Dumpshock Data Haven
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Dumpshock Data Haven

…Connecting to Freedonian Aerospace VPN…

…Spoofing Matrix ID…

…Encryption Initiated…

…Connected to The Dumpshock Data Haven…

…Biometric Scan Initiated…

New User Detected. Invitation Valid. Please create a Login.

>LOGIN

****

>PASSCODE

****

Login Created. Welcome to The Dumpshock Data Haven.

Message of the Day: *"Order is Illusion. Chaos is Bliss. Got any Fours?"*

Welcome Back! Your last visit was on: No prior login detected.

DDH News:

*<pinned> Please read and obey the terms of service and the board rules. Remember, my Black Hammer is bigger than your Black Hammer. – Bull

*<pinned> The DDH VPN is still very much in Beta Test. If you find anything glitchy, please report it ASAP. Thanks, and bear with us as we work out the bugs. – Tauron

*<pinned> Please, for Ghost's sake, will you guys STOP inviting Harlequin, The Laughing Man, or whatever that fragger is calling himself this week to these boards? All you're doing is wasting your invites. And I know who's doing it, so knock it off. – Bull

DDH Personal Alerts:

- You have 1 new private message.
- You have 0 new responses to your subscribed discussions.
- You have 1 new Friend request from: Bull.

DDH Privacy Mode: You are currently Hidden from all users.

DDH Rep Score: 50

Current VPN Time: January 15, 2072 18:34:09

12 users active in the last 15 minutes.
0 Guests, 1 Member, 14 Hidden
Members: Bull*

Hoi Chummers!

If you're seeing this, that means you got an invitation to the Dumpshock Data Haven Virtual Private Network, and this is your first time logging in. Since you're new, there are a few things you should know before you head off and start playing with the other kiddies. First off, while DDH is the official name of this place, we like to call it Bull's Mobile Bar & Grill. If you look around, the architecture of the place should give you a clue as to why we call it a "bar and grill". And being a VPN, it's fairly mobile, in a way.

Second, we have a few rules and guidelines, and I expect all our users to follow these guidelines. There's a full list posted right by the door in flashing, day-glow orange there. Take a moment to read them over. It's not a long list and it's not a complicated list. Mostly, don't try to hack the code, don't attack any other users while logged into the network, and if an argument gets out of hand and I tell you to stop, you stop. I have both a Ban Hammer and a Black Hammer, and both are quite large.

Now, the question you're probably asking yourself right now is "Who the hell is this guy, and why the frag should I listen to him and follow his rules? Fair question. As the unofficial name of the place may imply, my name is Bull. I'm an ork, I'm a decker, and I've been running the shadows for over 20 years now, which is longer than some of you have been alive. Yes, yes, I know, the term "decker" is so "last decade" as my son likes to point out. We're all "hackers" now. Bah. Talk about an outdated term. Isn't hacker so "last century"? But whatever. I'm old, I don't like change, and as far as I'm concerned, I'm still a decker. You can call yourselves whatever you want, and I'll do the same.

(>)Bull doesn't run much anymore, but he still carries around the battered shell of his Alpha Allegiance cyberdeck case. He's upgraded the guts of that thing more times than anyone can count, and these days it sports a top of the line Commlink Unit hidden inside it tricked out with some military grade hardware and IC, so don't think he's completely out of touch. He's just cranky.
(>)Tauron

So why did I set up this VPN, when Fastjack's got Jackpoint for all the superstar runners, and the public networks like ShadowSEA and old stalwarts like the Denver Data Haven are still up and running? Well, Fastjack's crew handles a lot of the high profile stuff. They're good, I'm friends with a bunch of his regulars, and I have a lot of respect for the old man and his kids. But his network is very small and closed to the public beyond what they release to the Matrix. He has some diversity, but a lot of stuff slips through the cracks because of how small and insular his network is. Plus, the kids over there seem to spend more time bickering amongst themselves than they do posting useful data.

(>)Do I sense a bit of jealously and resentment that someone wasn't invited to the party?
(>)Slamm-O!

(>)Actually, Bull's got a standing invite to join us whenever he likes. He's just chosen to go his own path for the time being. We both have our reasons for handling things as we do, and neither is incorrect. Should be interesting to see how this venture works for him.
(>) Fastjack

As for ShadowSEA and the like, well, they're open systems. In theory, they're still hidden, and you still have to be able to find them, yadda yadda yadda. Once upon a time, you needed skill, knowledge and a little luck to find Shadowland, which all these networks have replaced in one form or another. If you got onto Shadowland, you deserved to be there, and it gave your words at least a little bit of weight. But these days the Matrix is so wide open to anyone with a disposable commlink they bought at the Stuffer Shack and a mediocre Browse program can find and access these sites. They're so cluttered with idiots, posers, spammers, and drekheads just looking to cause trouble that it's nigh impossible to glean any real useful information without letting an agent dig through the crap for a couple days.

So I'm shooting for a happy medium. This network is invite only, and if you're reading this, that means you got invited. Congratulations! Or, my condolences, I'm not sure which is more appropriate yet. Either way, I'm running this as an open invite VPN. You each have the ability to invite one other person to this network. As you post, everyone here has the ability to rate you and increase your reputation on the network, and as it goes up, you'll be able to invite additional people. Please use this ability to invite folks you think will be worthwhile contributors. Abuse of either this or the rep system will result in you getting your hoop booted out.

Anything and everything is a valid topic of discussion. If you think your fellow shadowrunners will find it interesting, post it, we'll discuss it, and then every so often I'll collect the info we bandy about and release it to the general Matrix population so that everyone can get a look at it. Maybe someone will find it useful. At the very least, hopefully they'll find it entertaining.

That's it kids, class dismissed!

(>) You truly are a masochist, Bull.
    (>) Chaos

'Small Awakening'

They say home is where the heart is. As far as Smalls was concerned, home was where he could snatch some sleep for a couple of hours. For the last few nights, home was also an old rusty cargo container on the Tacoma docks. It was more comfortable than many of the places he had called home over the last few years. Someone had lived here not long ago, and had scrounged together a makeshift bed made from packing crates and a real mattress which had definitely seen better days. After having slept in a few dumpsters, Smalls barely even noticed how bad the mattress smelled.

Some previous occupant had also knocked a small hole in the end of the container, opposite the door and hidden on the outside by a pallet leaning against the container. A crucial exit point in case someone or something came sniffing around. He felt as safe as he ever had, which was not really saying much. The life of a street kid in Seattle was anything but safe.

If he had been born an Orc or Troll, he could have found safety in the Underground. If he had been born an Elf, maybe the Tir would have taken him in. If their child had been Human, his parents might not have left him to fend for himself on the streets to begin with. As a Dwarf, where did he have to go? Nowhere that could be called safe, that was for sure.

Lost in thought, Smalls did not hear the voices approaching until it was too late, they were already outside the big container doors, and one of those doors was being swung open! Smalls froze, holding his breath and trying not to make a sound.

"We can do our business in here," a gruff voice said as the door swung wider, letting in the moonlight.

"So long as you got the goods, omae." The other voice was smooth and assuring.

"Yeah, just inside here…"

Smalls had no idea what the goods were, there was nothing of value in the container that he knew of, and he did not plan to stick around to find out. He slid off the mattress as quietly as he could, glancing towards the door to see three figures silhouetted in the moonlight. One was obviously a Troll, with large horns curling over his head like ram's horns. Fear took over, and Smalls scrambled for his bolt hole, scattering trash as he went.

"What the… hey!" The smooth voice proclaimed, "This some kind of setup?"

Smalls heard a scuffle behind him, "Grab him!" shouted the gruff voice Smalls now recognized as the Troll. Smalls was almost to the hole when the inside of the container lit up with a quick flash, followed by the deafening boom of a gunshot. He jumped uncontrollably in response, banging his head on the edge of the hole as he slid through. Instead of smoothly rolling out from under the leaning pallet as he had practiced, he crashed straight into it.

He heard more gunfire as bullets pinged against the inside of the container. The Troll was howling in pain now, accompanied by screams from one of the others in an awful chorus of agony.

Smalls threw the pallet off just in time to see another dark figure standing over him. Out in the light of the nearly full moon, he should have been able to see more of this new threat, but the figure was surrounded by a blackness that actually seemed to absorb the light. The darkness was

not natural, he could feel it as much as he could see it, though he did not understand why, he knew it was magic.

Before Smalls could bat an eyelid, the dark figure had produced several blades, seemingly from nowhere, which were now just millimeters in front of his face.

"Don't move a muscle, or it will be the last thing you ever do." This voice was low and controlled, a voice that meant what it said.

Smalls froze in place, something he had gotten pretty good at over the years. He now had time to examine the blades, there were three of them, and they literally had been produced from nowhere, or close enough to it. They protruded from the back of the figure's hand. Smalls had heard of Street Samurai before, he now faced one in the flesh.

Tires squealed, a van was approaching quickly. Smalls tensed hoping his captor would look away so he could make a run for it. No such luck, the Street Samurai grabbed him and flipped him over, before his face could meet the ground, his hands were bound behind him with zip cuffs, and Smalls was being hauled to his feet.

"The Troll's out cold," The man with the smooth voice was trotting their direction, apparently unscathed by the brief firefight, "I think Sparkles overdid it a bit with the Stunbolt again, he's bleeding out of his ears, and there's no way I can move him."

"You're welcome." A slender Elf floated down from the top of the container, Smalls had never even known she was up there. "Of course, I'm not the one who decorated the docks with our contact's internal organs."

"It was him or me." The smooth talker was now in a place where the light illuminated his features. A tanned face, well kept hair, and a smile that would make a politician envious. Smalls found it hard not to like the guy, even with the business end of an Ares Predator pointed at him.

"At least Prowler managed to restrain himself with this one," the smooth talker was motioning towards Smalls with his pistol. Smalls got the picture, they thought he was with the Troll and his buddy.

"Hey, I'm not one of…" Smalls started to protest, but the smooth talker cut him off.

"That's what they all say, stuff him in the van, and let's roll."

The van had just pulled up, and the side cargo door slid open, Smalls had a sinking feeling as the one called Prowler shoved him towards the opening. Smalls intentionally tripped over his own feet and tried to roll under the van. As malnourished and scrawny as he was, Smalls was still a dwarf with a thick torso, and with his hands bound behind his back he could not flatten himself the way he had hoped, the van did not have enough clearance for him to fit under. All he managed to do was add a few more scrapes and bruises before Prowler hauled him back to his feet again and tossed him into the van, slapping him on the back of the head in the process.

"Nice try," The smooth talker said as the van sped off, "now, what was that all about back there?" He asked as he produced a flashlight and shone it directly into Smalls' eyes.

"I don't know nothin', let me go!"

"Jesus Christ, Clinton, he's just a kid!" Sparkles proclaimed.

"How can you tell, he's a halfer."

"Watch your tongue Clinton, or I will have Prowler cut it out." Came a gruff voice from where the driver seat was located. "Holy crap, she's right. From the looks of him, he's just a street kid…"

"From the smell of him too," Clinton observed, "doesn't mean he wasn't involved."

"I'm not lying!" Smalls protested, "I was just tryin' to grab some sleep, I don't know nothin'."

"There's one way to find out," Clinton switched off the flashlight and nodded to the Elf, "do your thing Sparkles."

Smalls looked at the Elf, she was stunningly beautiful, and was looking right into his eyes. He stared back, lost in those eyes, the world faded to gray around them, only she stood out brightly, as she reached out to touch his face. He felt something building in her touch, and that something started prying at his thoughts. As entranced as he was, he knew her touch was wrong, and he had to fight what was happening.

Smalls closed his eyes and mentally pushed back with all of his willpower. The prying ceased immediately, and he heard a sharp intake of air from Sparkles. When he opened his eyes, she was staring at him much more intently.

"He is counterspelling me," Sparkles announced, "This kid is awakened!"

The ride after that was a blur to Smalls. Sparkles put a name to the change he had been feeling recently. 'Awakened' meant he had magical power, he knew it was a fact as soon as she articulated it, but it would be quite some time before he truly came to grips with it.

Maybe that was part of what had caused his parents to abandon him. Perhaps they could feel the power in him, even at that young age, and they were afraid of what he would become; that the ugliness on the outside would be mirrored by what was contained on the inside.

The one they called Clinton continued to question him, taking advantage of Smalls distracted state. By the time the van arrived at its destination, Smalls came to the realization that Clinton had accepted that he was telling the truth not long after the interrogation had begun. The questioning had continued, though, either Clinton was digging deeper, trying to learn more about him, or he was just passing the time. It was hard to tell, but Smalls easily came to the conclusion that this man loved to talk.

The rest of the group were silent by comparison, Prowler never said another word after stepping into the van, and Sparkles only chimed in on occasion, clearly distracted by her own inability to effect him with magic.

Smalls learned that the driver was a dwarf named Glen, and took an immediate liking to him. It was more than just a racial kinship, Glen seemed to be the first one to indicate he believe Smalls, and stuck up for him whenever he felt Clinton was going too far.

When the van finally stopped and the door rolled open, Smalls got another sinking feeling. It seemed that they were in the heart of the Redmond Barrens, and he was going to be dropped here in the roughest part of the Seattle sprawl. Prowler prodded him to stand up and step out of the van.

"What? You can't dump me here…" Smalls pleaded.

"Relax kid," Clinton assured him, "We aren't dumping you anywhere, at least not yet."

After a glaring look from the dwarf rigger he continued, "I doubt Glen would let me do that even if I wanted to."

He felt blood rush into his hands as Prowler deftly freed them from their bounds, tossing the zip cuffs aside after he cut them away. Smalls took in more of his surroundings. They were outside of an apparently dilapidated warehouse, and the others beckoned him to follow as they approached an office door. Glen moved a piece of the rusty corrugated metal next to the door aside to reveal a very new looking maglock. He thumbed the maglock scanner and the door opened with a click. Glen quickly reached inside the door, and Smalls heard another click.

Glen looked back at Smalls, "Flechette dischargers set all around this door, they are just high enough up to fire right over our heads, but if I didn't flip that switch, anyone taller 'n a dwarf would be hamburger from the chest up."

Smalls followed them in to an office that was a stark contrast to the exterior of the building. It was clean and well lit, with state of the art equipment filling it.

"What is this place?" Smalls wondered aloud.

"Glen's little slice of heaven, in the heart of hell." Clinton mused.

"Heh, like faceman says," Chuckled Glen, "welcome to my humble home. You look like you are starving."

"And smell like you could use a bath." Sparkles observed.

He was offered food, real, hot, fresh food, something he could not remember ever eating. It tasted fabulous, but he was not allowed to relish it for long before he was ushered to the bathroom and told to shower. When he was done, he found that his raggedy clothes were gone, replaced by a pair of dwarf sized pajama pants and a t-shirt. He felt virtually naked in them, having grown used to the layers of cast off clothing he normally wore to keep warm.

He heard his new acquaintances talking in hushed tones in the office, and they stopped as soon as he emerged from the bathroom. They had been talking about him.

"Thanks for the food, and the shower." He kept his head down and avoided eye contact as he walked into the room. "If you could just give me back my clothes, and give me a ride back to Tacoma, I sure would…"

"You seriously want those old rags back?" Sparkles laughed, "And what would you do if we took you back to Tacoma?"

"I would just…" Smalls started.

"What Sparkles is trying to say," Glen piped up, "is that we wouldn't feel right dumping you back on the street. Why don't you stick around here for a while? I could use some help keeping the place clean, and when Sparkles is around she can teach you a thing or two about magic."

Smalls tried to say 'no thanks', that he would be just fine on his own, but he couldn't get it out. Years of repressed emotion suddenly came to the surface at the thought of someone else actually caring what happened to him, and all he could do was sob.

They all hugged him, except for Prowler, and it wasn't long before he came to regard them as a family. A family that haunted the shadows, but the only family he would ever know.

Advice from a Fixer

"They" say, things in the shadows used to be done with some sort of civility, that there was once some honor to thieves. "They" say a lot of things, and the older generation often romanticizes the past, allowing their memories become colored over time. Fact is, there never was much honor in the shadows. The older generation likes to pretend it was different, mostly to help them cope with the things they've done, and occasionally to throw off the new kids on the block, to try to get them to abide by the rules of a "fair fight", to get an edge. Let me tell you, if you ever find yourself in a fair fight, your tactics suck.

I happen to be part of that older generation. Most of the people that ran the shadows in my heyday are either dead, or like me, have gone to shades of dark gray rather than all out black. It's a hard life to try to stay in, and frankly, it's a young man's game. My name is Shades, an unfortunate moniker I picked up some years back and never really managed to kick. You are your reputation on the streets, and that rep sticks to your name like a newbie ganger to his shock collar when the lead starts flying. I've been working the shadows from one angle or another for over twenty very long years. I started as a security operative for one of the corps, and then made my way to the streets when I decided I couldn't work within their system, and decided to make my own. I ran the shadows for more years than I care to admit, before I had the good sense, and the contacts, to step out a bit and become a fixer. Unfortunately, I'm not here today showing you my bona fides as part of a recruiting run. I'm here because I've seen one too many green runners make the same mistakes I did when I first got started, and not have the good turn of luck that I did that allowed me to survive and learn from it.

Bull's asked me to try and dispense some of the things I've learned over the years. I won't be so pretentious as to call it "wisdom", but try and keep in mind that I've been there, and the lessons I've learned might be what keep you alive. If so, feel free to stop by my office some time and tell me your story. Gifts are always appreciated too. I'll give out whatever tips and words of warning I can, but what I've got are just tools. It's up to you how you put them to use. For today, we're going to start with that most often misunderstood profession, the fixer. Me.

Plenty of you out there work with Fixers. They're "the guys that know people". While that's true, that's only the beginning of what we do. A Fixer has to be everything to everybody, and they have to maintain a reputation of dealing straight, or they won't be dealing for long. That's why so many fixers start out as shadowrunners of one sort or another. It takes a lot of skills to handle things on our side of the table, and you can really only learn by doing. A good street rep is essential, and performing as a skilled runner is an excellent way to earn one. Fixers come from plenty of different backgrounds, almost universally criminal, but it takes certain skills unique to runners to really manage the relationship between Johnsons and runners.

Acting as a go between for a Mr. Johnson and a team of shadowrunners is the Fixers bread and butter. Your side doesn't see it very often, but it pays well too. Believe me, I'd be in a different profession if it didn't. Remember that up front. If a fixer approaches you with a job, chances are, he's already been approached himself by a Johnson looking for a piece of work to be done. That means money has already changed hands, and the fixer now has a vested interest. He's now said that he can and will find or put together the team that will make this op work. He's gone to you because he thinks that you have enough talent for him to deliver on his promise to the Johnson, and *maybe* for you to do well enough for the Johnson to come to him a second time. So think about what it is that makes you an *asset* to this Fixer. That word is key on the streets, but we'll come back to that.

Any Fixer worth the name knows that his reputation goes both ways as well. By the very nature of their relationship, the Fixer is going to know more about the Johnson that he's working with than the average shadowrunner is going to. First, they usually have more assets to call upon to look into the Johnson's background, and learn a little more about who they are, and their motivations. Second, they're going to require a little more information about a Johnson in order to work with them. Fixers *have* to do this, because they also have an obligation to the runners they're bringing in. No story spreads as fast as runners that were double-crossed, and the number one guy in a mess like that is the one that set it up. Nothing kills a Fixers rep quicker, so it's crucial that they know a little bit more about who they're working with. This is where things can get hairy for a Fixer, for as soon as they become the go between, they've just become a deniable asset.

