



## SHADOWRUN >noun

Any movement, action, or series of such made in carrying out plans which are illegal or quasilegal.

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SHADOWRUN, FIFTH EDITION • PREVIEW ONE



INCOMING MESSAGE FROM M. WRATH:

**Hoi chummers!**

This is a preview of an in-progress version of *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*, and proofing is still under way. Spelling, grammar, "p. XX" references and so on will be updated before heading to press.

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**SHADOWRUN, FIFTH EDITION • PREVIEW ONE**





# ANOTHER NIGHT. ANOTHER RUN

Smoke filled the air, cut through by the dancing, impossibly straight crimson lines of laser beams. Lights strobed all around him, showing Gentry still-frame images of bodies clashing violently, muscles heaving, chrome flashing razor-sharp contrast against scuffed black leather. Belly-deep, he felt as much as heard the staccato thrums of too-loud percussion, shaking him to his core. He ignored it all and concentrated on the AR feed piped straight to his brain by top-end hardware and his customized implants.

This was Gentry's first trip to the Skeleton, and the last thing he wanted was to get turned around in the press of thrashing bodies on the dance floor, dazzled by the lights and fog, smothered by the surrounding hordes of metahumanity. Hardpoint had sent them all directions for the half-secret—and, Gentry dearly hoped, well-soundproofed—back rooms, and ignoring reality for his AR overlay had gotten Gentry this far in life, hadn't it? Meat-side light shows had never done him any favors. The Matrix was where the action was. Augmented reality or full-on virtual, whatever—that's where Gentry did his best work.

The heaving crowd jumped and roared in time to the Archfiends on stage, an all-elf rock band with more guitars and good looks than talent. That part, at least, made Gentry feel at home. He hadn't been back into Tír Tairngire since his sentence had been commuted, but seeing a rock band of nothing but elves reminded him of home. The crowd had enough humans in it so that Gentry wasn't as self-conscious as he'd been back in the Tír, though. Here, his rounded ears didn't stick out.

He was just one of many, wedging his way through a brawling pit disguised as a dance floor, overcrowded with all metahumanity had to offer, humans included: weekend warrior wannabes slumming it from Downtown and Renton, soaking in the dirt and danger of a trip to the edge of the Barrens. Then there was the everyday Redmond populace, as tough and stained as the denim and leather they all wore. Redmond being Redmond, a sizable chunk of the crowd was gangers. Gentry saw a tight knot of orks from the Crimson Crush, louder and more violent than the slam-dancers near them, a lone woman in the green and black that marked her a Desolation Angel, looking for trouble and pretty enough some idiot would offer her some before the night was out, and a troll looming over everyone else, not wearing any gang's colors in particular but big enough he didn't have to. Metahumanity, sweating and panting, moving in time to the wailing strings and shouting voices from the stage, flash-lit by a retro light show and the lasers and commlinks some of them waved in white-knuckled fists.

Gentry wrestled his way clear and sucked in a deep breath. Chip-truth, he didn't really care for metahumanity enough to like it packed this tightly around him. Coydog was waiting for him just outside the press of bodies, though, elf-thin and elf-pretty, with raven-dark hair. The leather fringe of her outfit swayed just a bit as she let the Archfiends' latest guitar riff make her move, and a light sheen of sweat covered her bare arms, showing she hadn't been afraid to join in on the dance floor while the night had still been young.







BY RUSSELL ZIMMERMAN

When she noticed him, the Salish elf just laughed and shook her head, then tapped her wrist where someone else might wear a watch.

Gentry made a face and said terrible things about her mother in Sperethiel, knowing that despite her pointed ears and high cheekbones, he knew more of the elven language than she did. She got the gist of it, though, and—still laughing, teeth flashing elf-perfect and white—her little fist thumped into the armor over his shoulder.

“Let’s go,” Coydog hollered at him, turning to show him which hallway to take. Or, upon reflection, Gentry supposed she might have just called him an asshole. So that he’d know next time, he set his snugged-in earbud’s sound filter to pick up her voice.

Coydog sauntered through the shadows of the back halls easy as you please—Gentry was used to that, with elves—but it took him a few seconds to adjust. He thumbed at the dimmer-display for his cyberdeck and sent all the secondary lighting to full power. His cobbled-together backpack was powered by several cannibalized commlinks strapped to his messenger bag strap, and when he told them to, they could give him at least a little light to see by. The last thing Gentry wanted to do was stumble into Coydog from behind. She’d never let him live it down.

Hardpoint and Sledge were waiting for them in the back room with a half-open window letting moonlight and soft traffic sounds in, and probably a couple of Hardpoint’s drones out. The dwarf killed time in the middle of the room, juggling a trio of

small KnowSpheres. MCT had designed the drones about three weeks after the Horizon Flying Eye had hit the market, but if you tried to tell him Mitsuhama had copied the design, Hardpoint was liable to kick you in the shin or punch you somewhere uncomfortably higher. He’d been in the business long enough to have gray streaks through his beard, but the dwarf was stubbornly loyal despite what life had thrown at him.

