



SHADOWRUN >noun

Any movement, action, or series of such made in carrying out plans which are illegal or quasilegal.

WorldWide WorldWatch
2050 archive



INCOMING MESSAGE FROM M. WRATH:

Hoi chummers!

This is a preview of an in-progress version of *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*, and proofing is still under way. Spelling, grammar, "p. XX" references and so on may be updated before heading to press.

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SHADOWRUN, FIFTH EDITION • PREVIEW SIX



The cover art for Shadowrun Fifth Edition depicts a chaotic cyberpunk battle scene. In the center, a large, translucent, blue-green dragon-like creature with glowing eyes and lightning bolts around it is the focal point. Several characters are engaged in combat: a man with a beard and tattoos in the foreground wields a glowing sword and a handgun; a woman with long dark hair and a purple top is also in the fray; and other figures are visible in the background, some using firearms and others magical abilities. The setting is a dark, industrial cityscape with tall buildings and a hazy, smoky atmosphere. At the top center, there is a red, stylized logo of a dragon or creature's head.

SHADOWRUN

FIFTH EDITION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ANOTHER NIGHT, ANOTHER RUN	8	Special Attributes	52	Throwing Weapons	132	Computer	144
INTRODUCTION	14	Initiative and Condition Monitors	52	Unarmed Combat	132	Cybercombat	144
THE BATTLE FOUGHT	16	Initiative	52	Physical Active Skills	133	Cybertechnology	144
LIFE IN THE SIXTH WORLD	20	Initiative Dice	52	Disguise	133	Demolitions	144
EVERYTHING HAS A PRICE	20	Condition Monitors	52	Diving	133	Electronic Warfare	144
Magic: Paying with Your Mind	20	Skills	52	Escape Artist	133	First Aid	144
MegaCorps: Paying with Your Self	21	Qualities	53	Free-Fall	133	Forgery	144
Wares: Paying with Your Soul	23	Magic	53	Gymnastics	133	Hacking	145
Shadows: Paying with Your Blood	23	Matrix	53	Palming	133	Hardware	145
WHERE TO RUN	24	Augmented Reality	53	Perception	133	Industrial Mechanic	145
North America	24	Virtual Reality	54	Running	133	Locksmith	145
Central America	26	Gear	54	Sneaking	133	Medicine	145
South America	26	Cyberware	54	Survival	133	Nautical Mechanic	145
Asia	26	Bioware	55	Swimming	134	Navigation	145
Europe	27	Contacts	55	Tracking	134	Software	145
Africa	27	Lifestyle	56	USING GYMNASTICS	134	BUILDING & REPAIRING	145
Australia and Oceania	27	EDGE	56	Climbing	134	USING FORGERY	145
A DAY IN YOUR LIFE	27	Edge Effects	56	Rappelling	134	USING NAVIGATION	146
People You Know	27	Regaining Edge	56	Climbing Failures and Glitches	134	VEHICLE SKILLS	146
Doing the Dirty Work	28	Burning Edge	57	Jumping	134	Gunnery	146
The Meet	28	GIRLS WITH GUNS	58	USING ESCAPE ARTIST	135	Pilot Aerospace	146
Legwork	29	CREATING A SHADOWRUNNER	62	USING PERCEPTION	135	Pilot Aircraft	147
The Plan	29	STEP ONE: CHOOSE CONCEPT	62	USING RUNNING	136	Pilot Walker	147
Do It	29	STEP TWO: CHOOSE METATYPE	65	USING STEALTH SKILLS	136	Pilot Exotic Vehicle	147
Wrap It Up	29	Metatype & Special Attributes	65	Using Disguise	136	Pilot Ground Craft	147
WHAT YOU MIGHT BE DOING	29	Mental and Physical Attributes	66	and Impersonation	136	Pilot Watercraft	147
THE OPPOSITION	30	STEP THREE: CHOOSE MAGIC	68	USING SURVIVAL	136	Devising New Active Skills	147
The Corps	30	OR RESONANCE	68	USING SWIMMING	137	KNOWLEDGE SKILLS	147
The Big Ten	31	STEP FOUR: PURCHASE QUALITIES	71	Holding Your Breath	137	CHOOSING KNOWLEDGE SKILLS	147
Organized Crime	33	POSITIVE QUALITIES	71	Treading Water	137	Knowledge Skill Specializations	148
Gangs	34	NEGATIVE QUALITIES	77	USING TRACKING	137	STREET KNOWLEDGE	148
Academics	35	STEP FIVE: PURCHASE SKILLS	88	SOCIAL SKILLS	137	ACADEMIC KNOWLEDGE	148
Mana Chasers	35	What the Numbers Mean	88	Con	138	PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE	148
Politicos	36	Restricted Skills	89	Etiquette	138	INTERESTS	148
The Law	38	Knowledge and Language Skills	89	Impersonation	138	USING KNOWLEDGE SKILLS	148
Beneath the Surface	38	STEP SIX: SPEND YOUR RESOURCES	94	Instruction	138	LANGUAGE SKILLS	150
Off the Job	39	Cyberware and Bioware	94	Intimidation	139	Language	150
Money	39	Lifestyle	95	Leadership	139	LINGOS	150
The Matrix	39	Starting Nuyen	95	Negotiation	139	USING LANGUAGE SKILLS	150
Music	39	STEP SEVEN: SPENDING	98	Performance	139	Social Skills and Language	151
Trideo	40	YOUR LEFTOVER KARMA	98	USING SOCIAL SKILLS	139	USING ATTRIBUTES	152
Sports	40	Contacts	98	Social Modifiers	139	ATTRIBUTE-ONLY TESTS	152
Food	41	STEP EIGHT: FINAL CALCULATIONS	100	Using Social Influence Skills	139	Composure	152
Sex	41	STEP NINE: FINAL TOUCHES	103	Using Performance	141	Judge Intentions	152
Staying Healthy	42	CHARACTER ADVANCEMENT	103	Using Etiquette	141	Lifting/Carrying	152
Getting Around	43	Attribute and Skill Tables	105	Etiquette & Glitches	141	Memory	152
SHADOWRUN CONCEPTS	44	Learning complex forms	106	MAGICAL SKILLS	142	WHERE THERE'S SMOKE	154
THE GAME & YOU	44	Learning Magic	106	Alchemy	142	COMBAT	158
The Gamemaster & You	44	Qualities	106	Arcana	142	THE BASICS	158
HOW TO MAKE THINGS HAPPEN	44	SKILLS	128	Artificing	142	Combat Turn Sequence	158
Hits & Thresholds	44	SKILL TYPES	128	Assensing	142	1. Roll Initiative	158
Buying Hits	45	Active skills	128	Astral Combat	142	2. Begin Initiative Pass	158
Glitches	45	Knowledge skills	128	Banishing	142	3. Begin Action Phase	158
Tests and Limits	46	Language skills	128	Binding	142	4. Declare & Resolve Actions	159
Success Tests	47	Using Skills	128	Counterspelling	142	of Remaining Characters	159
Opposed Tests	47	SKILL GROUPS	129	Disenchanting	142	5. Begin New Combat Turn	159
Extended Tests	48	SKILL RATINGS	129	Ritual Spellcasting	142	Initiative	159
Extended Tests & Glitches	48	Specializations	129	Spellcasting	143	Initiative Attribute	159
Teamwork Tests	49	Defaulting	130	Summoning	143	Initiative Score	159
Trying Again	49	Combat Active Skills	130	RESONANCE SKILLS	143	Initiative Passes	159
Time Passing	49	Archery	130	Compiling	143	Changing Initiative	160
Combat Turns	49	Automatics	130	Decompiling	143	Initiative and Edge	160
Actions	49	Blades	130	Registering	143	Delaying Actions	161
YOUR CHARACTER	50	Clubs	131	TECHNICAL SKILLS	143	Timed Items & Initiative	161
Metatype	50	Exotic Ranged Weapon	131	Aeronautics Mechanic	143	Movement	161
Attributes	51	Heavy Weapons	132	Animal Handling	143	Standard Movement	161
Physical Attributes	51	Longarms	132	Armorer	143	Sprinting	162
Mental Attributes	51	Pistols	132	Artisan	143	Running Modifiers	162
				Automotive Mechanic	143	Action Phase	163
				Biotechnology	144	Matrix Actions	163
				Chemistry	144		