This means that, like the runners, the Fixer is now another level of deniability for the Johnson behind the run. Every layer of protection and deniability protects the Johnson, and more importantly, the corp he works for. Using a Fixer gives them a more hands off approach, which is a comfortable place for most Js. Fixers also have their ears much closer to the streets. They have a better idea of the newest, freshest talents. Johnsons need to do a lot work and make a lot of payouts to get information like that, so the Fixer is an asset they are usually very happy to pay for. The most important thing to remember about the relationship between a Fixer and a Johnson however is this; like a runner, a Fixer who knows too much can quickly move from being a Deniable Asset, to an Expendable Asset. In that case, the Fixer is the only link between the team and the Johnson. It's a fact that makes my life pretty damn stressful some nights. But it also gives you, the runners, some added level of protection. The Fixer can be a buffer. It's a shitty part of the job, but it comes with the territory. And hey, that's why we make the big bucks.

When a Fixer gets paid for a job, depending on the type, he usually either gets a flat pay out, like a finder's fee, or a percentage of the total take. And you'd better believe we insist on half up front too. A lot of that money goes into networking, maintaining contacts, buying information, paying out bribes, and making sure that we've got access to all the latest toys and tech. Like so many high rollers in the shadows, we've got a certain image to maintain. It takes a special type of runner to trust his run to a Fixer that dresses like shit and doesn't have half a dozen contacts on speed dial. Appearances can be just as important as actually having the connections you all need and pay for. Money changes hands pretty quickly for Fixers. Like us, a lot of the people that we work for are middlemen. Everyone wants to get their cut, and information is *never* free. That's why when a Fixer finds a dependable team, they stick with them.

If they can manage to find the right people, and maintain a good working relationship, plenty of Fixers will set up a stable of runners, men and women they work with regularly. It takes a lot of heat off of a Fixer, knowing what his people are capable of, and what jobs they can be depended on to perform. It looks good to a Johnson especially, if a Fixer can show a team's proven track record. You'd better believe we use spread sheets too. A Fixer and their team, or even better, *teams*, can get pretty tight if they work together long enough. But don't ever forget the basis of that relationship. You are a paycheck. Let that sink and, and think about the next time you sit down with your usual Fixer. No matter how chummy some of us might get, we've always got an agenda. But let's be honest, so do you. Honor and civility are just an illusion on the street. Rules only exist as long as they're expedient. It sounds nice, especially when it's pitched as "separating us from the beasts". Fact is, if you're looking for a fair fight, you're likely to come down with a case of high speed lead poisoning.

Maybe now, with a little more understanding of the basic mechanics that make the shadows run, you'll make it just a little longer. If you think you can cut it, stop by my office some time. I'm always looking for a few good men. My name is Shades. You can trust me.

The Black Market

(>) SOTA. State of the Art. Any good runner knows that you can live and die by that little acronym. Sometimes it means keeping your hard and software up to date. And sometimes it simply means knowing what new and interesting things have hit the streets. Whether it comes from Damien Knight's Ammo World factory, Aztechnology-Hogwart's School of Witchcraft and Blood Wizardry, or crawled out of a sewer drain in Seattle to eat your children, if you don't know about it ahead of time you can't defend against it. The Black Market is the place to get the scoop on all the latest you might encounter in the wild.
(>) Bull
    "The Best Ork Decker You Never Met"

Underbarrel Weapon Accessories

(>) These come from Ares' Fall 2071 Catalogue from last year. Ares has been giving all their weapons accessories a facelift and a big marketing push, and a lot more of these are showing up both on the streets and in the hands of security forces. Underbarrel was last fall's new black, and that means today's fashionable shadowrunner finds himself staring at the these a lot more often.
(>) Hawkeye

Colt M204 Underbarrel Grenade Launcher

The M204 is the standard workhorse underbarrel grenade launcher used by military and security forces world wide. A slight upgrade to the M203 of the past, the M204 has a three round cylindrical magazine, allowing the user to load different grenades and select the round to be fired.

(>) The ability to select various rounds can be a lifesaver. You might not always need to toss HE rounds around, but the ability to have the odd Stick'n'Shock or Smoke round no farther than a thought away in a firefight ups your survivability. Options are good.
(>) Mac

(>) Be careful with 3rd party manufactured versions, however. They're fully compatible, but the quality of the materials and their QA isn't nearly as high. I ran with a unit outfitted with some of these from a Chinese manufacturer called ECHO 2. Our first big firefight and 2 of the things misfired in the barrel due, one due to warping, the other to a stress fracture.
(>) Rush

Enfield UB-12 Underbarrel Shotgun

he UB-12 gives you that extra bit of stopping power without the need to give up your regular choice of firearm. Its simple, hardy design makes it nearly impervious to the harshest of battlefield conditions.

(>) Clean this out after every use. The UB-12's design leaves it more susceptible to collecting dust and gunpowder residue than normal, and leads to an above average jam and misfire ratio.
(>) Hangfire

FAB2G Armor

(>) Renraku R&D has been experimenting with manatech for a number of years now. With the advent of new forms of Fluorescing Astral Bacteria (FAB), it was only a matter of time before the use of FAB for security purposes filtered down to the personal level. In particular, strains of FABII were identified as providing not only protection from astral forms, but from spell casting as well. Renraku has begun incorporating FABII into the armor it issues it's elite Red Samurai units. This researched was swiped by the other corps, and they've begun putting together anti-magic squads as well.
(>) Sigma

(>) FAB2G®, as it's being marketed, has already hit the streets as well. It's fantastic stuff that really gives us non-magical types a bit of an edge when facing a spellslinger.
(>) Hawkeye

(>)One big drawback with FAB2G is that it does not discriminate when it comes to providing spell protection. Just try casting a healing spell on your buddy who is bleeding to death in the gutter while encased in this stuff, and you will find out just how FABulous it is.
(>) The Dire Radiant

(>) Do yourself a favor if you get one of these. Replace the Gel Packs regularly. I ran a couple times with this sammy who had gotten a cyberskull at some point, and apparently his olfactory sensors weren't hooked up right. A couple weeks after the expiration date, and his armor started smelling seriously rank. Ever smelled a fish tank that's been stagnant for a few months? Kinda like that.
(>) Tauron

Horizon-Doble MS3TD

(>) Horizon may be publicly perceived as the "friendly entertainment" corporation, but people tend to forget they're a AAA. This means that they have their hands in every cookie jar, not just media. This includes security and combat drones. For over a year now they've been utilizing and selling a pretty nasty piece of work that was reportedly designed by an AI that they have working in their R&D division, the Horizon-Doble MS3TD Combat Drone. Incredibly fast and maneuverable, high armor and durability, the ability to mount heavy weaponry, and comes standard with a suite of high-end Autosoft programs. Oh, and it has a

built in auto-repair capability. Makes me miss the days when the nastiest thing a corp had on-site was a sec guard with an assault rifle and a couple of Hellhounds.
(>) Hangfire

(>) I'm not the least big surprised that a corp that makes billions off of kids programming like "Tammy the Talking Tiger" and constantly spins out drek about how they're "community oriented" and everything is sunshine and roses. One of these days someone's gonna pull the masks off their board of directors, and we're going to find out it's the United Brotherhood all over again.
(>) Bull
          "The Best Ork Decker You Never Met"

(>) What's the United Brotherhood?
(>) Night Shadow

(>) I've seen these things come in squadrons, scary stuff. But the hype about being able to handle the loss of two engines is bulldrek. They tend to crash and burn when losing just one. That being said, these fraggers are tough and hard to bring down with anything less than AV ammo.
(>) Mac

(>)They offer non-security versions to their war correspondents. These are much easier to get a hold of and don't have that AI's program. You can occasionally pick one up in the bad parts of LA (slightly damaged).
(>) The Dire Radiant

(>) What's wrong with the AI's program?
(>) Night Shadow

(>) It was made by an AI. Isn't that reason enough?
(>) The Dire Radiant

(>) A sleek sexy body of my own and I can fly fast, low, and the look on people's faces when you buzz them is priceless!!
(>) Thoth

Sangre del Diablo

(>)Since Dr. Shapiro apparently isn't up on her parabotany and didn't include any awakened plants in the *Running Wild* compilation that Jackpoint dropped on us recently, especially some of the nastier stuff out there, I'll see about writing some up. I'll start off with something familiar, that I first published to Shadowland a decade ago: the Sangre del Diablo.

          The Sangre del Diablo was first discovered deep in the Yucatan rainforest during Aztlan's war in 2061, during the Year of the Comet. No record exists of the tree before that time, so it's believed that it Awakened due to the spike in the ambient mana level during that year. I was able to get a look at one first hand, and it's a horrible creature. Even today, a decade later, I can still remember how irresistible its call was, how

comforting it would have felt to touch the tree. *shudder*
(>) Wright

Sangre del Diablo
Croton Diabolus

Habitat: Rainforest and Jungles
Range: Amazonia, Central America, Madagascar, Africa
Frequency: Rare
Identification: This foul tree is an awaked form of the Sangre del Dragon (Croton lechleri), or Blood of the Dragon tree. The Sangre Del Dragon was a plant that has been considered for centuries to have natural healing properties in its dark red, blood-like sap. The Sangre del Diablo (Blood of the Devil), on the other hand, is a killer through and through.

          Growing up to 40 meters in height, this enormous tree has a larger than normal trunk, with larger tree's reaching 15 to 20 meters in diameter. The leaves are a very dark green, almost black, and streaked with red veins. Long vines covered in small black flowers hang down from its high branches. The bark and wood has a dark finish to it, a red so deep it's almost black. The sap from the tree, like its cousin, is a bright red that resembles blood.

Habits: The Sangre del Drago is only found in Central and South America, and the Sangre del Diablo was first discovered there as well, but in recent years these trees have been sighted in Africa and Madagascar as well. In Amazonia, they are cut down as soon as they are found, by order of the government.

          These trees don't feed off Chlorophyll, as a normal plant does. Instead they have the ability to magically lure in living creatures. Their vines are flexible, and will wrap up and pull the victim to the trees bark, where it will then quickly engulf the victim. Then its sap slowly digests the hapless being, feeding the tree.

          The wood of the tree is incredibly strong and resistant to both cutting and flames, and the tree has a natural resistance to magic.

(>) The wood from one of these is incredibly valuable. It's prized for wooden furniture for its unique dark red color and rarity, and it's reportedly a very potent exotic reagent for enchanting. If anyone's interested in hunting one of these down, I know someone who pays well.
(>) Caleb

(>) I said it back then, and I'll say it again. Support your local Deforestation Project today!
(>) Bull
          "The Best Ork Decker You Never Met"

Black Market Game Information

Underbarrel Weapons

Options for separately available standard underbarrel grenade launchers and shotguns are conspicuously absent from Shadowrun 4th edition. While the description of the Antioch grenade launcher in Shadowrun 3rd edition specifically mentions it being used as an underbarrel accessory for various weapons, that bit of text is missing in 4th edition, for example.

This led to a situation in which you either have to hand-wave them into being standard underbarrel mounted accessories or resort to using the Underbarrel Weapon option from Arsenal. Neither situation is ideal, as you are either forced to resort to fiat for the former, or use up 3 valuable customization slots for the latter. Given that there are Grapple Guns and Flamethrowers given as standard, single mount point accessories, it only made sense to stat these up. Enjoy!
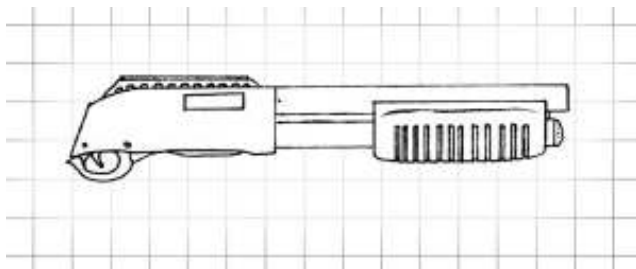
Colt M204 Underbarrel Grenade Launcher

Mount:	Under		Ammo:	3(cy)
Damage:	Grenade		Availability:	8F
Mode:	SS		Cost:	750¥
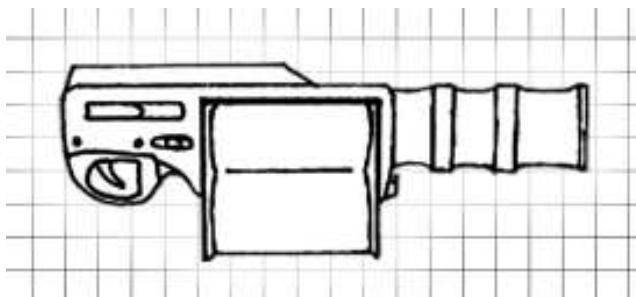
Enfield UB-12 Underbarrel Shotgun

| Mount:	Under		Ammo:	3(m)
Damage:	7P		Availability:	7R
Mode:	SA		Cost:	600¥

FAB2G Full Body Armor

FAB2G Full Body Armor replaces the traditional liquid armor gel patches found in Full Body Armor with patches containing FAB Strain III suspended in a nutrient gel. As a result FABG2 Full Body Armor provides the wearer some protection from spells and astral beings. However, the trade off is that it does not provide as much ballistic and impact protection as traditional Full Body Armor.

FAB2G Full Body Armor acts like a Mana Barrier, and reduces the force of any spell cast upon the wearer by 3 points, as well as reducing any purely astral attacks by the same amount. The gel patches must be replaced every 4 weeks, as the FABII colonies contained within use up the nutrients in the gel and die.

Ballistic	Impact	Availability	Cost
8	7	22R	14,000¥
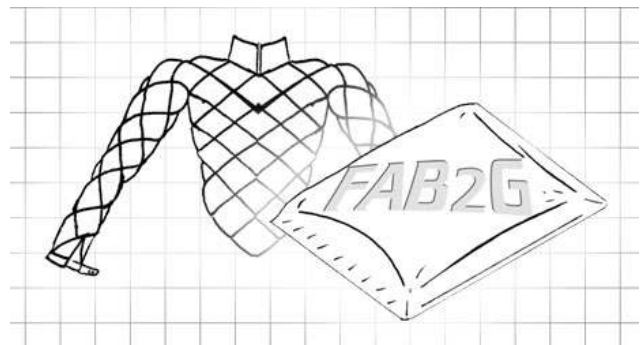
FAB2G Gel Patch Insert Armor Modification

As the FAB2G Gel Patches must be replaced on a monthly basis, the patches themselves have hit the Black Market and can be used to modify existing suits of Full Body Armor to provide the same protection as above. These gel insert patches can only be used to modify Full Body Armor, and will need to be replaced every 4 weeks.

Ballistic	Impact	Availability	Cost
-2	-2	16R	8,000¥

Horizon-Doble MS3TD Combat Drone

Horizon-Doble MST3D

The MS3TD (multi-specialty 3 turbine drone) is one of the few Horizon entries into the security drone market. Consisting of three vector thrust engines, armor composed of composites and nanite molded titanium alloys, and a built in self repair system for improved durability. This 1.3 meter long drone can handle all but the heaviest vehicle armaments due to its unique Counter Thrust™ targeting software programming technology. The AI designed technology allows the drone to fire full-auto with a everything up to and including a mini-gun. The three engine drone includes 2 smaller left and right vector thrust engines with 1 larger main vector thrust engine in port and starboard.

Std. Upgrades: External Flexible weapons mount, Ultra-wideband radar (4), Self Repair system, Targeting Sutosoft (4), Clearsight Autosoft (4), and Evasion Autosoft (4)
Cost: 70,000¥
Availability: 30F

Horizon-Doble MS3TD-R

A stripped down version of the MS3TD, the R (for reporter) is designed for in the field reporting in warzones and other less than civilized places. With no weapons, it is less likely to be attacked. It also lacks the self repair system to reduce cost. It is primarily used by the various Horizon news reporters and to track runners in LA during their dramatic escapades.

Std. Upgrades: Ultra-wideband radar (4), directional microphone, camera, Clearsight Autosoft (4), and Evasion Autosoft (4)

Cost: 20,000¥

Availability: 10R

Drone	Han	Accel	Spd	Pilot	Bod	Arm	Sen
MST3D	+1	40/80	320	4	4	8	3
MST3D-R	+1	40/80	320	4	4	8	3

Sangre del Diablo

The Sangre del Diablo will use it's compulsion power to lure in a victim. Once the victim is close enough, the tree will wrap him up in its vines (Treat this as an attack to Subdue if victim has resisted the compulsion) and draw him to its bark. The tree will then make an Engulf (Plant, unresisted if victim is still under the compulsion) and once he is unconscious, it will pull him partway into its trunk. It will then make a Corrosive Secretions attack once every hour, slowly dissolving its victim and absorbing the nutrients.

To free a victim, you have to do at least 9 boxes of physical damage to the trunk surrounding him. The tree will continue to make compulsion attacks each turn, plus has anywhere from 4 to 12 vines that it can attempt to entangle with.

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	EDG	ESS	M	Init	IP
16	5	5	14	5	5	2	6	3	6	8	10	1

Movement: N/A

Skills: Counterspelling 6, Perception 4, Unarmed Combat 6

Powers: Compulsion, Corrosive Secretions, Engulf (Plant), Immunity (Fire), Magical Guard

Other Notes: The wood from the Sangre del Diablo retains its toughness even after the creatures death. It is much stronger than normal wood, and is considered to be Structural Material for purposes of Barrier Rating (SR4A, p.166) and is considered to have Fire Resistance 6.

When harvested, the raw wood from the Sangre Del Diablo is worth 1,000¥ per cubic meter. It may also be used as an Exotic Reagent for purposes of enchanting.

Music MaveN: The Top Ten Songs You Should Be Listening To RIGHT NOW!!!!

(>) Bull's asked me to spill about some of that juicy celebrity gossip I'm always on about, and I quote "show how far the shadows run". Hey, why not – I was pulling up my favorite gossip reads and rumor sites then anyway.

