

## SHADOWRUN >noun

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

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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 may be updated before heading to press.

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**SHADOWRUN, FIFTH EDITION • PREVIEW TWO**



# SHADOWRUN CONCEPTS

## THE GAME & YOU

As a player in a *Shadowrun* game, your primary objective is to make things happen. Many of those things should be awesome. The gamemaster will set up a story for you, then your character will decide how to respond to the initial setup and all the events that happen once the story gets rolling. Sooner or later—hopefully sooner—you'll face a challenge, something that requires you to test your abilities. The rules are here so that you and the gamemaster can determine the outcome of your actions. Did the shot from your Ares Predator V hit the ork ganger right between the tusks? Are you able to sneak past the sleepy dwarf guard without waking him up? Did you counter the stunball the troll mage threw at you and dissolve it into millions of pieces of glittery mana?

The rules are here to help you move the story forward, to give you outcomes for the decisions you're making. They are not a perfect mirror of reality—at times, the rules provide abstract ways to determine the results of concrete actions, because it speeds up the game and prevents players from having to roll dice over and over again to complete certain tasks. This chapter describes the basic rules concepts you need to understand to play *Shadowrun*, complete your missions, and get the nuyen you've got coming to you.

## THE GAMEMASTER & YOU

*Shadowrun* games are led by a gamemaster, who guides a group of players through the adventures awaiting them. At the gaming table, the gamemaster sets up and advances the story, governs the actions of the non-player characters, and determine the results of tests and other rules-related matters. This gives them a certain amount of power in the game. When the game is working well, the gamemaster will be able to move the story along and work with the players to make an exciting, involving experience. Role-playing is a cooperative endeavor, and every member of the gaming group should be working together to help each member of the group have fun (even the gamemasters, since they should occasionally be allowed some enjoyment). Players should feel like their characters can play an important role in shaping and

advancing the story, and the gamemaster should feel that they can keep the story moving ahead without having to engage in prolonged and distracting discussions about the rules. The more members of the group work together, the better their chances of shooting people in the face for money in spectacular and amazing fashions will be.

For more advice on running a *Shadowrun* game and working with players, see **Gamemaster Advice**, p. 332.

## HOW TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN

Your *Shadowrun* character does all the things a normal person does, along with the occasional grand theft, espionage mission, or hit job. Most of these things—common tasks like eating, sleeping, and crossing an empty street—are done automatically and are kept in the background of the game. When you need to do something difficult or extraordinary, or when you need to avoid someone who has got you in their crosshairs, you have to roll the dice to determine a result.

## HITS & THRESHOLDS

*Shadowrun* uses six-sided dice, and usually you need a good quantity of them. The amount of dice you roll is referred to as a dice pool. Additions to the dice pool are often noted by a number in front of the term "D6," so that 3D6 refers to three six-sided dice. When you roll, you want to see fives and sixes. Each one of these numbers that comes up is called a **hit**. The more hits you roll, the better chance you have to pull off whatever you are attempting to do.

Each time you roll the dice, you'll be looking to get enough hits to meet or beat a **threshold**, which is the number of hits you need to do the thing you're trying to do. That threshold changes depending on what it is you want to accomplish; sometimes it will be a set number of hits, other times you'll just be trying to get more hits than the other guy. There will also be occasions when you see how many hits you can rack up over an extended period. All of this will be covered more in the section dealing with tests.





Descriptions of skills often have examples of thresholds that should be used, but gamemasters can fall back on the simple guidelines shown in the **Success Test Thresholds** table.

### SUCCESS TEST THRESHOLDS

DIFFICULTY	THRESHOLD
Easy	1
Average	2
Hard	4
Very Hard	6
Extreme	8–10

In most tests, the number of hits you get can do more than just determine whether you succeed; it can add to your success. The number of hits you have that is more than what you needed is referred to as your **net hits**. Net hits can increase the damage you do in combat or have other positive effects. At the gamemaster's discretion, she can reward extraordinary rolls that result in a high number of net hits (four or more) with a little extra accomplishment for the runner, something that may make their next test easier.

### BUYING HITS

Sometimes it can save time to skip a test and allow a player simply to buy hits, especially if they are rolling so many dice they are fairly certain they'll succeed. To buy hits, simply count one hit for every four dice in your pool, rounded down. Note that this can't be a halfway measure—you can't buy a couple of hits and then roll for the rest. Either you buy hits with all your dice, or you roll with all of them.

Buying hits often should not be done if there is a chance of a glitch or critical glitch that might significantly change the course of the game's actions. You need your gamemaster's approval to buy hits. If he doesn't want you to buy hits for the test, then you're not buying hits—get ready to roll.

### GLITCHES

Along with fives and sixes, you need to pay attention to how many ones show up when you roll the dice. If more than half the dice you rolled show a one, then you've got problems. This is called a **glitch**. When you glitch, something bad happens. Maybe you drop your gun. Maybe you trip over a broken piece of pavement you hadn't noticed. Whatever the case, something happens that makes your life more difficult. Just what it is that happens is left to the discretion of the gamemaster.

The guideline for a glitch is that whatever happens should make life more difficult for the particular shadowrunner while not disastrously interfering with their work. For example, a runner who rolls a glitch while working to defuse an explosive may drop his wire cutters, or may call up the wrong augmented reality window of information about the nature of the device. The gamemaster should not, however, decree that the player abruptly cut the wrong wire so that the explosive blows up in their face. As an additional factor, the gamemaster may decide to make the glitch more severe if the player only had one or two hits along with it.

Note that it is possible to roll a glitch on a test that has enough hits to be successful. In these cases, the glitch does not cancel out the success; instead, the glitch occurs in addition to the success. For example, a troll could take a mighty swing at a dwarf, rolling enough hits to make contact but also glitching. The dwarf takes damage from the troll's beefy fist slamming into his face, but the force of the swing and the need to aim downward takes the troll off balance, sending him to the ground after the punch lands. In the next couple of rounds, the troll has to get up on his feet and get back into a fighting stance.

