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SURVIVAL

OF THE FITTEST



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SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST



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SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST CREDITS

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Steve Kenson

A GATHERING OF DRAGONS

The great dragon Hestaby soared low over the mountains, drinking in the majesty and serenity of the landscape and fortifying herself for what was soon to come. It was a beautiful land, rugged and isolated. She could see why Dunkelzahn had been so fond of it, even though it had been a long time since it was his home—or that of any other dragon, for that matter. There were not as many of them as there once were. If things did not go well, there might even be fewer still.

Though she was larger than a fighter plane, the dragon had no concerns about disturbing the people who claimed this land as their own. She knew full well of the radar systems, sensors and spy satellites that watched these mountains, but Hestaby was unconcerned. She flew on the winds of the spirit world.

Hestaby's material body lay sleeping in her lair half a world away, while her spirit took flight. This mode of travel made her invisible and undetectable by mundane means. No one would notice her passing, save for the odd spirit or sensitive that happened to be watching as she passed by. Though she could have arrived at her destination in the blink of an eye, she chose to fly slowly, to give herself time to consider and to prepare.

There had not been a council in ... well, longer than the Young Races reckoned their history. The technology of the present Age had been a boon to dragonkind in that respect. No longer were dragons required to enter each other's territory, even in spirit, to send messages and exchange information. The Matrix served quite well in that regard, allowing the dragons to maintain a respectful distance from each other most of the time. Hestaby thought that it would ease tensions, but all the evidence suggested just the opposite. Now that they were able to follow each other's activities and communicate constantly via the Matrix, it was as if the great dragons were in each other's domains all the time. It was a situation that triggered certain instinctual responses, ones even Hestaby felt, and it could not endure forever.

Hestaby spread her spirit wings and banked, wheeling above an isolated plateau in the mountains. Most of the others were already gathered, as she knew they would be. She circled once for formality's sake before gliding down to take her place on the plateau among her brethren.

They acknowledged her with the Rite of Honored Greeting and she returned their felicitations in proper form, quickly taking note of who was already there and who was absent. Hualpa lay coiled by a rocky outcropping, his brightly feathered wings folded close against his body and his

head-plumes spread in an impressive display. Nearby were Mujaji and Arleesh, Hualpa's fellow feathered serpents and—Hestaby suspected—the only other females who would appear at this gathering. She knew of little connection between them, but feathered serpents tended to congregate with their own kind.

They were dwarfed by the sinuous forms of two of the great eastern dragons, Lung and Ryumyo. Hestaby imagined that they arrived together, taking up their places on opposite sides of the circle and remaining coolly formal as custom demanded, but glowering at each other the whole time as they were doing now. Tradition and ritual were very important to the eastern dragons, so the two would not disrupt the council with their private feud, no matter what their feelings. Their iridescent scales glimmered as they moved, and their tails lashed slowly back and forth in barely restrained agitation as they waited.

Almost exactly in between them at another quarter of the circle waited young Masaru, the third eastern dragon in the gathering. Hestaby wondered if this was the first Council he had attended. Certainly, it was the first time she had cause to encounter him. He actually showed more composure than his elders, though his eyes glowed with the eagerness of the young, something which Hestaby found oddly disturbing.

The largest and most numerous of the assembled dragons were Hestaby's kind, the western dragons. Hestaby was the only female, but she knew the other males quite well.

Closest to her was Rhonabwy, whose lair was in Wales. Beyond him was Celedyr, who shared the same land though some distance away. They appeared deep in conversation over some new musical piece Rhonabwy favored. Opposite from Hestaby was Alamais. She ignored him as best she could, wanting as little to do with him as possible. She was mildly surprised that he even chose to appear at the council after his recent dealings with his brother, but then Alamais was never one to miss an opportunity to further his own cause. The subject of this council was likely to be of great interest to him.

Even more surprising was the presence of Aden, not far from Alamais. Hestaby had not seen the *sirrush* in an Age, though she, like nearly everyone else, had seen the images of Aden's destruction of Tehran, in reprisal for the *jihad* declared against the Awakened. It was hardly the first city Aden had destroyed—and might not be the last.

Of no surprise was the absence of Sirurg. Hestaby suspected that Hualpa knew the whereabouts of the one known as the Destroyer, as he was the last of their kind to

have any real dealings with him, but she would not ask. It would be improper to do so. If Sirrurg wished to cut himself off from his own kind, that was his business. He was by no means the only one missing from the Council. Schwartzkopf and Kaltenstein were not present, nor were some others Hestaby had only heard vague rumors about. Perhaps they were too wrapped up in their own affairs; perhaps some of the elder ones were now gone. Certainly the absence of so many spoke to the weight that traditions created eons ago still carried.

There were two more notable absences from their Council. No doubt they would arrive last if at all possible, even if it meant keeping the rest of them waiting. Still, what were a few hours measured against the life of a dragon?

It turned out they didn't have to wait even that long. Only minutes after Hestaby's arrival, Ghostwalker appeared. He swooped down from above, folding his wings to land lightly on the earth. He was the largest of the males present, his bleached scales gleaming in the pale mountain sunlight. Everyone performed the Rite of Honored Greeting for him and he acknowledged it gravely.

He's as serious as ever, Hestaby thought, which doused any hope she had of an amicable council. Ghostwalker was clearly prepared for a fight, even though his manner was calm and controlled.

The last to arrive was Lofwyr. He was larger than even Ghostwalker. His scales shone in a rich range of gold, copper, and burnished brass, with under-tones of terra cotta and dun. He landed majestically, folding his wings with deliberate slowness, each movement studied and precise. They gave him the Rite of Honored Greeting—even Ghostwalker and Alamais—and he returned it as if accepting his rightful due. The appointed time had come. The council was assembled.

Lofwyr raised his head and began to assume the first posture of the Rite of Opening when Ghostwalker reared up, wings spread wide.

"HOLD!" he said. The single word rang in the minds of all present. It seemed to echo through the mountains around them.

For a long, drawn out moment Lofwyr and Ghostwalker regarded each other across the circle, the air almost crackling between them. Hestaby wondered if the matter would be settled here and now before the assembled council. But rather than lunging across the circle for Ghostwalker's throat, Lofwyr raised his head and sat back on his haunches, regarding the other dragon coldly.

"For what reason do you interrupt the rites of this Council, Doll-Maker?" Lofwyr asked, his thought-voice controlled, tightly leashed.

"Because the rites are not in order, Gold-Master. This Council should not even be convened, nor have you any right to open it." The other dragons remained impassive at Ghostwalker's challenge. It was not unexpected. They remained still; all attention focused on Lofwyr and Ghostwalker.

"Strange words, considering you called this Council yourself," Lofwyr replied. "Why do so if you claim not to recognize its validity?"

"It seemed the simplest way to gather us together for what had to be done, considering the unprecedented circumstances," the pale dragon replied, with an almost conciliatory shrug of his wings.

"Then perhaps you should permit the Council to continue, so we may learn your reasons for calling it," Lofwyr said with exaggerated patience, as if he were speaking to a hatchling. He was playing some sort of game, since they all knew Ghostwalker's reasons.

"There is no Council," Ghostwalker reiterated. "Nor can there be, until the Loremaster is chosen."

Ah, now it begins, thought Hestaby.

"That choice has been made," Lofwyr said with deadly gravity.

"Not in accordance with our customs and traditions," Ghostwalker replied. "Unless you claim to have arranged the events that led to the Loremaster's end?"

The question hung in the air for a long moment. Theoretically, Lofwyr could agree to what Ghostwalker asked. If he did, then his claim was potentially rightful, if a little suspect, but that would involve either admitting a great deal before the assembled dragons or else a bold-faced lie. If Ghostwalker had evidence one way or another, and caught Lofwyr in a lie ...

"I make no such claim," Lofwyr finally replied.

"Then you have no claim to the title and role of Loremaster," Ghostwalker said, snapping his jaws for emphasis as if he wished they were around Lofwyr's neck.

"I have the Jewel of Memory," Lofwyr said haughtily. "It was given to me—"

"Given!" Ghostwalker said, spitting the word like a curse. "Not won. Not attained by right. Awarded by random chance."

"Hardly random, Doll-Maker," Celedyr interjected. Hestaby was surprised. She hadn't expected any of the others to involve themselves in the dispute just yet. Perhaps the rumors she'd heard about Celedyr and Lofwyr having some mutual interests in Europe were true. Or perhaps Celedyr simply didn't care for Ghostwalker's attitude.

"Far-Scholar clearly chose quite deliberately to give the Jewel to Gold-Master, for reasons he did not see fit to reveal to us. Do you, of all of us, question his judgment?"

Ghostwalker drew himself up to his full height, nearly rearing up on his hind legs, in a formal Posture of Defiance. "I do, Stone-Diver," he replied. "Though I honor and respect my brother's memory, I must question this most flagrant violation of our ways, just as I must question why it has been allowed to stand. From all that I have seen and heard since my return, I can only assume the reason is a lack of courage."

"Not all of us have been willing to permit this," Alamais said, rising to the Posture of Defiance like Ghostwalker, glaring across the circle at Lofwyr.

"Yes, but those who object have been show the error of their ways," Lofwyr replied. "Remember Nachtmeister." He bared his teeth in a sneer at his brother, who flinched only slightly in recollection of those fangs at his neck. Alamais's own struggles against Lofwyr and subsequent failures were well known.

"There is only one thing to be done," Ghostwalker said. "The Rite of Succession must be carried out, in accordance with our ways."

"I agree," Alamais said immediately. "The Rite of Succession. As it has always been, as it was meant to be."

"The Rite of Succession is impractical, at best," Mujaji interjected. "Even if we are willing to submit our gains from Far-Scholar's death to the judgment of the Rite, what of the rest of his hoard? It has been scattered to the winds."

"That will be a matter for the successor to address, Rain Queen," Hualpa replied quietly before Ghostwalker could answer. "Just as one might deal with any thieves who made off with items from one's hoard. I, too, call for the Rite of Succession in this matter." The feathered serpent rose up, spreading his brightly colored wings. After a moment, Mujaji did the same. Hestaby knew that Hualpa had much to gain and little to lose in the Rite, since the fate of the item willed to him had long been in doubt. Mujaji's reasons for supporting the claim were her own, but Hestaby suspected a desire to shore up her own position in the face of events in Africa, and perhaps to curry some favor with Hualpa and his domain in Amazonia.

"I cannot support this," Celedyr said, sitting back on his haunches and folding his wings. "To me, the matter is settled."

"I do not agree," Rhonabwy replied. "There is, in fact, much that is not settled about this. The Rite of Succession has always settled such things in the past. Let it do so again." He took his posture from the others, rising up and spreading his wings.

Almost as one Lung and Ryumyo silently joined him. The Rite was an opportunity for them in nearly all respects. Masaru glanced at the other two eastern dragons before rearing up at his side of the circle.

"Let this be settled honorably," he said gravely and Hestaby restrained a chuckle. *Ah, the idealism of the young*, she thought.

Aden snorted faintly. "I care not for this matter. As Stone-Diver says, let it be finished." With folded wings and a lowered head, the *sirrush* mimicked Celedyr's posture.

All eyes turned to the remaining females in the circle. Arleesh shook her head somewhat sadly. It was already a forgone conclusion. "I cannot support the need for the Rite when there is so much else to be done."

Attention shifted to Hestaby. She had carefully considered what she would do if it came down to this, so she raised her head and regarded her peers.



DRAGON



"I cannot say that I am proud of this moment," she replied. "I had hoped that it would not come to this, that Far-Scholar's sacrifice had shown us the possibility of another way. Even now, it is not too late for us to turn back from this course and consider another path. This is the first gathering of our kind in an Age. Should it end over a matter such as this?" Though she saw agreement in the eyes of a scattered few, only silence answered her.

"What say you in this matter, Orange Queen?" Lofwyr rumbled.

Hestaby adopted the Pose of Challenge, like the others before her.

For a long moment of silence, Lofwyr regarded the gathered dragons of the council, his reptilian features unreadable, even to them; his aura placid, showing tremendous control.

"So be it," his thought-voice echoed in the silence. "There shall be a Rite of Succession. It will not, however," he continued, forestalling a reply by Ghostwalker. "be carried out here or now. I put it to the Council that this matter calls for the *full* Rite of Succession, a true testing, since the needs of this new Age call for different methods than in Ages past." His glance fell upon Ghostwalker and his intent was apparent to all. The Council shifted, with even Alamais moving into poses of agreement with Lofwyr's proposal. Ghostwalker could see that there would be no debating the matter.

"Very well," he replied. "An indirect contest will settle this, a test of all the facets of our nature. When the Rite is complete, we will see who is the most worthy of this new Age."

The dragons signaled their agreement; there was no more to be said. From that moment until the conclusion of the Rite, they were all enemies, all rivals for the greatest prestige of dragonkind. In the end, only one could be victorious. He or she would decide the future for them all. They made the Rite of Parting and each took their leave, winging through the spirit world to their scattered bodies, plotting and planning to win the greatest of prizes—or simply to protect themselves from the schemes of enemies ready to seize any opportunity.

As she rose into the air above the mountains, Hestaby threw a last glance back to where Lofwyr and Ghostwalker stood: the last to arrive, now the last to depart. They were like two sides of the same coin, both stubborn and proud. For most of the dragons, the conflict came down to the two of them, and one would claim the prize.

We'll just have to see about that, Hestaby thought. Then she sped off toward Mount Shasta and home. The time for contemplation was over. Now was the time for action, and there was much for her to do.

INTRODUCTION



"Shoot straight, conserve ammo, and never, ever, cut a deal with a dragon."
—Street proverb

Survival of the Fittest is a *Shadowrun* campaign that involves a struggle between the great dragons of the Sixth World that will influence the future of both dragon-kind and the rest of the world. It is based on events that have developed in the Sixth World since the death of the great dragon Dunkelzahn in 2057, but its origins stretch back long before that. There is a division in draconic society between traditionalists and those dragons who want to see the ancient ways of their kind adapted to the demands of the modern world—though there is little agreement among them regarding *how* that should be done.

Survival of the Fittest takes the player characters on shadowruns around the world, from the California Free State and the Denver Front Range Free Zone to the jungles of Amazonia, the ruins of Tehran, the Welsh countryside and the modern metroplexes of Hong Kong and Vladivostok. The adventures start out simply, but soon the shadowrunners become enmeshed in the complex web of plots woven by the great dragons as they play out their contest. By the end, the runners are involved in big-time shadowruns and may ultimately decide the fate of several of the world's great dragons. A full breakdown of the events in *Survival of the Fittest* can be found in the *Campaign Synopsis* on p. 13.

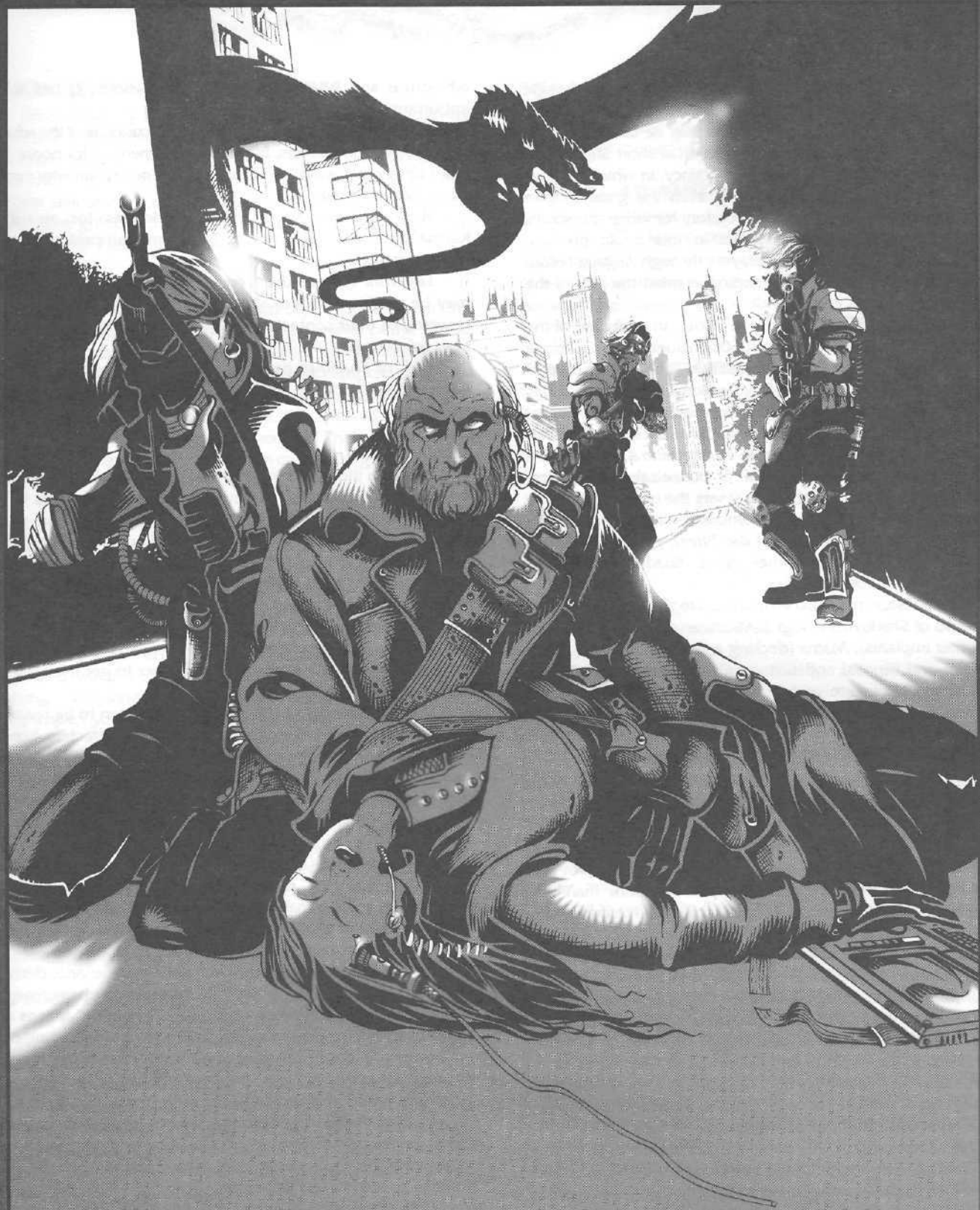
PREPARING THE ADVENTURES

Survival of the Fittest is intended for use with *Shadowrun, Third Edition*, and all character and rules information refers to the third edition of the *Shadowrun* rules. The *Shadowrun Gamemaster Screen* is a recommended resource, since it contains all of the necessary tables organized for easy reference and is accompanied by the *Critters* book, which provides more detailed information on the abilities of various paranormal creatures.

Other books that gamemasters may find useful in running the adventures in this book include the following:

- *Year of the Comet*, which details events in the *Shadowrun* world in 2062, many of which lead up to the events in this book. Of particular interest is the *Ghost Stories* section, which details the return of Ghostwalker and the creation of his new domain in Denver. It also has information on recent activities in Hong Kong and other parts of the world.







- *Magic in the Shadows*, which presents advanced magic rules for *Shadowrun*. A number of the adventures in this book involve powerful magic, so these rules may be useful.

- *Corporate Punishment* is a collection of short *Shadowrun* adventures, including the adventure *Legacy*, in which the Elemental Scrolls of Ak'le'ar are stolen from the great dragon Hualpa. This may provide useful backstory for when the scrolls appear in the adventure *Elements* in this book. (In fact, gamemasters may want to run players through *Legacy* before running *Survival of the Fittest*, keeping in mind the plot of the upcoming campaign.)

- *Shadows of North America* provides an overview of the nations of North America in the 2060s, including the California Free State and Denver Front Range Free Zone, where two of this book's adventures take place. Gamemasters may find this a useful reference for background information on these areas.

- Long-time *Shadowrun* fans may have the second edition sourcebook *Portfolio of a Dragon: Dunkelzahn's Secrets*. This out-of-print book details the death of Dunkelzahn and his last will and testament, which ultimately sets the events in *Survival of the Fittest* in motion. Though *Portfolio* it is no way necessary to understand or use *Survival of the Fittest*, gamemasters can find Dunkelzahn's Will on the official *Shadowrun* website (www.shadowrunrpg.com).

Gamemasters may also want access to the other advanced rulebooks of *Shadowrun*: *Man & Machine* (cyberware, bioware and other implants), *Matrix* (decking and computers), *Rigger 3* (vehicles and drones) and *Cannon Companion* (weapons and gear). These books are useful, but not necessary, for running *Survival of the Fittest*.

ADVENTURE STRUCTURE

Survival of the Fittest consists of seven adventures, with advice on interconnecting them and using them in the context of a longer *Shadowrun* campaign. Each adventure is a self-contained story with connections to the overall plot of the series. It has a beginning, middle and an end, with its own plot and characters. Some characters may appear in more than one adventure, and some events of the previous adventures may carry over into later ones.

Generally, the adventure gets started when an employer (a "Mr. Johnson") hires the player characters to carry out a particular job. The job may be a simple one—like breaking into a corporate office to steal some valuable data—or it may be quite complicated, such as traveling to the most out-of-the-way places in the world to find lost artifacts. Oftentimes shadowrunners appear deceptively simple but aren't, or simple runs are just part of a larger plot of which the shadowrunners aren't aware (as is the case in this series of adventures).

All adventures in this book are presented in the same basic format. They begin with a *Preparing the Adventure* section, which contains background information, a synopsis of the plot, a timeline of events and any other information the gamemaster may need to get things started.

Each adventure ends with a section called *Picking Up the Pieces*. It includes all the material for concluding the

adventure and wrapping up any loose ends. It has some important subsections:

It's a Wrap covers the potential repercussions of the adventure, lingering questions, future developments, plot hooks and other things that wrap up the adventure (or explain why certain things are left hanging).

Awarding Karma provides guidelines for awarding Karma to the player characters, based on their performance in the adventure.

Legwork has all the information the player characters may be able to discover about various things through either research or their contacts during the adventure, collected for easy reference.

Cast of Shadows presents descriptions, background and game statistics for the important non-player characters in the adventure.

SCENARIOS

Between the beginning and end of each adventure are several distinct encounters, ranging from important events in the story to particular places where the action may take place. These encounters are called *scenarios* and outline the most likely sequence of events, as well as how to handle unexpected twists and turns that inevitably crop up. Each scenario contains the following subsections, providing gamemasters with all the information necessary to run it.

What's Up, Chummer? provides a quick synopsis of the scenario's action, allowing the gamemaster to get a feel for the encounter at a glance.

Tell It To Them Straight is generally written to be read out loud to the players, describing what their characters experience upon entering the scenario. The gamemaster should feel free to modify the narrative as much as desired to suit the group and the situation, since the characters may arrive at the scenario by different means or under different circumstances than the text assumes.

Hooks describes the mood and helps set the stage for the encounter, pointing out different "staging tips" for the gamemaster to help make the scene come alive for the players. It also points out different plot twists or hidden things in the encounter the character might not notice right away.

Behind the Scenes covers the bulk of the scenario, describing what's happening, what the non-player characters are doing, how they will react to the player characters' actions and so forth. It also covers the setting of the encounter, going over environmental conditions and other properties of the location as well as providing any necessary maps, descriptions of important items, and so on.

Pushing the Envelope looks at ways to make the encounter more challenging for experienced or powerful characters and other ways the gamemaster can add some "extra spice" to the scenario to liven it up, if need be.

Debugging offers solutions to potential problems that may crop up during the encounter. While it's impossible to foresee everything that a group of player characters might do, this section tries to anticipate any major problems and offer suggestions for dealing with them.



GAMEMASTERING THE ADVENTURES

Gamemastering is more of an art than a science, and every gamemaster does things a bit differently. Follow your own personal style when it comes to preparing and running the adventures in this book and do whatever you feel is best to provide the best *Shadowrun* game you can for your players. This section offers some guidelines you may find useful in preparing to run *Survival of the Fittest* (or any *Shadowrun* adventure).

STEP ONE: READ THE ADVENTURE

Carefully read the adventure from beginning to end. In the case of a multi-adventure campaign like *Survival of the Fittest*, you may want to read the entire book from start to finish before you run the first adventure. This gives you a complete overview of the whole series and how events in the early adventures flow into the later ones on up to the finale. Get a feel for the overall plot and what happens in each adventure. That way, if something different happens, you won't be caught off guard and you can adapt things smoothly.

STEP TWO: ASSESS THE ADVENTURE

Once you've read over the adventure (or while you're reading it, for that matter), you may decide that certain parts don't work for you or don't suit your *Shadowrun* campaign. By all means, feel free to change them as needed to make the adventure more enjoyable for you and your players. Keep in mind, however, that changes to one adventure may impact on the later adventures in the series, so you should be consistent in applying your changes throughout and should consider carefully any impact your changes may have on later adventures.

STEP THREE: KNOW THE CHARACTERS

Get copies of the characters' record sheets for your reference and have basic information about their important abilities handy so you can refer to it during play. Also go over the characters and keep their abilities in mind when reading through and preparing the adventures. While every effort has been taken to cover potential character actions, you know your characters and players better than we do, so you're better able to anticipate their actions during the adventure and be prepared for them.

STEP FOUR: TAKE NOTES

Take notes for yourself while reading through the adventures that you can refer to later on. Possible things to note include: major plot points (so you can see them all at a glance), the names of various non-player characters, possible problems you notice, situations where you think a particular character can shine and other things you'll want to keep in mind while running the adventure. Take notes during the adventure as well, so you can remember important things that happened and keep them consistent in future adventures.

STEP FIVE: DON'T PANIC!

Gamemastering involves juggling a lot of different things. Sometimes you drop the ball and forget something or you just

make a mistake. It happens, don't worry about it. Nobody is perfect all of the time and everybody makes mistakes. Just pick up from there and move on. Your players will understand and forget about it once you get back into the action.

GENERAL ADVENTURE RULES

Published *Shadowrun* adventures use the rules presented in *Shadowrun, Third Edition (SR3)* and various sourcebooks for the game. Standard rules such as success tests, the Rules of One and Six, Perception Tests, Negotiation Tests and other common mechanics are described in *SR3* and are not repeated in this book.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Non-player characters (NPCs) are essential to any adventure. They are the allies, antagonists and background characters in the adventure that interact with the player characters. NPCs in this book have already been created and can be found in the *Cast of Shadows* section of each adventure.

The NPCs in this book should generally stand up to the average player character, but may need some adjustment to suit a particular group of characters, especially a more experienced and powerful group. The adventures and NPC descriptions offer tips on adjusting the NPCs to suit the abilities of the characters in your group. Take the player characters' abilities into consideration when assessing the NPCs in this book and modify them accordingly.

All NPCs are given Karma Pool (p. 246, *SR3*) and Professional Rating (p. 248, *SR3*) to help level them out against player characters. If this isn't enough, the gamemaster may wish to consider using the rules for creating prime runners (p. 83, *SRComp*) to determine the general level of the NPCs against the player characters and adjust them as appropriate.

ULTIMATE-LEVEL CHARACTERS

Survival of the Fittest deals with some of the most powerful beings in the Sixth World, the great dragons. Since they appear only occasionally throughout the series and are not expected to come into direct conflict with the player characters, no game statistics are provided for them. The great dragons are tremendously powerful, ancient beings. In addition to their immense physical strength and sheer toughness, they also all have considerable magical skill and power, far beyond that of any mortal creature. They should be considered Ultimate-level NPCs, according to the system in the *Shadowrun Companion*.

If necessary, the statistics given in *SR3* (p. 269) can be used as a guideline for the great dragons. But keep in mind that those statistics represent the *minimum* abilities of a great dragon, including Strength 50, 20 points of Hardened Armor, and Mental attributes and Magic in the double-digits. Using the rules from *Magic in the Shadows*, all great dragons are at least Grade 10 initiates (usually higher), know all the available metamagic techniques and have a wide selection of powerful spells.

In short, if the player characters try to frag with a great dragon directly, they haven't got a chance.

CAMPAIGN BACKGROUND

Survival of the Fittest builds on events in the *Shadowrun* world that have been unfolding for the past several years. The roots of the story go back even further than that, before the current Age of Magic to a time when the great dragons previously walked the Earth. It includes events described in *Portfolio of a Dragon: Dunkelzahn's Secrets* and *Year of the Comet*. Those events are summarized here for the gamemaster's reference.

LONG, LONG AGO

The Sixth World is by no means the first Age to have magic, or dragons. The great dragons recall a previous Age of Magic, where they dwelled in a world quite different from the one known in the twenty-first century—quite different, in fact, from any recorded human history. They recall an Age that mortals can only remember as distant legends and myths.

Even in that Age, dragon society was ancient, with culture, history and traditions going back thousands upon thousands of years. Most of their history involved conflict, because dragons are predators and territorial by nature. Most of their traditions and culture, therefore, revolve around limiting the conflicts between them, so that dragons can co-exist in relative peace.

One of those traditions is the role of Loremaster. Dragons are remarkably long-lived creatures and they have extraordinary memories, but even the mind of a dragon is hard pressed to cope with thousands of years of knowledge and accumulated lore. Dragons are also mortal, however it may seem to the short-lived young races (as the dragons call them), so they do die, meaning that the knowledge and wisdom of the most ancient dragons can be lost if an effort is not made to preserve it.

Dragons do not create books. In fact, they have practically no written language, only a few symbols for basic concepts that can be scratched into stone or earth with a powerful claw. They do, however, have a means of recording words and information. Long ago, dragons discovered how to enchant certain natural crystals so they could mentally "impress" information onto them, just as they mentally project their thoughts to other creatures. In the same way, they could retrieve impressed information from a crystal, making it an ideal storage device, a sort of "draconic book" (though more akin to a modern CD or data-chip). Many of the legendary "jewels" in a dragon's hoard were worth far more than they appeared.

Dragons maintained collections of these "memory crystals" for recording their experiences, knowledge and thoughts over the years. Since they were among the greatest treasures of dragonkind, they were highly prized and fought over following the death of their owner. This led to the creation of the role of Loremaster among the great dragons, thus recognizing the dragon who held the greatest store of knowledge and wisdom gathered by a combination of strength and cunning. The Loremaster was universally recognized as an authority on draconic tradition. Though the Loremaster's word was not law (for no dragon bowed easily to another), it carried great weight.

THE DEATH OF DUNKELZAHN

The great dragon known as Dunkelzahn always sought knowledge and new experiences. Long before he appeared to

the people of the modern world, Dunkelzahn became Loremaster of the dragons, with the greatest store of draconic knowledge and the accumulated lore of untold millennia. Though the mortal world only saw an affable media personality willing to give interviews and host talk shows, Dunkelzahn's fellow dragons knew of his power and his knowledge and thus respected—even feared—him. Of the greatest concern, however, was Dunkelzahn's apparent fascination with the mortals of this new Age and their achievements. Some feared that Dunkelzahn's sympathy would lead him to reveal things that he knew, things best kept secret. In fact, some made it abundantly clear to the great dragon the consequences of revealing certain things to humanity.

Dunkelzahn surprised everyone in 2057 when he decided to run for president of the United Canadian American States. The world was shocked when he won and stunned when the great dragon was apparently assassinated on the night of his inauguration. Even Dunkelzahn's fellow dragons had not anticipated his actions or his demise, and the sudden death of the Loremaster left that position vacant for the first time in more than an Age. Dragon tradition called for a rite to honor the fallen Dunkelzahn and then a contest among the strongest challengers for the right to claim Dunkelzahn's hoard—particularly the Jewel of Memory, the great memory crystal containing the Loremaster's vast stored knowledge. But before that could happen, Dunkelzahn surprised his fellow dragons once more: he left a will.

REPERCUSSIONS

Against all draconic tradition, Dunkelzahn used metahuman legal mechanisms to see to the disposition and distribution of his possessions after his death. It was a shocking affront, but there was little that the great dragons could do about it. The will was released publicly shortly after Dunkelzahn's death, and the Draco Foundation was immediately in place to administer to the will's bequests. Most importantly, Dunkelzahn chose to will the Jewel of Memory to the one dragon who could best protect it: Lofwyr. The CEO of Saedler-Krupp wasted no time in claiming his prize, while other dragons received various bequests from Dunkelzahn's will, delivered to them by agents of the Draco Foundation.

The delivery of the Jewel of Memory into Lofwyr's hands made him de facto Loremaster of the dragons, but since it was not won through a traditional Rite of Succession, there was some question as to Lofwyr's rightful claim to that title. Some dragons refused to acknowledge it. Lofwyr cared little, since the Jewel was his without the need to risk himself to get it. Most of the other great dragons did not care to challenge Lofwyr's possession of the Jewel, since they didn't feel certain they could wrest it from him.

A few upstarts like Nachtmeister did challenge Lofwyr, but they paid the ultimate price for their defiance, discouraging further challenges. There were also those dragons, like Hestaby, who applauded Dunkelzahn's break with tradition and shared his fascination with the modern world and its advances. Though they were not necessarily pleased with Lofwyr's possession of the Jewel of Memory, they supported Dunkelzahn's right to make the decision.



So the great dragons largely returned to their own affairs, thinking little of the lost opportunities of the Rite of Succession until a new challenger appeared.

THE RETURN OF GHOSTWALKER

In the last days of 2061, the great dragon now known as Ghostwalker emerged from the astral rift left by Dunkelzahn's sudden demise in the Federal District of Columbia. Ghostwalker wasted no time in seizing control of the city of Denver, which was located in his old domain as detailed in *Year of the Comet*.

Ghostwalker is a powerful great dragon, a peer of Dunkelzahn, and the potential equal of any of the world's current great dragons. Once his affairs in Denver were settled, Ghostwalker acquainted himself with the goings-on in the world and was shocked to learn not only of Dunkelzahn's death, but also of the unprecedented way in which the Loremaster's hoard had been disposed of. Ghostwalker was outraged at this violation of draconic tradition, at a loss to understand how his fellow dragons had allowed it to stand. He could not permit such blatant disregard for the ancient ways, so once matters in Denver were arranged to his satisfaction, Ghostwalker prepared to do something about it.

CAMPAIGN SYNOPSIS

Survival of the Fittest begins when Ghostwalker calls a council of the world's great dragons. He formally demands that a Rite of Succession take place for the position of Loremaster and the right to claim Dunkelzahn's hoard, despite the fact that most of it has already been distributed to the beneficiaries of Dunkelzahn's will. Ghostwalker has the support of enough other dragons (and the support of draconic tradition), so the Challenge is accepted. Rather than decide the issue through direct conflict, however, the dragons play out a complex and ritualized contest using proxies and agents to prove their superiority.

Though some dragons play only a token role in the Rite, seeing it as primarily being a struggle between Ghostwalker and Lofwyr, other dragons jump into the fray, either to win or simply to further their own positions. The great dragon Hestaby makes plans to win the Rite of Succession, not so much to gain the position of Loremaster as to prevent the conflict between dragons from destroying the progress she has made with her own plans. The player characters are Hestaby's agents during the Rite, though they don't know it at first.

In *Knowledge*, the shadowrunners are hired to steal a datafile from Hestaby's Mt. Shasta lair in the California Free State.



The runners have to make their way through the territory claimed by Hestaby—and protected by her allies—to reach the mountain. They then have to sneak in, acquire the file and get back out again. The run is a fairly straightforward one, simply because the runners' employer is actually Hestaby herself. She's testing the runners' abilities and laying a false trail so that others will assume the runners work for someone other than her. It also allows her to safeguard some of her secrets by pretending they've been stolen already.

Once the runners have proven themselves, they're hired for another run in Denver. In *Cunning*, they're supposed to extract (read: kidnap) Morningstar, the leader of a splinter faction of the Children of the Dragon that believes Ghostwalker is the reincarnation of Dunkelzahn and a divine prophet and guide. The runners' employer claims that Morningstar is a traitor to the Children of the Dragon and wants to expose him. When the evidence shows that Morningstar was framed, Ghostwalker eliminates the runners' employer, as Hestaby wants him to do for reasons of her own.

Next, in *Elements*, the characters are sent to deliver a package to a destination within the Awakened nation of Amazonia. They have to smuggle it across the border and take it upriver into the depths of the Amazon rainforest. The package contains a set of ancient magical scrolls from Dunkelzahn's will (which previously appeared in the adventure *Legacy in Corporate Punishment*). Hestaby acquired the scrolls and sent the runners to deliver them to the great feathered-serpent Hualpa, scoring another point for Hestaby.

In *Balance*, the shadowrunners are hired for an operation in Hong Kong involving its most powerful corporation, Wuxing. They are asked to assist with a geomantic ritual intended to steal some of the mystic power that Wuxing has been gathering, helping to maintain the balance of power between the eastern dragons Lung and Ryumyo and their proxies.

In *Hunting*, the runners are hired to steal a magical treasure called the Silver Songbird from the collection of the great Welsh dragon Rhonabwy. They end up playing a dangerous game of their own when Rhonabwy decides to hunt them to recover what they have taken.

Another of Dunkelzahn's former treasures is the runners' target in *Rest*, when they go to the ruins of Tehran looking for the Shroud of Shadows. They face the undead and ghostly inhabitants of the ruined city and the threat of the great dragon Aden, who claims the Shroud for himself.

In *Memory*, Hestaby sends the shadowrunners into the depths of the metaplanes to recover the magical essence of the Jewel of Memory and give her an edge over Lofwyr. The runners have to face the challenges that stand between them and their goal and come face to face with Lofwyr himself, who makes them an offer that may be difficult to refuse.

Finally, the future of dragonkind rests with the characters when they attend the Council of Dragons where the outcome of the Rite of Succession is decided and have the opportunity to choose who they will support. Their actions can make the difference between victory and defeat for Hestaby and her plans.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURES

Survival of the Fittest is intended to be run as a series of adventures leading up to the climax where the Rite of Succession is decided. The gamemaster has a certain amount of flexibility when it comes to integrating the adventures in this book into an ongoing *Shadowrun* campaign.

CAMPAIGN TIMEFRAME

The exact dates for when the Rite of Succession begins and ends are intentionally left undefined, so that gamemasters can easily incorporate the Rite into their campaigns. As a general timeframe, the Rite would not begin until mid-2062, after Ghostwalker has consolidated his power base within Denver, and probably ends in early 2063. The maneuverings of the Rite shift the balance of power between various dragons, however, creating a situation where dragon activity is amplified for some time to come.

TIME IN BETWEEN ADVENTURES

The exact time that passes between the adventures in *Survival of the Fittest* is left deliberately vague in most cases. You can run the adventures in this book one right after the other or you can choose to insert other adventures in between them to extend the campaign. Adding other adventures can also keep the players off-guard, since they won't necessarily know which shadowruns are part of the Rite of Succession and which ones aren't. Dragons are patient creatures, so the Rite of Succession could take a considerable time if you want it to.

CHANGING THE ORDER

The initial adventures in this book can be run in a different order, if you want. Generally speaking, it's best if *Knowledge* is the first adventure, but it can come later on. Perhaps Hestaby has the characters undertake a run against her own assets to throw off suspicion on the part of the other dragons, rather than trying to test the runners' abilities.

The middle five adventures can be run in any order desired. The order given in this book is only a suggestion. If running the adventures in a different order suits your plans for the campaign better, then by all means do so.

MODIFYING THE ADVENTURES

You may wish to modify the adventures as they are written to better suit your own *Shadowrun* campaign. This is encouraged, and the adventures often have suggestions on how to customize them. When modifying the adventures, pay close attention to how any changes may affect the adventure and later ones in the series. This is particularly true of changes that may have a large impact on any of the dragons involved in the Rite of Succession. If you decide to have the shadowrunners involved in a plot to assassinate Ghostwalker, for example, and they are successful, that will have a major impact on both the campaign and the Sixth World in general.



ADDING ADVENTURES

You can add more adventures to extend *Survival of the Fittest*, if desired. Perhaps another dragon hires the shadowrunners for a run or two with Hestaby's silent consent, since those shadowruns may serve her purpose. Perhaps you want to run adventures where Hestaby scores points against some of the other dragons mentioned in this and other *Shadowrun* books that don't appear directly in the adventures in *Survival of the Fittest*.

You can also add completely unrelated shadowruns between the adventures in this book to give the players a break from the ongoing *Survival* campaign, and to keep them wondering which adventures further Hestaby's plans and which are not a part of the Rite of Succession.

DEALING WITH DRAGONS

Survival of the Fittest revolves around the conflict played out among some of the world's most powerful beings, the great dragons. Their motivations and agendas are found throughout this book, but this section offers an overview of the major players in the challenge, their domains and their goals.

HESTABY

Lair: Mt. Shasta, California Free State

Hestaby is a prime mover behind the scenes in *Survival of the Fittest*. Though female dragons are renowned for both their strength and cunning, some of Hestaby's fellow dragons have made the mistake of underestimating her. They may pay for it by the time the story is over. Like Dunkelzahn, Hestaby plays her cards close, revealing little about her true goals and abilities.

For many years, Hestaby has claimed Mt. Shasta in the California Free State as her lair and domain and protected the surrounding land against anyone who would try to take it. This included the elven nation of Tir Tairngire, when Hestaby turned back an attempted invasion of northern California by Tir forces in 2053. More recently, Hestaby has become a member of the ruling Council of Princes in Tir Tairngire, much to the concern of people in California's Northern Crescent, who assumed that her presence was a major deterrent to elven aggression. The outcome of Hestaby's alliance with the Tir elves remains to be seen, but it has drawn the attention of her fellow dragons. It has also alienated some of Hestaby's supporters, who considered the elven nation an enemy and now see Hestaby as a traitor.

Hestaby is something of a progressive, as dragons go. She genuinely likes and admires the young races and has watched their development over the years. She was inspired by Dunkelzahn's willingness to defy custom to take a more active role in guiding metahumanity toward a better existence. Since Dunkelzahn's death, she has taken up his cause, and wants to forge an alliance that can help to create that better world. Of course, most of Hestaby's fellow great dragons are not nearly so altruistic. The Rite of Succession offers Hestaby an opportunity to gain some influence in draconic society and take the measure of her potential adversaries (and allies, for that matter).

LOFWYR

Lair: Saeder-Krupp Headquarters, Rhine-Rhur Megaplex, German Alliance

Widely considered the most powerful creature in the Sixth World, even by his fellow dragons, Lofwyr adapted quickly to the modern world and shrewdly invested vast sums of wealth from his hoard into the true source of power in the 21st century—a corporation. Under the great dragon's guidance, Saeder-Krupp Heavy Industries has become the largest, wealthiest and most powerful megacorporation in the world. Lofwyr intends to see that it remains that way.

Lofwyr is an unusual mix of tradition and innovation. On the one hand, he has adapted to the demands of the modern world and learned to play the games of corporate finance and economics better than most of the young races. He's a firm believer in using modern tools and methods to accomplish his goals. On the other hand, Lofwyr's goals are still very much those of a dragon who recalls a time when his kind ruled the world and were unchallenged in their might. Lofwyr wants nothing less than all the power he can get, and his megacorporate empire is the key to that goal. Anyone and anything that stands in his way is a threat that must be eliminated.

Lofwyr considers sympathy for the young races a sign of sentimentality and weakness. Metahumanity is nothing more than a resource, a collection of servants, subjects, consumers and potential meals. Though their activities and their society are interesting for Lofwyr, it's no different than stirring up an anthill and watching what happens. Individual people mean very little to him. At best they approach the level of favored pets, but certainly not equals. In fact, Lofwyr believes that he has no equals, even among his own kind.

Lofwyr is inhumanly cold and calculating, merciless and ambitious. He's also patient above all else. He's already thousands of years old. The complex corporate maneuvering and scheming of the past fifty years or so are nothing more than a moment in time for him, the first moves of an infinitely more complex game that has only begun.

GHOSTWALKER

Lair: Denver, Front Range Free Zone

The great dragon Ghostwalker is a peer to Lofwyr in terms of age and experience, though Ghostwalker is not as familiar with the modern world, having only recently returned from a long sojourn in the depths of the higher astral planes. Only he knows what he was doing there for all of this time, journeying in spirit while his body lay hidden in a deep and dreamless sleep near the modern city of Denver. All anyone knows is that Ghostwalker's spirit recently returned.

His first action upon awakening was to lay claim to his old domain, which includes the Denver Front Range Free Zone. Ghostwalker assaulted the Aztlan sector of Denver, destroying the *teocalli* (Aztec temple) there. He made it abundantly clear that the area was his. Though the citizens and nations that claimed Denver would be permitted to live there, Aztlan would be removed and those that remained would have to



acknowledge Ghostwalker as the master of the region. Having seen the great dragon's power, the other nations had little choice but to agree.

Ghostwalker, like Lofwyr, is a mix of traditionalist and innovator. Ghostwalker was clearly close to Dunkelzahn at one time and considers himself the rightful heir of Dunkelzahn's position as Loremaster. Though he respects Dunkelzahn's achievements and goals, he does not feel that he can let the violation of draconic tradition go unchallenged. His move to claim Denver as a personal domain recalls the time when great dragons were respected and feared masters of all they surveyed, but his quick move to make an ally of the Nexus data haven and his open-door "petitioning" policy show that is adapting quickly to the modern age.

It's no secret that Ghostwalker dislikes Lofwyr and considers him his greatest rival, or that the feeling is mutual. Ghostwalker isn't as willing to "play the game" as Lofwyr nor does he understand the finer points of modern society, but he's learning quickly.

HUALPA

Lair: Somewhere in Amazonia

The great dragon Hualpa is something of an enigma, even by dragon standards. He is perhaps the most prominent feathered serpent in the world, having led a coalition of Awakened forces (including several other dragons) to overthrow the government of Brazil and establish the nation of Amazonia. Though not the first dragon to attack a sovereign nation, Hualpa was the first to make a go at establishing one of his own and, thus far, has been the most successful at it. Amazonia is recognized as a legitimate nation by most of the world and is a bastion of Awakened rights and progressive ecology, preserving one of the most vital and complex ecosystems on Earth.