Free Actions	163	Falling Damage	172	Superior Position	187	Light Conditions	201
Call a Shot	163	Fatigue Damage	172	Character Using		Pilot Unaware of Event	201
Change Linked Device Mode	163	Fatigue from Running	172	Off-Hand Weapon	187	Pilot Wounded	201
Drop Object	163	Fatigue from Environments	172	Environmental Modifiers	187	Piloting a Damaged Vehicle	201
Drop Prone	164	Hunger, Thirst, and		Friends in Melee	187	Piloting Using AR/VR	201
Eject Smartgun Clip	164	Sleep Deprivation	172	Opponent Prone	187	Crashes	201
Gesture	164	Combat Resolution	172	Touch-Only Attack	187	VEHICLE COMBAT	202
Multiple Attacks	164	Combat Sequence	173	Melee Damage	187	Tactical Combat	202
Run	164	Grazing Hit	173	Multiple A attackers	187	Movement Rates	202
Speak/Text/Transmit Phrase	164	RANGED COMBAT	173	Simple Bonus	187	Actions	202
Simple Actions	164	Ranged Attack Modifiers	173	Melee Teamwork	188	Free Actions	202
Activate Focus	164	Environmental Modifiers	173	DEFENDING IN COMBAT	188	Change Linked Device Mode	202
Call Spirit	164	Environmental Modifiers		Ranged defense	188	Simple Actions	202
Change Device Mode	164	Compensation	173	Melee Defense	188	Use Sensors	202
Change Gun Mode	165	Visibility	174	Defender Inside		Use Simple Device	202
Command Spirit	165	Light/glare	174	a Moving Vehicle	188	Complex Actions	203
Dismiss Spirit	165	Wind	174	Defender Prone	189	Control Vehicle	203
Fire Bow	165	Range	175	Defender Unaware of Attack	189	Fire a Vehicle Weapon	203
Fire Semi-Auto, Single-Shot,		Recoil	175	Defender Wounded	189	Make Vehicle Test	203
Burst Fire or Full-Auto	165	Progressive Recoil	175	Attacker has longer Reach	189	Ramming	203
Insert Clip	165	Single Shots	176	Defender has longer Reach	189	Chase Combat	203
Observe in Detail	165	Vehicle and Drone Mounted		Defender Receiving a Charge	189	Chase Ranges	203
Pick Up/Put Down Object	165	Weapons	176	Defender has Defended		Determine Chase Environment	203
Quick Draw	165	Situational Modifiers	176	Against Previous Attacks	189	Chase Actions	204
Ready Weapon	165	Attacker Firing from		Firing Flechette on		Catch-Up/Break Away	204
Reckless Spellcasting	165	Cover with Imaging Device	177	Narrow Spread	189	Cut-Off	204
Remove Clip	166	Attacker Firing From		Firing Flechette		Ram	204
Shift Perception	166	a Moving Vehicle	177	on Medium Spread	189	Stunt	204
Stand Up	166	Attacker in Melee Combat	177	Firing Flechette		Passenger Actions	205
Take Aim	166	Attacker Running	178	on Wide Spread	189	Attacks Against Vehicles	205
Take Cover	166	Attacker Using Image		Attacker Firing Full Auto Burst	190	Vehicle Damage	205
Throw Weapon	166	Magnification	178	Attacker Firing Long Burst	190	Evasive Driving	205
Use Simple device	166	Attacker Using		or Full-Auto	190	Called Shot on Vehicles	205
Complex Actions	167	Off-Hand Weapon	178	Attacker Firing Burst		Damage and Passengers	205
Astral Projection	167	Attacker Wounded	178	or Semi-auto Burst	190	HEALING	205
Banish Spirit	167	Blind Fire	178	Defender in Melee		First Aid	205
Cast Spell	167	Called Shot	178	Target of Ranged Attack	190	Natural Recovery	206
Fire Full-Auto Weapon	167	Previously Aimed with Take Aim	178	Defender Running	190	Stun Damage	207
Fire Long Burst or		Wireless Smartgun	178	Defender/Target		Physical Damage	207
Semi-Auto Burst	167	FIREARMS	178	Has Good Cover	190	Glitches & Healing	207
Fire Mounted or		Firing Modes	178	Defender/Target		Medicine	207
Vehicle Weapon	167	Single Shot	178	Has Partial Cover	190	Medkits and Autodocs	208
Load and Fire Bow	167	Semi-Automatic	178	Targeted by an		Magical Healing	208
Matrix Actions	167	Semi-Automatic Burst	179	Area-Effect Attack	190	Physical Damage Overflow	209
Melee Attack	167	Burst Fire	179	Cover	190	Stabilization	209
Reload Firearm	167	Long Burst	179	Active defenses	190	ROOFTOPS & RAINBOWS	210
Rigger Jump In	167	Full-Auto	179	Full Defense	191	THE MATRIX	214
Sprint	167	Suppressive Fire	179	Dodge	191	WIRELESS WORLD	214
Summoning	167	Shotguns	180	Parry	191	Matrix Basics	217
Use Skill	167	Choke Settings	180	Block	192	Virtual Visions	217
Interrupt Actions	167	PROJECTILES	181	SPECIAL ACTIONS	192	The Population of the Matrix	218
Block	168	Thrown weapons	181	Surprise	192	Personas	218
Dodge	168	Shuriken	181	Surprise and Perception	192	Devices	219
Hit the Dirt	168	Throwing Knife	181	Surprise Tests	192	Files	219
Intercept	168	Grenades	181	Ambushing	192	Hosts	219
Parry	168	Grenade Launchers, Rockets,		Surprise in Combat	193	Matrix Authentication	
Full Defense	168	& Missiles	181	Effects of Surprise	194	Recognition Keys	219
Accuracy	168	Projectile Triggers	182	Interception	194	The Matrix: For You	
Armor	168	Determine Scatter	182	Knockdown	194	and Against You	220
Armor and Encumbrance	169	Blast Effects	182	Subduing	195	Grids	220
Specialized Protection	169	Blasts in a Confined Space	183	Called Shots	195	Looking Down:	
Armor Penetration	169	Multiple Simultaneous Blasts	183	Multiple Attacks	196	Grid Overwatch Division	221
Damage	169	BOWS	183	Dead Man's trigger	197	Augmented World	221
Types of Injury	169	Crossbows	183	BARRIERS	197	Life with a Commlink	221
Physical Damage	169	Gunnery	183	Shooting Through Barriers	197	Shadowrunning with	
Stun Damage	169	Drone Gunnery	183	Destroying Barriers	197	a Commlink	223
Wound Modifiers	169	Sensor Attacks	184	Penetration Weapons	198	The Digital Underground	223
Exceeding the		Sensor Targeting	184	Body Barriers	198	Deckers	223
Condition Monitor	170	MELEE COMBAT	184	VEHICLES	198	Technomancers	223
Special Damage Types	170	Reach	186	Vehicle Combat	198	(MIS)USING THE MATRIX	224
Elemental Damage	170	Attacker Making		Vehicle Stats	199	CRACKING THE MATRIX SPINE	224
Acid Damage	170	Charging Attack	186	Vehicle Tests	199	Matrix Skills	226
Cold Damage	170	Attacker Prone	187	Modifiers	201	Using Computer	226
Electricity Damage	170	Called Shot	187	Pilot has Impaired Visibility	201		
Fire Damage	171	Character Has		Piloting in Limited			



Using Cybercombat	226	Spoof Command	242	Hash	257	Spellcasting	281
Using Electronic Warfare	226	Switch Interface Mode	243	Stability	257	Step 1: Choose Spell	281
Using Hacking	226	Trace Icon	243	Suppression	257	Step 2: Choose the Target	281
Using Hardware	226	PROGRAMS	243	Watermark	257	Step 3: Choose Spell Force	281
Using Software	226	Program Listing	243	Submersion	257	Step 4: Cast Spell	281
Using Resonance	226	Common Programs	245	Increased Resonance	257	Step 5: Determine Effect	282
Matrix Attributes	226	Hacking Programs	245	Access to the		Step 6: Resist Drain	282
Attack	227	Agents	246	Resonance Realms	257	Step 7: Determine	
Sleaze	227	HOSTS	246	Echoes	258	Ongoing Effects	282
Data Processing	227	Host Archives	247	Sprite Database	258	Glitches	282
Firewall	227	Host Attributes	247	Courier Sprite	258	SPELL CHARACTERISTICS	282
Files & Matrix Attributes	227	Host Convergence	247	Crack Sprite	258	Combat Spells	283
Cyberdecks	227	Intrusion Countermeasures	247	Data Sprite	258	Acid Stream	283
Deck Configuration	227	Security Response	247	Fault Sprite	258	Toxic Wave	283
Reconfiguring Your Deck	228	Types of IC	247	Machine Sprite	258	Punch	283
Matrix Damage	228	Acid	248	THE DANGER	260	Clout	284
Bricking	228	Binder	248	OF SIDER JOBS		Blast	284
Repairing Matrix Damage	228	Black IC	248	RIGGERS	264	Death Touch	284
Non-Devices and		Blaster	248	FREE AS A BIRD	264	Manabolt	284
Matrix Damage	229	Crash	248	The Game is Rigged	264	Manaball	284
Biofeedback Damage	229	Jammer	248	Riggers in the Shadows	264	Flamethrower	284
Dumphshock & Link-Locking	229	Killer	248	BEING THE MACHINE	265	Fireball	284
User Modes	229	Marker	248	More than Metahuman	265	Lightning Bolt	284
Augmented Reality	229	Patrol	248	The Control Rig	265	Ball Lightning	284
Cold-Sim Virtual Reality	229	Probe	248	Complete Control	265	Shatter	284
Hot-Sim Virtual Reality	230	Scramble	248	Control Override	265	Powerbolt	284
Making Connections	230	Sparky	248	Rigging Skills	265	Powerball	284
Noise	230	Tar Baby	249	Rigging and You	266	Knockout	284
Illegal Actions	231	Track	249	Taking the Jump	266	Stunbolt	284
Overwatch Score		TECHNOMANCERS	249	VR and Rigging	266	Stunball	285
and Convergence	231	Technomancer Life	249	Rigging and Limits	266	Detection Spells	285
Direct Connections	232	Resonance	249	Noise and Rigging	266	Analyze Device	285
PANs and WANs	233	Resonance Signatures	250	Physical Damage	266	Analyze Magic	285
Grids	233	Resonance Actions	250	Matrix Damage	266	Analyze Truth	286
Grids on a Run	233	Call/Dismiss Sprite	250	Jumping Out	266	Clairaudience	286
The Public Grid	233	Command Sprite	250	Riggers and Deckers	266	Clairvoyance	286
Local Grids	234	Compile Sprite	250	Rigger Command Console	266	Combat Sense	286
Global Grids	234	Decompile Sprite	250	Noise Reduction & Sharing	267	Detect Enemies	286
Devices and Personas	234	Kill Complex Form	250	Data Processing & Firewall	267	Detect Enemies, Extended	286
Devices	234	Register Sprite	250	Group Command		Detect Individual	286
Persona	235	Thread Complex Form	250	and Jumping Around	267	Detect Life	286
Matrix Perception	235	Living Persona	250	PANs & WANs (Rigger Style)	267	Detect Life, Extended	286
Spotting Duration	235	Rebooting Your Living Persona	251	Electronic Warfare for Riggers	268	Detect [Life Form]	287
Running Silent	235	Using Mundane Electronics	251	Getting Hacked	268	Detect [Life Form]	287
Noticing Hackers	236	Threading	251	Getting Dumped	268	Detect Magic	287
Recognition Keys	236	Killing Complex Forms	251	Drones	269	Detect Magic, Extended	287
Owners	236	Fading	251	Drones in the Matrix	269	Detect [Object]	287
Matrix Actions	237	Resonance Library	252	Pilot Programs	269	Mindlink	287
Brute Force	238	Cleaner	252	Autosofts	269	Mind Probe	287
Change Icon	238	Diffusion of [Matrix Attribute]	252	Drone Combat	270	Health Spells	287
Check Overwatch Score	238	Editor	252	Drone Perception	270	Antidote	288
Control Device	238	Infusion of [Matrix Attribute]	252	Drone Infiltration	270	Cure Disease	288
Crack File	238	Static Veil	252	Drone Initiative	270	Decrease [Attribute]	288
Crash Program	238	Pulse Storm	252	Repairing Drones	270	Detox	288
Data Spike	239	Puppeteer	252	A LITTLE SHADOW MUSIC	272	Heal	288
Disarm Data Bomb	239	Resonance Channel	252	MAGIC	276	Increase [Attribute]	288
Edit File	239	Resonance Spike	253	INTRODUCTION	276	Increase Reflexes	288
Enter/Exit Host	239	Resonance Veil	253	MAGIC BASICS	278	Oxygenate	288
Erase Mark	239	Static Bomb	253	Magic	278	Prophylaxis	289
Erase Matrix Signature	239	Stitches	253	Magical Skills	278	Resist Pain	289
Format Device	239	Transcendent Grid	253	Force	278	Stabilize	289
Full Matrix Defense	240	Tattletale	253	Inherent Limit: Astral	278	Illusion Spells	289
Grid Hop	240	Sprites	254	Drain	278	Agony	290
Hack on the Fly	240	Compiling a Sprite	254	Power Points	278	Mass Agony	290
Hide	240	Compiled Sprite Tasks	254	TRADITIONS	279	Bugs	290
Invite Mark	240	Registering a Sprite	254	The Hermetic Mage	279	Swarm	290
Jack Out	240	Registered Sprite Tasks	256	The Shaman	279	Confusion	290
Jam Signals	240	Sprite-Technomancer Link	256	MAGICAL LODGES	280	Mass Confusion	290
Jump Into Rigged Device	241	Decompiling Sprites	256	PERCEIVING MAGIC	280	Chaos	290
Matrix Perception	241	Sprite Powers	256	SORCERY	281	Chaotic World	290
Matrix Search	241	Camouflage	256			Entertainment	290
Reboot Device	242	Cookie	256			Trid Entertainment	90
Send Message	242	Diagnostics	257			Invisibility	291
Set Data Bomb	242	Electron Storm	257			Improved Invisibility	291
Snoop	242	Gremlins	257			Mask	291