There may be circumstances where a player rolls a glitch and also does not achieve a single hit. This is called a **critical glitch**, and this is where the drek hits the fan. These are the dice rolls that could put characters' lives at risk, where they're going to have to think fast and move faster in order to get out with their hoops intact. Again, exactly what happens is up to the gamemaster, but a critical glitch should throw a serious monkey wrench into shadowrunners' plans, making them scramble to recover. While an abrupt, ignominious death





is possible when a critical glitch is rolled, gamemasters and players will likely have more fun if the roll keeps the players alive but forces them to improvise, test the limits of their skills, and develop desperate plans to help them stay alive.

Clearly, a critical glitch is something players want to avoid, and if they really feel the need to do it, they can use a point of Edge to do so (see **Edge Effects**, p. 56). By using the Close Call function of Edge, players can downgrade a critical glitch to a mere glitch, or entirely negate a glitch (note that they cannot spend two points to negate a critical glitch). This does not, however, do anything about their total lack of hits. They'll just have to suck that up.

## TESTS AND LIMITS

When you roll dice in *Shadowrun*, you are generally making one form of **test** or another. There are four things you need to know when you're making a test. They are:

1. What kind of test it is;
2. How many dice you should roll (usually this is a rating of a skill added to the rating of a linked attribute);
3. The limit on the test, which tells you the maximum amount of hits you can apply to the test;
4. The threshold for the test.

### EXAMPLE

Saskatchewan Pete is on astral overwatch, keeping an eye out for spirits and spells while his team infiltrates a corporate facility. As they are working to breach an outer door, he catches a glimpse of an aura approaching and recognizes it as belonging to a spellcaster. Wanting to take out the threat before it gives him any headaches, Pete casts Stunbolt at the interloper, hoping to catch them off guard. He rolls 11 dice on the test; he gets 3 hits, but he also gets six ones, meaning he glitches. The gamemaster decides that Pete paid too close attention to the aura of his own spell, so his astral sight—his vision of all things magical—is dazzled temporarily, giving him a penalty on any tests he makes while performing his astral overwatch duties.

The opposing spellcaster was hurt but not taken out by Pete's casting, and he's still coming. In fact, he's got a Blast spell brewing that could put a real hurt on Takouba, the group's street samurai. The spellcaster throws it, and Pete tries to counterspell it. Unfortunately, Pete gets six ones on his Counterspelling test and not a single hit—it's a critical glitch. The gamemaster decides that Pete manages to deflect the spell away from Takouba and right onto himself. Pete then takes the full force of the Blast spell. A bad overwatch assignment just got a hell of a lot worse, and the team will have to figure out how to function with an injured mage.

If Pete wanted to, he could use a point of Edge and avoid the critical glitch, which would keep the spell from deflecting to him, though Takouba would still have to deal with its effects. Get hurt or watch your partner go down—that's how life in the shadows goes.

The notation for a test gives you all the information you need to know. Test notations look slightly different based on the kind of test it is—either a Success test, an Opposed test, an Extended test, or a Teamwork test. Each type is discussed below.

There are two different types of **limits**: inherent limits and limits from gear. Your character has three inherent limits—Physical, Mental, and Social—that are derived from their attributes (p. 51). These limits represent just how far you can push your body, your mind, and your charm (elven characters may be dismayed to discover that their charm is not, in fact, boundless). In game terms, limits tell you how many of the hits from your initial roll you can actually use to determine the result of the test. If you roll more hits than your limit allows, then you can only count the hits equal to the limit. Occasionally runners might find ways to extend or even blow by their limits, but they should be aware of these limits so they know how it might affect any upcoming tests. One method to get around a limit is Edge—by using a point of Edge, you may choose to ignore your limit for a single test (see **Edge Effects**, p. 56).

Note that limits generally only apply to tests involving a dice pool derived from a skill and an attribute. Tests using a single attribute, or two attributes, do not use limits.

Often, rather than using their inherent limits, runners will be limited by the piece of gear they are using. Each weapon, for example, has an Accuracy rating that serves as its limit for attacks made with that weapon, while cyberdecks have attributes that serve as limits on a variety of Matrix actions. For more info, check out the write-ups on different pieces of gear in **Street Gear**, p. 416.

### EXAMPLE

Takouba has a Physical limit of 6, thanks in part to his high Body and Strength. He starts his shadowrunning career using a Defiance T-250 shotgun, which has an Accuracy of 4. He uses the Accuracy as a limit in all tests for shooting the shotgun; his Physical limit does not come into play. He has an Agility of 5 and a Shotguns skill of 6, meaning he rolls 11 dice when he uses the gun. After a time, though, he notices that he is losing too many hits due to the relatively low Accuracy of the Defiance, so he saves up his nuyen and invests in a PJSS Model 55, with an Accuracy of 6. He still uses the Accuracy instead of his Physical limit, but now that he's working with a higher Accuracy, he is not going to lose as many hits. He may then add a laser sight to the gun, which bumps the Accuracy up to 7. It's now higher than his Physical limit, but the Accuracy is still the limit he uses when shooting that particular gun. He's got plenty of room to grow now. Once his Shotgun skill gets to 8 or 9, he still generally won't hit the limit, and he'll be bringing drekloads of pain to anyone at the wrong end of his gun barrels.

When a limit is imposed by a piece of gear, it overrides the inherent limit, whether it is higher or lower than that limit. For example, the Accuracy of a firearm acts as the limit for tests that involve shooting that gun (see p. 416 for more discussion of gear and its attributes), so no inherent limits are used in that test. The limit is a game statistic for the piece of gear that reflects both its general nature and the quality of its workmanship.

## SUCCESS TESTS

Success tests generally occur when a shadowrunner has to use her abilities to accomplish something in a single moment of time. This could involve weaving a car through traffic at high speed, looking for a needle in a haystack, or lifting a heavy object. A Success test (also known as a Simple test) is a matter of rolling up enough hits to meet the threshold for the test, then moving on. Success test notation looks like this:

### SUCCESS TEST



## OPPOSED TESTS

Opposed tests happen whenever a shadowrunner has to pit her skills against another individual, living thing, or (occasionally) technological force. Maybe she's trying to sneak by a security guard in a factory complex, knock out a belligerent ganger with her stungun, or talk Mr. Johnson into offering a higher payday. Notation for Opposed tests looks like this:

### OPPOSED TESTS



Note that Opposed tests do not list a threshold. That's because in an Opposed test, you are trying to generate more hits than an opponent. Sometimes the opponent is rolling the same skill + attribute combination, sometimes a different one; see **Using Skills**, p. 128, for information on what skills and attributes are used in specific Opposed tests.



