

EdgeRunner

In the Beginning there was the Word

Brought to you by Iggy, the stuffed animal with an attitude
Welcome to the first issue of Edgerunner!

Phew! This has been a tough last few months of creating articles and figuring out how the whole magazine will work. Finally here is the end result. You might ask what happened to the pictures...Well we don't have any onboard artists, so...if you ever were interested in getting some of your artwork published look no further.



This Netzine, or Internet distributed magazine made by fans for fans, is the creation by us players to show how much we enjoy Cyberpunk, and it us players duty to make it bigger and better than ever before. As a fanzine we are constantly looking for new submissions, in the form of articles, artwork or even adventures. To show your support why don't you submit some of your ideas, it is only through your submissions that this magazine will survive. So come on send in those ideas, after all the worst thing that can happen is InfoComp extracts you for selling classified information. If you've detailed an area for your players submit it as a Travel advisory for the rest of the world to see!

I would like to thank everyone who wrote for Issue 1, without we would certainly be lost. So enough of me, on with the show. Welcome to the edge cyberpunks!

Looking into the future:
Lauri Gardner, Edgerunner Editor-in-Chief

Who are we?
Lauri Gardner -- Slave driver/Media
Gary Astleford -- PR/Fixer
Ian Birchenough -- Editor/Netrunner

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UPCOMING REGULAR DEPARTMENTS:

UPLOADS – (Letters from the readers – with a question every issue that we ask the readers, and they're to send back answers and opinions.

Datafort Reviews – new websites reviewed each issue.

Ask Mechanical Maxxx – Rules questions by you readers answered by a our resident experts

Cyberspace Coordinates:

Rust Never sleeps

<http://www.paper-dragon.com>

Chrome book 5

<http://members.xoom.com/cybrpunk2020/index.html>

The BlackHammer CyberPunk Project

<http://www.ambient.on.ca/cpunk/>

Datafortress 2.0.2.0.

<http://www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Fuji/3598/indexlotek2.html>

Node 16

<http://www.ajames.force9.co.uk/cpunk/nodema.htm>

The Future of Cyberpunk

An Interview With Mike Pondsmith

by Gary Astleford (ocelot@connectnet.com)



If you play Cyberpunk, it's doubtful that you don't know who Mike Pondsmith is. He's the man behind the game, from its earliest "Black Box" incarnation, to the eagerly-anticipated Third Edition. In addition to "Cyberpunk 2020," Mike is responsible for such games as "Castle Falkenstein," "Teenagers from Outer Space," and the popular game of Anime-style role-playing, "Mekton." He's been playing and writing games for years, and he's no stranger to the gaming industry.

Since it was announced that a third edition of the popular Cyberpunk role-playing game was in the works, there has been much debate concerning the actual release. Fans have questioned the changes being made to the setting (as initially put forth in the "Firestorm" series of supplements), the release date, and (especially) Interlock's latest incarnation: "Fuzion!". Up until recently, it hasn't been entirely clear what the days and weeks ahead might hold for everyone's favourite game of the Dark Future.

I had the opportunity to meet Mike at DunDraCon in February of 1997, and since then I've had sporadic correspondence with him. In early June, Mike agreed to submit to a phone interview. I compiled a list of questions, picked up my phone, and called him in the early evening. What follows is a transcript of the conversation we had. Hopefully, it will answer questions that many of you have wished to ask, in addition to giving you a taste of what 3rd Edition Cyberpunk will be like.

Gary Astleford: When did you first start gaming, and what kind of games did you play when you first started out?

Mike Pondsmith: Oh, man. I think I started gaming way back, I would guess about, 76 or 77. A friend of mine from college had another friend, and this particular friend went to the Merchant Marine academy somewhere in the Great Lakes area, and he had a copy of Chainmail and brought it back. And we played that. Then we graduated up to D&D. So I've been playing since, like, original "white box" D&D. Somewhere around here I still have my copy of it. But when I met my wife, Lisa, she didn't have copies, just Xerox's. (laughs) And so I played D&D. So the problem was, I got bored with the fantasy genre. So I wrote a game called "Imperial Star." --a science fiction game. This is long before "Star Wars." And then, mid-way in the middle of when I was putting Imperial Star together, which was going to be kind of roughly based on Poul Anderson's Dominic Flandry novels, I saw a copy of "Traveller." So I got Traveler, I got home, and I started going through the rules, and I realized you couldn't kill anybody. There were these enormous rules holes, and I went, "Oh, man, this is terrible! I can't make this do what I want!" So I went and finished Imperial Star and basically we played that, which was a home-grown. The Imperial Star game ran for about twelve years. We were playing our great-grandkids by the time it was over.

G: Wow! Did you ever get that published professionally, or was that just a home grown?

M: It's a home-grown which eventually evolved (part of it) into Mekton. It was the same

system that we've used for Interlock all these years. Part of it evolved into Mekton, part of it evolved into Cyberpunk. We never actually published I-Star...one reason is once Star Wars came out we kind of went, "Okay, well, you know, Star Wars is so much cooler than what we've got here, so, forget it. (laughs) I don't even want to do another science fiction game set in a vast galactic empire even if it isn't an evil one because Star Wars is just SO much cooler than anything I ever could come up with."

G: I remember hearing something about you doing some "Buck Rogers" stuff for TSR.

M: I wrote Buck Rogers for TSR.

G: The whole thing?

M: Well, I didn't write all the supplements, I wrote the main game. It was an interesting story. Basically, I'd done a lot of stuff for TSR in my early career. They were like my fun jobs. At one point, somebody mentioned that TSR was doing Buck Rogers. I'd been a real big Buck Rogers fan because when I was a kid they had done a re-print, in fact I can see my copy of the collected works of Buck Rogers in the 25th Century about seven feet away from where I'm sitting. I was heavy into Buck Rogers. So I said to their editor at TSR, "Oh, hey, Bruce, if you ever do anything with Buck Rogers give me a call cause I'm really into it." It turned out Buck Rogers was a problem for TSR. They didn't know what to do with it. They had the license, they had no idea what to do with it. Suddenly they had me, Mike, the dumb guy, from outside. They said, "Okay, you do it." It was actually an interesting project. Part of it is that I didn't quite get the game I would've liked to have done. There were a lot of external things we had to deal with in the process of putting it together. But it was an interesting situation because all the sudden I'd gone full circle. I was building a D&D-based science fiction game. My theory is that if Buck Rogers had existed in some form back when I first started I never would have written Imperial Star. Which meant I would've never written Mekton, which meant I would've never written Cyberpunk. So, yes, I am responsible for Buck Rogers.

G: Is it embarrassing to you?

M: No, I'm amused by it. Like I said, it's not exactly what I would've liked to have done. I wanted to make it much more hyper-realistic. As I described it, I wanted to try and take it [and make it] Tom Clancy with spaceships. But it didn't quite go that way, because we had to kind of fit in all the other stuff that had happened before.

G: Well, I guess the big question that everyone is asking right now is when is 3rd edition Cyberpunk going to be out?

M: 3rd edition got pushed back because of DragonBall Z...because of the multiple license levels Dragon Ball Z has to go through. We have to send it to five different licensees! Dragonball just took longer, and it's hopefully on the last rev right now of changes and all that. It's hard to do two games at once. It really is. Particularly when you're going from god-like Kung Fu super-beings who blow up planets to, you know, the mean, gritty streets and people who are technically helpless without a .45 in their hands. It's a real hard jump to make. So I had to put Cyberpunk V3 down for a while. I'm picking it up now that I've got Dragonball on the ropes. The goal is to have it done by September. There's a lot of cool stuff I've wanted to do with Cyberpunk for years. When we started there was only one kind of cyberpunk in the genre, and part of what the game did was it was to teach people what the shticks were in the punk genre, how it worked, what the style was, you know. In those days, nobody knew what netrunning was, nobody knew anything about cyberwear. All of it was incredibly new. My favourite movie is Bladerunner, so I was already heavily into this sort of thing so I felt like the game should be a primer for the cyberpunk genre. Taking what I knew and putting it out on the street for everybody else to see. But now we've gone to a point where Cyberpunk has come all the way out the other end. This maturity gives you a chance to put more depth into it, to explain more how you get this dark future and how it really does work. So I'm looking

forward to that. I'm looking forward to a lot of the real post-modern stuff that I've been reading and learning about and integrating that into the new Cyberpunk.

G: Is it just you? Are you doing all the work yourself?

M: I'm doing this one myself. You've got to remember, I did the original Cyberpunk, I did the original Mekton, I did the original Teenagers, I did Buck Rogers, Falkenstein...I did...gack! I'm looking around my office now, and it's pretty surprising when I think about it...Cybergeneration, that one I did have help on the science stuff with. Pretty much, though, I write the games solo. So this is my baby, I'm going to go write it.

G: Is it still using Fuzion?

