



SHADOWRUN

THE EDGE OF NOW





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MISCHIEF IS MY BUSINESS

Coydog tucked her hair behind one pointed ear as she carefully backed her beat-up old Gopher truck into a parking spot. The engine growled and idled for a second before she killed it, then she gave herself a long look in the mirror. It was time. She'd slung spells to help out her brother and his friends, and been feathered for her courage. She had shown her teacher each of the five spirits, summoned and tasked, and controlled them all. Four-Paws-Laughing had told her she was ready. Coyote hadn't disagreed. She had everything she needed, even her *father's* old duty Browning and her *mother's* favorite set of armor-lined clothes; she could do this. Why not? She had the skills, the power, and her totem's faith; she might as well get paid for having a good time, right?

It was time for her first real shadowrun.

She clambered out of her truck and thumbed her scuffed-up commlink to life. She was five minutes early, which Four-Paws-Laughing had always said was on time. She made sure her fake SIN was being broadcast instead of her real one, checked that her pistol was hidden beneath the folds of her shirt, and headed into the Café Sport. Downtown wasn't her usual neighborhood here in the Seattle Sprawl, but the smells inside this particular restaurant reminded her of growing up; real fires fed by real wood, real fish being grilled. No soy, just actual food.

The prices, of course, were astronomical. What Coydog and her family took for granted back home, and even on Seattle's Council Island, these poor saps had to pay out the nose for. She waved off the server and nodded toward a table in the back. Coydog smirked as she made her way past tables full of suit-clad salarymen and their families, knowing they were spending a week's wages on food she'd been cooking since she was a little girl.

The crew assembled at the table her commlink had told her about— the juggler was a lot of things, but as fixers went

he was pretty honest— could only be the rest of her team. The most eye-catching was the big ork with the bold tattoos and armored-up arms. He loomed over the dwarf who sat next to him, who had some external headware and gray streaking his beard. A human shared the booth with them, a datajack on his left temple and friendly smile on his face. Apparently she was interrupting an argument between the ork and the dwarf.

"I'm just sayin', I ain't a fan of Prop 23," the bigger one scowled. "It ain't up to outsiders to give the Underground laws. It's up to us orks."

"My father helped build that place, Sledge, before he got kicked out by you orks. It's got all manner of changelings and other metahumans in there, even today. It didn't start the 'Ork' Underground, and it's never been ork exclusive. If those people want law and order, their voices count just as much as yours."

"More, I guess," the ork—Sledge?—sulked and crossed his arms across his wide chest. "Since it ain't like I'm crashin' down there no more."

The human rapped on the table to quiet the two, then gave Coydog a bright smile as she approached.

"I'm betting that's not our Mr. Johnson, but I also bet she's not here to talk politics," he said to the other two with a grin. He got up from his edge of the booth and gave her a polite bow.

"*Se'thinerol. Telegit thelemsa.*" He sure did say it like he expected Coydog to understand him.

"Sorry, chummer." She bit down a laugh as she breezed past him to snatch up his seat. "No habla elfy-elfy."

The pair at the table laughed loud enough to catch a few glares from nearby patrons. The dwarf shot back by quieting down, the ork by glowering and looking like he was about to stand. That emptied the nearest table, patrons scurrying away in a flurry of polite excuses to one another.





BY RUSSELL ZIMMERMAN

"I, ah. Sorry." The human started in again. It had been ages since Coydog had made someone blush that red. "I thought you would..."

"Speak that Sperethiel stuff, just 'cause I'm an elf? Nope, sorry. I speak English and a couple flavors of Salish, pal. My momma was Sinsearach, not Cénesté. My folks stuck with the Council, didn't run off when the Tír started recruiting."

"So what's your story, anyways, breeder?" Sledge cut in with a big orkish snort. "Some kind of dandelion-eater wannabe?"

Coydog rolled her eyes at how casually he used the meta-racial insult, as though an actual elf weren't sitting right across from him.

"The name's Gentry," the human said, features a little colder toward the ork than they'd been to Coydog. "And no. I'm just from down there, is all."

"Yeah? What do you do, Gentry? Why should I wanna work with a breeder like you?" With cyberlimbs as obviously dangerous as his, no one had to ask the ork what he brought to the team. Every crew needed muscle.

"You watch urban brawl, Sledge?"

"I got eyes, don't I?"

"Gentry the Jinx ring any bells? Played fifteen games as a scout for the Bend Borderers."

"Yeah?" Sledge sized Gentry up openly, eyes flashing just a hint of chrome as he looked the human over. "I remember seein' a few trid-clips, sure. Held your own, I guess. You're some kind of fancy-pants hacker or something, right?"

"Decker," the dwarf corrected on the human's behalf. He reached out across the table—Gentry's longer arm making the handshake possible—and as they shook he nodded down at the bulky wrist-module strapped to the human's forearm.

"Nice hardware. Renraku core on your cyberdeck, looks like? You should upgrade to the new Shuriken when you can. MCT's

best stuff. I know a guy. The name's Hardpoint, I rig. Zero-zone experience, and plenty of it. If it's broken, I can fix it. If it ain't broken, I can fly it."

"Good to meet you." Gentry quirked an eyebrow and nodded toward Coydog. "What do you think, Hardpoint? I crash and burn hard enough I shouldn't try again?"

Coydog snickered and shook her head.

"No need, pal. Name's Coydog. I'll be your mojo for the evening, boys." She waggled her fingers and put on her best faux-menacing face. "Spells, spirits, and inscrutable tribal wisdom, at your service."

"Nice ink," Sledge grunted and nodded to her bare arms. Coydog had a neo-circuitry design, top-end nanotattoo work.

"Thanks. Got it from Lou's after my first fight. Yours too," she lied as she glanced down at the ork's own blocky tattoos. The work was sloppier than hers, hardly the high art that the high-end shop, right here in Downtown, put onto her skin. Maybe it was prison work, maybe just Underground standard. Skraacha ink, maybe? The gang had a lot of sway in the subterranean city.

Gentry and Hardpoint had already turned away from the tattoo conversation and were exchanging electronic pleasantries through their commlinks—Coydog pouted a bit when she saw just how outclassed her cheap Meta Link was, but she'd kind of expected it—when a newcomer arrived to their booth. Several nearby tables had been quietly cleared out, and the lights in this corner dimmed a bit. Right on time.

Coydog glanced up and saw almond eyes, salt and pepper hair, a crisp, dark suit, and a small corporate pin glinting on one lapel. She opened her mouth to draw out something halfway polite, when Hardpoint surprised her by clambering out of the booth with deceptive speed. The dwarf bowed deeply at the waist, and straightened up very formally.

"*Konbanwa, Johnson-sama.*"



She quirked an eyebrow at Sledge and Gentry while their temporary employer returned the greeting without the honorific, and Hardpoint scrambled to grab a chair for their Mr. Johnson.

[*Old habits dying hard?*] Coydog looked down as her Meta Link vibrated and alerted her to an incoming text message. Instead of quipping back, she glared over at Gentry, wondering how he'd gotten access to her system so quickly.

"And good evening to each of you, as well." Mr. Johnson cut off her silent accusation, switching to English to address the rest of the group. Hardpoint settled back into his seat as though nothing unusual had happened, and even Sledge didn't press the matter.

"Juggler-san and I appreciate your willingness to accept this task on such short notice. He has entrusted me with some basic contact information. Check your inbox now, please, and feel free to ask me any questions that come up as you read."

With her Link already in-hand, Coydog opened the attachment he'd just sent them. As the images slowed her loading time, she felt sure that Gentry and Hardpoint—spirits, maybe even Sledge!—were probably hip deep in confidential information by now. She started to scroll down slowly, and paused when she saw a violently severed cyberlimb.

"My previous team has been ... inconvenienced." Mr. Johnson spoke up right on cue, his subtly chromed eyes flicking from face to face. "They were scheduled for this employee transfer some time ago. They did a reasonable job of handling the legwork and relaying information to the target for me. However, due to an unrelated incident, they find themselves now incapable of performing this final task, the extraction itself."

His voice was clinical, calculating, and showed only disappointment—no concern—for whoever that savaged, glossy-black, cyberarm had once belonged to.

"I am in need of a driver, an electronic security specialist, a mundane combatant." He nodded to Hardpoint, Gentry, and Sledge in turn. "And you, miss, will be the icing on the proverbial cake. My former employees lacked an overt magical operations agent. It is my hope that you will be something of an insurance policy. We don't expect any magical security, so you should tip the balance rather nicely."

An unfair fight, then? Coydog's favorite kind! She tried not to smile as she slowly scrolled through the document. Blah blah blah, Kirsten Haines was an executive assistant to slick NeoNET big-shot Andrew Rolf, Mr. Johnson's company—who Coydog was sure she could figure out by asking Hardpoint later—had kept Haines and her headware as a covert data source for quite some time, and Mr. Johnson felt it was time to reward her loyalty with a proper extraction. Haines was eager for the exchange, the groundwork had been laid thanks to Johnson's terribly unlucky but otherwise competent old crew, and the pick-up was slated for ...

"Tonight?" Hardpoint somehow made the word both deferential and incredulous.

"Timeliness is critical, yes. Ms. Haines has been an asset for some time now, and has made it clear she requires immediate extraction. Our mutual acquaintance, Juggler-san, should have offered you a substantial bonus for this being such a short notice task."

"And it's just her?" Gentry glanced up from his sleek Transys commlink, and Coydog stifled a grumble about how fast these drekheads were reading.

"Ms. Haines is unmarried, has no children, and has no family she wishes extracted with her, that is correct."

"Lots o' security for some secretary," Sledge grunted. Coydog wanted to punch someone. Even he was out-pacing her!

"Ms. Haines is the administrative assistant to an important man. The security detail is for him, not her. I had hoped that four of them wouldn't be too much for four of you. Is my hope unfounded?"

"Ain't sayin' we can't do it," the ork's voice rose a bit, bristling. "I'm jus' sayin' ..."

"I don't think we have any more questions, Johnson-sama." Hardpoint cut Sledge off before he could get them all fired or assassinated. A stream of Japanese flowed from the dwarf and the corporate suit gave the rest of the team a look. Mr. Johnson waited a heartbeat for someone in the team to disagree, then gave them a polite nod.

"I'll see you and Ms. Haines in two hours, then."

Coydog opened her mouth to ask where, when an incoming text—[*The hand-off point's at the end of the message*]—buzzed onto her commlink. Gentry looked smug, but Coydog closed her mouth. She'd get him for that, later.

Later.

Mr. Johnson nodded toward the kitchen before he strode off, and a handful of eager wait-staff scurried to the table. Sledge dug in with orkish gusto, Hardpoint waited until Johnson was out of sight before going for some salmon, Gentry stuck to a huge salad, and Coydog picked at her meal while they planned. She figured a beer wouldn't kill anyone, but their waiter fell all over himself apologizing and insisting that Mr. Johnson had left explicit instructions that alcohol was not to be served. Bah!

They ate, they planned, and— in well under an hour— they left. Sledge had been sitting with a big Ares handcannon in his lap the whole time, she saw as they stood up. A tiny spy-drone zipped down to rest on Hardpoint's shoulder as they walked off. Coydog saw a holstered Colt on Gentry's hip as he reached for some scrip to leave for a tip. They all went out the back door, and she strode along with them like she'd been planning on a surreptitious exit all along, herself. She was a shadowrunner now, after all.

They had agreed to simplify their travel logistics over dinner, and everyone left their vehicles at the Café Sport except Hardpoint.

"It's no drone," he'd said as he climbed into the driver's seat of his big Bulldog step-can. "But I can make it fly."

On the drive over, Sledge meticulously loaded and unloaded a few magazines for his autopistol. Hardpoint hummed to himself as he drove. Gentry seemed to be playing a videogame, unless Coydog missed her guess. Just like the plan called for, though, she worked during the trip.

"Little brother," she whispered so that only the air could hear it. "I need your help."

Hardpoint had all the doors and windows closed, but a breeze filled the back of the van.

"Little brother," she breathed in her power while Coyote smiled. "Aid us in mischief."

Her magic worked, as Coyote had willed it to. The minor spirit was enough to conceal them. No one noticed as the van pulled into an employee-only curbside parking spot. No one noticed as a surly ork with a gun and military-spec cyberarms climbed out. No one noticed as a swimmer-lean human in a courier jumpsuit— blinking commlinks all wired together to mimic the processing power of a proper cyberdeck—hopped onto the curb, adjusting his sling-bag. No one noticed as the big loading doors at the van's rear swung open, and Coydog sat on the edge of the van and swung her boots in the wind. It didn't matter how little they fit in on this curb full of corporate-approved delivery vans and shining limousines. No one saw them, really saw them, enough to care.



Gentry and Sledge loitered at the back of the van with her, half a car-length from a Mitsubishi Nightsky whose driver had just straightened up and tried to look attentive. The tinted doors of this NeoNET branch office slid open, and their target walked into sight, right on time. With her was a terribly important-looking human in a suit that probably cost as much as Coydog's truck, and a foursome of serious-faced men who looked like cookie-cutter copies of each other. The four bodyguards had implanted optic shields, permanent sunglasses that made their faces unreadable and likely hid a half-dozen cybernetic modifications.

