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# LISTEN UP! TO ROB MULLIGAN

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# LISTEN UP! TO ROB MULLIGAN

## LISTEN UP, CHOOMS!

If you've ever looked for video content on **Cyberpunk RED**, chances are you've run into the work of Rob Mulligan, head of *Cybernation Uncensored*. He's been there from the beginning, offering sage advice, gameplay guidance, and exciting Actual Plays. Plus, if you're a fan of the **Cyberpunk RED** soundsets from our partners over at *Syrinscape*, you'll hear him guest-starring as the Block Party Soundsets.

Since he's a veteran **Cyberpunk RED** GM, we've asked Rob to step in and offer his best tips on running the game, as well as a few of his favorite homebrews. So, buckle up, and get ready to ride because we're turning over the article to Mister Mulligan.

You'll find more work by Rob and the entire *Cybernation Uncensored* crew over at <https://www.youtube.com/@CybernationUncensored>.

## ROB MULLIGAN'S GM ADVICE

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

### MAKING IT CYBERPUNK

Theme's important. If your style isn't up to snuff, it doesn't matter how good your substance is. In other words, you've got to make your game **Cyberpunk**. Here's four tips to help you do it.

#### ► Make it Dangerous ◀

**Cyberpunk** takes place in a dark dystopian future. It's a high-tech, low-life setting with extreme ups and downs. There's booster gangs, evil corporations, Edgerunners, and more! Everyone is elbowing for a spot in the city and trying to cut out a place of their own! Everyone is trying to survive and succeed and willing to do what it takes to get there! Especially in **Cyberpunk RED**, as things are being rebuilt and the world is finally recovering from the 4th Corporate War.

Everyone is trying to rise up to succeed or survive or both! These circumstances cause things to be cut-throat, so make your gameplay dangerous.



*"Danger doesn't only come in the form of physical violence. Tap into slander and corporate espionage and other forms of aggression when creating your world!"*

#### ► Make it Dirty ◀

**Cyberpunk** should be dirty, both figuratively and literally. Aside from back-stabbings and gore and pressing things to the limits, there's literal filth from post-4th Corp War destruction, grime and dust from reconstruction, and refuse from the ever-advancing evolution of tech. With each gain, the opposite end of the spectrum expands. Every beautiful advancement in cyberware and architecture is to the detriment of society and maintenance.

Sure, the upscale districts have their automated cleaning drones scouring the streets, but there are limited resources, and the rest of the city (especially the Combat Zones) fall by the wayside.



*"This is all about the haves and have-nots. Gleaming towers for the haves and dirty streets for the have-nots. It isn't all sunshine for the top percent, though. Anyone who looks closely at their streets will see the cracks and the rot, too."*

#### ► Make it Diverse ◀

**Cyberpunk** is definitely not a narrow world. It's diverse with every race, nationality, sexual orientations, gender fluidity, and numerous Roles, languages, and styles set in the future. Be sure to include as much diversity as possible in your gameplay. Remember, the Corporations are willing to exploit everyone - to them, every group is a market to be tapped - while the punks rebel against the norm by being more truly

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and aggressively themselves. When diversifying your world, don't forget to think of architecture, vehicles, and fashion, too. Try to cover every aspect of life as you describe what your Crew runs into each and every day.



*"Think of how diverse a major metropolis already is today. Now, imagine how much more mixing and matching technologies like biosculpting and cybertech will change and grow that diversity."*

## ► Make it High Tech ◀

Include cyberware, AI, holographic ads, and weapons and vehicles walking the edge between ugly and advanced. In **Cyberpunk RED** it's essential to balance the grit, dirt, and danger with high tech and mad science. If one end of the spectrum is Combat Zones, wastelands, and gangs, make the other end beautiful tech advancements, slick cyberware, fun tools, and gleaming architecture.

Find the balance between danger and comfort, if only to highlight the dichotomy between the Combat Zones and the Executive Zones.



*"Add neons and holograms to everything. Neon lights and holograms always help set that high-tech mood. Sensory overload is the **Cyberpunk** way!"*

## NEVER SAY NEVER (YES, BUT...)

Want to create an immersive open world for your Players? You should allow them to do what they want, when they want – within reason. Yes, that means they'll go off script and deviate from what you planned, but things will be fine. Roll with the chaos and lean into the changes. Maybe the Players don't want to interrogate that NPC or fight that gang or search for that clue – don't panic. Don't stress out, and no matter what they suggest, squash the instinct to say "no" outright!