## EXTENDED TESTS

Rather than taking place in a single moment, some tests take place over time. Maybe you're taking a few days to learn a new spell or you're repairing your beat-up Americar and you need to determine how long the job takes. Extended test notation looks like this:

### EXTENDED TESTS

**Skill Used in Test**  
Automotive Mechanic + Logic [Mental] (10, 1 hour) Extended Test

**Applicable Limit**  
10

**Interval**  
1 hour

**Attribute Used in Test**  
Mental

**Threshold**  
10

Instead of obtaining all of the needed hits in a single roll, Extended tests allow you to make repeated rolls and then accumulate the hits you made in each roll until you either reach the threshold, you run out of time because there's something else you need to do or because people start shooting at you, or you run out of rolls. Note that on each roll of the Extended test, you can only count the hits equal to or under the applicable limit (unless you decide to use Edge to get around the limit; see p. 56). The **interval** for an Extended test describes how much time passes between each roll. Intervals can be as short as a Combat Turn or as long as a month. The Task Difficulty Threshold table provides some suggestions on thresholds for Extended tests, while the Extended Test Difficulties can help gamemasters choose the proper interval.

Extended tests cannot last forever; at some point, characters reach the limit of their abilities, and further efforts will do them no good. To simulate this, with each successive roll on an Extended test, players should remove one die from their dice pool. Eventually they'll have no dice left, and the test will be over.

Generally, all of the rolls for an Extended test do not need to be made concurrently. Shadowrunners can set the task aside for a bit, do something else, then pick up where they left off with the amount of hits they had remaining in place.

### A NOTE ON ROUNDING

Sometimes you're going to have to divide some number or another, and sometimes that will require rounding. The general rule of thumb is to round up, unless a specific rule tells you to do otherwise.

### EXAMPLE

Sorsha's Americar took a beating in the last fight, and she needs to sit down and get it fixed. The gamemaster judges that the damage is severe enough to warrant a threshold of 18, and he assigns a Long interval of an hour to the work. Sorsha rolls 10 dice on this test, and the first roll goes well—she gets 5 hits. Fortunately, her Mental limit is 5, so she can count all the hits. Sorsha takes away a die for the second roll (representing the second hour) and rolls poorly, getting only 2 hits. She has a total of 7 hits now. The next hour she rolls 8 dice and gets 4 hits; then she rolls 7 and gets another 4. Her total is now 15, though her dice pool is dwindling. Her next roll of 6 dice only produces a single hit, but the roll after that gets 2. She has her 18! The Americar is now repaired, and the job took six rolls, meaning six hours have passed in the game.

### EXTENDED TEST THRESHOLDS

DIFFICULTY	THRESHOLD
Easy	6
Average	12
Hard	18
Very Hard	24
Extreme	30+

### EXTENDED TEST INTERVALS

TASK	TIME INTERVAL
Fast	1 Combat Turn
Quick	1 minute
Short	10 minutes
Average	30 minutes
Long	1 hour
Consuming	1 day
Exhaustive	1 week
Mammoth	1 month

### EXTENDED TESTS & GLITCHES

A glitch does not necessarily cause the Extended test to fail. Instead, it causes difficulties or delays in the effort. The gamemaster may choose to reduce the hits accumulated to this point by 1D6. If this reduces the total hits to zero or less, the test fails.

On a critical glitch, the test fails—no dice roll needed. Whatever work you put into the test is lost.



## TEAMWORK TESTS

Shadowrunners learn quickly that no one survives for long on the streets by themselves. You have to function as a group, and there are times when all members of a team pitch in to help out on a job. Teamwork tests simulate the effect of group members working together.

To start a Teamwork test, your group needs to choose someone to act as the leader. All of the others serve as assistants, and they should roll the appropriate skill + attribute. For each assistant that scores at least one hit, the relevant limit for the leader's test increases by one. Additionally, each hit the assistants make adds one die to the leader's dice pool. The most dice that can be added to the test is equal to the leader's rating in the applicable skill, or the highest attribute rating if the test involves two attributes. The leader then rolls their adjusted dice pool and tries to beat the threshold for the test.

If any assistant rolls a critical glitch, then the leader receives no adjustments to the relevant limit, in addition to the regular effects of a critical glitch. A glitch prevents that assistant from adding an adjustment to the limit.

### EXAMPLE

The shadowrunning team is tracking a particularly elusive shaman, and each and every member of the team needs to pitch in. Takouba, with 3 ranks in Tracking and an Intuition of 4 (total of 7) and a Mental limit of 5, takes the lead in the test. Liane has Tracking 2 and Intuition 3, so she rolls five dice and gets one hit. Saskatchewan Pete and Sorsha both do not have the Tracking skill, so each of them rolls their Intuition – 1, which is 2 for Pete, 3 for Sorsha. Pete gets no hits and Sorsha gets one, so altogether the team is adding 2 to Takouba's limit and 2 dice to his test. He will roll 9 dice with a limit of 7 and see how many hits he gets.

## TRYING AGAIN

A shadowrunner who gives up after a quick failure is a shadowrunner who will never know the satisfaction of getting a maglock to finally open after repeated tries and then slipping into an office just before the security sweep passes by. Re-trying on a failed test is allowed, but players must take a cumulative –2 penalty on each retry. If the character takes a sufficient break from trying (it's up to gamemaster discretion how long a break is needed), they can begin the task again with no penalty.

Note that taking a shot or another swing of the sword after missing does not count as trying again. Each at-

tempted shot, sword swing, or punch counts as its own action, rather than being a re-try of a previous failure.

## TIME PASSING

Time passes in *Shadowrun* just like it does anywhere else. Most of the time you won't have to track every minute or second, though we won't stop you from doing so if that somehow increases your enjoyment. Sometimes time will be of the essence as runners try to get to a meeting, or attempt to intercept a convoy that follows a very tight schedule, but even in those situations it's best to keep track of time in an abstract fashion rather than measuring it down to the second. When the bullets start flying, however, a little closer attention to the passage of time should be paid.

