

Crossroads of the Commonwealth:

A generic investigation RPG campaign world

#2: New York City

New York, post-Portal

The city consists of five boroughs:

- Brooklyn. Brooklyn transformed itself almost overnight into a burgeoning commercial transport/warehouse hub. The Brooklyn Navy Yard recently reopened as a commercial shipyard, and already operates at 110% capacity. Companies that cannot afford Manhattan addresses operate in Brooklyn instead. This includes companies the informally specialize in smuggling.
- Bronx. This borough underwent a significant housing (and economic) boom since the Portal opened. The inhabitants rapidly became the most steadfast supporters of the President and Mayor in NYC, primarily because both Clinton and Giuliani stepped down hard on unscrupulous real estate developers. But, like most places where people are suddenly making money over fist, there is a lot of crime and not all that much appreciation of local law enforcement.
- Manhattan. Manhattan is probably the least supportive of Clinton/Giuliani's activities. The borough does not dominate city politics the way that it used to, and that rankles many of the people that live there. It also rankles the officials at the United Nations, which is infuriated that the Traders treats the UN like a mildly unpleasant acquaintance.
- Queens. Queens is now where the tourists stay. And, increasingly, where they spend their money. And meet visitors from other dimensions. And other things that cause headaches for cops.

- Staten Island. If you are extremely rich, rather tacky about it, and do not have a New York accent then New Yorkers generally assume that you bought a house in Staten Island for twenty times its pre-Portal value, because that's what's been happening since 1994. The good news is, Staten Island *nouveau riche* try not to involve the Permanent Interdepartmental Law Enforcement Task Force (PILE) much in their internal shenanigans. This is also the bad news.

The Ellis Island Portal Zone itself is informally considered to be a 'sixth borough;' PILE administers all of the non-Gate portions of it directly (much to the disgust of the United Nations and the state of New York), but the island's lack of a permanent population makes Ellis Island unique. Long Island and Hoboken also claim 'sixth borough' status, although PILE generally finds the former more of an annoyance (smuggling) and the latter an active menace (smuggling, unsympathetic New Jersey governor). Lastly: the United Nations stubbornly claims that its territory is an international zone... despite the fact that the Traders do not.

Access to the city

Theoretically, nothing has changed. There are no formal additional restrictions on who can enter or leave NYC. But PILE maintains a comprehensive list of *items* that are forbidden on Ellis Island itself, and another, larger list of items that are of 'interest.' Generally speaking, possession of those items is not illegal; but getting caught with them while committing a crime is not recommended.

Complicating the situation is the Trader-provided shielding that effectively covers the city. It's a remarkably powerful and comprehensive defensive shield: attacking someone or something inside the city from outside the city, or vice versa, just doesn't happen. There are persistent and widely-believed rumors that the shield somehow can detect the worse sorts of contraband (i.e., the contraband that the Traders worry about).

Unfortunately for PILE, apparently the Traders don't worry about most drugs or ultratech personal weapons. Arms or drug smuggling is a perennial problem for the NYPD and FBI.

What can go through the Portal

At the present time, Earth's Portal is not set up for large-scale interdimensional travel, or mass transport of materials. The Traders smilingly decline to speculate when that might change, and forthrightly admit that the limitation is a function of Earth's current probationary status in the Commonwealth. The general rule of thumb is that if it fits into a car, it *might* be moved through the Portal; if it fits into a suitcase, it *can* be moved through; and if it fits on a thumb drive, it probably *will* be moved through at some point.

So far, significant imports include:

- Medical self-replicating nanotech that wiped out every infectious disease on the planet. This was not an 'import' so much as it is the Traders' standard safety precaution when opening a new universe.
- Noticeably less advanced, yet still highly superior, general medical treatments for cancer and the most common genetic diseases.
- Working laser hand weapons.
- Various low-volume luxury items.
- A large amount of digitalized blueprints, schematics, scientific textbooks, video and audio entertainment, books, and other media artifacts.
- The *readers* needed to access anything listed in the previous bullet point.

So far, significant exports include:

- Earth's own music, videos, books, and digitized art.

