

This section covers the key concepts and terms used in *Shadowrun*. Some are general roleplaying terms, and others are unique to this game system. Whether you are an experienced gamer or new to roleplaying, once you understand how these rules operate in *Shadowrun*, the rest will fall easily into place.

Some of the explanations provided here also appear in other appropriate sections in more detail. The first time a game term appears in this section, it is set in **bold** type.

We have attempted to take real world concepts and abstract them down into game mechanics as much as possible.

The mechanics for doing things in *Shadowrun* are actually abstract guidelines for all of an individual's actions, including combat, vehicle movement, and even how individuals think and react. These rules are not meant to be a direct copy of how things really work—they can't be. We try to approximate conditions and situations in

# GAME CONCEPTS

## PLAYING SHADOWRUN

*Shadowrun* is a roleplaying game that provides all the excitement of an adventure story in a collaborative format. Roleplaying games require one or more players and a gamemaster. The players control the main characters of the story, the protagonists of a plot whose outcome is uncertain. The gamemaster directs the action of the story and controls the opposition, the props, the setting, and everything else the player characters may encounter. The game is not a contest between the good guys (the players) and the bad guys (the gamemaster), however—the gamemaster may control all the bad guys, but he is actually in sympathy with the heroes. Players and gamemasters must work together to build and experience an intense and interesting adventure.

As a player in the game of *Shadowrun*, you control a player character (PC)—a shadowrunner. All of the character's statistics and information are noted on your Character Record Sheet. This is where you record your character's abilities, possessions, physical appearance, and other facts. Over time, you will likely expand your Character Record Sheet to include a detailed history of your character and her adventures in the 2070s.

During the course of the game, the gamemaster (GM) will describe events or situations to you. Using your Character Record Sheet as a guide, you decide what your character would do in a given situation. As you roleplay through some situations, the gamemaster will probably ask you to roll some dice, and the resulting numbers will represent your character's attempted action. The gamemaster uses the rules of the game to interpret the dice rolls and the outcome of your character's action. The gamemaster also controls any other characters that the player characters interact with.

## THE ABSTRACT NATURE OF RULES

*Shadowrun* is a game and games have rules. That doesn't sound very odd; after all, you did plunk down your hard-earned nuyen to purchase this book of rules in order to play our game. But you also bought this book to become involved in a fictional world. The world of *Shadowrun*, however, is not the real world—no matter how closely it is based on it. It only makes sense, then, for us to make rules that reflect that fictional universe. In some cases this may mean certain game mechanics are structured more for ease of play or game balance than to reflect how things actually work. Not only do these rules sometimes reflect "creative license," but often they have to abstract things we take for granted in daily life. There are no "rules" for how well you play street basketball with your friends or how well you can write a web page. In this gameworld, however, we are expected to create rules that do in fact show these differences—a daunting task.

reality as much as possible, but that can only go so far. That being said, we urge you to appreciate the rules in *Shadowrun* for what they are and not stress out when they don't simulate real life perfectly or fail to take into account certain conditions or factors. If something in these rules doesn't quite fit or make sense to you, feel free to change it. If you come up with a game mechanic that you think works better—go for it!

Above all, the rules are here to facilitate telling good stories. Don't get bogged down in rules disputes when it's important to keep the plot moving, just fudge it and move on. Don't allow powergaming to run out of control, but don't let an unexpected death or glitch derail the plot either. If you know in advance that a certain outcome would be more dramatic or amusing than what you are likely to roll, then don't bother to roll. When the rules get in the way of the story, ignore the rules and tell the story.

## DICE

*Shadowrun* uses a number of six-sided dice to resolve tests and other semi-random factors. A typical player may use up to a dozen dice at any one time, so having plenty on hand is a good idea.

## MAKING TESTS

*Shadowrun* is filled with adventure, danger, and risk, and characters usually end up in the middle of it all. You determine what your character does in a situation and how well she does it by making a **test**—rolling dice and determining the outcome by how well or poorly you rolled. There are many situations in which the gamemaster will ask you to make a test to determine how well you perform, be it bypassing an alarm system, shooting an assassin, or persuading a security guard that one's presence in the corporate facility is legitimate. The gamemaster should not require a player to make a test when the action is something that the character should be expected to do without difficulty. For example, if a character is driving downtown to buy soy milk and NERPS, no test is necessary. If she's suddenly found herself in a car chase, however—perhaps she ran a red light and a Lone Star officer is in pursuit—then it's time to break out the dice.

## DICE POOLS

When a player makes a test, she rolls a number of dice equal to her **dice pool**. The dice pool is the sum of the relevant **skill** plus its **linked attribute**, plus or minus any **modifiers** that may apply. When a gamemaster calls for a test, he will provide the player with a description of the task at hand and which skill (and linked attribute) is most appropriate for it. The gamemaster and player then decide on the applicable dice pool modifiers—both positive and negative—to determine the final dice pool. The player then rolls a number of dice equal to the dice pool.

## .. example

Netcat is trying to bypass the maglock on a security door. To break open the maglock and mess with its interior, she needs to use her Hardware skill of 3 and its linked attribute Logic, which she has at 5. The gamemaster determines that she has a +2 dice pool modifier to the test. That means Netcat's dice pool for hacking the maglock is 10 dice (3 + 5 + 2).

*Shadowrun, Fourth Edition*, uses four distinct types of modifiers: Attribute modifiers, Skill modifiers, threshold modifiers, and dice pool modifiers. Attribute and Skill modifiers affect the character's relevant stats directly, resulting in *augmented* Attribute Ratings and *modified* Skill Ratings respectively (see *Attribute Ratings*, p. 68, and *Skill Ratings*, p. 68). Threshold modifiers are situational modifiers that increase or decrease the thresholds of unopposed Success Tests and Extended Tests (see *Thresholds*, p. 63). Finally, dice pool modifiers are the most common type of modifiers; they represent dice pool increases and reductions from situational modifiers, the effects of augmentations, powers, spells, and from injuries, qualities, and various other sources (see *Dice Pool Modifiers*). These add and subtract from the dice pools but do not modify the basic Skills and Attributes in use.

The type of modifier in question is noted in the description of each modifier. Should there be any doubt, assume the modifier is a dice pool modifier.



## A NOTE ON MODIFIERS

Let's face it: while modifiers help to add realism to a game, they can also bog down gameplay when you have to consult a big list of possibilities and do a bunch of math. If you seek a sleeker and more fluid style of play, try one of the following options:

**Adjust the Threshold:** Rather than counting modifiers, tell the player to make a standard test without modifiers and simply adjust the threshold to account for how you think modifiers would affect the difficulty (as a rule of thumb, -3 dice would equal a +1 threshold). Note that this only works for Success Tests and Extended Tests.

**Use the Most Severe Modifier:** Instead of accounting for every potential modifier that could affect a test, quickly identify only what the most severe modifying circumstance is, and just apply that one. If it's a situation where you feel a lot of additional modifiers may apply, increase it by 1 or 2 according to your gut feeling. This should allow you to seize upon a single modifier quickly rather than accounting for all of the possible affecting elements, though it makes Tests significantly easier for characters with high dice pools.

For example, let's say you want a character to make a Perception + Intuition Test to notice a clue left in a room. Rather than looking up the Perception Test modifiers, the GM decides that the biggest modifying factor is that the room is dark, and applies a -3 modifier for that alone. If a lot of other modifiers might also apply (the character is wounded, the clue is partially hidden under something else, the character knows what he's looking for, etc.), the gamemaster can simply nudge the modifier up to -4 or -5 depending on his "eyeballing" of the situation, rather than looking all of the modifiers up.

Gamemasters should be warned that using the Most Severe Modifier may favor characters with high dice pools that might otherwise be kept in check by cumulative modifiers.



## OPTIONAL RULE: EYEBALLING MODIFIERS

## example

Netcat fails to bypass the maglock, so her pal Fei tries to force the door open with brute strength. This calls for an attribute-only test, so Fei rolls Strength 3 + Body 3 (for a dice pool of 6 dice) to shoulder through the door.

## DEFAULTING

If the character lacks the appropriate skill for the test, she can still attempt the action, but will find it harder to succeed than someone else who has the skill. Improvising in this manner is called **defaulting**. In some cases, however, a task may be too difficult for someone who lacks the proper skill to attempt (such as brain surgery, for example). In this case, the character simply fails. For more on defaulting, see p. 121.

Characters who default use only the linked attribute in their dice pool. Additionally, they suffer a -1 dice pool modifier.

## .. example

Now Fei is trying to follow a Triad soldier who she thinks may lead her back to his boss. The Shadowing skill is used to trail someone without being spotted, but Fei does not have that skill. The gamemaster allows her to default to Shadowing's linked attribute of Intuition instead. Fei has an Intuition of 3, so she rolls 2 dice (Intuition 3 minus a defaulting modifier of 1).

## DICE POOL MODIFIERS

The *Shadowrun* rules often call for a plus or minus dice modifier to a test. These modifiers can result from injuries and situational factors that affect what the character is trying to do. The modifier affects the number of dice used in the dice pool. If more than one dice modifier applies, they are added together and applied to the dice pool.

Note that **threshold modifiers** (p. 63) do not affect the dice pool. Unless otherwise stated, any modifier mentioned is considered to be a **dice pool modifier** as noted above.