None of them helped against Coydog's spirit, though. No one glanced twice.

"You sure you can do this to his wheels, breeder?" Sledge elbowed Gentry to hurry him up.

"I've been boosting cars since I was twelve, Sledge."

Gentry didn't look up. He kept his attention on the sleek little keypad strapped to his arm, now linked directly to him by a thin cable. His left hand hovered just above it, hitting imaginary keys, running programs, tweaking processors, or maybe—hell if Coydog knew—still just playing *Star Lords* or something. He sure seemed to know what he was doing in augmented reality, she could tell that much.

"So yeah. I'm pretty sure."

The suit-clad targets approached the car, and the bodyguard in front reached out to pull open the door to the Nightsky limo. He started and they all looked frustrated when the door didn't open. Coydog fought a snicker. In the front compartment, the driver looked terrified.

The engine purred itself to death, and the driver's eyes whitened. He started frantically adjusting controls on the dash, but he was locked in a powered-down car, one with windows so tinted and soundproofing so fine he had no way to warn the rest of the security team. The foursome of bodyguards milled around looking concerned and alert, but Coydog's magic was strong, her air spirit loyal, and Coyote's mischief was with her; they looked, eagle-eyed, everywhere but at the team and their van. Gentry flashed a very pleased with himself smile while the limo driver's face went red. Sledge drew his big Ares and stalked across the sidewalk.

"Think I should remind him this ain't a full-on invisibility spell?"

Coydog glanced Gentry's way, then back to watching the ork.

"Ah, he'll figure it out," the decker grinned at her, then cheerfully flipped off the hapless limo driver as he strolled after Sledge.

They drew attention pretty quickly once Sledge started shooting. Point blank, muzzle a hair's-breadth from the security guard's temple, the gel round dropped him like a poleaxe. Suddenly—and unsurprisingly—the ork wasn't so easy to overlook any more.

In the blink of an eye Mr. Rolf grabbed Ms. Haines and shielded himself with her. Hardpoint howled with laughter and the engine roared with his amusement. The three guards that remained went for their guns so quick Coydog could barely see them move. Sledge looked surprised, cursed, and dove, scratching paint the whole way, across the parked Nightsky. Rounds ricocheted off the limo's subtle armor plating, and the ork growled his frustration but stayed low and out of sight.

Gentry hauled a stun baton from his little messenger-bag hack-pack and waded in. One guard's wrist was broken and gun was sent flying with two efficient swings, then the third big overhand strike connected with his head and sent the bodyguard, herky-jerky, to the pavement. Pistols barked in Sledge's direction while Ms. Haines and Mr. Rolf cried and begged. One guard turned to line up a shot on Gentry and Coydog reached out and threw a bolt of pure mana. The round went wild as Gentry dove clear, and an instant later Coydog's spell tore into the guard's aura. Blood poured from

nose as he tumbled to the ground next to their extraction target and her boss, who still huddled beneath her for cover.

Sledge popped up from the rear of the limo—not the front, where he'd vanished—and dropped the last exec-protect company man with a pair of gel rounds. He slid across the trunk—Coydog wasn't sure if it was thanks to a steady diet of action trid-flicks or just the urge to scratch more of the paint job—and landed just next to Rolf. An ork-sized combat boot won out over Rolf's flawlessly styled hair, and the middle-executive crumpled and let go of Haines.

"Let's go, lady!" Sledge hauled the bawling woman up by one arm and dragged her toward the van.

"It's okay, Kirsten." Coydog tried to sound a little nicer than Sledge had, which wasn't hard. "We're here to help you, not hurt you. We're a...secondary team."

"You're from...?" Haines' eyes were wide, but a lifetime of corporate obedience had her climbing into the back of the van.

"*Hai*, Haines-san," Hardpoint turned in his driver's chair to nod to her. "Please be seated and we'll get you there in no time."

"Hustle it up, breeder!" Sledge hollered back to Gentry as he buckled himself in.

The human stooped over Rolf's unconscious form, then straightened up. He still had his buzzing shock baton in one hand, but his other held a chrome-shining commlink.

"Boss-man might toss us a bonus once I decrypt this puppy." He idly tapped the side of the parked limo with his baton, arcing blue-white sparks as he trotted toward the back of the van. Sirens had only just begun to wail, and the sound was still thin and hungry, coming from a distance.

"This wasn't so bad," Gentry smiled and tossed the stolen commlink up into the van for Sledge to smoothly snatch out of the air, chip-quick.

"In the movies, something always goes wrong on a shadow-run."

Coydog smiled at him sweetly, then pulled the van door shut in his face.

There were chuckles from the driver's seat and the Bulldog started rolling. Coydog peeked over Hardpoint's shoulder and saw a dashboard monitor display showing that, sure enough, Gentry had clambered onto the back of the van and clung desperately to the ladder there, kicking the back door and cussing at her in Sperethiel. She filled the back of the van with peals of laughter, Sledge chuckled and flashed his tusks in a laugh, and Ms. Haines looked like she was going to go back to crying any minute now.

"Give him about half a klick before we let him in," Coydog laughed out over the sounds of Gentry's pounding and hollering. Taking one last favor from her spirit, she cloaked him in magical indifference, so that once they got a little distance between themselves and the quick, lopsided, firefight, no one would even notice him hanging there.

That's what he got for being a show-off. ✖



THE EDGE OF NOW

Hoi, chummer! Glad you're still breathing. Actually, I shouldn't be surprised. You show a lot of potential for a newbie in the shadows. Since you made it this far, and we've got some time, why don't you sit with me for a few ticks and we can talk shop. What's that? You don't have a lot of shop to talk? Nothing to worry about, omae, I'm here to help. Just go get me another beer—soy, please, not krill—and then have a seat and let me tell you all about what you've gotten yourself into here.

LIFE IN THE SIXTH WORLD

It would be nice if you had all the time in the world to get your bearings in the Sixth World. If you could walk around, see the sights, and get adjusted to what life as a shadowrunner is. But you don't have that much time. There are squatters looking for whatever space you're taking up, organ harvesters interested in your still-pumping heart, and more than enough hazards to fill a handful of Daily Things That Will Kill You calendars. So let's talk for a bit about what you need to know, then you can get up and running to see how much more you can learn.

EVERYTHING HAS A PRICE

Read the sentence in the header there. Read it again. Got it? Good. Because if that's the only thing you take away from this, if

that's the only thing you learn, then you'll still be getting something valuable about the world you live in. You walk around this world, you'll see a lot of heaps, and each one of them's got someone perched on top of it. Every megacorporation has its CEO, governments have their chief executive, gangs have their lieutenant or head man or chief head basher or whatever they hell they decide to call it. Each of them figured out what they would have to pay to get to the top of that particular heap, and each one of them ponied up when the time came and paid it.

You're going to have to do the same thing. Probably not as much as Renraku's CEO, but unless you want to spend your days chained to a wage and making somebody else rich, you're going to have to pay something. And it's best if you know your options.

MAGIC: PAYING WITH YOUR MIND

December 21, 2011. That's the day the Sixth World Awakened. According to the academicky types who like to sort things into boxes and put the boxes in order, this planet of ours has seen six ages, by which they mean six different levels of magic. The previous age, the Fifth World, was an ebb in magic. Magic was shady, disreputable, a bit slatternly, hiding out in dark corners and back alleys, very rarely coming out in the light of day. On December 24, 2011, the great dragon Ryumyo flew out of Mount Fuji and darted alongside a bullet train full of very surprised commuters, pretty much putting the world on notice that the ebb was

SHADOW SLANG

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

breeder *n.* Ork slang for a "normal" human.

buzz *v.* Go away. Buzz off.

chill *adj.* Good, cool, acceptable.

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

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

chrome *n.* Cyberware, especially obvious enhancements.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

deckhead *n.* Simsense abuser.

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

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





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

exec *n.* A corporate executive.

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

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

geek *v.* To kill.

go-gang *n.* A vehicular gang.

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

halfer *n.* (vulgar) A dwarf.

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

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

hose *v.* Louse up. Screw up.

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

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

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

jing *n.* Money, usually cash.

keeb *n.* (vulgar) An elf.

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

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

merc *n.* A mercenary.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

pawn *n.* (derogatory) Street slang for Knight Errant officers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

swag *adj.* Awesome.

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

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

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

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

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

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

wetwork *n.* Assassination. Murder.

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

wiz *adj.* Wonderful, excellent.

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

wizworm *n.* A dragon.

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

zaibatsu *n.* (Japanese) A megacorporation.



over. That was just the beginning; magic coming back meant big changes for the world.

In fact, some of the changes had kicked in months before, just nobody understood that's what was happening. They called it Unexplained Genetic Expression (UGE)—a scientific-sounding name for children being born who looked just like the elves or dwarfs of legends and folktales. Only they didn't just look the parts; the new dwarf children grew to be unnaturally strong and could see in near darkness while the elf children had preternaturally quick reflexes and moved like dancers. For ten years these kids were freaks. Then, in 2021, they became average. That's when Goblinization struck. And it was not pretty. Where UGE had created interesting-looking newborns, Goblinization struck people of all ages. Most noticeable symptom was blinding, mind-numbing agony. This lasted twelve to seventy-two hours while the victims changed shape, grew tusks and/or sprouted horns and maybe doubled their body mass. Which is how the orks and trolls came back. Not that they'd been gone—elves and dwarfs and orks and trolls had always been here, but in the low magic ebb of the Fifth World, they'd looked just like ordinary humans. It was clear "humanity" was too narrow a term to cover all the types of people roaming the Earth, so now we call ourselves metahumanity. Turns out the different metatypes don't like each other any more now than they did in all those legends and fairytales. But we're all stuck on the same rock spinning through space, so we deal with it.

It didn't take too long for people to start trying to get a handle on how to use all the new magic floating around for themselves. Turned out some people had a knack for it. While the rest of us were wondering what they were looking at with glazed eyes and weird expressions, they were figuring out how to channel and shape streams of mana—a sort of magic energy that seems to be just about everywhere. Turns out, if you can suss how it's done, you can use mana to set the air on fire, make people do things they'd never do, or things truly esoteric and/or insane. And mana wasn't just for the spells. It gave some people the strength to punch through walls, others can shame a cobra with their reflexes, and there are some who can outrun a cheetah; and that's just scratching the surface. And you know all those magic goodies from legends and fairytales and myths? We got 'em all. Enchanted swords, magic rings, wands, amulets, mojo bags, every potion you can think of, all exist. Not that they always work the way they did in the stories. Don't just grab up the sword of a legendary warrior and expect to slice and dice like she did, for example. The point is, magic is out there, and people are using it. The Atlantean Foundation, the Draco Foundation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Thaumaturgy—they're regularly researching how to do the impossible.

Now, let me be straight with you. The vast majority of us have no talent for magic, which means we're likely to look on those who do with some combination of fascination and mistrust. We love them because they can do the things we've only dreamed about, and we hate them for the exact same reason. So if you're Awakened, get used to folks eying you with interest and suspicion. And be ready for anyone with a gun to aim it at you first. It's the Sixth World way.

One last and very important thing you've gotta understand about magic: dragons. They're large, they're dangerous, and they will frag you up. Ryumyo of Mount Fuji fame was the first—but definitely not the last—dragon to have an impact on the Sixth World; they have their claws everywhere. The great dragon Ghostwalker reigns over the divided city of Denver. The great feathered serpent Hualpa does likewise in Amazonia. A dragon

named Dunkelzahn managed to get himself elected the president of the United Canadian and American States, only to get blown up on the night of his inauguration. And don't overlook the corporate dragons—Celedyr directs research at NeoNET, Rhonabwy manages a supremely massive stock portfolio, and the great dragon Lofwyr is the president and CEO of the largest megacorporation on Earth, Saeder-Krupp.

Which makes this a good time to talk about the megacorporations.

CORPORATIONS: PAYING WITH YOUR SELF

There was a time when the highest law of any land was the law put down by national governments, and all bodies in national borders, individuals and corporations alike, were subject to those laws. But there was a time even before that when the only law of the world was power, and you could do what you wanted as long as you had the strength to keep anyone from stopping you. The state of the Sixth World, then, isn't really anything new. It's just the latest iteration of the might-makes-right way of doing things. The only real change is that once upon a time governments were able to restrain corporations, or at least enforce some limits. Not any more.

In the end it boils down to one word: extraterritoriality. That's the word that allows corporations to say that whatever happens in their holdings, on the buildings and lands they own, is subject to their laws—and no one else's. Gaining extraterritorial status was a long-held dream of many of the world's largest corporations, and when courts in nations across the world started giving it to them back in 1999, they spent several years pissing on themselves and each other in utter delirium. Then they figured out their infighting was cutting into their bottom line, so they concentrated on pissing on the rest of us.

Not every corporation in the world has extraterritorial status. To understand who does, you have to know about the Corporate Court, the body the megacorporations created when they realized they were spending too much time solving their disputes by ravaging entire small countries. The Corporate Court is sometimes mocked as a toothless entity, a puppet of the world's largest megacorps, but it manages—usually—to keep open warfare between the corps from breaking out, and that's at least worth something.

