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A FEW GRUMPY WORDS FROM THE EDITOR:

This book has been coming for a long time.

I mean that the same way that a person will look at the bad luck of someone they don't like, and say "That guy's had it coming for awhile."

When I took over this line some years ago, the sort of questions we got were along the practical side. "If Bob does X, can I do Y? It doesn't say anything about it in the book." A good question, because no rules can be complete; players can (and will) come up with some creative situations. That sort of question began to diminish as the rules went into later editions and we published more supplements. The holes were plugged, and people's questions were answered.

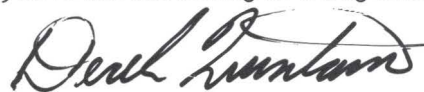
It was the questions that began to follow that were the unusual ones: people whose games had gotten out of control, whose players were out-thinking them, who were trying to get the "official" answer to a game procedure, because they thought that was the only way to do something (and enforce some kind of order). My opinion on "official" procedures is simple: if the game is some kind of tournament with money and prizes riding on the outcome, then standard rules are important. Otherwise, RTG isn't looking over your shoulders, kids. You paid the 20+ bucks, you can do what you like.

I began to wonder where these peoples' willpower, flexibility, and creativity had gone...

One thing that starting a gaming career using original "white-box D&D™" will teach you: you are running the game, you are telling the story; there is no one telling you how something should be run, because there is no "should be." The very nature of role-playing is that it is innovative, it is make-believe; if there is nothing written down, make it up yourself. Hell, if it's written down and you don't agree, change it to what you want.

The purpose of this book is to restore innovation and creativity, not by rote dogma "you must do X, Y, Z for a successful game," but by inspiring through example. What follows is a product of some of the cleverest *Cyberpunk* writers and referees I know, showing how they've run and played their games (some have been at it for as long as the game's been around), hoping that their example will show you the way do it better (and have more fun, to boot).

So buy the book. Use your mind. Take control.
You've had this coming for a long time.



Derek Quintanar

***Congratulations to Mike and Lisa Pondsmith
on the birth of their first son, Cody Kevin
Pondsmith, born March 5th, 1994.***

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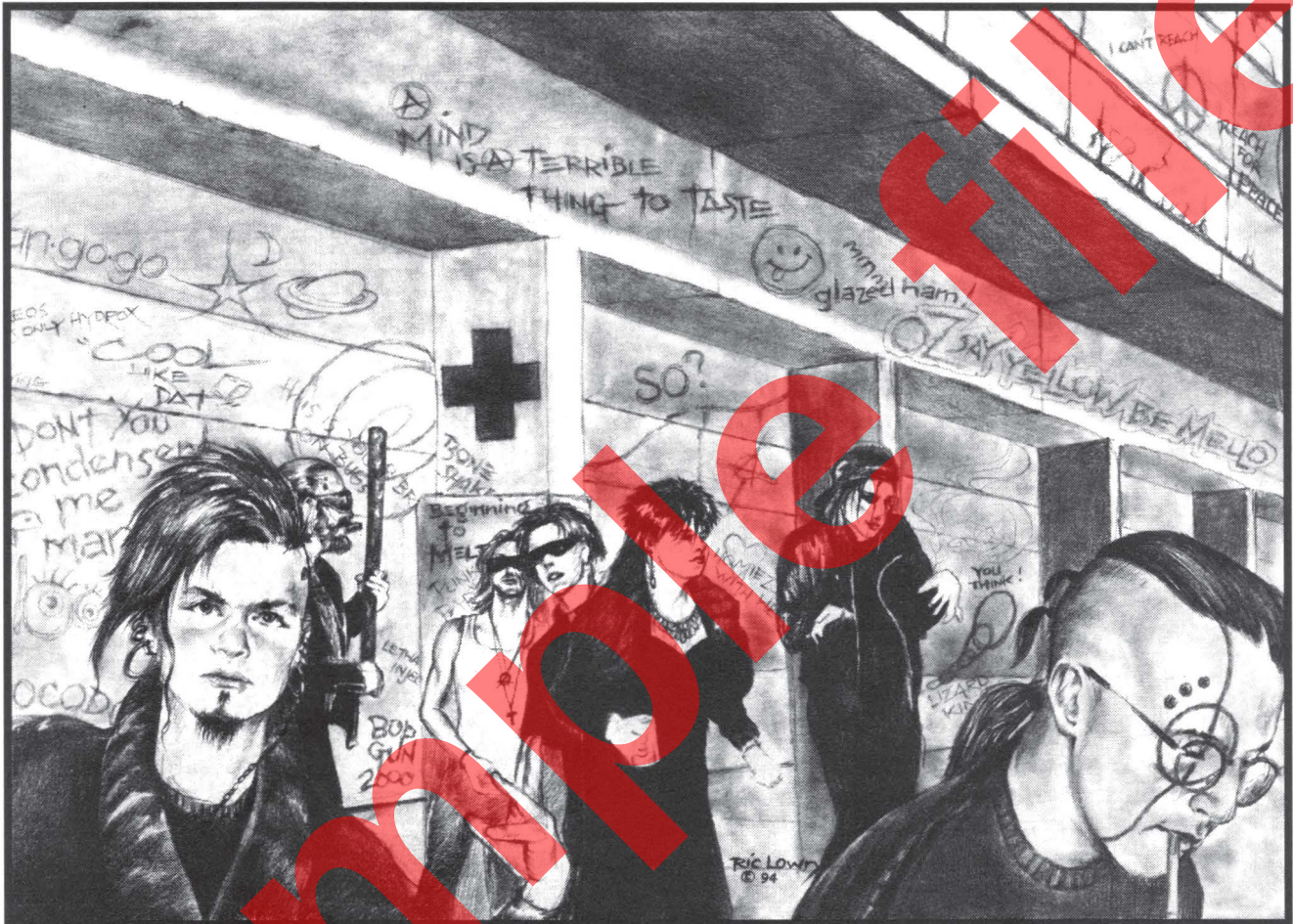
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RUNNING LONG-TERM CAMPAIGNS



