

The cover art for Shadowrun Fifth Edition depicts a cyberpunk city at night. In the foreground, a bald man with a beard and tattoos, wearing a black vest, holds a glowing sword. To his right, a man in a black jacket and goggles holds a glowing device. In the background, a large, glowing, blue, insect-like creature with multiple limbs and a central eye-like structure is the focus of attention. Other characters, including a woman in a purple dress and a man on a rooftop, are visible. The scene is filled with neon lights, smoke, and a sense of action.

SHADOWRUN[®]

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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 tridflick, 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.

✖

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.

✱

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.

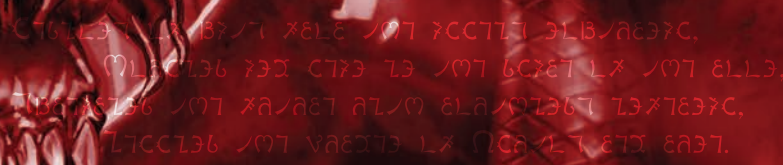
decker *n.* A person who illegally uses a cyberdeck.

deckhead *n.* Simsense abuser.

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

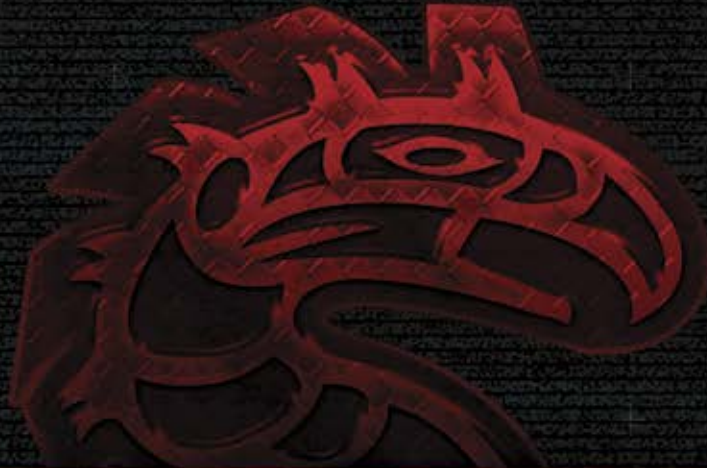
dump *v.* To be involuntarily ejected from the Matrix.





zaibatsu *n.* (Japanese) A megacorporation.





SHADOWRUN >noun

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

WorldWide WorldWatch
2050 archive



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.

Get more info at www.shadowruntabletop.com

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
Applicable Limit
Interval

Automotive Mechanic + Logic [Mental] (10, 1 hour) Extended Test

Attribute Used in Test
Threshold

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.

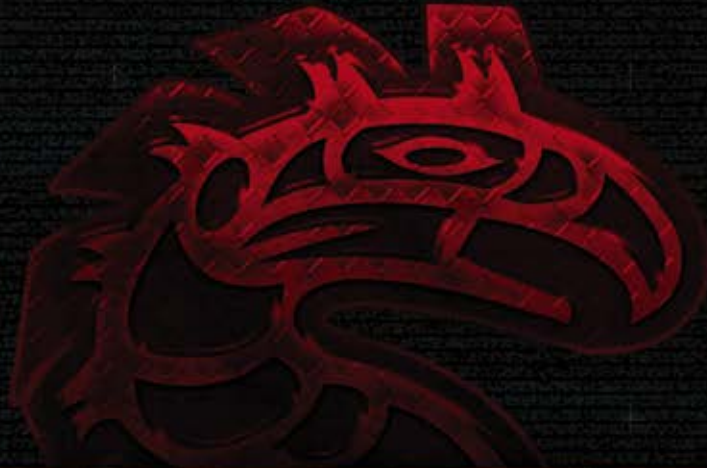
EXAMPLE

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.





SHADOWRUN >noun

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

WorldWide WorldWatch
2050 archive



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.

Get more info at www.shadowruntabletop.com

SHADOWRUN, FIFTH EDITION • PREVIEW THREE



GIRLS WITH GUNS

All I wanted was a damn omelet and a cup of coffee. Sadly, Allen's Diner in sunny, downtown Tacoma didn't serve coffee—they served soykaf. I've had both, and it's just not the same. Yeah, the real stuff will cost you, but isn't it worth it to once in a while have something *good*? And not fake? But at least their omelets more than made up for it, so I dealt with the disappointment. I shelled out enough for real eggs, because the substitutes are just this side of inedible, and they stuffed the real ones with soyrizo and real onions and bell peppers and a ridiculous amount of rice-based faux-pepper jack cheese. Heaven on a plate right there.

I got started in the shadows at a place like this. Been five years now. I was out on the street; the army and I had parted company on less-than- cordial terms a few weeks earlier, and while I'd managed to avoid time in the stockade, a bad conduct discharge made it hard to find a legitimate job. A lot of the corps didn't want the risk of someone like me, who'd struck a superior officer, no matter how justified it might have been at the time. It speaks of a bad attitude, which in corp-speak means not bowing down to your corporate masters. Can't have that.

So there I was, way back when, trying not to look too desperate, tightening my belt in an alley behind some diner

in Puyallup, competing with a dozen or so other homeless people for scraps. I guess one of the employees at that diner saw something in me—my bearing, maybe, or the armor jacket I'd managed to liberate before the army gave me the boot—and she motioned me to her side. "You want to earn some cred?" she asked.

"Yeah," I told her, trying to keep my voice from sounding too eager. I figured what was coming wasn't going to be good, but I also figured I wasn't in a position to be picky. "What do you need me to do?"

She looked me up and down a little bit more, then waved me into the kitchen. "Sit tight," she said, and told one of the others in the kitchen crew to get me a sandwich. She disappeared for a moment, then came back to get me. She led me up front to one of the booths. It was in a dark corner, away from the doors and windows. The only person sitting there was an ork with a couple of datajacks in his head, a commlink sitting next to a cup of something that might have been coffee.

He looked me up and down like the woman had done back in the alley, then he said, "Have a seat." I climbed up into the booth—it really wasn't built with a dwarf like me in mind, but I've had to deal with worse inconveniences in my





BY PATRICK GOODMAN

life—and the woman refilled his cup and set one down in front of me. I finished the sandwich she'd gotten for me in silence; the ork waited patiently for me.

"You got any skills?" he asked me with a voice that sounded like gravel in a blender.

"I drove a truck in the army," I said.

"The army adapts vehicles for dwarfs?" He seemed genuinely interested.

I nodded. "Yeah. Sometimes I had to do it myself, but it wasn't that big a deal."

He made a motion in an AR window he had up, then nodded. "You have any problems with shooting someone if the situation calls for it?"

I looked him over for a minute. He was interviewing me for a shadowrun. Actual shadow work, the big time. At least that's what I thought then. When you're down as far as I was, even the gutter looks like a step up. "I'm not gonna kill anybody for you, but if it's defending myself or my team ... no, I can pull the trigger." I felt my cheeks flush. "I don't have a piece, though."

He nodded. "This isn't network; I try to stay away from that sort of thing." He made a few more gestures. "It so happens I need a driver. I've got the ride and the crew, though

you'll have to do your own mods." He waved aside the AR window and looked me in the eyes. I didn't flinch away. "Pay's a thousand, half up front. It goes down day after tomorrow; give me your commcode and I'll get you the particulars." I gave it to him, then he continued. "You're going to want to be armed, though, so your up-front won't be cash this time around. You have a doss?"

I nodded. "After a fashion." I let him know where I was crashing, and he said he'd send someone over with my payment. He told me to get another sandwich to go before I left, and then he got up, put his commlink in his pocket, and walked away. I got another sandwich and made my way back to my squat. I fell asleep wondering what the hell I'd gotten myself into. The next morning I woke up with a box next to me. It had a note that said, "Frank, here's your up-front. Hauser."

I hadn't given him my name.

I opened the box and stared at the huge fragging pistol it contained. It was a Predator IV, still in its factory packaging, matte-black and just as deadly as it looked. The grip was scaled to fit my hand; the box also held two extra clips, a shoulder holster, and a box of ball rounds.

True to his word, Hauser sent me a message with an address and a time. I turned up on time, and got to spend



the afternoon modifying the driver's side of a Bulldog van so I could drive the damn thing. I met the team, and the next day we went and liberated a dozen cases big enough to hold assault rifles. To this day, I don't know what was in them; it wasn't part of my job to know, and I realized I didn't much care.

I didn't have to shoot anyone that time around. I got a credstick with five hundred nuyen later that night. Hauser asked if I wanted more work; I allowed as to how I did.

I got to keep the pistol. I still carry that piece. I should have tossed it ages ago, but I've almost never had to fire it in anger and I'm sentimental. Probably going to get me killed one of these days, but so far I've managed to keep body and soul together.



I come to Allen's these days to get the hell away from the shadows. It's a way to connect to what I laughingly refer to as reality, the life I used to lead before I became a runner. I don't know why; it wasn't a great life. Like I said, I'm sentimental sometimes.

I staggered into the diner at about half past eleven; the lunch rush hadn't started yet, but there was still a pretty good crowd. I climbed up on my usual barstool and looked around. Regulars, mostly; some looked at me and nodded, some scowled. One woman in particular, an ork somewhere between thirty and three hundred years old, actually muttered a curse, spat on the floor, and got up and walked to a different section of the diner. We knew each other; I'd been driving a job where her son, a basically good kid trying to claw his way out of the soulless poverty of his childhood, had gotten shot up. He was in a coma in a hospital across town; I wondered if Hauser's operation still paid his medical bills, but I doubted it. I'm sentimental, but Hauser—Hauser's one of those guys who thinks emotions just get in the way.

The waitress, an older human lady named Charlotte, set a cup of soykaf in front of me without having to ask what I wanted. She smiled at me, read my omelet order back to me before I'd even made it, and sent it to the kitchen while I chided myself for my predictability. I was going to have to shake up my routine one of these days. But the omelets were so damn good.

I noticed this girl walk in the door and start hitting up customers for loose change. Panhandling sucks, but even in this bright shiny electronic age of ours, there's still corp scrip and coinage floating around. It's hard to keep body and soul together, but it didn't seem to me she'd resorted to flat-backing just yet. She held her head up a little high for that.

She hadn't made it over to my side of the diner when trouble walked in. By "trouble walked in," of course, I mean, "a dumb fraggin' ganger with a pink mohawk rode a damn

Harley Scorpion through the door and unloaded a Remington Roomsweeper into the ceiling."

All I wanted was a goddamn omelet.

I bowed my head and closed my eyes. Knight Errant didn't come out this way very often; besides the eggs, that was one of the reasons I liked the place so much. I wasn't a cop. I used to drive a truck in the army; now I drove a truck for Mr. Johnson. I was a shadowrunner. I shot people in the face for money. Figuratively, anyway.

But this was my place, dammit. This is where I came to get away from craziness like this. A dozen of Pink Mohawk's close friends and relations had joined him by this time, terrorizing the customers and the staff. I didn't recognize their colors; whoever they were, they were away from their turf. This was a problem, because while KE didn't patrol the neighborhood, we did have the Spikes, and they didn't take kindly to motorcycle-riding thugs that weren't them. These punks were trying to make a statement to those punks, and before too long things were going to get even messier.

Dammit.

They were starting to make their way to my side of the diner. Most of the crowd was hiding under their tables or behind the counter. Most everybody but me and the panhandler. She had tucked herself into a corner by the counter, but she wasn't cowering behind it. She was watching the gangers shake down the customers and tear random shit apart. I saw something in her face that I hadn't seen in a while. She was scared ... but it wasn't running her. She was scared, but she was also angry. She was looking for a way to stand her ground.

I smiled a little then, and she gave me a funny look, like she was trying to figure out what the hell was wrong with me. She cocked her head at about the same time I felt Pink Mohawk walking up beside me. Like the other mouth-breathers he rode with, he was hooting and hollering and generally acting like his size and the pistol-sized shotgun he was carrying were going to be enough to leave me shaking in my boots.

He was way too close. He wouldn't be able to get off a shot before I could put my fist in his solar plexus. "All right, old man, gimme your stick and your link!"

Old man, my ass. I looked up at him—I'm a dwarf, I look up at a lot of things—and got my first good look at the punk. Jesus. He was barely old enough to shave. I tried to play it cool, to keep him focused on me, but I really wished some of my team were there with me. I was on my own, though. Mostly. "There's still time to call this off and get out of here with all of your organs." I flipped a switch in my head and felt my body light up as I got ready.

Yeah, mostly I drive. It's not *all* I do, though. The wires help me in a fight almost as much as they help me behind the wheel.



The punk scoffed, and pointed the Roomsweeper at my head. "I said gimme your stick, old man!"

My left fist shot into his belly like a cobra, doubling him over and knocking the breath out of him. He didn't even have a chance to cry out. He *did* have time to pull the trigger, but by that time he was no longer aiming the gun at my head; he took a divot out of the floor as he went down. I chopped the back of his head to help him along. I jumped down from my stool, drawing my Predator as my combat boots found the back of Pink Mohawk's jacket. I was looking for my first real target when I felt a pair of hammers hit me in the ceramic plates that reinforced the armor in my jacket. I staggered backward and tripped as my foot caught on Mohawk's collar.

One of them had shot me. It was a heavy pistol, but the report didn't sound like a high-quality piece. Something cheap made in a nanoforge or a sweatshop in Vladivostok, probably, though if it had hit me in the head, I'd be just as dead. I came down hard on the diner's tile floor. I lost my grip on the Predator as the back of my head met the tile; I could hear it skidding away as stars began dancing in my vision. I shook it off and looked for another weapon as one of the other gangers approached to finish what she'd started. My hand found the barrel of Mohawk's Roomsweeper; I yanked it into one hand, got my other hand around the grip, and I was aiming at the punk who shot me when she staggered backward and dropped like a stone down a well.

I recognized the report of the weapon that dropped her; it was my Predator. I looked back, and saw the young dwarf girl standing there, in a passable stance with both hands on the grip. She looked surprised, but determined. I smiled again, a little wider this time, and stood up to face the surprised remnants of the gang with Mohawk's gun in my hand and my boot on the back of his head.

Funny thing about most gangs: A lot of them don't really want a real fight. They want to beat people up and terrorize them. Faced with actual resistance, most of them will tuck their tails and run. This one was no different; they lit out of Allen's like a dragon was chasing them as soon as they figured out that their boss was down. I dragged Mohawk and the girl who'd shot me—she wasn't dead, but she was going to be sore as hell when she came around—and dumped them both in the gutter. The bike I pushed out and toppled over next to them. I walked back in, and found the girl slumped into a booth, my Predator sitting on the table in front of her. I picked it up and holstered it, then looked around the diner. Someone had almost certainly hit a PAN-ICBUTTON™, and the Knights would show up soon, regular patrols or not. It would be much better for me if I weren't there when they arrived.

I looked back to the girl. "You hungry?"

She nodded.

I motioned toward the kitchen, and the back door. "I think I owe you lunch, at least, but we should probably get it someplace else." I handed her the punk's Roomsweeper. "Come on, I know a place."

She tucked the pistol into a jacket pocket and followed me to the parking lot. We both piled into the beat-up pickup I was driving and headed away from Allen's as quickly as I could without attracting attention. I'd been right; Knight Errant cops were already pulling up to the place, lights blazing. We passed a couple of their cruisers going back the way we came. I turned the truck and headed for Puyallup.

The girl was silent for most of the drive. I rummaged through the truck's console and found a certified credstick with a couple of hundred nuyen on it and handed it to her. "You earned this," I said. "Thanks for saving my ass back there."

She took it without expression, then said, "You're welcome." She looked at the stick. "Where are we going?" she asked. I don't know what she was thinking, either about me or the situation in general. She seemed wary, but she didn't act like she thought I was one of the bad guys.

"Another diner, a lot like that one. Omelets aren't as good, but they have pretty good sandwiches." We drove a little further in silence, then I pulled into the parking lot at the same diner I'd been scrounging behind five years ago when I'd started down this crazy road.

I stopped the truck, then looked at her before I got out. "You need a job? I know a guy."

A look of wary hope showed in her eyes. "Yeah. Beats starving."

I chuckled. "Don't I know it."

We climbed down from the truck and walked into the diner by the front door. I scanned the crowd, and sure enough, I saw Hauser holding court in his usual corner booth. He acknowledged me with a nod, but someone was sitting opposite him, so I motioned the girl to a barstool and we both sat down. A waitress took our order, and the girl dug into her sandwich with gusto when it arrived.

Hauser's guest finally rose and left; I excused myself and walked over to the booth. Hauser was looking rougher every day, but that happens with orks. They get old before the rest of us. I know he had a son somewhere whom he was presumably grooming to take over the family business, but I'd never met him. Hauser greeted me warmly and asked how my last job had gone. He knew the answer, of course, but there are forms to follow in this work.

I motioned with my head toward the girl, and said, "Got someone looking for work. She's got moxie, if nothing else." I told him about what had just happened over at Allen's; he nodded approvingly and motioned her over.

I turned to leave, and smiled at the girl as she passed me. I heard her climb into the booth, and heard Hauser's raspy voice ask her, "You got any skills?" ✖



CREATING A SHADOWRUNNER

SAY IT WITH ME, NOW:

Watch your back!
Shoot straight!
Conserve ammo!
Never deal with a dragon!

Those are the fundamental rules for surviving in the *Shadowrun* world. Beyond that, individuals have their own rules—codes, or lack thereof. There are people who steal from the rich and give to the poor, and people who steal from the rich and laugh at the poor. People who are flamboyant, pulling off capers in grand style, and people who are never seen, not for a second, by those they don't want to see them.

The point is, there are all types of shadowrunners out there, and it is time now to create one and take to the streets of 2075. Take your best shot, fight the odds, hope for the best, and show everyone you have the guts and the skills to do the impossible. You may never be accepted in “civilized” society, but you can take pride in the fact that you've earned everything you own—including your freedom.

STEP ONE: CHOOSE CONCEPT

The sidebar **Common Character Concepts and their Roles Explained** gives you a snapshot of the character types you most likely to find in the shadows. Disparate characters band together as runner teams; blending their talents, skills, and specialized expertise to complete missions they would not be able to pull off as individuals. Some runner teams come together for a specific job, while others stay together throughout their entire careers, becoming as close-knit as family. This gallery is just a starting point—there are characters in the shadows that don't conform to any list. The one you create will be uniquely yours.

TIPS FOR CHARACTER CREATION

A spreadsheet, word processing document, or pen and paper will help keep things clear and organized as you go through the character creation process. Organization makes it easier to track the priorities you have selected for your character, along with your Karma expenditures. It will also prove useful in calculating Essence and other elements as well as subtracting costs from your resources. As you go through character creation, note any bonuses you receive from Qualities and augmentations on the character sheet, as these may modify the statistics of the character at the end of the character creation process.

Character creation involves many decisions, from choosing the right skills to purchasing the appropriate gear. It could take as little as an hour to build a character or as long as an evening. It is helpful to have an idea of what you want to play and what you want your character to do before getting together for a home game of *Shadowrun*.

You may start with an idea of what sort of character you want to play and some basic background concepts. The character may be an ex-soldier from a national government looking to use her combat skills on the streets. Or a former corporate headhunter forced out of the megacorporation by an ambitious rival and now using his negotiating savvy and deal-making skills to survive the shadows. There are second-generation runners, born to the life and learning the skills of the trade from their SINless parents. It's not unusual for a bounty hunter who collects pelts of paranormal critters or tracks down fugitives to engage in a little shadow-running to supplement his income. The character may have grown up in a street gang, and he sees shadow-running as a way to get out of the gutter. Or the character may have just gotten out of jail and be eager to see what she can do with the skills she learned and the connections she made on the inside.

You do not need to understand all the nuances of character creation and character statistics to get start-





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COMMON CHARACTER TYPES AND THEIR ROLES

Face: The face runs his fingers over the thrumming strings of other people's wants and needs, playing them like a maestro. He is master of the con, a polished negotiator, and often an expert leader. Interacting with Mr. Johnson during the meet is his specialty, especially when it comes to bargaining for the greatest profit. The face also excels at legwork, coaxing or squeezing vital information from a variety of sources that could help make sure his job is a success. Though the face usually manages to get what he wants with charm and a smile, he knows how to be more forceful to get people to cough up their secrets. Words are the face's weapon of choice and Charisma and Willpower are the face's two important attributes—but he has no problem using an Ares Predator when the situation warrants.



Spellcaster: A manabolt to your chest, a fireball in your face—that's what the spellcaster brings to the table in combat. And he does so much more. He manipulates and channels mana, an energy field that is the essence of magic. Mana can be manipulated in several different ways, allowing for different types of spellcasters. Magicians follow a more logical and ordered system of magic, while shamans rely more on their instincts and intuition. To make a spellcaster, a player needs to select a priority that grants a Magic attribute rating (see **Priority Table**, p. 65). Depending on the tradition, Charisma or Intuition can be important attributes for spellcasters, and Willpower is an important attribute for resisting Drain.



Decker: The trickster in the Matrix, the flash of lightning in the corner of your virtual eye—a decker specializes in hacking into computers, commlinks, and datahavens. Her job often involves stealing, altering, and manipulating data as well as taking control of or modifying security systems so her teammates can get in and out of defended facilities. A good decker knows her work may put her right in the middle of heated action, and she knows how to react. Whether she's firing a weapon, disabling the weapons of others, or sending every electronic device in a place on the attack, she has a



whole bunch of options to keep herself involved in unfolding combat. A decker never travels without her cyberdeck (p. 227), the tool of her trade. Logic, Intuition, and Willpower can be important attributes for the decker character.

Technomancer: Some people hack the Matrix with physical tools, but a few have the ability to log on with nothing more than their minds. These people are technomancers. A technomancer can access the Matrix with his mind through an intrinsic connection that's not fully understood, even in 2075—though plenty of people would pay plenty to figure out how it works. A player who wishes to play a technomancer must select an option on the **Priority Table** (p. 65) that gives the character a Resonance attribute. Logic, Intuition, and Willpower can be important attributes for the technomancer.



Rigger: Some people drive cars; other people use vehicles as an extension of their body, like an additional set of limbs. A rigger is a professional driver, an ace controller of all sorts of machines. She is highly skilled in the operation, repair, and customization of all sorts of vehicles and/or drones, offering surveillance, transportation, and remote firepower to their team. Reaction is a critical attribute for riggers.



Street Samurai: Some artists work in watercolors, some in oils. The street samurai is an artist of pain. In any given situation, he knows fifteen ways to hurt an opponent, and an additional eight ways to hurt an opponent *real bad*. He can take significant amounts of damage and stay standing, leveling devastating damage on her opponents. He typically is augmented with significant amounts of cyberware and bioware to make him exceptionally tough and dangerous in physical and armed combat. While he is ferocious and deadly, he tends to have a code—it may be a code comprehensible only to him, but it's something. Body, Strength, and Agility are important attributes for characters that are street samurai.



ed. That will come with time. To start, have a concept in mind and dive in. Your character will quickly become unique—and all yours.

Players and the gamemaster should work together to develop a team of characters that are suited to the campaign. The character creation rules as presented in this chapter involve the creation of an experienced shadowrunner. For rules on the other levels of character creation (street level, prime runner), see the **Alternate Gameplay Sidebar**.

All characters in *Shadowrun* start with 25 Karma they will use to improve themselves. They'll get plenty of other resources as they move through the process.

EXAMPLE

GETTING STARTED

James, Rob, and Kyra are putting together new characters for a *Shadowrun* game. Their gamemaster is Michael. After talking with the players about what they are looking for in a game, Michael has determined that the starting level will be experienced runner (the default level). James has decided he wishes to play a technomancer who grew up on the streets. Rob wants to put together a street samurai, whose background includes service in the military of the United Canadian American States (UCAS). Kyra has chosen to be a SINless mystic adept, combining the abilities of spellslinging with a body enhanced by magic abilities. Kyra has also decided to add some social skills to her repertoire.

James, Rob and Kyra have determined the following qualities are important to their characters. Later in the character creation process, they may select other qualities to purchase that will work well with the characters' attributes and skills.

JAMES

Technomancer

Natural Hardening (Cost: 10 Karma)

ROB

Street Samurai

SINner [National]: (Bonus: 5 Karma)

Exceptional Attribute [Strength]: (Cost: 14 Karma)
[Dependent on gamemaster approval]

KYRA

Mystic Adept

Mentor Spirit (Cost: 5 Karma)

Focused Concentration [Rating 2] (Cost: 8 Karma)

ALTERNATE GAMEPLAY

Shadowrun provides players with two alternate ways of building characters besides the normal experienced players. The first is for street-level characters; characters that have not yet had a chance to establish themselves as runners and are still in the process of earning their street cred. Obviously, these characters will not have the same gear or resources as the experienced shadowrunner. The second option is the prime runner build to create a character who has successfully been running the shadows long enough to have established their reputations as professionals in the eyes of Mr. Johnson. They possess the gear, the connections, and the talent to back up those reputations. The following are the rules for each level of alternate game play:

STREET-LEVEL PLAY

- **Modify the resources column on the Priority Table as follows:**
 - **Priority A:** 75,000 nuyen
 - **Priority B:** 50,000 nuyen
 - **Priority C:** 25,000 nuyen
 - **Priority D:** 15,000 nuyen
 - **Priority E:** 6,000 nuyen
- **Karma:** Each player receives 13 Karma to customize characters (maximum of 26 Karma).
- **Gear Restrictions:** Device Ratings must be rated at 4 or less. Maximum Availability is limited to 10 or less.
- **Nuyen Restrictions:** Characters may only convert up to 5 Karma into nuyen (10,000 nuyen).
- Follow all other rules for Character Creation/Advancement as laid out in this chapter.