Hualpa is fairly peace-loving at heart, but willing to do what is necessary for the future of the world. He is wary of technology, having seen the kind of damage it can do to the environment. He's not anti-technology, but considers magic superior and more "natural." Technology is useful so long as it is carefully controlled and works in harmony with nature rather than causing harm. This philosophy tends to prevail in Amazonia, where technology is used to enhance and protect nature, not destroy it. Unfortunately, this means Amazonia cannot always take full advantage of modern technology, at least not without compromising its principles.

Hualpa's greatest concern is Amazonia's neighbor, Aztlan, the embodiment of everything Hualpa fears about the modern world. In fact, the creation of Amazonia was intended at least in part as a check to Aztlan's power, keeping it from expanding and seizing control of the Amazon Basin and the rest of South America. Hualpa considers Aztlan's unrestrained use of technology and blood magic a serious threat, and wants nothing less than to see the nation (and its ruling corporation, Aztechnology) removed from power so that some of the damage it has done can be healed. The recent Yucatán War is a prime example of Aztlan's abuses, which may have done irreparable damage to the environment (both physical and magical).

Hualpa ultimately cares little for the Rite of Succession except for how it may aid his cause. If he gains greater respect from his fellow great dragons, then he may be able to rally more of them to his side and away from the power games of dragons like Lofwyr, Lung, Ryumyo and others.

LUNG

Lair: T'ai Shan, central China

The great dragon Lung recently established a lair atop T'ai Shan, a sacred mountain in central China. The China region has been the focus of Lung's attention since his awakening in the modern world (see *Target: Awakened Lands* for more information). Before then, Lung operated primarily in the shadows of the warring nations of China, influencing the local warlords and the Triads.

Lung is primarily concerned with an ages-old struggle with his rival, the great dragon Ryumyo. The two have been fighting a proxy-war against each other since the dawn of the Sixth World (and for some time before that, in a previous Age). Recently, both have moved to positions of greater prominence in Asia as their conflict escalates. Lung's main interest in the Rite of Succession is ensuring that Ryumyo doesn't win. Though Lung would be pleased to take the position of Loremaster for himself, he's too wrapped up in his personal feud to make much of an effort to gain it.

Still, one of the prizes that Lung and Ryumyo struggle over is control of the dragon-lines and power sites in Asia and along the Pacific Rim, a prize rich enough to draw the attention of the other great dragons. Should one of the two come close to victory, their peers may see the need to intervene, assuming they're not already too late.

RYUMYO

Lair: Unknown, presumably somewhere in Japan

Ryumyo, Lung's fellow eastern dragon and rival, is at least as mysterious as Lung is. He has only been seen in public a handful of times, and hardly at all in recent years. Ryumyo's power base is concentrated in Japan, where he originally held considerable influence with the Yakuza (and, through them, several Japanese megacorporations). Ryumyo has long been a shadow-power in Japan, pulling strings behind the scenes arranging matters to suit his various schemes.

Following the disasters that struck Japan recently, Ryumyo has been forced to take a more active hand in things. It's widely suspected that he has ties to the young Emperor and is manipulating events in the Japanese Empire. The truth of the matter is that Ryumyo's influence is not as great as some might think. The involvement of the free spirit Buttercup and Yamatetsu Corporation in Japanese affairs has caused some trouble for the great dragon, but he continues to consolidate his influence in the Empire through the Yakuza and other agents in the shadows.

Ryumyo is more interested in the Rite of Succession than Lung, in that his interest goes beyond simply denying his rival the role of Loremaster. Ryumyo believes that the title and position could aid him in his own plans and has diverted some resources toward that end, though his attention is stretched somewhat thin with all the other matters currently going on in Japan and its territories.



RHONABWY

Lair: Llandoverly, Wales

Rhonabwy is a great dragon that lairs in a region of Wales, a domain he claimed shortly after his awakening. Like Lofwyr, Rhonabwy plays the corporate game well. Rather than buying a megacorporation outright, Rhonabwy is a shadow-investor, owning shares in numerous corporations and business interests. He does not possess enough to give him outright control of any top-tier corps, but more than enough to give him insight into the operations and business dealings of most of them (and providing him with a tremendous amount of wealth from his shrewd investments). Rhonabwy and Lofwyr politely dance around each other in corporate circles, rarely getting close enough to require a response from the other but always testing the other's resources and knowledge.

Rhonabwy is a collector with a vast hoard. He fancies himself a connoisseur and patron of the arts. His collection includes priceless art treasures from around the world, some of which predate any known human civilization. Rhonabwy is particularly fond of music. He supports both musical education and performance, though his tastes run more toward folk, classical, and opera than modern nova-rock or other genres.

Legend has it that Rhonabwy has a rival, a sea dragon that dwells in Cardigan Bay. If this is true, no one has ever seen this supposed rival, and neither Rhonabwy nor his fellow dragons talk about it. Rhonabwy is also rumored to have ties with certain legends about King Arthur but, again, he neither confirms nor denies this. None of these elements appear in *Survival of the Fittest*, though the gamemaster is free to use them as desired.

CELEDYR

Lair: Caerleon, Wales

Rhonabwy's fellow Welsh dragon is Celedyr, who lairs at Caerleon in southeastern Wales. Above the dragon's underground lair is an ancient Roman amphitheater and a high-tech complex built by telecommunications megacorp Transys Neuronet. The topic of communication—language in particular—fascinates Celedyr, making him a natural ally for Transys. The corporation has provided Celedyr with millions of nuyen of equipment and researchers in exchange for the dragon's support and occasional insights into their various projects.

Celedyr has a somewhat kinder attitude toward the young races than Rhonabwy, though he's still quite ruthless when it comes to protecting his own interests. Celedyr and Rhonabwy have maintained a friendly rivalry for some time; there have never been open hostilities between the two dragons (at least, not yet).

ADEN

Lair: Mt. Ararat, Turkey

The great dragon Aden is best known for his devastating attack on the city of Tehran after its ruling *ayatollah* declared a *jihād* against the Awakened. Iranian military might proved no match for the unleashed power of a great dragon, and Aden systematically destroyed the city as a warning to all that violence against the Awakened would not be tolerated. The city was evacuated and largely abandoned, and Aden retreated to

his lair high atop Mt. Ararat in neighboring Turkey. He has been seen only rarely since then. Local people give him a wide berth, rather than risking angering him again.

Aden is a sirrush, a variety of eastern dragon found in the Middle East and Asia Minor (p. 268, SR3). He has little interest in metahumanity, provided that the young races show proper respect and deference for their betters (i.e., dragons). He has no compunctions about driving his point home with another assault like the one on Tehran, though he hasn't found it necessary since that first object lesson. Something of a contemplative, Aden prefers the solitude of his lair and doesn't concern himself with the affairs of others, except where they intrude on his domain.

Aden's prime interest in the Rite of Succession is that he is a traditionalist. He did not agree with Dunkelzahn's means of distributing his hoard, and registered his disapproval by refusing to claim the bequest the Loremaster left him. Aden approves of a return to traditional draconic ways and so supports the Rite. He even entertains thoughts that he would make a good Loremaster, given the opportunity.

OTHER DRAGONS

Though the great dragons described here are the prime moves of the Rite of Succession, there are a number of other great dragons in the Sixth World, as well as numerous younger dragons that involve themselves in the affairs of their elders in one way or another. Some other noteworthy dragons include:

Alamais is Lofwyr's brother and a great western dragon as well. Alamais has not adapted to the modern world as well as his brother and remains jealous of Lofwyr's success. He despises Lofwyr's corporate wheeling and dealing as "weak" and not befitting a great dragon. Instead, he manipulates various radical policlubs and terrorist groups to further his own goals, which include keeping the nations of Europe divided where Lofwyr would unite them under Saeder-Krupp's logo.

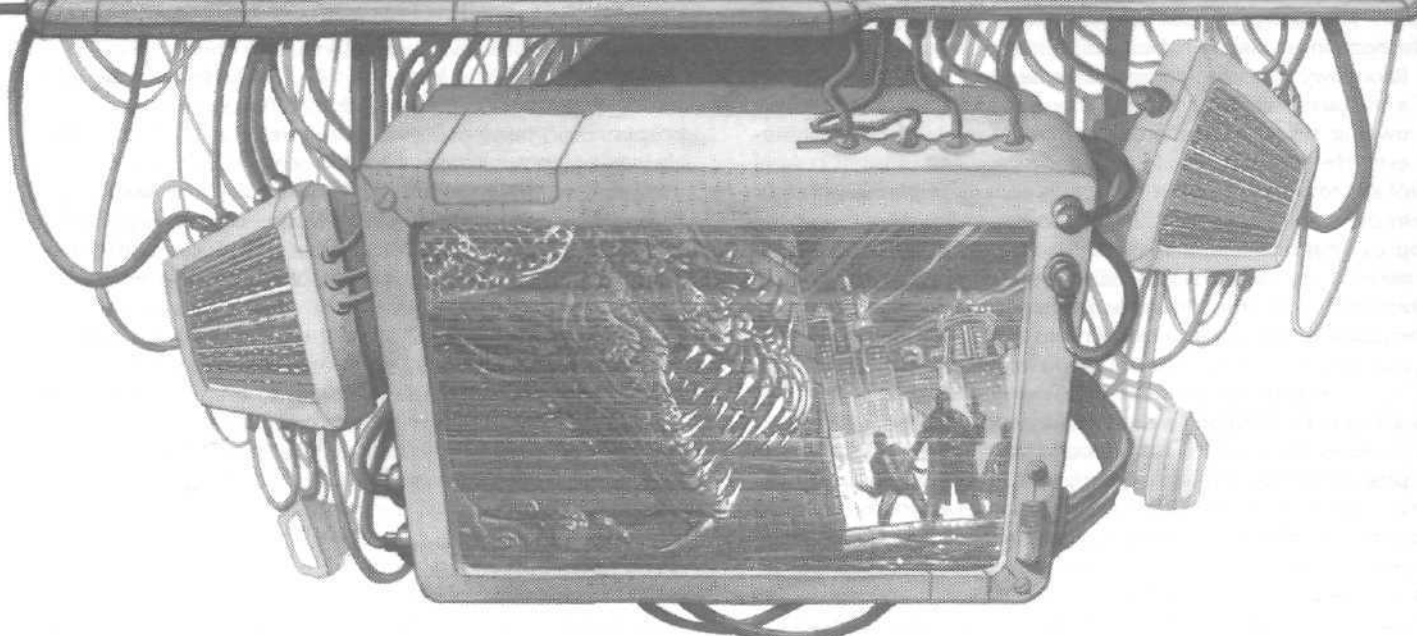
Arleesh is a female great feathered serpent, but more active in mortal affairs than Mujaji. Fairly young by dragon standards, Arleesh is devoted to protecting the world against Awakened threats of which the young races are as yet unaware and not prepared to handle.

Masaru is an eastern great dragon associated with rebel factions in the Philippines. He's also fairly young by great dragon standards and fiercely dedicated to his ideals, which primarily involve protecting "his" islands from outsiders (including the Empire of Japan).

Mujaji, the "Rain Queen" of Africa, is a great feathered serpent with a lair near the Cape of Good Hope. She tends to keep to her own affairs.

Sirurg the "Destroyer" is something of a draconic terrorist, a great dragon that has supported Awakened causes by striking against government and even civilian targets. Sirurg was last seen publicly as part of the coalition that overthrew the Brazilian government to establish Amazonia. He has not been seen since then, and isn't involved in the events in *Survival of the Fittest* unless the gamemaster wants him to be.

KNOWLEDGE



To Hestaby, I leave the encryption key to my private datastore on board the Zurich Orbital Habitat. Use the knowledge you find there well, as I know that you will.

—From the Last Will and Testament of Dunkelzahn

PREPARING TO PLAY

This adventure isn't exactly a milk run (breaking into a dragon's lair never is), but it's probably the simplest that the runners will encounter during the Rite of Succession. It's not actually a part of the Rite itself, merely a test of the runners' abilities and professionalism to see if they're worthy agents. On the face of it, the run is a straightforward one: get into Hestaby's lodge atop Mount Shasta and acquire a particular data file from the on-site computer system. Of course, to do that, the characters have to get across dangerous parts of Northern California, reach the lodge undetected, get inside, get the data from a well-protected system and get out without being caught. Still, that's why they're paid the heavy cred, right?

PLOT SYNOPSIS

A fixer named Radek contacts the player characters about a run to the California Free State. The target is a data file called "Kallisti," which Radek says is stored in an offline system at the Shasta Lodge, the home of the great dragon Hestaby. The team needs to gain access to the lodge and acquire the data file, preferably without raising any suspicions on the part of Hestaby or anyone else at the Shasta Lodge. Radek offers the runners a handsome payment for their efforts, with a small amount in advance and the remainder upon delivery of the data. Since time is of the essence, they have only a little more than a week to complete the run.

The team makes their way to Mount Shasta by whatever means they have at their disposal. They may be able to gain the assistance of some local gypsies in navigating the hazards of Northern California to reach the mountain. There they have to hike up the mountainside, dealing with the challenges of the terrain as well as the critters and spirits that guard the Shasta enclave and try to keep unwanted visitors away.

Once they reach the lodge, they need to get inside and gain access to the system where the Kallisti file is stored. After overcoming the IC in the system, they can download





the file and slip away from the lodge, hopefully unnoticed. Provided that things go well, no one will be any the wiser that the runners were there. Of course, where shadowruns are concerned, things often have a way of going in unexpected directions.

What's Really Happening

The run itself is entirely what it appears to be, a datasteal with a fairly difficult target. The runners' true employer, however, is actually Hestaby herself. An intermediary of hers hired the runners through Radek to carry out the run as a test of their abilities. Hestaby wants to see if they've got what it takes to serve as her agents in the Rite of Succession, and if they can handle runs involving other dragons. She also wants to arrange the "theft" of the Kallisti file to create the false impression that a rival dragon has stolen it from her. The others will think that Hestaby is weaker than she actually is and she can conceal certain valuable data under the guise of the "theft." Nobody will be looking for it because they will believe it stolen. If nothing else, unraveling the truth will keep Hestaby's fellow dragons occupied while she moves her own plans forward.

It's unlikely that the runners will discover who is actually behind their mission, though some concerted investigation might reveal the truth. See *A Simple Run, Minimal Complications* for suggestions on handling the matter, should it arise.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The adventure is a fairly straightforward one. This makes it suitable for players who aren't especially experienced in playing *Shadowrun*. It's also fine for more experienced players (who are likely to be suspicious; after all, simple runs are rarely what they seem to be).

Parts of the adventure have been left for the gamemaster to modify, based on where the runners are coming from, their resources, their previous relations with Hestaby and the other great dragons (if any), and so forth. Read through the entire adventure carefully, noting places where it requires adjustment to suit the player characters. Suggestions for making these adjustments can be found throughout the adventure. Gamemasters running *Knowledge* for more experienced groups of shadowrunners may wish to use the suggestions given in the *Pushing the Envelope* sections to make things a bit more challenging.

A SIMPLE RUN, MIMIMAL COMPLICATIONS

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The runners meet with their new employer, Mr. Radek, who offers them a datasteal job in CalFree. The only real catch is that the data they're after is in the lair of a great dragon, but then if the job were easy, he wouldn't need to hire skilled shadowrunners, would he? Radek suggests there may be more work down the line if the runners handle this job well. The characters may get the (correct) impression that Radek is ultimately working for a dragon, though which one is hard to say.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Another night in the sprawl and you're out for biz. You pay little attention to the glaring neolux signs flashing logos and product names in English, Spanish, Japanese and various types of Cityspeak. You glide through the bustling crowd on the sidewalk. Everyone who looks your way is smart enough to give you your space as you walk. A light, fitful rain is falling, making the sidewalks and the streets glisten in the glare from the city lights.

You're headed for a club called the Rubber Suit for a meeting about a potential job. No word yet on what it's about, only that it's out-of-town work. You could actually use a chance to get out of the sprawl for a little while, allow some tempers to cool and some memories to fade a little. You spot the club and quicken your pace, the crowd parting before you, and soon you're standing under the tall glowing image of a giant reptile breathing neon blue flames that flash with Japanese characters spelling out the club's name.

You wander past the bouncers and take in the inside of the club. Down the stairs on the floor below, a scale model of the ruins of Tokyo from about a hundred years ago is laid out, so you can feel like a giant monster stomping through the city. Giant trid-screens cover the walls, showing loops of old flat-vid monster movies spliced in with what looks like soft-core Japanese porn, with a retro music track. People are clustered around the bar that runs the perimeter of the floor above the ruins, allowing customers to lean at the rail and look down.

A quick glance shows your contact sitting on a "building" down below, an untouched drink and a pocket secretary resting on the "roof" of the building next to him. He's one hundred percent suit, good-looking in that bland corporate way, as at ease as he is out of place in here. You head on over and he invites you to take seats.

"I'm Mr. Radek," he says by way of introduction. "I understand that you are both reputable and discrete. If so, then I have a job offer for you.

"The job is a simple data acquisition from an isolated system in the California Free State. All you need to do is get in, get the data and get out. The run pays 50,000¥ on delivery and verification of the data, with an additional 10,000¥ up front to cover expenses. That amount buys your silence as well as your expertise.

"There're only two potential complications," Radek says. "The first is that the run is somewhat time sensitive. It must be completed within ten days from today. The second is that the target is in the Shasta Lodge, the home of the great dragon Hestaby. Will that be a problem?"

HOOKS

Set the tone of things right from the start by emphasizing the conditions of the sprawl the characters live in: crowded, dirty, noisy, active, the nights filled with the glow of streetlights and neon signs. Let the players feel like their characters have some pull on the streets by pointing out that people can tell they are bad news. Feel free to go into detail



about the sort of people in the Rubber Suit, a mixture of slumming corporate salarymen and street trash, Anglos, Asians, some mixed-bloods, maybe a few Natives. Don't forget about metahumans, possibly some metavariants or strange changelings. The characters should be on their guard, but relatively at ease. They're in their element here.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Mr. Radek is a fixer who was contacted by a middleman in turn contacted anonymously by an agent of Hestaby to hire shadowrunners for this particular job. Radek has a decent, solid reputation on the streets. The characters should have at least heard of him, enough to know that he can be trusted (at least as much as anyone in the shadows). If the player characters have a regular fixer contact, feel free to use that character in place of Radek, or have the runners' fixer vouch for Radek after putting the characters in touch with him, to help put them at ease.

Radek's offer is exactly what it appears to be: a basic datasteal operation, with the exception of the somewhat unusual target. The fixer is willing to negotiate over the fee; he'll go as high as 200,000¥, including expenses, for the whole run. Any more than that and he decides that the shadowrunners aren't worth his time. "I hope you're as good as your prices say you are," he tells them before leaving the club. Radek negotiates in good faith. He has instructions to cultivate the shadowrunners for possible future work, so he's interested in building a rapport with them, not getting on their bad side.

The Rubber Suit

The Rubber Suit is an exclusive nightclub in the Everett district of Seattle (see p. 48, *New Seattle*). It's known to be something of a hangout for the local Yakuza. Let the players draw what conclusions they may from Mr. Radek's preference for meeting them there.

If the campaign is based in a metroplex other than Seattle, send the characters to a suitable meeting place there. Perhaps the Rubber Suit in Seattle is so popular it has inspired imitators or a chain in other cities. If there's a particular locale in your own game that would suit the meeting better, feel free to use it. A setting that has associations with giant lizards or dragons is particularly appropriate (again, allow the players to draw whatever conclusions they wish).

Investigating Radek

It's likely the runners will want to check out Mr. Radek to make sure that he's on the level with them. Feel free to remind them that overt spellcasting or astral scanning at a meet is a serious breach of etiquette (anyone with a rating of 1 or better in Etiquette (Street) knows this). The characters should be discrete in checking Radek out and confirming his bona fides.

Contacts: Runners who ask their contacts about Radek learn that he has a solid reputation and is considered by past associates to be decent to work for. Give this information to any runner who bothers to check. You can roll a few dice and

consult the results, then tell the players that Radek has a decent reputation. The runners' contacts know nothing about Radek's association with Hestaby because not even Radek knows that.

Astral Perception: Any character examining Radek from the astral plane can make a normal Assensing (4) Test (p. 172, SR3) to learn more from reading his aura. Radek is a mundane with a modest amount of cyberware. His aura shows him to be cool and collected, a consummate professional. He's not emotionally involved in this situation; it's just business to him. There are no indications that he bears the runners any ill will.

Detection Spells: Characters may use spells like Analyze Truth or even Mind Probe to try and learn more about Radek's motives. Analyze Truth reveals that everything Radek is telling them is true (at least so far as he knows). Radek has no reason to lie to the runners. Again, he wants to build a rapport with them, not frag them over. He's as candid as he can be about the details of the run.

Even a *Mind Probe* spell reveals nothing unusual. Radek doesn't know anything about Hestaby's involvement with the run or anything else that could compromise her plans. All a Mind Probe can do is confirm that he's telling the runners the truth and perhaps find out how much he's willing to pay them if pressed. If Radek notices the Mind Probe (*Noticing Magic*, p. 162, SR3), he breaks off negotiations at once.

The Matrix: Characters may research Mr. Radek more thoroughly via the Matrix, trying to dig up any dirt that's available on him. Given the limited time they have to complete their run, the characters can't find anything incriminating on Radek. His connections are buried too well for them to dig up with this sort of investigation. All a Matrix search turns up is that Radek is a fixer with a decent street rep, the same as going through the characters' contacts.

More on the Run

The runners are likely to have questions for Radek regarding the run. Use the following to answer them as completely as possible, filling in additional information as needed.

- **What's the data we're after?** Radek tells the runners that the data file is code-named "Kallisti" and that its contents are encrypted and of no concern to them. He refuses to explain what the data is or why his client wants it. In truth, he doesn't even know, so even magic can't get the information from him.

- **How do we get to California?** Radek leaves this up to the runners. He does note that travel in and out of the California Free State is somewhat hazardous lately (since the events in *Year of the Comet*). If asked, Radek recommends that the runners either fly into a small local airport in Northern California and make their way to Shasta overland or else make the whole trip overland if they're close enough. See *Getting There Is Half the Fun* (p. 22) for more details.

- **How do we get into the Shasta Lodge?** Again, that's what Radek is paying the runners for. It's up to them to figure out how to get into the Lodge and get at the data. Radek points out that the client wants this done quietly, so the subtle approach is best. He also mentions that the most direct approaches to the Lodge are probably watched.



• **What kind of opposition can we expect?** Radek has only limited information on this, but what data he does have indicates that the Shasta Lodge's primary protection comes from Hestaby herself and the magical nature of the site, including the various paranormals dwelling there. The Lodge also has some electronic security systems, though Radek doesn't know anything about them. There may be some guards on site, but not many, since it's known that Hestaby limits the number of people living and working at the Lodge.

• **Where do we deliver the data?** Radek asks the runners to deliver the data to him at the same meeting place in ten days. He gives them an LTG number as a message drop where they can leave messages for him if something happens and they need to meet earlier.

Future Opportunities

During or after the negotiations, Radek mentions that if the runners handle this job well he may have "other opportunities to offer them in the future." He's deliberately vague about what these "other opportunities" involve (again, because he doesn't really know himself), but it should be clear that this has the potential to turn into lucrative long-term work for the runners if they do well.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

This encounter is meant to be a fairly straightforward one: the runners meet Radek and take on the run. If you want to liven things up a bit or start them off with a bang, you can insert some gratuitous violence into the encounter. The best candidates are either a street gang outside the club looking to pick a fight with someone or the Yakuza and their rivals mixing it up inside the club.

In the first case, Everett has no lack of gangs to choose from, including the Red Rovers go-gang and the zany Scatterbrains, psychos with a clown fixation (both detailed on p. 50, *New Seattle*). The gangers may just be out looking for trouble or they may be another "test" arranged by Hestaby to see how the runners handle themselves (perhaps the runners notice a tiny roto-drone or spirit watching things from afar).

Since the Rubber Suit is notorious as a Yakuza hangout, it's also the perfect place for the Mafia to stage a hit against the local kobun. Alternately the hitters could be from a Seoulpa Ring, Triad or other rival syndicate, or even gang members in their employ (combining the previous option with this one). Bullets start flying, people start dying and the runners are caught in the crossfire. If they handle things well, Radek may be more inclined to overlook any questionable behavior when it comes to hiring them.

DEBUGGING

The main thing that can go wrong in this scenario is if the runners either refuse the job or hack Radek off enough that he'll never hire them.

In the first case, try to make the run as appealing as possible to the runners without railroading them into taking it. Stress Radek's good reputation, or use a fixer contact the characters know and trust. Feel free to have contacts call in favors to encourage the runners to take the job. Hestaby has a lot of connections and she can pull strings to nudge the runners in the right direction. If that's not enough, then move on to the next chapter. Perhaps that run will prove better suited to the characters' tastes.

If the characters do something to seriously offend Radek, give them the chance to make amends. Radek isn't unreasonable, and he'll hire the runners so long as they don't make it impossible for him. If they do, consider hav-

ing the runners' reputations take a dive once word gets out about their unprofessional behavior. When the beginning of *Cunning* rolls around, the runners should have been out of work long enough to make the prospect of almost any shadowrun seem appealing.

If the runners don't have a decker or anyone skilled with computers on their team, Radek will arrange for a freelance combat decker (use the sample character on p. 66, *SR3*) to accompany them.

THE RUBBER SUIT'S HEARTH SPIRIT

If a magician on the team happens to conjure up the Rubber Suit's hearth spirit for any reason, the runners are in for something of a surprise. The nightclub has an unusual hearth spirit, given its theme and the endless number of old flat-vids shown here over a number of years. The hearth spirit appears as a man wearing a bad rubber monster suit, standing about six feet tall. It's somewhat clumsy (Quickness of Force -1) but unusually strong (Strength of Force +2). In addition to the usual hearth spirit powers, it has Innate Spell (Flamethrower) that it uses to breathe bright blue blasts of flame from its mouth. The spirit can speak but it generally issues only high-pitched roars.

GETTING THERE IS HALF THE FUN

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The shadowrunners figure out how they're getting to Mt. Shasta across potentially hostile borders and make whatever preparations they want for their run with the cred Radek provides them and whatever resources they have at their disposal. Of course, California isn't the friendliest place in the Sixth World, so there are likely to be some possible snags in the runners' travel plans.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Become a shadowrunner: travel to interesting places, meet interesting people and geek them or take their stuff (or both). It could be an ad for the biz. Now that you've got the job, all you need to do is figure out how you're going to get there and pull it off in the time you've got. Should be null sheen, right?

HOOKS

One way or another the shadowrunners are heading into unknown territory. Even if they're familiar with California, the Shasta Enclave has a mysterious reputation and isn't exactly

open to casual visitors. The players should feel some sense of wonder and trepidation approaching the mountain. This scenario is also an excellent opportunity to play up the feeling of paranoia and conflict in the Sixth World. The Northern Crescent of the California Free State is an embattled place, dangerously close to the elven lands of Tir Tairngire. Travel isn't easy at the best of times, and anti-metahuman (particularly anti-elven) sentiment runs high in some places (though not in the Shasta Enclave itself).

BEHIND THE SCENES

This scenario is fairly freeform. It's up to the players to decide how their characters want to get to the Shasta Enclave. Use the information here to describe the results of the character's plans, and possibly give them an encounter or two en route. If the runners have a sound plan for getting where they need to go, you can gloss over this scenario and move on to *It Hasta Be Shasta*. Alternately, this scenario can play out for some time, especially if the runners are forced to take a roundabout route to get to the mountain.

There are two basic approaches that shadowrunners can take to reach Mt. Shasta: by air or by land. This assumes the characters are already in California. If not, they also have to get into the Free State from wherever they are, which may present challenges of its own.

California Here We Come!

If the characters are not starting out somewhere in the California Free State, they first have to get there in order to make their way to Mt. Shasta. That can be easier said than done, since the powers that be in California tend to be quite security conscious and often shoot first and ask questions later.

A commercial flight into CalFree is one possibility, but it's difficult. For one thing, the major airports in California (San Francisco Airport, Oakland Airport, and LAX in Los Angeles) are restricted and under heavy security, with either the forces of General Saito in SF or Pueblo Security Forces in LA. Smuggling weapons and similar equipment on board such flights is out of the question, and the characters may be detained and questioned by authorities at their destination. This is particularly true of metahuman characters traveling into San Francisco or Oakland. Unless the characters have clean and secure SINs and identities to travel under, they're likely to face detainment, even arrest.

A more roundabout flight into a smaller airport is a possibility, though legitimate flights must still file proper flight plans and characters won't be permitted to bring weapons or similar equipment on board. Alternatively, characters may be able to hire a bush pilot to smuggle them across the border and into the Free State. Illegal flights have to deal with passing over potentially hostile territory (Tir, Ute or Salish-Sidhe) where they may be shot down without warning. If one of the characters is a pilot and wants to fly the team in, you can toss in an encounter with some patrol planes, helicopters or aerial drones that try to bring the intruders down. (See *Rigger 3* for details on various sorts of aircraft and detailed vehicle combat).

Getting into California overland is also a possibility. Characters from distant places can arrange a flight to Seattle, Denver or some other nearby metroplex, then make the rest of the trip overland. The most likely route passes through Ute territory, since few smugglers are willing to cut through Tir Tairngire. Stopovers in Las Vegas, Salt Lake City and Reno are possibilities, depending on the smuggler's route. Characters with their own vehicle can choose their own route, of course, though anything less than a LAV (low-altitude vehicle) is going to be limited even with off-road capabilities, particularly in crossing the Rocky Mountains.

Once the team is in California, they have to get to the Shasta Enclave itself.

Shasta By Air

Reaching Mt. Shasta by air isn't terribly difficult, provided the characters don't run into a Tir Tairngire patrol or something similar.

The characters can't make it all the way to the mountain by air, though; they'll have to set down outside the Enclave and cover the remaining forty or so miles overland. Hestaby's enclave is well protected by technological means, such as radar and other early-warning systems that can detect approaching aircraft. Bound Force 5 air elementals and wind spirits also watch the borders. They have orders to stop unauthorized aircraft—which is to say, any aircraft not escorted by one of the enclave's spirits—from entering the area. Intruding craft are disabled by the spirit's powers and forced to land (or crash). Such intrusions are also reported to the Shasta Lodge and Hestaby.

A magician who scouts the enclave using astral projection quickly discovers the air spirits, since they also have orders to keep out astral intruders they encounter. They engage any intruders in astral combat and try to disrupt or drive them off. They also report any intrusions. Any destroyed or banished spirits are replaced within a few hours.

Shasta By Land

The simplest approach to Mt. Shasta is overland. Interstate-5 runs right through the center of the enclave, and traffic is permitted along it. Characters can easily drive as far as Mt. Shasta City, which sits near the base of the mountain, without arousing undue suspicion provided they keep a fairly low profile. Strangers are not too unusual in the enclave these days, particularly since upheavals in other parts of the Free State have expanded the refugee and gypsy populations.

Though it has grown over the past fifty years, Mt. Shasta City remains a small town of only a few thousand residents. The transient population of the Shasta Enclave is much larger, however, with gypsy tribes and families passing through all the time. Some of them settle in one area for weeks or months at a time before moving on. Runners may be able to pose as a small gypsy band traveling through the area in order to avoid suspicion, and they may encounter some gypsies along the way (see *Pushing the Envelope* for some ideas).



Prep-work and Legwork

Before and during the trip to the Shasta Enclave, the shadowrunners may want to do some prep-work and legwork for their run. See the *Legwork* section at the end of this adventure for guidelines on information the runners can dig up about their target and the opposition that they face.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

The trip to the Shasta Enclave can be fairly routine, particularly if the runners are reasonably well connected and take routine and sensible precautions (like not trying to board a commercial flight in full combat-gear). In that case, the gamemaster can easily gloss over the trip and move on to *It Hasta Be Shasta*, where the runners tackle the mountain and reaching the Shasta Lodge.

On the other hand, there is room for plenty of activity during the trip to the mission site and plenty of obstacles that can get in the runners' way. Gamemasters looking to extend the adventure can easily add a few encounters here to liven things up for the characters. Here are some possibilities:

- **Border Patrol:** Runners crossing one or more borders to get to Mt. Shasta may run afoul of the local border patrol. This can involve anything from convincing the border guards to accept a bribe to a running gun battle as the shadowrunners try to give the border patrol the slip and get away clean. Characters who appear to be smugglers or who are traveling with a smuggler are particularly likely to draw attention from the border patrol.

- **Gangs:** Large marauding gangs roam the Northern Crescent, attacking and looting whomever they can. A small group of people traveling on their own may prove a tempting target, at least until the gang finds out that the runners are well-armed and know how to take care of themselves. Use the Vehicle Rigger stats for gang members (p. 79, SR3), changing the Car skills to Bike skills and dropping the other Vehicle skills. A gang may also have a Tribal Shaman (p. 78, SR3) along with them for magical support.

- **Gypsies:** Northern California is home to a large number of people who have been driven from their homes by border wars and other conflicts. Many of them have adopted a mobile lifestyle, traveling in caravans of vans, cars, mobile homes and such around the area. They call themselves "gypsies" and have developed their own culture and traditions. Fiercely independent, gypsies have no problem with anyone who doesn't bother them. Characters can easily encounter a gypsy band on their way to Mt. Shasta. Traveling along with them would allow the runners the opportunity to blend in and learn something about gypsy ways, though their hosts won't be pleased if they find out that the runners intend to rob Hestaby, who they consider a patron and protector.

- **Human Nation:** A counterpoint to the tolerance of the gypsy bands, hate-groups like Human Nation and the Humanis Policlub have more than a few supporters in Northern California, so close to the disputed Tir border. Metahuman or



SHASTA PATROL MODIFIERS

Situation	Modifier
Characters have active spells or foci	-1 per 2 Force Points*
Characters are astrally active	-1 per 2 Magic Points
Characters have spirits with them	-1 per 2 Force Points
Per Combat Turn (or portion thereof) of combat	-1
Using artificial light sources at night	-1
Spirit using Concealment	+Spirit's Force

*Unless Masked (see p. 76, *MITS*).

changing shadowrunners may draw attention from one of these human-only enclaves in the area. Bigots might take it upon themselves to teach the unwanted "freaks" a lesson, discovering they've bit off more than they can chew when the runners fight back.

• **Paranormals:** Gamemasters with access to the *Critters* sourcebook may wish to spring a few of them on the runners as they trek through the wild lands near the Shasta Enclave. Gamemasters with the *Target: Wastelands* sourcebook can even throw in a mutant or toxic critter for a change of pace.

DEBUGGING

The primary concern in this scenario is that the runners may be unable to come up with a way of getting to Mt. Shasta safely. If the runners come up with a particularly hare-brained plan for getting where they need to go, feel free to offer them some hints about the potential flaws in their plan. Make some Knowledge skill rolls for the characters, if necessary, to spotlight what they know about getting in and out of places like Northern California. You can also have Mr. Radek or a helpful contact make some suggestions as to the best route for the characters to take.

IT HASTA BE SHASTA

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The runners make their ascent up Mt. Shasta to get to the lodge, dealing with the mountain's natural defenses as well as some supernatural and technological ones. They're also treated to the unexpected sight of Hestaby making a hasty departure from the Shasta Lodge.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Mount Shasta. It's not until you stand at the base of it that you realize just how *big* it really is. The mountain dwarfs everything else for miles around, the tallest point in the whole Shasta Enclave. It stands like a giant watching over the whole area, and you can't help but wonder who and what might be looking down from the heights of that mountain. The top of

Mt. Shasta is capped in snow, as it nearly always is, so it's going to be more than a little cold up there. Don't worry, though, things will warm up soon enough.

When the runners near the Shasta Lodge, read the following:

You just catch sight of the Shasta Lodge, up on the high slopes of the mountain, when movement catches your eye and makes you freeze in your tracks. From behind the lodge rises the massive form of a western dragon. Her scales are the color of amber and her wingspan would dwarf a fighter jet, maybe even a Lear Platinum. She takes to the air with long, slow beats of her wings, throwing up a mist of snow. It looks like she's headed in your direction!

HOOKS

The runners from the depths of the sprawl brave the wilderness. Stress the majesty and size of Mt. Shasta (which is one of the tallest mountains in North America) and the challenge of climbing it. Most runners are likely to be out of their element hiking up the side of a mountain. It's a far cry from the concrete and steel canyons of the metroplex they come from. The mountain is also the center of a magical place. The runners should get the feeling they're going somewhere the normal rules don't apply. The wilderness of the mountain is primal, mystical and just a little scary.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Once the runners arrive in the Shasta Enclave, they need to decide how they're going to get up the mountain to the Shasta Lodge. The two easiest routes—the main access road and going by air—are the most difficult for the runners, as they're heavily watched and guarded. There's also nowhere to land an air vehicle except for the immediate grounds of the lodge itself. Runners may be able to approach via the road with the aid of a nature spirit's Concealment power, but there are still plenty of spirits (and occasionally shamans) patrolling astral space around the mountain who may see if a spirit approaches.

The most covert approach is simply to climb the mountain to reach the lodge. It's not an easy climb and it's long—at least a good eight hours from the base of the mountain—but it's not especially dangerous, unless the characters run afoul of a patrol or some of the local wildlife.

Once the runners decide on their approach, begin making tests to see if anyone notices their presence, and possibly takes action. Make one test if the runners approach the lodge via the road or by air, four separate tests if they hike up the mountainside (roughly one test every two hours). Roll 5 dice. The base target is the result of an Open Stealth Test by all the characters. Use the worst result, modified as per the Shasta Patrol Modifiers Table, above.



If the target number is reduced to 0, the runners are automatically spotted. Otherwise, they have a chance of evading detection.

If the runners are spotted, a shaman on duty at the Shasta Lodge is informed. A Force 6 Great Form Mountain Spirit is sent to intercept the runners. The mountain spirit's orders are to capture or incapacitate the runners if possible, drive them off or kill them if necessary. The spirit will use its various powers (particularly Accident and Movement) to slow the runners down, eventually materializing to warn them off. It asks the runners to surrender and attacks if they refuse to do so.

If the characters overcome the mountain spirit, the shaman who summoned it will be aware of it. The Shasta Lodge sends other spirits to find the runners and capture them. These spirits are of the Mountain and Sky domains, with Force Ratings from 4 to 6. They will again use powers like Accident and Movement to keep the runners from escaping until they can capture them. Runners may be able to use spirits of their own—as well as their other abilities—to evade the nature spirits, but it should be difficult. Unless they flee, they are likely to be captured. If that happens, go to *Guests of Hestaby* (p. 30).

Mountain Spirit (Force 6)

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
10	4 (x2)	10	6	6	6	(6)A	4

INIT: 12 + 1D6, **Astral INIT:** 26 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Combat 8, Astral Combat 9

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 3

Attacks: 10S

Powers: Accident, Concealment, Guard, Materialization, Movement, Search

Hestaby Departs

Assuming the runners evade detection and get close to the Shasta Lodge, they're in time to see Hestaby emerge from the lodge and fly off. The great dragon likes to survey the Shasta Enclave from time to time, and Hestaby has been making an increasing number of forays since the Rite of Succession began.

She flies in the general direction of the runners, though she's not aware of their presence unless they've done something to tip off the patrols. Give the characters a few moments to hide themselves however they wish, then have Hestaby fly overhead, heading out and away from the mountain. To see if she notices the runners, make a Perception Test using 13 dice. The target number is the result of the runners' Open Stealth Test, plus any appropriate modifiers (keeping in mind that Hestaby is dual-natured and has various enhanced senses).

Though Hestaby may (very likely) notice the runners, she doesn't show it and does nothing to interfere with them. She does note how well (or poorly) they hide from her, and runners who actually manage to escape her notice earn her respect.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

There are a number of additional challenges gamemasters can throw at the player characters to keep the ascent up Mount Shasta interesting and tense. Start with near misses as spirit patrols pass close by where the characters are. Perhaps a runner catches a shimmering in the air as a spirit passes, without knowing whether or not the spirit has spotted them (or even if it was a spirit at all). Make things tense as the runners try to avoid being spotted.

The fauna of Mt. Shasta can make for a suitable encounter along the way. Gamemasters with access to the *Critters* sourcebook can find some paranormals for the team to run into, such as eyekillers, griffins, icedrakes, perytons, piasma and thunderbirds, to name a few. Those with access to *Year of the Comet* may want to try out a horned bear (p. 144, YOTC). Critters encountered on the mountain's slopes may be hostile or not, depending on how the runners react. Certainly, if the runners get into a prolonged fight with a critter—especially if they start shooting off guns—they're more likely to draw attention to themselves.

Finally, there are the natural hazards of climbing a snow-topped mountain. While the trails that ascend up the slopes of Mt. Shasta are relatively safe, it's possible for a character to slip and fall, or for the runners to have to get across difficult and treacherous ground to reach their objective. A sudden avalanche or rockslide can cause serious problems for the team. If they make the ascent at night, they'll also have to deal with the darkness (since using artificial lights increases the chances that they'll be seen).

DEBUGGING

If the runners really botch things, they're likely to end up "guests" at the Shasta Lodge, which is dealt with in *Guests of Hestaby*. If the characters insist on death before capture, give them every opportunity to surrender (the Shasta shamans are a peaceful lot, for the most part), but if push comes to shove, let the chips fall where they may.

If the players come up with a particularly innovative plan for infiltrating the Shasta Lodge in some other manner (posing as visiting officials, arriving as a band of gypsies petitioning to see Hestaby, etc.), use the information in this and the following sections to handle things. Keep in mind that the shamans of the lodge have astral security measures, and will be suspicious of any unusual behavior on the part of the characters, but give them a reasonable chance of success.

Finally, if the runners even *consider* launching an attack on Hestaby, have a few Force 6 great form nature spirits show up immediately to subdue the runners and bring them to the Lodge. Hestaby has sufficient magical defenses that she's immediately aware of any imminent attack on her and takes steps to protect herself.

THE SHASTA LODGE

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The team arrives at the Shasta Lodge and has to figure a way in, get the data file and get out, hopefully without getting



caught. The Lodge's security measures are formidable, but nothing that an experienced team of shadowrunners can't handle.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The Shasta Lodge was built on the site of an old ski lodge. Some of it still has the look of one, though the current lodge has a lot of touches that look more like a Native American medicine lodge than a ski resort. Still, it's not completely rustic, as the satellite dish tucked into a corner of the roof attests. There's definitely some tech in the Shasta Lodge despite rumors to the contrary.

The lodge doesn't have a fence or barricade around it, just a small parking lot in front along with a detached garage that could probably hold a half-dozen or so vehicles. There are front and side entrances to the main building covered by floodlights, and probably security cameras or some other sort of surveillance. The exterior of the lodge is quiet and peaceful.

HOOKS

Keep the tension high as the runners break into the lodge and try to find the Kallisti File. If nothing else, feel free to remind the runners that Hestaby may return any time. They've got a window of opportunity before the great dragon gets back, so they're well advised to use it. Stress the lodge's combination of

native design and decoration with hints of high-tech equipment hidden within. The runners should be cautious and on alert.

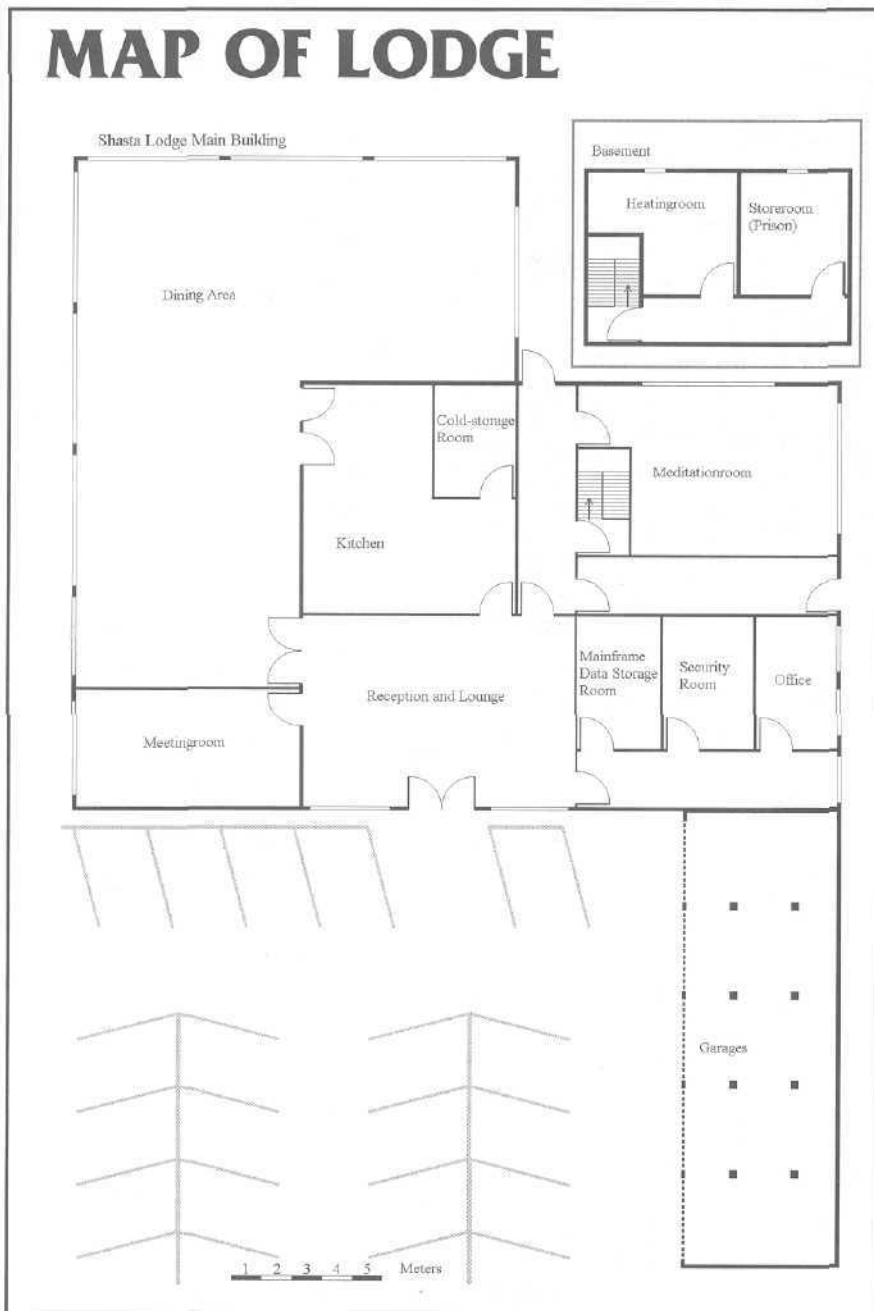
BEHIND THE SCENES

This is it. The runners need to get past the lodge's security, get the Kallisti file from the isolated system inside and get out. Let the runners come up with their own plan as to how they're going to do it, using the information here to estimate their chances of success. There are three basic approaches the runners can take to getting into the lodge and getting the file: sneaking in, infiltration or assault.