## COMBAT TURNS

When fighting breaks out, action takes place in a series of **Combat Turns**, where each participant gets the chance to select and take actions. Each Combat Turn lasts approximately three seconds, representing the amount of time it takes individuals to stage an attack.

## ACTIONS

There are three different kinds of **actions** in *Shadowrun*: Free Actions, Simple Actions, and Complex Actions. On their turn, characters take a specific action or combination of actions. They then make tests to generate a result. The way they spend actions, as well as the specific actions in each category, are discussed on p. 163.

## LEVELS OF PLAY

The main rules for *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition* have been designed to provide characters who are skilled and capable from the moment they are created but have room to grow into true legends of the shadowrunning world. Different groups may prefer, however, to play at different levels. Some may want to start with a more street-level campaign, making their players figure out how to survive with relatively low skills until they can earn enough Karma to truly grow into their abilities. Other groups might prefer a more cinematic, high-powered game, with characters who are among the world's elite right off the bat and only grow fiercer as they further hone their abilities.

At different junctures in the book, including at character creation, rules are provided for normal, street-level, and primer runner campaigns to help players and gamemasters play the game in a way that suits your preferences.



## YOUR CHARACTER

At the heart of your experience in *Shadowrun* is your character. This is who you are in the Sixth World, the person whose story you will follow and develop throughout the missions and campaigns you undertake. The back of the book contains a character sheet that holds all the data you'll need to quickly reference for your character. The character sheet may contain a bunch of numbers and other stats, but your character is more than that. The character is the combination of skills, inborn abilities, street smarts, and bleeding-edge gear that makes them dangerous—sometimes to others, sometimes to themselves, often to both. The numbers are there to give you a summary of your character's skills and abilities, and to provide the information you need to resolve the various tests that arise. As a player, though, you can work within the numbers and every other part of the character to create a vivid personality who is part of the ongoing drama of the Sixth World.

The building blocks below are the critical elements that help make your character who they are.

### METATYPE

The first crucial element of a character is their metatype. People in the Sixth World belong to different strains of metahumanity, which means the hands attempting to strangle the life out of you come in a variety of shapes and sizes. During the Awakening, when magic returned to the world, humans started turning into the creatures out of fantasy and fairy tales, and these kinds of people are now common sights in many parts of the Sixth World. Your *Shadowrun* character will be one of five different types of being (called metatypes): human, elf, dwarf, ork, or troll. The game rules for each of these metatypes are described in **Creating a Shadowrunner**, p. 62.

**Human** (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) is the metatype that has been around the longest (well, with one possible exception). You know them, you love them, and if you're reading this there's a high probability that you are one. They are balanced in their abilities and tend to have a

little larger portion of luck (represented by Edge) than other metatypes.

**Dwarfs** (*Homo sapiens pumilionis*), as you may guess, are shorter and stockier than humans. They tend to be quite strong and very resilient, able to recover from damage ranging from knocks to the head to doses of hemlock. Or knocks to the head with a club wrapped in hemlock leaves. Dwarfs are hard workers and tend to be highly valued by corporations, which means they are more deeply integrated into human society than the other metatypes. They still face discrimination due to their size, and they often have to take steps to make a world built for humans suitable for them.

**Elves** (*Homo sapiens nobilis*) are taller than humans, thinner, and have pointed ears. They have an extremely annoying knack for being more nimble than humans, and they generally are better looking to boot. They also have very long lifespans, and continue to look young into their forties and fifties. They have occasionally been known to lord those facts over humans, or anyone who comes within hearing range. While most elves emerged at the Awakening along with the other metatypes, there are rumors that a few elves were hiding somewhere during the magical ebb of the Fifth World, and they are far older than any creature has a right to be.

**Orks** (*Homo sapiens robustus*) look like the creatures that have been dying by the score in fantasy movies and trideos for almost one hundred fifty years. With protruding brows, prominent tusks, and a large stature, orks have trouble avoiding the stereotype of being unthinkingly violent brutes. It doesn't help that there are more than a few orks who are happy to live up to that stereotype rather than fight it. The end result is a certain underlying tension between orks and humans, which leads to both groups often preferring to live in separate communities. Elves and orks, on the other hand, often prefer to live in entirely separate countries. Despite the stereotypes, orks can be found in all walks of life, from dank alleys to corporate boardrooms. They have a shorter lifespan than humans, which often leads to them having a certain desperation to pack as much living into their years as they can.

**Trolls** (*Homo sapiens ingentis*) make orks look like the ordinary man on the street. Orks might be, on average, less than a quarter-meter taller than humans; trolls, by contrast, are more than a half-meter taller than orks. Orks might look like a monstrous version of humanity;



trolls, on the other hand, look like vaguely human versions of the creature from your most recent nightmare. With thick, curled horns on their heads (some trolls prefer to have them cut, while others polish them with pride), spiky protrusions of calcium on their joints, and individual muscles that are larger than a full-grown pig, trolls give the immediate impression that they are built for destruction. Most of them are able to live up to that image. Not all trolls, though, are about absorbing and inflicting damage. They have tried to find their way into different roles, but their large size combines with cultural stereotypes to make it hard for them to fit in. Orks tend to be the most accepting of trolls, and the two metatypes often inhabit the same neighborhoods. Typically these are not the most resource-rich neighborhoods in any given sprawl.

## ATTRIBUTES

Attributes are the inherent characteristics of your shadowrunner, the basic abilities they bring to the table. Shadowrunners have a numerical rating for each attribute, which is used to help determine the amount of dice rolled for tests in the game. Attributes fall into three different groups: Physical, Mental, and Special. Every character has a rating in each of the Physical and Mental attributes, though they may not have ratings in the Special attributes.

For humans, all attributes are between 1 and 6, though certain modifications and qualities can change this. Metatypes have different ranges in these attributes, as seen on the table on p. 65.

## PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

### BODY (BOD)

Body measures your physical health and resiliency. It affects how much damage you can take and stay on your feet, how well you resist damage coming your way, your ability to recover from poisons and diseases, and things of that nature.

### AGILITY (AGI)

Agility measures things like hand-eye coordination, flexibility, nimbleness, and balance. Agility is the most important attribute when it comes to scoring hits during combat, as you need to be coordinated to land your blows, whether you're swinging a sword or carefully aiming a rifle. It also is critical in non-combat situations, such as sneaking quietly past security guards or smoothly lifting a keycard from its secured position.

