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LISTEN UP! TO JONJONTHEWISE

LISTEN UP, CHOOMS!

If you've visited my YouTube channel, you know I love Cyberpunk RED.

I love **Cyberpunk RED** because it provides us to explore the many complicated facets of what makes us human. We learn more about ourselves as we make decisions for a person we fabricated by spending points, rolling dice, and consulting a book. Our characters mean so much to us because they are an extension of ourselves. We walk in their shoes and observe how they grow into a survivor of the Dark Future. Our games provide a front-row seat to the theater of our mind.

Being a Gamemaster in the Dark Future can seem like a daunting task. Your decisions can impact the game for many sessions to come, and you feel a special responsibility to "do it right." Sometimes being a GM means you play the rules as written, and other times you may be required to interpret the rules in ways the rules didn't foresee. That's part of the finesse of being a Gamemaster.

You may have ideas about creating variations to the existing rules during your gameplay and campaign preparations. Making and changing the rules is a normal part of gaming, colloquially named *homebrew*. It isn't just allowed but encouraged as a way to customize the game to the unique variables represented by your gaming group.

While homebrewing can improve your experience, it can also result in unintended consequences to the balance and playability of your game. It is a fine line requiring careful consideration. In this guide, I'm offering some of my own personal homebrew ideas. I've found they improve my table's gameplay experiences while minimizing the overall impact of the consequences of my changes to the game at large.

When it comes to homebrew at my table, these are my guidelines.

1. Know and play the rules as written first. You can't change the rules if you don't know them. I know the Mayor of Balancetown personally, and he's worked very hard in tuning them.
2. Apply a soft change to the rules. Big changes have big consequences. Small changes minimize the impact on the game as a whole, making them easier to incorporate into play.
3. After seeing your homebrew implemented, reflect on its impact on your game. Determine if you need to pull back or double down. If necessary, be ready to scrap the homebrew entirely.
4. Remember, this is supposed to be fun.

We're at the end of this transmission, and I have to run. I have a date with Zigurra, and Microtech isn't too happy about it. You have everything you need. Now it's time to do what you do best.

JonJonTheWise

<https://www.youtube.com/@JonJonTheWise>

JonJon's been kind enough to illustrate his wise council with examples from his actual table. You'll know you've run into one of JonJon's examples because it will be italicized, in quotes, and next to picture of his friendly face!

JONJONTHEWISE'S GM ADVICE

Need some help plotting your game? Here's some advice from one of the best **Cyberpunk RED** GMs around.

ON MAKING A CYBERPUNK PLOT

In my experience, the best **Cyberpunk** plots involve your Players' backstories. So, being familiar with your Player Character's Lifepath is always beneficial. Scour their Lifepath and look for nuggets of inspiration to inject into your plot.

Need a bad guy? Look at their enemies. Need an ally? Look at their friends and partners. Need to connect Characters to one another? Look at their past experiences on their Lifepath and see where they might intersect.



"In the preparation phase of the campaign, I look over the Lifepath of every Character. The Continental Brands Exec who wiped out Talo's Nomad family will be a great villain. Co-Pay's estranged father is a doctor.

Maybe he works with the Exec unwillingly. I can use these links to motivate both Players to buy into the plot and work together."

ON STARTING A SESSION WITH STYLE

If we want our Players to feel excited to play, we need to get their blood pumping and their dice rolling. After you've introduced the world of **Cyberpunk RED** to your crew, it's time to throw them in the pool and force them to swim.

First, set the scene. Where are they? Why are they there? What makes this place a **Cyberpunk RED** location?



"Central Dallas, a beautiful Corporate zone the size of a city. You're just outside of The Zone, in a place that's far from luxurious. You're in Flash Point, a neon-soaked nightclub and casino. More importantly, you're inside the favorite hangout for the Black Sand, mercenaries for hire."

Second, put them in the middle of the action. It's time to shove your Players face-first into an action-packed scenario filled with tension and intrigue.



"You're five hands into a tense game of Texas Hold 'Em with Pact, leader of The Black Sand. Sam Ectoplasm and Drex, you're sitting across an aged veteran of violence. Throughout the last hour, you've watched his facial expressions change from confident to enraged. You're winning. He's losing. Pact doesn't like to lose and sometimes he lets his gun show his displeasure. 'I'm all in.' he growls, as you look at your fresh-dealt hand for the first time."