Physical Mask	291	Step 6: Resist Drain	305	Fire-Bringer	322	Shadowrun's Three Worlds	348
Phantasm	291	Glitches	305	Mountain	322	Spotlight Time	348
Trid Phantasm	291	The Finished Preparation	305	Rat	323	Character Skills	348
Hush	291	Using a Preparation	305	Raven	323	Player Personality	348
Silence	291	Artificing	306	Sea	323	Step In	349
Stealth	292	Step 1: Choose Focus Formula	306	Seducer	323	Pace	349
Manipulation Spells	292	Step 2: Obtain the Telesma	306	Shark	323	Handling surprises	349
Animate	292	Step 3: Prepare the		SNAKE	324	Relocate	350
Mass Animate	292	Magical Lodge	306	Thunderbird	324	Replace	351
Armor	292	Step 4: Spend Reagents	307	Wise Warrior	324	Remove	351
Control Actions	292	Step 5: Craft the Focus	307	Wolf	324	Running Scenes	351
Mob Control	292	Step 6: Resist Drain	307	INITIATION	324	Investigation	351
Control Thoughts	293	Artifact Assessing	307	Initiate Powers	325	Social	352
Mob Mind	293	Disenchanting	307	Increased Magic	325	Action	352
Fling	293	Disjoining	307	Metaplanar Access	325	CAMPAIGNS	353
Ice Sheet	293	ADEPTS	308	Metamagic	325	Campaign Plots	353
Ignite	293	Using Powers	308	ALL THE ANGLES	328	Plot Pacing	353
Influence	293	Adept Powers	308	GAMEMASTER ADVICE	332	Plan to Finish	354
Levitate	293	Adrenaline Boost	308	ROLE OF THE GAMEMASTER	332	Data Management	354
Light	293	Astral Perception	309	PRE-GAME CONSIDERATIONS	332	Campaign Time and	354
Magic Fingers	294	Attribute Boost	309	Know Your Players	332	Character Advancement	354
Mana Barrier	294	Combat Sense	309	Know Yourself	333	Alternate Campaigns	354
Physical Barrier	294	Critical Strike	309	Group Rules and Boundaries	333	Street Scum	354
Poltergeist	294	Danger Sense	309	Group Template	334	High Life	354
Shadow	294	Enhanced Perception	309	Final Thoughts	334	Military or Mercenary	355
COUNTERSPELLING	294	Enhanced Accuracy	309	DESIGNING A RUN	335	DocWagon	355
Spell Defense	294	Improved Ability	309	The Hook	335	Criminal Syndicates	355
Dispelling	295	Improved Physical Attribute	309	Background	335	SECURITY IN THE SIXTH WORLD	355
RITUAL SPELLCASTING	295	Improved Potential	309	Scenes	336	High Threat Response	356
Step 1: Choose Ritual Leader	295	Improved Reflexes	310	Scene Types	336	HTR Team Response Time	356
Step 2: Choose Ritual	296	Killing Hands	310	Social	336	Countering Physical Threats	356
Step 3: Choose the		Kinesics	310	Investigation	336	Cover	356
Force of the Ritual Spell	296	Light Body	310	Action	337	Suppression	357
Step 4: Set Up the Foundation	296	Missile Parry	310	Build Backward	337	Ambushes	357
Step 5: Give the Offering	296	Mystic Armor	310	Transitions	337	Traps	358
Step 6: Perform the Ritual	296	Natural Immunity	311	Write the Background	338	Countering Matrix Threats	358
Step 7: Seal the Ritual	296	Pain Resistance	311	Opposition	338	Access Limitation	358
Ritual Failure	296	Rapid Healing	311	Be Appropriate	338	PANs and WANs	358
Glitches	296	Spell Resistance	311	Give Equal Opportunities	338	Hosts and IC	359
RITUALS	296	Traceless Walk	311	Have Stats For Easy Access	338	GODs and Spiders	360
Curse	297	Voice Control	311	Plot Hole Check	339	Wired Security	360
Prodigal Spell	297	Wall Running	311	Game Extras	339	Countering Magic Threats	361
Remote Sensing	297	THE ASTRAL WORLD	312	Document Hand-Outs	339	Tactics for Mundanes	361
Ward	297	Auras & Astral Forms	312	Maps	339	Contracted Magical Security	361
Circle of Protection	298	Astral Signature	312	Props	339	Magical Barriers	361
Circle of Healing	298	Astral Perception	312	Music	340	Critters and Spirits	361
Renascence	298	Astral Projection	313	Run Templates	340	Drones	362
Watcher	298	Astral Movement	313	DataSteal	340	Security Devices	362
Homunculus	298	Manifesting	314	Assassination or Destruction	340	Landscaping	362
Learning Spells	299	Staying Astral	314	Extraction or Insertion	340	Barriers	362
CONJURING	299	Astral Detection	314	Misdirection	341	Doors, Windows, & Locks	363
Summoning	300	Astral Combat	315	Protection	341	Sensors and Scanners	364
Step 1: Choose Spirit		Astral Tracking	315	Delivery	342	Automated Defenses	366
Type & Force	300	MANA BARRIERS	315	Random Run Tables	342	IDENTIFICATION	366
Step 2: Attempt Summoning	300	Getting Around Mana Barriers	316	Job Type	342	System Identification Number (SIN)	366
Step 3: Resist Drain	300	Astral Intersections	316	Meet Locations	342	Issuing a SIN	367
Glitches	300	REAGENTS	316	MacGuffins	343	Licenses	367
Binding	300	Harvesting Reagents	317	Employers	343	Fake SINS	367
Banishing	301	FOCI	318	Twists	343	Checking a Fake SIN	368
Spirit Basics	301	Focus Types	318	NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS	343	Burned SINS	368
Spirit-Summoner Link	302	Enchanting Foci	318	Description	343	DROP-IN LOCATIONS	368
Spirit Range	302	Metamagic Foci	319	Personality	344	Hell-Hole Bar	368
Spirit Services	302	Power Foci	319	Background	344	Secret Research Station	369
Unbound Spirit Services	302	Qi Foci	319	Motivations	344	Nova-Hot Club	369
Bound Spirit Services	302	Spell Foci	319	Stats	346	Mom-and-Pop Shop	369
Spirits and Edge	304	Spirit Foci	320	Full Build	346	No-Tell Motel	370
ENCHANTING	304	Weapon Foci	320	Story Build	346	Large Corp Office	370
Alchemy	304	MENTOR SPIRITS	320	Improvised Build	346	Hospital or Clinic	370
Step 1: Choose a Spell	304	Mentor Spirit Archetypes	320	Roleplaying the NPC	347	High-End Residential	371
Step 2: Choose Spell Force	304	Bear	321	Know Their Purpose	347	Derelict Building	371
Step 3: Choose the Lynchpin		Cat	321	Stay Focused on Players	347	REPUTATION	372
for the Preparation	304	Dog	321	Let Them Go	347	Street Cred	372
Step 4: Choose Preparation		Dragonslayer	321	GAME MANAGEMENT	348	Notoriety	372
Trigger	305	Eagle	322			Public Awareness	372
Step 5: Create the Preparation	305					LIFESTYLES	373



