



SSS #10

The Shadowrun Supplemental

All New Design!

In This Issue:

A Little Learning...
SwiftOne Speaks
The complete Quicksilver
Lightning!

And more!



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Editorial Verbiage

Welcome to #10. This is the big one - the giant move up to double digits. Ordinarily that would be cause to celebrate, but this is extra special, because with this issue I've taken what will hopefully be the big steps in pushing this magazine to greater heights.

No longer do I say I when I refer to the future of the magazine, or when I talk about reading your submission and getting back to you, I now say we. For the first time in the two plus years since starting TSS, the magazine has a staff. It has more structure than it as ever had before. It has a future should I decide I no longer wish to work on the magazine. The changes have revitalized my outlook towards the magazine, and I look forward to working on many more issues. It's a long way until triple digits, though..

It also means I get the chance to delegate a bit of work around, which I'm sure the people who send in submissions and then don't hear back from me for weeks at a time appreciate. I also have some more organization on my end regarding this, so those problems should be left in the dust.

Something else that's important to some readers - there is no longer a Word or RTF version of the magazine. The reason for that is simple - issues 1 through 9 were compiled in Word '95 and '97, so distributing the Word/RTF version was no problem. The magazine is now compiled in Adobe Pagemaker, which does not produce those types of files. I apologize for this, but those of you who use MS Word know that it can be a difficult program at the best of times, and I've run out of patience with it.

I want to give a special thanks to the people who have been so instrumental and encouraging during these last few months, and who helped so much with this issue. You guys and gals know who you are, and I'm doubling your pay! Unfortunately, double nothing is still nothing, but I love ya!

Submissions

Submissions to The Shadowrun Supplemental fall into 3 categories now. The procedure for making submissions is relatively the same in each category, but there are a few small differences.

All submissions and queries should be sent to adamj@shadowrun.html.com Please ensure that this email is plain text only, with no attachments. If you have a version in another format that you would prefer to use (Such as a Word document, HTML, etc.), please send an email asking for further instructions.

- “Regular” articles – These are stand-alone articles that are not part of a regular feature or column and will be published entirely in one issue. Please send a short summary of the article and wait for initial feedback before sending the full article.

- Miscellaneous “Stuff” – These are things such as spells, cyberware, other gear, short plot ideas (Less than one page), and basically anything else that doesn't make a full article in itself, but would be placed with other similar items to make a full article. Simply email these pieces to the address above. Be aware that while we may not use your piece in the forthcoming issue, it will be kept in our archives until we get the chance to use it.

- Regular Features – These include things like “**SwiftOne Speaks**”, and “**A Little Learning... .. is a dangerous thing!**”. In order for us to consider adding you as a full time staff member with a article in every issue, we need 3 sample articles on your chosen topic, as well as a commitment to a full years worth of articles (A total of 6). Please send a query email before sending the sample articles.

If you're not quite sure what category your submission fits in, or have further questions, go right ahead and email me at adamj@shadorwun.html.com, or send me a ICQ message, my UIN is 2350330.

A Little Learning...

... is a Dangerous Thing!

by Lady Jestyr (jestyr@iname.com)

Greetings.

One of the best things about Shadowrun 3rd Edition, in my humble opinion, is the revised skill system. In particular, the definition and array of Knowledge skills suddenly makes them very attractive to characters. Unfortunately, there's very little material presented in the main rules, about the benefits of any given Knowledge skill - why you should spend the points on it, and what use it is to your character other than 'background flavour'.

This column aims to present several new skills every issue, with a description of what each skill allows you to do - finally, a reason to pay attention to your character's Knowledge skills! In addition, there will be a small selection of new, expanded, or revised Active skills.

Are you sitting comfortably? Then let's begin...

Knowledge Skills

Architecture (Intelligence)

The Architecture skill covers many aspects of building design and layout, including interior design, layout and occupational health & safety issues. Of particular relevance to a shadowrunner is the ability this skill grants to assess building exteriors and interiors. It can be used, for example, when analyzing blueprints to find accesses into a building. Characters may also use this skill when inside a building to reasonably predict the location and layout of guard points, amenities, fuse boxes, air conditioning vents, fire escapes, and the like. It is also applicable in the use of mapsofts and orientationsystems.

Default: Structural Engineering

Specializations: By culture, by building type (EG: residential, office space, shopping complex), by building density (low/medium/high density).

Linguistics (Intelligence)

Rather than knowledge of any specific language, this skill represents knowledge of grammar, language evolution, and etymology. It may be used as a Complementary skill when defaulting from one language to another. For example, if a character has skill in French but not Italian, they may make a Complementary Linguistics test when defaulting from French to Italian. This represents the advantage in knowing language structure, evolution, and formation when extrapolating meaning from semi-familiar languages.

Specializations: By language group (see SR3)

Political Science (Intelligence)

This skill covers a wide range of political knowledge. It grants a reasonable knowledge of political theory and practice, the current political climate and situation, and political history of the last 1000 years. In appropriate situations, this skill may be used as a Complementary Skill for Negotiation or Etiquette Tests, at the discretion of the gamemaster.

Specializations: By country, by continent, by historical period, by faction

Security Devices (Intelligence)

This skill allows knowledge of individual security devices and sensors, and their strengths and limitations. It allows characters to recognize individual devices of a particular type, and remember facts relating to that device. For example, this skill could be used to recognize the 'black box' in the corner as the housing of a Sentry Gun emplacement. Equally, a character with this skill might recognize a security camera as being a particular model, with particular strengths and weaknesses (perhaps good range, poor resolution, or a wide viewing window), allowing the character to exploit any weaknesses that present themselves. Use of this skill should be carefully monitored by the gamemaster to avoid abuse.

Default: Security Systems

Specializations: Detection measures, weapons emplacements

Security Systems (Intelligence)

Default: Security Devices

Specializations:

The Security Systems knowledge skill gives knowledge of the design, layout, and implementation of security systems, particularly regarding the integration of different types of devices into one security setup. Characters with this skill can assess visible security measures and predict and exploit the sensitivity and responsiveness of an area's security system. In addition, characters may also predict the location and type of further security measures, based on standards for effective security layouts. For example, a character possessing this skill who could see the location of various cameras on a building plan might also be able to predict likely locations for trip-lasers, motion sensors, or other measures.

Structural Engineering (Intelligence)

The Structural Engineering skill includes most aspects of designing and constructing a building or similar edifice, and making sure it doesn't fall down around your ears. This skill's primary use lies in determining load-bearing walls and pillars, for the purposes of knocking them down - indeed, at the GM's discretion, a character may use Structural Engineering as a Complementary Skill for a Demolitions test when placing explosive devices. Structural Engineering may also be used for assessing the relative strengths of construction materials - it is useful when selecting targets for a 'Ram' spell. Characters may also make a Structural Engineering Test (Target Number 5) to determine the Barrier Rating of a given impediment.

Default: Architecture

Specializations: By culture, by building type (eg residential, office space, shopping complex).

Active Skills**Forgery (Intelligence)**

Forgery allows a character to manipulate data in any number of ways. The File Editing specialization can be used to forge computer files and their associated data - making sure that file headers, date stamps, backups, and so forth meet scrutiny. The Image Manipulation and Audio Manipulation specializations are useful for digitally massaging images and footage - to remove, add, or alter parts of the image, sound, or video. The Physical Forgery specialization allows counterfeiting of banknotes, bearer bonds, certificates of authenticity, artworks and the like. Use of this skill should be carefully regulated by the GM, with reference to the Shadowbeat sourcebook where appropriate.

Specializations: File editing, image manipulation, audio manipulation, physical forgery

Quicksilver Lightning

by Bull (bull22@collegeclub.com)

Editors Note: We ran parts of Quicksilver Lightning in issue #1, 2, 4, and 5. Then, completely unintentionally, it got left by the wayside. With this issue we bring you the complete story, with changes and additions that have happened over the past two years.

“Drek” I muttered to myself as I dodged the sinuous black scorpion tail that lashed out at me. Before me stood the biggest damned scorpion I’d ever seen in my virtual life, and it was black. In the Matrix, black meant one thing: Black IC, the deadliest form of Intrusion Countermeasures. And this was big, even for corp IC

My brain buzzed at speeds far greater than most norms ever achieve in a lifetime as I scanned the IC, looking for a weak spot in the program. One mistake and it could end my career for good, leaving me as a brainless vegetable, if I survive at all. Finally I managed to find a weak spot in the code. I swung back

We were hired to get some data for a guy calling himself Mr. Johnson. a n y t h i n g
Yeah, I’ve heard that one before. r e l a t e d
e i t h e r

the massive ax that my Icon carried, and swung with full force at the base of the creature’s tail, my real life fingers flying over my cyberdeck’s keyboard as my attack program ripped into the coding of the IC.

The ax severed the tail, and with a flash, the IC exploded. In the same instant, the virtual reality of the Aztechnology computer system started flashing red. Drek, they knew I was there now. I had to hurry.

I flew through the nodes, stopping occasionally to scan for more IC, this time trying to rely on Stealth more than my deck’s strength. If I got dumped from the system now, I might never get the info Johnny and I needed to finish this run.

My name’s Bull. At least, that’s my name now. I’ve had others, and still have one more, but that’s the one almost everyone knows me by. I’m a decker, as well as an Ork. I know that’s odd, I’m used to it. After all, aren’t all Orks big and dumb? Right.

Anyway, I’m a Shadowrunner as well, which explains why I’m breaking into Aztechnologies computer system, trying to find some classified data on a former employee, and a top secret project. My partner is Johnny 99. He’s a spell slinger, an Amerind Shaman following Coyote. We were hired to get some data for a guy calling himself Mr. Johnson. Yeah, I’ve heard that one before. But he offered a decent amount of cash, so now I’m slogging it through one of the nastiest computer systems in the world trying to get a lowdown on some slot I’ve never met for I guy I don’t know. Ain’t life grand?

Well, I cruised down a couple of datalines, then turned left at the next data intersection, and stepped into a huge datastore. Aztech of Cleveland’s matrix was custom sculpted, and the whole fragging thing looked for all the world like one of those ancient Incan or Mayan temples, and this datastore was no exception. Row upon row of cases held scrolls, millions of them, each one representing a data file in the computers memory banks. I sighed, then started uploading AI, my search smartframe.

Several nanoseconds later, a small creature with glasses, a pickaxe tied to his back, and holding a lantern appeared before me. I’d modeled this frame to represent a Gnome, and he was programmed to scan data for me, leaving me free to deal with any problems that arose.

“Whatcha need, boss?” AI asked in a high pitched voice.

“I need some data. Find out anything you can here about Kano Serennto, and a project called Quicksilver. Pull and copy a n y t h i n g
r e l a t e d
e i t h e r of them.
I’ll browse the files later and sort through them. It’s a quick pull today.”

AI nodded, and then went to work, scanning through the scrolls faster than I could follow. I watched him work for a few seconds, then spun as I heard a sound behind me.

Running up the hallway leading to the datastore were two huge cats, possibly panthers. I’m not really up on my animal species, and this wasn’t the time to worry about that anyway. I pulled my axe as they charged, and steadied myself. More fragging black IC. Whatever it was I was looking for, Aztech certainly didn’t want anyone finding it.

I blocked the first’s charge with the haft of my virtual axe, and shoved it off my as the second leaped on me. It’s claws raked large gashes in my armor program, but didn’t quite penetrate. I kicked the cat off, and the two panthers circled me warily, looking for an opportunity to strike. I tried to keep them focused on me, hoping that they wouldn’t notice AI who was still plugging away on the data. If they decided to attack him, he’d be a sitting duck. AI had no real defensive abilities, as he was mostly made of search programs and empty memory.

I watched the two panthers for a few nanoseconds, then launched my Mirror Image program. It created a duplicate of myself, and then mimicked my movements. The two panthers looked slightly startled at this, then split up to deal with both of my icons. I sent my duplicate running back down the hallway, hoping to lead at least one of the IC constructs off, leaving me free to deal with only one of the things.

Quicksilver Lightning

Sure enough, one of the panthers followed. One nice thing about IC is that while it may be powerful, it still is incredibly stupid. That left only one for me to tangle with, and that definitely tipped the odds in my favor. Compared to the Scorpion I'd dealt with earlier, this thing was a kitten.