M: Yeah, it'll be using Fuzion. Fuzion was created because Steve Petersen and I basically saw a number of things we wanted to be able to do, and one of them was that I needed to make V3 integrate with Mekton better. At this point there's a whole lot of that mecha-level crossover going on in the actual cyberpunk genre and we need to be able to explain how to deal with mecha, large things--there are super hero cyberpunk type things out there, there are Goth, vampiric cyberpunkesque things being written out there. We need to integrate all that. We had to build a system that could go as big as you wanted to. The final goal, oddly enough, was to be able to do Dragonball Z within Fuzion. We figured you weren't going to get anything more powerful than Dragonball characters. I'll put it this way: for Fuzion characters, one point of power equals one dice of damage. Regularly, characters in Dragonball throw 2000 to 20,000 dice worth of damage.

G: Ouch.

M: And there are ways we have to bring it down to where you don't have to go out and raid a store to do it. Literally we have characters that, when we worked out the scales, could say, "Okay, I'm going to throw 250,000 dice of damage." Think of it--250,000 dice! And it would have to be in scale! On the other hand, we are talking characters who could, at the drop of a hat, destroy a small moon. Destroy planets at a whim.

G: I personally don't have any experience with Dragonball Z. I think I've caught it on TV once or twice, so I don't have any comment to make (laughs) concerning Dragonball.

M: Well, basically the reason I bring it up at all is that that is the top end of Fuzion. The bottom end is the guy in the street working at a 7-11. The lowest level, you and I; everyday human beings dealing with everyday situations. The highest level is Dragonball, where you can bust a planet. We couldn't really THINK of anything more powerful than Dragonball.

G: There's been a lot of talk on the newsgroups, rec.games.frp.cyber, about Cyberpunk and version 3, and there are a lot of people who have been dissenting the fact that you're changing from Interlock to Fuzion. They're very comfortable with Interlock, and they're not very happy with the transition.

M: Which puzzled the hell out of me because when I did the work on Fuzion...I can see the Hero players [feeling that way], because certain things have visibly changed for them. But if you really look at Fuzion and Interlock side by side they're virtually identical. There are certain elements that are changed which are to simplify things. For example, instead of 3.2 seconds it's boiling down to a 3 second turn and things like that. The damage systems cross straight across. The scaler systems and building characters; we've fixed a lot of the problems we had. For example, people used to use Body Type for everything. It meant that everybody built a mondo super character. I knew I was going to have to fix that sooner or later. I'd made Body Type as a generic stat, to kind of cover a number of different functions that really aren't covered by one aspect of a human being. In Fuzion, we also broke Reflex into two separate areas because everybody was buying massive amounts of Reflex and becoming mondo super-powered characters. So, I can see the basis of the complaints, but I would of have done that in regular Interlock anyway because they were rules breaks--things that people

were just abusing the living daylights out of. I would get character sheets in at conventions that I'd just look at and go, "Oh my GOD. I wrote the game, and I don't even do this sort of thing."

G: I know how you feel. I'm not even a professional.

M: I think, to some extent, that the biggest complaints are from people who are saying, "We don't like it because it's a change," without really looking at what the change is. I can sit down and literally show them a break-down of every single rule between the two systems and what has changed and what hasn't. I went ahead and did that, in fact. I went through Interlock in the beginning of the project and laid out every single rule point by point by point, and then went back through it and asked myself, "What changes in Fuzion?" There wasn't a whole heck of a lot. The biggest change right now between Fuzion as it's done and Interlock as it's done in Cyberpunk is I'm getting rid of that rather cumbersome wounding system. That's primarily because the wounding system, while it's very sophisticated, doesn't translate real well into other elements like vehicles, large animals; anything that is bigger than man-size, or much, much smaller than man-size.

G: Is there anything you can tell these people who have all these complaints that might curb their fears, make them feel a little better?

M: Tell them that they trusted me when I did the first one (Interlock). Why not trust me to do the next one right?

G: Fair enough.

M: I mean, if I hadn't done Interlock, the players would have had no idea what that rules set was. So they had to follow me somewhere along the way and say, "Okay, well, I think he's doing a good job." It's in my best interest to do a good design, because for one thing, I play my games. It's not like somebody's randomly designing this stuff. I'm in there playing it just like they are (in fact, I'm getting my butt clobbered right now in a Cybergen game) so I know exactly what they put up with. It's in my best interest to make sure the stuff works and is simple, and I'm asking them to trust me. Ask them to give me the benefit of the doubt, that if I didn't screw up the first time, I won't screw it up this time.

G: So, is Interlock dead in that case?

M: Interlock will be Fuzion. They are so close. I'm surprised people just can't see that. They are really close, to a point where I couldn't really find a middle ground. Most of the changes that are there are changes that I would make in Interlock anyway because they were repairing breaks in the system. I'll give you a good example. Interlock is a linear system. You have a problem when you get above man-sized weapons. So, there you are; a Cyberpunk character hanging by the side of a building, somebody brings an AV-4 in and they open up with a minigun and a couple of rockets. Well, up to the point just below the minigun the damage was realistic and you could deal with it. But when you open up with the rockets, you have basically, right now, one option: you're DEAD. If they hit you, you're fragged. When I started looking over accounts of actual combat, talking to friends of mine who had been in combat, you know, looking over stuff over the years, is if a rocket hits near somebody, they don't die because the rocket hit them. They die 'cause the shrapnel got them. They're blown forty feet. I started looking and saying, "You know, I've got to design a damage system that will account for that, because in the next revs of the game, people will be carrying shoulder-carried rockets and missiles and using large weapons and so forth like that." It all needs to be factored in. So a lot of the scalar changes were done to accommodate that. To give people a chance instead of, "Well, the rocket comes down. You're dead." The other problem which Interlock had is that we had no damage system, other than hits. We didn't have anything resembling stun damage in the second version of the game. In the first Interlock, we did have stun damage. People don't remember black book Cyberpunk. In black

book "Punk, we had the equivalent of stun damage which meant you could have a Kung Fu fight for a change. When I fight somebody in Kumite I'm not killing them. I theoretically can kill them, if I hit them in the right place, or if I hit them hard enough, or if I keep hitting them. But if people immediately kicked somebody in the side of the head and it did massive damage just like a nine millimetre handgun, then I wouldn't have survived to get my first belt. (laughs) I kind of look at it as, "Yeah, this needs to be changed." This is a break point. We've got to go back to the way we did it.

G: In that case, one of the more popular gripes with a lot of the 2020 players is the netrunning system.

M: Ahhh...the netrunning system.

G: A lot of people are curious if the netrunning rules are going to be totally overhauled or just tweaked, and can you give any details concerning that?

M: I can hear the sounds of chainsaws in the woods. (makes chainsaw noise) Yeah, the rules have got to be changed. Here's the problem. In order to accurately simulate the Cyberpunk experience as given to us by the grand masters like Gibson and Walter Jon and people like that, you have to do netrunning as a totally immersive environmental situation. So what happens is the netrunner goes into the 'net. He's immersed in it and it's like he's in another reality. He's gone to fairy land. He's somewhere else. That's boring for everybody else in the party. What I wanted to get was something closer to, let's say, what happened in the old "Max Headroom" series, where the netrunner actually commands and operates stuff in realspace. The hope was that people were going to spend more time running what's called the Menu in Cyberpunk, and doing the useful "opening the doors," and getting the other players into places, basically becoming the thief of the party. Didn't happen, because flying around over that vast cyberspace, shooting programs from your thumbs is just really too cool...it's fun. The problem was that I was being anchored to what the genre had. In the literary sense, this can be exciting. In a game play sense, when you're the actor rather than just a reader, it's really boring. It's like sort of, "...then Luke sat down and meditated for five hours until he could lift the x-wing out of the swamp." Well, yeah, that's cool when you read that. But if you're playing Wedge Antilles, sitting around waiting for five hours with no beer in a hot, stinking swamp, while Luke learns to lift a box, it sucks. Likewise with netrunners, a guy goes in there and he flies around the 'net and he does all this cool stuff. Everybody else is all watching and going, "Well, what are we going to do?" One of the first things I did was, and you'll see this in V3, is I blew the 'net up. The 'net is now no longer this vast area that everybody can run in. It's a bunch of balkanized areas that are very different between them. Think of them as little intranets than internets. And this would be typical for a situation where most of the world got taken down by one large computer virus. Everybody would get very isolated. That means that you don't spend a lot of time flying for miles through the 'net in 203X. Your netrunches are rather short and to the point. Second, how people interface with the 'net is going to be a bit different. They're going to be much more like what we have today where we actually go into the web and we get information-- we move through things in a much simpler, more architectural way. The idea is that I'm slowly but surely trying to get the netrunner back into a box where he is a useful member of the party and he isn't going to be spending as much time flying through cyberspace looking at the pretty pictures.

G: So you're basically promoting more group cohesion with the netrunner along with the rest of the party.