Sledge, meanwhile, did what he normally did: glowered. Gentry knew the ork was vain enough, in his street-tough way, to keep a synthflesh covering over most of his cyberarms, not wanting his augmentations to ruin his tattoos and the biceps that were so central to his self-esteem. His forearms, though, were no-frill monstrosities, Evo-specced combat chrome that didn’t pretend to be anything but armor plating and hidden weapons. Right this second, those arms were crossed across his broad chest, and he took turns glaring at Hardpoint for his goofing off, Coydog for the perpetually amused smirk she always wore, and Gentry for being late.

He settled on Gentry, natch. Just the decker’s luck.

“You’re late,” the razorboy grunted, showing tusks in a snarl. “We’re supposed to be professionals, breeder. Mr. Johnson’ll be here any minute.”

Gentry shrugged, armored jacket rustling and soft lights from his backpack sending shadows dancing.

“Nasty traffic, Sledge. Hardpoint’s directions had me rolling through contested turf. Skirmish started up, an’ traffic went for crap. Spikes and Ancients going at it again, you know how it is.”





Hardpoint didn't seem to notice he'd been blamed. He just kept juggling his KnowSpheres. Coydog looked for something clean to sit on. Sledge didn't let it lie, though.

"So next time you geek the elves, end the firefight, an' get here on time. You ain't back in your precious Portland. You gotta earn your nuyen in Seattle, kid."

"Right." Gentry sighed and rolled his eyes, ignoring that, if anything, he was probably a year or two older than the ork. "What, you think being a human criminal in the Tír was just a walk in the park, huh?"

"You must'a treated it like it was, breeder." Sledge pushed off from the wall he'd been leaning against, arms uncrossing as he took a few steps towards the human, "Since you got your ass locked up and put to work, didn't you?"

Gentry's eyes narrowed. It wasn't about timeliness or professionalism, it was about machismo and pride. Both of them had too much of it. Sledge took a perverse pleasure in rubbing Gentry's nose in the fact he'd been arrested back in the Tír and had to work off a long sentence playing the hyperviolent sport urban brawl, while Sledge had so far avoided Knight Errant or any other law enforcement body. The violent ork also resented that he wasn't the team's leader any more, and—knowing that—Gentry had long since been ready for a confrontation. He bet Sledge wouldn't talk so tough if someone took advantage of a backdoor to his personal area network and shut those fancy arms down for diagnostics.

"Before you two cripple each other, I thought you might want to know our boss is outside."

Hardpoint's voice, all business, interrupted the brewing staredown. A fresh bevy of lights blinked on the external display panels of his MCT-issued headware, a sure sign he was actively monitoring one of his recon drones.

"Maybe we should take the job and burn off some steam, huh boys? Having both of you along for the gig helps our odds, I'm sure."

"I dunno, HP," Coydog teased and flashed a wicked grin, "If one of 'em geeks the other, it means bigger shares all around!"

Sledge kept up the glare, but Gentry lost interest and turned away.

"You guys are right. We need to focus, Sledge." The decker sent mental commands to his backpack, shoving icons around and canceling the viruses he'd been about to upload into the ork's PAN.

"Let's go meet the boss and get the details."

✖

Sledge wasn't thrilled with leaving his Harley back at the Skel-ton, but after a short conversation with the righteous tusker running the door, he was satisfied his bike would be cared for. That punk Gentry's sleek Mirage looked fast but fragile next to Sledge's chopper, but Coydog's muddy Gopher pickup dwarfed both of them. Satisfied they'd all be there when they got back, the big ork clambered into Hardpoint's big van, a GMC Bulldog.

But right away, Gentry started whining and wrecked what should've been a quiet ride.

"I'm telling you, facial recognition pegged the guy. Mr. Johnson's from Ares. You can see him in this fundraiser picture, he's part of a security detail, if you'd just take a look at—"

"Well, I ain't takin' a look at it," Sledge cut Gentry off with an angry chop at the air. His new sword was sheathed, but he

still liked waving the thing around to interrupt the wannabe daisy-eater.

"It ain't our job to care, chummer. We took the job and the up-front payment, so now we do it. Period. We go in, download the specs, record the infiltration. That's it. That's all. It's simple."

"No, it isn't. It's never that simple! This guy's hiring us to do a run against his own company, and you don't think that's a little weird?"

Sledge rolled his eyes.

"I'm saying it don't matter if it's weird. It's just another night. Just another paycheck." Sledge reached across the van and jabbed the decker in the chest with his sheathed blade again. "Maybe he's Ares internal affairs or somethin'. Maybe he's from another department. Maybe he's angling for his boss's job an' wants us to make him look bad. Lots of maybes, but none of 'em matter. It's just another run."

"Listen, if you'll give me five minutes to ..."