Third, keep the action going. Add a burst of problem-solving to your session by introducing an obstacle. This could be a patrolling guard, a roadblock ambush, or even a keypad lock at the secret backdoor entrance.



"Sam give me a Gamble Check...a 15? Yeah, that's enough. Statistically, you know Pact is making a mistake. Going all in right now doesn't make sense. Clearly, you've pushed him into letting his emotions get the better of him unless he means to subvert the rules of the game. Drex, give me a Perception Check...22? You notice some of the other Black Sand present. You observe three goons congregating around Pact, but you've also clocked two pairs of his enforcers in the rear corners of the room. From a quick stolen glance, you notice your game is the focus of their attention."

It is important you allow your Players to resolve the obstacle as they see fit. Player agency is vital to role-playing games.

Last, end it with a bang. After some time, the location you're in will have served its purpose and the players will want to enact their plans to overcome your obstacles. Trust your gut in this situation and be ready to move things along. You may decide more obstacles have emerged from the player's actions. Or you may decide the time has come to move on to a new location. If all else fails, start blatin'.



"Your intuition proved correct; Pact is a dirty cheater. But he didn't expect you to cheat as well. Before you can shovel your winnings into a bag, Pact flips the table over in anger. His goons jump to action and they mean to start a shootout in this fine establishment. Your covert communications with the rest of the Crew pay off as Talo, Co-Pay, and Liber pounce on unsuspecting Black Sand goons. Pact makes a mad dash towards cover and right into Wasp's crosshairs. Roll for Initiative!"

FIVE OF JONJON'S HOUSE RULES

Every table is different, making your game the unique experience we all strive for. To reflect my own unique experience and adapt **Cyberpunk RED** to my play-style, I've created some homebrew rules. The following section contains some of my personal homebrew ideas that have been tried and tested. With my compliments, use them at your discretion, and feel free to make any changes needed for your own game.

RULE 1: THE 3-GOON METHOD

When running the game, I'm at my best when I am relaxed. To enter this zen state, I've noticed it has everything to do with letting go of the responsibility of planning every appropriate response to my Players' gameplay and giving myself permission to improvise.

My brain can only process a finite amount of ideas at a time, and I risk overwhelming myself in critical moments if I try to keep track of every possible outcome. I have often found myself paralyzed with indecision because I am processing too many ideas simultaneously. I am processing my notes, the rules, the dice rolls, my Players' decisions, and many more variables. Cutting the number of variables down makes them easier to manage and gives me room to make better decisions in the heat of the moment. Most of all, I feel more relaxed and can enjoy my part in the shared tabletop gaming experience.

You can see the problem, though. If my players want to fight a group of doombas who look at them the wrong way, then I have to be ready with those stat blocks but if I wasn't planning on the fight, I don't have those stat blocks ready to go.

Spending an hour of precious game time to create stat blocks for a spontaneous fight is not an ideal situation to be in. An action-packed scenario comes to a screeching halt as I toil over my notes to create the perfect opponents to battle the Players.

To solve this problem, I scoured the **Cyberpunk RED** core rulebook for help and came across "Demons" in the Netrunning chapter. I noticed they had a special stat called a "Combat Number," simulating the Demon's ability to fire meat space weapons connected to its NET Architecture. To make an Attack Check for a Demon, the GM rolls $1d10 + \text{Combat Number}$ to determine if it hits with its weapons.

Using the Combat Number and some additional stats, I devised a system to create NPCs on the fly. If my Players start a fight with a small group of baddies, the 3-Goon Method provides me with the necessary tools to create the encounter quickly, without impacting the game's pacing. I never need to worry about having a character sheet ready for every encounter.

Instead of individually plotting out an NPC's stats, gear, and skills, I assign them a set of numbers similar to the Combat Number of a Demon. Each one of these numbers is rolled with $1d10$ to determine if the NPC has passed or failed. I also provide a fixed value or simple choices for the Armor SP, Hit Points, MOVE STAT, Initiative, Cyberware, and Weapons available to these goons.

► Reading the Goon Stat Blocks ◀

Goons come in three flavors. **Easy, Average, and Elite.** The type determines how much of a challenge a Goon provides when facing off against your Crew. Here's how to read the Goon Stat Blocks.

