

SIMSENSE

HOUSE RULES FOR SHADOWRUN 5TH EDITION

FOREWORD

It's all Vincent Baker's fault. Him and his Powered by the Apocalypse engine.

Shadowrun has been one of my favorite role-playing games since I started playing it in December of 1989. It had cyberpunk, elves, magic, decking (or hacking if you'd rather), and the part that really fired my imagination, rigging. It was me and Gandalf, the cranky old rigger with his armed Harley Scorpion (named Shadowfax, of course) and his reliable Ares Dragon (which I'm sure had a name that I don't recall) for over a year.

I've played every edition since as a runner or as a gamemaster. I was so intrigued by 4th Edition's wireless Matrix that I asked to write for the game. It was under FanPro at that time, and after the usual freelancer preliminaries of submitting writing treatments and signing NDAs, I got to work on the newest splatbooks for Shadowrun.

A half dozen years later and some of my friends wanted to try out a new game called Dungeon World. It was a fantasy game in the style of Dungeons and Dragons, but it used the Powered by the Apocalypse engine to move the narrative forward. Suddenly, I was playing a game that moved at the speed of narrative. A number of games followed suit with faster game play, and suddenly role-playing games entered a new age of lighter mechanics.

So I guess it's really the fault of Dungeon World and its creators, Sage LaTorra and Adam Koebel. Apologies to Mr. Baker.

Not to much later, I was excited to be invited to help create the 5th Edition of Shadowrun on its rules committee. All of us members—artists, writers, game designers, and industry veterans—brought a lot of different ideas to the table. A lot of those ideas were discarded, which is what happens to most of the ideas that come into any design process, but a few things were universally agreed upon. Shadowrun 5 needed to be a good experience for the players, keep that dystopian, cynical, noir, cheerfully nihilistic cyberpunk theme that makes Shadowrun known and loved, and let people roll great big handfuls of dice—this last design goal was actually set down first at the very first rules meeting.

Another directive from The Powers that Be was that Shadowrun would not follow the trend of simpler games, but keep that rich set of game mechanics that gamers like to call crunch. “Streamline the game,” they said, “but keep that five-point-two liter V10 engine that gives players the chance to squeeze every die, every hit, every Initiative point they can out of the game.” I think we succeeded; it might corner a bit slow (to abuse the metaphor further), but it's got raw power off the line and in the straightaway.

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I began to wonder if there was a lighter way to play Shadowrun. I pitched a narrative Shadowrun game, an early version of this document in fact, but I never got a reply. But since I'm in this biz because I like to design games, I decided to move forward with this set of house rules and release it as the work of a Shadowrun fan.

It's important to point out that as I write this, I am aware that there will be a rules-light version of Shadowrun called *Anarchy*. This game is not that game, nor is it intended to compete. I haven't seen *Anarchy* yet, but I'm told it's based on Catalyst's very fun Cue System (if you haven't taken a Cue game for a spin, I highly recommend it). *Anarchy* probably doesn't do the same things that these rules do, but it might, and it might do those things better, so check it out when you get the chance.

So I wrote these house rules for the fun of it, which hopefully shows in my writing style and in the footnotes from a JackPointer who shall remain nameless. If you're a fan of light RPGs, I hope you like it. If you prefer your games on the crunchy side, this might not interest you at all. But I definitely want to acknowledge that this all started when two ideas collided, so I'd like to thank those who created the *World games I mentioned already, and everybody who worked on Shadowrun over the years.

That out of the way, I'd like to add that I'm a game designer more than I'm a writer, and I'm a writer far more than I am an artist, art director, graphic designer, marketer, or any of the other things you need to be able to do to put out a role-playing game these days. Apologies for the fact that this document is missing all of those things. I'd also like to acknowledge that I wrote this for fun, so I'm sure I've missed a few things; I'm open to the idea of improving these rules either myself or with others.

Best of luck, chummers!

