

11 Shadowrun Questions

(for new players)

1 What can technology do in 2070?

A lot and a little. The biggest advances are in data processing and understanding of the human brain. For the computers, this (a) means countless little computers everywhere. You can message your fridge to order food in when its low, you have voice recognition on your comm (the next evolutionary step on from mobile phones), your car can find its way home when you pass out drunk behind the wheel. And (b) the real computers are able to run incredibly realistic virtual environments and interface with the human brain in real time. The latter is called SIMsense and is a way of overriding the normal sensory input of the human body. It has many wonderful uses and a few really, really nasty ones.

Other advances are in biology, materials science and power storage. The upshot? Biological and cybernetic alterations to the human body. They can give you a new arm, they can rebuild your skull, they can vat grow additional grey matter from stem cells and give your brain an upgrade. And eyes... you can get some really cool eyes, these days.

But there aren't many big revolutions in science. No teleporters or lightsabres. The things that are possible in theory 2007/9, are sometimes possible in practice in 2070. But no-one's radically changed the theory yet.

2 What can magic do in 2070?

No-one really knows for sure. At least no-one who's talking. All that's definite is that magic is dark, sinister and powerful. Mages have been able to manipulate energy to throw fire, fly, turn flesh into stone or control the very way people think. There seem to be limits though. There have been constraints though – no-one has managed to teleport or raise the dead.

Spirits and Astral Projection are real, however.

3 Is everybody happy?

No. Really, no. It's bad out there. Stay here in your little corporate enclave where our nice security forces will protect our loyal employees. Seems like every year, the police lose control of another part of the city. And the VITAS plagues... who did you lose to VITAS? Me? Just my sister. I was kind of lucky. I tell you this, it's a good job the Megacorps are in charge. If it wasn't for us, you'd be left with what remains of the World's governments trying to run things. They had their chance and they failed. Now don't you think you should be getting back to work? You're productivity was down this month, and you really don't want to be blacklisted if you lose this job. Not with little Timmy wanting school vouchers, eh?

4 Where did the metahumans come from?

Us. It began with UGE back in the early 2010's. Children were being born “deformed” (as it was thought back then). So many of them in so many parts of the world, the medical world was baffled as to the cause. Because they fitted the stereotypes so well, it was inevitable that the media dubbed the children Dwarves and Elves. That got about 10% of newborns in the early years. But it wasn't anything compared to what happened to seemingly normal

children when they hit puberty (and some unfortunate adults). “Goblinisation” put people in prolonged, agonising states lasting from months to over a year. And they emerged grotesquely changed. With “dwarves” and “elves” setting a precedent, it was inevitable that we got “Orks” and “Trolls.” though they have scientific names. It's still settling down and even now, a human child will occasionally goblinise at puberty (every parent's nightmare). Likewise a troll or an elf will sometimes give birth to a human child. It's getting less frequent though.

And everyone falls into one of the races. There are no half-breeds. Human and orc get it on, it could go either way, but it will be one or the other.

5 Who's in charge?

There are ten corporations that are called Megacorporations, or triple AAA's. There's barely a government in the world that isn't in their pockets. Megacorps like Renraku, Saeder-Krupp or Ares run the show. National governments remain for the most part because “the mega's don't want to deal with taking out the trash.” But there are no real rules for the big boys. The manoeuvring and struggle for dominance between them is what turns the greasy cogs of the world.

But perhaps there are also other powers at work. Less obvious. No less dangerous. You'll learn.

6 How many hit points do I get?

About 10 - 15. And you don't get more. One of the fundamental principles of Shadowrun, and you need to get used to this, is that it is easier to dish out damage than it is to take it. You can be the best shot in the UCAS, you can hurl a fireball that will scorch the armour off an Ares Citymaster, but you will never, ever get away from the fact that if someone catches you in the open with an assault rifle, you might die. Even the big players are vulnerable. That dragon might have enough magical juice to level your party in one go, but with the right planning (and a Medium Machine Gun), a single starting character could bring her down. That's why Shadowrun is so filled with plotting, treachery and stealth. It's part of the game. (And oh yes, dragons are very good at all three of these).