The cat circled me again, and I drew back my axe, intending to go on the offensive with this thing. I stepped forward and swung my blade toward it, but in a flash, it was suddenly gone. Then I heard a "click" from both sides. I turned to the left to see what it was, and saw several darts fly from hidden alcoves in the walls. I felt several darts hit me from both sides. Drek! A trap, and I fell for it... Damned overconfidence...

I looked up and saw both the panthers re-appear in front of me. I dropped to my knees as my vision went fuzzy. My muscles felt filled with lead, and I couldn't lift my axe.

"Boss!" Al's voice called out from behind me. He sounded like he was a million miles away. "I got it all!"

In the Real World, I struggled to talk. Interacting with the real world while decking is difficult enough under the best circumstances. I don't know what I got hit with, but now it was almost an impossibility. I struggled as the panthers got closer and closer, finally managing to croak out the word "Pull". Fortunately, Johnny's watched over my meatbod enough times to know when I'm in trouble, and he pulled the jack out of my skull as soon as I said Pull.

The virtual world flickered, then vanished. I sat in the bright light of my apartment, staring at Johnny for several seconds, the collapsed on my face as darkness overtook me.

A sharp pain lanced through my head, and that was the first indication to tell me that I'd survived. God, I hate dump shock. The fraggin' trid shows make it look so painless and easy. The decker gets in trouble, his bud pulls the plug, and off they waltz into the night with the goods, a jazzy theme song playing in the background. The only theme song playing here, though, was the pounding of my head and a slight hiss of static in the back of my head, where the datajack feeds info into my brain. That would clear up in a minute. The pounding would last the rest of the day.

With a groan, I sat up and looked around, trying to clear my head and remember what the frag had happened.

"So what happened this time, Bull?" Johnny asked. He had a slight smirk on his face, and I grimaced. He'd seen this happen before, and always gave me a hard time about it.

"Got hit with some nasty Black IC, a couple different flavors." I replied, my voice still a bit shaky. Between the Black IC and the dump shock, I think that was the worst I'd ever gotten hit. "Al got the files, though. But it'll probably take some time to decrypt 'em all and sort through 'em to get rid of all the junk."

Johnny nodded. "You got till Friday night. That's when we're supposed to meet Johnson with the data."

I sighed. "All right, done. But first, let's grab a bite to eat. Have you gotten anything on Serrento or Quicksilver?"

"Nada." The Amerind said with a shake of his head. "No one's heard a thing, but I think Fast Eddie might have something for me later tonight. He said to check in with him." Fast Eddie was an old contact of Johnny's, a snitch. He specialized in collecting information. In this day and age, information of any kind can be worth a great deal of cred, and Eddie was one of the best at his job.

"All right. Let's go see what that great smell is coming outta the kitchen, then we hit the street." With a big grin, Johnny followed me out of the rec room, and into the kitchen.

My wife, Marie, is a wonderful cook, and a wonderful woman. She's a human, and while that always causes some head turning, as well as the occasional trouble from Humanis Policlub and their ilk, I don't care. I love her anyways. She's one of the reasons I want to get outta this biz someday soon. Problem is, it pays so damn well! And the fact that your enemies don't seem to care about the concept of retirement.

I've been married to Marie for four years now, and have two wonderful children, Reba and Billy. I'm really proud of those kids. They're really smart, too, despite their Ork heritage. Billy's starting to show signs of being extremely talented with electronic equipment, and Reba's definitely magically active. In fact, she already knows a spell. It's extremely low powered, but it's still a pain. "Suburban Removal" she calls it. Johnny says it's a tooled down version of a spell he knows, Urban Renewal, but it still drills little holes in the walls, among other things.

Anyway, Johnny and I grabbed a bite to eat. Marie made delicious Lasagna, then we went to work. Johnny hit the streets, to check with fast Eddie and a couple other chummers we know. I hit the computer, intending to find out what was on that chip that Al pulled for me.

I knew the data was going to be heavily encrypted. I hated digging drek out of the major corps matrix systems for just that reason. Everything from toilet supplies to the latest high tech toy was always heavily encrypted. Made it harder to determine the drek from the gold, I guess. Oh well, nothing to do but dive right in.

I jacked back into the computer once more, but this time I didn't log into the matrix. No real need to, and the headache that I still had despite a half dozen painkillers would distract me if I did. All I needed was some space to work, and a few top notch decoding programs that I had designed for just such occasions. I pulled out my code can opener and got to work.

Quicksilver Lightning

A light tap on my shoulder brought my attentions out of my virtual computer world, and back to the real world. I opened my eyes and looked up to see a pair of dark, beautiful eyes and a mass of long, dark curls smiling down at me.

“Honey,” Marie murmured quietly. “Are you going to come to bed?”

“What time is it?” I asked quietly, keeping my voice down since the kids would have been in bed long ago.

“After 4 in the morning. You’ve been decking all night.” She smiled a little wider, and I knew that despite her annoyance that I spent hours on end hunched over a workstation in the corner of the room comatose to the real world, she was also amused by the whole thing. I’d taken her for a ride through the ‘trix a few times using a VR feedback helmet, but she usually stayed out, and settled for hassling me a little when I stayed on too long.

“Hmmm.” I mumbled non-committedly. No need to get myself in trouble. “What time did Johnny get home? He should have let me know what he found out.”

She kind of frowned slightly. “He hasn’t come back yet. Xuxa went over to Tailspin’s to see if he’s heard anything. That’s why I’m awake. She got worried and woke me to see if you had mentioned anything to me. When I told her you hadn’t said anything, she went over to Tailspin and Penth’s place.”

Tailspin and Penthisil were a couple friends and sometime allies of ours. Tailspin is an Amerind Coyote Shaman, like Johnny. He helped train Johnny in the so-called “mystic arts”. He’s getting up there in age, though, so he’s pretty much retired from the biz, though occasionally gets involved out of necessity.

Penthisil, on the other hand, is a little harder to describe. He was a combat mage, and a chummer of Tailspin’s. He started heading down the road of the burn-out, though. According to Johnny, Burn-Out is when a mage starts losing his magic for one reason or another, and makes up with it by going with cyberware. This of course weakens his magic further, and it’s a slowly tightening circle that inevitable leaves the mage dead, or powerless. Penth, however, had sacrificed his life for us a couple years ago. That’s when things get strange.

We used to live in Chicago. In fact, we lived there until about a year and a half ago. Unfortunately, we were living there when *they* came. The bugs. At one point, we had to fight our way through a nasty beetle hive, and in the end, Penth sacrificed himself to buy us the time we needed to get out.

Not long after we got out and moved to Cleveland, we ran into him again. Or rather, his ghost. Penthisil is now a wraith, a spirit, whatever. Call it what you will, I sure as hell can’t explain it. But, we have a ghost on our side.

So anyways, where was I? Oh yeah, Marie was talking to me. Sorry about that, I tend to ramble a bit when I’m telling a story.

I nodded to Marie, then jacked out of the computer. I started packing up my deck, and Marie sighed.

“You’re going out to check on him, aren’t you?”

“I have to, hon. He’s my partner.” I told her, giving her my best smile (The toothless one. My toothy ork grin can be kind of gruesome). “He could be in trouble.”

“He’s a big boy.” She said, sighing again. “But I understand. I know I’d want you coming after me if I ever turned up missing.”

“I have, remember?” I said with a forced grin. I didn’t like thinking about the couple times she’d disappeared or been kidnapped. My shadow life didn’t always stay in the shadows.

I kissed her on the cheek, grabbed my jacket, and headed out the door, pausing long enough to grab my gun belt and promise my wife that I’d be careful.

I climbed into my modified GMC Bulldog and jacked in. Yeah, I know I said I was a decker. But, I can also rig vehicles occasionally. What can I say? Everyone needs a hobby. I opened the garage doors and gunned the Bulldog, and headed out into the night, praying that Johnny was ok.

The first place I headed was to Shark and Spill’s place. They were a couple chummers of Johnny and I, though they were a little rowdy at times. They’re a couple ganger brothers. They’re also two of the biggest trolls I’ve ever met. They run the local chapter of the Trawgs, and claimed the Flats as their turf. The Trawgs were a go-gang consisting almost entirely of Trolls and Orks. Me and Johnny were honorary members, although I doubt we ever get invited back for a rumble. We’re a little too violent. The Flats, for those of you not familiar with the Cleveland Sprawl, is a large section consisting mostly of clubs, bars, and warehouses.

While Shark and Spill weren’t necessarily the brightest pair of trolls to ever be born, they have plenty of street smarts and know just about everything that goes on in this part of town.

I pulled by van up to the abandoned warehouse where they made their headquarters, and looked up and down the long rows of motorcycles parked outside, looking for Johnny’s modified Rapier. I didn’t see it, but I climbed out of the van anyway, hoping that maybe Johnny had stopped by earlier, and maybe the troll brothers knew where he was.

I headed up to a large steel door that was the only visible entrance to the warehouse. There was a hidden back door that Shark had shown me once, but this was the only entrance that could be found from the outside. This came in very helpful when the rival gangs tried to raid the Trawgs HQ. They could only come in one way, and when you have to come in one at a time into a room full of Trolls and Orks, you’re in very big trouble.

Quicksilver Lightning

I knocked on the door, and a small peep slot opened up, and a pair of pretty blue eyes looked out at me. I outwardly grinned, but inside I was grimacing. It was Thery, Shark's human girlfriend. How she survived that relationship is beyond me, but she loved to tease me. She delighted in sleeping with every new member of the gang, and after Johnny and I had helped the gang out and was made members, she tried her best to seduce me. Unfortunately for Thery, I love my wife and am devoted to her, and I'm the only member of the gang that's turned her down. Now she sees it as something of a challenge to try and get me into bed.

"Bull!" She squealed, throwing open the door. She was wearing only a pair of blue silk panties and her black leather Trawgs jacket. The jacket didn't conceal her rather ample bosom in the least. "How ya been, big guy? Finally changed your mind?"

"Sorry Thery," I replied with a grin. "I'm still very happily married. I'm looking for Johnny. Has he been by tonight?"

"No idea, Bully. Let's go see if Shark's seen him."

I followed Thery into the back sections of the warehouse, where the sleeping quarters were. Actually, sleeping quarters was a generous term for it. Shark and Spill had their own rooms, and Thery slept in Shark's room. But the rest of the gang, at least the ones that didn't have a home, slept in a large common room, either on cots or on blankets thrown across the floor. I stepped over a couple of the gangers that were sprawled across the room.

We approached Shark's door, and Thery knocked. We could hear loud music blasting thru the door, and after a moment, Thery shrugged and opened the door. We walked in, and I suppressed a smile as I beheld Shark playing air guitar in a pair of boxer shorts covered in hearts. That was not a sight I ever expected to see from one of the trolls.

He looked up as we walked in, then clicked off the stereo. "Hoi there, Bull. Wazzup?"

"Looking for Johnny. He been around tonight?" I said.

"Yeah..." Shark said, his brow wrinkling up as he thought. "He was by earlier asking 'bout some dude named... Ummm... Kano, I think."

"Oh yeah? What'd you tell him?"

"I told him to check with Schmoove." was the reply.

Schmoove was a bartender at the Trolls favorite hang-out, The Gojira. Good guy, but a little bizarre. Also one of my better contacts here in Cleveland. I looked at my watch, and sighed as I saw that the display read after five in the morning. I wouldn't be able to contact Schmoove till after noon.

I nodded to Spill. "Thanks, man. If Johnny comes back this way for anything, make sure he calls me."

Spill nodded. "No probs, Bull. Will do."

With that he clicked the speakers back on, and started jamming on his air guitar once more. I shook my head and chuckled, then turned and headed out.

"Hey Bully!" I could hear Thery shout out after me as I headed toward the front door.

I turned and Thery ran up and grabbed me, pressing her large breasts against me. She reached up to kiss me, and I jerked my head back and pushed the girl away. "Thery, no. None of that now. You know how I feel."

Thery pouted a moment, then laughed. "Go on, get outta here, ya big dumb Ork. You'll give in one of these days."

I grinned at her, then got out while I could. That girl was damned persistent if she wanted to be, and I didn't need trouble of that sort. Besides the fact that the Troll brothers frowned upon anyone making time with the girl, I really am happily married to Marie.

I sighed as I climbed into the cab of my Bulldog. Well, not much more I could do tonight, so I wanted to head home and catch a few more hours of sleep before noon, then I'd check with Schmoove and see where Johnny went from there. I started up the van, and pulled out into the night traffic as a light drizzle came down.