M: Yeah, the biggest changes in V3 are going to be all built towards group cohesion. Not that everybody has to like everybody, but group cohesion and giving people a realistic infrastructure to work in are a major goal. Something that the players can work towards. That's a problem now. People have asked before when they sit down and look at it, "Well,

how can this dark future work? I mean, we've got people living in these massive cities clustered around the coast, and everything else is a wasteland, and they can't get any transport. Where's all the stuff come from?" Well, you're right. It shouldn't work. One of the first things I sat down and did last year was to work out, well, exactly how does a Cyberpunk universe work when there's no transportation between major urban zones except for occasional convoys? That's not going to work. I started asking about the infrastructure, how things held together. The other thing I started looking at was cohesion and logic. Right now we have a bunch of guys who are heavily-armed solos, which are basically the Terminator in an armour jack, but how does that really work in a society? Right now, I don't walk out on the street and say, "Hey, I'll hire a killer! Yeah, I'll get three guys to go blow away my neighbour." How does a society get to that point? Why do you have solos who are hired muscle, hired killers? What happens in society to support that? How does a solo really make a living? You know, why is there a solo? There are questions that get answered in V3.

G: Are you going to re-write the history? I mean, what's the history of 2030 like?

M: Oh, that's evil. This is extremely evil. Okay, you have a hint of what is about to happen, which is Rache Bartmoss has been building a virus which I hinted at back in the 2013 days, and it's now full-blown. It basically re-wrote chunks of data, of historical data particularly. It scrambled things. It was Rache's last huzzah to freely distribute data and sort of put question marks in it. For example, let's say I go down to the dataterm and I say, "Well, you know, I want to find out what's down there for Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky." In 203X, I'd get three or four different versions. I'd get the one where he and Monica died in a fiery car crash. I'd get the one where Hillary got a gun and shot him; I'd get the one where he, Trent Lott, and Kenneth Starr ended up in a death match in the Capitol Building, and I'd get the one where everyone lived happily ever after 'cause Hillary was killed in a plane crash and the affair was never discovered. I would get maybe seven different versions. Which one is true? Especially if I could, on film, see every single version. That's what Rache brought into the picture. History re-written, altered, changed. Which means confusion, historically, but it also means a vast array of possibilities because people can then pick the reality THEY want. History is often consensual anyway. This consensual reality helped fuel what happens in the new Cyberpunk future--the AltCult or Alternate Culture movement. What consensual history does is to allow people to kind of tailor the reality, take things and move them around, and so forth. It's also kind of slick because, for the people who actually have the old books they're real, they're history, it's what happened, but it's not necessarily true that everybody that you meet knows or believes that. So to somebody else who's never had a Chromebook, and the information that's in the data stacks from Chromebooks, the idea that a Malorian 557 handgun exists is apocryphal, just like Arthur's sword. We don't know what Arthur's sword looked like. We don't know that there was a King Arthur's sword. Was there an Excalibur? What if a Malorian handgun is a similarly mythical thing? It means that pretty much every book in the Cyberpunk canon is reality, the question is how you're going to get to use it as a GM.

G: Are you going to re-issue any of the old supplements?

M: Actually, we're already in the process of doing that. There's an upgraded version of the Chromebooks, and they're being brought back out. We're also going to bring in the Solos [of Fortune], probably add a couple books as well for the Solos. And we're going to keep Night City around. We haven't decided entirely what parts we're going to keep, but we're going to make a lot of the key books still available. And they'll be usable in V3.

G: Without any change, or are you going to need to re-write the major rules portions?

M: No, no, not any changes. I can go pick a gun up right now out of any one of the books and use it.

G: One of the guys on the staff was wondering if the new timeline excludes Cybergen and the

ISA?

M: Cybergen and the ISA never occurred in the Cyberpunk timeline. I've said this millions of times in interviews before. They are a side story. Cybergen in 203X did occur, it just didn't occur to the extent that we know, where the entire ISA happens. Yeah, there are Cybergen kids out there, but there's not a whole heck of a lot of them, and it certainly wasn't a world-sweeping plague. In the 203X universe what has happened is that it was all a short incident.

G: How much change from the dog-eat-dog environment of 2020 is there going to be in the game? Is the trend still cyberwear and lots of it? Are you going to go towards bioware?

M: Depends on where you are in the world. One of the cool things about 203X is that I looked at it and I said, "Well, if you could re-write your history and you could have cultures that were just established around cultural memes---jointly shared beliefs and world views - then you could build cultures anywhere, and they don't have to all be the same." Let's say you start off in one community, which is essentially dominated by people who are heavy into bioware, as the upper Pacific northwest is, you're not going to see a lot of cyberwear there. But go fifteen hundred miles south down into the southwest and you'll run into Corpore Metal; a culture of full body 'borgs. Everybody's a full body 'borg. When you're born, literally, within two years or so, once you learn your basic body functions and can walk and generally talk, wham! Your brain is dropped into a metal body. You're a 'borg. Everybody's a 'borg. Go a little bit further east, go south, you're onto Reef and Riff which are two very, very different ocean aquatic cultures. Some are bioware-driven, some are cyberwear-driven, some are technology and mental driven. There's one entire culture that lives entirely in the 'net the entire time. No bodies at all, they're just wired in at birth. So what you'll see in 203X is going to be a lot more like travelling around to a whole bunch of very, very different and fractured kingdoms that are united by particularly strong beliefs. You may meet a cell of Corpore Metal in any city you're in. Their rules are different from your rules. And they'll have to live with the Inquisitors as their neighbours.

G: Sounds very diverse.

M: Yeah, that's one of the things I wanted to push. Diversity. Up to now, Cyberpunk has always been about the guy with the big trenchcoat and the big gun. There still guys like that. Night City is like that, very much so. Night City is like the Casablanca of this world. It's where everybody meets because it's safe ground. In that area the old style cultures still exist. But that's not the only culture---There's also Corpore Metal guys, and there's Riff guys, Reef guys, Disney guys-- enormous variations that are all just living cheek and jowl next to each other.

G: Are you guys going to be attending any conventions this year?

M: Yeah, we're definitely going to ComiCon. We're sort of, right now, looking at doing Origins. We're still boycotting GenCon for our own personal reasons. We kind of object to some of the practices that are being put down there, still, I don't know whether the general boycott is still continuing or not. Some people may have caved, I don't know. We still believe there are some things that need to be addressed first, before we'll go back. We're doing a lot of smaller shows and things like that. To be honest, it's kind of nice to also get a break and not do show after show after show. For the first time in I don't know how long, I actually had a Fourth of July last year where I was able to be home and see my kid. In the old days, we tended to go to one or two [conventions] a month, which meant we spent an awful lot of time flying around places. Don't even ask what it used to cost to send everybody out to GenCon. I could put a sizable down-payment on a house with it! Not any more.

G: Are you going to have any more products based on popular cyberpunk fiction?

M: Sooner or later we may try to do Snow Crash. We actually talked to Neil Stephenson

about it but the rights were tied to a movie deal he was doing and the movie deal seems to have fallen through. I'd like to do Snow Crash. No one really knows what's happening with Blade Runner. I'd still love to do a game book based off that one too.

G: Now, that would be cool.

M: But, yet again, it's all up in the air. With Bubblegum Crisis we're already pretty much doing the premiere Japanese cyberpunk show, as it were. We probably aren't going to do a whole heck of a lot more because we've covered most of the high points.

G: How about a computer game based on Cyberpunk?

M: That's one of the things I've been working on now; learning the computer game industry. For years we tried to get a Cyberpunk game going. We had all these people who wanted to do it. No matter who they were, they just never could seem to get it together. We're talking some fairly large companies. One of the reasons I dropped it back to part time was I wanted to learn something about how computer games get done so I could actually have an active hand in doing it for a change, rather than hoping someone, as a licensee, would get it done. So, yeah, we're still working on that idea.

G: What kind of formats do you like? Do you like the first-person shooters, do you like the role-playing aspect like in Fallout? What kind of format do you prefer?

M: Fallout's got an interesting possibility. I've been playing Metal Gear Solid, which is definitely a first-person shooter situation, for some of it. Actually, one of the ones I was interested in was-- have you seen the new Phantom Menace (game)?

G: I haven't seen it, I know it's out there.

M: That's basically a top-down you can change the view kind of thing, which is how we were experimenting with the Mekton game. I kind of like that because you can do a lot of things with the environment. You can move around, do stuff, see stuff. You don't just solve puzzles, but you can also shoot, fight, you interact with the environment. It seems a real shame to not really interact with the Cyberpunk environment. That's why you're there. Otherwise you might as well be in down-town Oakland.

G: (laughs) That doesn't say a lot for down-town Oakland.

M: Well, in down-town Oakland, people shoot at you. You have to do business transactions, there are drugs around, and there are cops. You know, it's everyday. But if down-town Oakland also had enormous pyramids and flaming spires and flying cars, now, that would rock.

G: Well, it'd be Bladerunner.

M: Yeah.

G: If you could have one piece of Cyberwear installed, what would it be?