► SKILL

This covers all the skills the Goon logically has some proficiency in. For example, a low-level ganger probably knows how to throw a punch, so you would this number for Brawling but probably can't solve a quadratic equation, so you would add a 0 to their Check if they had to roll Science (Mathematics). Use Skill + $1d10$ to determine if they succeed or fail at a Skill Check.

At your discretion, you may feel a Goon is more proficient or less capable with some Skills compared to others. Note which Skills you feel deserve such treatment and assign them a positive or negative modifier between 1 and 3.

For example, an Easy Goon Boosterganger might roll a -1 for all Human Perception Checks because the doomba is always high on something, clouding their judgement.

Note: Only Elite enemies can attempt to dodge bullets.

► INITIATIVE

Roll Initiative + $1d10$ to determine when a Goon's turn occurs during a combat Round.

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► MOVE

This covers the MOVE STAT for the Goon.

► ARMOR

Two armor SP values are present — one for the head and one for the body.

► HEALTH

This is the total amount of Hit Points the Goon has.

► POSSIBLE WEAPONS

These weapons are available to the Goon, including special ammunition and grenades. You decide what they're packing.

► POSSIBLE CYBERWARE

A list of potential Cyberware available to the Goon. You either decide or roll to determine what they have. If your Goon receives Cyberware requiring foundational Cyberware, they have that as well.

► Types of Goons ◀

Here are stat blocks for the three Goon types your Crew will encounter.

► EASY GOON

This goon is the dim-brained doomba who thought they could pickpocket one of your players. They're a low-level enforcer barely capable of loading a gun. In large numbers, they could be a problem. But individually, they're easy pickings.

Skill 8 • Initiative 4 • Move 5

Armor 0 SP (Head) / 7 SP (Body)

Health 15 HP

Possible Weapons: Light Melee Weapon • Medium Melee Weapon • SMG • Medium Pistol

Possible Cyberware (Choose 1 or roll 1d6)

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Light Tattoo | 4. Chyron |
| 2. Big Knucks | 5. Internal Agent |
| 3. Chipware Socket | 6. Grip Foot |

► AVERAGE GOON

The most common combatant in the Dark Future, these goons have some training and combat experience. Examples include beat cops, Corporate security, bodyguards, and militia members.

Skill 11 • Initiative 6 • Move 6

Armor 4 SP (Head) / 7 SP (Body)

Health 25 HP

Possible Weapons: Heavy Melee Weapon • Heavy Pistol • Heavy SMG • Very Heavy Pistol • Very Heavy Melee Weapon • Either 2 Armor-Piercing Grenades **or** one gun is loaded with Special Ammo of your choice.

Possible Cyberware (Choose 1 or roll 1d6)

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Skate Foot | 4. Anti-Dazzle |
| 2. Rippers | 5. Internal Agent |
| 3. Pain Editor | 6. Talon Foot |

► ELITE GOON

These goons are the scariest of them all. They dodge bullets, evade melee attacks, and have a terrifying kill count. Use these goons sparingly to support a final boss or to give your players a major challenge. Examples include experienced Solos, hitmen, MaxTac, and cyber-ninjas.

Skill 14* • Initiative 8 • Move 7

Armor 11 SP (Head) / 11 SP (Body)

Health 35 HP

**can use this to dodge bullets*

Possible Weapons: Very Heavy Pistol • Very Heavy Melee Weapon • Shotgun • Assault Rifle • 2 Grenades of your choice **and** one gun loaded Special Ammo of your choice.

Possible Cyberware (Choose 2 or roll 1d6 twice)

- | | |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Skate Foot | 4. Anti-Dazzle |
| 2. Wolvers | 5. Sandevistan |
| 3. Pain Editor | 6. Low Light/Infrared/UV |

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► Special Goons ◀

I know this is called the Three Goon Method, but there is one more goon worth mentioning. These are special bosses or unique enemies with an important role in your game. They can't just be faceless enemies. You can use the method above to create them, but you may want to hand-craft each sub-category to reflect the unique nature of the enemy better.



