cathedral was still mostly in use. Even a devastated city has to pray occasionally - more so, maybe, I don't know: personally I'll take my salvation with the end of a 38.

"OK guys, goin' in - looks like we got here first, Spread out: Zamecki, sit in the trees behind the cathedral, what's left of 'em anyhow; Daniels, you take lookout; Johnson, you and me are goin' inside - your oxygen full?"

"Yes Sir - 100%"

"OK, on my mark, hit the ground and dismount."

A crackle on the radio preceded by a few seconds the scream of engines overhead. "Sarge - four incoming at three O'...." The line went dead as an explosion split the air. Zamecki's bike fell out of the sky and whistled past me. He never had a chance, but he would have felt honoured to know that seconds later he was avenged in style by two hundred rounds from Johnson's cannon.

"OK Johnson - nice shooting, but get the hell down to that cathedral now before your luck runs out." For once he obeyed in silence, and disappeared beneath the smog that infiltrated even consecrated ground. I followed as Daniels closed in from deep cover throwing out tracer like he'd cornered the market. "Hey Daniels - save it for later, huh? We got a few questions to ask 'em - a dead gook don't grill too good."

"Ten four, Sarge - can't have your butt fried though, huh?"

I didn't reply - there was no need: with friends like that, enemies stayed home nights. Pity St.Paul and his goons hadn't heard the news though.

Pull back on the stick, swing the tail and boost down - classic VTOL landing, but then the text books didn't say anything about a hundred feet of toxic Cloud. Daniels hovered at fifty feet while Johnson and I moved in on the old ruined cathedral. It all seemed pretty quiet, but then I guess they weren't about to announce their presence. "No-one here Sir," came Johnson's voice

on the radio. "Should there be?"

A good point there, and one that was soon emphasised by a stream of cannon fire from the cathedral door.

"Ambush!" I screamed as Johnson nimbly avoided the attentions of an Angel machine gun. "Get down, Johnson - get some cover: Daniels....Daniels!"

"On my way chief" came the voice of our supposed cover.

"Goddammit Daniels - you're supposed to be on watch: what's the matter - lost your contacts?"

"Sorry chief - this should make up for it." As he said that an Angel bike disappeared in a cloud of exploding fuel. I hadn't seen that one, but it looked like he'd seen me.

"OK Jeff, you can stay - Johnson, keep em busy: I'm goin in."

Johnson answered with a burst of covering fire that dissuaded an incoming Angel from joining the party. Unstrapping my harness, I gave the suit's oxygen levels one last check and hit the canopy button. In a movement that had been practised all too often I palmed the Beretta and pushed the K&H 9mm into its leg holster whilst throwing the other leg over the side of the bike, rolling with it to keep the XB between me and the line of fire. All that practising with the elevator had to pay off someday, and this was it. In a second I was inside the Cathedral doorway, in another it was shut behind me. I paid my respects to the saint in charge and dived for the nearest pew. The Angels weren't far behind.

I watched through the delicate tracery of the pew's backrest as Louis St.Paul strutted in like he owned the place, which he probably would if I didn't do my job right. Outside the sounds of a running gun-battle were still ruining the spiritual silence the cathedral would have normally commanded: when three heavily armed 2000bhp hoverbikes have to break into a Cathedral that's mostly covered in toxic smog, however, it is safe to assume that the word normal is no longer in regular usage. And where the hell was Johnson? I hoped to God he hadn't bought it: I needed him in here. And anyhow, he was a good kid.

"OK Copper - this Cathedral is ours. You got two choices - give yourselves up, in which case you'll get away with execution, or....." Thirty rounds of 9mm automatic fire suggested to St.Paul that I didn't need to know the second choice. I knew I could take him, and his 'disciples', but I wanted him alive - not too easy when he seemed determined to be otherwise. I decided to play for time, and hope that something turned up. St.Paul had begun a search of the pews, which mostly involved spraying machine gun fire into each one he came to: no respect. I waited till his back was to me, and moved. Fire, roll, fire, roll - St.Paul was too quick, but his buddy wasn't. I wanted him alive too,

but I guess you can't have everything you want.

