



The BlackPowder Plague

by Richard Harris



I guess I've been reading too many good books recently, or eating too much cheese before bedtime.

I always wondered, what would Cyberpunk be like if we didn't have any guns? Would we really have street samurais? How would the Powers That Be keep control....or would they?

Would the underclass get shafted again, as only the rich can afford energy weapons?

What this post is, it a sketch of a possible campaign featuring such an idea.

OVERVIEW

Society is almost in total collapse.... you've got armed kids shooting at the cops.... cops shooting at corps.... and corps arming all sides. Just what the f*** is going on?

What if you could do something about it? What if you knew the world would be a safer place without SMGs, snipers and holdups at the seven-eleven.

What if you had technology that could kill guns....? Or, more to the point, what if you had that technology that spread.....

The cops can always use static guns... they stop, but they don't kill. Maybe that's what this old world needs... a wakeup call to down tools.

STREET GOSSIP

"Yeah, I've heard about the gun troubles people have been having. I reckon it's just a batch of faulty ammo.... more of the cheap arab crap that Militech is importing."

"It's a good thing if you ask me. Gun deaths and down... I dunno what the cops are doing though. Di Marno's meatboys are out in force at the mo, get this, they're not packing!"

"You mean the plague? Well, the corps haven't been hit by it yet. So I hear it's just cheap ammo again. Saying that, I don't think it's that cut and dry. I reckon its the NSA, tooling us all down to take out the bad parts of america."

"Hey, you seen that vid footage of Dweeb's netsite? Militech goons spraying their building with some anti-bacterial agent. I told you they were behind it."

THE INCIDENT

One of the player's main weapons will start to jam and misfire. By D4 days, *any* ammo or weapon the player has touched, will NOT fire.

Caseless ammo is affected more quickly than old brass ammo. Caseless rounds become useless within D4 days, while brass cased ammo packs in after D6 days of infection.

NEWS BROADCASTS

Channel Six: "The Major of Night City, Mrs Emily Ronson, has called her first emergency act since her recent election. Continued problems with NCPD firearms have resulted in the emergency release of static guns to officers. When pressed for more information, the Chief of Police, CEO Markus de Whit said he had no comment."

HardCore: "You're telling me the government didn't know about this? It's a plague I tell you. No comment from de Whit and Ronson recalls all the cops just happen to have enough volt guns to keep themselves safe. What about you and me, huh? We need to defend our homes, our families... This is Mike Hunter for HardCore News."

CORPORATE ANNOUNCEMENTS

Militech: "No Miss Jones, we are not behind this alleged plague, isn't that very close to slander? The spraying incident you refer to was merely part of our routine building maintenance. If customers have any problems with equipment purchased through the Home Defence Network, may I suggest they visit our net site, or contact the customer care line."

Monarch Corporate Security: "Yes, we have withdrawn many of the sidearms our agents carry. We are concerned by the increase in misfires, so we have provided our officers with energy based systems. We have always preferred stun weaponry over shoot to kill."

Biologic: "We have been carrying out tests for numerous parties. I am not a liberty to say who, although I can say that an outside agent is responsible for causing ammunition to fail. We have yet to discern if such an agent is either bacterial or nanotechnological."

BEHIND IT?

Rumours:

- Any energy weapon company would rub their hands if the old chemical slug throwers packed in.
- The cops would love to bring the no-go areas back under police jurisdiction.
- Any government or corp, who wanted an unarmed population. You can bring order back, before releasing the antidote. Or, you could never release the antidote and hang on to power.
- Anti-gun lobbies, need I say more?
- A foreign power, or megacorp, could use this as a pre-invasion tactic.
- The orbitals who are sick of grounders shooting up habitats.

The Truth:

Well, if your players are reading this, then I'd mix and match from the options above.

Personally, my take on this is a nanotech/bacterial expert. Maybe someone left over from one of the old government germ warfare projects.

I'd be tempted to say he (or she) was funded privately, or maybe by some shadowy corp/government agency. The latter is a little too obvious, but then it's your choice on this.

The developer should be to nanotech, what Newton was to physics. He is a genius, but his ideas were twisted, or he was deluded into releasing the agent.

He is:

- working on an antidote to fix the mess he's made.
- has no plans to release an antidote.
- is unable to make a fix (being held captive by another party).
- has the antidote, but is being kept from releasing it.

POSSIBLE ADVENTURE HOOKS

This all depends on how you want your game to develop.

HARD OPTION

You could take it that the agent is almost unkillable and that would mean the loss of most firearms within the game. Obviously, this would take some serious thought and would take your game out of the Cyberpunk game setting. Maybe you could use this as a one off campaign.....