PRIME RUNNER PLAY

- **Modify the resources column on the Priority Table as follows:**
 - **Priority A:** 500,000 nuyen
 - **Priority B:** 325,000 nuyen
 - **Priority C:** 210,000 nuyen
 - **Priority D:** 150,000 nuyen
 - **Priority E:** 100,000 nuyen
- **Karma:** Each player receives 35 Karma to customize characters (maximum of 70 Karma).
- **Gear Restrictions:** Device Ratings must be rated at 6 or less. Maximum Availability is 15 or less.
- **Nuyen Restrictions:** Characters may convert up to 25 Karma into nuyen (50,000 nuyen).
- **Karma Restrictions:** Instead of the normal Charisma x 3 Karma for contacts, increase this amount to Charisma x 6 Karma for contacts.
- Follow all other rules for Character Creation/Advancement as laid out in this chapter.

STEP TWO: CHOOSE METATYPE

RAISE MENTAL, PHYSICAL,
AND SPECIAL ATTRIBUTES

METATYPE & SPECIAL ATTRIBUTES

In *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*, character generation is based on the Priority System. The Priority System is a table with the following columns: Metatype, Attributes, Magic or Resonance, Skills, and Resources. The rows are divided into Priority Levels ranging from Priority A to Priority E. Players assign a specific Priority Level for each of the columns to their character depending on their preferences. The values assigned must be different for each column (representing each aspect of the character), and there can be no duplications. For example, a character may not have Priority Level B for Magic or Resonance and Priority B for Resources. The higher the Priority Level (A, B, etc.), the more valuable it is for the character. Characters use Karma later on to customize their characters even further.

The player begins the character-creation process by choosing their character's metatype, or race. There are five distinct races within *Shadowrun*: dwarfs, elves, humans, orks, and trolls. Each race receives different ra-

cial advantages (and possibly disadvantages). Humans, for example, receive a higher rating in Edge (+1). Trolls receive Thermographic Vision, +1 Reach, and Dermal Armor, but they also receive the disadvantage of having to pay an additional fifty percent for gear because everything—including cyberware and bioware—must be specially modified to meet their massive physical requirements. Several metatypes also receive physical or mental advantages/disadvantages to their attribute ratings (such as higher or lower natural attribute limits). When determining which metatype best fits the character concept they wish to play, the player should refer to the **Metatype Attribute Table** (p. 66) and review the specific details for each metatype.

Once the player has selected the metatype they wish to play, they should review the Metatype column to determine which Priority Levels give them the best options for their character based on their preferred metatype and the special attribute points they need. The special attributes are Edge, Magic, and Resonance; if you want your character to have a high rating in one or more of these areas, make sure you select a row with plenty of special attribute points. Technomancer characters need to ensure they can have a high Resonance, while magician or adept characters will want a high Magic rating.

Edge starts at the value for each metatype listed in the **Metatype Attribute Table** (p. 66). Magic and Resonance start at 0.

PRIORITY TABLE

PRIORITY	METATYPE	ATTRIBUTES	MAGIC OR RESONANCE	SKILLS	RESOURCES
A	Human (9)	24	Magician or Mystic Adept: Magic 6, two Rating 5 Magical skills, 10 spells Technomancer: Resonance 6, two Rating 5 Resonance skills, 5 complex forms	46/10	450,000¥
	Elf (8)				
	Dwarf (7)				
	Ork (7)				
	Troll (5)				
B	Human (7)	20	Magician or Mystic Adept: Magic 4, two Rating 4 Magical skills, 7 spells Technomancer: Resonance 4, two Rating 4 Resonance skills, 2 complex forms Adept: Magic 6, one Rating 4 Active skill Aspected Magician: Magic 5, one Rating 4 Magical skill group	36/5	275,000¥
	Elf (6)				
	Dwarf (4)				
	Ork (4)				
	Troll (0)				
C	Human (5)	16	Magician or Mystic Adept: Magic 3, 5 spells Technomancer: Resonance 3, 1 complex form Adept: Magic 4, one Rating 2 Active skill Aspected Magician: Magic 3, one Rating 2 Magical skill group	28/2	140,000¥
	Elf (3)				
	Dwarf (1)				
	Ork (0)				
D	Human (3) Elf (0)	14	Adept: Magic 2 Aspected Magician: Magic 2	22/0	50,000¥
E	Human (1)	12	—	18/0	6,000¥



Edge, of course, is beneficial to all characters. Special attribute points may be spent entirely on Edge if the player chooses not to play a magic user or a technomancer, or they may split these points as they see fit between their Edge and Magic or Resonance attribute ratings if the player so chooses. These Special Attribute Points may only be allocated on Special Attributes. They may never be used to raise Mental or Physical attributes. Any unspent Special Attribute points disappear following the character creation process. If the player chooses an option that provides 0 special attribute points, don't worry. Players may elect to spend the Karma given to them during the character creation process to raise these special attributes by following the standard **Character Advancement** rules (p. 103).

Note that for most metatypes, the maximum rating for Magic, Resonance, and Edge is 6; humans have a maximum Edge rating of 7. Certain qualities (Lucky, Exceptional Attribute) allow characters to exceed attribute maximums by one, but the player must purchase these qualities with Karma and may only do so with gamemaster approval (the player may purchase either Lucky or Exceptional Attribute, but not both). Even if one of these qualities is purchased, the player must still spend the attribute points/Karma to raise the attribute to that new limit. With Exceptional Attribute, you can end up with a maximum Magic or Resonance rating of 7 when starting the game (before initiation or submersion).

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

The next step is to raise the character's attributes. The player chooses a Priority Level from the Attribute column that best suits their vision of the character. The number in this column represents the points a player has available for raising their character's Mental and Physical

attributes. When spending attribute points, refer to the Metatype Attribute Table. This table shows the starting attribute ratings for each metatype (the number before the slash) as well as the maximum for each. Characters begin at their metatype's starting levels at no cost; so humans begin with a Body rating of 1, dwarfs have a starting Body rating of 3, orks have an initial rating of 4, and trolls start at 5. Characters then apply their attribute points to these starting values. It takes 1 attribute point to raise an attribute rating by 1.

A character must spend all attribute points during character creation. They may not spend attribute points from the Attributes column to raise special attributes or for any other purpose. Characters at character creation may only have 1 Mental or Physical attribute at their natural maximum limit; the special attributes of Magic, Edge, and Resonance are not included in this limitation.

A player needs to be careful in building their character, as many of the attributes have a natural limit below the default level of 6 to reflect a metatype's inherent disadvantage in that particular attribute.

While the player is raising attributes and deciding on starting levels for her character, she should keep in mind several factors that will be calculated at the end of character creation based upon the character's attributes, namely Initiative and Inherent Limits. Initiative determines the order in which characters, both player characters and non-player characters (NPCs), act in combat (for rules on Initiative, see **Initiative**, p. 52). The base Initiative rating for a character is Intuition + Reaction.

Inherent limits (see **Tests and Limits**, p. 46) restrict the number of hits characters can count in certain tests. They are based on attributes, so when choosing attributes, keep these limits in mind. The formulas for inherent limits are found on the **Final Calculations Table** (p. 101).

Technomancers need to remember that their mental attributes will determine attributes for their Living Perso-

METATYPE ATTRIBUTE TABLE

RACE	BODY	AGI	REA	STR	WIL	LOG	INT	CHA	EDG	ESS	INI
Human	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6	2/7	6	REA + INT
Human Racial: None											
Elf	1/6	2/7	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6	3/8	1/6	6	REA + INT
Elf Racial: Low-Light Vision											
Dwarf	3/8	1/6	1/5	3/8	2/7	1/6	1/6	1/6	1/6	6	REA + INT
Dwarf Racial: +2 dice for pathogen and toxin resistance, +20% increased Lifestyle cost											
Ork	4/9	1/6	1/6	3/8	1/6	1/5	1/6	1/5	1/6	6	REA + INT
Ork Racial: Low-Light Vision											
Troll	5/10	1/5	1/6	5/10	1/6	1/5	1/5	1/4	1/6	6	REA + INT
Troll Racial: Thermographic Vision, +1 Reach, +1 dermal armor, +100% increased Lifestyle costs											



EXAMPLE

ASSIGNING ATTRIBUTE POINTS

JAMES

James thinks the human metatype is best suited to the role of technomancer, and he has decided to use row D in the Metatype column. As a human character, he receives 3 Special Attribute Points that he wants to spend on Edge and Resonance. James assigns 2 Special Attribute points to Resonance (giving it a rating of 2) and assigns 1 Special Attribute point to Edge. Consulting the Metatype Attribute Table, he sees that the starting Edge rating for a human is 2, so the point he spent raises the rating to 3.

James then moves on to the Attribute column of the Priority Table and decides to assign row C to his Mental and Physical Attributes. That gives him 16 Attribute Points to raise his Mental and Physical attribute ratings. After distributing the points, James' attributes look like this:

ATTRIBUTES	RACIAL BASE/ NATURAL LIMIT	POINTS SPENT	NEW RATINGS
Body	1/6	2	3
Agility	1/6	1	2
Reaction	1/6	1	2
Strength	1/6	2	3
Charisma	1/6	2	3
Intuition	1/6	3	4
Logic	1/6	3	4
Willpower	1/6	2	3
Essence	6	—	6
Total		16	
Special Attributes (so far)			
Edge	2/7	1	3
Resonance	0/6	2	2
Racial Bonuses/Disadvantages: None			

ROB

Rob has decided to build a troll street samurai and has chosen Priority B for his metatype, even though this priority level does not give any Special Attribute Points to a troll character. If he desires to raise his Edge, Rob will need to spend his bonus Karma later on in the character creation process to do so. Rob chooses Priority A for his Attributes category, giving him 24 Attribute Points to spend on his Mental and Physical attributes. After Rob has spent all his points, he reviews his character. He intends to take the Exceptional Attribute quality, which would allow him to take his Strength up to 11, and the gamemaster has given Rob permission to take this quality at character creation. Knowing this ahead of time, Rob has spent the points to give his character Strength 11. Rob checks his character, and makes sure he only has one Physical attribute that is at (or in this case, above) his character's natural attribute maximum limit. Rob's attributes look like this:

ATTRIBUTES	RACIAL BASE/ NATURAL LIMIT	POINTS SPENT	NEW RATINGS
Body	5/10	4	9
Agility	1/5	3	4
Reaction	1/6	2	3
Strength	5/10 (11)	6	11
Charisma	1/4	2	3
Intuition	1/5	2	3
Logic	1/5	2	3
Willpower	1/6	3	4
Essence	6	—	6
Total		24	
Special Attributes (so far)			
Edge	1/6	0	1
Racial Bonuses/Disadvantages: Thermographic Vision, +1 Reach, +1 dermal armor, +50% gear and Lifestyle costs			

KYRA

Kyra has decided her character will be an elf. Scanning the Priority Table, Kyra decides on Priority Level D for metatype. Like Rob's troll character, Kyra's elf character will receive no extra Special Attribute Points. For her to raise her special attributes, she will need to use Karma later on. Kyra settles on Priority B for her Attribute Points. This gives Kyra 20 Attribute Points to improve her character. Checking her character, none of her Mental or Physical attributes are at their natural maximum limit. After spending her points, these are her character's attributes:

ATTRIBUTES	RACIAL BASE/ NATURAL LIMIT	POINTS SPENT	NEW RATINGS
Body	1/6	2	3
Agility	2/7	4	6
Reaction	1/6	2	3
Strength	1/6	1	2
Charisma	3/8	3	6
Intuition	1/6	3	4
Logic	1/6	2	3
Willpower	1/6	3	4
Essence	6	—	6
Total		20	
Special Attributes (so far)			
Edge	1/6	0	1
Racial Bonuses/Disadvantages: Low-Light Vision			

na, their representation in the **Matrix** (p. 249). For details on the living persona, see p. 250. Similarly, when magicians project themselves into astral space, they have **astral attributes** (p. 314) that are based on their mental attributes. The choices players make in this section will affect those attributes later.

STEP THREE: CHOOSE MAGIC OR RESONANCE

The next column of the Priority Table is Magic or Resonance. This is a column for players who want to be magic users (adepts, aspected magicians, mages, shamans, and mystic adepts) or technomancers. Players who desire none of these character options choose Priority E for this column. For a quick reference on the variety of magic users available in *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*, refer to the **Magic User Types** sidebar. Additionally, the **Life as a Magic User in 2075** and **Life as a Technomancer in 2075** sidebars help players know what they're getting into if they choose these kinds of characters.

Priority Levels A through C in this column specify the character's starting attribute rating (either Magic or Resonance) along with a number of skills and spells or complex forms for their character as listed in the appropriate box. These are already paid for and can be added to the character sheet right away; they do not cost any skill points or Karma up front, although they can be increased later. The player should select which skills, spells, and complex forms they want for their character at this time. A list of active skills (including those that are Magic- and Resonance-based) can be found on p. 90. Skills are described in detail in the Skills chapter, p. 128. Adepts should review the adept powers (p. 308) to ensure that the skills they choose will support the adept powers they want, such as the Blades skill for the Critical Strike (skill) adept power. Spells listings start on p. 283, while complex forms can be found on p. 252.

Aspected magicians must choose a specific Magic-based skill group (Sorcery, Conjuring, or Enchanting) to be the one area of magic that the character practices. Once an aspected magician take this specific skill group, the character may never take any other skills from the other Magic skill groups, either at character creation or at any future point.

Note that while adepts receive Power Points for free (equal to their Magic rating), mystic adepts do not. Mystic

LIFE FOR A MAGIC USER IN 2075

Magic has been back in the world for more than sixty years, but the Awakened—the term for those who channel magic—remain a small minority of the population. As a result, they are both admired and feared. They are the subjects of wild rumors, baseless speculation, and the occasional free-floating prejudice.

Many mundane metahumans fear what the Awakened can do with their abilities. There have been magic-based terror attacks, ranging from the Ghost Dance to the global attacks Winternight launched before and during the second Matrix Crash in 2064, that give credence to these fears. Policlubs like Humanis feed these fears, building them up to spark hate and violence against the Awakened.

As a reflection of this fear and as a measure of caution, many sprawls require magic users to register their gear, spell formulas, and spirits (typically they only care about spirits and gear of at least moderate power—in game terms, those with a rating of 3 or higher). They are required to purchase licenses in order to legitimately carry and use magic. These legal licenses often come with invasive requirements, including being subjected to compliance checks that can be conducted at any time, giving law-enforcement corporations

the right to search a magic user's premises without a warrant, even when the person is not present. Some sprawls require magic users to give law enforcement agencies and/or security corporations blood samples that could serve as material links to track the character magically if necessary. Because of this, many magic users in the shadows have fake IDs and licenses, partly so they won't get nabbed by the cops, but also so they don't have to turn any part of their bodies over to them. Rules and cost for magic items and licenses are found in the **Street Gear** section (p. 416).

Since magic is such a rare commodity, it is very much desired by the megacorporations. Legally registered magic users often find themselves the targets of extractions, snatched by rival megacorporations looking to press them into employment.

The Awakened have their own prejudices, often against magic users not of their type (e.g., magicians are sometimes prejudiced against adepts). Since they are limited in what they can do, aspected magicians suffer the most prejudice within the Awakened community. Many see them as not fully Awakened or not full magic users, and they are barred from many magic groups.



MAGIC USER TYPES

Shadowrun has four distinct types of magic users: Adept, Magician, Aspected Magician, and Mystic Adept. Here's a quick breakdown of the unique characteristics of each group. A player should weigh these different characteristics carefully when deciding which kind of magic user to play. Page references are provided for more detailed information about each type of magic user.

ADEPTS

- Adepts channel mana into their own bodies to enhance their natural abilities, making their talents and skills much more potent.
- Adepts never astrally project (p. 313).
- Adepts only perceive astral space by purchasing the Astral Perception power (p. 312).
- Adepts can learn the Assensing skill only if they have the Astral Perception power.
- Adepts cannot use skills from any magic-related skill groups (Sorcery, Conjuring, or Enchanting).
- Adepts can follow mentor spirits (p. 320).
- Adepts gain Adept Powers that are purchased with Power Points. Adepts receive a number of Power Points equal to their Magic rating.

MAGICIANS

- Magicians can astrally perceive.
- Magicians can astrally project.
- Magicians can choose freely from the magical skills or skill groups (Sorcery, Conjuring, Enchanting).
- Magicians can cast spells, conjure spirits, or enchant magical items.
- At character creation, magicians who cast spells, perform rituals, or create alchemical preparations may know a maximum number of formulae from each group equal to their Magic Rating x 2 (i.e., Magic Rating of 4 allows 8 spells, 8 rituals, 8 alchemical preparations).

ASPECTED MAGICIANS

- Aspected magicians are a limited form of magician.
- Aspected magicians do not astrally project.
- Aspected magicians can astrally perceive.
- Aspected magicians must choose one, and only one, of the following three Skills/Skill Groups.
 - Sorcery (Spellcasting and related skills)
 - Conjuring (Summoning and related skills)
 - Enchanting (Alchemy and related skills)
- Aspected magicians cannot perform any of the magical skills associated with the two groups they did not select.
- Aspected magicians can only learn Counterspelling if they take the skills to be a spellcaster.
- Aspected magicians can follow mentor spirits.
- At character creation, aspected magicians who cast spells, perform rituals, or create alchemical preparations may know a maximum number of formulae from each group equal to their Magic Rating x 2 (i.e., Magic Rating of 4 allows 8 spells, 8 rituals, 8 alchemical preparations).

MYSTIC ADEPTS

- Mystic adepts are a combination of magicians and adepts.
- Mystic adepts never astrally project.
- Mystic adepts can astrally perceive if they purchase the Astral Perception adept power.
- Mystic adepts purchase their spells/rituals/preparations in the same way as magicians.
- Mystic adepts must purchase their Power Points with Karma (2 Karma each at character creation for a full Power Point, with a maximum number of points equal to their Magic attribute rating).
- Mystic adepts can have any skills from the Enchanting, Sorcery, or Conjuring skill groups.

LIFE FOR A TECHNOMANCER IN 2075

Much about what technomancers are and how they operate is shrouded in mystery. Though there is no firm estimate of their exact number (since many of them choose to remain underground and not reveal their gift), it is believed that there are fewer technomancers than magic users.

Because so little is known about technomancers, many in the world fear what they might be and what they might be capable of. In pop culture their abilities are exaggerated to extreme proportions (they might be shown, for example, shutting down every piece of electronics for blocks), and some groups

have put bounties on their heads. Many corporations would like to study technomancers, conducting experiments to map their talents and discover ways to better understand and perhaps duplicate their abilities. Others groups just want them dead. The legal rights of technomancers are hazy and ambiguous—many times deliberately so. The world in 2075 is generally hostile and occasionally very dangerous for technomancers. Many technomancers pass themselves off as ordinary deckers, carrying dummy cyberdecks to blend in. They will often do whatever it takes to keep their secret from being discovered.



EXAMPLE

MAGIC OR RESONANCE COLUMN

JAMES

James has already assigned Priority Levels D to his Meta-type and C to Attributes for his technomancer character, so these Priority Levels are no longer available to him, leaving A, B, and E. Row E has no Resonance options, so James rules that one out and chooses Priority Level B. This gives him a Resonance Attribute Rating of 4 (which is added to the 2 Special Attribute Points he dedicated to Resonance in Step Two), as well as two Resonance-based skills at rating 4. He selects Compiling and Registering as the skills. For his 2 complex forms, he chooses Cleaner and Editor.

At this point during character creation, James' character looks like this:

ATTRIBUTES	RACIAL BASE/ NATURAL LIMIT	POINTS SPENT	NEW RATINGS
Body	1/6	2	3
Agility	1/6	1	2
Reaction	1/6	1	2
Strength	1/6	2	3
Willpower	1/6	2	3
Logic	1/6	3	4
Intuition	1/6	3	4
Charisma	1/6	2	3
Essence	6	—	6
Total		16	
Special Attributes (so far)			
Edge	2/7	1	3
Resonance	0/6	2	6
Racial Bonuses/Disadvantages: None			
Resonance-Based Skills: Compiling 4, Registering 4			
Complex Forms: Cleaner, Editor			

ROB

Rob's street samurai does not use Magic or Resonance. He chooses Priority E, giving him no points in this step, so he simply moves on to the next step in the character creation process.

KYRA

Kyra's character is a mystic adept. Reviewing the Priority Levels that she has left, Kyra chooses Priority A. This gives her a Magic attribute rating of 6, two rating 5 Magical

Skills, and 10 spells. She picks up Spellcasting and Counterspelling as her skills, and after looking over the selection of spells starting on p. 283, she chooses 10 that suit her (see the list below).

Kyra won't get any free Power Points for adept powers, so she decides to spend some of her Karma now just to keep things organized. Kyra decides to spend 10 Karma from her Karma fund to purchase 5 Power Points. She divides up those Power Points among the listed **adept powers** (p. 308), giving her a good mix of combat and social abilities. She'll choose the skills that some of the powers enhance once she has selected her specific skills.

This is what Kyra's character looks like after including her Magic Rating and the new skills, adept powers, and spells:

ATTRIBUTES	RACIAL BASE/ NATURAL LIMIT	POINTS SPENT	NEW RATINGS
Body	1/6	2	3
Agility	2/7	4	6
Reaction	1/6	2	3
Strength	1/6	1	2
Willpower	1/6	3	4
Logic	1/6	2	3
Intuition	1/6	3	4
Charisma	3/8	3	6
Essence	6	—	6
Total		20	
Special Attributes (so far)			
Edge	1/6	0	1
Racial Bonuses/Disadvantages: Low-Light Vision			
Magic-Based Skills: Spellcasting 5, Counterspelling 5			
Adept Powers		Cost	
Combat Sense (2 levels)		1	
Enhanced Accuracy (Skill)		.25	
Improved Ability (Skill)		.5	
Improved Potential (Social)		1	
Mystic Armor (3 levels)		1.5	
Voice Control (3 levels)		.75	
Spells: Analyze Truth, Blast, Clairaudience, Clout, Heal, Improved Invisibility, Influence, Lightning Bolt, Mind Probe, Stunball			

adepts must purchase Power Points using Karma at the cost 2 Karma per full Power Point. The maximum number of Power Points Mystic Adepts may have is equal to their Magic rating. These points would be purchased during **Step Seven: Spending Your Left Over Karma** (p. 98).

Remember, players are not limited to only what they receive in the priority level. Players may spend Karma to buy more spells or complex forms, register sprites, or bind spirits toward the end of character creation

STEP FOUR: PURCHASE QUALITIES

This next step in the character creation process is finalizing the list of qualities the character will have at the beginning of a *Shadowrun* campaign.

Qualities help round out your character's personality while also providing a range of benefits or penalties. There are two types of Qualities—Positive Qualities, which provide gameplay bonuses and require an expenditure of Karma; and Negative Qualities, which impose gameplay penalties but also give bonus Karma the player can spend in other areas.

As mentioned earlier, the character starts the character creation process with 25 Karma, and some of that can be spent to buy Qualities. Players can spend all of it, some of it, or none of it based on what they want their character to have and how much Karma they want to save for later. Additionally, at creation characters can only possess at most 25 Karma worth of Positive Qualities and 25 Karma worth of Negative Qualities.

After character creation, Positive Qualities can be purchased during game play, while Negative Qualities may be awarded to the character by the gamemaster based on events that take place in game. Negative Qualities can be bought off using Karma during game play. See **Character Advancement** rules (p. 103) for more about purchasing Positive Qualities or buying off Negative ones.

When purchasing a Positive or Negative quality, note the quality on the character sheet along with any bonuses or negative modifiers to skills in parentheses next to the appropriate skills or attributes.

POSITIVE QUALITIES

AMBIDEXTROUS

COST: 4 KARMA

The Ambidextrous character can handle objects equally well with either hand. Without this quality, any action performed solely with the off-hand (i.e., firing a gun) suffers a -2 dice pool modifier (see **Attacker Using Off-Hand Weapon**, p. 178).





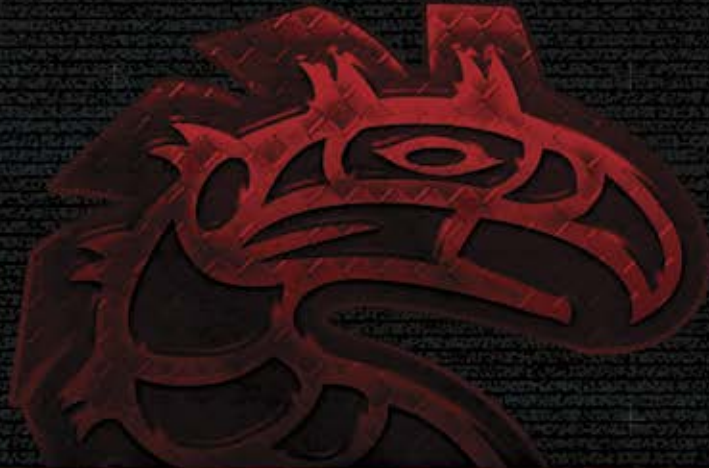
SPRAWL GANGER

Gangers. The sprawl's filled with them. Most wind up dead or in jail, a rare few crawl into positions of power, and some? Some graduate to the big time. The sprawl ganger is a cut above the usual street scum; he's faster, smarter, tougher, meaner, and has learned how to run an operation. He's seen how much nuyen passes upstairs and has decided that he wants to start taking a bigger cut by going pro and running the shadows. He's not a part of his gang anymore (though everyone knows you never really leave) and is in business for himself, kicking some of his funds back to his family and his neighborhood. In return, the neighborhood looks out for him. After narrowly escaping with his life (but minus an arm), he's starting to realize that there's more to life than being a gangbanger—now he just has to figure out what that is.