Optionally, gamemasters may choose to cap dice pools (including modifiers) at 20 dice, or at twice the sum of the character's *natural* Attribute + Skill ratings, whichever is higher.

## ... example

Fei is trying to see what is happening between two orks on a busy street corner. The gamemaster calls for a Perception Test modified by the fact that Fei is currently talking with a street vendor (-2 for being distracted) and that the street is busy (-2 for interfering sights and sounds). This is a total of -4 dice to the Perception Test. Fei has Perception 3 plus Intuition 3, so she rolls a dice pool of 2 (6 - 4).

## LONG SHOTS

In some circumstances, modifiers may reduce a character's dice pool to 0 or below. In this case, the character automatically fails the test unless she spends a point of Edge (see *Edge*, p. 74). Spending a point of Edge this way is called making a Long Shot Test. The character rolls only her Edge dice to make the test; this represents depending on blind luck rather than any innate ability or skill.

## ... example

Going back to the previous example, let's say that the orks were a ways down the street and so the gamemaster applies another -2 dice pool modifier to Fei's Perception Test. This would reduce Fei's dice pool to 0, meaning that she automatically fails unless she spends Edge for a Long Shot Test. Since her Edge is 3, this would give her 3 dice to make the test with.

As an optional rule, gamemasters may choose to limit the probability of extreme Long Shots by reducing the Edge dice available at a ratio of -1 for every increment of -3 negative modifiers accrued on the original test. For instance, if taking a Long Shot in a Pistols test where the character's dice pool would have been subject to a total -5 modifier, an Edge 3 character would roll only 2 dice on the Long Shot.

## TARGET NUMBER AND HITS

Unlike other games, when you roll the dice in *Shadowrun*, you do not add them together. Instead, you compare each *individual* die to the standard **target number** of 5. This target number never changes. Each die that is equal to or greater than 5 is considered a **hit**. In other words, any die that rolls a 5 or 6 is a hit. The more dice that score hits, the better the result. Players should count the number of hits they score on each test and tell the gamemaster.

Note that scoring one or more hits does not necessarily equal success—it is possible to score hits but still fail a test (if you don't score enough); see the explanation of tests further on.

example

Manya makes an Infiltration + Agility Test to hide from the Lone Star officer searching for her, rolling a dice pool of 6 dice. She rolls a 1, 1, 2, 4, 5, and 5—both of those 5s counts as hits, so she has scored 2 hits on her test.

## BUYING HITS

If the gamemaster allows it, a character may trade in 4 dice from her dice pool in exchange for an automatic hit. Gamemasters should only allow this when the character has an exceptionally large dice pool (and is unlikely to fail) or when the situation is non-threatening and non-stressful. If the character might suffer bad consequences from failing the test, then the gamemaster should require her to roll the test rather than buying hits. Buying hits is an all-or-nothing affair; you cannot spend part of your pool to buy hits and then make a test with the rest.

BUYING HITS	
DICE POOL	AUTOMATIC HITS
1-3	not possible
4-7	1
8-11	2
12-15	3
16-19	4
20-23	5
24-27	6
28-31	7
32-35	8
36-39	9

SUCCESS TEST DIFFICULTIES TABLE	
DIFFICULTY	THRESHOLD
Easy	1
Average	2
Hard	4
Extreme	6

example

Elijah is searching a room for a clue. He has a good Perception skill and Intuition attribute, and with various modifiers on his side (good lighting, knowing what he's looking for, etc.), he has a dice pool of 12 dice. Since Elijah has plenty of time to search and is not hurried, the gamemaster allows him to simply buy 3 hits rather than rolling 12 dice. That's more than enough to locate the chip buried under some papers on the desk.

## GLITCHES

If half or more of the dice pool rolled come up as 1s, then a **glitch** results. A glitch is a mistake, error, fumble, or random fluke that causes the action to go wrong in some way. It's possible to both succeed in a task and get a glitch at the same time. For example, a character who rolls a glitch when jumping over something may knock the item over, or land on a nail she didn't see on the far side. The exact nature of the glitch is up to the gamemaster, though we recommend you choose a negative effect that is dramatic or entertaining, but not disastrous. The nature of the glitch can be tempered against the number of hits achieved: 6 hits and a glitch would be a minor setback, while 1 hit and a glitch would be a severe annoyance.

Characters may spend Edge to negate a glitch (p. 74).

example

Pistons makes a Climbing Test to get over a chain link fence. Rolling 5 dice, she gets 1, 1, 1, 5, and 6. While she succeeds with two hits, she also glitches since she rolled three 1s. The gamemaster rules that she climbed over the fence, but slipped on the way down and ripped open the bag she was carrying, spilling the contents all over the ground.

## CRITICAL GLITCHES

If a character rolls a glitch *and* scores zero hits, then she has made a **critical glitch**. Critical glitches are far worse than regular glitches—they may cause serious injury or even threaten the character's life. The gamemaster decides the nature of the glitch based on dramatic effect. Perhaps the character's gun misfired or she hit a comrade with friendly fire, or her spell backfired at ground zero, or she accidentally set off the alarm.

Note that characters may spend Edge to downgrade a critical glitch to a regular non-catastrophic glitch (p. 74; note that the character still fails).

example

If Pistons had not managed to get any hits in the previous example, rolling no 5s or 6s, then things would have been much worse. Not only would Pistons have failed to climb the fence, but her gear would have gotten entangled on the top, making her stuck at the top and unable to get down without assistance—hopefully before the security patrol arrives.

## RULE OF SIX

The **Rule of Six** only applies to tests made with Edge dice (p. 74). When Edge is spent on a test, any dice that roll sixes are counted as hits and then re-rolled. Thus dice rolled with Edge can potentially generate more than 1 hit (since you keep re-rolling sixes).

example

Jimmy No really needs to bluff his way past a guard, so he adds Edge dice to his Con Test. He rolls his Con 2 + Charisma 4 + Edge 4—a dice pool of 10 dice. He gets 1, 2, 2, 3, 3, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 6. That's 3 hits, but since he used Edge, the Rule of 6 applies and he gets to roll those two 6s again. He gets a 3 and a 6 for another hit, and then rolls that 6 again and gets a 5, for a total of 5 hits.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF TESTS

The basic information you've learned so far about tests applies to every test you make in *Shadowrun*. There are, however, three types of tests that may be called for: **Success Tests**, **Opposed Tests**, and **Extended Tests**.

### SUCCESS TESTS

A Success Test is the standard test to see if a character can accomplish a given task, and how well. Use Success Tests when the character is exercising a skill or ability for immediate effect and is not directly opposed by another person or force.

To make a Success Test, the character rolls her dice pool and counts the number of hits, as described above.

### THRESHOLDS

Hits represent a measure of achievement on a test. In order to succeed completely on a Success Test, you must meet or exceed a gamemaster-determined **threshold** with your hits. The higher the threshold, the more difficult an action is. The standard threshold is 1 (so only 1 hit is necessary to succeed), though other tests may have thresholds as high as 4 or more. The Success Test Difficulties Table lists a range of difficulty levels along with a standard threshold for each. In some cases, a threshold modifier may apply to an action, raising or lowering the threshold by the stated amount.

The more **net hits** a character scores (the more hits *exceed* the threshold), the more the task was pulled off with finesse and flair. So a character who rolls 4 hits on a threshold 2 test has scored 2 net hits.

The gamemaster does not have to (and should not) tell the player what the threshold for any test is before she rolls, unless the character has good reason to know exactly how difficult the action will be.

If the threshold is larger than the character's dice pool, then there is simply no way the character can succeed unless she spends Edge (p. 74).

... example

Leila wants to pilot her speedboat between two larger ships and then take a hard turn down a narrow canal. The gamemaster decides that this is much more difficult than a normal Pilot Watercraft Test and increases the threshold to 3. Leila has a Reaction of 4 and a Pilot Watercraft of 2. Leila rolls and gets 2 hits, but that's not enough to meet the threshold so she does not succeed.

### NOTATION

The standard notation for a Success Test in *Shadowrun* uses the skill called for by the test plus the skill's linked attribute, followed by the number that indicates the threshold in parentheses. For example, a Success Test utilizing the Infiltration skill with a threshold of 3 would be written as: "Infiltration + Agility (3) Test."

If no threshold is listed, then the threshold for the test is 1. So only 1 hit is necessary to succeed in an Infiltration + Agility Test.

If an attribute-only Success Test is called for, use the attribute in place of the skill: "Agility + Body (3) Test."

### OPPOSED TESTS

An Opposed Test occurs when two characters are in direct conflict with one another. In this case, the chance of success is based not so much on the situation as on the opponent. When making an Opposed Test, both characters roll their dice pools and compare the number of hits they score. The character generating the greater number of hits achieves her goal.

In the event of a tie, the action is typically a stalemate, and the characters have to choose between continuing with another test or withdrawing. If the gamemaster needs or wants a result on a tie, then rule in favor of the defending character.

... example

Max is holding a door shut while a security guard tries to push it open. This test has no appropriate skill, so the gamemaster calls for a Strength + Body Opposed Test. Max rolls eight dice (STR 4 + BOD 4) and gets a 1, 2, 2, 4, 5, 5, 6, 6—four hits! The guard rolls nine dice (STR 5 + BOD 4) and gets 1, 2, 3, 3, 3, 4, 5, 5, 6—only 3 hits! Miraculously, Max barely holds the door shut while his team escapes.