"OK St.Paul, your advantage is slipping - your turn to give up, before the backup arrives."

He fired wildly in the direction of my voice, which was a shame, because I wasn't there. Good thing about these old churches - everyone's a ventriloquist. A burst from the Beretta and his gun was spinning down the aisle. I risked standing up, and got a bullet in the arm for my pains. The suit stopped most of the impact velocity, but it still hurt like hell. Not enough, however, to stop me taking advantage of the man's shot from the door and pick him off with the Heckler and Koch. He made a lot of mess, and a lot of noise.

"Right, pal, now it's just you and me - you gonna come nice, or am I gonna have to make you?"

He didn't answer, just standing there as if in shock. I walked up slowly, and slapped the cuffs on him without any trouble.

"OK Louis, you got the right to remain silent, but I really wouldn't advise it; you got the right to an attorney: if you cannot afford an attorney, that's tough luck on you, bud; you got the right to get your face smashed by me; you got the right to squeal on your pals; you got the right to do ten to twenty if you even breathe wrong between here and the station, and if you so much as think of escapin' you got the right to a bullet between the shoulder blades. You got the picture, punk?" I think he had. "SAY YOUR PRAYERS, COP!!" I should have known, really. I spun round - I must've only nicked the little guy, cos he'd staggered to his feet, waving a battered but mean-looking Uzi. I pulled St.Paul out of the way - he'd be the first to go, if I knew anything about their loyalty. Both my weapons were empty - I had more magazines, but the time it'd take to change them was about half a second more than I'd get. I dived for cover, but the little guy's gun had jammed. After a second he had it fixed, and loosed off a volley into the ceiling. Then he levelled it at me, and I prepared for the worst. He fired, but there was rather more of an explosion than usually associated with Uzis: the door flew off its hinges, showering the disciple with wood and brass. As the dust-cloud cleared, I saw the headlights of a Hoverbike meandering through the huge stone doorway. It looked like one of ours. Still hovering a few feet above the ground, the Canopy opened, and a figure stood up, wobbling a little but steady nonetheless. He had a microphone in his hand.

"Blew the frud out of that one, huh sergeant?"

Johnson. Who else could it have been?

This was our chance - our first major Angel: time to get a lead on the big guys. I would have liked to have grilled the guy personally, but I decided to leave it to the professionals. Anyhow, somewhere there was a bottle of Bourbon

calling my name.

I heard later that The Converter had died in the grill, but not until he'd named everyone he knew in The Black Angels. Unfortunately he told us nothing about the so-called Trinity I'd heard so much, and so little about. Still, that's what you get when you let Interrogation loose with the truth drugs. Too much science ain't good for a guy: didn't do St.Paul too many favours, that's for sure.

It's a dirty job, and we're just the guys to do it.

TO BE CONTINUED.....

THE KILLING CLOUD

the manual

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THE CLOUD THE BATTLE
WITH NOBODY TAKING
OVER.



San Francisco wasn't so golden no more - the bio-clouds had seen to that. One day the bay fog had rolled in, and just stayed there: somewhere along the line it had mixed with some toxic gasses.

The Killing Cloud had arrived.

Within days over half the population were either dead or dying, whilst the rest headed for the roofs. The whole city was covered - The Cloud just hung there, about 100 feet thick from top to ground, like a malevolent smog, killing anyone that took a lung-full. And it didn't look like it was going on place, neither.

That was a few years ago now, and the place has changed, a whole new life-style has emerged. After The Cloud, what little authority remained began to move upwards, constructing walkways and tramways, all up in the sky, away from the deadly fumes. And so we got used to the hi-rise life. If you could call it a life.

Then it got worse. A series of assassinations left the city without leaders, and crime without restrictions. It began to occur to us that The Cloud was no natural phenomenon - someone had put it there for a reason. But resources were scarce - there was only a depleted force of cops to find out who...

