

Khadim Nasser's Shadowrun 4th

Things I have house ruled and things I have not.

I have very few house rules. This is for the three golden reasons: I am lazy, a lot of what looks broken turns out to play very well once you actually try it, and I am lazy.

The following house rules are things that I have found necessary to achieve realism or balance. I recommend them to other GMs.

House Rules I:

1. Characters may not take more than one Sprint action in a Combat Turn. (Sprinting Rules, SR4, pg. 138).

With one Sprint action allowed, the rules closely reflect real world performances.

Characters with multiple initiative passes can reach absurd speeds however. It does not fit that an average character should be able to shatter world records because they have an implant that heightens their reflexes. I believe that the allowance of more than one Sprint action is an oversight on the developers' part.

2. Lifting rules are amended as follows:

30kg per point of strength overhead, plus 5kg per success on Bod+Str

55kg per point of strength straight lift, plus 10kg per success on Bod+Str

The RAW lifting rules seem to have been designed to represent real world maximums as the result of very good dice rolls. That is fine except that the system presented causes drastically reduced lifted weights on typical dice rolls. In real life, the weight you can lift does not swing by 30-40% from attempt to attempt. The adjustment above preserves the dice roll element, but shifts most of the result onto a fixed formula to reduce the absurd variance. It is calculated so that someone with Strength 6, Body 6, would be around the current world records for weight-lifting.

The following house rules are not necessarily recommended as they affect the flavour of the game somewhat, but I have found them to work very well for me. A method to use if the GM desires.

House Rules II:

1. All Edge begins at the minimum at character creation (2 for humans, 1 for metahumans) and cannot be purchased higher with either BP or karma. Edge increases automatically at the following levels of karma earning: 10, 30, 70, 150, 270, 590 (i.e. the amount needed for the next point goes 10, 20, 40... etc.).

This has several positive effects. Firstly, it enforces a more gritty and realistic approach at the start of a campaign when it is important to establish atmosphere and style, it prevents the absurd theatrics of a player creating a six Edge starting character that lives by luck. It rewards intelligent play. Secondly, it provides a slightly more steady progression of survivability as characters develop and a nice feeling of achievement over time. It just works very well all round, I find.

The following are clarifications. Things that can be a little subjective and which not all GMs will agree on, but which I think most do and which don't contradict the RAW (imo).

Clarifications:

1. The most common human attribute is 2. Some people say that the average is 3, perhaps because they are used to systems where that is true, or because they are used to thinking in terms of dice rolls. Average is not a fixed mathematical term and can actually be used to describe the Mean, the Median and the Mode of a set of numbers. Mean is where you add up all the numbers and divide by how many there are. Median is the half-way point of the range and Mode is the most common value. None of these are the same as each other. There needs to be more room at the top of the scale than there is at the bottom because most people don't reach their maximum potential. It's pretty clear that the average person is not half as strong as the strongest person. They aren't normally even close to half as strong. Same with other areas of ability. If you have a ninety people who can run the 100m in 12 seconds, and ten people who can run it in 10seconds, then 90% of people are below average. Make sense? The average score is higher than the most common score. In play and during character creation, making this clear has had a very positive effect in my experience. Players are a lot more willing to have characters with scores of 3, or even 2 once they realise that 3 is still not bad. Consider 2 to be the strength of the average man, 3 to be the strength of a dock worker. Consider 2 to be the average Logic of most people, 3 to be the Logic of your typical computer programmer. None of this applies to skills which have a clearly defined scale already.

Obviously there are a lot of things that have not been house-ruled. But some things are worth saying they have not been house-ruled because there is a temptation to do so. The following are things that look problematic, but which either aren't, or can be resolved without recourse to house-rules.

Things That Have NOT Been House-Ruled:

1. Indirect Combat Spells

The drain of indirect combat spells has not been adjusted to fit to make them more worthwhile in comparison to Direct Combat Spells. Indirect Combat spells have a number of advantages, principally the ability to affect targets that you cannot see by catching them in the blast area and the ability to damage targets with strong counterspelling. Damage from Indirect Combat spells must be staged all the way down to nothing to escape damage whilst a Direct Combat spell need only be resisted in order to avoid all damage. The effect of this is to make it sometimes very difficult to affect opponents with counterspelling.

Additionally, the elemental effects of Indirect Combat spells can be very useful, e.g. the effect of Electricity on drones, the knock-down effect of Blast or the incendiary effect of Fire.

Direct Combat spells often appear superior to Indirect due to a game being played at a high level. At lower Force levels, Indirect Combat spells can compare much more favourably, but it is the nature of Shadowrun that not all options are equal. Some things are better than others in the right circumstance and Direct vs. Indirect Combat spells are one such example. Making them equivalent simply reduces the variety of the game for no benefit. It is not as if players are forced to choose one or the other.

2. Direct Combat Spells

Direct Combat spells are sometimes house-ruled to be less effective, perhaps by allowing a damage resistance roll. This is normally done because they are perceived to be over-powered in comparison to firearms. The general principle of combat spells is that you get some advantages in return for reduced reliability / sustainability. It doesn't matter if on average a magician takes no drain from a medium force Powerbolt, if she fires them off as often as a samurai fires off shots from an SMG, she will get hurt. That is a balance.