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INTRODUCTION

Simsense is the name of a bunch of extensive house rules for *Shadowrun, 5th Edition* (or *SR5*). You can't play the former without the latter, so it's not really a stand-alone game. The idea is to apply the rules of *Shadowrun* a bit differently, making the mechanics a lighter experience for the players, keep that dystopian, cynical, noir, cheerfully nihilistic cyberpunk theme that makes the Shadowrun universe known and loved, and let players roll great big handfuls of dice.¹

WHAT YOU DO AND DON'T NEED

These rules use a lot of what's in *SR5*. You'll still need pretty much all of your character sheet. Spells are pretty much the same. Some of the gear works a bit differently, though, and there's a section

¹ Hoi, chummer. I'm a shadowrunner and member of JackPoint. You've probably read lots of my experience and wisdom in Shadowrun books. I'm here partly to make fun of the author and make you keep looking at the bottom of the page, but mostly to be enthusiastically helpful to you, the reader. You're welcome.

on that later on. You won't need limits.² A few of the rules are changed a bit, like the Rule of One and the Rule of Six, Edge use, Karma gains, and actions.

You GMs won't need your screens. Dice pool modifiers are out. You also won't be rolling dice, so you can focus on the story, action, and NPCs. Initiative is gone, which probably seems a bit weird but you won't have to track it in combat. NPC stats are streamlined, but not entirely done away with, so you still have a little paperwork.

There are also a few new mechanics. The GM uses *dreks* to represent what hits the shadowrunner's collective fan. There are also *beats* to measure the narrative and make sure lots of things are happening all at once. Most of the news stuff is for the GM, so null perspiration if you're just here to play.

PERFORMING ACTIONS

Actions in these house rules aren't predefined like they are in the normal game. Instead, they are called for by the gamemaster.

As you narrate what your character does in the world, the gamemaster will ask for you to take an *action*. This happens whenever you do something that is opposed by someone or something else or when your action may have negative or unforeseen consequences.

When she calls for an action, the GM will tell you what dice pool to roll.³

Rolling your Dice Pool

Once you have your dice pool collected, give them a shake and roll them on the table, calculating hits the usual way. The thresholds in these house rules are the same for every roll, and they look like this:

6 or more hits: You completely succeed with your action.

3–5 hits: You get success at a cost, an unpleasant choice, or a partial success.

1–2 hits: You fail, and something happens, but on the bright side, you get 1 Edge back.

0 hits: You glitch, and something really bad happens, but you get all your Edge back.

One way to think about the result of your roll is as a combination of how well you do *and* how well your opposition does. Take the classic example of a street samurai (the player character) fighting hand-to-hand with a razor-decked street ganger. The player character's single roll determines what happens with both of the combatants' attacks. If she rolls 6+ hits, she succeeds and the ganger fails. If she's less lucky and gets 3–5 hits, she succeeds but so does the ganger.⁴ If she's having a bad dice day and gets 1 or 2 hits, she fails and the ganger succeeds. And then there's the critical glitch on zero hits.

² Don't cheer yet, this isn't entirely true.

³ If you don't know what a dice pool is, stop reading this and go back to *Shadowrun 5th Edition* by Catalyst Game Labs and catch up.

⁴ Maybe. Keep reading, omae.

It Ain't a Shadowrun until Something Goes Wrong

It's an old adage that no plan survives contact with the enemy, and *Shadowrun* embodies this like no other game. Shadowrunners are paid to deal with unexpected situations, improvise on the run, and stay chill under pressure. This ability is what separates the shadowrunners from the ghouls.

The majority of your rolls are going to hit that *Simsense* middle ground, the 3–5 hit result. This result generates unexpected results while still allowing you to succeed and move the run forward. And since the world of *Shadowrun* is ever full of surprises, so will your gameplay, courtesy of your GM.

The example above of the samurai and the ganger both succeeding on a 3–5 result is an example of succeeding at a cost. In this case the cost is that the ganger gets to strike at the same time as the samurai, with each of them inflicting damage on the other. But the GM has two other options.

