Headlines From A Dark Future

Random Events for Cyberpunk Games

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The following table is a Game Master's aid - a random events generator suitable for any kind of urban near-future campaign, from **Cyberpunk 2020** to **Shadowrun** to [**GURPS Cyberworld**]**.** With a shoehorn and some grease, it can also be used to inject a dystopian flavor into other campaign worlds, as well - just substitute alchemy for drugs for fantasy, or starships for helicopters for space opera.

The table generates Big News - the kind of events that will rock the headlines if they are public knowledge. But of course, they don't always have to *be* public; each result includes "Adventure Hook" notes on how the PCs can become personally involved, and the entire event might remain secret. In this way, the table can be used to generate "background noise" for an ongoing campaign, or to generate entire plots directly for the PCs. In general, events of this magnitude should be rolled for monthly.

Cyberpunk Events Table (1d100)

01-02 Air Vehicle Crashes: A large flying vehicle (a plane, space shuttle, or helicopter) arrows into the heart of the city, killing many. The crash may be accidental, or the result of attack or sabotage. *Adventure Hooks:* The PCs may know somebody who was on the craft. Are they alive? A valuable object might have been on board.

03-05 Arch-Criminal Apprehended: A boostergang leader or other organized crime figure is captured by the authorities. He or she may eventually escape, stand trial, or simply vanish. *Adventure Hooks:* Maybe he has some dirt on the PCs, and is eager to sell them out to bargain in court.

06-07 Arms/Ammo Blockade: Peace-desiring politicians cordon off the city and forbid the importation of any weapons or ammunition; legal sales are forbidden, and black-market weapons prices skyrocket. The blockade lasts 1d10 months before it is finally abandoned. *Adventure Hooks:* Plenty of opportunities for employment, and also plenty of opportunities to have nice weapons stolen by desperate "friends."

08-11 Atrocity: A large number of innocents is slaughtered by the local corporate or government authorities,

and the community is outraged. *Adventure Hooks:* Maybe for once, the authorities are innocent of the slaughter. Could be a twisty mystery if the PCs get tangled up in it.

12-13 Assassination: An important personage is "whacked" by a professional hit team. Maybe even in broad daylight. *Adventure Hooks:* The PCs might be key witnesses, hunted down by unknown forces.

14-16 Bloody Corporate Raid: One corp gets bullish and decides to create a monopoly by removing the competition. This raid attracts special note because of the large number of bodies. *Adventure Hooks:* In the wake of such a raid, corporate security often has trouble locking down the premises - could be a fun time to loot.

17-19 Bomb Detonated: A bomb is detonated outside of a corporate headquarters, city hall, barracks, or other target by a terrorist group. *Adventure Hooks:* "Hey! That was *my* car!"

20-24 Gang War: The triggermen of two or more gangs begin fighting over turf, the war lasts for 2d10 months and causes hundreds of deaths. *Adventure Hooks:* Toward the end, one side or another will begin desperate recruiting measures to even the score. The PCs could play along, or become double-agents and make the most of both sides.

25-27 Celebrity Visit: A president, movie star, rocker, or other famous person arrives amid a bustle of bureaucrats and groupies. *Adventure Hooks:* Maybe it's somebody the PCs need to get a personal audience with - or maybe the celebrity is a *fake,* and the PCs find out. Can they pull off turning that info to their advantage?

28-29 Computer Virus: A destructive and ingenious virus impacts nearly every computer system in the city, paralyzing communications, electronic commerce, and control systems. The virus lasts 3d10 days before it's finally cleaned out. *Adventure Hooks:* The virus might be a dangerous prank, a deliberate act of sabotage against the city, or it *might* be a noisy coverup for any number of crimes or acts of terrorism - a lot goes unnoticed when an electronic culture is put on hold.

30-31 Coup: The exact effects of the coup depend on the campaign. If the city is autonomous, then City Hall is taken over by a corp, mercenary group, boostergang, or military clique. In a setting where such a bold move would be unlikely, then the coup occurs in a major gang or a corporation. *Adventure Hooks:* Shifts in power on the Macro scale effect everybody - this is a good time to shake the ground beneath the players' feet, and see how they bounce back from changes in the way they get their supplies, who they go to for jobs, and who they can trust for information.

32-35 Draconian Law Passed: A special interest manages to railroad a peculiar and harsh new law through the city council; examples could include outlawing fashionware or restriction of rights for those with cyber-implants. *Adventure Hooks:* The PCs are probably *used* to doing illegal things, so this event will have more impact if it hits the party indirectly - harming somebody they care about, or benefitting somebody that they can't stand.