### REACTION (REA)

Reaction is about reflexes, awareness, and your character's ability to respond to events happening

around them. Reaction plays an important role in deciding how soon characters act in combat and how skilled they are in avoiding attacks from others. It also helps you make that quick turn down a narrow alley on your cycle to avoid the howling gangers on your tail.

### STRENGTH (STR)

Strength is an indicator of, well, how strong your character is. The higher your strength, the more damage you'll do when you're raining blows down on an opponent, and the more you'll be able to move or carry when there's stuff that needs to be moved. Or carried. Strength is also important with athletic tasks such as climbing, running, and swimming.

## MENTAL ATTRIBUTES

### WILLPOWER (WIL)

Willpower is your character's desire to push through adversity, to resist the weariness of spellcasting, and to stay upright after being nailed in the head with a sap. Whether you're testing yourself against a toxic wilderness or a pack of leather-clad orks with crowbars, Willpower will help you make it through.

### LOGIC (LOG)

The Logic attribute measures the cold, calculating power of your rational mind. Whether you are attempting to repair complicated machinery or patch up an injured teammate, Logic helps you get things right. Logic is also the attribute hermetic mages use to resist Drain from the spells they rain down on their hapless foes. Deckers also find Logic extremely useful, as it helps them develop the attacks and counterattacks that are part of their online battles.

### INTUITION (INT)

Intuition is the voice of your gut, the instinct that tells you things before your logical brain can figure them out. Intuition helps you anticipate ambushes, notice that something is amiss or out of place, and stay on the trail of someone you're pursuing.

### CHARISMA (CHA)

Charisma is your force of personality, the persuasiveness and charm you can call on to get people to do what you want without having to go to the trouble of pulling a gun on them. It's not entirely about your appearance, but it's also not entirely *not* about your appearance. What it's mostly about is how you use what you have—your voice, your face, your words, and all the tools at your disposal—to charm and/or intimidate the people you encounter. Additionally, Charisma is an important attribute for shamanic mages, as it helps them resist the damaging Drain from spells they cast.



## SPECIAL ATTRIBUTES

### ESSENCE (ESS)

Essence is your metahumanity encapsulated in a number. In *Shadowrun*, you have ample opportunities to alter your body or push it beyond its normal limits. Such actions often have a cost, and they can result in a loss of a portion of your metahumanity, which means a loss of Essence points. Each character starts with an Essence rating of 6, and it acts as a cap on the amount of alterations you can adopt. When it's gone, it doesn't come back. It also affects the Magic and Resonance attributes, as losses in Essence are reflected by losses in Magic and Resonance.

While denizens of the Sixth World are accustomed to seeing a variety of augmentations and alterations to the metahuman form, the “uncanny valley” still exists. The uncanny valley is the disconcerting effect that happens when people see something that is almost, but not quite, metahuman. An animated cartoon with exaggerated features looks fine to metahuman eyes, but a computer program that closely, but not exactly, replicates human appearance is a troubling and unpleasant sight to most viewers. This is what happens when people see others with augmentations—on some level, people notice there is something less (or more) human about that, and they respond to it negatively. The change may not be exactly visible, but it is in some way noticeable—in one way or another, a person has become less human, and on some level other people notice this. This is why a character's Essence is included in the calculation of their Social limit.

### EDGE (EDG)

Edge is the ultimate intangible, that certain something that provides a boost when you need it, that gets you out of a tough spot when the chips are down. It's not used to calculate dice pools; instead, you spend a point of Edge to acquire a certain effect. Every character has at least one point of Edge, more if they want to take more frequent advantage of the boosts it offers. The possible effects of and more details about Edge are on p. 56.

### MAGIC (MAG)

If you intend to cast spells or use magic in any way, your character needs to have the Magic attribute. Most individuals do not have this attribute, meaning their rating is zero. Mages, who cast spells, and adepts, who channel magic into enhanced physical and mental abilities, need this quality. Their Magic rating measures how capable they are in the arcane arts and how much power they can draw down to help them in their efforts.

### RESONANCE (RES)

Similar to Magic for mages and adepts, Resonance is the special attribute for technomancers. Technomancers interface with the Matrix using the power of their mind, and Resonance measures the strength of their ability to

interact with and shape that environment (see **Technomancers**, p. 249). Non-technomancers have a zero rating for Resonance.

## INITIATIVE AND CONDITION MONITORS

As is the case with limits (p. 46), Initiative and the Condition Monitors are character statistics derived from attributes. They should be calculated during the character creation process (p. 62).

### INITIATIVE

Initiative governs how quickly a character responds in a combat situation. A character's Initiative attribute is their Reaction plus their Intuition.

### INITIATIVE DICE

Initiative Dice, as described on p. 159, are extra dice used to roll a character's Initiative Score. They generally come from gear, spells, or adept powers. Everyone has one and can get up to four more (for a total of five) from various gear, spells, and other effects. Hackers get extra initiative dice depending on how they interact with the Matrix (see p. 214).

### CONDITION MONITORS

Condition Monitors are used to track the damage inflicted on a character. Player characters have two Condition Monitors; one tracks Physical damage, the other tracks Stun damage. Each Condition Monitor has a specific number of boxes arrayed in rows of three boxes apiece. The Physical Condition Monitor has boxes equal to half the character's Body (rounded up) + 8; the Stun Condition Monitor has boxes equaling half the character's Willpower (rounded up) + 8.

When a row of the Condition Monitor is filled up, the player character takes a -1 penalty to all subsequent tests. This penalty stacks for each row of the Condition Monitor that is filled in.

Obviously, walking around with a damaged Condition Monitor is problematic, and characters will want healing as soon as possible. For possible methods of healing, see p. 205.

## SKILLS

The other part of the dice pool equation, along with attributes, is a character's skills. Skills represent the knowledge and abilities the character has picked up throughout his life. Skills cover a wide variety of topics, such as the ability to shoot a gun, a proficiency with disguises, and a knack for repairing vehicles and machines. Skills come in two main categories: Active skills and Knowledge skills. Active skills cover the things



characters do, while Knowledge skills cover the facts and information the character has acquired over their career, including speaking languages other than their native tongue.