"No time, shadowkiddies." Hardpoint's voice cut off their argument, and the dwarf unplugged himself from the Bulldog's dash. "This is our stop. Sledge, you're on point"

Sledge hopped out of the van smoothly, leaving Gentry to fumble with this seatbelt and strap his goggles and headset on. The ork's movements came herky-jerk quick now, his enhanced reflexes turned on and running hot. He had a blocky AK-98 in his hands, an Ares handcannon holstered at his hip, and his new pig-sticker, long and thin, slung over his back. It was an official *Neil the Ork Barbarian* repro, all thin, curved, and fantasy-stylized right out of a high-budget trid flick, but it had a wicked sharp mono-edge, and that's all Sledge cared about. The team had a block and a half of broken-down Seattle to cover, and Sledge knew the streets better than the rest of them. He led the way from cover to cover, alley to alley, hurrying them through the rain-slick shadows. The Seattle shadows were his home, and urban gunfights his way of life. They knew he'd get them there.

Sledge shot a backwards glance as he waited at a corner and flashed his tusks in a smirk at Gentry, who was second. The decker had a Colt 2066—which wasn't the worst gun in the world, Sledge grudgingly admitted, and Gentry wasn't the worst shot—in his hand, but the real skill he brought to the team was strapped all over his body. It was some sort of drek-hot Renraku backpack rig that Gentry'd sometimes babble on and on about like anyone but him or maybe Hardpoint gave a damn. The human's eyes weren't chipped up like Sledge's, and the breeder had to wear those goggles of his, half shooting glasses and half supercomputers, to use a smartlink or see in the dark.

Sledge snorted.

Coydog and her cowboy boots came last. The elf was different. Salish tribal born and raised, but now marking time on Seattle's Council Island and Everett neighborhoods. She had a foot in both worlds. Native and Anglo, backwoods and city streets; Sledge liked her. Everyone liked her. She had a big Browning pistol holstered at her waist in a sleek, modern gunbelt that didn't quite fit in with the feathers in her hair, the strings of colored beads, the leather fringes on her clothes. She was an interesting gal, Coydog. Sledge saw her lips move, saw hints of color flash and ripple from her hands, and then felt a cool breeze swirl around them all. He knew what that meant, and would've smiled if smiling was his style. The shaman had gone to work and called up a friendly spirit. They'd be hidden from prying eyes, at least partially, but Sledge sure wasn't going to let that trick him into relaxing.





The ork stopped at the building's loading entrance, back to the wall, covering the team as they approached. It was time for Gentry to do his job. His smartgoggles brightened and his Colt was holstered as he began to work with his own brand of magic. No, not really magic, just skill. Soft blue lights flared and danced while the decker's fingers shifted and tapped, pecking away at an imaginary keyboard that his Renraku hardware spun into existence. Sledge covered them while the decker worked, smartlink reticule and the muzzle of his AK sweeping the streets.

The ork growled impatience low in his throat like a junkyard dog, his reflexes wired up so fast it seemed like the decker was working in slow motion. Coydog laid a gentle hand on Gentry's shoulder and whispered something encouraging to him, but Sledge didn't have a chance to say something snarky about it. Maybe a half-second later, the doors slid open. Fraggin' finally.

The ork gave Hardpoint a nod, and the rigger lifted his hand. Several drones leaped to answer his call. A sleek little glossy-black beetle drone, an MCT FlySpy, lifted off from his palm and led the way into the building, with Sledge and his AK just behind. Hardpoint rummaged in his pockets and tugged out his KnowSpheres, and soon enough the trio of little black globes were buzzing through the air circling the team, recording the job per Mr. Johnson's explicit request. The FlySpy, nimble and silent, sped down the hallway ahead of them as the team hurried inside, getting in out of the Seattle drizzle and the putting walls and doors between them and the external security teams.

The FlySpy led the way. Hardpoint's tiny drone buzzed along ahead of them, making sure that security cameras were where they were supposed to be, that a corpsec kill-team wasn't lurking around every corner. The dwarf worked his left hand to pilot the little machine, fingers splayed, twisting and planing his hand this way and that, angling his palm to orient and maneuver the spy-drone, headware and extensive control rig electronics making it unnaturally responsive to such simple commands. He had one eye looking through the drone's optical sensors, the other squinted half-shut, and Coydog led him through the halls and kept him from bumping into anything.

Gentry was the slowest of them, here; every camera the FlySpy tagged on their team's heads-up display—visible to all of them but Coydog, who said she kept losing her AR glasses though Hardpoint insisted she was breaking them on purpose—became his responsibility. Sledge gave Gentry a little nudge and a grunt each time he spotted one, just to make sure the geek was on top of things. And to hurry him up.

Gentry reached out through the Matrix, his AR-goggles bright with streaming data and security override commands, cracking into their nodes one at a time and convincing each camera to run a loop of the last minute over and over again before they stepped into the frame. Gentry's skills convinced corporate cameras to shut their eyes tight while the team snuck past. If the decker kept it up, Sledge knew their job would be a whole lot easier.

It was slow going, and tense. The FlySpy took point, Sledge cleared each hallway with the muzzle of his sturdy Kalishnikov, then came Hardpoint and Gentry, only half there, most of their attention sapped away by the electronic wonderland of the Matrix. The dwarf's three KnowSpheres swirled around the team, tiny dog-brains obediently recording. Coydog rode herd, listening for doors opening and closing behind them, the stomp of security boots, the wail of alarms. Slow and tense, and careful, too, but Sledge got them there. They didn't see another living soul. Together they threaded a careful path through winding Ares

corporate hallways and stairwells, slicing their way deeper and deeper into the belly of the beast.

