PREP TIPS FOR THE BEGINNING GM CYBERPUNK

by Justin Alexander – July 1st, 2019

Many moons ago, I wrote *Prep Tips for the Beginning DM*, a super-streamlined set of guideposts for a first-time DM to follow. The advice was aimed specifically at D&D/*Pathfinder* GMs, and over the years I've received a number of queries about how GMs can get started with other systems. The truth is that the advice is largely transferable. For example, here's how you could get started running a fairly typical cyberpunk campaign where the PCs are a crew that runs heists and similar jobs in the style of William Gibson's *Neuromancer*.

(You might be starting up a new *Shadowrun* campaign. Or maybe you're hyped about the upcoming *Cyberpunk 2077* and want to run a game like that for your friends. Whatever works. This advice is widely applicable.)

(1) Start with a simple run featuring a location-based crawl. Keep it simple! Make it a single building with maybe a dozen rooms. Keep the challenges inside the building firewalled (i.e., the PCs can generally muck around in Room A without also bringing everything in Rooms B-Z down on their heads) with the possible exception of a roving security patrol that will also respond to triggered alarms. Keeping things compartmentalized will make it easier for you to run; it'll also give your players a chance to figure out their characters and the system.

(2) Do a couple of those. You can slowly start building the complexity. Introduce adversary rosters so that the complexes become more dynamic and active. This will increase both the challenge for your players in planning out their runs and the complexity for you in actually GMing those runs.

(3) Take a look a the Three Clue Rule and use it to create a linear investigation scenario: Go to Location A, find clues that lead to Location B. At Location B, find clues that point to Location C. Repeat until you reach the conclusion.

LINK IT TOGETHER

It's okay to just run a purely episode campaign where each run is independent from the last. But here's a simple example of how you can link all of these things together: The PCs are hired by somebody to do a couple of jobs. Then their patron calls them with another job, but when they show up for the briefing they find him dead. Now they need to figure out who did it.

Discovering who their patron was, what he really wanted, and why he was killed will either wrap up the mini-campaign or wrap up Act I of the ongoing campaign and give you a nice launchpad for the rest of the game.

Note: You don't need to prep all this before you start play. In fact, you shouldn't because you'll be learning stuff in play that you'll want to implement in the next scenario you design.

All you need to get started is #1: A simple run.

As you're wrapping up Act I, take a look at *Don't Prep Plots* and *Node-Based Scenario Design*. Use those to build an Act II.

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