As part of its duties, the Court has created a ranking system for corporations. At the bottom are the unrated corps, ranging from the commlink repair business two guys named Mitch started in the back of their Ford Americar to companies that stretch from coast to coast of the world's largest nations but don't cross any borders. To get the lowest ranking the corp gives out, the A-ranking, you've got to be a multinational, doing substantive business in more than one country. And no, occasionally selling a bag of WafoCrisps to a shepherd in New Zealand doesn't count.

The next step, becoming an AA-ranked corporation, is the one that gets you the big prize of extraterritoriality. To get to this point, you've got to show that you're big in several nations, you're tough, and you can take the drek the really big boys may dish out at you when they're in a pissy mood.

Then you've got the top rank, the AAAs. The Big Ten. They're not necessarily the largest megacorporations on Earth, but their size, their diversity, and their power set them apart. That, and the fact that they somehow convinced the other megas to give



them a seat on the Corporate Court. Because that's who populates the Court, justices from the Big Ten. They are the powers that shape the world, and everyone, shadowrunner or not, knows their names, because they're the centers from which nuyen flows—and where most of the nuyen normally ends up. Ares. Aztechnology. Evo. Horizon. Mitsuhamma. NeoNET. Renraku. Sadder-Krupp. Shiawase. Wuxing. If you're going to be a runner for longer than ten minutes, you're going to work for one of these guys, and if you're going to live in the shadows for more than a day, you're going to get screwed over by them. You need to know about these guys, so we've got a briefing coming up.

In the meantime, what you need to understand is that these guys are bigger than big. Think of the world's largest manufacturer of computer equipment. Then add in a powerful magic supplies broker. Throw in a few banks, an insurance firm, and entertainment conglomerate, and a snack-food giant, and you're still not a tenth of the way to forming one of the Big Ten. They employ millions and control trillions of nuyen. They have dozens of subsidiaries that, on their own, would be A- or AA-rated corporations. Each and every one of them owns a piece of land within one hundred kilometers of you, unless you're in the Sahara, the Amazon, or at the bottom of the ocean. And maybe even then. And each of them has convinced their employees that the safe haven they offer is worth decades of low-paying, mundane, soul-sucking work. They are the armies of the wageslaves of the world, and one way we shadowrunners know who we are is that we know we're not them. Of course, just like them, we sell our time and sometimes our lives dancing to the megacorporations' tune. They have the nuyen, and we want it, which means they determine what the rules of the game are. We just play it.

But if we're going to be different than them—stronger, faster, and dare I say better—we need an edge. A few of us are lucky enough to get that edge through magic.

For the rest of us, there are augmentations.

AUGMENTATIONS: PAYING WITH YOUR SOUL

Ever since the days of John Henry, we've been fighting the battle against machines, trying to prove that humanity has the upper hand on cold iron and circuitry. It took us until earlier this century to figure out that we shouldn't be trying to beat the machines; we should be joining them. Of course it all began as prosthetics—artificial legs and hands that moved like the originals, cybernetic eyes and ears that let people born blind or deaf see and hear. But pretty soon people figured out what began as medical marvels could be adapted to improve anyone's senses and abilities. It wasn't a big jump from there to implanted phones and computers.

These days, every bit of who you are can be improved with the right piece of gear (unless you're Awakened—we'll talk about that in a second). Think you've got quick reflexes? You can be quicker. An artificial neural network'll make you faster than a nervous jack-rabbit. Think you're strong? Switch out the muscles you were born with for a set that's been custom grown for brawn and efficiency and you'll take strong to a whole new level. Think you're charming? Implant a few sets of specialized pheromone dispensers and people will swoon when you walk by and nod enthusiastically when you talk.

And that's just for starters. You can put actual plates of armor on your skin, or lace your bones with metal so that your fists and legs deliver crushing blows. You can make your senses sharper,

your brain faster, and you can implant knowledge that you never learned in school. You can replace entire pieces of your body with artificial replicas full of extra strength, nimble agility, secret compartments, and hidden weapons that provide very unpleasant surprises at just the right time.

But it's not free. And we're not just talking money, there's a higher price to pay. All this stuff is useful and great, but it's artificial. It's not metahuman, and your body knows it. Each time you get one of these augmentations, you give up a piece of yourself. You lose something inside of you, the essence of metahumanity. We don't quite understand what this "it" is, but we know this much—the more artificial you make yourself, the farther you get from actual life. If you get too far, whatever animated you is going to disappear, until you and all the gear you bought just collapses and becomes indistinguishable from any other pile of silicon, meat, and chrome. So go ahead and get yourself augmented up. Get those synaptic boosters, those muscle replacements, and while you're at it put a sparkling datajack in your head and some boss, day-glo nanotattoos on your face. Just understand that each time you do this, another piece of your metahumanity goes sliding away.

But wait! There's more! If you are Awakened, if you have any sort of magical mojo, you lose more than your essence. Your magic theorists, they'll tell you that mana is tied to life. You take away some of the life of an Awakened person, you take away some of their power. That's why the spellslingers and adepts among us are cautious about how many augmentations they get. But they got their spells and their abilities, which means they got plenty of ways to keep up even if they aren't wired to the gills.

In the end, all this augmentations stuff comes down to a single question: How much of your metahumanity are you willing to trade for power? And that, chummer, is a question that covers way more about you than how much chrome you get.

THE MATRIX: PAYING WITH YOUR FREEDOM

Back around the turn of the century, people could access a world of information—and each other—in seconds from their portable phones. That wasn't fast enough for metahumanity, though. We wanted our global network even faster, and by Turing's ghost, we were going to get it.

And get it we did. Direct neural interface (DNI) connects your computer to your brain, first with an implanted datajack, then dry active electrode arrays (or trodes). Digital pathways merged with neural pathways and the Matrix was born, a virtual world where people, data, and programs could interact, work, and even fight. That and most of those wiz augmentations we were just talking about.

It wasn't all flowers and candy, this Matrix. There was the Crash of '29 which killed a lot of people. Black IC killed a lot of people (and still does). An insane AI named Deus formed out of a rogue experiment and killed a lot of people. Another global crash, Crash 2.0, killed a lot of people, too. The new wireless Matrix didn't kill anybody, but the megacorps found it too liberating for its users, so they "fixed" it.

The new new Matrix is just fine, if you like paying through the nasal cavity for a service that would be dirt cheap if the Corporate Court Matrix Authority didn't have a stranglehold on it. You get to choose which megacorp gets your money, and then you use the Matrix and everything in it on their terms.

Don't like it? You're not alone, omae. If you're friends with a hacker, or you're one yourself, you can twist the Matrix and give



the corps the *digitus medius*. But there's a price, there's always a price. The Grid Overwatch Division (GOD) is constantly vigilant for hackers, and the Matrix itself resists any attempts to break its rules. If you start hacking, you get to be on GOD's hit list.

As if that's not weird enough, there are people called technomancers wandering around. They're even more rare than magicians, but they can do in the Matrix what magicians do with reality—with their minds! Technomancers don't need technology to interface with the Matrix, they just do it. Some folks say technomancers are Awakened (they're wrong, but only mostly wrong), but nobody knows for sure. People's paranoia about magicians goes doubly for technomancers. Apparently having acid thrown at you is less scary than having your ID hacked, your accounts drained, and your life ruined—okay, now I see it.

LIFE IN THE SHADOWS: PAYING WITH YOUR BLOOD

Like I said before, this is a world dominated by the megacorporations. They like things a certain way, and that way requires a docile population, a world of people who do whatever work they're told, build anything, carry anything, sacrifice anything for the mega, then spend all their money in the company store and be glad they got it so good. Sheep. That's how megacorps see metahumanity: a flock of sheep they have to keep in line to serve their purposes.

Which means the rest of us face a stark choice: accept their shit ... or not. There are lots of ways to sell out in this world and find a corporate master who will order you around. There's garbage to be collected, floors to be swept, numbers to be added. The megas have literal mountains of menial labor to be performed in a never-ending series of twelve- or sixteen-hour shifts. Yes, it's a lot of work, but you'll have time off occasionally, and there's a whole slew of corporate-approved entertainments. You can even have relationships with other people, as long as you don't associate with anyone your beloved parent megacorporation might consider in any way unsuitable. You will never be required to be creative or inspired. You will never have to take risks. You could live, potentially, for a long time (if you're lucky enough not to contract any diseases on the corporate Do Not Treat list), and you will have approximately the same quality of life as a worker bee.

For some of us, that's not enough. That's not a life. The megacorps own enough in the world. They don't need to own us. So we drop out, stay away from the life of a corp drone, and find another way to be. We do the jobs corps don't want their regular employees to do, the things they don't want connected back to them. Espionage missions; missions of theft, sabotage, and assault—maybe assassination if you swing that way. That's the kind of work that drifts down into the shadows of the world, and that's what we pick up. That's how we survive. We still have to dance to the corporate tune to some degree—who doesn't?—but we get to live on our terms, in our way, and if we do it right and build up our skills, we can become the best at what we do and get paid what we deserve. Then, maybe, instead of being one of us, scrambling under the heels of the powerful, we can be one of them, and remake a small part of the world in our image.

Now, let me be clear on something. Some of us choose the shadows, and some of us have the shadows thrust upon them. One of the dividing lines between the world of shadows and the world of light is a SIN—a system identification number, the identification you need to be accepted in security systems and government databases and pretty much any computer anywhere that authenti-

cates people's identities. If you don't have one, you're an outsider. You're pushed into the shadows of the world by default.

So who is born without a SIN? Well, if your parents didn't have one, you probably don't. So children of criminals, along with kids of a high percentage of orks or trolls (who often get denied SINs as a matter of course), often start off in the dark. Then there are criminals—the professional kind, the amateur ones, and the accidental ones. Whatever they did, however they got caught, they ended up with a criminal SIN, which is about as useful as a fingerless cyberhand. Most of the time, rather than staying with the norms and being treated like a radioactive leper, folks with a criminal SIN drop out of society, either running in the shadows or opting for the full-on criminal lifestyle (the mobs and street gangs of the Sixth World are always hiring).

The point is, no matter how each of us got into the shadows, we're here now. If we're going to survive, we have to find work. There are dozens, hundreds, thousands of jobs out there. You can make money off of them, but each one will cost you something. You'll get a scar from a bullet that should have killed you. A leg that aches in the cold 'cause you broke it crashing your motorcycle on one of your less stylish getaways. A missing arm because you were standing just a bit too close to a bomb going off and a working cyber model is pricy. And that's just what will happen to your body. You'll be double-crossed, betrayed, and abandoned. You'll see trusted friends turn on you and watch others die. You'll have every last bit of you tested in ways you can't imagine just to see how much you can endure.

And if you succeed? If you stay alive? Money, first of all, but more. You become a legend. You join the ranks of the people we tell stories about, the shadowrunners whose names we all know. Dirk Montgomery. FastJack. Sally Tsung. The Smiling Bandit. You'll have lived your own life, survived, and even thrived. You'll have stuck it to every man the Sixth World has to offer.

As long as you can pay the price.

A DAY IN YOUR LIFE

So now you've got some idea how to make yourself strong enough and fast enough and maybe smart enough to do what you need or want to do and you've got a snapshot of a few places you might want to do it. Now let's talk about what really matters to you—your life in the Sixth World. We'll start with the people you'll encounter, in particular the ones you should seek out.

PEOPLE YOU KNOW

If you're going to make it as a shadowrunner, there are four types of people you need to know. First is other runners. Yeah, you're great—you got the talent, you got the moves, you do everything better than anyone else—but what you can't do is everything by yourself. You may have drek-hot Matrix skills, but you'll need some magic surveillance to help keep you safe. Or you may be an ace at long-range weapons, but could really use a tank who can charge in and do some serious damage in nose-to-nose situations. The point is: to be effective, you need a team. Ask around, do some trial runs, and find some people you trust. Your team is going to be the only thing standing between you and death on a number of occasions, so you need to be able to count on each one of them. That doesn't mean they need to be normal, likable, or even entirely sane. They just need to be there when it counts.



The second group is contacts. We understand if you're not a people person—for a lot of us, being called an antisocial psychopath would be a compliment. But there are people we run into. There's the girl at the corner bar who's as good with the tap as she is with a shotgun. The weapons dealer who always calls you first when a new shipment hits the black market. The owl-eyed guy who runs the odds-and-ends shop that occasionally carries that powdered something-or-other horn that's extremely useful in alchemy. The Knight Errant lieutenant who once let you skate on a pickpocket charge because you had a nice face. All these people and more have two important qualities: First, they won't immediately shoot you on sight; and second, they're in a position to know useful information. Whether it's who's hiring and for what, where someone trying to keep a low profile might have gone to ground, new and interesting infestations of security types, or other bits of data you didn't know you needed to know, what your contacts can tell you is an indispensable part of your life. So treat them nice.