Skills are linked to a specific attribute, and the ratings of the skill and linked attribute, added together, form the dice pool for most tests. A list of skills ordered by their linked attributes can be found on p. 151.

Characters may attempt some skill-based tests even if they don't have any ranks in the skill. This is known as **defaulting**. For example, even if you're not trained in the art of running, you can still attempt a sprint to see just how much ground you can cover. In these instances, your dice pool for the test equals your ranking in the linked attribute - 1. So if Sorsha doesn't have the Running skill but wants to give a sprint a try, she'll check her Strength, which is 6. That means she rolls 6 - 1 dice, or 5, and hopes for the best.

There are some skills, though, for which tests cannot default if you don't have the appropriate skill—guts and a willingness to pitch in sometimes just aren't a substitute for actual abilities. All the can-do spirit in the world won't help you speak Russian if you don't have any knowledge of the language, or repair a car if you're not familiar with the basic workings of the machinery involved. It's nice to be able to do everything, but sometimes you have to wait for an expert. Skills where defaulting is not an option are indicated in italics on the table on p. 151.

## QUALITIES

Along with attributes and skills, characters also have Qualities that can provide modifications to their character. Positive Qualities provide bonuses and require the expenditure of Karma at character creation; Negative Qualities inflict penalties but provide additional Karma the character can use to enhance her skills and attributes. Qualities have a range of effects, and they are described in detail on p. 71.

## MAGIC

The return of magic to the world is one of the pivotal moments in *Shadowrun* history, and in the decades since its arrival, millions of people have looked for new ways to take advantage of the power it offers. Spellcasters are still a significant minority of the population, but magic has had a profound effect on the shape of the world. From the existence of magic divisions in the world's largest corps to hunts across the globe for rare magical reagents, from spells being slung in urban brawl to research being conducted in the highest halls of learning, magic has a place in all parts of Sixth World society.

As described in **Special Attributes** (p. 52), in order to have the ability to use magic, characters must have

the Magic attribute so that they can become an adept, magician, aspected magician, or mystic adept. Adepts channel mana into improved physical and mental abilities, while magicians use it to power spells that can affect the world in a wide variety of ways. Mystic adepts are a hybrid of the two, dividing the mana they can access between spell power and physical and mental boosts.

More information about the uses of magic, including the spells and adept powers characters may use, can be found in the **Magic** chapter on p. 276.

## MATRIX

The Matrix of the Sixth World is a continually evolving beast. After Crash 2.0 hit in 2064, the Matrix went wireless, and in the initial flush of excitement and access, the Matrix became more free and open than it had been in years. The corporations have reacted, though, and thanks to individuals rallying the populace on their behalf, the corporations have taken a degree of power over the Matrix that has not been seen for decades.

Control of the Matrix may have changed, but some of the basics have not. It's still vast, it's still used by almost everyone in the world, and it's still home to vast amounts of paydata (buried in vast swathes of nonsense and trideo footage of cats). One reason for the changes, though, was that the corporations had tired of hackers half a world away breaking into their systems. By placing tighter control over the Matrix, they can make it harder for long-distance hackers to do any damage. Additionally, executives have learned to store some of their private data in wired nodes, meaning that runners have to track down those specific pieces of machinery if they want a portion of that reward.

One of the results of this has been the return of the cyberdeck as the prime tool for hacking the Matrix. Commlinks are still around and used by almost everybody, but the new Matrix design requires a new tool, and hackers were quick to name the tool the cyberdeck after the legendary hacking tool of old. They also reclaimed the title of deckers for themselves.

Cyberdecks are not what they once were. They are smaller, more powerful, and able to function as part of a wireless network. Deckers can use them in both of the Matrix's standard environments: Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality.

## AUGMENTED REALITY

Augmented reality (AR) takes the real world and overlays it with multimedia information to make that world more visually interesting and more functional. At its simplest, AR is a series of windows and virtual screens, called Augmented Reality Objects, or AROs, that float in front of a user's vision like mostly opaque, incredibly thin virtual computer monitors. On the more detailed level, AR dresses up every bit of the physical world, providing a bit



of extra shine and sparkle, even putting objects in your vision that don't appear in reality. They can also be used to alter your own appearance, giving you a different look without having to go through the hassle of actual physical changes. (Of course, you can't expect AR overlays to serve as an effective disguise—in any crowd, it seems there's always at least one person who likes to see the world without an overlay of graphic ornamentation and will not be affected by any computer graphics you overlay on yourself). These objects can be about more than mere decoration—they can provide information and interactive activities for the viewer. For example, pressing the keys on the overlaid cash register in a store allows you to check out your own items, removing store clerks from the transaction. "Pressing" an ARO sign in an office building can reveal a directory of the building's occupants. As long as you have some way to allow your commlink or cyberdeck to send you visual information—such as cybereyes, eyeglasses, or goggles—then you can see the AR information the Matrix has to offer.

Deckers may prefer virtual reality to AR, but they need to be skilled at working in AR environments if they want to be truly successful. The nature of the Matrix (see p. 214) means that they need to be mobile, often getting physically close to the locations they want to hack. Hacking on the move is often more efficiently done through AR, since it allows you to keep a foot in meatspace while getting your work done.

## VIRTUAL REALITY

Virtual Reality (VR) is the full immersion in electronic environments. By 2075, this has gone far beyond visual representations accompanied by the occasional rumble or vibration. As long as runners have the right gear, they can get a full range of sensory experiences in VR, from feeling the emotions of people in a trideo to smelling the burning rubber on plascrete as the sports car they're driving peels out. Riggers and hackers in particular wouldn't be caught using anything besides a virtual environment in their work. The response time it offers and the full spectrum of sensory feedback allows them to react quickly and launch attacks as fast as possible. While hacking in AR is possible, especially for quick-hit efforts while a team is on the move, much of the heavy lifting is done in VR.

## GEAR

A good runner can survive on nothing but her wits—but she'd rather not. The equipment a shadowrunner uses can be critical to the success of her mission, and knowing the right goods to bring along (and how to keep the less-legal ones from being detected) is an important skill. The gear shadowrunners may carry includes a full range of firearms, melee weapons like saps and swords, armor, eye and ear enhancements, surveillance and counter-surveillance gear, commlinks, cyberdecks,

grenades, and more. The gear may cost a pile of nuyen and may not be legally available in all jurisdictions, but a good shadowrunner knows how to find what they need, no matter what.