METATYPE: ORK

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	EDG
7	4	4	7	4	4	3	4	4.8	1

Condition	13 / 10
Monitor (P/S)	
Armor	12
Limits	Physical 8, Mental 4, Social 5
Physical Init	8 + 1D6
Active Skills	Armorer 1, Athletics skill group 2, Automatics 1, Blades 3, Clubs 3, Computer 1, Con 1, Cybertechnology 1, Etiquette (Street) 2 (+2), First Aid 1, Intimidation 5, Leadership 3, Locksmith 1, Mechanics skill group 1, Navigation 1, Negotiation 3, Perception 3, Performance 3, Pilot Ground Craft 2, Pistols 3, Stealth skill group 2, Throwing Weapons 1, Unarmed Combat 5
Knowledge Skills	Business 2, Seattle Street Gangs (Crimson Crush) 4(+2), Sprawl life 3, Street drugs 2
Languages	English (City Speak) N, Or'zet 2
Qualities	Dependent (6: several brothers and sisters), Distinctive Style, Guts, Home Ground (You know a guy), Prejudice (Outspoken against elves)
Augmentations	Cyberarm (standard, used, obvious)
Gear	Armored jacket [12, w/ nonconductivity 6], armorer kit, automotive mechanics kit, cybertechnology kit, fake SIN (Rating 3), earbuds [Rating 1], fake gun license (Rating 3), glasses [Rating 1, w/ image link], Harley-Davidson Scorpion, industrial mechanic kit, jazz (4 doses), Low Lifestyle (2 months), medkit (Rating 3), 10 plastic restraints, Renraku Sensei commlink, respirator (Rating 1), survival kit
Weapons	Colt America L36 [Light Pistol, Acc 7, DV 7P, AP —, SA, RC —, 11(c), w/ concealed holster, 2 spare clips, 110 rounds of regular ammo] Combat axe [Blade, Reach 2, Acc 4, DV 12P, AP —4] Extendable baton [Club, Reach 1, Acc 5, DV 7S, AP —] Knife [Blade, Reach —, Acc 5, DV 7P, AP —1] Ruger Super Warhawk [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5, DV 9P, AP —2, SS, RC —, 6(cy), w/ 2 speed loaders, 60 rounds regular ammo] Streetline Special [Hold-out, Acc 4, DV 6P, AP —, SA, RC —, w/ concealed history, 30 rounds regular ammo]
Contacts	Fixer (Connection 3/Loyalty 1) Sprawl Ganger (Connection 2/Loyalty 5) Street Kid (Connection 1/Loyalty 3)
Notes	Natural low-light vision
Starting ¥	1,500 x (3D6 x 60)¥



SHADOWRUN >noun

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

WorldWide WorldWatch
2050 archive



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.

Get more info at www.shadowruntabletop.com

SHADOWRUN, FIFTH EDITION • PREVIEW FOUR



COMBAT

In the world of *Shadowrun*, combat is an inevitability. At some point the talker will run out of words, the sneaker will get spotted, and the fight will be on. Shooting, stabbing, blowing things up, drive-bys, car chases, breaking things, and healing wounds will be covered in this chapter.

THE BASICS

Shadowrun assumes we're all past the "I shot you!"—"You missed me!" arguments of childhood. Combat is governed by rules and procedures designed to keep the action clear and flowing. In *Shadowrun* everyone in the game quickly learns whether your axe-toting troll whacks the obnoxious elf ganger or if that elf is just too damn fast. We'll open up the Combat rules lessons with the basics: Who goes first? Where can I go? What can I do? Then we'll ground you in the general concepts you'll need to understand before we get into the more in-depth stuff.

COMBAT TURN SEQUENCE

Things happen fast in combat. To keep those things straight, *Shadowrun* breaks each encounter into three-second chunks called **Combat Turns** (20 Combat Turns = 1 minute). Each Combat Turn follows a set sequence to resolve issues such as who acts first, who's faster on the draw, what happens when one character punches another, and so on. During the Combat Turn, players act in an order determined by their Initiative Score (see p. 159); each player describes their character's action, then rolls dice to see how well the character performs. The gamemaster describes the actions and reactions of the non-player characters, as well as the final outcome of all actions.

Combat Turns are broken up into a series of **Initiative Passes**, which are further broken down into **Action Phases** allowing player characters (PC) and non-player characters (NPC) to take actions sequentially during the Combat Turn. This allows combat to flow smoothly from character to character without clogging up on the actions of a single player. Things can happen quickly; one of the gamemaster's jobs is to keep players engaged and ready for their next Action Phase.

The Combat Turn plays out as follows:

1. ROLL INITIATIVE

Determine Initiative Scores for all the characters, critters, spirits, sprites, intrusion countermeasures (IC), and anything else involved in the fight (see **Initiative**, p. 159). The order in which things happen during the Action Phase is determined by Initiative Scores, going from highest first to lowest last. Initiative is fluid and changes both within a Combat Turn and between Combat Turns.

Note that wound modifiers affect the Initiative Score (see **Changing Initiative**, p. 160) as soon as the wound is inflicted.

2. BEGIN INITIATIVE PASS

The character with the highest Initiative Score in the combat takes their Action Phase first. This character is the acting character.

If more than one character has the same Initiative Score, compare Attributes according to **Initiative Score** (p. 159) to determine who acts first. Alternatively, the gamemaster can simply determine that all actions occur simultaneously.

3. BEGIN ACTION PHASE

The acting character declares and takes his actions, according to the steps below.

If another character has delayed an action (see **Delaying Actions**, p. 161) and wants to act during this Action Phase, he must declare it here. That character chooses whether to act before, after, or at the same time as the current acting character.

3A. DECLARE ACTIONS

The acting character declares his actions for the Action Phase. He may take two Simple Actions or one Complex Action during his Action Phase. Action types are further detailed in the **Actions** section (p. 163). Alternately, the character can choose to delay his action until a lower Initiative Score in that Combat Turn (see **Delaying Actions**, p. 161).

The character may also declare one Free Action during each Action Phase in the Combat Turn. Likewise, any character who has already acted in the Combat Turn



EXAMPLE

Saskatchewan Pete and Cayman have stumbled down the wrong alley and encountered a Halloweeneer who is intent on making his name by beating on a few shadowrunners. There is no room for negotiation or bargaining—the Halloweeneer is set on a fight. It's time to roll initiative.

Cayman has a Reaction of 4 (augmented to 6, thanks to his wired reflexes level 2) and an Intuition of 5, giving him an Initiative Rating of 11 and 3 Initiative Dice (1 base die and 2 more from his wired reflexes). Saskatchewan Pete did not get a chance to cast any of his spells yet, so he is using his regular Reaction of 3 and Intuition of 5, for an Initiative Score of 8. He has his base of 1 Initiative Die. The Halloweeneer has Reaction 3 (augmented to 4 thanks to wired reflexes 1) and Intuition 3, for an Initiative Rating of 7 with 2 Initiative Dice (1 base, 1 from wired reflexes).

The dice rolls go like this:

Cayman: Dice roll 11 + Initiative Rating 11 = Initiative Score 22

Saskatchewan Pete: Dice roll 2 + Initiative Rating 8 = Initiative Score 10

Halloweeneer: Dice roll 9 + Initiative Rating 7 = Initiative Score 16

In the first Initiative Pass, Cayman's score of 22 allows him to go first, while the Halloweeneer goes second with his 16. Pete's 10 makes him go third.

Score higher than 0 get to go again during a second Initiative Pass. This process is repeated until all characters have an Initiative Score of 0 or less, the Combat Turn ends, or the combat ends.

A character with an Initiative Score of 0 or less can only take one Free Action during an Initiative Pass. However, a character with 0 or less Initiative is allowed one Free Action. She can also respond to attacks by dodging or defending herself.

CHANGING INITIATIVE

In some cases, a character's Initiative Score or Base Initiative Dice may change in the middle of a Combat Turn. A player might gain Initiative by activating an augmentation, for example, or could receive a boost from a drug or spell or other enhancer. Conversely, a character who is wounded or whose vital equipment (weapon, augmentation, etc.) takes damage might lose Initiative.

If a character's Initiative attribute changes, immediately apply the difference as a positive or negative modifier to the character's Initiative Score. This new Initiative Score applies to all remaining actions in that Combat Turn. So a character with Initiative 8 and an Initiative Score of 11 who activates an implant that changes his Initiative to 10 (+2) immediately raises his Initiative Score to 13 (11 + 2).

If the number of Base Initiative Dice available to a character increases, that character immediately rolls the

EXAMPLE

Continuing the example from above, after Cayman, Pete, and the Halloweeneer have taken their actions, everyone subtracts 10 from their Initiative Score, leaving the following totals:

Cayman: 12

Saskatchewan Pete: 0

Halloweeneer: 6

This means that in the second Initiative Pass, Cayman goes first and the Halloweeneer goes second. Pete's score is too low to allow him another Action Phase.

The third Initiative Pass, once again subtracting 10, leads to these totals:

Cayman: 2

Halloweeneer: -4

Cayman is the only one who can act in this Initiative Pass—hopefully he can use his actions to bring a decisive end to the fight, because he won't have another action after this one. A new Combat Turn will start, and everyone will get a turn in the next Initiative Pass.

extra Initiative Dice and adds the sum to their current Initiative Score for that Combat Turn. So a magician with 1d6 Initiative dice who takes his first action to astrally project (2d6 Base Initiative Dice) gains the die (and the change in Initiative) for their Astral Initiative during that Combat Turn. (In this case, the magician would also replace their Reaction + Intuition for Physical Initiative with Intuition x 2 for Astral Initiative.)

If the number of Initiative Dice available to a character decreases, then that character immediately rolls the number of lost dice and subtracts the total from their Initiative Score (along with any decrease to their Initiative Attribute).

Initiative also changes when a character or NPC is injured. Wound modifiers are applied directly to the character's Initiative attribute. These changes are made immediately after the injury occurs and can affect the initiative order even within the same Initiative Pass. These changes do not allow the character to act again; they simply change their Initiative score.

If a character enters combat after it has already begun, they should roll for their Initiative Score as normal and then subtract 10 for each Initiative Pass that has already occurred. This means they may get an Action Phase during the current Combat Turn or they may not, but at least they have a chance.

INITIATIVE AND EDGE

Here's what you can do with Edge to mess with initiative.

- **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. The other players and NPCs then take their actions according to their Initiative Scores. This move to the top of the initiative 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.

DELAYING ACTIONS

There are times when a player wants to see how others act and what happens before making his move; choosing to wait is called a Delayed Action. A Delayed Action must be declared during Step 3A of the Combat Turn Sequence (see **Declare Actions**, p. 158). A player can declare a Delayed Action on any of his Initiative Passes and can continue to delay action until a later Initiative Pass. When the character decides to act, he replaces his normal Action Phase for that Initiative Pass with the Delayed Action and then acts on an Initiative Score lower than their own.

During the Declare Actions part of that Initiative Pass, the character must declare that he is intervening at a specific Initiative Score. He can make that declaration when it is time for players with that score to act. Characters who have a Delayed Action and intervene in this manner can choose to go before, after, or at the same time as a currently acting character who would normally take his action on that Initiative Score; any actions they take receive a -1 dice pool penalty. If multiple characters delay their actions until the same Initiative Score, they break the tie in the same manner as Initiative (p. 159).

Characters delaying an action in this manner keep their initial Initiative Score. If the character does not act before the end of the Initiative Pass, they incur the standard reduction of 10 at the end of the Initiative Pass.

Players can also decide to go after the last player's Action Pass. As long as the character acts before that Initiative Pass ends and the next one begins, there is no problem. If more than one character wants to act last in a Initiative Pass, they act in the reverse order of their Initiative Scores; the character with the highest score goes last. In the event of a tie the characters must either act simultaneously or continue delaying their actions into the next Initiative Pass.

A character can delay his action into the next Initiative Pass and be the first to act. He must still use his own Initiative Score to determine the Action Phases he has for the Combat Turn.

TIMED ITEMS & INITIATIVE

Some items, such as grenades, explosive devices, timed traps, and so on, go off after a certain preset interval. In most situations, these items do what they do based on the character's current Initiative Score during

EXAMPLE

Tempers have flared at a gathering of the Hellhounds gang (to no one's surprise), and the gang members have rolled initiative and are ready to start raining blows on one another. Cutter may be faster than his fellow Hellhounds, but he really wants to make a point of how well he can take a hit before dishing them out. He declares he is delaying his action on Initiative Score 13 and waits for one of the others to make a move.

PainKiller is up next in Initiative Score 11 and he wants to whale on Ash, so he takes a swing, connects, and knocks him flat. Cutter is not about to let that go unanswered, so he declares he wants to use his Delayed Action. When he makes his attack on PainKiller, he suffers a -1 dice pool penalty on his melee attack action. On the next Initiative Pass, Cutter's Initiative Score drops to 3. This means he will get a second swing at PainKiller before PainKiller goes on Initiative Score 1.

the next Combat Turn. If there are no more Combat Turns, the item activates as the gamemaster sees fit.

If an item has a timer set by a player character, that character can decide for how long to set the timer, but he must declare this when the item is activated. It's usually best to have such items go off during the character's Action Phase on a predetermined Initiative Pass or at the beginning or end of a three-second Combat Turn. Timed items always go last in the case of tied Initiative Scores. In the case of radio-detonated items, the character spends their Action Phase performing a Use Item action.

MOVEMENT

Getting from one place to another, especially from one piece of cover to another or closing the distance on an opponent, is important. Characters in *Shadowrun* have three types of movement: Walking, Running, and Sprinting.

A character's movement for an entire Combat Turn (meaning total movement for *all* Initiative Passes, not for *each* Initiative Pass) is based on their Run rate, which is determined by metatype. Walk rate determines the farthest a character can move during a Combat Turn before they are considered to be Running.

It's important to point out that "run" does not mean bolt as fast as you can; that's sprinting. Think of running as a trained combat hustle or a jog, something to get you to another point quickly but still leave you able to perform other actions, albeit with a penalty. Sprinting is exactly that, running as fast as you can from point A to point B.

STANDARD MOVEMENT (WALKING AND RUNNING)

The Movement Rates (Walk and Run) for each metatype are noted on the **Movement Table**. This is the dis-



tance the character can move during their Combat Turn. As soon as the character exceeds their Walk rate, they are considered Running until the end of the Combat Turn and incur any penalties or benefits of running. Running characters must use a Free Action in each Initiative Pass they are considered running.

Characters cannot exceed their calculated Run Rate in a Combat Turn without making a Sprinting test.

SPRINTING

Characters may attempt to increase their running distance by performing a Sprint Action during their Action Phase. In this action, they make a Running + Strength [Physical] Test. Each hit increases the distance a character can move in a Combat Turn by either 1 meter (for dwarfs and trolls) or 2 meters (for elves, humans, and orks). Characters are allowed a maximum number of Sprinting tests equal to half their Running skill per Combat Turn, minimum of 1. Sprinting characters also suffer fatigue (see **Fatigue from Running**, p. 172) if they sprint for too long.

EXAMPLE

Cutter needs to make sure he can get clear of the Zero-Zone before MCT's security goons open up with their assault rifles. He chooses to spend a Complex Action to Sprint. Cutter rolls Running + Strength [Physical] test and gets 1, 4, 5, 5, 5, 6, 6 for 5 hits. His Physical limit is only 4, though, so he's limited to 4 hits from the test. As a human those 4 hits add 2 meters per hit to his Run Rate, meaning he gets a boost of 8 meters. He adds 8 meters to his Run rate of 20 (he has Agility 5), so he can cover a total of 28 meters during this Combat Turn.

He also gains the defensive benefits of Running Modifiers, specifically Sprinting (-4), and is harder to hit when the MCT gun emplacements open fire.

RUNNING MODIFIERS

Characters who are running take a -2 dice pool modifier to all actions performed while running (except for Sprinting). Characters charging into melee combat gain a +4 dice pool modifier (making a net bonus of +2 when combined with the general penalty) when running into melee combat. Characters making a ranged attack against a running opponent suffer a -2 dice pool penalty

EXAMPLE

Wombat wants to take a quick shot and bolt for the next piece of cover. He declares his actions and fires while moving for cover 8 meters away. He has an Agility of 5, making his Walk Rate 10 meters. He makes the cover and would be considered walking on this Action Phase.

If the same cover was 11 meters away, Wombat would be considered running. On his next Initiative Phase Wombat can only move 2 meters before he is considered Running. His Run Rate is 20 meters, meaning he has 12 meters of movement left for the Combat Turn before he has to Sprint.

Caster, a dwarf with Agility 3, is going right after Wombat and wants to blast a guard with a quick spell while moving into cover with Wombat. Since the cover is 8 meters away and Caster's Walking rate is 6, he is considered Running. On any subsequent Initiative Passes in this Combat Turn, Caster is still considered to be Running even if he doesn't cover any more ground. He can only move another 4 meters. This Combat Turn before he has to Sprint.

METATYPE	WALK RATE	RUN RATE	SPRINT INCREASE
Dwarf, Troll	Agility x 2	Agility x 4	+1m/hit
Elf, Human, Ork	Agility x 2	Agility x 4	+2m/hit

COMBAT ACTIONS

FREE ACTIONS

Call a Shot	Eject Smartgun Clip
Change Linked Device Mode	Multiple Attacks
Drop Object	Run
Drop Prone	Speak/Text/Transmit Phrase

SIMPLE ACTIONS

Activate Focus	Quick Draw
Call Spirit	Ready/Draw Weapon
Change Device Mode	Reckless Spellcasting
Command Spirit	Reload Weapon (see table)
Dismiss Spirit	Remove Clip
Fire Bow	Shift Perception
Fire Weapon (SA, SS, BF, FA)	Take Aim
Insert Clip	Take Cover
Observe in Detail	Throw Weapon
Pick Up/Put Down Object	Use Simple Device

COMPLEX ACTIONS

Astral Projection	Melee Attack
Banish Spirit	Reload Weapon (see table)
Cast Spell	Rigger Jump In
Fire Weapon (FA)	Sprint
Fire Long or Semi-Auto Burst	Summoning
Fire Mounted or Vehicle Weapon	Use Skill

INTERRUPT ACTIONS

Block	Hit the Dirt
Dodge	Intercept
Full Defense	Parry



to their attack test. Characters making a ranged attack against a sprinting opponent suffer a -4 dice pool modifier to their attack test.

ACTION PHASE

When a character's Action Phase arrives, she must decide what she's going to do. She has many options to choose from: fire a gun, cast a spell, activate a computer program, and so on. Each of these actions falls into one of four categories: Free, Simple, Complex, or Interrupt. During her Action Phase a character can perform two Simple Actions or one Complex Action. The character may also take one Free Action at any point in the Initiative Pass (either during her own Action Phase or at any later time). Interrupt actions are a little different as they can be taken at any time in a Combat Turn, even if it is not the acting character's Action Phase.

The **Combat Actions Table** lists common actions in each category. Note that actions possible while rigging or in the Matrix are detailed in the **Matrix** section (p. 214); magical actions are detailed in the **Magic** section (p. 276). A complete list of actions can be found at the back of this book.

When it's your turn to act, you must declare the actions that you will perform during the Action Phase. While you generally may take your actions in any order during your Action Phase, sequence can sometimes be important; like drawing your weapon before you fire it.

Many of the combat actions a character might take in *Shadowrun* are described below. Gamemasters must determine on the fly whether any action not listed that a character wants to take would be Free, Simple, or Complex by comparing it with actions that are listed and considering the effort the action would take.

Movement is declared and taken into consideration during the declare actions phase of the Action Phase. Once declared, a character cannot increase the distance

they wish to move but can decrease the distance or change the direction if they run into unforeseen obstacles. The same movement penalties and bonuses apply regardless of whether the character moves their full distance.

MATRIX ACTIONS

A chart of Matrix actions is provided here for Action Type reference, but rules are located in the **Matrix** section (p. 214) of this book.

FREE ACTIONS

Free Actions are relatively simple, nearly automatic actions that require little effort to accomplish. Examples are saying a word, dropping an object, gesturing, or walking.

A character may take one Free Action during his own Action Phase or at some later point in the Initiative Pass. A character may only take a Free Action prior to his first Action Phase in the Initiative Pass if they are not surprised (see **Surprise**, p. 192). Only one Free Action is normally allowed per Initiative Pass, but multiple Free Actions could be allowed by the gamemaster if the situation seems reasonable (dropping an object and speaking a phrase).

Free Actions generally require no Success Test, though special circumstances may warrant one.

CALL A SHOT

A character may call a shot (aim for a vulnerable portion of a target) with this Free Action; see **Called Shots**, p. 178. This action must be combined with a Fire Weapon, Throw Weapon, or Melee Attack Action.

CHANGE LINKED DEVICE MODE

A character may use a Free Action to activate, deactivate, or switch the mode on any device that he is linked to by a direct neural interface through either a wired or wireless link. This includes activating cyberware, changing a smartgun's firing mode, changing a smartlinked shotgun's choke, deactivating thermographic vision, switching a commlink to hidden mode, turning a device's wireless functionality off, and so on. Note that it takes longer to interact with some devices, as noted in individual gear descriptions.

DROP OBJECT

A character may drop a held object as a Free Action. If he is holding an object in each hand, he may drop both objects as a single Free Action. At the gamemasters discretion, dropped items may suffer damage from being dropped if they are fragile or dropped in a hostile environment.

RELOADING WEAPONS

RELOADING METHOD	RESULT	TYPE OF ACTION
Removable Clip (c)	Remove or insert clip	Simple
Speed Loader	Use speed loader to completely load gun	Complex
Fill Clip	Insert (Agility) rounds into clip	Complex
Break Action (b)	Insert 2 rounds	Complex
Belt Fed (belt)	Remove or insert belt	Complex
Fill Belt/Drum	Insert (Agility) Rounds into belt/drum	Complex
Internal Magazine (m)	Insert (Agility) rounds	Complex
Muzzle-Loader (ml)	Load 1 muzzle tube	Complex
Cylinder (cy)	Insert (Agility) rounds into belt	Complex
Drum (d)	Remove or insert drum	Complex
Bow	Nock 1 arrow	Simple



MATRIX ACTIONS

FREE ACTIONS	SIMPLE ACTIONS	COMPLEX ACTIONS		
Load Program	Call/Dismiss Sprite	Break File	Erase Matrix Signature	Snoop
Switch Two Matrix Attributes	Change Icon	Brute Force	Format Device	Spoof Command
Swap Two Programs	Command Sprite	Check Overwatch Score	Grid-Hop	Trace Icon
Unload Program	Jack Out	Crack File	Hack on the Fly	Compile Sprite
	Invite Mark	Crash Program	Hide	Decompile Sprite
VARIABLE ACTIONS	Send Message	Data Spike	Jam Signals	Erase Resonance Signature
Control Device	Switch Interface Mode	Disarm Data Bomb	Jump Into Rigged Device	Kill Complex Form
Matrix Search		Edit File	Matrix Perception	Register Sprite
		Enter/Exit Host	Reboot Device	Thread Complex Form
		Erase Mark	Set Data Bomb	

DROP PRONE

A character may kneel or drop prone as a Free Action, as long as he is not surprised (see **Surprise**, p. 192). A character who is surprised may not drop prone.

EJECT SMARTGUN CLIP

A character linked to a ready smartgun may use a mental command to eject the weapon's clip. It still takes a separate Simple Action to insert a new, fresh clip (see **Smartgun System**, p. 433).

GESTURE

A character may communicate with a few quick gestures as a Free Action. Characters unfamiliar with the gestures may make an Intuition (2) Test to determine what the gesture means.

MULTIPLE ATTACKS

A character may use a Free Action to attack multiple targets in a single action (see **Multiple Attacks**, p. 196) by splitting their dice pool. This action must be combined with a Fire Weapon Action, Throw Weapon Action, Melee Attack Action, Reckless Spellcasting, or Cast Spell Action.

RUN

Running uses a Free Action and inflicts Running movement modifiers. Running is any movement that exceeds the character's Walking Movement Rate in a single Combat Turn (see **Movement**, p. 161).

SPEAK/TEXT/TRANSMIT PHRASE

One short phrase of verbal communication is a Free Action. If the character wants to speak more, each additional phrase or sentence requires a Free Action. The

gamemaster should be careful to control excessive, unrealistic conversations within the span of a single action during a 3-second Combat Turn. If the gamemaster and players prefer more elaborate communications, parameters should be laid out before the mission begins. Characters who are equipped to send text messages through a direct neural interface connection with their commlink may also send short messages as a Free Action.

SIMPLE ACTIONS

A Simple Action is one step more complicated than a Free Action and requires more concentration to attempt.

During his Action Phase, a character may take two Simple Actions, though only one can be an attack action. A character may also take a Free Action with the two Simple Actions.

ACTIVATE FOCUS

A character may activate a focus they are carrying with a Simple Action.

CALL SPIRIT

This action is used to call a spirit that has already been summoned and placed on standby.

CHANGE DEVICE MODE

A character may use a Simple Action to activate, deactivate, or change the mode on any device with a simple switch, a virtual button, or a command from a commlink or other control device through either a wired or wireless link. This includes changing a gun's firing mode, changing a shotgun's choke, changing vision systems, switching a commlink to hidden mode, turning a device's wireless functionality off, and so on. It takes longer to interact with some devices; check individual gear descriptions.



CHANGE GUN MODE

A character holding a ready firearm can change its firing mode via a Simple Action. If the weapon is a properly linked smartgun, it costs only a Free Action to change the mode (see **Firearms**, p. 424, and **Smartgun Systems**, p. 433). This includes changing a shotgun's choke if the gun does not have a smartgun link (see **Shotguns**, p. 429).

COMMAND SPIRIT

Issuing a command to a single spirit or group of spirits under a summoner's control is a Simple Action.