One of those options is the unpleasant choice. The GM might mention to the samurai that she sees an opening in the ganger's defenses, but it would leave her shoulder open to the ganger's hand razor, and would she like to take the opportunity knowing the cost? This puts the narrative squarely into the player's hands and gives her a chance to turn the result from "both succeed" to "both fail," if she doesn't want to risk the damage.

The other option is the partial success. Things don't go precisely the way you want them to, but you make some progress or get a result that isn't bad but isn't great. This is a variation your GM might choose to give you some success while causing the opposition to fail. It is also a popular option when there is no direct opposition, like when you're trying to leap a gap or disarm a bomb.

DICE POOL AND RESULT EXAMPLES

Here are a few examples of what might happen in a game played with these house rules. There are lots of different actions the player could attempt, and even more ways the GM could interpret the results of each action, but these are among them.

GM: "A security guard pops up from behind the car. He shoots at you."

Player: "I interrupt him with my wired reflexes and shoot him with my SMG before he can pull the trigger."

GM: "Roll Automatics + Agility."

6+ hits: "You hit the guard square in the chest, throwing off his shot and doing damage."

3-5 hits: "You've got a line on him, but it looks like he'll get a shot on you if you bother to aim. What do you do?"

1-2 hits: "You miss completely, and his shot hits true. Roll to resist damage."

0 hits: "As you get up to shoot, you trip over your ally and accidentally hit her. You both need to roll to resist damage."

Player: "I use the cable to swing across the gap."

GM: "Roll Athletics + Strength."

6+ hits: "You lithely swing across the gap, landing in a classic three-point stance on the other side."

3-5 hits: "You land on the other side, but your commlink slips out of your pocket and starts sliding toward the edge."

1-2 hits: "The cable isn't quite long enough, leaving you hanging over a twenty-story drop."

0 hits: The cable breaks, swinging you into the gap. You slam against a window and fall two stories onto a grotesque on the side of the building. Resist [a lot of] damage."

Player: “I use my Rotodrone to swing across the gap.”

GM: “Roll Pilot Aircraft + Reaction.”

6+ hits: “You make it across the gap, your Rotodrone bobs merrily behind you.”

3-5 hits: “You almost make it across, and now you’re hanging on the other roof by your fingertips.”

1-2 hits: “Your weight is too much for the drone, and you find yourself slowly sinking to the street below.”

0 hits: “Your swing falls short, and you make it back to the roof you started on, but not before tearing off part of the drone’s cooling system. One of its rotors locks up, and it goes into a flat spin as it plummets to the pavement and shatters into a million pieces.”

Player: “I create a diversion by casting Chaotic World into the center of the mall.”

GM: “Roll Spellcasting + Magic.”

6+ hits: “Pandemonium reigns. You feel confident that nobody will notice your team for a while. Resist Drain.”

3-5 hits: “You distract everybody nearby, but attract the attention of a group of security guards up on the food court balcony. Resist Drain.”

1-2 hits: “Your omae stumbles into you as you finish, and the spell goes off on your team. Through the chaos of it all, a group of HTR officers just going off shift wander over to see what the problem is. Resist Drain.”

0 hits: “Your mentor spirit chooses this time to get back at you for the off-color joke you made at its expense the other day. Resist Drain, but increase the DV by 6. Oh, and your spell is working. As far as you can tell.” (ominous chuckle because the spell actually backfired and the caster only thinks it’s working)

Player: “I use my Hammer program to kill the attack drone.”

GM: “Roll Cybercombat + Logic.”

6+ hits: “With a spark and a loud pop, the mini-tank shutters to a stop. There is also smoke.”

3-5 hits: “You hear a ripping sound from the drone, but it keeps rolling forward. You get a mark on it for later, though.”

1-2 hits: “The drone’s Firewall overcomes your attack and the backlash hits you for 3 unresisted Matrix damage.”

0 hits: “Your attack is completely overwhelmed. The drone’s rigger locates you and fires a withering burst of gunfire directly into your center of mass. Resist 14P damage.”