"Back at the nightclub, Talo, Co-Pay, and Liber took out three targets with their surprise attacks. That leaves Pact and four goons. Pact is a Special Goon, so I have his stat block ready. I wasn't sure how the scene would go down, though, so I didn't prepare the other Goons. Two of Pact's henchmen can be Elite Goons, as they are his personal retinue. I decide on Assault Rifles for weapons, and Pain Editor and Anti-Dazzle Cyberware. The other two will be Average Goons because they are not as well-trained. They'll carry Heavy SMGs and come equipped with Rippers Cyberware. If it devolves to hand-to-hand, every Goon will also have a Heavy Melee Weapon to defend themselves. I also quickly check to determine special ammo and grenades available to the Goons. The Average Goons each have Expansive Ammunition loaded. The Elite goons will each have 2 Armor Piercing Grenades and Armor Piercing Ammunition loaded."

RULE 2: NO DEATH SAVES FOR MOOKS

In the Dark Future, life is cheap and it is cheapest for the numerous faceless doombas that make the mistake of crossing your table's Crew. During my sessions, I've found I can better illustrate the unimportance of some combatants compared to others by skipping their Death Saves altogether. If a Mook is less significant than the boss they work for, when their HP reaches zero? They're gone from this world. This speeds up combat and makes Death Saves entirely a mechanic signifying more important NPCs such as bosses and leaders.



"Talo swings his axe and cuts a mortally wounding gash across the belly of one of Pact's Elite goons, dropping them to 0 HP. The poor sod's shocked expression is instantly replaced with a dead one as they slump into a pile of their own gore and breathe their last breath. The enemy is slain."

DATA

SEE CP:R means check the **Cyberpunk RED** core rulebook.

RULE 3: EXCESSIVE DAMAGE STUN SAVES

In **Cyberpunk 2020**, the rules had more mechanics to simulate the visceral realism of battle, resulting in significantly slower combat and frequent Edgerunner death. **Cyberpunk RED** has streamlined many of those features to speed up combat and increase the chances of your Edgerunner living long enough to tell a full story. One of the **Cyberpunk 2020** rules I'm talking about here was the Stun Save. Designed to simulate how any wound can cause shock, failing a Stun Save forced combatants to spend time regaining their faculties before they could carry on with combat.

The Excessive Damage Stun Saves rule reintroduces Stun Saves into **Cyberpunk RED** without slowing down play. It also helps big damage numbers feel like they have a truly notable impact.

When a combatant is successfully hit by a single Attack resulting in 20 or more damage (after all damage reduction) they must make a DV13 Resist Torture/Drugs Check.

If the combatant passes, they keep their footing and continue as normal.

If the combatant fails, they are *Stunned* and fall Prone. A Stunned Character must use their next Action to shake off the effect of being Stunned and pull themselves together. They remain Prone after doing so and must use their Move Action to get up.



"While running away, Pact fires his custom Very Heavy Pistol at Drex. His shot connects, dealing 27 damage! Drex, give me a DV13 Resist Torture/Drugs check... an 11 is not enough! The impact of the round sends you reeling, and you lose your footing. Down on your back, you are Stunned as a stream of blood begins to flow from your gunshot wound. You must spend your next Action getting your wits about you."

RULE 4: MAJOR SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

Cyberpunk RED's signature rules of "imploding" and "exploding" dice (SEE CP:R PAGE 130) are wonderful mechanics but they don't assign any unique benefits or losses to your Skill Check result. My Solo Player once

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rolled a 34 on an Attack Check, and all I could tell him was, "you definitely hit." There is no special ruling for such a success of that magnitude. That's when I was inspired with the idea of introducing Major Successes and Failures.


Major Successes mean the Skill Check is perfectly executed and may offer additional benefits to the results as determined by the GMs. Major Failures, meanwhile, do the opposite, creating additional negative consequences.

I encourage GMs to focus on the narrative aspect of any results triggered by this rule. In my experience adding to the story elements, such as one of your Players rolling so well on an Evasion Check against gunfire they also manage to dive behind cover in the process, has a more lasting impact than simply offering an additional d6 to damage or +1 bonus on their next Check.

A result of 25 or more on a Skill Check triggers a *Major Success*.

To qualify for a Major Success, the Check must be against DV21 or lower. Any Check with a DV higher than 21 already qualifies as a special moment if passed.

A result of 5 or less on any Skill Check triggers a *Major Failure*.