Along with the standard gear shadowrunners carry, there are augmentations they can build into themselves, making these pieces of gear fully part of their body. There are two primary types of augmentations: cyberware and bioware.

## CYBERWARE

Cyberware is the fusion of man and machine, the combination of metahumanity and technology that helps people break through the boundaries of what used to be impossible. Cyberware may take the form of eye or ear implants that provide better sensory reception while also offering recording capabilities; wires built into someone's muscle and nervous system that allow them to act with inhuman speed; armor built into skin; and more.

The performance improvements cyberware offers come with a cost (besides the nuyen you have to lay out to purchase and install the gear). Every piece of cyberware takes away a bit of your humanity, which is represented by a loss of a character's Essence (see p. 52). Since Essence is important to spellcasters, adepts, and technomancers (every point of Essence they lose comes with a corresponding loss of Magic or Resonance), it is rare to see Awakened or Emergeed individuals with extensive implants. Additionally, runners who serve as the face of the team may want to keep away from radical cyberware, as some Mr. Johnsons and everyday citizens don't respond well to the inhuman look it can generate. On top of all that, an abundance of cyberware can impede magical healing.

The Essence loss cyberware inflicts can be controlled, to a degree, by using the different grades of cyberware. There are three grades of custom cyberware that offer the same benefits as standard cyberware, but with reduced Essence loss (though significantly increased prices). These grades are alphaware, betaware, and deltaware. Betaware and deltaware are not available to starting characters. For more information on these grades, see p. 451.

People with cyberware know a simple truth—what they have generally makes them better, stronger, and faster than other people, and other people don't like that. Security types are especially suspicious since the purpose and capabilities of cyberware aren't always apparent. All of which means there are all sorts of laws and restrictions concerning the installation and use of cyberware augmentations. Most airlines, for example, require travelers to deactivate their cyberware before they board a plane, and to leave it off for the duration of the flight. Runners who install cyberware should be aware of the regulations controlling its use and be prepared to comply with them—or plan to break the rules in ways that draw as little unwanted attention as possible.



## BIOWARE

While cyberware improves metahumans by building machinery into them, bioware uses flesh, muscle, and other organic materials to bring similar benefits. Since it is biological in nature, bioware has less impact on Essence than cyberware, but it is also more expensive and harder to find. It still introduces foreign elements and the impression of inhumanity to individuals, though, so the Social limit tied to Essence loss remains.

If a player wants to further reduce Essence loss, she can opt for cultured bioware, which uses her own cells as the source material for the augmentation. As might be imagined, this makes cultured bioware very compatible with the individual, but it also makes it heinously expensive. Runners will have to dive into a lot of shadows to be able to afford it, but a lot of them believe it's absolutely worth it.

## CONTACTS

The Matrix is full of information, but the things shadowrunners need to know are not the kinds of things people put up on their personal or corporate websites. Word of available jobs, news about what street lowlives and organized crime figures have been up to, dirt about who's just snuck into town and who may be looking to make a quick getaway—this is stuff you're not going to find through a quick data search.

To get this information, you need **contacts**. Contacts come in a lot of forms. They may be the arms dealer who has a knack for coming up with armor-piercing bullets right when you need them. Or the underground journalist who is willing to share what she knows if you give her some inside info about upcoming juicy stories. Or the old standby, the bartender with the watchful eye and the listening ear.

Shadowrunners have a roster of personal contacts that they can turn to in order to help them find jobs and provide useful information about what's going on in the world. Contacts have the same types of statistics that other characters would have, but they also have two special statistics that describe their relationship to player characters. Their **Loyalty** rating measures the closeness of their relationship to a character, while their **Connection** rating illustrates how well connected they are to the world around them. The Loyalty rating ranges from 1 to 6, while the Connection rating ranges from 1 to 12.

Player characters are allowed to purchase a certain amount of contacts during character creation (see **Contacts**, p. 98). After that, future contacts cannot be bought—they have to be earned. Through their actions, characters can build a relationship with a contact that results in a productive exchange of information. Note that contacts do not have to be friends with the player character, or even like them. They just have to understand that there may be a benefit to sharing information with the character.

For more information on contacts as well as some sample contact characters, see p. 386.



## LIFESTYLE

Some shadowrunners are in the business to right wrongs or to get revenge. There are a few in the business because they are utter psychopaths. For the rest, though, shadowrunning is mainly a matter of survival. They're not willing to sell their souls to the corps, and they know that begging will get them nowhere. So they scrape up money any way they can so that they can pay for the basics of life—food, shelter, and maybe a little fun from time to time.

A character's lifestyle represents the money they have to spend to live in the way they have selected. This can range from the homeless life of someone scraping up whatever food and temporary shelter they can get their hands on to those who live like the lords of the sprawl, dwelling in walled-off palaces or airy condominiums that flaunt the extravagance the owner has earned. Most shadowrunners, of course, are far closer to the former than the latter.

More information about lifestyles, including their costs, can be found on p. 373.

## EDGE

Edge is a character's luck, the favor of the gods, that unexplainable factor that allows her to beat the odds. A character's Edge attribute represents the number of Edge points a character has to spend during game play. Edge points can be used for a wide range of benefits, as listed below. Edge points that are spent are temporarily unavailable (see **Regaining Edge**, at right), as luck will only take you so far. A character's Edge attribute never actually changes, even when Edge points are spent, unless the character permanently burns Edge (see **Burning Edge**, p. 57).

## EDGE EFFECTS

Edge can affect your character's world in a lot of ways. When you want one of these effects to happen, you must spend a point of Edge. A character can only spend Edge points on her own actions; she cannot spend it on behalf of others. No more than 1 point of Edge can be spent on any specific test or action at one time. If you spent a point of Edge for extra dice and rolled a critical glitch anyway, for example, you cannot use Edge to negate that critical glitch since you have already applied Edge to that test. The uses of Edge are:

- **Push the Limit:** Add your Edge rating to your test, either before or after the roll. This can allow you to take tests that might otherwise have a dice pool of zero or less thanks to various modifiers in play. Using Edge in this way makes the **Rule of Six** come into play: for every 6 you roll, count it as a hit and then re-roll that die, adding any additional hits from the re-roll to your total. If you decide to use this function af-

ter your initial roll, only your Edge dice use the Rule of Six. This use of Edge also allows you to ignore any limit on your test.