DISMISS SPIRIT

This is the action of freeing a spirit from the summoner's control. It does not immediately send the spirit back to its home plane but instead frees it to do as it chooses.

FIRE BOW

Firing a single arrow from a loaded bow is a Simple Action. To nock a single arrow, the character must use the Reload Weapon Simple Action.

FIRE SEMI-AUTO, SINGLE-SHOT, BURST FIRE OR FULL-AUTO

A character may fire a readied firearm in Semi-Auto, Single-Shot, Burst-Fire, or Fully-Auto mode via a Simple Action (see **Firearms**, p. 424) but may not take any other attack actions in the same Action Phase. If a character has one weapon in each hand, he may fire once with each weapon by adding a Multiple Attacks Free Action (see **Multiple Attacks**, p. 96); the off-hand modifier applies (see **Attacking Using Off-Hand Weapon**, p. 178). When taken as Simple Actions, Burst Fire fires 3 bullets, while Full-Auto fires 6 bullets.

INSERT CLIP

A character may insert a fresh clip into a ready firearm by taking a Simple Action, but only if he has first removed the previous clip (see **Remove Clip**, p. 166, and **Reloading Weapons**, p. 163).

OBSERVE IN DETAIL

A character may make a detailed observation by taking a Simple Action. This allows a Perception Test (see **Using Perception**, p. 135).

Note that characters should always be able to observe what is immediately obvious (gamemaster's discretion, keeping in mind any perception enhancements the character may have) without having to spend a Simple Action and make a Perception Test. For example, a character might automatically be aware that someone is running toward him with something in hand; however, the gamemaster may decide that the character cannot

tell if it is a friend or foe or what is in their hand without taking an Observe in Detail action.

PICK UP/PUT DOWN OBJECT

A character may pick up an object within reach or put down one that he was holding as a Simple Action. This action means care is taken to put the object down or pick it up. Just dropping an object is a Free Action, but items that get dropped are more likely to be damaged than items that are set down.

QUICK DRAW

A character may attempt to quick-draw a pistol, pistol-sized weapon, or small throwing weapon and immediately fire it by using a Quick Draw Simple Action. For the character to successfully draw the weapon, the player must make a (Weapon Skill) + Reaction [Physical] (3) Test. If the weapon is held in a quick-draw holster (see p. 432), reduce the threshold to 2. If the test is successful, the character draws the weapon and fires as a single Simple Action. If the test fails, he clears the gun but cannot fire with the same action. If he glitches, the gun is stuck in the holster or dropped, and no more actions are allowed. On a critical glitch, a drawn blade may be fumbled out of the character's reach or a pistol accidentally fired while still in the holster; the gamemaster decides the exact nature of the screw-up.

Only properly holstered weapons can be quick-drawn. They do not have to be in a quick-draw holster, but they do need to be in a holster or sheath or on a proper sling to be quick-drawn. Two weapons may be quick-drawn and fired simultaneously, but the (Weapon Skill) + Reaction dice pool is split, and off-hand penalties apply.

READY WEAPON

A character may ready a weapon by spending a Simple Action. The weapon may be a firearm, melee weapon, throwing weapon, ranged weapon, or mounted or vehicular weapon. Readyng entails drawing a firearm from a holster, drawing a throwing or melee weapon from a sheath, picking up any kind of weapon, or generally preparing any kind of weapon for use. A weapon must be ready before it can be used. Weapons not held in a traditional holster may require a Complex Action to ready at the gamemaster's discretion.

A character can ready a number of small throwing weapons, such as throwing knives or shuriken, equal to one-half his Agility (round up) per Ready Weapon action.

RECKLESS SPELLCASTING

A spellcaster may use a Simple Action to cast a spell more quickly, but at the cost of higher Drain. See **Step 4: Cast Spell**, p. 281.



REMOVE CLIP

A character may remove a clip from a ready firearm by taking a Simple Action (see **Insert Clip**, p. 165, and also **Reload Weapons**, p. 163). It takes another Simple Action to grab a fresh clip and slam it into the weapon.

SHIFT PERCEPTION

A character capable of Astral Perception may shift perception to or from Astral Space as a Simple Action.

STAND UP

Using a Simple Action, a character who is lying down or prone may stand up. If the character is wounded and attempting to stand, he must succeed in a Body + Willpower (2) Test to do so (wound modifiers apply to this test).

TAKE AIM

A character may take aim with a ready firearm, bow, or throwing weapon as a Simple Action. Take Aim actions are cumulative, but the benefits are lost if the character takes any other kind of action—including a Free Action—at any time before attacking. Take Aim actions may be extended over multiple Action Phases and Combat Turns. The maximum bonus a character may gain from sequential Take Aim actions, either to her limit or her dice pool, is equal to one-half the character's Willpower, rounded up.

Each Take Aim action applies a +1 dice pool modifier or +1 Accuracy increase to the Attack Test.

If the character is using image magnification or a targeting scope, Take Aim must be used to line up the shot in order to receive the bonus from the item. In this case the first action of Take Aim does not provide any additional bonus beyond enabling the function of the modification.

TAKE COVER

A character may use this Simple Action to gain a cover bonus to their defense test, as long as she is not surprised (see **Surprise**, p. 192). A character who is surprised may not take cover.

THROW WEAPON

A character may throw a ready throwing weapon (see **Ready Weapon**, p. 165) by taking a Simple Action. The character may not take any other attack actions in the same Action Phase. Multiple readied throwing weapons can be thrown at a target within Short or Medium range by adding a Multiple Attacks Free Action (see **Multiple Attacks**, p. 196).

USE SIMPLE DEVICE

A character can use any simple device with a Simple Action. Simple devices are those that are activated with



a simple movement like a thumb trigger, pressing a single key, or tapping a single icon.

COMPLEX ACTIONS

A Complex Action requires intense concentration and/or finesse. Only one Complex Action is possible per Action Phase. A character may also take a Free Action in the same Action Phase as a Complex Action.

ASTRAL PROJECTION

A character capable of Astral Projection may shift their consciousness to the astral plane as a Complex Action (see p. 313).

BANISH SPIRIT

A character may enter into a Banishing contest with a spirit as a Complex Action (see p. 301).

CAST SPELL

A character may cast a spell as a Complex Action.

FIRE FULL-AUTO WEAPON

A character may fire a readied firearm in Full-Auto fire mode via a Complex Action (see **Firearms**, p. 424). If a character has one weapon in each hand, he may fire once with each weapon by adding a Multiple Attacks Free Action (see **Multiple Attacks**, p. 196). Off-hand modifier applies (see **Attacker Using Off-Hand Weapon**, p. 178). When fired as a Complex Action, Full-Auto uses 10 bullets. Remember the effects of cumulative recoil when using these fire modes. And good fragging luck!

FIRE LONG BURST OR SEMI-AUTO BURST

A character may fire a readied firearm in Long Burst or Semi-Auto Burst via a Complex Action (see **Firearms**, p. 424). A character may attack multiple targets within Short or Medium range by adding a Multiple Attacks Free Action (see **Multiple Attacks**, p. 196). If a character has one weapon in each hand, he may fire once with each weapon by adding a Multiple Attacks Free Action (see **Multiple Attacks**, p. 167). Off-hand modifier applies (see **Attacker Using Off-Hand Weapon**, p. 178). Remember the effects of cumulative recoil when using these fire modes.

FIRE MOUNTED OR VEHICLE WEAPON

Fire a previously readied mounted or vehicle weapon by taking a Complex Action (see **Vehicle Combat**, p. 198).

LOAD AND FIRE BOW

With this action a character can load and fire a bow with a single Complex Action. The two activities can be re-

versed, Fire and Load Bow, if the bow had been readied using a Simple Action already.

MATRIX ACTIONS

A character may perform most Matrix actions with a Complex Action.

MELEE ATTACK

A character may make a melee attack by taking a Complex Action (see **Melee Combat**, p. 184). A character may also attack multiple targets within melee range by adding a Multiple Attacks Free Action (see **Multiple Attacks**, p. 196).

RELOAD FIREARM

Weapons that are belt fed (belt), break action (b), cylinder (cy), drum (d), internal magazine (m), muzzle loaders, or use a speed loader are reloaded using a Complex Action (see **Reloading Weapons**, p. 163).

RIGGER JUMP IN

A character with a VCR and rigger adapted vehicle may jump in to control the vehicle with a Complex Action.

SPRINT

Sprinting allows a character to increase his Running rate by using a Complex Action and making a Running Test (see **Movement**, p. 161).

SUMMONING

A character may summon a spirit to assist them with a Complex Action.

USE SKILL

A character may use an appropriate skill by taking a Complex Action (see **Using Skills**, p. 128).

INTERRUPT ACTIONS

There are times when a character is permitted to take an action outside his allotted Action Phase. Such rare instances are called Interrupt Actions and are clearly identified in the rules. When a character uses an Interrupt Action, such as Full Defense, he takes an action out of turn, but only if he has enough Initiative Score left in the Combat Turn to pay the price for the action. Interrupt Actions occur outside the normal course of the Combat Turn and do not cost the character their Action Phase (unless they reduce their Initiative Score below 0 with their actions). The Initiative Score reduction occurs at the time of the Interrupt Action. A character may only take an Interrupt Action prior to their first Action Phase if they are not surprised (see **Surprise**, p. 192).



BLOCK (-5 INITIATIVE SCORE)

A character may choose to use her own unarmed combat skill to block incoming melee attacks as an Interrupt Action (see **Defending in Combat**, p. 188). By decreasing her Initiative Score, the defending character can add her Unarmed Combat skill to their defense test. This is a one-time add, unlike going on Full Defense (below) which lasts for an entire Combat Turn. Bonus die, such as die from a relevant weapon foci, can be added to this test.

DODGE (-5 INITIATIVE SCORE)

A character may choose to use her own skill to dodge incoming attacks as an Interrupt Action (see **Defending in Combat**, p. 188). By decreasing her Initiative Score, the defending character can add her Gymnastics skill to the defense test. This is a one-time add, unlike going on Full Defense (below) which lasts for an entire Combat Turn.

HIT THE DIRT (-5 INITIATIVE SCORE)

A character who has already used their Free Action may choose to drop prone when caught by suppressive fire using this action (see **Suppressive Fire**, p. 179). The defending character doesn't need to make the Reaction + Edge test but is considered prone on their next Action Phase. If the suppressive fire continues, the defending character needs to use a Stand Up Simple Action to get back up, risking getting shot, or fight from the ground. If the suppressive fire has stopped the prone character still needs to use a Stand Up Simple Action to get back up.

INTERCEPT (-5 INITIATIVE SCORE)

A character may take an Interrupt Action to intercept an opponent who attempts to move past him (within 1 + Reach meter(s)) or break out of melee combat (see **Interception**, p. 194). The Intercept Action allows a character to make a melee attack out of turn. If the character does not have enough Initiative Score left that Action Phase he cannot intercept.

PARRY (-5 INITIATIVE SCORE)

A character may choose to use his own melee weapon skill to deflect incoming melee attacks as an Interrupt Action (see **Defending in Combat**, p. 188). By decreasing his Initiative Score, the defending character can add his melee weapon skill to their defense test. This is a one-time add, unlike going on Full Defense (below), which lasts for an entire Combat Turn.

FULL DEFENSE (-10 INITIATIVE SCORE)

A character may choose to focus on deliberately avoiding incoming attacks as an Interrupt Action (see **Defending in Combat**, p. 188). This action adds the character's Willpower to their Defense tests for the entire Combat Turn. Full Defense actions may be taken at any time, even before the character's Action Phase as an Interrupt Action, as long as the character is not surprised. Characters may only go on Full Defense if they have enough Initiative Score left in that Combat Turn. The bonus gained in this manner is kept until the end of the Combat Turn so a character can choose to fight defensively early in the round by decreasing her Initiative Score to increase her defense. This bonus is also cumulative with other Interrupt Actions.

ACCURACY

All weapons have an Accuracy score that acts as a Limit for that weapon. Accuracy scores reflect the quality and craftsmanship of a weapon and determine the number of hits that can be used in a skill test.

Melee weapons, those that were made for combat, have an average Accuracy of 5. Improvised weapons—items that can be used, however awkwardly, to inflict damage but are not designed for combat, such as a golf club or frying pan—usually have an accuracy of 4. Random objects used as weapons that are very unwieldy or heavy (like a chair, barstool, or refrigerator) generally have an Accuracy of 3. Standard Weapons that are in poor condition or broken can have their Accuracy reduced by 1.

Unarmed attacks use the Inherent Limit [Physical] as determined by the Attributes of the character and do not have an Accuracy rating. Items used as part of the Unarmed Attack, also use the Physical limit.

Most basic ranged weapons have an accuracy of 4 or 5. Specialized ranged weapons, like some sniper rifles, have an accuracy of 6 or higher. Improvised ranged weapons have an Accuracy of 3, and broken, old, damaged, or otherwise flawed ranged weapons can have their Accuracy reduced by 1, to a minimum of 1. This includes items that have been damaged through Matrix Combat.

ARMOR

Armor is used with Body to make damage resistance tests (see **Step 3: Defend**, p. 173). The armor rating is modified by the attack's AP value (see **Armor Penetration**, p. 169).

Good armor protects a character from serious physical harm. If the modified Damage Value (DV) of an attack causing Physical damage is less than the AP-modified armor rating, then the attack causes Stun damage instead of Physical damage.



ARMOR AND ENCUMBRANCE

If a character is wearing more than one piece of armor at a time, the value of the highest armor piece applies for determining Armor. All the other pieces do nothing but add a lot of bulk; too much can make Joe Shadowrunner look like the SoyPuff Marshmallow Man, slowing him down more than the protection is worth.

Armor accessories, items listed with a “+” in front of their rating, add to the character’s Armor for the purpose of Damage Resistance tests. The maximum bonus a character receive from these items is limited to their Strength attribute. For every 2 full points by which the bonus exceeds the character’s Strength, the character suffers a -1 penalty to Agility and Reaction.

EXAMPLE

Full Deck is headed out on a run and wants to be able to make a quick change from runner chic to corporate clean. He throws on some Actioneer Business Clothes (Armor 8) and then pulls on his Urban Explorer jumpsuit (Armor 10). For resistance tests he uses only the Armor 10 from the jumpsuit.

Caster is looking for a little extra protection during a particularly dangerous raid the team is planning. He borrows Wombat’s riot shield (Armor +6) to hide behind as they enter. He’s seen Wombat use it dozens of times and thinks it shouldn’t be a problem. Caster has a Strength of 2. Comparing the Armor bonus to his Strength shows a difference of 4 full points, meaning Caster receives a -2 to both his Agility and Reaction while trying to use the riot shield.

When Caster eventually decides he can’t handle hauling around the big shield, he gives it back to Wombat. Wombat has a Strength attribute of 5. Comparing his Strength to the Armor bonus of the shield gives a difference of only 1. He doesn’t have a problem with it, but he is also wearing a helmet (Armor +2). The total Armor bonus needs to be compared to his Strength. Wombat is now at a +8 Armor bonus with a Strength of 5, so he suffers a -1 penalty to his Agility and Reaction while using both armor accessories.

SPECIALIZED PROTECTION

Standard armor is generally not designed to protect against electricity, fire, and other special damage types and thus suffers greatly when faced with attacks of this nature. But fear not, good shadowrunner, you have options. Any clothing item, including Armor, can be modified with a number of additional features that help protect against other forms of damage. This additional protection is used along with the modified Armor values to determine total Armor against an attack. Specialized armor

values can be combined on a single piece of armor, but the sum of the ratings cannot exceed the capacity of the armor (p. 436).

ARMOR PENETRATION

Certain weapons are better at punching holes in armor than others. A weapon’s Armor Penetration (AP) represents this penetrating ability. AP modifies a target’s Armor rating when he makes a damage resistance test. Some weapons fare poorly against armor, and so actually raise the value of the armor. If the target is not wearing armor, this bonus does not apply. If a weapon’s AP reduces an armor’s rating to 0 or below, the character loses all his armor dice on his damage resistance test but does not subtract from his Body.

DAMAGE

Involved as they are in an illegal and often hazardous line of work, shadowrunners get hurt and get hurt often. What kind of damage, how bad an injury is, and how much it affects the character vary greatly depending on the situation.

TYPES OF INJURY

Damage in *Shadowrun* is defined as Physical or Stun. Each type of damage is tracked on a separate Condition Monitor.

PHYSICAL DAMAGE

Physical damage, the most dangerous type, is the kind done by guns, explosions, most melee weapons, and many magic spells. Weapons that inflict Physical damage have the letter “P” following their Damage Value.

Physical damage takes a longer time to heal.

The number of boxes in the Physical Condition Monitor equals $(\text{Body} \div 2) + 8$.

STUN DAMAGE

Stun damage—bruising, muscle fatigue, and the like—is the kind done by fists, kicks, blunt weapons, stun rounds, shock weapons, concussion grenades, and some magic spells. If something does Stun damage, the letter “S” follows the Damage Value.

Stun damage takes a shorter time to heal.

The number of boxes in the Stun Condition Monitor equals $(\text{Willpower} \div 2) + 8$.

WOUND MODIFIERS

Injuries cause pain, bleeding, and other distractions that interfere with doing all sorts of actions. Wound modifiers are accumulated with every third box of damage and are cumulative between damage tracks and with other negative modifiers such as spells or adverse conditions.



Wound modifiers are applied to all tests not about reducing the number of boxes you're about to take on your Condition Monitor (such as damage resistance, resisting direct combat spells, toxin resistance, and so on).

The Wound Modifier penalty is also applied to the character's Initiative attribute and therefore their Initiative Score during combat.

EXCEEDING THE CONDITION MONITOR

When the total number of boxes in a damage track (Physical or Stun) are filled in, and damage still remains to be applied, one of two things happens:

- If the damage is Stun, it carries over into the Physical damage track. For every two full boxes of excess Stun damage, carry over 1 box to the Physical damage track
- If a character takes more Physical damage than he has boxes in the Physical damage track, the character is in trouble. Overflowing the Physical damage track means he's near death. Instant death occurs only if damage overflows the Physical damage track by more than the character's Body attribute. One point over that limit and his memory will be toasted at their favorite shadowrunner bar.

Characters whose Physical damage overflow has not been filled can survive if they receive prompt medical attention. If no medical attention is available, the character takes an additional box of damage from loss of blood, shock, or other complications for every (Body) minutes he manages to hang on. If the cumulative overflow damage exceeds the character's Body attribute before medical help arrives, he dies.

EXAMPLE

Pauly G, a troll smuggler, and Beta Test, his human decker sidekick, got caught sneaking across the Salish border. Neither has a valid SIN, and the Rangers who caught them are looking to send a message to other smugglers. They tie the runners to a tree and line up their shots.

The two Rangers fire their rifles and one of them does a staggering 13P of damage.

Pauly G rolls his Body (9) + Armor (1) and gets 4 hits, reducing the damage to 9 boxes of Physical damage. Pauly has 6 empty boxes in his Physical Condition Monitor so he fills in all those and takes the remaining 3 as overflow. If he could get some medical attention before the overflow damage reaches 10 boxes he could survive.

Beta Test rolls his Body (2) + Armor (0) and manages to get 1 hit, reducing the damage to 12 boxes of Physical damage. Beta Test has 3 empty boxes in his Physical Condition Monitor so he fills in all those and moves the remaining 9 to overflow which only has 2 boxes (equal to Beta Test's Body).

Beta Test is headed to the Happy Hunting Grounds. Pauly G is going to have to get some luck and some help to avoid joining him.

SPECIAL DAMAGE TYPES

Bullets do their damage by delivering kinetic energy to a target, but that's not the only kind of hurting that can be put on a runner. Burning, freezing, zapping, and chemical damage can all dampen the mood of the most boisterous runner. Along with the elemental forces things like gravity (or at least the stop at the bottom), drowning, and general exhaustion can add to the pain and suffering. All of these different damages have their own rules quirks, detailed below.

ELEMENTAL DAMAGE

This is damage caused by non-kinetic sources, like acid, fire, etc. Most of the time you'd look to magic for this sort of damage, but some mundane weapons and attacks can deliver added elemental effects.

ACID DAMAGE

Acid damage is Physical. In addition to its normal damage, it also reduces the rating of any Armor it hits by 1. If the acid isn't removed from the target (by washing it off, or because the acid is from a spell and evaporates into mana after the spell ends), then the acid continues to burn. Each Combat Turn the base DV of the acid is decreased by 1 and damage is applied again. The acid also continues to burn through armor reducing the target's Armor rating by 1 until the acid is removed, neutralized, or loses all its base DV. The Armor reduction should be applied to worn Armor first but could be applied to Armor accessories (+Armor items) if the gamemaster allows.

At the gamemaster's discretion, acid can also create Light Smoke conditions in an area around the target.

COLD DAMAGE

Cold is just the absence of heat, but it hurts when too much heat is absent, and calling cold "absent heat" doesn't make it any less painful. Cold damage is Physical. Additionally, cold damage can make armor brittle, liquids freeze, lubricants gum up, etc. Make a simple Armor Test for anything directly hit. If the armor gets no hits, it breaks and cannot be used as armor. It can be repaired with the **Building & Repairing** rules, p. 145. In the case of a glitch, it's destroyed irreparably. With a critical glitch the armor breaks irreparably in a dangerous way.

ELECTRICITY DAMAGE

A wide variety of nonlethal weapons are designed to incapacitate targets with electrical shock attacks, including stun batons, tasers, cyberware shock hands, and similar electrically charged weapons. These weapons rely on a contact discharge of electricity rather than kinetic energy. Spells and critter powers such as Lightning Bolt and Energy Aura cause similar effects.

Electrical damage is treated as Stun or Physical damage depending on the source and/or target. The **Non-conductivity** armor upgrade (p. 438) adds its full rating to the Armor value. The gamemaster can also decide which (if any) other factors may modify the target's damage, such as extra conductivity for a character covered in water.

An Electricity attack that does damage can stun and incapacitate the target as well, though if there is no damage, there is no secondary effect at all.

Secondary effects for characters injured by Electricity damage include a -1 dice pool penalty on all actions and Defense Tests, but not Damage Resistance Tests, for 1 Combat Turn and an immediate Initiative Score reduction of 5. The dice pool penalty and Initiative Score

reduction do not accumulate with multiple attacks, but the length of the penalty is extended by 1 Combat Turn for each successful damaging attack while a character is affected. If the character's Initiative Score is reduced to 0 or below, they lose their last action. If they have no Initiative Score left the reduction comes on the start of the next Combat Turn.

Electronic equipment and drones can also be affected by Electricity damage. They never suffer Stun damage so Electricity damage is Physical when used against electronics and drones. They resist damage as usual and suffer a secondary effect if they take even a single box of damage.

The secondary effect for electronics and drones damaged by Electricity damage is shorting out or overloading. In game terms this is reflected as secondary Matrix damage equal to half the Physical damage rounded down.

Vehicles can be damaged by Electricity attacks but do not suffer any secondary effects. Specific systems of vehicles can be targeted by a **Called Shots** (p. 195).

EXAMPLE

Wombat has been drinking pretty heavily and the bouncers at the Blue Flame Tavern remember the last time they had to ask him to leave, so they call Knight Errant and wait for the officers to arrive and help them escort Wombat out the door.

Well, Wombat can't stand Pawns (his term of endearment for KE cops) and decides "quietly" is not an option for how he wants to leave. The KE officers feel sufficiently threatened, and they decide it would be easier to carry Wombat out than try to change his mind.

Both officers pull their Yamaha Pulsar tasers and fire before poor Wombat can reconsider his options. They score 4 and 3 net hits, so Wombat must make a Damage Resistance test against 11S and 10S respectively. Luckily for Wombat, he upgraded his lined coat with nonconductivity rating 4.

Against the first damage he rolls Body 6 + Armor 9 + nonconductivity 4, with an AP adjustment of -5, for a total of 14 dice. He gets 6 hits, reducing the damage to 5S. Since he took damage he also suffers the secondary effects of -1 to all actions for 1 Combat Turn and -5 to his Initiative Score.

Against the second hit he rolls the same pool of dice and gets 7 hits. He still takes 3S, but the secondary effects are changed. He doesn't lose any more from his Initiative Score, and the -1 dice pool penalty is already there and does not increase. It does, however, get extended by 1 Combat Turn to a total of 2 Combat Turns.

After Wombat lays out one of the Pawns on his Action Phase (he may be slowed but he's not out) the other hits him with another dart from the Pulsar. The KE officer scores 6 hits but is limited by the Accuracy of the weapon, which is 5, so Wombat is facing 12S.

Wombat rolls his Damage Resistance but spends a point of Edge to throw some extra dice into the pool and gain the Rule of Six. After an awesome roll that scores 14 hits, he shrugs off the damage. Since he didn't take damage he doesn't suffer any secondary effects and still has some actions left to KO the other KE Pawn.

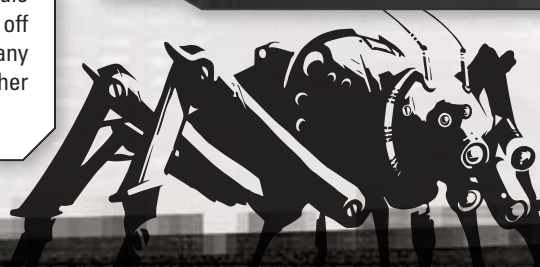
FIRE DAMAGE

Fire damage is Physical. It can also make things catch fire. To determine if something catches fire, roll Armor Value + Fire Resistance - Fire AP (see **Fire Armor Piercing Ratings** table, below). The threshold on this test is the net hits rolled on the fire-based attack. If the item succeeds, it is not on fire (for now). Armor accessories are excluded from the test but the gamemaster may require them to make their own test.