36-38 Draft: The government, a powerful corporation or another entity begins forcibly mustering an army for some suicide mission across the continent, overseas, or even in the orbital or lunar colonies (if there are some). *Adventure Hooks:* Maybe the PC's aren't drafted. Instead, they're hired to *get themselves drafted* , for an employer who needs a hidden ace in the coming war.

39-42 Drug Plague: A deadly new designer drug hits the streets, and there is a large increase in the number of zombies, crazed junkies, drug peddlers, and other effluvia of the chemical subcultures. *Adventure Hooks:* It might just be a particularly popular designer drug, or it might be the work of a higher power trying to manipulate the public. When people start vanishing, it's time to face the side effects . . .

43-46 Election: An important civil election is held, preceded by a lengthy period of campaigning, including all manner of dirty tricks and skullduggery. *Adventure Hooks:* From sleazy sex at party conventions to outright murder to protect a reputation, politics has plenty to offer the campaign - and it's even more interesting if the PCs are given a genuine reason to take sides *other* than mercenary opportunity.

47-50 Environmental Disaster: A tanker of toxic something-or-other breaks open, flooding the immediate area with extremely nasty and harmful gunk. *Adventure Hooks:* The area will be quickly blocked off to contain the problem - but what if there's something in that area that needs dealt with, right now? The PCs to the rescue - but they'd better be careful not to get holes in their HAZ-MAT suits . . .

51-52 Fire: During a dry period, an arsonist starts a blaze that eventually destroys a huge swath of the neighboring suburbs and threatens the heart of the city itself. *Adventure Hooks:* Under just the wrong conditions, an urban blaze can tear on for days, filling the sky with smoke, firefighting helicopters, and screaming sirens. Maybe someplace the PCs care about is threatened. Maybe the city decides that it's worth sacrificing a few residential blocks to make a a firewall.

53-55 Hot New Fashionware Introduced: An innovative and stylish new fashionware line (phosphorescent skin dye, animated tattoos, etc.) is marketed. Be the first in your boostergang . . . *Adventure Hooks:* When dealing with those with Big Money, knowledge of what's hip and what's stale can be a matter of employment or poverty. Seeing if the PCs can keep up with the trends when it becomes a matter of money can add a light diversion to the campaign.

56-58 Irritating New Trend: The younger set gets into a really stupid new trend, like wearing clothes several sizes too big or clomping around in elevator shoes. *Adventure Hooks:* Five Words - It's Fun To Shoot Them.

59-60 Major Rock Concert is Held: The hottest bands of the year hold a huge concert, with overpriced tickets and scads of supremely radical T-shirts. *Adventure Hooks:* The vultures come out to play when thousands of screaming kids gather *en masse* to show how alternative they are. Maybe the PCs will be those vultures. Alternately, a few go missing, and they have important and wealthy parents who want them back.

61-63 MegaCorp Leaves Town: To the joy of some people and the consternation of others, a major

corporation packs its bags, closes its factories, and leaves town (probably in search of greener pastures, tax-wise). *Adventure Hooks:* Like result 30-31, above, this can mean radical shifts in how people do business on every level. Also, there's often a huge vacuum to be filled - the PCs might have a line on something that could fill it, and it might be time for a move from the street to the boardroom. Alternately, minor wars can spring up as the remaining corps fight over the wreckage.

64-65 Moral Crusade: A popular local figure tries to cleanse the city of "wickedness". He or she quits, utterly dejected, after 1d10 weeks. *Adventure Hooks:* It can be a really different kind of adventure if the PCs find that they have a legitimate reason to *help* the hapless crusader of decency, even if only for a little while.

66-68 Natural Disaster: A tornado, earthquake, tidal wave, drought, hurricane, or other natural disaster strikes the city. *Adventure Hooks:* Disasters open up walls that are impossible to open otherwise, inconvenience people that are otherwise untouchable, and can turn an ordinary populace into a rat-pack mob, killing each other for a can of dog food. A fine time to be alive and mercenary.

69-71 New Virtual World Opens Up: An intense new virtual world is opened up, a masterwork of imagination and technology. Admittance is expensive, but considered worth it. *Adventure Hooks:* In some cases, a new virtual realm might as well be a new drug (see above). However, it can also just be a great new place to hang out, explore, meet new people and make new contacts. Rather than casting the new online haven as an overtly addictive problem, see if you can be sneaky enough to really *get* the PCs hooked on it, by making it a better place than they've ever been.

72-73 Radical New Musical Group: A hot new act breaks into the music biz, but becomes utterly dull and tedious after 2d10 months. *Adventure Hooks:* See result 56-58, above.

74-75 Riot: A devastating riot lasting 3d10 hours rocks the city, resulting in looting and destruction in poor neighborhoods. Wealthy areas, however, are untouched. *Adventure Hooks:* Aside from the usual potential for illicit gain when things go badly, a riot also makes a great "monkey wrench" to throw into the middle of an operation that needs an added complication.