If you're just starting out with one of your contacts and you don't have much work on the horizon, the first thing you need to ask about is a fixer. These are the guys who know who's out there on the street, what jobs need to be done, and how to put those two things together to get the right people doing the right things. A lot of the time fixers have specialties—you'll get one who's a source of corporate jobs, another who's in with the Mafia and knows what they're hiring for, and so on. So shop around until you find a fixer who specializes in the kind of work you want to do. And who won't hook you up with someone you just finished screwing over.

Understand that if you haven't been on the streets long and you don't have any successful jobs under your belt, you can't expect the fixer to throw you the plum jobs. So forget about bodyguarding some CEO's daughter while she goes to the mall; you gotta work up to that. But there's still plenty of work out there for you, from getting in the middle of ferocious gang fights to stealing corporate prototypes to tracking down stray rich kids who got themselves lost in the urban barrens. Prove yourself on the first job your fixer gives you, and there will be more to come.

This brings us to the fourth person you need to know, the person who will tell you what it is you're being hired to do and how much you're going to be paid to do it. We call this person Mr. Johnson, because that's what he calls himself. Sure, in Japan he sometimes calls himself Mr. Tanaka, in the Allied German States he's Herr Schmidt, and in Hong Kong he might go by the name Mr. Wu, but you don't need to remember all that. All you need to know is that you're not supposed to know his real name, he'll be the one telling you the details of your mission, and there's a good chance that, one way or another, he's going to screw you over.

The number of ways Mr. Johnson can screw you could fill a book bigger than this one. The simplest, and most common, is not telling you everything you need to know. Mr. Johnson is in the secrecy business, after all, so there's always going to be something he wants to hide. He also might be screwing you over in a more deliberate fashion—sending you into a trap, having you chase after something that doesn't really exist, that sort of thing. Mr. Johnson is inventive. What is it the diplomats say? "Trust, but verify?" And when a real journalist's mother says she loves him, he gets it confirmed by three sources before he believes. Shadowrunners consider both groups to be suicidally naïve; they've dealt with Mr. Johnson.

DOING THE DIRTY WORK

Okay. All your asking around and making friends has paid off—your fixer has a job for you. Now what? There is no one shape for shadowruns to take. They all look different. They start different, they end different, and they get from their various points A to their final points Z in a multitude of fashions. Despite this, there are basic steps that show up in most runs, and knowing them reduce the chances of being pegged as the uninformed newb you are when you're starting out.

THE MEET

Nothing's going to happen unless you know what you're supposed to do, and you're not going to do anything—we hope—unless you know how much you're going to get paid. The meet is where you work out these basic terms. Pay attention to every little bit of the meet when it happens, because every detail can tell you something. Is Mr. Johnson meeting you in person, or over the Matrix? Is he astrally glowing with sustained spells? Did he arrange to meet you in a posh restaurant, a skeezy nightclub, or some dive bar in the barrens? Is he dressed to match his surroundings, or does he look out of place? And, perhaps most important, is he willing to pick up the tab for anything you decide to eat or drink during the meet?

Watch carefully, listen closely, and use everything you absorb during the meet to inform your job. And wrangle every last nuyen out of Mr. Johnson. You're not going to get too many other chances to bargain, so use this one well.

WHY TO MEET WHERE

- 1. Private room in a nightclub.** Provides the seclusion you want, doesn't have a strong dress code, and has a crowd nearby to keep the participants honest.
- 2. Secured Matrix site.** You can't shoot what's not physically near you. Dumpshock is a risk, maybe, but if you're worried about it, don't go in with hot-sim. The problem is that you're not going to be able to get much of a read off Mr. Johnson's body language or facial expressions.
- 3. Office in an abandoned building.** The upside is, it's plenty isolated and private. The downside is, it's plenty isolated and private. Too many people have walked into meets in places like this and not come out. Plus, the amenities are non-existent.
- 4. Hotel room.** You don't want Mr. Johnson to know where you're staying, he doesn't want you to know where he's staying. So motel rooms are anonymous and private—which can be the same good/bad thing as the abandoned warehouse, though things usually stay less violent in hotel rooms. Not always, but usually. And you get room service. Unless you're at some no-tell motel, though some of those offer an array of services that your nicer establishments can't match.
- 5. Fancy restaurant.** Privacy and discretion are guaranteed at these spots, and you might even get real meat. Just remember that sometimes Mr. Johnson is watching the tab you run up like he's your parent, making sure you don't spend too recklessly. Every part of every meet is a kind of test.



LEGWORK

Whether you're going to snatch a middle manager from a secured office, find a missing corporate scion hidden in a Yakuza compound, or break into a Matrix node to find a hidden piece of pay-data, the first thing you want to do is get the lay of the land, whatever that land might be. Check out floorplans, learn about security details, piece together the daily routines of the people involved, find out what the networks and IC are like where you'll be going, scope the area on the astral plane, and check around with the kind of people who know stuff to find out who else might be interested in what you're doing and if there are some things you should know that Mr. Johnson either didn't know or didn't bother to tell you. No bullets are usually fired in this stage, no one is punched in the face, and sometimes, shockingly, no laws are broken, but make no mistake—this is where you can make or break your run. The more you know, the more you can anticipate, and the more likely you are to stay one step ahead. Ahead of whom? Ahead of everybody else; that's how runners stay alive.

THE PLAN

I knew a few runners who loved to wing it—get into the action, handle things on the fly and make the next move up as they ran. I visit their tombstones every year.

Look, there's room for creativity in a run, especially when things happen that you don't expect, but the best runners know what they're going to do when they go in. So plan. Know who does what and when they do it. And who does it if the runner supposed to do it goes down. Have a second option for each decision point. Have a foolproof communications plan. Have a backup communications plan for the foolproof one. Know where you're going to meet if things go pear-shaped. Know how you're going to pay for funeral expenses should the need arise.

DO IT

Some people say the most successful missions are the ones where you get in, get out, and don't fire a shot. Others say that you should go big, go loud, and always be ready to make an impression. The point is, you have a wide range of options. You don't have to do things one particular way, but you have to do them. Get in there, carry out your plan, deal with the inevitable unanticipated obstacles, then see who's left standing at the end.

WRAP IT UP

Unless Mr. Johnson is a total fool, you didn't get your entire pay in advance. So connect with him however you were supposed to, deliver whatever goods or proof of activities you were supposed to, then collect the remainder of your pay. And a bonus, if you can wrangle one.

WHAT YOU MIGHT BE DOING

The types of jobs there are in the world are almost as numerous as the shadowrunners wanting to do them. But if we put a little brainpower into organization, we can narrow the types of jobs you might be hired to do down to the following basic types:

Data steal: Whether it's plans for a new sonic weapon, information on a corporate manager's private life, or details of Pathfinder Multimedia's trideo productions over the next year, data

can equal power. So shadowrunners are often sent to snatch data; paydata—the kind worth something to someone.

Burglary: Sometime information needs to be stolen, and sometime it's actual stuff. It may be a racing motorcycle prototype (call me if you get that job—I want in), an artifact stored away in some museum, a corporate exec's left shoe, an eye, or something truly esoteric. Whatever it is, it's not easy to get, which is why someone's willing to pay you to go fetch. Sometimes this requires subtlety and stealth; misdirection, subterfuge, impeccable timing, and nuanced moves. Other times you bust in, grab what you want, then run like hell.

Breaking shit: Sometimes you've got to break a newshound's car to remind him what he could lose if he keeps making waves. Sometimes you've got to burn a politico's house down to inspire her to go into seclusion and contemplate her life choices. Sometimes you might have to break parts of an ambitious executive's body (what we call "wetwork") to encourage more teamwork and less independent entrepreneurialism. Destruction, in all its glorious forms, is a standard part of shadowrunning. You just have to decide how much destruction you're willing to live with.

Extraction or insertion: In the old days, corporations would get into bidding wars to win the rights to employ hot talents in all sorts of fields, including engineers, researchers, actors, and even corporate managers. That was before corporations got the leverage they have now. These days, the megacorps have large legal departments and considerable security devoted to making sure people stay in place, employed for life by the same boss. Which means you can't just wave money at an employee if you want to hire them; instead, you've got to get them out of where they are. Extractions of valuable personnel, and then insertion of those people into their new corporate homes, are a regular part of the shadowrunning biz.

Delivery: Prostitution has the reputation as the world's oldest profession, but delivery boy has got to be right behind it. Sometime after clubs but before fire, humans invented point A and point B and right away they needed someone to get their stuff from one to the other; been that way ever since. Shadowrunners, of course, are not hired to deliver soykaf lattes and bagels to the morning faculty meeting. Instead, we get jobs like making sure a vial of dragon blood gets to the right enchanter or delivering a sample of the newly synthesized narcotic to the Mafia's labs for chemical analysis or, always a favorite, a thing they don't want to tell you about to a person they don't want to identify. As you might guess, there's a little more than travel going on here. There will be people who want whatever it is you're carrying—or want it back—and there's a good chance they'll come after you while you're in transit. Stay sharp, move fast, and don't drop anything important. Oh, and make sure all your papers are in order because "delivery" usually means "smuggling" which means transit docs with all the right clearances that look good enough to get you across borders.

Protection: Just like runners are hired to jack data, steal stuff, break things, and extract people, runners are hired to stop runners from jacking, stealing, breaking, and extracting. Sometimes the employer thinks runners are the best defense against runners; other times the employer needs expendable assets she can plausibly deny knowing anything about. Protection can be bodyguarding, defending, checking an area out for traps and ambushes, or tracking down and neutralizing threats. The important thing is to be as good as you say you are.

Misdirection: Okay, back in the day, before magic became a real thing, there were people who called themselves magicians



who were anything but. They ran a kind of confidence game that lasted just long enough for you to believe their act. Their tools were mechanisms or constructions that did or hid more than you'd expect, sleight of hand, and the art of getting the audience to watch the wrong thing. He'd make broad, flamboyant gestures with one hand while making the one actually doing the trick look like it's holding still or look dull and uninteresting when his beautiful assistants wiggle and strut, doing his thing while your eyes were on them. In misdirection jobs, you get to be the waving hand or the dancing girl, keeping the attention of law enforcement or other runner teams away from whatever important drek is going down. Of course, all that attention is seldom admiring and it's unlikely any of the watchers have your best interests at heart, so be ready to be creative and fast on your feet.

THE OPPOSITION

Now that we have some idea what you're going to be doing once you hit the streets, we need to look at who might try to stop you or who will be presenting some form of obstacle. Some of the people here will hire you, some of them will work against you, but make no mistake—they're all the opposition. They've got resources you want, or are living the life you're looking for, or in some other way competing with you for whatever is out there. You're going to run into them, so the more you understand them, the more likely you are to thrive. Or, when you're just starting out, you'll have a better chance of staying alive.

THE CORPS

Most of your runs will be jobs that will wrap you all up in corporate interests, so we'll start there. That's not to say that every megacorp has its hand in every shadowrun, or that every corp sponsoring a run is one of the almighty ones with infinitely deep pockets. There are corporations and there are corporations. The little corporations are small enough to be barely worth the notice of the big fish in the pond. The thing about the little guys is, well, they're not that big. That means that they're trying to protect pretty much everything they have going for them. If you go up against a tiny corp, you may not encounter the armies that the megas can throw up against you, but you'll be facing another weapon that can be just as dangerous as bullets or spells: desperation.

The big corps with the AAA rating are the big time when it comes to shadowrunning. Most often, you'll be running against subsidiaries, outlying assets, or plausibly deniable facilities outside of main corporate territories. Once in a while, you'll find yourself on a run against one of the Big Ten direct-like.

Know this: The megas don't care about you. If you're somewhere you're not supposed to be, they'll try to kill you. They'll tear into you with lead, spirits, spells, IC, and anything else handy that they can throw at you. And that's the sugar-coated version. They're ready for anything, and they're ready to give better than they get.

Like the dead Chinese guy said, you should know your enemy.

THE BIG TEN

There are ten megacorps that have a AAA rating from the Corporate Council (hell, they *are* the Corporate Council). They have all the gold, so they make the rules, and you need to know the basics about them if you want to make it in the shadows.

ARES MACROTECHNOLOGY

Most shadowrunners know Ares from their Ares Arms division, and with good reason. The Ares Predator is the staple sidearm for the discerning runner. Run by wealthy playboy Damien Knight, the corp has a reputation as a very "American" outfit: gung-ho, militaristic, patriotic, and individualistic—Mom and apple pie, in other words. Don't let that fool you—sure, they're one of the better megas to work shadow ops for, but keep your eyes open, because they can be as underhanded as the rest. Ares specializes in law enforcement, military hardware and arms, aerospace (they have five orbital habitats), entertainment, automotive (the former General Motors is also part of the Ares family), and smaller divisions in many other areas.



AZTECHNOLOGY

If you've bought any kind of consumer goods recently, chances are you've contributed to Aztechnology's bottom line. Sixty percent of the goodies you find at your local Stuffer Shack (90% if you count the Stuffer Shack itself) come from Aztechnology. They make chemicals to trideo-game software to military goods and magical supplies. They've got their fingers in more pies than just about any other mega, and their public relations campaigns are second to none. Which is good, because they're also all about blood magic and evil conspiracies ... allegedly ...