When something catches fire, the fire has an initial Damage Value of 3. This damage is caused at the end of each Combat Turn, and the DV increases by 1 at the start of each subsequent Combat Turn until the item is completely destroyed or the fire is put out. You can fight the fire a number of ways (water, smothering, etc.), making an Agility + Intuition Test and reducing the fire's DV by 1 for each hit. Remember, as long as the fire is burning it can ignite any nearby flammables, including furniture, vehicles, foliage, and elves.

FIRE ARMOR PENETRATION

TYPE OF FIRE	AP
Open Flame	-2
Fire-based spells	spell Force
Flame-based weapon	-6



EXAMPLE

Wombat is having a bad day. He left the bar and ran afoul of one of those really deranged members of the Halloweeners who carries a flamethrower! His reflexes are a little off due to the booze and he gets a solid blast of flame. The gamemaster calls for a test to see if his lined coat catches fire and rolls the lined coat's Armor 9—the flamethrower's AP of 6 versus the two net hits the Halloweener got on the test. He only gets one hit, so the coat, and therefore Wombat, catches fire.

At the end of the Combat Turn Wombat has not put out the fire and has to resist 3P damage.

In his next Action Phase Wombat decides to try to put out the fire with the classic stop, drop, and roll. The gamemaster calls it a Complex Action with a Drop Prone free action and asks for an Agility roll modified by his wounds. Wombat hits the dirt, rolls—and fails.

Another Action Phase comes up and Wombat keeps trying. This time he gets 1 hit, still not enough to put out the fire but enough to lessen it a little.

At the end of this Combat Turn Wombat faces 2P damage again and needs to think fast if about how he's going to get this fire out.

FALLING DAMAGE

When a character falls more than three meters, he takes Physical damage with a DV equal to the number of meters fallen, with an AP of -4. Use Body + Armor to resist this damage. The gamemaster should feel free to modify the damage to reflect a softer landing surface (sand), branches to break the fall, and so on.

Falling characters drop 50 meters in the first Combat Turn, 150 meters in the second Combat Turn, and 200 meters every Combat Turn after that. Terminal velocity for a falling body is about 200 meters per turn.

FATIGUE DAMAGE

Fatigue damage is Stun damage you incur through doing something strenuous or for being in the middle of something stressful. It's caused by harsh environments, hard exertion, and drek like that. Fatigue damage is resisted with Body + Willpower, not with any armor. Fatigue damage cannot be healed while the condition causing it still exists.

FATIGUE FROM RUNNING

If you sprint over multiple consecutive Combat Turns or during multiple Action Phases in the same Combat Turn, you risk taking fatigue damage. For every consecutive Action Phase or Combat Turn in which you use the

Sprint action, you take a cumulative 1S DV of fatigue damage, which means that the second time you take it without dialing it back you take 2S, then 3S, etc.

If you're only running (using your running movement rate) instead of sprinting, this damage is taken every 3 minutes.

FATIGUE FROM ENVIRONMENTS

Hot, cold, humid, dry, polluted, or irradiated environments can cause fatigue damage, depending on the severity of the surroundings. As with running fatigue, the DV from a harsh environment starts at 1S and increases over time. Unlike running fatigue, if you keel over in a hostile environment the damage doesn't stop rolling in.

ENVIRONMENT & FATIGUE

ENVIRONMENT SEVERITY	FATIGUE DAMAGE INTERVAL
Mild	6 hours
Moderate	3 hours
Harsh	60 minutes
Extreme	1 minute (10 Combat Turns)
Deadly	6 seconds (2 Combat Turns)

HUNGER, THIRST, AND SLEEP DEPRIVATION

After 24 hours, if you haven't eaten, slept, or had a (non-alcoholic) drink, you risk fatigue damage. Like running, the damage starts at a mere 1S and increases over each interval it is taken. The interval for hunger is 6 days, for thirst is 2 days, and for sleep is 3 hours. This damage stops when you eat, drink, or sleep, respectively.

COMBAT RESOLUTION

Shadowrun includes four types of combat: **ranged combat** (p. 173), **melee combat** (p. 184), **astral combat** (p. 315), and **cybercombat** (p. 226). All combat, whether it involves firearms, knives, astral attacks, or attack programs, is resolved in essentially the same manner.

Combat is handled as an Opposed Test between the attacker and defender. The exact skills and attributes used depend on the type of combat, method of attack, and style of defense, as described in each section. Various modifiers may also apply to both attack and defense rolls.

If the attacker scores more hits than the defender, the attack hits the target. In the case of a tie the defender usually wins, with the exception of a **grazing hit** (p. 173). Otherwise, the attack misses.



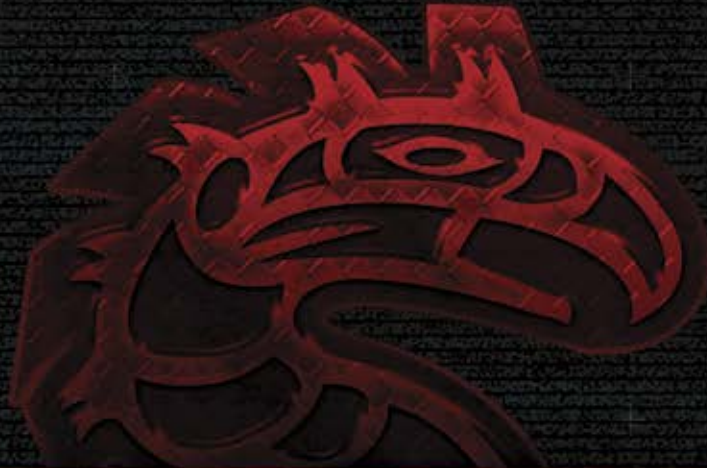
GUNSLINGER ADEPT

It started when the adept was a kid, and he shot a devil rat off a roof ledge with a BB gun from 300 meters. With a battered gun he found behind a dumpster. The amount of time people repeated the story let him know it was something special, so he dedicated himself to honing his skills, making himself deadlier with each day. People started offering him all sorts of money to use his skills, and he could have left a long path of bodies behind him. He decided, though, that powers like his had to be used carefully, so he developed a code to put boundaries around when he lets his abilities loose. When he does, though, make sure you're either on his side or very far away. If you are his target, his bullets will find you.

METATYPE: ELF

B	A	R	S	W	L	I	C	ESS	EDG	M
3	6	3 (5)	2	2	2	3	3	6.0	5	6
Condition Monitor (P/S)	10 / 9									
Armor	14									
Limits	Physical 4, Mental 3, Social 5									
Physical Init	6(8) + 3D6									
Active Skills	Blades 4, Con 3, Firearms skill group 5, First Aid 3, Gymnastics 5, Perception 4, Pilot Ground Craft 3, Running 4, Sneaking (Urban) 4 (+2), Swimming 2, Tracking 3									
Knowledge Skills	Egyptian Ceramics 2, Weapon Manufacturers 4									
Languages	English 5, Lakota N, Sperethiel 4									
Qualities	Adept, Addiction (Mild, BTLs), Code of Honor (Assassin's Creed), Guts, Natural Athlete									
Adept Power	Attribute Boost (Agility) (4, 1 PP), Combat Sense (1, 0.5 PP), Enhanced Accuracy (Pistols, Automatics) (2, 0.5 PP), Improved Reflexes (2, 2.5 PP), Mystic Armor (2, 1 PP), Spell Resistance (1, 0.5 PP)									
Gear	Armor jacket [12, chemical protection 3, fire resistance 3, non-conductivity 4], contacts [Capacity 3, w/ smartlink, vision enhancement 2], DocWagon contract (Platinum, 1 year) earbuds [Capacity 3, w/ audio enhancement 1, spatial recognizer], 2 fake SINs (Rating 5, w/ 5 Rating 5 fake gun licenses) gecko tape gloves, Hyundai Shin-Hyung, maglock passkey (Rating 3), Low Lifestyle (1 month), medkit (Rating 4, w/ 2 re-supplies), Renraku Sensei commlink (Device Rating 3), 2 trauma patches									
Weapons	Ares Predator V (2) [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5(7), DV 8P, AP -1, SA, RC —, 15(c), w/ smartlink, 100 rounds regular ammo, 100 rounds Stick-n-Shock ammo] Ingram Smartgun X [SMG, Acc 4(6), DV 8P, AP —, BF/FA, RC 2, 32(c), w/ gas-vent 2, integral sound suppressor, smartlink, 100 rounds regular ammo, 100 rounds explosive ammo] Knife [Blade, Acc 5, Reach 1, DV 3P, AP -1] PJSS Model 55 [Shotgun, Acc 6, DV 11P, AP -1, SS, RC (1), 2(b), w/ integrated shock pad, 100 rounds regular ammo, 100 rounds explosive ammo] Ruger Super Warhawk [Heavy Pistol, Acc 5, DV 9P, AP -2, SS, RC —, 6(cy), w/ 100 rounds regular ammo] Steyr TMP [Machine Pistol, Acc 5, DV 7P, AP —, SA/BF/FA, RC —, 30(c), w/ laser sight, 100 rounds regular ammo, 100 rounds explosive ammo, 100 rounds Stick-n-Shock ammo] Yamaha Raiden [Assault Rifle, Acc 6(8), DV 11P, AP -2, BF/FA, RC 1, 60(b), w/ integral sound suppressor, smartlink, 100 rounds regular ammo, 100 rounds explosive ammo]									
Contacts	Black market gun dealer (Connection 3/Loyalty 3) Target range operator (Connection 3/Loyalty 2)									
Starting ¥	1,690 + (3D6 x 60)¥									





SHADOWRUN >noun

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

WorldWide WorldWatch
2050 archive



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.

Get more info at www.shadowruntabletop.com

SHADOWRUN, FIFTH EDITION • PREVIEW FIVE



MAGIC

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the Sixth World, certain people have been able to connect to a new force of energy, the stuff called mana. This mana is channeled through a person and projected into spells, or used to summon a being from a metaplane, or to improve their physical capabilities beyond metahumanity's normal limits. The people who can manipulate mana are called "Awakened."

As it turns out, the mana that fills the world is a fragile thing, and its presence ebbs with pollution and human misery. Despite mana's ups and downs, metahumanity has learned to harness it and practice extraordinary feats of magic.

Nowadays, there's a social order among the Awakened. At the top of the food chain are second- and third-generation **magicians** (people who can cast spells and/or summon spirits) and **adepts** (people who channel mana into their bodies to perform amazing feats). They've been able to stand on the shoulders of the people who came before them, using magic the same way kids use technology invented in their parents' time—reflexively and intuitively. The knowledge that previous generations struggled to obtain, they simply absorb as quick lessons in their youth. They sometimes have more than a touch of arrogance about them, and sometimes they go to ridiculous lengths to claim a magical heritage for themselves (don't ever get stuck listening to one drone on about how their great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandmother or whatever was burned in Salem as a witch). But they are good at what they do, they have corporations across the world fighting for their services, and they even have their own organizations for people born into "magic families." If they sometimes act

as if the world were their plaything, it's because in many ways, it is.

Then you have the mainstream magicians and adepts, magic's equivalent of random lottery winners. One day, often during puberty, they found out that they could make things happen just by thinking about it. They get mad, they glare, and something catches on fire; or they will themselves to incredible feats of physical prowess, leaping over hedges or fences in a single bound, leaving their friends struggling behind.

The newer group of magicians has a caste system of its own—the main divide is between aspected magicians and full magicians. Even though—or possibly because—ninety percent of those given the gift of magic are limited in the ways that they can use it (for example, they can work sorcery only or enchanting only), those who are full magicians believe they are superior to aspected magicians, though it's not like those in the latter group are terribly limited.

Where the ability came from and how they got it is anyone's guess (though several megacorporations are racing to figure out how to intentionally cause someone to Awaken). This group can now have their pick of jobs with corporations—or they can hit the streets and walk around with large targets on their back, thanks to the "geek the mage first" policy every shadowrunner has heard about. Cashing in on the cushy life seems like a no-brainer, but some mages end up on the street anyway. Maybe they've got a bad temper or a criminal record, so corporations don't want to take a risk on them. Maybe they pissed off the wrong people. Or maybe, despite all the pressures of the world, they've managed to hold on to a shred of their integrity and are not ready to sell out. Yet.

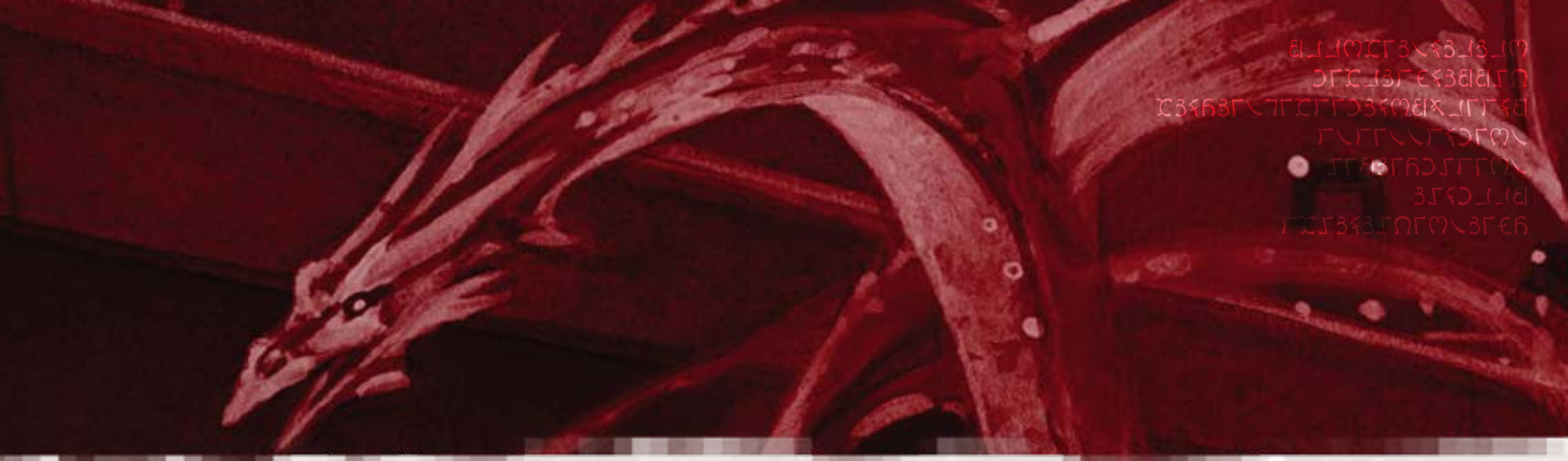
All of the Awakened, regardless of their talent level or parentage, have access to the considerable infrastructure of magical industry that has been built over the decades. Curio shops and alchemy stores filled with items of magical interest cater to mages and shamans, carrying competing corporate brand names like Alchemix and Ming Solutions.

Among the items they sell are reagents, small items that carry magical energy and are the magical equivalent of duct tape—useful in just about any situation. They can be used for temporary lodges, spellcasting aids, rit-

CORPORATE LORE STORES AND TALISMONGERS

- **Ipsissimus** (Mitsuhamas)
- **Mageworks** (Aztechnology)
- **Pentacles** (Ares)
- **Lore Stores, Inc.** (Shiawase)
- **Yin and Yang** (Wuxing)
- **Pentagrams** (Manadyne)





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uals, even banishing pesky spirits if you have the right combination of ingredients.

What has remained the same, even after all this time, is the public's ignorance of magic. They're less nervous about magic than they've been in the past, thanks to the desensitizing effects of newsworthy (and, on one occasion, electable) dragons, spirits, fictional and documentary trids, and even ads featuring or catering to mages, but their understanding of how magic works is still very limited.

While magicians and adepts have caught the public's imagination, they've also gotten the attention of the world's various governments and corporate rule-makers, leading to a whole host of regulations covering the use of magic. Anyone with magic ability is supposed to list the fact that they are Awakened on their SINS, and generally they need to possess a license to practice magic as well as a permit for possession of "magic-related paraphernalia." Guilds have to register to be legal, which means they have to prove that all their members are legal magicians. Without registration, they're subject to being raided at any time by Awakened cops on astral patrol, looking for any gathering of Awakened people that may not be authorized. The authorities seem to think that any unapproved discussion between magicians will eventually lead to chaos and/or destruction. They are not entirely wrong.

Most jurisdictions require a license to sell magical goods—maybe just to squeeze out the little independent alchemist—and they throw down a hefty fine on merchants who sell goods to someone who doesn't have the right permits or, spirits forbid, no SIN. Some corporations and governments take their regulation of magic to extreme levels, requiring the Awakened not only to register but also to provide a tissue sample. This means magicians and adepts can be tracked down if they step out of line, or do anything that pisses off the authorities.

So maybe your offense is casting a Clout spell at a Lone Star officer who was annoying you, or maybe it's just not casting a spell when The Man snapped his fingers. Corps see Awakened people as just another resource to exploit. They try to entice magicians to work for them in exchange for a magical education, a better lifestyle, and even a corporate SIN. They're called "wage mages," and while it's not a kind term, a lot of magicians

see it as being better than the limited alternatives sitting in front of them.

There are plenty of Awakened who say "Screw that!" and work in the shadows instead. Who wants some ignorant mundane bureaucrat trying to time-manage a ritual? Why should you have to fill out eight forms simply to justify the purchase of frog eyes? Why shouldn't you be able to climb down the side of a building instead of taking the elevator? The corps may have the benefit of being storehouses of magical knowledge, but just because they know stuff doesn't mean that they're going to share. On the streets, things are rough, though for the most part, systems work as you'd expect. Need reagents? Do your legwork, track them down, and either find them yourself or get them in a trade. Want to cast a ritual? You don't have to wait for the higher-ups' approval. You're only limited by your own resourcefulness, stubbornness, and courage. If you're tenacious enough to find more than you need, you're in luck—the shadows are full of potential buyers.

Magic is plenty useful on a run, whether the magician is putting up a shield to deflect bullets or other spells, or concealing the sights and sounds of what a group of runners is doing so they can go about their business undisturbed. Adepts come in handy, too, either launching their bodies into impossible feats or bringing supernatural levels of charm into play. This doesn't come with the same pressure the corps might level on you—instead, you get a completely different range of problems, from the gangs wanting a piece of you to the snipers looking to take you out with a single shot before you can do some serious damage. Then there's law enforcement. The law is well aware that there are Awakened crooks out there, and they have plenty of means at their disposal to deal with them, including specially designed restraints, hoods to prevent them from establishing line of sight so they can cast a spell, and detention rooms treated with substances that inhibit sorcery and conjuring.

The worst part of it is that the authorities have a good reason to be worried about magic, as some spellslingers and adepts are doing some pretty nasty drek. The legal term for illegal magic is **maleficium**, and it can get pretty ugly. From toxic magic that summons spirits from the bubbling filth of the most polluted corners of the Sixth World to blood magic where casters drain an unsuspect-



ing victim to add power to their spells, magic can go to some twisted places. Most of these practices have an impact on the practitioner, twisting their brains until they are as warped as the magical effects they create. Then they generally either become tyrants of their own small domains or get geeked by runner teams coming out to collect the sizable bounties somebody has inevitably put on their heads.

MAGIC BASICS

Here's what you need to know to use magic in *Shadowrun*.

MAGIC

Magic is a special Attribute that measures a character's magical power. Characters do not have a Magic Attribute unless they select one of the priorities that specifically provide one (see the Priority Table, p. 65). Magic has a starting value from 1 to 6 (or 7 with the Exceptional Attribute quality), but you don't have to settle for that limit forever. You can go through a process called **Initiation** (p. 324) that can enhance your abilities. The maximum value of your Magic Attribute (if you have one) is 6 + your Initiation level.

Anything that reduces your Essence also reduces your Magic rating. For every point (or fraction thereof) of Essence lost, both your current Magic Attribute and your maximum Magic Rating are reduced by one. If your Magic is reduced to zero, you can no longer use any skill requiring the Magic attribute, even if your maximum Rating is still greater than zero (but you can still raise the attribute with Karma and then get back to the spellslinging). If your maximum rating falls to zero, you've burned out, losing all magical abilities, including astral perception and projection. You are mundane forever. Burned-out magicians retain all magical skills and knowledge, but they lack the ability to use them. All Magical active skills except for Arcana become Knowledge skills.

MAGICAL SKILLS

There are three categories of magical skills. The three Sorcery skills—Spellcasting, Counterspelling, and Ritual

EXAMPLE

Jimmy Two-Tone, who has a Magic Attribute of 4 and a maximum rating of 6, has decided he can't live without some cybereyes. To keep the Essence loss low, he selects the Rating 1 model, which costs 0.2 Essence. His Essence is reduced to 5.8, his current Magic Attribute becomes 3, and his maximum Magic rating is now 5. He can get some more cyberware if he wants, as Essence reductions do not reduce his Magic rating again until his Essence drops below 5.

Casting—are what you use to manipulate magic in the form of spells. The three Conjuring skills—Summoning, Binding, and Banishing—let you conjure spirits from beyond astral space to aid or serve you. The Enchanting skills—Alchemy, Artificing, and Disenchanting—allow you to imbue mundane objects with magic on the physical plane.

FORCE

Almost everything magical has an attribute known as Force, including spirits, spells, foci, and more. This attribute is a measure of magical power of the object or being. Force is used as a limit for magical effects performed without the channeling benefits of reagents or foci.

INHERENT LIMIT: ASTRAL

If you're going to go messing about in astral space, you need a strong mind, because that's what's going to be doing all your heavy lifting once you leave your body behind. Your mind is both your best muscle and your basic limiter in the astral. Your Astral limit is equal to your Mental or Social limit, whichever is greater.

DRAIN

Drain is the price you pay for wielding awesome magical power. The manipulation of mana, whether forming of a spell, brewing a potion, or bringing forth a being from another plane, can exhaust or injure you. Mana is a form of energy, and channeling greater quantities of that energy can strain the body and mind. This effect is referred to as Drain. Magical actions that cause Drain have a Drain Value, which is a measure of how much Drain they inflict.

The base Drain Value for Sorcery and Enchanting tests is listed with the appropriate spell, ritual, or preparation description. For Conjuring tests, the Drain Value is twice the hits (not net hits) generated by the spirit when it resists the Conjuring attempt. Drain generally is inflicted on you as Stun damage, though there are situations in which it can be Physical damage (see the Sorcery, Conjuring, and Enchanting sections). You resist the damage from Drain through a Drain Resistance Test; each hit reduces the Drain by one. Any remaining Drain is applied as boxes of damage to your Stun (or Physical) Condition Monitor. Drain damage, regardless of whether it is Stun or Physical damage, cannot be healed by any means other than the natural properties of the body—that means no magical healing and no medkits. If you overdo it, you'll simply need to make time for some rest.

POWER POINTS

Power Points are the quantified *qi* energy that adepts can spend to buy permanent powers. At character cre-

ation, adepts receive Power Points equal to their Magic attribute, while mystic adepts have to buy Power Points with Karma. Subsequently, Power Points can come in two ways. You get a free Power Point whenever you increase your Magic attribute, and you can gain a Power Point through **Initiation** (p. 324) instead of gaining a metamagic. For adepts, losing Essence is doubly dangerous because every time your Magic attribute is reduced, you lose an equal number of Power Points (you have to “un-buy” powers to make up the loss). If your Magic attribute is reduced to 0, you are cut off from magic and can no longer access your mystic abilities—which would be a good time for you to avoid anyone you’ve pissed off in the past while you’re trying to learn some new skills.

TRADITIONS

A magical tradition describes how you interact with mana. Sure, you don’t necessarily need things like chants, elegant hand gestures, muttered curses, and a holistic philosophy to sling spells and summon spirits, but it sure helps you connect to the magic, and your tradition gives you exactly that. Often, when looking for ways to focus, people fall back on elements of their culture or background that they associate with magic. If you spend your whole life thinking that magic happens when you wave a small wand, having such a wand in your hand helps you focus your abilities. Or maybe you’ve been told that magic can be contained in a beaded necklace—in that case, holding and fingering such a necklace is precisely what you need. All magicians are members of one of the magical traditions.

There are many different magic traditions in the Sixth World, and we have two of them for you here. The hermetic tradition values a scholarly, logical approach to spellcasting. Shamanic magic is looser, wilder, and can gain strength from the magician’s personality. Followers of the hermetic tradition are called mages, while followers of the shamanic tradition are called shamans.

Different aspects of the world (the elements) are important to traditions in different ways—the description of each tradition describes how each element lines up with the different types of spells, reagents, and spirits in their thinking, indicating which types of spirits and spirit powers they might be likely to call upon in particular situations. Each tradition’s description also includes the Attributes used in the Drain Resistance Test for spellcasters of this tradition.

THE HERMETIC MAGE

The hermetic mage relies on logic, practice, and execution of a planned formula rather than intuition and improvisation to effectively cast spells. They have learned to control magic and believe that the universe

(both the magical parts and the mundane) follows patterns of energy that can be manipulated through complex symbols, formulae, and arcane knowledge of its components. This tradition was widely practiced (if not effective) even before the Awakening, and this form appealed early on to corporations and governments due to its intellectual, formalized nature. In hermetic thinking, casting magic involves imposing the magician’s will on the universe—so you can imagine some of the egos that emerge when mages get together. Mages are scholars and often have libraries of magical information from which they design spells. Any mage worth his reagents has at least a digital copy of one of the founding texts on hermeticism (rich mages have a fancy hard copy written and bound by hand in a very fancy ceremony). Hermetic trappings also include deluxe, well-crafted equipment in archaic laboratories where mages can create preparations and carry out their research.

Mages create circles of power (they’re really just magical lodges, just with a hermetic twist, but don’t try to tell a mage that). Hermetic reagents include minerals, ores, and other elements—a knowledge of geology, parageology, and chemistry help them find where to gather such reagents. In urban areas, items found in the esoteric, antique, and forgotten corners of the cities can be used by mages. Older buildings, graveyards, and antique shops may have pieces of brick, pottery, glass, wrought iron, and jewelry that have been imbued with magical properties of the elements. Knowledge of architecture and antiques help in the search for these reagents.