M: Hmmmm. Boy that has so many possibilities. I've thought about this so many times and it always changes. I think I would probably a radio-link cyberoptic combination so I could record the stuff I always miss. As a writer, there's always stuff that I go, "Man, I wish I had a record of that somewhere, it's just a weird little thing I just saw." The other one is a generic cyberarm. Not necessarily weapons, but just, you know, you always have this feeling like, "Wow, I could really use a whole lot of gadgets right here." I carry a pouch habitually on me and I have a thing called a chatelaine, which is basically a key ring with dozens and dozens of small useful objects - openers, knives, tool kits, magnifying glasses, radios, calculators, it's this little tiny key ring thing I carry. I was thinking, "If I could open up a door in my arm and I had all this stuff in there, it'd be useful." I'd say, probably, I'd want a cyberoptic cyberaudio recording system. Or maybe something that gave me a direct caffeine drip to my brain in the morning.

G: Hey, that wouldn't be too bad.

The Vidiot Box: Cyberpunk Movie Reviews

by Mat Black

Welcome to the first installment of The Vidiot Box, a hopefully regular column here in Edgerunner. In keeping with the Net-centric theme of this issue, we'll be looking at some flicks dealing with cyberspace, virtual reality, and computers.

In Theatres

The Matrix

144 min.

1999 Warner Bros. Entertainment

Starring: Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Ann Moss, Joe Pantolano, Hugo Weaving

Rated 'R'

review by Mat Black

By its very nature, the Cyberpunk genre is a constantly evolving, mutating thing. In the past ten years, many aspects of the world we live in have come to mirror a lot of concepts laid down in earlier fiction. It is the true face of the beast.

Virtual reality technology is already here. Maybe not in the way that Case might be accustomed to, but it's getting there. A lot of the morality issues have been dropped by the wayside as computers have insinuated themselves into our homes. Most people are no longer afraid of it.

The past ten years have proven science fiction, in general, to be a viable motion picture medium, no longer the sole domain of pencil-necked geeks and immature thirty-year old dreamers. The past five years, in particular, have lead to Cyberpunk sci-fi crossing over in to the mainstream. Movie studios have had big plans, and mixed success, with releases like Hackers, Johnny Mnemonic, Gattaca, and Strange Days. The past six months alone have produced ExistenZ, The Thirteenth Floor, and what may arguably be Cyberpunk's most touted release since Blade Runner, The Matrix.

This blockbuster film deals with the old virtual-reality-as-mind-control concept, and the even older question: What is reality? It addresses these with a very modern and fresh style.

It's 1999. Thomas "Neo" Anderson (Keanu Reeves; Johnny Mnemonic, Chain Reaction) is a software engineer by day and a hacker by night. He is searching for 'Morpheus,' though he has no idea what or who Morpheus is. So what do you do when your computer starts talking to you, and tells you to follow the white rabbit? Well, if you're a hacker, you'll probably follow the white rabbit. Thus Neo, like Alice herself, is thrown into a reality bending adventure.

All is not as it seems. It's actually closer to 2199, and the scorched, ruined planet is run by machines that grow, harvest, and use humans as a source of power. The humans are kept docile and unaware by keeping them permanently jacked in to a huge virtual reality. But not everyone is asleep.

Somewhere, deep underground, lies the city of Zion, the last encampment of surviving humans. They send out scout ships to try to free others from servitude. Their overall goal is to find "The One," a being who can re-program the virtual reality from inside. Morpheus, head of the hovercraft Nebuchenezzar, thinks Neo is "The One."

OK, I have a real problem with computer generated special effects. More accurately, I hate them with a passion. It all stems from the thriller *Species*, and admittedly, CGI has come a long way since then. Still, I always manage to find something wrong with them, and it's always analogous to what I have come to call "The Species Effect." So I went to *The Matrix* expecting to be disappointed.

The first scene literally struck me dumb for about forty seconds. Then I realized I was drooling. I was expecting computer-generated f/x, but instead was presented with computer-enhanced special effects. I was blown away. By the time the movie was over, the action scenes had burned parts of my brain out. The martial arts training scene, and the big shoot-out in the lobby were particularly impressive. This movie is worth the price for the effects and cinematography alone.

The Matrix, unfortunately, suffers from the problem of too much story, not enough time. Even with the almost hour and a half time scale, this film is incredibly rushed. There are sub-plots that could take two hours on their own, and still not be boring. There is simply too much scope to be neatly wrapped up in 144 minutes. The movie may be left open enough for a sequel (of which I have heard indiscreet rumblings), but would be better suited to a TV series or (da-dum!) a role-playing game.

This movie turns out an impressive amount of good acting. Everyone is perfectly cast, especially Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne; *Event Horizon*, *Hoodlum*), Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving; *Babe*, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*), and Trinity (Carrie-Ann Moss; *F/X: The Series*.) Moss, incidentally, has signed opposite Val Kilmer in Warner's upcoming feature sci-fi film *Mars*). Weaving is one of the high points of the film. His mannerisms as Agent Smith are almost addicting. I actually found myself over-enunciating things for days.

The Matrix, I think, is going to be a very important movie; at least as important to future sci-fi as *Blade Runner* was/ is. It has proved that Cyberpunk sci-fi can be an incredibly viable film subject, and could very well open the way to many other films. Maybe we can expect to be seeing the long-rumoured film adaptation of *Neuromancer* soon?

At any rate, if you haven't seen this yet, move your butt to your local theatre as fast as you can. It's worth it.

On Video Cassette

Hackers

104 min.

1995 United Artists/ MGM

Starring: Jonny Lee Miller, Angelina Jolie, Fisher Stevens, Matthew Lillard, Laurence Mason
Rated 'PG-13'

review by Mat Black

When *Hackers* came out, it got a lot of flack from the hacker community. Many of them, I think, were expecting a technically and socially accurate film, and rather than accept that their own intuitions were flawed, they ripped the movie apart. *Hackers* is fiction. *Hackers* is entertainment. *Hackers* is NOT a how-to film.

The storyline is fairly simple. Young hacker Dade Murphy, aka Zero Cool, (Jonny Lee Miller; *Shallow Grave*, *Trainspotting*) is busted at a young age. As a senior in high school, he moves with his mother to New York and gets involved with other hackers who think he's just

a really well informed newbie. Dade and friends get embroiled in a corporate hacker's plot to embezzle millions and poison the environment. And all the while, the Secret Service is closing in. And there is the requisite competitive romance with sexy hackerette Acid Burn (Angelina Jolie; Cyborg 2, Foxfire).

As characters go, Dade and Acid Burn are actually pretty boring. The secondary hackers are much better done, especially Lord Nikon (Laurence Mason; The Crow, True Romance) and Cereal Killer (Matthew Lillard; Wing Commander, Serial Mom). Penn Jillette (Penn and Teller Get Killed, Fear & Loathing In Las Vegas) also turns in a chuckling performance as Hal, a computer security guy.

This is what Cyberpunk would be if eMpTyVee had its say, and maybe that's the most Cyberpunk thing about this movie. There are a few nods in the direction of the true genre (i.e., the Gibson mainframe), but overall, it's too clean-cut to truly be considered. Not to say that this movie should be summarily dismissed. It's one of the main cp/ mainstream crossover movies, and as such can work very well introducing people to the genre.

Hackers isn't crap. It has high entertainment value and a few shards of Cyberpunk-ness in it that make worth at least one watch.

Virtual Combat

93 min.

1994 A-Pix Entertainment

Starring: Don "the Dragon" Wilson, Michael Dorn, Rip Torn

Rated 'R'

review by Mat Black

In my mind, the scene went something like this: Johnny was an exec at a big-time motion picture company. He was in his late twenties, unmarried, hopelessly single, and his hobbies included video games and collecting porn. One day, he approached his boss with an idea for a movie. "Well, these guys are cops, and they know martial arts, and they play around in virtual reality a lot, martial arts games and cyber sex, and then one day the company that makes the programs finds a way to make the programs real, and they start creating the hot cyber sex women as real girls, but then somehow one of the bad programs accidentally gets created and then he wants to get his friends out of the computer so they can do some bad stuff, and somehow they're all psychically linked, but this one cop just can't beat this one level of the game and that just happens to be the one level that accidentally got created and he kills the guy's partner, and now the other guy is really pissed and it's up to him to beat the bad guys and get the girl 'cos she's special somehow."

Johnny's boss put his glasses on the desk and looked at him for a moment. "Johnny," he began, "You have fifteen minutes to clear your desk out and vacate the premises."

So Johnny took his idea to A-Pix and they liked it; thought it was ultra-cool, actually. They cast Don Wilson to be in the movie. Which was OK, 'cos he had nothing else to do. Then they got Michael Dorn to play the voice of the bad guy. Not the body, just the voice. And to top it off, they got Rip Torn to do a cameo.

Don't watch this movie. It really sucks. I'm sure you might be thinking, "hey, he just can't think of anything to say about it."

You're right, no words could do justice to this movie. You'll have a better time watching The Rollerblade Seven.

Virtual Assassin

99 min.