I drove along for about five minutes, lost in my thoughts, when a small light started flashing on the dashboard. I hadn't bothered to jack in to the van this time around, wanting to drive myself, and started cursing myself. I looked up at the Heads Up Display that flashed up onto the middle of my windshield, and saw that there was some sort of projectile heading at the van at high speeds.

"Drek!" I roared, and cut the wheel to the left, hard. The projectile, a missile of some sort, narrowly missed the van and sped by me as I turned down a side street. The radar scanner picked up what appeared to be a car or small truck following me, and a large explosion down the street I'd just turned off of as the missile struck a building. I hoped that the building was empty, but this was a nice part of town. Chances were good that it wasn't.

I looked into the rearview mirror to see what looked like an armored Dodge Ram with a pop-up missile rack following me. I increased my speed, and cut a corner as tightly as I could. I wished that I could jack into the van's piloting system, as I was much better rigging than straight driving, but that would be suicide, as it takes a few critical seconds to orient yourself to the systems, and jacking in at high speeds was more than likely to get me killed, especially if the bastards following me took that moment to fire off another rocket.

I was coming up at an intersection, and two large Honda Vikings driven by a couple massive trolls pulled out in front of me, heading toward my van. They both had machine guns of some kind mounted on the front bumpers of the cycles. Both opened fire as they came to bear on my van. Bullets bounced off the armor plating of my van, and I gunned the motor and cut

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left, smashing into one of the cycles. The van shuddered as it crushed the smaller vehicle and tossed it and the troll aside, but didn't slow down.

I reached over to the dashboard, and flipped on the automated defense system, targeting the Dodge. The turret gun popped up, and the auto-cannon spewed bullets as the Dodge swerved to avoid getting shot up. My warning system beeped again as another rocket was fired, and I swerved to the side again, hoping to avoid the missile again. This time, though, the rocket slammed into the back end of the van, rocking the vehicle with a massive explosion.

I screamed as the van flipped over onto its side and slid into the side of a building. Despite crash bars and airbags, I slammed into the dashboard rather hard, and stars flashed through my head. I could feel blood gushing from my nose and from a gash on my forehead.

I crawled through the shattered windshield, feeling for my Ruger Warhawk as I did so, but the gun was gone, tossed from the holster in the crash. I looked up to see a large pair of combat boots standing in front of me, worn by the Troll that I hadn't crushed during the chase. One of the boots was pulled back, poised to kick, then everything went mercifully black.

For the second time in 24 hours, I opened my eyes with a groan. This time, however, I wasn't lying in my bed at home, with friends and family worrying over me. As pain lanced through my head, and then through every nerve in my body, I really wished I was at home. With a grunt of pain, I forced myself to look around.

Flat gray walls. That's all that surrounded me, on three sides... I couldn't turn and look behind me, because I was suspended in mid air, my arms and legs chained to the side walls, forcing me to hang in a large X shape. My arms ached from supporting my bulk, and I could feel dried, crusty blood covering my face. Every bone and muscle in my body ached from being slammed around in the accident. Considering I'd just been blown up, it could have been worse.

I must have twisted a muscle in my neck during the explosion, or during whatever beating that troll gave me for running over his buddy. Either way, though, I could barely move my head.

The room seemed to be about ten to twelve feet wide, and the wall I was facing was maybe five or six feet in front of me. Thick metal chains held me suspended to the walls. Despite my somewhat artificially enhanced strength (Hey, runners these days need every edge they can get), there was no way I could bust my way out of this one.

There was a metallic clang behind me as the door opened, and with a loud growl, something struck me hard in the back. I let out a grunt as yet more pain shot through my body.

"So, this is the Ork that's been meddling in my affairs." A deep, quiet voice said from behind me. Slowly, the owner of the voice walked around in front of me, followed by an enormous troll holding a metal baseball bat.

The man was tall and thin, with short, well-groomed dark hair and an expensive, tailored suit. The troll was likewise wearing a suit, but the nasty grin on his face and the bat in his hand made it quite obvious that he was the muscle, and that he truly enjoyed his job.

"I believe your name is Bull, is it not?" The man said. He talked slow and leisurely, obviously used to being in charge and having everyone obeying him. When I didn't reply, he motioned to the troll, who swung the bat into my gut. This time I screamed and spit up some blood and bile.

"Now, cooperate with me, Ork, or I allow Smith here to continue his work. Now, are you the Ork known as Bull?" He had a slight smile on his face as he talked. He was enjoying seeing me in pain. I glared daggers at him, but nodded.

"Good, that's better." His grin sickened me. "Now, tell me, where is your partner, the Shaman known as Johnny 99?"

Good, that meant Johnny was alive, and that this mad man didn't have him. "Go to hell, you bastard."

Stars exploded in my field of vision as the bat struck me in the side of the head. Vaguely, through the pounding of my skull, I could hear the Troll laughing. The vision in my right eye turned a filmy red as blood poured down my face. I felt sick, and it was all I could do to stay conscious.

"You are really pissing me off, you wretched scum!" The man roared. It seemed my refusal to cooperate was really getting to him. I felt a grim satisfaction at that. "Now tell me what you know of Quicksilver Lightning! Tell me!"

I summoned all of my remaining strength to raise my head up and glare at him. I spit a stream of saliva and blood at him, splattering the collar of his white silk shirt. With a snarl he motioned to the troll again and stalked out of the room.

Mercifully, I passed out after the first blow.

I have no idea how long I was unconscious, but when I came to, I wished I hadn't. Every breath was torture, and my lungs burned with the effort. I knew I had several broken ribs, and from the searing pain in my right shoulder, it felt like the joint was out of socket. That damned troll had worked me over but good.

I heard the door behind me open again, and I winced. All I could think of was Marie and the kids. With a sigh, a very painful sigh, I prepared myself to deal with the suit and his pet troll again.

"So Bull, how's it hanging?" A grinning, familiar Amerind face appeared in front of me, an annoying smirk on his face.

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“Johnny!” I gasped, wondering if the pain was making me hallucinate. “What? How did you...?”

“Shhh.” He said, motioning for me to be quiet. He pulled out his enchanted blade and sliced through the chains holding me up. I immediately collapsed in a painful heap on the floor.

The Shaman helped me to a sitting position, then placed his hand on my forehead. With what he claimed was an ancient Indian chant passed down by his ancestors (I suspected it was just gibberish), he cast a spell and a warm sensation passed through me as my body was healed. Well, kinda healed. My ribs still ached and I was sore from head to foot, but I could move.

“C’mon, Bull. We need to get out of here. Now.” Johnny said, helping me to my feet. He ran out the door, and I stumbled out after him.

In the hallway outside my prison, there was an unconscious Ork with an Uzi lying next to him. He must have been guarding the cell when Johnny showed up. I grinned and we paused long enough for me to grab the Uzi and strip off the guard’s armored long coat. I felt a little better with some clothing on. Running around naked doesn’t do well for your self esteem.

“What the hell is going on?” I whispered to Johnny as we crept down the hallway.

“Did you see a dark-haired man and a hulking troll?” He asked me.

“Yeah. And I owe those bastards some payback.” I snarled. Just the thought of that Troll beating me made me wince.

“Well, the man was Kano Sorrento, the man we were hired to find. The troll’s name is Smith. He’s Kano’s bodyguard.” He whispered back at me. We ducked around the corner as two men wearing lab coats walked by. We crouched, and I saw Johnny set to cast a spell should one of them look around the corner.

I couldn’t really catch much of what they were saying. They were talking in hushed tones, but I did catch the word Quicksilver. This immediately piqued my interest. After all, this is what we were getting paid the big money to find out about. Though compared to the cost of that van, what we were getting paid was pocket change. Yet something else to talk to the Johnson about.

“Bull, you coming?” I started and looked up to see Johnny waiting for me.

“Sorry John... Was thinking.”

“Well, let’s get going.” He said, and we moved down the hall. When we got near the exit, Johnny cast an invisibility spell on the two of us, and we slipped out past a couple more unconscious guards. I paused long enough to look over the guard’s uniform, and noted the Aztech Logo on the collar and the sleeve.

And then we were gone from that cursed building, but I planned to be back. I owed someone big time.

“So how the hell did you ever find me, Johnny? And what did you find out on the streets?” I asked once we were at our safehouse. We have three apartments in the low rent section of Cleveland that we used as hidey-holes when the heat came down. We got ahold of Marie and Xuxa, and they and the kids were fine, and once we warned them, they took off for Tailspin’s place. While our house was fairly heavily guarded, they would be a lot safer with the Old Coyote Shaman and the ghost if we weren’t around. Tailspin had more than a few tricks up his old sleeve.

Johnny gave me that irritating grin again. “Actually, I didn’t find drek on the streets. Nobody had ever heard of this slag Sorrento, nor this Quicksilver Lightning.”

“However, I got a call from Joey about 10 minutes after your van was blown to pieces. He recognized it, and snagged a couple things out of the wreckage before the rest of the Star got there.” With that, he pulled out a battered case with a familiar red and black camo pattern on it. My cyberdeck! Joey is a Detective with Lone Star, and one of Johnny best buds. Johnny supplies plenty of donuts, as well as a few other things, and Joey sends us some useful data, as well as the occasional pulling our asses out of the fire with the Star. It’s a nice little arrangement, and for saving my Deck, Joey was getting a huge fragging reward.

“Great. I figured I’d lost this too. Thank God for miracles. I’m surprised it survived that crash.” I muttered, opening the case and running a quick diagnostic on the deck. All the systems were in one piece, and the memory with the stole Azzie data was intact. “So, if you didn’t find anything, how did you know who Sorrento is, and how did you find me?”

Johnny 99 chuckled. “Well, finding you was easy. Remember that tissue sample I asked you for? Me and Pent had you tracked in less than 5 minutes with it. As for Sorrento, I almost ran into him in the hallway while I was looking for you. I managed to turn invisible and hide, and got to eavesdrop a little.”

“Seems he was talking to his boss. I never caught the name of the boss, but they were talking about you. You’re lucky I found you when I did. Bossman told Sorrento to wax you if you didn’t talk. Anyways, they didn’t say much about Quicksilver, but apparently it has something to do with computers. I couldn’t make most of it out, you know how I am with that techie crap. But he did mention something about a double speed processor, or something like that.”

“Hmmm... OK, cool. Mind watching out for me while I deck again. I need to check a couple contacts in the matrix, and see how my decrypt program’s doing with that data I snagged from Aztechnology.” Johnny nodded once, and I moved over to a corner to jack in and got back to doing what I do best.

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Three hours later, I pulled the datajack out of my head and looked around, my head throbbing. You know, decking with a concussion is really not a healthy thing to do, but unfortunately, I didn't have time for several days of bed rest. I looked over to see Johnny opening up a steaming pizza box.

"Yo Bull! Hungry? Got some Papa Joe's. Extra Cheese." He said around a mouthful of pizza.

Rubbing my temples I nodded and shuffled over to the table, my body feeling like a giant bruise as I moved. Johnny tossed me a cold cola, and settled down to eat a few slices.

Johnny let me eat for a few minutes, then asked "So what did you get?"

I set down the crust on my sixth slice of Pizza, and sighed. "Well, you were right. This is definitely something computer related. Looks like it's pre-production designs for a new Cyberdeck processor, and from the performance readouts, it moves twice as fast as anything on the market. Looks like it could be a prototype for an 8th Generation Cyberdeck."

Johnny nodded, not quite understanding. "OK, speed. Can't you buy programs and such to speed up your deck already? Is this something similar, just a little faster?"

"No, not really. What this does is makes everything in a Cyberdeck move faster. OK, look at it like this. Imagine an engine in a car. If you make one part of that engine work better and faster, while it improves how the car works, and makes it go a little faster, it's not going to make all that big of an impact." I replied, trying to explain it in simple terms for Johnny.

"Now, imagine being able to replace something on the car that made everything on it move twice as fast, and twice as efficient. You would have a car that could travel twice the speed of the old one, with half as much gas, and being able to travel twice as far before needing a tune up or such because it was that much more efficient."

Johnny nodded and I could tell he at least understood the basics. And fortunately, knew enough not to ask anymore questions about how it worked. "So, the question is, what do we do about it?"

