

Shangri-La 2009

Concept behind Art Direction:

We are attempting to make the whole place as thematically cohesive as possible, to allow punters see the relationships between venues, crew and performers (either real or characters) so to present a full picture of what a pleasure city could be.

The debate about what a city is and what will happen to them and their inhabitants in the future is hotting up. Towns are dying and city populations are soaring. This is a real-world social issue and as people try to escape their reality by going to festivals it is interesting to re-imagine their reality and give it back to them. It might just make them think.

Shangri-La: A monostate of quarantined and enforced utopia.
A self-proclaimed paradise with an administration which is dedicated to the pursuit of perfect pleasure.

The centre of Shangri-La is the HUB (Hot Utopian Bliss).
It is the home of The Administration who are unceasing in their administration of 24hr entertainment, wellbeing services and unceasing propaganda. The Administration is run by the deeply corrupt local Mayor, his seat of office is within the Hub. He looks down upon his town: The hotel and spa, the café, the entertainment mega-plex of Club Dada, the Circus, and the bustling alleyways which contain all manner of human detritus, grinning good-times, and surprising micro-venues.

The Hub spews out it's hedonistic propaganda from a huge screen. Every hour it shows a news reel, the show and the host is a freaky blend of Max Headroom and Al Jazeera. These short televisual bursts give pleasure updates, vox pops recorded by the on-the-ground documentary team, interviews with the denizens (characters), and information about what can be found in Shangri-La "Tonight at midnight, DO NOT MISS the ten-breasted pleasure beast, greasy and ready for you in the Gin Joint"

The further away from the Hub you get the more it breaks down into seedy, dark alleys of unregulated badness.
This is the Badlands, home to the real denizens of Shangri La. Here can be seen the effect of Shangri-La being your home. this is a place of covered alleys, dark with shards of light piercing the roof in the day, fat drops of rain splatting in the broken neon glare. It is dark and steamy, pulsating, dirty, chaotic and sexy. Here you find the denizens of Shangri-La doing their thing. You might stop for a bowl of special noodles and vodka and find yourself in a small room watching a contortionist clarinetist doing a zydeco sex-dance with 20 other stunned individuals. There are micro-venues everywhere and they offer a contrast to the Shangri-La sanctioned entertainment offered nearer the HUB.

The denizens and the micro-venues are connected and work with each other to create this reality. The denizens take several roles to populate Shangri-La: a brutal and corrupt police force or Russian army style border officers; A group of Protesters protesting all the time, encouraging visitors to Shangri-La to "get involved!"; Religious zealot types screaming mad after too much exposure to pleasure, howling "the end of the world is nigh!", "whatever you do, don't go into the alleyway...!"; Riotous teenagers, thugs and the corresponding concerned mothers.

Like any town there are the prostitutes and the men who use them. Workers, a group of men simply digging a hole. There is a whole under-class that forms the society of Shangri-LA, providing services not provided by the Administration, courier gangs on BMX's, seedy rikshaw drivers, hawkers selling brollies and badges and information and illicit shit, people with leaflets trying to get punters into their club. Stretcher bearers picking up the done-in punters and taking them to a secret field hospital where they are either cured with a cup of tea, or processed into mince.

There is an information centre run by the denizens, punters can try to get information there, but it feels like being in an episode of Twin Peaks, things are strange, a little hard to understand, the people giving the information seem to drift in and out of reality, there is info everywhere, but none of it means anything.

Over the weekend the denizens start to become more and more integrated with the venues, they could be taking over. Anti HUB graffiti can be seen everywhere, posters are put up on the hub walls advertising venues in the badlands, groups of denizens are getting together, wearing the same clothes, is there about to be an uprising..

All this adds up to punters feeling like they have entered a living, breathing (gaspng), city state. A totally realised and augmented reality. Somewhere they have never been before and if they return it is not taken for granted they will discover what they did last time.