1995 Turner Home Entertainment/ Prism Pictures/ Everest Entertainment

Starring: Michael Dudikoff, Suki Kaiser, Brion James

Rated 'R'

Review by Mat Black

In the tradition of films like *Die Hard*, *Under Siege*, and even *Project: Shadowchaser* comes *Virtual Assassin*. Nick James (Michael Dudikoff; *Radioactive Dreams*, the *American Ninja* series) was a cop until a run in with a psychotic named Nassim (Brion James; *Blade Runner*, *The Fifth Element*, *Nemesis*). Nassim kills Nick's partner and almost finishes Nick off, too. So, like all good traumatized cops, Nick hits the sauce and gets thrown off the force.

Thus he has become a janitor at virtual reality and holography creators, Quantum Corp. Quantum has also been developing something new... a biologically augmented intelligent computer virus. The virus is designed to be inserted into a system, "out-think" all of the security holes, and take steps to rectify the situation, making the system hacker-proof. The only problem is a "random element" in the virus, often causing it to go haywire and eat up gigs of information in the target system.

Re-enter Nassim, now the head of a terrorist group. He has been following the development of the virus on the net, and has decided to steal the program and take control of the net.

Luckily for everyone else, Nick happens to be hanging out in the VR lounge after his shift, and his name isn't on the list of employees present. So it's up to Nick to save the day from the terrorists and the cops who have decided that HE is the one shooting all the people.

Despite (or maybe because of) its very standard set-up, *Virtual Assassin* is a really good flick. The technology isn't too far-fetched, the action is well paced, and the acting is believable, even if the dialogue is sometimes sketchy. This is also a pretty good one-liner movie.

Brion James turns in yet another startlingly great role as a psychopath, though he looks like someone gene-spliced him with Bill Idol and then raided Rutger Hauer's wardrobe from *Split Second*. Dudikoff is great as the reluctant hero who cares more about the baseball game going on than he does about saving the world. The rest of the terrorist are enjoyable characters (a cowboy, an African liberation/ Rastafarian, and a psycho who can't feel pain, among others) and pretty well acted.

The virus is presented fairly feasibly, but, of course, there are some gratuitous glowing special effects so the audience can be more sure of what is happening. My favourite little flourish was the SWAT team's neural gadgets, which allowed them to better carry out group manoeuvres. This, of course, worked against them, when the Nassim/ Virus combination use the implants to control the entire group.

As a whole, *Virtual Assassin* was an incredibly entertaining action movie. It also goes to show that some people are really trying to do a good job making CP films. Go out and rent this one!

<<'PUNK WILL EAT ITSELF>> Music in Cyberpunk 2020

by Mat Black

Music has always been a huge part of the Cyberpunk ethos. As the genre has changed over the last decade and a half, from Neuromancer and Blade Runner to The Diamond Age and The Matrix, the music has also changed. From Cabaret Voltaire, Non, and Sigue Sigue Sputnik to Nine Inch Nails, Prodigy, and Rage Against the Machine. Yet, music itself has remained a constant and important staple in the movement.

The use of music in RPG settings has happened to some degree since its inception. When we used to gather round the table to play AD&D back in the late 80's, there'd usually be something sort of classical and adventurous playing in the background. But two RPGs in particular bridged the sometimes cavernous gap between music and game: Cyberpunk 20XX and Vampire: The Masquerade. These games brought music out of its background status and into the game itself. For obvious reasons, we will be dealing with the former.

<<THE LIGHTS GO DOWN>> Theme Songs

Cyberpunk is a mediagenic entity, by nature and practice. A good game session can be remembered and visualized as easily as that favourite episode of Max Headroom that you've seen a hundred and twenty-eight times. Theme music is a major part of a TV show. Week after week the show comes on, preceded by the highly thought out and produced soundtrack. This is, by the way, merely a means of mental conditioning. The theme song rises, and your brain gets ready to process the latest episode. It gets you "in the mood" for that particular show. This same concept can be used for a game.

When running an ongoing campaign, take some time out before hand, and look for a theme song. It should be something that really conveys the feeling you want. Is there a particular song you listen to over and over again while you're planning the story line out? Chances are, that's a good choice. We're just looking for something to play at the beginning of each session, to let the players remember past events and get into character. In any event, a few precautions need to be taken.

First (and foremost), make sure the content is relevant. If your game is gonna be an action packed, shoot em up style of game, don't use an Ink Spots song. If it's going to be a slow-moving, thriller/ mystery type, avoid using Ministry. Also be sure that songs are both musically AND lyrically relevant.

The other big concern is length of the song. You want to give the characters time to get into their characters, but you don't want to be waiting for the InnaGoddadivida drum solo to end. A good game theme should usually run about two to three minutes. Once you hit four minutes, you're starting to push the envelope. It should be noted that you don't need to use ALL of a song. If you find a six minute long song, start looking for a good spot to fade out or cut it altogether.

As a final precaution, if you are going to use music inside the game as well, avoid using your theme song over and over again, unless it's called for. Using it as backdrop to main story points, like a shoot out with the Big Baddie of the game, is understandable and acceptable. Using it as a backdrop to every firefight or club scene will make it lose its effect.

Need some pointers on picking out good theme music? Songs that players are very familiar with can tend to work well, but can also backfire. People attach emotions and memories to songs, and sometimes this can work against the goal of putting them in the proper state of mind for a game. Music that no one really knows works best, because it will then be associated directly with the game. Certain genres also lend themselves well to Cyberpunk, foremost among these obviously being industrial and punk*. Techno and Metal also work very well. If you don't much about these genres, look into them. There are plenty of stores out there that will let you listen to CD's before you purchase them. It might take a bit of work, but no one ever said it was gonna be easy.

* Footnote to philistines: Nine Inch Nails does not typify "industrial," nor do Green Day or Everclear typify "punk."

<<AGAIN, WITH FEELING>> Scene Specific Music

Now that you've got your theme song, let's discuss scene-specific music. Selecting this music mostly follows the rules of picking a theme song, i.e., relevant content and avoid overuse. However, there are a few special considerations that need to be taken into account.

The most important step is to make sure the music is not too distracting. I've found that players can become very distracted by the simplest things. Lyrics, for example, are often quite distracting. Instrumental pieces or instrumental re-mixes work very well. And if you have access to one of those (otherwise cheesy and near worthless) karioke machine stereos, you can make nearly any song into an instrumental remix.

Volume is a concern as well. You want the music to be present, but you usually don't want the players to be screaming at one another and you. Occasionally, however you can work this to your advantage. Club or bar role-playing scenes are an excellent chance to crank the music up to high volumes. If you're good, you can even simulate the effect of the players screaming something really embarrassing or illegal just as the song stops.

Length is less a consideration in this consideration than it is in a theme song. However, quantity may have to be stepped up. Game masters everywhere are well versed in the knowledge that players can sometimes make scenes last far longer than the GM ever imagined. So make sure you have a few relevant songs lined up, so you don't have to repeat the same track over and over again. In general, have enough music to get you through twice the time you expect to spend on a scene.

Remember, of course, that not every scene in your game needs to have a song attached to it. It's just a tool you have at your disposal to make the experience more enjoyable. A meeting with a big corporate CEO may not need scene specific music, but going out to a big TechNoise show most likely will.

<<SHE'S SO UNUSUAL>> Mood/ Theme Specific Music and Personal/ Group Theme Songs

With the ideas of a theme song and scene specific music, you are ready to get into your musically enhanced CP2020 experience. There are, however, further steps you may wish to

take integrating music into your campaign. Two of these are mood or theme specific music and personal or group themes.

Mood or theme specific music are songs that are used to accompany certain ideas that may be recurring in your game. The classic concept of a "Love Theme" is a perfect example. Mood music should almost ALWAYS be instrumental and fairly low-key. It should be evocative of the situation, and totally non-distracting. Take a listen to the Blade Runner soundtrack for archetypal examples of this music.

Personal or group theme music allows the character to get in to the action of selecting music for their character, or the whole group. A player's personal theme should be used as a tool to help that character visualize his or her own character, and as such should most likely be chosen by the player themselves. Group theme music should act as a sort of anthem, and should be chosen together by everyone. Personal and group themes are also very likely to change over the course of time, as individuals and the group itself changes.

<<URBAN FUTURISTIC>>

These ideas are very general and brief, purposefully so. Music is such an individual thing that it would take far too many pages to go into detail. If you wish music to play an important part in your game, you're going to have to invest some time in going out and finding and creating a good soundtrack. Above all, don't be afraid to experiment and have fun with things. It is after all, only a game...

And for those of you who may be wondering what makes for some good mood music, I have included a list of bands that I have found to be very useful. Have fun listening...

