

LIFE AT THE TOP

Ristie life is a constant stream of the finest comforts technology can offer in a secluded world atop the towering skyscrapers that literally place them above the masses. These luxury arcologies are cities within cities. Every service that a citizen could desire—shopping, style, education, security—is at the fingertips of the upper-middle and upper class in every megapolis, from New Angeles to Mumbad and beyond.

Self-sufficient in many respects (including food, water, and even power generation), arcologies ensure that society's wealthiest need not venture far for work, home, or play. Business centers feature offices for the arcology's system administrators, project developers, business managers, brand officers, insurance adjusters, budget analysts, and efficiency experts. Nearby corporate arcologies, easily reached by slide-walk or hopper or Metro, provide the other white-collar and knowledge-based careers that pay far more than anyone outside an arcology enjoys. Residential towers feature posh apartments and homes interspersed with greenspaces and artificial beachfront for recreation and relaxation.

At plaza level, shopping centers, social venues, and entertainment districts span tens of floors. Many luxuries are imported from across the globe. From Mumbad come the finest smartfabrics that morph and twist to the wearer's digital demands, changing color and style to suit the latest season (for a nominal fee). Genuine grass-fed meat instead of the mass-produced gogs of the Amazonian feedlots—produce grown in sunlight rather than the emulated wavelengths in an agroplex—all is served on a fingernail-thin crystal platter flowing in pleasant waves of holographically projected colors.

The vast majority of a ristie's work time is spent enjoying the lavish entertainments the arcology and surrounding New Angeles has to offer. Designer holo-golf courses serve as the new board rooms, and business is conducted while listening to concertos played on exclusive instruments—some as old and treasured as a Stradivarius, others on the cutting edge of technology and literally one of a kind. Networking is done at galas for aficionados with similar interests in art, food, fashion, and every other celebration the elite can justify (which is to say, anything that comes to mind). Privileged children and wealthy spouses spend their days in leisure at attractions the poor can only dream of—holoparks, mag-flight zones, roller coasters that span hundreds of floors—no recreation is too exotic or too expensive for the residents of an arcology.

Within the arcologies, many of the retail and service positions essential to quotidian life are filled by androids. If a resident so desires, he can spend, acquire, and consume anything he likes with a wave of the hand. Clones prepare what foods require a more tender touch than a robot can provide, while bioroids serve as couriers to ferry shopping bags from retail outlets to their assigned destinations. For those who live in these sky-high palaces, anticipation is momentary; one's every desire is instantaneously fulfilled, often before one realizes he wanted it at all.

Some ristics choose to never venture beyond the luxury afforded to them, oblivious to the stark realities of the world outside its walls. There is no underway access to the most exclusive arcologies; the residents who do leave take hoppers or elevated skywalks only. Those who try to claw upward and sneak their way inside aren't in much luck either—AI secretaries routinely screen entrants for biometric data, and if a visitor isn't a resident or approved guest, a sec-team quickly arrives to escort him or her out. Thick plascrete walls, digital gatekeepers, and well-paid (and often well-trained) prasec forces ensure that the lives of the elite are uninterrupted by the world at large.

The least affluent residents know their place is on the bottom in an arcology—both figuratively and otherwise. Vast underground complexes of hex-tubes and ramshackle cargo containers date far back to the founding of New Angeles or before. These are filled to the brim with middle- and lower-class workers who are glad to have a permanent address at all and dream of one day ascending to the plaza level or higher.

Luxury arcologies are literally shining examples of the world reserved for the business elite. They perennially stand as incentives for the lesser classes to strive ever harder for advancement in their careers, regardless of whether such aspirations are likely to be stifled by corporate inertia, background checks and blacklists, catch-22 laws, and no shortage of corrupt politicians. Rags-to-riches stories on NBN's content streams might be popular, but in the real world, downward social mobility is much more common than the reverse. The megacorps are the gatekeepers of the ristie class, and those lacking the connections or designer g-mods for intelligence and beauty are at a marked disadvantage.

Residences make up the bulk of the arcology's levels. Each suite comes equipped with a secretary AI to modulate climate controls, schedule cleaning and maintenance, and monitor the residents' security.

Despite cramming most of the life support facilities deep underground, residence-heavy towers still have to import food.

Arcologies have wide vanes that can fold inward to protect the topmost observation and lounge decks from rain.

Pools with raft islands provide recreation for the richest arcology dwellers.

Plumbing, electricity, the goods distribution system, and hopper elevators run vertically through the arcology's center.

Administrative and white-collar areas occupy the upper levels of the arcology to provide easy access for clients traveling by hopper.

Public hopper landing and charging pads are the fastest and most direct mode of transportation for those who can afford them.

The white-collar business center contains shopping venues along the outside layers, although most goods are circulated or imported through a distribution system.

Communal areas allow residents to relax and socialize in style.

The Bio-Industrial Center is the primary food production module for the arcology. Work here has minimal noise and pollutants to keep living conditions good for residents along the edge suites and above.

UV-blocking transplas tessellation covers most arcologies.

Lower-grade residential offshoots are built to house wait-listed arcology candidates or temporary workers. Many have just enough money for the buy-in, but can no longer afford to leave. These areas are safer than slum living, but they can feel prisonlike as well.

Monorail train lines to neighboring arcologies offer private transportation options for residents. Slide-walks on the lower side cater to the health-conscious.

Nearby the Public Relations Center are shops, social venues, hiring stations, and other commercial attractions for non-residents.

This divider was constructed later as a second "farm initiative." The platform built over the slums—and the scaffolding through them—was meant to shield residents from New Angeles' frequent acid rainfall, but it would also provide an extra barrier to keep slum dwellers away from the newly built arcologies. An air circulation system was later added to keep the undercity's miasma from wafting upward.

Support struts for the kilometer-tall arcology stretch deep into the ground to provide stability and earthquake resistance.

This is one of the rarer "bridge towers" that connects the upper levels to the subway system via a series of elevators. Contains high-security apartments and offices.

Historical housing projects from the middle of the twenty-first century still comprise a surprising percentage of the underlevels.

Shipping containers have been piled onto old buildings to add floors or fill nooks and crannies in the slums. Each houses an average of four people.

These hex-shaped apartment tubes used to be part of the first massive city-wide urban aquaponics initiative decades back. As the technology surpassed them, they slowly eroded into slums. New Angeles' massive appetite for housing has prevented them from being demolished.