

Informers in *Judge Dredd* - *The Roleplaying Game*, grassed by Carl Sargent

Crime is everywhere - computers, droids, and monitoring vids are constantly alerting Judges to crimes they don't witness for themselves. Smart Judges know that information about crime is always at a premium and many of them are smart enough to have pet narks. The *really* smart ones, though, are the ones who have **informers** as well. The distinction is this: narks, classically, are perps who remain in criminal organisations and the underworld and volunteer regular information in return for having certain crimes not brought to book. Informers are citizens without a criminal record (or with a trivial one), who are not part of even a minor perp group, but who volunteer information for one of a variety of reasons to be explored. They may be one-off, sporadic or possibly regular sources of information about crime. There are three major advantages of using informers in the *Judge Dredd* game: their role in *forestalling* crime, feeding Judges impressionistic or partial clues which heighten the detective-story element of JD gaming, and enhanced role-playing. Many questions now arise. How do informers establish contact with Judges? Why do they do this? What information can they supply? Why is it worth a Judge's time dealing with them?

It's the duty of citizens to volunteer information on crime to the authorities, of course, but the classic "I don't want to get involved" attitude is sadly prevalent amongst citizens. So vid-advertised rewards for such information might be a regular activity for judicial authority; money is an obvious lure for informers. Informers attracted in this way, though, will probably be one-off information sources and they won't change game-playing in *JD* since the information will be filtered to Judges through central systems.

"Oppressed" informers are another matter. These are innocent citizens subjected to some indignity or minor criminal activity who want to get their own back but who don't want to go the whole hog to vigilante status. As an example, in my own Brit-Cit campaign there has recently been a craze for porg-throwing ('porg' is an acronym for 'Persons Of Restricted Growth', ie. dwarves; the juves aren't too fussy about this on weekends, however, and anyone under about 5'3" is fair game). Not surprisingly the porg population has become deeply resentful, but they have not organized because they don't want their porgishness to become a publicly recognised and derided feature. What has happened is that individual porgs and small porg groups (sorry about that) spy on the juves who initiated and perpetuate the craze, reporting any juve misdemeanours to the authorities. Law-



NARKS!



abiding porgs who would previously have kept out of any judicial involvement have been bestirred to become informers. Since this activity was restricted to the Ron Atkinson Block, the local Judges became more closely associated with the porgs and more information was given direct to local Judges on patrol that would be true for reward-lured informers. And Judges had to work at keeping these informers useful. After a while, porg-throwing was criminalised and the juves moved onto the new craze for brown-outs (I will not sully these pages with a description of this activity). Porgs mostly drifted back to their normal activities but one or two were coaxed into continuing their useful activities by Judges who had taken the time to befriend them and made efforts to suppress porg-throwing by hassling the juves responsible for it.

A related species in the 'grudge' informer, who wants to get this own back on an individual or group for personal reasons; eg, a minion worker in a service industry hates his boss for stealing his girlfriends and is only too happy to inform on him when he discovers (or even suspects) that the boss is skimming creds somewhere along the line. Such informers may prefer an approach to a Judge rather than to impersonal 'authorities', maybe hoping for a little attentive listening or even sympathy before the Judges gets to work.

The fourth type of informer is one the Judge finds, rather than one who comes to him: the 'trivial offender'. A Judge may make an arrest for some trivial crime and find that the citizen may have some useful ability, exceptional skill, or information which could make him a useful informer in return for sentencing being suspended. How might this happen?

The first possibility is that the citizen has, and offers, some useful information to the Judge. This isn't likely; the citizen may fear, if he has such information, that trying to bargain with it may attract a second sentence for withholding evidence (very serious too). The citizen may be too scared — we're considering trivial offenders here — and meekly take the rap for littering, jay-walking, or conspiring to urinate in a public place (an increasingly prevalent offence in Ron Atkinson Block, I'm afraid). Likewise, if the perp has some exceptional skill score or even special ability which could make him useful he's unlikely to have the nerve and presence of mind to suggest this to the Judge. How to get around these problems? I'll suggest some possibilities.

The first concerns good role-playing of Judges in the *JD* game; Judges *don't* have to be objects of fear for ordinary citizens and their idiosyncracies can be exploited in exchanges with citizens to set up potential informer encounters. As

an example, aspiring Judge Dremmler has a reputation for being lenient on first-offence juves involved in trivial crime. His belief is that heavy sentences on such juves simply increase recidivism and breed nastier criminals. However, he is no soft touch; he is also known for bringing down the full weight of law on second-offence juves who have had lenient treatment from him first-time around. An apprehended local first-offence juve, knowing this reputation, may be more ready to talk to Judge Dremmler and offer information or willingness to act as an informer than would otherwise be the case.