Luxury	373	Mimicry	398	Getting a Fix	415	Housings	445
High	373	Mist Form	398	Withdrawal and Staying Clean	415	Sensor Functions	446
Middle	373	Movement	399	Overdosing	415	Security Devices	446
Low	373	Mystic Armor	399	STREET GEAR	416	Breaking and Entering Gear	447
Squatter	373	Natural Weapon	399	GEAR RATINGS	416	Industrial Chemicals	448
Streets	373	Noxious Breath	399	BUYING GEAR	416	Survival Gear	448
Hospitalized	373	Paralyzing Howl	399	Standard Goods	416	Grapple Gun	449
Lifestyle Options	374	Paralyzing Touch	400	Starting Gear	418	Biotech	450
Special Work Area	374	Petrification	400	Black Market Goods	418	DocWagon Contract	450
Extra Secure	374	Psychokinesis	400	Contacts and Availability	418	Slap Patches	450
Obscure/Difficult to Find	374	Regeneration	400	FENCING GEAR	418	Augmentation	451
Cramped	374	Sapience	400	Contacts and Fencing	419	Cyberware/Bioware Grades	451
Dangerous Area	374	Search	400	(IL)LEGALITY	419	Cybersurgery/Recovery Time	451
Paying the Bills	374	Venom	401	Jurisdiction	419	Headware	451
Buying a Lifestyle	374	Weather Control	401	CONCEALING GEAR	419	Eyeware	453
Team Lifestyles	375	Weaknesses	401	Noticing hidden Gear	419	Earware	453
RUN REWARDS	375	Allergy	401	Actively Hiding Gear	419	Bodyware	454
Cash	375	Dietary Requirement	401	CARRYING GEAR	420	Cyberlimbs	455
Sample Run Cost Calculations	375	Essence Loss	401	Carrying Capacity	420	Cyberlimb Enhancements	456
Karma	376	Induced Dormancy	401	Encumbrance	420	Cyberlimb Accessories	456
		Reduced Senses	401	SIZE COSTS	420	Cyber Implant Weapons	458
		Uneducated	401	Using Unadapted Gear	420	Bioware	459
		Vulnerability	401	WIRELESS FUNCTIONALITY	420	Cultured Bioware	460
HELPS AND HINDRANCES	378	Critter Combat	402	Wireless Bonuses	421	MAGICAL EQUIPMENT	461
NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS	378	Mundane Critters	402	Turning It Off	421	VEHICLES AND DRONES	461
Grunts	378	Dog	402	Throwbacks	421	Bikes	462
Condition Monitors	379	Great Cat	402	Incompatibility	421	Cars	462
Professional Rating	379	Horse	402	GEAR LISTING	421	Trucks and Vans	463
Group Edge	380	Shark	403	Melee Weapons	421	Boats	464
Lieutenants	380	Wolf	403	Blades	422	Submarines	464
Sample Grunts	381	Paracritters	403	Clubs	422	Fixed-Wing Aircraft	464
Professional Rating 0	381	Barghest	403	Other Melee Weapons	422	Rotorcraft	464
Professional Rating 1	382	Cockatrice	404	Projectile and Throwing Weapons	423	VTOL/VSTOL	465
Professional Rating 2	382	Devil Rat	404	Firearms	424	Microdrones	465
Professional Rating 3	383	Ghoul	404	Tasers	424	Minidrones	465
Professional Rating 4	383	Hell Hound	405	Hold-Outs	425	Small Drones	466
Professional Rating 5	384	Sasquatch	406	Light Pistols	425	Medium Drones	466
Professional Rating 6	384	Vampire	406	Heavy Pistols	426	Large Drones	466
Prime Runners	385	Dracoforms	406	Machine Pistols	427		
Building Prime Runners	385	Eastern Dragons	407	Submachine Guns	427		
The Hand of God	386	Feathered Serpent	407	Assault Rifles	428		
Contacts	386	Western Dragon	407	Sniper Rifles	428		
Contacts by the Numbers	386	TOXINS, DRUGS, AND BTLs	408	Shotguns	429		
Using Contacts	387	Toxins	408	Special Weapons	429		
Glitches	389	Using Toxins	409	Machine Guns	430		
Favor for a Friend	389	Concentration	409	Cannons & Launchers	430		
Sample Contacts	390	Antidotes	409	Firearm Accessories	431		
CRITTERS	392	Sample Toxins	409	Ammunition	433		
Attributes and Skills	393	CS/Tear Gas	409	Grenades, Rockets, and Missiles	434		
Movement	393	Gamma-Scopolamine	410	Grenades	434		
Powers	394	Narcoject	410	Rockets and Missiles	435		
Accident	394	Nausea Gas	410	Explosives	436		
Animal Control	394	Neuro-Stun	410	Clothing and Armor	436		
Armor	394	Pepper Punch	410	Armor	437		
Astral Form	394	Seven-7	410	Armor Modifications	437		
Binding	395	Drugs and BTLs	410	Helmets and Shields	438		
Compulsion	395	Drugs	410	ELECTRONICS	438		
Concealment	395	Bliss	411	Commlinks	438		
Confusion	395	Cram	411	Cyberdecks	439		
Corrosive Spit	395	Deepweed	411	Electronics Accessories	439		
Dragonspeech	395	Jazz	412	RFID Tags	440		
Dual Natured	395	Kamikaze	412	Communications and			
Elemental Attack	396	Long Haul	412	Countermeasures	440		
Energy Aura	396	Nitro	412	Software	441		
Engulf	396	Novacoke	412	Skillsofts	442		
Enhanced Senses	396	Psyche	412	ID and Credit	442		
Essence Drain	396	Zen	412	Tools	443		
Fear	397	Better Than Life	412	Optical and Imaging Devices	443		
Guard	397	BTL Chips	413	Optical Devices	444		
Hardened Armor	397	BTL Downloads	413	Vision Enhancements	444		
Hardened Mystic Armor	397	SUBSTANCE ABUSE	413	Audio Devices	445		
Immunity	397	AND ADDICTION	413	Audio Enhancements	445		
Infection	398	Addiction Tests	414	Sensors	445		
Influence	398	Role-Playing Addiction	414				
Innate Spell	398						
Materialization	398						



THE MATRIX

We use it every day to read our email, pay our bills, talk to our friends and loved ones. It monitors our money, handles our utilities, and manages the traffic on our streets. Billions of people use it constantly, from the hungry family in Redmond to the CEO in Neo-Tokyo and everyone in between. It is the Matrix, the digital world within a world made of fiber-optic cables, networks, and more data and computing power than has ever existed in the history of the planet. A record that exists today so it can be broken tomorrow.

Everybody uses the Matrix. Most shadowrunners have multiple pieces of gear that use it, often interacting with the Matrix without them knowing it. Smartlinks use it to look up local conditions and calculate firing solutions, medkits access medical databases to analyze and diagnose injuries and then recommend treatment, and your clothes and armor use it to detect wear and tear. And tell you when it's time to do the laundry.

Some shadowrunners do more than just soak in information the gear gathers for them. They use the Matrix as a tool and a weapon. They glide through it, bending it to their will, making it dance and spin to the tune they call. Such a runner is called a **hacker**. There are two kinds of hackers, classified based on how they interact with the Matrix: **deckers**, who use cyberdecks to access the bones and muscle of the Matrix and twist that structure to their will; and **technomancers**, who have a downright weird ability to interface and control the digital world without the aid of technology.

Hackers play critical roles on shadowrunning teams. They open locked doors, muffle alarms, cancel security calls, unearth buried facts, monitor things other team members can't see, and keep the heat off long enough for the rest of the team to finish the run. In a scrap, they can take control of or destroy opponents' weapons and gear.

They also play an important role in defense. Every other skilled team in the world has a hacker running interference for them; if your team doesn't, you're vulnerable to whatever electronic havoc they decide to bring down on your head. Quick tip: leaving yourself vulnerable is a bad idea.

WIRELESS WORLD

The paradox of the Matrix is this: to be an ace hacker, you need to understand it—but no one really understands it. Like so many things, though, the real key is to know more and be better than the next guy. So let's get you started with a quick overview of the Matrix experience. We won't start with hacking, because you need to walk before you can run. We'll start with the ways users—you and everyone else—experience the Matrix.

When you jack in and flip over to the electronic world, you plunge into a virtual environment of a consensual hallucination. Everything is rendered in incredible detail powered by a century of digital graphics innovation. Sometimes it seems almost real, but either through conscious artificiality or the difficulty of duplicating the complexities of the physical world, the computer-generated seams usually show.

Physical laws don't apply in the Matrix (unless some jackwad admin programmed them into a host, but those strictures can always be overwritten if you know what you're doing). You want to fly? Go ahead and fly. And watch the vast expanse of exquisite artificiality spread out around you.

Below you, stretching off in every direction, three-dimensional icons of real-world devices light up the landscape like a galaxy of stars in a perfect night sky. The devices that appear to be closest to you are the ones nearest your meat body. Your own icon—your virtual self—is usually the brightest and clearest of the icons. The points of light on the distant horizon, the devices that are the farthest from your presence in the real world, flicker and sputter with the lag of data traveling from the other side of the globe.

Hovering above you, massive hosts—tremendous data collections guarded by spiders and IC—float like corporate gods, attempting to see everything and be surprised by nothing. Their custom geometries form a virtual geography that is unconnected to the meat-bound map below. The larger ones, the size of cities, belong to the Big Ten megacorporations and are dangerous to enter if you're not invited. Other, smaller hosts cluster in the neural sky, offering social connections, presenting consumer products, or promising darker pleasures.





MATRIX JARGON

If you're going to spend any serious time in the Matrix, you have to be able to sling around the lingo. Hackers move fast and talk faster—this is the stuff you need to know so they don't leave you behind.

agent: A semi-autonomous program that is capable of taking independent action in the Matrix.

archive: An area of a host that stores files securely away from all users, legitimate or otherwise.

artificial intelligence (AI): Self-aware and self-sustaining intelligent programs that evolved within the Matrix.

augmented reality (AR): Information added to or overlaid upon a user's normal sensory perceptions in the form of visual data, graphics, sounds, haptics, smell, and/or limited simsense.

augmented reality object (ARO): Virtual representations (usually visual graphics, but other sensory data can be included, typically sound) that are connected to a physical object or location in the physical world and viewable through augmented reality. The abbreviation, ARO, is pronounced "arrow."

avatar: The icon of a persona.

better-than-life (BTL, beetle): Hyper-real levels of simsense that are addictive and potentially dangerous.

brick: To destroy a device by Matrix damage; also, a device destroyed in that fashion.

cold-sim: Standard simsense that operates at legal, safe levels. Used by most people to access virtual reality.

commcode: Combination email address, phone number, and IM name that identifies an individual for communications; if people want to get a hold of you, this is what they need.

commlink ('link): The handheld or worn personal computer used by nearly everyone to access wireless services.

complex form: Mental algorithms that technomancers use to manipulate the Matrix—their equivalent of programs.

control rig: An implanted augmentation that allows a rigger to "jump" into a vehicle, drone, or other device, giving him or her superior control and performance.

deck: A tablet-sized computer used to hack the Matrix; it is restricted or illegal in most of the civilized world.

demiGOD: A subsection of the Grid Overwatch Division that oversees a single grid, run by the grid's owner.

device: A piece of gear that performs functions integral to a network.

direct neural interface (DNI): A connection between the brain's neural impulses and a computer system that allows a user to mentally interact with that system.

drone: An unmanned vehicle that can be controlled via direct wireless link or through the Matrix.

echo: An enhanced ability a technomancer can learn after undergoing submersion.

fading: Mental drain technomancers sometimes experience when using their abilities.

file: A program or set of data that is collected as a single package; this runs the gamut from annual reports and kitten videos to autosofts and Attack programs.

firewall: A program that guards a node from intrusion. This is the first line of defense of a device or host to fend off unwanted Matrix interference.

geo-tagging: Assigning AROs to a specific physical location, often using RFID tags.

ghost in the machine: Mysterious phenomena and perceived entities that exist entirely within the Matrix. Some believe these are AIs or magical spirits of the Matrix. Others believe they are the disembodied personalities of people trapped within the Matrix during and since the Crash of '64.

GOD: Grid Overwatch Division, an entity run by the Corporate Court to oversee security in the Matrix.

grid: The resources offered by a Matrix provider; typically, you can access information on that provider's grid easily, while accessing info on other grids is more difficult. The term is also used to refer to the Matrix as a whole outside any host.