Sneaking In: In order to sneak into the Shasta Lodge, the shadowrunners need to overcome the Lodge's outside security monitors in some way. They can use an invisibility spell or the Concealment power of a spirit, or a decker can try to access the Lodge's host system from the outside, allowing the runners to slip past the security systems. Then they have to deal with the electronic maglocks on the doors and get to the room where the data they're looking for is stored. This approach is probably the easiest, if the runners have the means to pull it off.

Infiltration: The runners might try getting into the Lodge by posing as people who are supposed to be there. Since access to the Shasta Lodge is somewhat restricted, it may

MAP OF LODGE



at the lodge. The runners would have to deal with a number of skilled shamans fighting on their home turf with the aid of nature spirits.

A smarter approach for shadowrunners looking to blow some stuff up would be to stage a distraction for the personnel at the Shasta Lodge, most likely some commotion nearby on the mountain-side. An explosion, rampaging spirit, or similar disturbance will bring an astral shaman to investigate almost immediately, followed by Shasta security personnel, reducing the number of people the runners have to deal with at the lodge. Of course, the lodge will be in a heightened state of alert, and the shadowrunners then have to time it so they don't run into those people on their way out ...

The Lodge's Security

The Shasta Lodge has the following security features for the runners to overcome:

- **Security Cameras:** Tiny security cameras scan the entire, outside of the lodge for about 15 meters in any direction. The cameras are monitored from a station inside the lodge. The security system uses an image recognition program that detects authorized personnel, alerting the user if any strangers enter the area or anything else unusual happens. The cameras are small and difficult to see or hit (TN 8 for either task, plus range modifiers). If a camera goes out, the monitor is immediately alerted and security personnel are dispatched to investigate.

Physical illusion spells can fool the cameras, including invisibility and physical mask. Characters can also attempt to sneak past the cameras by making an Open Stealth Test. Roll five dice for the cameras for each turn the shadowrunners are within their line of sight to see if they are detected. The concealment power of a spirit can help hide the runners from the cameras.

- **Maglocks:** All the outside doors of the lodge are protected by maglocks with card-readers. Lodge personnel have swipe-cards that open the locks. See *SR3*, p. 235, for information on overcoming maglocks.

- **Reinforced Doors:** The doors of the lodge are made of reinforced composites and the windows are armored glass (both Barrier Rating 8). Doors and windows are also wired so that breaking them sets off a silent alarm at the security station.

- **Wards:** A Rating 6 ward covers the outer walls of the Shasta Lodge on the astral plane. The shamans of the lodge

take the characters some time and effort to come up with the right disguise (perhaps more time than they have for the run). The use of spells like Mask and Physical Mask may be helpful in providing disguises, though there are a number of magical defenses at the lodge and the chances of an illusion spell being spotted are high.

Assault: Finally, shadowrunners may simply decide to bust into the lodge and take what they're after, dealing with anyone who tries to get in their way. This is a very risky approach, simply because there is so much magical muscle



(and any spirits under their command) may pass through the ward freely, but all astral intruders are blocked by it. The lodge shamans are immediately aware of any attack on the ward and a shaman will investigate in astral form within two Combat Turns.

Lodge Personnel

The Shasta Lodge has security personnel on site and relies on the shamans of the lodge for its magical security. Six security personnel are on-duty at all times: three in the front reception area of the lodge, one monitoring the security systems, and two guarding the secure areas inside the lodge (usually access to Hestaby's chambers). The relatively light compliment of security personnel comes from the lodge's reliance on its magical defenses (such as the shamans and guardian spirits) and Hestaby's preference to keep the number of people at the lodge to a minimum.

At least three shamans are always available at the lodge to respond to any problems, and as many as a dozen will respond if a general alarm is sounded or the lodge is attacked. The shamans are loyal to Hestaby, though they won't throw their lives away defending the lodge. They'll generally summon nature spirits (either the lodge's hearth spirit or Shasta's mountain spirit, if they are outside) to aid them in dealing with any intruders.

Security Guards

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
3	3 (5)	3 (5)	3	3	3	1.3	3 (5)

INIT: 3 (5) + 1D6 (2D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 5

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 2/3

Active Skills: Assault Rifles 4, Car 2, Etiquette 2 (Corporate 4), Interrogation 3, Pistols 4, Unarmed Combat 3

Cyberware: Commlink, Cybereyes (with Display Link, Low-Light, and Thermographics), Datajack, Muscle Replacement 2, Wired Reflexes 1

Armor: Light security armor [6/4]

Weapons: AK-97 Rifle [Assault Rifle, SA/BF/FA, 8M, 38 (c)]
Range (TN): 0-50 (4), 51-150 (5), 151-350 (6), 351-550 (9)

Shasta Shamans

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
3	3	2	5	4	6	6	6	3

INIT: 3 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Astral Combat 7, Combat 6, Spell 5

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 2/3

Active Skills: Clubs 3, Conjuring 6, Etiquette 3 (Tribal 5), Instruction 3, Negotiations 2, Pistols 2, Sorcery 6

Spells: Analyze Truth 3, Astral Barrier 4, Cure Disease 4, Detect Life 4, Detox 4, Heal 4, Light 2, Stabilize 2, Stunbolt 4

Armor: Armor clothing [2/0]

Weapons: Walther Palm Pistol [HO, SS, 4L, 2 (b)]
Range (TN): 0-5 (4), 6-15 (5), 16-30 (6), 31-50 (9)

Staff or club [4M stun]

Note: If the player characters have initiates among their number, then make the shamans initiates as well, with their grade one or two less than the highest grade player character.

The Lodge Mainframe

The lodge's mainframe system is rated Red-9/13/11/13/13/13. Its security sheaf is as follows:

Step	Event
2	Cripler (jammer)-10
4	Tar Pit-8 (Armor)
7	Cripler (marker)-8 (Expert Offense-1)
9	Passive Alert
12	Probe-10 with trap Sparky-10 with trap Black-8
16	Construct-11 with trap Blaster-11
20	Killer-10 with trap Killer-10
24	Active Alert
27	Cripler (acid)-8 (Shielding)
31	Lethal Black IC-11
34	Killer-10 (Shifting) with trap Black-8
37	Non-Lethal Black IC-8
39	Psychotropic Black IC (positive conditioning)-8
43	Shutdown

Access to the mainframe system allows a decker to control the security system with a successful Control Slave operation, overriding the security cameras and maglocks.

The Data Storage System

The isolated data storage system where the Kallisti file is kept can only be accessed by an on-site decker or if a character connects the system to the lodge's mainframe (requiring about a minute and a Computer (4) Test). Once the decker has access, he can attempt to download the Kallisti file. It is 500 Mp in size and protected by Scramble IC-8. The offline system has the same security sheaf as the mainframe except that it shuts down at step 20.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Getting into the lodge and getting the data file should be reasonably challenging for a team of shadowrunners. The gamemaster may want to tinker with the ratings and security sheaf for the lodge computer system to suit the abilities of the decker player character. If the team doesn't have a decker, then the runners can ensure that an NPC gets access to the offline system. You can either assume the NPC decker is successful or throw in some complications to make things more interesting for the players.

If the team has a fairly easy time getting to the lodge and a good plan for getting in, you can throw them a curve by adding some paranormal guard critters, like hellhounds or harpies (or something more exotic) to the grounds, giving the runners another obstacle to overcome.

You can also have Hestaby return to the lodge at any time to interrupt the runners. The great dragon's return may just give the runners something else to worry about or, if Hestaby returns to find trouble at the lodge, a good reason for them to get out of there!

Finally, if the runners have an easy time getting the data, or you simply want to end things with a bang, you can have a chase scene down the mountain. Perhaps the runners steal one of the vehicles in the lodge's garage (assuming they didn't



bring their own) and the security guards (with one or more of the shamans) set off in pursuit. The vehicles could be jeeps, cars, trucks or even snowmobiles! To really ramp things up, have an attack helicopter pursuing the runners, or even Hestaby herself! In the latter case, Hestaby toys with the runners a bit to take their measure, but ultimately lets them go, particularly if she's impressed with their overall performance.

DEBUGGING

The main difficulty in this scenario is if the runners are simply unable to reach the Kallisti file without setting off every alarm in the Shasta Lodge. If the runners have a little trouble getting to the file, that's okay. Have the people at the lodge looking for them and give the runners the couple of minutes they need to get access to the file. In a worst-case scenario, the runners could even try and take the whole offline storage unit with them (it only weighs about 10 kilos, so it's not difficult to carry, just delicate and a little unwieldy).

The other potential problem is if the runners simply kill everyone in their way to get at the data. While Hestaby does not care overly much for the individual lives of the security personnel, she does hope to avoid needless casualties. Runners who are quick to resort to lethal force may lose some

points with Hestaby if she feels it wasn't necessary. It doesn't mean she won't continue to use them as her pawns, but her esteem for them will decrease, and her treatment of them during the *Endgame* may be somewhat different (see p. 120).

GUESTS OF HESTABY

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

If the runners are caught and brought to the Shasta Lodge, Hestaby gives them the opportunity to escape, though she doesn't necessarily make it easy on them. If the runners impress her, they may still have a job. Otherwise, they're going to have to be grateful with getting out of there with their skins intact.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The room isn't large and it isn't particularly stylish, but it is pretty secure. There is a small rectangular window about two meters off the concrete floor, and the door is a reinforced composite, closed with a maglock. The drop-ceiling has recessed light panels and there's a bench up against the wall with the window, opposite the door. Other than that, the room is bare. It might serve as a storeroom of some kind, though it's empty now.

Actually, now that you think of it, it's not empty. It has you in it. You just hope that it's not Hestaby's pantry ...

When "Abby" arrives, read the following:

You hear a muffled noise outside the door, like a body hitting the floor. A moment later, the maglock beeps and the door opens to admit a woman. She's wearing the mixture of native and modern garb you've come to associate with shamans. Her features are a mix of different races, predominantly Hispanic, and her dark hair is tied at the nape of her neck.

"My name's Abby," she says. "I'm here to help you."

HOOKS

Get the players worried for a little bit then offer them a way out of their predicament, perhaps even another shot at their goal. The characters should feel concerned and be looking for a way out.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This scenario assumes that the runners messed up somewhere along the way and were captured by Shasta Lodge security, perhaps by a guardian spirit, shaman or even by Hestaby herself, if she was forced to intervene. The Shasta shamans heal the runners' injuries, so the characters awaken (if they were knocked out) fully recovered. The introduction above assumes the runners don't know how they got into the room. If some of them were conscious, they might be stunned or drugged into unconsciousness, or you can simply modify the description so the runners know that they're locked in a basement room of the lodge.

The characters are without any equipment other than their clothing and armor. Particularly well-concealed gear (with a Concealability of 12 or better) may have been overlooked by the quick search the characters were given.

There is a Rating 8 ward along the inside walls of the room. It imposes a TN penalty on all spells cast against the walls or door or reaching outside the room as well as keeping astral forms and spirits from leaving. Characters with the Magic Background skill also know that the ward's maker will sense any attack against it.

A few minutes after the characters have assessed their situation, they get a lucky break. Hestaby arrives in human form to help them out pretending to be a disgruntled shaman named "Abby Nightbird." She tells the runners that not all of the shamans of the Shasta Lodge agree with the things Hestaby has done recently, particularly her new position on the Council of Princes of Tir Tairngire, which some saw as Hestaby selling out to the elves. Some people at the lodge left in protest while others, like her, stayed behind to try and work for change. She's willing to help them get out of the lodge safely.

If the runners agree, Abby gets them out past the guards and to the garage where they can steal a truck or lets them go off on foot, if they prefer.

If the runners want Abby to help them get the Kallisti file, she agrees (since it's in Hestaby's best interests if the runners succeed). She leaves the planning up to the runners, offering suggestions and what reasonable help she can. She

opposes any plan that would result in the death of someone at the lodge.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

As in *The Shasta Lodge*, above, you can make the runners' escape from Mt. Shasta more exciting by adding a pursuit scene as they flee the lodge. If the runners quickly come up with their own plan for getting out of the lodge (and perhaps even achieving their objective), then let them try; save "Abby" as a backup plan in case the runners need rescuing.

If you're running a particularly hard-edged game, you can ignore this scenario altogether. Runners who get captured on the run are simply killed and Hestaby hopes that she has better luck with the next batch. Perhaps the players get another shot at the mission with a new group of characters!

DEBUGGING

If the runners try taking "Abby" as a hostage, let them. Hestaby allows it, knowing that she can use her magical abilities to escape or overpower the runners virtually at will. If the runners actually try to kill her, assume that Hestaby's magical defenses are great enough to protect her from any attack the characters can bring to bear, though she might create the illusion that "Abby" is injured or dead. Hestaby will use her time as the runners' "hostage" to learn more about them before simply disappearing when she wishes.

Anyone who assenses "Abby" sees only a normal human shaman of modest abilities. Hestaby's aura masking is too powerful for a player character to overcome.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

IT'S A WRAP

Once the runners are safely away from Mount Shasta with the Kallisti file, assume that they get back home without any problems, unless you want to run some interim adventures along the way. Mr. Radek pays the runners the agreed-upon fee for their services and informs them that he may be calling on them in the near future with more opportunities, if they're interested.

A curious runner who decrypts and scans the Kallisti file discovers that it contains a large amount of apparently nonsense text. Characters can puzzle over it for some time, but they don't find any meaning to it. Naturally, the file is actually worthless, along with all the other files in the system the characters invaded.

AWARDING KARMA

Award individual Karma according to the guidelines on p. 244, SR3. Award Karma to each team member based on the following requirements:

Surviving the run	1
Acquiring the Kallisti file	1
Not being detected breaking into the Shasta Lodge	1
Avoiding any unnecessary casualties	1

LEGWORk

Runners doing legwork on the various items of interest in the run can turn up the following information:

Mr. Radek

Appropriate Contacts: Any fixer, street, or shadow contacts (TN 4)

Successes	Result
0	"Didn't he work for Aztechnology? Oh, wait, it was UniOil, wasn't it? Oh, I guess I don't know him, then."
1	"He's a fixer, moderately high-class, professional."
2	"Yeah, Radek's a middle-man. He fields jobs from 'discrete' employers and then farms them out to runners. Good guy to know if you're looking for biz."
3	"Radek has been doing some hiring lately, seems like business is good."
4+	"I hear that Radek has some real high-class contacts. He knows a lot of people, he just doesn't brag about it, you know? He's definitely going places and I hear he's looking for some steady talent to make the trip with him."

The Shasta Lodge

Appropriate Contacts: Any magical contact (TN 4)

Successes	Result
0	"That a new bar or something?"
1	"It's a kind of combination spiritual retreat and safehouse run by a bunch of shamans loyal to the dragon Hestaby up on Mt. Shasta. They say that they can tap into some serious mojo from the mountain and that they don't allow any tech up there. It's all back-to-nature stuff."
2	"The Shasta Lodge basically belongs to Hestaby and the shamans there work for her. Doing what, I don't know. They help out the people in the Shasta Enclave from time to time but keep pretty much to themselves."
3	"I hear there's been trouble at the Shasta Lodge since ol' Hestaby cut her deal with the dandelion-eaters in the Tir and whatever else she's been up to lately. Some of the shamans there up and left in protest, and more than a few folks in Northern California think that Hestaby has betrayed them."

4 "Don't believe what they tell you about the Shasta Lodge being some mud hut on the mountain. It's as modern as any place in the Sprawl: satellite, Matrix hook-up, you name it. The shamans just like to look retro; they don't advertise their tech, but they've got it. You can bet they've got some high-tech security to go with it."

Hestaby

Appropriate Contacts: Magician, Tir Tairngire, dragon-watcher (TN 6)

Successes	Result
0	"She's the great dragon that lives on Mount Shasta."
1	"Nobody really knows much about Hestaby. She kept pretty much to herself before the Big D geeked it. Lately though she's been busy. She just got elected to the Tir Council of Princes, or appointed, or however the frag they choose who runs that place. Big change from when Hestaby held off a Tir army in Northern California."
2	"She got a bequest of some data in Dunkelzahn's will, this private datastore on board the Zurich-Orbital. Sure like to know what was in that."
3+	"Hestaby has a lot of contacts. Might not seem that way, but a lot of people said the same thing about Dunkelzahn once and he showed us just how much pull a dragon could have going on behind the scenes, didn't he? I don't know that I'd want to tick her off."

The Kallisti File

Appropriate Contacts: Any

Inquiries about the Kallisti File will turn up no information except that "Kallisti" is a Greek expression meaning "for the fairest," supposedly written on the golden apple that the goddess Eris used to sow discord among the goddesses of Olympus. No one knows of any file or project going by that name, even in connection with Hestaby (should her name come up).

If runners are too casual in asking around about the Kallisti File (particularly if they mention Hestaby's name), it's possible that Hestaby might hear of it and that Mr. Radek may scold the runners for their lack of discretion at some point.

CUNNING

"I have seen a vision of the future and, if humanity is to survive, we must all of us give ourselves over to the guidance of the Great Dragon Spirit, embodied in this world by the great dragon called Ghostwalker. He is our savior and our guide to a new age of peace and prosperity."

—Joshua Morningstar

PREPARING TO PLAY

Now that Hestaby has confirmed the runners' abilities in *Knowledge*, she's ready to start using them as agents against the other great dragons in the Rite of Succession. She sets the characters up with a mission to go to Ghostwalker's new domain in Denver to remove a potential ally of his. The catch is that Ghostwalker is going to help them do it, if the runners manage to pull things off correctly. Of course, not everything goes smoothly in the shadows. Even if the runners succeed, they'll earn Ghostwalker's attention, which is something they may later come to regret.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The runners are ostensibly hired by a man named Brother Goldwing, a member of the breakaway faction of the Children of the Dragon cult in Denver. He claims to have discovered that Morningstar, the leader of the Denver faction, is actually a traitor to Ghostwalker and in league with another great dragon, though Goldwing doesn't know which one. He wants the runners to kidnap Morningstar and find out who he's working for, so that Goldwing can present the whole matter to Ghostwalker as a *fait accompli* and earn the great dragon's favor.

The runners have to figure out how to get at Morningstar and successfully extract him from the Children of the Dragon compound in Denver, along with evidence of his activities. Once they have him, they have to get him to another sector of the city, past the border guards and checkpoints, to a pre-arranged meeting with their employer.

As it turns out, Ghostwalker himself catches wind of the extraction and shows up at the meeting to confront the runners and Morningstar. After seeing the evidence the runners have collected, Ghostwalker devours Goldwing before runners' eyes and allows the shadowrunners to leave, provided that they understand they are never to reveal what they know about Ghostwalker's business.



What's Really Happening

The truth is that Morningstar *is* a traitor, but he's not even aware of it. He considers himself entirely loyal to Ghostwalker and to his vision that Ghostwalker is the reincarnation of the Great Dragon Spirit, first incarnated as Dunkelzahn. He's actually a "sleeper" agent, conditioned by Hestaby. Hestaby's agents have planted evidence that implicates Morningstar in a conspiracy with Lofwyr against Ghostwalker. Hestaby arranged for the ambitious Brother Goldwing to "discover" this "plot," and saw to it that her agents were the shadowrunners Goldwing hired to expose Morningstar's duplicity to Ghostwalker.

Hestaby understands Ghostwalker's suspicious nature and she's aware of Goldwing's ambitions and complete loyalty to Ghostwalker. The truth is that Goldwing would be a far more effective agent for Ghostwalker if he were allowed the opportunity to seize control of the Children of the Dragon. Therefore, Hestaby has arranged for Goldwing to make his move based on flimsy evidence that Ghostwalker will disprove. She knows that this will anger Ghostwalker and expects his temper will get the better of him. Thus Goldwing is weakened or eliminated and Morningstar's position is strengthened, diverting suspicion from Hestaby's chosen agent and getting him that much closer to Ghostwalker. If all goes well, Hestaby scores a victory over Ghostwalker in the Rite of Succession and focuses his attention on Lofwyr without even having to show her cards.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

Though the plot behind the scenes is convoluted, the actual run itself is a fairly simple one: extract Morningstar and evidence that he's working for Lofwyr from the Children of the Dragon compound in Denver and get him to another sector of the city for a meeting with their employer. The runners have to overcome the security at the cult's headquarters and evade Denver's paranoid border patrols. Their greatest challenge may actually be dealing with an angry Ghostwalker, who could turn on the runners if they don't play their cards carefully.

The adventure assumes that the runners are reasonably capable (and that Hestaby has a good understanding of their abilities after the events in *Knowledge*). If the characters are more experienced or the run doesn't seem challenging enough for them, use the ideas in the *Pushing the Envelope* section of each scenario to make things a little more difficult for them.

MEETING IN CHINATOWN

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

After arriving in Denver, the runners meet with their employer at a discrete restaurant in Chinatown, in the CAS Sector of Denver. There Goldwing outlines the run for them and the runners get a chance to ask him a few questions before they get started.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Denver, the Mile-High City; nowadays it's also the personal fiefdom of the great dragon Ghostwalker. Not exactly what you'd call a vacation spot, but then you're not here for pleasure, strict-

ly biz. When Radek contacted you and mentioned a thousand nuyen each just to go and talk to some skag in Denver and listen to his pitch, well, you're not averse to making a little easy money and doing some traveling on somebody else's tab.

So now you're walking through the crowded streets of Chinatown in the CAS sector of the city, looking for a place called the "Imperial Jade." Doesn't take you too long to find it, a little out-of-the-way hole in the wall tucked between a couple larger buildings. The slight, older Chinese man at the front counter seems to be expecting you, and he takes you through the main restaurant to a private back room. He asks you to be seated before closing the door behind him. The table has a nice spread laid out on it, a dozen different dishes and most of it real, not just soy-substitute.

A few moments after you've seated yourselves, the door opens again to admit two people, then closes behind them. The woman in front is a dwarf decked out in a stylish suit from some Euro-designer, her hair styled and gelled within an inch of its life. Her hard, lined face shows that this halfer doesn't take drek from anybody.

The man with her looks even taller than he actually is standing next to a dwarf. He's got a thin build and thinning dark hair brushed back from a high forehead. He takes the room in with a glance. The light gleams on a gold ring set with a red stone on his right hand as he adjusts his designer tie slightly, straightening up the front of his dark double-breasted suit.

"I'm Sappho," the dwarf says. "I believe that you're all well acquainted with Mr. Johnson, in one form or another." She gestures to the man standing behind her with a tight smile.

"Let's get down to business, shall we?" They seat themselves at the table and Mr. Johnson folds his hands in front of him, glancing down as if to collect his thoughts before looking across to you and speaking.

"My name isn't important, but I belong to the Children of the Dragon, a faction that broke away following the vision of Joshua Morningstar. He claimed that he received a vision from the Great Dragon Spirit that told him Ghostwalker was the Spirit's new incarnation, the savior of humankind. His devotion to Ghostwalker divided the church, but we were able to take over some of the temples, including the one here in Denver."

He pauses for a moment to compose himself.

"With that in mind, you can imagine my shock when I discovered that Brother Morningstar, our leader and guide, has been working secretly with a dragon other than Ghostwalker, whom he proclaimed our savior. I chanced to overhear a conversation between Morningstar and this other dragon that he calls "master," but I haven't been able to find proof that Morningstar has betrayed us. I can't confront him or he might destroy the evidence, or try to eliminate me. I can't go to the others in the church because they are all loyal to Brother Morningstar, but I'm also not willing to turn away and let them be deceived.

"I need you to acquire Brother Morningstar's private computer files. More importantly, I need you to acquire Brother Morningstar himself and help me discover if he has betrayed the Children of the Dragon—if his vision about Ghostwalker was false, some sort of ruse."





"That's the job," Sappho says. "We're willing to pay five-thousand nuyen up front for expenses, plus the thousand each you got offered to show up. Complete the job and you get another twenty thousand each.

"Do we have a deal?"

HOOKS

The key to this scene is to get the players intrigued and whet their appetites for the scenarios to come. Sappho should ooze confidence and professionalism with a hard edge, while Martin Goldwing—their Mr. Johnson—should project something of an air of mystery, even subtle menace. Don't make either one seem overly threatening to the runners—their purpose is to hire them, after all—but make it clear that these are people who are not to be trifled with.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Sappho is a well-known fixer in the CAS Sector of Denver, with a reputation for being able to acquire just about any rare "commodity" her clients are looking for. She has provided services for the Children of the Dragon in Denver before, though nothing quite like what she's doing now. Mr. Radek (or another of the characters' fixer contacts) recommended the shadowrunners to her. She's on hand to broker the deal between the runners and Goldwing, nothing more. She has no interest in Goldwing's plans or power struggles within the Children of the Dragon except in how they might affect her future business. Goldwing has made it quite clear that he'll be suitably grateful to Sappho should things go his way.

Q&A

Once Goldwing has explained the job to the runners, he'll answer their questions to the best of his ability, though he'll maintain his image as the faithful and loyal church member outraged at Morningstar's apparent betrayal. The information he'll provide for some of the common questions is as follows:

• **How do you know that Morningstar is a traitor?** "I don't, not for sure. That's what you have to find out."

• **Why not just acquire Morningstar's files? Why kidnap him if he might not be guilty?** "Because the files may have been altered." (In fact, they have been, but Goldwing doesn't know that.) "If Morningstar is guilty, he needs to be dealt with. If he's not, then he will understand the necessity of what I am doing."

• **Could it have been Ghostwalker you overheard Morningstar talking to?** "No. They were communicating via vid-phone, for one, and Ghostwalker dislikes talking over the Matrix. Also, I heard Morningstar say 'Ghostwalker suspects nothing,' so he couldn't have been talking to Ghostwalker."

• **What's your interest in all this?** "I'm not sure that you would understand, but I believed very deeply in Brother Morningstar's message. I still do in many ways, and so do all the people who matter to me. I have to know if he has betrayed us; if it was all for nothing."

• **What help can you offer us?** "I can give you the layout of the temple here in Denver and access codes to all but the highest security areas and systems. I don't have access to those, only Morningstar does."

Improvise other answers as needed, using the information on Goldwing from the *Cast of Shadows* section and other information on his agenda in the adventure.

Investigating the Principals

The runners may decide to check out Sappho and Goldwing during and after the meeting with them. See the *Legwork* section at the end of this adventure for what the runners can dig up on the two of them through their contacts and some research.

If an Awakened character examines the two astrally, he can discover the following information:

• Sappho is a mundane with a modest amount of cyberware, mostly headware, though none of it is visible (clearly some high-class work). She's entirely professional and detached about the whole matter; a little greedy, perhaps, but otherwise she has no emotional involvement in things.

• Goldwing is masking his aura to conceal his true feelings and his initiate status, but he doesn't bother to hide the fact that he's a mage. He doesn't assense the runners, but he does have a watcher spirit hovering just above his shoulder in astral space (invisible in the physical world). If a runner assenses Goldwing, the watcher spirit dips down and whispers in Goldwing's ear. He glances at the assensing runner for a second, making it clear that he knows what's going on. Goldwing will play it cool unless the runners become hostile or accusatory, in which case he will break off negotiations and probably send some trouble their way (see *Debugging*).

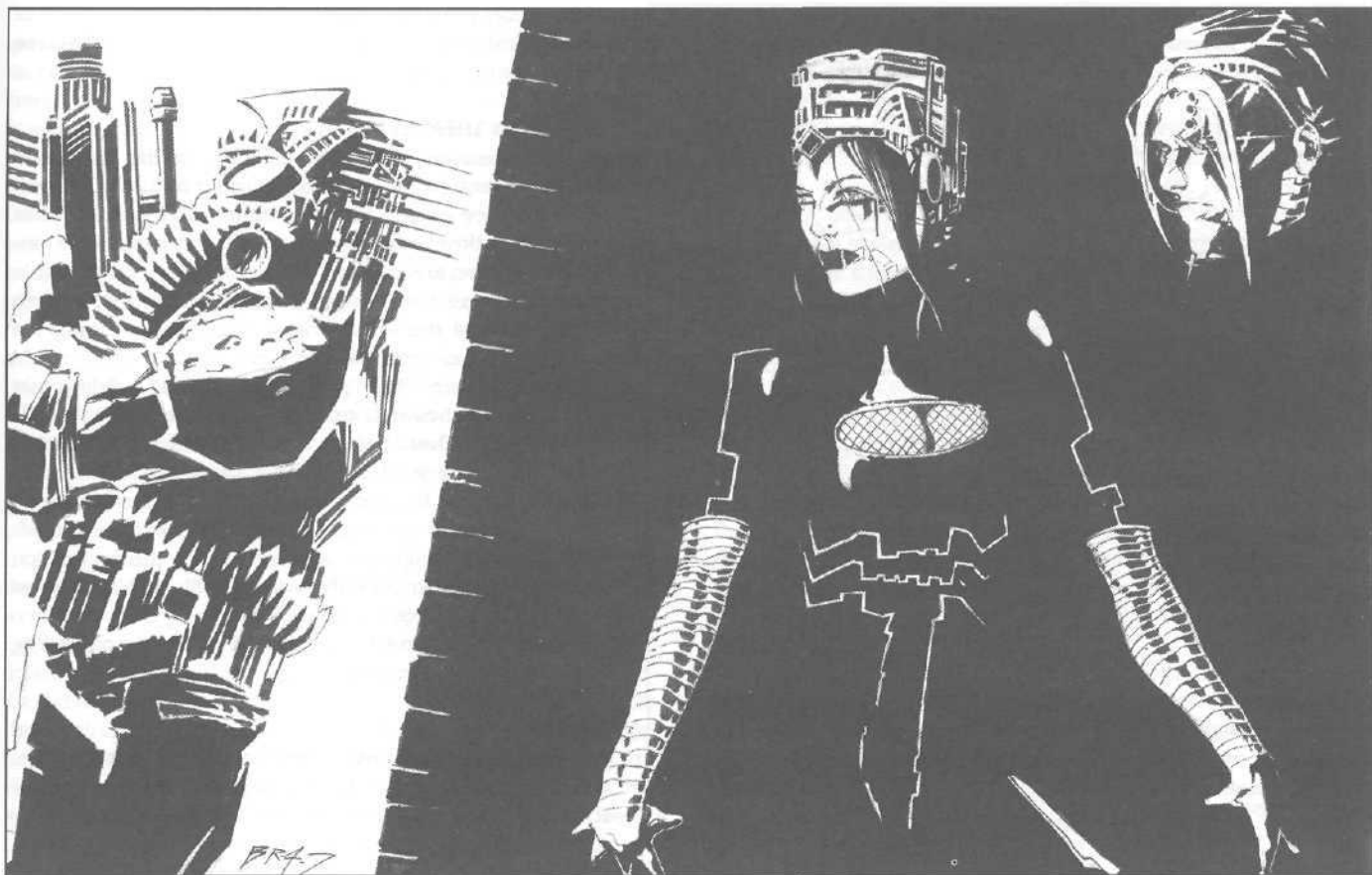
The ring Goldwing wears is a sustaining focus for an Analyze Truth spell, which is currently active. If the runners lie to him, roll 5 dice versus a TN equal to the runner's Willpower. On a success, Goldwing knows he's been lied to and will react accordingly. Goldwing also maintains metamagical shielding during the meeting; any spells cast on him or Sappho have their TNs increased by +2 and they roll an additional 12 dice for Spell Resistance.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

This scenario is basically roleplaying and an introduction to the action to come later in the adventure. If you want to liven things up, you can have the runners encounter some trouble on their way to the meet or even during it.

Denver is a fairly rough city, especially recently, so the characters may encounter some gangers or other urban scavengers while making their way to the Imperial Jade for their meeting. Alternately, the Triads have been stepping up activity in Denver in recent months, and the Imperial Jade is perfect place to stage a Triad shootout in the finest Hong Kong action-film style. These options can provide an interesting distraction and a chance for runners to "warm up" a bit and flex their abilities. If you want to tie things in further with the storyline, perhaps the Triad hitters have ties with Lung and their attack on the restaurant wasn't random. If you go with this option, Sappho and Goldwing should survive the battle and escape, allowing the run to proceed as planned.

Since the arrival of Ghostwalker, the fragile balance of power in the shadows has been going through massive upheavals as everyone tries to grab a higher rank in the new



pecking order under the new dragon boss. Alliances are forged and forgotten overnight, and there's been a heavy influx of "unknowns" from out of town. Some information brokers have made it a point to monitor the airports and checkpoints just to spot any new shadow talent coming in. The runners may be spotted and followed to the meet by such a person or team. If they're not careful, the entire negotiations with Goldwing and Sappho may be caught on surveillance tape. The info would go for sale on the open market, but give the runners a chance to hear about it and track the leak down before Morningstar hears about it and their run is spoiled.

DEBUGGING

If the runners are suspicious about the job or reluctant to take it, Sappho is willing to sweeten the deal a bit. She'll go as high as an extra 15 percent on top of the fee offered to the runners in *Tell It To Them Straight*, but no higher. If the runners get greedy, Sappho wishes them luck with their next job and pays them each the agreed-upon 1,000¥ before sending them on their way.

Likewise, if the runners get abusive with the fixer or Goldwing, they will break off negotiations. If a runner tries casting a spell on either individual, Goldwing knows it and will demand an explanation. If the runners give him static, he tells them to take their nuyen and get out.

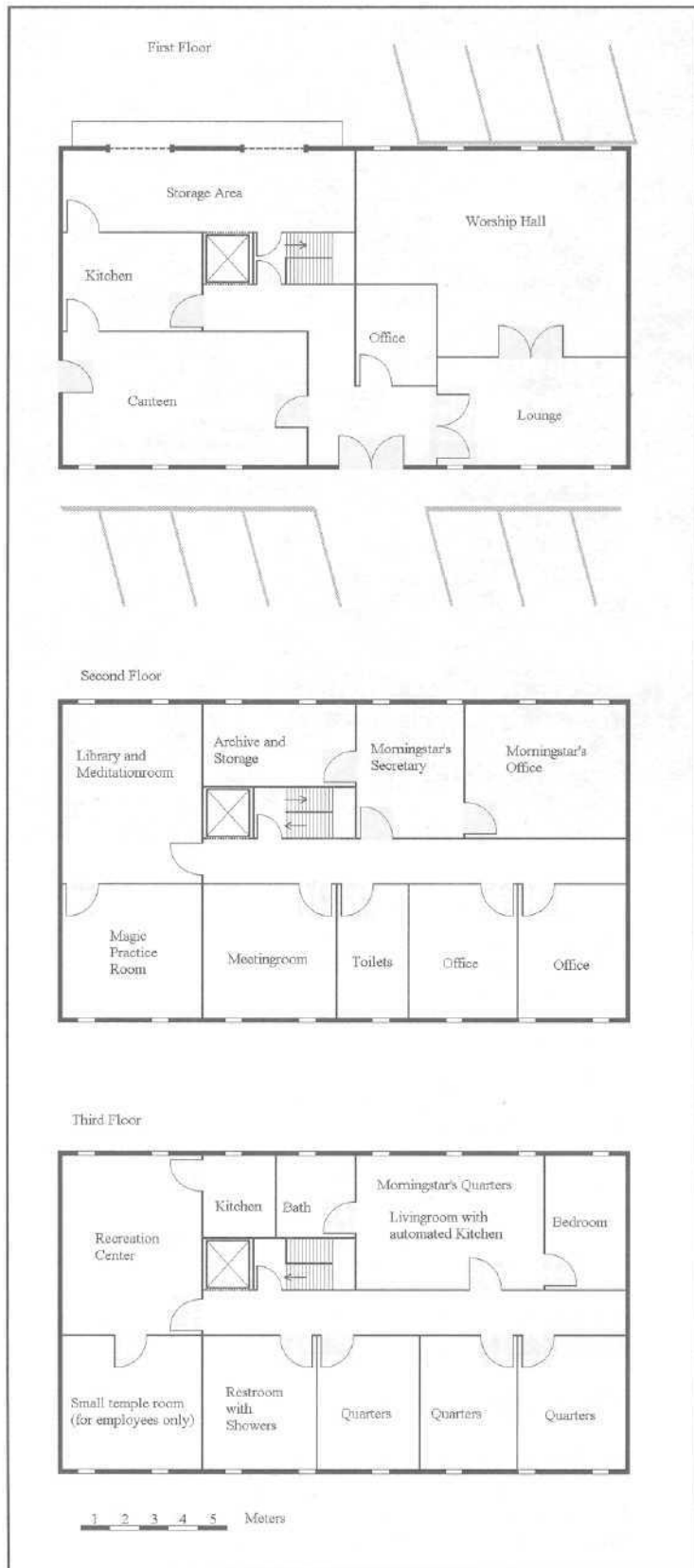
In any event, if the runners frag up negotiations with Goldwing and don't take the job, Goldwing decides that they know too much to trust in their silence (since all they have to do is go to Morningstar with what they know). To that end, he sends some hired guns to get rid of the runners. Choose a number of shadowrunner templates equal to the player characters and have them set up an ambush before the runners leave Denver. The runners shouldn't have too hard a time figuring out who set them up, in which case they may go after Goldwing and Sappho. Use the material in the rest of this adventure to get an idea of how they'll handle things. It's very possible the runners could become embroiled in the conflict between Goldwing and Morningstar from the other side of things!

If this happens, Hestaby won't necessarily write the runners off as possible pawns, especially if they handled things well and helped bring Goldwing down. Still, if you want, it's a good opportunity for another dragon to try and lure the characters into their service. Perhaps Ghostwalker hires them for a run or two.

GOIN' TO THE TEMPLE

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The runners have to figure out how to grab Joshua Morningstar and evidence of his involvement with Lofwyr from the Children of the Dragon temple in Denver, preferably



without drawing the wrath of Morningstar's cadre of fanatical followers or attracting the attention of the Free Zone's authorities.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The main temple of the Children of the Dragon in Denver is located smack in the middle of the UCAS sector of the Free Zone. Like most of the UCAS sector, it has seen better times, though it's not as depressed and run-down as some areas. The sector also suffered fairly little damage during Ghostwalker's initial appearance though the gangs and the occasional riot are slowly doing the work that the dragon did not.

The "temple" itself is an old industrial building that was heavily renovated to turn it into a church. It looks like the main floor holds most of the public facilities, including where services are held and a soup kitchen the Children run for the local squatters and other people in need (and there are more of them than ever in Denver these days). The upper floors are where the real action happens, and supposedly where Joshua Morningstar lives and works most of the time.

Finding Morningstar should be no problem. Getting to him is another matter.

HOOKS

Simple run, minimal complications; that's the feel the players should get from things at first. They've got their target, all they need to get him and the data. The runners shouldn't be too concerned with getting in and out of the temple. It's no high-security corporate research facility or anything like that. Of course, some players might start suspecting that it's just a little *too* easy, which is just what they should be feeling.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Whether or not they snatch Morningstar there, sooner or later the runners will need to deal with the Children of the Dragon temple in Denver, since that's where the data they need to complete the run can be found. The characters can also try and extract Morningstar from the temple, wait for a better opportunity or create one on their own. This section looks at all of these possibilities.

The Temple

The temple itself is a three story brick-face industrial building that dates back well over a hundred years. The interior of the building has been gutted and heavily renovated, but the exterior still has most of its original brickwork, with tall, narrow windows. The main entrance is a set of double doors that lead into a lobby and then the temple's worship hall. There's also a side entrance into the soup kitchen and a rear loading dock entrance. The entire structure is surrounded by a paved parking lot, with the road running past the front of the building.

During normal hours (8–6 PM daily) the main doors are unlocked and visitors are welcome at the temple. The soup kitchen remains open until 10 PM daily. After that, all the entrances to the building are locked and require maglock cards to gain entrance. Only high-ranking members of the church carry these cards, but it's possible the runners could steal one. (Goldwing doesn't want them using his, since it might implicate him.) Otherwise they have to use a maglock passkey or overcome the locks some other way. The doors and windows are also wired to an alarm that sounds if any of them are opened outside of normal hours. Use of the correct passcard shuts off the door alarms, otherwise they must be dealt with separately. The third floor quarters of the high-ranking church members also have individual maglocks, as does Morningstar's office on the second floor.

A Rating 5 ward covers the upper two floors of the building on the astral plane. The Awakened members of the church maintain the ward and are all attuned to it, so it does not affect them. An attack on the ward immediately alerts Morningstar and the other Awakened Children of the Dragon present.

Three shifts of guards work at the temple, all members of the Children of the Dragon with experience in security (including some reformed gangers). There are eight guards in each shift, four working the bottom floor, and two each on the upper two floors. The guards on the upper floors typically keep an eye on the elevator and stairwell and keep in touch with the guards downstairs. At the first signs of trouble, the other guards will go to investigate, but the third-floor guards stay where they are at night to protect access to the private quarters. The security guards have been trained to recognize signs of astral intruders, and will contact Morningstar or another high-ranking member of the temple if they do.

Security Guards

B 3 **Q** 3 (4) **S** 3 (4) **C** 3 **I** 3 **W** 3 **E** 1.3 **R** 3 (5)

INIT: 3 (5) + 1D6 (2D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 5

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 2/3

Active Skills: Athletics 3, Etiquette 2 (Church 3), Interrogation 2, Pistols 3, Submachine Guns 4, Unarmed Combat 4

Cyberware: Cybereyes (with Low-Light and Thermographic), Datajack, Muscle Replacement 1, Wired Reflexes 1

Armor: Armor vest with plates [4/3]

Weapons: Uzi III [SMG, BF, 6M, 32 (c) w/ 2 extra clips]

Range (TN): 0–10 (4), 11–40 (5), 41–80 (6), 81–150 (9)

Getting at Morningstar

The runners basically have two approaches for getting at Morningstar: trying to get into the temple and grabbing him there or waiting until he's outside the temple's security (or luring him outside so they can make the grab). It's up to the players depending on how they want to approach things.

When he's at the temple, Morningstar typically works until 10 PM before retiring to his third-floor quarters for the night, going to sleep by around 11:30 PM or so. Runners can try and break in late at night, overcoming the security measures to get

Morningstar and get out before they're caught. During the day, they're likely to have more difficulty getting at Morningstar and will draw more attention to themselves unless they come up with a particularly clever plan.

Morningstar rarely makes personal appearances outside the temple, though he does have appointments and business that takes him to different parts of the UCAS sector. He never leaves the sector unless there is a pressing reason. When he travels, Morningstar always has at least two bodyguards with him (use the stats for the security guards above, but give them Wired Reflexes 2 and Unarmed Combat 5). He rides in a Mitsubishi Nightsky (p. 164, *Rigger* 3). Use the Vehicle Rigger (p. 79, *SR3*) for the driver's stats. One bodyguard rides shotgun, the other rides in the back with Morningstar.

Naturally, Morningstar will resist the runners however he can (including using his magical abilities), but he's no fool and he will certainly surrender if faced with unfavorable odds. He'll cooperate in order to keep himself alive, though he won't make things easy for the runners. He may try and keep them in the dark about the extent of his magical skills and abilities, saving them as an ace up his sleeve.

Getting the Data

In addition to snatching Morningstar, the runners have to get the data that shows he has been conspiring with Lofwyr. That information can be found by accessing Morningstar's personal files and telecomm records on the computer system at the temple. Only Morningstar has the passcodes for his files; anyone else will have the deck into the system to gain access. The Children of the Dragon system is an Orange-7/12/14/14/11/12 host, and a Rating 5 Data Bomb protects Morningstar's personal files. The files the runners need are only 150 Mp in size. The security sheaf for the temple's host system is as follows:

Step	Event
3	Tar Baby-7 (Armor)
8	Probe-9 with trap Black-7 (Armor)
11	Tar Pit-5 (Armor)
14	Killer-5 (Shielding)
18	Tar Pit-9 (Shifting)
21	Probe-5 with trap Black-10 (Armor)
26	Passive Alert
29	Ripper (bind-rip)-7 (Shifting)
32	Cripler (acid)-9 (Armor)
37	Ripper (acid-rip)-7 (Shifting)
41	Sparky-5 (Armor)
44	Sparky-5 (Shielding)
49	Sparky-7 with trap Sparky-9
54	Active Alert
59	Ripper (bind-rip)-7 (Cascading)
62	Scout-7 (Armor)
65	Non-Lethal Black IC-5
68	Cripler (binder)-5
72	Lethal Black IC (cyberphobia)-7
76	Shutdown



Checking the Data

Once they have their hands on the files, the runners may want to go over them before handing them over to Goldwing. The evidence is fairly damning for Morningstar: there are records of a number of telecomm calls made and received from PLTGs in the German Alliance or associated with Saeder-Krupp. There's also a private journal where Morningstar describes conversations with his unnamed "master" and talks about how he is trying to get closer to Ghostwalker on his master's orders. It seems fairly clear that Morningstar is working for another dragon, probably Lofwyr.