Second, a Judge may be able to detect that the citizen is unusual in some way which could make him a useful informer. In some cases, simple observation of what a perp's done or where he is arrested ("How did a punk like you get in here?...") Thinks) might do the trick. A high TS might be given away in such a manner. More generally, mere observations of the perp and interrogation might give away an exceptional skill score or a special ability. I'll suggest an optional rule here for GM's who like numbers: a Judge might recognise an exceptional skill score (*usually* this means above 30 for an ordinary citizen) by using a percent roll against the average of the Judge's and citizen's scores for that ability (so that Judge Dremmler, with an SS of 64, has a 54% chance of detecting that the juve he's interrogating is exceptionally street-suss, since the juve has an SS of 44 and the average of 64 and 44 is 54). Or, a straight roll against PS or (some fraction of) SS on the Judge's part might be allowed to permit recognition of an exceptional quality in a citizen. But almost any kind of conversation or interrogation should add a modifier to this; the GM should decide for himself.

As an example, Judge Dremmler is about to arrest a juve for jaywalking. The juve, who has no record, turns to run but thinks better of it and walks towards the Judge. Dremmler, having seen the juve about to run initially, leaps from his bike. The juve, coming to him, decides to get in a bit of toadying to facilitate clemency: "Hey, Judge, ain't no point running from you, you're fast man. The way you leapt offa that bike ain't easy to do." "Yeah, what would you know about it? Punks don't ride Lawmasters. Unless..." "Drokk! No, Judge, not that, I..er..." It emerges in conversation, while Judge Dremmler is checking ID and confirming with the Brit-Cit equivalent of MAC that he does have a first-offence case on his hands, that the juve is a keen power-boarding fan (frowned on but not actually illegal — yet). His high DS and TS are given away in this exchange. The juve knows about autos and bikes, and people involved in them, and Judge Dremmler gets rather interested in all this...

So even simple arrests can give Judges the chance to encounter possibly useful informers. A really shrewd Judge could go one better and check the information on MAC or Barney (or equivalents) for citizens in the Blocks he routinely patrols, collating information on all those who have some special abilities of some kind or work in some capacity which could make them useful to him. A network of local informers could be built up from such a base.

Clearly, then, there are several sources of informers. Two questions now arise. First, are they useful? That's the Judge's decision. A citizen with exceptional SS (one with a PS over 40 will surely be tagged by central authorities - or ought to be), or a special ability such as *Use Data* is always likely to be useful. Anyone who works in a location where he can unobtrusively observe many other citizens may fall into the same category. A citizen with high DS alone might not be much use. Judges, decide for yourselves. It's likely that in any case Judges will continually re-evaluate the usefulness of their informers as a function of the accuracy of the information they get from them. The second question, in the case of 'trivial offender' perps, is: what crimes can be 'overlooked' in return for information and willingness to act as an informer? The GM will have to help players here, since official rules from central authority would exist to cover such matters (this problem is much worse with narks, of course, and the GM must devise his own rules — the *JD* rulebooks give no help on this one).

There is then the matter of whether a citizen is prepared to act as an informer in the case of the "trivial offender" — a base chance could be one-half of the Judge's SS score, but again modifiers might apply. After all, in a high unemployment society where people want jobs a criminal record is the kiss of death, so an employed perp might be 100% willing to act as an informer in return for getting a 'suspended sentence'. And what kind of deal can be struck? A Judge can't expect a lifetime of informer service in return for a single littering offence being overlooked, for example. Finally, there's the question of how much informers can be paid, which is again the GM's decision.

Very well. Just what, in game terms, is worthwhile about informers? Judges are up to their anti-flash visors in crime anyway, so why take the time and trouble to make sure you have an informer or two on every block? What do they add to the game?

First, the informer comes into his own, uniquely, in the area of *crime prevention*, by feeding Judges information varying from the precise to the vague. An example: one of Judge Reid's informers is a

robo-maintenance supervisor in a droid reconstruct unit. By virtue of his exceptional TS he has discovered that (at least some) droids are being refitted with inferior components. This is what he tells Judge Reid, and it's precise information. What's more, only this informer could have supplied the information at this stage — otherwise the problem would only have come to light months later in a massive wave of droid malfunctions. Here we see the informer able to tip off a Judge about a problem which otherwise would take months to become clear — the informer's role in crime prevention is clearly potentially powerful.

Now, in the example, Judge Reid still needs to do some work on this information. He *could* go to the Brit-Cit equivalents of MAC and Barney and check on everyone and everything involved in the reconstruct operation, but that would be very time-consuming and highly expensive. Acc-Div wouldn't like that at all. Some such check on over-use of computerised information — and reasoning — sources, forcing Judges to think more for themselves, is important in my view. So Judge Reid gets his informer to tell him everything he knows and thinks about the people involved. His informer gives him names, and tells him that certain people seem like regular citizens, one or two seem conspicuously honest, some he doesn't know, and one or two are shady characters or a little rebellious (they bad-mouth the authorities, express admiration for renegade groups, don't watch much vid at home, and the like). Judge Reid narrows down the field on the basis of this information (which, of course, is largely impressionistic and may be incorrect in parts) and runs computer checks on the subset of more plausible candidates for criminal involvement. This may not come up with anything, of course, and if not he *will* have to check everyone out; but if he can show that he *tried* to save time and money by running an initial check on a subset of suspects Acc-Div won't get so grouchy about matters. Anyway, the upshot of all Reid's informer-initiated detective work and subsequent actions with his team was that the perps behind the scam were apprehended and Brit-Cit was saved millions of creds in avoided droid disasters. Judge Reid was recommended for promotion and Acc-Div didn't complain about his highly enthusiastic use of large quantities of stumm grenades for a long, long time. Reward good playing of Judges in a practical way like this which makes a difference!