USING EDGE

These house rules are simpler than the main rules, so we don’t need all of the different ways of using Edge (p. 56, *SR5*). Push the Limit is totally in, although don’t re-roll sixes because the game is intended to move quickly from roll to result. Since the idea is for the game to move faster, Second Chance is out. The order in which players take actions isn’t based on Initiative, so ignore Seize the Initiative and Blitz. You can use Close Call, but then you don’t get your Edge back for it. Dead Man’s Trigger works fine, and it always succeeds—no need to roll dice.

You get Edge points back the usual way (same page in *SR5*). You can also regain them if you roll under 3 hits (see that table above).

DAMAGE VALUES

When you do damage, take the base Damage Value from the attack and add the hits you rolled less two; in other words, $(\text{hits} - 2)$.⁵

RESISTING DAMAGE

Whenever you take damage, you can resist it the same way you do in *SR5*. The GM will let you know the Damage Value (and the type for elemental damage), and you make your usual Resistance Test.⁶

GAMEMASTER SECTION

These house rules are intended to keep the players from having to figure out a lot of changes, which means that you, as gamemaster, have the steeper learning curve. This means that players get to do the things they like to do: be awesome and roll lots of dice.

The rules are also designed to require you to do as little work as possible during the game. You don't need to calculate penalties, keep track of recoil or conditions, or even roll dice. Instead, you can concentrate on the flow of the action and facilitate the players' good time.

There's no need to go into detail in this document about how to be a GM. There are great guides in *SR5*, *Apocalypse World*, and *Dungeon World*. Anything more would be just a rehash of that material, so instead we'll look at how to apply the house rules to the game.

CALLING FOR ACTIONS

For the most part, the players will be merrily narrating what they're doing, and for the most part you should just let them. When they hit something that could be difficult, dangerous, or have interesting consequences of failure, that's when you call for an action.

Usually, the dice pool you ask for is the same one in *SR5*, with one difference. If you ask for two attributes, give the player the option to substitute their Inherent Limit (pick one most appropriate to what they're doing) for one of the attributes.⁷

⁵ They tried it with full hits and it was way too much, so it was dialed back. Mooks exploding everywhere is fun for the first half hour or so, but then it just goes from crazy to old hat.

⁶ It's on page 169 in *SR5*. Look, Randall, no copyright infringement!

⁷ Skills can go up to 12, and so they tend to end up being higher than attributes. Since the number of hits you need to succeed in *Simsense* doesn't change scale the way it does in the base rules, it's nice to give the players a little help. Corollary to that: In my world, nice gets you geeked.

Roll Results

The player's roll determines the outcome of their action. Here's a quick breakdown of the different results of a roll from the GM's side of the table. Drek is a game term for something that goes wrong for the runner, it's described in more detail later.

6+ hits: Success, free and clear of drek.

3–5 hits: “CUP,” with the possibility of drek (see below).

1–2 hits: Failure, drek, and the runner recovers 1 Edge point.⁸

0 hits: Failure, drek stepped up one difficulty level, and the runner recovers all Edge points.

CUP: The Tough Call

CUP is a mnemonic for “Costly success, Unpleasant choice, or Partial success.” It's what the runner gets for rolling 3-5 hits on an action. When this happens, pick one of the three options and tell the player about it.

The choice between the options can be a tough call sometimes, so here are a few suggestions. If the result of a partial success is obvious, go for that one, it's easiest because it doesn't require any further thought. The other two are a bit trickier.

A costly success is one where the player succeeds completely but also generates drek. This can be difficult to make work in the moment, but like all GM calls in every RPG ever written, if there's an obvious narrative path, take it with glee.

The unpleasant choice is like a costly success in that it could involve drek. It's different because you hit the ball back into the player's court: succeed and take drek or fail. Don't tell them they'll take drek, of course, just frame the consequences as part of the narrative.