EVO CORPORATION

"EVOLVE" they say on all their ads. Let's be fair, they are a megacorp that looks to the future. Their CEO is an ork and their largest stockholder is a free spirit.

They focus a lot on transhumanist projects ranging from bio-ware cybernetics, anti-aging experiments, and other even more out-there projects designed to take metahumanity to the next stage of evolution. They're the first megacorp to successfully set up a base on Mars. Evo leads the megas in goods and services designed with orks, trolls, elves, dwarfs, changelings, and other nonhuman people in mind. Their corporate culture is pretty touchy-feely, but don't freak, they can be as cold and calculating as any other mega.



HORIZON GROUP

Horizon is based in the midst of media wonderland Los Angeles, and they've managed to score many exclusive contracts for dealing with the development of



California. With a charismatic ex-sim star at the helm, Horizon specializes in anything that can be used to manipulate opinion (media, advertising, entertainment, social networking, etc.), along with consumer goods and services, real estate and development, and pharmaceuticals. Its corporate culture is “people-centered,” and employees are well taken care of and encouraged to develop their talents and pursue their interests on company time—as long as the corp reaps the profits.

MITSUHAMA COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES

This Japanacorp is all about the computers. Robotics, heavy industry, you name it—but it’s less well known that they’re one of the biggest manufacturers of magical goods around. There’s a rumor going around that they’re in bed with the Yakuza (who am I kidding, they’re all over each other). In any case, they’ve established quite a presence in North America over the last few years. The corp pays very well for success in shadowruns, but when you fail they ... disapprove. Be extra careful when you’re running against them, because their “zero-zone” policy of shooting first and shooting more later usually means failed runners get geeked.



NEONET

NeoNET is the primary power behind the Grid Overwatch Division, and they practically invented the wireless Matrix. Needless to say, they’re heavily invested in Matrix infrastructure, along with cyberware, electronics, software, biotech, aerospace, small arms, and many others. As a corporation, NeoNET is pretty fractured, with the major factions controlled by a long-time corporate raider, a reclusive dwarf, and the great dragon Celedyr. Runs for or against NeoNET are a grab-bag, all the time.



RENRAKU COMPUTER SYSTEMS

Renraku controls the world’s largest data repository and they own almost all of Asia’s local grids. And when nobody knows what kind of useful (or incriminating) information you’ve got squirreled away in your datastores, it’s going to take some strong motivation to risk messing with you. They’ve got a seriously traditional Japanese culture, and their Red Samurai military units are universally feared. Not respected, *feared*.



SAEDER-KRUPP HEAVY INDUSTRIES

Saeder-Krupp Heavy Industries can be summed up in one word: Lofwyr. The great dragon owns nearly 100 percent of this German-based megacorp, and he rules it with the kind of attention to detail that only one of his kind can maintain. It’s not impossible to put one over on Lofwyr, but it’s very difficult—and usually fatal. The wyrm doesn’t suffer fools gladly, and shadowrunners who go against him (or fail in one of his jobs) might just find themselves on his list—which is probably also his lunch menu. S-K is primarily involved in heavy industry, chemicals, finance, and aerospace with a presence in many other areas, which is just what you’d expect from the largest corporation in the world.



SHIAWASE CORPORATION

The oldest of the megas, Shiawase was the first corp to claim extraterrestrial status. A classic Japanese *zai-batsu*, Shiawase is run in a traditional “family” style, with most employees signing lifetime contracts and even marrying within the corp. Families, however, tend to ... squabble. As for what they do, what don’t they do? Either directly or through subsidiaries, Shiawase has its hands in nuclear power, environmental engineering, biotech, heavy industry, technical service, minerals, military goods, and a whole lot more.



WUXING INCORPORATED

The only Chinese player on the megacorp scene, Wuxing owns a sizeable chunk of the Pacific rim. The corporation is quiet and conservative, the stealthiest of the Big Ten. Their employees are steeped in Chinese culture, even those who’ve never been within a thousand clicks of Asia. Traditionally focused on finance and shipping concerns, Wuxing also specializes in magical services and goods, vying for the top spot of most mystic megacorp. Wuxing has also expanded heavily into other markets, including agriculture, engineering, consumer goods, and chemicals.



ORGANIZED CRIME

A lot of shadowrunners will tell you the only real difference between what we do and organized crime is the organized part. There’s some truth in that. Shadowrunners have occasionally formed organizations, like the legendary Assets, Inc., but as a rule it’s not something we do. People like us, shadowrunners, we don’t take orders well, we don’t like to share with anyone outside of our team (and sometimes we don’t share with them), not to mention regimentation, hierarchical organization, and all that lock-step are pretty much poison to us. Organized crime, on



the other hand, thrives on that stuff. Organized crime does the things large numbers of people do well: deal narcotics and other additives; run protection rackets; operate gambling rings—just about anything that requires an army and turns a profit. This means organized crime can often be found deeply entwined with legitimate, respected businesses. In some cases it's hard to tell where the crime ends and the business begins.

Despite their violent reputations, the organizations that make up organized crime eschew pyrotechnics whenever possible. Fire-fights bring police attention, and could result in important people getting killed or otherwise indisposed. As a general rule, the work they do goes better when no one is looking, so they put a lot of effort into keeping a low profile. But don't be confused—and don't get stupid. Just because they'd rather keep their guns holstered and the money flowing, don't think for a minute they won't get down and dirty when they need to.

The Mafia is an extensive and significant presence in every major North American city, most European cities, and a lot of cities everywhere else. They like cities. They usually don't work closely with the megacorporations because, let's face it, they are a megacorporation. The main difference between the recognized corps and the Mafia is that the when there's infighting between Mafia's divisions it's slightly more likely to involve body counts.

The Yakuza, by contrast, have tied their fortunes to Mitsuhamma Computer Technologies. This is not to say that every Yakuza syndicate has a connection to Mitsuhamma—they don't; and some fight tooth and nail against those who do. But the Yakuza and MCT are inextricably tied together. As in four high-ranking Yakuza

between them own about forty-five percent of the megacorporation. Mitsuhamma uses Yakuza foot soldiers to do their dirty work, while the Yakuza uses MCT as the greatest money-laundering organization the world has ever seen. The corporate association gives the Yakuza a ruthless efficiency; anyone who deals with them watches their manners.

The Triads have their origins in what used to be China and differ from the other major crime networks in that they are decentralized—they have no central leadership, no supreme commander or high council or arbitration committee. This can mean a whole new set of protocols when you move from one Triad's turf to another; what kept you alive in one place might kill you in the next. Their lack of central leadership means conflict resolution within the Triads is often bloody and brutal—though they are capable of considerable restraint and finesse if the situation calls for it. The lack of central control also makes them more flexible in adapting to—and taking over—new territories. If they ever got over their cultural prejudice against women in authority and non-human metatypes in general they'd own a lot bigger piece of the pie. The Triads have the usual gambling, drugs, and prostitution operations, of course, but their specialty is Awakened drugs. For some reason the Triads attract a disproportionate percentage of mages, which makes them very efficient at finding, testing, and preparing the drugs with the best street value.

Remember when I told you organized crime liked to keep a low profile, avoid the spotlight, and keep attention of itself? I was not talking about the Russian Vory v Zakone. They can't match the money and manpower of the other major syndicates, so their

LEADING NORTH AMERICAN ORGANIZED CRIME GROUPS

The O'Malley syndicate (Mafia): Dona Rowena O'Malley runs all things Mafia in Seattle, simultaneously controlling the Finnigan, Gianelli, and Ciarniello families. She ascended to that position with managerial acumen, effective leadership skills, and a dead cold ruthless streak that takes no prisoners. Now that she has the Gianellis and Ciarniellos working for her instead of against her, she is working to secure her territory against anyone thinking they deserve a piece of Seattle.

The Shotozumi-rengo (Yakuza): Led by Oyabun Hanzo Shotozumi of Seattle, this syndicate has a presence in most major North American cities. For the most part local groups act independently of each other, but they all seek out the wisdom of their oyabun and listen when he speaks. Questions have been raised—okay, murmured—as to Hanzo's ability to deal with the pressures he's under on so many fronts: a newly aggressive *capa di capi* in Seattle; epic *Sturm und Drang* involving a great dragon and unruly invading forces in Denver; and impatient, ambitious underlings in his own organization murmuring questions about his ability to deal. In particular, Oyabun Honjowara of New Jersey is rumored to be building a power base of his own, and smart money's betting he'll make a play for the top spot in the rengo in the not-too-distant future.

Large Circle League (Triad): Maybe not as powerful as some of their Southeast Asian counterparts, the Large Circle League of New York City is more potent than a lot of people realize.

They've used the Manhattan Development Consortium to their advantage and infiltrated many corporations, especially Shiawase. They use the information they gather as leverage. Nothing too overt; mostly just guiding and/or pushing events in that corporate-controlled sprawl in ways they want them to go. They have a more overt and ongoing battle with the local Mafia lately, over control of the sprawl's drug trade.

Povryejhda (Vory): Led by Andrei Petschukov (nickname: Terminator), this Seattle branch of the Vory is chock-full of Russian loyalists and a fair number of Red Army personnel. They have built something—or are up to something, depending on who you talk to—on a large piece of land they acquired near Puyallup. No one knows what that something or somethings is because they've surrounded their property with a massive wall and backed it up with a pretty impressive astral barrier. What's happening in there is anyone's guess—and there's plenty of guessing going on.

The Outer Circle (Koshari): The leaders of Koshari circles in Santa Fe, Phoenix, Denver, and Las Vegas work together, divvying up territory and business and making sure no one steps on anyone else's toes. They also regulate where and how far smaller operations can expand. Right now elements in Los Angeles are flexing and agitating; they think it's time the big four became the big five.



primary public relations tool is intimidation. Their go-to negotiation technique is blunt brutality; the first indication the Vory has entered a new area is usually the bodies of criminals who thought it was their turf. The Vory want to shake things up, they hit every confrontation at the full charge, loud and raging. It doesn't always work, but I'll tell you this—no one ever likes to see these guys coming.

In the Hopi tradition, Koshare is the spirit of overdoing things—gluttonous, disruptive, and irreverent, the universal cautionary example. Koshare does all the things people should not do, illustrating why they should never do them. Which is why the network of Native American organized crime rings call themselves the Koshari. They do all the things you would expect an organized crime outfit to do, but they're especially skilled at talislegging, the illicit smuggling of magical reagents and telesma. If you're a T-bird pilot in the western half of North America, depending on the impression you make on the Koshari, you'll either be recruited, warned off their territory, or shut down hard.

GANGS

We don't have the room or the time to fill you in on all the gangs that are banging around whatever sprawl you're sitting in right now. Small places seem to get by without a gang, but get much over two thousand locals and you've got at least one gang. Over a million locals and you're talking a healthy gang network. You should take the time to figure out that network—doing one gang's work on another's turf is more likely to get you killed if you don't know that's what you're doing.

There are two types of gangs, and by and large as a runner you're most likely to come across some flavor of the many street gangs. Street gangs are all about territory. A few broken blocks, a handful of abandoned buildings, the streets around their favorite dive, fifteen piles of different piles of brick, a neighborhood, you name it. Whatever they've got, it's theirs. They don't always know what to do with it—maybe deal minor drugs or run half-assed protection rackets—but they'll defend it against all comers. Which usually means hanging out and challenging anyone they don't know to a fight. There are street gangs that aren't all about the territory. Some gangs are racially based, like Seattle's elf-only Ancients; some are bound together by a common interest, like the Halloweeners, who dress up like ghouls to terrify and assault civilians unfortunate enough to cross their path. As a general rule gangers are young, raw, untrained, unpredictable, quick-tempered, and eager to mix things up. So yeah, if the needs of whatever job you're on do not require you to deal with them, avoid gangs. Unless you think your evening would be much improved by a fistfight.

What street gangs do to a collection of sprawl blocks, go-gangs do to highways. Riding around on souped-up cycles and choppers, these gang members look for any driver that shows a milligram of fear. The least hesitation, just looking like you're thinking things over, can trigger an attack: A ram, or head-on chicken with a sawed-off shotgun propped on the handlebar. There's no point to their attacks—the attack is the point. They are random, indiscriminate, and leap to violence the way a frog leaps to water. Know where the go-gangs are and avoid them.

ACADEMICS

All right, this may seem odd. We're not known for hanging around in classrooms much or being on the cutting edge of ac-

ademic research. But academics have their uses. They invariably have schools of business, which can provide you with all sorts of corporate information that PR flacks aren't willing to share. And if you're looking for any sort of historical information—about the Matrix and technology, about politics and nations, about magic and spell formulae—academics know more than the common man about a wide range of topics. And universities teach languages—if you need something translated, check them out. A university makes a good first choice when looking for their kind of data; compared to their corporate counterparts, profs are surprisingly low budget.

Generally speaking, universities come in three flavors: public, private nonprofit, and private for-profit. That last one is the most common, as the corps like to send their people through their own institutions; it's a quality control issue—corps want people who see the world the way they do, undistracted by contrary data or plagued by independent thoughts. Most public universities are hanging by a thread. Government budgets are tight, and it's hard to justify funding schools when public perception is they only serve students the megacorps didn't want. It's like there's a stigma attached to anyone trying to better herself on her own; which sounds a bit like megacorp PR. Despite that, some public universities remain well-respected bastions of learning, insofar as anyone cares about that drek. The University of Washington in Seattle is one notable example.

