

YOU'LL NEVER TAKE ME

Perps as Player Characters in Judge Dredd the Roleplaying Game



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ALIVE, COP-AARRGH!

by Carl Sargent



Who'd be a perp? You, spug, if you think about the challenges of it. There are more opportunities for roleplaying being a perp. Judges tend to be slightly stereotyped after a while; they have to be highly predictable and somewhat rigid by definition - they are The Law, after all. And perps don't have the logistical support of Judges; no MAC to interrogate, no special back-up squads to get you out of trouble. Indeed, on this score, Gamemasters might prefer to have players role-playing perps, because this solves the perennial problem of player-character Judges relying on these external sources of help instead of racking their own brains when the going gets weird. Finally, roleplaying perps can be fun for a change; get some extra variety into your *Judge Dredd* gaming! So let's see how the Perp Game in JD can be run for fun.

Creating the Player Perp

I suggest generating the statistics for player character perps in the same way as for a Judge, with one modification (stick to the d4 determination for Strength; don't use the official method for determining Judge S scores given in the forthcoming *Judge Dredd Companion* in the case of perps, because the logic of that method

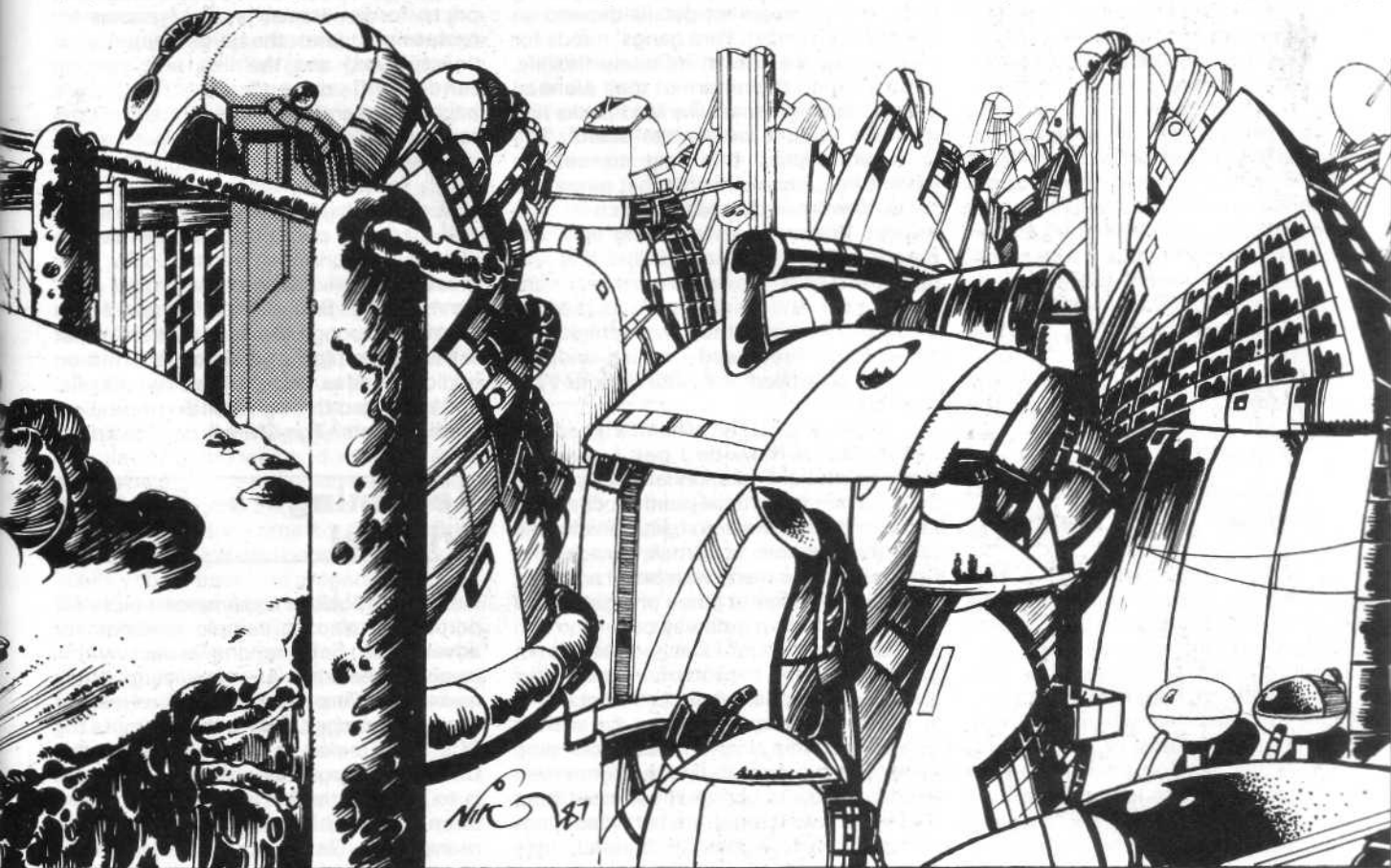
applies only to Judges). The modification is this: you may allow the perp PC to advance his highest skill score (but not PS) to 40 if he does not have a 40 skill score to begin with. The reason for this is simple. It's going to be very tough for perps out there, and to have a chance of staying alive the PC perp should start off with one special ability.