And didn't I just have to be one of them.

You are one of the rapidly dwindling San Francisco Police Department, your sole purpose now to reassert authority.

As you move through each assignment you will gain experience and information on the leaders of The Black Angels, an amalgamation of all the old street gangs that now effectively runs the city: they must be stopped.

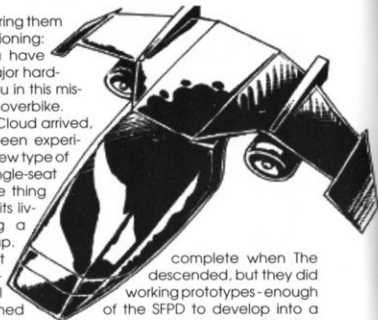
Your orders - to bring them in alive for questioning: if you can. You have one piece of major hardware to assist you in this mission: the XB500 hoverbike. Just before The Cloud arrived, the SFPD had been experimenting with a new type of "motorbike" - a single-seat VTOL jet, just the thing for a city doing its living and dying a hundred feet up.

Tests were not complete when The Cloud descended, but they did have several working prototypes - enough of the SFPD to develop into a small but effective fleet. They were quickly adapted for below-Cloud work, and were further equipped with a variety of crime prevention devices - on-board computers, sophisticated communication equipment and heads-up display. The old riot water cannons were replaced with a 7.62mm machine gun, and a 30mm cannon firing armour piercing shells.

With these the SFPD began to fight back.

However, The Angels themselves captured and customised a large number of these bikes, before turning them on their old masters.

No-one ever said it was gonna be easy.



1. QUICK START GUIDE

- Flight Controls
- Key controls
- Briefing
- Launch

2. FULL GUIDE

Briefing:

- Icons
- Back up:
 - Nets
 - Pups
- Crime files
- City info

Armoury:

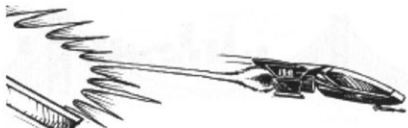
- Weapons
- Survival suit
- Selection

Launch procedure

Docking procedure

Missions

Information Gathering



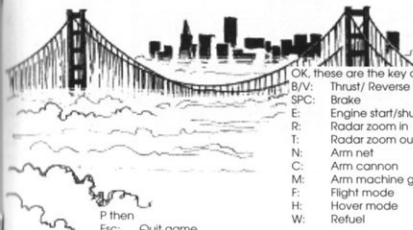
The engines wound themselves up into their less than friendly whine as me and the bike were hauled high up into the roof to launch position. Up above, the huge wheels began to pull the metal sheets aside, leaving a hole just big enough for me to squeeze into the murky city outside. We had to get out, but it didn't mean we let anyone else in.

"OK 43, you are cleared for launch - commence final ignition, and look lively out there, guy."

The turbines bit, and my body did its best to escape through the back of the seat as the bike whipped into another San Francisco morning. It didn't look much different to any other time of day - grey, wet and ghostly. I rolled left around the remains of an office block and headed east towards the familiar landmarks of the old financial district. They didn't make too much money there any more - those glittering post-modern spires had mostly been appropriated as high-rise accommodation by the city's small but hardy band of post-Cloud survivors. Somewhere in there this so-called gang would be hiding. Maybe.



Normal flight controls apply - you move the mouse left, you go left, move it right, you go right, then forward puts your nose down, back puts it up: get the picture? OK, for thrust, you gotta use the keyboard: see below. When your weapons are up, the left mouse button fires 'em and the right selects the HUD target.