And then, suddenly, there they were: dataterminal 501. Sledge took a knee and braced his rifle against a cubicle wall, nodding for Gentry to move in. It was showtime.

Sledge watched as Gentry settled into this corporate spider's chair—he had to admit that hacking into a Matrix security agent's terminal as a way into the whole system was a decent plan, assuming he could pull it off—and adjusted a few of the sub-systems on his makeshift cyberdeck. Then Gentry pulled a long, slender cable from a spool on his right bracer, the main body of his illegal 'deck, and reached toward a port on the Ares counter-hacker's workstation.

Sledge thought about wishing the decker good luck, but decided against it.

That might have been a mistake.

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Hardpoint knew better than Sledge or Coydog what the decker was up to. The dwarf was no expert console cowboy like Gentry, but he had a handle on the basics of illicit Matrix interfacing. He knew how fast things happened in full virtual reality, how every nanosecond counted and how everything, from your own icon to the intrusion countermeasures that threatened it, moved at the speed of thought. Gentry flew in VR when he could, but Hardpoint preferred to keep one foot in the real world. That was the difference between them. The human liked to escape reality fully in the Matrix, where the dwarf preferred to influence the meat-world, just through drones instead of his own two hands when he could help it.

But the speeds were the same. The electronic rush. The stakes. Hardpoint knew, even if the rough-edged samurai and the city shaman didn't, how quickly things could go wrong in an electronic contest.

He heard and saw it through his own eyes and ears, as well as the audio and optical sensor suites in four different drones, when the claxons started to howl and the security lights began to flash. It hadn't taken long, but Hardpoint hadn't expected it to. Things moved fast in VR. Sometimes a little too fast.

The dwarf watched through his FlySpy's optics as Gentry rocked in the chair, lurching side to side. He called his littlest drone back to him —no point in stealth, now—and stowed it in the armored pouch on his belt. He kept his KnowSpheres running and recording, one swooping all around the team on autopilot, the other two racing away to scout. The decker jerked again in the big chair, body going tense and rigid, somewhere between having a seizure and taking a punch. Then again. And again.

"He gonna die?" Sledge didn't look up from the sights of his AK, unperturbed by the security alert.

"Spirits, I hope not," Coydog bit her lip.

"I doubt it," Hardpoint said, half his attention elsewhere. He piped commands through his headware to the waiting Bulldog, disabling security measures, firing up the engine, and getting it rolling in their direction for a quick escape.

"No," Gentry himself said, reaching out with one hand to unplug himself. The human stood and swiped the back of his other hand under his nose to smear away some blood.

"Got the file by the tips of my ears." He shook his head, still unsteady on his feet, and Hardpoint watched through a drone as he blinked heavy eyelids that suddenly had deep bruises beneath





them. Gentry patted his primary commlink, now heavy with stolen data, a sleek Transys Avalon that rested on his hip not far from his Colt.

"I almost got iced, but me and my baby got the job done."

Intrusion countermeasures—IC—could tear a Matrix icon to shreds in nanoseconds. Some IC, the blackest of the black, could do the same to a decker's brain and body through custom-programmed biofeedback. Judging from Gentry's condition, the files had been more heavily protected than Mr. Johnson had mentioned.

Hardpoint started to get fresh information from his recon KnowSpheres, his reliable MCT headware giving him several datastream overlays at once.

"Welcome parties are coming. West side, down three stories," he said, monotone, matter-of-fact. He recorded and reported all at once, telling the others about the incoming security teams even while his headware showed him black-clad security troopers, armored head to toe, faceless beneath their glossy helmets. In their midst loomed a taller, broader, figure, a massive troll, too big to even fit in the full-body security armor the rest of them wore.

"And east, one floor down." A second group was jogging up the opposite stairwell, looking to trap them. A pale woman in a dark suit led a handful of heavily armored guards. Behind them, Hardpoint recognized combat drones; Duelists, the experimental bipedal drones Ares was manufacturing in this very facility.

Gentry and Sledge could see the problem over the team's shared cam-feed. Before that KnowSphere could get a better look, the woman raised a hand and whispered a word. A flashing bolt enveloped Hardpoint's little spy drone, and the display window turned to static.

Sledge didn't speak, just led the team down the left hallway where they'd have a better chance of making it upstairs unimpeded. He shouldered the door open and threw a pair of metallic spheres down the stairwell in one smooth motion, then took a knee. Gentry led the rest of them up the stairs hurriedly. Sledge's broad orkish frame blocked Hardpoint's curious KnowSphere from being able to track the grenades as they bounced down the stairs, but there was no denying the ensuing explosion was impressive. Hardpoint's ears rang from the twin blasts, but he was able to hear the wailing of injured guards through the audial suites in his drones. Sledge hadn't moved, just waited there with his AK shouldered.

One of Hardpoint's drones watched as Gentry kicked the roof access door open, the other floated above and behind Sledge. Hardpoint and Coydog burst onto the roof behind the decker just as Sledge's AK started to bark and fill the stairwell behind them with muzzle flashes and fast-moving bullets. The first heavily armored guard to recover from the grenades and stumble into view caught a burst for his trouble and went tumbling back down the stairs. Then came a second and third, and Sledge burnt the rest of his magazine knocking them back out of view.