- * Sigue Sigue Sputnik
- * Pop Will Eat Itself
- * Front Line Assembly
- * Skinny Puppy
- * Babyland
- * Sex Pistols
- * Black Flag
- * Bentley Rhythm Ace
- * Ministry
- * Filter
- * Deep Forest
- * Mussolini Headkick
- * Merzbow
- * Penal Colony
- * STG
- * Hate Dept.
- * Chem Lab
- * Savage Aural Hotbed
- * Test Dept.
- * Emergency Broadcast Network
- * Manufacture

- * Die Warzau
- * Underworld
- * Tricky
- * Die Krupps
- * Ethyl Meatplow
- * Aphex Twin
- * Front 242
- * GusGus
- * Download
- * Hungry Ghost
- * Pablo's Eye
- * Curve
- * Shonen Knife
- * Pizzcato Five
- * Queensryche
- * Cradle of Filth

- * Delta Nine
- * Metallica (Pre-"...And Justice For All")
- * 16 Volt
- * Hanzel und Gretel
- * BILE
- * Acumen Nation
- * Camouflage
- * Cabaret Voltaire
- * Non
- * SPK
- * Rage Against the Machine
- * Body Count
- * Suicidal Tendencies
- * Public Enemy
- * Killing Joke
- * Public Image, Ltd.
- * UK Subs
- * Coil
- * Daft Punk
- * Chemical Brothers
- * Fields of the Nephilim
- * TGT (The Genetic Terrorists)
- * In The Nursery
- * Swamp Terrorists
- * The Misfits
- * The Dead Kennedys

Movie Soundtracks:

- * Pi
- * Blade Runner
- * Strange Days
- * Johnny Mnemonic

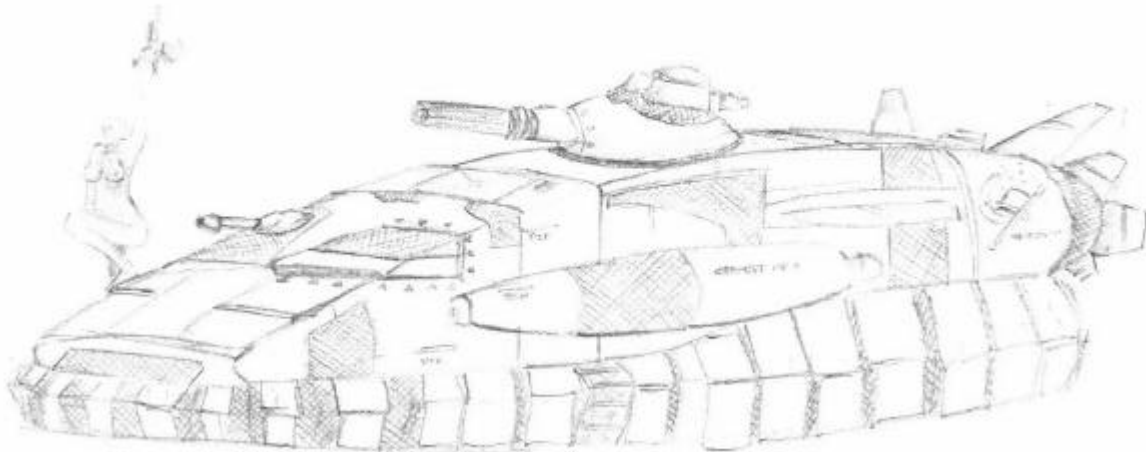
- * Armitage III
- * Akira
- * Passion (Peter Gabriel; The Last Temptation of Christ)

Panzergirls guide to the Union

By Ian Birchenough (ian@birchenough.demon.co.uk)

GM's Note,

You may not want to give your players access to armoured vehicles (especially armed



ones). Smuggling campaigns may not be something you want to do, in which case turn on to something else. For those of you willing to give it a try read on....

Most peoples awareness of Panzers and their Jockeys will be restricted to DMS' Vid serial "Combatt Cabs" and the occasional news report of Smugglers in combat with the authorities. What's the truth about these people, who are they, why do they do it, how do they do it?

For answers to some of these questions we turn to WNS reporter "Lee" Enfield who managed to secure an interview with the Jockey of "Mr Midnight" a panzer frequently seen in the Cotton Republics.

Enfield: What shall I call you?

MM: Midnight will do. In this business the less people who know your name, the better!

E: So why do you do it? What makes you want to crash over defended borders? Money or something else?

MM: Money's always handy, it costs a lot to keep one of these beasts running (Pats tank), but that's not the reason why. I'd have to say that, for me at least, love of speed and the desire to poke a finger in King Gardeners eye are the prime motivations. Most Jockeys love speed and Panzer is the fastest thing on the ground.

E: So how much does it pay?

MM: Varies, but I got 540,000 for a run not so long ago. Cyberdeck motherboards and chips delivered to Georgia. Of course that's not all profit. The Agent who contracted me got his cut first. Out of the money that was left I have to cover fuel costs, repairs, spares, pay for the maintenance crew, Ammunition, bribes, intelligence fees etc.

E: How much did you finally get in your hand, if you don't mind me asking?

MM: About 30,000, but I won't be going out on another run for a while.

E: What advice could you give to someone who wanted to be a PanzerJock?

MM: First off protect your identity. If you've got a SIN then don't ever connect it to your work as a Jockey. You can face off helicopters and AV's in a panzer, when you're in your own skin a cop with a baton can take you down.

Second, build a good team. Mr Midnight here has 2 afterburning turbofans for propulsion and they need a lot of care between runs. Like wise the weapon system. If you reckon that your going to have to be able to support something like this you're going to need the same level of Manpower as an airline or the air force use to support their jets. Probably somewhere in the region of 10-12 trained techies.

Third, Know your target area and the area you'll be running through to get there. A lot of newbies in this business go straight for Nevada. All they see is the profit to be had running stuff in there. The reason the pay is so high is that the Government and the State Governments of all the states bordering Nevada put a lot of effort into stopping you crossing the border without being inspected for contraband. North Dakota and the Cotton States are much better targets the borders are watched from within, the terrain doesn't restrict your routes and the only problems in the areas are the local governments. Once you've crossed the borders on the way out you're out of their jurisdiction and, especially in the case of the Cotton Republics some of the bordering states may go out of their way to help you.

Fourth chose your terrain. Nevada doesn't really lend itself to panzer traffic.

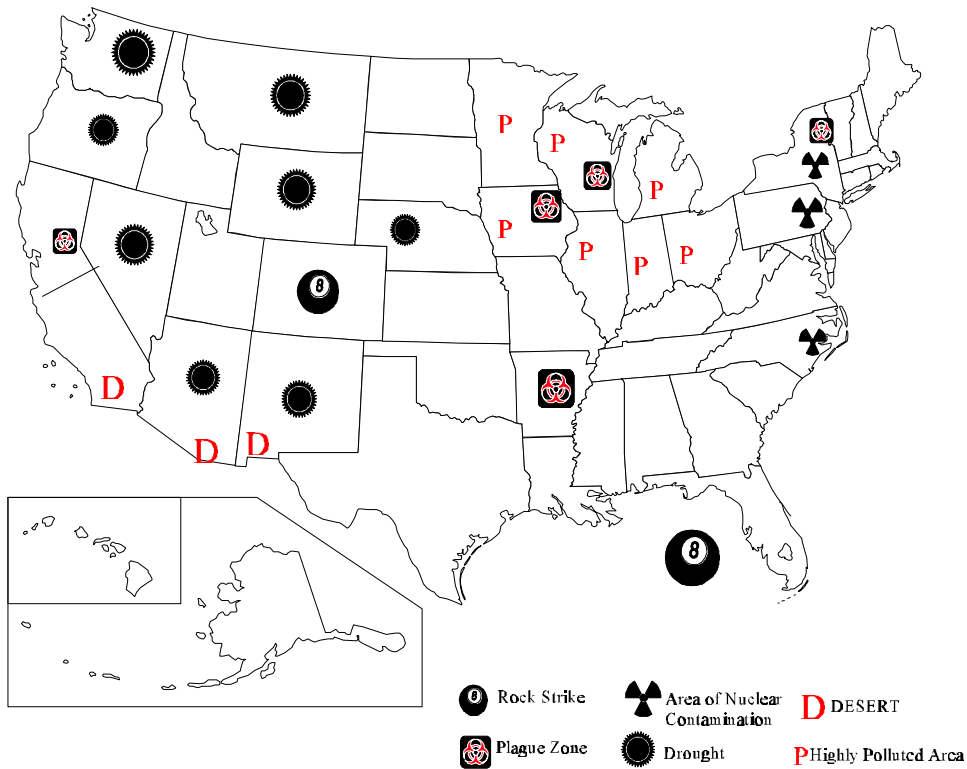
Mountains restrict your choices of routes so the only good options are AV's or Ospreys, something that the "authorities" are well able to handle. North Dakota is open on 3 sides, four if you want to go through Canada. That's a lot harder to cover. Fifth, don't get involved in personal disputes and involve your panzer. It's best defence is speed and manoeuvrability. If you start dragging it into towns fighting gangers who offended you you're a sitting target for the police and the Military. Your Panzer will protect you against small arms, it might even save you from the first anti tank missile you get, more than that and you're gone..

Lastly, and I think it's a sound comment whatever your business, Know your Fixer.

This is the person who vets your contracts. They should be sharp enough to spot the ringer. Honest enough not to sell you out. Energetic enough to provide the intelligence you'll need for your runs and sufficiently well connected to be able to get runs for you and provide any back up you need in the way of Fuel dumps etc. en route. You might have to search long and hard to find someone who can do all these without ripping you off, but when you find them pay them well.