MATRIX JARGON, CONT.

hacker: Someone who explores and exploits the Matrix.

haptics: Computer interactions based on the sense of touch.

host: A self-contained place in the Matrix. Hosts have no physical location, as they exist purely in the Matrix cloud.

hot-sim: Simsense without the safeguards that prevent potentially damaging biofeedback. Hot-sim is illegal in the civilized world.

icon: The virtual representation of a device, persona, file, or host in the Matrix.

intrusion countermeasures (IC): Software that runs in a host and protects that host from unauthorized users. The abbreviation, IC, is pronounced "ice."

jackpoint: Any physical location that provides access to the Matrix through plugging in with a wired connection.

living persona: The mental "organic software" that allows technomancers to access the Matrix with only their minds.

master: A device, usually a commlink, cyberdeck, or host, that is linked to other devices in order to protect them against Matrix attacks.

Matrix authentication recognition key (mark): A token that measures a user's access to a device, host, or persona.

Matrix object: A persona, file, device, mark, or host in the Matrix.

Matrix: The worldwide telecommunications network and everyone and everything connected to and by that network.

meat: (slang) An unwired individual, or the physical part of a Matrix user in VR.

meshed: (slang) Online, connected to the Matrix.

noise: Unwanted data or wireless signals that make using the Matrix slower or more difficult. (slang) Unwelcome information.

persona: A user, agent, or other autonomous or semi-autonomous icon in the Matrix.

personal area network (PAN): The set of devices slaved to a single commlink or cyberdeck.

pilot: A sophisticated program with semi-autonomous decision-making abilities.

radio frequency identification tag (RFID, pronounced "arfid"): A device no bigger than a matchbox that holds data and other miniaturized electronics.

real life (RL): (slang) Anything not having to do with the Matrix.

Resonance: The measure of a technomancer's ability to access and manipulate the Matrix.

Resonance Realms: A mysterious plane of virtual existence that technomancers can access. It is believed that a copy of every bit of electronic data ever created exists somewhere in the Resonance Realms.

rigger: Someone who uses a control rig to "jump" into a properly adapted device (usually a drone, vehicle, or security system) in order to directly control it as if the device were an extension of his or her own body.

sculpting: The look and feel of a host's internal virtual space.

simrig: A device for making simsense recordings.

simsense (sim, simstim): Hardware and software that enable a person to experience what has happened to someone else as if they had sensed and experienced the events themselves. Requires a direct neural interface.

slave: A device connected to a master device, usually a commlink, cyberdeck, or host, on which the slave depends for defense against Matrix attacks.

spam zone: An area flooded with invasive and/or viral AR advertising, causing noise.

spider: A security hacker/rigger employed by a corporation or law-enforcement agency to protect a physical space or a host from hackers.

sprite: A Resonance-based entity created (or called) by a technomancer.

static zone: An area where the physical environment creates noise.

submersion: A state in which a technomancer strengthens his or her connection to the Resonance.

tag: An RFID tag.

technomancer: A person who is able to use and manipulate the Matrix without hardware. The term often carries connotations of hacking and cyber-terrorism.

trodes: A headband or net worn on the head that creates a direct neural interface. Popular models include an attached hat, wig, or other headware. Short for "dry active electrode array."

virtual reality (VR): A state where outside stimuli are ignored and the user only receives impressions from the Matrix. Requires a direct neural interface.

wide area network: A set of devices slaved to a host.



Between it all are the representations of people, processes, programs, and data that zip from icon to icon and host to host, leaving datatrails of light that fade back into the dim hum of information. The Matrix moves at the speed of light and thought.

That's the view from virtual reality. There are other ways to view the Matrix, but VR is the only way to see it firsthand. And it's the only way that lets you fly.

MATRIX BASICS

Everything in the Matrix is an **icon**, a virtual representation that allows you to interact with something in the Matrix. Every object's owner can choose what the icon looks like, within certain limits. An icon doesn't just represent a Matrix object in an abstract way; it shows you what it is and how to access it. The Matrix is programmed to give users a context to make it easier to work and play; if a tool is hard to use, it's not much of a tool. There are designers and programmers who deliberately obfuscate an icon's purpose with confusing design, but for the most part people like to know how they can use whatever they encounter. Most Matrix locations require icons to match certain visual protocols.

For example, let's say you're in the host for Dante's Inferno. The Inferno is a popular and swanky nightclub with a presence in the real world (it's on Fifth and Madison in Seattle's Downtown), but it's also got a host that looks the same as the physical club so that patrons from around the world can fly in for a visit at a moment's notice. So you get to the club's host, pay your cover charge with a quick transfer of nuyen from your account to the Inferno, and in a blink you're whisked to your favorite spot in the club. In this case, let's say you go to the fifth level to enjoy the iconography of angry, dead souls writhing to the beat in and under swampy water. You're in the mood for virtual food, so you call up a menu. That's a file, and Dante's menu appears as a flaming scroll with a fancy script. The programmers and the Inferno know it's something you'd want to read—and they want you to read it—so they make sure the icon looks like something you'd read, in this case a scroll. The flames feel hot and look bright, but they're just virtual. If you were somewhere else, like say the Club Penumbra host, a nightclub with an outer space theme, it wouldn't look like a flaming scroll, but it would still look like something you'd read (in this case, an astronaut's log book).

The whole Matrix is like that. Everything is custom crafted by its owners and is generally designed for intuitive usefulness. The other side of the experience is your software. Some hackers don't want other programmers telling them how their icons look. So they run software to impose their own visuals on their icons. The struggle to show what you want to show is only one of the battles you'll fight in the Matrix. Most people, though, don't bother to fight over iconography, and just let the designers of the Matrix win out.

Matrix protocols limit the relative sizes of everything to give users a standard experience they can share. If your icon was a robot version of the Wuxing Skytower, that might seem cool, but if you're talking to someone with an icon of a dung beetle or something, then communication's not going to run smooth. To overcome this, personas (people in the Matrix) are kept between dwarf and troll sizes, so what you actually would end up with in the described conversation is a comically small skyscraper talking to a frightfully large bug, so you're both approximately the same size. Files and devices are smaller than personas (so you'll never see someone reading a book the size of a great dragon for example), and hosts are larger (much larger in the case of big sites, like the megas' corporate hosts).

VIRTUAL VISIONS

That sets up the size of things, but what do they look like? The answer is a bit more complicated than you'd think. The look of the Matrix depends on what grid you're on, the programs you're running, and a bunch of other factors. Luckily, there is a sort of "base version" that forms the foundation of everyone's Matrix experience.

In this base version, the Matrix is a black flatland under a black sky. This virtual plain is lit with the glow of the icon of your commlink (or deck) and other icons around you, one for each device and persona connected to the Matrix. The plain is a projection of the whole world made flat, so the icons get more and more sparse the farther out you look.

There are uncounted billions of icons in the Matrix. Devices have icons in the Matrix in sort of the same way that living things have auras in astral space. This could get overwhelming, but some background tech keeps things from getting out of control.

The first piece of assistance comes from your commlink, which automatically filters out the least interesting icons. Do you want to know the virtual location of every music player in the world? Right, neither do I. So the Matrix will usually show you an icon for an individual's personal area network (PAN), not every device in that network (although it makes exceptions for interesting or dangerous devices in that network, such as a gun). Additionally, the farther away devices are from you in the real world, the dimmer their icons are in the Matrix; this is partly because your commlink figures the farther ones aren't as interesting to you, but mostly because the connection is a bit slower due to the distance. Matrix gear renders the far-off devices and personas as dim, muted, or flickering icons. Also cutting down on the visual noise is the fact that some icons are deliberately hidden from view, such as locks and other security devices, baby monitors, maintenance monitors, and of course people who prefer not to be seen.

To understand the uses of virtual reality and how people balance the meat world with the virtual one, let's



look at some typical Matrix uses. Let's say that you're in your car, driving home from work, school, or wherever you usually drive home from. You let the car's autopilot handle the driving and drop into VR to start dinner. Once you check into VR, your car, the road, and everything nearby drop from view, and instead you see the Matrix's plane of stars. You think about going to your home node, and boom, you go, streaking forward like a comet. As you get close, you see all of the devices that make up your home network, and you head for the one that represents your fridge. The icon for the fridge looks like a small fridge, with a list of the food (which the fridge's electronics automatically update with what's actually inside it). You see frozen pizza on the list and decide to go with a frozen pizza. You then reach out to your stove's controls (appearing as some dials over a warm, homey glow) and fire up the oven to pre-heat to 230°. It's a bit nippy outside, so you set your drink dispenser (which you've made look like a beer tap in VR) to start warming the soy base, and since you're feeling luxurious you hit the controls for chocolate flavoring. Sill in VR, you zip back to your car, which cheerfully tells you that you've got another ten minutes, enough time to visit your favorite social networking host.

Speaking of hosts, the big hosts are the most interesting spots in the Matrix landscape, and they're the things hovering above you when you log on. No matter where you go in the Matrix, they're always up there. One of the critical things to understand about hosts is that, unlike the devices in your house, they are not necessarily the representations of a specific device or location in the meat world. Hosts are part of the Matrix, rather than being a single device, so you can access them from anywhere without worrying about the distance involved.

The next important thing to know is that the inside of a host is a lot different from the outside. For one thing, it's often bigger on the inside than the outside. It's also a virtual environment of its own, with clear boundaries indicating where it starts and the rest of the Matrix, for most intents and purposes, ends.

But let's get back to the social networking host you decide to check into on your way home. The one you're going to does not have any particular entry requirements, so you don't have to endure the virtual equivalent of an entry line. You just zoom to the host, fly over the border, and you're almost ready to go in. On the inside, this particular host looks like a classy perpetual cocktail party, with a sculpted look that swanky lounges in the physical world would kill to have. Before you go into the actual party, you enter a private changing room, where you can make your icon look more appropriate for the party. Maybe pick out a stylish black suit or a little black dress, then add a tie or neckerchief for a splash of color. Get the outfit and your virtual hair set, and you're ready to mingle.

Or maybe a come-as-you-are sports bar is more your style. That host has booths for visitors that change size depending on the number of people in it, so they're al-

ways full but not too cozy. Or possibly games are more your style, joining your friends for board games, or puzzles, or grand adventures. Or you could go to a cat fanciers' clubhouse. Or a movie theater. Or a zero-G simulated spacecraft. The inside of a host is limited only by its owner's preferences and imagination.

Those are the general outlines of the Matrix; now let's dive into what and who you'll encounter.

THE POPULATION OF THE MATRIX

Every icon in the Matrix is one of six things: a persona, a device, a PAN, a file, a host, or a mark. Occasionally, you might also see a datastream, a transfer of data that looks like a thin beam of flickering, multi-colored light. Datastreams are normally filtered out of your Matrix view because if they weren't, they'd be the only thing you would see. If you want, you can dial back on the filtering, but the streams pass by so quickly that you can't tell where they're coming from or going to without snooping on whatever is sending or receiving them, and that would be illegal (and we'd never do anything illegal in the Matrix, right?).