"Well, I figure this is why we've gotten hired. Aztechnology has this tech now, and is ready to put it in production. If they do, they'll have all the patents and such, and no one else will be able to produce a version of it for a couple of years, until they find a way to design one that works the same way, only different." I could tell I lost Johnny again, but I just pushed on.

"Anyways, chances are our employer works for one of the Big 10, probably Fuchi or Renraku, but maybe even Ares. This tech here" I held up a chip with the data on it "Is worth Billions to the corp that can market it first, and not only that, but before hand, their deckers will be able to slice through pretty much anything sent their way. When you're moving that fast, there ain't much that can keep up with you."

"Of course, the IC SOTA will catch up pretty quick, and things will settle down, but for awhile deckers with this tech will be kings of the datalines."

Johnny nodded again. "And we're getting paid how much for this gig?"

"Ummm, 10K each, I believe. Though with my van blown to hell and myself getting tortured, I think the price just went up." I replied.

"Think we should try taking this to the highest bidder?" Johnny asked, a twinkle in his eye. I always got worried when he decided to get mischievous. Sometimes he took the whole Coyote Shaman thing a little too far for our own safety.

"As much as I'd like to... No. You should know better than to ask that." I gave him a stern look. "Remember last time?"

Johnny grunted and nodded. He remembered all too well the last run that we tried that. We ended up with four different corps and a pissed off Yakuza clan on our asses for nearly a year. I think the only reason they stopped looking for us is that most of the primary players in that little drama were in Chicago like us when the bugs came to town.

"Yeah, OK. I know, we stick with the original deal." He said. "Besides, last thing we need is to get our rep blown to hell by double crossing our Johnson."

"Right. But we can and will ask for a good deal more for this info. Provided we can stay alive for the next few days. When is our Johnson supposed to contact us?"

Johnny glanced at his watch. "Friday afternoon, around 1:00. It's Wednesday now. So we got 2 days. Besides, don't we need to dig a little more on this Sorennto character?"

I nodded grimly. "Yeah, and if I get my way, it'll be dirt on his grave."

"So, where do we start?" Johnny asked.

"Where do you think? Same place we just came from. Itlan Industries, where Sorrento apparently has his headquarters, and definitely has his private little torture chamber. It's time for a little payback."

What can I say? I get a little cranky, vindictive, and melodramatic when I get tortured. You should see me when you threaten my family.

I had a few hours before nightfall, and we planned our raid for 3 AM. That's long enough after midnight, but still a few hours before dawn, the two most common times for breaking into an installation like this. That gave me about 8 hours, so I slept. The bed was little more than a board with some worn out padding, but with everything I'd been through the last couple days, I slept like a rock.

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Johnny woke me a couple hours before the run was planned, and I looked up to see a couple of semi-familiar faces. Johnny apparently decided that we needed some backup on this one.

One was an enormous female troll named Sally. Sally ran with Shark and Spill's gang, but wanted to "break into" the biz, so to speak. She'd been pestering Johnny and me for a chance to go on a run with us, and I guess he finally decided that it was time. I hoped that nothing would happen to her, she was a nice kid, and I really wouldn't want to have to explain things to Spill.

The other was a hard-faced cyberdude that we'd worked with a couple times before named Angel. Angel wasn't the ideal partner for a team like ours. He was in the biz solely for the money, and I didn't trust him any further than I trusted my Johnson's to tell me the entire truth about a run. Plus, he killed far too casually. Johnny and I always try to keep the body count to a minimum, but Angel never even considered non-lethal tactics.

Johnny must have figured that we would need some heavy hitters if he was bringing in Angel. Of course, Johnny said he found me on the first floor. He said that he knew there was at least one basement level to the complex, and it was guarded by a heavy-duty ward. Chances are, that's where we need to go.

Besides, on this mission I wasn't feeling overly merciful. We'd run into trouble with Aztechnology before, and this Sorrento joker hadn't exactly made me his bosom buddy. I fully intended to pull no punches.

"You feeling better, Bull?" Johnny asked, helping me stand up.

"I've been worse." I muttered, stretching the kinks out. I nodded to Angel, who silently returned the nod. I looked over at Sally, and she immediately started talking a mile a minute.

"Isn't this really fragging cool, Bull? I mean, a real shadowrun! Wizzer! The gang'll never believe me when I tell them!" She babbled. I inwardly sighed, but tried to keep a cheerful face. Working with newbies was always such a trying experience. I made a mental note to keep her close by and try and keep her alive.

Sally kept talking, but I mentally tuned her out and gathered up my gear. Looking up at Johnny I said, "You got anymore surprises, chummer? Or is this it?"

"This is it. Couldn't get ahold of anyone else on such short notice."

"That's kinda a shame. I'd really like to have a little more punch, but... I suppose this will have to do." I grumbled with a sigh. "So, you figure out exactly how you want to run this one, John?"

Normally I make the plans, and then Johnny screws them up. However, since I needed time to recuperate from all the drek I went through, and Johnny was at least familiar with the layout of the first floor, I let him do the planning for once. Plus, it annoyed him to no end to be put in charge.

"Yeah." Johnny said with a grin. "Basically, we break in and find what we want. We do it quietly as possible, and if the drek hits the fan, we open up hard and blow the roof off the place."

I sighed, but didn't argue. I was still far too tired to even think about convincing him to plan a little better. 'Besides,' I thought, more than a little anger welling inside him again. 'I owe these jokers and would love to blow the wretched place to kingdom come.'

"OK Johnny. We need to dip into the stores and get these guys outfitted. We need to go in heavy." I sighed. "I hate to do things this way, but there's no other way. And I need to get inside the building if I'm gonna be able to hack their system."

Johnny nodded, "Yeah, there ain't no sneaking into this one. After they find you gone, they'll be waiting for us to come back anyways. I figure we'll need to get you inside, probably into the lower levels of the place. That way you can get into any isolated system they might have. Angel here will cover you while you do the decking."

"Then me and Sally will locate the prototype, and then we bail. Anything that gets in our way, we drop."

"Sounds good," I said, surprised that Johnny had thought ahead that far, or that he even knew what an isolated system was. "But...?"

Johnny 99 chuckled. "And you thought I didn't pay attention when you talk to me."

I laughed lightly, especially at the bewildered looks we got from Sally. Angel, of course, looked on stoically. I stood up, and we led the way out, and we headed over to a warehouse to suit up. Dread balled up in my stomach for about the tenth time since this damned mission started.

Sally stood up, stretching, testing out her suit of armor. In hopes of keeping her alive, and knowing that she was strong enough to run full tilt with even the weight of such massive gear, we'd outfitted the big Troll ganger with a full suit of heavy armor. Angel, on the other hand, stuck with a suit of light security armor, and both our new partners were outfitted with Ares Combat Guns.

"Won't we have probs with the Star, Bull?" Sally asked, hefting the Combat gun for emphasis. "I mean, this much heavy ordinance is bound to get noticed."

"I think we'll be OK for a little while Sally." I replied, pulling my own armor on and double checking my deck. "The installation is outside the city, out near the toxic zone. The Star rarely goes out there. And I've got some Matrix pals running interference, so any calls to the Star should get slowed down some."

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Ahh, the toxic zone, such fun. Back a few dozen years ago, The cities of Cleveland, Ohio, and Erie, Pennsylvania got together and decided they needed a new Nuclear Power Plant. The old one, in Perry, really wasn't large enough to power both the city of Cleveland, a metropolis in it's own right, and the growing cities of Ashtabula, on the Ohio side of the border, and Erie, on Pennsylvania's side of the border. They were already close to growing together into a sprawl back then.

The job of building a new, and very large nuke plant was contracted out to the lowest bidder, of course, and that proved to be a major problem. The contractor decided to skim money off the project. Lots of money. And that meant that the building suffered in a lot of areas.

Three days after the plant went online full time, it suffered a major meltdown, the worst since the Chernobyl Plant in Russia in the late 20th century, and irradiated the surrounding area. There is now a 25 square mile radius that used to be the city of Ashtabula that's now mostly an unlivable toxic hell-hole, and for miles around the TZ everyone refuses to live there except the dregs of society. It's mostly wilderness, so it's also a haven for criminals, shadowrunners, and others who'd like to be left alone, and with the land cheap as it is, there's more than one corp installation hidden out there, working on projects they don't want anyone to see.

Sally nodded, but still looked dubious. I smiled reassuringly and hefted a Panther Assault Cannon, after checking to see if my pair of Ruger Warhawks were secured to my waist. Her eyes goggled at the sight of the huge anti-tank weapon, but I ignored her and turned to Johnny.

"The van is fragged, dude. We're going to have to take the Landrover, and that things not armored or modded up at all." I told him.

Johnny 99 nodded. "That's OK. We shouldn't have any problems getting in, but on our way out we may run into problems. These are the Azzies, after all. You know how they get when you take their toys away."

I sighed and nodded back at him. "I know, Johnny. But Sorrento's got our number now, and he knows we're after him. And, he knows that I have data on Quicksilver Lightning. Until that info is no longer worth anything, which will be anywhere from one to six months from now, he'll be on our asses. We have to get in there and get this info, and get it into someone else's hands, fast. That way, they'll have bigger fish to fry, and hopefully, we'll no longer be that big of a threat to them."

That was always a shadowrunners worst fear. That the corp would decide that this time, they were worth the effort of hunting down and killing. And if a corp decides to do you in, then you're done. No matter how good you are, there's no way you can survive for long against the kind of manpower and money they have to bring against you. With a half million nuyen bounty on your head, even your mother will turn your ass in.

"What's our time frame, Johnny?" I asked.

"45 minutes, Bull." He replied, looking at his watch. "We need to get going if we're gonna hit the place on schedule."

With a sigh, I motioned to Angel and Sally, then we loaded into a somewhat battered Landrover and headed off into the night.

What came next was a blur, for the most part. They say that Street Samurai and other combat recall very little between the time we left the warehouse and when we limped back. It was a nasty little fight, I remember that much. And poor Sally, who so wanted to be a runner, didn't survive. She got fragged by a sentry gun on the third sub-basement of the damned place. The only consolation is that Kano Sorrento died on his knees, begging for his life. And we got the data. But at what cost?

I was not looking forward to telling Shark and Spill what happened.

The bar was your typical dark, seedy dive, the kind of place that all of these meets take place in. Roaches and Devil Rats crawled in the dark corners, and several even lower forms of life sat on battered stools, slumped over the bar drinking their troubles away with cheap sythahol.

I could spot our Mr. Johnson and his high priced suit immediately in the gloom of the Sal's Den, and I stepped towards that corner of the bar. Johnny 99 silently followed behind me, his Amerind features grim. Normally I play the "big dumb ork" and let Johnny talk during these meets, but not tonight. After the botched run that we had just barely survived, I was not in the mood for games.

The front door crashed open behind us, but I didn't even look back. From the gasps from a couple of patrons and the brief flicker of surprise and fear from Johnson and his two thug bodyguards let me know that Shark and Spill had entered. The two trolls always had that kind of impression when they walked into a place. And tonight, they were pissed.

I walked up to the table and sat down in an empty chair across from Mr. J and his pet trolls. Johnny and the twin troll gangers grabbed chairs from a nearby booth and dropped into them beside me. Mr. Johnson did his best to look impassive, but the trolls next to him fidgeted nervously in their seats as they sized up our merry little band. Mr. Johnson's eyes betrayed his doubts about the situation. He was in way over his head.

We sat looking at one another for several long minutes, and finally the Johnson cleared his throat and began to speak.

"So, Bull... Did you get the, ummm... data?" He asked, his voice stammering slightly. I nodded once, saying nothing.

"Good, good. Now, if you'll hand over the item," He reached into his jacket and pulled out a couple of credsticks. "I have your money and we can be done with this business." And

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away from us scummy, dangerous Shadowrunners, I'm sure he wanted to add.

And so it begins.

"Sorry pal, but it's not quite that simple." I said, my arms crossed in front of me. I leaned back in my chair slightly, tipping it back on two legs, and propped one heavy, booted foot up against the table.

"Excuse me?" He asked. Why do they always seem so surprised when complications arise?

"You heard me." I growled, watching carefully as his bodyguards tensed up slightly. Johnny had already done some magical astral recon of the place and our Johnson, and he could tell these two were mundane thugs with some cyberware to make them faster, stronger, and meaner. However, we weren't impressed. I slowly pulled an optical chip from my pocket.