Even if the action or idea feels like it merits a "no" in response, learn to say "Yes, but..." and give alternatives. By this, I mean learn to go with what the players suggest in a way that works and makes fair sense.

For example, maybe the Crew is at a Night Market and searching for a particular weapon. Maybe that weapon is a bit rare or too expensive. Maybe they did a LUCK Check (**SEE PAGE 4**), and they weren't lucky

enough to find the item in stock. Instead of just saying no, you could have the Fixer pull them aside and say, "Hey choom, I don't have one here, but I have a lead on a location where a troop transport crashed during the 4th Corporate War, and I know one of the soldiers inside was armed with what you're looking for. No one's found it yet, but I can sell you the coordinates. What do ya say?"

As another example, say the Edgerunners approach a building, and the door is locked. You've planned for them to pick the lock or break in the window, and you've placed some defenses and traps accordingly. Instead, the Crew decides to scale the building and search for rooftop access.

Maybe you didn't plan for that but don't deny them the excitement of a rooftop path. Maybe you say, "Yes, but... the rooftop hatch is rusted shut from years of neglect." This causes them to use brute force to enter via the rooftop, causing noise and alerting the guard downstairs. Or maybe you let them in, slick as can be, and move the defenses you planned for the bottom floor of the building to the top floor.

Hey! They don't have your notes. They'll never know the Stun Panels were originally in the lobby and not lining the top floor main corridor!

When your Players go "off script," don't shut them down. Give them agency and follow the concept of Rewards, Repercussions, and Complications. These rewards or repercussions or complications come in the form of the "but" after you say "yes." The rusted-shut hatch in the paragraph above is an example.

The Crew controlled the route they wanted, giving them a sense of ownership in the story, but things were not smooth or as easy as they anticipated, which kept the danger and tension flowing.



*"Not every change in plan needs a "but." Sometimes you can just say yes and go with the alternative. Sometimes you can lean into the plans the Players make, and it will make fair sense without any complication or reward or repercussion. Knowing when to say "yes, but" and when to just say "yes" is like any other skill in your GM toolbox. It will get easier to do as you practice and gain experience. Hang in there."*

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## FIVE OF ROB'S HOUSE RULES

Every table is different, and each experience is unique. Here are five house rules I use to fit the style at my table. Use them or adapt them to your table with my compliments.

### RULE 1: THE LUCK MULLIGAN!

We're all familiar with using LUCK. Typically it's treated as a pool of points refreshed at the beginning of each session. These points are spent before a roll to give that check a +1 per LUCK point used. The Lucky Mulligan allows you, a Player, to spend the points after the Check at double the cost. What once cost 1 LUCK point for a +1 now costs 2 LUCK stat points. This way, you're rewarding preparation but still allowing a last-minute save. Sometimes in the neon, cutthroat streets of Night City, getting a second chance is the only difference between successfully finishing a gig for some extra eb and being flatlined!



*"Here's a bonus house rule. LUCK Saves. Check a character's LUCK by rolling a 1d10 and seeing if it lands under their current LUCK. It's a great way of seeing if a particular item is in stock or if an NPC answers a call. Anywhere a decision is needed, but the outcome feels potentially random, LUCK can help!"*

### RULE 2: MEMORY CHECKS AND INFO DROPS

Lives are busy, so it isn't uncommon for Players to forget In Character information between sessions. Often, this information can be important to the campaign, representing a clue needed to find a specific path through the plot. At this point, it's up to the GM to decide if they want to give the Player a chance and call for a Concentration Check. With a success you say, "This just popped into your head!" or "Your Character just remembered..." This can also be used to give information about an NPC, location, or anything else they might have encountered in their background or Lifepath but not in active gameplay.

Concentration is a Skill many Players won't think to use on their own. At least, not at first. To help, ask for a Concentration Check a few scenes before that information becomes important to remind them the Skill exists and can be used in this specific way.

### RULE 3: DAMAGE WITH EVERY HIT!

This concept is nothing new – it has been around almost as long as **Cyberpunk** itself. I can't remember the game nor the GM that introduced the concept to me, but it was sometime in the early 90s, and I was just testing a combat situation during gameplay. I was successfully hit by an enemy, but the damage didn't penetrate my armor. The GM then explained how even though the armor blocked the damage, the hit made an impact – some of the energy still transferred to my body and hurt me. I took 1 point of damage as a result. I felt like that was intense and realistic, and I loved how immersive it was. To this day, I use it with experienced players who need an extra level of danger and/or difficulty.