"Smash and Connor arrive late to the party and missed the start of the fight against Pact and his goons. Standing at the entrance, the bouncer and his retinue block entry. They won't let you in until they get a handle on the violent breakout inside. Connor, you wanted to Persuade the bouncer to stand aside? Go ahead...a 31! You absolutely smashed it! Your angry ranting and finger-wagging forces this stoic bouncer to question his very existence. What if you're right and the owner of the club is your brother? He won't just lose his job. He'll lose his head! With a fearful response, he mutters the shipping entrance is a safer entry point. The code is 1313. He also, reluctantly, gives you the keys to the truck parked there in case you need to get out quickly. You'd better act fast before he second-guesses himself."


RULE 5: POLICE RESPONSE TIME

In **Cyberpunk RED**, the Lawman Role can call in backup to a combat encounter (**SEE CP:R PAGE 158**) and the efficacy of the backup varies depending on their Role Ability Rank. That's all well and good, but the most intriguing part of the mechanic to me was the mechanic for the backup's response time.

I wanted to extrapolate on the idea to offer a sense of a police/security presence in the setting we're playing in. After all, combat tends to be extremely loud and can cause abrupt chaos in an otherwise peaceful area. In other words, people usually notice when it happens. Therefore I wanted to add a sense of urgency and consequence to public displays of violence. If the Players decide to spit lead at some boosters in the middle of Little Europe, they had better be ready to face NCPD's finest.

At the beginning of Round 2 of a combat encounter, roll 1d6 divided by 2 (rounding up). A nearby patrol unit or security force shows up in a number of Rounds equal to the result.

This rule only triggers in public places with an established police or security presence. There'd probably be no need for it in a Combat Zone. The arriving police force size and ability level is at the GM's discretion. I recommend you start small and increase the arriving police force incrementally every round. Raise their efficiency and firepower as the combat drags on.



"Bam! Good work, Wasp. Your shot connects and Pact stumbles as your bullet causes a Broken Leg Critical Injury. He tumbles to the ground, screaming in pain. You see Smash and Connor enter through another entrance. They immediately grab Pact and start dragging him away to the new truck they've acquired. Hopefully, he doesn't bleed out before you can extract some information about his client, Continental Brands. Since this is the second Round of combat with everyone present, let's see when the Dallas Police Department will arrive... a 1! Oh, no! The sirens are close. Too close. Hell, they must have been in the parking lot of the donut shop next door! They'll be upon you all in mere moments. If you have a plan, you'd better enact it now or face their reckoning. Dallas cops habitually shoot first and carry extra body bags for later."

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|------------------|---|-------------|----|-------------|---|
| EASY GOON | | HP | 15 | | |
| STATS | | | | | |
| SKILL | 8 | INIT | 4 | MOVE | 5 |
| MODIFIERS | | | | | |
| WEAPONS | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| ARMOR | | | | | |
| HEAD | | | | SP 0 | |
| BODY | | | | SP 7 | |
| CYBERWARE | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|------------------|---|-------------|----|-------------|---|
| EASY GOON | | HP | 15 | | |
| STATS | | | | | |
| SKILL | 8 | INIT | 4 | MOVE | 5 |
| MODIFIERS | | | | | |
| WEAPONS | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| ARMOR | | | | | |
| HEAD | | | | SP 0 | |
| BODY | | | | SP 7 | |
| CYBERWARE | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------|----|-------------|----|-------------|---|
| AVERAGE GOON | | HP | 25 | | |
| STATS | | | | | |
| SKILL | 11 | INIT | 6 | MOVE | 6 |
| MODIFIERS | | | | | |
| WEAPONS | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| AMMO | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| GRENADES | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| ARMOR | | | | | |
| HEAD | | | | SP 4 | |
| BODY | | | | SP 7 | |
| CYBERWARE | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|----|-------------|----|-------------|---|
| ELITE GOON | | HP | 35 | | |
| STATS | | | | | |
| SKILL | 14 | INIT | 8 | MOVE | 7 |
| MODIFIERS | | | | | |
| WEAPONS | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| AMMO | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| GRENADES | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| ARMOR | | | | | |
| HEAD | | | | SP 11 | |
| BODY | | | | SP 11 | |
| CYBERWARE | | | | | |
| | | | | | |