"This little baby caused us a lot of problems. It cost me and Johnny a lot of money, and it cost *them*" I jerked my thumb at Shark and Spill "a friend. This job turned out to be a lot more difficult than you told us it would be, but I expected that. However, the Azzies really wanted to protect this info, and it's worth a hell of a lot more than 10K."

At the mention of money, the Johnson's face immediately became a mask as his business demeanor overtook him. Apparently negotiation and haggling were areas he was prepared to deal with, not the hard edged reality of dealing with Shadowrunners. I chuckled inwardly, wondering if this was his first time playing Mr. Johnson, and wondered how he'd react to someone as mercenary as Angel, or some of the more bloodthirsty and insane runners I'd met. I reached into a second pocket and pulled out a sheet of paper and laid it on the table.

"Between having to hire additional personnel, the loss of an operative, the loss of a very expensive van, myself getting tortured, equipment, time, and the fact that I don't like you very much, our fee has gone up considerably." I said as I recited a list of expenses. The Johnson at least had the good graces to blanch slightly when I mentioned Sally's death and my own torture.

Mr. Johnson picked up the paper and skimmed it over, his eyes widening as he came to the final cost. "One Million Nuyen!?! Are you crazy?"

I snorted slightly, a technique I had worked on ever since getting the nickname Bull in High School shortly after I goblinized. "You don't even know what's on this chip, do you?"

"Some kind of new software." He shrugged. "Not that it matters. You were hired to do a job for a certain fee. After all the problems you had, we could see fit to at least double your fee. But this is ridiculous!"

I shrugged and pulled out another optical chip and tossed it to Mr. J. "Here, slot that for a second, 'Mr. Johnson'."

He pulled out a high priced Pocket Secretary and inserted the chip. He was silent for a minute as he read, then his eyes widened as he read the material on the chip.

"Let's see if I can remember the important stuff" I said as he read. "Mr. Jonathan Nagy, 42 years old. Worked for Renraku for 8 years, after defecting from Ares and changing your name. You have a wife named Alyssa, and a 4 year old daughter named Jessica. You live at—"

"Enough!" Jonathan Nagy roared, leaping up from the table. His eyes held a mixture of fear and anger as he looked down at us. Behind me the trolls tensed slightly as Nagy's two bodyguards stood up, flanking the man. "You... You're not supposed to be able to find out who I am! Don't you runners live by some kind of honor code or something??"

I laughed coldly at him. "Believe it or not, we do. But we don't appreciate getting screwed over by some newbie, two-bit corp dork who can't even bother to find out what information he's after. And who then tells us it'll be an easy mission. Sorry pal, but you have our updated fee. Pay it, or this little baby goes to the highest bidder, and that info about you gets posted to every BBS and Trash Tabloid this side of Amazonia."

Nagy stood staring at us for a second, shock apparent on his face as he absorbed this information. "Kill them!" He yelled to his trolls.

They were fast, I'll give them that, a hell of a lot faster than me. And had the trolls punch landed, I'd have been in a world of hurt. It never did though.

The first troll was a blur of motion as he drew his fist back, his cyber-augmented muscles tensed to deliver a blow that could probably have crushed plasticrete. Then his head vanished in a spray of red mist that blew back onto Nagy and his second troll body guard. I glanced sideways, and Johnny's eyes were glowing slightly and his head was cocked to the side slightly. I gave him a quick nod, then stepped back as Shark and Spill tackled the second troll with a bone crunching thud. In the blink of an eye, Nagy stood alone, both his bodyguards lying on the ground next to him, and with almost a ton of angry Troll, Ork, and Amerind staring at him. He blinked in shock, then fainted.

I glanced around the bar as the last patron bolted out the door. The bartender, a grizzled old Troll named Drok, stood behind the bar with a dirty cloth in his hand, watching us, his expression a mixture of frustration and tired expectancy. He saw this kind of thing happen far too often, most likely.

Shark grabbed Nagy, and I tossed one of the certified credsticks that Nagy had brought over to Drok. "Sorry about the mess."

Then we headed out.

In the end, Nagy managed to scrounge up the money to pay us. Turned out he had been skimming money off the Renraku “Shadow Ops” budget for a couple years now. He’d offer very low pay, and hire low-end runners to do the job. This time he had to hire a little higher up the ladder (that, or Renraku had even less data on us than I suspected), and the job turned out a lot tougher than he expected. I gave him all the data I had on him and his family, and warned him that if I ever saw him again, or had any trouble I could trace back to him, he’d wish for a quick death. And I described several fun little tortures in detail to him, just to emphasize the point. Had Sorrento survived our run on Itlan Industries, he’d have been envious of those tortures, to be sure.

Of course, I also gave him my word that I gave him every copy of the data that I had. And I did. However, mysteriously enough, several weeks later, that info got posted to every major BBS on Shadowland, and then to every BBS in the world within an hour. Every hack with some technical skills and the right equipment could make themselves the Quicksilver Lightning chip. And all this appeared to be released as free info by Aztechnology themselves. Rumor goes that if they couldn’t have it to themselves, everyone could have it.

Of course, the fact that I killed all technical data on the Quicksilver project that Aztechnology had made that reasoning very false. But I had nothing to do with it. I was on vacation in the Bahamas with Marie, the kids, Johnny, and Xuxa.

It’s nice to have friends with talent.

QTTV News Tonight: Shadows of Crime

by Alexandre van Chestein (havoc@zone.ca)

Welcome to QTTV News Tonight!

In our continuing series Shadows of Crime – Seattle’s Dark Side, we’ve treaded murky waters such as government cover-ups, insidious private business fraud dealings and even threw a glance at organized crime. In tonight’s installment, we’ll first explore gang activity in Sprawl Gangs, along with an exclusive file on one of the gangs that can be problematic to our faithful viewers: the Crash Hammers. Other segments will include tips on personal security, home safety and we’ll finish with a high-tech report on the latest technological advancements in personal protection. Without further ado, it’s QTTV News Tonight!

☛ *QTTV News is not the most accurate or reliable of networks, and QTTV News Tonight has seen better days as far as content is concerned. This ‘Shadows of Crime’ series they’ve been milking for ratings lately is not without its charm, however, and certainly not without its usual payload of drek. The smart readers will take most of the stuff here with a grain of salt. Still, there’s bound to be something in here that may turn up useful.*

As always, children, this archive is read-only – you’re welcome to try to access it, though, we’re testing an adorable little bit the MCT boys call a ‘Dark Knight IC’. Ample storage is available for those of you with something to add.

☛ *Captain Chaos*

Sprawl Gangs: The Crash Hammers

The first of tonight’s topics is Sprawl Gangs, a threat to daily life as we know it. These rag-tag organizations are stealing our youth away and turning them into weapons against the city – they must be exposed and taken care of! On this Friday, the gang we’ll zoom in on is one of the most notorious gangs of late: the Crash Hammers.

Gang Focus

The Crash Hammers are reunited under a single banner; that of heavy urban renewal. Founded by a former member of the Spikes gang with the simple name of Jack, the Hammers set up shop in the Puyallup Barrens some time ago, switching headquarters and shifting their turf around erratically over the months. There is no mistaking it when you enter Crash Hammer turf; the territory limit is covered with smashed cars and trucks, broken windows and crushed walls.

☛ *And that sets their turf apart from the rest of Puyallup because?*
☛ *Smudge*

The Crash Hammers’ main motivation is simply to wreck everything in sight. Most members carry around large sledgehammers with which they inflict random property damage on anyone or anything that they didn’t receive protection payment from.

Gang Leader

The gang is led by Jack, a somewhat large Troll with an affection for pneumatic jackhammers. The current leader is in fact the third Troll to bear the name Jack, as twice now the old leader has been vanquished in a leadership battle and afterwards walled into the headquarters’ basement.

☛ *No confirmation on this yet, chummers, but word on the streets says that’s how most intruders into gang turf end up. Walled up tight in a busted-up old building.*

☛ *Lightway*

☛ *...Preferably after having every major bone broken or cracked by fledging gangers.*

☛ *Grind*

The current Jack follows the lead of the two previous, being a heavysset Troll with a strange, unhealthy fixation on destruction. His weapon of choice consists of a reinforced jackhammer, which has so far weathered untold amounts of punishment without breaking down. His leadership skills are second to none, as he can motivate his entire legion to level a city block in no time.

Lieutenants

Jack currently has three Lieutenants: Rumble, Girth and Ferh.

Rumble is the only human member with any kind of power in the Crash Hammers. A large man with an equally large build, Rumble is suspected to be a former construction worker.

☛ *That or he has a hell of a weird fetish with hard hats. Haven’t seen him twice with the same one.*

☛ *Smudge*

Girth, a stout Ork, is rumored to be the only tactician the Crash Hammers have. Sources say he’s the true leader of the gang, and that the three Jacks so far have been mere figureheads. Girth is one of the rare Hammers who don’t go around toting blunt instruments; witnesses say the Ork carries an LMG with him at all times.

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- ◆ ...As any master tactician would.
- ◆ Sir Longshot
- ◆ *By the by, chums, some breaking news – Girth has been officially ‘demoted’ by the big man upstairs after the latter got wind of this particular report on QTTV News.*
- ◆ Lightway
- ◆ *Bulldrek. I scoped him out last week heading some prime urban renewal biz.*
- ◆ Smudge
- ◆ *Your sources against mine, trog.*
- ◆ Lightway
- ◆ *Don’t gimme a reason.*
- ◆ Smudge

Ferh, the last of Jack’s Lieutenants, is nonetheless the most brutal when it comes to business. Practically all demolished businesses, houses and other establishments have reported that Ferh, a remarkably thin Troll, was leading the destruction.

- ◆ *‘Remarkably thin’? Hardly, that thing isn’t human. Then again, neither are most of his toothy brethren.*
- ◆ Lightway
- ◆ *That’s it, fragface – you die.*
- ◆ Smudge
- ◆ *And now for something completely different. I’ve pulled in some quirky bits of info from a few buddies o’ mine, and what I garnish is that these guys are pretty much on par with most other outfits out there – so don’t get any bright ideas, chummers. Not unless you like having your head reduced to a pancake.*
- ◆ Sir Longshot
- ◆ *They got guns too.*
- ◆ Smudge
- ◆ *‘Scuse me for asking, but where exactly do you get all these choice parcels of data you keep tossing at us here? You living in their attic or something?*
- ◆ Grind

Head Count

The Crash Hammers are rather numerous, ranging in the 30 to 40 members according to official reports. Sources say they may have even more members out there.

Initiation Rituals

Jack is said to personally oversee every initiation of a new ganger.

There are two known parts to the Crash Hammers’ initiation. The first is to simply show aptitude with any kind of blunt instrument – this is often proved by beating up a trespasser or unfaithful protectee with said instrument. If the ganger’s skill is judged high enough, he moves on.

The second part of the initiation ritual involves proving one’s toughness, often by having a concrete wall fall down on the fledging ganger. If he survives, he becomes a member of the Crash Hammers.

- ◆ *Rumors abound of a third part – you get to harass a local go-ganger until he charges you, then crash him in a twisted game of chicken with you on foot. Fun fun fun.*
- ◆ Smudge



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Our most reliable sources tell us that to become a Lieutenant, a Crash Hammer has to weather a single strike from every other ganger in the group. The survivor then becomes a Lieutenant.

☛ *This makes no sense! That means you'd end up with less and less Lieutenants as the gang's size increased. Bulldrek, they can't be this dumb.*

☛ Rippler

☛ *Surprise, surprise.*

☛ Lightway

Uniforms

The Crash Hammers usually wear all sorts of clothing, as long as it has heavy (or at least obvious) armor plating. Additionally, no Crash Hammer is seen without some kind of blunt instrument, ranging from simple hammers to huge sledgehammers to Jack's pneumatic jackhammer.

☛ *Not to mention their damn shotgun sledges.*

☛ Holy Field

☛ Pardon?

☛ Grind

☛ *Shotgun sledgehammers. They rig 'em up with a shotgun's firing chamber just below the weight and link the trigger to the handle, then fill the gun with some sort of all-powder round or such. Gives a hell of a swing when they fire it off.*

☛ Holy Field

☛ Uh huh.

☛ Ripple

☛ *No drek. Had a run against the Hammers a while back and some of the tough grunts had those. Damn well nearly flung me through a wall.*

☛ Holy Field

Symbols

The Crash Hammers' symbol is a blue sledgehammer over a crumbling stone wall background. It is often worn near the neck or breast, but most gangers also have it embroidered onto the back of their jackets or coats.