For **Cyberpunk RED**, Don't ablate the SP when an attack hits but fails to penetrate armor, but deliver 1 point of damage directly to HP. Also, be sure to go over this, like any homebrews, with your players during session 0 or before a new campaign/session. It's only fair if agreed before gameplay. Otherwise, it will feel like you're creating rules as you go to give yourself the upper hand.



*"Want to crank it up a notch? Ablate the SP by 1 point, but only after two successful hits delivered this way. Although the armor doesn't ablate with every hit like normal damage, it makes for it ceramic plates to crack and ballistic fabrics to fray after ongoing abuse."*

### RULE 4: THE GM REPORT CARD

If you're a good GM, you know you never stop learning and progressing. You never stop perfecting your craft. You should constantly try to make better campaigns with more depth and smarter plot twists. You should work towards better NPCs with more dynamic personalities and ties to the campaign or characters. Ultimately you should be consistently trying to be a better GM with every session! I created this GM Report Card to help you with exactly that! Typically we all watch for Player reactions and body language to gauge responses to our methods, but sometimes that can be difficult.

The GM Report Card will give you direct feedback and allow you to focus your adjustments better to meet player/character needs and wants. I suggest sending

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the report card at the end of a campaign and allowing the players to send it in anonymously. Delegate one player to collect all completed report cards and send them to you in a single email with nothing to designate who filled them out.

And when you do make changes, it helps to gently implement those changes over time and multiple sessions/campaigns. If you adjust everything simultaneously based on report cards, it may feel too contrived. Take your time and allow it to evolve and feel natural.

This is the report card I use but feel free to customize it and make your own. After all, every table is different!

## GAMEMASTER REPORT CARD

<b>Describing People, Places, and Things</b>	<input type="radio"/> Well Done	<input type="radio"/> More Please	
<b>Using Voices, Accents, and Mannerisms</b>	<input type="radio"/> Well Done	<input type="radio"/> More Please	
<b>Using Sound Assets, Lighting, and Props</b>	<input type="radio"/> Well Done	<input type="radio"/> More Please	
<b>Keeping the Game an Open World</b>	<input type="radio"/> Well Done	<input type="radio"/> More Please	
<b>Attention to Each Character</b>	<input type="radio"/> Well Done	<input type="radio"/> More Please	
<b>Implementing Rules Efficiently</b>	<input type="radio"/> Well Done	<input type="radio"/> More Please	
<b>Incorporating Lore into the World</b>	<input type="radio"/> Well Done	<input type="radio"/> More Please	
<b>Gameplay Pacing</b>	<input type="radio"/> Too Fast	<input type="radio"/> Just Right	<input type="radio"/> Too Slow
<b>Meta Gaming</b>	<input type="radio"/> Too Much	<input type="radio"/> Just Right	<input type="radio"/> Too Little
<b>Level of Overall Fun</b>	<input type="radio"/> Extremely Fun	<input type="radio"/> Fun	<input type="radio"/> Not Fun

### I Want More of the Following

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Action and Combat  | <input type="radio"/> Puzzles and Mystery | <input type="radio"/> General Roleplay      |
| <input type="radio"/> Lifepath Usage     | <input type="radio"/> Technology and Gear | <input type="radio"/> Weapons and Cyberware |
| <input type="radio"/> Corporations       | <input type="radio"/> Gangs               | <input type="radio"/> Nomad Packs           |
| <input type="radio"/> Scavengers         | <input type="radio"/> NPCs                | <input type="radio"/> City Districts        |
| <input type="radio"/> Suburbs            | <input type="radio"/> Combat Zones        | <input type="radio"/> Badlands              |
| <input type="radio"/> Other Cities       | <input type="radio"/> Other Countries     | <input type="radio"/> Sea Themes            |
| <input type="radio"/> Air Themes         | <input type="radio"/> Land Themes         | <input type="radio"/> Drama                 |
| <input type="radio"/> Comedy             | <input type="radio"/> Violence and Gore   | <input type="radio"/> Romance               |
| <input type="radio"/> Enemies            | <input type="radio"/> Allies              | <input type="radio"/> Crime Bosses          |
| <input type="radio"/> Mooks and Henchmen | <input type="radio"/> Corporate Assassins | <input type="radio"/> Edgerunners           |

# LISTEN UP! TO ROB MULLIGAN

## RULE 5: THE QUICK CAMPAIGN BUILDER

This Quick Campaign Builder will help you create an epic campaign for **Cyberpunk RED** with depth and plot hooks. Simply roll the dice to find the basics of what you need to create a campaign for your next **Cyberpunk Red** adventure!