- **Second Chance:** Re-roll all dice that did not score a hit on a test roll. Second Chance cannot be used to negate a glitch or critical glitch, it does not use the Rule of Six, and it has no effect on limits.
- **Seize the Initiative:** Move to the top of the initiative order, regardless of your Initiative Score. If multiple characters spend Edge to go first in the same Combat Turn, those characters go before everybody else, in order of their Initiative Scores; subsequently, the other players and NPCs take their actions according to their Initiative Scores. This move to the top of the order lasts for the entire Combat Turn (meaning multiple Initiative Passes); you return to your normal place in Initiative order at the start of the following Combat Turn.
- **Blitz:** Roll the maximum of five Initiative Dice for a single Combat Turn.
- **Close Call:** Either negate the effects of one glitch or turn a critical glitch into a glitch.
- **Dead Man's Trigger:** When your character is about to fall unconscious or die, you can spend a point of Edge to make a Body + Willpower (3) test. If you succeed, you may spend any remaining actions you have on a single action before your character blacks out.

## REGAINING EDGE

Your character gets one point of Edge back after a fulfilling meal and a good night's sleep (at least eight hours); additionally, the gamemaster can reward players by refreshing a single point of Edge in exchange for inventive or entertaining actions in the course of a gaming session. Incidentally, that's *refreshed* Edge points, not free Edge points—you can't go higher than your maximum Edge. Luck only counts if you use it.

- Good roleplaying.
- Heroic acts of self-sacrifice.
- Achievement of important personal goals.
- Enduring a critical glitch without using a Close Call (you get a point of Edge back to balance the scales a bit; this should be used judiciously, though, so as not to always let the players off the hook when they roll a critical glitch).
- Succeeding in an important objective.
- Being particularly brave or smart.
- Pushing the storyline forward.
- Having the right skills in the right place at the right time.
- Impressing the group with humor or drama.



## BURNING EDGE

Sometimes it's not enough just to spend a point of Edge and hope for the best. Sometimes you need guaranteed results—or a miracle. In those circumstances, you can choose to burn a point of Edge, meaning it is gone and will not be recovered through the normal means (though in the future you can spend Karma to move your Edge up again). Burning a point of Edge has two potential uses:

- **Smackdown:** Automatically succeed in an action with four net hits. This has to be an action the character is capable of performing—he cannot, for example, score a success in a skill like Automotive Mechanic if he does not have ranks in that skill. Limits have no effect on this—the character gets four net hits regardless of the applicable limit.
- **Not Dead Yet:** There are circumstances—a bullet to the brain, a live grenade in the pants—that by all rights should result in a shadowrunner's inevitable death. In these cases, a player may elect to burn a point of Edge in order to keep her character alive, against all odds. Note that this does not mean she entirely avoids the effects of the potentially fatal action. The bullet still hits their head, and the grenade still goes off. Instead of dying, though, the character manages to keep breathing somehow and maintain a thin thread of a pulse, giving others a chance to stabilize her and hopefully provide some quick healing. The gamemaster should devise the exact circumstances that lead to the character surviving the current threat.

### EXAMPLE

Takouba has security guards closing in on him from every direction, a bullet in his leg, and only one way out—a hallway guarded by a dwarf with a big gun. He has absolutely no time to waste, so he burns a point of Edge to shoot the guard with his Colt Cobra. He has the Automatics skill, but in this case he could use this ability even if he didn't, as this is a skill he could default in, just using his Agility -1. The point is, this is something he can do. He doesn't need to check anything else, including his gun's Accuracy, and neither he nor the target roll dice to see if he hit. He is counted as having four net hits on the attack. The base Damage Value of his weapon is 7P; the four net hits raise it to 11P. The dwarf now has to roll to see if he can resist 11P worth of damage. Takouba sincerely hopes the damage will be enough to at least put the guard off balance so he can make his escape.

## OPTIONAL RULES

While the rules of *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition* were designed to provide a fun, balanced gaming experience, no one set of rules can take into account every individual's preferences. To that end, optional rules are provided in the book that you might choose to use in your game. Some make the game move faster; others provide a more detailed, simulationist approach to *Shadowrun*. Gamemasters should feel free to use the rules that suit them, and tweak existing rules as they see fit.



The cover art for Shadowrun Fifth Edition depicts a chaotic cyberpunk battle scene. In the center, a large, translucent blue dragon-like creature with glowing eyes and lightning bolts emanating from its mouth is the focal point. Several characters are engaged in combat: a man with a beard and cybernetic arm on a rooftop in the upper right; a man with a cybernetic arm and a sword in the foreground; a woman with long dark hair and a purple top in the center; and a man with a cybernetic arm and a sword in the foreground. The background shows a cityscape with tall buildings and a dark, stormy sky. The title "SHADOWRUN" is in large, metallic, stylized letters, and "FIFTH EDITION" is in smaller, white, block letters below it. A red, stylized dragon logo is positioned above the title.

# SHADOWRUN

## FIFTH EDITION

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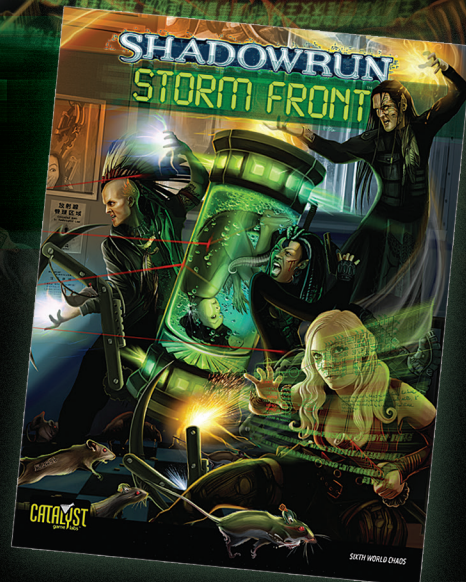
# SHADOWRUN



## 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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