    I'm cheating some by using someone else's list – but the rumors are all mine.
(>) Kas

10. NTE – Disposable – Trashmark

(>) NTE recently went solo and now distributes through his own personal label on the Matrix while waging his one-man war against the Waxcorp he worked for. He's advocated everything from stealing his old albums to hacking their mainframe to, get this, physical violence against anyone working at the company now. He's lost some fans, but the rest are listening.
(>) Kas

(>) Rumors of paranoid schizophrenia are making the rounds. As are the nuyen amounts for his head.
(>) The DJ

9. Beyond Dark Hills – Deliver Me, My Sacrifice – Zadok Records

(>) This band needs to be witnessed live to get the full effect of their over-the-top stage shows. Their lead singer is a green skinned and horned changeling and the other members "worship" him with sacrifices and bloody chants to all that is forbidden. Apparently they're just mundane kids though.
(>) Kas

(>) Don't tell that to the freaks that worship Dent as the real thing. They get violent.
(>) The Dire Radiant

8. Tomoe Ginkari – Theme To Giganto Roboto!!!! – Ushaguri Record Corp

(>) Tomoe has become the image of the anti-idoru: she lies, steals, spits on her fans and gets in fights – but her career is skyrocketing. Her management keeps her on a "short leash" but she still manages to get in trouble everywhere she goes.
(>) Kas

### 7. McKey – Rock the Pop – GPE Corp

(>) McKey is everywhere – from trideo to merchandise to sold out concerts filled with screaming pre-teens – but sources say that there's a struggle going on behind the scenes because McKey wants to grow up her image. It's been kept quiet so far.
(>) Kas

(>) What's keeping it quiet is that the company has told her they'll replace her if she keeps it up. McKey doesn't want to go back to being an orphan.
(>)The DJ

6. Pilgrim – Towards A Deeper Understanding – Unit 6 Recordings
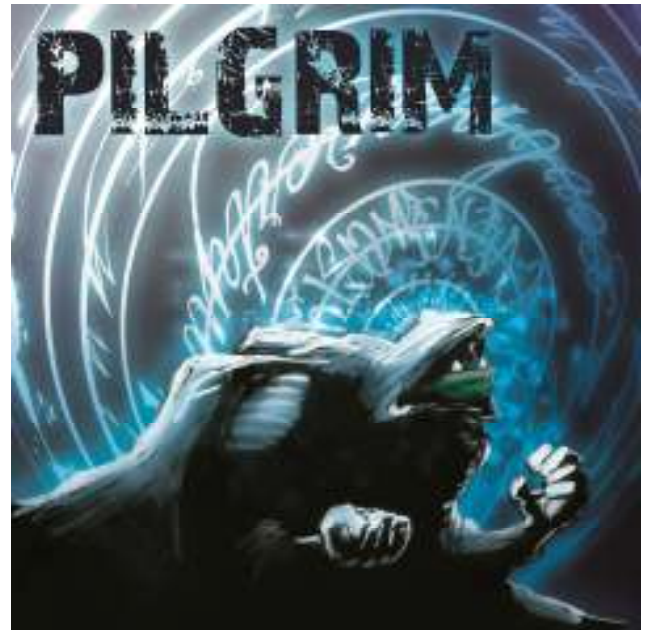
(>) Pilgrim's gone from a washed up orxploitaton star to progge rap messiah in the short time since his near-fatal shooting last year. Now he's searching for answers and spirituality through his music and ticking off the groups that aren't pleased with his music's message.
(>) Kas

(>) Forcibly kicking gangers out of his home neighborhood didn't make them fans either.
(>) Dumpster Diver

5. Denver "Wanderin' Fingers" Walker – Sojourn – SS Records

(>) Wanderin' Fingers is an adept with the ability to make his fingers fly across the frets of his acoustic guitar. He wanders from magic site to magic site, playing, recording, and protesting against pollution. Isn't it interesting that the child of ex-EcoFirst parents always seems to be around when they decide to make a "forceful" protest?
(>) Kas

4. AI +1M4 - Melancholy - SP

(>) If you haven't heard the AI +1m4 yet, then you will soon. She and her "club" are the birthplace of the nascent Neo-Jazz movement that's sweeping the Matrix. Maybe it's the sculpting of +1m4's node, or maybe its jazz's roots in the Prohibition, but the club is quickly becoming a major hang out for shadow types. Don't be surprised if you get invited to meet a Johnson there.
(>) Kas

(>)Her singing voice is better than some of the old vinyl recordings I own. I've even chipped in to get her an Otomo body for live performances.
(>) The DJ

3. Madame Bloody Marie - You Heard Me - House of Music

(>) Bloody Marie exploded into the public eye at last year's Pop Music Awards and she hasn't left it yet. She's into extremes: she loves to flaunt high fashion while singing some seriously dirty songs. A club goer,

a few shadow friends have also mentioned seeing her in places frequented by our types.
(>) Kas

2. Jenny Green - Our Mother, Earth - SS Records

(>) Jenny's an ex-Tir princess that's run away for the spotlight and her parents want her home but quick. She was discovered by Wanderin' Fingers in a club in Seattle and shares his talent for combining magic and acoustic guitars.
(>) Kas

(>) Hey Nessa, did you hear about their big concert in Chicago?
(>) Dumpster Diver

(>) You're shitting me?! "Free in the CZ"? Seriously, who thought that was a good idea?
(>) Quantum Princess

1. Brightstar - Try Me Again - MG Records

(>) Remember Brightstar? She went through a divorce, lost the kids, got a serious BTL addiction, and then the tragedy of performing when Crash 2.0 hit. The world watched as she recovered from near-vegetable to vying for the title of Queen of Pop, making her newest album the biggest release for her yet.
(>) Kas

(>) After writing this, I got a message from someone with the handle "Fetch" that just reads, "check the medical records." Anyone recognize the handle?
(>) Kas

Seattle Newsnet™ Screamsheet!
"Getting your news before it gets you!"

Medical Records Stolen, Reward Posted

Hundreds of confidential medical records for patients of Evo's Red Star Clinics throughout Seattle were posted publicly on the Matrix. Evo has posted a 25,000 Corp Scrip reward for information leading to the capture of the neo-anarchists responsible for the cyber-vandalism. Meanwhile, several multi-million nuyen lawsuits have been filed against Evo for violation of client privacy protection laws are in the process of being filed with the Corporate Court.

Manhattan Grid Guide Malfunction

The Manhattan Grid Guide malfunctioned yesterday at 4:27 PM, causing dozens of vehicular accidents. 15 people were killed, 70 wounded in sixty car pile up. Grid Guide has yet to make a statement revealing the cause of this malfunction.

Eco-Terrorists cause Brownouts throughout Seattle

For over two days, power has been sporadic throughout the Seattle Metroplex due to multiple attacks conducted against the power grid. Air Spirits are believed to be responsible for the physical attacks. Knight Errant believes that Eco-Terrorists have been directing the attacks

Knight Errant Announces Successful Sting Operations

Knight Errant today announced that it's sting operations have been a resounding success, with arrests and convictions up over 15%. The sting operation was one of Knight Errant's platforms when lobbying to replace Lone Star earlier this year.

Seattle Treasury Office Scandal

An audit of the Seattle Treasury has revealed that over 10 million nuyen is unaccounted for, dating as far back as 2065. Secretary of the Treasury John Littletree is under investigation for possible fraud and embezzlement charges, while several of his aides have been arrested in connection to the missing funds.

Wraiths Strike Again

Marcone Jeweler's in Bellevue was robbed Tuesday evening, the thieves taking away over a half million nuyen in gold and jewelry. The Wraith gang is believed to be responsible. This will mark the 10th jewelry heist the gang has been linked to, and the 26th time a jewelry store has been robbed this year. Knight Errant is promising swift action to stop the Wraiths.

Riots at the ACHE

Frustrations with living conditions and lack of adequate services reached a boiling point for residents of the ACHE on Wednesday evening. Riots broke out among several floors, with looting and violence reported across the lower levels. Knight Errant quickly moved in to suppress the riot. Claims that the AI Deus was responsible were quickly disproved.

Lofwyr turns 10,000?

An enormous, 2-story tall birthday cake covered in LED Candles as delivered to Saeder-Krupp Headquarters last week, with an oversized birthday card that read "Happy 10,000 Birthday Goldensnout." Whether it was his birthday or if this is his true age is unknown, as is the identity of the person who sent the cake. Lofwyr is reportedly bending a large amount of resources to tracking down the culprit, however.

North American Urban Brawl League (NAUBL)

Cleveland Chaos	*6	Detroit Nightmares	*9
New Orleans Tombstones	5	Montreal Assassins	0
Ares Predators	*6	Oakland Terminators	*8
Miami Spears	3	St. Louis Slaughter	4
Norfolk Battlers	*5	Mountain Dragons	*7
Tsimishan Warriors	3	Renraku Invincibles	6

UCAS League Football

Cleveland Browns	*25	Detroit Lions	*28
Buffalo Bills	24	Seattle Seahawks	14

Freedom League Football

Atlanta Falcons	*34
Orlando Thunder	6

World Combat Cyclist League (WCCL)

Baton Rouge Red Devils	*8	Houston Mustangs	*6
DeeCee Shurikens	4	Texas Rattlers	3

Formula One Racing League

A major upset in the Formula One community as the F1 Association announced more stringent testing for nano and chemical performance enhancers. This announcement was undoubtedly made in response to the seven-driver pile-up last weekend in Monaco after Swiss driver Jon Hefti lost control of his vehicle due to seizures related to side-effects of the performance enhancing drug, Cram. Hefti was banned from the league and several other drivers are facing administrative punishment in the wake of refusing to be tested, claiming it is a violation of their rights. The F1 administration refuses to comment.

International Freeform Fighting Organization

Sharon Bradley continues to sweep across the women's division with her sixth consecutive TKO in a 5-round bout in Malaysia. Next month, she faces world champion Yoshi Kim in Bali in what is gearing up to be a record-setting event for attendance.

RUNNING WILD ADDENDUM: SHAPESHIFTERS

(>) After the *Running Wild* document hit the Matrix last year, I was contacted by an old chummer of mine, Dr. Wright. He's a parazoologist who studied under Dr. Patterson of the *Paranormals Guide to North America* fame. Some of you may remember Doc Wrights contributions to the *Year of the Comet* file, documenting the new critters that popped up. Anyway, he had a whole treatise on Shapeshifters that he'd submitted to Fastjack for *Running Wild*, but it ended up left out. So we're posting it up here. It's some interesting suff.
(>) Bull
         "The Best ork Decker You Never Met"

SAPIENT ANIMALS
By Dr. Wright

It's been well established for years that metahuman society has been infiltrated by metasapient animals. Of course, when speaking of these beings, the name animal is in fact a bit imprecise, as it insultingly suggests a relative decrease of intelligence. Nonetheless, their inherently feral nature and disposition does certainly provide ample justification for calling these people inhuman. Regardless of the classification, it must be accepted that these beings do exist and that their methods of thinking and nature are decidedly unusual.

As with so many facets of the Awakening, it's impossible to be certain what triggered the appearance of these people. It may have been that they were there all along, or it might have just been the endless series of legends of talking anthropomorphic animals that have appeared in folklore and in children's' entertainment for ages. Regardless of the cause, it's necessary to consider the psychology of these beings—their personalities ultimately validate genetics. While they might be able to maintain a facade of metahumanity, they are not metahuman and cannot be expected to behave in a manner that is consistent with metahuman expectations and morals.

To better understand their true nature requires a solid understanding in the behavioral society of the various types of animals that have been identified as shapeshifters. Their base species are generally aggressive animals whose survival is dependent upon quickly identifying and consuming prey. Though some predators, particularly among those observed as shapeshifters, are pack animals, many prefer to lead comparatively isolated lives.

A substantial problem for a predatory animal is the basic fact that their native hunting grounds have dramatically shrunk over the centuries as metahumanity has continued to expand its control over the earth. Every time a natural habitat is destroyed to make way for metahuman progress, the animals that previously dwelt there are forced to relocate. In some cases, one or more of those relocating animals turns out to have been a shapeshifter that was leading a lifestyle separate from metahumanity.

As one might expect, having their habitats destroyed in this manner can motivate some shapeshifters to strike out at humanity in a very aggressive and animalistic fashion. It's these instances of attacks, which are arguably provoked, that have often served to give these creatures a bad reputation. Of course, these aren't the only times that a shapeshifter might attack a metahuman, nor are those species listed below the only ones from which shapeshifters arise.

AETHERPEDIA ENTRY : SHAPESHIFTERS IN CAPTIVITY

The first confirmed appearance of a shapeshifter was in the Beijing Zoo in November of 2019. At that time, one of the female Pandas, named Meixiu, transformed into a human woman. She begged for her freedom from the zoo. It wasn't that she objected to the treatment she received, rather, she was just exhausted of being an exhibit. A number of pirate reporters quickly spread her story across the world to countless sympathetic and fascinated viewers. Most people thought it was a hoax, at least until a few of the more reputable magicians of the time reported what they saw upon assensing her.

Meixiu lived out the remainder of her life in the zoo, often as the premiere attraction. Attendance skyrocketed after her first appearance, and continued at a high level for several years, before she became just another exhibit. For twenty years, her case was passed from court to court as various human rights advocacy groups tried to prove that she should be given the full metahuman rights. In the end, she was killed during a terrorist raid on the zoo.

While she was posthumously granted a SIN and full Beijing citizenship, the precedent was not carried forward to other shapeshifters. Though a few other shapeshifters have emerged while in captivity, the phenomenon remains extremely rare. In some cases, particularly in the NAN states, shapeshifters are granted full metahuman status, but most do not receive such standing.

MOTIVATIONS

Invariably, a shapeshifter identifies with other creatures of its animal form far better than with metahumans. In fact, of the shapeshifters that have been interviewed about their nature, many admit that they first underwent a transformation when they were desperately trying to prevent metahuman encroachment upon their native lands. In the case of pack animals, these people retain a strong loyalty to their pack. For those that are solitary animals, they will still always be concerned about the welfare of their native species. It's clear that a desire to protect their species and their natural habitats from harm is a major part of a shapeshifter's psyche.

However, this protective nature is not the sum total of the shapeshifter's existence. Though it may often be a trigger, it is certainly not the only trigger. Further, once a shapeshifter gains the ability to shift, they never abandon it. Instead, these people seem to be compelled—subconsciously or magically—to spend time in the company of metahumans. Clearly some loathe this time, but these beings seem to find metahuman companionship as addictive as a street drug. Without it, they become listless and lose their sense of self. As a consequence, they often hover on the edges of metahuman groups—making friends but abandoning them before they can get too close.

In many cases, this leaves the shapeshifter feeling like a being without a home. They are creatures trapped

between two worlds, unable to fully embrace either of them. This sense leaves many shapeshifters mentally unstable, by metahuman standards. The two sides of their mind are in a constant state of battle, trying to find what is there home. There is clearly a certain amount of companionship open to them in the metahuman world that is unavailable to them in the animal realm. Sapience in a social animal brings a desire for discourse. As a consequence, those who avoid metahuman contact generally lead a lonely life surrounded by their non-sapient kin, but unable to effectively communicate with them—a depressing life to say the least.

SOCIETY

Over the last few years, I've begun to encounter signs, of a discrete shapeshifter society. I'm not talking about a civilization, though I suppose that could be possible in an Awakened nation. Rather, I'm referring to an organization dedicated to shapeshifters of various breeds.

Though these beings aren't characterized as technophiles, they are fully capable of using technology. In light of all of the advances in AR and the ubiquity of commlinks, it seems that these creatures have used their resources to create a dedicated VPN. This network provides the shapeshifters with a social outlet where they can freely interact with others of their own kind. While it doesn't completely replicate the society that that they are deprived of by their very nature, it does provide an outlet for them.

The quandary that this raises, however, is to know the nature of the society they have created. After all, their bestial nature dictates that these beings must compete with one another at some level. Getting to the root of how their organization chooses to express this competition would be a fascinating piece of sociological data totally unique in our Awakened world.

While I have done some hacking to further investigate this VPN, I'm afraid that I've met with no success for my efforts. I strongly suspect that some of the other regulars here might have better luck were they to investigate it. With that in mind, I'd strongly encourage others to take a look and see what they can dig up. The name that I've heard used for this site is "Call of the Wild."

Given my limited confirmation on this matter, I can only recount what rumors I have heard, though they do seem to come together quite well. The first of these is that these beings may be coordinating efforts to establish additional physical communities. As it stands now, there may be private clubs in a few sprawls that are dedicated meeting points for shapeshifters. In the case of some of the smaller clubs, these might be institutions where all members are shapeshifters. In most cases, though, these meeting places are a secret organization that uses the backroom of a more popular club—generally one owned by another shapeshifter or an eco-friendly sympathizer.

There are some suggestions that these organizations might intend to join with a larger nation, particularly an ecologically friendly one to establish larger protected enclaves for their kind, including their more mundane animal relatives. The problem with such a supposition is that the predatory animals that give birth to shapeshifters need a very large territory to establish a stable ecosystem. I don't believe there remain any nations with sufficient undeveloped lands to create an enclave that could accommodate a meaningful number of shapeshifters and their kindred animals.

Though this suggests that these beings might be attempting to conquer one or more nations, I do not believe that they are sufficiently organized for this. Similarly, though individuals may take part in eco-terrorist activities, I again do not believe that there are enough shapeshifters globally to have a meaningful impact on such efforts.

As a consequence of their relative rarity, I strongly suspect that these efforts are ultimately futile. If that is the case, then at some point in the near future, the shapeshifter community may come to a similar conclusion. In the even that happens, they may decide to take more direct action. The idea of a global terrorist organization coordinated and populated by shapeshifters willing to take extreme action against megacorporations, nations, and individuals is a decidedly unpleasant one. The only reasonable solution I see to this issue is to attempt increase the number of nature preserves that could be friendly to these beings.

SHAPESHIFTER STRAINS

There are no instances of an Awakened animal that is also a shapeshifter. Metagenetic theory suggests that the two different variants of Awakened genes are incompatible, in much the same way that metahuman genetics are exclusive. An organism could Awaken into a shapeshifter or into a paranatural animal, but not both.

What follows is a brief description of each of the known species of shapeshifters. I do not believe that these are all of the existing types. In fact, I'd be quite surprised to learn that there are no types that have not yet been encountered by metahuman society. I also suspect quite strongly that there may be specimens in the wild that have only not been identified because they have not yet had sufficient motivation to exercise their abilities.

In all cases of these entities, they are born to either shapeshifters or members of their native animal breed. Metahumans are incapable of interbreeding with shapeshifters due to basic chromosomal incompatibilities. Anecdotal evidence, primarily collected by interviewing shapeshifters, suggests that most were unaware of their abilities until adolescence or later. In all cases, the creatures only first transformed when they were subjected to unexpected stresses. These include natural disasters, pollution, or a more powerful predator.

In spite of this fact, these beings clearly have memories of their lives before their first transformation into metahuman form. Their sapience was present from a very early stage of their lives, their ability to shapeshift merely manifested later.

The reasonable conclusion from this fact is that there may be substantially more shapeshifters in the wild than metahumanity has had reason to suspect. It's entirely possible that many seemingly mundane animals do, in fact, possess the ability to change into a metahuman form. The only reason that they have not done so is that they have not been sufficiently motivated to attempt the transformation. It might be interesting to capture a large number of animals of one of the breeds associated with this ability and treat them to a stressful situation to see if a high percentage of them exhibited this trait.

BEAR

Legends of humans that can transform into a bear shape go back to early Amerindian tribes and also to

Ancient Greek myth. There are also extensive legends tied in with Norse berserkers during the Middle Ages. It's possible that these legends are ones that were tied to the modern paranormal beings. Though the myths varied considerably, in many cases, these creatures were viewed as more friendly towards humans than some of the other lycanthropic legends. Some were seen as saviors or heroes.

In spite of that, the bear shapeshifter is not generally a particularly friendly metahuman. In their metahuman form, these massive people are generally characterized as having a temper that can make them quite volatile. Though they can be reasonably patient, once their anger turns, they tend to go to great lengths to discharge it. In some cases, they may shapeshift into their bear form before entering a combat, or in the midst of it. All of the anecdotes I've compiled of such fights include substantial body counts.

Bear shapeshifters are found globally associated with the different varieties of bear found in the wild. Instances of grizzly, panda, black, brown, and panda shapeshifters have all been identified. The animal form of all correlates roughly to the size of their natural species, though shapeshifters tend to be among the larger end of the growth curve. The dietary requirements of a bear shapeshifter tend to diverge only slightly from their native species. As an anecdotal generalization, many of the shapeshifters do seem to have a slightly higher preference for meat than their mundane relatives, but no large studies have been made.

Shapeshifters differ from bears that have not awakened in that they almost never hibernate. Rather, they tend to spend winters primarily in their metahuman form dwelling among human society. Similarly, these beings do not have the need to gorge themselves during late summer and autumn in preparation for such a hibernation. Though skinny bears at that time are often desperate for food and exceptionally aggressive, a bear shapeshifter will not be appreciably more aggressive than it would be at any other time of the year.

In their metahuman form, many have a tendency to find roles in military jobs. These people are well suited to exploiting their large frames and physical prowess in such a field. In disciplinary situations, their tempers may sometimes be an issue. However, their durability and general tendency towards competence largely offsets this.

Shamanic tradition often ascribes a strong healing aspect to bear. However, this is not usually seen amongst the shapeshifters. This inconsistency is a bit striking, and suggests that the origins of these paranimals may not be tightly linked to whatever inspires that tradition of belief.

EAGLE

Simply put, there are not a lot of ancient legends about people transforming into eagles. The earliest I could find was a Comanche tale about a chief whose son, after dying, was resurrected as an eagle. That one seems a bit of a one-way transformation. Though there are a few other tales, none of them appear to be widespread or central to a particular culture or religious belief system.

In spite of this scarcity of legends, eagle shapeshifters have been identified throughout North America and in parts of Europe. All identified shapeshifters have had a native form from either the *Aquila* or *Haliaeetus* genus. The most common types are Bald Eagles in North America and the White-tailed Eagle in Northern Europe. Though the latter species also includes much of Asia as its native habitat,

there are no known shapeshifters of this type from that region.