- Various low-volume luxury items. Awkwardly, there are about twenty separate markets that badly wish to (legally, from their point of view) purchase Earth's cocaine.
- Statistical research. This is surprisingly popular.
- 'Gimcracks.' This is a catch-all term representing perfectly mundane items in our universe that happen to have incredible value or power in another. Gimcracks terrify the novice PILE agent, and mere existential dread in experienced ones.

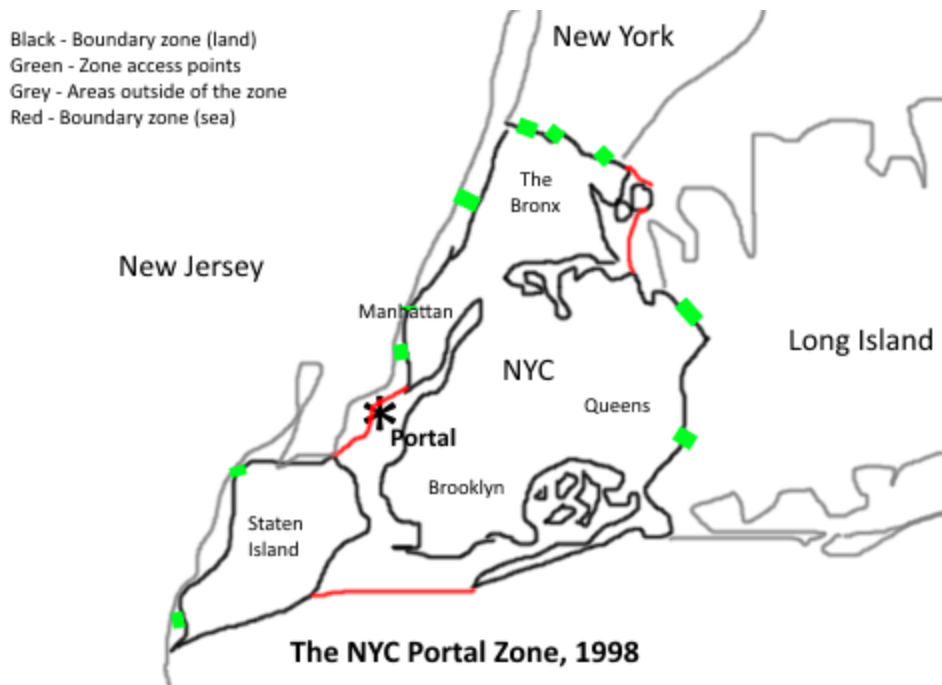
Getting things from the Portal to the rest of the planet (and vice versa)

PILE does not actively operate the Portal itself; that is the purview of the Traders. PILE's job is to hand over products that are exported via the Portal, and take charge of products that are imported. How the stuff gets moved from one universe to another is the Traders' problem.

Theoretically, all items coming in or going out through the Portal get inspected. In reality, PILE concentrates on the latter, out of sheer necessity. The single most important job for PILE is making sure that they don't knowingly allow an item to end up somewhere where it's already forbidden. The second most important job for PILE is to keep a good, comprehensive list of everything that may not be imported to Earth. If either one - or both - of these jobs gets neglected, a diplomatic incident will inevitably result. Diplomatic incidents are bad.

As a result, PILE agents quickly train themselves to not ask questions like *Why does that guy in that universe need a crate of AK-47s?* If it's not on the destination universe's forbidden list then it's not PILE's problem. Likewise, if someone brings in a box full of green stones PILE will not always have the time to work out why, right then and there. They'll eventually send over someone to check, but in the meantime: enjoy your green stones, sir.

Another complication is that the Traders explicitly do not cross-check any item that actually gets through PILE's customs/contraband checks. In fact, the Traders do not respect the right of local governments to levy taxes on imports and exports, which means that they do not cooperate in smuggling investigations. Once an item or person ends up in the Traders' possession, from Earth's law enforcement's point of view it's gone.



ELLIS ISLAND PORTAL COMPLEX, 1998 CE