Astute players may notice that the whole thing seems a little too easy. Wouldn't Lofwyr find a subtler means of communicating with his agent, and would Morningstar be foolish enough to write down his indiscretions and keep them in a file on the temple's host system? A character who examines the files for evidence of tampering and succeeds at a Computer (6) Test determines that the files *have* been tampered with, altered to make Morningstar look guilty, though they can't say by whom.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Gamemasters looking to make things tougher for the runners can beef up security at the Children of the Dragon temple, both the physical on-site security and the Matrix security on the host system. The security guards may have additional cyberware (consider using the Street Samurai sample character, p. 75, SR3, if you want to give the runners a real tough fight). They may have paranormal guard animals on site if the gamemaster has access to the *Critters* sourcebook and wants to pull something out of that. Bound elementals patrolling the temple on the astral plane are also a possibility.

If the runners plan to go after Morningstar outside the temple, consider a chase scene where he attempts to escape them in his limo, with the runners pursuing through the streets of Denver. Throw in some spirits and drones running interference and things can get quite interesting.

Morningstar has plenty of other enemies, so it's possible that someone else might come after him at the same time the runners do. Have the team encounter radical elements from the main Children of the Dragon sect out to kidnap or assassinate Morningstar. Or perhaps their rivals are agents of another great dragon in the Rite of Succession, who are looking to remove a potential pawn of Ghostwalker or use Morningstar against the dragon in some way. The runners have to deal with their competition, either through negotiation or force, before they can deal safely with their quarry.

DEBUGGING

If the runners make an attempt to nab Morningstar and fail, security at the temple and around the cult leader will increase and everyone will be on their guard against another attempt, making it that much harder. If the runners *really* botch things, Goldwing will call them off and cancel the contract, making it clear that he expects the runners to keep quiet (otherwise he may send someone after them to ensure it, as in *Meeting in Chinatown*).

If the runners accidentally kill Morningstar, then the confrontation with Ghostwalker goes a bit differently and they've failed in their mission for Hestaby (see *Meet the New Boss* for details).

BORDER CROSSING

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The runners have to get Morningstar (and the data) out of the UCAS sector of Denver and into the CAS sector, evading security and patrols at the border (along with any possible pursuit they might have picked up in the previous scenario).

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Now that you've got the goods, all you need to do is get them across town to deliver them. For most runs that would be the easy part, but you're in Denver, and the Front Range Free Zone is more like five different cities, all walled off from each other and patrolled by paranoid, trigger-happy military forces. That's especially true since Ghostwalker took over and the nations controlling Denver understood just how vulnerable they are. What with the terrorists and political dissidents, it's no wonder border security has gotten tighter. It's getting so a shadowrunner can't even make a dishonest living any more.

HOOKS

This is a tense scenario, with everything depending on the runners making it across the border back into the CAS sector without getting caught. Give the players plenty of opportunities to roleplay if they're interacting with border guards or checkpoint personnel. Give them the chance to use their various skills if they're trying to get over the wall or into the CAS sector in another way.

BEHIND THE SCENES

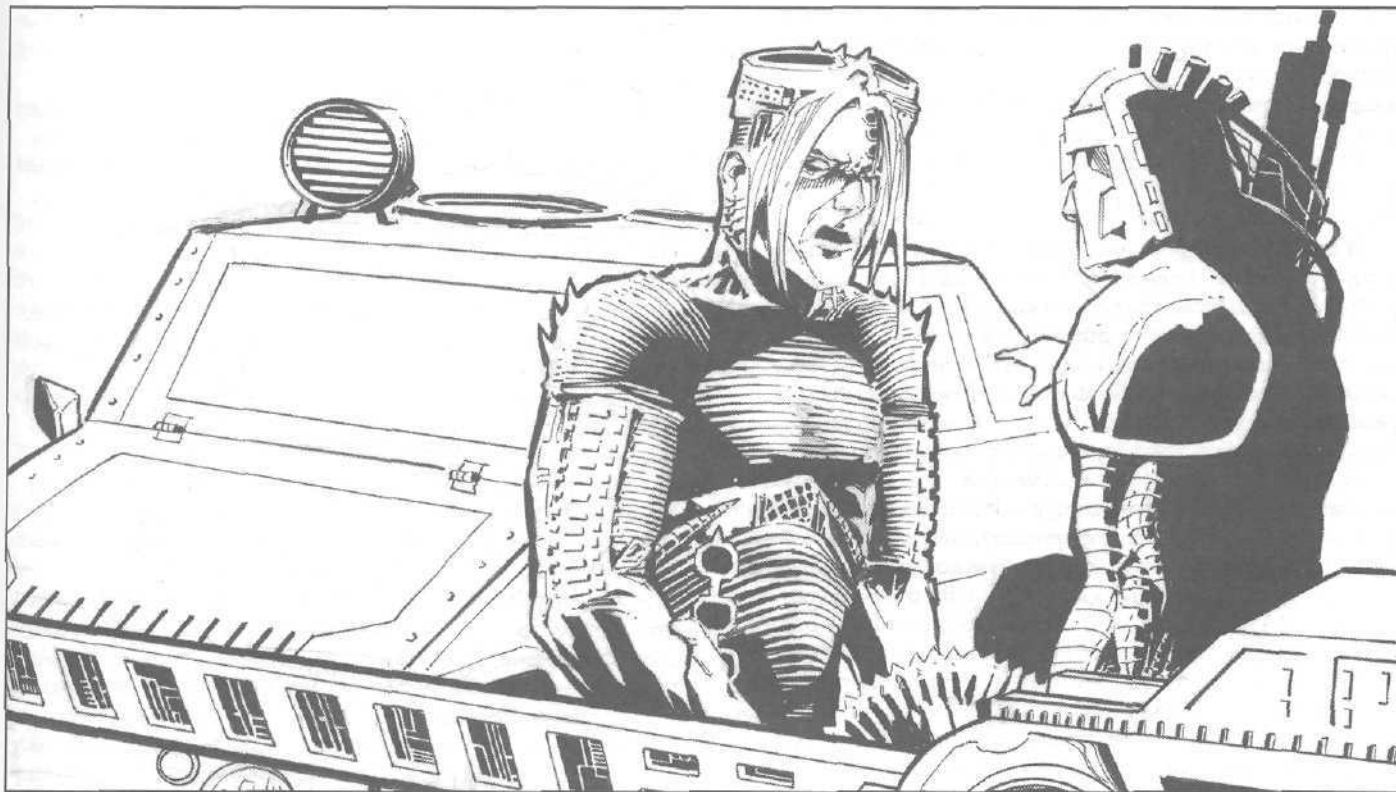
Once the runners actually bag Morningstar and get their hands of the necessary data files, they have to get them to their meeting with Goldwing in the CAS sector of Denver. That means getting across the border without getting caught, which may be almost as difficult as the first part of the run, given the paranoia of Denver's border patrols.

For detailed information on border crossings, see *Shadows of North America* (pp. 203–206). The material relevant to Denver has been summarized here.

Over the Wall

Runners may choose to go outside the Free Zone and re-enter through the CAS side of Denver to get to their destination. This involves going over the wall in the UCAS sector and getting back into the CAS sector, but it does (hopefully) avoid the scrutiny of the checkpoint guards.

The walls protecting the UCAS and CAS sectors of Denver are at least 5 meters high, made of reinforced ferrocrete with a Barrier Rating of 16 and topped with concertina wire (p. 234, SR3). When the runners go over the wall, make a Perception Test using 5 dice against the results of the runners' Open Stealth Test



(using the modifiers found on p. 232, *SR3*). If the test is successful, a border patrol detects the runners and tries to intercept them. See the *Cast of Shadows* section for details on the CAS and UCAS border patrols in Denver.

Through a Checkpoint

Alternately, the runners may choose to pass through one of the authorized checkpoints between the UCAS and CAS sectors, presenting their identification just like any regular citizens would. Presumably the runners are driving a vehicle (unless they've come up with a way to keep Morningstar with them on foot and unrecognized). They have to wait in line at the border checkpoint, where a guard asks them for their identification. Make an Opposed Test between the lowest rating of the runners' ID and a Verification Rating of 3 for the checkpoint. If the runners win the test, their ID passes muster and they pass on through unnoticed. If the checkpoint wins the test, some discrepancy has cropped up. The runners are asked to move out of line and border guards come to question them further. The runners are detained until their identities can be verified and, more importantly, their vehicle is searched.

Other Ways In

A clever group of runners may come up with another way of smuggling Morningstar into the CAS sector, including the possibility of using magic (such as a Physical Mask or even Transform spell) to conceal him, or finding some alternate means of transport. Keep in mind that Morningstar isn't going to be the willing subject of any spell cast by the runners, so they'll likely

have to knock him out in order to avoid dealing with his metamagical shielding. Modify the situations described here as needed to reflect the runners' preparations and plans.

If a Fight Breaks Out

If the authorities catch the runners and a fight breaks out, help will arrive fairly quickly (since the various sectors of Denver tend to be security conscious). Additional security personnel will arrive within a minute (20 Combat Turns), so runners are well advised to get away from the area of a fight as quickly as possible. If they have a vehicle and the authorities give chase, see p. 138-149 of *SR3* for rules governing vehicle combat and chases.

Border Guards

The sectors of the Front Range Free Zone are walled off from each other and patrolled by armed guards. The UCAS and CAS border guards typically patrol in groups of three. The game statistics here represent a typical UCAS or CAS security guard that the shadowrunners might encounter during this adventure.

B 3 **Q** 3 (4) **S** 3 (4) **C** 3 **I** 3 **W** 3 **E** 0.8 **R** 3 (5)

INIT: 3 (5) + 1D6 (2D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 5

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 1/2

Active Skills: Etiquette 2 (Governmental 3), Interrogation 3, Pistols 4, Rifles 4, Unarmed Combat 3

Cyberware: Cybereyes (with Low-Light and Thermographics),



Datajack, Muscle Replacement 1, Smartlink, Wired Reflexes 1
Armor: Light Security Armor [6/4] with communications option (p. 284, SR3).

Weapons: Ingram Smartgun [SMG, BF/FA, 7M, RC 2 (3), 32 (c) w/smartgun system]

Range (TN): 0–10 (2), 11–40 (3), 41–80 (4), 81–150 (7)

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

If things are going too easily for the runners and you want to make them more interesting, there are several options.

The first is to have Morningstar cause trouble. If the runners don't keep him sedated or otherwise unconscious, he will be able to use some of his magical abilities. If he's tied up, gagged, and blindfolded, he won't be able to cast spells but he can still use astral projection. Imagine the runners waiting at a checkpoint when Morningstar's astral form suddenly manifests and starts yelling for help! If he's not blindfolded or bound, he might also try casting spells or even conjuring a spirit for aid (such as sending a watcher spirit back to the temple to tell his subordinates where he is). Morningstar will bide his time and look for the right opportunity to trip the runners up and save his own hide.

Next, the runners might encounter trouble with the border guards. Whatever the result of the tests to detect the runners described in *Behind the Scenes*, have the team run into some minor trouble that could quickly escalate if they don't handle it well. For example, have a checkpoint guard start questioning the runners about their business in the sector and looking at them suspiciously, or have a border guard come to investigate a random noise, forcing the runners to hide. If they keep their cool, the trouble passes them by, but if they panic or overreact, things can get messy.

Someone else in line with the shadowrunners can start causing trouble, either loudly complaining or picking the shadowrunners as a target for their anger and frustration. This can range from a minor nuisance the runners must show restraint in dealing with to a potentially serious threat, particularly if the other party is, for example, hopped up on BTLs and thinks that he's Neil the Ork Barbarian.

Finally, you can always toss some completely unrelated problem at the runners to make things more interesting. Maybe a known criminal chooses the same time as them to pass through a checkpoint, setting off security (and possibly giving the team a useful distraction). Maybe they run into a gang looking for trouble along the way, or encounter some paranormal scavenger near the border (for gamemasters with the *Critters* sourcebook).

DEBUGGING

If sector security catches the runners, in either the CAS or UCAS sectors, give them a fair opportunity to either get away or surrender, if the odds are against them. Those runners taken alive are placed in custody. Ghostwalker quickly hears of the incident and pulls strings to get the runners released. He has them and Morningstar brought to him so he can question them himself. Run *Meet the New Boss* with the runners being brought to Ghostwalker's Denver lair rather than encountering the great dragon at their pre-arranged meeting site with Goldwing.

MEET THE NEW BOSS

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The runners make it to their meeting with Goldwing, but discover an unexpected guest has crashed the party: none other than Ghostwalker, who has a few questions for the runners about what's been going on in "his" city. The runners had better answer carefully, if they want to get out of this in one piece.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Time to put this run to bed. You've got your target and the data, now all you have to do is turn them over to Mr. Johnson, collect your cred and find a place to spend it.

The meet is at a warehouse building in a burned-out section of the CAS sector bordering on the former Aztlan sector. There was probably a skirmish here between CAS and Azzie troops or maybe some trouble when Ghostwalker first came down on the Aztlan sector like a ton of bricks. Either way the place is empty, making it a good spot to handle biz without any unwanted visitors.

Mr. Johnson is waiting inside, but there's another man with him. He's tall and thin, dressed all in white from head to toe. Even his hair is almost pure white, slicked straight back from a high forehead. He takes a step forward while Mr. Johnson hangs back, looking rather nervous.

"Welcome, we've been expecting you," he says. Then his form shimmers, and begins to change. His neck elongates and a pair of wings sprout from his back as he swells to tremendous size, covered in gleaming scales the color of old ivory. A reptilian head looks down at you from near the ceiling of the warehouse, as the great dragon Ghostwalker settles back on his haunches to regard you.

"We have some business to discuss," his voice says in your minds.

When the runners and Morningstar have said their piece, read the following:

Ghostwalker rears back, silently pondering what he has heard.

"Your claims of innocence are true in your own mind, Joshua Morningstar," he says and Morningstar beams.

Ghostwalker turns toward Mr. Johnson. "I believe there is some business you need to conclude?" he says. The Johnson seems to come out of his horrified trance, glancing over at you.

"Yes, yes," he says quickly. He approaches you, reaching inside his overcoat and producing a credstick, which he holds out to you with a trembling hand.

"Here's the rest of the payment we agreed on," he says. "Take it."

"Now I think you should be going," Ghostwalker says. "But one last thing, before you do. Mr. Goldwing has wasted my time with this pointless distraction, when I have precious little time to waste. Therefore ..."

With the speed of a striking snake, the dragon's head lunges forward and he snaps your Mr. Johnson up in one bite, barely leaving him time to scream in terror. The sound of crunching bones fills the hollow warehouse as Ghostwalker chews and

swallows. His tongue flickers out to lick the last traces of blood from his pale jaws before he turns to regard you again.

"That's what happens to those who cause trouble for me," he says. *"I suggest you remember it in the future."*

HOOKS

Awe the runners with Ghostwalker's presence and the imminent possibility that the great dragon may decide to geek them in a heartbeat if they displease him. The players should feel their characters' lives depend on giving Ghostwalker exactly the right answers (which, to a degree, is true). Emphasize the great dragon's size, power and presence along with Morningstar's devotion and Goldwing's helplessness (and later terror when Ghostwalker turns on him).

BEHIND THE SCENES

Confident that the shadowrunners would complete the job, Goldwing petitioned Ghostwalker for an audience. Intrigued by the human's audacity and by the possibility of a double-agent in his domain, Ghostwalker agreed to the meeting. Ghostwalker is curious about Goldwing hiring the runners and mildly impressed by their abilities in accomplishing the shadowrun. He already has Goldwing's side of the story—and is aware of his ambitions—but he wants to get details directly from the runners.

After appearing before them in this true form, Ghostwalker asks the shadowrunners to tell him how they were hired and why they abducted Morningstar. He also wants to see the data that the runners recovered. If the characters show any defiance or refuse to give Ghostwalker what he wants, the dragon provides them with a sample of his power (melting a section of the warehouse wall with his fiery breath or smashing it with a blow from his tail or claw, for example). If that's not enough to convince the runners, then he eats one of them. Hopefully the characters are smart enough not to get on the bad side of a potentially ticked-off great dragon.

Ghostwalker also asks the runners for their evaluation of Morningstar's guilt or innocence. If the runners have any suspicions about Goldwing's motives, or the evidence against Morningstar, they would be wise to voice them. Regardless of their opinion, Ghostwalker listens and weighs it carefully.

Assuming the shadowrunners tell Ghostwalker what he wants to know (and he knows if they lie to him), the dragon turns his attention to Morningstar. If the cult leader is awake, Ghostwalker asks him for his side of the story and Morningstar fervently proclaims his innocence, condemning both Goldwing and the shadowrunners. Ghostwalker considers what he has to say for a moment. Then he has Goldwing pay the runners the remainder of the nuyen they're owed. Before sending the runners on their way, Ghostwalker devours the impertinent Goldwing for the nuisance of the whole situation, underlining his power for the shadowrunners and Morningstar.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Though a direct confrontation with a great dragon is dramatic enough, you may want to make things more involved by having Ghostwalker interrogate the shadowrunners in greater

detail, perhaps even putting them to some sort of "test" for his own amusement or to find out more about their abilities. The test could involve overcoming a summoned spirit or critter, dealing with a very realistic illusion created by the dragon, or even a riddle game or other test of wits.

If you want to end the adventure with a bang, consider having some Aztechnology agents with heavy weapons seize the opportunity to strike at Ghostwalker outside his lair. They attack the warehouse, trying to kill the great dragon and everyone else inside. Ghostwalker is more than capable of fighting them off, but a lucky surprise attack might injure or stun him, giving the runners a chance to take down some of the Aztech agents and possibly earn the dragon's respect, if not his gratitude.

If you're looking for some comic relief in the middle of a tense, dramatic scene, have some game-playing squatter kids or a prostitute and a "client" looking for some privacy accidentally wander into the warehouse and interrupt the meeting. The sight of Ghostwalker may prompt them to faint, stare in dumbfounded shock or run screaming in terror. Ghostwalker will allow the runners to handle the interference, noting carefully how they go about it.

DEBUGGING

If the runners think they have a chance of taking Ghostwalker in a fight, you probably haven't sufficiently impressed upon them the great dragon's power. Feel free to remind the players that Ghostwalker recently destroyed a good portion of the Aztlan sector of Denver and fought off armed attack craft with heavy weapons, far more powerful than anything the runners are likely to have with them. An outright attack on Ghostwalker is suicidal. If the runners try it, Ghostwalker kills them, possibly leaving one or two alive to recount the story to other would-be dragon-slayers.

If the runners try to keep Ghostwalker from killing their employer, the dragon likewise takes offense and kills any runner who gets in his way. So long as the runners treat Ghostwalker with the respect he deserves, they'll be able to survive the end of the adventure. If they don't, hopefully the players' next characters will be a little smarter.

If the shadowrunners managed to get Morningstar killed before their encounter with Ghostwalker, the dragon expresses his disappointment at not being able to verify his guilt or innocence directly. He still asks the runners about what they've learned, but he does not kill Goldwing, who becomes Morningstar's replacement and Ghostwalker's "chosen prophet." Ghostwalker lets the runners go, but they have failed in their mission for Hestaby.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

IT'S A WRAP

Once Ghostwalker has dealt with Goldwing and the runners have their payment, they're free to go. Though there's no reprisal against them by the Children of the Dragon or Ghostwalker, they may find it wise to leave Denver, at least for a



while until things begin to settle down again. On the other hand, they're likely to be able to find more work through Sappho, perhaps a smuggling run from Denver heading back home, and there are the other adventures in *Survival of the Fittest* awaiting them.

AWARDING KARMA

Award individual Karma according to the guidelines on p. 244, SR3. Award Karma to each team member based on the following requirements:

Surviving the run	1
Extracting Morningstar and getting him to the meeting alive	1
Getting the data from the temple computer system	1
Figuring out that Morningstar has been set up	1

LEGWORk

Here is the information the characters can dig up on the various principals in this adventure. The gamemaster can improvise other investigations based on the information given elsewhere in the adventure.

Children of the Dragon

Appropriate Contacts: Any magical contact or Matrix search (Target Number 4)

Successes	Result
0	"They're that cult that worships Dunkelzahn or something, right? Buncha nutjobs, if you ask me."
1	"The church, if you can call it that, has actually achieved some measure of legitimacy since it got started. They've done a lot of charity work and things like that."
2	"The current split between the main church and the faction that follows Joshua Morningstar in Denver has caused a lot of problems for the Children, especially since Morningstar's faction seems to be drawing in more new recruits lately."
3	"I've heard that Morningstar's position isn't all that stable. If he doesn't get some kind of acknowledgement from Ghostwalker soon, his followers are going to start drifting back to the main sect, or might even turn on him. It could get ugly."
4+	"There are more than a few people that would be happy to see Morningstar's splinter sect brought back into the fold, not the least of which is the main church. The rest just don't want Ghostwalker building a power-base around the cultists."

Mr. Johnson (Martin Goldwing)

Appropriate Contacts: Any magical contact (Target Number 6), Any Denver contact (Target Number 4)

Successes	Result
0	"Who?"
1	"He's Martin Goldwing, a member of the Children of the Dragon in Denver, the faction that believes Ghostwalker is the Second Coming or something like that."
2	"Goldwing is a mage and a pretty good one by all accounts. He worked for Manadyne before he got it into his head to join up with the Children of the Dragon a few years back."
3	"Rumor has it that Goldwing is ambitious. He wants to be Morningstar's right-hand man, maybe even more, if you know what I mean, but he hasn't had a lot of luck getting that far."
4+	"Goldwing's real name is Martin Bellecote. He's been a supporter of Morningstar's almost from the start and he was heavily involved with the Children of the Dragon before then. He's definitely got some magical muscle, though how much nobody can say for sure."

Joshua Morningstar

Appropriate Contacts: Any magical contact or Matrix search (Target Number 4)

Successes	Result
0	"Morningstar is the head of a splinter group of the Children of the Dragon, currently based in Denver, that claims the great dragon Ghostwalker is the savior of humanity."
1	"Morningstar isn't just some nutcase, he really believes in this 'vision' he had about Ghostwalker being the reincarnation of Dunkelzahn or something like that. He's been able to convince a lot of the Children of the Dragon that he knows what he's talking about, too."
2	"When he was younger, Morningstar was involved in a lot of radical causes, and he didn't have any problem with getting his hands dirty, if you know what I mean. He still knows how to get things done on the streets when he has to."
3	"The main Children of the Dragon church may be peaceful enough, but the group Morningstar is in charge of is willing to do whatever it takes to get their message across. I hear there was some violence when it came to taking possession of the Denver temple and a few others, and that Morningstar is willing to break heads if people in the cult don't play it his way."
4+	"They say that ever since his 'vision,' Morningstar has got some serious mojo up his sleeve. He was a mundane when he first joined the Children, but there are a lot of people who say that he isn't now, though I don't know anyone who has actually seen him use magic before."

Ghostwalker**Appropriate Contacts:** Any (Target Number 4)**Successes****Result**

- 0 "Ghostwalker is a dragon, chummer, and you know what they say about dealing with dragons. I'd rather not know anything."
- 1 "Ghostwalker has mostly been busy consolidating his hold on Denver and cutting deals with the various sector governments. He hasn't had to resort to the kind of force he used in Aztlan Sector, but I don't think anybody else needs convincing that the dragon means business."
- 2 "Ghostwalker doesn't grant too many audiences and he tends to keep out of the public eye, at least lately."
- 3 "The dragon has got problems in Denver, not the least of which are the Azzie-backed terrorists and dissidents who don't like the idea of a dragon flying in and declaring himself lord and master of the whole Free Zone. It's not secret that a lot of people would like Ghostwalker out of there."
- 4+ "The Children of the Dragon in Denver may think that Ghostwalker is the Second Coming, but the dragon hasn't said anything to confirm it one way or another. Rumor has it that he's had the cult's leader cooling his heels ever since he got to Denver, refusing to give him an audience. Maybe he just doesn't like religious fanatics."

CAST OF SHADOWS

The following non-player characters are central to this adventure. Other NPCs are described in the sections where they appear.

MARTIN GOLDWING

Martin Goldwing has a dangerous combination of ambition and religious fervor. Born and raised in the north-eastern corridor of the UCAS, Martin Bellecote attended Brown University and earned a degree in thaumaturgy that he put to work for Manadyne. A moderately agnostic neopagan, Bellecote performed his duties well enough. He started working his way up the corporate ladder, but something was lacking in his life. He found it when Dunkelzahn ran for President of the UCAS and was shocked along with the rest of the nation by the dragon's assassination.

Martin discovered the burgeoning Children of the Dragon movement not long after David Dragonson founded it. He was immediately drawn to the new church. Something about it spoke to the part of Martin that was searching for something to believe in. He joined the church and left his corporate job a few months later, becoming more and more involved in the church hierarchy and taking the name "Goldwing" as his new spiritual



identity. His magical training and abilities were an asset to the Children and Martin rose through the ranks of the church, particularly since the Awakened were accorded special status for being closer to the spirit world. He did labor under some prejudice for being a mage among the Children's shamans, which limited his advancement somewhat. He found that frustrating, because he knew that he had so much to contribute.

When Joshua Morningstar's vision split the Children of the Dragon, Goldwing went with Morningstar's faction, both convinced that he could do better there and out of a sincere belief in Morningstar's vision. He has advanced under Morningstar's guidance, but recently Goldwing began to suspect that Morningstar was not all he appeared to be. Fueled by his own jealousy and ambition, he became convinced that Morningstar was a traitor to the church, so he conceived of a plan to prove it and win Ghostwalker's approval.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
2	3	2	5	5	6	6	9	4

INIT: 4 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Astral 3, Astral Combat 8, Combat 7, Spell 6

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 4/3

Race: Human

Active Skills: Aura Reading 4, Car 1, Centering 4, Conjuring 5, Etiquette 3 (Corporate 5), Instruction 3, Leadership 3, Negotiation 3, Pistols 2, Sorcery 6 (Ritual 8)

Knowledge Skills: Chanting 4, Children of the Dragon 6, Dragons 3, History 3, Magic Background 5, Metaplanes 4, Shamanism 4

Spells: Analyze Truth 5, Clairvoyance 4, Detect Enemies 3, Entertainment 1, Fashion 1, Flamethrower 4, Magic Fingers 3, Mob Mood 4, Physical Barrier 5, Powerbolt 4, Stunbolt 5, Treat 3

Metamagic [Initiate Grade 3]: Centering (chanting), Masking, Shielding

Armor [4/1]: Secure clothing [3/0], secure vest [2/1]

Weapons: Fichetti Security 500 [LP, SA, 6L, Conceal 7, 12 (c)]

Range (TN): 0-5 (4), 6-15 (5), 16-30 (6), 31-50 (9)

Gear: Dragon amulet [Detection Spell Focus 3], gold ring [Sustaining Focus 5 (Analyze Truth)], pocket secretary

SAPPHO

The woman known as Sappho is a well-known fixer in Denver, part of the city's shadow community for years. Sappho is primarily known for her ability to find and acquire whatever it is her clients want. For the right price, she can get her hands on nearly any contraband, smuggling nearly anything into (or out of) the Front Range Free Zone. Sappho doesn't broker shadowruns quite as often, but there have been no lack of opportunities for a "businesswoman" of her stature in Denver of late, so she's been expanding her operations somewhat. She has provided services for Martin Goldwing before, which led him to engage her for the affair the shadowrunners are involved in. Sappho is certainly interested in having some influence with the Children of the Dragon and figures she can get it if Goldwing comes out on top and ends up owing her one. If it should turn out that Morningstar wins, well, Sappho has some potential dirt on him now, too.

Sappho is a hard-edged woman who hasn't made a living in the shadows for over a decade by being soft-hearted. She's all business. She doesn't let personal feelings (good or bad) get in the way of getting the job done and maintaining her good reputation. So long as the shadowrunners don't cross her, they can consider her a potential resource in the future (and she might well find other work for them, especially if they're good at smuggling). Sappho knows little about the political maneuverings within the Children of the Dragon and nothing about the larger conflicts between the great dragons; she's just running a business.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
3	2	2	4	5	5	3.8	0	3

INIT: 3 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Combat 6

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 8/3

Race: Dwarf

Active Skills: Car 3, Computer 3, Electronics 3, Etiquette 5 (Street 7), Negotiation 7, Pistols 3

Knowledge Skills: Denver Politics 6, Denver Shadows 5, Evaluate Items 6, Organized Crime 5, Smuggling Routes 5, Vices 6

Cyberware: Chipjack, Cybereyes, Datajack, Headware Memory (300 Mp), Knowsoft Link, Telephone

Armor: Secure clothing [3/0]

Weapons: Ares Viper Silvergun [HP, SA/BF, 9S (f), Conceal 6, 30 (c) w/integral silencer]

Range (TN): 0-5 (4), 6-20 (5), 21-40 (6), 41-60 (9)

Gear: Various Knowledge and Language chips (Rating 3-5).

JOSHUA MORNINGSTAR

Joshua Morningstar is a true visionary. He's been given a vision of the future of humanity and the responsibility of making sure that vision comes to pass. It's a heavy burden, but one that Joshua bears willingly, even though it has cost him friends, family and any semblance of a normal life.

Joshua's life was normal, once, or at least as normal as anyone's in the Sixth World can be. Joshua Keller was raised by a corporate family in the CAS and attended the University of Virginia, where he studied marketing and communications. He also developed many of his liberal (even radical) political views in college, and become involved with organizations like TerraFirst! and various civil-rights causes. Joshua was one of the many people drawn to Dunkelzahn's message of political and social reform and campaigned for the dragon early in the '57 election, but he was dismissed after using violent methods to advance the dragon's cause and hinder his opponents (particularly Arch-Conservative candidate Kenneth Brackhaven).

Joshua joined the Children of the Dragon shortly after the church was founded and threw himself wholeheartedly into his newfound vocation. He took the name Morningstar and quickly rose to prominence within his crèche through a combination of personal charisma, self-sacrifice and hard work. By 2060, Morningstar was a highly visible member of the church and part of the upper echelons, where he drew the attention of David Dragonson, the founder of the movement. The two became fast friends



and it wasn't long before Morningstar was widely acknowledged as Dragonson's right-hand and likely successor.

That all changed when the great dragon Ghostwalker appeared. Morningstar collapsed at a board meeting of the Children immediately following Ghostwalker's appearance. While he was unconscious, he claims to have had a vision that Ghostwalker is the reincarnation of the Great Dragon Spirit worshipped by the Children of the Dragon and the chosen savior of all humankind. The other leaders of the church, particularly Dragonson, greeted Morningstar's vision with skepticism, which led to a schism. Morningstar and those who believed in his vision split off from the main body of the Children of the Dragon and seized control of several of its temples, particularly the one in Denver, which Ghostwalker claimed as his domain. Morningstar's skill in handling problems through direct, even brutal, confrontation served him well and put him firmly in control of a substantial minority of the Children of the Dragon.

Since then, Morningstar has worked to consolidate his gains and regularly petitions Ghostwalker for an audience, though the great dragon had not yet deigned to speak with him. Morningstar sees this simply as a test of his faith and dedication. He knows that once he can show that the majority of the Children of the Dragon have seen the light, Ghostwalker will endorse his holy mission. Part of the proof of Morningstar's vision are the magical abilities he has developed since Ghostwalker's return. He keeps them secret for the most part, though it become common knowledge that he has some sort of "power" at his command.

Personally, Joshua Morningstar is a tall, imposing man with long dark hair and a neatly trimmed beard and moustache. He wears clerical robes when handling the public business of the Children of the Dragon, the rest of the time dressing in casual business attire. He keeps in excellent physical shape and is still quite capable of taking care of himself, as the player characters may discover.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
3	3	3	6	4	6	6	8	3

INIT: 3 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Astral 2, Astral Combat 8, Combat 6, Spell 6

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 5/4

Race: Human

Active Skills: Athletics 3, Car 1, Clubs 2, Computer 1, Conjuring 4, Divining 5, Etiquette 4 (Church 5), Interrogation 4, Intimidation 4, Leadership 4 (Speechmaking 6), Negotiation 5, Pistols 4, Sorcery 6, Unarmed Combat 3

Knowledge Skills: Children of the Dragon 6, Dragons 5, Dreaming 5, Environmental Groups 4, Magical Background 2, Politics 5, Radical Groups 4

Totem: Dragon (see p. 146, *YOTC*), +2 dice for detection/manipulation spells, +1 dice for mountain spirits, Willpower (6) Test to change course of action or relinquish item of value

Spells: Analyze Magic 2, Clout 4, Confusion 4, Dream 3, Flame Aura 4, Healthy Glow 2, Ignite 4, Increase Charisma 5, Mass Confusion 4, Resist Pain 4

Metamagic [Initiate Grade 2]: Divining (dreaming), Shielding Armor [4/1]: Secure clothing [3/0], secure vest [2/1]

Weapons: Fichetti Security 500 [LP, SA, 6L, Conceal 7, 12 (c)]
Range (TN): 0-5 (4), 6-15 (5), 16-30 (6), 31-50 (9)

Gear: Dragon amulet [Sustaining Focus 5 (Increase Charisma)], pocket secretary

GHOSTWALKER

The great dragon known as Ghostwalker is not nearly as concerned with the affairs of the Children of the Dragon as either Martin Goldwing or Joshua Morningstar might hope. Ghostwalker is aware of the attention and worship that the Children offer him and he accepts it as his due, but he's not particularly interested in worshippers, especially ones that have as little idea about his true nature as these aptly-named "children." (Ghostwalker also isn't fond of the group's name, either, since it carries a measure of hubris and reminds him of other unpleasant matters, but that is neither here nor there.)

Ghostwalker once controlled the region where Denver is located as his domain and upon his return, he was quick to reassert his territorial rights. Now Ghostwalker controls the Front Range Free Zone, opposed only by a number of scattered rebels and terrorists that he's certain will be quickly dealt with. Since his return, the great dragon has been occupied by learning all that he can about the events that have transpired in his absence. More recently, Ghostwalker's time has been consumed by the declaration of the Rite of Succession and competition with his fellow great dragons. He has taken the loyalty of the Children of the Dragon in Denver for granted thus far, an error in judgment that becomes a concern in this adventure.

Though impossibly old and experienced by human standards, Ghostwalker does have something of a short temper, particularly recently. He is not at all pleased by what he has seen of this new Age and that leads to fits of pique, such as the one that leveled parts of Denver. Ghostwalker fondly recalls the days when the Young Races (that is, metahumanity) knew their place. He finds the overly complicated, polluted and strange modern world troublesome. Of course, when something bothers Ghostwalker, he acts to deal with it, and he has been since his return.

Like all the great dragons in this book, Ghostwalker has no game stats. He's more akin to an elemental force than a living being that a group of shadowrunners can hope to overcome. His magical abilities alone protect Ghostwalker from most forms of harm (including heavy weapons and any sort of magical assault) and player characters who try to get into a direct conflict with the master of Denver are likely to end up charred grease spots on the floor. The runners are well advised to stay on Ghostwalker's good side (inasmuch as he has one).

ELEMENTS



To Hualpa, who has already achieved so much, I leave the Elemental Scrolls of Ak'le'ar. Though they are not our work, there is much wisdom to be learned from them. May your continued efforts to protect what others would destroy be successful.

—From the *Last Will and Testament of Dunkelzahn*

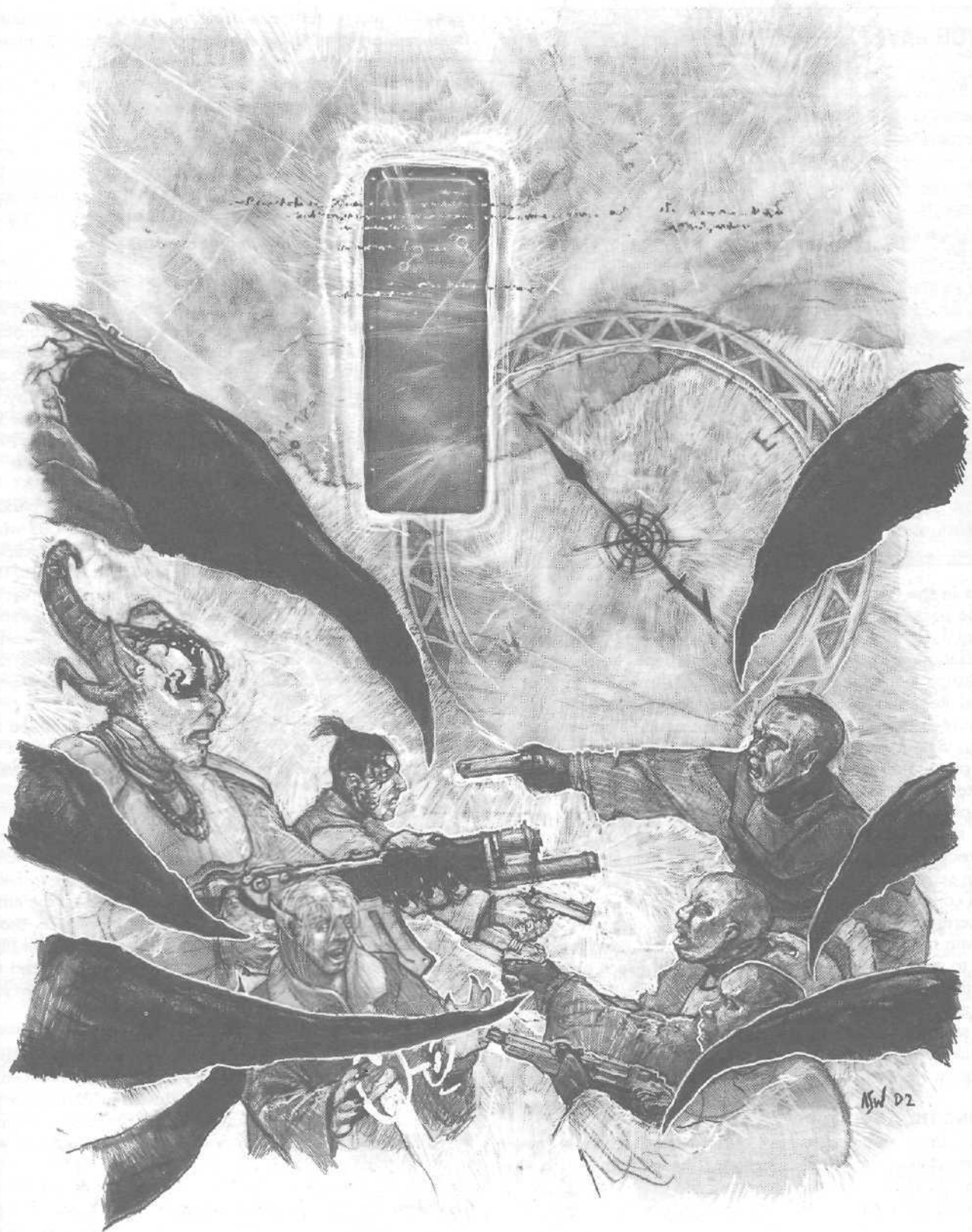
PREPARING TO PLAY

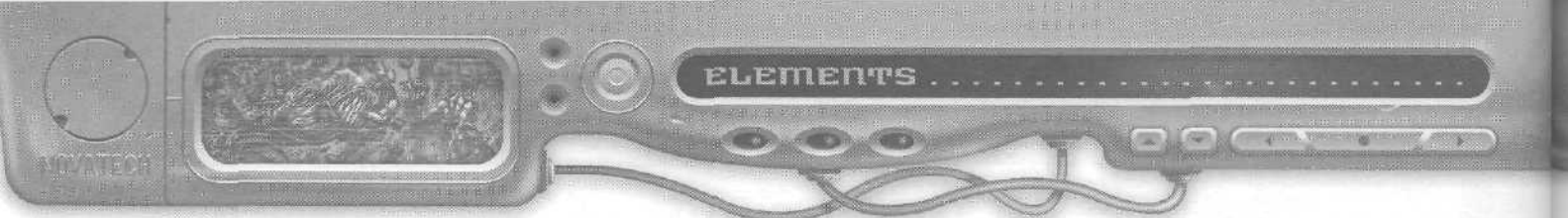
Elements takes the runners out of familiar territory and across the Caribbean to the jungles of Amazonia, where they have to deliver a particularly valuable package at the behest of their employer. It should be a challenge for shadowrunners used to operating in the urban jungle, and gamemasters may want to ensure that the runners have at least some basic survival skills for handling things in the wilderness. A shaman will come in handy, and the group should have at least some magical support. A rigger character able to pilot a boat is useful, but not necessary. A decker is only minimally useful on this run, so the gamemaster may want to consider places where deckers can find things to do, or encourage decker characters with other skills and abilities.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The shadowrunners are hired to pick up a package in New Orleans and deliver it to someone in Amazonia, avoiding the entanglements of customs and the attention of the authorities. Agents of Mitsuhamma Computer Technologies, who are after the contents of the package, crash the runners' pick-up in New Orleans. The team needs to get out of the city and meet the smuggler who will take them down to Amazonia. Along the way, they have to deal with modern-day pirates and the other dangers of the Awakened ocean, while getting hints that the package they carry contains something very valuable and very strange.

The runners arrive in the city of Macapa, at the mouth of the Amazon River. There they must head upriver to their final destination, but their arrival does not go unnoticed. Agents of Aztechnology become interested in the runners' activities and MCT agents are not far behind them. The runners have to deal with the opposition as well as the hazards of the jungle to reach their goal, a primitive village in the depths of the Amazon. There the runners' pursuers spring a trap and make a last grab for the goods.





IF YOU HAVE PLAYED LEGACY

It's quite possible that the shadowrunners may already be familiar with the Elemental Scrolls of Ak'le'ar, if they took part in the adventure "Legacy" in the *Corporate Punishment* adventure book. If this is the case, you may want to adjust the adventure to reflect the runners' familiarity with the scrolls and the various parties interested in them.

This adventure assumes the runners in "Legacy" (whether the player characters or not) weren't able to hold on to the scrolls for long, and that Hestaby eventually managed to acquire them from whomever ended up with them at the end of the adventure. If the runners were involved in the original theft of the scrolls, then Hestaby has even more reason to use them as her agents in this adventure, enjoying the poetic justice of having the runners return what they originally stole.

If the runners managed to hold on to the Elemental Scrolls at the end of "Legacy" and still have them (and somehow haven't been killed by any of the several parties that want to get their hands on them), you may need to modify the start of the adventure. Perhaps the runners are offered a handsome price for the scrolls, provided they're willing to deliver them to a pre-arranged location in Amazonia. The runners might even try to double-cross their employer in this case, which may cause them some problems with Hestaby in the future.

What's In the Package?

The package the runners are hired to carry contains the Elemental Scrolls of Ak'le'ar, ancient magic items that Dunkelzahn left to the great feathered serpent Hualpa in his will. Hualpa loaned the scrolls to the Dunkelzahn Institute of Magical Research for study, and they were stolen (in the adventure "Legacy" in *Corporate Punishment*). After passing through various hands, the scrolls recently ended up in Hestaby's possession. She saw the opportunity to score points in the Rite of Succession by returning the scrolls to Hualpa, accomplishing what he has not been able to do. To make things that much sweeter, she intends to have the scrolls delivered right to Hualpa's doorstep rather than simply having him send agents to collect them.

Of course, Hualpa and Hestaby are far from the only parties interested in the Elemental Scrolls. The Dunkelzahn Institute, with the aid of the Draco Foundation, has been making efforts to recover them (and regain some of the face they lost when the scrolls were stolen in the first place). Mitsuhamma Computer Technologies and Aztechnology, two megacorps with a strong interest in magic, are also after the scrolls. MCT picks up their trail around the time the runners go to pick them up in New Orleans, and the adventure begins.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The run is assumed to start out in New Orleans, in the Confederation of American States, but the gamemaster can change this to any suitable port along the Caribbean or Gulf of Mexico (or even farther, if desired). It may be useful to include an adventure that takes place in the Big Easy before

Elements, just to get the shadowrunners into the city, but it's not necessary. See *Target: Smuggler Havens* and *Shadows of North America* for more on New Orleans and the CAS.

MIDNIGHT RUN

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The runners pick up the scrolls in New Orleans to take them to meet a smuggler who will get them down to Amazonia. Unfortunately, their meeting is interrupted by the arrival of MCT agents looking for the scrolls.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

New Orleans, the Big Easy: it's a shadowrunner's kind of town, especially at night. Of course, you're here on business and not pleasure, but you're looking forward to the opportunity to get biz taken care of and then maybe spending some cred at a few select places here in the Crescent City. Or maybe you'll spend some time in Rio de Janeiro, now that you think of it. After all, your business is taking you to Amazonia before this is all over, and you've heard that the nightlife in Rio makes even New Orleans look tame.

It's a pretty straightforward job. You pick up a package from a fixer in New Orleans, take it down to the Gulf where you meet up with a ship that takes you down to Macapa, a city at the mouth of the Amazon River in South America. Then you head upriver to deliver the package to some shaman in a village along the river. You've heard some freaky things about the critters living in Amazonia, especially since the comet, but you're sure it's nothing a little applied firepower can't handle. Then it's off to Rio to spend your hard-earned nuyen and maybe pick up a little more work.

The lakeside area of the city is virtually abandoned this late at night, so there's no one to see you arrive outside the old warehouse. Time to get down to business, chummers.

HOOKS

Things start off casual: another night, another shadowrun, nothing unusual. The runners feel confident; maybe it's something in the air in New Orleans. Things quickly get complicated, however, when their meeting is interrupted by the arrival of the MCT team looking for the scrolls. The runners should immediately get the impression that they're playing for higher stakes than they originally thought. They should end this scenario thinking they should have asked for more money.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The adventure begins with the shadowrunners arriving at a meeting in New Orleans to pick up the package containing the Elemental Scrolls for delivery down to Amazonia. Of course, the runners don't know what the package contains—they only know that it's contraband, and they're being well paid not to ask any questions.