LE: About knowing your ground. How do you see the states of the Union.

M: More as a Disunion. The Free States do pretty much as they wish. The states that are left and have sufficient population left to matter either try and squeeze trade till the pips squeak or they couldn't give a damn what you're carrying. I ran into a couple of Attack helicopters in Kansas a while back. They didn't care what the load was they just wanted the border Tariff paying. Some battles are better fought with a credit transfer! If you look at a map of the union then you can see that Plague has depopulated several states, others are so badly affected by pollution left over from their industrial days that no-one really lives outside the towns, the area around Chicago and Detroit is particularly bad. Then there are the states afflicted with drought, sometimes to the point of being a desert . These are also stripped of their populations. All these states are good Panzer territory. Low population, mostly abandoned, lots of



cover for the times that you have to go to ground

As you can see, apart from the Geography, you can cross from Coast to Coast through areas stripped of

their population by Corporate greed and government stupidity. The only other comment to make is avoid New Mexico. True its nice and open and there's almost no population, but the Military uses the whole state as a Training Zone and anything passing through without an ID beacon is treated as a training target by every Tanker, Pilot, Artilleryman and foot soldier in the state.

If you want to know more about the conditions in each area I can give you a netbox address for Traffic advisories in each state. Sometimes they change pretty fast, other things never change.....

The “Transport” Business (Panzer girls Guide to the Union Part 2)

For part 2 in this series WNS reporter “Lee” Enfield approached one of the shadowy figures involved in organising smuggling. This man, a Fixer, goes by the tag of FedX and works out of an establishment near Fresno.

LE: I made my way to the roadside bar where I’d been told that FedX would talk to me. The place was one of those countless bar/eateries you see along the roads. The car park was filled with vans and rigs, a couple of cargo AV’s were sat on a pad round the back. Inside I could see that I wasn’t dressed to fit in too well, Flight suits and overalls seemed to be the required dress code. Enquiries at the bar directed me to my subject the Fixer known as FedX. Of average height and build FedX is notable from his scar’s. At some time in the past he’s been in a fire sufficiently intense to make his skin run like melted wax. I asked what brought him to the transport business....

FX: Fire, Lee. I used to be a jockey running the lines 10 years ago. Then my bird took a missile and we burned. I was lucky to live. The doc’s patched me up, but that was the end of my days as a Jock. I took what I knew, the contacts I had and moved into the fixing transport for other people.

LE: How does that work.

FX: Well Lee, you come to me and say you’ve got a cargo, we discuss it’s weight, volume and value to you, and whether you think it has a value to anyone else. You tell me where you want it delivered to. We decide what sort of security measures you want to employ in its delivery. I tell you a price. If you agree then I put the job out to tender. When we have a contractor you deliver your goods to me and I have them delivered to your destination.

LE: Do you insure delivery?

FX: Your only real insurance is my reputation and the reputation of my contractors. If your goods were vanilla then you’d be using UPS or someone with an office in every town. All I can guarantee is that we’ll deliver your goods or die trying.

LE: What about your contractors, what do you do for them?

FX: Well Lee, that depends what the job is. Generally I find them jobs (minus my cut of course) I guarantee their payment and I run part of the Travel advisory service we all use. Sometimes I’ll find them parts for their vehicles and other consumables. For specific runs I’ll arrange fuel, flight plans, I obtain Intel for them, sometimes I arrange financial inducements to smooth their routes. Mostly I act as their agent.

LE: You mentioned arranging fuel and Intelligence, does that mean you know where they are planning to run?

FX: Only in the most general sense. When I arrange fuel, what happens is that I will alert a number of dealers on several possible routes that they might be required to provide fuel. They get a stand-by fee for being at a particular location with fuel at particular times. Sometimes we supply them with coded beacons so a Jockey can identify a supply dump in potentially hostile territory. If they have to actually deliver fuel or ammunition, they get paid for that by the Jockey. What Intelligence the Jockey gets depends on what they ask for. Some ask for travel advisories from Pick up to destination. Some want more detailed info for places en route. Depends on who they are and the routes they plan on using. Successful Jockeys don’t use the same routes repeatedly and they make contingency plans for all manner of occurrences.

LE: How does a Jockey start in the transport business?

FX: Not too different from anyone on the edge. They make a rep for themselves. Driving,

riding, piloting, whatever. Eventually they need someone to pay for whatever ride their using, that's when they come into the business. Some have their own machines, some need assistance. Most established Name Jockey's have several of their chosen steed's in various states of repair or modification.

LE You mentioned assistance?

FX If your REP is good but you're down on your luck sometimes a Fixer will spring for a steed. Course there's strings attached. You'll do the runs you're offered, you'll take the lower pay you'll get and to make it pay the runs you'll do will be higher risk. Don't expect that your fairy godmother is going to give their newest Jockey a Panzer or an AV, you'll be lucky to get a minivan with some armour and a turret, at least until you've proved yourself. Most jockeys work their way up like that, never owning their ride, just graduating to a better one as their REP increases until they get into the big leagues. Trying to save enough as they go so that when they get their chance they can afford to buy and maintain their ride.

LE You mentioned Maintain...?

FX Maintenance is one of the Jockeys big costs. The better the machine the more the maintenance costs. If you're just using a bike to run you can get by with a part time techie you trust. If you're using a Delta then you'll need to maintain a full time crew of Techs:- Propulsion specialists, Sensor and ECM specialists, Weapons specialists, even people who can maintain your survival aids. At that level having someone who knows what a spanner is just won't cut it and those people expect to earn good money. You'll want people you can trust with your life, people you can be sure won't sell you out.

LE where can these people be hired?

FX They're around if you know where to look. I do, that's why I'm a fixer. You want a crew to maintain your steed, I can get you 30 Techs to interview by Friday, but it'll cost you....

Background Information

If you want to figure maintenance costs a good approximation for a new-ish vehicle can be roughed out as follows:-

Wheeled vehicle (bike, car, van) Routine maintenance (for 1 year) = purchase price/26

Big Rig Routine maintenance (for 1 year) = purchase price/20

Non Combat Aircraft (AV, Osprey, etc) Routine maintenance (every 200 hours) = Purchase price/30

Combat Veh (Tank, APC) Routine Maintenance (for 1 year) Purchase price/10

Combat Aircraft Routine maintenance (after each mission) = purchase price/25

Of course these figures don't include the cost of repairing battle damage, just the costs of keeping a maintenance team and consumable parts. If you are maintaining a fleet of vehicles the cost will drop significantly, which is why combat aircraft come in squadrons!! A crew which costs about 1,000,000Eb/year can maintain several planes simultaneously

Netrunning in 2020, 1988 style

By NightFlyer

To understand the reasoning behind the Netrunning rules in Cyberpunk 2020, one must understand the Net and computers at the time of the writing of the Core rules.

The rules of netrunning make extensive use of BBS's, or Bulletin Board Systems. Up till the explosive use of the net, BBS's were, for the most part, the only place outside of the local hard drive that a computer user could go. The BBS's themselves were individually owned with the SysOp (System Operator) being the god of his or her domain, they had the final word as to who could come in and who was locked out. The SysOp, with the press of a function key could force the user into "chat mode", he could direct him around the BBS, taking him where the SysOp wants the user to go, or drop carrier.

The BBS's took on the personality of the SysOp, some were pirate boards, looking like a normal BBS on the outside, while having hidden areas for privileged users that had the goods. Others were online dating services or classified ads, while still others were places to hang out and play games or to download shareware files. Some required references from other users before being allowed admittance, while others openly accepted all. Some of the BBS'S were as little as one Node and some had many more, some were free and some were pay.

The user interface was like a Telnet session found today, text based at the least, ANSI or RIP graphics at the most. If the BBS was part of a network, messages could be sent out and received, however the process was much slower than our almost instant Usenet newsgroups. Messages would be posted at the local node, then at a prescribed time (usually at 2 in the morning) the packet was processed and sent out to hub, who then sent his packets to his hub, which would eventually spread out over the entire network, usually taking several days to reach all the nodes.

It is reasonable to assume that the reason netrunners are viewed in CP 2020 as such an elitist class is because at the time of publication they were an elitist class. Not every home had a computer, with access to the Internet for \$14.99 a month. There were no books on "Learn Visual Basic in 21 days". Computers at the time of publication were for universities or for business. and consisted of mostly 386s & 286s (the 486 chip didn't arrive until 1989). The much acclaimed Windows operating system 3.0 by Microsoft had sold a grand total of 100,000 copies which finally started the ball rolling for mass market usage. at the time, very few people used them for recreation. (Wolfenstein 3d the first successful "virtual reality" game didn't appear until 1992).

As for the Internet itself, it didn't get its name until 1982. In 1989, there were 100 Internet Hosts (there are now close to 33,000,000). Internet E-mail as we know it didn't get its start until 1992. The first web browser (Mosaic) wasn't released until 1993. And in 1995 management of the Internet is turned over to private companies.

Knowing what you do now, don't be so hard on the system that was written for the Netrunners, they had no idea about what was to come (come to think of it, neither did William Gibson!)