Difficult Actions

Sometimes it's just not fair to use the same dice pool for every situation. Leaping from rooftop to rooftop is one thing, but surely it must be more difficult when the runner is making the jump under fire in a high wind while carrying an unconscious troll, right?

Right, but that moment when the chips are down and the player is on the edge of his seat when he picks up his dice, calculating modifiers isn't the best way to keep the tension. On the other hand, how enthralling is an easy task?

Instead of changing the player's dice pool, the difficulty shows up in the back end of the action: the consequences of failure. To help sort this out, we have four levels of difficulty when it comes to actions.

The **Lightly Difficult** action is one where everything is going the runner's way. The target is tied up, there's a ladder on the wall, the range is point-blank, there's plenty of time to complete the action, the test is open book, etc. Don't even call for an action for this level of difficulty—it's better to just keep the story moving.

A **Moderately Difficult** action is the norm for most rolls. It's the difficulty for using an action in the sort of environment you'd expect to perform that action.

⁸ Failure ain't all bad.

When things get tough, it's time for a **Seriously Difficult** action. The lights are out, the runner is badly injured (more than six boxes on either Condition Monitor), the shot is outside of Long range, the task needs to be completed in half of the usual time, etc.

The **Deadly Difficult** action is one that is not only Seriously Difficult, but downright foolhardy. Charging into withering gunfire would be Seriously Difficult, as it would be across a field of ice, but doing both at once would be Deadly. This level of difficulty should be used sparingly.

When a runner performs a Seriously or Deadly difficult action, have them roll normally. If the roll comes up with 6 or more hits, the action still succeeds as normal. If the hits are in the 3–5 range, give them a level of (normal) drek in addition to their partial success, success at a cost, or hard choice. If they fail, the drek they generate is the level of the difficulty: a Seriously difficult failure gets serious drek, and a Deadly difficulty gets deadly drek.⁹

DREK

As a GM, your job isn't to kill the runners, it's to give them a chance to become legends. A shadowrunner doesn't become a legend without facing danger, and that means the risk of loss or even death. *Drek* is your tool for making this happen.

Drek represents the ugly consequences of poorly performed actions, the deadly intent of the runners' adversaries, or just bad luck. It drives the narrative of the game by creating immediate (or delayed) challenges and dangers to the players.

Drek is generated by the players as they perform actions.¹⁰ When a player rolls 2 or fewer hits on an action, they get drek.

Additionally, drek can be used to keep the game moving. Whenever they turn to you and ask what happens next (as opposed to doing something themselves), give them drek. That's worth repeating in bold: **Whenever the players turn to you and ask what happens next, give them drek.**

Drek and the Narrative

If you want to immerse your players in the tale you're collectively spinning, then don't talk about drek to players. Don't mention levels of drek or how much they have generated or how much you've spent. Keep the drek in your head and in your notes and only let the players see the narrative side of your GMing. They'll be more impressed and they can focus on their characters in the moment.

Levels of Drek

There are levels of drek, ranging from dangerous and damaging to downright deadly. When you use it, choose one of the options based on the level of drek. They're somewhat vague to make it easier to apply the drek to the situation at hand. If it obviously doesn't apply, like increasing Drain Value as a result of climbing a wall, then obviously don't apply it.

⁹ Hee hee, "deadly drek!"

¹⁰ Or don't perform actions, as the case may be. The shadows have a tendency to geek the timid.

Normal Drek

- Reveal (or create) an approaching threat.
- Deal damage to one or more runners, as appropriate to the source.
- +1 DV to Drain or Fading.
- Use extra of a runner's resources.
- Damage to gear.
- Turn the action against a runner.
- Show the runner an opportunity, but one with a cost.
- A downside of an ability or piece gear rears its ugly head.
- A choice between the terrible and the horrible.
- Change the environment.
- Bring in a new faction, interested party, or threat.
- Use an enemy ability (see Enemy Abilities).