I made this Quick Campaign Builder a long time ago for **Cyberpunk 2020** and adjusted it to fit **Cyberpunk RED**, so feel free to adjust things even more to fit your players' needs or campaign better! Nothing in the dark future is permanent; live fast or die young!

### ► Roll Up a Simple Plot & Plot Complication ◀

**If you roll a CHARACTER listing, go to CHARACTERS & CHARACTER ATTITUDE**

**If you roll a LOCATION listing, go to LOCATIONS & LOCATION COMPLICATIONS**

**If you roll a ITEM/GOODS listing, go to ITEM/GOODS CONDITION**

1d10	Simple Plot
1	Kill CHARACTER
2	Escort CHARACTER
3	Rob a LOCATION
4	Steal ITEM/GOODS
5	Investigate CHARACTER
6	Rescue CHARACTER
7	Sabotage CHARACTER
8	Investigate LOCATION
9	Buy/Offload ITEM/GOODS
10	Recruit/Bribe CHARACTER

1d10	Plot Complications
1	CHARACTER is hunting Crew
2	They know the Crew is coming
3	Heavy, well-armed security
4	The Crew is on their own
5	Area is patrolled by police
6	Area is a common drug sale zone
7	The Crew doesn't get paid/stiffed
8	Area suffers a power outage
9	Flash flood/heavy rain/heavy fog
10	Innocent bystanders all over the area

### ► Character & Character Attitude ◀

1d10	Character
1	Cop/Lawman
2	Booster/Gang Member
3	Netrunner/Hacker
4	Corporate Exec
5	Average Citizen/Streetrat
6	Celebrity
7	Government Official
8	Gang Leader
9	Mercenary/Freelancer/Assassin
10	Nomad

1d10	Character Attitude
1	Wants a Crew member dead
2	Generally dislikes the Crew
3	Doesn't trust the Crew
4	Cold and professional
5	Neutral attitude towards the Crew
6	Thinks the Crew could be potential allies
7	Trusts in the Crew's decisions
8	Considers a Crew member a partner
9	Considers a Crew member a good friend
10	Worships a Crew member

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## ► Location & Location Complications ◀

If you roll a **CHARACTER** listing, go to **CHARACTERS & CHARACTER ATTITUDE**

1d10	Location
1	Movie Studio
2	Marketplace/Busy Public Area
3	Corporate Zone/Corporate HQ
4	Nightclub/Bar/Lounge
5	Government Building
6	Police Station
7	Nomad Outpost
8	Gang Hideout/Gang Hangout
9	The NET
10	Combat Zone

1d10	Location Complications
1	Heavily fenced perimeter
2	Need ID/Password to get in
3	Heavy traffic on the way to the location
4	Robbed/vandalized by <b>CHARACTER</b>
5	Fortified positions by security personnel
6	A No-Gun zone
7	Shootout with police and third party
8	CCTV. Police surveillance is heavy
9	Celebrity sighting/pop-up concert
10	Construction zone/street work/accident

## ► Item/Goods & Item/Goods Condition ◀

1d10	Item/Goods
1	Money
2	Weapons
3	Biological Samples
4	Drugs/Illegal Contraband
5	Cyberware
6	Digital Files
7	Food/Fuels/Supplies
8	Vehicle
9	Exotic Animal
10	AI/Robot/Drone

1d10	Item/Goods Condition
1	Broken and in pieces
2	Low-grade cheap materials
3	Functional and utilitarian
4	Below-average quality
5	Average quality
6	Good condition but used
7	Brand new and in great condition
8	Enhanced in some way and sought after
9	Collectors item. Few in existence
10	One-of-a-kind item. Top quality

## QUICK CAMPAIGN BUILDER

**Simple Plot** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Plot Complication** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Character** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Character Attitude** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Location** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Location Complication** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Item/Goods** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Item/Goods Condition** \_\_\_\_\_