OK, these are the key controls:
B/V: Thrust/ Reverse thrust. Also walk
SPC: Brake
E: Engine start/shutdown
R: Radar zoom in
T: Radar zoom out
N: Arm net
C: Arm cannon
M: Arm machine gun
F: Flight mode
H: Hover mode
W: Refuel

P then

Esc: Quit game
F1: Console view
F2: Rear view
F3: Left view
F4: Right view
F5: Rear tracking view
F6: Scrolling external view
'1' = Zoom in, '2' = zoom out
'3/4' = pitch camera
'5/6' = yaw camera

S: Arrest suspect
I: Enter station house to end mission

P: Pause

6: Tourist View (toggles fog On/OFF, Mission 1 ONLY)
7: Low detail on shapes
8: Medium
9: High
0: Contours On/OFF



Welcome to the SFPD, gentlemen: so, you wanna get into the air quick, huh? OK - but if you change your mind, check with the Flight Guide for full details, OK?

Right - you gotta do just three things:

In Briefing, read the assignment, then hit the Armoury icon, arm your craft, double click the Launch icon, and you'll find yourself in the cockpit, ready to rock and roll.

There's only one problem - you wanna know how to stop again, you'd better have a look at the Docking Procedures if you don't wanna be cleaned up with a shovel.

Finally, pray - you're gonna need all the help you can get!

FLIGHT GUIDE

Before you do anything else, you gotta insert the code word - it changes every time, so's the bad guys don't get hold of it:

you know the form. This ain't the same as the Mission Code, though - that you get at the end of a successful mission, so's you can go on to the next. OK?

Welcome to Briefing, Officers: you'll see this scene at the beginning of each mission. To access any required information, just hi-light the relevant icon, OK? OK.

SAN FRANCISCO

This displays details of current mission

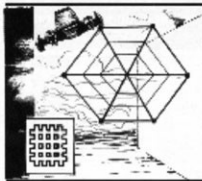
Takes you through the levels of the map system: this is where you get to place your PUPs and Nets, but more of those later.

Gets you straight into the Armoury:

This accesses details of the felon currently under investigation

Accesses 3D reconnaissance shots of major city landmarks.

Use 'Esc', or the right hand mouse button, at all times to get back up through the menus

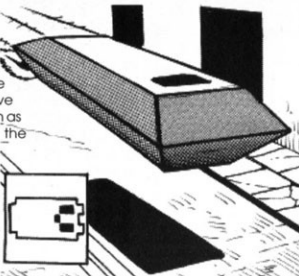


OK, your Nets are your basic arrest aid: click on the icon at Back Up and you get to deploy a number of the missile pods that hold these babies. Then you just fly over 'em and they just fly on up to your craft. To fire 'em, get 'em on the HUD, and make sure the felon's inside your targeting circle. Then you gotta get your cross hairs over him and lock on - the red circle turns green when you're locked on, and fire, again using the left mouse button. Remember to keep the cross hair locked on until the missile has hit the felon, if you loose the lock the missile loses it too.

The PUP's a radio-controlled mobile holding pen.

Hi-light the icon, then position 'em around the potential arrest site. When you've launched your net, you move out and arrest the guy. Soon as you've read him his rights, the PUP'll come running.

Be advised that the PUP's radio only has a limited range: if it's too far away, it won't respond. Be further advised that they ain't armed - you gotta protect 'em if you want your felon to get back safe.



As the Sarge briefed the others, I stood up, and made my way through the dimly lit room; as I passed, some of the other guys whispered their best wishes. At the end of the day we were all on the same side, and our numbers were dropping rapidly - whatever our differences, we stuck together.

ARMOURY

No-one went into The Cloud without packing some serious heat: the Station House Armoury had everything the modern police force could want - we even had a few things the bad guys didn't have. Cancels last request: appears after 'Select' is hi-lighted.