These people are characterized as being emotionally distant and aloof. There is a stereotype that they are extraordinarily observant of their surroundings and a predatory in their attitudes towards everyone. Even other shapeshifters have described those of eagle descent as being ego-driven and aggressive.

Eagle shapeshifters are generally non-migratory. Rather than moving towards a warmer climate with a better food supply during winter months, most tend to spend the time in a metahuman form using man-made resources to find warmth and food. Some have indicated that they prefer to do this so that they can maintain a watch over their natural territory in the winter, as otherwise intruders could cause substantial damage while they were away. Others have given the more pragmatic opinion that they simply prefer to take advantage of all of their resources, rather than depending upon trying their luck at finding a food supply and a comfortable environment hundreds of miles away for three to four months a year.
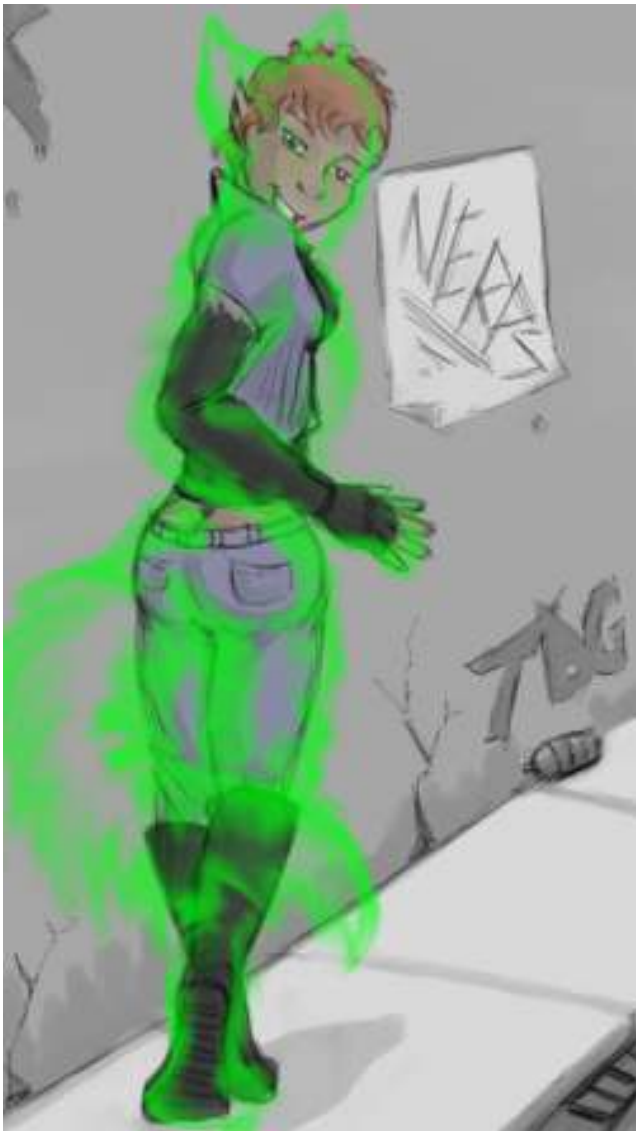
For those eagle shapeshifters that choose to follow a career in their metahuman form, most find their way to careers that have a solitary work environment. When possible, they tend to also be jobs that involve working out of doors. Though some metahuman contact and cooperation is inevitable in any field, these people have a clear preference for independent entrepreneurial endeavors—the idea of a boss and a traditional work day in an office seems to be anathema to them. Some follow comparatively mundane jobs as landscapers or duties in forestry services. A few have followed careers in freelance photojournalism or other artistic fields. The structured life of the military, a sarariman, or related jobs is clearly not compatible with their psyches.

FOX

The earliest confirmed traditional legends of fox shapeshifters come from Japan in the sixth century. The kitsune were powerful kami with the ability to assume the a human form, generally a female one. Interestingly, the power of these entities was easily identified by the number of tails they possessed. The more common ones had a single tail, but the most powerful could have as many as nine. Similar legends of fox shapeshifters are found throughout China and southeast Asia. It's unclear where these legends originated, as some evidence suggests may have first appeared on the mainland prior to the sixth century and later migrated to Japan.

While the fox shapeshifter of the sixth world shares the kitsune's characteristic of keeping its tail upon transforming to metahuman form, this is largely where the similarity ends. These creatures always have a single tail and they are clearly not spirits. As with all shapeshifters, they are clearly awakened members of their native species and entities native to the physical plane. Though some might hint at a greater knowledge of the spiritual world and the ways of spirits, there is no concrete evidence that such an expanded supernatural tie actually exists.

The vast majority of fox shapeshifters are members of the common *Vulpes vulpes* or red fox species. These foxes are found in the wild on all continents save South America and Antarctica. Though not native to either the Americas or Australia, they have flourished in both of these places. The native species is extremely adaptive in terms of its prey

their money. A few have followed a religious motif, where they've used their nature to their advantage. However, that is by no means the most common. Many have managed to become highly skilled in Matrix use, and developed sophisticated schemes based upon matrix redirection and identity theft.

JAGUAR

Ancient Olmec representations that link their shamanistic traditions with the power of the jaguar date back to at least 1000 BCE. The traditions include a number of depictions of tribal shamans transforming into a jaguar form, and also of half-human half-jaguar shapes, characterized by iconography associated with a jaguar's physiology. These traditions were carried forward into the Mayan culture and into a number of the other indigenous peoples of Latin and South America.

Of course, the half-form is suggestive that this iconography has no connection to the modern entity. Nonetheless, the mythical associations and the deliberate linkage between shamanism and these animals cannot be easily ignored. The mundane jaguar is a species native only to Latin and South America. In that environment, it maintains a position at the top of its food chain. This placement alone is a powerful one that clearly made for a powerful association among these ancient civilizations.

Further, the animal's extremely powerful bite—capable of cracking through its prey's skull—in conjunction with its ability to conceal itself from prey and carefully stalk its targets made the creature a very powerful symbol to these civilizations. These facets combined to make the animal a powerful symbol of dominance for warriors within these cultures. It's easy to imagine that these people would beseech a shaman that claimed an association with such an entity to grant them a portion of the animal's abilities.

As these animals are only native to Central and South America, the associated species of shapeshifter is also limited to this same geographic region. Like their mundane relatives, the jaguars only rarely form any sorts of lasting bonds with others of their kind. Rather, they are highly territorial. This carries over to residencies within sections of a given sprawl for those who maintain a metahuman residence and lifestyle. If more than one male jaguar shapeshifter lives within a sprawl, they will reside at least fifteen kilometers apart. Further, when traveling into another shapeshifter's territory within the sprawl, the intruder will go to great lengths to conceal the intrusion unless they are extremely confident in their ability to win a fight with the shapeshifter who holds the territory.

Though jaguar shapeshifters have been hunted to near extinction within Aztlan, some have chosen to integrate into metahuman society within Amazonia and other South American nations. Their career choices are invariably ones that put them in a position of dominance over as many other metahumans as possible. As their personalities tend towards patience and secrecy many will be found with responsibilities that allow them to work their way up within in an organization. In many cases, this puts them in charge of powerful urban crime syndicates. However, there are definitely cases of these shapeshifters assuming high-ranking positions within several megacorporations.

animals and its ability to integrate into new environments. There are a few instances of known shapeshifters associated with other species, however, they are comparatively quite rare. It's unknown if this is a simple case of metagenic association or due to the much larger global population of red foxes.

In spite of the global spread of their parent species, almost all shapeshifters are native to Southeast and Central Asia. The commonality of the kitsune myths with the uneven shapeshifter distribution strongly suggests that the two may be linked. However, there is no concrete evidence to confirm or deny if there is a definitive connection between these two factors.

These shapeshifters seem to be among the most successful to integrate into metahuman society. Just as their mundane fellows have managed to find a unique niche in a vast array of different ecosystems, individual fox shapeshifters have found ideal placement in different metahuman societies. While it is an unfair generalization, many of these beings have willfully and deliberately engaged in lives of crime and deception. Though the specific schemes vary from instance to instance, the majority of them involve traditional confidence schemes, whereby the shapeshifter dupes the unsuspecting out of

The popular myth of the werewolf has included for centuries the notion that these entities are controlled by the lunar cycle. At the full moon, a werewolf would be forced to transform into their feral shape. Once transformed, the entity would lose all self-control and ruthlessly hunt and kill unsuspecting human victims, often transforming the victims into werewolves in the process. s

There is absolutely no truth to this myth, at least as it applies to shapeshifters. (There is some similarity in terms of the cycles of loup garou and their infectious nature.) Shapeshifters are never compelled to transition from one form to another by outside forces, including the phase of the moon or the presence of any mundane animals. Shapeshifters are also born as shapeshifters, the abilities are entirely metagenic in nature. It is not possible for a shapeshifter to pass its abilities to a mundane human or, for that matter, to a mundane animal. Their abilities are in no way contagious.

LION

The massive statue of the Sphynx near Cairo is a clear reminder that Ancient Egypt believed in beings that bridged the gap between mankind and lions. Further legends arose in several cultures from Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly involving divinities manifesting in a leonine form and interbreeding with mortals. Cave paintings of lions appear in artwork that's well over 30,000 years old. Clearly, the two species have interacted for a very long time.

Traditional imagery and symbolism of the lion is deeply ingrained in most metahuman cultures. The animal has long represented a combination of strength, power, and nobility. In light of this symbolism, the animal has been central to the heraldry of many nations and individual families. In spite of this broad reaching connection, there are no confirmed instances of a member of a family that used this imagery being also identified as a lion shapeshifter.

A lion is generally considered a keystone predator, in that it has no predators that attempt to prey upon it, save man. The female of the species is the dominant hunter, though the males are generally instrumental in directing prey during a hunt. While there are rare instances of lions preying upon humans, instances of man-eating lions are quite rare. Generally speaking, a lion will prey upon any source of meat that is reasonably convenient for it to obtain. In some cases, this may mean that a pride of lions will even scavenge upon an easily accessible cadaver.

While the lion's historic range was substantial, its modern range is limited to Sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, aside from a few instances in zoos, all lion shapeshifters have come from that region. Mundane female lions tend to remain closely affiliated with their pride, however, male lions are excluded from their birth pride. These males, upon maturation, are expected to dominate an existing pride or establish a new one of their own. In much the same way, male shapeshifters will often go in search of a new family unit during their young adult years. This time of exploration is mirrored closely in their metahuman and animalistic forms.

Those lion shapeshifters that choose to establish a lifestyle as a metahuman tend to fall into either a nomadic or a communal lifestyle, just as their animal side would. Some prefer to follow independent careers, or perhaps relying on just one or two close companions. Conversely, others often accrue a large group of associates whom they rely upon and defend fiercely. These larger groups of companions seem to serve as a virtual pride for the shapeshifter, and the full range of protective instincts clearly come into effect when dealing with them.

SEAL

The legends of the selkie, or seal shapeshifter, date back to at least the thirteenth century. During this time, the legends were active in the Orkney Islands, north of Scotland. Over time, these legends spread through Scotland and into the Celtic lands of Ireland. Selkies were identified as seals who could remove their skin to assume a human form. They were also fully capable of interbreeding with humans, and a number of stories recount men stealing a selkie woman's skin to force her to remain in her human guise and marry him. Interestingly, the selkie stories are often associated with other tales of faerie.

In spite of this association, there is nothing to indicate that the seal shapeshifter of the sixth world is a wild spirit. Rather, they are clearly an Awakened species of seal. Further, like all other shapeshifters, the selkie is incapable of interbreeding with metahumanity. Nonetheless, a few points of the selkie stories certainly are true. These shapeshifters are decidedly more friendly towards humans than most, even those whose territory has been damaged by pollution. Selkies also have a tendency to spend nearly an equal amount of time in their metahuman form, unlike most other shapeshifters. While these beings clearly have a great love for the sea, they also clearly enjoy their social interactions with metahumans. However, the longing for the sea that always figures into these legends is certainly true. A selkie will never travel far from the ocean. In fact, most will rarely go more than three to four miles inland. Only extreme circumstances will persuade them to travel far enough from their beloved waterfront that they can no longer feel and smell the ocean's breeze.

All confirmed selkies have been associated with the family Phocidae or earless seals. Individual species are found throughout the northernmost and southernmost portions of both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. In a manner consistent with the spread of the legends, there have is an increased number of admitted selkies active in the United Kingdom and Tir na nOg. Both nations have consistently granted SINs to selkie inhabitants, though they have not extended this practice to all types of shapeshifters.

The stereotypical selkie often maintains a metahuman career in the service or entertainment industries. Though limited by their inability to receive an implanted simrig, a number of these beings have still managed successful careers in the recording and performance arts—a few have even leveraged their popularity to champion the cause of shapeshifter rights. Other selkies have worked as bartenders, pub owners, or even run successful water taxi or tourism businesses.

TIGER

Legends of tiger shapeshifters are primarily from India and historic China. These legends go back at least two thousand years, and tend to grant the shapeshifters additional magical prowess beyond the ability to change forms. In fact, most of these beings were credited with additional powerful magics and the ability to deal with spirits and demons.

In the sixth world, tiger shapeshifters hold remarkably true to these legends. A very high percentage of these beings are fully awakened spellcasters and conjurers, with a subset of the remainder having adept talents. Their traditions tend towards shamanic ones that are tightly interlinked with the worship of forest spirits.

Their mundane parent species remain in the wild in India, southeast Asia, China, and occasionally into Siberia. However, the vast majority of the known shapeshifters have migrated into Awakened Yakut and joined with the government of that nation. This migration has been so remarkably consistent that there are no known tiger shapeshifters in the wild outside of that country.

Tiger shapeshifters are clearly descended from all of the different subspecies, and those associated with the physically larger subspecies are also associated with physically larger metahuman forms. This correlation is a bit inconsistent with other shapeshifters, but may be due to the fact that these animals clearly use their size in conjunction with their hunting methods. In the wild, the mundane animals use their substantial strength and mass to knock large prey off balance, then move in with their powerful jaws to strangle the victim. Smaller prey can often be eliminated by quickly severing the spinal column, again using their jaws and fangs advantageously.

Both male and female tigers tend to be solitary and territorial hunters. Battles between encroaching animals can be vicious and sometimes deadly. This competition can often extend beyond members of their own species—tigers have been known to disrupt wolf packs and kill intruding leopards. Though this relationship does carry over to the shapeshifters of the breed, it is at a reduced level. As evidenced by the success of Yakut, these beings can clearly work together. However, they will often be quite protective of their area of expertise. Often, these people will go to great lengths to maintain an aura of secrecy about their projects until the work is complete and ready to be presented.

In Yakut, most tiger shapeshifters are involved in a role associated with government security operations. In many cases, they are directly involved as soldiers. However, several have assumed roles in espionage or in law enforcement. Due to their proclivity for additional magical abilities, their assignments often involve roles in enforcing or overcoming the magical aspects of security.

WOLF

Due to the entertainment industry, the werewolf is most likely the best known shapeshifter legend throughout the northern hemisphere, if not the world. Legends of humans transforming into wolves extend back to Ancient Greece and also to several early Amerindian cultures. A variety of clinically known syndromes have been ascribed to the origin of the myth, though all tend to link in more closely with the half-man, half-wolf form popularized by the media.

The mundane wolf has a very broad range throughout all of North America and most of Europe and Asia. Historical and fossil records further indicate that its population and range have both been significantly reduced by the encroachment of methuman civilization. In spite of this fact, the mundane animals have a remarkable ability to adapt to changes in their environment and the availability of their prey. Through the vast majority of their range, there are no predators that present a threat to a healthy pack of wolves.

This broad range for the parent mundane species correlates directly to a broad range for those with the ability to shapeshift. A large population of wolf shapeshifters is active within Yakut, but they are certainly not a majority of these shapeshifters globally. Rather, a substantial percentage of the global population remain in Eastern Europe and in Native American Nations of North America.

Adolescent male wolves will generally be forced to leave their birth pack, and go in search of another pack to join. However, this is typically the only time during a wolf's life when it will be independent. In the vast majority of cases, a wolf will be closely affiliated with a pack. Pack mates exhibit fierce ties of loyalty that are one of the most defining characteristics of these animals.

Similarly, a wolf shapeshifter will be incredibly loyal to its pack. In some cases, where the shapeshifter is actively pursuing a metahuman life, it will consider its close metahuman friends as pack and exhibit a similar loyalty to them. However, with increasing frequency, there have been reports of packs made up entirely of wolf shapeshifters. It seems that these beings have managed to exploit metahuman technology sufficiently to use it to identify other shapeshifters in distant parts of the world. They have then tracked down these younger shapeshifters and recruited them into their own societies. While these societies are purportedly quite peaceful and isolationist, the notion of a pack of wolves with metahuman intelligence and tactical training is certainly disquieting.

In their metahuman lives, wolf shapeshifters have taken on too broad a variety of roles for a sweeping generalization to be appropriate. While they often show a tendency towards professions that require physical prowess, many have also shown a tendency towards more academic pursuits.

Prime Runners

(>) There's always an interest in knowing who is who in the shadows. Some folks don't like the dirt being spread, but it's out there anyway. Embrace it, and you can do some damage control. Try and hide it, and it just makes the dirt that much juicier. Contact is an expert at finding information on people, and he's been researching some of the regulars in the shadows around here. I'm letting him post up his "Prime Runners" on occasion, and I'm letting him start with myself. Lord help us all.
(>) Bull
   "The Best Ork Decker You Never Met"

Bull

So you want the lowdown on our local dictator, do you? The lord high and mighty of "Bull's Mobile Bar & Grill"? Well, lucky for you boys and girls that while Bull's an excellent decker and would love to run a trace and burn on his past, there's just too damn much of it floating around the Matrix for him to ever properly bury. Of course, the fun part is trying to figure out what's rumor, what's legend, what's an outright lie, and what's the truth.

Bull was born and raised in the Chicago sprawl, and his parents were killed during Alamos 20,000's attack on the Sears Tower that created the Shattergraves. He was declared deceased as well, though obviously he survived. Rumor has it that he was taken in and raised by a dwarf shadowrunner, but I can't find any more details about that. Bull goblinized into an Ork around age 13 or 14. That's right, the "Best Ork Decker You Never Met" wasn't originally an Ork. He was born human.

Around 2050, he entered the shadow scene, partnered up with a rookie Coyote Shaman named Johnny 99. The two of them stumbled around the shadows for a while before starting to make a name for themselves. At some point, Bull met a human waitress named Marie, and the two began dating. When Marie found herself pregnant, Bull married her, and soon after Marie gave birth to twin orks named William Jr (Billy) and Rebecca (Reba). Marie became pregnant again a short time later, though the baby died at birth.

(>) There were rumors going around that maybe an enemy of Bull's had actually snatched the baby from the hospital and switched it out for a corpse. Bull chased down a number of leads, but as far as anyone can tell, these never led anywhere.
(>) Quantum Princess

Bull and Johnny were trapped in Bug City in 2055. They had been involved in investigating the local chapter of the United Brotherhood, and had prepared themselves to fight Insect Spirits, and so were better off than many of the cities residents. Bull helped get the Chicago BBS up and running, and was one of several deckers crucial to making contact with the outside world. Shortly after this, through unknown means, they manage to escape the Containment Zone and relocate to Cleveland. They make several trips back into the CZ over the next year, either hired as Shadowrunners or to go back to try and help friends left behind.