To begin with, it will be a big advantage to create a perp gang. Later on, a GM can devise solitaire adventures for expert cat-burglars (or bat-burglars - latter-day Bennies), but there is safety in numbers and gang members with different special abilities will be able to complement each other. And they will be differentiated; the budding heavy, the canny thief, the forger, the extortionist, the cracker of security systems, the crack getaway driver.

We might take a closer look at special abilities here, because they will be important to beginning perps and again later, when experience and further abilities can be gained (more on that later). In the existing game, most abilities available to Judges are available to perps (see *GameMaster's Book*, p49) with one odd exception - of the Street Skill (SS) abilities, only *Keen Observation* and *Sector Knowledge* are available to NPCs. Yet one

might reasonably expect that SS based abilities would be particularly easy for perps to acquire, since they don't seem to be likely to be learned through training (as, say, TS special abilities might be), but rather through general experience and observation. I suggest that *Sense Crime* and *Spot Hidden Weapon* should be available for PC perps, and also *Interrogate* for those difficult times when it isn't possible, sadly, to get the particular piece of information you want by pointing out that kneecaps do not tend to fare too well in traumatic encounters with a well-aimed sledgehammer.

The GM should consider developing some new special abilities to balance the fact that perps won't have the resources, in most cases, to use some of the ones in the rulebooks. Here are some examples; if Judges can *Sense Perps*, why shouldn't perps be able to *Sense Judges* (not as dumb as it sounds - their uniforms do tend to give it away - but haven't you heard of the Wally Squad?) The *Acting* ability from the *Judgement Day* adventure is another obvious possibility, and one can readily imagine a TS *Forgery* ability which would enable a perp to forge ID, credits, credit cards, maybe even security passes and auto-keys (of course, some of these forgeries would need expensive equip-



ment; cheaper equipment would lead to an increased risk of casual detection). Special TS and DS skills for *Modifying Mechanisms* (not just repairing or disabling them) could be important in souping-up weapons and vehicles, enabling a perp gang to make the most of limited resources in hard times. One can imagine a special skill for cracking automated security systems (*Hacking?*) and even a Street Skill *Intimidate* ability, useful for extortionists and heavies. This could affect a citizen's willingness to talk to the Law, even under direct interrogation. There are clearly many possibilities.

Having generated the basic stats of the perp and determined a special ability, we need to create some kind of role within society for this person. If players are going to have their perp PCs form a gang, they won't need to know each other to start with, but they shouldn't come from totally different backgrounds, with nothing in common at all (but they can be friends of friends of friends...). Obviously, our perp is certainly no master criminal and no way is he a member of a feared gang (yet). But is he an outlaw hiding in a ruined sector block? Or a teacher running a kiddie Umpty Candy ring? Or is he a whizz kid creaming off the odd credit off accounts at the bank? He could even be new to the world of crime, with no criminal record or history of criminal involvement (this is most likely with white-collar and very young PCs).

The player should decide the general kind of background he favours for his character, since this will be determined to some extent by the best skill scores and special ability of his character. The GM can then determine specifics as he sees fit - some suggestions follow. Incidentally, we might note at this time that having a family is unfortunate, since they can be held hostage or interrogated by perps who you've crossed, and children are notorious for careless talk, especially when nailed to the floor. Cruel GMs should give PC perps large families of brainless individuals who will, of course, be totally indifferent to their fate and cost the PC criminal social status - more on that important theme below. After all, even Judge Death loved his Mum (well... no, actually, he didn't... but you know what I mean). The thing to remember is never to be too generous, and this will become clearer as we review the key needs of perps: problems Judges never have to worry about.

More Fear and Loathing

The first thing a perp must have is a safe base. Sure, you have your hab or your ruined sector block or maybe the GM was a generous fool and allowed you a run-down shuggy hall or munska bar. But when the heat is on, from the Law or other criminals, you need somewhere else to go, and not to the homes of other gang members either (leading trackers to your friends, perhaps). Here is one benefit of being a gang member - there will be a gang hideout, the location of which should be

determined by the GM to be initially known only to gang members. Any gang which is hoping to survive will take considerable trouble to locate and maintain several bolt-holes, each with key supplies (see below). Always have somewhere to hide, perps, you never know when someone will be after you with a stub gun or a Lawgiver.

A second essential is the ability to move fast. Never underestimate the value to the gang of a good mechanic and getaway driver - fast wheels are always useful. Powerboards and jet packs are for later - they cost plenty. Some people have claimed that laser power has been utilized for personal travel, and if that's true... Perps should not be given superfast transport to begin with by the GM, but they must have something. Don't forget that manoeuvrability can be as important as speed too!

Third, perps need weapons. The GM should probably rule that any perp must have a weapon of some kind, but obviously this will depend on the nature of the persona the player has created for his perp. A bodyguard will have a stump or spit gun, a club or knuckledusters, a knife, and maybe a miscellaneous weapon as well; a computer criminal will probably only have a knife. Don't give 'em anything silly like a flesh disintegrator or a sonic weapon. Such things are only dreams for now, and for some time in the future too.

Even things up here by determining that white-collar perps (who will have very little weaponry) will have miscellaneous useful items - maybe a Med-pack, a pollution meter, an auto-key or two, some plans or blueprints, tools and software for repairing bots, and so on (exact details depend on their backgrounds). Perp gangs' needs for such items are almost infinitely flexible, depending on the nature of their planned crimes, although items like Med-packs and pollution meters are always useful. The GM can exploit this fact to set up adventures, since initially what perps will try to do will be governed as much by their meagre resources as anything else. So, feed 'em the right gizmos, and this will push them gently towards what you want them to do. And be stingy! Also, get into the habit of making the players think hard about what they need - which widgets does my perp need and why? How do I get them?

Almost any 'how do I get...' question leads us straight to a key element of the Perp Game - the crucial need for contacts and information. How do I get plans for the security systems at Crook, Crook and Cockburn? How many watchmen are there on patrol at different times of night? We'll need a souped-up getaway car - who can do the conversion job? Can we get Stumm gas or sniper fire to protect and cover our getaway? Information and contacts; this is where roleplaying comes in with a vengeance. You simply must know who knows what, where to find the people you need, and how to get what you want from them. Threats are not a smart idea... not to start with certainly. Instead, use

persuasion and bargaining, and suitable toadying to those more powerful than yourself (which doesn't mean you don't plan to boil them in their own body fluids later).

Imagine the scene as you sit in the dimly-lit room, blue clouds of cigar smoke billowing across the air from the corpulent form of Mad Dog Poindexter. He speaks slowly: 'So ya did the Boyson job last month. No great shakes, a bit small beer for my outfit, but not bad. Clean job. Now ya wanna get a keyman, get into the security business. Well, I got the best. Maybe I put you in touch after you pay a little introduction fee. Maybe we do a little business sometime.' You visibly relax - just a fee! Too late you realize that it was a softening-up act. The beady eyes have homed in on your moment of vulnerability, and Poindexter tells you there's just a little something extra; he'd just like you to wipe out the last pathetic remnants of the megalomaniacal Bullturn gang, who are trying to muscle in on one of his minor operations. You curse and agree... you need those keys badly. A few weeks later, when it's all over, it was worth it. The keyman was good, and Poindexter really is putting some business your way... This is roleplaying, good and seedy but testing you out too.

However, issues of resources usually boil down to money in the end. Starting-out perps would have more than just the price of the next meal, but the GM shouldn't allow any of them to be rich (although possessing a decent auto would mean having a fair sum in property). I won't suggest precise sums here, because the *JD* game system doesn't document prices for key items, typical incomes for professions (and the large majority of unemployed) and the like, and starting funds will depend on the perp's background and on the GM's scale of cost for items. Certainly, GMs will need some such scale, because it's going to be used a lot - for an outlawed perp in Mega-City One, everything has to be bought in secret, and haggled over. And money is the lifeblood of criminal transactions. How much is a spit carbine or a stump gun? Ammunition? Body armour? Phew! Make them pay through the nose for that! What is the percentage, and absolute, profit on a kilo of adifax bought in at 'wholesale' and marketed through a chain of retailers on the streets? The GM will need to know!

Becoming a Master Criminal

Later, we'll look at experience points for perps and also at sample plotlines for adventures. But the one aspect which involves the kind of roleplaying which makes the Perp Game such a refreshing change in *Judge Dredd* is the attempts the PCs will make to become a Master Criminal. It's true that one road to success is to become the Mr Big, the behind-the-scenes machinating, machiavellian manipulator. On the other hand, criminals

usually want to be seen as prestigious by others of their ilk, even by the public in some cases (these latter don't usually last too long). The GM and players can have fun playing around with what we can term 'criminal social status'.

Criminal social status can be gained by wiping out an enemy gang (but the maximum gain is only obtained if this is done with real style and panache), but also in other ways. One can gain it from a famous coup against Sly Gonzo Flush at the poker table, by stealing the favourite floozy of a competing gangleader (or his 'creative accountant'), or by calmly walking into an illegal smokatorium owned by a rival (and notably psychopathic) gang leader with a huge Havana and swanning around with an enormous munska cocktail (and with his floozy as well, if you wish). Naturally, the place is full of your stool-pigeons and flunkies who will only be too ready to perform instant neurosurgery on anyone giving you any bother. To become a true bigshot should involve not only having pulled off some audacious crimes (maybe even topped a Judge or two), but also being socially visible and fearless in criminal circles. You got to get respect, know what I mean, John?

The point about respect is that you will get more positive reactions from other criminals, and since resources and contacts are the name of the Perp Game this is extremely important. If a PC perp has gone out of his way to earn respect, incurring some risks to do so, the GM should reward him by applying positive modifiers to any check he makes regarding the helpfulness and willingness to provide assistance of other criminals. Jimmy the Fence might have weapons for sale at a lower price, if his customer commands respect. Adopt the only good idea in Another Game here; reward flamboyant play. But penalize recklessness and stupidity. Becoming a bigshot takes careful planning and intimidation and arrogance only work if one demonstrably has the force to carry out threats and protect oneself against worthless guttersnipes.

A highly important consequence of gaining criminal social status - which the GM should again reward good role-playing with - is the lackey-pulling power it confers. Day-to-day, street-level pongos, taps and other riff-raff will be attracted to membership of an organization which is manifestly doing well and whose leaders get respect. As these flunkies accumulate, you can delegate the tiresome everyday bread-and-butter crime to them, paying them a commission on extorted monies, while you sit back and prepare Big Crime, the interesting stuff. The GM should make the players continue to work for this money, however, organizing their lackeys. For example, Lackey Group A plants timed smoke bombs and a Stumm gas canister to explode in a shopping plaza at a set time. Judges roar up, and try to help the disabled, also trying to figure out what's going on. In the next plaza, Lackey Group B has just robbed three shops and mugged a few old ladies before doing a runner.

Oldest trick in the book (and not likely to work more than once at best) but make the players think it up - and better ones!

Experience for Perps

Experience point acquisition is notoriously vague in *JD* (there seems to be a vogue for the 'give 'em whatever keeps 'em happy' cop-out these days). However you decide to award EPs, they should certainly reflect the calibre of roleplaying, intelligent problem solving, tactical and strategic awareness in combat (and especially in planning it), and sudden inspiration. These factors are at least as important in the Perp Game and in some cases (roleplaying) demonstrably more so. Something well worth watching for is when players start dreaming up their own little schemes, asking sly little questions about times of Judge patrols and distances between rooftops and the like. This is worth an EP or two...

So far as skill gains go, a standard conversion of $2d3 = 100$ EPs skill points will do for perps as well as for Judges. If you wish, a perp may nominate a 'prime skill' at the start of his career and get $3d3 = 100$ EPs for an advance for this stat, (but only $1d3 = 100$ EPs for others). This should be different for different types of character - for Dave 'The Doc' Owen, a perp we'll meet later, it would be MS, for a blitzer it would be CS or I (only one of the two), for a driver it would be DS, for a blackmailer it would probably be SS. Don't let the players all get away with claiming CS is their prime skill (so many naive and hack-and-slay players want CS advances as their first ones) - it must be the one they originally advanced to 40.

With special ability acquisition, it is best to allow only one special ability every 15 skill points gained above 40, not one per 10 as holds for Judges. Judges have more resources, more tutors, archives, training, and so on. However, for the perp's prime skill you might allow one special ability gain per 10 skill points above 40; this will still leave Judges stronger on all-round abilities and on their average Strength score (see the *JD Companion*).

Two Special Cases

Almost anything is possible with the Perp Game, but two particular unusual cases are worth a closer look. The first of these is The Doc, the gang member with Med Skill abilities. He's invaluable. You're going to get wounded in shootouts, you may pick up diseases if you have to hide out in unpleasant parts of the city, you can even pick up radiation sickness if you go the wrong place. Only The Doc stands between you and death. If your gang has one such character, don't forget that making his services available to another gang at a time of crisis (for a fat fee and with suitable security precautions) is going to generate a lot of good will. The Doc is also likely to be skilled with poisons, especially those nasty hard-to-trace

insinuating jobs (the GM will have to be very careful with this). And The Doc has several other obvious skills. With a rueful smile, a thermometer in one hand and a blue-tinged aqueous solution in the other, he informs you that the adifax which Narco Priestley is trying to sell you is badly adulterated and largely worthless. Giving the shaking perp a quick once-over, the Doc tells you not to be too enthusiastic about expressing your considerable displeasure at this turn of events. Livers are fetching a good price on the organ-legging market these days...

The second case is much rarer, but uniquely exciting; the Psyker criminal. Having abilities like *Levitate*, *Jinx Mechanism* and (*Super-*)*Telekinesis* is obviously useful to criminals, but the obvious major role for a Psyker would be in gathering information with *Detect Intent* which could be used for extortion, blackmail, etc. Also, just having information about planned raids would be very helpful to planning. Industrial ESPionage is another possibility. This ability is very vaguely defined in the rulebooks and will call for a lot of work from the GM. Again, consider the possibility of perps reading off information from non-mental sources such as files and machines with a new *Clairvoyance* special ability (as opposed to the telepathic nature of *Detect Intent*), and even involuntarily precognizing future events. The GM needs to make the information picked up accurate enough to keep the players interested, but without giving away too much - information should be partial, incomplete and/or somewhat vague. Finally, players should keep in mind that over 90% of PC Psyker perps will have $S=1$ if the dice are unbiased and their rolls were honestly recorded, so they have a very healthy respect for their own survival! They'll be cowardly, and so they should be.

Plotlines for Perps

Obviously, there are very many possibilities; I'll just detail a few to stimulate the your imaginations.

Getting Hardware

Perps never have enough weapons and tools, so raids and robberies aimed at getting them will always be an attractive proposition. The good thing about this from the GM's point of view is that hardware will always be a lure for the PCs, and you can make the lure stronger (better weapons, body armour, etc) as they gain in experience. You can also change the nature of item locations to make sure that no two heists are ever the same - warehouses, shuggy hall basements where another gang caches the stuff, supplies left behind in a disease-infested sector block well away from the Law, and for the highly-skilled expert, there's the ultimate challenge of a crack at Justice Department stocks (of course they're heavily guarded: it just needs lots of decoys and hoax calls at exactly the right time and an elite squad of fanatical blitzers, that's all). This type of scenario can make a good introduction

to further adventures. The Fowler-Currie Headbanger Gang do indeed have a stash of weapons in their shuggy hall basement, but they also have security rotas and vehicle arrival times at a local warehouse known to store a new, possibly very valuable, experimental form of Boing®. This entices the PCs to have a crack at that too...

Judge Hunt

A particular Judge has been notably successful in blowing away your minions and now he's got one of your friends! The word is you can't take care of your own anymore! What are you going to do about it? Flunkies are already beginning to desert... Smart players will try to set up the Judge with either a 'poisoned nark' (good stuff at first, to gain confidence, and then a lure to a sad death in an isolated place), a corruption bust or narcotics (hide some in his Lawmaster when he's off pursuing some perps on foot). It's best to just throw everything at him - every strategy you can think of. This is a good test of player creativity, so I won't give away any more than the elementary suggestions above.

Cleaning Up the Neighbourhood

You have a nice little number in your patch. Nothing too heavy, just tapping and a small line in insurance policies. Nobody gets hurt, right? But now a vicious little gang of punks with a huge, manic, vicious leader sporting a nasty line in dogs with filed teeth and *huge* jaws has been operating on the edge of your territory, making furtive forays. If you don't act, the Law will surely take an interest and start checking around, and they need not necessarily go

when the punks do. Of course, the Law doesn't approve of vigilantes, so you might be in trouble if the actions are traced to you. Unless you've got a pet...

Bent Judge

This is a scenario the players will need to work at, but it opens up many possibilities. It becomes known that a nark (maybe even a PC who plays both ends against the middle - a dangerous game indeed!) has told Judge James that the Fowler-Currie Headbangers are soon to pull a big job at a local bot repair unit. And so they do - and they get away with it! This, and similar, evidence shows the PCs that James must be a bent Judge. Very careful and diplomatic questioning, involving no more compound fractures than was absolutely necessary, reveals that James never takes money but accepts payment in bot units and parts and in a variety of weird instrumentation. In return, he makes sure that the crimes he has been forewarned of aren't apprehended. Because he is otherwise efficient, his overall detection rate doesn't differ too much from any other Judge with a similar job. Now it's up to the PCs to exploit this. Perhaps James would do more than turn a blind eye to a crime by them. Perhaps he would bring them information, something from the Justice Department's own files... The possibilities are awesome. This will call for very careful roleplaying from the players and considerable care. The GM can open up some very dramatic adventure possibilities this way.

Why does Judge James collect these instruments and bot parts and the like? Because God told him to do it, that's why; he's stark, staring mad, and is building

himself an interface to the Eternal Executive through which he can deliver mega-amplified addresses to the people. A fruitcake - but it's nice that the PC's possible hotline to the secrets of Justice Department should be like that. They can never be sure if they get to know him...

Mob War

For the real enthusiast, and only possible for criminal Bigshots (unless the players want to roleplay being cannon fodder). This can be developed by the GM through a series of lead-up, bruising encounters, to an apocalyptic shoot-out in some ruined area of the city. It can involve aerial combats, attacks through the Undercity (or, more likely, in passages and tunnels leading to it) and the like in addition to ground-level shooting, brawling and general mayhem. Obviously the Law is likely to turn up at some stage and you should be prepared for this (eg, they'll obviously try the use of Stumm gas and/or riot foam, so be prepared for these contingencies). Players may also need to hire mercenaries, try to buy (or even hire!) area-attack blitzing weapons, and the like; a great deal of tactical awareness can be expended on this one. Great fun, though.

Being a Judge is fun - part of the time. But so is being a perp, having fun committing all those unspeakable crimes. Even if you get arrested, you may get liberated from jail, if you have enough powerful allies. You can dream of vast wealth and innumerable flunkies. So get started now. Mug that old lady today!

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