Serious Drek

- Reveal (or create) an immediate threat.
- Deal damage with +3 DV to one or more runners, as appropriate to the source.
- +3 DV to Drain or Fading.
- A piece of gear is lost or broken.
- Split the team.
- Change the environment into something hazardous.
- Use an enemy ability (see Enemy Abilities).

Deadly Drek

- Reveal (or create) an surprising threat for which the runners are unprepared.
- Deal damage with +6 DV to one or more runners, as appropriate to the source.
- +6 DV to Drain or Fading.
- Change the environment into something immediately dangerous.
- Use an enemy ability (see Enemy Abilities).

Using Drek

When you use drek, choose one of the options from the appropriate drek level and describe it to the players, applying any effects (damage, breakage, bricking, and the like). When picking drek, make sure it fits into the narrative. Ideally, the drek to apply will be pretty obvious from the way the action is unfolding, but don't be afraid to throw them a curve ball every now and again.

The drek that comes out of combat is usually damage, destruction, and mayhem, but let's say you're in a social scene and the team's face is using Con + Charisma to talk up the bartender in a corp bar to get some information and he rolls some drek. Having the bartender pull a shotgun and shoot you in the chest (deal damage) would be completely at odds with the narrative of the scene. It would be more appropriate if the face or a teammate noticed a company man across the bar giving the face the stink eye (reveal or create an approaching threat). Or the bartender turns out to be racist against the face's metatype (turn the action against a runner) and asks him to get out of her bar. Or you discover the bartender hates the target, and will help the team if they help her first (show the runner an opportunity at a cost). Or the bartender falls in love with the face, starts giving him free drinks, and

insists that he sticks around after work (the downside of an ability rears its ugly head). Or the bartender mistakes the face for a courier, gives him a credstick full of jing and a briefcase filled with BTL snuff sims (change the environment).

With a bit of practice, dealing out drek will become second nature. There's plenty more about this subject in the *Apocalypse World* and *Dungeon World* books (where drek is called "moves"—sort of), which I highly recommend, so I'm not going to go too much further into how to use drek in the narrative.¹¹

Drek Now or Drek Later

Most of the time, the players' drek will come back at them right away, usually as an unintended result of their action. But you're the GM, not just an automated drek dispenser. You can keep the drek your player's generate and use it on them later, whenever you think it's more dramatic.¹² If you do hold your drek¹³ like this, it doesn't stack; if you get normal drek twice, you can't "add them together" to make serious or deadly drek.

You also don't have to always throw the drek at the runner who generated it. Drek can target any player character, not just the ones who roll low.¹⁴

BEATS

A beat for a film director is a loosely defined unit of time, usually between two characters. It's usually the length of a character's action and the reaction to that action, which itself could be the beginning of a new beat. These rules use beats instead of rolling for Initiative, calculating it, sorting it, and then doing the subtractions each Initiative Pass.

There are two things that beats should help you do as GM. First, it helps you think in terms of the flow of the action. Second, it helps you make sure that everybody gets to play. Try to keep the beats moving from player to player. If the result of one player's beat ends up affecting another player, then that second player is a logical choice to start the next beat (usually with a "what do you do now?" or similar prompt). Try to spread the beats as evenly as you can among the players.

In an action scene, like a fight or a chase, each beat encompasses about three to five seconds, give or take. Outside of an action sequence, a beat can be much longer, like a full conversation with a contact. It might help to think of each beat as the time between cuts in a film, or sentences or even paragraphs in a story. But these are just guidelines, and you should make your beats as short or long as you feel is appropriate.

Beats and Augmented Reflexes

Rolling Initiative is one of the triumphant moments of the player with the augmented character. I remember my first 50+ Initiative roll (although that was in 3rd Edition), and I was full-on, fist-pumping jubilant about it. It would be unjust to remove Initiative but leave nothing for the speedsters.

¹¹ I'll bet the real reason is because he's not getting paid for this. Any takers?

¹² This last bit about saving drek for a dramatic moment can be tricky. It's important that the drek comes as a result of *something*, even if it's unrelated to the action that generated the event. Dramatic and dangerous scenes are fun, but random punishments meted out with no apparent cause can be frustrating.