Slivers of Hardpoint's attention flitted from drone to drone, watching as the Ares security troll lumbered into view. He swung up a huge gun and the dwarf's KnowSphere and Sledge both scrambled out of the way. Hardpoint felt the gun go off on the roof, even two stories away, as the Panther Assault Cannon roared like thunder and sent a round smashing a fist-sized hole through the wall where Sledge had been just a second earlier. His drone whirled loudly as it tried to keep up with the impossibly quick ork, flying up the stairs after him as he ran to catch up to the rest of the

team. Just as the security door opened up and the second Ares team burst into the stairwell near them, the drone's audio equipment picked up the sound of a pair of metallic spheres bouncing down behind the ork.

The dwarf fought a little smile as he heard the second pair of grenades go off, but the hulking troll and his assault cannon worried him. Ares was so concerned with securing the facility that they were willing to blast giant holes in it to try to stop a few shadowrunners. Security, not practicality, mattered to them here, and that made them unpredictable. Unpredictable people were dangerous to get into firefights with.

Hardpoint tssked under his breath and shook his head, sending out a fresh series of mental commands. The only way to fight fire ...

✖

Coydog still wasn't exactly sure how everything had gone so wrong, so quickly. One second Gentry had been doing whatever he did in the Matrix, and the next their whole night had gone to pot. Claxons everywhere, emergency lights painting the whole building red, and Hardpoint and Sledge rushing them up stairs, a half-breath ahead of onrushing security goons.

The crew darted across the roof, heading towards the nearest building and starting to cross over. The Ares security team burst up the stairwell behind them, missing maybe half of their number, several of the survivors with armor scratched and scarred from Sledge's explosives. The troll stood head and shoulders over the rest, the slender, pale, woman in her dark suit pointed, and they lifted their guns. Supplementary laser-sights flickered to life beneath their assault rifle barrels and gunshots rang out.

Gentry leapt courier-quick across the gap between buildings, firing blind behind him with his big Colt autopistol. Sledge sprinted across a ventilation pipe, chip-quick, and spun to unload a second magazine from his AK. Coydog carefully holstered her Browning and leapt across the gap, nimble as a deer. Hardpoint stood where he was, letting his stubby little Ingram hang by his side, and just lifted his arms and grinned. His reinforcements were here.

A flurry of grenades fell onto the roof, fired, one after another, from a trio of miniature helicopter-like drones that swooped low overhead. Coydog recognized Hardpoint's MCT-Nissan Roto-drones a second before the team's activity was covered by thick smoke and a fresh wave of explosions that scattered the security team. The dwarf cackled as he scampered to join them on the new rooftop. Sledge's AK fired and fired, and was soon joined by the autoguns mounted in each of Hardpoint's support drones. Coydog ducked as one of the little KnowSpheres flew by, turning to record the firefight while the larger drones traded fire with the Ares security squad. Between the drifting clouds of thermal smoke and the protection of her own friendly spirit, the security forces had trouble getting clear shots at Coydog and her friends, but the drones' mobility and armor plating were their only real defenses.

She heard Sledge's AK stutter out a long burst and saw the Ares troll stagger but not fall. In the corner of her eye she saw Gentry kicking at the rooftop door that would get them clear of the fight, and everywhere else she looked she saw smoke and muzzle flashes, swooping drones and black-clad security. She reached out with a simple spell and sent an Ares goon stumbling and staggering, exhausted. But didn't quite drop him. She heard Coyote bark laughter at her failure and frowned, drawing up a





fresh wave of mana. The black-armored thug turned to fire at her, no doubt shouting into his helmet, but then he wavered and fell unceremoniously on his face.

Coydog smiled and started to say something smug to no one in particular when the security woman across the way lifted her arms. A sickly blue glow filled the rooftop as she chanted with a voice that scratched Coydog's soul. The elf transitioned to astral sight to get a look at what the other magician was up to and her blood turned cold. The spirit in mid-summoning was terrible, but just as disconcerting was the black, lifeless, no-aura mass of drones that emerged from the stairwell.

"Oh, Ghost," the elf said under her breath as the wave of Duelist anthro-drones led a fresh charge across the rooftop. Her mana spells wouldn't do any good against such soulless automations. She blinked and dragged her vision back to the material plane and dragged her big Browning out of its holster as though it would do her any good.

Sledge appeared out of nowhere, blocky AK nowhere to be found, with a blue-glowing sword in one hand and the bucking, death-spitting, mass of a big Ares handgun in the other. He barreled into the lead drone with a simple shoulder-check, then she lost a clear view of him as he blurred into motion. A fresh wave of smoke grenades dropped onto the roof, and all she could see of him was the faintly glowing blade and the occasional muzzle flash of a point-black shot. Coydog likely couldn't have made out his motions clearly even without the smoke, though, the big ork was moving so fast. Pieces of Duelist sec-drone started to tumble out of the smoke.