Scroll between available weapons and ammunition

SELECT

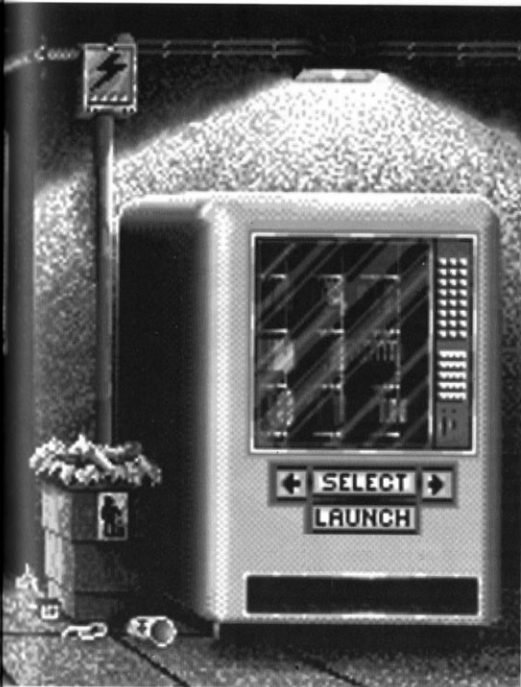
Selects weapons/ammunition on display

LAUNCH

Initiates launch sequence - double click goes straight to launch.

CANCEL

Cancels last request: appears after 'Select' is hi-lighted.



WEAPONS

OK, this is what you got, ordnance-wise

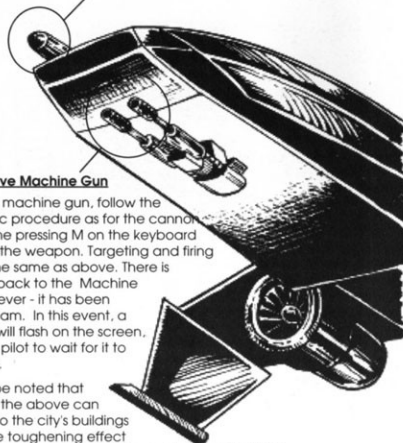
30mm Cannon - the XB500's best weapon. To access the cannon, press C on the keyboard. Then once the enemy is targetted within the square, line up the cross-hairs on the circle and fire at will using the left mouse button.

Your only limitation is the ammunition supply and whether or not the guns jam.

7.62 Reserve Machine Gun

To use the machine gun, follow the same basic procedure as for the cannon but this time pressing M on the keyboard to access the weapon. Targeting and firing are also the same as above. There is one drawback to the Machine Gun, however - it has been known to jam. In this event, a message will flash on the screen, telling the pilot to wait for it to clear itself.

It should be noted that neither of the above can do harm to the city's buildings due to the toughening effect created by spraying the buildings with PollutoProt(TM).



PAYLOADS AVAILABLE

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 1. 50 rounds of armour piercing shells. | 50lb. |
| 2. 100 rounds of armour piercing shells. | 100lb. |
| 3. 150 rounds of armour piercing shells. | 150lb. |
| 4. 125 rounds of explosive tipped M.G. ammunition. | 50lb. |
| 5. 250 rounds of explosive tipped M.G. ammunition. | 100lb. |
| 6. 500 rounds of explosive tipped M.G. ammunition. | 200lb. |
| 7. 750 rounds of explosive tipped M.G. ammunition. | 300lb. |
| 8. Reserve fuel tank. | 100lb. |

Be advised - maximum payload available is 350lbs and that the armoury is prone to running out of stock of certain items.

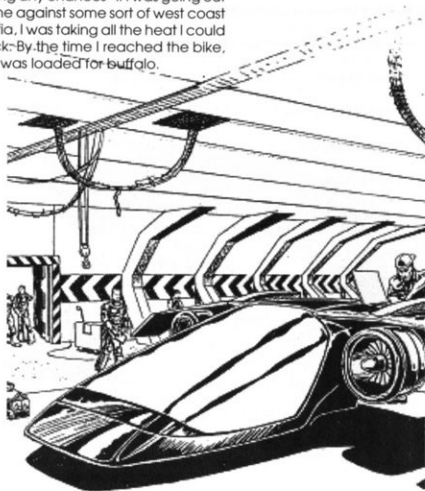
THE G.E.P. MkIV ARMOSUIT

The latest word in armoured lightweight anti-flash, anti-biochemical survival suits.