Things start off with the runners arriving at the location of the meeting. If you want, you can run a short scenario to get the runners down to New Orleans and introduce them to the

Johnson and the run beforehand. The adventure assumes the runners agree to the job and a payment of 150,000¥, with 10 percent (15,000¥) in advance, with the rest upon completion of the run. Adjust the payment and the introduction as necessary to suit the style of your group. If the runners are already acquainted with Toshi Akimura (from the adventure "My Name Is Legion" from *Brainscan*, and from *Portfolio of a Dragon*), then the introduction is even simpler (assuming their relations with Akimura remain cordial). Feel free to substitute another fixer NPC in this scenario if you prefer.

Akimura is a well-known fixer in New Orleans who once had ties with Dunkelzahn. He's now indirectly working for Hestaby. His job is to hire the runners and charge them with returning the Elemental Scrolls to Amazonia. His only real stake in the operation is his reputation, which he means to protect.

When the team arrives at the pre-arranged meet site, Akimura is waiting for them. He's accompanied by two bodyguards; elven women who are either twin sisters or have been bio-sculpted to look identical. Use the Adept sample character (p. 55, *SR3*) for their stats, if necessary. They remain silent throughout the meeting and only act to protect Akimura, or on his orders.

The fixer presents the runners with the "package" they are to deliver. It is enclosed in a plastic packing crate just over a meter long but about half that wide and tall, sealed in heavy shrink-wrap (the crate provides another point of impact armor to the scrolls). He doesn't explain what's inside, though the box is fairly light for its size (about 20 kilos). He also provides the runners with a chip containing a map to their destination and information on where they should meet their transportation in the Mississippi Delta.

After providing the runners with the goods, the necessary information and a certified credstick for the agreed-upon advance, Akimura takes his leave, departing through the back of the old warehouse to where his car awaits. As he drives off, the observing MCT team decides to move in.

A number of MCT security personnel equal to the runners in the team enter the warehouse from front and back. They attack the runners immediately, though they have orders to avoid damaging the package the runners have with them. See the *Cast of Shadows* section (p. 58) for information on the MCT personnel and their equipment.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

The initial fight with the MCT team is intended as little more than a warm-up. A group of experienced and capable shadowrunners shouldn't have too much trouble dealing with them (especially if the runners have magical support to back them up). If you want to make the initial scenario more challenging there are several things you can do.

First, give the Mitsuhamas team additional personnel and have them send along a combat mage to provide magical support (use the Combat Mage character from p. 57, *SR3*). Assume this is one of Dr. Kozakura's subordinates. He could even have an elemental or two along with him to make things more interesting.

Second, you can have some of the named members of the MCT team described in the *Cast of Shadows* section show up. This may be a bit premature, and it may result in some (or even all) of them getting killed by the runners, so be prepared for the eventuality. Of course, Ms. Miyamoto and her team aren't stupid. If they're seriously outclassed, they'll run and look to regroup and come at the runners with even more firepower the next time.

You can complicate the fight against the MCT team if Akimura and his bodyguards are still present when they show up. In this case, you should add a few more security personnel to the MCT side. Akimura and his bodyguards will aid the runners against the team, but the elven bodyguards focus on getting their boss out safely, leaving the runners to keep the corporate team busy, if need be.

You can *really* complicate the fight by having a third party show up to try and snatch the scrolls. Possibilities include shadowrunners or security personnel in the employ of Wuxing, the Draco Foundation, the Dunkelzahn Institute, Manadyne, the Atlantean Foundation or nearly any other faction that might have gotten wind of the scrolls' existence and presence in New Orleans. Perhaps the rival team works for another great dragon and is unaware of what the package contains, only that Hestaby wants it to get to Amazonia, so their boss wants to make sure that it doesn't.

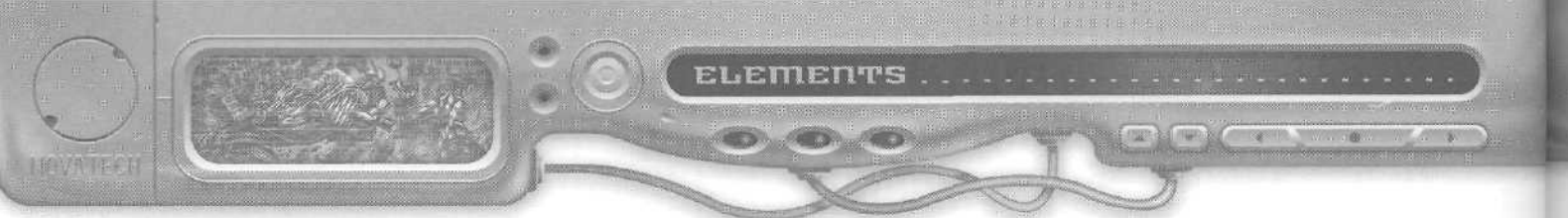
Finally, don't forget about the magical properties of the scrolls themselves or the spirits associated with them. The presence of the scrolls could cause a mana warp or wild magic inside the warehouse (see *MITS*), making it more difficult for the runners (or their opponents) to use magic. Any direct threats to the scrolls cause their guardian spirits to appear (see *Cast of Shadows*, p. 58, for more information).

DEBUGGING

If the players aren't likely to go along with the setup presented here, you may wish to run an additional short scenario where the runners have the opportunity to meet with Akimura and negotiate the terms of the run before moving on to the main part of the adventure.

If the players have any questions about their arrangements with Akimura, answer them based on the material in the adventure. The fixer isn't likely to negotiate with the runners for any last-minute changes to the deal. If the runners seem untrustworthy or unprofessional, Akimura calls off the deal and he and his bodyguards take the package with them to find another team to handle it. The MCT team attacks the runners, thinking they have the package, which may encourage the runners to take the job, just to annoy MCT (or to try and get them off their backs).

If the MCT team proves too dangerous for the runners, Akimura's bodyguards can return to help them out (since the fixer has an interest in seeing the run carried out). The guardian spirits of the scrolls might also appear, say after a stray shot from the MCT team hits the package. They are capable of making quick work of the MCT team, and should leave the runners wondering what it is they are carrying.



THE CROSSING

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The team meets up with their transportation and heads out into the Gulf of Mexico on their way to Amazonia. They run into trouble with some pirates and may have some other interesting things happen because of the presence of the scrolls.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Whoever said "getting there is half the fun" obviously never had to make their way through the swampy Mississippi Delta in the dead of night to meet some smuggler while carrying a big fraggin' box with who-knows-what in it, pursued by some corporate goons willing to gun them down in order to get it. It's gonna be one of those nights.

You think you've just about reached the pre-arranged meeting site when you see a tiny light in the darkness. At first it's like the winking of a bright firefly, but then it draws closer and you can see it's the gleam coming from the cybereye of a rather mangy-looking ork. It flashes again as the eye's range finder plays over you briefly. Then the ork lowers his Ares Predator slightly.

"I'm Cap'n Fixx," he says gruffly. "Have you got the goods?"

HOOKS

This scene is a transition between New Orleans and Amazonia, with the runners pursued by parties unknown and wondering about what they're carrying and why it's so valuable. The team is literally headed into difficult waters and should be cautious, ready for trouble at any moment.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The runners meet up with an ork smuggler who goes by the name "Cap'n Fixx," the captain of a small ship called the *Gulf Runner*. Akimura is paying Fixx to transport the runners and their cargo from the CAS to Amazonia, with no questions asked, which is just what he's going to do. Fixx and his crew of a dozen smugglers have been operating in the Gulf region for years and know the area extremely well. They've dodged patrol ships from Aztlan, the CAS and the Carib League, as well as corporate vessels and lived to tell about it.

The *Gulf Runner* has stats similar to a Harland & Wolff *Clasique* (p. 162, *Rigger 3*), except with none of the amenities. She's not an opulent yacht, she's a seaworthy smuggler that's been modified and patched together for years. Fixx and his men get the runners out to the ship by launch and set sail as quickly as possible, particularly if the runners make any mention of the trouble they ran into back in New Orleans.

Trouble at Sea

A couple days out from the CAS coast, the *Gulf Runner* encounters some trouble in the form of a band of pirates. Unknown to Cap'n Fixx, one of the members of his crew is on the take from this pirate band, providing them with information on the cargo Fixx carries. This particular one interests them, so the pirates make their move on the *Gulf Runner* as she exits the Yucatán Channel into the Caribbean Sea near dawn.

The pirates have three GMC Riverine boats (p. 161, *Rigger 3*) each with an Ingram Valiant light machinegun on a hardpoint [Ammo 50(c), BF/FA, 7S]. Each boat holds six pirates. One of the boats also carries Grin, the band's shark shaman. Grin has a Force 5 Sea Spirit (p. 268, *SR3*) on hand when the attack begins. Consult the vehicle combat rules in *SR3* for information on handling the fight between the ships. Gamemasters may find the additional information in *Rigger 3* helpful as well.

The pirates attempt to get the crew of the *Gulf Runner* to surrender and give them the package the runners are carrying, along with the other contraband in the ship's hold that Fixx is smuggling into Amazonia (cases of BTL chips and other electronic goods). If they refuse to surrender, the pirates open fire on them and the shaman orders the sea spirit to attack. They don't want to sink the *Gulf Runner*, but they have no objections to killing everyone on board if necessary.

The *Gulf Runner's* crew fights back, but they're no match for the pirates (particularly the shark shaman) without the runners' help. Grin focuses his effort on countering any magicians on board the *Gulf Runner*, though he keeps his spell defense on himself and the boat he's on. The others are largely on their own.

If the pirates lose half their number or at least two of their three boats are destroyed, the rest will retreat as fast as they can. If he can, Grin will order his sea spirit to aid the pirate's retreat. Loss of their shaman is also likely to get the pirates to retreat, especially if the shadowrunners still have a lot of magical muscle on their side.

Pirates (18)

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
4	3	3	2	2	3	6	—	2

INIT: 2 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Combat 4

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 2/3

Race: Human

Active Skills: Athletics 2 (Swimming 3), Boats B/R 3, Clubs 3, Diving 2, Etiquette 2 (Pirate 3), Heavy Weapons 4, Pistols 4, Rifles 4, Motorboat 4, Unarmed Combat 3

Weapons: Ceska Black Scorpion [MP, SA/BF, 6L, RC (1), 35 (c)]

Range (TN): 0–10 (4), 11–40 (5), 41–80 (6), 81–150 (9)

Armor: Armored jacket [5/3]

Grin—Shark Shaman

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
3	4	4	5	3	6	6	6	3

THE RIGGER PC OPTION

If one of the shadowrunners is a rigger skilled in Motorboat, then feel free to alter this scenario to spotlight the rigger's abilities. Having Akimura provide the runners with access to a suitable boat (assuming they don't have one already) and let the rigger character pilot it to their destination. You can make the encounter with the pirates more of a chase scene, using the rules from *SR3* and *Rigger 3* and giving the rigger character a chance to show off a little, or you can run the encounter as described.

If you prefer to use the scenario as written, you can also have the pirate attack on the *Gulf Runner* injure or kill the ship's pilot, allowing the rigger character the opportunity to step in and help pilot the ship to its destination.

INIT: 3 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Combat 6, Spell 5

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 3/3

Race: Human

Active Skills: Athletics 2 (Swimming 4), Boats B/R 3, Conjuring 6, Diving 3, Etiquette 3 (Pirate 4), Pistols 3, Motorboat 4, Sorcery 6, Unarmed Combat 3

Totem: Shark, +2 dice combat/detection spells and sea spirits, may go berserk when wounded

Spells (Shark Totem): Agony 4, Armor 5, Combat Sense 3, Confusion 5, Influence 4, Oxygenate 2, Power Bolt 4, Shape Water 4, Treat 3

Weapons: Ceska Black Scorpion [MP, SA/BF, 6L, RC (1), 35 (c)]

Range (TN): 0–10 (4), 11–40 (5), 41–80 (6), 81–150 (9)

Armor: Armored jacket [5/3]

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

The encounter with the pirates should give the runners a good fight and leave them wondering how the pirate crew knew where to find them and what they knew about the package they're carrying. If things look too easy for the characters, you can increase the number of pirates (even giving them an extra boat). You can also make Grin an initiate with invoking (and possibly shielding) and the sea spirit a great form spirit.

To liven up the combat and provide some action for the characters lacking ranged attacks, you can have one of the pirate boats come alongside the *Gulf Runner* (aided by Grin's sea spirit, perhaps). Some of the pirates can board the ship and fight in melee combat with the crew and the runners.

The trip from New Orleans to Amazonia takes the better part of a week for the ship, so there is plenty of time for other encounters along the way, if desired. The *Gulf Runner* could be attacked by other pirates in or near the Caribbean, run into Awakened sea creatures (for gamemasters with the *Critters* sourcebook) or have to evade an Aztlan border patrol (which is feeling a bit jumpy, given the current situation in the Yucatan). A toxic spirit or mutant creature created by the chemical agents used in the Yucatan War could even show up. There's also time for the shadowrunners to mingle with Cap'n Fixx's crew, if they're so inclined. Friendships or rival-

ries could develop, and the runners might even be able to track down the crewmember on the take from the pirates, if they choose to investigate the possibility.

Finally, the Mitsuhamas agents may manage to track the runners and could go after them at sea before they arrive in Amazonia. They can replace the attack by the pirate gang or even augment it, for a real major fight.

DEBUGGING

If the fight with the pirates proves too overwhelming for the runners, the spirits of the Elemental Scrolls can be an ace in the hole. With machinegun fire riddling the *Gulf Runner* and unleashed magic flying about, it's not too difficult for the scrolls to become endangered and for the spirits to take swift and decisive action. The Fire Elemental can destroy one of more of the pirate's boats in fiery explosions, either driving the pirates off or giving the runners a shot at finishing them.

If the runners get curious and decide to open up the package to see what's inside (at any time during the adventure), let them. The Elemental Scrolls are described in the *Cast of Shadows* section (p. 58). To astral perception and all other forms of magical detection the scrolls seem completely mundane, despite their apparent great age and magical trappings. They're also extremely difficult to damage, and any attempt to do so summons the guardian spirits. The runners might be able to get a little information out of the guardian spirits but not much, since they tend to be poor conversationalists. Runners who took part in the adventure "Legacy" from *Corporate Punishment* will recognize the scrolls—and the spirits—if they see them again.

UP THE RIVER

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The runners arrive in Amazonia and head upriver to their destination while avoiding undercover agents of Aztechnology operating in the area.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

It takes days on board the *Gulf Runner* to get to the port city of Macapa in Amazonia, and you're more than happy to say goodbye to Cap'n Fixx and his crew when you finally reach your destination. The city lies on the equator at the mouth of the Amazon River, and it's one of the coastal cities maintained by the Amazonian Awakened as "gateways" to the rest of the world. People come here to trade freely, so long as they don't break any local laws or venture too far into the interior of Amazonia, like you're intending to do.

The city is like a lot of "free" port cities the world over: a riot of activity along the waterfront, with ships from all over the world and different sorts of people going about their business. The air is hot and sticky, even close to the water, and you can see the jungle in the distance, always encroaching on the city limits. Macapa has more than a few metahumans and changelings. Amazonia is supposed to be a haven for the Awakened, after all, though you notice that many of them are squatters or beggars.

According to the info you got from Mr. Johnson, you're supposed to meet someone named Hilde to take you upriver to deliver the goods and complete your run. You should be able to find your contact here along the waterfront, which is a good thing, because you're starting to feel a little exposed. The sooner you get things wrapped up, the better.

HOOKS

The runners are in a familiar, yet foreign, environment. They also know that there are other factions interested in what they're carrying, so they should be on their guard and watchful for any signs of trouble. Macapa is a chaotic place, full of potential dangers for the unwary. A group of street-smart shadowrunners, though, shouldn't have too much trouble.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The person the runners are to meet in Macapa is an elf woman named Hilde (the only name she gives or answers to). She has Latina coloring and attractive elven features, but she's also a hardened and street-smart professional. She makes her living as a guide to parts of the interior of Amazonia, and she's been hired to guide the runners to their destination to deliver their package. Like Cap'n Fixx, Hilde has been paid not to ask questions, and she doesn't really have any interest in what the runners are doing. She does have a strong dislike for Aztlan and Aztechnology (from years of experience), which may make her more sympathetic toward the characters later on.

The runners can find Hilde in any of a number of small waterfront dives. Asking around (and an Etiquette (4) Test) is enough to locate her in a matter of an hour or so. She sizes up the runners and asks them when they want to leave, then goes along with their wishes. She's willing to wait in Macapa if that's what they want, but otherwise she suggests getting underway as soon as possible.

Stalking Jaguar

The runners' arrival does not go entirely unnoticed. Aztechnology has agents at work in Macapa and other coastal cities in Amazonia. One of these is Reynaldo Ocelopan (see the *Cast of Shadows*). Ocelopan takes note of the runners when they arrive and start asking around for Hilde. He has them pegged as potential corporate or government agents or mercenaries on business in the city, and hopes to find out what they're up to. To that end, he pays some local street toughs to hassle the runners so he can see how they handle themselves and what they're capable of.

The Macapan gangers are nothing much. Use the stats for the pirates from *The Crossing* (p. 52), minus the vehicle skills and equipment and arming them with clubs and knives. There should be at least as many gangers as there are shadowrunners, and they're likely to include some metahumans—mainly orks and trolls—among their number (or changelings, if you have access to *Year of the Comet*). The gangers back down if the runners show they've got superior combat abilities or if they kill any of the gangers.



Leaving Macapa

Hilde is ready to leave the city as soon as the runners are. She takes them down to her boat, a GMC Riverine (p. 161, *Rigger 3*) and they get underway. Getting out of Macapa, however, isn't quite as easy as the team's arrival. Ocelopan's Aztechnology agents try to stop the runners at the waterfront, and they have two boats waiting (the same as Hilde's Riverine) waiting to pursue them, if necessary. The ground team is Ocelopan and a number of security agents equal to the runners, while each pursuit boat has a crew of three.

Of course, since he has no legal authority in Amazonia, Ocelopan will try to keep things as quiet as possible. If the runners resist, however, he has no compunctions about escalating things, knowing that he and his men can disappear before the authorities can intervene. If the runners escape, Ocelopan lets them go, at least until he discovers that Mitsuhama is also after them.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

The runners' time in Macapa is the perfect opportunity to introduce them to some "local color" like a bar-brawl, more street gangs or some paranormal urban predators like devil rats, harpies or even an incubus (see the *Critters* book). Feel

free to let them wander around a bit and introduce some mini-encounters with the locals.

If any of the runners have caused trouble for Aztechnology in the past, it's possible Ocelopan may recognize them and try to capture or kill them for whatever bounty the corporation will award. If the runners openly display magical abilities, the Aztechnology agent may also arrange to have a hired shaman on hand for the encounter with the runners at the waterfront (use the Tribal Shaman character, p. 78, *SR3*).

To turn the confrontation at the waterfront into a major melee, have the Mitsuhama team find the runners at the same time and try to grab the scrolls, making it a three-way fight. Otherwise, the MCT team shows up in Macapa too late to stop the runners and pursues them upriver (see *Savage Jungle*).

DEBUGGING

Again, if one of the player characters is a rigger with the Motorboat skill, you can make Hilde into a contact who simply supplies the team with a boat (unless they brought their own). Perhaps she's just a local guide who can help the team avoid some of the hazards of the jungle.

If the runners stir up too much trouble in Macapa, they may have to leave the city with the local authorities on their



heels. If they somehow manage to get themselves arrested, then Hilde can pull strings to get them out, which might happen after Ocelopan or Miyamoto have claimed the scrolls, forcing the runners to try and get them back.

Adjust the encounter with the Aztechnology agents at the waterfront as needed to make it a fair challenge for the runners. If it's too difficult, you can use the Spirits of the Scrolls to help the runners out. If it's too easy, you can toss in some extra Aztechnology personnel or have the MCT agents show up at the same time, as mentioned above.

SAVAGE JUNGLE

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The characters make their way up the Amazon River, dealing with the paranormal dangers along the way and the pursuit of their rivals for possession of the scrolls.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The Amazon River is wide and sluggish, the water murky most of the time. As your boat chugs upriver toward the interior of Amazonia, you're amazed by the riot of life surrounding the riverbanks: thick jungle foliage, flowering vines, the air abuzz with insects, birds and the cries of jungle animals. Occasionally, you catch sight of things moving through the water, some small and others quite large. The heat and humidity are oppressive, and you're always expecting something to come leaping out of the jungle or water at you.

You'll be glad when you can finish this up and get back to the concrete jungle, where you belong.

HOOKS

The runners are headed into unknown territory. The Amazonian Jungle is a wild, strange place, especially for a bunch of shadowrunners used to life in the city. Though it's beautiful and awesome, the runners should find nearly everything about it unpleasant: the heat, the humidity, the noise, the biting insects and the rain, to say nothing of all the potentially hostile Awakened wildlife.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The team has to make its way deep into Amazonia along the Amazon River, a trip of just over two days by boat. Hilde knows how to navigate the river and avoid most of the obvious hazards, though the trip is still no pleasure cruise. Two days of travel upriver brings the runners to the area where they're supposed to be. Hilde moors the boat along the riverbank, and the team has to head inland through the jungle to reach the native village where they must deliver the goods.

Aztlan Standoff

Reynaldo Ocelopan pursues the runners into the depths of the Amazon, either because of the damage they did in Macapa or because he learns that MCT is hunting for them and wants to know why (and acquire whatever it is that MCT

wants). Ocelopan and his men attempt to ambush the runners when they reach the shore and head inland toward their final destination. The Aztechnology adept has at least as many security men with him as there are runners (more if the runners handled the Aztechnology men easily in their last encounter). He tries to surround the runners and convince them to surrender the package they are carrying. If they refuse, he orders his men to attack.

Blood in the Jungle

En route to the village, the runners also encounter a couple Sangre del Diablos, awakened trees that feed on the blood of animals (p. 144, *YOTC*). The two trees use their Compulsion power to try and draw some of the shadowrunners to them so they can engulf and consume them. Roll an Opposed Test between the trees' Essence and the shadowrunners' Willpower. If the tree wins, the shadowrunner is compelled to move close enough for the Sangre to make its Engulf attack. This requires another Opposed Essence vs. Willpower Test. If the tree wins, it engulfs its victim, doing 8M damage each Combat Turn (which armor does not protect against).

To make things interesting, you can combine this with *Aztlan Standoff*, above, having the Sangre del Diablos attack both the runners and the Aztechnology agents.

Sangre Del Diablos

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
16/8	5 x 0	14	—	2/5	6	8	3

INIT: 3 + 1D6

Powers: Compulsion, Corrosive Secretions, Engulf, Immunity (Fire), Magical Guard

Notes: Treat the engulf power as a sludge engulf (see p. 9, *Critters*).

Special Delivery

The runners' destination is a small, nameless village in the depths of the jungle, inhabited by Amazonian natives. The village is little more than a collection of huts and lean-tos in a small clearing in the jungle. When the shadowrunners arrive, a small group of four native hunters (armed only with spears and bone knives) meets them. One speaks enough broken English to guide the shadowrunners to the largest hut in the village, raised up above the others on stilts. Apparently they are expected.

Inside the hut waits an old shaman with deeply tanned, weathered skin wearing native dress, including a cloak and headdress of brightly colored feathers and a necklace of shells and beads. He welcomes the runners into the hut in almost perfect English and asks them why they have come. So long as the shadowrunners remain reasonably polite and explain their mission, the old man is gracious toward them. When presented with the box containing the Elemental Scrolls, he opens it and seems somewhat surprised to see the scrolls. He offers the shadowrunners a bow and his humble thanks for returning the scrolls to Amazonia.

Mitsuhamas Strikes

Shortly after the runners deliver the scrolls, the Mitsuhamas agents catch up with them. Seeing only a humble and isolated village, Miyamoto and her team set about neutralizing the runners and claiming the scrolls for themselves. Use the three main MCT team members described in *Cast of Shadows*, along with a number of security personnel equal to the shadowrunners. They move into the village and quickly begin making their way toward the hut where the runners are. The village warriors attempt to stop them and are gunned down, giving the player characters some warning about the imminent attack.

Miyamoto calls for the runners to surrender the scrolls and tells them they will be allowed to go if they do. If the runners agree to surrender the scrolls, the old man attempts to stop the corporate team alone. He is killed after Dr. Kozakura blocks his attempt to cast a stunball spell on them. Miyamoto is true to her word if the runners give her the scrolls, and does let them leave.

If the runners fight back, the MCT personnel do everything they can to overcome them and secure the scrolls. If they suffer heavy enough losses, they retreat into the jungle. The runners can pursue them or simply let them go.

The Pickup

Shortly after the MCT team is dealt with, a feathered serpent arrives at the village, sent by Hualpa to take possession of the scrolls. The feathered serpent glides majestically down and lands near the main hut, where the old shaman greets him (assuming he is still alive). The serpent gravely thanks the shadowrunners for their assistance in returning the Elemental Scrolls to Amazonia and says that they have the nation's thanks. They are welcome to remain in Amazonia or depart, as they wish. The feathered serpent offers no explanations to the shadowrunners if they ask him questions about the scrolls.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

The shadowrunners can have other encounters with the native flora and fauna on their trek through the Amazonian jungle, if you want. Feel free to break out the *Critters* book and see if anything in there inspires you. The characters can also run into some free nature spirits in the jungle, which may question their presence there (Amazonian spirits don't care much for outsiders). They may also react to the presence of the Elemental Scrolls, showing unusual deference to the runners or wanting to follow them.

If you want the final confrontation with the Mitsuhamas agents to be *really* climatic, you can have them bring in some extra muscle in the form of an attack helicopter (like a Northrup Yellowjacket, p. 183, *Rigger 3*) that strafes the area with gunfire and even missiles. The runners can deal with the chopper on their own or you can have the feathered serpent show up early to deal with it. He avoids the Yellowjacket's minigun (or simply creates a magical barrier to protect him-

self from the gunfire) and strikes the helicopter with a powerful spell or a blast of fiery breath.

You can also have the Aztechnology forces involved in the final assault, making things into a three-way battle the runners may be able to turn to their advantage, if they can get the two corporate forces fighting each other.

In either case, don't forget about the guardian spirits of the scrolls. If they feel the scrolls are threatened they will take action, which can get them involved on the runners' side of the fight (or may even turn the spirits against them, if the runners threaten the scrolls to try and keep them out of MCT's hands!).

DEBUGGING

If the runners suggest getting to their destination by air rather than following the river, Hilde advises against it. Amazonia has a number of defenses against airborne intruders, particularly air spirits, elementals and other paranormals in the service of the Amazonian Awakened. It's even been known for a dragon to down unwanted aircraft, so taking the river is considerably lower-profile. It's also what the runners' employer wants (assuming that carries any weight with the characters).

If the runners are too worn down by the various encounters on their way to the village for the final confrontation, you can have the old shaman offer to magically heal some of their injuries so they're at least partially recovered when the Mitsuhamas squad arrives.

If the final fight is proving too difficult for the runners, you can always have the feathered serpent or the spirits of the Elemental Scrolls intervene to help them out. On the other hand, if the runners are walking all over the MCT squad, you may want to give them an extra edge, like some additional men in sniping positions in the jungle, waiting to take potshots at the runners with high-powered rifles.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

IT'S A WRAP

Once the runners have successfully delivered the Elemental Scrolls into the hands (or talons, as the case may be) of Hualpa, they're free to leave Amazonia and return home (or wherever else they want to go). You can assume that Hualpa provides the runners with safe passage, if you want to wrap things up quickly, or the runners might have to deal with additional difficulties on their way out of the Amazonian interior along with arranging transportation back to North America. For further adventures in Amazonia, you can always have the runners end up back in Macapa or down in Rio, where they might find additional work. If Hualpa is impressed with how the team handled their mission and the Aztechnology agents, he may hire them to root out any of Ocelopan's remaining confederates in Macapa.

AWARDING KARMA

Award individual Karma according to the guidelines on p. 244, SR3. Award Karma to each team member based on the following requirements:

Surviving the run	1
Successfully delivering the Scrolls to Hualpa	1
Successfully dealing with the Mitsuhama team	1
Successfully dealing with the Aztechnology agents	1

LEGWORX

The runners don't have a lot of opportunities for legwork in this adventure, since they're traveling most of the time. But cell phones and satellite links really do go everywhere in the Sixth World, so they might find some time to contact a few people and ask some questions. Here's what they may be able to find out.

Amazonia

The nation of Amazonia remains one of the most mysterious of the Sixth World, since it was established by a coalition of Awakened beings. Its coastal cities are open to commerce, but its jungle interior teems with Awakened life. The masters of Amazonia protect it fiercely against all intruders.

Appropriate Contacts: Activists (ecology, metahuman or Awakened rights, TN 4), any others (TN 6).

Successes	Result
0	"Amazonia? Why the frag would anyone want to go there?"
1	"Amazonia is a tough nut to crack, chummer. They don't much like outsiders down there and there are all sorts of things living out in the jungle, they say."
2	"Though Amazonia is somewhat insular, the coastal cities are just as open to trade and tourism as anywhere else in the world. As long as you're careful, you can get into the country without too much trouble."
3+	"The interior of Amazonia is teeming with Awakened life of all kinds and the Amazonian government protects the rainforest environment with an iron fist. Of course, most of the time all they need to do is let the jungle critters eat anyone who crosses the line."

Mitsuhama Computer Technologies

The megacorporate computer giant has interests in a great many things. Shadowrunners in this adventure are most likely to be trying to find out what MCT's interest is in the package they're trying to deliver.

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 4): Any corporate contact, Matrix search

Successes	Result
0	"Mitsuhama? Sorry, chummer, I don't know and I'm better off that way. It isn't healthy to know too much about MCT's business."
1	"If it's on the cutting edge of anything, magic or tech, Mitsuhama is interested in it. Anything they can pirate or copy for the next great breakthrough to get the jump on their competition."
2	"Mitsuhama has this division, Unit 13, that does 'special thaumaturgical research,' which means black magic of the deepest and most secret kind. If it's got to do with magic, odds are good that Unit 13 is involved."
3	"A while back, Unit 13 was involved with some dust-up in Boston involving the Dunkelzahn Institute and MIT&T. I don't know what it was all about, probably some new magical formula or focus. I hear that things didn't work out to Mitsuhama's satisfaction. What a pity."
4+	"Unit 13 has been hunting for something for a while now. Word has it they're some scrolls or magical books or something from Dunkelzahn's will that have some major mojo to them. Mitsuhama wants them and they're willing to do whatever they have to in order to get them."

The Elemental Scrolls of Ak'le'ar

If the runners find out exactly what it is they're carrying, they may try to find out more, which is not so easy a task.

Appropriate Contacts (Target Number 6): Any magical contact.

Successes	Result
0	"The what of who? Never heard of 'em."
1	"They were in Dunkelzahn's Will. He left them to Hualpa, the feathered serpent who's a big noise down in Amazonia."
2	"Hualpa loaned the scrolls to the Dunkelzahn Institute for study and they disappeared. Really left egg on the faces of everyone at the DIMR and they've been scrambling to kiss Hualpa's feathered hoop to avoid a big incident."
3	"I heard that a Mitsuhama operation heisted the scrolls from a lab at MIT&T but that there were complications. I don't know if the scrolls ended up with MCT or someone else nabbed them."
4	"Whoever it was, MCT didn't get the scrolls or hold on to them for long, because word has it that they're still looking for them."



CAST OF SHADOWS

The following are the major characters (and items, in the case of the Elemental Scrolls) appearing in this adventure.

THE ELEMENTAL SCROLLS OF AK'LE'AR

The Elemental Scrolls of Ak'le'ar are a collection of five scrolls written on thick, tough parchment. Each scroll is about a meter wide and 50 meters long when completely unrolled. When rolled up, each scroll is a cylinder about 33 centimeters in diameter. The scrolls are attached to metal spools with circular metal end-caps, one engraved with a pentagram, the other with an eight-spoked wheel. Each scroll fits into a soft leather slipcase, with all five stored in a carved hardwood box with a lid. The scrolls have a Barrier Rating of 20, making them extremely resistant to damage. Their cases have an Armor Rating of 0/1 while the box has a Barrier Rating of 3.

There is writing on both sides of each scroll, along with elaborate mystical diagrams and illustrations. The writing is in no known language and is indecipherable, as are the diagrams. The scrolls present a very impressive looking package, but they offer no information as to their true nature or purpose. Despite the fact that they're far more durable than any mundane material, the scrolls show no signs of enchantment when examined astrally. Physical tests provide conflicting and inconclusive data regarding their age and composition.

Despite their mundane appearance on the astral plane, there is some powerful magic associated with the elemental scrolls. First, wild magic phenomena (p. 87, *MITS*) tend to crop up in the area within a kilometer or so of them. This appears to be entirely random and there's no predicting when it will happen next. The gamemaster can use this to have nearly any magical event occur near the scrolls as needed in this adventure.

The second effect of the scrolls is the spontaneous appearance of various elemental spirits in their vicinity (see *Spontaneous Appearances*, p. 98, *MITS* and *Spirits of the Elements*, p. 105, *MITS*). These spirits have Force Ratings of 2D6 and tend to be curious and inquisitive rather than openly hostile, though they will react poorly to any attempts to banish or control them and will defend themselves if they are attacked. The sudden appearance of a spirit may be a problem for shadowrunners trying to remain unnoticed, though a spontaneous spirit may prove a help as well as a hindrance from time to time. The gamemaster should feel free to have a spirit "drop in" at any point during the adventure.

THE SPIRITS OF THE SCROLLS

Two spirits are particularly associated with the Elemental Scrolls. They are the guardians of the scrolls, who appear only when the existence of their charge is threatened in some



way, such as if an attempt is made to damage them, they're placed in the line of gunfire, and so on. Their purpose is to protect the scrolls and eliminate any danger to them. They don't appear to care who actually possesses the scrolls, so long as they are not harmed in any way.

Both are free spirits of considerable power, a spirit of the wind and a fire elemental. They're intelligent and capable of conversing with characters, though they're fairly evasive when it comes to questions about themselves and the scrolls. They won't reveal their names or anything about the scrolls, saying that those things are "part of the reason why the scrolls exist." They only mention that they are "shadows of what once was" and nothing more. Though quite reasonable, they won't assist anyone with anything beyond keeping the scrolls safe from harm. They will resist any effort to divert them from their appointed task. If seriously outmatched, they will flee back to the metaplanes, but will always return when the scrolls are endangered. The spirits can be disrupted, but they cannot be destroyed so long as the Elemental Scrolls exist.

Spirit of the Winds

The Spirit of the Winds manifests as a powerfully muscled troll made up of translucent mist, crackling with flashes of lightning with eyes glowing electric yellow. Its main purpose is to safeguard the scrolls by removing them from danger as quickly as possible (usually using its psychokinesis power).

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
11 (12)	16 x 4	10	10	10	10	(10)A	—	15

INIT: 25 + 1D6, Astral INIT: 33 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Astral Combat 15, Combat 18

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 8/3

Attacks: 10M Stun

Powers: (Force 10, Spirit Energy 3, Great Form Spirit of the Winds where applicable): Aura Masking, Cleansing, Concealment, Confusion, Engulf, Guard, Magical Guard, Materialization, Movement, Psychokinesis, Storm, Wealth

Great Form Bonuses: Armor (2/2), Body +1, Reach +1

Weakness: Vulnerability (Earth)

Fire Elemental

The Fire Elemental appears as a human male in flowing robes, shrouded in fire so that his features are shadowy and indistinct, with eyes that glow like a furnace. Its main purpose is to eliminate any direct threat to the scrolls, and it does so with ruthless efficiency. It tends to rely on its innate powers, using sorcery when necessary.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
13	14 x 3	10	12	12	12	(12)A	—	13

INIT: 23 + 1D6, Astral INIT: 32 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Astral Combat 18, Combat 19, Spell 12

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 6/4

Attacks: 10M

Powers: (Force 12, Great Form Fire Elemental where applicable): Aura Masking, Dispelling, Engulf (12 meter radius, never harms the scrolls), Flame Aura, Guard, Hidden Life, Innate Spell (Flamethrower), Materialization, Sorcery (Skill 10)

Spells: All elemental, telekinetic and transformation manipulation spells at Force 6

Weakness: Vulnerability (Water)

THE MITSUHAMA TEAM

Mitsuhamma Computer Technologies has already invested considerable time and effort into acquiring the Elemental Scrolls of Ak'le'ar. Their initial attempt ultimately failed when the scrolls ended up with Hestaby and she chose to return them to Hualpa. This adventure is MCT's last shot at regaining the scrolls, and they do not intend to fail again.

The team sent to retrieve the scrolls is attached to Thaumaturgical Research Unit 13, part of MCT's infamous magical resources and "black ops" division. The team is made up of three elite operatives, backed up by a number of MCT security personnel whom the operatives treat as expendable, so long as they achieve their goal. The three MCT operatives are:

Nell Miyamoto

Nell Miyamoto has worked for MCT North America for the past eight years after serving a hitch in the UCAS military. Her adept talents were honed in military training, and she quickly worked her way up in the ranks of MCT Security to the Special Projects Division. Her no-nonsense attitude and military experience made her well suited for taking charge, but unfortunately she wasn't always given the opportunity, since she is both a woman and half-Anglo. She pushed herself to prove that she was twice as capable as any man, and her adept powers helped to make it so. She worked hard to earn her current position within the company, so she's not going to let anything endanger it. At least a part of her is concerned that her superiors assigned her this mission to set her up for failure. She won't let that happen if she can do anything about it.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
4 (6)	6	4	5	4	5	6	9	5

INIT: 5 + 1D6 (3D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 7

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 5/3

Race: Human

Active Skills: Athletics 5 (7), Bike 2, Biotech 2 (First Aid 4), Car 3, Centering (Katas) 4, Etiquette 3 (Military 5), Interroga-

tion 4, Intimidation 4, Leadership 4, Pistols 5, Rifles 4, Stealth 6 (8), Unarmed Combat (Karate) 6

Knowledge Skills: English 5, Karate Katas 4, Japanese 4, Japanese Philosophy 3, UCAS Military Bases 4

Martial Arts: Karate 6 (focus strength, focus will, sweep, throw)

Adept Powers: Great Leap 2, Improved Athletics 2, Improved Body 2, Improved Reflexes 2, Improved Stealth 2, Killing Hands (Serious), Pain Resistance 3

Metamagic (Initiate Grade 3): Centering (Combat Skills), Centering (Physical Skills), Masking

Weapons: Browning Max-Power [HP, SA, 9M, 10 (c)]

Range (TN): 0-5 (4), 6-20 (5), 21-40 (6), 41-60 (9)

Armor [7/3]: Armor jacket [5/3] over form-fitting body armor [4/1]

Gear: Cell phone, transceiver (Rating 4), 2 concussion grenades [5M stun]

Kozakura Hiro

Dr. Kozakura is a junior member of Unit 13 with a promising future ahead of him, provided that he proves his usefulness and abilities doing field work for the company. Hiro was raised within the corporate family and sent to school on a company scholarship when he developed his magical gifts. Having recently completed his doctorate work in thaumaturgy, Kozakura's company connections got him assigned to Unit 13. He's fascinated by the opportunity to study the Elemental Scrolls, but even more interested in the opportunity to win a promotion and prestige within the company. Kozakura considers himself in charge of the operation, even though Ms. Miyamoto is technically his superior. He's arrogant and assured of his magical knowledge and abilities. He's eager to test them, though in truth he's something of a coward and looks out for himself above all things. He'd gladly sacrifice anyone else on his team to accomplish his goals.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
3	4	2	4	6	6	6	8	5

INIT: 5 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Astral 2, Astral Combat 8, Combat 8, Spell 6

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 3/3

Race: Human

Active Skills: Car 2, Centering (Mudras) 5, Conjuring 4 (Banishing 6), Enchanting 5, Etiquette 3 (Corporate 5), Leadership 2, Pistol 3, Sorcery 6, Stealth 2

Knowledge Skills: Calligraphy 4, English 4, Japanese 6, Magical Background 6, Mudras 5, Paranormal Animals 4, Yoga 4

Spells: Alter Memory 4, Analyze Magic 3, Blindness 4, Control Thoughts 4, Cripple Limb 4, Levitate 3, Manabolt 5, Physical Barrier 5, Preserve 1, Stunbolt 4, Treat 5

Metamagic (Initiate Grade 2): Centering (Mudras), Shielding

Weapons: Fichetti Security 500 [LP, SA, 6L, 12 (c)]

Range (TN): 0-5 (4), 6-15 (5), 16-30 (6), 31-50 (9)

Armor: Lined coat [4/2]

Gear: Cell phone, transceiver (Rating 4)

Ono Isaeo

Ono Isaeo is a soldier; he always has been and he will be until he dies. He worked MCT Security in San Francisco for several years until the recent change in the political climate, then he was reassigned. He has come to respect Nell Miyamoto's abilities, both as a soldier and a leader, and backs her without hesitation. He makes no secret of his disdain for Dr. Kozakura, whom he considers a paper-pusher and a book-worm who thinks he's in charge. He's a bit frightened, however, of Kozakura's magical abilities.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
4 (6)	6	4 (7)	3	3	5	.01	—	6 (11)

INIT: 6 (11) + 1D6 (3D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 7

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 4/3

Race: Human

Active Skills: Athletics 4, Edged Weapons 4 (Spurs 6), Etiquette 2 (Military 4), Leadership 3, Pistols 6, Stealth 4, Sub-machine Guns 6

Knowledge Skills: English 4, Japanese 4, Megacorporate Security 4, Security Procedures 3, Small-Unit Tactics 6

Cyberware: Cyberarms (2) [Obvious, with Smartlink, Retractable Spurs and Strength Enhancement 3], Cybereyes (Alphaware) [Flare Compensation, Display Link, Thermographic Vision], Dampener (Alphaware), Datajack (Alphaware), Dermal Plating 1 (Alphaware), Hearing Amplification (Alphaware), Reaction Enhancer (Alphaware), Wired Reflexes 2 (Alphaware).

Weapons: Ares Predator [HP, SA, 9M, 15 (c), w/smartgun system]

Range (TN): 0-5 (2), 6-20 (3), 21-40 (4), 41-60 (7)

Ingram Smartgun [SMG, BF/FA, 7M, RC 2 (3), 32 (c) w/smartgun system]

Range (TN): 0-10 (2), 11-40 (3), 41-80 (4), 81-150 (7)

5 concussion grenades [5M stun]

Armor: Armor jacket [5/3]

Gear: Transceiver (Rating 4)

MCT Security

Ms. Miyamoto's team has a number of security personnel assigned to it. The statistics below represent their abilities. The gamemaster should feel free to add appropriate Knowledge skills and such for flavor as needed. The security personnel are loyal to the company and their current superiors, but not fearless (as their Professional Rating shows). They'll retreat if faced with an overwhelming force (particularly if it involves strange magical phenomena).

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
4	4	3	2	3	3	4.6	—	3

INIT: 3 + 1D6 (2D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 5

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 1/3



Race: Human

Active Skills: Athletics 2, Car 2, Clubs 2 (Stun Baton 4), Etiquette 1 (Corporate 3), Pistols 4, Submachineguns 4, Unarmed Combat 3

Cyberware: Boosted Reflexes 1, Cybereyes [Flare Compensation, Low-Light], Datajack, Smartlink

Weapons: Fichetti Security 500 [LP, SA, 6L, 12 (c)]

Range (TN): 0-5 (4), 6-15 (5), 16-30 (6), 31-50 (9)

HK-227-S [SMG, SA/BF, 7M, RC (1), 28 (c) w/integral silencer, folding shoulder stock, smartgun system]

Range (TN): 0-10 (2), 11-40 (3), 41-80 (4), 81-150 (7)

Stun Baton [6S Stun]

Armor: Armored jacket [5/3]

Gear: Transceiver (Rating 4)

THE AZTECHNOLOGY TEAM

Aztechnology has a number of agents operating undercover in various parts of the world, including Amazonia. These agents have the authority to call upon certain company resources in times of need, such as security personnel for covert operations. One such agent notices the shadowrunners when they arrive in Amazonia and becomes entangled in their affairs.

Reynaldo Ocelopan—Jaguar Knight

Reynaldo Ocelopan is an operative of Aztechnology as well as an initiate of the Order of the Jaguar Knights, a magical order of magicians and adepts in Aztlan. Ocelopan is an adept, trained as a spy and assassin. He operates in Amazonia as an agent provocateur, stirring up trouble against the Amazonian government while gathering information useful to Aztechnology. Though he's exceedingly good at his job, Reynaldo would like nothing better than to be reassigned elsewhere since Aztechnology has been more active in other areas, such as the Yucatan and the recent trouble in Denver (where Ocelopan is hoping to go next).