### OPPOSED TEST MODIFIERS

Situational modifiers that affect both sides of an Opposed Test in an equal fashion are applied to both dice pools. Situational modifiers that give an advantage to one character in an Opposed Test over another are only applied to the one initiating the action, unless otherwise noted.

Note that thresholds are never applied to Opposed Tests.

example

Lyran is trying to talk her way past a local street gang that wants to mug her, which is handled as an Opposed Test. Everyone involved happens to be intoxicated (they just left the same party), so both groups suffer a -1 dice pool modifier. The gang is hostile to Lyran, however, so she suffers a -3 modifier on her part of the Opposed Test.



### OPPOSED TEST VS. A GROUP

Some situations may call for a character to act against an entire group of opposing characters, such as a runner trying to sneak past a group of guards. In this event, only roll once for the entire opposing group, using the highest dice pool available to the group, but add +1 die for each additional person in the group (maximum +5).

example

Lyran's attempt to negotiate past the gang failed, so she distracted them long enough to run down an alley and is now attempting to hide in a dumpster. The gang is trying to find her, so this is handled as an Opposed Test between Lyran's Infiltration skill and the gang's Perception. The gamemaster uses the highest Perception + Intuition dice pool among the gang (a score of 6), plus they get an extra die for each member involved in the search. Since all four members are searching, this means they get +3 dice to their part of the test.

### OPPOSED TEST NOTATION

When an Opposed Test is called for in *Shadowrun*, write it out using the skill + attribute called for on each side of the test: "Athletics + Strength Opposed Test." Many Opposed Tests, however, call for two different skills to be used against each other. For example, if a character is trying to sneak past a guard, the gamemaster would call for an "Opposed Test between the character's Infiltration + Agility and the guard's Perception + Intuition."

If the Opposed Test is between attributes, use the attribute in place of the skill: "Agility + Body Opposed Test."

### EXTENDED TESTS

An Extended Test represents a series of tests that a character performs over time, such as a mechanic repairing a vehicle, a hacker programming a piece of software, or a scholar attempting to translate a foreign tome. When an Extended Test is called for, the player makes multiple tests and cumulates hits until she has enough hits to equal or exceed the threshold.

Rather than covering an overarching task (like working on a damaged car) with a single Extended Test, the gamemaster can instead divide it up into a specific set of goal-oriented sub-tasks (check-up, fix the engine, change the tires, upgrade the onboard computer, fill in the bullet holes) that are each handled separately.

Extended Tests assume that given enough time a competent character will eventually complete a given task. Though it may seem that characters are guaranteed of success over time, this might not always be appropriate or dramatic. The character may have a limited timeframe in which to accomplish the task, so she may run out of time before she finishes the job. The gamemaster can also limit the number of rolls under the assumption that if the character can't finish it with a certain amount of effort, she simply doesn't have the skills to complete it. The suggested way to do this is to apply a cumulative -1 dice modifier to each test after the first (so a character with a Skill 3 + Attribute 3 would roll 6 dice in their first test, 5 in their second, 4 on their third, etc). Note that a character can also fail an Extended Test by glitching (see below).

### INTERVAL

The **interval** for an Extended Test is the time period that a character must work on a task in order to make a test. The interval period varies depending on the particular task. To simplify matters, we typically use intervals of 1 Combat Turn, 1 minute, 1 hour, 1 day, 1 week, or 1 month.

example

Chris's mechanic, Slick, runs a shadow garage on the side, repairing not-so-legal vehicles for friends. He's working on repairing a classic car owned by a local mob boss who wants it first thing in the morning—only 12 hours away. The car is pretty shot up, so the gamemaster, Adam, rules that this is an Extended Mechanic Test, with a threshold of 15 and an interval period of 1 hour. That means Chris has 12 tests in which to accumulate 15 hits.

After 1 hour of work, Chris makes a test with his dice pool of 7 (Mechanic 4 + Logic 3) and gets 1, 2, 4, 5, 5, 5, 6—that's a total of 4 hits on the first test. After 2 hours, he rolls again: 1, 1, 2, 4, 5, 5, 5—another 3 hits. After only two hours, Slick is almost halfway finished!

### EXTENDED TEST NOTATION

When an Extended Test is called for, we write out the skill plus linked attribute used and follow it with the threshold and then the interval period in parentheses. So an Extended Test with a threshold of 5 and an interval of 1 hour is written: Swimming + Strength (5, 1 hour) Extended Test.

### INTERRUPTIONS

Unless otherwise noted, characters who are pursuing Extended Tests can break off from their work and return to it at a later time with no penalty. The gamemaster must keep track of how much accumulated time the character spends on the task, calling for a test once the time equals the interval period.

If the gamemaster chooses, however, some tasks must be restarted if they are interrupted because there is no way for the character to "save" her work—such as methodically finding one's way through a maze, for example.

### QUICK EXTENDED TESTS

In some situations, you may wish to avoid a lot of dice-rolling and focus on the storytelling. In this case, rather than repeatedly asking a

TASK DIFFICULTY THRESHOLD	
DIFFICULTY	THRESHOLD
Easy	6
Average	12
Hard	18
Extreme	24+

EXTENDED TEST DIFFICULTIES	
To quickly set the guidelines for an Extended Test, pick an appropriate interval and difficulty:	
TASK TIME	INTERVAL
Fast	1 Combat Turn
Quick	1 Minute
Short	10 Minutes
Average	30 Minutes
Long	1 Hour
Consuming	1 Day
Exhaustive	1 Week
Mammoth	1 Month

character to roll for an Extended Test, the gamemaster can secretly roll once on behalf of the character and note the number of hits scored. Divide the threshold by these hits to determine the average amount of tests the character would've taken to reach the threshold. Multiply that amount by the interval, and you have quickly determined the amount of time the character will take to complete the task. Now you can continue to focus on the game, and you know exactly when you can tell the character she's finished the extended task.

### ... example

Clockwork is trying to fix the prototype commlink his group recently liberated from Ares. The gamemaster sets the threshold and interval for the Extended Test at 10/30 minutes. Clockwork gets 2 hits on his first roll. Rather than asking for repeated rolls, the gamemaster simply determines that it will take him 5 tests (threshold  $10 \div 2$  hits) to fix the prototype, for a total repair time of 2.5 hours (0.5 hours x 5 tests).

### EXTENDED TESTS AND GLITCHES

If a character rolls a glitch during an Extended Test, the task is not aborted, but the character should be inconvenienced in some way (broken tools, missing parts, or distracted from work by an annoying pest, for example). The gamemaster can also roll 1D6 and subtract this from the hits scored so far; if this reduces the accumulated hits to 0, the test fails.

If the character rolls a critical glitch, however, the task is immediately aborted—the character has simply failed and must start over. This failure does not need to be dramatic, dangerous, or catastrophic, unless that happens to make for a good story.

### RUSHING THE JOB

In some cases, a character may not have the luxury of taking the time to do a job right—she needs to complete it by a certain deadline—or *else*. In this case, the character can rush the job and cut the interval period in half. Rushing the job, however, means that errors are more likely to occur. A glitch is rolled whenever half or more of the dice are a 1 or 2. She may get it done quicker, but she's unlikely to do it as well as she could have if she took her time.

### TEAMWORK TESTS

Sometimes characters may choose to work together on a task, whether they are holding the door against a rampaging paracritter or fixing a car. To determine success, pick one character as the primary acting character. Each of the secondary characters makes the appropriate test; each hit they score adds +1 die to the primary character's dice pool. The primary character then makes the test, and her results determine success. The maximum dice bonus the primary character can receive from teamwork is equal to that character's skill.

If any of the assisting characters roll a critical glitch, raise the threshold for the test by 1 (3 for Extended Tests).

### TRYING AGAIN

Just because a character has failed a test doesn't mean she has no hope of ever succeeding. A character may attempt a task she has previously failed, but each successive attempt incurs a -2 dice pool modifier. A magician who has failed twice to summon a spirit, for example, can try again with a -4 modifier.

If the character takes the time to rest for a sufficient period (anywhere from 5 minutes to 1 hour, as the gamemaster decides), the negative modifier no longer applies and the character gets a fresh start.

## CRITICAL SUCCESS

Any time a character scores 4 or more net hits on a test (4 hits more than needed to reach the threshold or beat the opponent), she has scored a **critical success**. A critical success means that the character has performed the task with such perfection and grace that the gamemaster should allow her to add whatever flourishing detail she likes when describing it. If the gamemaster chooses, he can also reward a critical success with a point of Edge (see *Edge*, p. 74), though this should only be done when a critical success was unlikely (it shouldn't be used to reward highly-proficient characters undertaking an easy task).

### ... example

Jones runs afoul of a go-gang that shoots up his motorbike. He manages to ditch the gangers and find a hiding spot before his engine craps out, hopefully long enough to make a quick repair job that will get his bike running again. The gamemaster tells Jones's player that she'll need to make a successful repair test with a threshold of 3. The player rolls 8 dice and gets 7 hits—a critical success! Jones not only gets the bike running again in record time, but he gets out of there before the gangers have doubled back to look for him.

## TIME

In most situations, you don't have to keep strict track of time while playing *Shadowrun* as long as the gamemaster and players have a clear sense of continuity and the sequence of events. While it may often be necessary to keep track of time for specific periods within the game (for instance, if the runners must meet with the Mafia don for a dinner, and he hates tardiness), it is best dealt with in a fluid and abstract manner.