76-79 Robbery: A daring heist results in the theft of an art collection, diamond cache, or other fabulous treasure. *Adventure Hooks:* Maybe the PCs were trying to steal it, but somebody beat them to it. Maybe the PCs find out that the "treasure" was really *dangerous* , and try to warn the thieves before the entire city pays the price. But of course, the thieves think it's just a trick . . .

80-83 Police Brutality: The public, and particularly the underclass, becomes shocked and upset by a particularly nasty example of police brutality. *Adventure Hooks:* As relations between ordinary people and the police become more strained, it gets harder to get decent cop contacts at a *very* inopportune time for the PCs, who need one badly. This could take a lot of donuts.

84-87 Power Blackout: Most of the power to the city is cut off by sabotage or accident. The blackout lasts 2d10 hours. *Adventure Hooks:* It could be for a coverup, like the computer virus (above). But even if the PCs never run across the real reason - things are going to go *crazy* in the darkness. The GM can use it as an opportunity to shake up relationships with trusted NPCs - times like that are times that can be a real test of friendship.

88-91 Scandal: A supposedly squeaky-clean public figure is found to be an adulterer, drug addict, embezzler, or other variety of lowlife. *Adventure Hooks:* The public figure's PR people decide that their meal ticket's image is still salvagable, if they can get a fall guy or three to divert the blame to. Will the PCs do it for money? If not, the PR mob might decide that they can still do it for free.

92-95 Serial Killer: A clever, maniacal slayer stalks the city, going after a certain type of person - strippers, used car salesmen, people named Cindy, whatever. *Adventure Hooks:* If the PCs have a stripper friend named Cindy, they might have to hurry down to her used car lot before it's too late. But even that assumes that they figure out the pattern in time. And one of the PCs keeps having blackouts, losing hours at a time from his memory . . .

96-97 Technological Innovation: A cool new gadget is introduced, such as a cheap flying car, a thumbnail-sized computer, and so on. *Adventure Hooks:* Perhaps the PCs are sympathetic (or simply loyal) to the corp that manufactures the older, more expensive flying car or the palm-sized computer. A campaign of sabotage could result. Or maybe the PCs become privy to a problem with the new wonder-widget that the manufactures are willing to kill to hide.

98-100 No occurrence or GM's choice: If you're rolling for a monthly "news" event in an ongoing campaign, this month is strangely devoid of scandal, disaster, or danger. If you're rolling to build a random plot, roll again, or choose something that strikes your fancy.

Campaign-Generation: Some Examples

The GM has run out of plot ideas, so he breaks out the ten-sided dice and decides to give his imagination a random boost. He rolls a 28, a 15, a 16, a 3, an 84, and a 10 (he rolls six times since he's decided that he wants the campaign to represent about six months of game time).

He interprets the rolls as follows: A terrible corporate battle - a computer virus rocks the city, used by one corporation against another and then accidentally loosed on the whole community. The next two months see two vicious corporate raids as each corp seeks to retaliate against the other, and the stakes of the war escalate. The whole community is in uproar, and politicians call for a blockade to prevent new supplies of arms from entering the city. The corps respond to that particular bucket of ice water by setting it to boil: one begins looting the property of the other company, focusing on the now-illegal arms caches, and the second corp retaliates by shooting up the company picnic of the first first one. The stage is set for the flavor of the whole campaign, and the PCs have a violent stage to step onto . . .

That worked so well that he decides to finish out the year just as randomly. The rolls are 62, 01, 75, 39, 51, 31: The corporate war is resolved. Technocorp, the loser, is rousted out of town by Datadyne, the victor. During the rest of the summer, Technocorp plots to recoup its lost profits. A robot air vehicle is programmed to crash into the office tower of Datadyne, which now holds a monopoly on the territory the two once fought over. However, it is shot down before it can impact the building, and debris from the crash hits a slum, causing a great deal of fire damage. The citizens, irate over slow response times by firefighters and paramedics afraid to enter their neighborhood, instigate a citywide riot. Technocorp takes advantage of the confusion to outfit a local gang with an experimental combat drug that proves so addictive and pleasurable that it becomes a hit on the streets, saturating the city for months with combat-primed joyseekers. The police raid the main warehouse of the dealers of the new narcotic, and a stray smoke grenade starts a fire that kills dozens of innocents. In the political fallout that follows, with citizens distrusting cops and the government, Datadyne offers its services as "security analysts", and makes the elected officials an offer they can't afford to refuse. Within weeks, Datadyne is running everything, and Technocorp is out in the cold. Just an ordinary year in the cities of the future . . .