Private nonprofit universities provide a resource for students who have what corps want but have managed to make their way without committing to any of them. Yet. Many of the private nonprofits don't just survive, they thrive—such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Thaumaturgy and CalTech. Which brings us to the next category.

MANA CHASERS

Whenever anything new hits the world, two things happen in short order. First, someone figures out how to make money off of it; and second, someone figures out how to use it for porn. So it is with magic. We're going to focus on the first one, but yeah—magic's used for porn, just like everything else.

Aside from the business of wage mages we talked about before, there are a number of other ways to generate money from magic, because wherever the money is, that's where we should be. Researching and developing new spell formulae is a big one. There are a number of wealthy spellslingers out there, and they're generally willing to lay down a nice pile of cash for something that will give them a competitive advantage over their peers. There's also a lot of money to be made in the area of magical reagents and their uses. Research in this area has been particularly profitable lately as more uses for reagents have been found, which has led to increased demand for these rare items. Arcanoarcheologists, researchers, critter hunters, and anybody who thinks they've got a knack for it are scouring the globe, gathering up as many rare animals, vegetables, minerals, and not-sure-whats as possible. Most go into making reagents, but a lot of stuff no one knows for sure what it does—a lot of mage research is about figuring that out.

As you might expect, the leaders in magic sales are the megacorps, namely Aztechnology and Mitsuhama, but if you're talking about the bleeding edge of magic research, you have to talk about the Draco Foundation and the Atlantean Foundation. The Draco Foundation came into being when the great dragon Dunkelzahn died in an explosion on the day he was inaugurated



as UCAS president. Since he was a great dragon, that meant he was sitting on a pile of wealth, and he left a will that had a huge number of odd bequests, including many that people are chasing after to this day. The Draco Foundation was set up to manage his affairs and estate, while the Dunkelzahn's Institute of Magical Research was established to further the dragon's magical research. Working in coordination, these two organizations are formidable players in almost anything even tangentially related to magic.

The relatively recent rise of the Draco Foundation has brought mixed reactions from its older counterpart, the Atlantean Foundation, which—as you might guess from the name—began as an outfit looking for and into anything and everything that might be connected to the lost island of Atlantis. In the process they developed considerable relic-hunting and magic-researching capabilities. Dunkelzahn recognized this by dropping five billion nuyen on the Atlanteans in his will, which amped up their capabilities pretty significantly. This means they've got a friendly relationship with the Dracos—which is perfectly understandable, as I'm pretty friendly with everyone who's given me five billion, too. But there's a rivalry going on as well; the two groups are often going after the same things. If you're going relic-hunting, be ready to outrun teams from one or both of these groups.

POLITICOS

Politicians may not have the clout they did back in the day, but there are still taxes to be collected, laws to enforce, infrastructure to be maintained, and careers to be made. Most government crap goes on way over your head. You don't need to worry about who's president or king of whatever nation you're in, and almost all state and regional objectives require resources and manpower beyond any runner team's inventory. What you want are the local officials—mayors, aldermen, trustees, that sort of thing—who enforce the laws, collect the taxes, fund emergency and rescue services, and try to ensure everything works. These local leaders may not be as powerful as the corps, but as long as you're on their turf they've got a lot of ways to help you or hinder you. Good news is they're far enough down the food chain there's a chance you can afford whatever it takes to buy their momentary cooperation. They're easier to blackmail, too. Ask around, look around, figure out whom you need to know and what you need to know about them—you never know when you're going to need them.

Besides the actual politicians, the other people you want to know are the policlubs. If there is any cause in the Sixth World that two or more people can agree on, they'll form policlub around it. Sometimes the point of the club is to, you know, actually participate in politics. Other times the clubs are a cover for illegal activities and a lot of them are just an excuse for people to get together and get wasted. Most of these groups wield no discernible power; you can pretty much ignore them. Others, well there're a few you should pay attention to.

One is the Humanis Policlub. Elves, dwarfs, trolls, and orks have been in the world for more than six decades, but for some people that hasn't been long enough to get used to the idea or to like having them around. Especially the orks and trolls. Following the proud tradition of racist groups since the dawn of time, Humanis is dedicated to putting a friendly face on hate. They're not against anyone, they'll tell you, they're just pro-human. They don't want to take anything away from the other metatypes, they just want to make sure humans get their fair share (which is pretty much everything).

Humanis serves as a nexus for a whole range of like-minded groups, from the unpleasant and aggressive Alamos 20,000 to the ultraviolent Hand of Five. If you're a non-human, if you like a non-human, or if you're going to be traveling anywhere non-humans are going to be, you need to be aware of what Humanis and its ilk are up to. They could pop in and mess things up at any time. Be warned.

The whole Newtonian thing about action causing reaction works with people, just like it does in physics. There are some notable pro-metahuman groups, from powerful lobbyists and organizers of the Ork Rights Commission to the radical and violence-prone Sons of Sauron. Like the anti-meta groups, these organizations are capable of causing distractions or chaos wherever you may be. And if you get pro-meta and anti-meta groups in the same place at the same time—well, I hope your contingency plans can deal with random explosions and scattered bodies.

In addition to racists of various flavors, you also need to keep an eye out for the various iterations of the neo-anarchist policlub. Sometimes they go by that name, just with capitals (“Neo-Anarchist”); but depending on the location and the situation they might call themselves the Panopticans or the Lambeth Martyrs or the People's Party or anything that sounds symbolic, sincere, and all about the little guy. Individual groups within the neo-anarchist policlub are, well, individual. Some are wild-eyed bomb throwers who think everything should be reduced to rubble before trying to build something new; some think everything should be reduced to rubble and nothing built; some are earnest reformers, working within existing systems; some want to change how nations work; some want an end to all nations; some like coffee; some like tea. What unites these disparate agendas and the people who love them is a to-the-core distrust of centralized power in all its forms and wiles. We're talking both megacorps and big government. They're all about individuals controlling their own lives, and families and communities living the way they want to live. That is enough to make them radicals in the eyes of anybody with any authority. They are outsiders, often criminalized by the people in power. Just like us. Which makes them natural allies—provided you have a high tolerance for rhetoric.

THE LAW

The most annoying thing local politicos can do is sic local law enforcement on you because local ain't local anymore. Back in the day law enforcement was a tangle of local, state, and federal authorities doing their own things—barely talking to each other and almost never sharing data. Oh sure, if you were a serial killer they'd spread the word and be on the lookout; but if you were a burglar or practiced any other illegal trade, you could pretty much move from one jurisdiction to the next and get a fresh start with none the wiser.

These days things are both worse and better. The bad part is most sprawls save their limited budgets by privatizing law enforcement—which means cops are corps. The two big boys are Lone Star, an independent that boasts about its tradition of no-holds-barred Texas justice (i.e., brutality), and Knight Errant, a division of Ares Corporation. These two compete for big-ticket contracts; Knight Errant recently wrestled the plum of Seattle from Lone Star's hands. Other major security providers include Sakura Security, which has a large presence in Japan, German security giant Sternschutz, France's Esprit Industries (a subsidiary of Aztechnology), and Mitsuhamas's one-two punch of Parashield and Petro-



vski Security. These companies have international reach, and their centralized databases are everywhere they are; do something in one jurisdiction and all the others know about it. So stay out of the database. Give them nothing—your name, your picture, your favorite make of whiskey, anything—because some smart cop, or smarter program, can use that anything to finger you. The good part is that while law enforcement corps share all data internally, it's in their best interest to make their rivals look as inept as possible—which means they never tell each other anything. So as long as you know who's covering what turf, you can still find cracks to fall into.

But don't get cocky. Law enforcement contracts can change hands in a blink; what's Knight Errant territory one day may be Lone Star the next. Meaning you may be an unknown free agent one day and an actively sought fugitive the next. And be aware many sprawls have multiple security companies in their borders—Knight Errant may have the city contract while Lone Star covers residential or maybe corporate compounds. Make sure you know who's patrolling which streets when.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

The thing about living in the shadows is, the denizens of the dusk tend not to be well organized. We're here because we don't get along with all the rules and protocols and drek formal organization requires. But. We're alive because we understand that sometimes it's better to work together.

One of the premier shadow groups is JackPoint, a collection of exceptional shadow minds gathered by FastJack, perhaps the best hacker the world has ever seen. Jack had to step down from the network recently, but the group is still going strong. The members of it aren't known, and its information is kept private, but if you can get wind of anything they're putting together, know that you're hearing from people who know their shit.

The Denver Nexus is another shadow group with a solid rep. They're hackers guarding the Denver Data Haven, one of the greatest stores of secret knowledge the world has ever seen. Or perhaps we should say "never seen," as not too many people get a look at what's stored there.

Then there are groups that live in the shadows but are not tied to shadowrunners. They like the dim light because of the secrecy it provides. One of these is the mysterious gathering of mages known as the Black Lodge. A cataclysmic upheaval that hit the UCAS capital of DeeCee in the summer of 2073 was blamed on the Black Lodge, and many people think the Lodge was somehow involved in the recent battle between the great dragons Lofwyr and Alamaïs that ended with Alamaïs dead. Everyone knows that the Black Lodge has their claws into a whole host of politicians and other leaders, but no one knows which. Short form: if you spot people in black robes casting weird mojo, take some notes, call the authorities, and get the hell out of there.

New Revolution is dedicated to re-establishing the old United States of America, a noble cause everyone else recognizes as a stupid-ass idea that totally ignores the current state of the world. In 2064 New Revolution attempted a coup, killing the UCAS president and secretary of Defense and making a mess. Vice President Nadja Daviar survived and teamed with Brigadier General Angela Colloton and kept the UCAS together. They hunted down, tried, and executed New Revolution's leaders and everyone congratulated themselves on ridding the world of the lunatics. Yet here we are, over a decade later, and the New Revolution is still around.

General Colloton helped stand off the coup and hunt the leaders down, but has been dogged by rumors linking her to the radicals for years. Rumors that didn't stop her from becoming UCAS president. If they're true, she's in a heck of a position to build New Revolution into a major player; I cannot tell you how many betting pools there are on that one.

OFF THE JOB

Like just about everyone with a pulse, you're going to spend most of your time getting ready for work, working, or recovering from work. But every now and then you might find yourself with free time and a couple of extra nuyen. Luckily for you, there are a wide range of activities to make sure that you and your money don't develop a long-term relationship.

MONEY

Speaking of money, always remember to make sure you've got the right kind of currency for wherever you'll be spending. The dominant currency in the world is the nuyen, but some stubborn nations insist on issuing their own currencies (like England's pound or Germany's Deutsche Mark). Still, even in those nations the nuyen tends to be accepted readily. All of which is rendered pretty much moot by electronic transactions. Actual cash is rarely used—maybe for special transactions or in areas so backward they don't have the Matrix (scary, but real). You might get dinged for conversion fees in states with local currency, but that's about the only hassle.

Certified credsticks are the tool of choice for people who don't trust wireless transfers or want to avoid leaving any trails. Smaller than your thumb, credsticks carry funds certified by one of the financial powers of the world. The bigger the bank, the more stable the money stored on the credstick, so most people like to use sticks certified by the biggest bank there is, the Zurich-Orbital Gemeinschaft Bank.

Corporations jumped on the currency bandwagon decades ago and started offering **corporate scrip**, usable only in corporate locales. The megacorps love paying their employees in scrip, as it keeps money in the corporate family. The fact that corporate scrip's uses are somewhat narrow make it less valuable, but if that's all there is, take it. Remember, the megas are huge—somebody somewhere wants scrip and there's a thriving market for scrip exchanges.

THE MATRIX

When you want to amuse yourself in your downtime, this is where you start. Music's on there, movies are on there, sports broadcasts, virtual nightclubs, chat rooms, epic battles on twisted landscapes, and so on and so forth.

The Matrix is around most of us every minute of every day, so much that we don't think about it much. We just use it. Most of the time we use it as augmented reality (AR), an overlay that adds information and occasional glitz to the world around us in the form of augmented reality objects, or AROs. You can also go whole-hog and dive into virtual reality (VR), leaving your meat body behind for a trip into the realm of pure information. While the speed of VR is convenient for hackers, most people like the ability to use the Matrix while carrying on with their lives at the same time.



With AR, the Matrix is constantly around you. As long as you've got the right gear, messages from friends pop up as floating windows hovering in your field of vision, moving as you move. Stores you walk by tell you about their current sales customized to your preferences based on what you've bought before. Music and video samples are everywhere, waiting for you to open them with a quick gesture and see if there's anything you like.