Nu-Tech

Courier Pouch/ Sheylon fabric By Ian Birchenough

Developed from technology used for screening Orbital Habitats this fabric can be woven into any number of shapes. The fabric shields the contents from NMR scans, Capacitance checks and most other common forms of scanning. On Scan arch monitors it shows as an opaque area. Obviously a large opaque area will attract attention which is why such large coverage is used only on Diplomatic or Corporate Immune baggage. However woven into a small purse or handbag the opaque area can be small enough to miss observation. Data chips, an air Hypo or even a small handgun might be disguised sufficiently to pass a cursory inspection. (25+ on Electronic Security, TECH and Awareness/Notice to detect a small courier pouch, 20+ for a handbag, 15 for a Briefcase.) . Sheylon won't protect from a physical search or X-Ray examination(it will partially shield the contents from X-Rays but the image is unmistakable). Cost 1000Eb /sq. Metre

Scribe V2.0 By Ian Birchenough

Bartmoss is Gone, but his work lingers on. Many top level Runners have used Scribe V1 to copy interesting programs from inside Dataforts, but Scribe V1 won't work in open netspace. This update to Scribe has been attributed to Brother Gregory a UK based runner who wanted to lift some of the programs used by MARLAUTH runners. It has all the usual features of Scribe V1, but instead of attacking the program and re-writing its priority to below that of a device it inserts extra routines into the target program for it to execute. This creates a cloud of angels which swarm around the target singing Hymns. The complex forms and actions of the angels perform much the same function as re-writing the target programs priority. However the extra load on the system supporting the program to be copied may be spotted by an alert Sysop. Additionally the sheer size of the program make it only suitable for the largest decks.

Functions (as Scribe V1.0) plus Endurance (3) Conversational Ability (3), Super-Realistic Icons (5) Trace (2) Auto Re-Res (3) total to write (63)

Required Memory 11MU

Price- not commercially available, but chunks of code can be found at Runner BBS's in the UK (UMIST especially!)

Obfuscation by Max, IR baffling cammo make-up by Lauri Gardner

Price: 20eb.

This invention just released by Max Cosmetics, is a boon to all would be "hunters" and those who would like to fade in the background.

Obfuscation uses a half-liquid base to decentralize and release heat from around the body into the environment. Obfuscation comes in 3cm diameter sticks and boot black sized tins. Current color types available: Wooded pine, Tundra white, Jungle green and Urban gray. The second colour in the sticks is always Black

(Warning! due to its thermal conductive properties it is not recommended to be worn in over

or under 20 degree Celsius weather, minus one HT when throwing against temperature caused effects).

Game Notes: it reduces the wearers infrared signature, and lets the person blend in with the surroundings, giving a -1 to notice and -2 to IR. This is not a cumulative bonus.

FEN BLD-TR by Lauri Gardner

Price: 400eb per 100ml

BLD-TR, or blood as it is commonly known, is an explosive designed as an assassination device or suicide bomb. Taken by the victim, or the suicide bomber either in the form a gel-like paste (Allowing 4 hours for it to enter the bloodstream fully), or diluted with water and injected into the blood stream. Blood is extremely toxic and amounts less than one ml will kill or severely injure the subject due to Renal Damage within a week. A full dose will turn the subject into an explosive device of 3d10 damage. Blood comes in a 100ml tube.

Special detonators are needed, among the available are timers, subdermal, and radio detonators. These must be emplaced to penetrate a blood vessel triggering sympathetic detonation of the altered blood once the detonator fires. Cost: 400eb

Directional mike and speaker unit by Lauri Gardner

Price: 160eb.

This device is about the size of packet of cigarettes. Originally designed by the FBI for close range surveillance on the street this device has a maximum range of 50 meters. The sound quality is mediocre at best, due to several compromises that had to be made in the design so that it could fit into one box. Use is very simple: Just put the speaker to your ear point it in the direction you want, set the sensitivity and turn it on.

It has two jacks, one for an ear piece, and one for a recording device.

DPI 'Boom' pocketsized ghetto-blaster by Lauri Gardner

Price: 250eb.

Ever tired of having the corp. police hassle you for carrying around a large ghetto-Blaster, or just the fact that you want to make a statement without carrying something heavy and bulky. Then this is for you. The pocket book sized ghetto blaster has enough power to really bug out your neighborhood and make you look chic at the same time. Comes in several different colors and shades. Uses 6 C Cells and runs for up to 5 hours.

(Edgerunner Staff Comment Sound quality cannot be described as Good. It's loud and small that's all that can really be said for the 'Boom')

DPI earrings by Lauri Gardner

Price: Varies

These devices are for those people who don't want to miss their music, but want to also hear what is happening around. The earrings contain directional speakers which are hidden behind and inside the earring.

They are connected by infrared sensors to the desired playback device for maximum enjoyment.

Several different types of earrings are sold, plain metalled, cryo-chilled, holographic and ethnic. The earrings have 10 hours of use before a battery change.

Spike by Lauri Gardner

Price: 250eb.

Spike is a favorite of mean minded phreaks and B&E teams. It is a plastic box that is roughly the size paperback, although heavier and larger models are available doing more damage. Spike is designed to overload a phone or modem burning out its circuits. Some versions have an inbuilt phone dialer.

It works on the principle that you phone up the target phone number, waiting for the pickup and pushing the 'fry' button within 0.01 seconds spike will let go a burst turning the recipient phone or modem into a paper weight. Will not work on or from cell-phones. Game notes: Spike can be considered a program with a power of four (roll under the number on a 1d10). A critical success: Not only is the phone totally useless but in computers it fries one program randomly (count by MU of the program). A critical failure: Congratulations you just fried a node/LDL! Netwatch is just slightly pissed off...(CP2020 pg. 134 roll 1d10 on chart to see what they will do to you 7-10 means that you have escaped but they will hunt you with whatever little info they have of you, roll 1d6 as if you rolled a six for the correct response).

Edgerunner Staff Comment This piece of sabotage ware was evaluated in the office. Practically it's of limited utility as it won't work over Fibre Optic bearers only over Copper. If the target system has opto isolation (as many do since back in the '90's) you will blow up his opto isolators but not affect the system. This means that you can't use it outside an area served by the exchange you're connecting it to as you'll blow up the Internet Exchanges Opto-Isolators (possibly triggering intense interest in your activities by Internet). Really only any use against a private individual on the same exchange as you or for using inside a Corporate building on their internal phone system!

Infocomp's Virtual Agent/ Private Butler by Lauri Gardner

Price: 300 000

Service: 20-400eb

The virtual agent, or the on-line organizer as it is called among business people, is meant for those who are not interested or too busy to arrange their own travel or rely on a human travel agent. Virtual agent will arrange your tickets, give you useful information on your destination, arrange your visas, even book your hotel room according to the parameters you have specified. Virtual agents can do more than just be a travel agent they can search for information on the Net or guide you through an unfamiliar city. The more complex commands and the more thorough the request the more it costs for the service.

The difference between Virtual agent and Private butler are quite huge, in the sense that the private butler is your property to use for whatever whim that you feel necessary, while a virtual agent is to be phoned for service, and discarded after one use. The private butler is individually programmed for your tastes, and to which the systems will it be connected to. The private butler is to many affluent Netrunners a way on having a personal search engine and constant on-line presence. The initial Purchase price includes a 3 month subscription to Infocomp.

Kiroshi Mirrorshades by Lauri Gardner

Cost: 400eb.

Brought to you by the same people who brought you OptiShields! Kiroshi opticals introduces you to a whole new level of style and for those demanding edgerunners who want a little bit more bite for the buck.

Mirrorshades incorporate SP8 armour and have a maximum of five option spaces.

For removable Mirrorshades the price is 800eb. The eyes underneath have only three options, this being due to interface attachments and connectors for Mirrorshades. Kiroshi is not liable to any damages that are caused by using some one else's Mirrorshades. HC 1d8

Kiroshi MILshades by Lauri Gardner

Cost: 550eb.

MILshades are for that corporate Merc or Spec Op. MILshades incorporate into its design SIX options anything ranging from anti-dazzle to X-ray vision. While MILshades are large and unwieldy looking they are quite strongly built with a SP10.

Removable MILshades cost 1000eb. The eyes underneath have only three options, due to interface attachments and connectors. Kiroshi is waiting for your call!

Private citizens need not apply.

Virtual reality game machine

Cost: 15000eb

One game: 1eb

New from Orange Entertainment, comes this arcade game machine. Orange Entertainment has made a new innovation in virtual firmware. The system comprising of a gyroscope, pressure suit and VR glasses give the ability to play breath taking games at a reality level you thought was impossible without expensive neural hook-ups. Take a refreshing swim off the coast of New Zealand, fight or fight with terrible alien invaders from another dimension.

Current and up-coming games include: Tobogan 2.0; Air, land and sea; Final fantastic XVIII; and Shogun. For those individuals with a Neural Processor and plugs these experiences can be enjoyed without the suit and glasses by direct interface feed to your machine link.