(>) Bull's pretty tied to some of the mess that was Chicago. If we'd have found out some of this earlier, I'm not sure how much we'd have trusted him then, though the trust turned out to be fairly well founded. Bull had numerous contacts with the Ghoul community in the Shattergraves, and the ghouls turned out to be a huge help fighting off the bugs due to their ability to see the astral plane. Also, his partner Johnny had two wives prior to the bug invasion. One of them, Becky, went missing right before things went to hell, and it was later learned that she had willingly joined with a Mantis hive. This particular hive turned out to be fairly harmless, comparatively, and worked with us on numerous occasions to take out bug hives. Most of the Mantids present in Chicago were pretty ruthless, but her group seemed much more interested in destroying the insects than killing humans.
(>) Hawkeye

Around 2062 or so, Johnny 99 was presumed killed on a mission. Johnny survived and turned up later, but that was one near miss too many for him, and he hung up his deck. He moved his family somewhere up north, rumor has it to a farm in Wisconsin or Minnesota, and decided he was done with the biz. Of course, no one ever manages to get out completely out of the biz. Rumor has it Bull's worked occasionally as a Fixer, once or twice as a Mr. Johnson, and now of course he's set up this VPN. He's still a top notch hacker, and keeps his hardware top of the line.

(>) There's a lot of rumors going around about some of the ork's exploits. There was a video that made the rounds years ago, showing Bull and Johnny following clues and riddles throughout Chicago and getting the drek kicked out of them along the way. Turned out it was an elaborate revenge scheme by an assassin that they had foiled once. There are stories about some of the drek they pulled in Chicago during the CZ, fighting some monster insect queens, rumors about them having a free spirit and a ghost working with them, a story about them being responsible for crashing the Ares Prometheus orbital platform in '59. Bull also holds a very public grudge against the elf Harlequin, aka "The Laughing Man", whom he blamed for Johnny's supposed death in '62. Even though Johnny has since turned up, Bull's not let up in that regard. How much of any of this is true is anyone's guess, though we all know how stories grow in the shadows.
(>) Findler-Man

(>) Ahh, yes. "The video". That's a plan that actually backfired somewhat, since rather than ruin Bull's career, it actually helped give him exposure and got him some jobs. Worked out in the end though, I suppose.
(>) The DJ

William Michael "Bull" MacCallister (Decker)

Birth Date: August 10, 2030
Birthplace: Chicago, Illinois, UCAS
Nationality/Metatype/Gender: UCAS/Caucasion Ork/Male
Current Residence: Minnesota, UCAS
Height: 195 cm
Weight: 130 kg
Hair: Dark Brown
Eyes: Green
Distinguishing Physical Features: Twin datajacks at right temple
Psychology
　　Traits: Friendly, Boisterous, Confident, Loyal
　　Motivations: Protection and well being of family, a desire to share his experiences
Lifestyle: High

Notes and Hooks

Bull has retired to a farm in the middle of nowhere in Minnesota, and has no plans to leave it. However, both his children have become shadowrunners, Billy operating as a hacker in Seattle, and Reba running as a mage in Cleveland. If either of them needed help in any way, he'd come running. Likewise, if either got into trouble, he'd move Heaven and Earth to save them.

Bull will sometimes operate as a fixer or a Mr. Johnson for friends, operating remotely through the Matrix. He can be hired by runners to provide off-site Matrix support if they can give him a good enough reason to help (he's a sucker for a sob story), and his rates are pretty reasonable, as he's managed to acquire quite a bit of money over the years. He also makes a valuable contact, with extensive knowledge in a lot of different areas and a vast array of contacts to tap.

He's utterly loyal to his friends, and while he doesn't believe in needless killing or violence on a shadowrun, cross him, his friends, or his family and he will hunt you to the ends of the earth.

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Ed	Ess	Init	IP
9	5(9)	5(8)	6(10)	5	6	6(9)	5	6	2.20	14/14*	4/5*

*Matrix Initiative in Hot Sim VR

Active Skills: Cracking Group 6 (Cybercombat Specialized in IC), Electronics Group 6, Heavy Weapons (Specialized in Assault Cannon) 6, Pistols (Specialized in Heavy Pistols) 6, Exotic Weapon (Polearm) 6 Exotic Weapon (Ares Squirt) 6, Close Combat Group 4, Athletic Group 4, Influence Group 4, First Aid 4, Pilot Groundcraft 4, Pilot Aircraft 4, Throwing Weapons 4, Stealth Group 3, Automatics 3, Longarms 3

Knowledge Skills: Insect Spirits, Chicago CZ, Cleveland, Anything Matrix-related, Shadowrunners, Computer and programming theory, all at high ratings (4 to 6).

Augmentations: Control Rig, Datajack x2, Cerebral Booster 3, Encephelon 2, Math SPU, Mnemonic Enhancer 3, Synaptic Booster 3, Muscle Augmentation 4, Muscle Toner 4, Simsense Booster (all Betaware)

Commlink: Custom Built, all programs and attributes rating 6 or better, carried inside an armored Alpha Allegiance Cyberdeck casing.

Gear: Has the resources to gain access to nearly any gear he needs. He routinely carries a Ruger Warhawk or an Ares Super Squirt with Gamma Scopolamine, carries a collapsible pole arm enchanted with a Slay Insect Spirit spell, and wears an armored Spike Wheels (Chicago Chapter) jacket. He always has a Panther Assault Cannon kept nearby, and has a tricked-out GMC Bulldog armored out with drone racks carrying several Micro Skimmer drones.

Rush

If you run in the Manhattan Corporate Gulag at all, you may have run into Rush, an ork street sammy that's been running out of there for a little while now. He's volatile, a little unhinged, and not someone you want by your side when negotiating with Mr. Johnson for some better pay. However, when the bullets start flying, so long as you're not his target, you'll be glad he's there. Rush's history was something of a matter of public record, but since it recently "disappeared" off the Matrix, I'll be nice and not divulge too many secrets. I'm sure it cost him a pretty penny to do that.

(>) Good call. You don't want to make me angry.
(>) Rush

(>) "You wouldn't like me when I'm angry"? Bah, never mind, before your time. Regardless, Bull wants us to play nice, so I am.
(>) Contact

Rush is an ork with Amerind ancestry. Probably a local tribe, I'd guess Mohawk Indian, but that might just be because he wears that god-awful bright blue mohawk. He ran with a small, local street gang in Brooklyn, where he grew up. He got busted a couple times as a teen for petty stuff, and when he turned 18 he got nabbed again. This time, the judge gave him that age old option: prison or the army. Rush joined the army.

He was a mean enough cuss, and rumor has it that he got recruited for a black ops unit shortly after he got out of basic. That would explain where a street kid managed to get hold of some top end Alphaware wired reflexes and dermal sheathing. Some classified intel indicates he was part of a unit that was sent down to either Central America or Amazonia to help with some of the fighting that's been going on there for the last couple decades, under the table of course since Uncle Sam isn't officially involved with that mess. Then last year, Rush came home in bandages, discharged from the service honorably, but without the pomp and circumstance that usually accompanies such things.

(>) My guess is the Yucatan. The UCAS has been covertly supplying the rebel forces down there since '59 or so. It's a mess and been a massive stalemate for the last 6 or 7 years, but there are still clashes.

And last year, there were rumors of the Azzies and the rebels having their biggest dustup in a decade.
(>) Hangfire

(>) I thought this guy sounded familiar. I was making a supply run to one of the rebel encampments last year, and got paid to take a bunch of what I thought were mercs up to a way station in Miami. They were banged up pretty bad by the damned Azzies, and from what I pieced together, sounds like they had tangled with a couple blood mages. Sounded like some nasty stuff. Rush was one of those "mercs".
(>) Crossbones

With the recent activity by the Manhattan Development Consortium, there's been a lot of call for shadowrunners, and Rush transitioned into that pretty easily. He's been seen running pretty regularly with another Amerind, a rigger named Lynx Redmoon. Rumor has it they were somehow involved with the destruction of the MDC headquarters last year.

James "Rush" Howling Wind

Birth Date: May 5, 2048
Birthplace: Brooklyn, New York, UCAS
Nationality/Metatype/Gender: UCAS/Mohawk Amerind Ork/Male
Current Residence: Brooklyn, New York, UCAS
Height: 190 cm
Weight: 128 kg
Hair: Blue
Eyes: Brown
Distinguishing Physical Features: Blue Mohawk, Mirrored Cybereyes, Tribal Tattoo on right side of face.
Psychology
>**Traits:** Uncouth, Rash, Anxious
>**Motivations:** Rush suffers from nightmares from his time the Yucatan, and has become addicted to the drug Guts while dealing with this. He leaps headfirst into dangerous situations as a way to prove he is unafraid.

Lifestyle: Middle

Notes and Hooks

Rush is a mercenary, and runs the shadows for two reasons: for money, and to prove to himself that he's not a coward. He used to know some of the local street gangs, but during his absence his old gang has evaporated and a lot has changed.

Rush could be used as opposition in a New York campaign, or could be a hired gun. He'll honor his end of any deal, and he won't sell out someone he's working with, but he doesn't really make friends.

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	Ed	Ess	Init	IP
7	5(7)	5(7)	3(5)	3	3	2	3	4	1.03	8(10)	3

Active Skills: Close Combat Skill Group 3, Dodge 3, Perception 2, Intimidation 2, Exotic Weapons (Monowhip)

5, Pistols (Specialized in Semi-Automatics) 5, Automatics 3, Acrobatics 2

Knowledge Skills: Recreational Pharmaceuticals 4, Military Procedures 3, Street Fighting 3, Or'zet Metal 2, Jungle Tactics 2, New York Street Gangs 1

Qualities: Ambidextrous, Bio-Compatibility, Uncouth, Moderate Addiction (Drug - Guts)

Augmentations: Cybereyes 3 (Recorder, Flare Comp, Image Link, Lowlight, Smartlink, Thermographic, Vision Enhancement 2, Vision Mag), Cyberears 3 (Enhanced Audio 3, Recorder, Sound Link, Sound Filter, Sound Dampener, Spatial Recognizer), Dermal Sheath 2, Wired Reflexes 2, Muscle Replacement 2, Cyber Spurs (All Cyber at Alpha)

Commlink: Off the shelf Erika Elite (Response 3, Signature 4) with Iris Orb OS (System 3, Firewall 3). Has 4 commlinks, one for each fake ID he has.

Gear: 2x Ruger Thunderbolt (Smartlink, Custom Grips), FN HAR, 2x Katana, Monowhip, Maglock Passkey 4, Maglock Sequencer 4, Doc Wagon Gold Contract, 50 Doses of Guts, 20 Doses of Kamikazee, Harley Scorpion

Contacts: Cyberdoc (4/3), Armorer (3/3), Fixer (2/2), Pharmacist (4/4), Several NY Missions Contacts

Tough Lessons

It was an average job, and sounded simple. We met at our normal bar to talk over the details. Our hacker, Hex, had done all the legwork, and Colt, an orc ex-merc, planned on going with me. Colt was tough and liked to show it. His idea was very much a 'run and gun' style of mission.

"We go in, clean 'em out, and call it a day. What's so hard about that?" Colt was confident that this would be a cakewalk. I don't blame him. Nothing seemed strange about it, and I am still convinced that it was not a set up. Hex said he checked everything out multiple times. It all lined up perfectly.

I told him not to underestimate anything. I learned that long ago, but apparently I needed a refresher course.

"Anze, they're ferals. Not even sentient. Jus' don't get bit, easy as that." He flicked a cigarette butt onto the dingy floor and snuffed it out with his boot. He finished off the last of his synthohol before continuing. "You should know as good as me. We were professionals."

I told him that was years ago, and not to bring it up again. I like the present much more. It may not be that good right now, but it is better than being forgotten about in a hostile land by people you trusted. Sure the world had gone to hell, but I could still be bitter. I tried to focus back to the task at hand. I asked him what his plan was.

It made sense at the time. We both used to be soldiers. Naturally we both thought like soldiers and less like shadowrunners. We took what we knew we would need for an assault and nothing else. In his mind it played out pretty simple. Kick in the door, take out one or two and let the rest come to us through the door. "They won't have guns, so let's leave our plates behind. It'd only slow us down." That really stuck in my head. Pulling the ceramic plates out of our vests would save on weight and help our mobility as long as we didn't get shot. I haven't seen a feral ghoul yet that tried to shoot me.

We managed to get there through the sewers and had three separate exit routes planned. It looked like it was a room built into the side of the sewer. We checked to make sure our commlinks were able to send each other messages, I snugged up my goggles so they would stay on, and we readied. I watched Colt give a three count in my AR display and he kicked open the door. His Mossberg snapped to his shoulder and he entered the room. I came in behind him my M23 readied as well. It was too quiet to be normal. A single light bulb hung from the ceiling, illuminating the main room. A piece of dirty corrugated metal sat on four stacks of broken bricks to create a makeshift table. An open doorway on the other end of the room led into another room a good five meters away.

"I'll check the room. Cover me" popped into my vision.

"I got your back" I replied. He moved toward the open door, but as soon as he got in front of the table shots came out of the door. I caught a quick glimpse of a ghoul duck back into the the

room, and saw Colt stumble backwards. I fired a quick burst at the door before running to Colt. He was standing back up with blood oozing out of his right shoulder. "Head for the exit. I'll cover you." I sent over my 'link. He gave a nod to me and moved for the exit as I put a few more bursts into the doorway. I heard a few shots behind me and a shotgun blast and the room went dark. I dropped to the ground to get a good look at what the heck had just happened.

I flipped on my thermal and looked back toward the exit to see two figures there. Colt lay a meter or so away from me and another figure lay in the doorway, both of them did not move at all. I looked under the low table and saw the other ghoul walking slowly out of the room. I looked back at the exit just in time to see the body in the exit doorway being dragged out of sight. I knew there was at least one left out there. I had a couple seconds to take out the closest ghoul before the other was done moving the body. I began to quickly get up to take a shot at the ghoul walking toward me. About half way up I noticed the ammo counter in my AR was flashing zero. This was not one of my better days. I flipped the M23, gripped the barrel, and took a swing at the ghoul. It caught him in the chin with a strong upward swing. His head flew back and he hit the ground as I felt the receiver of my rifle snap and clatter to the ground.

My body just started acting on it's own. I dove over the table catching the far edge on my way down, causing it to topple off the bricks that held its corners up. Gun fire hit the steel and bricks as I moved through the air, and a bullet streaked through my left shoulder. I came down hard on it and pain surged through my arm and made me skip a breath. I still managed to get my Predator out of the holster as I bit back the pain. I sat up quickly and put two shots at the target in the door. The muzzle flash blinded me for a moment. My vision returned a second later to see the figure of the ghoul on the ground.

I figured there could be more outside of the door, but I didn't care. I ran for it. I ran the whole way out. We should have been ready. It almost killed both of us. It cost Colt his life. Something so simple and it was a mess. I remember I took some time off after that and found a new group. Sold some nice gear to keep paying rent. I learned some lessons at least. Take every job seriously, pay attention, and always wear your armor.

Giving Form to Chaos… (or Not)
Adventure Design in Shadowrun

My main gaming group has been a little slow as of late. We play remotely, meeting online and lately peoples' schedules have been non-compliant. Like many GMs when I have these interludes I tend to do a lot of thinking and lately I've been thinking a lot about non-linear adventure design. I did some searches on Dumpshock, but these concepts haven't really been discussed in any great detail. But my game-less plight is your good fortune. Lucky for you I have compiled my thoughts into this here article for your perusal and enlightenment

Let me first say that I do not claim to have invented these ideas all by myself. Many of the concepts were discussed on other RPG blog sites and discussion boards, particularly a great site called Gnome Stew [http://www.gnomestew.com]. Oddly enough I also ran into a number of discussion boards dedicated to video game design, which also discussed these concepts. Apparently there is something of a debate raging right now between two extremes- essentially linear game play (in the form of FPS) and non-linear game play (MMORPGs). These two formats have become the big sellers in recent years, so there is a lot of discussion about what direction the video game industry will go. But the real holy grail of non-linear video game design is what has been dubbed "sandbox" play- a world wherein the player can go anywhere and do anything they want. For obvious reasons it is unlikely that any video game will ever achieve a true "sandbox" feel. However, this may be the greatest advantage a pen-and-paper RPG has over video games- we can theoretically achieve a truly non-linear sandbox. Of course actually doing so is another matter altogether (more on this later).

The Spectrum of Linearity:

Linearity, as it applies to adventure design, exists as a spectrum. On one extreme you have Railroading, which is basically linearity-gone-bad and on the other you have The Sandbox, which is almost completely non-linear. Most games exist somewhere in between, and probably the majority is closer to the linear side of the spectrum, utilizing a roughly Linear or Decision Tree format. The linearity of the adventure has some important implications for game play. For example, the linear side of the spectrum lends itself to story driven adventures with intricate plots and strong themes, whereas the non-linear side is more character driven and allows for more choice on the part of the individual players. Conversely, the more linear the adventure the easier it is for the GM to plan and prep, whereas a non-linear adventure (particularly a Sandbox) can be very challenging for a GM. I'll discuss each adventure format in more detail.

Railroading:

In my opinion linear adventure design gets a bad rep. The reason: many players' gut reaction is that Linearity = Railroading, which isn't exactly accurate. For one, the definition of Railroading can be a little subjective. To some die-hard non-linear extremists any attempt by the GM to stick to a plot is "Railroading". However, being moderate in all things, I am of the opinion that true Railroading comes in two flavors, both of which are distasteful to most players.

One form of Railroading common to all RPGs is what I like to call the "Storytime Express". In this situation the

PCs have little-to-no impact on how the story advances or the ultimate outcome of the game. While this seems to defeat the whole point of an RPG because it removes all semblance of interactivity, it is an easy trap for GMs to fall into basically for two reasons. The first is that the GM has invariably spent a lot of time planning the adventure around the story he wants to tell and he is going to tell his story come hell or high water. In this situation the players are just along for the ride. The second reason (which is a little more insidious) is that most GM's don't enjoy harming PCs. The GM has a natural tendency to protect the PCs from the consequences of their own actions because the alternative would "derail" the adventure. In either case there is a predetermined outcome. Thus, to avoid this kind of Railroading the GM has to accept that the PCs may take a different course than he planned, and (equally important) that they might fail altogether and never reach that glorious and climactic ending he envisioned.

The second form of Railroading is what I like to call the "Rubik's Cube of Death" and is a little more subtle. In this situation the GM presents what appears to be a variety of options for solving a particular problem, but all of them lead to catastrophic consequences for the PCs except one- the one he has predetermined to be successful. Of coarse this also happens to be the one he has spent all of his time prepping. I find this form of Railroading to be very common in SR. Very often an adventure is designed in such a way that should the PCs fail a particular task (blow their cover, trip an alarm, etc) the bad guys respond with overwhelming lethal force (which is arguably a reasonable response based on SR fluff). The problem with such heavy-handed consequences is that the GM needs to strike the right balance, a very difficult task indeed. On one hand, the GM needs that lethality, for example, in order to challenge the players and make the adventure exciting, but if he goes too far to one extreme or the other (see above regarding letting the players fail) he will end up Railroading the players. One way to avoid this style of Railroading is to spend some time and creative energy coming up with alternate consequences in advance of PC failure. Not every mistake needs to end with the PC bleeding out onto that cheap (but sensibly tread-resistant) office carpeting.

As an aside: a very frustrating (for the player) variation of this is the "Rubik's Cube of Boredom" in which all paths but one lead to dead ends, pointless role-play and padded walls. If you are ever unlucky enough to find yourself in such a game the answer to all situations is simple: start killing. Kill anything and everything and break some stuff while you're at it. The GM will invariably squash your character like a bug, but the game is fucked already so you might as well go out with a bang.

Now, having said all that I will concede that Railroading may occasionally be necessary, though I can't think of a great example. Suffice to say that there may be certain situations wherein the GM just has to move things forward and there is no good way to do so. This should always be a last resort, and in any such situation it is best to simply tell the players that they are off course, push them through whatever scene they are stuck on and get the game moving again.