The distraction had worked, though. The drones had done their job, and the Ares security magician ducked back into cover, her work complete. There was a flash of too-bright light and a faint droning in the air. Coyote yipped and barked out anger in the back of Coydog's head, and the elf looked up at a twisted insect spirit, all mandibles and outstretched, wriggling legs. She felt bile fill her throat.

And the worst part was, thanks to a locked door and a seven-story drop, they couldn't even run away.

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Smoke filled the air, cut through by the dancing, impossibly straight crimson lines of laser beams. Lights strobed all around him, showing Gentry still-frame images of bodies clashing violently, muscles heaving, chrome flashing razor-sharp contrast against scuffed black leather. Belly-deep, he felt as much as heard the staccato thrums of too-loud percussion, shaking him to his core. He ignored it all and concentrated on the AR feed piped straight to his brain by top-end hardware and his customized implants.

They needed him to open the door. The team needed him to dive back into the Matrix and get just this one door open to save all their lives.

Gentry ignored the stutter-flashes of muzzles spitting out round after round, whether from Hardpoint's swooping drones or the Ares Alphas shouldered by corporate muscle. He pushed aside the curses and grunts of exertion where Sledge was, single-handedly, dismantling a half-dozen purpose-built combat drones. He didn't flinch when the Ares troll's cannon sent a round close enough to tug at the edge of his armored jacket, or turn to stare in abject horror at the clawing, chittering nightmare that loomed over Coydog.

He decked. He could more than hold his own in a fight, and he had some subtle combat augs to back it up, but more than that—more than anything—this was who he was, what he did. His mind ran through program after program, subroutine after subroutine, thought about security protocols and lockdown practices, thought about everything the computer might do so he could anticipate it, counter it. He knew electronics backwards and forwards, literally inside and out, and all he had to do, all he had to do in the world right now, was beat this maglock and the hardwired security system supporting it. His Renraku backpack screamed wirelessly in the back of his mind and ran hot, back-up systems getting shut down and processing power shunted from secondary processors. Bullets flew by and chipped paint from the wall just near him, and Gentry just reached out, irritated, to snap a return shot without looking.

One pop-up window out of many, all juggled at once by Gentry's headware coprocessors and his top-end smart goggles, started to show him what he was missing through his gun's smartlink camera. Harpoint alternated between twitch-quick piloting and wild cheers as his Roto-drones strafed the looming Ares troll and dodged assault cannon rounds. Sledge hacked the last drone apart and blasted the wreckage point-blank to disentangle it from his trid-flashy sword, then staggered as an enemy burst tore into his armored vest.

The terrible spirit loomed over them, ready to strike. Coydog raised her hands and chanted something in a language Gentry didn't know.

"I'm sorry," Gentry's earbud picked up the elf's voice, wedging past all the background cacophony to hear her whispered apology to empty air.

There was a thunderclap and a flash of sorcery-bright lightning. The enemy spirit, assaulted by Coydog on one plane and by her spirit on another, shrieked in pain and tumbled to pieces. There was a cyclone hanging in midair for a half-second, impaled on the ephemeral insect's claw, before it, too, vanished.

In the same instant, Gentry gave the door locks open and disengage commands thirty-seven different times and one finally got through. Coydog swayed and fell, elf-thin and elf-fragile, having given almost everything within her to blast the spirit to nothingness. Sledge, covered in equal parts blood and oil, dove to snatch her up and—kicking her dropped pistol Gentry's way—hailed her toward safety.

Hardpoint's FlySpy led the way past Gentry's just-opened door, and directions and building schematics began to scroll across the team's network. They had their exit route, finally.

"Straight down, Bulldog's out front," the dwarf whooped and flashed a thumbs up. His sole remaining KnowSphere—the other one lay ruined, the victim of a stray bullet—hovered just over his shoulder as he started down the stairs. Sledge was next, half carrying Coydog, shouldering roughly past Gentry but just for a half-second there, in the doorframe, giving him a nod.

Gentry covered their escape with his Colt in one hand and Coydog's Browning in another, while the remaining Roto-drones split up and swooped wide around the rooftop, still firing, and splitting the corp-sec's attention. A fresh wave of smoke grenades made the cross-building jump risky, and Gentry knew they'd make it clear before the Ares troops caught up to them.

He had the data. Hardpoint had the footage. None of them were dead. Johnson would profit from it all, somehow. It was just another night, just another paycheck, but considerably more than just another run. ✱





# FUTURE DYSTOPIA

Welcome to *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*. Welcome to the streets. If you're here, it's because you think you have what it takes to be a shadowrunner. And if you got it, we definitely want to help you use it. What you have to understand, though, is that not everyone's got it. So we're going to throw a quick screening interview at you, just to make sure you're ready to hit the shadows. Answer fast—no one's got time to sit around these days.

Do you have imagination? And your own weapon?

If you're in a dark alley and the earth buckles under your feet, and some being materializes from the ground and prepares to attack, are you ready to make that thing—whatever it is—hurt?

If the situation suddenly changes in the middle of a mission, and you're swarmed by security guards who weren't supposed to be there, and you've got bullets, drones, and magic lightning streaming down on you, can you keep your shit together?