Territory

The Crash Hammers claim an area of the Puyallup Barrens which changes every week, shifting to and fro. They often move due to either other gangs reaffirming their boundaries or simply because there's no more good real estate to destroy and desecrate.

☛ *What they're not telling us yet again is that the lovable Hammers aren't invincible against odors – all those mushed-up people walled into the basement eventually stink like hell. Still wonder why they keep moving?*

☛ Smudge

Operations

The Crash Hammers deal in BTLs in order to fund their urban renewal escapades. Despite their destructive habits, sources tell of very skilled dealers within their ranks.

Additionally, the Hammers are known to sell out a small portion of their numbers for a few hours now and then to carry out wrecking jobs, both legitimate and shadowy.

☛ Heh.

☛ Rippler

☛ *Strange as it may seem, these guys seem to be the right people to ask if you want something torn down quickly. Though I'd think twice about it, seeing where the money's going...*

☛ Grind

☛ *What are their rates? I know a certain Mr. Corp I'd love to see the face of upon returning to a crumbling pile of dust after a long day at the office.*

☛ Hotshot

☛ *Depends. I've heard their asking price is in the four digits.*

☛ Smudge

Foes

Evidently, the Crash Hammers are not without enemies. Local gangs such as the Night Hunters are known to occasionally do their thing to isolated, non-human members of the gang. The Spikes, a Troll go-gang covering nearby Interstate 5, is the original gang the first Jack was a member of, and therefore still has a grudge against its splinter faction.

☛ *Remember that third initiation ritual I mentioned? Guess where they find the go-gangers.*

☛ Smudge

☛ *So you're telling me the whole 40 of 'em have successfully knocked down a fragging Troll charging on a cycle? You're slotted up something serious, Smudge.*

☛ Lightway



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Of course, all forms of law enforcement and security consider themselves an enemy of the Crash Hammers, as well as any other gang in Seattle.

- *Sure... Me, I consider myself an enemy of the Cascade Ork people – don't mean I actively go out and give 'em grief.*
- *Lightway*

Uniqueness

The Crash Hammers are known for their extensive use of sledgehammers and jackhammers in their twisted goal to actively destroy everything in sight. Hardly a building goes down in the Puyallup Barrens that isn't blamed on the Hammers.

- *A final word on these jokers – if you have to deal with them in any way, keep it 100% business. One bit of idle chatter about their sledges, the Spikes or anything at all will get you mashed if you're not drek-hot in fast-talk.*
- *Smudge*

Prevention: Are they who they say they are?

Every day while commuting from home to work or while enjoying a corporation-sponsored outing, we meet countless people who, for all intents and purposes, may not be who they say they are. While it's easy to have security drop by and do a SIN check on any suspicious person when we're at home or on the job, we don't have that luxury when 'security' is nowhere near... or do we? SecuriTech (not affiliated in any way with SecureTech), the leader in personal safety for the common man, has developed and authorized a portable, fully-working SIN verifier for all of us.

- *Unlikely. To check a SIN you need access to the Matrix or to a bigass databank – and I doubt that fits into a portable format.*
- *Grind*

How A SIN Works

For those of you who are unfamiliar with the workings of your System Identification Number, refer to our sister publication *The Guide to Real Life*, which offers comprehensive information on how the single most important item in today's society functions.

Linked to the common credstick (uncertified versions) is your SIN, which compiles everything that has been recorded about you so that competent businesses and law enforcement can confirm your identity and prevent anyone else from assuming it.

- *Not to mention the great blackmail possibilities and Big Brother influence. Methinks the argument's one-sided.*
- *Rippler*

- *Big Brother? The hell is that?*
- *Smudge*

However, there are those unfortunates who, for any number of nefarious reasons, will forge themselves a fake SIN and assume a false identity, possibly even yours. For this reason, SecuriTech has developed the world's first civilian-authorized portable SIN and credstick verifier so that even the common man may make sure that the person he's talking to is who he is.

- *If this really works which I doubt, can it really identify forged SINs with any kind of accuracy?*
- *Grind*
- *Read on.*
- *Lightway*

The SecuriTech SIN and Credstick Checker (SINACC)

The SecuriTech SINACC consists of two main parts; the checker proper and a linked communication module which interfaces directly with SecuriTech's link to the local law enforcement branch and verifies whatever credstick it plugs into.

- *The direct interface it mentions is through a cellular connection. Jam that, and you're scott-free.*
- *Smudge*
- *Not quite. If it can't communicate with the local branch, it'll say so – this may be potentially more dangerous for those of us with a not-so-genuine SIN, because you never know how the average Joe will react to that.*
- *Grind*

The checker is roughly the size of a pocket secretary and is fully portable; the communication module is the size of a briefcase and has a considerable range away from the checker. It is recommended to carry the communication module close to you, perhaps by placing it in your car or by carrying it as a briefcase.

Securitech SINACC Communication Module			
Rating	Weight	Avail.	Cost
1	0.2	6/6 days	6,250€

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☛ *Here's another way to circumvent this bugger – get between the checker and the communication module. If you can catch the signal and send back a positive before the module does, there you go.*

☛ *Lightway*

Availability and Distribution

The SecuriTech SINACC is available at all SecuriTech outlets, and can also be found in the leading stores that deal in personal and home security.

Don't wait to be taken off-guard by a pretender – reaffirm your grip on your personal safety and get the SINACC today! If just one citizen in ten acquires the SIN and Credstick Checker and uses it actively, the percentage of kidnappings and robberies will drop by half in the next year. Together, we can make a better city.

☛ *Got the opportunity to dissect one of the buggers, and I'm pleased to say that all it does is generic background checks and a password verification. Those of us with decker friends will sleep soundly – if, however, you got your SIN off the back of a van, you may be in trouble.*

☛ *Lightway*

☛ *And while we're on the subject, I managed to engineer a rather handsome little piece of machinery. I call it the SINACC Burner; it fits at the end of your credstick and is nearly undetectable, but will zonk out any SINACC it plugs into. It effectively burns out its sensor module and gives the user an 'Internal Malfunction – Bring Back to Detailer for Repairs' message. Ring me up at LTG# 34251 65-2221 ; it's a mere 500¥ apiece, single use only.*

☛ *Lightway*

A Last Word of Caution

We should also mention that no amount of checking makes up for lack of forethought. Should someone happen to steal your identity and no one cares to verify it, who can guess the horrors that criminal may do while under your name? The best way to safeguard against being robbed of your name is to keep good relations with your superiors and your co-workers. Make sure your boss knows who you are and what you look like; develop a routine so people will notice if something is amiss. By becoming predictable in the workplace, an unpredictable event such as being robbed of your SIN will protect you from the brunt of the damage, as people will notice the impostor. That is the true way to be safe in an unsafe today.

☛ *This brings up an issue most of us face here – what constitutes a 'good' fake SIN? Let's say I*

want to hold up a good, everyday worker image in case I get a speeding ticket and want to pass it off. I find a good Matrix-running friend who owes me a favor and I get myself a SIN saying I'm on the night shift at the local Stuffer Shack. Now if the cop checks the SIN, it should pass provided my friend didn't slack off. But if he sees something and decides to go ask whoever runs that Stuffer Shack, I'm screwed, because in a place like that he's bound to know all his workers.

☛ *Sixth Gear*

☛ *So? By then you're long gone.*

☛ *Smudge*

☛ *True, but I just lost a perfectly good SIN, a wad of nuyen, and I better not see that particular street cop again.*

☛ *Sixth Gear*

☛ *Let's get a forum going here. What's the best fake SIN? My personal favorite is private detective. Self-employed, no bosses, cheap to upkeep and you don't get stared at for asking questions.*

☛ *Grind*

☛ *Can't beat corporate accountant. NOBODY knows who the hell you are. "Yes officer, well my records say Joe Bloggs works in our department, so I guess that's where he is. Can I help you?"*

☛ *Sir Longshot*

☛ *Whatever it is, keep it low-profile. Hit that magic number of high enough position to warrant paying cash for a car, yet low enough prestige so that nobody can actually find out that you don't exist.*

☛ *Rippler*

Defense: Protecting Yourself on the Streets

While you may feel safe in your home and within the protective shield of your workplace, the transit between the two is not always assured. There's no telling what danger might spring up from the shadows of a nearby alley, and thus one must be prepared. SecuriTech, aforementioned in the previous article, has come out with a number of personal defense options for the common man, and it is our duty to examine them and explore their applications on today's corporate worker.

☛ *That common man includes the corp suits we happen to meet along the way as well as the clerk down at the local Stuffer Shack, so read attentively, people.*

☛ *Lightway*

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Holdup FlashPak

While attempting to defend yourself against muggers and other criminals is not always a sound idea, as many of them are much more skilled at violence than the rest of us are, there are nonviolent ways to give a mugging victim time enough to make an escape into a public area.

- ◆ *Sure there are. Such as handing over the credstick.*
- ◆ *Smudge*

One of these ways is the Holdup FlashPak, a small yet powerful flash that is easily concealable as a brooch, pin or in a tie. It is wired under your clothes and has small lines circling your collar and going to your arms, so that should you ever raise your arms above your head and stiffen your neck, the FlashPak will emit a sudden, sharp flash of light before burning out. This will effectively stun your aggressor and give you the few seconds you need to escape. It must be replaced after use.

Securitech Holdup Flashpak		
Weight	Avail.	Cost
0.5	4/24 hours	350¥

- ◆ *Will flare compensation work for this bugger?*
- ◆ *Grind*
- ◆ *It should. It's not as high as the nastier stuff CorpSec tosses our way, so if your cybereyes or goggles got decent enough flare comp, it'll handle it. If you have bargain-basement flare compensation, however, it might get past it.*
- ◆ *Holy Field*
- ◆ *If you've got bargain-basement flare compensation, you shouldn't be in the biz at all.*
- ◆ *Grind*
- ◆ *Same goes for bargain-basement anything.*
- ◆ *Punctual Brendal*

The Holdup FlashPak is available at all SecuriTech outlets and at any respectable personal security store.

- ◆ *Final word on this little fella – if you mug someone, don't ask him to raise his arms.*
- ◆ *Smudge*

PANICBUTTON Shortcut

The wonderful PANICBUTTON system immediately sends out a distress call to the local law enforcement branch. Unfortunately, it is only available to businesses and homes – it cannot protect you on the streets. Or can it? SecuriTech, using the same network the SINACC uses, has set up a small and portable PANICBUTTON transmitter that will have Lone Star (or its equivalent) coming to help you within minutes once activated.

- ◆ *Same goes for this puppy as was said for the SINACC – jam it.*
- ◆ *Lightway*

The PANICBUTTON Shortcut consists of a small button that can be put anywhere, but which is most commonly installed near the toes. Once activated, it relays to a larger transmitter about the size of a pocket secretary, which itself hooks up with the local branch of security and tells of your plight, as well as coordinates. Within minutes a patrol will be on its way.

- ◆ *Just as long as you're in a public good area. If Mr. Corp happens to be in the middle of Puyallup when he hits the button, I doubt Lone Star will send the cavalry running.*
- ◆ *Grind*

PANICBUTTON Shortcut		
Weight	Avail.	Cost
1.5	6/24 hours	1,000¥

The PANICBUTTON Shortcut is available at all SecuriTech retailers and should be available at your local law enforcement office.

- ◆ *The main problem with this bugger is that you can't always know where the suit is hiding it, and as such you're gonna have a hard time preventing him from sounding the alarm.*
- ◆ *Holy Field*
- ◆ *No you're not. Just taser the hell out of him.*
- ◆ *Smudge*

Credstick Invalidation Switch

There comes a time when no matter what you might attempt, you WILL have your possessions taken away. In case this should ever happen, and to prevent any tampering or use of your credstick after it has been taken away from you, SecuriTech offers the Credstick Invalidation Switch (CIS).

Consisting of a set of installed circuits inside your credstick linked to a small transmitter no bigger than a cufflink, the CIS works along the principle that your credstick will never get away from you in a normal day's work. You wear the transmitter hidden somewhere on you, and should your credstick ever find itself more than ten meters away, it will immediately deactivate and lock up, becoming useless. It will reactivate within the hour of being brought back inside the 'safe zone'.