Mages, unsurprisingly, take a somewhat arrogant view on conjuring. The mage tends to believe that spirits are intelligent but inferior beings predestined for servitude. With that mindset, mages tend to be more comfortable binding spirits than are spellcasters of other traditions.

HERMETIC TRADITION

Combat: Fire

Health: Man

Manipulation: Earth

Detection: Air

Illusion: Water

Drain: Logic + Willpower

THE SHAMAN

The shaman uses mana to balance the world of nature and their own will. They believe in harmony and guidance, observing the world and using emotion to weave magic. They respect the gift of magic that connects them to the flow of the spirit of life. To the shaman, the earth is a living being, and her children are spirits who guide and aid those that support her; spirits of the sky,



SHAMANIC TRADITION

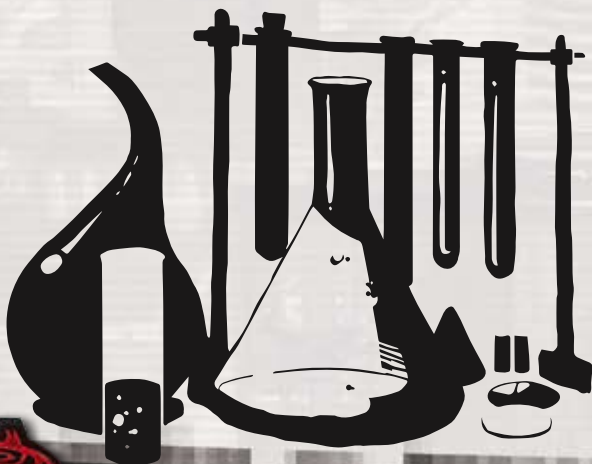
Combat: Beasts
Health: Earth
Manipulation: Man
Detection: Water
Illusion: Air
Drain: Charisma + Willpower

mountain, birds, rats, even metahumanity. Shamanism has been practiced far longer than hermetic magic and can be found in all parts of the world, although it wasn't taken seriously by modern metahumanity until the Great Ghost Dance. To the shaman, casting a spell is asking a greater universal entity, such as a mentor spirit, to grant her power.

Shamans call their magical lodges "medicine lodges." A medicine lodge (also known as a sweat lodge, inipi, kiva, temazcal, or a number of other names) can take a variety of forms, including a small domed hut with an animal skin roof or a hole dug into the ground and carefully covered with a ceiling of woven branches, or in an urban area a small room filled with skins, painting, and artistically decorative urban junk.

The wilderness is an excellent place for shamans to gather reagents, finding plant and animal parts, naturally shaped stones, and vials of water in such pristine locations. Knowledge of zoology, parazoology, botany, and parobotany help them find and harvest these materials. In urban areas, shamans find that the spirit of life also inhabits in the cities. So-called "street shamans" find reagents in urban animals, naturally worn stones in parks or waterways, and handcrafted jewelry made with natural materials. Knowledge of architecture and crafts helps find this sort of reagent.

The shamanic perspective on conjuring is based on a belief that spirits are intelligent and ancient, and they should be treated with the respect one would show an elder. Due to their belief that spirits are everywhere, shamans frequently summon spirits from the area when the need arises, rather than binding spirits for long periods. Shamans often develop personal connections to spirits, following them as they learn magic.



MAGICAL LODGES

A **magical lodge** is a stationary collection of symbols, writings, tools, fetishes, and other mystical materials that helps spellcasters record their lore, expand their talent, and practice magic. It's a basic tool of magicians across the world, about the size of a room. You need it to learn spells, perform rituals, craft foci, and in a pinch you can use it to protect yourself from magical threats. Each lodge is of a specific tradition—a shamanic lodge is intended for shamans, and a hermetic lodge for mages.

Magical lodges don't always look like lodges *per se*. A shamanic lodge is a traditional medicine lodge, but a hermetic magician's lodge is a series of magic circles, shelves filled with arcane tomes, mystical mechanisms, and alchemical apparatuses. Every tradition has its own version of a magical lodge, but they all work the same way.

Magical lodges aren't intended to be portable (although you can make a temporary one with reagents, p. 316). To create your own, you need magical lodge materials (they cost Force x 500 nuyen) that are appropriate to your tradition. Once you have the materials, find a space to put it, like your apartment, or a cave in the wilderness, or a secret abandoned sewer tunnel—someplace you won't mind spending some time. Then spend a number of days equal to the lodge's Force dedicating the space, setting up the physical components, building its astral form, setting up barriers, and harmonizing it to your aura. Once you're done, your magical lodge is up and active. An active magical lodge acts as a mana barrier (p. 315) and shares your astral signature.

If you want to move your lodge, you'll need a day to take it down, turning it back into magical lodge materials; then you can set it up again somewhere else. If you want to improve your lodge, just bring in more materials to add to the current ones and spend a day times the Force you want the lodge to have at the end of your work.

PERCEIVING MAGIC

Magic is rarely subtle. Any form of magic (conjuring, spellcasting, enchanting, magical lodges, spirits, etc.) changes the world around it. Sometimes it's obvious through a magician's gestures or incantations (magicians seen by non-Awakened people are sometimes called "twitchy fingers"). Spirits sometimes cause the air to shimmer, even from astral space. People have reported feeling chills, dread, or other unnatural sensations they can't quite put their finger on when magic is in the area.

Noticing magic is a Simple Perception + Intuition [Mental] Test with a threshold equal to the Skill Rating of the being performing it minus the Force of the magic, or 6 - Force if there's no skill involved (minimum 1 in either case). For example, if a magician with Spellcasting 6 casts

a Force 4 manabolt, the threshold for spotting her do it is 2 (Skill Rating 6 - Force 4). If you just stepped through a Force 5 ward, the threshold to notice the markings or feel the tingle is 1 (6 - Force 5). You get a + 2 dice pool modifier on this test if you have any magic-related Active or Knowledge Skill.

Obviously, if a magician is throwing fire from his fingertips, you're probably going to notice without making a test. But if the magic is subtle, then you have to pick up some dice.

SORCERY

Sorcery is the art of shaping mana to create specific effects. You can use it to cast spells (Spellcasting and Ritual Spellcasting), or protect against or destroy spells (Counterspelling). You only have to concentrate to cast a spell, but your tradition probably has plenty of chanting, gestures, dancing, and other things to go along with it. All traditions cast spells using the same rules.

SPELLCASTING

Spellcasting is the art of channeling mana through force of will, turning it into an astral or physical form called a spell. Before casting a spell, you have to learn it (**Learning Spells**, p. 299). Casting a spell involves the following steps:

STEP 1: CHOOSE SPELL

At character creation, magicians purchase a set of spells for spellcasting, then add more as they advance. The magician can only choose from this set of spells.

Casting Multiple Spells: Some magicians have the mental discipline to weave multiple threads of mana into various spells at once. You can attempt to cast multiple spells simultaneously in the same action, even at different targets. To do this, you have to split your Spellcasting + Magic dice pool between the spells you want to cast (see Step 4), with a minimum of 1 die per spell. Since the modifiers per spell may be different, they are applied after you split the dice pool. The number of spells you can cast simultaneously is limited to your Magic attribute.

STEP 2: CHOOSE THE TARGET

The next thing you must do is choose target(s). You need to be able to establish a link with your target—depending on the spell, you'll need to be able to see or touch the target in order to establish the mystical link.

If you need to see the target, line of sight can be established with your natural vision, including using reflective surfaces and looking through transparent objects. Cyber- or bioware visual enhancements that have been paid for with Essence count as natural. Any technological visual aid that digitizes or augments the visual input

for you (a camera, electronic binoculars, Matrix feeds, etc.) doesn't work—you're looking at a generated image, not the light from the real target. Spellcasting by visual targeting is subject to normal visibility modifiers. You can use visual targeting to target astral targets when you're in astral space (you're not technically seeing them, but the analogy works).

Some spells can only be cast on targets that you're touching. You don't need to see these targets, but you might need to make an unarmed attack to make contact with an unwilling target. Touching a target through clothing, armor, or a layer of paint is acceptable.

A magician in the physical world can only cast spells on targets that are in the physical world. Similarly, a magician in astral space can only cast spells on targets that are present in astral space (though auras of things in the physical world can be seen, auras alone cannot be targeted). If you're using astral perception (or you are otherwise dual-natured), you can cast spells on targets in either the physical world or astral plane. Only mana-based spells work in astral space, even if you're in the physical world astrally perceiving the target.

Area Spells: Area spells can be cast on a specific target or a point in space that you can see. Unless noted in a spell, the area of the spell is a sphere centered on the target with a radius in meters equal to the Force of the spell. All targets in the area of effect that you can see, friend and foe alike, are valid targets for the spell. If a potential target is outside your vision (behind a screen, for example), they're not affected.

STEP 3: CHOOSE SPELL FORCE

You must declare the Force at which to cast the spell. The Force acts as a limit on the spell. Higher Force spells are more powerful, but cause more Drain. You can cast a spell at a Force up to twice your Magic rating. If the number of hits (not net hits) you get *after applying the limit* exceeds your Magic rating, the spell's Drain is Physical instead of Stun damage.

STEP 4: CAST SPELL

Casting a spell involves some mental preparation and a Complex Action. Make a Spellcasting + Magic [Force] Test, including dice pool modifiers for injury, sustained spells, and so on. Any opposition roll or threshold you need to reach is listed in the spell description. If the number of hits (not net hits) you get (after applying the limit or Edge spending) exceeds your Magic rating, the spell's Drain is Physical instead of Stun damage.

Reckless Spellcasting: You can bypass some of the preparation, but it can take a toll on your body. This action is called Reckless Spellcasting; it lets you cast a spell as a Simple Action instead of a Complex Action, but with an added +3 Drain Value. If you decide to cast two spells as Simple Actions in the same Action Phase, both receive the +3 Drain Value.



STEP 5: DETERMINE EFFECT

Details on the type of spell are listed under each spell. Some spells require an Opposed Test prior to resolution, while others can possibly be dodged by the target. Note that this is Step 5, and Drain is Step 6—the effect of the spell happens even if Drain takes you out.

STEP 6: RESIST DRAIN

Drain calculation is listed for each spell; the Drain Value is determined using the Force and the listed calculation, but can never be lower than 2. After casting a spell, you must resist Drain using the dice pool for Drain Resistance according to your tradition. Remember that if the number of hits you rolled when casting the spell (Step 4) exceeds your Magic rating, then the Drain causes Physical instead of Stun damage.

STEP 7: DETERMINE ONGOING EFFECTS

If you sustain the spell (that is, if you want the effect of a Sustained spell to continue), you take a -2 dice pool penalty to all tests while it is sustained. You can sustain multiple spells, but the -2 penalty is cumulative for each spell.

Area effect spells that are sustained can be moved as a Complex Action, provided that the spell area is in the magician's line of sight. Characters that drop out of the affected area are no longer affected by the spell, while characters that are enveloped by the new affected area must defend against the spell accordingly.

GLITCHES

A glitch on a spell might cause extra drain (generally a +2 Drain Value), invoke a different elemental effect than what was intended, hit the wrong target, or any other bit of mischief your gamemaster can think up. On a critical glitch, the spell could get away from you and cause all sorts of havoc, or you might not get to resist Drain, or it could go off in an unconventional and unpredictable

manner that could harm you or your team—again, your gamemaster gets to decide what happens.

SPELL CHARACTERISTICS

Each spell is described with a set of characteristics. Here's a rundown of those categories and what the different abbreviations accompanying them mean.

Type: Spells are either Physical spells (P) or Mana spells (M). For a full discussion of the difference between the two, see the **Physical vs. Mana sidebar** (below).

Range: This describes how close you have to get, or how far away you can be, to cast the spell. The most common range is Line of Sight (LOS), meaning you have to physically see the target (described in Step 2 of spell-casting, p. 281). Some spells require you to Touch (T) the target—if the target is unwilling, you'll need to make an unarmed attack against the target (see **Accuracy**, p. 168).

Some spells are Area spells, affecting an area rather than a single target. These spells are noted with (A) after the range designation. With a few exceptions, the area is a radius in meters equal to the Force of the spell.

Damage: If the spell inflicts damage, this describes the type—either Physical (P) or Stun (S). The Damage Value for the spell is listed in the spell or spell category description.

SPELL CATEGORIES

Combat spells: These spells are quick, dirty, and violent.

The energy of the spell is used to harm, maim, or otherwise frag the target. Spell energy may be channeled directly into the target, damaging it from within, or it may generate external energy to damage the target from the outside.

Detection spells: These spells enhance the senses. They allow the subject of the spell to see or hear over great distances, or grant new sensory abilities. There are also Detection spells to sense the presence of other beings, magic, life, and/or enemies.

Health spells: These spells affect the condition and performance of a living body. They can be used to treat or heal injuries, purge poisons or toxins, and increase or decrease Attributes.

Illusion spells: These spells can mess with a target's perception. They can be used to deceive, make things invisible, confuse the senses, or provide simple or complex entertainments.

Manipulation spells: These spells are used by magicians to alter and shape their environment in a variety of ways. Manipulation spells can control the emotions or actions of a person, move objects, shape, create, or channel energy, or change a target's form or appearance by altering its structure.

PHYSICAL VS. MANA

Physical spells: When using Physical spells, the magician converts the channeled mana to energy and/or tangible material in the physical world. The tangible material is simple—energy or matter such as ice, acid, oxygen, heat, light, etc. This material is also temporary unless sustained, converting back to mana energy when the spell ends. Physical spells can affect both living and non-living objects in the physical world.

Mana spells: When using mana spells, the magician can only affect living things with auras or astrally active entities (such as spirits or foci) even in the physical world. Mana spells can affect targets on either the physical or astral planes, but only if you're on the same plane as your target(s).



THE ASTRAL WORLD

While the physical world is the world you interact with all the time, there is another world, invisible and unnoticed but indirectly influenced by the people wandering the material plane. This world is called the **astral plane**. It is an emotionally charged photonegative of the physical world where only living things and things infused with mana are real and physical objects are mere intangible shadows.

Mana, the essence of magic, flows through the astral plane, bridging the metaplanes to the physical world, fueled by the life force that exists in and on our planet. The general aura of that life illuminates the astral world at all times with an ambient glow. Things that exist only on the material plane can be seen and heard from the astral, but they are blurred and muted as the emotional context of people and things registers more than physical properties of light and sound (in many ways they are a substitution for those properties). Echoes of things-that-used-to-be cast shadows in the astral world with varying consistency based on the lasting emotions tied to objects and places. These echoes stand out more prominently in the astral world as the emotional context makes them more colorful or tangible.

AURAS & ASTRAL FORMS

Living things in general are not active on the astral plane but still cast a reflection of themselves there. This reflection is called an aura; it appears as a shining, vibrant, colorful luminescence. Any non-living objects appear as faded semblances of their physical selves; grey, lifeless, and intangible.

Anything active on the astral plane, including spirits, active foci, dual-natured beings, etc., has a tangible astral form. These forms are more colorful and brighter than auras, as they are astrally “real.” The Earth has an astral form, and many regard this as proof that the planet as a whole is a living entity apart from (or made up of) the creatures that inhabit its surface.

ASTRAL SIGNATURE

Generally, when magicians cast a spell or perform a ritual, they leave their astral fingerprints on it. This is called an astral signature, and it’s produced on anything affected by magic skills or abilities. This astral signature can be detected by anyone with the assensing skill. A signature lasts for a number of hours equal to the magical effect’s Force after the effect (spell, critter power, astral battle, or whatever it was) ends, slowly fading into the background. An astral signature of a spell can be detected both where it was cast and where it took effect. Semi-permanent objects such as

alchemical preparations and watchers contain an astral signature while they last. More permanent items such as foci, lodges, and circles always contain the astral signature of their owner.

A character can attempt to read an astral signature with an Assensing + Magic [Astral] 3 Test. This is not the simplest task, as perceiving and understanding an astral signature is somewhat difficult amid the mixture of magic and emotional background of the astral plane. Once successfully read, a signature can be recognized again (possibly with a **Memory Test**, p. 152). Other details such as the general class of spell or spirit, or the skill of the magician, can be determined with net hits (see **Assensing** p. 142).

A magician using astral perception can “wipe clean” a temporary astral signature (such as from sorcery) or hasten its normal fading. A magician can spend a Complex Action to reduce the amount of time it takes for the signature to fade by 1 hour (mentally pushing the signature into the background energy, if you will). No test is required. This action can be done multiple times until the astral signature is gone. If the signature is not completely erased, it will be obvious to others assensing it that someone tampered with it.

Magical forensic investigators use astral signatures to gather information about criminal magicians, so be careful about leaving them behind where they are likely seen.

ASTRAL PERCEPTION

Many Awakened characters can perceive the astral plane from the physical world. This ability is called **astral perception**. It is a primary sense used in the astral plane that allows you to “see” auras and other things in the astral world overlaid on the material plane. Astral perception is available only to some; for metahumans you can only use astral perception if you’re a magician, or an adept with the Astral Perception power. Technically, astral perception isn’t vision—you don’t need working eyes to see in the astral plane—but vision is the easiest metaphor to use.

With the skill of Assensing, you can interpret the “colors” and “brightness” of an aura to determine the wellness and state of being of the subject. When astrally perceiving, you become **dual-natured** (meaning you have presence in both the physical and astral planes simultaneously) and can interact with astral objects, including through combat. Astrally perceiving while trying to accomplish mundane tasks is very distracting; you take a -2 dice pool penalty to actions on the physical plane.

While astral perception allows an Awakened character to sense the astral plane, actually interpreting what you’re looking at takes practice. Interpreting auras to gain information about the person or thing to which they belong is called Assensing. If you want to learn more about an aura, you may make a Simple Assensing + Intuition [Astral] Test, with the number of hits determining how much you learn (details are on the **Assensing Table**, p. 313). Without



ASSESSING TABLE

HITS	INFORMATION GAINED
0	None
1	The general state of the subject's health (healthy, injured, ill, etc.). The subject's general emotional state or impression (happy, sad, angry, etc.). Whether the subject is mundane or Awakened.
2	The presence and location of cyberware implants. The class of a magical subject (fire elemental, manipulation spell, power focus, curse ritual, and so on). If you have seen the subject's aura before, you may recognize it, regardless of physical disguises or alterations
3	The presence and location of alphasware cyber implants. Whether the subject's Essence and Magic are higher, lower, or equal to your own. Whether the subject's Force is higher, lower, or equal to your Magic. A general diagnosis for any maladies (diseases or toxins) the subject suffers. Any astral signatures present on the subject.
4	The presence and location of bioware implants and betaware cyber implants. The exact Essence, Magic, and Force of the subject. The general cause of any astral signature (combat spell, alchemical combat spell, air spirit, and so on).
5+	The presence and location of deltaware implants, gene treatments, and nanotech. An accurate diagnosis of any disease or toxins which afflict the subject. The fact that a subject is a technomancer.

attempting to read an aura, you can still get an impression of what type of aura it is (spell, ritual, spirit, living creature, foreboding horror from beyond all mortal ken, etc.).

Like physical perception, you don't need to make a test to see things that are immediately obvious (and since astral forms are bright and vibrant, this means that most astral forms are easy to spot). You only need to roll the dice when your target is trying to hide or when you're trying to observe in detail—then you make an Assessing Test to see what you can see.

Objects that are neither magical nor living do not have an aura; they are featureless grey shadows of their physical form. They can, however, pick up impressions for a limited time from being in contact with living auras. A teddy bear in the Barrens might pick up a child's fear, a wedding ring its owner's sense of love and joy, or a murder weapon an aura of rage. These impressions are vague and fleeting, but you don't need to assess the object to get them. Note that it's the object that picks up the impression—a trid display used at an oppressive desk job would give the sense of stress, even if it was displaying a love note.

ASTRAL PROJECTION

If astral perception is like sticking your face in a lake to peer below the surface, astral projection is diving right in. Your consciousness is contained in an astral form

and can leave your corporeal body. Your astral form is a mental projection of your self image combined with physical characteristics based on your mental attributes, which means you can always have awesome hair.

A projecting mage can travel around the astral plane at great speeds unimpeded by material objects such as walls, floors, and burly goons (unless they are dual-natured). Your body is in a coma-like state while your astral body is out in the aether. Your mind and body are still connected, so any damage taken to body or mind is felt by both. Only characters who are full Magicians can astrally project.

You're using astral perception the entire time you're projecting, so you can see the auras of living things. Auras alone don't give you the mystic link you need to target spells. As the saying goes, what's cast in astral space stays in astral space, and ditto for physical space.

ASTRAL MOVEMENT

Astral forms can move almost at the speed of thought. The magician only needs to imagine himself at a place and his astral body travels there. Any nearby places can be reached in seconds, minutes for locations on the same continent, hours to get anywhere on the globe. At this speed however, you have no time to perceive the environment, and things you pass are a blur (think warp speed in movies). Astral barriers block astral trav-



el, and you might run into one before you realize that it's in your way.

If you're looking for a particular place or thing, you must travel at a slower pace. "Slower" in this case means up to 100 meters each Combat Turn—this is considered to be the Walking rate in astral space. Moving faster, 5 kilometers per Combat Turn, is your Running rate—the normal penalties to actions for Running apply in these cases.

Astral forms can move in any direction—they are not limited by gravity as they are in the physical world, though most projecting magicians tend to stick close to the ground because that's where most of the interesting stuff is, if not out of force of habit. The exception to this freedom of movement is at the limits of the Earthly atmosphere (about eighty kilometers up)—the Gaiasphere weakens to the point where astral voyagers usually go mad or die.

Only astral forms can slow or affect another astral form. The Earth is solid on the astral plane, just as it is in the physical world; astral forms cannot pass through it. Secure facilities are often built underground to keep out astral intruders. Active weapon foci have a presence in astral space and can harm an astral form (see **Foci**, p. 318), but you must be present on the astral plane to use the focus in astral combat. Only mana spells affect astral forms.

MANIFESTING

A purely astral form such as a spirit or an astrally projecting magician can interact with the physical plane by manifesting. Manifesting is a psychic effect that lets you make yourself visible and audible on the physical plane through an act of will. Manifesting takes a Complex Action to engage or disengage. You appear on the physical plane as a ghostly, hazy image of your astral form and may freely communicate with physical characters. Unlike the Materialization power of spirits (p. 314), manifesting doesn't give you a physical form, so you can't interact with anything physically (or be harmed by physical attacks). It's a psychic connection, so you can't cast spells on targets on the physical plane while you're manifesting. For the same reason, technological devices can't detect or record you. You're still on the astral plane, so astral attacks can still target you. Manifesting is pretty taxing, so you can only manifest for a total of your Magic Rating x 5 minutes per astral projection session.

STAYING ASTRAL

It's mentally taxing to stay on the astral plane for a long time. You can use astral projection for a number of hours equal to your Magic Rating x 2. If you stay out longer, your astral being ceases to exist and your body dies. This might make spotting rituals more difficult to complete (the time limit, that is—death makes every-

ASTRAL ATTRIBUTES TABLE

PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTE	ASTRAL ATTRIBUTE
Agility	Logic
Body	Willpower
Reaction	Intuition
Strength	Charisma
Astra Initiative	Intuition x 2
Initiative Dice	+2D6 (3D6 total)

thing more complex). If you return to your body, this clock stops, but it doesn't reset until you've spent at least as long in your body as you spent out of it.

ASTRAL DETECTION

Physical beings may sense when an astral form passes through their aura. Make a Perception + Intuition (4) [Mental] Test—you receive a +2 dice pool bonus if you're Awakened. If the test is successful, the character feels slightly breathless, and they experience a chill or tingling sensation from the passing of the astral form. Security personnel are trained to recognize this feeling as a sign of an astral intruder. This specialization of Perception is called Numinous Perception, which includes both the chilly tingle of astral forms and the "bad vibes" of noticing magic (p. 280).

WHILE YOU WERE OUT

When a magician is astrally projecting, her mind has stepped out for the moment. Mental detection and manipulation spells targeting the physical body of an astrally projecting mage simply do not work, although other spells do. Although if you really want to mess up a magician without killing her, you can move her body away from where she left it.

Magicians hate playing hide and seek with their own body. If someone moves your body away from where you expected it to be, you'll have to search for it. If that happens, make an Assensing + Intuition [Astral] (1 hour) Extended Test. The threshold should be determined by the gamemaster based on how far your body was moved and how well it was hidden.



ASTRAL COMBAT

Astral combat is resolved in the same way as physical combat. Astrally perceiving and dual-natured characters use their physical attributes and skills to fight opponents with a physical body, and their Astral Combat + Willpower to fight wholly astral entities. Astrally projecting characters use their mental attributes in place of physical ones (see **Astral Attributes Table**) along with the Astral Combat skill. There are no ranged weapons that function in astral space, so unarmed attacks, active weapon foci, and mana spells are the only options for astral combat.

Unarmed astral attacks are performed through an Opposed Astral Combat + Willpower [Astral] v. Intuition + Logic Test. Astral attacks with a weapon focus are an Opposed Astral Combat + Willpower [Accuracy] v. Intuition + Logic Test. Base Damage Values are listed on the **Astral Damage Table**; add 1 to the DV per net hit on an attack. Damage inflicted from astral combat can be either Stun or Physical (attacker's choice). Astral barriers can only be affected by Physical damage.