CRAIG SHEELEY— GETTING CHARACTERS TOGETHER

One of the greatest problems with starting up any role-playing game is that of getting the characters together as a cohesive group. This problem has given birth to the classic (and timeworn) joke, “you all meet in a bar...”

There are several ways to introduce the player-characters to one another. One of the simplest and most direct is

already outlined in *Cyberpunk 2020*, that of having all the PCs be part of a single team. This not only introduces them to each other, but it gives them a common goal and encourages them to think of each other as teammates instead of acquaintances.

The chance meeting in the bar is hackneyed, but servicable. The trick is to engage player-character interest by giving them a reason to bond together—say, by having them gathered together to act as a temporary team (all contacted by the same Fixer, the one that all of them picked up from the Lifepath generation. See the next paragraph for more on this bit of blatant

manipulation), or by threatening them and forcing them to fight together or die separately.

Come to think of it, one of the more interesting ways to bring player-characters together is to connect them through a threat or present danger. Here’s a sample scenario: All of the player-characters happen to eat out at the same vendor. Unbeknownst to them, the vendor’s food has been doped with an experimental mind-altering drug that heightens both their aggressive and pack instincts, as well as adding a specific scent to their perspiration that only they will recognize. This scent marks them as part of the same “pack,” and they naturally cluster

together, acting like a surly wolf-pack. The drug, provided covertly by a sneaky corp secretly testing its effectiveness, is designed to turn entire neighborhoods into involuntary combat gangs, ready to trash anyone perceived as being a threat to the "pack," trespassing on "pack" turf, or even being different. The uses for this would range from causing civil disorder to creating combative hordes who would be willing to follow suggestions and orders from an operative treated with the appropriate scent. (For those who are wondering, I've just described a variant of the Block Mania toxin from the *Judge Dredd* comic.)

Or the drug could be a slow-acting poison or bioplague, and the PCs have a limited time to get the antidote and save their lives. Or the player-characters might be harassed or threatened directly by an external group, a gang, corp, or so on. Nothing brings humanity together in a common cause like an active "us versus them" threat. (Ha! Imagine opening your campaign with the PCs in an elevator, the same elevator that the Bozos are planning to dump a barrel of hungry rats into. That'll get the characters acquainted quick! And angry as heck at the Bozos, too.)

A less convoluted and Machiavelian method of introducing player-characters to one another is to have them be pre-introduced as friends or mutual acquaintances. The adventure in the *Cyberpunk* GM's Screen assumes that all the PCs are roomies, and have been rooming together for some time. Mutual friends are a good way to bring PCs together; these friends can be easily provided by the Lifepath process (see below).

THE LIFEPATH AS A TOOL

The Lifepath is more than just a past for the characters. It does more than flesh out the character's life and times. It provides the referee with a great many opportunities for roleplay and character problems to come. Think about it; every friend, lucky break, calamity, love affair, and especially every enemy provides the referee with just that many more things that he can throw at the beleaguered player.