Linear Adventures (& Event Matrix):

If you accept the premise that Linear design does not automatically entail Railroading, then Linear adventures can be a viable option. In a truly Linear adventure the players move from point A (the start of the adventure, often called the hook) to point E (the end, or finale) through a logical series of events (A→ B → C → D → E). The players may be able to bypass certain "optional" events (A → C → D → E) but they must proceed through certain events in order to succeed. A variation of this is called an Event Matrix format, in which the start and end points are set but the intervening events can occur in any order (A → D → C → B → E). An Event Matrix can be useful when certain events occur on a set timeline regardless of what the PC's do before or after (event C in the sequence above). In either design scheme the prior events may alter the context of the subsequent events, but ultimately the same end point is reached.

Again, this may sound a lot like Railroading, but there are some subtle (and not so subtle) differences. In a good Linear adventure the GM should set the sequence of events and have a solid idea for an end point, but allow the players to tackle each event in any way they choose and accept that the end point might not look like what he expected when all is said and done. Its best not to envision the end point as a scene, but more generally as a conflict that will need to be resolved in some way to bring the adventure to an end. The GM also has to accept that creative players may find ways to bypass events he thought were crucial and/or reach the end point quicker than he anticipated. All these possibilities are okay. Above all it's important to keep in mind that the players aren't always aware of the sequence. Their approach may seem to them to be the most logical, and if the GM simply goes with the flow it will seem to the players like he had planned the adventure that way all along.

Linear adventures are well suited for situations where the players are "behind the curve" or in pursuit of some moving target. If their quarry is staying one step ahead of them (for whatever reason) they will have no choice but to follow the trail. Again, creative players may think of ways to get ahead of the quarry, to set an ambush for example (see skipping events above), but this just makes the adventure more exciting and might be a great setup for a "near miss" that will make the finale even more exciting.

PROs:
-- Linear adventures are easy to design and run and require a finite amount of prep work for the GM
-- Linear adventures allow for strong story telling.
CONs:
-- A Linear adventure requires a tacit agreement from the players. The story may require players to forfeit their individual character agendas and invest themselves in the group story.
-- Along the same lines, Linear adventures work best with coherent and cooperative PC groups. Lone wolf characters may not be as much fun to play, and can make the adventure more difficult for the GM run. Any such character should be carefully considered in advance.

Alternate Ending Adventures:

Now to be fair, all adventures have at least two endings: success and failure. But the Alternate Ending design is a little different. In an Alternate Ending design the

runners advance through an essentially Linear adventure, but are faced at some point with a single decision, which is central to the plot and will determine the final outcome of the adventure. The event sequence may not change, but the ending is certain to.

The Alternate Ending format is great for adventures (or campaigns) that deal with themes of morality. The central decision in such adventures is whether the PCs will chose a moral route and end up being the heroes or an amoral route and wind up the villains. This need not be a lasting distinction- its entirely possible for the characters to do the right thing one day and go back to murdering people in the face the next day. The real fun in these adventures is exploring the limits of your characters' moral… well, character… and finding those circumstances that will turn a "good" character to evil deeds and vice versa.

Other examples of Alternate Ending design include adventures in which the PCs are forced to choose sides in advance of a pending conflict or decide what to do with a particular piece of information that could have serious consequences. When used in this fashion, an Alternate Ending adventure works great for setting the tone of the next adventure or the context of a pending campaign.

PROs:
-- Like a Linear adventure, Alternate Ending adventures are easy to plan and run and require only finite prep work on the part of the GM.
-- Alternate Ending adventures allow for strong story telling and character development, particularly in regards to morality.
-- Adventures that feature a moral dilemma can add a lot to a "Gritty" campaign.
CONs:
-- Some players do not like moral themes in their games, and find such adventures "preachy" or otherwise distasteful.
-- Some players may need extra prompting to fully invest themselves in the role playing required. Don't make it easy for your PCs to, say, murder a busload of children just because "that's what the characters would do". To make a moral dilemma interesting you need to get the players to think about the in-game implications.

Decision Tree Adventures:

The Decision Tree format is similar to the Alternate Ending format discussed above, except that instead of one central decision the adventure progresses from a single starting point through a series of decisions each of which has the potential to alter the final outcome of the adventure. In this scheme, each decision represents a "branch point" on the metaphorical tree, and each branch has the potential to lead to a different ending. The Decision Tree allows for greater PC decision-making, but is still fairly story driven. As such, it represents a near midpoint on the spectrum of linearity.

The Decision Tree format has a long and prosperous history in SR. The concept was actually introduced in the earliest published adventures, and was featured in the 2nd edition Shadowrun Companion published in 1996. It is still the most common format found in published adventures and is probably the most common style of adventure design at most SR tables. All of this is because the format lends itself to the SR setting and system.

Its important to note that while the metaphor of diverging branches on a tree is useful in conceptualizing this format, there is no rule that says that players cannot jump from one branch to another if the idea occurs to them and if they have the means. Obviously certain branches will be mutually exclusive (and thus lead to distinct endings) but otherwise "branch hopping" can add a lot of intricacy to an adventure, and may be a useful to the GM if he needs to stall or get things back on course.

PROs:
-- The PCs have a lot of control over the how they proceed through the adventure and the final outcome, but the amount of prep work required of the GM is still limited.
-- Decision Tree adventures allow for story driven and character driven play.
-- Decision Tree adventures facilitate different approaches to the problems presented, which makes the game fun for a variety of character types.

CONs:
-- Decision Tree adventures are still a little too linear for some tastes.
-- Players often find branches the GM did not anticipate.

Decision Web Adventures (a.k.a. Multiple Paths & the Onion):
Similar in some respects to the Decision Tree discussed above, the Decision Web format is sometimes called a Multiple Path. The difference is that rather than a single start point branching out towards multiple different end points (like a tree), a Decision Web adventure has multiple plot threads that converge on a single end point (like a web). The various plot threads or paths cross and intersect at various decision points, but ultimately arrive at the same climactic encounter or final confrontation.

This adventure format is great for a group that wants to start with individual disconnected characters. If done right the various characters will meet at various decision points and may need to decide if they are going to help or oppose each other, continue together or go their separate ways. For the GM, the focus in this design is really on the decision points, which can represent events, NPCs, places or objects with which the players interact (similar to the Floating Island format discussed below). The GM then loosely strings various decision points together with plot threads that (hopefully) move the players toward the center. Unfortunately this format can also lead to players moving away from the ultimate goal or "backtracking" at times, because they misinterpret a clue or jump to the wrong conclusions about how decision points are connected. Of course, that can be fun too.

An even less-linear variation is sometimes called The Onion, which is a little bit like a Decision Web without the plot threads. The goal is still to reach a single central end point, but there is no predetermined path to get there. Rather the GM sets up a series of generalized barriers to PC advancement (analogous to the layers of an onion), which the players can approach from any start point or from any angle. The players wander around interacting with each layer until they "break through" into the next layer. A break through event could represent meeting the right contacts, gaining entry into certain exclusive groups or infiltrating certain underworld organizations. It could entail gathering enough NPC support or raising enough money to

do something particular. It could also be a "trigger event" that alters the nature of the setting in some drastic way, or a clue that points the players to a new setting altogether.

PROs:
-- Decision Web adventures support both story driven and character driven play
-- The story is generated by a combination of GM planning and PC decision-making.
-- The GM can focus his prep time on the various decision points and the loose connects between them - he doesn't need to fill in every detail.

CONs:
-- Players must be invested in the central goal. If they have little interest in reaching the end they may wander willy-nilly in other directions, which can be very frustrating for the GM.
-- Players often find plot threads or connections that the GM did not anticipate. Sometimes these connections may be based on wild leaps of logic, which may be correct by chance or completely wrong.

Plot Point Adventures (a.k.a. Floating Islands):
In this format the GM focuses his attention and prep time on designing a collection of interconnected "plot points" which can be events, locations, NPCs, objects or anything else the players may encounter. The key is that the GM does not assume any sequence of events or set relationships between the points. Rather the GM relies on PC decision-making to flesh out the connections in a fluid sequence. The non-linearity of this format stems from the fact that the GM has little or no control of how the various plot points are connected, as these connections are based almost entirely on PC decision-making and how the players choose to advance from one point to another.

Plot Point adventures are great for experienced role players and (in particular) GMs. For obvious reasons the GM needs to be quick on his feet and highly adaptable. These adventures are great for characters with strong self-interest or personal agendas. They work best when the GM sets the adventure against a backdrop of sweeping conflict or subtle intrigue to give the players some context to work with (otherwise it is easy for them to loose focus).

PROs:
-- Plot Point adventures allow great freedom in PC decision-making, but still limit the amount of prep work for the GM.
-- Plot Point adventures can be great fun for experienced role players who really want to explore how their characters would interact with the setting.

CONs:
-- Plot Point adventures rely on the players to be proactive.
-- Players who rely too much on GM guidance or like consistency may be frustrated.
-- Plot Point adventures require a great deal of adaptability from the GM.

The Sandbox:
The Sandbox represents the absolute non-linear extreme in adventure design; so much so that even calling sessions an "adventure" is a stretch. In Sandbox play the PCs are basically turned loose in a particular setting and are free to go wherever and do whatever they want. In a true Sandbox there is no metaplot, no over-aching theme

nor even a particular tone, but sometimes a GM will add these elements as a backdrop to give the setting some semblance of order or direction.

There are a few variations that incorporate the Sandbox concept to a limited degree, but are not truly Sandbox. The "mini-Sandbox" can be useful for one-off games, or as a fun alternative in the context of a larger, more directed campaign. Basically, the GM designs a fully fleshed-out but innately contained setting for an adventure- the underwater archology, for example, or a small African village. The players are free to go anywhere and do anything within the confines of the mini-Sandbox, but generally there is some goal or objective to be achieved, so this does not constitute true Sandbox play.

Another interesting variation is to start with a Sandbox but include "event funnels" and "trigger events". Trigger events are events (in which the players may or may not be involved), which dramatically alter the setting. An event funnel is a series of seemingly unrelated events that "funnel" the PCs toward a trigger event and establish the context of their involvement. Using this system the players are free to explore the Sandbox and establish their characters until such time as the GM wants to advance the overarching story, at which point he can temporarily make the game play more linear.

Sandbox games can be hit or miss. When they work they allow for an unprecedented level of PC decision-making and character driven play. But they rely very heavily on a good GM who can come up with plot elements on the fly and proactive players who are willing to take an active role in driving their story forward. Anything less can lead to a listless world of pointless role play and endless wandering, which tends to kill games quicker than an orbital cow bombardment (which by the way is a perfectly viable option in the Sandbox).

The unpredictable nature of a Sandbox game also demands that a GM is both knowledgeable about the rules and comfortable making decisions in situations where the rules are vague (or nonexistent). To minimize wonkiness, it's best to stick to the RAW as much as possible, or otherwise ensure that everyone at the table has clear expectations for how things will work mechanically. If your group is willing to accept "GM fiat" most situations can be resolved quickly in order to keep things moving. However, in any case its important that players have an opportunity to discuss the GM's decision after the session and give their input on how things should be handled in the future.

PROs:
-- Sandbox play allows for unprecedented PC decision-making; it is entirely character-driven.
-- Sandbox play allows players to really experience the world through the medium of their character, and pursue their characters' personal agendas.

CONs:
-- Sandbox play requires proactive players and characters with strong personal agendas- without these essential elements the game quickly looses direction.
-- Sandbox play does not usually allow for strong story telling.
-- Sandbox play can be very taxing for the GM. It is impossible for him to plan for every eventuality, and he will often find himself GMing on the fly.

Conclusions:
So which style of adventure design is best? Elitists are quick to tell you that if you aren't using one style or the other "You're doing it wrong!" But no single design scheme is perfect for every adventure, and my hope is that this article has given you an appreciation for the strengths and weaknesses inherent to each approach. Understanding the structure of a given design scheme (and the subtleties that come along with it) allows a savvy GM to focus the adventure and tell a more compelling story. Ultimately the "best" design scheme is the one that best facilitates the story you are trying to tell and ensures a fun and enjoyable session for you and your players. Learn them all, love them all and use them all.

Dear Mr. Johnson

For our first issue of the Dumpshock Data Haven and, thus, the first *Dear Mr. Johnson* column, we decided to focus on concerns in the metagame and questions about rules rather than questions focused on in-game activities. We got a lot of questions about the Matrix, but we're going to handle those later. This month, we're going to talk about how to get your game started and then something with a little more crunch. Without further ado …

What are common mistakes for a new Shadowrun Game?

Shadowrun is a complex game with a full, rich history that can be intimidating to new GMs and players alike. However, as a GM, you're expected to know what's going on. For game masters either new to their leadership role or simply new to Shadowrun, there are two areas that cause the greatest concern: (1) group size and (2) the "three-worlds" game system.

Speaking from my own experience and what I expect is likely the experience that many of us had, Shadowrun was not my first game. It was the first game that I ever ran, but I played in a number of D&D (2nd edition) campaigns prior to transitioning to Shadowrun. Even while playing Shadowrun primarily, I sat in on the occasional game run by someone else in some other setting. One thing I've noticed is that almost every other game I've played seems to accommodate larger groups better than Shadowrun.

This stems from a number of things, but the largest is the amount of minutia present in the Shadowrun rule set and the relative inexperience with those rules that the average gamer tends to have, especially in light of the changes that have taken place from edition to edition. Thus, as a GM you're not just expected to run the game and provide plot and NPCs, but also to know the rules and help train the new players (or older players new to 4th edition) in what their role is and how to play it. As the group size gets larger, it's harder and harder to manage that extra weight on the GM's shoulders.

The second group-size-related problem is likely combat. In my experience, Shadowrun combat is slow. Actually, that's an overstatement; tectonic plates move at an average velocity faster than combat at my tables. One problem is rules inexperience on the part of the players, but the larger part is the vast numbers of NPCs that you might need to effectively challenge a larger group of characters. As the NPC reinforcements increase, so too does the complexity of the situation. That's before you add in matrix or astral actions, drones, spirits, and sprites. Limiting the group size can help you effectively limit the size of the challenging force necessary to keep your players on the edge of their seats.

And that segues nicely into the second area of concern: game system. Shadowrun is like three games in one: matrix, meat, and magic. Each of those parts interacts with each other, but there are parts that just need to be separated. As a new GM, think carefully before you start trying to mix everything in all at once. Try to ensure that, after you limit the size of your group, maybe you limit the encounters the characters have to deal with so that they're not (and you're not) overwhelmed. Once you've got a handle on all the rules and regulations for the meat world, add in a little bit of the astral or the matrix; then top it all off with the one that's left.

This is not to say that you shouldn't use Augmented Reality from moment one at your table, but that you might want to advise your matrix-based characters that hacking in combat is something that you're going to work on more next week and this week's session is to help everyone learn more about the physical world and the skills necessary to surmount challenges therein. Hopefully your players will understand the need to ease into things so that you don't burn out. Everyone wants their game to last, not implode after only one or two sessions.

One last piece of advice: as a new GM, I would suggest that you help steer your players toward generalist characters rather than specialists. The specialist character is the one that's going to be bored when his or her specialty is not in play. Generalists, while maybe not having quite as hefty a dice pool for their actions, will likely get the chance to roll their dice more often. This is going to help everyone feel like they've made some contribution to the events that occurred during the session and will help you balance the encounter toward the group. Not to mention the fact that if your hacker can also sneak and shoot reasonably well, they'll be more amenable to a slow build up toward encounters focused on hacking since they'll still get to flex their imaginary muscle in other ways.

How does one get a player to get into character or roleplay when at the table?

This one is a lot harder than the last one because it's completely out of your control. As the GM, you can do your level best to try and keep things in-character but if there's one or more of your players who're unused to that style of game or actively resist it, there may not be much you can do to change their minds.

The best way to try and avoid this problem is to be up front with your players at the start of the game and make sure they all understand the expectations. I'm beginning a game wherein I'll need a certain amount of character-driven plot and their choices will control the direction of the game to a far greater extent than in my previous campaigns. Explaining this to one of my players, his eyes seemed to be opened to the idea of roleplaying as more than simply rolling dice and seeing what happens next. He was somewhat surprised at the complexity and difficulty of trying to make character-based decisions that might not necessarily be the same as the player's.

There are a lot of people out there, especially those who haven't encountered games which promote roleplay, who've never had to do so in character. Their former GMs allowed or supported speaking of a character in the third person rather than in the first. And, there's nothing really wrong with that, but if you want to include roleplaying at your table, you might need to break down those walls.

My first bit of advice is also the one I break most frequently: don't drop your characters. When an NPC is interacting with the team, do it in-character; play the role of the NPC to the hilt. Is he a Jamaican smuggler? Do the accent (if you can). What about someone who has a facial tic? These sorts of quirks will not only help your players remember the characters they encounter, they'll also help the shyer or, at least, less inclined to roleplay among them recognize that (a) it's not so bad and (b) no one's going to judge at the table.

Secondly, reward good roleplaying. The character improvement rules already suggest one or two Karma Points for good roleplay, but you could use the rewards for good humor or drama or for advancing the storyline to drive the point home. Or, keep it in the game and reward Edge for people who're using their roleplaying to keep the game on track. You could even provide bonus dice to the players (or penalties to the NPCs) in social situations when excellent roleplaying has set the scene.

But, this is a double-edged sword. Be careful that you are consistent in rewarding the players for playing their character and their role, not how you think their role should be. Forgive me as I tell you another story. During a campaign a few years ago, one of the players decided his character wasn't going to listen to any more of the NPCs explanations and was just

going to start shooting him in unnecessary places. The other players tried to stop him both in and out of game, but he held firm. I even felt that his actions were premature and heavy handed, but at the end of the game I rewarded him with Karma for roleplaying. The table was astonished, but after I explained to them that while I didn't think the actions were strictly necessary, I did think they were in-character and appropriate for that character. Hence: a reward.

The trick is positive reinforcement. Don't penalize those that don't roleplay and don't try to force it if one or more players don't like the idea. Instead, reward the people who are roleplaying and, hopefully, those that aren't will come around. And, in the end, you might need to reorganize your thinking if your players want something else or, if necessary, ask a player to leave if they're being disruptive or otherwise causing problems for the others at the table. No one wants (or likes) to have to do that, but games are not created equal and some people are going to prefer one style to another.

Two of my most hated game mechanics are grenade scatter and shotgun rules. What are some common house rules that supersede or at least streamline these beasts?

In all my years of running Shadowrun (about 11) and playing Shadowrun (about 14), I've never seen anyone actually use the shotgun choke rules. Thus, I'm not sure that I can effectively cover that one. The book's rules, while somewhat complex, are not insurmountable. The key thing to remember is that most shotguns in the game are loaded with slug rounds which follow the same rules for other firearms. Only when a shotgun is loaded with shot rounds do the choke rules come into play. Thus, you could effective skip those rules by simply requiring slug rounds; this is what I've seen most often. The fluff even supports it: the armor penetration bonus for a target being hit with shot rounds at wide choke is +9. A leather jacket suddenly provides 11 points of Ballistic Armor! Since most targets faced in Shadowrun are armored, increasing the choke is a recipe for a bark bigger than its bite.

On the other hand, I am willing to share with you the way I resolve grenades and other explosive bursts (like Fireball or Toxic Wave spells). Firstly, let me be clear: these are my house rules and ones that have served me well, but they expressly contradict the official SR4 FAQ (available online). That being said, I combine a number of other rules into one set that allow me to resolve grenades as quickly as possible. Firstly, recall that a First Aid test has a threshold of two with each additional hit healing boxes of damage. That's a key precedent for my grenade house rules. Secondly, I use the rules for Interrupt Actions (p. 148, SR4A). Armed with those, here's the rundown:

1. Grenades (and Fireballs, etc.) are not targeted at a person. Instead they're targeted at a point in space. If a person is hit with a grenade, I'd run it as if they had just been hit with a rock, not an explosion.