## COMBAT TURNS

In certain situations, such as combat or pursuit scenes, timing becomes critical. When this occurs, the *Shadowrun* game proceeds in turns. Each character acts in order, the fastest first, according to their **Initiative Score**. Characters act in a set sequence known as the **Combat Turn** that is roughly 3 seconds long (see *Combat Turn Sequence*, p. 144). The point during each Combat Turn when a specific character can act is called an **Action Phase**.

### INITIATIVE PASSES

Some characters may have magic or implants that allow them to act more than once in a Combat Turn. When this occurs, the Combat Turn is divided into **Initiative Passes**. Everyone gets to act during the first Initiative Pass (in order according to their Initiative Score), characters with two actions get to go again during a second Initiative Pass, characters with three actions get a third action during a third Initiative Pass, and so on.

## ACTIONS

Within an Action Phase, a character can carry out a number of actions depending on their complexity. Each phase, a character can take one **Complex Action** OR two **Simple Actions** (see pp. 147–148 for a complete listing of what actions fall into which categories).

### FREE ACTIONS

In addition to Complex or Simple Actions, a character can take one **Free Action** during each Initiative Pass in which she has an action. This Free Action can only be taken on the character's Action Phase or at any other point later in that Initiative Pass. Free Actions are detailed on p. 146.



### DELAYED ACTIONS

When a character's Action Phase arrives, the player may declare that she is **delaying action** until a later Action Phase (note that it is not necessary for the player to state which exact Action Phase). While the character waits, she may take Free Actions as normal. When something occurs to which the character wishes to react, she may then intervene and take her action as normal. Delayed actions can be carried over into the next Initiative Pass (or even the next Combat Turn), but the character loses any action she would have had that pass in exchange for taking the delayed action instead.

## SHADOWRUNNING BY THE NUMBERS

In game terms, nothing defines a character more than her Character Record Sheet. It contains all the information and elements that make up a player character. This section will introduce and define these various components of a character.

### THE CONCEPT

A character in *Shadowrun* is much like a character in a novel or film, except that the player controls her actions. Composed of a collection of attributes and skills, a character has the personality that the player injects into it. Without that personality, the character remains an *it*. Only when fleshed out can a character become minimally *he* or *she*, and, with good characterization, someone memorable.

### METATYPE

Characters in *Shadowrun* usually belong to one of five subgroups of Homo sapiens: the predominant **human** (*Homo sapiens sapiens*), **elf** (*Homo sapiens nobilis*), **dwarf** (*Homo sapiens pumilionis*), **ork** (*Homo sapiens robustus*), and **troll** (*Homo sapiens ingentis*). Non-humans are known as **metahumans**, while the five subgroups as a whole (including humans) are known as **metahumanity**. As described in the section on *Metahumanity*, p. 71, all are human beings, at least according to the geneticists. Racists say differently.

In the early 2070s, humans are still the most numerous metatype populating the planet. Each of the other metatypes is represented about equally, but are scattered unevenly across the globe. In some places, humans form an extreme minority, but those tend to be areas where the other metatypes have gathered for safety, protection, and isolation.

**Humans** make up the statistical standard. As characters, their only statistical bonus is to the Edge attribute (p. 67).

**Dwarfs** are harder (slightly higher Body), stronger (higher Strength), and more stubborn (higher Willpower) than humans, but are also slower on the draw (lower Reaction). They have thermographic vision, which allows them to see radiated infrared (heat) energy as well as the normal light spectrum simultaneously. They have a slower movement rate than other metatypes, but are more resistant to disease. And yes, they are short.

**Elves** are more agile (higher Agility) and more charismatic (higher Charisma) than humans. They also have low-light vision, which enables them to see clearly in near-total darkness.

**Orks** are much tougher (much higher Body), stronger (higher Strength), less charismatic (lower Charisma), and less acute (lower Logic) than humans. They too have low-light vision.

**Trolls** are big and nasty. They are a lot tougher (much higher Body), less agile (lower Agility), much stronger (higher Strength), less charismatic (lower Charisma), less perceptive (lower Intuition), and less acute (lower Logic) than humans. They have thermographic vision, really long arms that give them advantages in melee combat, and extremely tough skin with bony deposits that makes them more resistant to damage.

A player does not have to pay extra to create a human character. Players who want to play a metahuman (dwarf, elf, ork, or troll) must pay a little extra for the privilege.

## ATTRIBUTES

There are thirteen **attributes** in *Shadowrun*, though each character has just eleven or sometimes twelve. There are four Physical attributes, four Mental attributes, and five Special attributes. Out of the five Special attributes, most characters will have three while some (magicians, adepts, mystic adepts, and technomancers) will have four, but none can have all five.

Attributes are typically used to complement skills when making tests, though some tests are made with only an attribute or pair of attributes (see *Using Attributes*, p. 138).

A character's attributes—Agility, Body, Reaction, Strength, Charisma, Intuition, Logic, and Willpower—represent the raw material that makes up every person: her body and mind, what the character has done with both, and what's inside the person that makes her unique. Because attributes can be improved during the course of a character's life, they represent something more than genetics.

### PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

**Agility** represents fine motor control—manual dexterity, flexibility, balance, and coordination. A character with a low Agility may be someone with an inner-ear problem, one leg that is shorter than the other, or a simple klutz. Higher Agility ratings may belong to characters that are “natural” athletes.

The **Body** attribute determines a character's resistance to outside forces. It represents the character's cardiovascular fitness and endurance, immune system, how well she heals, her tolerance for drugs and alcohol, and, to some extent, her muscle and bone structure and weight. Low Body could mean a character is skinny and frail-boned or has bad eating and health habits. High Body means a character is better fed, tough as nails, has strong bones with some spring to them, and an immune system that won't quit. Body does not *necessarily* correlate with physical size—a fat, out of shape character likely has a low Body, but a small character who is wiry and athletic may have a high Body.

A character's **Reaction** is, quite simply, her physical reflexes—how quickly she can react to a changing situation, and how well she can dodge the physical slings and arrows that shadowrunning brings. A character with a high Reaction is more likely to be on top of a situation and will be in a better position to react to danger, while low-Reaction characters will lag behind.

**Strength** denotes what a character's muscles can do, including things such as raw lifting power and running speed. Strength is somewhat dependent on a character's size and metatype. If your character is a 5'3" tall, 115-pound human girl, she's unlikely to possess an un-augmented Strength attribute of 6. On the other hand, dwarfs have a muscle density that rivals that of reptiles. Characters with low Strength may be small, skinny, or slight, or simply too busy to work out. A high-Strength character may be tough and wiry, know how to use her body to her best advantage, work out every day, or simply be fraggin' BIG.

### MENTAL ATTRIBUTES

**Charisma** is a nebulous attribute. More than just looks, Charisma represents a character's personal aura, self-image, ego, willingness to find out what people want and give it to them, and ability to recognize what she can and can't get out of people. A whiny demeanor, a me-first attitude, or an inability to read body language or subtle hints are just a few traits that can give a character low Charisma. A character with high Charisma might simply enjoy entertaining others, may excel at making friends and/or manipulating people, or may be all flash and fun with whomever it is today. A high-Charisma character might deliver jokes at the right moment, have a sexy way of carrying herself, or command respect because her timing is always impeccable.

**Intuition** covers “mental alertness”—the ability to take in and process information, to read a crowd, to assess a situation for danger or opportunity. A character with little Intuition may be unobservant, may rarely think things fully through, or could simply be “slow.” A character with a high Intuition is adept at making the best of a bad situation, knowing when to leave before an encounter escalates, noticing small clues, and working from instinct.

**Logic** represents a character's memorizing ability and raw brainpower. It denotes how fast a character learns, how much she can remember, and how well she can execute pre-planned sequences. A Logic-lacking character might get overwhelmed when confronted with a lot of details and may have a poor memory—especially for facts and figures. Characters with a high Logic rating will likely be excellent book-learners, able to deal with computer and magic theory with ease, and capable of building (and tearing down!) machinery and electronics.

**Willpower** keeps a character going when she wants to give up, or enables her to control her habits and emotions. Willpower determines whether or not a character is going to take charge of her life. A character with low Willpower might defer to other people when big decisions are being made, for example. A high-Willpower character is more assured and possesses a never-say-die streak. Such characters go down to the monowire because that's exactly the fragging *point*. Willpower also represents a character's cool under fire, her ability to resist intimidation and manipulation, and her resolve to stick to her guns when the pressure is on.

### SPECIAL ATTRIBUTES

A character's **Edge** represents that special *something* that can turn the tide and save the day—a successful gut check, a moment of brilliant inspiration or creativity, or a once-in-a-lifetime physical feat. Edge is a combination of luck, timing, and the favor of the gods. Characters with low Edge are unlikely to get unexpected breaks in life, much less win the lottery. A high-Edge character, however, is graced with good fortune and has an uncanny ability to succeed despite the odds. Edge can be spent at certain points in the game to help tip the odds in your character's favor. Unlike other attributes, Edge provides Edge points that may be spent in certain ways—once used, these points are not regained until certain in-game events occur, at the discretion of the gamemaster (see *Edge*, p. 74).