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
5	5	5	4	5	6	6	7	5

INIT: 5 + 1D6 (3D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 8

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 5/4

Race: Human

Active Skills: Athletics 5, Edged Weapons 4 (6) (Swords 6 (8)), Etiquette 3 (Corporate 5), Pistols 6, Stealth 6, Submachineguns 4, Unarmed Combat 4

Knowledge Skills: Amazonia 4, Aztec Mythology 5, Court Ball 3, Poisons 4, Terrorist Organizations 4

Adept Powers: Blind Fighting, Enhanced Perception 2, Improved Edged Weapons 2, Improved Stealth 2, Increased Reflexes 2, Magic Resistance 1

Metamagic (Initiate Grade 2): Centering (Physical Skills), Masking

Weapons: Macautl [+1 Reach, 7M]

WW Infiltrator [HP, SA, 9M, 15(c)]

Range (TN): 0-5 (4), 6-20 (5), 21-40 (6), 41-60 (9)

Armor: Armor jacket [5/3]

Gear: Cell phone (with scrambler), transceiver (Rating 3)

Aztechnology Security

The above stats are typical of the security personnel that Ocelopan has access to. They operate covertly in Amazonia, so they generally do not openly display signs of their corporate affiliation, instead using nondescript equipment and jungle-style fatigues.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
4	4	3	2	3	3	4.6	—	3

INIT: 3 + 1D6 (2D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 5

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 1/3

Race: Human

Active Skills: Athletics 2, Car 2, Etiquette 1 (Corporate 3), Pistols 4, Submachineguns 4, Unarmed Combat 3

Cyberware: Boosted Reflexes 1, Cybereyes [Flare Compensation, Low-Light], Datajack, Smartlink

Weapons: Fichetti Security 500 [LP, SA, 6L, 12 (c)]

Range (TN): 0-5 (4), 6-15 (5), 16-30 (6), 31-50 (9)

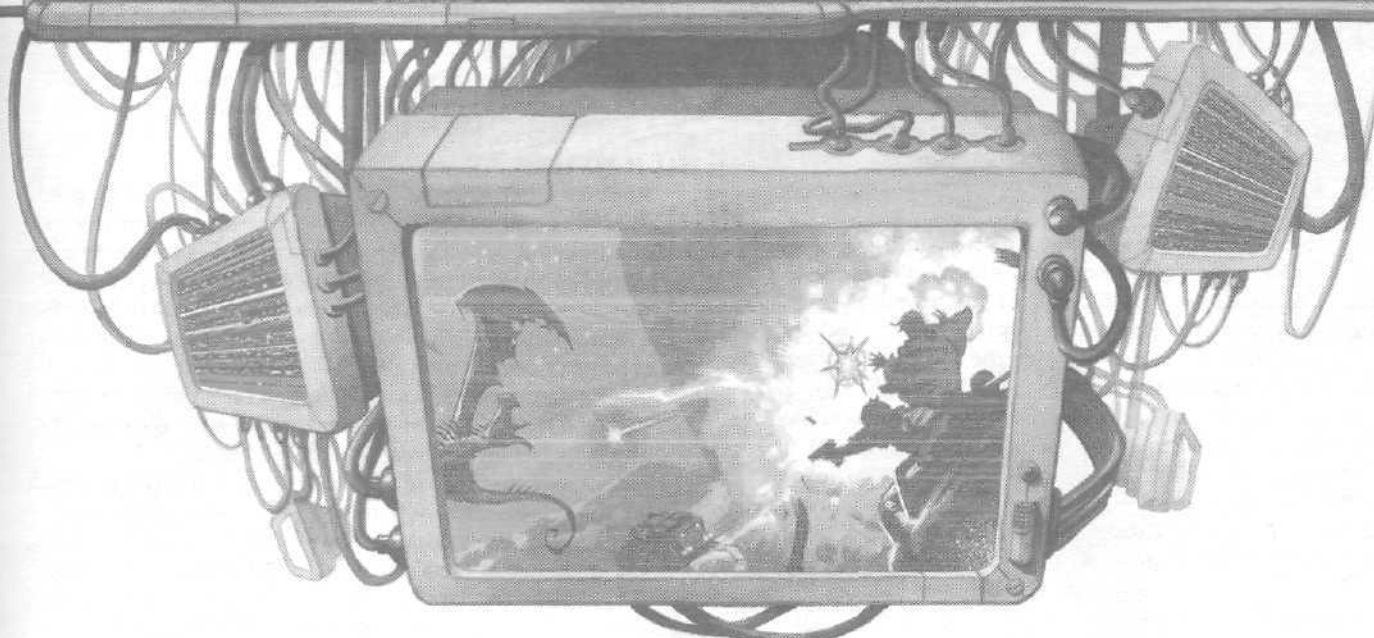
HK-227-S [SMG, SA/BF, 7M, RC (1), 28 (c) w/integral silencer, folding shoulder stock, smartgun system]

Range (TN): 0-10 (2), 11-40 (3), 41-80 (4), 81-150 (7)

Armor: Armored jacket [5/3]

Gear: Transceiver (Rating 3)

BALANCE



To Lung, I leave the Second Coin of Luck in hopes that he might benefit from the long view as I have.

To Ryumyo, the first of our kind to be seen in this modern age, I leave my envy at stealing my chance to be the very first dragon as well as the Ring Ouroboros, since it is the early bird who catches the wyrm.

—From the *Last Will and Testament of Dunkelzahn*

PREPARING TO PLAY

In *Balance*, the shadowrunners become indirectly involved in an ancient conflict between two great eastern dragons: Lung and Ryumyo. The runners' target is the prize that the two dragons are fighting over—the mystic power of the dragon lines. Hestaby expects the runners' actions will get the attention of the rival dragons, hopefully giving them something to think about where their conflict is concerned.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Ever since their Awakening in the modern world, Lung and Ryumyo have been struggling for control of the vast network of dragon lines and power sites in Asia and the Pacific Rim. These sites represent some of the greatest untapped magical power in the world. Control over them would provide a single being with untold power and influence. For decades, they have played out a game of move and counter-move using various pawns to try and influence and control the dragon line network.

Things took an unexpected turn when Dunkelzahn left a statue known as the Jade Dragon of Wind and Fire in his will to Wu Lung-Wei, the CEO of Wuxing. Wu used the magical properties of the statue to intensify the properties of the power site on top of which his corporate headquarters was built in Hong Kong. Since then, the Wuxing Skytower has been drawing increasing amounts of *chi* (the Asian term for mana) and Wuxing's star has continued to rise in the corporate world. This has disrupted Lung and Ryumyo's own plans, turning them against Wuxing.

Hestaby understands the potentially unbalancing effects of Wuxing's manipulation of the dragon lines. Already, the use of magic in Hong Kong is becoming warped by the con-



centration of so much magical power there. She is not the only one to suspect the natural disasters that struck Japan may have something to do with the continued drain on the dragon lines. Something needs to be done to even out the balance, both to ensure that Wuxing's continued growth is checked and to prevent magical disaster from striking the region.

Hestaby therefore strikes a bargain with Buttercup, the free spirit who sits on the board of directors of Yamatetsu. Hestaby will provide Buttercup with assistance in diverting some of the stored energy that Wuxing has built up at their corporate headquarters, channeling it to Yamatetsu in Vladivostok. The two ostensibly allied corporations will become like the poles of a magnet, balancing out the mystical forces. Yamatetsu will gain some of Wuxing's good fortune and help serve as a balancing faction within the Pacific Prosperity Group. The fundamental shift in the dragon lines will also draw Lung and Ryumyo's attention and help keep them occupied with each other; a delicately balanced situation all around.

Buttercup is taking a risk with this venture, since Yamatetsu and Wuxing are generally allies and both members of the Pacific Prosperity Group. Still, Buttercup has no desire to see Wuxing dominate the PPG and puts Yamatetsu and her own interests above anything else. She believes that once the deed is done, there will be little that Wuxing can do about it. Their fate will be linked with that of Yamatetsu one way or another.

To this end, Mr. Radek (the fixer from *Knowledge*) arranges a meeting between the runners and Buttercup, where she offers them a series of related jobs that have to be completed in fairly short order.

First, the team must go to Hong Kong and locate Mr. Sen Lo, a noted geomancer. Sen Lo is deeply in debt to the Red Dragon Triad and hiding in fear of his life. The runners are to extract him and get him safely out of Hong Kong. Once they do so, they are to bring Sen Lo to Vladivostok and deliver him to a drop-off point.

Then it's back to Hong Kong for the runners, where they have to get high atop the Wuxing Skytower to do a little interior redecorating as an important part of the ritual to divert the power of the dragon lines. If the runners are successful, a connection is formed between the Wuxing power site and one in Russia. There is a powerful surge of magical energy that causes some strange happenings in the Pacific Rim region for a while, and the balance of the dragon lines is changed.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

Balance basically consists of two shorter runs: extracting the geomancer Sen Lo and getting him to Vladivostok, then the run on the Wuxing Skytower to complete the geomantic ritual. Both are equally important to Hestaby's plans.

The gamemaster may find the information on Wuxing and Yamatetsu in the *Corporate Download* sourcebook helpful for this adventure. Other useful references include material on Vladivostok from *Target: Smuggler Havens*, details on the Wuxing Skytower mentioned in *Year of the Comet*, updates from *Target: Awakened Lands* and information on geomancy from the *State of the Art: 2063* sourcebook.

PROMISES OF PROSPERITY

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The runners meet with a potential new employer about a run that will take them to the Far East, but there are potential complications with the run before it can even begin.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Another night, another shadowrun—at least, that's what you're hoping. Mr. Radek, a fixer of your acquaintance, has set up a meeting with a potential employer, so you're headed downtown dressed to impress the new Johnson.

The meeting is set for 10 PM at the Eye of the Needle, one of the most exclusive restaurants in the metroplex. Under normal circumstances it's difficult to even get into the place, but Mr. Radek's name works wonders. Apparently, you're expected. The elven maitre'd politely asks you to check any weaponry at the door before showing you to your table.

You've got a great view of the metroplex skyline from here as the restaurant slowly rotates—and plenty of privacy. Apparently, the Johnson hasn't shown yet.

You're taking in the view when a voice from beside the table says, "Spectacular, isn't it?" You turn to see a young Japanese woman standing there. She can't be much more than eighteen at the most. She's dressed in a rose-colored blouse and a dark skirt, and her black hair is cut almost boyishly short. She gives you a broad smile and bows slightly as she takes a seat at the end of the table. You're certain she wasn't in the room when you walked in, but you didn't hear her come in either.

"How do you do?" she asks. "Would you like to order something, or do you prefer to get right down to business?"

HOOKS

The unusual is a big part of this scenario. What starts out as a run-of-the-mill meet turns into an encounter with a powerful free spirit and a brush with one of her enemies. The shadowrunners should be on their guard, wondering what's going to happen next. Emphasize the opulence of the restaurant and the personal presence of Buttercup, despite her apparent youth.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The team's new Ms. Johnson is none other than Buttercup, the free spirit stockholder of Yamatetsu. Buttercup and Hestaby decided that the matter was too delicate to entrust anyone else. Buttercup is also rather curious to meet Hestaby's chosen agents and learn a bit more about them.

Tea with Buttercup

Have Buttercup enter the room where the shadowrunners are waiting while they're distracted. She materializes somewhere they aren't watching, allowing her to sneak up on a group of hardened and street-smart operatives. She doesn't tell them her real name, going by "Ms. Johnson" if anyone asks, but you can have the runners make Intelligence (8) Tests





to see if they recognize Buttercup from Yamatetsu documentation available on the Matrix. Characters with the appropriate Knowledge Skills (like Free Spirits or Yamatetsu Corporation) or any Yamatetsu contacts can lower the TN to 6. If any of the runners ask about her resemblance to Buttercup or if she is Buttercup, the free spirit simply smiles and say "Yes, I get that a lot," or "As I understand it, it isn't wise to ask someone's true name in this business." She continues to coyly avoid any further such questions.

Buttercup is happy to indulge the runners in whatever they'd like to order off the menu, though she takes only tea, and that only if the characters are having something. Otherwise she gets right to business and outlines the mission for the runners.

Buttercup wants them to go to Hong Kong to find a man named Sen Lo, a well-respected geomancer in the city. She has a dossier (complete with holo-image) available for their perusal. Sen Lo went missing two days previous. When the runners find him, they are to bring him to Vladivostok, Russia, on the Sea of Japan. There they will receive the first half of their payment. If they are successful, they will return to Hong Kong for another run, the details of which will be provided to them in Vladivostok.

The payment for the run is 50,000¥ per runner for the safe delivery of Sen Lo, plus an additional 120,000¥ each for the second mission, if they choose to accept it. Buttercup is willing to front the runners an advance of up to 5,000¥ each on their first payment for expenses.

Allow the runners to ask questions and negotiate during Buttercup's spiel. Keep in mind that she is a shrewd negotiator, but that part of her agreement with Hestaby involves getting the runners to do the job, so Buttercup is willing to be a bit more accommodating than usual. She'll up the payment by as much as 20 percent, but no higher than that. She also won't give the runners any details about the second run, insisting that they'll be provided in Vladivostok. She points out that the runners can refuse the second run in Vladivostok if they want, and simply return home with the payment they have.

If the runners ask for any help, Buttercup basically tells them that the details of the run—from getting into Hong Kong to finding their target—are up to them. They are supposed to be the professionals, after all. All the information she has on Sen Lo is in the dossier she provides. The rest is up to them.

Gate-Crashers

At some point as the runners are wrapping up their negotiations with Buttercup, make a secret Perception (6) Test for each runner. If any of the runners have a Detect Enemies spell active, compare the results of the caster's Sorcery Test against TN 6. A success means the runner senses imminent danger from an enemy outside the restaurant. A runner who succeeds on the Perception Test notices a Northrup Wasp helicopter closing rapidly on the restaurant. There is a heavy machinegun on a chin-mount swiveling towards them. It's about to make a strafing run!

Runners who succeeded at the Perception Test have a chance to hit the deck before the helicopter opens fire. If one of the runners shouts a warning, everyone in the room gets to duck before the helicopter opens up. Otherwise, roll Initiative for the runners and the pilot of the helicopter (who rolls $8 + 3D6$ because of his vehicle control rig). Characters who win Initiative have the chance to take cover before the chopper opens fire.

The helicopter strafes the side of the restaurant the characters are on. Heavy machinegun rounds shatter even the armored glass of the windows and tear up the room. Anyone not ducked down under cover must resist a base damage of 10D. Note that if none of the runners warn her, Buttercup is caught off-guard by the attack and injured (though not nearly as seriously as a mortal would be).

After its initial strafing run, the helicopter banks around for another pass, which takes a full Combat Turn. This gives the runners the opportunity to take action. They can either try to take out the helicopter (keep in mind that their weapons should be checked in the restaurant's front room) or they can try to flee. If the runners are no longer in the room once the chopper banks around, it will break off the attack and fly off. Otherwise, it will strafe the room again. The chopper makes a total of three passes before it breaks off and flies away. It will break off sooner if the runners do any serious damage to it.

Enemies in High Places

The Wasp is piloted by a hired gun working for a local fixer in the pay of Hideo Yoshida, the former chairman of the Yamatetsu board of directors. Yoshida became aware of Buttercup's secret meeting with the shadowrunners through his various spies in the corporation and arranged the hit. Though he's aware that the attack couldn't possibly do more than disrupt Buttercup for a short while, Yoshida wanted to eliminate whomever the spirit was meeting. If he also manages to drive Buttercup from the physical world for a month or so, well, there's a lot that Yoshida could do in a month's time. There are enough layers of deniability between Yoshida and his hiring that the runners will never trace the hit back to him.

Once the attack is over, Buttercup will tell the runners that time is of the essence and encourage them to get to work immediately. She claims (truthfully) to have no knowledge of who's behind the attack or whether it was meant for her or not, though she may cryptically mention that she "has some suspicions." She also encourages the runners to leave before the police arrive on the scene, since it would certainly be awkward if they had to answer a lot of questions.

Northrup Wasp

If you want to run the scene more as an actual combat rather than in the free-form style described above, you can find stats for the Wasp on p. 311, SR3. An RPK HMG (p. 279, SR3) is mounted on a chin turret (half recoil). The rigger piloting it has an Initiative of $8 + 3D6$, Gunnery skill 4, Rotor Aircraft skill 4, Control Pool 8 and a Karma Pool of 4. Improvise any other skills or attributes as necessary.



PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Though an airborne attack on the runners in a revolving restaurant is action-packed enough for most groups, you may want to push things a bit further. Perhaps on his second pass the chopper pilot fires an anti-personnel or high explosive rocket into the place, forcing the runners to get out before the explosion sends half the restaurant crashing to the street. Or you can replace the one helicopter with a small number (say three or so) of killer drones armed with machineguns and similar heavy weapons. Drones may even be able to fly *into* the restaurant to pursue the runners!

There's also the possibility of coupling the aerial assault with something more personal. Have a group of men armed with assault rifles bust into the room after the strafing run to finish off anyone who's still alive, giving the runners some other targets to shoot.

DEBUGGING

For the most part, Buttercup takes whatever the runners do in stride. She's fascinated with mortals and curious about these agents of Hestaby, so she's willing to give the characters a little latitude. She's also not terribly intimidated by anything they can do, given her own powers.

An Awakened runner who examines Buttercup astrally sees only that she's a mundane girl, unless the character can penetrate her Aura Masking (p. 76, *MITS*). Consider Buttercup a Grade 9 initiate for the purposes of the Masking Test. A character that manages to penetrate her masking can see that Buttercup is a powerful free spirit.

You may want to ensure that at least one character succeeds at the Perception Test to notice the approaching helicopter before it attacks. If not, you can always have Buttercup notice and call out a warning just in time. Otherwise, there's a good chance of one or more of the runners being seriously hurt or killed. To add some tension, you can have the runners make Open Quickness Tests to dive under cover (just ignore the results and assume they succeed unless one of them manages to roll abysmally low—encourage that player to spend some Karma Pool).

If the runners really need it, you can have Buttercup step in and lend a hand. She is a powerful spellcaster; assume that she knows whatever spell is needed for the situation and can cast it at Force 6 or better, without any drain (since she is a free spirit). This allows her to throw up a Physical Barrier spell to shield everyone from the gunfire, for example, or to blast the helicopter with a Lightning Bolt or the like. Just don't have Buttercup intervene at the expense of the players' fun—only if the runners need help.



HONG KONG DAYS

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The shadowrunners go to Hong Kong to find and recover the geomancer Sen Lo. They quickly discover they're not the only ones looking for him and have to deal with Triad and Wuxing agents to get Sen Lo out of the city.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Hong Kong is a bustling metropolplex, especially in the past few years. Rumors abound about the strange magical forces at work in the city: sightings of spirits, encounters with the walking dead and other such things. It might have to do with the passing of Halley's Comet or it might be connected to Wuxing's supposed experiments with magic, or maybe a little of both. Whatever the case, Hong Kong has a strange sort of vibe to it, a kind of humming energy in the air that even the mundanes in your group can pick up on.

It's also a very crowded city. People fill the streets all hours and traffic moves at a crawl. It isn't going to be easy finding one old guy in a city of millions of people, but then if it was easy your employer wouldn't have hired you to do it, would she? You've got Sen Lo's last known address in the dossier Ms. Johnson provided, so that's probably your best place to start.

HOOKS

The runners are searching through a large foreign city to find their target. Describe the setting of Hong Kong, emphasizing the foreign elements and the feeling of magic in the air, just below the surface. The runners should begin to feel that time is of the essence as they look for Sen Lo and discover that there are other people looking for him as well.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This scenario has two main parts: finding Sen Lo and getting him out of Hong Kong to Vladivostok, dealing with any factions that may want to keep the geomancer from leaving.

Crouching Geomancer

Finding Sen Lo requires some investigation and legwork on the runners' part. The geomancer has a home and office in a fairly upscale part of Hong Kong. The runners have the address, but Sen Lo is nowhere to be found. Runners who check out the address discover that the two-story apartment has been ransacked, searched quite thoroughly by someone looking for something. Furniture is overturned and clothing, books, computer chips and other materials are scattered around.

As it happens, Sen Lo ran up a considerable debt to the Red Dragon Triad in the city. When the Triad threatened him he went into hiding, hoping to get enough money to pay them off. Agents of the Triad ransacked the geomancer's home looking for money and clues as to his whereabouts. They also have the place under surveillance in case Sen Lo returns at some point. Unless the runners take extraordinary measures entering the apartment (doing so invisibly, for example), the Red Dragon agent takes note of their arrival and the Triad has them followed. Make secret Perception (8) Tests for the runners once each day to see if they notice the Triad agent tailing them through the city (see *Hidden Danger*).

The runners can find a few leads by carefully searching Sen Lo's place. The data chips hold information on the geomancer's various clients. A character who makes Computer (4) Test searching through Sen Lo's records quickly discovers that he is in serious debt, though the records do not make clear to whom. Using the information found in his apartment, the runners can do some legwork to track Sen Lo down, making Etiquette (Street) Tests, one per two hours, with a target number of 6. Once they have accumulated a total of fifteen successes, they locate Sen Lo.

Alternately, the runners might try to find Sen Lo using magic. There are no biological material links in the apartment (Sen Lo was meticulous about such things), but there are personal items that will suffice for ritual tracking if any characters know symbolic linking metamagic (pp. 47-48, *SOTA: 2063*). Sen Lo may notice the attempt; make a Perception (8) Test for him. If it succeeds, he notices the tracking attempt and leaves his current hiding place, looking for another and forcing the runners to keep up with him.

Sen Lo is currently hiding out onboard a houseboat along the Hong Kong docks, mixed in with dozens of other boats and junks. If the runners manage to track him down, he will be cautious and on his guard, but willing to listen to them. If they make Buttercup's offer of payment and a way out of Hong Kong to him, he will gladly take it without negotiating, but he will tell the runners that the Red Dragon Triad is after him, which may complicate their efforts to leave the city.

Hidden Danger

Shortly after the shadowrunners find Sen Lo, or possibly even before then, they have a run-in with agents of the Red Dragon Triad. This can happen in a number of ways:

- The runners discover they are being tailed. If they capture and interrogate their shadow, they find out that his name is Han and he works for the Red Dragon Triad, which is also after Sen Lo. If the runners try to get any further information out of Han, he refuses to give it to them. If they try to force him using magic or other means of coercion, Han screams and

BUT GETTING THERE IS HALF THE FUN!

This adventure assumes that the runners make their trips from place to place fairly uneventfully for the most part, picking things up where the action starts. So long as the runners come up with reasonable ways to get from Point A to Point B, they don't have any trouble doing so. If you want to play out the trips to and from Hong Kong and Vladivostok, or even include some additional encounters en route, feel free.



MAGIC IN HONG KONG

Gamemasters with access to *Magic in the Shadows* should note that mana surge and wild magic conditions apply in Hong Kong during the time that the runners are there (see p. 86–88, *MITS*). This means that magic acts somewhat unpredictably when used by the shadowrunners or their opponents. Awakened characters can sense the unusual conditions by making an Astral Perception (6) Test, allowing them to curb their use of magic and take precautions.

Roll on the Wild Magic Table (p. 88, *MITS*) at the start of this scenario and for each day the runners are in Hong Kong. You can use the events and effects from the table to complicate matters for the runners or simply as background material, things the characters may hear about or witness while they're in Hong Kong. The characters should quickly realize that magic is very unusual in Hong Kong and that there's something strange going on.

bursts into flames, instantly burning into ash before the runners' eyes. The Triads take their oaths of loyalty quite seriously.

- If the runners don't discover that they're being tailed, Han alerts the Triad when the runners close in on Sen Lo's location. Triad agents show up shortly thereafter to deal with the runners and take Sen Lo.

- If the runners eliminate their tail, the Triad may send another or they may simply manage to find Sen Lo around the same time, sending their people to collect him.

The members of the Triad are under orders to collect Sen Lo alive if possible, but to kill him if they must in order to prevent his escape. (His death will serve as an example to others who think they can cheat the Triads, which is worth more than letting him go.) They're willing to let the runners go if they hand Sen Lo over without any trouble, but otherwise they'll kill the characters and anyone else who gets in their way.

The Triad team is led by an adept assisted by a Triad wujen (p. 17, *MITS*). Syndicate soldiers (at least as many as there are shadowrunners) make up the rest of the team.

Kun Xilang

Kun Xilang is an adept and initiate of the Red Dragon Triad. Her father was a member of the Triad and she was raised to believe in it and follow its precepts. Her adept talents have proven the key to her rise within the ranks, despite her sex, giving her a position of authority and respect. She's been hardened by her life with the Triad and shows its enemies no mercy.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
4	6 (8)	4	3	4	6	6	8	6

INIT: 6 + 1D6 (3D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 9

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 3/3

Race: Human

Active Skills: Athletics 5, Bike 4, Centering (Kiai Shout) 4, Etiquette 2 (Triad 4), Intimidation 4, Leadership 3, Pistols 4, Stealth 5, Unarmed Combat 6 (Kung Fu 8)

Knowledge Skills: Cantonese 5, English 3, Kiai Shout 4, Martial Arts 5, Triad Traditions 5, Zen Philosophy 4

Martial Arts: Kung Fu 6 (Kick Attack 8) (Kick Attack, Kip-up, Multi-Strike, Whirling)

Adept Powers: Improved Quickness 2, Improved Reflexes 2, Improved Unarmed Combat 2, Killing Hands (Serious), Pain Resistance 3

Metamagic (Initiate Grade 2): Centering (melee combat skills), Centering (Athletics skill)

Weapons: Ares Predator [HP, SA, 9M, 15 (c)]

Range (TN): 0–5 (4), 6–20 (5), 21–40 (6), 41–60 (9)

Armor: Armor jacket [5/3]

Little Chang

Little Chang (as he is known) is a Chinese dwarf wujen. He's short even for a dwarf, just over a meter tall but broadly built. He wears traditional robes under a heavy lined coat and a conical straw hat and carries a staff almost twice his height topped with three jangling rings. Chang will summon a Spirit of the Ground (p. 105, *MITS*) if he has the opportunity to do so before encountering the runners and have it aid him and the Triads in battle.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
6	3	4	5	3	7	6	6	3

INIT: 3 + 1D6, Astral INIT: 23 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Astral Combat 7, Combat 6, Spell 5

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 2/3

Race: Dwarf

Active Skills: Aura Reading 4, Etiquette 3 (Triad 5), Conjuring 5, Pistols 3, Sorcery 6, Stealth 2

Knowledge Skills: Cantonese 4, English 4, Magical Background 4, Mandarin 4, Triad History 4

Spells: Animate 3, Clairaudience 4, Death Touch 5, Gecko Crawl 3, Hot Potato 5, Intoxication 4, Shape Earth 5, Stunball 4, Thunderclap 4, Treat 3

Weapons: Browning Max-Power [HP, SA, 9M, 10 (c)]

Range (TN): 0–5 (3), 6–20 (4), 21–40 (5), 41–60 (8)

Armor: Lined coat [4/2]

Gear: Three-ring staff [Spirit Focus (Spirits of the Ground) 2]

Triad Soldiers

These are typical Red Dragon Triad soldiers who accompany Xilang and Chang to recover Sen Lo. They're well trained and follow orders to the letter. They rely on their sliverguns first, followed by hand-to-hand combat, falling back on their HK submachine guns only when necessary (since they tend to attract a lot more attention).

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
4	4 (5)	4 (5)	2	3	3	4.7	—	3

INIT: 3 + 1D6 (2D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 5

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 1/3

Race: Human

Active Skills: Athletics 3, Etiquette 1 (Triad 3), Pistols 4, Submachine Guns 3, Unarmed Combat 4 (Kung Fu 5)



Martial Arts: Kung Fu 4 (Kick Attack 5) (Kick Attack, Kip-up)
Cyberware: Boosted Reflexes 1, Cybereyes [Flare Compensation, Low-Light], Muscle Replacement 1

Weapons: Ares Viper Slivergun [HP, SA/BF, 9S (f), 30 (c) w/integral silencer]

Range (TN): 0-5 (4), 6-20 (5), 21-40 (6), 41-60 (9)
 HK-227-S [SMG, SA/BF, 7M, RC (1), 28 (c) w/integral laser sight, silencer, folding shoulder stock]

Range (TN): 0-10 (3), 11-40 (4), 41-80 (5), 81-150 (8)

Armor: Armored jacket [5/3]

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Rather than having the Red Dragon Triad simply trail the runners and wait for them to find Sen Lo, you can have the Triad send soldiers and agents after them, forcing the team to dodge assassination attempts while tracking their quarry. You can also make the showdown with Xilang and her men into a chase scene if the runners try getting away, having the Triad pursue them through the crowded streets of Hong Kong. Or perhaps the runners can snag a speedboat in the harbor, turning it into a water-borne chase with Little Chang trying to use *Spirits of the Water* against the runners.

If the Triad team isn't tough enough to give the runners a good fight, feel free to increase Xilang's initiate grade and make Chang an initiate as well, perhaps with *Invoking* (allowing him to conjure up great form spirits) or *Shielding* (to better protect the Triads from the runners' spells).

There's always the possibility of the local authorities intervening if the runners or the Triads make enough noise, and you can have agents of Hideo Yoshida track the runners down in Hong Kong and try to eliminate them, giving them something else to worry about.

Don't forget about the mana surge effects in Hong Kong. If either side uses magic during the confrontation, there's a chance of spells fizzling or going off much stronger than intended, which can make things interesting.

DEBUGGING

If the runners are having difficulties tracking down Sen Lo, they might be able to turn the tables on the Triads by tailing the Triad agents sent to find him, then snatching him out of the Triads' hands when they do.

If the runners prefer to simply nab Sen Lo rather than talking with him, it shouldn't be that hard for them to do. He's a powerful magician, but not all that much in a fight. Of course, they should be careful not to injure him too badly, since their employer isn't paying for damaged goods. If the runners do manage to kill Sen Lo, they don't get paid for the first part of their run though Buttercup still offers them a chance to make things right by taking the run against Wuxing.

You can decrease the abilities of the Triads if they look like too much trouble for the runners, or reduce the number of soldiers that Xilang has along. If they still end up stomping on the runners, feel free to have Sen Lo lend a hand with a well-timed illusion spell to help distract the Triads and give the runners an edge.

COLD RUSSIAN NIGHTS

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The shadowrunners arrive in Vladivostok to deliver Sen Lo to their employer, only to run into some trouble along the way. Ms. Johnson then explains to them the next part of the run: breaking into the penthouse of the Wuxing Skytower in Hong Kong.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Vladivostok and Hong Kong actually have a great deal in common in some ways. Both are gateway cities to the Pacific Rim and the western world on the edges of potentially hostile frontiers. Both are filled with different sorts of people going about their business, a lot of it in the shadows. But the similarities end there. Vladivostok is frozen and old; even the newer buildings give the impression of being gray and bowed with age. You can see why some people consider this place depressing. Fortunately, you're not planning on visiting for long. All you need to do is deliver your charge and find out about this other run that your Johnson offered you. Hopefully it involves going someplace warm.

The meeting is set for a couple hours from now. The location is in the "entertainment" district of the city, according to your datafile. You're on your way when you start to get the distinct feeling that you're being followed. Sure enough, there's a dark sedan pacing you a short distance back. Looks like you've got company.

When the runners meet with Buttercup again, read the following:

Apparently you're expected at the "hospitality house" when you arrive. You're guided to a private room upstairs and asked to wait there. You don't have to wait long, only a few minutes, before your employer enters. Sen Lo rises from his seat and bows deeply to her.

"It is an honor to meet you, gracious lady," he says in a tone of profound respect.

"The honor is mine," she replies. "I am pleased to have you with us, learned scholar. If you would excuse us for a moment, the ladies outside will see to your needs. We must discuss business."

"Of course," Sen Lo replies. He gives another low bow and withdraws from the room, leaving you alone with Ms. Johnson.

"You did a good job getting him here in one piece," she tells you. She takes a fistful of credsticks from her shoulder bag and sets them on the table in front of you. "That's the amount we agreed upon. Now, are you up for trying to triple your money?"

When the runners agree to take on the second run read the following:

"The job isn't an easy one, but you've proven that you can handle yourselves. I need you to go back to Hong Kong and get access to the Wuxing Skytower, namely the penthouse at the top of the building. Once you're inside I need

you to do a little ... redecorating as it were. Re-arrange some elements of the main room according to guidelines that I'll provide. The key is that the work has to be done according to a precise timetable and it has to be done just right. If you can pull it off, I'll pay you 120,000¥ each upon completion, but if you're not successful ... well, assuming you survive, you'll get a 5 percent fee for expenses, but that's all.

"So, do you think you can handle it?"

HOOKS

Just when it looks like the shadowrunners are in the clear, they run into more trouble from Hideo Yoshida, who has had his people on the lookout for suspicious visitors to the area. He learned the runners' identities through various contacts (or from agents of his who attacked the runners in *Promises of Prosperity*, assuming that any survived). Then Buttercup offers the runners another job that involves them going back to Hong Kong to rearrange the decor of the Wuxing Skytower for reasons she doesn't explain. The scenario should raise the runners' suspicions that there's a lot more going on than they've been told.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The sedan holds two Yamatetsu men in the employ of Hideo Yoshida. They picked the shadowrunners out from their descriptions through whatever port of call the runners used to enter Vladivostok. The Yamatetsu agents may also pick up on the runners via the Matrix if they enter through legal means or use their credsticks to rent a car or use a public Matrix terminal, for example. Or it may simply be a matter of bad luck for the runners that the company spotted them. If there is absolutely no way for the company to have picked up on the runners, you may wish to skip on to the meeting with Buttercup.

The sedan, a Eurocar Westwind (p. 308, SR3), keeps pace with the runners' vehicle through the streets of the city, maintaining its distance but following the runners wherever they go. If the runners try and lose their tail, the company men call in for backup and try to chase the runners into an ambush or roadblock in order to capture them. Yamatetsu security can have at least three other cars zero in on the runners in a matter of minutes. The team has to outrun or disable their pursuers in order to get away clean.

If the runners betray no sign that they know they're being followed, the company men follow them wherever they go. When the runners stop somewhere, they call in for backup. Once it arrives, they move in to take the runners. This may mean that the Yamatetsu personnel crash the runners' meeting with Buttercup, if the characters let them. Buttercup certainly won't be pleased with that turn of events, though she won't necessarily blame the shadowrunners unless they make it clear that they deliberately led their pursuers to her.

Yamatetsu Company Men

These men are personally loyal to Hideo Yoshida's faction within the corp.



TREASURE HUNT

Though the adventure assumes that Sen Lo's expertise and the runners' assistance at the Wuxing Skytower are the final components needed to carry out Buttercup and Hestaby's plan, that doesn't have to be the case. Gamemasters looking to extend the sequence of events in this adventure can easily send the runners out looking for other components important to the ritual to draw power from the dragon lines. This makes *Balance* into a much longer adventure or even a short series of adventures within the larger *Survival of the Fittest* series.

Other possible targets for the runners include obscure mystical items, particularly the mysterious Coins of Luck mentioned in Dunkelzahn's will (two of them in Lung's possession, one held by Wuxing and fourth unaccounted for). They might have to find other geomancers from Japan, China, San Francisco or elsewhere and acquire their services. They may also have to help them arrange smaller rituals at other key power sites throughout the Pacific Rim in preparation for the main rituals. Along the way they can deal with the Red Dragon Triad, corporate and Yakuza agents of Ryumyo, and Buttercup's rival Yoshida.

B 5 **Q** 4 (5) **S** 5 (7) **C** 2 **I** 4 **W** 4 (5) **E** 5.3 **M** — **R** 4 (7)

INIT: 4 (7) + 1D6 (3D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 6 (7)

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 3/3

Race: Human

Active Skills: Athletics 3 (4), Car 3 (4), Etiquette 3 (Corporate 5), Interrogation 3, Pistols 4 (5), Stealth 4 (5), Shotguns 5 (6), Unarmed Combat 5 (6)

Cyberware: Cybereyes [Flare Compensation, Low-Light, Thermographic], Smartlink

Bioware (all cultured): Adrenal Pump, Enhanced Articulation, Orthoskin 2, Synaptic Accelerator 2, Trauma Damper

Weapons: Ceska Black Scorpion [MP, SA/BF, 6L, RC (1), 35 (c) w/smartgun system]

Range (TN): 0–10 (2), 11–40 (3), 41–80 (4), 81–150 (7)
Mossberg SM-CMDT (Shotgun, SA/BF, 9S, 8 (c) w/smartgun system]

Range (TN): 0–10 (2), 11–20 (3), 21–50 (4), 51–100 (7)

Armor [6/4]: Orthoskin 2 [1/1], armored jacket [5/3]

If the Runners Are Captured

If Yamatetsu security captures some or all of the shadowrunners (and Sen Lo), they are taken to nearby Popov Island, where the corporation's new worldwide headquarters is located. They're not taken to the Yamatetsu HQ, however, but to a private estate owned by Hideo Yoshida (where he lives while on business in Vladivostok). Yoshida will first offer the runners the opportunity to betray Buttercup in exchange for twice whatever she is paying them. He'll have a corporate mage on hand use Analyze Truth and verify their answers, and use Mind Probe to get the information he's after if the runners refuse to cooperate. Of course, since the runners

don't know anything about Buttercup's plans, there's not much they can reveal, even under duress. Still, Yoshida isn't likely to believe them if they say they don't know anything.

Once he believes that he's gotten all that he can from the shadowrunners, Yoshida orders his men to take them out and kill them, dumping their bodies somewhere they won't be found. This is the case even if the runners willingly go along with Yoshida. (If they trusted a corporate shark like him, they're getting what they deserve.) Yoshida keeps Sen Lo alive until he figures out what Buttercup wants with him. You can pick up the adventure with a new group of shadowrunners sent to extract Sen Lo from Yoshida's estate if the player characters get themselves killed.

We Meet Again

Assuming the shadowrunners get Sen Lo to the designated meeting place, Buttercup congratulates them for their good work and pays them the agreed-upon amount. She then offers them the other job she mentioned during the first meeting: a run on the Wuxing Skytower in Hong Kong.

If the runners are interested, she provides them with specifications of the tower and its security, along with information on the uppermost floor, where they are supposed to carry out their mission. The job is deceptively simple; get inside the penthouse and make some "adjustments" to the decor, according to directions laid out by Buttercup.

The runners' employer refuses to explain why she wants this done. The runners are being paid to do the job, not ask a lot of questions. A character with the Magic Background skill can make a test (TN 6) to figure out that Buttercup's instructions have something to do with feng shui, Chinese geomancy and that re-arranging things in the tower will change the flow of energy through it, though the character won't know how exactly. If one of the characters has the Geomancy knowledge skill and makes a test (TN 6), he can determine that the changes Buttercup wants will help re-direct some of the chi gathered by the structure of the tower elsewhere.

Buttercup makes it clear that the run must take place so that the final adjustments are made no later than midnight Hong Kong time in five days, but it must not be so soon that Wuxing personnel will notice the changes and correct them before that time. If the runners can't complete the run before the appointed time, they'll have to give up and they'll only get paid a pittance to cover their expenses (and maintain their silence).

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

The encounter with the Yamatetsu men can be expanded into a full-blown chase scene if you wish, complete with security helicopters or drones pursuing the runners through the streets of Vladivostok, accompanied by elementals guided by an astral security mage (or perhaps a city spirit summoned by a corporate shaman). The runners have to give their pursuers the slip before they can make their meeting with Buttercup. They also have to make sure Sen Lo stays alive and well until they can get there.

Alternatively, the company men may hang back and shadow the runners, allowing you to run an assault on the meet



site while the runners are talking with Buttercup. This is similar to the trouble in *Promises of Prosperity*, except that Yamatetsu is more likely to send personnel into the building rather than shooting it up from the outside. Buttercup's primary concern in such a situation is protecting Sen Lo, but she can help the runners out if they're having trouble dealing with the opposition.

Finally, you can always have Yoshida offer the shadowrunners the opportunity to betray Buttercup (and therefore Hestaby). He offers the runners a substantial amount of nuyen (at least double what Buttercup is paying them) to take her job and deliberately mess it up. Smart runners should realize that could ruin their reputations on the street. If they take the offer and sabotage the mission, Buttercup (and Hestaby) will *not* be pleased. It's likely that Hestaby will no longer use the shadowrunners as her agents, and may let Buttercup deal with them as she sees fit. If the runners take Yoshida's offer and then betray *him*, the Yamatetsu exec will make it a priority to have them hunted down and killed.

DEBUGGING

If the runners are captured by Yamatetsu and seem quick to betray Buttercup to save their own skins, feel free to remind them that such a betrayal might smear their reputations as reliable shadowrunners and that men like Hideo Yoshida can't always be trusted. You can always give them a chance to escape from Yoshida's men before they can be killed if they do mess up, or you can hope that the players' next group of characters does better.

If the runners refuse Buttercup's second job offer, she can try and talk them into it, either by praising their work to date or by implying that they're just not up to the challenge. But if the runners decide to quit while they're ahead, it's no big deal; just move on to the next adventure and assume that Buttercup hires another team to handle the Wuxing break-in.

SCALING THE DRAGON'S TOWER

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The shadowrunners break into the Wuxing Skytower in Hong Kong to carry out the modifications that will allow Buttercup and Hestaby to divert some of the magical energy that the tower has been accumulating to Yamatetsu, shifting the balance of power among the dragon lines of the Pacific Rim.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The Wuxing Skytower is one of the tallest and most prominent buildings on the Hong Kong skyline. It's also one of the best protected, since it's the corporate headquarters of one of the world's most powerful megacorporations. According to the information provided by your employer, there are really only two ways of getting access to the penthouse on top of the tower: up through the tower itself using the executive elevator or emergency stairwell, or from the outside, hundreds of feet above the street level. Either way isn't going to be easy, but that's why you were hired to do the job.

When the runners gain access to the penthouse, read the following:

The top floor of the Wuxing tower isn't like any corporate office or penthouse you've ever seen before. Rather than cubicles or offices or even living quarters, the top floor is more like some sort of temple, or perhaps a meditation room on a vast scale. The ceiling features angled glass panels that allow light to fall in precise patterns across the veined marble floor of the room. Scrolls with Chinese calligraphy hang on the walls alongside hexagonal mirrors in red lacquered frames, while small tables with statuettes carved from jade and crystal sit beneath them.

In the middle of the room is a circular depression filled with fine, pale gravel raked into whorls and patterns. Inside that is a square pool. A wooden footbridge arcs gracefully over it while water trickles and bubbles from small fountains into the pool. Lily pads and lotus blossoms float on the surface while silver and gold fish dart beneath. Softly glowing lanterns are placed at the corners of the pool. In the middle of the bridge sits a raised pedestal, and on top of it a fantastic jade carving of three leaping fish, so detailed and realistic that they could have just come from the pond. There's an overwhelming sense of beauty and harmony from the whole scene but also something else, a feeling of barely restrained energy, almost like a background hum. There's power here. Even the mundane among you can sense it, like a charge in the air.

When the runners finish their adjustments in the penthouse read the following:

As you finish your work there's a faint chiming sound, like the tone of a crystal goblet, and you feel a tingle in the air. Suddenly light seems to pour off the jade fishes in the center of the room, blindingly bright for a moment. You feel yourselves surrounded and lifted by the light, weightless and drifting. You're aware of the vast network of dragon lines, stretching outward from the nexus below you, criss-crossing this part of the world like a vast and complex web of light. In that web you see two bright points, one in Hong Kong and the other in Vladivostok. Then you see two others, in mainland China and Japan, forming a kind of crude square, the points balanced against each other, energy flowing between them in a complex pattern.

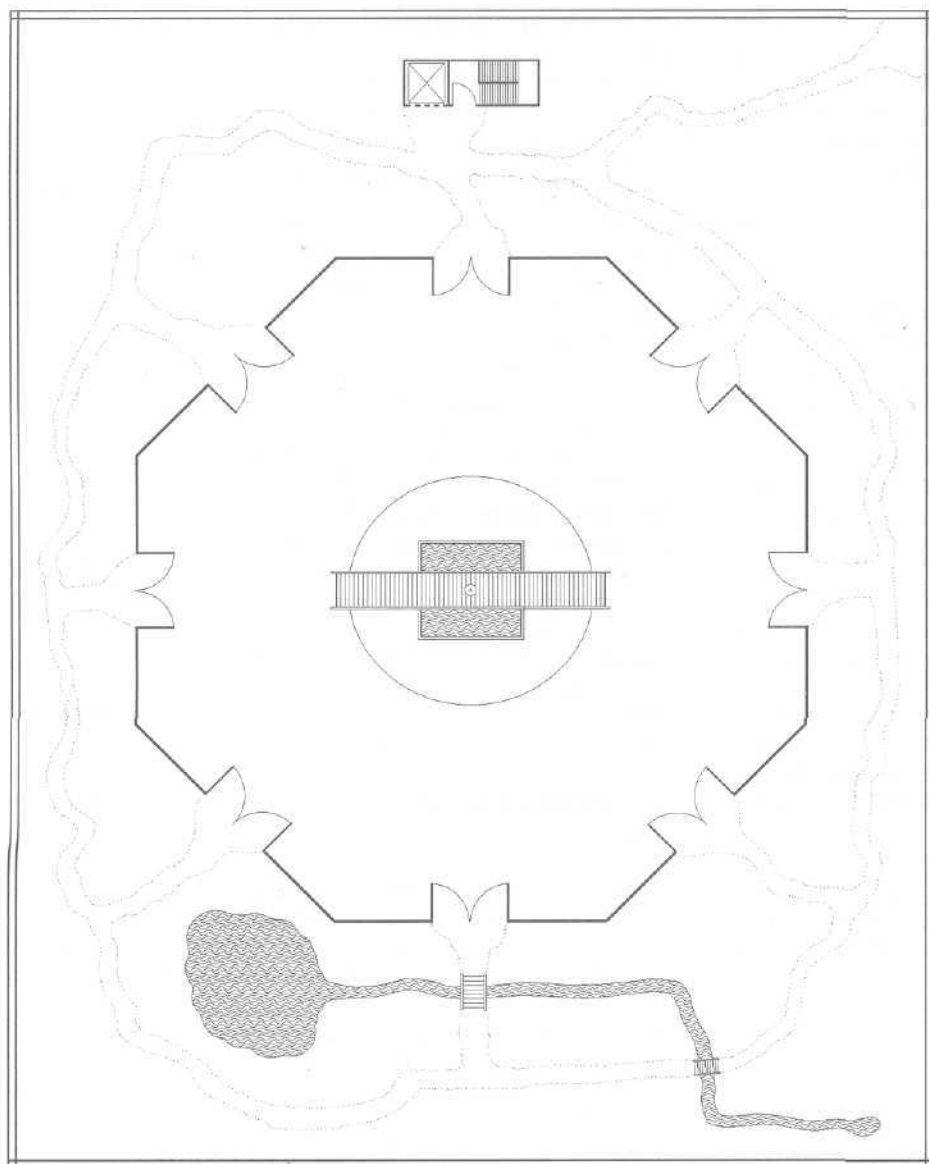
You have an intense feeling of being watched. Then the points of light in China and Japan grow and elongate, becoming vast, serpentine dragons that tower up above you, their coils stretching around you. They flow in circles, orbiting you from opposite sides, regarding each other warily.