How are these things used? Well, besides the obvious applications—like the fact that those past enemies are going to show up sometime; bank on it!—Lifepath events are good ways to tie the characters together. Say one character has a friend, an ex-partner or someone the character worked with. The character is a solo; let's say that the friend is a weapon-smith. And another character, a techie, has a friend who's got similar interests. What a coincidence; the solo's weapon-smith and the techie's fellow traveler are the same person. Or perhaps characters share a common enemy, or even love interest! (Guaranteed to cause lots of fun friction within the group; not for the squeamish referee.)

Sometimes the referee has to step in and dictate a Lifepath event, deliberately linking characters together. I find that it's easiest for the referee to have the player roll the D10 for Lifepath events, and tell the player what happened to the character. That way you can make the Lifepath event anything you want, heh heh.

GOAL-ORIENTATION

When you start a campaign, some thinking has to be put into campaign development before you even start it up. Ask yourself the following questions: What do you want the characters to develop into? Do you have a specific goal in mind, some sort of change in history or the surroundings? For instance, do you want to have the campaign developing up to the catastrophic incident which triggers the alternative future of *CyberGeneration*? Or do you want an orbital war to break out, signalling a corporate war in space and on the ground? What about a corporate takeover of the USA? (Part of the background of *CyberGeneration*; even if you don't agree with some points of the supplement, you can adapt pieces of it to your own use.) You really should determine the thrust of your campaign early, so you can plan accordingly.

After you've decided the general direction of your campaign's development, you have to work with the players. What do the players want their characters to become? Discuss this with each of them privately; find out what their ambi-

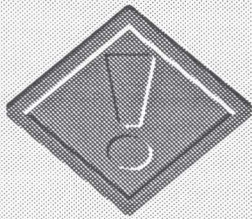
tions are, where they want their characters to go, what they want them to do. Don't underestimate your players; they'll often have ideas that can be put to good use within your campaign, and they'll provide you with plot twists that you'd never have thought of yourself. Of course, you don't have to give them exactly what they asked for; mix and match, mutate their ideas, and turn them into your own plotline.

The step of consulting your players is vital to the ease of maneuvering them into following your plotline. They'll be eager to get involved in something that they suggested, and will probably be pleasantly surprised when they discover the twists you've added to their suggestions.

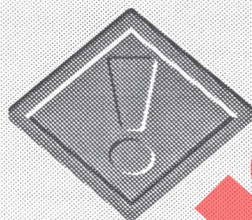
It's amazing how many referees don't take the time to even plot out the direction of their campaign, much less consult their players for actual assistance (I, too, have been guilty of this. Often.). Not only does it give a good direction to the campaign, assisting the logical progression of events, but it makes things a lot easier when the players can actually see light at the end of the tunnel. Of course, the campaign doesn't have to stop there; it can continue, mutated into another campaign! Think of it as sequels to a book or movie...

BENJAMIN WRIGHT—

The kid gloves are off, gato—*Cyberpunk* isn't supposed to be easy. For referees, the Dark Future is a severe challenge! In 2020 death lurks around every corner, hope is in small supply, and ambition is the only virtue. Such an environment is certainly ideal for fast-paced, stylish adventures; any edgerunner will tell you that greed, violence, paranoia and attitude are perfect accessories to the perfect crime. But such an environment is discouraging to long-running campaigns. The atmosphere on the Edge is pretty oppressive and can become eventually daunting and ultimately unsatisfying. Another obstacle to long-term campaigns is *Cyberpunk*'s lack of a clearly-defined "villain." This can



Gato: The Spanish word for "cat," but it also means a smooth operator (like a "cool cat"). It is used in the same way as (but is so much more flattering than) "Choomba"...ask any Fixer.



The Seven Steps to a Successful Saga:

- 1: **Think Hard**
- 2: **Make A Decision**
- 3: **Choose Characters**
- 4: **Find Players**
- 5: **Lay The Foundation**
- 6: **Get Writing**
- 7: **Maintenance, Maintenance, Maintenance...**

be a real problem—without a Bad Guy, what do the Heroes do on Friday night? The modern world cannot really function without the omnipresent corporations; in truth, the 21st century's biggest enemy is entropy, not evil. This situation is not terribly inviting to those referees who need predefined goals to build a long-running campaign around. Well, you know what we say to those referees?

Tough!

This is the kind of situation you, a *Cyberpunk* referee, were born for! You have total freedom in 2020—you supply the motivation, the action, the whole situation by creating a good story.