How do these music and movies match up to your taste, and how do they know where to find you? The magic of corporate control. You see, the Matrix has gone through two major Crashes, and been re-invented after each one. After the second one, back in 2064, the Matrix made the leap to wireless, and along with that it moved into a neo-anarchist ideal of freedom and openness, a network open and accessible to anyone with the tools to log on. That lasted a good decade until the corps realized there was a resource out there they weren't exploiting. After confessing that sin to their respective clergy and saying a few Hail Marys, the corps went about setting that mistake right, instituting more controls over the Matrix so that they can better shape what goes where. Naturally, their best customers get the best bandwidth, while the less-resource-endowed are left to deal with spotty access and slow traffic.

Unless we know how to play the game. The clampdown of corporate control has re-ignited the battle between hackers and the overseers of the Matrix, as shadowrunners look to exploit the weaknesses of the new system and stay one step ahead of security.

But that's mostly another topic. For now, just know that everyone and everything is on the Matrix, but the easiest things to find are the things programmers are betting you want to buy.

MUSIC

Music's been around since homo erectus noticed different things made different noises when you hit them and it's not going anywhere. (Though frankly, some of it sounds like Neanderthals banging rocks. But there's no accounting for taste, right?) Point is, whatever your taste in music may be, you can find someone playing it. For classic rock fans, the legendary Maria Mercurial is on her comeback tour, laying down the mighty riffs that made her a star back in the '50s, and Concrete Dreams is once again calling down the thunder. Orxsploitation, the sound of the streets, continues to be blasted in sprawl barrens, with CrimeTime acting as the old-school standard bearer for the movement. Disposable electro-pop will never die, no matter how many stakes we bury in its pulsating heart, with the Latch-Key Kids currently playing the leading role in blasting annoyingly catchy ditties into everyone's lizard brain. And elven folk exists for those who don't like their music turned up to eleven, with Tir Tairngire icon Deirdre showing everyone how it's done.

TRIDEO

Sometimes you just gotta plop down in your favorite chair (or on your favorite floorboard if all the furniture has been burned for heat) and let flickering images take over your brain. For these times, trideo is there for you, bringing you the latest in news, sports, and entertainment programming. While 3-D was clumsy and clunky in its earliest years, now it drops you believably into the middle of the story. And the level of immersion is up to you—stick with the visual and audio versions if you want simplicity, or plug into simsense to get the full-bore, multi-sensory, emotion-enhancing experience. You can watch sports events as if you were in the stands, or you can buzz around the field, seeing the game as the players see it.

There are fictional trids for every taste. The *Cree & Dido* series provide the slapstick and physical comedy the masses love, while the hit *Water Margin* has spawned an action series about shadowrunners fighting government corruption in Seattle (a theme that has gained extra resonance thanks to recent scandals in Seattle Governor Kenneth Brackhaven's administration). Like reality shows? *Toxic Hunter* takes you to the most blighted spots in the world and puts host Brennan "Heavy" O'Dell against the local critters; his recent battle with a pack of ghouls in Lagos was a ratings winner. The classic *Neil the Ork Barbarian*, a favorite of your parents when they were kids, has gotten a slick upgrade and reboot that puts you, the viewer, right in Neil's furry boots. First-person medieval sword-swinging, fur-bikini-slashing, muscle-flexing action.

SPORTS

If the twentieth century was about figuring out how to turn professional sports into big business, the twenty-first was about how to best use sports business to benefit other corporate interests. Basketball, baseball, football, soccer, and hockey still draw crowds, but now fans can follow their favorite player's MeFeed, watching the trideos they watch, listening to the music they listen to, and learning about their favorite fashion and foods—all of which you can buy with a quick gesture at the right ARO. Where kids once dreamed of following their idols by working hard to earn their way into the big leagues to become stars in their own right, they're now content to just buy as much of their idols as possible.

Of course, the megacorps have been growing new sports that give consumers/fans the addictive rush of fast-moving action and bone-crushing violence. Right now the most popular new sports are urban brawl and combat biking. Urban brawl is a no-holds-barred variant of capture-the-flag played out on city streets with guns and magic. Combat biking is something like polo, only played on motorcycles. By psychopaths.

FOOD

Back when overpopulation of the world was a serious concern, people turned to the mighty soybean as a promising food source (when combined with lentils and green food dye, it makes a tasty ... oh, never mind). It's packed with protein, very versatile, and fairly easy to grow. Thanks to several global plagues and ecological disasters, world population is not quite as big a concern as the amount of arable land on the planet, but the net result is the same: Soy is a major food staple. Soykaf is the beverage that gets us moving in the morning, soyburgers are a popular lunchtime choice, and tofu is to our dinners what chicken was in the twentieth century. There are a few restaurants and grocery stores here and there that sell real meat, but they tend to be beyond the budget of all but the most affluent.

While meat is rare, sugar substitutes are plentiful. The megacorporate food producers of the world know how much people like their sweets, and know satisfying cravings keeps populations in line. The Stuffer Shacks and other convenience stores of the world are filled with Sweeteez, Krak-I-Snaps, and other nutrition-free foods that give corporate drones and poor shadowrunners a small bit of pleasure in their lives.

SEX

I thought about saying "Romance," but threw that out because there ain't nobody doing the box of chocolates, bouquet of ros-



WHERE TO SHOP

You need stuff, and there is a vast array of vendors whose every moment is dedicated to selling you stuff. What a great world, huh? Anyway, here are some representative store chains to give you some idea where to go to get what you need.

DEPARTMENT STORES

Luxury: Lordstrungs, Lacy's

First-Class: Fallon and Nelson, The Beaux

Family Style: Wordsworth, Lears and Mervins, Meyer's Superstores

No Frills: Kong-Wal Mart, Saver's Central, WeaponsWorld

GROCERIES AND CONVENIENCE STORES

Luxury: Society Grocers

First-Class: Meyers Groceries, Natural Vat Foods

Family Style: Allenson's Groceries, Carrefour, Carry&Save, SAMS Virtual Marketplaces, Quickway

No Frills: Stuffer Shack, Loco Foods, MiniMart, Buy-Low Foods

RESTAURANTS

Luxury: Azteca International, The Edge, Takuri's, Trattoria Pagilacci's

First-Class: Green Village, The Gravity Bar, La Gallaria, Kau Kau's, Purple Haze

Family Style: Gracie's for Ribs, Bosco's, McKraken's Seafood, Bangkok Hut, Maximillion's

No Frills: Cap'n Beef, McHugh's, Nacho Mama, Nukit Burgers, Street Pizza, You Should Not Eat So Much!

HOTELS

Luxury: TripleTree, Lucas, Hilton, Sheraton, Elysium

First-Class: Westin, Gold Lion Inn

Family Style: Wylie's Gala, Rubikan Int'l

No Frills: Rent & Rest, Comfy Cubicle, Aston's Moneymakers, The Cubes

COMPUTERS AND ELECTRONICS

Luxury: Nybbles & Bytes, Gate's Computer Showcase

First-Class: Hardware Etc., Blood Monies Software

Family Style: Software Sellers, Microdeck, DeGear's Electronics

No Frills: Computer Exchange, Hacker's Delight, Kennedy's Used Electronics

CLUB FRANCHISES

End of the Earth, Farnsworth's, Miami, Dante's Inferno, Equilibrium, Flair, Congregation of Rhythms

SPECIALTY CHAINS

Armanté (Fashion), Body + Art (Bodyart), Life by Evo (Design Megastore), Lord's AutoShops (Auto Repair), Lore Stores Inc., Pentagrams (Talismonger), Robyn's (Hardcopy Bookstore), Facets of New York (Jeweler), Link'n'Fix (Commlink Repair Clinic), Zoé (Fashion)

es, and horse-drawn carriage ride in the park these days. Then I thought about calling it "Dating," but it's not like you can ask Jane the leather-clad razorgirl if she'd like to go to the malt shop with you Friday afternoon. So I decided that since I've been straight up with you so far, I'll call the primal urge what it is.

So yeah, people in the Sixth World have sex. In plenty of ways, in plenty of combinations, and across all metatypes; gender is no object. You got a fetish, you can be damn sure that someone's ready to indulge you.

Like everything else in the world, sex has been commodified, a slickly packaged product designed to make you forget it once meant something real. Prostitution thrives where it's legal (about 99.998% of the known world). Some brothels cater to specific fantasies, stocked with body types or metatypes their customers want. If your fantasies are more specific—and you don't care much about the human cost of your actions—head to a bunraku parlor, where the employees are pretty much puppets, surgically altered and implanted with personafixes so that they become stunning imitations of simstars and other celebrities. For just a few hundred nuyen, you can spend an hour pretending you're someone they'd give the time of day—or whatever you have in mind. A booming, and less exploitive, industry is simsense porn, which lets you feel everything the actors look like they should be feeling. (I know some actors in these things—it's a job with every wiggle choreographed and fake shriek rehearsed. You don't want to experience the kind of boredom they're really feeling.)

With sex and prostitution being as open as it is in the Sixth World, you might think it reduces the opportunities for blackmail. You'd be right. But only partly. There are still some taboos, some lines that should not be crossed. Many spouses tend to expect fidelity (and property laws still favor the wronged party), so finding incriminating evidence of cheating is still effective leverage. Also, sex with children (though the actual age varies from place to place) is out of bounds, and bestiality and necrophilia are the kind of things that can negatively impact a career if they come to light. In the end, your job is to know the basic sexual mores of the area you're in, so you can use violations of those mores against select people.

STAYING HEALTHY

Staying healthy in the world ain't easy, and not just because people are always pointing guns at each other. There are plenty of other threats to your health to worry about.

In the early twenty-first century, the world was an overcrowded mess. Then a new disease came along and wiped out about a quarter of the population. Whether it was the planet's way of rebalancing the ecosystem or something we did to ourselves is still debated, but Virally Induced Toxic Allergy Syndrome, or VITAS, was nasty. It triggered something akin to anaphylactic shock—even in people with no allergies—and people suffocated to death when their respiratory system swelled shut. There's old video around the Matrix of victims fighting to inhale; it ain't pretty.

Every now and then a new strain of VITAS raises its ugly head—nothing anywhere near as bad as the first outbreak, but it keeps the medicos on their toes. Then, in the 2040s, we got something entirely new: the human-metahuman vampire virus, or HMMHV. This did not, as the name implies, give victims immortality or the power to change into bats and wolves. What it did do was leech the body of radiation-fighting pigment, stop the production of red blood cells, spurred dental development,

and shut down the digestive system. Victims, no matter what color they began with, turned dead flesh grey, had to stay out of the sun, grew fangs, and needed copious amounts of fresh blood to stay alive. That last part's important—they are not immortal. If you're ever trapped in a barrens alley with some nosferatu closing in on you, a few bullets in the right place will stop them for good.

As was the case with VITAS, there are a number of strains of HMMHV that cause different types of pseudo-undead, including ghouls, banshees, and things that don't match legends. The dark alleys of Sixth World got a little darker with this virus.

But the Sixth World doesn't need to rely on viruses to mess you up. There are a staggering number of mind-altering drugs, from the street favorite novacoke to the mind-bending zen, from the pure combat rush of kamikaze to the astral sensation of deepweed. If there's anything you want to feel, there's a drug that delivers it. We've also got new forms of addiction, like better-than-life chips (BTLs, or beetles). To make one of these, take your basic simsense recording of some powerful emotional experience, then amp up every bit of the content. Want a bigger adrenaline rush than surfing a ten-meter wave, or a more brain-crushing thrill than skydiving from the stratosphere? Want to experience something better than sex? Then upload a BTL right into your brain. Fair warning, though: You might find reality pales in comparison, and you'll spend the rest of your life enduring the pale shadows so you can have a few moments of full-color BTL bliss.

So we've got your viruses, we've got your drugs, and we've got all the other diseases and situations that have been killing metahumanity for hundreds or thousands of years. The question you need to ask yourself now is, how do I get help once I'm messed up?

Public health systems range from inadequate to non-existent. There's just too much money in medicine to leave it to the do-gooders. You want medical care of any sort, it's going to cost you.

The best care is provided by the healthcare corps, and as long as you're willing to shell out a pile of nuyen, you get the works, including the best technology and ambulance service to anywhere in the world, even combat hot zones. But you probably don't have that much cash, or you wouldn't be slugging it out in the shadows. Still, you might be able to afford some basics, like medics who will pull your bleeding carcass out of the barrens and stabilize you until your spellslinger friend arrives with a heal spell. That may not sound like much, but it can save your life. That's why most shadowrunners with any sort of rep at all buy a basic contract with one of the providers. The venerable DocWagon is the most popular, with decades of experience navigating the meanest streets, but Evo's CrashCart, with access to the parent corp's cutting edge med tech, is gaining ground.

If you can't afford a medical contract, you can always go to one of the hospitals or clinics run by the med corps and pay for whatever you need at the moment. If you can't afford that, you need a street doc. If you survive more than two runs, chances are you'll pick up some basic first aid, like how to keep blood from spurting everywhere. The more runs you survive, the more you learn. Some runners have a real knack for anatomy and first aid and earned a rep for doing good work; injured runners took to seeking them out and before long they had a sideline practicing unlicensed med in severely non-sterile locations. Sometimes you'll find a real doctor operating a street clinic. Or former doctors now on the streets due to addiction, crime, incompetence or some combination thereof. A lot of us tend to find the upgraded former runners to be more reli-

able than the downgraded doctors, but in the end whichever you choose, you're taking a risk. Especially if you're looking for someone to install a secondhand cybereye, cheap.