"How have you done this?" one asks.

"It is not my doing," the other replies. "I could ask you the same."

"A likely story," the first one says.

"We will see," they say in unison. They split off in opposite directions. Then the light dims and you are back in the penthouse of the Skytower once again.



1 2 3 4 5 Meters

HOOKS

The shadowrunners step from the high-powered corporate world of Hong Kong into the heart of Wuxing's secret sanctuary, a nexus of magical power. There should be a feeling that the runners are tampering with tremendous forces, things normally beyond the ken of even the Awakened (because they are).

BEHIND THE SCENES

This scenario comes in two main parts: getting into the Wuxing Skytower and carrying out Buttercup's instructions at the appointed time. The first part is the most difficult, though the second may have the most impact on the shadowrunners.

Getting In

There are two main approaches the shadowrunners can take to getting into the Skytower: inside and outside. Let the runners scout out the situation and develop their own plan for getting into the Skytower. They have five days to do legwork and plan before the run has to go down, though they can make their move sooner if they're confident the break-in won't be noticed until it's too late.

Inside: Access to the penthouse inside the Skytower is limited to the executive elevator and an emergency stairwell. The elevator requires a special passcode known only to high-ranking Wuxing executives, while the stairwell cannot be entered without setting off an alarm throughout the building. The runners might try to acquire the elevator's passcode from someone who knows it, either by kidnapping a Wuxing exec or using a mind probe or some form of coercion to get the code from one of them. A mistake alerts Wuxing security, who'll be waiting for the runners.

A decker can also attempt to overcome the passcode measures or override the alarm. This requires getting into the building's host system (a successful Logon to Host action) followed by a Locate Slave action, then a Control Slave or Edit Slave action (to take control of the elevator or suppress the alarm signal). The Wuxing host system is described on p. 75.

Runners can try to get into the building in disguise (mundane or magical) or break in after-hours, overcoming the surveillance cameras, door and window alarms and keypad maglocks (see pp. 234–235, SR3, for details involving

these and other security systems).

Outside: Getting into the penthouse from outside the Skytower requires either scaling the outside of the tower or the ability to fly (using magical or technological aid). Exterior surveillance cameras pick up anything larger than a bird that approaches the Skytower unless a decker in the system overrides them (an Edit Slave action). The same is true for anyone scaling the outside of the building using climbing gear or a spell like Gecko Crawl. From the outside, the runners can attempt to cut open a window (dealing with the window alarms in the process) to get inside the building. They can also try to access the rooftop helipad, which has security doors sealed with maglocks and a guard station always manned by two security guards.

A Rating 8 ward surrounds the penthouse of the Skytower and blocks the passage of all astral intruders. Initiates can attempt to attune themselves to the ward in order to pass through it (p. 88, *MITS*), though this is extremely difficult for all but high-grade initiates. Any attack on the ward immediately alerts the Wuxing security mage on duty, who arrives in astral form to investigate on the following Combat Turn.

The outside of the Skytower is also patrolled by three bound Force 6 air elementals at all times. See p. 89, *MITS*, for details on astral patrolling. The background count near the tower imposes a +4 TN modifier on all astral tests, including the Perception Tests of the guardian elementals, so the shadowrunners may be able to use this to their advantage.

Astral Visibility

As described in *Year of the Comet*, the area around the Wuxing Skytower is also an *astral shallow* (detailed in *Target: Awakened Lands*). In essence, astral forms in the area around the building are always visible as if they were manifest, even astral forms that are normally never visible. That means even mundane shadowrunners can see the building's wards, guardian spirits and so forth and that anyone approaching the building in astral form is visible not only to magical security but to the mundane security as well. This may complicate the shadowrunners attempts to scout out or examine the Skytower astrally.

Interestingly enough, if the shadowrunners successfully complete their mission, the astral shallow around the tower disappears, the nearby astral forms fading back into invisibility.

Wuxing Security Guards

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
5	5	5	3	4	4	3.78	—	4 (8)

INIT: 4 (8) + 1D6 (3D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 6 (5)

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 3/3

Race: Human

Active Skills: Athletics 3, Etiquette 4 (Corporate 5), Interrogation 3, Pistols 5, Small Unit Tactics 4, Submachine Guns 4, Unarmed Combat 5

Cyberware (betaware): Smartlink, Wired Reflexes 2

Weapons: Savalette Guardian [HP, SA/BF*, 9M, 12 (c), RC 1, integral smartlink]

Range (TN): 0-5 (2), 6-20 (3), 21-40 (4), 41-60 (7)

Ingram Smartgun [SMG, BF/FA, 7M, RC 2 (3), 32 (c) w/smartgun system and 1 clip EX ammo]

Range (TN): 0-10 (2), 11-40 (3), 41-80 (4), 81-150 (7)

Armor: Light security armor with helmets [7/6] w/electronic magnification 3, thermographic, and Rating 4 transceiver (w/encryption 5)

Wuxing Security Wujen

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
3	4	4	6	5	5	6	8	4

INIT: 4 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Astral 2, Astral Combat 8, Combat 7 (5), Spell 6

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 3/3

Race: Human

WUXING SKYTOWER HOST

The Wuxing Skytower Host is Red-10/15/18/16/16/18 with the following security sheaf:

Step	Event
2	Scout-8 (Cascading)
5	Trace-8 (Shifting)
7	Cripler (binder)-10 (Shifting)
9	Cripler (jammer)-8 (Armor)
13	Passive Alert
17	Ripper (jam-rip)-6 (Armor)
20	Killer-12 (Armor)
22	Blaster-8 (Party Cluster)
25	Sparky-6 (Shifting)
27	Active Alert
31	Psychotropic Black IC (cyberphobia)-8
35	Cerebrotoxic Black IC-6
38	Scout-10 (Cascading)
41	Lethal Black IC-6
43	Cripler (jammer)-8 (Shifting)
45	Shutdown

Active Skills: Aura Reading 6, Etiquette 3 (Corporate 5), Conjuring 7, Pistols 3, Sorcery 5 (Spellcasting 6), Unarmed Combat 3

Metamagic (Initiate Grade 2): Invoking, Reflecting

Spells: Alter Memory 4, Compel Truth 3, Control Fire 3, Detect Life 4, Increase Reflexes 3, Levitate 4, Mindlink 4, Spirit Bolt 5, Stunball 4, Thunderclap 5

Weapons: Hammerli Model 610S [LP, SA, 6L, RC 1, 6 (c) w/1 clip EX ammo]

Range (TN): 0-5 (4), 6-20 (5), 21-40 (6), 41-60 (9)

Armor: Light security armor with helmets [7/6] w/ electronic magnification 3, thermographic, and Rating 4 transceiver (w/encryption 5)

Gear: Dragon figurine (Levitate sustaining focus 4)

Ninja Interior Decorating

Once they're inside the penthouse, it's a fairly simple matter for the shadowrunners to carry out Buttercup's instructions. The changes they're expected to make are minor to the mundane eye: shifting around small statuettes, plucking petals from lotus blossoms, raking the gravel into a slightly different pattern and so forth, but it's slow and delicate work. All in all it takes a base time of 180 minutes for the runners do the work. Have each runner who's making modifications make an Intelligence (4) Test, total the successes and divide them into the base time to determine how long it actually takes. A failed test means the runner doesn't contribute to reducing the time, while a test that comes up all 1s means the runner has made a critical error (see *Debugging*, below).

Even the mundane runners can feel that they're in a strong power site. Awakened characters can feel that this is one of the



strongest power sites they've ever encountered, with a Rating of 8. Any Awakened character can add an additional 8 dice each Combat Turn to any magical tests made while in the penthouse, dividing the dice up as desired. There's a tremendous wellspring of magical energy, just waiting to be tapped.

Riding the Dragon's Tail

Once the shadowrunners complete their work, the mystic forces in the chamber shift perceptibly and the runners experience a kind of vision (as outlined in *Tell It to Them Straight*). Though it seems to take a while, the vision actually lasts only a moment before the runners return to their normal consciousness and can withdraw from the Skytower by whatever means they have prepared.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Most of the tension in this scenario comes from the runners trying to do their job without getting caught. There are a number of ways to add some more action, however, if desired.

First, the shadowrunners might get into a conflict with the security personnel or guardian spirits in the Skytower. If they've timed things right, it won't matter if Wuxing is alerted to the run, so long as the feng shui modifications are done in time. So you can have the runners mix it up, using the background count and power site properties of the Skytower to keep the fight interesting. Of course, the runners (and the Wuxing personnel) want to

be careful about not damaging the penthouse chamber (see *Debugging* for details). This could even lead to a sort of standoff between the runners and security personnel, with the shadowrunners effectively holding the penthouse hostage.

Second, you can extend the presence and influence of Lung and Ryumyo in the scenario. It's possible the great dragons may sense the shifting of energies in the dragon lines as the runners begin to make their modifications in the Skytower. If so, you can have either or both of them actually show up in astral form, ordering the runners to stop what they're doing because they're interfering with something they don't understand. The dragons are reluctant to break the ward around the penthouse (which would alert Wuxing) and there isn't much they can do to the shadowrunners in their astral forms (unless the runners are foolish enough to expose themselves on the astral plane). But the appearance of two great dragons should at least give the shadowrunners pause and provide a major hint that something big is going on.

Finally, once the runners have finished the job, you can make getting out of the Skytower harder than getting in. Perhaps they trip an alarm (or it's tripped for them by an outside force) and they have to escape Wuxing security. You can have a chase through the tower, followed by the runners trying to escape through the streets of Hong Kong. If the shadowrunners have an air vehicle as part of their getaway, you can have an aerial chase with attack helicopters, drones and servitor spirits.

DEBUGGING

It's possible that the shadowrunners might frag up the process of re-aligning the feng shui of the Wuxing Skytower, either by rolling poorly or getting into a fight that wrecks the place. In this case, the plan to shift the dragon lines fails and something else happens—exactly what is up to you. The damage might simply be a minor setback for Wuxing while they fix things—a temporary vulnerability that their enemies might still take advantage of. Alternatively, the damage might cause even more wild magic and mana surges in the Hong Kong area, or even throughout the Pacific Rim. At the extreme end, the entire Skytower might be consumed in a spectacular explosion of magical energies, forming an astral rift or some other phenomenon on the site (see *Magic in the Shadows* and *Target: Awakened Lands* for some ideas).

PICKING UP THE PIECES

IT'S A WRAP

Once the runners have completed their work in Hong Kong, Buttercup arranges for the remainder of their fee to be delivered to them when the runners return home. They have no difficulties getting out of Hong Kong (unless you want to extend the adventure further). In fact, for a few days after the completion of their run, the shadowrunners seem to enjoy a run of good luck. Mention that they feel invigorated and things seem to go their way for a while.

The runners don't have any further trouble with Hideo Yoshida (unless they gave him good reason to keep coming after them). Not long after their run they hear that Wuxing has suffered some minor setbacks and Yamatetsu has helped to maintain its ally's position within the Pacific Prosperity Group, since it has gained some new opportunities. They also hear news and rumors about an increase in unusual magical activity in Vladivostok for a time.

AWARDING KARMA

Award individual Karma according to the guidelines on p. 244, SR3. Award Karma to each team member based on the following requirements:

Surviving the run	1
Successfully delivering Sen Lo	1
Successful run against the Wuxing Skytower	2

LEGWORX

The following tables show what the runners may be able to learn about various facets of this adventure through their contacts and other resources.

Buttercup

Runners who get a picture of Buttercup (possibly using a cyber-eye camera) or do a Matrix search from memory (requiring a Computer (6) Test) can discover Ms. Johnson's identity without too much trouble. Runners may then try to dig up more on the mysterious Buttercup.

Appropriate Contacts: Any corporate contact (TN 4)

Successes	Result
0	"Is that some kind of stuffer or something?"
1	"Free spirit that sits of the board of directors of Yamatetsu. A real mystery, nobody knows much about her."
2	"Buttercup definitely backs the current chairman of the board. In fact, without her, it's pretty likely that he would have been geeked already. You can bet that doesn't make her too popular with the hard-liners in the company."
3	"Buttercup may <i>look</i> like some giggly Japanese schoolgirl, but remember she's not—drek, she's not even human. There's no telling how old or powerful she is, but there's no doubt that she's got a lot of pull with Yamatetsu and a lot of money and resources to back her up. That would make her powerful even if she <i>wasn't</i> a spirit."
4+	"Buttercup has some kind of agenda of her own for Yamatetsu. I don't know what it is, but backing the current chairman and the whole relocation to Russia was a part of that. For a long time everyone just assumed that Buttercup was having some fun, playing businesswoman. They underestimated her, which turned out to be a big mistake. Buttercup isn't just playing a game. She's playing for keeps."

Sen Lo

Runners may very well try to dig up information on Sen Lo before they go looking for him.

Appropriate Contacts: Any magical contact (Target Number 6)

Successes	Result
0	"Never heard of him. He owe you money or something?"
1	"A geomancer in Hong Kong. Knows his stuff. I guess he does a lot of work for high-price clients."
2	"Sen Lo is a brilliant geomancer. He's forgotten more about feng shui than most people will ever know. Unfortunately he's not as great in the business or personal affairs departments."
3	"I heard that Wuxing was looking to acquire Sen Lo's services on a permanent basis but he turned them down for some reason. That might not have been the smartest career move ever."
4+	"Sen Lo has his share of vices and I hear that's gotten him in debt with one of the local Triads. No amount of good feng shui is going to pull his hoop out of the fire if he crosses them."



The Red Dragon Triad

The Red Dragon Triad is fairly well known in Hong Kong, but people there are less likely to talk about the Triads, especially to strangers, so the target number remains about the same whether the runners are gathering their information in or out of Hong Kong.

Appropriate Contacts: Any criminal contact (Target Number 4)

Successes	Result
0	"I don't know nothin' about the Triads, chummer. It ain't healthy."
1	"The Red Dragon is one of the major Triads in Hong Kong."
2	"It's an interesting question whether or not the Red Dragon will <i>remain</i> one of the major Triads in Hong Kong, however. They've supposedly had difficulties of late which may or may not be connected to Wuxing's increasing influence in the Free Enterprise Zone."
3	"Word has it that the Red Dragon is well named because they ultimately answer to the great dragon Lung on the mainland. What Lung wants with a criminal syndicate, I don't know."
4+	"The Red Dragon has been unusually active lately. They've been in conflicts with the Yakuza over the black market and smuggling in the Sea of Japan and word has it they're coming down hard on anyone who crosses them these days. Harder than usual, that is."

CAST OF SHADOWS

The following characters play significant roles in this adventure. The rest are described where they appear.

BUTTERCUP

The shadowrunners' (ostensive) employer in *Balance*, Buttercup is a mysterious figure and should remain so during the adventure. She is a powerful and influential free spirit. Though she normally appears as a teenaged Japanese girl, she is far older and more experienced than that, despite a certain girlishness in her attitude. Buttercup isn't human, and she's capable of being surprisingly ruthless when necessary.

Buttercup's agenda in *Balance* is to further Yamatetsu's fortunes while at the same time reining in Wuxing and putting the two corporations on more even footing within the Pacific Prosperity Group. Technically, this involves betraying one of Yamatetsu's allies, but Buttercup has no particular fondness for Wuxing. It is an ally of convenience, nothing more. Of course, she would still prefer that Wu Lung-Wei didn't know about her involvement in the whole affair.

Buttercup should be considered an Ultimate-level NPC (p. 84, *SRComp*), capable of feats of magic beyond those of most mortals. Her powers are considerable, so she's given no game stats. Since Buttercup doesn't use her powers lightly, you can have her accomplish what's needed to move the story along without worrying too much about her disrupting it. She's difficult to harm at best, and even a massive attack will only disrupt her for a time. Attempts to learn Buttercup's true name require that the would-be conjurer first penetrate her aura masking, then undertake a massive (Quest Rating 10+) astral quest. Buttercup bitterly resents any attempt to bind her and will mercilessly eliminate anyone who tries.

SEN LO

Sen Lo is a well-known geomancer and practitioner of *feng shui*. His services as a consultant are highly sought after in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, success has not entirely agreed with Sen Lo, and he has run up considerable gambling debts with the Red Dragon Triad (his good fortune doesn't extend to the gaming table, especially when some of the games are rigged in the house's favor).

Though he is a wujen of some ability, Sen Lo isn't a combat-mage or a shadowrunner. His magic is focused on his work, involving geomancy and the design of harmonious environments. Sen Lo is also getting on in years. At the age of 60, he's still in good health, but not as active as he once was. All he wants is to find a way out of his debts so he can regain some semblance of the successful life he had.

B 2 **Q** 2 **S** 2 **C** 3 **I** 6 **W** 6 **E** 6 **M** 9 **R** 4

INIT: 4 + 1D6, Astral INIT: 26 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Astral Combat 7, Combat 7, Spell 7

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 3/2

Race: Human

Active Skills: Aura Reading 6, Conjuring 4, Divining (Sortilage) 5, Etiquette 3 (Corporate 5), Negotiation 2 (Business 4), Sorcery 5 (Ritual Sorcery 7)

Knowledge Skills: Architecture 5, Astrology 6, Chinese Brush Painting 4, Dowsing 5, Gardening 5, Geomancy 8, Interior Decorating 4, Sortilage 6

Spells: Astral Window 3, Catalog 4, Cure Disease 4, Detect Life 3, Detox 4, Light 3, Phantasm 4, Physical Camouflage 4, Shape Earth 5, Shape Water 4

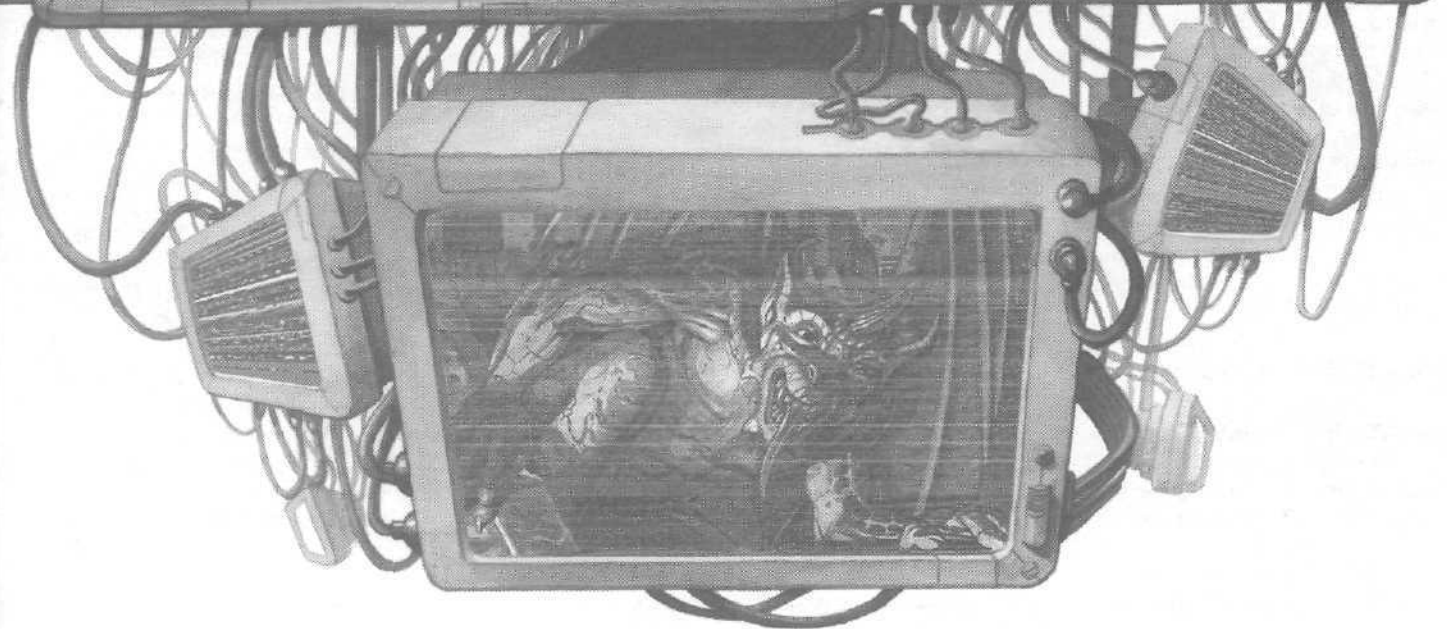
Metamagic (Initiate Grade 3): Divining, Masking, Sensing

Weapons: Wooden staff (4M stun)

Armor: Armor clothing [2/0]

Gear: Divination coins and copy of the *I Ching*

HUNTING



To Rhonabwy, I leave the Silver Songbird. A poor reflection of that most beautiful of voices, but still a feast for the appreciative ear.

—From the *Last Will and Testament of Dunkelzahn*

PREPARING TO PLAY

Hestaby's next move involves another pair of dragons, this time the great Welsh dragons Rhonabwy and Celedyr. Hestaby has set the runners up as Celedyr's agents in a run against Rhonabwy, to steal a priceless magical artifact. Unfortunately the runners' preparation isn't enough, and they fall into Rhonabwy's clutches. He offers them an opportunity to get out with the goods, so long as they're willing to play a little game ...

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The team is hired for a shadowrun in Wales. They're flown out to Celedyr's lair in Caerleon, where they are briefed on the specifics of the run: to get into the lair of the great dragon Rhonabwy and steal an item called the Silver Songbird from his hoard, then return with it to Caerleon. The runners are given magical talismans that will help them get past some of Rhonabwy's defenses, but the run will still be a difficult one. Celedyr is willing to compensate the runners handsomely for their work.

The team makes its way into Rhonabwy's domain in Wales, avoiding his various guardians and security measures to get into his underground lair. There they find the songbird, but Rhonabwy is also there waiting for them. With the shadowrunners cornered, Rhonabwy offers them a chance. He will let them take the Songbird and give them a brief head start before setting some of his minions to hunt them. If the shadowrunners can overcome Rhonabwy's hunters, he'll let them go with their prize. If they can't, well, at least Rhonabwy won't have to feed his "pets" for a while.

What's Really Happening

The shadowrun for Celedyr is legit, for the most part. Hestaby arranged for the runners to come to Celedyr's attention, along with information on Rhonabwy's lair. She also tipped off Rhonabwy that Celedyr might try something, deliberately leading the runners into a trap. According to the rules of the contest, Rhonabwy can't directly harm another dragon's chosen



agents, and Hestaby knows Rhonabwy's penchant for playing games. The contest is effectively one of hunting ability between two sets of proxies. If the runners win, Hestaby scores the success of taking the Songbird from Rhonabwy, victory in the hunting contest, and the deception of both Rhonabwy and Celedyr. If the runners fail, Hestaby loses nothing but their service and Celedyr takes the fall for her.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The *Critters* sourcebook is useful for providing additional creatures the shadowrunners can encounter (though there are some described in the adventure) and the *Threats 2* sourcebook provides information about drakes like Rhonabwy's servant Branwen.

ALL FOR A SONG

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The shadowrunners go to Celedyr's lair in Caerleon to receive their instructions for the shadowrun, giving them the opportunity to learn more about their target.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The Welsh countryside rolls past beneath you as the Transys Neuronet tilt-rotor flies toward your destination. The trip to the British Isles was a fairly uneventful one, and now you're looking forward to meeting this new Johnson and getting the specifics on the run he wants you to do. All you know right now is that he wants someone from out of the area and that he's willing to pay a couple thousand nuyen a head just to interview the right people for the job. Whatever it is, it sounds like it won't be simple.

The corporate facility stands out from the surrounding countryside. The new buildings of steel, chrome, and glass seem out of place in the picturesque area, even more so when they surround a ring of ancient-looking standing stones and tumbled ruins, the past and the future standing side by side. The tilt-rotor vectors in toward a landing pad on the outskirts of the facility and smoothly touches down, the engines powering down with a slight whine of protest. The co-pilot jumps out and opens the side door for you as another man approaches across the tarmac.

He's not your typical corporate suit, that's for sure. He's African, tall and well muscled and dressed in what looks like some kind of ceremonial get-up you'd expect to see on a movie set. It has a wide gold collar, a kind of belted kilt, sandals and a cloth headdress. The man gives you a shallow bow at the foot of the stairs.

"Greetings, welcome to Caerleon," he says in a deep voice. "I am Amon. I will take you to meet your host. This way, please."

Amon takes you into the Transys facility, past a security checkpoint to a bank of elevators, where he slots a card into a reader beside the door and presses his thumb to a scanner plate. The door chimes softly, then opens to admit you. The elevator descends for some distance. You're not sure how far. There's no floor readout over the door or control panel.

The elevator gently bumps to a stop, the doors open and Amon takes the lead again. The corridor he takes you through is smooth stone—no, a modern ceramic composite, by the look of it. You pass through a door guarded by a pair of men dressed much like Amon who watch you with cold stares, hands close to the submachine guns at their belts. Down another corridor and another set of guards to a wide set of double doors. Amon uses his key-card and thumbprint again to gain access, and the doors slide open.

"Please," he says with a bow, "enter."

Beyond the doors isn't a room but a vast chamber, actually the inside of what looks like an ancient and ruined amphitheater with its walls and seating rising up all around you. The ceiling above is a dome of fused rock, with electrical lamps bolted to it to cast light down into the arena below.

Standing just inside the arena is a tall, fair-skinned man with brassy-colored hair. He's wearing a long, belted robe and a pair of sandals. As you enter, he gestures toward the conference table and chairs set up on the sand nearby, across from a hi-tech flatscreen multimedia deck.

"Welcome," he says. "Please be seated and we can talk business."

HOOKS

Wow the shadowrunners with the unusual setting and trappings. Impress upon them odd nature of the business negotiations deep in the heart of the dragon's lair. They should get the feeling there's a lot more going on than they're being told (and that most of it has nothing in particular to do with their mission).

BEHIND THE SCENES

The robed man who introduces himself as "Mr. Johnson" is actually the great dragon Celedyr in human form. Once the runners are seated and introductions have been made, Celedyr gets right down to business. He wants to hire the team for a mission of some delicacy and risk. He has recently acquired information about the lair of a great dragon named Rhonabwy, nearby in Wales. Rhonabwy has in his possession an item known as the Silver Songbird. Celedyr wants the runners to sneak into Rhonabwy's lair and steal it. He can provide them with the layout of the lair, the location of the Songbird and some general information about the place's defenses, along with the means to circumvent some of them. If the runners are successful, they will each be paid 150,000¥ in certified credit-sticks or up to twice that amount in hardware and software from Transys Neuronet (including most computer equipment and cyberware from the *Shadowrun* rulebook). Transys technicians handle the installation of any cyberware free of charge.

Dealing with the Dragon

The shadowrunners may wish to negotiate with Celedyr. The dragon is a canny negotiator and not used to being questioned, but he will negotiate on the following points:

- He's willing to pay the runners in different currency, if they wish. He'll pay them up to the 150,000¥ in certified credit, gold, gems (or other precious commodities), even up to two





units of refined orichalcum each (with a street value of 176,000¥, provided the runners can fence it). He'll pay them more (around 25 percent) in corporate script or other negotiable securities.

- He won't advance the runners any money, since work on the shadowrun is to begin immediately. He will, however, provide the runners with any reasonable mundane gear that they request, so long as they can show a need for it on the run. They get to keep any such gear when the run is completed.

- He may be willing to pay magician characters by teaching them particular spells or providing them with magic items, provided they're things you feel are acceptable for the character and the campaign. Naturally, the character must still provide the necessary Karma to learn the spell or bond the focus.

The Briefing

If the shadowrunners agree to take on the run, Amon and "Mr. Johnson" provide them with a briefing and overview of their mission.

They will be taken by tilt-rotor to an area some 10 kilometers from Llandoverly in Wales, the domain of the great dragon Rhonabwy. Any closer and an aircraft risks detection by Rhonabwy's defenses. The runners can proceed on foot to Rhonabwy's lair, which is an underground complex. Celedyr will provide the runners with magical amulets that will prevent Rhonabwy's guardian spirits from attacking them, allowing them to reach the lair and gain entrance. Once inside, they're shown the way on a map to reach the dragon's treasury, where they will find the Silver Songbird. It is a magical construct: a life-sized songbird made of pure silver that sings sweetly on command, in a cage of the same material. They will take the Songbird and make their way to a pre-arranged pick-up point 10 kilometers east (not the same place they will be dropped off). Celedyr tells the runners they can have anything else they can take from Rhonabwy's treasury, but they must return with the Songbird if they expect to be paid.

The amulets that Celedyr supplies them with will allow the runners to bypass some of Rhonabwy's magical security: they can pass by guardian spirits and wards without setting off an alarm. They will have to deal with the physical security, however, and Celedyr can only supply limited information about it. Dangerous paranormal creatures are known to prowl Rhonabwy's domain, and there may be guardian-beasts inside as well. Technological security is likely, so the runners should be prepared to overcome it.

Amon and Celedyr answer the runners' questions to the best of their ability and allow them to plan out the run as they see fit. Celedyr wants the job done as soon as possible. He points out that the longer they wait, the more likely the amulets will become useless against Rhonabwy's security. At most he'll give the runners a week to prepare, but he'd prefer they started as soon as possible. He'll also veto any plan to scout out Rhonabwy's lair in advance. There's too great a risk of alerting the dragon to their run. The runners will have to make do with the information Celedyr provides. Part of the dragon's insistence involves following the rules of the Rite of Succession, but he doesn't tell them about that.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

This scenario is fairly straightforward, but there are some ways that you can make things more tense and difficult for the runners to add some action.

First, Celedyr might stage some sort of "test" of the runners' abilities before he'll even consider hiring them. Perhaps "terrorists" or "mercenaries" attack the Transys facility or even try to hijack the runners' transportation en route, allowing the characters to show what they're made of against real opposition (hired as expendable muscle for just that purpose). The dragon may also insist on some other test of the runners' abilities or character before hiring them, anything from a deadly obstacle course to pitting the runners against extremely lifelike illusions of their darkest fears (or desires).

Additionally, Celedyr may want the characters to go through one or more "dry runs" of the break-in, using the state-of-the-art virtual reality equipment at the Transys Neuronet facility. This allows you to run *Into the Dragon's Lair* once or twice for the characters "in advance," with slight changes in the details to account for gaps in Celedyr's knowledge. When the characters get to the actual run, you can allow them to breeze past the challenges that they have "already" overcome in the simulations, but spring a surprise or two on them (not the least of which will be Rhonabwy's unexpected presence).

DEBUGGING

If the runners refuse to take the job, Celedyr asks them not to be too hasty in their decision and invites them to enjoy his hospitality and think things over. The characters are wined and dined but if they try to leave, the dragon's Knights of Rage stop them. Amon makes it clear to the runners that they have two choices: they can accept Celedyr's offer, or they can remain his guests while he finds another team of shadowrunners. They won't be allowed to leave until the shadowrun is complete, in order to maintain security. They're treated decently, but they're prisoners for what could be weeks.

Let the characters stew for a few days (as Celedyr interviews other shadowrunners, perhaps) and reconsider their decision. If they remain obstinate, remind them of how much precious time they could lose, being out of touch for who knows how long, to say nothing of the fact that Celedyr might decide to ensure they *never* get the chance to tell anyone what they know. If even that fails, then the dragon keeps them as "guests" for a few weeks, then lets them go.

If the runners try to make an escape attempt, let them, but keep in mind that the doors out of the underground complex require both a keycard and a thumbprint scan (p. 235, SR3), both at Rating 8. The complex is more than 50 meters underground, with walls of reinforced ferrocrete. The Knights of Rage will also use lethal force to keep the runners from escaping. The characters should find escape difficult (if not impossible).

INTO THE DRAGON'S LAIR

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The shadowrunners make their way into Rhonabwy's lair, past the dragon's various security measures to get to his treasury and the Silver Songbird.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

An unmarked tilt-rotor aircraft awaits you on the landing pad outside the Transys facility. Once you and your gear are stowed on board, it lifts off and heads north toward Llandovery, the domain of the great dragon Rhonabwy. It's over an hour past sunset and darkness has fallen over the Welsh countryside. Though you see the lights of various towns and villages as you pass overhead, the area surrounding the dragon's land is dark, lit only by the light of the stars and the crescent moon.

The trip passes quickly and the pilot alerts you a few minutes before you reach the drop-off point. You lightly finger the amulets given to you. They're simple bronze coins strung on leather thongs and etched with strange magical runes. You hope that they work as advertised and get you past Rhonabwy's guardian spirits and wards, or else this is likely to be a real short run.

The tilt-rotor touches down in a rolling field, the backwash from the rotors flattening the grass all around. You hop out and your ride takes off the moment you are clear, rising back up into the night sky until it is quickly lost from sight. You're on your own now.

When the runners reach the treasury, read the following:

You always thought that the images of dragons curled up on top of big piles of gold coins and other treasures was something you only saw in cheap fantasy sims. But as you stand at the threshold of Rhonabwy's treasury, you can see there's more than a little truth to the stereotype.

The room is like a vast domed cavern, its walls sloping upward toward the ceiling, lost in shadows above. Sconces along the walls hold modern electric lights that look like brass carriage lamps, shedding a golden glow that's intensified by the contents of the room. All around are tables and shelves of various sorts, each holding an array of treasures: statues of fine marble, bronze and jade, gold-hilted swords in jeweled scabbards, necklaces of silver and pearls. There are several full suits of armor from different eras, an upright slice of translucent crystal fully two meters tall and a meter wide held in a silver stand, a statue of a rearing dragon almost three meters tall, its scales burnished red gold. There are more things than you can count.

But the center of the room is what catches your eye. There stands a raised stone platform, a step up off the polished stone floor. In the center is a stack of gold bricks over two meters tall and wide and at least twice that in length. There must be hundreds upon hundreds of them, literally *tons* of gold, enough to bankroll a megacorp, stacked there in the center of the room.

Tearing your eyes away from the other treasures in the room, you spot something hanging from a brass stand: a finely wrought silver cage containing a bird made from the same material. Each feather is picked out in the smallest detail and as you watch, it shrugs its wings as if it were alive. The Silver Songbird, the treasure Celedyr sent you for.

When one of the runners touches the Songbird's cage, read the following:

At the slightest touch to its cage, the Songbird begins to sing, an impossibly sweet, liquid melody that fills the air like a gentle perfume. Just listening to it makes you feel warm and

safe and content, but unfortunately you don't have time to take in a concert.

"Magnificent, isn't it?" A voice asks in your minds and you turn to see where it came from.

The rearing golden dragon statue shimmers and, in an instant, begins to grow. It swells to many times its original size, its head reaching up toward the ceiling and its wings spreading out toward the walls, filling the midst of the chamber with its bulk. Its scales deepen to a blood red and fiery light shines from its eyes as the head of the great dragon tilts down toward you. The heavy armored door into the treasury slams shut with a clang that echoes in the chamber.

"Welcome to my home," the thought-voice says. "I am Rhonabwy. Would you be so good as to tell me who you are and why it is you are here?"

When Rhonabwy is finished questioning the characters, read the following:

"Now there is the matter of what to do with you," the dragon says. "In truth I'm impressed that you've made it this far. I can use some amusement, so I will make you an offer.

"I will let you take the Songbird and leave here, but once you do, you will be hunted by some ... pets of mine. If you can escape them, alone and without any outside aid, then the Songbird is yours. If not, well, at least you'll have a chance. Of course, if you prefer, I can finish things here and now.

"What do you say?"

HOOKS

This scenario is one of growing tension and suspense. The runners overcome obstacles getting to Rhonabwy's lair and make their way to the treasury. Dazzle them with the sheer wealth at the dragon's disposal, like opening Ali Baba's cave or finding a fantastic treasure in a fantasy story. Let the characters' greed and imagination run wild for a little bit before springing the presence of the great dragon on them. Then hit them with Rhonabwy's greeting and proposal, letting them wonder for a moment what the dragon intends to do with them.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This scenario is made up of three main parts: getting to Rhonabwy's lair in Llandovery, navigating the lair to the treasury, and unexpectedly encountering Rhonabwy and having to negotiate with him.

The Amulets

The amulets Celedyr gives the shadowrunners to get them past Rhonabwy's magical security are unique enchantments (p. 46, *MITS*) created by the dragon himself. They act as magical "passkeys" of a sort, so that Rhonabwy's guardian spirits will not notice them and his wards will not hinder them. So long as the runners continue to wear the amulets, there's no chance that Rhonabwy's magical defenses will react to them as long as they don't use any magic.

If a runner uses astral projection or a Magical skill, there's a chance the guardian spirits will notice it. Roll 6 dice with a base Target Number of 6, minus half the Force of the magical



effect used (spell cast, spirit conjured, etc.) or half the Magic attribute of the character astrally projecting. Success means the runners are detected and intercepted by a group of four free spirits, with Force ratings and Spirit Energy of $3 + (1D6 \div 2)$. Use the random tables from *Magic in the Shadows* (pp. 119–120) to create these spirits, if necessary. The spirits attempt to capture the runners if at all possible. If they do, move on to *An Offer You Can't Refuse*.

Celedyr will caution the runners against using magic while protected by the amulets. Astral perception and defensive uses of Magical skills like spell defense are safe, as are adept powers. The enchantment Celedyr placed on the amulets is temporary. They cease working after sunrise; more than enough time for the runners to complete the run (or fail, as the case may be).

Reaching the Lair

To get to Rhonabwy's lair, the shadowrunners must cross about 10 kilometers of Welsh countryside at night. This means minimal light conditions (*Visibility Table*, p. 112, *SR3*) when and if the characters run into any trouble.

Moving at a normal walking pace, it takes the runners about an hour or so to reach the lair. Have the players make Open Stealth Tests for their characters with a -2 modifier for the foliage and unfamiliar ground they must traverse. Then roll a Perception Test using 5 dice against the lowest result of the runners' Stealth Test. If it is successful, the runners encounter trouble en route to the lair: a pack of wolves led by a wolf shapeshifter loyal to Rhonabwy. There is one wolf for each shadowrunner present, along with the pack leader. They attempt to ambush the runners, springing from the shadows to attack (see *Surprise*, p. 109, *SR3*). Unless one of the runners uses astral perception, they won't notice the shapeshifter as any different from the other wolves, at least until it is wounded and starts regenerating. Use Volk's stats (p. 91) for the shapeshifter. The wolves have the following abilities:

Wolves

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
5	5 (x4)	4	—	3/4	2	6	5

INIT: 5 + 2D6

Pools: Combat 5

Karma/Professional Rating: 2/2

Attacks: 7M

Keep in mind that using magic may give the shadowrunners away, as could things like loud gunfire, muzzle flashes and explosions. Feel free to remind the players of this if they forget. The fight with the wolves should ideally be a dark, silent and deadly melee with the runners relying on silenced weapons and their own skills. If the runners don't bother trying to conceal themselves, they may be detected and caught by the guardian spirits as described under *The Amulets* above. The target number for the spirits to notice mundane activity is 6, possibly lower if the characters do something very obvious (like setting off a grenade). So long as the runners take pains to conceal themselves, the spirits do not notice them.

Into the Labyrinth

The entrance to Rhonabwy's underground lair is a cave-like structure set into a hillside. The cave entrance has Rating 5 motion sensors (p. 234, SR3) that detect any creatures moving around inside. Miniature surveillance cameras automatically activate if the motion sensors detect anything. A massive, sliding metal hatch covers the actual entrance into the lair, with a Rating 6 maglock keypad (p. 235, SR3). A Rating 10 ward also protects the entire lair, making it difficult for astral intruders to enter (assuming they can make it through the heavy layer of soil and rock to begin with). If the runners set off one of the security systems, they trigger a flood of Neurostun gas into the cave entrance (doing 6S Stun damage per Combat Turn). Unconscious runners are brought before Rhonabwy (see *An Offer You Can't Refuse*).

The underground lair is a labyrinth of tunnels wide enough to accommodate Rhonabwy's massive frame (big enough to drive an eighteen-wheel truck through, in other words). The map Celedyr provides the runners with guides them directly to the treasury. If the runners choose to stray, feel free to make up some interesting sights for them before they encounter Rhonabwy, who is monitoring their progress.

The treasury is protected by a reinforced door with a Barrier rating of 24 along with a Rating 10 ward. A Rating 6 maglock keypad provides access to the chamber. The other security measures in the room are shut down because of Rhonabwy's presence (though inputting the right code into the keypad also turns them off), so they're of no concern.

Feel free to improvise the contents of the treasury chamber based on the description given in *Tell It to Them Straight*. If the runners decide to take inventory or loot the place before getting the Songbird, you can have Rhonabwy make his presence known then. A character using astral perception notices active auras around the Songbird, the dragon statue and many other items in the chamber, but Rhonabwy masks his aura so that his true nature cannot be detected.

An Offer You Can't Refuse

Once Rhonabwy appears, give the shadowrunners the opportunity to answer the dragon's question about who they are and what they're doing in his lair. Rhonabwy already has a fair idea and he's very difficult to lie to. He asks the runners to explain their mission and how they managed to get past his various security measures. If the runners tell him about the amulets Celedyr gave them, Rhonabwy bends close to one of them to examine it for a long moment, his hot breath right in the character's face.

After he's finished questioning them, Rhonabwy offers the characters a deal. If they can escape from the hunters he will send after them, they can take the Songbird and go. If they refuse, he can kill them right there. Assuming the runners agree, Rhonabwy lets them leave the chamber and has Branwen escort them to the surface in her human form. Once they leave the cave entrance, they get a five-minute head start before Rhonabwy's hunters come after them.

THE SILVER SONGBIRD

The Silver Songbird is a unique magic item of unknown origin. Until recently it belonged to the great dragon Dunkelzahn, who left it to Rhonabwy in his will.

The Songbird is a life-sized bird made entirely out of finely wrought silver, with mechanical moving parts and extraordinary detail, down to the individual feathers. It has tiny blue sapphires for eyes. It's capable of flight like a normal bird (moving around 12 meters per Combat Turn). It has a Body Rating of 2, made from metal, but fairly delicate. It normally sits inside a beautiful hanging cage of silver wire and filigree. The songbird (but not its cage) has a definite aura of magic about it, though a magician character won't be able to tell anything more than that.

The only ability the Songbird displays in this adventure is its song. It can sing a beautiful, sweet melody on command. Its song makes people feel happy and lifts their spirits, but has no other apparent effects. Though the Songbird can be physically damaged, it is apparently immune to magical harm. Any attempt to use magic to change, damage or destroy the Songbird simply fails.

There are a few other things of note about the Songbird in this adventure. First, there is an activate-on-demand tracking signal device (p. 281, SR3) hidden beneath the top of its cage. The hunters use this to track the shadowrunners. Finding the tracking signal requires a Perception (10) Test. A bug scanner can pick up the tracking signal, but only when the hunters activate it. A jammer can mask the signal and the runners' location.

The bottom of the cage has a hollow space filled with a kilo of C-12 plastic explosive (p. 283, SR3) with a coded radio detonator. It does 12D damage to anyone within a meter of the blast, -1 to the Power per meter away. Rhonabwy intends this as a final safety measure and means of retribution, should the runners escape (see *Picking Up the Pieces* for details).

Finally, astute shadowrunners might note that the silver wire and decoration of the cage can be used to fashion crude weapons useful against the shapeshifter Volk (p. 91) who is allergic to silver. Runners can turn bent silver wire into crude shot for a shotgun, or make simple hand weapons that do (STR)L damage. (Taking apart the cage may also reveal the tracking signal and the explosives.)

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

The material in this section assumes the runners make their run on Rhonabwy's lair during one of the more temperate seasons of the year in Wales (late spring, summer, or early autumn). To make things a little more challenging in this and the following scene, have the run take place in rainy springtime or fall weather or even during the dead of winter, with a thick blanket of snow covering the ground. The characters have to deal with exposure to the elements in addition to the other challenges. Of course, clever players may be able to take advantage of the weather, using heavy rain as cover and a means to hide their tracks, or leaving false trails in the snow.



DEBUGGING

If the runners manage to attract the notice of the guardian spirits, the spirits try to capture them, which allows Rhonabwy to basically make the runners the same offer from *An Offer You Can't Refuse*. Feel free to stack the odds a bit in favor of the runners being captured by giving the spirits the necessary powers and spells to do so. If the characters take on the spirits and seem to be winning, have some reinforcements show up or have Rhonabwy personally intervene to capture the runners.

If the runners attack Rhonabwy the moment he appears (perhaps hoping to catch him off guard or in a moment of weakness), let them. Any attack they can muster bounces harmlessly off the dragon's armored hide or is deflected by his various magical defenses (which operate automatically). Unless the runners brought a tac-nuke with them, it's highly unlikely that they have anything that can overcome Rhonabwy's protections.

The dragon shrugs off the attack, asking the shadowrunners if that is any way for them to treat their host. If the runners continue to attack when it's plain that they can't hurt the dragon, Rhonabwy may take action. Have him magically turn one of the shadowrunners into stone or a toad (or similar lowly creature), keeping in mind that Rhonabwy's magical abilities are far beyond those of any player character magician (thus he automatically succeeds). Have the affected player roll a Resistance Test, but feel free to ignore it unless the player somehow manages to score an overwhelming number of successes (say 15 or more). Rhonabwy can drop the spell after he has made his point, with the character none the worse for wear.