Yes, a story. This is what being a referee is really all about. Running a long-term roleplaying campaign is only one step removed from writing a novel or scripting a movie. If you really want to create a long-term *Cyberpunk* campaign (heretofore to be referred to as a Saga), you must start by thinking about what you want to happen; not about who the PCs will fight or how much money they can make, but what they will be doing. Then, find some people who want to play *Cyberpunk*. That's the next step—establishing a campaign premise is the first and most important step. Natch, more steps follow. They are listed in the sidebar—follow them, and your Saga will be a success.

A Warning: Murphy's Law applies to running Sagas too. The recipe assumes ideal conditions, so it may not always be possible to follow all the steps exactly, or in their original order. There are numerous complications to consider. You may not have enough time to be fully prepared; your players might insist on using their favorite characters (a horror); you might not be able to find players at all! These are all individual problems which must be dealt with on an individual basis, so they will not be covered in any detail here. Just be resourceful.

Individual complications notwithstanding, the key to a successful Saga is preparation; if you are truly well-prepared, your players will know it. This improves everything—your players will feel flattered that they are worth the amount of work as you put in, and you will feel safe and comfortable since you will be firmly in control of the game.

But enough jockeying. Let's take those seven steps.

STEP 1: THINK HARD

This is the most basic level—usually, you'll have gotten to this step by the time you've even decided you want to referee a Saga. Well, what kind of Saga do you want to run? The answer to this question is all about style—scale, setting, morality, violence and technology are all elements of a campaign's style, and are well-covered in Chapter 8 of this book. The point about Step 1 is to mull over all the elements of a *Cyberpunk* Saga's style and see what piques your interest. This is the fun, easy part (the hard part is Step 2). Consider what it is about 2020 that bothers or interests you, and use these elements to form a general idea of the style your Saga will have.

For example, let's say that what bothers us is that all the corporations in 2020 seem to be malevolent, greedy establishments which are a necessary evil. We decide that the theme of the campaign will be an attempt to "humanize" one of the corporations; scale will have to be relatively large to effect such a change (a national level at least). The setting will involve travel in order to reach all the parts of the corporation (pan-national if not pan-global), but will be based in the city which is home to the company's headquarters. With such a lofty goal, morality will be higher than average for *Cyberpunk* (but not too high—eggs and omelettes, y'know) while violence will be low-scale, since changing a whole corporation takes more brains than brawn. To make the theme hit home, the company will be technology-oriented (tres cyberpunk) and thus the game's tech level will be a little above-average. With these concepts in mind, we're ready to get specific...

STEP 2: MAKE A DECISION

Time for the embryonic Saga to grow up. Pick specifics, set plot points, and think about major NPCs that will combine to form your grand scheme. A goal, a basic plot, and

an outcome must be chosen and defined right now. As the “writer” of your “story,” it is time to start editing yourself—making choices can be a pain because you limit yourself, but it has to be done. What will you allow and what will not be seen in your Saga? What will the characters really be doing, and what will not be their business? When making such decisions you set the power level of your player-characters, the agency they will have in determining the course of the adventures, and most importantly the potential depth of the roleplaying that will occur.

Your decisions should be influenced by your own interests and capabilities as a Referee; don’t run an insider trading campaign if you can’t tell a stock from a bond (unless you want to do some heavy research, which is certainly acceptable—who says roleplaying can’t teach you anything?). Similarly, if you don’t like the more cerebral, low-combat/high-drama arena of gaming, don’t feel you’re obligated simply to impress your players. The point is to have fun, not to put forward the image of a “refined” gamer. If you really want to, there’s nothing wrong with speaking softly and carrying a big gun! However, it really is a shame to squander *Cyberpunk’s* strengths on hack-n-slash when there are so many games out there which were made for it. Similarly, if you want your Saga to be a romantic tragedy, don’t feel obliged to throw in pointless combats just to excite your players—it’s quite possible (and infinitely more original) to excite them with drama instead of violence. Many roleplayers enjoy a healthy mix of the two, however, for the greatest range. As the referee, choose what you want; if you do it well, the players will enjoy it too.

Continuing the example from Step 1, the Saga will follow a secret cartel as they attempt to take control of the cybernetics corporation Raven Microcyb. This takeover will not be a traditional corporate takeover, but rather a secret redistribution of power through varied channels. The cartel (the PCs) will be made up of a small group of friends/associates who each have great influence in their own field. Together, they will bring the power of the street, the corporations and the individual psyche into play—a wide variety