**Essence** is a measure of life force, of a body's wholeness. It represents the body's cohesiveness and holistic strength. Things that are invasive to the body, such as cyberware and bioware, reduce Essence. If a character abuses her body repeatedly with chemicals, toxins, or even just negligence over a long period of time, she may lose Essence as well. Long-time drug addicts and chipheads who have done permanent damage to their systems have lost Essence. Lost Essence can never be regained (short of the Essence Drain critter power). When Essence declines, Magic and Resonance decline by the same amount. All characters start the game with an Essence of 6.

## HUMAN ATTRIBUTE RATINGS

RATING	DESCRIPTION
1	Weak
2	Underdeveloped
3	Typical
4	Improved
5	Superior
6	Max unmodified human

A derived attribute, **Initiative** is the sum of Reaction and Intuition, plus any additional dice from implanted or magical **reflex enhancers**. As it sounds, Initiative is used to make Initiative Tests (p. 144), which determine the character's **Initiative Score** for a Combat Turn. Any enhancements to Reaction and Intuition also affect Initiative.

Some implants and magic may give a character extra actions to take in each Combat Turn. These are noted as extra **Initiative Passes** on the character's record sheet. The maximum number of Initiative Passes a character can have is 5, but most character types can only ever achieve 4.

**Magic** is a measure of the ability to use magic and of the body's attunement to the mana that flows through our plane. Those with strong Magic ratings are able to handle powerful magic and mana manipulation. Those with weak Magic ratings are more sensitive and more easily drained by the use of magic. Those with no Magic rating have no magical capabilities and are tuned out from the magical realms. Serious damage to the body and invasive additions such as cyberware and bioware reduce the Magic attribute. Magic and Resonance are mutually exclusive attributes. A character who possesses a quality that grants a Magic of 1 or higher cannot have a Resonance attribute.

**Resonance** is a special attribute for technomancers, characters able to manipulate the Matrix with their minds alone (see *Technomancers*, p. 221). Resonance is an attunement to the echoes and transmissions that permeate the electronic world, an alignment with the wireless gestalt. The exact nature of Resonance is even more controversial than magic—some claim that Resonance is a form of magic that has adapted to the virtual and augmented realities of the modern world, others claim that Resonance is some new stage in the evolution of metahuman consciousness—but no one knows for sure. Resonance and Magic are mutually exclusive attributes. A character who possesses a quality that grants a Resonance of 1 or higher cannot have a Magic attribute.

### ATTRIBUTE RATINGS

Care must be made to distinguish between *natural*, unmodified attribute ratings and those *augmented* by cyberware, bioware, adept powers, and magic. Generally, augmented ratings are listed in parentheses after the natural rating, such as: 4 (6).

The standard range of natural human attributes is rated on a scale of 1 to 6, with 3 being average. Physical and Mental attributes have a maximum *natural* rating of 6 plus or minus metatype modifiers, depending on metatype (p. 81). The maximum *augmented* attribute value for each metatype is equal to 1.5 times this figure, rounded down (see the Metatype Attribute Table, p. 81). This also applies to Initiative.

During gameplay, players can spend **Karma** to improve character attributes (see *Character Improvement*, p. 269). Improving an attribute increases both the natural and augmented ratings.

**Essence Rating:** All characters have a starting Essence attribute of 6. Cyberware and bioware implants reduce this rating. No character may start with an Essence greater than 6. Under basic *Shadowrun* rules, characters can *never* have an Essence of 0 or less. If they do, they die.

Characters with Magic or Resonance attributes are subject to penalties if they have an Essence lower than 6. For each point or partial point of Essence below 6, the character loses 1 full point from her Magic or Resonance and the maximum for that attribute is reduced by 1. The maximum rating for Magic is 6 + initiation grade (see *Initiation*, p. 198); for Resonance the maximum rating is 6 + submersion grade (see *Submersion*, p. 243).

The maximum natural rating for Edge is 6 (7 for humans).

## SKILLS

Characters possess knowledge and techniques known as **skills**, which have ratings that are used to carry out tests. Skills define what a character knows and can do. They range from **Active Skills** such as Unarmed Combat to certain sets of **Knowledge Skills** such as Biology. The chapter on *Skills*, p. 118, has a complete listing.

All skills have a predetermined linked attribute—the attribute that applies when the skill is used. The combined ratings of the skill plus the attribute make up the dice pool for skill tests.

### SKILL RATINGS

Skills are rated on a scale of 1 to 6, similar to attributes. A rating of 3 represents professional competency in a particular skill.

Beginning characters can only start the game with either a single skill at a rating of 6 (and all others 4 or less) or only two skills with a rating of 5 (and all the rest 4 or less).

The maximum natural rating available for a skill is 6, or 7 with the Aptitude quality (p. 90). Some implants and magic, as noted in their descriptions, may increase the actual skill, creating a *modified* skill rating, whereas others may simply provide bonus dice to the test (and do not affect the base rating at all). Note that the modified rating is used when calculating costs to improve the skill. The maximum modified rating allowed is 1.5 times the natural rating (making 9 the maximum achievable, or 10 with the Aptitude quality).

### SPECIALIZATIONS

A **specialization** represents a focused field of training or education in one aspect of a **base skill**. For example, a character with Pistols skill can specialize in Semi-Automatics, improving her ability when firing any semi-automatic pistol. A specialization grants the character a dice pool modifier of +2 dice on tests using that skill when the particular specialty applies (see *Specializations*, p. 84). This is noted on the character sheet by adding “(+2)” after the skill rating. Only one specialization can be taken per skill.

### SKILL GROUPS

**Skill groups** are sets of related skills that can be purchased and upgraded at the same time for a reduced cost per skill. The individual skills inside a group function identically to skills purchased separately (see *Skill Groups*, p. 84). Starting characters cannot have a skill group higher than Rating 4. Any time you improve a single skill within a skill group or add a specialization to one of those skills, that skill group no longer exists.

Taking specializations or raising individual skills in a skill group breaks up the group. Gamemaster approval is required to break up skill groups during character creation.

## QUALITIES

Beyond skills and attributes, characters have **qualities**—both positive and negative—that affect them in specific game terms. Qualities range from Magician (which provides a character access to magic in the Sixth World) to Bad Luck (which turns her own Edge against her).

Positive qualities must be purchased during character creation, whereas negative qualities provide more points to be used during character generation. A complete list of qualities and their effects can be found, starting on p. 90.

Characters may not purchase more than 35 BP worth of Positive qualities or take more than 35 BP worth of Negative qualities.

## MAGIC

There are few who would argue that any single event in the known history of Earth is more significant than the return of magic. One morning the world woke up and the rules were different. The boundaries of existence changed and life had to be relearned. The world had Awakened. Some people have the ability to tap into the powers of the Awakened world and use them to do magic (see *The Awakened World*, p. 176).

In *Shadowrun*, Awakened characters must purchase the Adept quality (p. 90), Magician quality (p. 91) or Mystic Adept quality (p. 92) during character creation in order to have magical ability. Those with no magical ability are known as mundanes. Awakened characters who use magical skills are called magicians. Awakened characters who focus their power inward to enhance their bodies are known as adepts. Mystic adepts are a hybrid between adepts and magicians.

Magicians frequently use Sorcery to manipulate mana and form spells (see *Spellcasting*, p. 177) and Conjuring to summon spirits (see *Summoning*, p. 177). Both spellcasting and conjuring, as well as other magical activities, cause a type of fatigue to magicians called *Drain* (p. 178).

Each type of spell or spirit has a Force rating that begins at 1 and increases as its power increases, chosen by the magician and limited by her abilities, time, and money.

## TRADITIONS

In *Shadowrun*, each magician follows a particular magic tradition. Traditions are the different ways in which magicians conceptualize and understand their magic—they are their paradigms, or personal outlooks. Whatever path the player chooses for her character, it is for life. There is no going back.

The path of magic the character follows affects how she learns spells and what kinds of spirits she can summon. It may also impose requirements on how the character acts. The choice colors the character's outlook, relationships, and motives in studying magic.

Two traditions are presented in these core rules, but characters can also invent their own.

A character who chooses the shamanic tradition is a shaman (p. 181). Shamanic magic is fueled through a link with the outer world of nature and the inner world of emotion, will, and faith.

A character who chooses the hermetic tradition is a mage (p. 180). Mages see the universe as patterns of force and energy they can control with complex symbols and formulae of power. Hermetic magic is more intellectual, relying on observation, theory, practice, and precise execution, rather than intuition and improvisation. Mages are scholars and often have elaborate libraries and equipment to assist their work.

Adepts have their own unique path, known as the somatic tradition. Adepts are concerned with the harmony and perfection of body and mind, focusing magical power toward that end. Adepts follow paths of self-improvement and personal improvement that focus on an idealized self image of themselves as warriors, athletes, speakers, pilots, and other vocations.

A magician's link to magic may be personified by a spirit-figure or totem, called a mentor spirit, which exemplifies her beliefs. Mentor spirits provide certain advantages and disadvantages (see *Mentor Spirits*, p. 200).

## TECHNOMANCY

Technomancers are a new and unique character type in the *Shadowrun* universe. Emerged characters are mysteriously able to interface with the global Matrix via their “biological PAN” without resorting to foreign hardware or devices. Technomancers are able to tap into the enigmatic force known as the Resonance to power their abilities and manipulate the digital medium in hitherto unheard-of ways (see *Technomancers*, p. 239).

Technomancers must purchase the Technomancer quality (p. 93), in order to tap their Resonance abilities. Technomancers use complex forms (see *Complex Forms*, p. 88) instead of programs and compile Matrix entities known as sprites (see *Compiling*, p. 125) to do their bidding. Both Complex Forms and Compiling, as well as other activities, may cause a type of fatigue called *Fading* (p. 243).