PERSONAS

A persona is more or less what it sounds like: a person in the Matrix. A persona is the combination of a user and a device that gets the user onto the Matrix. The fact that the device has a user overrides the device's normal icon status, turning it into a persona. A persona is usually based on a commlink, cyberdeck, or rigged vehicle or drone, although technomancers are a sort of device-less persona.

Persona icons usually look like the people they represent (although who can resist making a nip here, a tuck there, a facelift, and maybe some nicer hair?), sometimes with a splash of style like flashing eyes, hair coloring, or a tastefully understated aura. There are wilder looks out there, but shadowrunners often shy away from them, as they draw too much attention and can be considered unprofessional. On the other hand, sometimes drawing attention is exactly the point, so base your look on however professional (or distracting) you want for the situation you're in.

There's a lot of variety to be had in persona icons. Just about any creature or animate object is fair game: animals, moving statues, griffins (popular among teens these days for some reason), steam-powered robots, zombies, aliens, just about anything that can walk and talk. The Matrix protocols will stop you from designing an icon for your persona if it isn't intuitively a persona, so you couldn't have an icon that is a dust speck, a Greek column, or a cube, for example. They'll also stop you from making something smaller than adult-dwarf-sized or bigger than adult-troll-sized.



DEVICES

Device icons in the Matrix represent electronic devices in the real world, from your music player to your commlink to your car and beyond. By default, a device's icon looks like the object it represents, in miniature if the real thing is larger than a person. It has controls of some kind, often the same controls it has in meat space, but not necessarily. The Ares Mobmaster riot control vehicle, for example, is famous for its unorthodox Roman chariot icon complete with reins to drive the vehicle.

Basic Matrix protocols require device icons to provide some hint of their real-life function. A firearm's icon looks like a weapon (even if that weapon is a tomahawk, like the icon of the Super Warhawk pistol), a vehicle's icon looks like a vehicle, a lock's icon looks like a lock, a refrigerator looks like a cold box for food, etc. The restrictions on devices aren't as stringent as on personas, as long as form suggests function at a glance.

PANS

Most individuals have multiple electronic devices on them at once, and having icons for each one show up would provide too much visual clutter in the Matrix. Often, what shows up instead is an icon representing an individual's personal area network. This icon often looks similar to the physical device that serves as master for the network, such as a commlink, but individuals will sometimes choose a design or logo that means something to them (such as sports team logos, Concrete Dreams album covers, or corporate designs). Some devices are not merged into the single PAN icon; if an individual is carrying a wireless-enabled gun—or any other wireless device that might kill you—it will show up separately so that it can be identified rapidly. Unless, of course, the user has gone to the trouble to hide that icon, but that'll be covered later.

FILES

A file is a collection of data. It can be a film, a song, a book, financial records, an image, a news article, and so on. It can even be a collection of other files (a "folder"). Files have icons that are smaller than persona icons, typically small enough to fit in the palm of the virtual hand. All file icons have a default appearance in the Matrix—a glowing cube or other polyhedron that can be opened to reveal its contents—but few Matrix users are so lazy and uninspired as to leave their files' icons with such a boring look. A text file might have an icon that is a book, a scroll, a data pad, or even stone tablets. Sound files look like speakers, musical notes or instruments, and so forth, while video might look like a film projector, a trid set, or an old-fashioned movie screen. Again, form suggests function is the rule in the Matrix.

HOSTS

Hosts are virtual places you can go in the Matrix. They have no physical location, being made up of the stuff of the Matrix itself. From the outside, hosts are as big as buildings in the electronic landscape, some of the largest being about the size of Manhattan (a limit imposed by the Corporate Court's Grid Overwatch Division to prevent the virtual sky from being *completely* dominated by the mega-hosts). The size of a host and its virtual altitude are related to its importance and influence in the modern world. Your local Stuffer Shack has a host icon that's roughly the size of the building it's in, and it sits low to the "ground," about on the same level as most of the devices in the Matrix. The Atlantean Foundation's host, on the other hand, floats about a virtual kilometer above the twinkling datascape and is about the size of the biggest skyscraper building in the physical world. Bigger still is the Shiawase Mainframe, which is a slowly rotating sphere about a hundred kilometers up and almost twenty kilometers in diameter.

The host icons themselves look like just about anything the owners want. If you look up into the Matrix night you'll see corporate logos, lavish building façades, and constellations of hosts. You might recognize the Seattle ACHE's ziggurat shape, or the mother-and-child logo of Humanis, or (if you have access) the three orbiting spheres of JackPoint.

Inside a host is a completely different story. A host can be (and usually is) bigger on the inside than on the outside. A host's internal sculpting is internally regulated, so while outsiders' icons conform to standard Matrix requirements, the host itself doesn't have to. The host can be a maze, an open space, have strange gravity or none at all, be hot, cold, loud, quiet, and everything in between. Most hosts stick close to reality to make it easier and more comfortable for its patrons, but some offer stranger or even downright bizarre sculpting.

MATRIX AUTHENTICATION RECOGNITION KEYS

A Matrix authentication recognition key, or *mark* if you're not a fan of rattling off fancy technological nomenclature, is how the Matrix keeps track of which personas have access to which devices, files, hosts, and other personas. Marks look like, well, marks—small personalized labels or tattoos on whichever icons you place them. Your marks can look like anything you like, as long as they're small, fit onto other icons, and have some thematic link to you or your icon.

For example, let's say you're using the icon of a neon green octopus. Your marks might look like neon green sucker marks. If you had a cowboy icon, your marks might look like cattle brands. If your icon were a vintage movie star, your marks might look like lipstick kisses.

Normally, marks are invisible to anyone except the person who placed them. To see other marks on an icon



HOST: DANTE'S INFERNO

Dante's Inferno is a premiere nightclub with locations in Seattle and Hong Kong. Its motif matches its name, with nine levels of dance floors descending from the entrance downward. What makes it unique is that its Matrix host is a perfect match to the physical locations. Images of patrons in the real world are projected into the host, and virtual visitors in the host can be seen in augmented reality by the physical patrons. While Dante's is in three different locations (two physical and one virtual), all three places overlap.

To make this work, Dante's host mimics reality. Its virtual physics match real physics, and flying is strictly forbidden. Additionally, the host blocks persona icons that don't look at least mostly like the user they represent. Also off-limits are persona icons that look like damned souls (reserved for staff) and demons or devils (which are security and IC). The host's simsense library lets VR patrons order almost any food and drink in existence, although watch out for the hard stuff if you're using hot-sim—they mix those drinks strong.

(or your own icon), you have to analyze it. Seeing a mark does not automatically tell you who put it there, though. Usually, you can only recognize a mark if you have already seen the persona responsible for the mark, or if you're familiar with his or her marking style.

Marks are routinely invited and given for normal, everyday, legal use of various services. They act as keys, permission slips, invitations, and account privileges on every icon in the virtual world. For example, the Seattle Public Library invites over 50,000 marks per day for its VR books, films, trideos, and other items in its collection. While the great percentage of mark traffic is legitimate, hackers try to get marks illegally to facilitate their own plans.

THE MATRIX: FOR YOU AND AGAINST YOU

It's important to remember that the Matrix exists to be used. That means that for the most part, the look and feel of various hosts is geared toward being approachable, not putting up obstacles that might prevent people from doing their work or conducting their business. It is a safe environment, with security built into its operating systems and protocols. Ever since the recent change in Matrix protocols, the structure is monitored by the Grid Overwatch Division of the Corporate Court, who act as a sort of Matrix police force devoted to protecting users (including innocent children, natch) from online predators, piracy, and fraud.

That's the corp brochure version of the Matrix, anyway. The real motives behind the Matrix, particularly its current structure, are profit and control. The megacorporations and the Grid Overwatch Division have been working on "The Matrix Problem" for decades, searching for a holy grail of Matrix design that will let them maximize their profits while minimizing their risks, and they may have finally found something close. The system is set up so that the corps always have the advantage, hackers always are at a disadvantage, and everybody else is stuck somewhere between.

One of the keys to the new system is the network of overlapping grids, which need to be understood if you plan on doing any serious Matrix work.

GRIDS

If you want to get on the Matrix, you need a grid. A grid is what a Matrix service provider uses to connect you to the digital world. When you connect to the Matrix, you are on the grid of your provider, much the same way an early 21st century cell phone user would be on their phone company's network.

Different grids cover customers in different areas; there are global grids provided by each of the Big Ten and local grids sponsored in part by local governments. Accessing these grids costs money, and each of them presents a slightly different view of the Matrix (although the inside of hosts look the same no matter what grid you're on, as that's controlled by the hosts). It's all still the "real" Matrix, of course, but the icons that belong to your grid's owner look a bit bigger and more shiny, and the advertising is slanted in ways that benefit the grid's owners.

For example, when you're connected to the Matrix through Seattle's local grid, Emerald City, the normally black Matrix sky is tinged a gemstone green, and the hosts that are closely related to Seattle are a bit brighter. NeoNET icons are also a bit larger when you're using Emerald City, because the main sponsor/owner of the local grid is NeoNET. If you were on NeoNET's global grid, you'd see much the same thing, without the emphasis on Seattle or the green sky.

If you can't pay for access to a grid, well, you're not completely out of luck. The corps would never have been able to get away with completely throttling access to the Matrix, so there's a public grid provided by underfunded non-profits, outdated satellites, and the occasional good Samaritan who's willing to share a wireless access point or two. The public grid is slow, low-resolution, and unreliable, but at least it's globally accessible. It's the Barrens of the Matrix.

As you'd expect, the grid you're on says something about your social standing. You might find notes like "Posted from the Renraku Grid" tacked onto the end of status updates. Corps market their own grids heavily, offering perks and free commlink upgrades every year or two. People on the public grid are viewed as



second-class citizens. High-class hosts advertise “No public-grid connections allowed” to show how their clientele are elite.

You can “hop” between grids, but which grids you can access depend on where you are in the world. You can get on the public or any global grid from anywhere on the planet. Local grids can only be accessed if you’re physically in the grid’s service area. For example, if you’re on Netzwerks Berlin, you could see and interact with a commlink that is on Seattle’s Emerald City, but you wouldn’t be able to hop to Emerald City grid itself.