Will you trade your flesh and blood for steel and chrome?

Will you risk blowing out your mind to seize a piece of the magic power flowing through everything?

Will you put your whole self into the Matrix so you can be faster than the next guy, even if it means you might have your brain seared by biofeedback?

Will you pay what it costs to be the best?

Forget the rest of the interview—the last question is the only one that matters. If you've got the guts and the will, you're ready for the streets. There are plenty of jobs waiting for you. Top-secret research plans need to be stolen from closely guarded R&D labs. Street gangs need rival leaders to disappear. Powerful executives need to be protected from street rabble looking to take their cash or kidnap them for ransom. Hidden artifacts need to be recovered from toxic wastelands. And if you're willing, there are always people offering cash in return for putting someone down.

I won't lie to you—it won't be easy. The Man takes on a million forms, and all of them work hard to keep you down. Organized crime outfits want your blood, and the corporations want your soul. The cops and the government, of course, just want you put away somewhere, out of sight and out of mind. Maybe they'll get you in a cell, maybe in a tomb. Either option works for them.

But all those people who want to bring you down? Let them come. You didn't choose the life of a shadowrunner to run away from trouble. You picked it to be control, to keep from selling out to anyone. So bring it on. You have everything you need. You have enough to be more than a street criminal, more than a run-of-the-mill shadowrunner. You have what it takes to be a legend.

It starts now.

## SHADOW SLANG

When you hit the streets, sling the lingo like a pro with this handy guide.

**breeder** *n.* Ork slang for a “normal” human.

**buzz** *v.* Go away. Buzz off.

**chill** *adj.* Good, cool, acceptable.

**chip truth** *n.* A fact or honest statement.

**chipped** *adj.* Senses, skills, reflexes, muscles, and so on, enhanced by cyberware.

**chrome** *n.* Cyberware, especially obvious enhancements.

**chummer** *n.* Friend, used in the same sense as “pal” or “buddy.”

**clip** *n.* A box magazine for a firearm.

**comm** *n.* Short for commlink, your phone, handheld computer, music player, game device, and more in the palm of your hand.

**corp** *n.* Corporation. *adj.* Corporate.

**cred** *n.* Money. Reputation, especially good reputation.

**dandelion eater** *n.* (vulgar) An elf.

**dataslave** *n.* Corporate decker or other data-processing employee.

**datasteal** *n.* Theft of data from a computer, usually by decking.

**deck** *n.* A cyberdeck. *v.* To use a cyberdeck, usually illegally.

**decker** *n.* A person who illegally uses a cyberdeck.

**deckhead** *n.* Simsense abuser.

**drek** *n.* (vulgar) Feces. A common curse word.

**dump** *v.* To be involuntarily ejected from the Matrix.







**dumpshock** *n.* The painful sensation of being forcibly ejected from the Matrix while deeply involved in multi-sensory interactions.

**exec** *n.* A corporate executive.

**frag** *v.* (vulgar) Common swear word referring to the act of copulation.

**fragged** *adj.* (vulgar) Broken, in trouble.

**geek** *v.* To kill.

**go-gang** *n.* A bike gang.

**hacker** *n.* Someone who illegally interacts with the Matrix, either by using a cyberdeck (as a “decker”) or with the power of their mind (as a “technomancer”).

**halfer** *n.* (vulgar) A dwarf.

**hoi** interject. (Dutch) Hi, a familiar form of greeting.

**hoop** *n.* (vulgar) A common curse word referring to a person’s backside.

**hose** *v.* Louse up. Screw up.

**ice** *n.* Security software. From “intrusion countermeasures” or IC.

**jack** *v.* To connect or disconnect to the Matrix or other device via a jack. Use jack in to mean establishing the connection, jack out to mean breaking a connection. Using jack alone refers to changing from one state to the other.

**jander** *v.* To walk in an arrogant yet casual manner; to strut.

**jing** *n.* Money, usually cash.

**keeb** *n.* (vulgar) An elf.

**kobun** *n.* (Japanese) A member of a Yakuza clan.

**meat** *n.* A physical body. Pertaining to the physical world. Organs harvested for sale.

**merc** *n.* A mercenary.

**mojo** *n.* (Caribbean) Magic. A spell.

**Mr. Johnson** *n.* Refers to an anonymous employer or corporate agent, regardless of gender or national origin.

**mundane** *n.* (vulgar) Non-magician. *adj.* Non-magical.

**nutrisoy** *n.* A cheaply processed food product derived from soybeans

**nuyen** *n.* The world’s standard currency.

**omae** *n.* A close friend. Can be used sarcastically.

**organlegging** *v.* Trading in organs or cyberware harvested from formerly living people.

**oyabun** *n.* (Japanese) The head of a Yakuza clan.

**paydata** *n.* A datafile worth money on the black market.

**pixie** *n.* (vulgar) An elf. An elf poser.

**plex** *n.* A metropolitan complex, short for metroplex.

**poli** *n.* A policlub or a policlub member. *adj.* Pertaining to a policlub.

**razorgirl** *n.* A female with extensive combat enhancements.

**razorguy** *n.* A male with extensive combat enhancements.

**roke** *adj.* Overly elaborate or unnecessarily detailed. From a shortening of Baroque.

**samurai** *n.* (Japanese) Mercenary or muscle for hire. Implies an honor code or a good reputation.

**sarariman** *n.* (Japanese) A corporate employee. From a mispronunciation of salaryman.

**screamer** *n.* Credstick or other ID that triggers alarms if used.

**scrip** *n.* A currency that is not nuyen, usually referring to currency issued by a megacorporation.

**simsense** *n.* A sensory broadcast or recording that lets the viewer feel and experience what the participants feel and experience.