1. Lightweight, Hi-Grade Armoplastic: will deter 9mm bullet at 30 feet; resistant to fire flash of 1000° & CFT (Constant Flame Temperature) of 300°.
2. Oxygen Recycling Life Support Pack: max.duration 10 minutes.
3. Life Support, Electronics & Computer connections: links with XB500's main support systems through jack in seat. When connected, recharges batteries and Suit's Life Support Systems: recharge time approx 10 minutes.

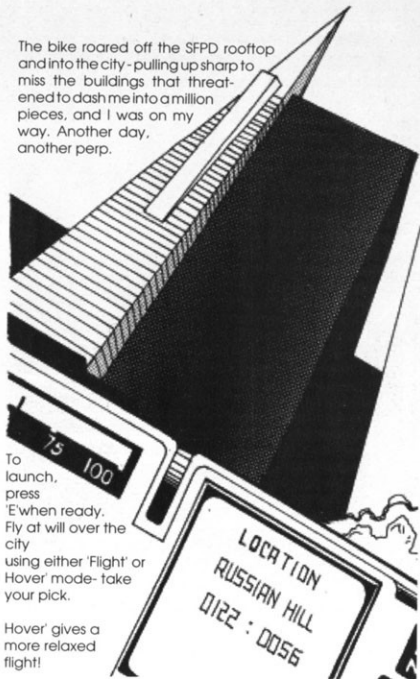


I quit the armoury and began to walk down the long dark, heavily armoured corridor that led to the roof-top hangar. I'd selected every scrap of ammunition the bike would carry: I wasn't taking any chances - if I was going out alone against some sort of west coast mafia, I was taking all the heat I could pack. By the time I reached the bike, she was loaded for buffalo.



On departure from Armoury, Launch is automatic: hit 'Launch' twice to cut through sequence.

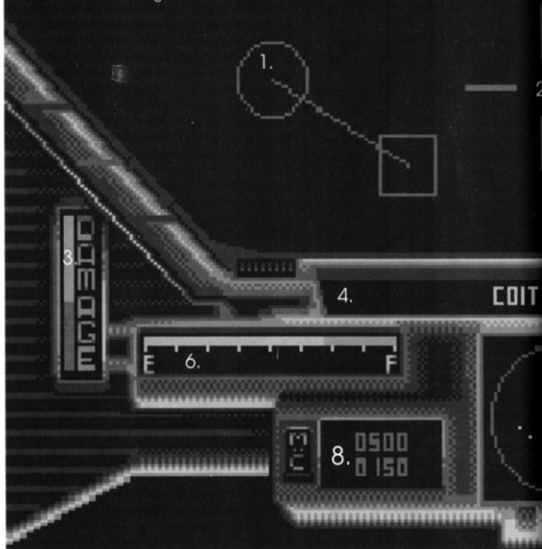
The bike roared off the SFPD rooftop and into the city - pulling up sharp to miss the buildings that threatened to dash me into a million pieces, and I was on my way. Another day, another perp.



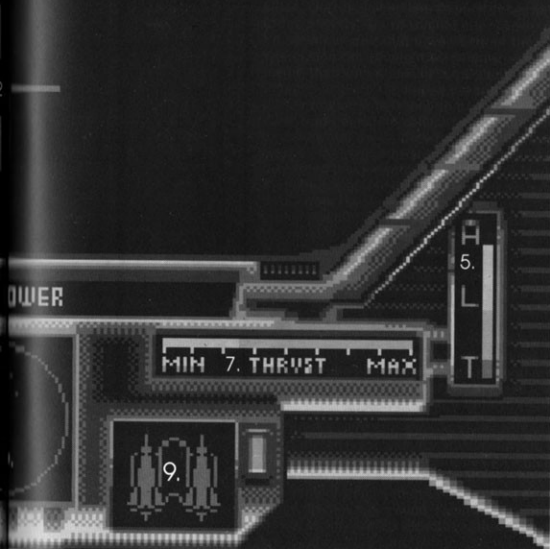
To launch, press 'E' when ready. Fly at will over the city using either 'Flight' or 'Hover' mode- take your pick.