LOOKING DOWN: GRID OVERWATCH DIVISION

The Grid Overwatch Division, or GOD for short, is responsible for securing the Matrix from hackers and other unwanted intruders, especially the parts connecting the various hosts and users (security with hosts falls more on the heads of the host owners). Each grid has its own sub-division (even the public grid), with its own financing and operatives. A sub-division (referred to as a demiGOD) watches its entire grid, keeping an eye out for misbehaving users and illegal activity. The grids have a warning system built-in, a subtle but telltale ripple that occurs when the automated software detects illegal or unauthorized use of the grid. It’s not much, but GOD is watching, and if they see enough ripples to find and identify a hacker, they can trace his physical location and boot him off the Matrix using the mechanisms built into each grid.

This is not to say the megacorps have made nice and are now holding hands singing Kumbayah. Far from it; the Matrix is an even hotter intercorporate battleground than ever, it’s just that the AAAs want to keep their battleground to themselves. While the demiGODs are separate and even competitive (the *Crash of the Titans* reality trid show is new but surging in popularity), they are still part of GOD and highly cooperative against hackers. They share their information in real-time, often faster than hackers can hop to another grid. Their operatives, called G-men (complete with 1930s-era FBI persona icons), technically only have jurisdiction over their assigned grid, but they can request and receive clearance, authority, and cooperation from the demiGOD of another grid in seconds during an investigation. The G-men investigate cases that aren’t lengthy enough or blatant enough to leave sufficient ripples for the demiGODs to track through standard overwatch alone. They also handle cases where a hacker has been kicked off the grid, supporting any security or law enforcement forces that the grid’s owner wants to send against the hacker in the physical world.

AUGMENTED WORLD

So far much of the discussion of the Matrix and its collected icons has focused on how things look in virtual

reality, but that’s not how most people interact with the Matrix on a daily or hourly basis. Most people who use VR use it to visit hosts, view entertainment, or play games, but a lot of people find the disembodied sensation of virtual reality to be uncomfortable, or even disturbing. The majority of people interact with the Matrix in augmented reality, using their commlink.

A commlink is combination computer, smartphone, media player, passport, wallet, credit card, Matrix browser, chip reader, GPS navigator, digital camera, and portable gaming device. And possibly a few other things, if you’ve got a really nice one. It’s got all of the necessary software already loaded, but unlike a cyberdeck it has no space for cyberprograms or other hacking tools.

Most models are small enough to fit in your pocket, on a belt clip, or on your wrist. If a pocket version isn’t your style, commlinks are available in a number of other forms, including headwear, glasses, jewelry, cranial implant, belt buckles, and other accessories.

LIFE WITH A COMMLINK

Your commlink does more than just sit in your pocket (or on your head). It interprets the Matrix around you to give you extra information and capability that can be useful in civilian life and vital in the shadows. This is done with **augmented reality**, or AR. AR overlays information on things in real-life in a way only you can perceive.

Let’s say you’re walking down the street in Downtown Seattle’s shopping district. Your commlink may seem like it’s sitting quietly, but in fact it’s quite busy. It’s regularly communicating with other devices and hosts around you, sharing information about your location and your movement. The other devices and hosts are sending information right back, telling you who else is out there, what stores are having sales, what movies are playing at which theaters, and so on. If you look at your commlink screen, you’d have all that information overlaid on an image of where you are, providing a mini heads-up display. But let’s say you live in the *current* decade, and you don’t interact with the world around you with just a screen. You may have glasses, or sunglasses, or contacts, or goggles, or cybereyes, or *something* that puts this information right in your field of vision. Overlaid on the world are icons telling you that shoes like the ones you bought last year are now half off, and there’s a dotted line leading you to the theater showing the sequel to the trid show you thought was wiz, and the people walking down the street are occasionally highlighted by glowing auras—nice blue ones representing your friends, glaring red ones telling you that someone you know and should be avoiding is coming close. You have more than just your natural vision—you’ve got everything in the database you’re carrying with you.

The civilized world adapted quickly to augmented reality, mostly because it’s easier than printing things on paper or making signs. **Augmented reality objects**, or



AROs (pronounced “arrows”), are used to show information and decorate spaces on the cheap. Stores have their logos blazoned in 3D above their door, restaurants offer animated menus complete with tantalizing images of their food, street names hover over every intersection, decorators use AR objects to spruce up interiors, all viewable in AR for anyone who has the capability, which is pretty much everybody. The unintended side effect is that things can look a bit dingy when you turn off your AR display, but that’s the price of progress.

DIRECT NEURAL INTERFACE

A direct neural interface, or DNI, connects your brain to electronic devices. Direct neural interface (along with a sim module) is required for VR use, but DNI is also useful for AR in that you don’t need any additional gear like earbuds or an image link to see or hear augmented reality objects.

How do you sign up? You get DNI by wearing trodes, or having an implanted datajack, commlink, or cyberdeck. And if you’re using a sim module along with your DNI, you can get a sort of “super AR mode” where you can also feel, smell, and taste your AR experience.

You don’t have to be an expert to make an ARO. If you want to send directions to your place from the party, you can draw a line on an AR map and share it with your friends. If you want to point out a person in a crowd for a buddy, you can make an ARO highlighting that person and send it. You can choose which of your AROs are seen by which people, so you can keep it private or, if you’re feeling impish, put vulgar AROs on RFID tags and scatter them around town for all to see. Of course, other people can filter out the AROs they don’t want to see, and so can you.

Augmented reality isn’t just visual information, either. You can hear audio AROs if you have earbuds or a cybereal. AROs can be tactile if you have a haptic device like AR gloves. Engineers are still working on putting physical scent into AR displays, and we’d rather not talk about AR flavors. On the other hand, if you use AR with a direct neural interface like trodes or an implant, you can use all of your senses to view AR without any extra devices.

Most of what you keep on your commlink are files, this includes music, your SIN (fake or otherwise), licenses (also fake or otherwise), maps, email messages, your contact book, AROs, and so on. These files are visible to people who can see your commlink in the Matrix, so most people keep all of their files in a protected folder.

MATRIX ACTIONS FOR THE NON-HACKER

So you’re not the team’s hacker, but you’ve got this commlink on your character sheet. What is it good for, you may ask? A lot of things, but not so many that you need to memorize this entire chapter. Here’s a short list of Matrix rules and actions you can use to get all you can out of your commlink.

YOUR GRID

You should know which grid you’re using, but unless you’ve bought an upgrade, your grid is dictated by your lifestyle:

Low or lower: public grid

Middle: local grid

High: global grid—pick one of the Big Ten megacorps to be your grid provider.

Luxury: you can be on any grid you want, chummer.

YOUR COMMLINK’S MATRIX ATTRIBUTES

Your gamemaster will occasionally ask for one of two Matrix attributes: Data Processing or (if your hacker isn’t doing her job) Firewall. Unless your commlink is a custom job, both of these attributes are equal to your commlink’s rating. Just keep a note by your commlink entry in your character sheet’s gear section.

FIVE MATRIX ACTIONS

As a typical Matrix user, there are only a few Matrix actions you might want to take a look at:

Change Icon: If you’re tooling around in VR, you’ll need this action from p. 238 to get the look you want.

Edit File: If you’re going to do any text, audio, or video editing, or you just like to write reports, you might want to know about the Edit File action, p. 239. You also use this action to protect files on your commlink, which is what seasoned shadowrunners like to call a Good Idea.

Full Matrix Defense: If your commlink or any connected devices are under attack, and you’re not sure what to do, just turn on all of your commlink’s active defenses with this action, p. 240.

Matrix Search: After communication, googling is the biggest advantage to having the Matrix in your pocket. Start your search on p. 241.

Send Message: This action will probably be the main use for your commlink. It’s not complicated, but you can read up on it on p. 242.



So where do you store all of the things you want to keep? Pictures from your Aunt Edna's wedding, credit information, your SIN, every book and movie you've bought, all the programs you might want to run—all of it fits on your commlink (or cyberdeck if you prefer). In fact, every device on the Matrix has a massive amount of storage space, unthinkable amounts by early 21st century standards. Your gamemaster might decide that a device is too small or low-grade or a file so massively large that a problem comes up, but such problems are extremely rare. Even if it does, the entire world is wireless, so you shouldn't have trouble finding an alternate storage location.

SHADOWRUNNING WITH A COMMLINK

Your commlink could be the most important piece of gear you own. It keeps you in contact with the rest of your team, even if you're scattered across the entire sprawl. You can share information like images, floor plans, and tactical instructions almost instantly, even in the middle of a firefight. It gives you AR displays for your surroundings, not just what other people put there but AROs created by your companions, which come in handy when your shaman tags a mage among the enemy security forces or a spotter drone maps the location of all the guard dogs it can find. A good commlink can also protect your own devices (including your gun) from opposing hackers. Some shadowrunners prefer to go without one, but most agree that the commlink is right up there with ammo in terms of usefulness.

THE DIGITAL UNDERGROUND

Not everyone is content to surf the Matrix in peace. Some users are protestors, flying in the face of the megacorps' power over the grids. Some are curious, poking at secure hosts and pushing boundaries that GOD and its demiGODs would prefer remain untouched. Some are angel-headed hipsters trying to find some connection to the starry dynamo of the virtual night. Some want to free the flow of information from its corporate shackles. Some just have a habit of ignoring the rules.

All these digital delinquents are known as *hackers*. In the heavily computerized world of the 2070s, a shadow-running team can go a long way with a hacker on their side. Hackers can pry at secrets, control devices, and even destroy electronics from a distance, not to mention defend against opposing hackers and spiders. Hackers come in two main flavors: deckers and technomancers.

DECKERS

A decker is someone who uses a cyberdeck (hence the name) to break the rules of the Matrix. A cyberdeck—

usually just called a deck—is like a commlink with some extra features. It is a bit bigger than a commlink, about the size of a small tablet or a spiral-bound notebook, or a pair of playing card decks. Its specialized functions and questionable legality make it far more expensive than ordinary commlinks. The cyberdeck has advanced electronics and firmware based on reverse-engineered protocols used in Matrix security. In short, a cyberdeck is the tool you need to be a hacker.

A deck can perform all of the functions of a commlink, but its primary purpose is hacking in the Matrix. Cyberdecks have a built-in sim module because they are so often used in VR, so a decker only needs a datajack or other DNI device to make that connection, instead of needing the full sim implant.

Deckers are far and away the most common type of hacker. They come to the profession out of necessity, a desire for profit, or a sense of mischief. Or all three. They are heavily dependent on their skills, and they need good gear to make sure their skills shine. They can usually maintain and even build their own electronic devices.

TECHNOMANCERS

Technomancers are able to interface both in AR and VR without the aid of a sim module, image link, or any other electronic devices. Strictly speaking, technomancers aren't magical, but they're just as mysterious as magicians were after the Awakening. The origins of a technomancer's power and how she makes things happen are still unknown to science. Like magicians, technomancers make up a tiny fraction of the population of the Earth. Also like magicians, they are generally distrusted and misunderstood, sometimes to the point of paranoia.