¹³ "Hold your drek!" Hee hee haw haw haw I'm five.

¹⁴ You know the thing I said before about making sure drek has a narrative cause? That.

When an augmented character¹⁵ has their beat, they can declare a chain of actions instead of just one, a total number of actions equal the number of Initiative Dice they have. For example, the Street Samurai archetype from *SR5* could declare that he will dodge across the battlefield, shove his cyber spur into one corp guard, and empty his HK-227 into the other.

A character who has more than one Initiative Die may interrupt characters with fewer Initiative Dice when they declare an action. There's an example of this in action under Dice Pool and Result Examples section way back in the player's section. You can help emphasize this by occasionally asking your augmented players, "Do you let that happen," or "Do you want to interrupt that?" They'll appreciate it. But don't let them overdo it—treat the interrupting action as the character's beat when you're rotating through the players.

NPCS AND CRITTERS

Good news, fellow GMs! You don't need to keep huge stat blocks on the bad guys! All you need is a few little stats, and you're good to go. Great for the game on the run.¹⁶

For the sake of my own sanity, the term "enemy" will be used to refer to critters, NPCs, spirits, grunts, drones, and whatever other entity might pose a threat to the team.

Combat Stats

You'll need some information on the off-chance the shooting starts. Here's what you need.

Condition Monitor(s): Use the one(s) already in the core rules.

Attack DV: Calculate the DV of the enemy's attacks in three steps. Step 1, take the base DV from the book. Step 2, find the dice pool that the enemy would use in the core rules and divide it by 6, rounding up. Step 3, add the numbers you got from steps 1 and 2 together and you've got your DV.

Damage Resistance: Enemies don't just take every box of incoming damage, they get to resist the damage too. Take the dice pool that the enemy would use to resist damage in the core rules and divide it by three, rounding up. This is the number of boxes that are resisted whenever a runner lands a hit. You might need different values for different situations, like for fire damage, astral damage, Matrix damage, etc.

Enemy Abilities

Critter powers, augmentations, spells, Matrix actions, and so on all fall under the category of enemy abilities. These are the things you can pull on the runners when you spend drek. An enemy's abilities can range from the mundane (throw a grenade, attack with a weapon) to the obscure (corrosive spit, control thoughts spell).

Some abilities are definitely more powerful than others, and you should only use them when the drek level is about right for it. Regular drek might turn into an enemy using wired reflexes to interrupt a runner, or a weapon attack, or an elemental attack. Serious drek might look like bricking-level Matrix damage, use of the engulf power, a grenade, or a spell with a high Force. With deadly drek, you might look at Essence drain, heavy weaponry, or the summoning of a massive spirit.

¹⁵ Or drone, critter, NPC, spirit, sprite, AI, dragon, or ... did I miss anything? Headcases?

¹⁶ Yes, Aaron, I see what you did there. Very wiz. Stick with drek jokes.

If an ability comes with a Damage Value, calculate it as described under Combat Stats.

Enemy Weaknesses

If a player targets an enemy's weakness in a way you think effective, drop the difficulty for that action. Don't forget that an enemy can (and will) try to mitigate their weaknesses, or at least protect them.

Elite Enemies

The stronger, prime-runner type enemies are more dangerous. If an adversary brings a dice pool of 12 or more to the table, then runner actions that would involve that dice pool are Seriously Difficult actions; if that dice pool is 18 or more, runners' actions are Deadly Difficult.

HOW TO CREATE ADVENTURES

This is the easiest part of these house rules. If you need an adventure for your players, just use the ones that come with the *Shadowrun* line of products. Catalyst Game Labs offers a number of plot books with adventure hooks and stand-alone adventures. Their Missions series of adventures offers scores of ready-to-play adventures for your table.

Of course, you can always create your own adventures. Page 335 in *SR5* has excellent guidelines for creating shadowruns.¹⁷

MATRIX

These rules try to streamline the Matrix by using their basic set of rules. You don't need to memorize a bunch of rules for different actions, instead approach the Matrix Action list as a set of guidelines for what you can do in the Matrix. Your dice pools will still be skill + attribute, like every other action.

When a hacker tries something that would require 2 or 3 marks in the core rules, the difficulty of that action increases. We've found that conversions of 2 marks for Seriously Difficulty and 3 marks for Deadly Difficulty seem to work well. You can use marks¹⁸ to make the hard stuff easier.

Marks

Marks are good for those 3–5 rolls that happen sometimes. The GM can make the call that your action doesn't work, but you get a mark on the target instead. Then you can use that mark later to reduce the difficulty against the target on future actions.

RIGGING

Rigging isn't changed much in *Simsense*. You've got your dice pools, your augmented Initiative, and so on. When the narrative leads to a situation in which an autonomous drone (or vehicle) gets its own beat, the GM has you roll for your own drones, using the drone's dice pool.

¹⁷ And the guy who wrote it also wrote a bunch of my dialogue in other *Shadowrun* books, so you know it's good.

¹⁸ These rules' version of marks, that is.

MAGIC

Magic works pretty much the same as it does in the core rules. Magic that has an effect causes that effect. Magic that causes damage causes damage using the rules for calculating Damage Values back in that section of this document. Drain Values are the same as for the core rules, and you resist them the usual way as listed in Resisting Damage.

These rules try to keep play quick and clean, so magic that causes modifiers doesn't cause any modifiers. Instead, they change the environment as resolved by your roll and described by the GM. If you cast Invisibility on yourself, you become invisible on a success. If you cast Detect Life, you detect life in the appropriate radius. If you cast Turn to Goo, the target turns into goo.

On 3–5 hits, things could get a little weird, and your fate is in the hands of the GM. Maybe it fizzles completely, but you don't take any Drain. Or you cast the spell but the Drain Value is increased.

Or the spell partially works. Or it flickers on and off. Or hits the wrong target. Your GM has a lot of latitude when you don't get those six hits.¹⁹

FORCE

For the most part, the Force of everything you do is simply your Magic rating, which is also the default in the core rules. This is good for keeping the game quick, but there's nothing terribly wrong with slowing the game about by varying the Force of your magic when you use it, if your GM and the other players agree. Just make sure to decide things ahead of time.

If the spell's result is based on the number of hits you roll in SR5, use the Force of the spell as that number. If the result is based on net hits (not just hits), use half the Force instead.

SPIRITS

Depending on the narrative, the GM can run the spirit as an NPC, or let it have its own beat and have you roll for it using its dice pool.

GEAR

We've covered calculating Damage Values and Armor already, so we're mostly set for gear. For the sake of simplicity, assume all gear has its wireless functionality all the time.²⁰ Gear that gives a modifier to certain situations doesn't; instead it's turned over to the GM to wiggle the difficulty if she likes. Plenty of gear simply allows you to try things (for example, you'd probably need a grappling hook or gecko gloves to climb a sheer concrete wall), so there's no need for modifiers.

On the other hand, if a set of gear changes your dice pool all the time (most augmentations, for example), then definitely include it in your roll. One piece of gear that definitely goes in this category is the medkit, because I believe in mercy.²¹

¹⁹ The same would go for technomancers threading complex forms. Aaron should have put that in the Matrix section. Ah, what the heck, it's just a first draft, he'll probably fix it before it goes out.

²⁰ There's a really big overlap between players who hate having to turn on their wireless and players who love the heavy crunch, so this probably won't be a problem for folks who want to try these rules.

²¹ Which is why he's designing games and not running the shadows.

AFTERWARD

That's about it. Did I miss anything? Contact me with any questions or comments, and let me know if you thought of them while reading the rules or playing them. I'm happy to take ideas, especially since I only had one group of playtesters (my home group) to try these ideas.

I hope you have fun, and thanks. Give yourself two karma if you read the whole thing from beginning to end.

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