The second important element the informer introduces into the game is shown in that example too - the detective work side of the story. The *JD* game is not primarily a fast-action game, it's a game based on detective work interspersed with combat sequences. The informer can be an excellent way of introducing information which is sufficiently vague to

ensure that it will need a smart Judge to turn it into something useful. For example, a citizen is killed in his hab close to that occupied by one of Judge Reid's informers. This citizen was suspected of indirect involvement in body-sharking but nothing even remotely concrete in the way of evidence could be pinned on him. While the forensic boys go over the hab, Reid talks to his informer. Two interesting things transpire. First, the ex-citizen had been receiving late-night calls on Thursdays regularly in the last few weeks. Two men (the informer didn't see them, but can describe their height, general appearance, etc) usually called. Second, the informer — who was quickly on the scene of the crime after the corpse was discovered — noticed a strange scent in the hab, an acidic, almost visceral scent.

Judge Reid needs to be smart here. If he gets his informer to enter the hab *now*, he will learn that the scent has gone (which is why the forensic boys won't trace it). Further, he will need to arrange for the forensic boys to work with his informer in tracing the scent (it is actually a derivative of adrenochrome, a drug with some highly interesting effects which is best prepared in a pure state from fresh human adrenal glands). This should suggest to him that the link with body-sharking was more than rumour. Now, what of the Thursday visitors? Reid runs computer checks on all organisations known to meet in the general area on Thursdays, and learns nothing of interest. Then he kicks himself as he remembers the botched case a few months back, where the vicious Brunton gang's protection racket slipped through his fingers. They always collected in this Block at this time. Are they back? But how come the ostensible body-sharker was linked with a protection racket?

Enough said, I hope. It should be clear that the observations of informers can be very valuable to Judges. But the third important niche for informers in the *JD* game is in enhancing roleplaying. Informers can give Judges/players a better feeling of being in touch with the pulse of the city, even (maybe especially) when dispensing impressionistic information. When two or three of a Judge's informers tell him that tension is rising in neighbouring blocks, the Judge may get a whiff of incipient Block War, and *that's* worth knowing about (time to put more synthi-trank in the rain and water supplies). And informers are neither other Judges nor perps; Judges may have to be less formal with their informers than they often are with other characters they deal with. With informers, the Judge may need to (pretend to) be an attentive, even sympathetic, listener to a citizen who may be anxious, scared, or simply miserable for mundane personal reasons (as virtually everyone in Mega-City One or Brit-Cit is, of course). Judges don't have to be like this, of course; players may be happier role-

playing a Judge like Old Stoney Face, but others may care for a little more flexibility in determining their Judge's personality and character. Some Judges might even become slightly friendly with especially valued and trusted informers, or even on very rare occasions take a cup of synthi-synthi with them, whilst retaining the respect for the Law which is so essential. Very street-cool Judges, or the unconventional Psi-Judges, would have no worries about this kind of behaviour. And there's always the Wally Squad, of course...

Which brings me to the penultimate point. There *are* alternatives to using informers in the roles I've noted for them, but they're not satisfactory. Certainly, the Wally Squad can find out *some* of the things informers can (but not things related to the vocation of the informer in many cases), but using them feeds Judges with information rather than making them work for, and on, that information. And narks are no alternative at all. True, narks may be more regular purveyors of high-grade information than informers, but they have many disadvantages. First, they're much more difficult to recruit (one needs the special ability of *Judge's Nark* and even then the chances are slim). Second, they're a lot more expensive (Max Normal, at least, has been known to get paid in tens of thousands of credits at a time and there's no way informers are anywhere near that expensive). Third, you can have many more informers than you can narks — for obvious reasons. Fourth, informers can obtain information far less conspicuously than narks, not least because the people they're observing are less likely to be alerted to, or by, them, and they're not suspicious anyway — just regular citizens. Fifth, narks can be very dangerous. More than one Judge has walked to his death into a lethal trap or blitzer welcoming committee organised by a nark who has become hostile or embittered for some reason. Even worse is the hazard of the 'planted nark', who is helpful (initially) to the Judge precisely *because* his aim is to lure the Judge into a death-trap. Finally, informers can often give their information to Judges a lot more easily and freely than narks can, by simply talking on the street or using regular communication channels.

Informers really *do* add something to the *JD* game — purveyors of tantalizing hints and clues, characters in their own right, stimulating better detective-work and role-playing by players. There is only one final word of caution. Some Judges have found that their most trusted informers are sometimes 'snatched' from them by higher authority, leaving them nonplussed and a bit sp***ed. So be careful, Judge; one of those ordinary-looking citizen bystanders observing your actions as you apprehend the latest rotten punk just might be an informer of a very special sort. One of the SJS's people...