2. There is a threshold for the tossing (or launching) of a grenade. I use the Vehicle Test Thresholds (p. 168, SR4A) as a guideline. Rarely is it ever more than two. Three might represent trying to bank the grenade around a corner or something like that. Hits beyond this threshold reduce the scatter of the grenade.

3. Characters wishing to avoid the fun of the explosion have the chance move out of the area or take appropriate cover. If they've not taken an action during this phase, then they can do so to move away from the grenade as if they'd declared full defense. Otherwise, they can steal their next action to do so, but never more than one. The distance they travel is based on their normal movement rates. Also, realize that normal, timed grenades explode after everyone else likely has a chance to move or react, so an Interrupt might be unnecessary.

That, for me, seems to make things smoother. Or, at the very least, it avoids the inevitable conversation about why the person tossing the grenade has to pick a specific target among the enemies who then determines the dodge pool for all of them. Scatter still happens, which might be what you were hoping I'd avoid, but that's not so bad. Plus, it's always fun to be dramatic about rolling the scatter die as the GM and watching the players hope their little ball of doom doesn't roll back in their general direction.

Here's an example:

Noel is throwing a grenade at a group of three guards that have her pinned down in an ambush. She rolls her Throwing Weapons + Agility, a dice pool of 10, to do so, and gets 4 hits. The game master analyzes the situation and decides this toss has an average difficulty; the guards are behind some cover, so Noel has to be sure to throw far enough to land behind that, but not so far that the guards feel safe ignoring her action. Therefore, she has a threshold of 2, which she beats with her 4 hits, leaving her with 2 remaining hits.

Now that we know the toss lands roughly where Noel wanted it to go, we consult the Scatter Table (p. 155, SR4A). She's throwing a standard grenade, so the game master throws 1d6 and rolls a 4. Thus, the grenade would scatter 4 meters, but this distance is reduced by 1 meter for every hit of Noel's beyond her threshold. The reduction for scatter distance is also listed in the Scatter Table. In the end, it only scatters 2 meters. A second die is rolled which comes up a 5 so the grenade comes to rest to the southwest of the intended location but it remains behind the guards' cover.

Since it's a standard grenade, it'll explode on Noel's pass during the next round of combat. Therefore, it's likely that the guards may have the chance to get out of the blast radius before then. But, if they can't, they can declare an Interrupt action, which eats up their next available action regardless of when it would occur, to move. The GM consults the movement rates for the guards and, when the grenade goes off, determines damage based on how far the guards moved.

A Fixer's Little Black Book
Contents for all occasions

Geist
Metatype: Male Human
Occupation: Rigger/Adept Corporate Spy
Connection Rating: 3

Geist is a very quiet individual that never shows his face, and speaks with a slight Japanese accent. He's utterly professional, and is highly sought out when a Fixer or Mr. Johnson need something done quietly. He combines the prowess of an Adept of the invisible Way with excellent drone rigging abilities to give him multiple ways to infiltrate any location.

Rumors abound about the reason Geist always wears his gasmask. Some claim it's a Japanese ritual thing, covering up some past shame. Others believe he's horribly scarred and hides this. Regardless of the reason, Geist never speaks of it.

Geist can be used as backup for a team if they need stealthy support, or he can be used to ferret out corporate secrets. He can also simply provide information and suggestions about corporate security and special black ops projects.

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	M/R	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
4	6	5	3	3	5	3	3	4	4	5.36	10	1

Active Skills: Athletics Group 4, Dodge 4, Escape Artist 3, Firearms Group 3, Infiltration 6, Palming 4, Perception 5, Pilot: Aircraft 4, Pilot: Anthroform 5, Pilot: Ground Craft 4, Shadowing 6, Unarmed Combat 4,
Knowledge Skills: Anime 3, Architecture 3, Corporate Politics 3, Local Area Knowledge 4, Security Design 4, Security Procedures 4
Augmentations: Control Rig (Alphaware), Attention Coprocessor (Alphaware)
Abilities: Improved Infiltration 3, Improved Shadowing 3, Traceless Walk, Eidetic Sense Memory, Attribute Boost (Agility) 2, Astral Perception

Elizabeth "Ma" Barker
Metatype: Female Ork
Occupation: Political Agitator, Restaurant Owner, President Local Chapter of Mothers of Metahumans
Connection Rating: 4

Ma Barker is a goblinized ork whose human parents were killed during the Night of Rage when she was just a child. She inherited a small diner from them, and with the help of an aunt, kept the place open. After the birth of her first two children, both born orks, she joined the metahuman rights political movement "Mothers of Metahumans". She now has six children, all of which help her run the diner, and she's become the president of her local MOM chapter, and now holds meetings in the diner each week.

Ma seems like a very sweet, motherly older ork woman, and that's a façade she tries hard to maintain publicly. She's always had a fiery temper, and she is a pit bull when it comes to MOM and the political arena. She has loudly denounced Brackhaven and some of his new policies in several public forums, and plans to continue to do so, though her friends and family fear for her safety.

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	M/R	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
6	2	3	5	5	3	3	5	--	2	6	6	1

Active Skills: Cooking 5, Computers 2, Clubs (Frying Pans) 3 (5), Etiquette (Political) 5 (7), First Aid 3, Intimidation 3, Leadership 5, Negotiation 4
Knowledge Skills: Children's Trid Shows 3, Civil Rights Movements 3, History 3, Law 3, Politics 5, Recipes 5

Delta
Metatype: Male Ork
Occupation: Street Samurai/Fixer
Connection Rating: 4

Little is known about Delta's past. In drunken moments, he's admitted to being ex-military, and when he's sober his demeanor agrees with that. He sports first generation Delta-grade cyberware, and lots of it, but no one can turn up any rumors, stories, or even legends about anyone matching his description. However even now, a little bit washed up, a little bit burnt out, and usually more than a bit drunk, everyone agrees that he's not one to mess with.

Delta operates as a Fixer most of the time these days, usually setting up runs with a military bend. He's also the man to go to for military grade hardware or cyberware, as he has good contacts into those areas.

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	M/R	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
7	5	5(9)	7	4	4	3	4	--	3	1.2	9(13)	1(4)

Active Skills: Athletics Group 3, Close Combat Group 3, Dodge 4, Firearms Group 4, Influence Group 3, Perception 4
Knowledge Skills: Alcohol 4, Black Markets 3, Corporate Rumors 2, Fences 4, Shadowrunner Teams 2, Military Procedures 5, Urban Brawl Teams 4
Basic Augmentations: All Deltaware - Bone Lacing (Titanium), Cybereyes 4, Cyberears 4, Obvious Cyber-replacement arms, Datajack, Move by Wire 3,

Sierra Laughing Moon
Metatype: Female Elf
Occupation: Dolphin Shaman/Street Doc
Connection Rating: 2

Sierra Laughing Moon is a Salish-Sidhe Amerind who follows Dolphin. She apprenticed under her tribe's medicine woman, and then moved into Seattle where she attended medical school. She found she wasn't cut out for the more formal and rigid methods of schooling, but she still desires to be a healer and help people. As such, she's set up a "wellness" center for "natural healing" in Snohomish, that acts as a front for a shadow clinic she operates for some of her 'runner friends.

Sierra is friendly and perpetually cheerful, much to the annoyances of some of her clientele. She opposes violence and takes her Hippocratic Oath very seriously, though she acknowledges that sometimes it is necessary. She never turns anyone away, and only charges what she believes someone can afford. There are those that would try and take advantage of her because of this, but her friendly nature has made her many friends, some of whom watch out for her and do their best to discourage these things.

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	M/R	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
2	4	4	3	6	5	3	5	5	2	6	9	1

Active Skills: Assensing 4, Chemistry 2, Conjuring Group 2, Etiquette 3, First Aid 4, Medicine 4, Spellcasting (Health Spells) 5 (7)
Knowledge Skills: Knitting 3, Medicine 5, Natural Remedies 4, Tribal Lore 3

Al Johnson
Metatype: Male Human
Occupation: Racist/Humanis Thug
Connection Rating: 1

Al Johnson knows that this country is going to hell. Every day, there are more and more metahumans roaming the streets. He's never been content to just sit back and watch as those freaks of nature took over his country. He's always stood up for what he's believed in, no matter the cost.

Al is a resilient man with beliefs that go deep down to his core. No one's ever going to be able to change his mind, and no one will ever get him to stray from his course, no matter how badly he gets beaten for it. He can take a beating or three. He's stared down the Ancients, picked a bar fight with a half-dozen members of the Spikes, and gone 3 rounds with Louis Spinoza, an ork and three time International Freeform Fighting champion. He'll always bounce back, and he'll never back down.

Al can be a useful friend, if you're human. He's got an in with almost every human rights and metahuman hate group out there, and is on a first name basis with many of Brackhaven's inner circle. He can also get a dozen friends together at the drop of a hate to stage a protest, harass a metahuman, or start a riot. After all, human's need to do anything they can for fellow humans, right?

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	M/R	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
6	4	4	4	3	3	2	2	--	5	6	7	1

Active Skills: Close Combat Group 4, Dodge 3, Firearms Group 2, Intimidation 5, Perception 3
Knowledge Skills: Fishing 4, Human Rights Groups 4, Local Area Knowledge 4, Local Politics 2, Metahuman Hang Outs 3, Metahuman Hate Groups 4
Other: High Pain Tolerance 3

Sgt. Martin "Sarge" Dunn
Metatype: Male Dwarf
Occupation: Corporate Black-Ops Operative
Connection Rating: 3

Sarge did two tours of duty with Ares in the Desert Wars, earning his Sergeant's stripes before he left the service and went into business for himself. He began working with Ares, but has since branched out and offered his services to anyone with the nuyen to pay him. He's a mercenary through and through, but is utterly professional. He specializes in running against corporate targets.

Sarge doesn't make friends, but if your money is good, he's willing to offer up advice, information, or even his gun arm.

B	A	R	S	C	I	L	W	M/R	Edg	Ess	Init	IP
5	4	4	5	3	5	3	4	--	4	1.8	9(11)	1(3)

Active Skills: Automatics 4, Blades 5, Dodge 4, Etiquette 4, Intimidation 3, Longarms 4, Negotiation 3, Perception 4, Pistols 5, Stealth Group 3, Unarmed Combat 4
Knowledge Skills: Corporate Politics 3, Corporate Security 3, Gambling 3, Horse Racing 4, Military Procedures 4, Small Unit Tactics 4
Basic Augmentations: Skillwires 4, Wired Reflexes 2

Expanded Training Rules

The Shadowrun Core Rulebook has the beginnings of rules for training (SR4 134, Using Instruction) but they are not complete. Finding a trainer, as well as how much they cost, is left up to GM discretion. These training rule additions only modify one existing rule (see Trainer Benefits), but fill in the gaps to complete the training system.

Finding a Trainer

There are two ways to get a training, virtual and a real-life trainer. A virtual trainer can be found via Tutorsofts (SR4 330, Datachips and Software). They have immediate availability and follow the existing Instruction rules. The Availability of a real-life trainer is their Instruction Skill + Charisma + Skill Rating (the skill being trained). Note that the Skill Rating must be a minimum of 3 and must equal or exceed the rating the trainee is working on.

Example: Bull is looking to increase his Etiquette from 4 to 5. He wants one of the best trainers he can find, so he looks for one with Instruction 6 and Charisma 7. The training has to have at least an Etiquette of 5 to train Bull. This trainer would have an Availabilty 18.

Using the existing Availabilty rules (SR4 312, Availability and Buying Gear), the player (or his contact) makes an Availability Test to locate a trainer.

Cost of Training

Unlike Tutorsofts, a real-life trainer needs to feed his kids. The cost of a trainer is his Availability x 100 nuyen per month. This cost can be lowered by making a Negotiation + Charisma (2) test, with every net hit reducing the cost by 50 nuyen. This adjustment occurs after the Availability Test needed to locate a trainer.

Example: The Availability 18 trainer that Bull is looking for will set him back 1,800 nuyen. This will also give the Availability test an interval of 2 days. Bull (or a contact of his) will need to roll Negotiation + Charisma (18, 2 days) before being able to locate the trainer. Once a trainer is found, he could negotiate a lower price.

Trainer Benefits

The hands-on intruction given by a real-life trainer is still the best and quickest way to learn a skill. Before the player rolls a training check (SR4 270, Improving Skills and Skill Groups), the trainer rolls an Instruction + Charisma test. Every 2 successes on the test provide the player an automatic success on his training check.

Example: Bull has completed a full week of grueling training and is now ready to make his first check. The trainer rolls his Instruction + Charisma (13 dice) and gets 4 successes. Bull's training check, Intuition + Etiquette (10, 1 week), is automatically has the threshold 10 reduced to 8. If Bull doesn't complete his training this week, the trainer will roll again next week and apply his successes to the remaining threshold.

Training Limit

A player can train an amount of skills, group skills or specializations equal to Logic simultaneously.

Example: Nast has Logic 4. Between using a couple Tutorsofts and paying for a world-class trainer, he could learn a new skill, train his Pistol from 3 to 4, train his Stealth group and pick up a Etiquette (Corp) specialization simultaneously. He wouldn't be able to start training any other skills until he completed training for at least one of the skills.

Dueling Reviews: Shadowrun 4 Anniversary Edition
The Jackal's View

In a Nutshell

The Good: The 20th Anniversary Edition includes all the previous errata as well as some rule tweaks that the authors felt were needed after taking the other core books in to consideration. The organization of the book flows much better and includes page number references throughout the books contents. Loads of new art with only limited works reused from previous source books. Every page is printed in full color on glossy paper making it overall a very attractive product.

The Bad: Color choices for some of the fiction make it very difficult to read. Section titles sometimes appear mid-page but they spanning across the entire page. From an artistic standpoint I like it, from a readers standpoint it sometimes annoyed me so I had to nit pick it.

The Bottom Line: This book is highly recommended but it is not absolutely necessary if you already have the original 4th Edition rulebook. Catalyst has posted all the previous errata as well as a list of the changes that took place in the 20th Anniversary Edition so this information is available to anyone. That said, in all honesty the detailed table of contents, the master index, and the inclusion of all the errata made the book worth it to me with the rest being icing on the cake.

First Impressions

The first thing I notice about this book is the artwork and layout, which is the most obvious and most drastic change in the 20th Anniversary Edition. This rulebook is by far the most colorful Shadowrun book I've seen out of all four editions. The binding is very sturdy and has an attached ribbon bookmark, which has already proven itself very handy.

The majority of the artwork in the book is brand new to this printing with nearly every page containing art appropriate to the content or contributing to the theme. The customary side notes having been placed in stylized boxes featuring white text on a black background that helps them stand out making them easier to find.

Unfortunately they elected to print the fiction on different colored backgrounds from the rest of the book, which in itself isn't an issue but the color selections could have been much better on a few pieces. With the exception of these minor issues the rest of the book is very appealing to the eye and nicely arranged without going overboard on the art.

Fiction

There are twelve selections of fiction included between chapters, each detailing a different aspect of the game while mostly keeping with the underworld feel of Shadowrun. The stories also include a few of the iconic characters from past sourcebooks giving some insight to their personalities.

The fiction is well written in all accounts and represents insight to the chapter following it either as a fictional example or simply to set the mood for the game world. They vary from shadowy betrayal, to a glimpse into the daily lives of runners, and even seeing things from the perspective of your contacts, employers, and allies.

Table of Contents

The table of contents is very well thought out and clearly divided by chapters and subchapters, while still being only three pages in length. In addition instead of having to hunt through the various chapters to find the fiction there is a convenient listing of the fiction by title and page number at the end of the listing.

One thing that I liked seeing was the full list of Skill Use page references. A quick glance in the front of the book and you can find pretty much anything you need without having to resort to paging through the index. This could almost replace the index for me, and speaking of which…

Master Index

This brings me to the back of the book because this is possibly the single greatest reason to pick up a copy: The Shadowrun Master Index. This is a 22-page index covering all the core rulebooks: Shadowrun 4th Edition, Arsenal, Augmentation, Runner's Companion, Street Magic, and Unwired. There is also a Master Table list at the end of the index, which helps you quickly find what page in which book a certain table is located. This is an excellent and long overdue addition to the core rulebooks in my opinion.

Welcome to the Shadows

Going back to the intro chapter we see the basic run down of what Shadowrun is about compressed down into about five pages. This discusses the nuts and bolts of role-playing, runner types, setting information, and the type of jobs the runners typically participate in. There is also a sidebar detailing each of the five core supplements, primarily aimed at new players.

A History Lesson for the Reality Impaired

The next chapter details the games timeline starting in the late 1990's and continuing on into 2071, including information from Ghost Cartels and Emergence. If you're a veteran, you can probably skip over this section unless you want to take the refresher course. On the other hand if you're new, I highly recommend reading this entire chapter because it will set the feel for your entire campaign.

Life on the Edge

As with the intro and the history lesson, this chapter is mostly for new players. That said, if you are new to this edition I'd suggest reading it anyway. There are also some handy side notes such as various businesses, body shops, street clinics, most downloaded music, top movies, and popular clothing brand names. All of which are useful for adding flavor to your game.

Game Concepts

As you'd expect, the game concepts chapter details dice, dice pools, various test, modifiers, time, and all the crunchy appetizers you could want. Basically, this is where the old school players need to start paying attention again. If you've already cut your teeth on 4th Edition this shouldn't be new to you with a few exceptions. Some of the success test and difficulty thresholds have been tweaked a little so pay close attention to those. Also there is an optional rule to cap the dice pools, handy if you have some serious problems with players min-maxing.

This is where you start to see a lot of green text with "…Example" written vertically next to it. The authors did an excellent job providing examples for every rule, and the style of the text helps it stand out well. There are also plenty of black and green charts littered through out the chapter emphasizing various game mechanics. Also included are the details of the different races, different attributes, how Edge works, as well as ways to change the play style of your game.

Creating a Shadowrunner

One of the things that I noticed in the previous chapter but really shines during character creation is that the authors did a very good job at listing page numbers anytime specific aspects of the game are mentioned. This is incredibly handy as you always have a virtual index at your fingers as to where to look up the next bit of information you need. As usual, the option to use a sample character is available but honestly, who does that? Lets get on to the crunchy part.

Previously, the suggested order for making a character was: Race, Attributes, Skills, Qualities, and Resources. That worked unless you were magically active or a technomancer, but not without a lot of backtracking. So, with the reorganization of the chapter the suggested order is now: Race, Qualities, Attributes, Skills, and lastly Resources. Now obviously this didn't hinder us in the past, as we'd just go to whatever section we needed. Where I think this will help a lot is for new players, as it will instill better habits for approaching character generation. This could help prevent the plague of characters with allergies and addictions…yeah, I'm just kidding on that one.

Sample Characters

At the end of the chapter placed in its usual place just before skills are sixteen sample characters very nicely laid out with their stats, equipment, lifestyles, and a blurb suggesting how to play the character.

Aside from being great for new players I've found these are useful for us old hands to get a good grasp of what's changed as far as the typical load out of starting characters. The artwork varies on the sample character from sketchy almost post-impressionistic looking to almost looking photographic.

Skills

The skills section of the rulebook has been reorganized a bit though most if it should look familiar to you if you've already been running this edition. One change in particular was moving the information for using skills to their own subsection while maintaining a single continuous list of skills. Included with using skills is several attribute only skills test that use the combined total of two separate attributes such as Memory using Logic and Willpower. At about 22 pages, the chapter is short and straight to the point with examples as needed while keeping light on the artwork and fluff.

Combat

This section is crunchy to say the least, as you would expect. Most of what has been updated with the Anniversary Edition is clarity and better organization. See a trend yet? I do like the nod to DMZ by the inclusion of its cover artwork in with Vehicle Combat rules.

Weapon Range now gets a page all to itself and is easy to find and read. Modifiers for ranged combat and visibility are on the next page so if you're lacking the GM screen or just on the wrong side of it most of the information you'll need for a fight is all in one place.