## GEAR

Gear is stuff the character owns. Gear includes a runner's trusted side-arm, her nightclub clothes and corporate drone disguise, her micro-transceiver tuned to the team's encrypted frequency, her battered Eurocar that she bought hot from the local gangbangers for use as a getaway vehicle, her ancient Celtic wristband made of orichalcum that serves as a spell focus, and the commlink that wirelessly connects her to the augmented Matrix. The list of available gear appears in the *Street Gear* chapter, p. 310. Beginning characters purchase gear with a pool of resources available only during character creation. Once the game starts, anything a character wants to buy, she'll have to buy with money she *earns*. Welcome to real life, *omae*.

As with attributes and skills, let your character's background suggest appropriate gear when allocating resources. Characters should not be able to pull money and gear out of thin air—they should only possess items they can plausibly pay for and obtain, based on their backgrounds. Resources spent during character generation, however, do not necessarily reflect actual nuyen spent—if a character has something that would normally be out of her price range, it could be justified as a gift from a mysterious benefactor, something implanted against her will (perhaps with some sort of tracking device attached ...), or something she earned “in trade” for services rendered.

## COMMLINKS

One piece of gear that almost every character in *Shadowrun* has is a commlink (p. 327). Commlinks are what everyone uses to get online, and thanks to the wireless Matrix, characters are usually online all of the time (see *The Wireless World*, p. 216). Commlinks are also the interface characters use to experience the augmented reality of the Matrix (p. 18). Commlinks (and other wireless mdevices) are not without their drawbacks however. Being online means you might be vulnerable to enterprising hackers and that you leave a digital footprint—if you don't take appropriate precautions.

## GEAR RATINGS

Some gear has ratings, beginning at 1 and increasing with the capability and sophistication of the item. In addition to cost, gear usually has an **Availability**, which determines how readily and quickly the item can be obtained.

Weapons have a **Damage Value** that tells the player how much damage they do. The code consists of a number and a letter. The number indicates the base number of damage boxes the weapon inflicts. The letter indicates whether the weapon inflicts Physical (P) or Stun (S) damage. Some weapons also have an AP rating, which stands



for armor penetration. The AP modifies the value of any armor used to resist the attack. See *Damage Codes*, p. 162, for further explanation of how these codes are used.

## AUGMENTATIONS

In basic *Shadowrun*, characters may choose to have cyberware (technological devices) and bioware (modified organs) implanted into their body.

### CYBERWARE

Various technological implants, chemical modifications, and structural enhancements to the metahuman body, collectively known as cyberware, can improve a character's attributes and abilities. Certain cyberware makes it possible for a character to accomplish extraordinary feats, such as acting three times as often as an unaugmented person (wired reflexes), recording a conversation across the room in a crowded bar (cyberear with select sound filter), or sending mental commands via wireless link to electronic devices.

Implanting cyberware in the body is an invasive procedure, so cyberware has an **Essence Cost**. The (meta)human body has limits—only a certain amount of cyberware can be installed before the body runs out of Essence and dies. Cyberware is particularly damaging to the magically active, because their Magic attribute is dependent on their Essence. Some burned-out mages, who have lost a bit of their Magic from accidents, drugs, or other abuses to their bodies, attempt to compensate for their weakened magical ability with more cyberware. This path is a rapid downward spiral, and more than one such runner has found himself unable to cast anything but the most weakened spells.

The more cyberware a character has installed, the more “inhuman” she becomes. Overly cybered characters tend to become a bit detached, and the empathy between them and other metahumans suffers for it. While some cyberware is so common that it can be implanted during lunch break at a corner bodyshop and is no longer remarkable to the general public (especially cybereyes and datajacks), heavy amounts of visible cyberware can still have a startling effect on many people. Implants are also an impediment to magical healing.

Many pieces of cyberware are considered to be dangerous and are either restricted to licensed security personnel or are outright illegal. This includes most cyber-implant weaponry, high-level wired reflexes, and so forth. Sporting 'ware like this can get a character heavily fined, jailed, or worse. This tends to make travel difficult for some, as most airports and border checkpoints scan for cyberware. Security companies have invented several methods of forcibly restraining people from using various implants.

Cyberware can be quite expensive, especially if it is illegal. Black clinics operate in the shadows, providing 'ware and installation services for hefty fees. Many of them offer used cyberware, and will pay for bodies that sport still-useful implants. Corporations and governments operate their own high-level clinics, far from prying eyes. Depending on a character's background, there should be some explanation as to how the character obtained the cyberware she has, what she had to do to get it, and perhaps who she still owes for it. It should be noted that many employers are not against removing 'ware installed in former employees.

For an extensive listing of various pieces of cyberware and their effects, see p. 338.

### BIOWARE

Whereas cyberware is mechanical and alien to the body, **bioware** is of the flesh. Bioware implants usually enhance the body's existing functions by replacing old organs and organic systems with new and improved organs and systems. Bioware is harder to detect and easier on the body than cyberware, but it is typically harder to acquire and more expensive. Bioware can allow characters to do extraordinary things such as see in the dark (Cat's Eyes), sleep only three hours per night (Sleep Regulator), or move with more agility (Enhanced Articulation).

While it's true that bioware is less invasive to the body than cyberware, it still has an unbalancing effect on the character's holistic systems. Bioware also has an Essence Cost, just like cyberware.

For a listing of bioware items and their effects, see p. 345.

### IMPLANT GRADES

Higher grades of cyberware and bioware known as **alphaware**, **betaware**, and **deltaware** are available. Alphaware is more Essence friendly than standard cyberware, but is more costly as well. Betaware and deltaware are even more Essence-friendly and expensive, but are also harder to acquire and are not available to starting characters.

In addition to the four implant grades some bioware must be cloned from the recipient's own cloned cells. Such bioware is known as **cultured bioware** and is more neurologically compatible and Essence friendly than basic bioware, but is more costly as well.

## CONTACTS

Contacts are non-player characters (NPCs) that gamemasters can use to make *Shadowrun* games richer, more unpredictable, and more exciting for players.

Contacts are vital in *Shadowrun*. These are the people a character knows who can reveal information important to the character's work, legitimate or not. Contacts are the purveyors of perhaps the most vital commodity of the 2070s: *information*. Need to know who's doing what to whom? What the latest street rumor is? Where a special piece of gear can be found? Ask a contact.

Contacts are not necessarily friends—many of them expect to be paid or to receive favors in turn. Contacts have their own lives and their own needs, so they may occasionally turn to the character for help (providing a new scenario basis). Contacts also vary in their dependability and trustworthiness—presumably if a character treats her contacts well and plays them straight, they can be trusted. A character will not get anywhere in the dicey world of *Shadowrun* if she doesn't trust *anyone*. To represent these factors, each contact has two ratings: Loyalty (indicating the depth of the relationship) and Connection (how networked they are), both described below.

Player characters start off with contacts acquired during character creation. These are contacts the character has established a working relationship with based on past legwork and social interactions. It is also possible to acquire contacts during the game, but only through roleplaying. Characters cannot “buy” contacts once the game begins; they have to earn them the hard way.

For more information, see *Contacts*, p. 285.

### LOYALTY RATING

This is the contact's level of loyalty towards the character—how much the contact will inconvenience himself, protect the character, or put himself at risk for the character. See p. 285.

## CONNECTION RATING

A contact's Connection rating indicates how useful he is in terms of his own network of contacts and influence. Connection is rated from 1 to 6, with higher-rated contacts having a better chance of providing favors, acquiring swag, or getting the information needed. For more information, see p. 285.

## LIFESTYLE

During character creation, the player must “purchase” the character's starting lifestyle. Lifestyle determines how well the character lives, and it eliminates the worry of daily expenses like food, laundry, phone bills, and so on. To maintain a lifestyle once the game begins, the character must pay a certain amount of money (based on the lifestyle) per month. Lifestyles are covered in detail on p. 267.

## CONDITION MONITORS

An important part of the record sheet is the **Condition Monitor**, consisting of two tracks. The **Physical Damage Track** displays wound damage and shows when the character dies. The **Stun Damage Track** shows fatigue and stun damage and indicates when a character falls unconscious. See *Damage*, p. 162, for more information.

The Physical Damage Track has a number of boxes equal to 8 plus half a character's Body attribute (round up). The Stun Damage Track has a number of boxes equal to 8 plus half a character's Willpower attribute (round up).

Some pieces of equipment, such as vehicles, also have a Condition Monitor to track the amount of damage the object has taken.

## KARMA

**Karma** is the numerical representation of a character's accomplishments (see *Karma*, p. 269). It is the equivalent of experience, awarded to characters at the end of adventures

## METAHUMANITY

Humans are no longer alone—they are just one of the five major subspecies of *Homo sapiens*. Known collectively as metahumanity, each of the five metatypes—dwarf, elf, human, ork, and troll—are more or less evenly distributed ethnically, though populations tend to congregate geographically across the globe for various reasons. Though humans retain the majority, each of the others comprises a significant percentage of the worldwide population.

The first metatypes to appear were dwarfs and elves born during the first wave of UGE (Unexpected Genetic Expression) in 2011. Orks and trolls appeared ten years later, during the period of “Goblinization,” when many humans suddenly transformed. Now a half century past the Awakening, goblinization is exceedingly rare, occurring only to humans, usually during puberty.