**SIN** *n.* System Identification Number. Identification number assigned to each person in the society.

**SINless** *adj.* Lacking a SIN. *n.* A SINless person.

**SINner** *n.* A person with a SIN. An honest person.

**slot** *n.* (vulgar) Mild curse word referring to female genitalia. *v.* To insert a chip or credstick into chip or credstick reading device.

**slot and run** *v.* Hurry up. Get to the point. Move it.

**so ka** (Japanese) I understand. I get it.

**soykaf** *n.* Ersatz coffee substitute made from soybeans.

**sprawl** *n.* A metroplex (see plex); *v.* fraternize below one’s social level.

**squat** *n.* Abandoned urban area used for housing. (vulgar) A dwarf.

**squishy** *n.* (vulgar) A dwarf, elf, or human. Usually used by orks and trolls.

**Star, the** *n.* The police. Originally referring to Lone Star specifically.

**static** *n.* Trouble, usually social in nature.

**swag** *adj.* Awesome.

**trideo** *n.* The three-dimensional successor to video. Trid for short.

**trog** *n.* (vulgar) An ork or troll. From troglodyte.

**tusker** *n.* (vulgar) An ork or troll.

**vatjob** *n.* A person with extensive cyberware replacement, reference is to a portion of the process during which the patient must be submerged in nutrient fluid.

**wagemage** *n.* A magician (usually mage) employed by a corporation.

**wageslave** *n.* A low-level corporate employee.

**network** *n.* Assassination. Murder.

**wired** *adj.* Equipped with cyberware, especially increased reflexes.

**wiz** *adj.* Wonderful, excellent.

**wizard** *n.* A magician, usually a mage.

**wizworm** *n.* A dragon.

**Yak** *n.* (Japanese) Yakuza. Either a clan member or a clan itself.

**zaibatsu** *n.* (Japanese) A megacorporation.









The cover art for Shadowrun Fifth Edition depicts a futuristic, cyberpunk cityscape at night. In the center, a large, glowing blue and white dragon-like creature with multiple heads and wings is unleashing powerful energy bolts. In the foreground, a diverse group of characters is engaged in combat. A man with a shaved head and tattoos is prominently featured, wielding a glowing sword and a handgun. To his right, a man with a beard and cybernetic enhancements is also fighting. In the background, other characters, including a woman with long dark hair and a man with a beard, are visible. The overall atmosphere is one of intense action and high-tech fantasy.

# SHADOWRUN<sup>®</sup>

## FIFTH EDITION

**CATALYST**  
game labs™

**SUMMER 2013**  
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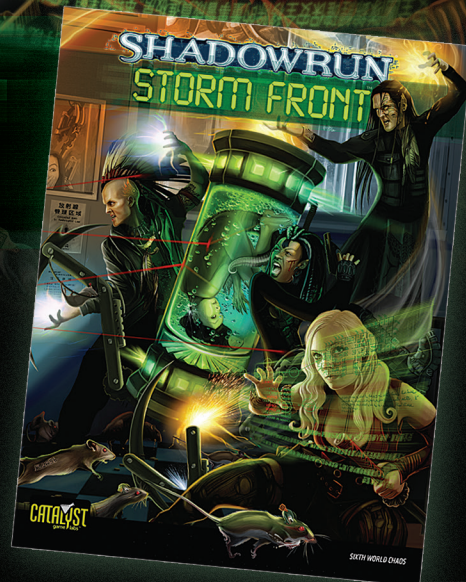
# SHADOWRUN



## STORM FRONT

It's been a tense couple of years (or couple of decades, if we're being accurate) in the Sixth World. Aztlan and Amazonia have been slugging it out. Great dragons have turned on each other, testing old alliances and forging new ones. Governor Kenneth Brackhaven of Seattle is facing pressure unlike ever he's ever seen, and scandals seem on the verge of overwhelming him. In Denver, a powerful dragon and an angry elf are set to butt heads in ways that will shake the whole city—and provide new opportunities for an old enemy. And on top of that, a new plague is spreading through the world, and the denizens of JackPoint aren't immune to its effects.

All this tension has been building up, and in *Storm Front*, it breaks. *Storm Front* provides background and updates on these and other plotlines changing the shape of the Sixth World. The shadows are shifting, and runners need to move fast if they want to earn a paycheck—or if they want to keep from being crushed as the powers of the world slug it out. The world is changing, but some things remain the same. Power will corrupt. Money will flow to those who already have it. And shadowrunners will scramble to make a living without selling their soul.



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