Credstick Invalidation Switch		
Weight	Availability	Cost
—	6/24 Hours	1,000¥

- ❖ *So what's the big deal with this one? Just have the suit cough up the transmitter in exchange for another breath.*
- ❖ *Smudge*
- ❖ *That would work, theoretically. But some outlets - I've done some research - will give you a few additional fake transmitters so you can give up a dud when a smart razorboy isn't taking any chances.*
- ❖ *Lightway*
- ❖ *Then just have the suit tag along.*
- ❖ *Smudge*
- ❖ *Well yes, that would work, if you could get him to clam up. Just make sure he isn't packing any of those other toys advertised in this report.*
- ❖ *Grind*

SecuriTech reminds you that you should nonetheless always contact your local creditor whenever your credstick is stolen. The CIS is available at any and all SecuriTech outlets, and your local creditor should have a small supply as well.

- ❖ *Y'know, this might be useful for other purposes. Ever had a buddy 'borrow' one of your certified credsticks on the way to his fixer? This baby works on certified too, not just the regular stuff.*
- ❖ *Holy Field*

Safety: Bodyguard Drones

In the final installment in tonight's report on crime, we explore the latest product line from SecuriTech's macrotechnology branch – that of Bodyguard Drones. Using existing technology along with cutting-edge security measures, SecuriTech has come up with a series of drone components which turn the most average of drones into automated means of saving your life.

- ❖ *I don't know whether to cheer or just whine like a two year old. Drones as bodyguards? Unless you've got the cash to hire yourself a full-time rigger, this just isn't a viable option. Better to hire the meat ones and have someone who isn't blinded by two-bit jammers.*
- ❖ *Punctual Brendal*
- ❖ *Speak for yourself, hotrod. If you gave drones more than a condescending glance every once in a while, you'd see their potential.*
- ❖ *Sixth Gear*
- ❖ *This from the guy who has an authentic '69 Mustang.*
- ❖ *Punctual Brendal*

Drones

For those not familiar with them, drones are self-piloting devices given a certain degree of autonomy and understanding. Someone implanted with a vehicle control rig (commonly known as a 'rigger') can interface with them via a remote control deck to 'dive into' the drones and control them as if they were the devices themselves. However, hiring a rigger can be a costly venture, and not all of us are willing to pay that kind of price.

- ❖ *What? My prices are very affordable!*
- ❖ *Sixth Gear*

SecuriTech Commsole

For this reason, SecuriTech has come out with the revolutionary Commsole. In essence, it bypasses the middle man in the operation (the rigger) and creates a direct link between the owner and the drone via voice commands.

- ❖ *Inefficient. Vocal commands can't compete with speed-of-thought impulses.*
- ❖ *Punctual Brendal*

The Commsole has two parts, one of which is nestled inside the drone. The other, roughly the size of a small cellular phone, is available in a number of types, ranging from the handset to the wristphone to the hands-free earplug and collar microphone set. Through vocal commands prewritten into the drone's code, the user gives the drone specific orders pertaining to the tasks at hand, all this without the need for expensive cybernetics.

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- Unless someone happens to have spent an arm and a leg to get a secondary voice signature, in which case you're fair game.
- Holy Field
- Wrong. Jump ahead to the next section and scan for yourself.
- Lightway

Securitech Commsole (User end)

Weight	Availability	Cost
—	Always	1,100¥

Consisting of a patented series of algorithms and some advanced interpretation software, the BES has access to a large database of knowledge and techniques related to the bodyguard profession (included in the BES). Depending on what command it is given, the BES directs the drone on what course of action is best to take and also keeps a lookout whenever no new commands are logged. The BES, working in concert with the Remote Pilot Advanced Programming and the user via Commsole, has all the capabilities of a well-trained bodyguard coupled with the deadliness and resistance of a drone.

- Scary in theory, but don't put all your trust in an expert system.
- Lightway

Securitech Commsole (Drone's end)

Design Specifications		
Design Cost	CF Consumed	Load Reduction
50	0.5	0
Customization Specifications		
Parts Cost	Availability	Street Index
5,000¥	6/24 Hours	2
Base Time	Skill	Target Number
64 Hours	Electronics B/R	8 - Sensors
Equipment Needed	CF Consumed	Load Reduction
Vehicle Facility	1	0

Bodyguard Expert System

Design Specifications		
Design Cost	CF Consumed	Load Reduction
150	0	0
Customization Specifications		
Parts Cost	Availability	Street Index
25,000¥	8/24 Hours	3
Base Time	Skill	Target Number
88 Hours	Computer B/R	6
Equipment Needed	CF Consumed	Load Reduction
Vehicle Facility	0	0

Rules: Jamming the Commsole is the same as jamming the drone's normal sensors; once done, a rigger may attempt to wrest control from the user through a Sensors roll against double the drone's Sensor rating. Any success means full control.

For other statistics for the users end of the Commsole, use the stats for a Cellular Phone.

Bodyguard Expert System

A bodyguard's duty is often very complicated and complex, as it means covering all angles, examining every bystander, scanning for weapons and threats, and so on. For this reason, SecuriTech offers the Bodyguard Expert System (BES), a sophisticated add-on to the Remote Pilot Advanced Programming found in drones.

- Once again, too much money for something that could just as easily be done by a meat body, at a fraction of the cost.
- Punctual Brendal

Rules: Treat the drone as a bodyguard with an Intelligence of 5; it will act in concord with user commands and of its own accord to do anything to protect the user. Even if jammed, it will not cause harm upon the registered user.

Though outright purchasing bodyguard drones can be fiscally dangerous, SecuriTech outlets offer many possibilities, such as renting one for a matter of days or weeks.

- So busting that drone might serve two purposes; open up the way to Mr. Corp, and put him in deep fiscal drek at the same time.
- Grind

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Additional Accessories

Other accessories not necessarily related to the bodyguard profession are available to drones. The first of these is a newly-developed ballistic gel that keeps its nonpenetrating kinetic properties even in minute amounts, which allows it to be loaded in packs and effectively act like shotgun rounds, knocking its target down by purely overbearing it from all sides. It also becomes useful in case it's difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of an attack.

☛ *Oh, now that's wholesome. Where'd that shot come from? Nevermind, let's just shoot everyone in sight.*

☛ *Smudge*

Gel Shot Rounds (Per 10)

Conceal	Damage	Weight
1	+1 Level, Stun	1
Availability	Cost	Street Index
4/48 Hours	100¥	1

Another useful addition to a bodyguard drone is a pressurized gas dispenser which can vent off a large amount of stored gas (such as tear gas) into a given direction. It functions much like any other weapon and has the 'cone' effect of a shotgun, with the same 'choke' options (although a choke per se is not used). It has the same accuracy and range as the standard light pistol.

Gas Sprayer

Conceal	Ammo	Mode	Damage
4	20 (c)	SS	Per Gas
Availability	Cost	Street Index	
4/24 Hours	1,500¥	1	

Gas Ammo (Per 10 sprays)

Conceal	Damage	Weight
—	Per Gas	—
Availability	Cost	Street Index
Per Gas	10x dose cost	1

The final item portrayed here could be the one that saves your life; it consists of the aforementioned PANICBUTTON Shortcut, but mounted inside the drone and activated by a single, quick command.

☛ *This is getting old. JAM IT.*

☛ *Lightway*

☛ *Actually, a drone's communication systems are pretty much above the cut of the usual hand-held transmitter, so it might not be as easy to jam.*

☛ *Sixth Gear*

Panicbutton Shortcut

Design Specifications		
Design Cost	CF Consumed	Load Reduction
20	0.5	0
Customization Specifications		
Parts Cost	Availability	Street Index
2,000¥	6/24 Hours	2
Base Time	Skill	Target Number
64 Hours	Electronics B/R	8 - Sensors
Equipment Needed	CF Consumed	Load Reduction
Vehicle Facility	1	0

The Last Word

All the measures exposed in tonight's installment of Shadows of Crime – Seattle's Dark Side cannot compensate for lack of judgment. The best way to remain safe is to stay alert, keep to public places and keep transit time to a minimum. Remember; you are our most important resource.

This concludes today's QTTV News report on gang warfare, as well as ways to protect yourself against it, in our continuing series Shadows of Crime – Seattle's Dark Side. Be there with us next Friday as we explore yet another down-and-dirty aspect of city life our brave and faithful friends at Lone Star are working to eliminate!

Brought to you by StarSight News Inc.

☛ *The latestest word on this – guess who owns StarSight News.*

☛ *Lightway*

SwiftOne Speaks

by Brett Borger (swiftone@bigfoot.com)

Welcome to another installment of SwiftOne Speaks. In this issue, we see the slumbering giant of FASA's SR division awoken, with the corresponding girth of product releases. Third edition is gaining definition, and my respect. All reviews are as non-spoiler as I can get (for products with plots), and are rated on my 5 point scale. I give openly opinionated reviews, because even if you disagree with my opinions, that disagreement conveys information to you.

In addition, I will be expanding SwiftOne Speaks to include a short mention of future products. While the release schedule for third edition is ever-changing (Magic In the Shadows, covered this issue, was originally slated for sometime between November '98 and January '99, while the 3rd Edition Companion, also covered this issue, wasn't even mentioned until shortly before it was released), the expected release date for new books - and a brief description, is available on this page. As usual, the release dates are subject to change.

As always, I'm open to comments, suggestions, and criticisms.

SwiftOnes 5 Point Scale

- 0 - Burn it in winter to keep warm.
- 1 - Avoid for your better health.
- 2 - Read when you have nothing better, but borrow it.
- 3 - Worth reading, but re-reading is questionable.
- 4 - A solid, stable book.
- 5 - Excellent material, certain to become a staple.

The Ratings Bar



The ratings bar is the new way of displaying the books rating - number with a black background is the rating for that product!

Future Releases

The **Corporate Download** is intended to cover the megacorporations. A semi-replacement for Corporate Shadowfiles, it is supposed to not only cover the changes resulting in the change from the Big 8 to the Big 10 (11, if you count the Draco Foundation), but also to provide more directly useful information than Corporate Shadowfiles had. While Corporate Shadowfiles was an excellent insight on the economics and dirty tricks involved in corporations, it required a bit of brain exercise to be useful to a GM or player.

Man and Machine will be the next cyber-book, covering all the various ways you can replace your good old fashioned meat with chrome and optics. Still unanswered is if Man and Machine will provide a solid replacement for Bioware and Shadowtech. Shadowtech is still a first edition book, and well overdue for updating, and rumor has it that SR Line Developer Mike Mulvihill wants to redo the concept of Bioware in a more balanced fashion. Expect Man and Machine to replace Shadowtech and Cybertechnology.

The Cannon Companion will be the gun book, replacing and expanding Fields of Fire. Persistent rumors of a gun creation system similar to Rigger 2's vehicle creation system run rampant, but I'll remain skeptical until I see it, given that the Rigger 2 errata and Ship creation rules we were promised remain a promise only.

The Year of the Comet will be the next main plot line (as the Election was a plot line, and Mob War was a plot line), revolving around the return of Halley's Comet to a magically awakened Earth. This I look forward to greatly, as it will be the first book for 3rd edition that is completely original (as opposed to a replacement and expansion of obsolete material) as well as further development of the rich SR world.

The Terminus Experiment
by Jonathan Bond and Jak Koke

Pros: A book with vastly high-power characters and plot, that still focuses on character development.
Cons: A book with vastly high-power characters and plot, stretches the willing suspension of disbelief.

Novel

0 1 **2** 3 4 5

New Seattle
by Steve Kenson

Pros: Excellent reference for new GM's.
Cons: Almost no new material for long-time players.

Sourcebook

0 1 2 3 **4** 5

When my local distributor finally got me my copy of *The Terminus Experiment*, I wasn't sure if I would love it or hate it. On the one hand, there was Jak Koke, who has always done a good job of having characters that learn and mature without becoming maudlin. On the other was Jak Koke's tendency to have the really high end characters. And of course, we have the co-author, Jonathan Bond, an unknown variable.

I read it, and I'm afraid to say my final conclusion was more towards the hate side. If you found Ryan Mercury of the *Dragon Heart Saga* or *Argent of Run Hard*, *Die Fast* too weak, take heart, because Martin De Vries is here to save your interest. For the rest of us, however, (or at least for me), De Vries, as a vampiric mage vampire hunter, is a little too powerful to allow us to identify with him. Add to this a weak plot line that sounds very threatening, but that is very weak if you start asking yourselves why the villains have the desires they do, and the book is simply not satisfying. Conclude it with some material about the speed and manner of vampiric infection that is contradictory to standard FASA fare, and it leaves me searching to reread 2XS to remind myself of how an SR novel should be written.