'Hover' gives a more relaxed flight!

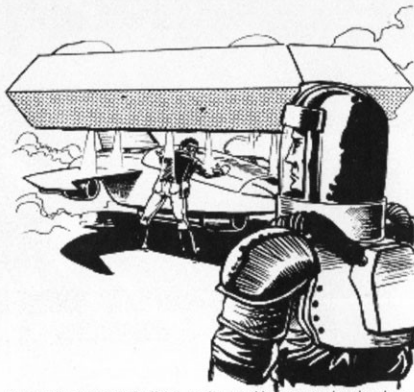
1. HUD targetting computer
2. HUD cross hair- used in conjunction with HUD targetting computer
3. Damage meter
4. Computerised messaging system display
5. Cloud Altimeter: Green shows your height above The Cloud.
Red shows height of ground or building height above sea level.
Brown shows height of cloud above sea-level.



6. Fuel guage
7. Speedometer
8. Ammunition Indicator - shows you how much you got left
- you run out, you're one endangered hombré.
9. Number of nets on board
10. Radar system- green- your bike, red-enemy, blue-PUPS
or nets



MISSIONS

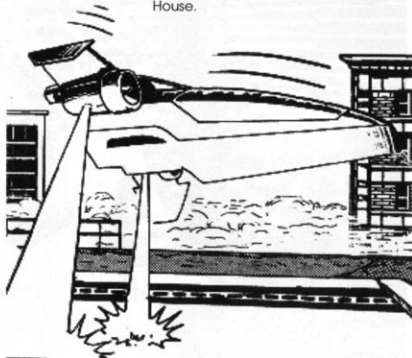


As of this moment in time, we're working on a day to day survival basis, and cannot possibly know what your duties will be: all we can say it will involve arresting suspects . The procedure is as follows:

1. Net the suspect, forcing him to land.
2. Land next to felon, turn off the engines, leave your craft, ('L' key) and walk towards him using the thrust keys.
3. On reaching the apprehended vehicle press the 'S' key to read suspect his rights and to call the PUP.

END OF MISSIONS

OK Officer, you nailed your man, and you got him back safely, now all you gotta do is get back into the Station House.



Nothing to it really-all you gotta do is fly back to the station house- with or without a suspect in tow, and land on the station. When your safely down, shut down exit the craft'E and then enter the building 'I'.

INFORMATION GATHERING

Right - you've shut down your engines, and now you find yourself having a cozy little chat with your suspect, and the only thing standing between you and the truth is the guy's 'mouthpiece, the shiftiest lawyer in the whole of San Francisco.

CONTROL BOX

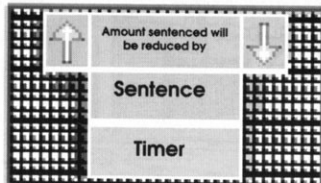
Now no felon wants to spend time in the can, so you tell him you're gonna put him there for a 50 year stretch unless he squeals. The more he squeals, the less time he gets to spend makin' licence plates

CONSOLE (this panel)

Gives you your list of questions, and a readout of the suspect's answers. In addition, it gives you a chance to reduce the suspect's sentence by use of the arrows to give him an incentive to give you the answers you require.

KEY CONTROLS

- 1 = 1st question
- 2 = 2nd question
- 3 = 3rd question
- B = Back to first question





You did it, pal: the gook spilled everything. You're now clear to go back to Briefing for the next assignment.

This time I know our side will win.

We'd done it - finally. It had taken us five years to crack The Cloud and its perpetrators, five long years. I should have felt victorious, or at least satisfied, but all I felt was tired: I'd put too many friends in the ground to care any more. San Francisco was free, and Law and Order was once more on top of things.

But for how long, though: for how long?



notes:
