

Interview of Karim Aouidad, Open de Paris 2K Winner

Words collected by Emmanuel Estournet



NetRunnerFrance: Hello Karim. You are a well known player in the Netrunner scene. Can you introduce yourself briefly for those who do not know you yet ?

Karim Aouidad : With pleasure. My name is Karim Aouidad, I'm 32 and I'm bachelor. I'm playing Netrunner for a little more than 2 years.

NETFR : How have you heard of Netrunner ?

KA : As far as I remember, it's because of Jean-Fred (Ostelen) during the first Omni-league Ostelen organized a short time after the opening of the shop.

NETFR : Do you play other games ? What are the best CCGs in your opinion ?

KA : I play quite a lot of other games, notably other CCGs : Magic, DoomTown, Mythos. I've tried Pokemon, but it's quite devoid of interest. I've tried also L5R, but I didn't like the game.

Apart from that, if I consider the two-players games only, I would rank Netrunner as first : it's really a very good game, as much because of its innovative concepts as for the fun you have during each match. Magic would follow, because of its richness, which gives great possibilities for building original and interesting decks. I'm working hard to find a third one for the podium. I'm currently testing Judge Dredd at the moment, but it's too early to put a reliable judgement forward.

NETFR : What are, in your opinion, the qualities of Netrunner ? And its drawbacks, if any ? :)

KA : It's a game in which the bluff plays a great part, and that makes it very attractive. It depends less on luck than in other games (even if luck does obviously exist, like in all CCGs), because you can go on drawing or gaining money : in other words, you manage your actions. The drawback, which is in fact a quality originally, is that this game is asymmetric, and this asymmetry is such that the Runner always gets an advantage over the Corp, at least as the game is played now. And I feel this phenomenon becomes more marked. Indeed, on one hand, you've got a player who can die from deck exhaustion, who therefore won't draw extensively, and on the other hand, you've got a player who brings his deck into his hand very quickly. The deck handling is far more important for the Runner than for the Corp ; and a Corp can make the best deck of the world, but if the cards don't come out, they don't come out ; the Runner, on the contrary, will get his good cards faster (those central to his strategy).

NETFR : Do you think there should be some expansions allowing a better deck handling for the Corp ?

KA : Yes, without a doubt. There should be at least some cards allowing the Corp to get its cards, maybe in a more specific way than for the Runner.

NETFR : What did you feel when Proteus and then Classic have been released ?

KA : For Proteus, it's a bit special, having discovered Netrunner from the start both with the base set and Proteus. My original judgement takes then into account both sets : it's a whole and I've reasoned with that from the beginning.

For Classic, I like the smallness of the expansion. It's not too difficult to get the cards, and above all not too expensive. By the way, if all CCGs were like that, it would be far better, and they would become more affordable, notably for the small purses. I think there would be more players. But all right, maybe it's not as good for sales for those who release these games...

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NETFR : What did you think of the Open de Paris ?

KA : The atmosphere was nice. Some players were missing ; it would have been cool to be over thirty players, especially knowing we were potentially that number. What a pity there was apparently an imbroglio, some people wanting to play sealed only. I wished the TOP4 was in pure no-limit (non revised), to maintain the balance between the different formats. Especially because only 4 players were involved. The playing quality looked good to me, but it's a bit hard to judge exhaustively, as you play only 4 games per round, i.e. you may only see 4 deck from the other side.

NETFR : Would you wish to limit the number of formats to one or two ?

KA : Yes and no. As a matter of fact, I'm not in favor of the no-limit. As I previously said, the game is asymmetric, and the no-limit increases the imbalance to the Runner advantage.

NETFR : How did you fare during the TOP4 ?

KA : Apparently, Yannick tried not to win ! :)) I won 10/0-10/1. With his 120 cards deck, he would have had a hard time to fit into the 40 minutes to score his agendas. I won also as Corp. To tell you the truth, I hadn't the opportunity to see what he was playing as Corp or Runner. :) Rémy and Yannick spent a lot a time and money to trash the Dieter.

I defeated Rémy 10/3-10/3 during the final but he bothered me a lot with his Corp trap deck (Fetal AI and Setup!). Before the top 4, I removed some Preying Mantis in order to put a All Hands and some Precision Bribery in (the combo not working any more with Time to Collect, I had seen the Corp not worrying any more about creating subsidiary forts). I won with Executive File Clerk, and I had the R&D Protocol Files + Microtech AI Interface combo.

NETFR : How do you imagine your decks ?

KA : As a matter of fact, from the cards themselves. I analyze and look at the cards, and according to my mood, I come across one of them or across a combo I like. I try then to build from that. When the deck is built, I test it " with blanks " to see if it works smoothly, if it comes out right, then I play against real people. This is the only true test, because it's only against players, in real conditions, that you realize what works or what does not.

NETFR : How did you get the idea of your Dieter deck (24 Dieter) ?

KA : I came upon this strategy thanks to the revised format. At first, I thought that because Enterprise Inc Shields was banned, I would play with 30 Setup!. But thinking more thoroughly, I decided Runners could still protect themselves with one or two Shield or Force Shield, and therefore could have one safe run each turn. Furthermore, Setup! can be trashed for 0 bit. On the contrary, Dieter Esslin cost 3 to trash. And by piling up the sysops on the forts, the deck gets strong on the long term. At any rate, against an unprepared Runner, the deck works very well, because the Runner exhausts himself to trash the sysops. I admit though that Death from Above is a real pain...

NETFR : Were you happy of Jennifer Clarke Wilkes coming in France ?

KA : Yes and no. Yes, because she represents WotC US for Netrunner. No, because I really didn't have the time to chat with her, i.e. to know her. I regret she did not have more power to convince WotC not to stop the game.

NETFR : And apart from that, which format would you be inclined to ? 1/15, no-limit, weefle, etc.

KA : Surely not the no-limit. When you consider all CCGs, you realize they have all been limited on the number of cards copies, and that rares play a great part : these are usually the most powerful cards, or central to some strategies. The most powerful decks will be then the most expensive ones, and I don't really like this idea for Netrunner, because " no-limit " means more and more big rares, like in a deck filled with Preying Mantis or TRC for example.

Otherwise, I don't think the 1/15 to be too restrictive. It is true that you don't see a wide

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diversity, notably for the Corps' decks, but I think that in fact we have not explored all possibilities or that we have not searched in the good directions. Players have not thought to build decks containing more than 45 cards, even if they can do it. It is true that probabilities are against big decks, but the Corps being able to die by deck exhaustion, we could easily play with 60, 75, or 90 cards decks. That would allow the playing of draw-cards, which are not usually played in smaller decks.

As for the sealed, it's a very good format, very amusing. What's more, most players who have learned a game with the sealed stick to it. Look at the Corporate War : in sealed format, there were more than 40 players. :) On the contrary, in constructed format, players were seldom seen.

About the Weefle, I'm dubious : it's like playing poker without aces. It's still poker, but it won't add anything to the game. You have to yield to facts and admit it : the CCG is not democratic. I'd prefer allowing rares proxies instead of creating a rare-less format. The core of a CCG is actually : the rares make the deck .

NETFR : Would you be willing to travel in Europe for an Europe championship out of France ?

KA : As long as there is good beer :)

NETFR : Do you visit Netrunner sites ?

KA : I used to go on the NR-L, but I don't do it anymore. I think people don't speak about the right things. I'm not willing to debate on rule issues, nor quarrelling with people. I'm here to play. On the contrary, if there was a site where you could play on-line easily with a good software, I would be there all the time.

NETFR : Errata and current playing ? Brainstormings about " successful run " etc. ?

KA : It's a pity we're still stuck here today, because the problem already existed when I started playing Netrunner. Some cards were errated to prevent broken combos (misc for Sale with Joan of Arc). Precision Bribery, more recently, seems to me well errated. On the other hand, I'm working hard to understand why some cards have been errated in a way and others cards not (Newsgroup Taunting, Street Enforcer, opposed to Obfuscated Fortress). Furthermore, a main issue for the Corp is to bluff, i.e. to put cards in play face-down. If you force it to rez its node previously, you're losing a lot of interest. And besides, the Runner has always the opportunity to end his run. Finally, if you consider the cyberpunk world, you know that when a Runner is located (tagged), he is very run-down (he risks death). In other words, if a Corp must play with face-up nodes, you're losing a whole part of the Corp's game mechanics. I think nevertheless that we should redefine clearly the timing during a run, at least to homogenize the playing of cards with special effects.

NETFR : See you for the French National championship in october ?

KA : Yes, probably.

NETFR : And what, or who do you fear most ?

KA : I fear nothing but myself. ;-) More seriously, I'm not playing in the " who is the strongest " area. What interests me is to play exciting games, whether I win or I lose. The format during the Open was good because I was able to play very different styles, even if some people have built very powerful and boring decks, just to win. But it's natural, it is a tournament.

NETFR : To conclude, what do you like and don't like ?

KA : I don't like bad-tempered players. I don't like the cold. I don't like morning : I'm rather a night owl, or at least starting the afternoon. I'm inclined to get up around midday. I like beer. :) I like CCGs, and games in general. I like good weather and warmth. I love life in general.

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