In 2072, most metahumans are born to parents of the same metatype. In the case of mixed parents, the child has a roughly even chance of being born as the metatype of either the father or the mother. There are no “half-breeds” in the Sixth World—no elf-orks or dwarf-trolls, no matter how amusing the concept may be.

Many first and second generation orks and trolls—especially those who goblinized—died young, indicating the relatively low lifespan of these metatypes. The early dwarfs and elves are still around, however, many of them showing little sign of aging. Lifespans for all metatypes are on the rise, which scientists partially ascribe to gene therapy and leonization (anti-aging treatments) and partially to improvements in social acceptance—leading to better medical treatment, living situations, and

other quality of life measures. Few countries, however, factor the SINless into their average lifespan statistics—after all, how could they?—and thus official figures may be especially misleading, as orks and trolls are statistically more likely to be SINless than the other metatypes.

## DWARFS

*Homo sapiens pumilionis*

Short, stocky, and barrel-chested, a dwarf typically has shorter legs than other metatypes. Dwarfs have natural thermographic vision (which helps fuel the stories that they prefer living underground—a stereotype that is only partially true as the 21st century marches on). They also have a hardy immune system and rarely get sick, even when exposed to toxins. They normally live in small family groups, sometimes isolating themselves from the rest of society.

In folklore, dwarfs are depicted as hard workers, taking on physical labor that no others would do. This holds true in the Sixth World, as dwarfs are known both for their strong work ethic and for an incredible ability to adapt to new technology and processes. When it comes time for megacorps to recognize the true brains behind many innovations, it's often a dwarf—to the surprise of many. Most dwarfs are quiet and unassuming about their abilities; as illustrated by noted programmer Frank “Friz” Baylor's live Matrixcast upon receiving the 2069 Innovative IC award: “I'm sorry I could not attend the awards in person, but I didn't want to take the evening off work—talk to you next year, when I repeat!”

Of all the metatypes, dwarfs tend to be the most assimilated into mainstream society. Dwarfs encounter less prejudice as they are not feared like orks and trolls or seen as glamorous or conspiratorial like elves, but they do often encounter paternalistic attitudes from those that equate short with child-like. Dwarfs must also struggle living in a world built for taller beings, as well as being literally overlooked when it comes to equal opportunities.

## ELVES

*Homo sapiens nobilis*

Elves are taller and slimmer than the average human, though their bone structure and musculature are no weaker than a human's. Their ears are distinctly pointed, and many elves wear their hair—which is normally very fine—long, so they can cover their ears in some social situations. Elven body hair is sparse to non-existent, and their eyes are highly capable in dim light. Elves have the longest gestation period of the metatypes, at just under a year.

Elves hold a position in pop culture unchallenged by any other metatype, partly due to their exotic looks, striking features, and the adoption of Sperethiel, their own “ancient” language (a claim disputed by some). Many media icons—from models to singers to politicians to porn stars to high-profile lawyers—are elves. Unlike dwarfs, orks, and trolls, who are discriminated against on the basis of being “different and ugly,” elves are often looked down upon by the other metatypes due to being “different and beautiful.” According to stereotype, elves are either poncy faux-aristocrats, homosexual, or back-to-nature “dandelion eaters” (though, in fact, a majority of elves *are* vegetarian). This intolerance is fostered by the common perception that there is an “elven conspiracy” set to take over the world (a belief that is not entirely without credible support, as illustrated by the foundation of the “elven” nations of Tír Tairngire and Tír na nÓg).

A new generation of elves is attempting to dispel these myths and unfair media portrayal, though some reckless youth are going out of their way to paint themselves as rebellious street toughs, swelling the ranks of gangs like the Ancients.

## METAHUMAN CHARACTERISTICS TABLE

METATYPE	AVERAGE HEIGHT	AVERAGE WEIGHT	AVERAGE LIFESPAN
Dwarf	1.2 meters	54 kg	More than 100 years
Elf	1.9 meters	80 kg	Several hundred years
Human	1.75 meters	78 kg	65 years (worldwide)
Ork	1.9 meters	128 kg	35–45 years
Troll	2.5 meters	300 kg	55 years

### HUMANS

*Homo sapiens sapiens*

Humans still make up a slight majority of the Earth's population, on average. Most stand about 1.75 meters tall and weigh just under 80 kilograms. Sixty years after the Awakening, humans are still seen as “the norm” by laymen and scientific organizations, and are typically the measuring stick to which the other metatypes are compared.

### ORKS

*Homo sapiens robustus*

Orks are proportioned similarly to humans, albeit with a heavier build that adds to their overall bulk. Beyond size, the most distinguishing physical feature of orks are large lower canines, which often look even

more alien when paired with the metatype's characteristic thin lips and flat noses. Ork ears are pointed just like elf ears, though not as elongated. Also like elves, ork eyes are naturally adapted for low-light situations.

Likely due to their high birth rates, orks often live in large, communal, extended family groups. Children are most often born in litters of four, but some ork mothers have given birth to as many as eight young. When *sapiens* are born to ork mothers, they will express as *robustus* at puberty roughly 95% of the time. Ork gestation periods are the shortest of any of the metatypes at roughly 6 months.

In 2060, *The Or'zet Codex*, published by the Orkland Community Center, established the basics of an ork language and spread through academic and social networks. This was not a new language; Or'zet is an interpretation of an ancient text, one of the many secrets of the



One of the bigger challenges for gamemasters, both experienced and new, to bringing an action packed shadowrun to life is the fact that the game can take place in three distinct—though connected—realms: the physical world the characters inhabit, the astral plane and the Matrix.

Keeping track of these three parallel worlds can be complicated, and gamemasters may prefer to play down both magic and the Matrix until they've familiarized themselves (and their players) with the basics of mundane shadowrunning. Introducing the complexities of the astral world and/or the Matrix gradually, over the course of the first few sessions, rather than presenting them up front will generally assuage some of the inherent difficulties and keep the game from getting bogged down and becoming non-fun.

Once familiarized with the nuances of the “three worlds”, finding a balance and keeping the story flowing can sometimes still be difficult in the heat of the action. Gamemasters will find it helps enormously to plan and approach each scene in an adventure with a general idea of what *might* transpire in the three worlds, rather than just preparing the elements of the physical encounter. In essence, be prepared for the eventuality that astral space and/or the Matrix will come into play, and map out some details in case they are needed.



## PLAYING IN THREE WORLDS

old world that the great dragon Dunkelzahn hoarded until his death. Though some tried to suppress this discovery, Or'zet soon became a cultural phenomenon and helped fuel “ork pride” throughout the sixties. On the other hand, it also has led to an explosion of “orxploitation” media that exploits the stereotyped image of orks as poorly tempered or prone to criminal activities.

## TROLLS

*Homo sapiens ingentis*

The largest and most exotic of the metatypes, trolls stand two and a half meters tall and can weigh upwards of 350 kilograms, though weights closer to 300 kilograms are more common. Most trolls have arms that are far longer in proportion to those of the other metahuman races, and their skin is often ridged and lumpy due to natural dermal bone deposits, resulting in a natural armor effect. Like dwarfs, trolls have natural thermographic vision, granting them enhanced sight, especially in low light conditions. A troll's ears are pointed, and they have two extra teeth—for a total of 34—including prominent lower canines. Trolls also have a pair of horns that grow in all manner of ways—straight, curled, twisted, etc.

Life and sentience in the Sixth World take a bewildering variety of forms, from “plain” metahumanity to the decidedly inhuman intellects of dragons, free spirits and artificial intelligences. The dynamics of how these sundry entities co-exist and interact is one of the key elements of Shadowrun's unique universe. Consequently, it's important to understand some basic facts.

The five metatypes (ie. dwarf, elf, human, ork, and troll) presented in *Shadowrun, Fourth Edition* represent the overwhelming majority of Earth's sentient population in 2072—approximately 98 percent. These are the races that populate the megalopolises and lesser sprawls of the Sixth World. Humans represent about 60 percent of that total, the other metatypes collectively making up the rest. Additionally, each baseline metatype is known to have unique ethnic/regional expressions, known as metavariants, though these are invariably minorities even among the global baseline metatype population.

In many parts of the Sixth World, even cosmopolitan and developed areas, metahumans are still subject to fear, racial prejudice, and social

exclusion, particularly the “Goblinized” (orks and trolls). This is one of the reasons many metahumans gather in their own communities and nations, why others are pushed into a life in the criminal underworld, and why the shadow community has an uncommon concentration of metahumans compared to other walks of life.

The remaining 2 percent of the global population includes dracoforms, ghouls and other vampiric entities, spirits, artificial intelligences, shapeshifters, and other sentient non-metahuman species. All these beings are comparatively rare on the streets of 2072—even within their native habitats—and are usually viewed with a mixture of awe, fascination, fear, and suspicion if not outright hostility by common metahumanity. While rules for playing such exotic character types (and metavariants) are introduced in the advanced core book *Runners' Companion*, such characters are notably exotic, rare, and otherwise remarkable compared to normal metahumans (few of which are good survival traits in the dangerous world of the shadows).