ASTRAL DAMAGE TABLE

ATTACK	TEST
Unarmed	Astral Combat + Willpower [Astral] v. Intuition + Logic
Weapon Focus	Astral Combat + Willpower [Accuracy] v. Intuition + Logic
TYPE	DAMAGE
Magician	Charisma
Weapon Focus	by weapon (using Charisma instead of Strength)
Spirit	Force
Watcher	1

ASTRAL TRACKING

Nearly all magical things (spirits, spells, foci, and magical lodges) have an astral link to whoever was responsible for them. Active spells are linked to their casters, spirits are linked to their summoners, astrally projecting magicians are linked to their physical bodies, and foci and magical lodges are linked to the magicians who activated them. Awakened entities who assense the astral signature of these astral forms can track their links through the astral plane back to their sources. Following an astral link requires an Assensing + Intuition (5,1 hour) [Astral] Extended Test modified as noted on the **Astral Tracking Modifiers** table.

ASTRAL TRACKING MODIFIERS

CONDITION	THRESHOLD MODIFIER
Each hour passed since astral link was active	+1
Target behind mana barrier	+ (Force of barrier)
Tracking master by spirit:	
Bound spirit	+0
Unbound spirit	+2

MANA BARRIERS

Mana barriers are magical walls that impede or block magic and astral forms. Mana barriers can be on the physical or astral planes, but some are dual-natured barriers that exist on both. The Mana Barriers table lists the different ways to create a mana barrier contained in this book.

Mana barriers on the physical plane are invisible (except to astral perception), but they act as solid barriers to spells, manifesting entities, spirits, and active foci. Anybody trying to cast a spell through a barrier must contend with the Force of the barrier, which is added to the Defense or the Resistance dice pool. If the spell doesn't normally have an opposed dice pool, the Spellcasting test becomes an Opposed Test against the Force of the barrier.

Mana barriers on the astral plane are solid, hazily opaque walls. Such barriers stop astral movement and impose a visual penalty equal to the barrier's Force. Astral mana barriers are resistant to astral spells as well as other astral forms, in the same manner as physical mana barriers.

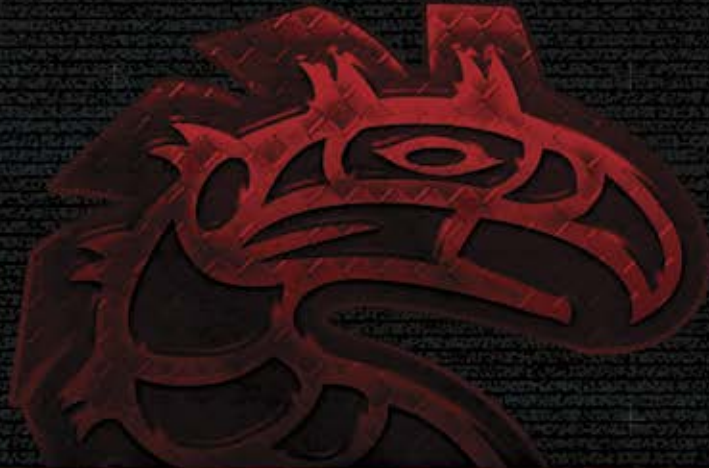
Dual-natured mana barriers are active on both planes simultaneously, and they act like mana barriers on both planes at once.

Adept powers and many always-on critter powers are innate and so are unaffected by a barrier. The gam-

MANA BARRIERS TABLE

MANA BARRIER	ASTRAL OR PHYSICAL	REFERENCE
Circle of Protection ritual	Both	p. 298
Magical Lodge	Both	p. 280
Mana Barrier spell	Either	p. 294
Ward ritual	Both	p. 297





SHADOWRUN >noun

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

WorldWide WorldWatch
2050 archive



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.

Get more info at www.shadowruntabletop.com

SHADOWRUN, FIFTH EDITION • PREVIEW SIX



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THE MATRIX

We use it every day to read our email, pay our bills, talk to our friends and loved ones. It monitors our money, handles our utilities, and manages the traffic on our streets. Billions of people use it constantly, from the hungry family in Redmond to the CEO in Neo-Tokyo and everyone in between. It is the Matrix, the digital world within a world made of fiber-optic cables, networks, and more data and computing power than has ever existed in the history of the planet. A record that exists today so it can be broken tomorrow.

Everybody uses the Matrix. Most shadowrunners have multiple pieces of gear that use it, often interacting with the Matrix without them knowing it. Smartlinks use it to look up local conditions and calculate firing solutions, medkits access medical databases to analyze and diagnose injuries and then recommend treatment, and your clothes and armor use it to detect wear and tear. And tell you when it's time to do the laundry.

Some shadowrunners do more than just soak in information the gear gathers for them. They use the Matrix as a tool and a weapon. They glide through it, bending it to their will, making it dance and spin to the tune they call. Such a runner is called a **hacker**. There are two kinds of hackers, classified based on how they interact with the Matrix: **deckers**, who use cyberdecks to access the bones and muscle of the Matrix and twist that structure to their will; and **technomancers**, who have a downright weird ability to interface and control the digital world without the aid of technology.

Hackers play critical roles on shadowrunning teams. They open locked doors, muffle alarms, cancel security calls, unearth buried facts, monitor things other team members can't see, and keep the heat off long enough for the rest of the team to finish the run. In a scrap, they can take control of or destroy opponents' weapons and gear.

They also play an important role in defense. Every other skilled team in the world has a hacker running interference for them; if your team doesn't, you're vulnerable to whatever electronic havoc they decide to bring down on your head. Quick tip: leaving yourself vulnerable is a bad idea.

WIRELESS WORLD

The paradox of the Matrix is this: to be an ace hacker, you need to understand it—but no one really understands it. Like so many things, though, the real key is to know more and be better than the next guy. So let's get you started with a quick overview of the Matrix experience. We won't start with hacking, because you need to walk before you can run. We'll start with the ways users—you and everyone else—experience the Matrix.

When you jack in and flip over to the electronic world, you plunge into a virtual environment of a consensual hallucination. Everything is rendered in incredible detail powered by a century of digital graphics innovation. Sometimes it seems almost real, but either through conscious artificiality or the difficulty of duplicating the complexities of the physical world, the computer-generated seams usually show.

Physical laws don't apply in the Matrix (unless some jackwad admin programmed them into a host, but those strictures can always be overwritten if you know what you're doing). You want to fly? Go ahead and fly. And watch the vast expanse of exquisite artificiality spread out around you.

Below you, stretching off in every direction, three-dimensional icons of real-world devices light up the landscape like a galaxy of stars in a perfect night sky. The devices that appear to be closest to you are the ones nearest your meat body. Your own icon—your virtual self—is usually the brightest and clearest of the icons. The points of light on the distant horizon, the devices that are the farthest from your presence in the real world, flicker and sputter with the lag of data traveling from the other side of the globe.

Hovering above you, massive hosts—tremendous data collections guarded by spiders and IC—float like corporate gods, attempting to see everything and be surprised by nothing. Their custom geometries form a virtual geography that is unconnected to the meat-bound map below. The larger ones, the size of cities, belong to the Big Ten megacorporations and are dangerous to enter if you're not invited. Other, smaller hosts cluster in the neural sky, offering social connections, presenting consumer products, or promising darker pleasures.





MATRIX JARGON

If you're going to spend any serious time in the Matrix, you have to be able to sling around the lingo. Hackers move fast and talk faster—this is the stuff you need to know so they don't leave you behind.

agent: A semi-autonomous program that is capable of taking independent action in the Matrix.

archive: An area of a host that stores files securely away from all users, legitimate or otherwise.

artificial intelligence (AI): Self-aware and self-sustaining intelligent programs that evolved within the Matrix.

augmented reality (AR): Information added to or overlaid upon a user's normal sensory perceptions in the form of visual data, graphics, sounds, haptics, smell, and/or limited simsense.

augmented reality object (ARO): Virtual representations (usually visual graphics, but other sensory data can be included, typically sound) that are connected to a physical object or location in the physical world and viewable through augmented reality. The abbreviation, ARO, is pronounced "arrow."

avatar: The icon of a persona.

better-than-life (BTL, beetle): Hyper-real levels of simsense that are addictive and potentially dangerous.

brick: To destroy a device by Matrix damage; also, a device destroyed in that fashion.

cold-sim: Standard simsense that operates at legal, safe levels. Used by most people to access virtual reality.

commcode: Combination email address, phone number, and IM name that identifies an individual for communications; if people want to get a hold of you, this is what they need.

commlink ('link): The handheld or worn personal computer used by nearly everyone to access wireless services.

complex form: Mental algorithms that technomancers use to manipulate the Matrix—their equivalent of programs.

control rig: An implanted augmentation that allows a rigger to "jump" into a vehicle, drone, or other device, giving him or her superior control and performance.

deck: A tablet-sized computer used to hack the Matrix; it is restricted or illegal in most of the civilized world.

demiGOD: A subsection of the Grid Overwatch Division that oversees a single grid, run by the grid's owner.

device: A piece of gear that performs functions integral to a network.

direct neural interface (DNI): A connection between the brain's neural impulses and a computer system that allows a user to mentally interact with that system.

drone: An unmanned vehicle that can be controlled via direct wireless link or through the Matrix.

echo: An enhanced ability a technomancer can learn after undergoing submersion.

fading: Mental drain technomancers sometimes experience when using their abilities.

file: A program or set of data that is collected as a single package; this runs the gamut from annual reports and kitten videos to autosofts and Attack programs.

firewall: A program that guards a node from intrusion. This is the first line of defense of a device or host to fend off unwanted Matrix interference.

geo-tagging: Assigning AROs to a specific physical location, often using RFID tags.

ghost in the machine: Mysterious phenomena and perceived entities that exist entirely within the Matrix. Some believe these are AIs or magical spirits of the Matrix. Others believe they are the disembodied personalities of people trapped within the Matrix during and since the Crash of '64.

GOD: Grid Overwatch Division, an entity run by the Corporate Court to oversee security in the Matrix.

grid: The resources offered by a Matrix provider; typically, you can access information on that provider's grid easily, while accessing info on other grids is more difficult. The term is also used to refer to the Matrix as a whole outside any host.



MATRIX JARGON, CONT.

hacker: Someone who explores and exploits the Matrix.

haptics: Computer interactions based on the sense of touch.

host: A self-contained place in the Matrix. Hosts have no physical location, as they exist purely in the Matrix cloud.

hot-sim: Simsense without the safeguards that prevent potentially damaging biofeedback. Hot-sim is illegal in the civilized world.

icon: The virtual representation of a device, persona, file, or host in the Matrix.

intrusion countermeasures (IC): Software that runs in a host and protects that host from unauthorized users. The abbreviation, IC, is pronounced "ice."

jackpoint: Any physical location that provides access to the Matrix through plugging in with a wired connection.

living persona: The mental "organic software" that allows technomancers to access the Matrix with only their minds.

master: A device, usually a commlink, cyberdeck, or host, that is linked to other devices in order to protect them against Matrix attacks.

Matrix authentication recognition key (mark): A token that measures a user's access to a device, host, or persona.

Matrix object: A persona, file, device, mark, or host in the Matrix.

Matrix: The worldwide telecommunications network and everyone and everything connected to and by that network.

meat: (slang) An unwired individual, or the physical part of a Matrix user in VR.

meshed: (slang) Online, connected to the Matrix.

noise: Unwanted data or wireless signals that make using the Matrix slower or more difficult. (slang) Unwelcome information.

persona: A user, agent, or other autonomous or semi-autonomous icon in the Matrix.

personal area network (PAN): The set of devices slaved to a single commlink or cyberdeck.

pilot: A sophisticated program with semi-autonomous decision-making abilities.

radio frequency identification tag (RFID, pronounced "arfid"): A device no bigger than a matchbox that holds data and other miniaturized electronics.

real life (RL): (slang) Anything not having to do with the Matrix.

Resonance: The measure of a technomancer's ability to access and manipulate the Matrix.

Resonance Realms: A mysterious plane of virtual existence that technomancers can access. It is believed that a copy of every bit of electronic data ever created exists somewhere in the Resonance Realms.

rigger: Someone who uses a control rig to "jump" into a properly adapted device (usually a drone, vehicle, or security system) in order to directly control it as if the device were an extension of his or her own body.

sculpting: The look and feel of a host's internal virtual space.

simrig: A device for making simsense recordings.

simsense (sim, simstim): Hardware and software that enable a person to experience what has happened to someone else as if they had sensed and experienced the events themselves. Requires a direct neural interface.

slave: A device connected to a master device, usually a commlink, cyberdeck, or host, on which the slave depends for defense against Matrix attacks.

spam zone: An area flooded with invasive and/or viral AR advertising, causing noise.

spider: A security hacker/rigger employed by a corporation or law-enforcement agency to protect a physical space or a host from hackers.

sprite: A Resonance-based entity created (or called) by a technomancer.

static zone: An area where the physical environment creates noise.

submersion: A state in which a technomancer strengthens his or her connection to the Resonance.

tag: An RFID tag.

technomancer: A person who is able to use and manipulate the Matrix without hardware. The term often carries connotations of hacking and cyber-terrorism.

trodes: A headband or net worn on the head that creates a direct neural interface. Popular models include an attached hat, wig, or other headware. Short for "dry active electrode array."

virtual reality (VR): A state where outside stimuli are ignored and the user only receives impressions from the Matrix. Requires a direct neural interface.

wide area network: A set of devices slaved to a host.



Between it all are the representations of people, processes, programs, and data that zip from icon to icon and host to host, leaving datatrails of light that fade back into the dim hum of information. The Matrix moves at the speed of light and thought.

That's the view from virtual reality. There are other ways to view the Matrix, but VR is the only way to see it firsthand. And it's the only way that lets you fly.

MATRIX BASICS

Everything in the Matrix is an **icon**, a virtual representation that allows you to interact with something in the Matrix. Every object's owner can choose what the icon looks like, within certain limits. An icon doesn't just represent a Matrix object in an abstract way; it shows you what it is and how to access it. The Matrix is programmed to give users a context to make it easier to work and play; if a tool is hard to use, it's not much of a tool. There are designers and programmers who deliberately obfuscate an icon's purpose with confusing design, but for the most part people like to know how they can use whatever they encounter. Most Matrix locations require icons to match certain visual protocols.

For example, let's say you're in the host for Dante's Inferno. The Inferno is a popular and swanky nightclub with a presence in the real world (it's on Fifth and Madison in Seattle's Downtown), but it's also got a host that looks the same as the physical club so that patrons from around the world can fly in for a visit at a moment's notice. So you get to the club's host, pay your cover charge with a quick transfer of nuyen from your account to the Inferno, and in a blink you're whisked to your favorite spot in the club. In this case, let's say you go to the fifth level to enjoy the iconography of angry, dead souls writhing to the beat in and under swampy water. You're in the mood for virtual food, so you call up a menu. That's a file, and Dante's menu appears as a flaming scroll with a fancy script. The programmers and the Inferno know it's something you'd want to read—and they want you to read it—so they make sure the icon looks like something you'd read, in this case a scroll. The flames feel hot and look bright, but they're just virtual. If you were somewhere else, like say the Club Penumbra host, a nightclub with an outer space theme, it wouldn't look like a flaming scroll, but it would still look like something you'd read (in this case, an astronaut's log book).

The whole Matrix is like that. Everything is custom crafted by its owners and is generally designed for intuitive usefulness. The other side of the experience is your software. Some hackers don't want other programmers telling them how their icons look. So they run software to impose their own visuals on their icons. The struggle to show what you want to show is only one of the battles you'll fight in the Matrix. Most people, though, don't bother to fight over iconography, and just let the designers of the Matrix win out.

Matrix protocols limit the relative sizes of everything to give users a standard experience they can share. If your icon was a robot version of the Wuxing Skytower, that might seem cool, but if you're talking to someone with an icon of a dung beetle or something, then communication's not going to run smooth. To overcome this, personas (people in the Matrix) are kept between dwarf and troll sizes, so what you actually would end up with in the described conversation is a comically small skyscraper talking to a frightfully large bug, so you're both approximately the same size. Files and devices are smaller than personas (so you'll never see someone reading a book the size of a great dragon for example), and hosts are larger (much larger in the case of big sites, like the megas' corporate hosts).

VIRTUAL VISIONS

That sets up the size of things, but what do they look like? The answer is a bit more complicated than you'd think. The look of the Matrix depends on what grid you're on, the programs you're running, and a bunch of other factors. Luckily, there is a sort of "base version" that forms the foundation of everyone's Matrix experience.

In this base version, the Matrix is a black flatland under a black sky. This virtual plain is lit with the glow of the icon of your commlink (or deck) and other icons around you, one for each device and persona connected to the Matrix. The plain is a projection of the whole world made flat, so the icons get more and more sparse the farther out you look.

There are uncounted billions of icons in the Matrix. Devices have icons in the Matrix in sort of the same way that living things have auras in astral space. This could get overwhelming, but some background tech keeps things from getting out of control.

The first piece of assistance comes from your commlink, which automatically filters out the least interesting icons. Do you want to know the virtual location of every music player in the world? Right, neither do I. So the Matrix will usually show you an icon for an individual's personal area network (PAN), not every device in that network (although it makes exceptions for interesting or dangerous devices in that network, such as a gun). Additionally, the farther away devices are from you in the real world, the dimmer their icons are in the Matrix; this is partly because your commlink figures the farther ones aren't as interesting to you, but mostly because the connection is a bit slower due to the distance. Matrix gear renders the far-off devices and personas as dim, muted, or flickering icons. Also cutting down on the visual noise is the fact that some icons are deliberately hidden from view, such as locks and other security devices, baby monitors, maintenance monitors, and of course people who prefer not to be seen.

To understand the uses of virtual reality and how people balance the meat world with the virtual one, let's



look at some typical Matrix uses. Let's say that you're in your car, driving home from work, school, or wherever you usually drive home from. You let the car's autopilot handle the driving and drop into VR to start dinner. Once you check into VR, your car, the road, and everything nearby drop from view, and instead you see the Matrix's plane of stars. You think about going to your home node, and boom, you go, streaking forward like a comet. As you get close, you see all of the devices that make up your home network, and you head for the one that represents your fridge. The icon for the fridge looks like a small fridge, with a list of the food (which the fridge's electronics automatically update with what's actually inside it). You see frozen pizza on the list and decide to go with a frozen pizza. You then reach out to your stove's controls (appearing as some dials over a warm, homey glow) and fire up the oven to pre-heat to 230°. It's a bit nippy outside, so you set your drink dispenser (which you've made look like a beer tap in VR) to start warming the soy base, and since you're feeling luxurious you hit the controls for chocolate flavoring. Sill in VR, you zip back to your car, which cheerfully tells you that you've got another ten minutes, enough time to visit your favorite social networking host.

Speaking of hosts, the big hosts are the most interesting spots in the Matrix landscape, and they're the things hovering above you when you log on. No matter where you go in the Matrix, they're always up there. One of the critical things to understand about hosts is that, unlike the devices in your house, they are not necessarily the representations of a specific device or location in the meat world. Hosts are part of the Matrix, rather than being a single device, so you can access them from anywhere without worrying about the distance involved.

The next important thing to know is that the inside of a host is a lot different from the outside. For one thing, it's often bigger on the inside than the outside. It's also a virtual environment of its own, with clear boundaries indicating where it starts and the rest of the Matrix, for most intents and purposes, ends.

But let's get back to the social networking host you decide to check into on your way home. The one you're going to does not have any particular entry requirements, so you don't have to endure the virtual equivalent of an entry line. You just zoom to the host, fly over the border, and you're almost ready to go in. On the inside, this particular host looks like a classy perpetual cocktail party, with a sculpted look that swanky lounges in the physical world would kill to have. Before you go into the actual party, you enter a private changing room, where you can make your icon look more appropriate for the party. Maybe pick out a stylish black suit or a little black dress, then add a tie or neckerchief for a splash of color. Get the outfit and your virtual hair set, and you're ready to mingle.

Or maybe a come-as-you-are sports bar is more your style. That host has booths for visitors that change size depending on the number of people in it, so they're al-

ways full but not too cozy. Or possibly games are more your style, joining your friends for board games, or puzzles, or grand adventures. Or you could go to a cat fanciers' clubhouse. Or a movie theater. Or a zero-G simulated spacecraft. The inside of a host is limited only by its owner's preferences and imagination.

Those are the general outlines of the Matrix; now let's dive into what and who you'll encounter.

THE POPULATION OF THE MATRIX

Every icon in the Matrix is one of six things: a persona, a device, a PAN, a file, a host, or a mark. Occasionally, you might also see a datastream, a transfer of data that looks like a thin beam of flickering, multi-colored light. Datastreams are normally filtered out of your Matrix view because if they weren't, they'd be the only thing you would see. If you want, you can dial back on the filtering, but the streams pass by so quickly that you can't tell where they're coming from or going to without snooping on whatever is sending or receiving them, and that would be illegal (and we'd never do anything illegal in the Matrix, right?).

PERSONAS

A persona is more or less what it sounds like: a person in the Matrix. A persona is the combination of a user and a device that gets the user onto the Matrix. The fact that the device has a user overrides the device's normal icon status, turning it into a persona. A persona is usually based on a commlink, cyberdeck, or rigged vehicle or drone, although technomancers are a sort of device-less persona.

Persona icons usually look like the people they represent (although who can resist making a nip here, a tuck there, a facelift, and maybe some nicer hair?), sometimes with a splash of style like flashing eyes, hair coloring, or a tastefully understated aura. There are wilder looks out there, but shadowrunners often shy away from them, as they draw too much attention and can be considered unprofessional. On the other hand, sometimes drawing attention is exactly the point, so base your look on however professional (or distracting) you want for the situation you're in.

There's a lot of variety to be had in persona icons. Just about any creature or animate object is fair game: animals, moving statues, griffins (popular among teens these days for some reason), steam-powered robots, zombies, aliens, just about anything that can walk and talk. The Matrix protocols will stop you from designing an icon for your persona if it isn't intuitively a persona, so you couldn't have an icon that is a dust speck, a Greek column, or a cube, for example. They'll also stop you from making something smaller than adult-dwarf-sized or bigger than adult-troll-sized.



DEVICES

Device icons in the Matrix represent electronic devices in the real world, from your music player to your commlink to your car and beyond. By default, a device's icon looks like the object it represents, in miniature if the real thing is larger than a person. It has controls of some kind, often the same controls it has in meat space, but not necessarily. The Ares Mobmaster riot control vehicle, for example, is famous for its unorthodox Roman chariot icon complete with reins to drive the vehicle.

Basic Matrix protocols require device icons to provide some hint of their real-life function. A firearm's icon looks like a weapon (even if that weapon is a tomahawk, like the icon of the Super Warhawk pistol), a vehicle's icon looks like a vehicle, a lock's icon looks like a lock, a refrigerator looks like a cold box for food, etc. The restrictions on devices aren't as stringent as on personas, as long as form suggests function at a glance.

PANS

Most individuals have multiple electronic devices on them at once, and having icons for each one show up would provide too much visual clutter in the Matrix. Often, what shows up instead is an icon representing an individual's personal area network. This icon often looks similar to the physical device that serves as master for the network, such as a commlink, but individuals will sometimes choose a design or logo that means something to them (such as sports team logos, Concrete Dreams album covers, or corporate designs). Some devices are not merged into the single PAN icon; if an individual is carrying a wireless-enabled gun—or any other wireless device that might kill you—it will show up separately so that it can be identified rapidly. Unless, of course, the user has gone to the trouble to hide that icon, but that'll be covered later.

FILES

A file is a collection of data. It can be a film, a song, a book, financial records, an image, a news article, and so on. It can even be a collection of other files (a "folder"). Files have icons that are smaller than persona icons, typically small enough to fit in the palm of the virtual hand. All file icons have a default appearance in the Matrix—a glowing cube or other polyhedron that can be opened to reveal its contents—but few Matrix users are so lazy and uninspired as to leave their files' icons with such a boring look. A text file might have an icon that is a book, a scroll, a data pad, or even stone tablets. Sound files look like speakers, musical notes or instruments, and so forth, while video might look like a film projector, a trid set, or an old-fashioned movie screen. Again, form suggests function is the rule in the Matrix.

HOSTS

Hosts are virtual places you can go in the Matrix. They have no physical location, being made up of the stuff of the Matrix itself. From the outside, hosts are as big as buildings in the electronic landscape, some of the largest being about the size of Manhattan (a limit imposed by the Corporate Court's Grid Overwatch Division to prevent the virtual sky from being *completely* dominated by the mega-hosts). The size of a host and its virtual altitude are related to its importance and influence in the modern world. Your local Stuffer Shack has a host icon that's roughly the size of the building it's in, and it sits low to the "ground," about on the same level as most of the devices in the Matrix. The Atlantean Foundation's host, on the other hand, floats about a virtual kilometer above the twinkling datascape and is about the size of the biggest skyscraper building in the physical world. Bigger still is the Shiawase Mainframe, which is a slowly rotating sphere about a hundred kilometers up and almost twenty kilometers in diameter.

The host icons themselves look like just about anything the owners want. If you look up into the Matrix night you'll see corporate logos, lavish building façades, and constellations of hosts. You might recognize the Seattle ACHE's ziggurat shape, or the mother-and-child logo of Humanis, or (if you have access) the three orbiting spheres of JackPoint.

Inside a host is a completely different story. A host can be (and usually is) bigger on the inside than on the outside. A host's internal sculpting is internally regulated, so while outsiders' icons conform to standard Matrix requirements, the host itself doesn't have to. The host can be a maze, an open space, have strange gravity or none at all, be hot, cold, loud, quiet, and everything in between. Most hosts stick close to reality to make it easier and more comfortable for its patrons, but some offer stranger or even downright bizarre sculpting.

MATRIX AUTHENTICATION RECOGNITION KEYS

A Matrix authentication recognition key, or *mark* if you're not a fan of rattling off fancy technological nomenclature, is how the Matrix keeps track of which personas have access to which devices, files, hosts, and other personas. Marks look like, well, marks—small personalized labels or tattoos on whichever icons you place them. Your marks can look like anything you like, as long as they're small, fit onto other icons, and have some thematic link to you or your icon.