SOFT OPTIONS

- The plague could burn itself out.

- Maybe an "immune" chemical propellant is now for sale.

- Someone releases an antidote.

The top two options would lead to "gun loss" being simply temporary. In any event, prices for weapons that are not affected, such as lasers, tasers, static pistols, etc, are going to go through the roof.

The third option (IMO), gives the most scope for a long scenario. How about a chase to find the developer(s) and locate the antidote? (see "The Truth" above).

Of course, you'd have to convince him/her/them to give you the antidote..... that might not be easy. (I'd be tempted to have the player's play on the developer's conscience - rather than outright violence - although that could work <g>).

You could have a race to get the antidote.

- The player's might want to release it and return to the old world.

- A government/corp might want it for a bioweapon (now they have the antidote).

- A government/corp might want to keep it and NOT release it (either "ever" or until they can benefit from doing so).

- Anyone not wanting the cure to be released. Anti-gun factions might like the new status quo, or the energy weapon manufacturers now they are onto a winner.

HOW DID IT HAPPEN?

I'll ignore the "it can't happen arguments". The agent is merely a plot device, that's all.

In order to infect such a large area, the developer will have needed outside help in some manner. Those are your first clues to tracking them down.

Some of the easier ways of releasing an infectious agent could be:

- Into the subway system (as per the old British flu test during the war - allegedly).

- Into the water supply. The bug is harmless to people, but not to gunpowder. You wash your hands don't you?

- Airburst the agent into the clouds or have it dropped by advertising blimps.

- Plant small release containers in key locations (ie: subways, water plants, shopping malls, air condition systems, etc).

HOW CAN WE FIND THE DEVELOPER?

- One of the players knows someone who planted one of the dispersion systems.
- One of the players was paid to plant the dispersion system (bit of a twist - that's fun if the hunters know about that).
- The players locate one of the dispersion systems and manage to trace its source (ie: a lab company makes them specially, psychometry, or one of the techie players actually made a similar one!).
- One of the players knows someone who is a nanotech expert. Maybe they can provide a list of suspects. (this option will be slow and gives the most chance of players bumping into the other hunters).
- A decker was paid to turn off the security measures/bacterial filters for a water/air processing plant.

The game should then move towards a cat and mouse segment. Depending on which delivery method was used, affects what tracing options there are.

At some point, the players should bump into one, or two, of the other hunters. Maybe the teams could share information, although given the power/money at stake here, I think any opposition is likely to be terminated (or shook down for info - then terminated).

I think the players should find part of the developer's laboratory. That could be either a disused army base or two articulated lorries in the middle of nowhere.

Not having any operation guns would make having the site in a big city risky. I'd be tempted to go for a system of sentry guns (lasers or volt guns of course).

When the players manage to break the security, they should find signs of forced entry and the lab ransacked. You could have them fish out a camera recording of the assault group, maybe using that trace what the opposition left in (two unmarked vans or a 'copter. The latter being traceable via radar - any good decker should be able to find that out).

Oh, and they are walking into an area owned by a nanotech expert... at this point don't forget to ask them if they are wearing NBC suits.... oh and to make lots of infection rolls... you never know. :-)

CUT TO THE CHASE

One of my last games had the ending based on a train. Perhaps I've been watching too many old movies....

Failing that, how about a trip on a blimp? You have the same type of access problems as before.... besides, blimps are more opulent and I've never seen a group blow one up yet. :-)

You could lead the players onto finding the developer on a cross country train (after all, modern trains don't stop and are well armed. It's a safe place to stay).

You now have the question of how the players get on board a moving train/blimp. Queue the train robbery film with Sean Connery. :-)

However you do it, there should be a show down with the other hunters. That can either be a laserfight, or wolvers at ten paces (I'd prefer the latter - melee gives most players the willies, as they can't stay behind cover and snipe at targets).

If the train (or blimp) passes through any major city, you could have the antidote released during a fight between the rival groups. I don't think you can beat a rooftop struggle between a player and a key NPC.... especially if you're gonna die if you fall off. :-)

SIGNING OFF

Anyway, that's enough waffle from me.

I've not written this idea down as a step by step scenario. I find that I don't stick to anything I write down anyway and my players often surprise me and I end up improvising chunks until they eventually hit a major clue.

Add your own stuff to this print out and have fun playing it. If you have any suggestions, or the outcome of any game you play, please drop me a line at richard.harris@leaderflush.co.uk or synik@usa.net.

Cheers,

Rich