Not all technomancers are hackers, but to the general public they might as well be. In the media, the word technomancer almost always means hacker, and the word "hacker" means cyber-terrorist. Many national and local governments require technomancers to register with the authorities, even if they have little talent or power. The perception of technomancers is that they are able to control a person's electronics, reading files at will, breaching every moment of privacy. They say that technomancers can see you through the devices in your home, trace your children, ruin your reputation and credit rating, launch nuclear missiles, drain your bank accounts, and steal your identity. As a result of the paranoia, most technomancers keep their identity under wraps, sometimes hiding their abilities behind dummy commlinks.

Technomancers are rare, but they have amazing abilities in the Matrix, doing things that by most reports should be impossible. They use their powers and abilities to bend the Matrix to their will and summon digital servants. They are generally not the figures public paranoia makes them out to be—but they have enough power to make it seem that the paranoia has at least one foot in reality.



(MIS)USING THE MATRIX

The first step in hacking the Matrix is conceiving and understanding what you might be able to accomplish. The example below provides a narrative of someone making their illicit way through the Matrix. It'll show you some of the things that are possible. Once we've set that up, we'll show you how to do the things it shows.

There's a lot that goes on in the Matrix. It's a big place, bigger than the real world if you include all of the hosts. It's also a very versatile place. Everybody in the civilized world (aside from a few barely worth mentioning since, you know, they don't show up on the Matrix) has some basic computer skills. They can surf the Matrix, search for information, send messages to one another, and use basic AR interfaces. That doesn't make them Matrix experts, and it definitely doesn't make them hackers. To really walk the virtual walk, you need a lot more.

EXAMPLE

BK relaxes at a small table outside a Downtown café. For Seattle, it's a nice morning: The sun peeks through the clouds occasionally, and he'd be able to see Mt. Rainier from his table if he wasn't surrounded by skyscrapers. He's in AR mode, with device icons superimposed on his vision. Right now he's filtered out most of the icons, but since the waitress hasn't protected her commlink's privacy, he's flipping through her music collection in a little virtual window that is linked by a pointer to a pouch at her hip. Seeing an album he likes (and having little respect for the law), he sleazes a mark onto her commlink, and a little bee sting that only he can see appears on its icon. The mark flashes a little as it helps him copy the music file from her commlink. He knows this bit of mischief could be discovered by the Grid Overwatch Division, but he doesn't care. He's already enjoying the first cut of the album.

The bank across the street opens for business, and BK gets to work. He has been waiting for the bank's employees to arrive and take files out of the archives of the bank's host for the workday. Now that the files are out of the archives, he can access them if he can get into the bank's heavily protected private host.

He crosses the street and melts into the alley behind the bank. There is an emergency exit here with a maglock that is slaved to the bank's WAN. That means the lock is protected by the bank's host, but it also makes the lock a point of vulnerability. He plugs a data cable from his deck to the lock's universal port and sits against the wall, flipping to VR.

BK's icon, a swarm of bees (well, a dark ball with bees flitting around it; he'll get a better icon after this run), appears next to the lock in the Matrix. He sees the dark Matrix sky but barely notices it, concentrating instead on the lock and the gothic monolith of the bank host floating behind it. He ignores the

CRACKING THE MATRIX SPINE

The Matrix is a controlled environment, with corporate owners wanting to keep things moving at their pace, according to their specifications. If something suits their goals, it moves through the Matrix just fine, encountering few problems or hang-ups. If it doesn't meet their goals, they shut it down as fast as they can before it causes too much trouble.

Hackers don't meet their goals, and they are paid to create trouble. They're the fly in the ointment, the fart in the cathedral, the droog in the milk bar. They're chaos amidst carefully cultivated order, and they're fast and nimble if they want to stay free and keep their synapses at their normal temperature.

Hackers can get an important advantage with their gear and equipment, but that's something anyone with a decent pile of nuyen can buy. For the true hacker, it's not the gear that sets them apart—it's how they use it. Their

bank's firewalls surrounding the lock, attacking the lock through his direct link. Another bee sting appears, this time on the lock, and in a microsecond's flicker, an identical mark appears on the lock's master, the bank host.

The hacker grins as much as a swarm of bees can as he flits into the host. On the inside, the host looks like a large modern office, occasionally pulsing with the blue light of local datastreams, complete with cubicles and (for some reason) restrooms. Icons walk busily back and forth, which BK rightly assumes means no flying allowed. BK changes his icon to something a bit less conspicuous: a low-level sarariman in a dark, conservative business suit. He then starts looking for the file he wants. Meanwhile, a stone-faced security guard (Patrol IC with a socially acceptable skin) is checking out every icon, looking for users that don't belong. BK is running silent, and the IC misses him ... this time.

BK finds an old-fashioned manila folder that is actually a file listing all of the patrons who have safe deposit boxes at the bank. It's the one he wants. He starts to copy it to his deck but notices a tiny padlock hanging from the corner of the file. The list is protected, and he'll have to remove the protection before he can copy it. That's going to take time. He glances at his watch, actually looking at a readout of the estimated time until the local demiGOD finds him: he's got some time, but not as much as he'd like. He would have more time if he hadn't stolen that album before the run, but he's really enjoying track three, and he should be okay as long as nothing goes wrong.

He reaches for the lock, firing up his cracking utilities, and something goes wrong. The host has undoubtedly already marked him and will be launching IC any second. Any second later, a three-meter-tall gorilla with the head of a lion dramatically



quick thinking, their imagination, and their relentless coding skills put them above the competition, letting them dance their way through a Matrix that's constantly trying to force them to color inside the lines.

Good hackers start with good skills (p. 226). Without those, they're just another idiot who spent too much money on electronic gear they don't know how to use. Once they have the skills that set them apart, they need the right gear or their skills are going to come up short. Knowing the Matrix attributes and how they can help or limit them (p. 226) will make sure they get the most out of their skills. Armed with this knowledge, they can choose the cyberdeck (p. 227) that's right for them. The good stuff isn't cheap. Hell, even the not-so-good stuff will set you back a pile of nuyen, so hackers need to learn how their deck might get damaged and how they can avoid having it turn into a useless brick of plastic and rare earth elements (p. 228).

Once they have their skills and gear ready to rock, hackers need to decide how they're going to access the Matrix (**User Modes**, p. 229) and how to use the structure of the Matrix to make the right connections (p. 230). If they don't understand the different grids involved and how to get on them (p. 233), they'll be behind the competition. They also have to understand what they're seeing—which icons are devices, which are personae, and why it matters (p. 234). They also need to be able to see the things they are not supposed to see, while also keeping themselves out of sight when necessary (**Matrix Perception**, p. 235).

When it's time to get down to business, hackers show they're the alpha dog in the traditional way—by

marking their territory. Placing marks (p. 236) on the devices they want to control gets them the access they are not supposed to have. Once your marks are in place, it's the hacker's time to shine and take the actions to make the Matrix do the weird and unexpected things their team needs (p. 237). They're not alone in there, though, so there's always the chance they'll have to go to battle against IC or a security spider (p. 247).

HOST: JACKPOINT

JackPoint is a Matrix host for shadowrunners, designed and administered by shadowrunners. While it isn't the only one of its kind, it is the best known and most widely trusted of all shadow sites. The host itself appears as a set of independent rooms floating in a vast grid that is an homage to the old-school style of decking. The rules are pretty loose in the host, as befits its "be yourself" attitude toward visitors. Most of the decor is abstract, and a lot of the icons are simple geometric solids with easy-to-read labels floating nearby. Some areas, like the cybercafe and the Museum of Shadowrunning, have a more styled sculpting, with visitors asked to obey some semblance of the laws of physics to maintain a slightly more normal atmosphere. The most restrictions are in place on the Memorial, where strict silence, gravity, and limits on outlandish iconography are enforced among the monuments and epitaphs to fallen shadowrunners.

EXAMPLE, CONT.

drops from the ceiling. His deck helpfully identifies it as Killer IC, and BK swears loudly. With the level of security on this host, Killer IC is only the beginning of his troubles. With any luck, he thinks, the bank's security spider is having a long breakfast this morning. BK's team needs that file, but now it's not going to be easy to obtain.

With a swipe, BK rubs out the mark the host put on him, noting grimly that it looks like a claw mark before it dissolves. Even though the mark's off, the host has spotted him, and that means its IC knows who and where he is. The gorilla-lion IC program hits him with a torso-sized fist that sends the decker staggering, but he's not defeated by a long shot. His deck starts overheating, but he feels it as a dull ache in VR.

BK waves an arm and digital smoke appears all around him, hiding him from the host and its IC. The host launches more IC, a large bloodhound-shaped Track program. In a way, the hacker thinks, the Track IC is more dangerous than the Killer. If the bank finds out that BK's meat body is just outside, security goons will be on him in seconds.

The gorilla-lion is looking to the Patrol IC for guidance when the stoic security guard is struck out of nowhere by a massive swarm of bees. The Patrol IC lurches, jerks, and explodes into a

million motes of light that slowly die out. The Patrol IC was the only way the host could find him, at least as long as he doesn't screw up again. BK has just enough time to laugh before a new stone-faced security guard begins to coalesce as the host launches a new copy of the Patrol IC.

Working quickly, he tries to smash the file's tiny lock. Again it proves too tough. The backlash from the host's firewall slams up his arm and into his deck, which crackles slightly in real life. This is one tough file protection. The host finishes launching the new Patrol IC, so BK tries one more time, slamming into the lock with all his virtual strength. This time, the lock gives way and vanishes. The Patrol IC starts searching for the intruder with inhuman resolve. BK copies the file and starts to jack out, just in time to see the security spider, a samurai wielding a glowing sword, enter the host from his long breakfast to join the fight—joining it too late.

The sudden jolt caused by the dump from virtual reality to actual reality painfully jars BK, and he stumbles to his feet. It's not the cleanest getaway, but it's one he can walk away from. The decker heads home as nonchalantly as he can to share his findings and repair his damaged deck, leaving bank security to try to figure out how he did it.



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STORM FRONT

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All this tension has been building up, and in *Storm Front*, it breaks. *Storm Front* provides background and updates on these and other plotlines changing the shape of the Sixth World. The shadows are shifting, and runners need to move fast if they want to earn a paycheck—or if they want to keep from being crushed as the powers of the world slug it out. The world is changing, but some things remain the same. Power will corrupt. Money will flow to those who already have it. And shadowrunners will scramble to make a living without selling their soul.



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