## METAHUMANITY AND BEYOND

Over the past twenty years, numerous different authors, artists, editors, and developers have contributed their voice to the Shadowrun *setting*, shaping, expanding, transforming, plotting, and generally breathing life into the dystopic universe known as the Sixth World. Unfolding across dozens of sourcebooks, setting books, adventures, and novels the Sixth World is one of the richest and most detailed settings ever conceived for a roleplaying game. A world with it's own ongoing and evolving history.

Such depth can be as daunting as it is fascinating to new players—that's the bad news. The good news is that you don't need to worry about any of it to enjoy a game of *Shadowrun, Fourth Edition*. In fact, all you need is the core book you are holding in your hands, some dice, some friends, and a little time to spare.

*Shadowrun, Fourth Edition* moves the Sixth World setting into the Seventies, five years after the events described in the final book of the previous edition. The Sixth World has evolved with the times presenting fresh opportunities for adventure and mayhem, equally accessible to long time fans and newcomers.

The world is familiar and yet different; things have changed. New technologies, new megacorps, and new powers have carved their stake in once familiar territories. New developments, new characters, and new settings will be introduced in coming books, but fans of Shadowrun's long and illustrious history can rest assured, old mysteries, familiar characters, and old plots have not been forgotten.

Though stereotyped as stupid or frightening, trolls are no less intelligent or well mannered than other metatypes, though they do suffer from disproportionately high illiteracy and poverty rates. Perhaps because they still face a certain amount of prejudice in society—not to mention the daily size difficulties of living in a society primarily oriented towards smaller people—trolls often band together socially and culturally. Like orks, many trolls have been driven to the fringes of society by fear and intolerance, leading to extensive populations of SINless squatter trolls. Some trolls prefer the outcast lifestyle, preferring to live simple isolated lifestyles in wilderness or remote urban settings. On the flipside, many trolls have found gainful employment for the very traits that make them marginalized: size, strength, and intimidation. Trolls often work as manual laborers and are in high demand as bouncers, bodyguards, and other security positions.



## EDGE

Edge is a character's luck, the favor of the gods, that unexplainable factor that allows her to beat the odds. A character's Edge attribute represents the number of **Edge points** a character has to spend during gameplay. Edge points can be used for a wide range of benefits, each noted below. Edge points that are spent are temporarily unavailable (see *Regaining Edge*, below)—luck will only take you so far. Note that a character's Edge attribute never actually changes, even when Edge points are spent, unless the character permanently burns Edge (see *Burning Edge*, p. 75)

### SPENDING EDGE

When you spend a point of Edge, you can choose to have one of the following happen:

- You may declare the use of Edge before rolling for any one test (or one interval roll on an Extended Test). You may add a number of extra dice equal to your full Edge attribute to the dice pool. All dice (not just Edge dice) rolled on this test are subject to the Rule of Six (p. 62), meaning that if you roll a 6, you count it as a hit and roll it again.
- You may declare the use of Edge after you have rolled for one test. In this case, you may roll a number of extra dice equal to your full Edge attribute and add their hits to the test's total. The Rule of Six (p. 62), however, applies only to the additional Edge dice rolled, not the original dice pool.
- You may re-roll all of the dice on a single test that did not score a hit.
- You may make a Long Shot Test (p. 61) even if your dice pool was reduced to 0 or less; roll only your Edge dice for this test (the Rule of Six does not apply).
- You may go first in an Initiative Pass, regardless of your Initiative Score (see *Initiative and Edge*, p. 145). If multiple characters spend Edge to go first in the same pass, those characters go in order according to their Initiative Scores first, then everyone else goes according to their Initiative Scores.
- You may gain 1 extra Initiative Pass for that Combat Turn only (see *Initiative and Edge*, p. 145).
- You may negate the effects of one glitch or critical glitch.
- You may invoke the Dead Man's trigger rule (p. 163).

A character can only spend Edge points on her own actions; she cannot spend it on behalf of others (except when engaged in a "teamwork" test, p. 65). No more than 1 point of Edge can be spent on any specific test or action at one time. If you spent a point of Edge for extra dice and rolled a critical glitch anyway, for example, you cannot use Edge to negate that critical glitch since you have already applied Edge to that test.

### REGAINING EDGE

The gamemaster decides when a character's Edge points refresh to the full Edge attribute. We recommend refreshing Edge at the beginning of each game session, though in some cases it may be more interesting or challenging to only refresh Edge when a full adventure has ended, or when specific goals have been met. One possibility is to refresh 1 point of Edge for each achieved goal, and the rest when the scenario is completed. Alternately, Edge can simply refresh every day.

There are many other possibilities for rewarding characters with Edge points:

- Impressive roleplaying.
- Heroic acts of self-sacrifice.
- Achievement of important *personal* goals.
- Scoring a critical success (p. 65) against the odds.
- Rolling a critical glitch (p. 62)—you get a point of Edge to balance the scales.

Note that you may never have more Edge points than your full Edge attribute—luck only counts if you use it.



There are several options you can consider to change these rules. Most of them add more complication to the game, but they may also fit your particular style of game play. Advanced *Shadowrun* rulebooks will touch on additional optional rules.

### CINEMATIC GAMEPLAY

Try any combination of these options for a more heroic or cinematic style of play:

- Hits occur on a 4, 5, or 6, rather than just a 5 or 6. This makes it much more likely for characters to succeed in their tasks; extra hits can be interpreted as “flair.” This may be a preferred style of play if you’re seeking dramatic action-movie scenes with lots of stunts and flourishes.
- You could also award extra dice to characters who describe their actions in colorful, inventive ways.
- You could allow Edge to negate all of the damage inflicted by any single attack (the attack miraculously misses or leaves you unharmed).
- As in previous editions, you can apply the Rule of Six to all dice rolls, not just tests on which you have spent Edge. This means characters will score more hits on average.

### MORE LETHAL GAMEPLAY

You may desire your games to be deadlier, in which case these options are suggested:

- Increase the DV of weapons by 2 across the board and don’t convert Physical damage to Stun if the DV doesn’t exceed the Armor rating.
- Only allow full defense actions (p. 148) when they are taken on the character’s Action Phase.
- Treat glitches on Damage Resistance Tests as severe wounds—bleeding, broken bones, mangled limbs, ruined implants that will require special medical care or repair.

### GRITTIER GAMEPLAY

If you want your game to be more challenging and harder, tinged with an element of desperation, try one of these options:

- The total hits scored on any test are limited to no more than the character’s skill rating x 2. This increases the relevance of skills over attributes, but it also means that low-skilled characters will have a more challenging

time. Defaulting tests would be limited to 1 hit. Edge, however, would allow you to bypass these limits.

- When Edge is spent for extra dice, you only get dice equal to your current unspent Edge points rather than your full Edge attribute (so if your Edge is 4 but you have already spent Edge twice that session, you only get to add 2 extra dice).
- Refresh Edge rarely—at the very end of a campaign arc, for example.
- Increase the chance for glitches when defaulting or taking Long Shot Tests—count 2s as well as 1s.
- Allow critical successes only on non-combat actions.

### ALTERNATE COMBAT

While the advanced *Shadowrun* rules will explore a variety of combat options, you can also consider one of these methods:

- Rather than handling all combat as an Opposed Test, you can handle ranged combat as a Success Test with a threshold based on range (1 Short, 2 Medium, 3 Long, 4 Extreme). Some situational modifiers will affect threshold rather than dice pool, such as blind fire, cover, etc.
- To cut down on dice rolling during combat, you could drop Damage Resistance Tests entirely, reducing combat to a single Opposed Test. In this case, Armor would deduct directly from the attack’s DV.
- **Cover as Attack Modifier:** Rather than applying Cover as a Defense Modifier, groups may opt to reduce the number of rolls by having cover provide negative dice pool modifiers to the attacker instead (Partial Cover -2 and Good Cover -4).

### CHANGING ATTRIBUTE-ONLY TESTS

There’s *always* an applicable skill. If someone comes up with a task not immediately associated with a particular skill, the GM assigns whichever skill is most appropriate. For example Strength + Athletics to break down a door (with Athletics measuring the applied use of muscle-power in this case).

### EDGE VARIATIONS

You can tweak the applications of Edge to fit your style. Here are a few examples:

- Rather than adding extra dice, Edge can be used to buy automatic hits (or perhaps even automatic success).
- Allow Edge to be spent to reduce an Extended Test interval by half.

## BURNING EDGE

In certain drastic situations, even spending Edge may not be enough. A character can choose to *burn* a point of Edge—permanently reducing his Edge attribute by 1—for one of the following effects:

- Automatically achieve a critical success on one action. The character must be capable of carrying out the action—you can’t buy a critical success for something you have no hope of achieving. (Note that you do not refresh a point of Edge for getting a critical success in this case.) If two opposing characters burn Edge in this manner, they cancel each other out.
- Hand of God: this option allows characters to escape certain death. This use of Edge represents another shot at life—something the spirits are rare to provide. The streets have decided that

they have more uses for this character before she’s discarded to the trash heap and miraculously pull her from the jaws of Death. Gamemasters can explain this phenomena with any rationale they like, from sheer coincidence to the intervention of the gods. Note that this does not mean the character gets off scot free. The character should not escape unharmed from whatever circumstances would have led to her death. In fact, the character should suffer most of the consequences of the action that would have killed her; if shot in the head, for example, she may be knocked into a coma and appear dead to her enemies, but she will survive to get revenge another day. A character who uses Hand of God should be incapacitated until the end of the current adventure or until the gamemaster deems she has recovered from the side-effects of her close call.