For example, let's say you're using the icon of a neon green octopus. Your marks might look like neon green sucker marks. If you had a cowboy icon, your marks might look like cattle brands. If your icon were a vintage movie star, your marks might look like lipstick kisses.

Normally, marks are invisible to anyone except the person who placed them. To see other marks on an icon



HOST: DANTE'S INFERNO

Dante's Inferno is a premiere nightclub with locations in Seattle and Hong Kong. Its motif matches its name, with nine levels of dance floors descending from the entrance downward. What makes it unique is that its Matrix host is a perfect match to the physical locations. Images of patrons in the real world are projected into the host, and virtual visitors in the host can be seen in augmented reality by the physical patrons. While Dante's is in three different locations (two physical and one virtual), all three places overlap.

To make this work, Dante's host mimics reality. Its virtual physics match real physics, and flying is strictly forbidden. Additionally, the host blocks persona icons that don't look at least mostly like the user they represent. Also off-limits are persona icons that look like damned souls (reserved for staff) and demons or devils (which are security and IC). The host's simsense library lets VR patrons order almost any food and drink in existence, although watch out for the hard stuff if you're using hot-sim—they mix those drinks strong.

(or your own icon), you have to analyze it. Seeing a mark does not automatically tell you who put it there, though. Usually, you can only recognize a mark if you have already seen the persona responsible for the mark, or if you're familiar with his or her marking style.

Marks are routinely invited and given for normal, everyday, legal use of various services. They act as keys, permission slips, invitations, and account privileges on every icon in the virtual world. For example, the Seattle Public Library invites over 50,000 marks per day for its VR books, films, trideos, and other items in its collection. While the great percentage of mark traffic is legitimate, hackers try to get marks illegally to facilitate their own plans.

THE MATRIX: FOR YOU AND AGAINST YOU

It's important to remember that the Matrix exists to be used. That means that for the most part, the look and feel of various hosts is geared toward being approachable, not putting up obstacles that might prevent people from doing their work or conducting their business. It is a safe environment, with security built into its operating systems and protocols. Ever since the recent change in Matrix protocols, the structure is monitored by the Grid Overwatch Division of the Corporate Court, who act as a sort of Matrix police force devoted to protecting users (including innocent children, natch) from online predators, piracy, and fraud.

That's the corp brochure version of the Matrix, anyway. The real motives behind the Matrix, particularly its current structure, are profit and control. The megacorporations and the Grid Overwatch Division have been working on "The Matrix Problem" for decades, searching for a holy grail of Matrix design that will let them maximize their profits while minimizing their risks, and they may have finally found something close. The system is set up so that the corps always have the advantage, hackers always are at a disadvantage, and everybody else is stuck somewhere between.

One of the keys to the new system is the network of overlapping grids, which need to be understood if you plan on doing any serious Matrix work.

GRIDS

If you want to get on the Matrix, you need a grid. A grid is what a Matrix service provider uses to connect you to the digital world. When you connect to the Matrix, you are on the grid of your provider, much the same way an early 21st century cell phone user would be on their phone company's network.

Different grids cover customers in different areas; there are global grids provided by each of the Big Ten and local grids sponsored in part by local governments. Accessing these grids costs money, and each of them presents a slightly different view of the Matrix (although the inside of hosts look the same no matter what grid you're on, as that's controlled by the hosts). It's all still the "real" Matrix, of course, but the icons that belong to your grid's owner look a bit bigger and more shiny, and the advertising is slanted in ways that benefit the grid's owners.

For example, when you're connected to the Matrix through Seattle's local grid, Emerald City, the normally black Matrix sky is tinged a gemstone green, and the hosts that are closely related to Seattle are a bit brighter. NeoNET icons are also a bit larger when you're using Emerald City, because the main sponsor/owner of the local grid is NeoNET. If you were on NeoNET's global grid, you'd see much the same thing, without the emphasis on Seattle or the green sky.

If you can't pay for access to a grid, well, you're not completely out of luck. The corps would never have been able to get away with completely throttling access to the Matrix, so there's a public grid provided by underfunded non-profits, outdated satellites, and the occasional good Samaritan who's willing to share a wireless access point or two. The public grid is slow, low-resolution, and unreliable, but at least it's globally accessible. It's the Barrens of the Matrix.

As you'd expect, the grid you're on says something about your social standing. You might find notes like "Posted from the Renraku Grid" tacked onto the end of status updates. Corps market their own grids heavily, offering perks and free commlink upgrades every year or two. People on the public grid are viewed as



second-class citizens. High-class hosts advertise “No public-grid connections allowed” to show how their clientele are elite.

You can “hop” between grids, but which grids you can access depend on where you are in the world. You can get on the public or any global grid from anywhere on the planet. Local grids can only be accessed if you’re physically in the grid’s service area. For example, if you’re on Netzwerks Berlin, you could see and interact with a commlink that is on Seattle’s Emerald City, but you wouldn’t be able to hop to Emerald City grid itself.

LOOKING DOWN: GRID OVERWATCH DIVISION

The Grid Overwatch Division, or GOD for short, is responsible for securing the Matrix from hackers and other unwanted intruders, especially the parts connecting the various hosts and users (security with hosts falls more on the heads of the host owners). Each grid has its own sub-division (even the public grid), with its own financing and operatives. A sub-division (referred to as a demiGOD) watches its entire grid, keeping an eye out for misbehaving users and illegal activity. The grids have a warning system built-in, a subtle but telltale ripple that occurs when the automated software detects illegal or unauthorized use of the grid. It’s not much, but GOD is watching, and if they see enough ripples to find and identify a hacker, they can trace his physical location and boot him off the Matrix using the mechanisms built into each grid.

This is not to say the megacorps have made nice and are now holding hands singing Kumbayah. Far from it; the Matrix is an even hotter intercorporate battleground than ever, it’s just that the AAAs want to keep their battleground to themselves. While the demiGODs are separate and even competitive (the *Crash of the Titans* reality trid show is new but surging in popularity), they are still part of GOD and highly cooperative against hackers. They share their information in real-time, often faster than hackers can hop to another grid. Their operatives, called G-men (complete with 1930s-era FBI persona icons), technically only have jurisdiction over their assigned grid, but they can request and receive clearance, authority, and cooperation from the demiGOD of another grid in seconds during an investigation. The G-men investigate cases that aren’t lengthy enough or blatant enough to leave sufficient ripples for the demiGODs to track through standard overwatch alone. They also handle cases where a hacker has been kicked off the grid, supporting any security or law enforcement forces that the grid’s owner wants to send against the hacker in the physical world.

AUGMENTED WORLD

So far much of the discussion of the Matrix and its collected icons has focused on how things look in virtual

reality, but that’s not how most people interact with the Matrix on a daily or hourly basis. Most people who use VR use it to visit hosts, view entertainment, or play games, but a lot of people find the disembodied sensation of virtual reality to be uncomfortable, or even disturbing. The majority of people interact with the Matrix in augmented reality, using their commlink.

A commlink is combination computer, smartphone, media player, passport, wallet, credit card, Matrix browser, chip reader, GPS navigator, digital camera, and portable gaming device. And possibly a few other things, if you’ve got a really nice one. It’s got all of the necessary software already loaded, but unlike a cyberdeck it has no space for cyberprograms or other hacking tools.

Most models are small enough to fit in your pocket, on a belt clip, or on your wrist. If a pocket version isn’t your style, commlinks are available in a number of other forms, including headwear, glasses, jewelry, cranial implant, belt buckles, and other accessories.

LIFE WITH A COMMLINK

Your commlink does more than just sit in your pocket (or on your head). It interprets the Matrix around you to give you extra information and capability that can be useful in civilian life and vital in the shadows. This is done with **augmented reality**, or AR. AR overlays information on things in real-life in a way only you can perceive.

Let’s say you’re walking down the street in Downtown Seattle’s shopping district. Your commlink may seem like it’s sitting quietly, but in fact it’s quite busy. It’s regularly communicating with other devices and hosts around you, sharing information about your location and your movement. The other devices and hosts are sending information right back, telling you who else is out there, what stores are having sales, what movies are playing at which theaters, and so on. If you look at your commlink screen, you’d have all that information overlaid on an image of where you are, providing a mini heads-up display. But let’s say you live in the *current* decade, and you don’t interact with the world around you with just a screen. You may have glasses, or sunglasses, or contacts, or goggles, or cybereyes, or *something* that puts this information right in your field of vision. Overlaid on the world are icons telling you that shoes like the ones you bought last year are now half off, and there’s a dotted line leading you to the theater showing the sequel to the trid show you thought was wiz, and the people walking down the street are occasionally highlighted by glowing auras—nice blue ones representing your friends, glaring red ones telling you that someone you know and should be avoiding is coming close. You have more than just your natural vision—you’ve got everything in the database you’re carrying with you.

The civilized world adapted quickly to augmented reality, mostly because it’s easier than printing things on paper or making signs. **Augmented reality objects**, or



AROs (pronounced “arrows”), are used to show information and decorate spaces on the cheap. Stores have their logos blazoned in 3D above their door, restaurants offer animated menus complete with tantalizing images of their food, street names hover over every intersection, decorators use AR objects to spruce up interiors, all viewable in AR for anyone who has the capability, which is pretty much everybody. The unintended side effect is that things can look a bit dingy when you turn off your AR display, but that’s the price of progress.

DIRECT NEURAL INTERFACE

A direct neural interface, or DNI, connects your brain to electronic devices. Direct neural interface (along with a sim module) is required for VR use, but DNI is also useful for AR in that you don’t need any additional gear like earbuds or an image link to see or hear augmented reality objects.

How do you sign up? You get DNI by wearing trodes, or having an implanted datajack, commlink, or cyberdeck. And if you’re using a sim module along with your DNI, you can get a sort of “super AR mode” where you can also feel, smell, and taste your AR experience.

You don’t have to be an expert to make an ARO. If you want to send directions to your place from the party, you can draw a line on an AR map and share it with your friends. If you want to point out a person in a crowd for a buddy, you can make an ARO highlighting that person and send it. You can choose which of your AROs are seen by which people, so you can keep it private or, if you’re feeling impish, put vulgar AROs on RFID tags and scatter them around town for all to see. Of course, other people can filter out the AROs they don’t want to see, and so can you.

Augmented reality isn’t just visual information, either. You can hear audio AROs if you have earbuds or a cyberear. AROs can be tactile if you have a haptic device like AR gloves. Engineers are still working on putting physical scent into AR displays, and we’d rather not talk about AR flavors. On the other hand, if you use AR with a direct neural interface like trodes or an implant, you can use all of your senses to view AR without any extra devices.

Most of what you keep on your commlink are files, this includes music, your SIN (fake or otherwise), licenses (also fake or otherwise), maps, email messages, your contact book, AROs, and so on. These files are visible to people who can see your commlink in the Matrix, so most people keep all of their files in a protected folder.

MATRIX ACTIONS FOR THE NON-HACKER

So you’re not the team’s hacker, but you’ve got this commlink on your character sheet. What is it good for, you may ask? A lot of things, but not so many that you need to memorize this entire chapter. Here’s a short list of Matrix rules and actions you can use to get all you can out of your commlink.

YOUR GRID

You should know which grid you’re using, but unless you’ve bought an upgrade, your grid is dictated by your lifestyle:

Low or lower: public grid

Middle: local grid

High: global grid—pick one of the Big Ten megacorps to be your grid provider.

Luxury: you can be on any grid you want, chummer.

YOUR COMMLINK’S MATRIX ATTRIBUTES

Your gamemaster will occasionally ask for one of two Matrix attributes: Data Processing or (if your hacker isn’t doing her job) Firewall. Unless your commlink is a custom job, both of these attributes are equal to your commlink’s rating. Just keep a note by your commlink entry in your character sheet’s gear section.

FIVE MATRIX ACTIONS

As a typical Matrix user, there are only a few Matrix actions you might want to take a look at:

Change Icon: If you’re tooling around in VR, you’ll need this action from p. 238 to get the look you want.

Edit File: If you’re going to do any text, audio, or video editing, or you just like to write reports, you might want to know about the Edit File action, p. 239. You also use this action to protect files on your commlink, which is what seasoned shadowrunners like to call a Good Idea.

Full Matrix Defense: If your commlink or any connected devices are under attack, and you’re not sure what to do, just turn on all of your commlink’s active defenses with this action, p. 240.

Matrix Search: After communication, googling is the biggest advantage to having the Matrix in your pocket. Start your search on p. 241.

Send Message: This action will probably be the main use for your commlink. It’s not complicated, but you can read up on it on p. 242.



So where do you store all of the things you want to keep? Pictures from your Aunt Edna's wedding, credit information, your SIN, every book and movie you've bought, all the programs you might want to run—all of it fits on your commlink (or cyberdeck if you prefer). In fact, every device on the Matrix has a massive amount of storage space, unthinkable amounts by early 21st century standards. Your gamemaster might decide that a device is too small or low-grade or a file so massively large that a problem comes up, but such problems are extremely rare. Even if it does, the entire world is wireless, so you shouldn't have trouble finding an alternate storage location.

SHADOWRUNNING WITH A COMMLINK

Your commlink could be the most important piece of gear you own. It keeps you in contact with the rest of your team, even if you're scattered across the entire sprawl. You can share information like images, floor plans, and tactical instructions almost instantly, even in the middle of a firefight. It gives you AR displays for your surroundings, not just what other people put there but AROs created by your companions, which come in handy when your shaman tags a mage among the enemy security forces or a spotter drone maps the location of all the guard dogs it can find. A good commlink can also protect your own devices (including your gun) from opposing hackers. Some shadowrunners prefer to go without one, but most agree that the commlink is right up there with ammo in terms of usefulness.

THE DIGITAL UNDERGROUND

Not everyone is content to surf the Matrix in peace. Some users are protestors, flying in the face of the megacorps' power over the grids. Some are curious, poking at secure hosts and pushing boundaries that GOD and its demiGODs would prefer remain untouched. Some are angel-headed hipsters trying to find some connection to the starry dynamo of the virtual night. Some want to free the flow of information from its corporate shackles. Some just have a habit of ignoring the rules.

All these digital delinquents are known as *hackers*. In the heavily computerized world of the 2070s, a shadowrunning team can go a long way with a hacker on their side. Hackers can pry at secrets, control devices, and even destroy electronics from a distance, not to mention defend against opposing hackers and spiders. Hackers come in two main flavors: deckers and technomancers.

DECKERS

A decker is someone who uses a cyberdeck (hence the name) to break the rules of the Matrix. A cyberdeck—

usually just called a deck—is like a commlink with some extra features. It is a bit bigger than a commlink, about the size of a small tablet or a spiral-bound notebook, or a pair of playing card decks. Its specialized functions and questionable legality make it far more expensive than ordinary commlinks. The cyberdeck has advanced electronics and firmware based on reverse-engineered protocols used in Matrix security. In short, a cyberdeck is the tool you need to be a hacker.

A deck can perform all of the functions of a commlink, but its primary purpose is hacking in the Matrix. Cyberdecks have a built-in sim module because they are so often used in VR, so a decker only needs a datajack or other DNI device to make that connection, instead of needing the full sim implant.

Deckers are far and away the most common type of hacker. They come to the profession out of necessity, a desire for profit, or a sense of mischief. Or all three. They are heavily dependent on their skills, and they need good gear to make sure their skills shine. They can usually maintain and even build their own electronic devices.

TECHNOMANCERS

Technomancers are able to interface both in AR and VR without the aid of a sim module, image link, or any other electronic devices. Strictly speaking, technomancers aren't magical, but they're just as mysterious as magicians were after the Awakening. The origins of a technomancer's power and how she makes things happen are still unknown to science. Like magicians, technomancers make up a tiny fraction of the population of the Earth. Also like magicians, they are generally distrusted and misunderstood, sometimes to the point of paranoia.

Not all technomancers are hackers, but to the general public they might as well be. In the media, the word technomancer almost always means hacker, and the word "hacker" means cyber-terrorist. Many national and local governments require technomancers to register with the authorities, even if they have little talent or power. The perception of technomancers is that they are able to control a person's electronics, reading files at will, breaching every moment of privacy. They say that technomancers can see you through the devices in your home, trace your children, ruin your reputation and credit rating, launch nuclear missiles, drain your bank accounts, and steal your identity. As a result of the paranoia, most technomancers keep their identity under wraps, sometimes hiding their abilities behind dummy commlinks.

Technomancers are rare, but they have amazing abilities in the Matrix, doing things that by most reports should be impossible. They use their powers and abilities to bend the Matrix to their will and summon digital servants. They are generally not the figures public paranoia makes them out to be—but they have enough power to make it seem that the paranoia has at least one foot in reality.



(MIS)USING THE MATRIX

The first step in hacking the Matrix is conceiving and understanding what you might be able to accomplish. The example below provides a narrative of someone making their illicit way through the Matrix. It'll show you some of the things that are possible. Once we've set that up, we'll show you how to do the things it shows.

There's a lot that goes on in the Matrix. It's a big place, bigger than the real world if you include all of the hosts. It's also a very versatile place. Everybody in the civilized world (aside from a few barely worth mentioning since, you know, they don't show up on the Matrix) has some basic computer skills. They can surf the Matrix, search for information, send messages to one another, and use basic AR interfaces. That doesn't make them Matrix experts, and it definitely doesn't make them hackers. To really walk the virtual walk, you need a lot more.

EXAMPLE

BK relaxes at a small table outside a Downtown café. For Seattle, it's a nice morning: The sun peeks through the clouds occasionally, and he'd be able to see Mt. Rainier from his table if he wasn't surrounded by skyscrapers. He's in AR mode, with device icons superimposed on his vision. Right now he's filtered out most of the icons, but since the waitress hasn't protected her commlink's privacy, he's flipping through her music collection in a little virtual window that is linked by a pointer to a pouch at her hip. Seeing an album he likes (and having little respect for the law), he sleazes a mark onto her commlink, and a little bee sting that only he can see appears on its icon. The mark flashes a little as it helps him copy the music file from her commlink. He knows this bit of mischief could be discovered by the Grid Overwatch Division, but he doesn't care. He's already enjoying the first cut of the album.

The bank across the street opens for business, and BK gets to work. He has been waiting for the bank's employees to arrive and take files out of the archives of the bank's host for the workday. Now that the files are out of the archives, he can access them if he can get into the bank's heavily protected private host.

He crosses the street and melts into the alley behind the bank. There is an emergency exit here with a maglock that is slaved to the bank's WAN. That means the lock is protected by the bank's host, but it also makes the lock a point of vulnerability. He plugs a data cable from his deck to the lock's universal port and sits against the wall, flipping to VR.

BK's icon, a swarm of bees (well, a dark ball with bees flitting around it; he'll get a better icon after this run), appears next to the lock in the Matrix. He sees the dark Matrix sky but barely notices it, concentrating instead on the lock and the gothic monolith of the bank host floating behind it. He ignores the

CRACKING THE MATRIX SPINE

The Matrix is a controlled environment, with corporate owners wanting to keep things moving at their pace, according to their specifications. If something suits their goals, it moves through the Matrix just fine, encountering few problems or hang-ups. If it doesn't meet their goals, they shut it down as fast as they can before it causes too much trouble.

Hackers don't meet their goals, and they are paid to create trouble. They're the fly in the ointment, the fart in the cathedral, the droog in the milk bar. They're chaos amidst carefully cultivated order, and they're fast and nimble if they want to stay free and keep their synapses at their normal temperature.

Hackers can get an important advantage with their gear and equipment, but that's something anyone with a decent pile of nuyen can buy. For the true hacker, it's not the gear that sets them apart—it's how they use it. Their

bank's firewalls surrounding the lock, attacking the lock through his direct link. Another bee sting appears, this time on the lock, and in a microsecond's flicker, an identical mark appears on the lock's master, the bank host.

The hacker grins as much as a swarm of bees can as he flits into the host. On the inside, the host looks like a large modern office, occasionally pulsing with the blue light of local datastreams, complete with cubicles and (for some reason) restrooms. Icons walk busily back and forth, which BK rightly assumes means no flying allowed. BK changes his icon to something a bit less conspicuous: a low-level sarariman in a dark, conservative business suit. He then starts looking for the file he wants. Meanwhile, a stone-faced security guard (Patrol IC with a socially acceptable skin) is checking out every icon, looking for users that don't belong. BK is running silent, and the IC misses him ... this time.

BK finds an old-fashioned manila folder that is actually a file listing all of the patrons who have safe deposit boxes at the bank. It's the one he wants. He starts to copy it to his deck but notices a tiny padlock hanging from the corner of the file. The list is protected, and he'll have to remove the protection before he can copy it. That's going to take time. He glances at his watch, actually looking at a readout of the estimated time until the local demiGOD finds him: he's got some time, but not as much as he'd like. He would have more time if he hadn't stolen that album before the run, but he's really enjoying track three, and he should be okay as long as nothing goes wrong.

He reaches for the lock, firing up his cracking utilities, and something goes wrong. The host has undoubtedly already marked him and will be launching IC any second. Any second later, a three-meter-tall gorilla with the head of a lion dramatically



quick thinking, their imagination, and their relentless coding skills put them above the competition, letting them dance their way through a Matrix that's constantly trying to force them to color inside the lines.

Good hackers start with good skills (p. 226). Without those, they're just another idiot who spent too much money on electronic gear they don't know how to use. Once they have the skills that set them apart, they need the right gear or their skills are going to come up short. Knowing the Matrix attributes and how they can help or limit them (p. 226) will make sure they get the most out of their skills. Armed with this knowledge, they can choose the cyberdeck (p. 227) that's right for them. The good stuff isn't cheap. Hell, even the not-so-good stuff will set you back a pile of nuyen, so hackers need to learn how their deck might get damaged and how they can avoid having it turn into a useless brick of plastic and rare earth elements (p. 228).

Once they have their skills and gear ready to rock, hackers need to decide how they're going to access the Matrix (**User Modes**, p. 229) and how to use the structure of the Matrix to make the right connections (p. 230). If they don't understand the different grids involved and how to get on them (p. 233), they'll be behind the competition. They also have to understand what they're seeing—which icons are devices, which are personae, and why it matters (p. 234). They also need to be able to see the things they are not supposed to see, while also keeping themselves out of sight when necessary (**Matrix Perception**, p. 235).

When it's time to get down to business, hackers show they're the alpha dog in the traditional way—by

marking their territory. Placing marks (p. 236) on the devices they want to control gets them the access they are not supposed to have. Once your marks are in place, it's the hacker's time to shine and take the actions to make the Matrix do the weird and unexpected things their team needs (p. 237). They're not alone in there, though, so there's always the chance they'll have to go to battle against IC or a security spider (p. 247).

HOST: JACKPOINT

JackPoint is a Matrix host for shadowrunners, designed and administered by shadowrunners. While it isn't the only one of its kind, it is the best known and most widely trusted of all shadow sites. The host itself appears as a set of independent rooms floating in a vast grid that is an homage to the old-school style of decking. The rules are pretty loose in the host, as befits its "be yourself" attitude toward visitors. Most of the decor is abstract, and a lot of the icons are simple geometric solids with easy-to-read labels floating nearby. Some areas, like the cybercafe and the Museum of Shadowrunning, have a more styled sculpting, with visitors asked to obey some semblance of the laws of physics to maintain a slightly more normal atmosphere. The most restrictions are in place on the Memorial, where strict silence, gravity, and limits on outlandish iconography are enforced among the monuments and epitaphs to fallen shadowrunners.

EXAMPLE, CONT.

drops from the ceiling. His deck helpfully identifies it as Killer IC, and BK swears loudly. With the level of security on this host, Killer IC is only the beginning of his troubles. With any luck, he thinks, the bank's security spider is having a long breakfast this morning. BK's team needs that file, but now it's not going to be easy to obtain.

With a swipe, BK rubs out the mark the host put on him, noting grimly that it looks like a claw mark before it dissolves. Even though the mark's off, the host has spotted him, and that means its IC knows who and where he is. The gorilla-lion IC program hits him with a torso-sized fist that sends the decker staggering, but he's not defeated by a long shot. His deck starts overheating, but he feels it as a dull ache in VR.

BK waves an arm and digital smoke appears all around him, hiding him from the host and its IC. The host launches more IC, a large bloodhound-shaped Track program. In a way, the hacker thinks, the Track IC is more dangerous than the Killer. If the bank finds out that BK's meat body is just outside, security goons will be on him in seconds.

The gorilla-lion is looking to the Patrol IC for guidance when the stoic security guard is struck out of nowhere by a massive swarm of bees. The Patrol IC lurches, jerks, and explodes into a

million motes of light that slowly die out. The Patrol IC was the only way the host could find him, at least as long as he doesn't screw up again. BK has just enough time to laugh before a new stone-faced security guard begins to coalesce as the host launches a new copy of the Patrol IC.

Working quickly, he tries to smash the file's tiny lock. Again it proves too tough. The backlash from the host's firewall slams up his arm and into his deck, which crackles slightly in real life. This is one tough file protection. The host finishes launching the new Patrol IC, so BK tries one more time, slamming into the lock with all his virtual strength. This time, the lock gives way and vanishes. The Patrol IC starts searching for the intruder with inhuman resolve. BK copies the file and starts to jack out, just in time to see the security spider, a samurai wielding a glowing sword, enter the host from his long breakfast to join the fight—joining it too late.

The sudden jolt caused by the dump from virtual reality to actual reality painfully jars BK, and he stumbles to his feet. It's not the cleanest getaway, but it's one he can walk away from. The decker heads home as nonchalantly as he can to share his findings and repair his damaged deck, leaving bank security to try to figure out how he did it.



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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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