Grenade scatter and shotgun spread is still in the rules so combat hasn't been completely simplified though there probably isn't an easy way to streamline either set of rules and still achieve the same effect. Needless to say fans of chunky salsa won't be disappointed.

The Awakened World

Everything you could want to know about magic, well mostly, the rest you'll probably find in the advanced rulebooks, but this is enough to get your feet wet. Magic usage such as sorcery and conjuring are detailed as you would expect and while not greatly detailed they've taken the liberty to list and explain Arcana from Street Magic. Basically they've given Enchanting about a page worth to explain how to make various foci so that it's available to players new to the game.

Astral Space and all its related topics such as Auras, Astral Perception, Assensing, and Astral Combat are given their own subchapter as well grouping the related topics into one handy location. Adepts get about three pages worth of powers to pick from and a blurb explaining Mystic Adepts. The chapter rounds out with information about Initiation, Foci, Mentor Spirits, and an eight page Street Grimoire listing the spells available to spell slingers.

The Wireless World

This is by far my favorite change that 4th Edition brought about. The new wireless matrix was ingenious and was the logical next step for the game. We're already heading rapidly towards a wireless world in reality so it seemed silly not to be the case in a world sixty years more advanced than our own. Ok, so off my soapbox and back to the review.

There is a lot to take in here and in face one of the first things you face in this chapter after the intro is a big black box full of matrix terminology. After this we get into how you go about getting online, what Commlinks are and what they do. Then you get a crash course on Augmented and Virtual Reality. After a quick mention about Technomancers and Artificial Intelligence we move on to Networking, as the former two will be covered in more detail later on.

One nice change is that storage memory is pretty much gone. The idea is that storage is so easy to come back at this point that you don't need to track it. If you really need a way to physically store data you can buy a Datachip for a nuyen that will hold hundreds of gigapulses of information. That's one less thing for hackers to sweat over and for GMs to have to calculate.

Networking covers all the crunchy parts of the matrix such as the software on your Commlink as well as the different modes you can operate it in while on the go. The number of programs available and needed by a hacker has been cut down a little bit though still is enough to fill roughly two pages.

Hacking is a section all on it's own covering all the things illicit and fun. Spoofing a command to a device to get it to do what you want without having to go in for a full hack. Cybercombat when you get caught in the act or someplace you're not suppose to be. The security response of the node you're in when you don't go as unnoticed as you hoped.

Technomancers get their treatment in this chapter and are very much a blend between a decker and a magic user in a lot of ways. From a GMs perspective this is a good thing as there are less variations in the rules on how things are handled. Players might feel like the Technomancers are as unique as they could have been as they mostly operate identical to hackers but are karma heavy like mages.

To me Rigging has always felt like it was cut short in the core rule books and with 4th Edition this seems more so as they've been folded into hackers with different specializations. On the plus side it's much cheaper to make hackers and riggers now than it has ever been. Riggers tend to be heavier focused on the hardware side of things such as signal strength and electronic warfare and are otherwise identical to hackers.

Running the Shadows

This is basically the catchall portion of the rules. Healing, Medicine, Toxins and Drugs. All the fun stuff self-inflicted or experiences by runners. There is plenty of detail for security systems and how to implement or bypass them. Reputation, which is a great tool for GMs to use to determine how well people know the runner for the good or the bad.

Friends and Foes

Here are the usual suspects of NPCs, Contacts, and Paranormal Critters and how to use each of them. Personally I like the revamped system for contacts for 4th Edition as it gives a much better defined role for contacts in regards to capability and how far they'll stick their neck out for the player. Most creature powers were also simplified to help game play flow much better.

Street Gear

Ok, seriously, it's the Sears Catalogue for Shadowrunners. Carrying Capacity and gear weights have been tossed out and get only a quick reference in case someone tried to pick something up and carry it and you really needed to know if they could. Concealing gear has also been simplified down to a single chart covering broad categories. What this boils down to is fewer stats to track and less room on the character sheet taken up by gear.

Wrapping Up

I've always been a big fan of Shadowrun. I also tend to be an early adopter of new things. Anyone that knows me can attest to both these facts. So setting those two tendencies of mine aside here is the bottom line for the Shadowrun 20th Anniversary Core Rulebook. If you haven't taken the dive into 4th Edition yet, now is the time to do so. If you are currently playing 4th Edition and all ready have the rules down this isn't vital to pick up as it's basically everything you have in the original core book just better organized. It is prettier and does have the Master Index in it though. What? I'm just saying…

Art/Color:	4
Layout/Organization:	5
Fiction:	5
Game Material:	5
Usefulness:	5
Final Review Score:	4.8

Dueling Reviews: Shadowrun 4 Anniversary Edition
The Kender's View

Shadowrun 4, 20th Anniversary Edition is not only hard to type repeatedly, (so from here on out, I'll refer to it as SR4A) it is also the heaviest RPG core rulebook I've ever had the pleasure to pick up. Is that weight worth the hefty $45 price tag?

Most definitely.

Like most Shadowrun folks, I have a lot of the rulebooks, sourcebooks, and random pieces of printed errata, including the original SR4 rulebook - complete with some nice hand-drawn art from one of the artists at GenCon. However, that book is going to be shelved next to my SR4:LE and my SR3: BABY because this new book is the Mustang to SR4's Corvette. Heavier, more muscle-y and just as fast.

The first fifty to sixty pages of the book gives you a feel for the world of Shadowrun, and it does a really damn good job of letting you know exactly what sort of drek you've been dropped in to. Covering the gamut of time between Y2K and 2072 you learn a lot during this history lesson - UGE, VITAS, the NAN, and a bunch of other non-acronym topics including how a big-ass dragon became the new Obama, then how he got scragged, and how a big pale dragon came to rule over Denver. The history is written very well, interspersed with a couple bits of fiction, and should not be skipped - even if you already consider yourself a person who knows most of the Shadowrun lore.

One of the most striking things that presents itself in the new SR4A was the care and detail as to the layout of the information. When you get to Qualities, you find that there is a table at the bottom of the first page which gives you a quick list of Positive and Negative Qualities, with the page numbers if you need a more detailed description. When they talk about buying Gear for your Shadowrunner-to-be, there's another sidebar with a handy table breaking down your Gear into types and what pages of the book each can be found on. Tables, examples, fictions, and sidebars all have a very distinctive and unique visual style, and each are positioned logically to help you find what you need in the shortest time. Even in-paragraph links to pages "*Foci*

(see p.199)" helps usher you to what you need in an efficient fashion. This limits the amount of time you spend flipping from front to back of the book to check the index, before finding the page you need.

The index though, is where the book erupts from really good into full-blown awesome. The index is updated and revamped, and covers all materiel from currently-released sourcebooks. Arsenal, Augmentation, Runner's Companion, Street Magic, and Unwired all have entries here, color-coded and cross-referenced to within an inch of their lives. At the end of the index is also a "Master Tables" list, where you might think from the bookmark that it would have every table in a nice, one-stop place, but unfortunately that is where you would be wrong. Instead it's a continuation of the index, but only covering the tables that appear in every book. A nice addendum, but it got my hopes up that I'd find a master table of... well, tables!

The crunchiness of the rules is stellar - people familiar with the SR4 rulebook will not find many surprises here, with the exception of more complete and better-laid-out tables and charts giving you the infodump you need on the wall-of-text. Melee combat, ranged combat, even the rules for using hand grenades to make 'chunky salsa' are all here for your digestion.

SR4A is a worthy legacy to mark out the 20th Anniversary of Shadowrun. While the $45 pricetag is a bit steep to choke on, when you consider the full-color pages, increased content, and the really impressive Index, you probably will find yourself forking over the cash for it in short order.

Art/Color:	4
Layout/Organization:	5
Fiction:	4
Game Material:	4
Usefulness:	4
Final Review Score:	4.2

Interview with a Developer

On September 9th, 2009, just a day after he was officially announced as the new Shadowrun Line Developer, and less than a month after he was hired, Jason M. Hardy was kind enough to sit through an interview session.

Bull: First off, I'd like to say "Thank you" for agreeing to do this. I know your schedule's probably crazy busy, what with you being finally announced as the new line developer yesterday. How does it feel now that it's out in the open?

Jason M. Hardy: Good--I was actually pushing for it. I wanted to be able to write things on the blog, on Dumpshock, and on Twitter, and start doing other things to interact with the fanbase. I'm happy to be able to start doing that.

Bull: How did you initially get involved with Shadowrun?

JMH: Through Randall Bills. I was hanging out at his house a lot during the FASA days and perusing his fine collection of Battletech and Shadowrun stuff. The Shadowrun stuff in particular caught my eye--it was very alluring. Then I did the Crimson Skies novels for FASA, and so on and so forth as I wrote on the blog and on Dumpshock.

Bull: Let's go back a little further. Tell us a little bit about your background, and how you got interested in writing in the first place.

JMH: Oh heavens. It goes back to the Frog and Toad rip-off story I wrote in second grade. I just loved the idea of coming up with stories. Then I got older and figured out that it wasn't enough just to love the idea--I also had to love the process of writing if I was actually going to get anything done. Around the time I graduated from college, I adopted the practice of writing every day, and I loved that, too. After that, it was just a small matter of finding a way to get paid for the stuff I was doing.
Getting my first professional sale took about five years.

Bull: What was your first professional sale?

JMH: Short story called "Triangle Monologues"--not fantasy of sci-fi at all, just raw emotions. I recently ripped myself off for a Battlecorps story called "Whatever the Mess You Are, You're Mine" that uses some of the same techniques.

Bull: Other than FASA/Wizkids/CGL properties, what else have you worked on and written for?

JMH: I did some work for Fast Forward Entertainment back in the day, along with things for Emerald Press and Reality Deviant. I've also done things for Smith and Tinker. I've had a short story published on the web in a publication called Nth Degree.

Bull: The FFE stuff, was that D&D 3.X D20?

JMH: Yup. I wrote a store for Tombs of Ra and some creatures for Deadliest Creatures. One of those, the Mourning Glory, was my standard audition piece for a while--it got me Emerald Press work and work for a group called the Wanderers Guild.

Bull: Having worked with d20, do you worry about cancer now as a residual side effect? Or are you hoping that working with some real systems will cleanse you? (*laugh* Sorry, I don't think the "d20 gives you cancer" joke will ever get old.)

JMH: *laughs* While I think it's awesome that Rob got to deliver the "d20 causes cancer" line at the ENnies, I've played it enough to have some affection for it despite its flaws. Though SR is clearly superior--I didn't realize how badly D&D and other systems had warped my brain until I looked at other RPGs.

Bull: Ok, well let's head over to Shadowrun for a bit then.

JMH: [scoots chair to the right] Okay, I'm there.

Bull: First off, do you play Shadowrun?

JMH: Yes, though not as much as I'd like. But do any of us?

Bull: Were you a Shadowrun player before you started working on the line?

JMH: No--I loved reading the materials, but I hadn't found a group to play with at the time.

Bull: You mentioned in the blog introduction you wrote for shadowrun4.com and on Dumpshock that you view Shadowrun as "Magic Cyberpunk Noir". Can you explain or expand on that at all?

JMH: I like that phrase because it captures three things I really enjoy. I love fantasy, I've been reading fantasy for decades, and anytime there's fantasy around I'm much happier than when it's not. I also love cyberpunk and the way it kind of blasted a hole in the '50s image of science-as-progress, where the future keeps getting cleaner and better and all that. Cyberpunk says that technology can only make the world as good as we are, and that we're pretty screwed up. I'm actually more optimistic than that, but I like a good clean breath of cynicism every now and again.
  The noir captures the fatalism in Shadowrun, and the view that the world is stacked against you, which is the classic noir point of view. But noir also has this fantastic energy, the fast-paced, deadpan patter, that I've loved. My computer desktop is a movie poster of The Big Sleep, because I love how people in that movie talk. So you throw magic's wildness in with cyberpunk's raw energy and noir's fatalism and wit, and you have an unbeatable combo.
  Fedoras and trench coats abound in SR just as they do in noir--and I love it!

Bull: Ok, that said, Magic Cyberpunk Noir... The question then is, Blue Mohawks or Black Leather Professionals, as the kids like to compare styles these days

JMH: Why choose? I'm in favor of both--it's a big world out there. And people can wear black leather and have a blue mohawk, as far as I'm concerned.

I'm not a big fan of the "Here's the right way to play Shadowrun" arguments.

Bull: Exactly. I've always liked to paraphrase the old Grimoire (Which is, of course, paraphrasing a million other sayings): Ask 10 different people what Shadowrun is, and you'll get 13 different answers.

Ok, tough question here for you. Taking in everything that Shadowrun encompasses, and everything that Shadowrun has been over the years, is there anything that's a part of canon that you consider a Pet Peeve of yours? Something that the game is sort of stuck with, but you'd love to do away with, fix, or change somehow?

JMH: Nah. I mean, there's strange stuff that's happened through the years and weird twists in history, but that's okay. They happened. It's fine. The setting is still cool, and I have enough nifty toys to play with that if there are little weird things in the past, they're not going to bother me.

Generally, I'm not a glass-half-full guy--I'm a "Hey, there's water in half of that glass, plus air in the other half! I need both those things to live! That glass is awesome!" I love the dark side of Shadowrun, but my nature is optimistic and positive. Go figure.

Bull: What is one thing you would eventually like to see happen in the Shadowrun universe, whether it's something you can bring in quickly, or maybe a long term goal?

JMH: Broadly speaking, I want to see things happen in the world that people talk about the same way they talk about Renraku Arcology or Dunkelzahn's Assassination--things that have great stories while keeping street-level runners involved in the action, things that make gamers lean back at the end of a session and smile dazedly while a little Mountain Dew dribbles down their chin and they sigh a little and say "That was cool!"

Bull: Ok, now, you accepted the position of line developer, knowing it meant crappy pay, long hours, dealing with folks like me, demanding and selfish freelancers, and often seeing only the small but very vocal side of the fanbase. Are you a total masochist?

JMH: Before I accepted the position, I was a freelancer, which meant crappy pay, long hours, dealing with folks like you, demanding editors, and often seeing the small but very vocal side of the fanbase. I view this as a lateral move . . .

Bull: *laughs* So, in other words, yes. Good to know.

JMH: *laughs*

Bull: For those that aren't familiar with the job, what all does being a Line Developer actually mean? Besides my smartass comments above, that is.

JMH: It means making sure products come out. From pitching ideas to management, writing up specs, assigning work to freelancers, making comments on drafts, to sending the book to layout.. It means shepherding projects through every step of the journey from conception to completion.

That's it.

Bull: So not much.

JMH: Nah. Thankfully, I have a Wii to entertain me while I sit around.

Bull: That segues into my next question nicely... Besides write Shadowrun, what do you do to relax?

JMH: I like almost any kind of sports. Basketball, baseball, golf, Frisbee--if I don't get to run (or at least walk) around in some sort of competition at least once a week, I get cranky. I read a lot, and I'm lucky enough that something I do a lot, write, is something I enjoy. Often I'll be home, relaxing, taking some time off, and I'll think, "What should I do with myself now that I have a few moments?" And the answer comes back: "I know! Write!"

I also love board games and play a fair number of them.

Bull: So what advice would you give to someone looking to break into the RPG field?

JMH: Know what you're doing. You don't have to be an expert in the game you want to work for, but you better know the part you want to write about or draw. And if you're writing, know the basics of grammar and style. Please. I'm begging you. The simple rule is this--the less work an editor has to do to make your piece publishable, the happier he or she will be, and the more likely he or she will be to hire/rehire you.

Also, I was on a Writing for Catalyst panel at GenCon, and every single panel member mentioned the same thing: If you're given an assignment, hit your deadline! Hit it!

Bull: What is one thing you would like to someday accomplish (Outside of gaming)?

JMH: At the moment, I've got this 150,000 word novel that I'd really like to find a home for.

Bull: And finally, to wrap this all up... What is the one thing that we never, ever needed to know about Jason Hardy?

JMH: When I was a freshman in high school, I was about 5 feet tall and weighed about 90 pounds. Whenever I played basketball, I'd dash to the other end of the floor after the other team made a basket, hoping someone would hit me for an open fast break. They never did. I received the nickname "Freight Train" for the way I always ran down the court.

Bulldrek
Or, thanks for waiting so patiently for this thing!

Wow. Ok, I need to confess something. I'm sure many of you are aware of this, but for those that don't know, I wrote a version of "Bulldrek" for Issue 1 back towards the end of September 2009. The first issue of the *Dumpshock Data Haven* was scheduled to be released in early October. Obviously, that didn't happen. For those that have been waiting patiently for this issue (and some, not so patiently), I wanted to take a moment to offer up not an excuse, but simply an apology and a half-assed explanation.

The Data Haven is something of experiment on the part of many of those involved in it's creation, and is a learning process. Figuring out what types of articles and features to put in, deciding what styles those should be written in, whether they should be in-character or out-of-character or a mix, finding folks to handle these, working out editorial styles and formats that our editing staff could work with, all of that. And that was just my side of things, the written side. Over in art, there was the matter of deciding on page layout styles, formats, and figuring out how to get the programs they were using to cooperate and do what they wanted.

Basically, we went in with an incredibly tight schedule. At the beginning of August, Caine Hazen said "Hey, we should resurrect The Shadowrun Supplemental, that would be fun." He was only half serious, but two weeks later, at Gen Con, we said "Screw it, we'll do it". And I set us a hellacious deadline of October 1st to have issue one out. Six short weeks to plan, plot, find writers, editors, artists, get material in, and then lay it all out. And the only thing we knew coming out of Gen Con was that we were releasing the magazine as a PDF, we wanted it to be as high a quality as we could manage, and that the name was most likely going to be the Dumpshock Data Haven.

Yeah. I sometimes get ahead of myself.

I was thinking like a writer. I knew what I could manage, and I knew what I could expect from the writers and artists, for the most part. I knew I could get the material together. What I didn't count on was how long it would take to actually make all that make sense, work together, and more importantly, how much of a pain it was going to be to actually put it on paper in a way that looked good.

Had that been the end of it, we might have had a product out in November. Unfortunately, the other thing I forgot about was that Murphy loves to kick my ass every chance he gets. The main computer that all the layout was being worked on went down 4 times before the end of 2009, and it was the only computer that we had Photoshop and the Adobe programs Caine was using. We brought in Chrome Tiger and his wife to help out, and ended up redoing a bunch of work as we rethought some of our designs. The house network went down when the router blew up in January, which cut off me and Caine from Chrome, and cut Chrome off from the FTP site where we were storing all the info by this time, since that's run off the house server as well.

In short, the fact that none of us really knew what we were doing bit us in the ass.

In March I accepted the Shadowrun Missions Developer position, which meant that suddenly my time and creative energy was being siphoned in another direction. The layout was still floundering, so I finally threw In the towel, and handed things over to ChromeTiger to finish off. Which didn't work out any better, really.

One disaster after another hit Chrome, and the next thing you knew… Here it is September. It's been a year since we started working on the DDH in earnest, and the magazine still hasn't been released. I know Chrome has at least a semi-finished version with a nice layout sitting around somewhere, but I'm not really sure what the status of that is. I have hopes that he'll get things rolling again very soon. In the meantime though, I wanted to finally get something out, which is what you're holding in your hot little (virtual) hands. I'm not much in the layout ad design department, nor do I have the software to do it right. So this thing is very likely ugly as hell and full of formatting errors, but… It's out! And that's something.

I'd like to take a moment to say thanks all my writers, artists, editors, playtesters, and everyone else who helped out at one point or another. I appreciate you putting up with me when I was a big ball of stress, and I want to thank you for hitting your deadlines, and being patient when we missed ours. I'd also like to say thanks to the fans and their patience. On Dumpshock and on Facebook where we set up a Fan Page for the magazine, you've been great, and the continued interest really helped us power through some of the major glitches that slowed us down.

    -- Steven "Bull" Ratkovich
        09/18/10