GETTING AROUND

One thing you need to always remember in the Sixth World—after “Everything has a price”—is corporations love predictability and live to control. Take GridGuide, marketed as the ultimate convenience for the commuter. It's a programmed control system for your personal vehicle that takes you where you want to go with little input from you, the driver. And by golly traffic flows more smoothly when everyone uses GridGuide and you can do other things while you drive, so it's great. Of course, GridGuide only works where the corps want it to work, which is fine for corporate drones on their daily commutes, but no good at all if you need to go into the barrens or a not-general-ly-open-to-the-public industrial area. And even if you're in approved areas, GridGuide doesn't respond well to emergencies, like evasive maneuvers or quick getaways. In fact, if you try to do anything GridGuide doesn't think is wise or safe, the system is going to drag you down. (But doesn't it always?) If you ever intend to go off the beaten path, or to maybe do something out of the ordinary, you're going to need to learn how to drive and to have a vehicle that does not depend on the power of the grid.

If you're traveling from city to city or country to country, you can rely on your personal vehicle, but there are other modes of transportation available. Trains and buses are available in most sprawls, and they can take you from sprawl to sprawl. The security in intra-city transit is pretty light; if you have the nuyen, you can ride. You may need to pass through security and have your SIN checked for longer trips, but on trains the scanners are cheap and easily fooled. Plus, you get to ride a bullet train, which tends to be awesome. If they remembered to clean it.

If you opt for air travel, you've got three choices: regular, sub-orbital, and semiballistic.

Semiballistic is the fastest and the most expensive; it can get you from Europe to North America in less than an hour, and you'll pay through the nose for the privilege. Security is tight. SIN scanners are top of the line and nearly impossible to fool. All weapons will be checked (don't even think about explosives) and all cyberware must be deactivated.

Sub-orbitals are slightly slower, slightly cheaper, and slightly easier to infiltrate. Slightly. Sub-orbital passengers are usually megacorporate clients, and the corps want them to feel safe. Security is tight, and violations will be dealt with harshly.

Regular air travel is for regular people. Security is present, but quality varies from provider to provider; if your fake SIN and forged documentation is good enough you should do fine. Depending.

Of course, if you want to avoid public transportation all together, there are ways to get around. Hitch a ride in the back of a cargo van, or in a container ship, or as part of a drone convoy. And then there's the almighty t-bird, the favorite choice of smugglers, spies, and anyone else involved in illicit border crossings. There are several different types of t-birds, but they have a few common characteristics: they're small, maneuverable, capable of landing in tight spots, and able to fly low to avoid radar. Learn how to pilot one of these babies well, and you'll never lack for work. Or anti-aircraft fire from folks you've pissed off.





SWEET HOME SEATTLE

The Seattle Metroplex: the Emerald City, premier metroplex, the western port and outpost of the United Canadian and American States, an urban locale of culture, history, and vibrant activity nestled amidst the Native American Nations and the thriving ecosystem of the Pacific Northwest. At least, that's how it looks in the brochure. Here's what it should really look like:

The Seattle Sprawl: city in the shadows, the crazy, mixed-up, fucked-up place that has been and continues to be one of the great havens for shadowrunners and edge societies in the world. If you want the real skinny on what's going on in the Seattle shadows, then you've come to the right place.

THE LAYOUT

The Seattle Metroplex covers nearly 4,000 square kilometers around Puget Sound (making it the second smallest state in the UCAS, after Rhode Island). It is divided into eleven districts, in-

cluding Downtown (a.k.a. Seattle City), formerly the city of Seattle in old Washington State.

DOWNTOWN

Downtown Seattle, also known as Seattle City, is the heart of the metroplex. The main business district is filled with businesses, shops, parks, theaters, museums, hotels, and restaurants, a wide variety of local attractions including the waterfront and market, and popular attractions like the Space Needle. Downtown is "where it's happening" in the shadows, too, for the most part; more runs focus on this part of the metroplex than any other. No real surprise, as there's more high-priced, high-security corporate real estate per square meter here than anywhere else. Although Knight Errant technically has overall responsibility for security and policing the city streets, in reality downtown is an overlapping crazy-quilt of corporate security zones and extra-territorial borders. You might be able to slip pursuit by crossing the right boundaries—like cutting through embassies and no-man's-lands—but pick the wrong one and you could be out of the frying pan and into the fire.



BELLEVUE

Located across Lake Washington from the Downtown district, Bellevue is the favorite retreat for Seattle's well-to-do white-collar community. It's filled with manicured parks and condoplexes, and maintains a serene air of natural and architectural beauty. Bellevue bills itself on its "everything is fine, everything is lovely" atmosphere, and goes to great lengths to maintain it. After all, the district shares a long border with the Redmond Barrens, with plenty of ferrocrete barriers, monowire, and patrol drones ensuring that the have-nots remain outside looking in. Everywhere you look is some part of the façade: gated communities with biofabric domes to filter toxins out of the air and absorb some of the Seattle acid rain, quiet drones crawling along the carefully clipped green lawns or scooping up trash while keeping an electronic eye out for anyone or anything that doesn't belong. The whole thing is like a real-life sim of what pleasant suburban life should be.

TACOMA

Tacoma's docks and heavy industry are the main reason for the jokes about the "Tacoma aroma." The district has busy docks, corporate business centers, and a "charming" turn-of-the-century downtown area with various shopping centers. Tacoma's economic prosperity has been in a long, slow decline since the late 2050s. The Nicaragua Canal has diverted shipping from the area, and corporations have found greener pastures, leaving some newly minted office parks largely vacant (except for whatever squatters have moved in). The district focuses on pouring money and effort into keeping that "charming" downtown area charming for the tourists, while trouble brews in the more industrialized parts of Tacoma.

EVERETT

The northernmost district of Seattle has long been known for "ships, planes, and stormy weather," as Everett is located along the northern part of Puget Sound. It is famous as the home of both the Everett Naval Shipyard (UCAS Navy) and Federated Boeing's aircraft construction facility. With the Snohomish River cutting through the district's northeastern sector, Everett is also an area of natural beauty, close to hiking trails and rainforest vistas. The Crash 2.0 decimated the district, wiping out records of land ownership and creating a bureaucratic nightmare that's still being sorted out over ten years later. The UCAS military solved some of the problem by seizing "disputed" properties and mollified some of the corps that complained by redistributing some of the wealth to them. The small fry often abandoned properties in the area, letting squatters move in and claim them. Right behind them came the Triads to carve up the booming market in drugs, chips, and illicit sex.

RENTON

Renton has a reputation as a sleepy bedroom suburb of the metroplex. Low and middling rent homes, plenty of apartment complexes, and the odd concrete park for the kids. The communities of Renton are among the most conservative parts of the metroplex. Alongside Fort Lewis and some of Snohomish, this district is the heart of Governor Brackhaven's voter base. Humanis members may not be wearing hoods and whipping up torch-wielding mobs, but that doesn't mean they're gone.

SEATTLE AT A GLANCE

Population: 3,821,992

Unofficial Population (incl. SINless): 4,739,270 (est.)

Human: 62%

Elf: 13%

Dwarf: 4%

Ork: 17%

Troll: 3%

Other: 1%

Per Capita Income: 54,000¥

Corporate-Affiliated Population: 59%

Hospitals: 86

DocWagon Clinics: 29

Grid: Emerald City

Fire Safety: Franklin Associates

Police Services: Knight Errant

AUBURN

Auburn is Seattle's industrial heart, home to many of the metroplex's factories, refineries, and other manufacturing plants. It's a blue-collar district, home to the district's urban brawl team (the Auburn Rumlbers). In the evenings, the district's restaurants, bars, and nightclubs offer a wide range of nightlife. Life in Auburn is crushingly routine. The people living in the district who are lucky enough to still have jobs work in the various factories doing things better suited to robots, but meat is still cheaper than metal in a lot of cases, and easier to replace. Auburn's also got a lot of the Sprawl's working-class orks and trolls, which leads to a fair amount of racial tension. Knight Errant has an "outreach" program that really amounts to heavy patrols, so watch your step on the streets.

SNOHOMISH

Snohomish is the metroplex's breadbasket, with numerous aquaculture and agribusiness farms along the Snohomish River and in the surrounding countryside Seattle still imports the vast majority of its food, something the Native American Nations and the metroplex government both keep in mind. It's a hotbed of conflict between the back-to-the-land types and small farmers versus Big Agribusiness. Don't think that "farm country" means you're dealing with hicks, or that there's no biz to be had here.

FORT LEWIS

Although treated as just another district of the greater Seattle Metroplex, Fort Lewis is a UCAS Military Reservation. The Seattle Metroplex Guard, McChord Airfield, and the UCAS Army Pacific Command Joint Task Force Seattle all call Fort Lewis home, so most of the area is restricted. It's also got the famous Fort Lewis Zoological Gardens. Fort Lewis is naturally part of the Sprawl where the shadows run deep and dark. Military black ops happen in and around the reservation, and plenty of high-end shadowruns happen here.



REDMOND

Redmond is a barrens, nearly lawless, nearly penniless, nearly always dangerous. It is home to gangs, squatters, and the desperate. Don't count on seeing a street light, or a Knight Errant patrol, or even running water in some places. The kilometers of abandoned buildings include Glow City (a radioactive area), the Plastic Jungles (a squatter commune), and a lot of very, very armed people.

PUYALLUP

Puyallup is another barrens, but for a different reason. When the Great Ghost Dance rebelled against the US government after the Awakening, the Pacific Northwest's volcanoes erupted, letting everybody know who's side the magic was on. The lava flow from Mt. Rainier devastated much of Puyallup, wiping out real estate and creating the vast lava plains that now cover the area. Even today, Puyallup is subject to occasional tremors, geysers, and ashfalls from the still-active volcano. The district is some thousand square kilometers and home to half a million people, most of them SINless, living in the shadow of an active volcano that could erupt again any day, spilling tons of ash and rivers of molten fire across the area.

THE SEATTLE UNDERGROUND

We used to call the place the Ork Underground, and most of us still do. Very recently the tunnels, sewers, and sub-basements underneath Downtown were given full district status in Seattle. What used to be an independent almost-barrens is now a hotbed of activity. Residents are trying to keep their homes, speculators are trying to grab as much underground land as they can, megacorps are claiming areas that happen to lie beneath their territories, and Knight Errant has been trying to keep everything from exploding. Renraku has moved in with the cooperation of the former Underground council, trading infrastructure support and development for its own extraterritorial zones here and there across the new district.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Local law enforcement in the Seattle Metroplex is contracted to Knight Errant, a private security company and wholly-owned subsidiary of Ares Macrotech. Uniformed officers patrol the streets and are available to answer emergency calls via the PAN-ICBUTTON™ system from commlinks or public terminals. Knight Errant got the contract a few years ago, taking it from Lone Star Security Services, the AA corporation that had held the contracts for decades. The fun part is that Lone Star still handles the prisons, so the two interact (or clash) all the time.

There are plenty of private security providers in the Seattle Metroplex, mostly handling corporate properties and private communities. By law their jurisdictions and "corporate interdiction zones" are supposed to be clearly posted, and most of the time they actually are. If you're on extraterritorial turf, they're allowed and even encouraged to shoot first and ask questions later.

CULTURE

Seattle is a crossroads where UCAS, Native America, Elven, and Asian peoples meet and blend with numerous others from all around the world. Seattle's original culture is strongly rooted in the old United States, but decades of isolation from the main body of the UCAS, along with a blending of elements from other foreign cultures, have led to some social evolution of culture shock proportions. If it's trendy, or just practical, anywhere in the world, somebody in Seattle is probably doing it somewhere.

SEATTLE'S NEIGHBORS

Seattle is unique in that, although it is part of the United Canadian and American States, it is located in the middle of the Salish-Shidhe Council. This makes Seattle's good relations with its international neighbors vital to the metroplex's existence, and presents travel opportunities to Seattle residents and visitors: foreign travel is right next door!

THE SALISH-SHIDHE COUNCIL

Seattle is surrounded by the Salish-Shidhe Council, one of the Native American Nations. Technically, Seattle is a UCAS reservation. For more than fifty years, Seattle has maintained friendly relations with the Council and the NAN, and this relationship is reflected in the Sprawl's culture. The Council possesses Council Island (formerly Mercer Island), where they keep an embassy. Not everything is friendly between the Sprawl and the Council: relations between Seattle and the NAN have always been a little crazy. Some Native factions view Seattle as a festering sore on the NAN's backside.

TIR TAIRNGIRE

Seattle's other neighbor, way to the south past Salish-Shidhe lands, is the elven nation of Tir Tairngire. The Tir being practically a neighbor, the 'plex is full of elven cuisine, elven culture, and elven architecture, along with elven exiles and elven runaways. Polite fairy-tales aside, Tir Tairngire finds Seattle useful, and the feeling is mutual. Trade agreements give the Tir's Council of Princes a lot of leverage on the Sprawl's government, and they rarely hesitate to use it when it suits them.