In defense of the book, De Vries is not truly the main character, just a central one. The main character is pretty much an average Jane, and the saving grace of the story. Her dilemmas and personal evolution were the driftwood my interest held on to while the ridiculously overwhelming story raged on around me.

It is impossible for me to say whether Jonathan Bond brought the story down or gave it what virtue it had, so I will not insult either author (further) by speculating. I would say, however, that if they could find a villain with a logically defensible goal, and main characters who don't cause redefinitions in the scale of a power chart, then the seeds of character development contained within this novel could blossom into a truly great story. The book ends with a clear opening for a possible sequel. I can only hope that if such a sequel is written that it is not just another power-bash fest between armies of powerful entities.

New Seattle is not a replacement for the *Seattle Sourcebook*. This is because they really had different goals. Where the *Seattle Sourcebook* detailed the streets, bars, and shops of Seattle, *New Seattle* talks about the neighborhoods and surrounding areas. You'll find few addresses in *New Seattle*, but a lot of information.

New Seattle is mainly a reprint, compiling information found in the two Native American Nations books, the *Seattle Sourcebook*, *Tir Tairngire*, *California Free State*, *Lone Star*, the *Underworld Sourcebook*, and *Blood in the Boardroom*, as well as giving a short update on events since *Renraku Arcology Shutdown*, all condensed to the essentials.

As a reference it is top notch, although not easy for quick in-the-middle-of-the-run lookups. *New Seattle* consists of different sections, covering the surrounding nations, the *Shadowrun Seattle* history, the different districts, local politics, the corporations, the underworld, and game rules.

New players will find it essential, giving them one-stop-shopping for a horde of out-of-print and previously outdated materials. Old players will find it a little more convenient, but may balk at paying full price for almost nothing new.

First Run

by Michael Mulvihill

Pros: Accomplishes its goal of detailed rule explanations for the GM.

Cons: Much worse at creating a consistent atmosphere for the players.

Adventure

0 1 2 3 4 5

When 2nd edition Shadowrun was released, I remember reading that 1st edition had been written with experienced gamers in mind, and that the 2nd edition was intended to revise the rules so that the average gamer, new as well as experienced, could understand them. 3rd edition Shadowrun clearly has a high priority of allowing new gamers to quickly and easily adopt Shadowrun.

This is a good goal, and as long as FASA continues to feed me interesting world developments, one that I approve of. First Run is part of that policy. It is intended to be for first time GM's and players, allowing them a chance to get used to the rules and character potentials. First Run consists of three adventures: Food Fight, Supernova, and Site of Desecration. Food Fight is taken from the 1st edition main book and updated to 3rd edition rules, and is intended almost entirely to be an introduction to the combat system. Supernova consists of a more complete adventure, and introduces player and GM to the series of changing scenes that make up an adventure. Site of Desecration is less linear than Supernova, allowing for some small additional freedom on the part of the players, so that players and GM can learn to relax and have fun.

Food Fight, while dear to the hearts of many an long-time runner, is a horrible first adventure in my opinion. Teaching the players to fight first means that that will be their first reaction for some time, leading to characters built around fighting. After

SwiftOne Speaks

training many a virgin role-player, it is my humble opinion that the best introduction is to drop them into a social adventure with minimal combat. They may fret for a bit, but soon they try something...and when it doesn't hurt, and works pretty much like a normal person in real-life would, they try more. Shortly, they understand role-playing. Food Fight is a good introduction to the combat system, and First Run patiently and explicitly explains how things should work, but I would suggest running it AFTER Site of Desecration.

I do not recommend running anything after Supernova, because I wouldn't recommend that anyone run Supernova. The very first part of the adventure isn't bad at all, and First Run explains how fixers work, how the runners are hired and what terms can be expected. However, in very short order the players are facing one of the deadliest combat teams of the Shadowrun world, and later they end up face-to-face with one of the most powerful men of the Sixth World. Not only is it completely unrealistic that the characters should have this happen, it is also vastly unrealistic that they should survive, and if they do so, I doubt they will have the proper level of respect for the most powerful entities in the game when they faced them all down on their first or second run.

Site of Desecration is the best of the lot, if there is a best. It introduces smugglers and non-corp based running. It is also where First Run first fails to properly explain rules, as it represents an excellent opportunity to go into a detailed explanation of magic use in non-combat situations. It does not do so, however, and really is just a mediocre run that you can test the experience supposedly given to you in the other runs.

A set of adventures that take extra care to explain the rules is a great idea. First Run also did a fairly good job of that, although I think that magic, as one of the most confusing areas, could have used some more attention. The selection of runs, however, is horrible. On the other hand, any GM that massages these runs enough to correct the problems has gained valuable experience indeed.

Crossroads
by Steve Kenson

- Pros:** Refreshing change from recent power-happy titles, excellent writing.
Cons: Sub-plots and non-main character development limited.

Novel

0 1 2 3 **4** 5

Shadowrun Companion
(Revised for 3rd edition)
by Lots of people

- Pros:** Much better balance than the original Companion.
Cons: Very little new information, inherits most basic flaws of the original.

Sourcebook

0 1 2 **3** 4 5

When Technobabel was released, my review stated that Steve Kenson should stick to writing sourcebooks, because he made a much better sourcebook author than a novelist.

I hereby offer my public apology and retraction of that statement.

I still think he's a better sourcebook writer than a novelist, but that is now due more to my respect of his work in the SR magic system than my disdain for his writings. Where I found Technobabel to be disjointed, predictable, and unsatisfying, I found Crossroads to be refreshing, involving, and very satisfying. Mr. Kenson skillfully used the tools of a writer, such as foreshadowing, monologue, and dramatic irony, in an genre where I have become used to textbook examples (writing textbooks, in general, have examples that involve the subtlety of a hand grenade in an aquarium).

First, I must confess that I am very pleased with the main character, Talon. Talon is a mage. He is not vampiric, not a shape-shifter, not even trained by a dragon. He doesn't own 5 Fairlight Excaliburs, he isn't the greatest master of defensive spells on the planet. He is just a skilled mage. He is associated with the power-rife Assets Inc., but almost immediately the plot becomes one that ignores Assets (with the exception of Jane-in-the-Box) entirely.

Second, the story doesn't revolve around his abilities. Magic is used only occasionally, and isn't always successful. Talon may very well be the best mage in the world, but he's a believable best.

Third, the opponents are powerful, but not so powerful as to make you doubt their existence, or the possibility of his victory as completely impossible.

Crossroads is a return to a good story. Too often SR authors replace characters and plot with gee-neato from powerful characters and entities.

First, some of you may have troubles getting this for a while, as FASA released it with the same FASA book number (#7905) as the original Companion (The ISBN Number is different though, 1-55560-380-7) so if your local distributor orders by the Company number, you will either have to point this out to them or wait for the supplies of the original Companion to run low.

When the original Companion came out, I was thrilled. I loved the point based creation system, and if I was less than enthused about the metahuman variants, I could deal with it. When 3rd Edition came out, though, the Companion wasn't worth much since the point system no longer worked. I returned to using the Priority system as given in the main book, and found that the changes wrought in the system by third edition corrected almost all of my previous complaints.

Now that I have the 3rd edition Companion, it has remain almost entirely unused, other than some basic playtesting for this review. Other than smoothing out the large jumps in Resources, the point-based system offers me little, and Edges and Flaws were too overused by my group with the original Companion for them to hold much appeal, although many of the outrageously abused ones have had their values altered. Happily, Otaku have found their way into the point system, although it points you to Virtual Realities 2.0 and Renraku Arcology Shutdown for rules. It was annoying that while they are reprinting all sorts of rules, they don't bother to compile the Otaku rules into a logical place.

Also included are Ghoul PCs, pretty much as found in Target:UCAS, the Edges and Flaws from Cyberpirates and Rigger2, and the Twenty Questions previously found in the 2nd edition main book. Shapeshifters undergo slight clarification, and there is a very nice additional section on dealing with common GM troubles, such as incorporating deckers into the group.

On the whole, the revised Companion is just an update of the original, with very little new material, but quite a bit of updated material. The new book is a must get if you find the original Companion essential, and useless if you found the original Companion useless. For anyone without experiences in the original Companion, I wouldn't recommend picking the new one up until you have a decent amount of experience with the system.

Magic in the Shadows
by Steve Kenson

Sourcebook

- Pros:** Magic! With clear rules!
- Cons:** Long time players will have to read carefully to note some subtle changes.

0 1 2 3 4 5

The Forever Drug
by Lisa Smedman

Novel

- Pros:** Great character, intriguing evolution of plot.
- Cons:** Unsatisfactory ending, jumping plot causes holes.

0 1 2 3 4 5

THE SHADOWRUN SUPPLEMENTAL

Magic in the Shadows, the long overdue and long awaited replacement for the Grimoire and Awakenings, is finally here. I grabbed my copy as soon as my local store opened its doors and dove in. I was not disappointed. Steve Kenson has done an excellent job revamping the Magic system for 3rd edition, and this product brings the Magic of 3rd edition to the point we left 2nd edition, only with a large number of errors corrected.

Explained in good detail are the Spell creation rules, a listing of new (and many redone) spells, an impressively lengthy list of totems, some new (and redone) Adept powers, Physical Mages, Astral Quests, Watchers, Background Count, Enchanting, Geasa, Ritual Sorcery, Free Spirits, Allies, Insect spirits and Toxic spirits with their associated shamans and, of course, Initiation.

Initiation remains mostly unchanged, with a few clarifications to make it a smoother progression. It appears that as a result of these changes Magicians may be shooting for higher grades than before, without becoming quite so ridiculously powerful as they had in the past. Several new Metamagical powers are described, and the old ones are revised. Voudoun (voodoo) makes a reappearance, much revised and much easier to play (or at least easier to GM). The other alternative magical traditions, such as Ancestor worship, Path Magic, Wuxing, Druids, etc, are all listed here, in simplified versions that make most of the distinctions role-playing rather than rule-based. As a player, this simplification disappoints me, but as a GM it means these types might actually be encountered in my games.

Covered in lesser, but mostly complete, detail are Magical security, Adept Ways, role-playing tips, Magical Groups and Avatars, Greater Form summonings, Blood Magic, and Ghosts.

Most importantly, after ten years of printing books for Shadowrun, someone finally realized that is smart to include the target number in the spell tables in the back of the book.

I cannot praise this book enough. On the one hand, the new material beyond what 2nd edition had is limited, on the other the 2nd edition magic material needed to be updated far more than other 2nd edition material. As a GM, I feel that 3rd edition magic is a wide and usable element of my games. As a player, I feel the need to earn more Karma, because there are a lot of places to spend it.

The Forever Drug represents only the second significant character in Shadowrun novels to be a shapeshifter. Rather than the Asian tiger of Striper Assassin and Who Hunts the Hunter, Romulus is a wolf. Romulus also represents a change of personality as well as breed. Where Striper was notable for her raw non-humanity, Romulus is much more human, and suffers from a mild, unacknowledged Pinochio complex (“I wish I were a real boy”).

The difference is notable, but not immediately for better or for worse. Lisa Smedman has always had a talent for strong characterization, and in The Forever Drug, she adds this to a very well-developed sense of locale. Set in what was Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, Smedman brings an area previously ignored by Shadowrun into the spotlight and gives the reader a strong sense of how it works. This is bolstered by a good rendition of Lone Star (for whom our hero works).

With these additions, Lisa Smedman conquered what had been her common flaw: no gripping plot. The plot of The Forever Drug is quick changing, and edged with a sense of urgency that her previous works (Blood Sport, The Lucifer Deck, Psychotrope) lacked. Alas, the rapid plot evolution leaves holes that in retrospect leave the reader confused. I haven’t any suggestion on how this could be corrected...filling in the necessary detail of the plot jumps and the plot would become thick and tiresome.

I was greatly enjoying the story, eagerly awaiting the vital key that would bring it all together. But it didn’t really happen that way. The conclusion of the book reveals the main plot, but doesn’t give the missing details along the way, and was just not satisfying to me. Be warned, however, that I prefer happy endings where all the good guys live and the bad guys evil plots are foiled and revealed and explained. Those of you that prefer somewhat less idealistic endings may not be disappointed with The Forever Drug.