7 Who is Harlequin?

An urban myth. Forget about it. Just because a death goes unexplained, there's no need to go inventing nightmares. Seriously, forget it.

8 What do Shadowrunners do?

It depends how much you pay them. They range from competent professionals to gangers from the street, but are usually a cut above the common man (or else they won't last long). Mr. Johnson might hire them to steal a prototype or sabotage a rival's operation or something else entirely. As “deniable assets” they can't be traced to their employer.

9 What can I get away with?

Depends where you are. If you're in the barrens then you can probably walk down the street with an assault rifle in your hands (but keep an eye out for the local gangs who might take offence). Try the same thing in Bellevue and you'll have heavily armed police all over you

in minutes. Likewise, who you piss off probably matters more than what you do. A murder in Redmond will get some paperwork filed. Punch somebody richer than you and they'll have a chip in your head faster than you can say "privatised police force."

10 What magical creatures and places are there?

Lots of creatures, some places. Just as in a mana-rich environment, some humans expressed as elves or dwarves, some faction of animals became altered versions of themselves. You won't see unicorns galloping down the freeway, but the zoo might have some depressed looking naga and a few corporate facilities use barghests for their ability to perceive (and harm) astral forms.

The big ones are dragons and spirits. The former for their intelligence, magical power and most importantly of all, their ability to communicate with mankind. One has even established itself as the major shareholder and director of a corporation. The spirits because they can be summoned and controlled by magicians. They come in many different forms and wield various abilities. And some spirits are free of any master. These in particular, are to be wary of.

11 What happened to America?

About everything bad you can imagine. It is no more. Instead you have the United Canadian and American States (UCAS) and they've had a lot of territory taken from them. Back in the early 2000's, there was growing popular unrest due to increasing corporate power and the economic woes that had befallen the debt ridden USA along with growing fear at the small, inexplicable phenomena that were starting to happen. The government responded in the usual way of governments that see themselves losing control and tightened their grip with stronger laws, harsher punishments and reductions in civil rights. A terrorist group, called SAIM, motivated by the blanket seizures of native american land struck at a nuclear missile facility in the USA. The native american movement in general had become something of a cause célèbre for the anti-corporate and anti-establishment factions and the government didn't like it. Amongst the many dissidents who were being relocated to "re-education centres" was included a young man called Danial Howling Coyote. A few years later, during a storm, he led the entire inmate population of the camp out into the night. Guards reported that he was "glowing" and that "bullets would not touch him." For the next year he was the USA's most wanted individual whilst at the same time support for him grew in many quarters and with all ethnic groups, fuelled by his occasional media statements against the government and corporations, and by his ability to elude the very best attempts to capture him. With incidents of being able to demonstrate real magic, native american shamans (though this actually included converts from any race), made enormous gains in popularising native american belief systems, including a "back to the land" ethos. Scared, the government hit back in all the ways it could and there is a strict media clampdown. Danial Howling Coyote issues a demand to the government of the USA to relinquish control of large swathes of North American territory to his "NAN Council." This is treated with derision until Mt. Redondo erupts, burying Los Alamos. Danial Howling Coyote broadcasts a message from a nearby reservation taking credit for 'invoking Mother Earth' and an entire battalion of USAF airborne cavalry is sent after him. None survive. The truth of what is happening leaks to the public despite government censorship provoking panic and more civil unrest. Over the next few years, repeated attacks on Danial's guerilla forces are foiled and the USA is now in a state of actual warfare against the enemy within its own borders. In 2017, Danial leads what he called the "Great Ghost Dance." Four volcanos in

North America erupted simultaneously, devastating whole regions. Faced with an enemy it cannot fight, and demands within its own populace, the USA negotiates. Large territories are ceded to NAN control and other parts of the USA secede of their own accord. After two-hundred and forty years of existence, the USA was no more.