THE HUNT IS ON

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The characters are allowed to leave Rhonabwy's lair and it's a fight to the finish to see if they can survive and overcome the dragon's chosen champions.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Rhonabwy rears back, something akin to a smirk on his reptilian face.

"So, we are agreed, then?" Without even waiting for a response, he turns his head toward the armored door of the room, which swings open to admit an elven woman. She's fairly tall, with long, pure white hair flowing down past her shoulders. She wears jeans tucked into a pair of serviceable boots, a close-fitting T-shirt and a synth-leather jacket that probably has some armor underneath it. She carries herself with an air of confidence, even in the presence of a great dragon.

"This is Branwen," Rhonabwy says. "She will escort you to the surface, where you will have a five minute head start before my hunters come after you. I hope that you prove challenging prey for them; they're getting sorely out of practice." Branwen smiles a bit at this and gestures toward the open door.

"After you," she says.

You're escorted back through the tunnels of Rhonabwy's lair to the door you entered through. There, Branwen gives you a last once-over, like she's assessing you. Then she says, "You

had better get going, the clock's running." In the tunnel behind her, you can hear the sound of something approaching. You're not sure you want to stick around and find out what it is.

The hunt has begun.

HOOKS

This is the climatic scene of the adventure, so play it up for all that it's worth. Keep in mind that the shadowrunners have no idea who or what is hunting them at first. Try and keep them in the dark for a little while and spring the various hunters on them one at a time. The runners should feel like they are in a fight for their lives, because they are.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This scenario is a fairly straightforward one. The shadowrunners need to signal for pickup and make it to the rendezvous point some ten kilometers east of Rhonabwy's lair, evading the dragon's paranormal hunters long enough to escape with their prize. Of course, the hunters aren't planning on making it easy for their prey.

The Hunter's Tactics

Rhonabwy's hunters are described in the *Cast of Shadows* section. Branwen (the drake) is in charge and Volk (the wolf shapeshifter) is her second-in-command. The other hunters are at least capable of understanding and following orders from either of them.

The hunters will take the five minutes of the runners' head start to prepare. Branwen casts and sustains Improved Invisibility on Andres and Volk. The naga casts and sustains Camouflage on herself. Volk assumes his wolf form while Branwen remains in her elf form for the time being.

Once the five minutes is up, the hunters set out in pursuit of the runners. Branwen carries the locator for the tracking signal in the Songbird's cage. She activates it for a 5-second burst to get a fix on the runner's location, then she sends the kludde in avian form to scout ahead and see what the runners are doing. Its flight speed is enough to overtake the shadowrunners unless they're moving very quickly. The kludde flies fairly high up, making it a Perception (10) Test to spot it. If the runners decide to take potshots at the circling crow, it is at least 100 meters away and there's an additional +4 TN modifier for it being such a small moving target. The runners can also attempt to use magic against the kludde, but remember that its Magical Guard power gives it an extra 7 dice on all Spell Resistance Tests.

Once the kludde has the runners' position, the other hunters move in. Andres and Volk can arrive the fastest and will take the lead. The gargoyle flies while Branwen and the naga remain on the ground. Once they are within sight of their prey, Branwen and the naga take cover (with the naga additionally concealed by her Camouflage spell).

When the hunters are in position, the kludde and the gargoyle swoop down to attack, the kludde assuming its canine form on its first action. Then the invisible centaur and werewolf attack, preferably from surprise, flanking the shadowrunners. Branwen and the naga cast spells and provide spell defense for their allies. Branwen will use her pistol if she sees an opportuni-



ty. The naga's spell of choice is Blindness on any obvious magicians in the team, while Branwen will cast Firewall to try and trap the runners and keep them from escaping. Keep in mind that the naga is sustaining one spell while Branwen is sustaining two when it comes to Sorcery and Drain Tests for them.

In combat, the other four hunters go immediately for the kill. The only advantage they give the runners is that they choose separate targets rather than ganging up on one or two of them. Andres charges his chosen target and attempts to trample them. If Branwen is threatened or injured, she drops the Invisibility spells and assumes her dracoform before wading into the combat herself.

If the runners manage to escape the hunters' first assault, Branwen will regroup her forces, assess any injuries (and use magic to treat them), then use the tracking signal to locate the runners again and set up another attack. This time she will assume her dracoform and personally lead the attack against them. The hunters continue chasing the shadowrunners until they are out of their reach.

Escaping the Hunters

The shadowrunners can take one of three main approaches in dealing with Rhonabwy's hunting party: try and escape them, fight and overcome them or negotiate with them.

Escaping from the hunters requires two things: dealing

with the tracking device and distracting or delaying the hunters long enough for the runners to get away from them. The tracking device is simple enough to handle once the runners find it. All it takes a sharp blow to disable it, though smart runners might be able to get more use out of it intact. They can either leave the signal device behind to mislead their pursuers (perhaps even attaching it to some passing critter to lead the hunters astray), or they can use the tracking signal to try and lead the hunters into an ambush, though this will require dealing with the kludde as well since it will be scouting ahead.

Since several of the hunters can move faster than the shadowrunners (particularly the fliers), the characters have to find some way of slowing down or delaying their pursuit long enough to get away (or at least get a good lead). They may try laying traps for the hunters, if they have a rough idea which way they will come (or can lay a sufficiently convincing false trail to lead them into it). They can use camouflage and illusions to create distractions (though neither will fool the hunters for long). They can focus on injuring the hunters enough to slow them down a little (though Branwen can deal with most minor injuries using magic). Judge each plan the players come up with individually and give them a reasonable chance of success, but keep in mind that even the best plan is likely to only delay the hunters temporarily. The runners may have to come up with a few more in order to make their escape.

SPIRITS

When he told the characters that they had to deal with his hunters without any "outside aid," Rhonabwy meant spirits as well as mortal agencies. Spirits are forbidden on either side of the contest. Rhonabwy's guardian and servant spirits do not interfere with the runners or aid the hunters, but the shadowrunners are not allowed to call on spiritual aid either. If a character tries to summon a spirit of any type (including an ally spirit), Rhonabwy's guardian spirits attack the newcomer one Combat Turn after it appears on the astral plane. They will fight and disrupt the spirit unless its summoner sends it away. In any case, the guardian spirits are more than enough to keep any spirit busy and prevent it from carrying out its summoner's commands. The runners would be wise to observe Rhonabwy's rules and not bother trying to call any spirits to their aid.

Finally, one of the runners may make the supreme sacrifice and try to hold off the hunters long enough for the others to escape. This is a very dramatic option, so you may want to allow it to succeed even if the character faces overwhelming odds. The runner who stays behind is almost certain to be killed, though you can always say that they are captured and that Branwen was moved enough by the runner's sacrifice that she used her magic to keep the character alive. This way the rest of the team can stage a rescue later on (and possibly be lured into a rematch with Rhonabwy).

Overcoming the Hunters

The shadowrunners can also go from being hunted to being hunters, taking the offensive and meeting their pursuers head-on. If they kill or disable all of the hunters, then they're home free. Rhonabwy, true to this word, doesn't pursue them, though he has left them with a little something to remember him by (see *The Songbird* and *Picking Up the Pieces* for details).

The runners can use part of their five-minute head start to prepare a trap or ambush for their pursuers, laying in wait. Unfortunately, unless they've already discovered and disabled the tracking device, an ambush will likely fail since the hunters will know almost exactly where the runners are.

The main advantage the runners have in a direct confrontation is that their opponents don't work especially well together as a team. Branwen and Volk try to look out for their fellow hunters, but the rest are rather disdainful and probably won't come to each other's aid. The hunters generally lack powerful weapons and high-tech equipment, though they do have paranormal abilities and magic on their side. The hunters also have their vulnerabilities that the runners may be able to exploit.

If a fight with the shadowrunners is going very badly for the hunters, they will withdraw. Branwen and the naga will heal the group's injuries to the best of their ability before setting out in pursuit of their prey once more. The hunters won't give up until the runners escape from the area, even if there's only one of them left. They fear Rhonabwy more than death itself.

Negotiating with the Hunters

The characters may try negotiating with the hunters in order to get out of their situation. This approach isn't likely to work, though it might buy the runners a little time to set up an ambush or something else. The runners don't have anything that the hunters want and they're not likely to intimidate or bully them (or sway them through charm). The hunters have no mercy or compassion for the shadowrunners. They're doing a job for Rhonabwy, and they know that he will not be pleased if they don't do it well. It's doubtful the runners have anything that can equal that.

One tactic that might at least keep the hunters from attacking briefly is if the runners pretend they want to surrender or negotiate terms. Branwen would like to be able to bring the runners back alive and in disgrace for Rhonabwy to play with again, so she'll try and take them prisoner if they surrender. This might lure some of the hunters out into the open or even into a trap or ambush set by the shadowrunners.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Don't forget about the conditions the runners are dealing with: it's the middle of the night and there are not light sources apart from the stars, a sliver of moon and whatever the runners have with them. They're on unfamiliar terrain, which is mostly open, rolling plains but there may be gullies, slopes, and similar hazards. There's also the possibility of the runners encountering some of the local wildlife apart from Rhonabwy's hunters. Gamemasters are encouraged to make creative use of the *Critters* sourcebook as needed. (Don't forget that the runners have no way of knowing whether a creature they encounter was sent by the dragon or not.)

As mentioned in *Into the Dragon's Lair*, the runners may also have to deal with adverse weather. A thick mist can make it easy to get lost or stumble into a natural hazard, as well as concealing foes for ambushes and such. A driving rain can turn large areas into thick mires that slow the runners down, while melees in the mud can cause weapons to jam. Winter weather means a layer of snow on the ground (which leaves clear tracks) and the possibility of the runners suffering from exposure if they don't have the proper cold weather gear.

Another environmental condition the shadowrunners might have to deal with is background count (p. 83, *MIT*). The adventure assumes that the area outside of Rhonabwy's lair is relatively "clean" of such astral phenomena, but you can include a background count to make things a little (or a lot) more difficult for the magicians in the group. You can also make the background count aspected so that it only affects the runners, but that may prove too much of a disadvantage unless the characters have some serious magical skill and power backing them up.

In addition to the problem of the tracking signal in the Songbird's cage, there's also the potential problem posed by the Songbird itself. It may decide to sing at particularly inopportune times, giving away the runners' position or spoiling an ambush, for example. The runners also have to be careful not to damage it. Since Rhonabwy's hunters will also take care to



avoid damaging the Songbird, the runners may be able to use that to their advantage, though they won't be able to hold the Songbird "hostage" to get the hunters to back off. If it comes to that, the hunters will attack regardless.

If the runners manage to escape the hunters and reach the pick-up point and you want to extend things, have the hunters stage an ambush. The naga can strike the tilt-rotor with a fireball, sending it crashing to the ground in a flaming wreck, or Branwen (in her dracoform) can swoop in and either manabolt the pilot or simply attack the vehicle and damage it so that it crashes. Suddenly, the runners' salvation lies in ruins and they have to turn and face Rhonabwy's hunters or travel another few dozen kilometers overland to escape them. Don't snatch victory away from the runners like this unless they've had an easy time of it or they've underestimated their opponents.

DEBUGGING

It's certainly possible that a player will come up with some way to bend the rules or a brilliant idea for dealing with Rhonabwy's hunters that isn't covered in the above material. If so, reward them with a successful escape and perhaps an additional point of Karma for their cleverness.

If the hunters are too strong for the runners, feel free to reduce some of their abilities or even remove one or more hunters from the group altogether. Branwen and Volk should be the last to go, and a small group of runners may face the two of them alone. You can also substitute other hunters for the ones given in *Cast of Shadows*. The *Critters* sourcebook offers a number of possibilities.

On the other hand, if the runners annihilate the hunters right away, you can have some of them withdraw and come at the runners later (perhaps ambushing them at the pick-up point when the runners think they're home free). Rhonabwy can also send other hunters after the shadowrunners. If it's clear that the hunters are no match for the player characters, feel free to beef up their statistics or add a few more to the group. You may want to make Branwen an initiate if there are multiple initiates among the player characters.

If none of the players think to check the Songbird and its cage for possible dangers, you can drop small hints that may encourage them to do so, like "you don't know how they keep finding you" or "they're following with unerring accuracy." Still, it's up to the players to figure things out. You don't have to help them too much.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

IT'S A WRAP

Once the runners escape from Rhonabwy's hunters, they're picked up by a tilt-rotor for transport back to Celedyr's lair. Mr. Radek awaits them on board with a perfect (non-magical) replica of the Songbird for them to deliver to Celedyr. If the runners aren't careful, however, they may be literally "picking up the pieces" at the end of the adventure, or they could be in pieces—little ones scattered all over the place.

If the runners found and dealt with the explosives concealed in the Songbird's cage (or if they simply discarded the cage) at some point during the adventure, then it's smooth sailing once they escape Rhonabwy's domain. Mr. Radek takes the Songbird into his custody and the runners turn the fake over to Celedyr, who is pleased with their work and pays them the agreed amount. He also sees to their transportation back home or wherever else it is that they want to go. When Celedyr discovers that the Songbird is a fake, he assumes that the shadowrunners were duped by Rhonabwy and chalks it up to another move in the Rite of Succession.

If the characters did not discover the explosives, you have two choices: first, you can have Rhonabwy set them off as the runners are escaping his domain: damaging (likely destroying) their transportation and probably killing the characters as well. Second, you can wait until the shadowrunners get back to Caerleon before the explosive goes off, destroying the tilt-rotor and apparently killing Mr. Radek. If either happens, then Hestaby's plan isn't quite as successful as she'd hoped.

If Branwen survived the adventure, the runners may encounter her again, still in Rhonabwy's service. In fact, the dragon may be sufficiently impressed by the shadowrunners' performance that he hires them for a future job after the Rite of Succession is settled (or even before then, if you prefer).

AWARDING KARMA

Award individual Karma according to the guidelines on p. 244, SR3. Award Karma to each team member based on the following requirements:

Surviving the run	1
Reaching the Songbird successfully	1
Successfully dealing with Rhonabwy's hunters	1
Discovering the explosives in time	1

LEGWORK

The runners have few opportunities for legwork in this adventure, mainly after their initial meeting about the run in Caerleon (and even then only via the Matrix). If the runners try to track down additional information on Celedyr, Rhonabwy, Transys Neuronet or some other factor in the adventure, have them make the appropriate Etiquette Test, with a target number of 4 for fairly routine information, 6 for more obscure data. Apart from the fact that the Silver Songbird appears in Dunkelzahn's will (a fact that a Computer (4) Test can reveal), the runners won't find any data on it. Use the material given elsewhere in this adventure if the characters do some information gathering before their run.

CAST OF SHADOWS

Apart from the dragons Celedyr and Rhonabwy (described in the *Introduction*) the main characters in this adventure are the various paranormal creatures that make up Rhonabwy's wild hunt. Gamemasters with access to the *Critters* sourcebook should feel free to modify this roster as desired to suit the player characters and the campaign.

BRANWEN (DRAKE)

Branwen is a drake (see pp. 72–80, *Threats 2*, for more information). She can assume one of two forms: a female elf with white hair and green eyes or a small western dragon (about 3 meters in length) with ivory-colored scales. In elven form, Branwen usually wears armor and carries whatever equipment is appropriate to the situation. She does not use this gear in draconic form, and in fact some of it may get destroyed during the transformation process. It takes an Exclusive Complex Action for Branwen to change form.

Branwen is Rhonabwy's trusted agent and certainly the smartest hunter that the runners face. She can coordinate the efforts of the other hunters to a limited degree (they know better than to disobey her). She's loyal to Rhonabwy, though she won't be quick to sacrifice herself for him. Once she assumes draconic form, she'll most likely stay that way during the hunt unless she needs to use her humanoid abilities. She can use Sorcery in either form and she'll likely provide spell defense for those other hunters that need it.

B 3 (7/6) **Q** 4 (5 x 4) **S** 4 (8) **C** 4 **I** 4 **W** 5 **E** 6Z **M** 6 **R** 4 (5)

INIT: 4 + 1D6, Drake Form: 5 + 2D6, Astral INIT: 26 + 1D6

Pools: Astral Combat 6, Combat 6 (7), Spell 5

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 4/4

Attacks: 4M Stun (8M, +1 Reach in Dracoform)

Powers (Drake form only): Astral Armor, Enhanced Senses (Wide-Band Hearing, Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Innate Spell (Flamethrower).

Skills: Athletics 4, Aura Reading 4, Biotech 4, Conjuring 3, Etiquette 3 (Draconic 5), Negotiation 3, Pistols 5, Sorcery 5, Stealth 4, Unarmed Combat 5

Spells: Detect Life 4, Firewall 5, Improved Invisibility 4, Magic Fingers 3, Manabolt 5, Resist Pain 5, Stealth 4, Treat 4

Weapons: Morrissey Alta [HP, SA, 9M, 12 (c) w/integral laser sight]

Range (TN): 0–5 (3), 6–20 (4), 21–40 (5), 41–60 (8)

Armor: Armor Jacket [5/3]

Notes: The attributes in parentheses are Branwen's attributes in drake form.

ANDRES (CENTAUR)

Andres (the name others call him—his true name sounds more like a series of grunts and whinnies) is the stallion of a small herd of centaurs that live on Rhonabwy's land. Andres and the other males of the herd help patrol the area and keep intruders away. The centaur tends to be aggressive and straightforward, usually charging at opponents with his lance to spear them or trampling them underfoot. Andres understands some simple words in Welsh but no English (or any other language) so he's difficult to communicate with at best. His Magic Sense power allows him to detect the presence of characters using or sustaining some sort of magic and his Search power makes him an excellent tracker.



B 10 **Q** 4 x 5 **S** 7 **C** — **I** 3/5 **W** 4 **E** 6 **M** — **R** 4

INIT: 4+ 2D6

Pools: Combat 6

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 3/4

Attacks: 6S (trample), +1 Reach

Powers: Enhanced Senses (Low-Light Vision, Thermographic Vision), Magic Sense, Search

Skills: Athletics 4, Pole Arms 4 (Lance 6), Stealth 3, Unarmed Combat 4 (Trample 5)

Weapons: Lance [11L, +2 Reach]

Armor: Armor vest [2/1]

EUROPEAN GARGOYLE

The gargoyle that Rhonabwy chooses for the hunt is one of several that lairs in his domain. It's only barely intelligent by human standards, but it is capable of understanding and following orders from the great dragon, especially when they apply to hunting down intruders or other prey. Like most gargoyles, it's quite adept at remaining utterly still until it attacks its prey. It will typically try to swoop down, stun prey with its noxious breath, then fly off with it or maul it. It may also try to drop prey that it can carry from a height (assume the gargoyle can lift characters with a Body rating of 4 or less).

B **Q** **S** **C** **I** **W** **E** **M** **R**
10/9 5 x 3 8 (14) — 2/5 5 6 — 4

INIT: 4+ 2D6

Pools: Combat 7

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 1/4

Attacks: 11S (17S)

Powers: Concealment (Personal), Enhanced Physical Attributes (Strength, once per day for 6D6 Combat Turns), Hardened Armor, Noxious Breath

Weaknesses: Allergy (Sunlight, Nuisance), Vulnerability (Iron)

Notes: Quickness multiplier while flying is 4.

KLUDDE

A kludde is a shapeshifter that is able to assume three forms: a crow, a black cat and a wolf-like canine. It's not particularly intelligent, but this kludde is well trained and cunning. Rhonabwy uses it as a spy and guard beast and it obeys his mental commands. It typically stalks prey in avian form, scouting out an area and then attacking in canine form. Its feline form is used mostly for stealth and ground surveillance. The kludde obeys Branwen's commands unless it is in combat, in which case it will only break off if it is badly wounded (a Serious wound) or its opponents are dead or flee.

Avian Form

B **Q** **S** **C** **I** **W** **E** **M** **R**
3 6 x 3 2 — 2/4 6 7Z — 4

INIT: 4+ 3D6

Pools: Combat 8

Attacks: 6L, -1 Reach

Canine Form

B **Q** **S** **C** **I** **W** **E** **M** **R**
6 6 x 6 4 — 2/4 6 7Z — 4

INIT: 4 + 3D6

Pools: Combat 8

Attacks: 5M

Feline Form

B **Q** **S** **C** **I** **W** **E** **M** **R**
5 6 x 4 2 — 2/4 6 7Z — 4

INIT: 4 + 3D6

Pools: Combat 7

Attacks: 4L, -1 Reach

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 1/3

Powers: Blindness, Desire Reflection, Fear (Canine Form Only), Hypnotic Song (Avian Form Only), Magic Sense, Magical Guard (Self Only), Psychokinesis

Weaknesses: Allergy (Sunlight, Nuisance)

Notes: Quickness multiplier while flying in avian form is 6.

NAGA

The naga that joins the hunt is a fairly recent acquisition for Rhonabwy, and the dragon is curious to see how she will perform as a hunter. The Welsh countryside is not a naga's normal

habitat, but her mottled green-brown coloration does blend well with the terrain. So long as it isn't too cold, the naga will join the hunt. (If you choose to have the adventure take place in late fall or winter, choose another suitable critter to replace her.) This naga knows a number of spells and uses them to her best advantage. She prefers to lay ambushes for her prey, allowing her the opportunity to get close enough to grapple and use her venomous bite.

B **Q** **S** **C** **I** **W** **E** **M** **R**
5/1 2 x 3 6 3 3 5 8Z 8 4

INIT: 4 + 1D6

Pools: Combat 5, Spell 5

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 3/4

Attacks: 5M, -1 Reach

Powers: Guard, Magical Skills (Sorcery 6), Venom (8S damage)

Spells: Alter Temperature 4, Blindness 6, Camouflage 4, Detect Enemies 4, Double Image 6, Fireball 5, Heal 5, Mist 4, Oxygenate 3, Stunball 4

VOLK (WOLF SHAPESHIFTER)

Volk is a mature wolf shapeshifter who works for Rhonabwy. He and Branwen have similar roles, both being able to pass as normal people in the outside world, allowing them to serve as their master's eyes and ears. Volk is an excellent tracker and guide in either of his forms, and he spends most of his time guarding the dragon's domain and living in the wilderness unless Rhonabwy needs his services. Since clothing and other accoutrements don't change with him, Volk doesn't bother with such things unless he's planning on leaving the area on a mission of some sort. During the hunt he'll remain in wolf form unless there's a need to assume his humanoid shape: a hairy, human-looking man with dark hair and a full beard. Volk speaks and understands English and Welsh, though he cannot speak in wolf form.

Human Form

B **Q** **S** **C** **I** **W** **E** **M** **R**
5 5 5 5 3 5 8Z — 4

INIT: 4 + 1D6

Pools: Combat 6

Attacks: 5M Stun

Wolf Form

B **Q** **S** **C** **I** **W** **E** **M** **R**
7 6 x 5 6 5 3/5 5 8Z — 4

INIT: 4 + 2D6

Pools: Combat 8

Attacks: 8M

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 4/4

Powers: Enhanced Physical Attributes (in animal form), Regeneration

Weaknesses: Allergy (Silver, Moderate), Vulnerability (Silver)

Skills: Athletics 4 (Running 6), Clubs 4, Intimidation 5, Pistols 4, Stealth 6 (Tracking 8), Unarmed Combat 5

REST

To Aden, I leave the Shroud of Shadows. May its shade cool the heat of your desert home as well as the tempers that flare around it.

—From the *Last Will and Testament of Dunkelzahn*

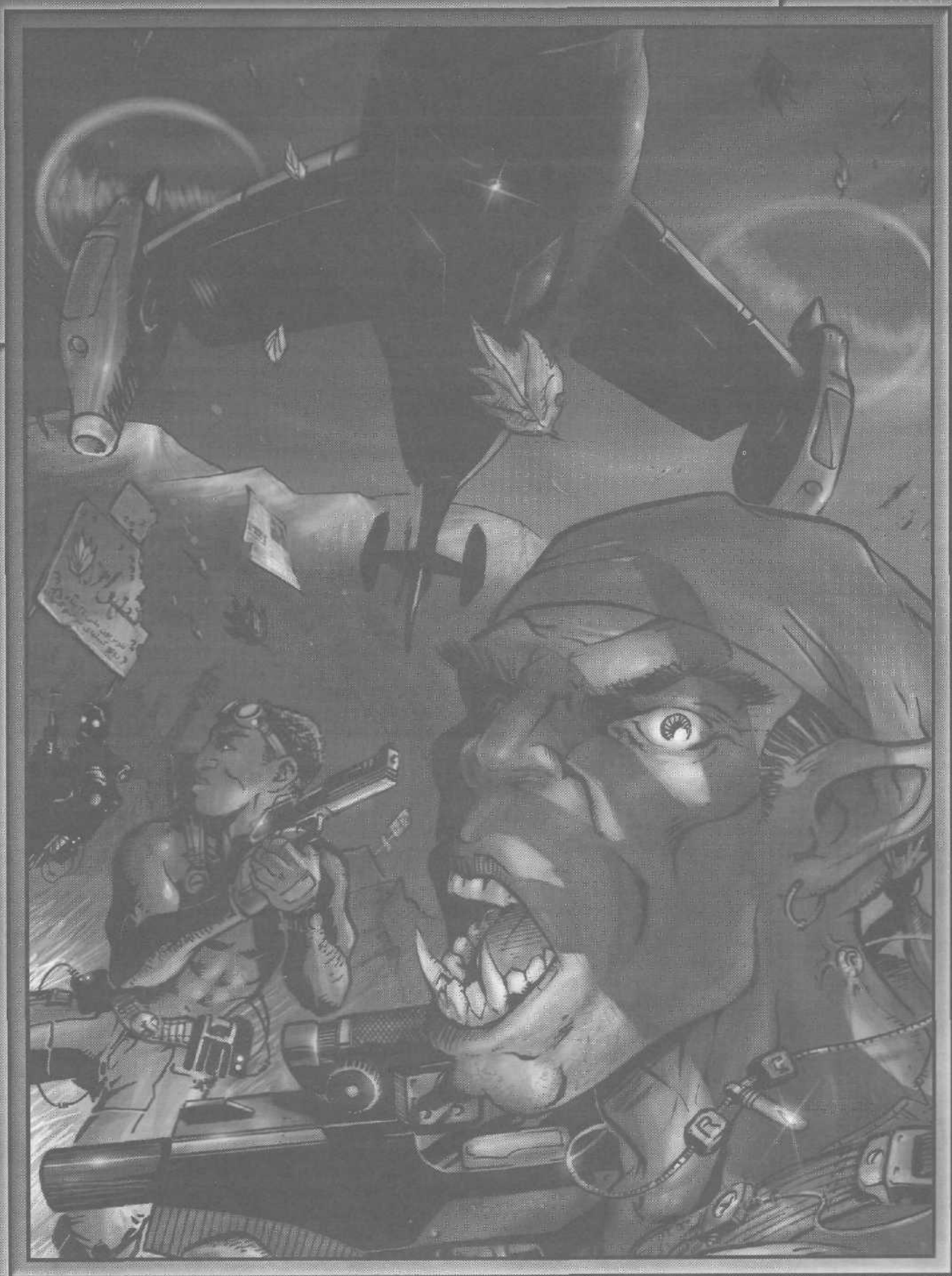
PREPARING TO PLAY

In *Rest*, the shadowrunners sent into a war-zone, the ruins of the Middle Eastern city of Tehran, to recover another magical artifact left to one of the great dragons by Dunkelzahn. This time, however, the item's "owner" isn't actually interested in having it, only in making sure that no one else does either. The ruins of Tehran are filled with dangers of their own, including ghouls and shedim. There are also mercenary forces at work in the city being manipulated by a terrible spirit known as a wraith, which feeds on violence and death and fears the item the characters have been sent to recover. The shadowrunners have to overcome these obstacles, but Hestaby has made sure to stack the deck a little. In the end, win or lose, she comes out ahead.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

Mr. Radek (the shadowrunners' contact throughout *Survival of the Fittest*) hires the team to go into the ruins of Tehran in the Middle East; a dangerous area at the best of times, but particularly so since the passing of Halley's Comet. They are to find the ruins of a particular mosque and acquire an item that is concealed within it. The item in question is a piece of black, silken material. It is the so-called "Shroud of Shadows" Dunkelzahn left to the great dragon Aden in his will, though Radek doesn't tell the runners that. He gives the runners instructions on how to find the mosque and the item and arranges transportation to and from the mission site.

The run is complicated by several factors. The ruins are inhabited by various paranormal creatures, particularly ghosts, ghouls and shedim spirits inhabiting the bodies of the dead. These creatures prey on anyone who comes to the ruins and will certainly consider the player characters as potential targets. There are other factions at work in the ruined city, which may see the shadowrunners as potential allies, enemies, pawns or all three. Ghosts of the city's former inhabitants war against the shedim that possess their former bodies. Followers of the Islamic prophet Badr al Din Ibn Eisa are working to reclaim the ruins from the "forces





of evil" there. They consider the mosque that the runners want to loot to be holy ground, and will take a dim view of any such sacrilege. The shadowrunners are also not the only ones looking for the Shroud of Shadows, and have to deal with mercenary rivals.

The greatest challenge, however, comes from the presence of a powerful spirit called a wraith in the ruins, a creature that feeds on violence and death. It is purposefully encouraging conflict and tries to draw the runners into its web of violence so that it can grow stronger. The Shroud holds the key to defeating the wraith, but the runners have to find it and learn about its powers before they can use it.

Finally, there's the matter of the Shroud's proper owner. Aden senses any interference with the Shroud's resting-place and comes to investigate personally. The runners must confront a great dragon and either find a way to hold on to the Shroud or give it over to Aden. Fortunately, Hestaby has planned for such an encounter.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The structure of *Rest* is more freeform than the other adventures in this book. The adventure sets up the major factions in the ruined city of Tehran and outlines some possible encounters for the shadowrunners. The rest is largely up to the players and how they decide to tackle the task that's given to them and deal with the opposition. The presence of the wraith may actually lead the shadowrunners to search for non-violent solutions to their problems. Otherwise, they end up having to deal with a very powerful and malevolent spirit before the adventure is done. The more power they deny the wraith, the easier it will be to deal with it eventually.

Gamemasters should read through the entire adventure carefully, noting the major factions and their agendas. You may want to look through the *Cast of Shadows* section before reading the adventure, to get an overview of the major players and their plans and abilities.

The *Year of the Comet* and *Target: Awakened Lands* sourcebooks provide useful background information for this adventure, but they are not necessary to run it. Likewise, gamemasters may find the advanced magic rules in *Magic in the Shadows* useful in running *Rest*, particularly the section on free spirits (pp. 113–118).

BAD OMENS

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The runners arrive near Tehran to start their mission. Outside the city they encounter a madman who attacks them. They also get their first look at the wraith, which attaches itself to the runners in search of new prey.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Becoming a shadowrunner promises many things. Unfortunately a long and safe life isn't one of them. One of the things you can be sure of as a shadowrunner, however, is that you're going to see some of the world's most interesting—and dangerous—places. That's certainly true now.

You're on board an Ares-made tilt-rotor, a TR-55, flying nape-of-the-Earth over the mountainous terrain of northern Iran. You're headed for the ruins of the city of Tehran, destroyed over forty years ago by the great dragon Aden. Apparently the Ayatollah of the city had the poor judgment to declare a holy war against the Awakened throughout the world. In response, Aden destroyed large parts of the city and drove its people away. Tehran was never rebuilt, considered cursed by many. The ruins have since become home to all sorts of outcasts and, ironically, Awakened creatures, particularly scavengers like ghouls and harpies. Needless to say, Tehran's tourist industry (such as it was) dropped off considerably.

You didn't figure there was much in the forty year-old ruins of a Middle East city to interest anyone, but your employer apparently found something. Radek hired you to locate the ruins of a mosque and find a particular item there. It's a piece of filmy black cloth, about three meters square, embroidered with silver thread. According to Radek, it's hidden beneath a stone in the center of the mosque. Should be simple enough, provided that the various inhabitants of the ruins—both human and otherwise—don't give you too much trouble. If they do, well, that's why Radek sent shadowrunners to be his errand boys.

The pilot gives you the high sign; you're coming up on the drop-off point. You've got until dawn, just under ten hours from now, to recover the target and get back to the landing zone for pick up. If you miss it, you're going to be spending another night in Tehran, and that's definitely one too many.

The drop off is smooth, no problems, and soon you're on your way to the city a short distance away. The tilt-rotor rises back up into the sky behind you, its lights off until it reaches a safe distance, and heads away. Well, the sooner you get where you're going, the sooner it'll be over and you can start spending your hard-earned nuyen.

You're on the outskirts of the city when you spot him, a man crouching behind a half-fallen wall. Unfortunately, he seems to spot you at the same time. With a barely articulate scream, he leaps out from behind the wall and charges you, firing an antiquated rifle at you. Old or not, it still works!

HOOKS

Start the action right away with the runners arriving at the site of their mission and being attacked by some crazy man. The appearance of the wraith (much less the effect it has on them) should have the runners concerned. Create a sense of urgency about the characters' mission and the fact that they have limited time to complete it. The scenario should feel tense with things happening fast.

BEHIND THE SCENES

This scenario starts off in the middle of things, assuming the runners accepted the job from Radek. If that's not the style of your group, feel free to start things off with a meeting between the shadowrunners and Radek to discuss the specifics of the run. You can use the scenario *A Simple Run, Minimal Complications* from *Knowledge* (p. 20) as a guideline on how to set things up. Radek offers the team 200,000¥ each for the

mission with transportation and other such expenses covered by the client (and arranged through Radek). Handle negotiations and such as you see fit.

The runners have no significant trouble getting to their destination, though you can feel free to run a few additional encounters between when the runners leave home and when they arrive outside of Tehran, if you'd like. The shadowrunners might run into trouble with customs or have to run a border or two to get where they're going. You may also want to have the characters handle their own transportation, especially if one of them is an experienced pilot or smuggler, in which case you can extend the adventure to accommodate it.

When the runners are not far outside of Tehran, a man suddenly attacks them as described in *Tell It to Them Straight*. He's a former mercenary that's now a near-crazed puppet of the wraith (see *Cast of Shadows* for more information). The wraith has already used him as much as it can, so it's looking for more suitable prey and has spotted the player characters.

Mad Merc

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
4	3 (5)	5 (7)	2	3	3	1.5	—	4 (6)

INIT: 4 (6) + 1D6 (2D6)

Dice Pools: Combat 5

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 0/4

Skills: Athletics 3, Car 3, Cyber-Implant Combat 5, Pistols 5, Rifles 5, Stealth 3

Cyberware: Cybereyes (Low-Light and Thermal), Muscle Replacement 2, Spur (Retractable), Wired Reflexes 1

Armor: Armor jacket [5/3]

Weapons: Ares Predator [HP, SA, 9M, 15 (c)]

Range (TN): 0–5 (4), 6–20 (5), 21–40 (6), 41–60 (9)

AK-97 [AR, SA/BF/FA, 8M, 38 (c)]

Range (TN): 0–50 (2), 51–150 (3), 151–350 (4), 351–550 (7)

First Encounter

When the madman attacks the characters, the wraith materializes in some nearby ruins behind them. For details on the wraith's abilities, see p. 102. The wraith starts the adventure with a Force of 3 and a Spirit Energy of 1 (see statistics below). It uses its Influence power on one of the runners, encouraging that character to attack and kill the man. If successful, the wraith drains a point from that character's Karma, then fades back into the astral plane.

The affected character feels a chill from the Karma tap. Don't tell the player exactly what happened, only that the character loses a point of Karma. The situation should be mysterious and eerie. You may mention that the character felt almost overwhelmed by feelings of rage and violence toward their attacker.

Any shadowrunner looking around during that attack can make a Perception (8) Test to spot the wraith lurking about ten meters away. The character sees a shadowy, cloaked shape with glowing violet eyes. If the character is using Astral Perception, the target number to spot the wraith is only a 6. If the wraith is threatened, it drops its materialization and returns to astral form. If a character tries to engage it in astral

combat, it will fade back to its home metaplane, disappearing from the ethereal plane altogether and returning to plague the runners later.

The Wraith

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
8	10	4	4	4	4	(4)A	—	5

INIT: 15 + 1D6, Astral INIT: 25 + 1D6

Pools: Astral Combat 6, Combat 9

Attack: 4M Stun or Powers

Force/Spirit Energy: 3/1

Powers: Empathy, Fear, Influence, Karma Tap (see p. 102), Magic Resistance, Magic Sense, Materialization

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

While the merc is a fairly capable opponent, he's outnumbered by the shadowrunners and no longer capable of much in the way of tactical thinking (though he still possesses a kind of animal cunning). The shadowrunners should be able to deal with him fairly easily.

If you want to make things more challenging, have a group of the wraith's former victims attack the runners. Give them abilities similar to or slightly less than the characters and have them try to ambush them as they approach Tehran. This allows the wraith to try and influence more than one of the characters (one each action the wraith has). It can also drain Karma from more than one character, if the shadowrunners fight back against their opponents (if they don't, they're as good as dead). In this way, the entire group may end up affected by the wraith immediately, making it more of a concern.

DEBUGGING

If the shadowrunners manage to knockout or otherwise disable the merc without injuring or killing him, they escape the wraith's power for the time being, but it doesn't give up immediately. They also don't do the merc any favors, since he's completely insane. The runners can't reason with him or get anything useful out of him. When he regains consciousness, he tries to attack them again and keeps doing so until he's put down. The characters will either have to kill him or leave him behind (which makes him easy prey for the other critters in the area).

If the wraith is weak enough that the runners may be able to destroy it in one shot, boost its Force to make it a credible threat, though not so much that the runners will be completely unable to resist its power. Remember that the wraith is likely to increase in power during the adventure. If it's too overwhelmingly powerful toward the end, the runners may be unable to beat it.

If the runners do end up disrupting or destroying the wraith, you can either have another one show up, drawn to the ongoing violence in the city, or you can ignore the wraith's role in the later scenarios. After all, there's more than enough going on in Tehran to cause the runners problems without the wraith's presence. The factions in the city already fight among themselves without any encouragement. The wraith is merely taking advantage of the ongoing violence.



CITY OF SHADOWS

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The shadowrunners reach Tehran and have to deal with the various factions at war in the city along with the manipulations of the wraith to reach the Shroud's resting-place.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Tehran must have been quite the city, once. The ruins sprawl out in all directions as far as the eye can see across the mountainous plateau. Some of the buildings are still intact even after forty years of neglect, but many others are just skeletal shells or piles of rubble. There's still evidence of fires that raged unchecked through parts of the city, leaving nothing but blacked ruins and pieces of building frameworks poking into the sky. The remaining streets are littered with rubble and the rusting hulks of old automobiles and other vehicles, stripped of anything useful years ago.

Though the ruined streets are dark and quiet, you can't escape the feeling that you're being watched from the shadowy corners, empty doorways and windows that loom all around like blank, staring eyes. A cry sounds in the distance. It might be human or something else entirely, you're not sure. Whatever it is, it sounds like it's hunting.

HOOKS

This is the free-form scenario in the adventure. The runners have to get from the outskirts of Tehran to the mosque where the Shroud is hidden. Along the way they're likely to encounter any number of different factions in the ruined city and possibly become entangled in their affairs. Maintain the feeling that Tehran is a haunted and dangerous place that the runners would do well to vacate as quickly as possible.

BEHIND THE SCENES

A number of different things can happen as the runners make their way toward their goal. Read through this section and consider the possibilities. Feel free to mix and match them as desired to suit the group and the adventure. Guidelines are provided here for possible conflicts, along with information in *Cast of Shadows* on the NPCs the runners can encounter.

The Wraith

First and foremost, the wraith continues to dog the shadowrunners' steps. It appears any time there is an opportunity for violence, using its powers to inflame both sides, trying to instigate conflict so that it can drain Karma from those involved. It follows the runners in astral space, maintaining its distance, watching them from behind ruins, out of windows and so forth. Any time the runners directly threaten it, it vanishes only to return a short while later.

This naturally complicates the runners' efforts to deal with others they encounter in the adventure. The wraith tries to disrupt any peaceful negotiations and steer the characters toward confrontation. It also forces the issue by influencing others to attack the runners so they will have to fight back. The more they fight, the stronger the wraith gets, and the more Karma the runners lose.

The wraith starts out with the statistics given in *Bad Omens* and uses the Karma that it reaps as follows. With the first 2 points of Karma, it raises its Spirit Energy from 1 to 2. With its next 3 points of

Karma, it raises its Spirit Energy from 2 to 3. Then it accumulates Karma until it has 12 points. At that point, it raises its Force to 4, lowering its Spirit Energy to 2 in the process. Then 3 more points of Karma to raise its Spirit Energy back to 3, followed by 4 more to get to Spirit Energy 4. Then it must accumulate 15 Karma to raise itself to Force to 5 (lowering Spirit Energy back to 3), ad infinitum. For details on the process of increasing Spirit Energy and Force, see p. 116 of *Magic in the Shadows*.

Violence in the Streets

The shadowrunners can encounter any number of dangerous creatures on their way through the city. The most likely encounters are packs of devil rats, ghouls or harpies (*Critters*, pp. 25, 30, and 32, respectively). The wraith only benefits from conflicts with the ghouls (since the other critters are non-intelligent). The runners may also run into wandering shedim (see *Cast of Shadows*), which attack in order to kill the runners and inhabit their bodies. The wraith does benefit from the runners attacking and killing the shedim and will encourage this. An encounter with the shedim should be as horrific as possible, keeping in mind that the spirits are animating the bodies of long-dead victims of violence in Tehran, including women and possibly children as well.

Finally, the shadowrunners might encounter living people in the ruins, refugees hiding out there and surviving as best they can. They're normally not likely to attack a clearly well-armed group like the shadowrunners, but the wraith may influence them to do so. Most of these poor squatters have average ability scores and minimal skills (ratings of 2 or 3). They're armed with crude clubs or knives for the most part. The real challenge for the shadowrunners is to deal with them without giving the wraith the bloodbath that it wants.

A Mother's Plea

At some point, the runners may encounter the ghost of Farah Al-Pasha (see *Cast of Shadows*). If there is an opportunity, she attempts to possess one of the runners. Otherwise, she may manifest to them and plead (first in Arabic, then in broken English) for their aid in destroying the shedim that have desecrated her body and those of many other ghosts in the ruins. She follows the runners, alternately pleading for their aid and heaping curses upon them until they either aid her or drive her away. If she sees an opportunity to possess one of the runners, she does so. Farah can lead the runners to the shedim if they agree to help. Of course, a fight with the shedim will attract the attention of the wraith as well.

The Cause of the Righteous

Musa Muqla and his followers (see *Cast of Shadows*) are in the process of rooting out evil spirits in the ruins, particularly in the city's former holy places. The characters may run across the religious leader while on their way to the mosque or Muqla can show up during a conflict with other forces (like a group of shedim). He and his followers will aid the shadowrunners if they are fighting against an obviously inhuman foe. Muqla will

then want to know who the runners are and what they are doing in Tehran. He has no quarrel with them, though he will be cold and disdainful toward the Awakened in the group. If he learns the runners are going to the mosque, he will insist on going with them, which may lead to problems once the characters find the Shroud of Shadows.

The wraith may try to create conflict between the missionaries and the shadowrunners, heightening tensions, prejudices and tempers. This may cause a shaky alliance to turn to violence before the runners even reach the mosque.

Professional Rivalry

Finally, there is Mack Donelley and his team of mercenaries (see *Cast of Shadows*), who are after the same goal as the shadowrunners. Donelley and his men can show up to help the runners out of a conflict with another faction and offer to help them with their objective in exchange for transportation out of the area. This is a lie, of course, Donelley has a means of transportation. He just wants to see what the shadowrunners are up to. Again, the wraith will try to create conflict between the two groups, turning them against each other even before they realize that they're rivals for the same prize. Alternately, you can wait and have the mercenaries show up once the runners reach the mosque.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

How easy or difficult this scenario is for the shadowrunners is largely up to you. It can be a simple fight with some shedim, ghouls or other critters on the way to the mosque, or it can be a complex series of encounters with different factions, negotiating along the way and trying to keep the wraith from spoiling everything by inciting conflict and sowing the seeds of dissent.

One way to increase the tension of the scenario is to focus the wraith's efforts on creating conflict within the team instead of (or in addition to) conflict with others. The wraith can heighten feelings of paranoia, anger and doubt within the shadowrunners that make them turn against their teammates. You can describe to the players the suspicious activities of other characters. This can be a real roleplaying challenge and it isn't suited to all groups of players, so handle it carefully.

Finally, to escalate the threat posed by the wraith, you can grant it a new power each time it manages to raise its Force. Some possibilities include: confusion, shadow cloak or psychokinesis.

DEBUGGING

If the players are completely confounded with how to deal with the wraith and violence is their only solution to the other challenges they face, then the wraith may become too powerful too quickly. In this case you can either limit the wraith's presence or limit the number of encounters the shadowrunners face before they reach the mosque (and the Shroud, which they can use to overcome the wraith). On the other hand, as the runners' Karma gets sucked away, the tension and need to complete their run will grow.



If the runners are frightened off and decide to scrub the mission, allow them to escape (albeit without any chance of regaining the Karma they have lost). Musa Muqla can provide the characters with some guidance on dealing with the wraith, if necessary, suggesting that destroying the creature will end its curse on them. He will certainly encourage them to do so and can help give them hope, if you want to encourage the players to continue.

MOSQUE OF THE SHROUD

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The characters reach the ruined mosque where the Shroud of Shadows is concealed. They only have to claim it and deal with the threat of the wraith (and anyone else who wants to take the Shroud from them).

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The mosque was probably once quite impressive. Even now there's a certain majesty to it, but there's also considerable damage to its outside walls and roof, allowing the elements to do their work in wearing down the building's structure. Rubble is scattered across the tile floor and a few of the support columns have collapsed, along with portions of the ceiling. Much of the tile and stonework is cracked and worn. Small creatures scuttle out of the way as you step over the debris, your feet crunching on the broken glass and loose stones on the floor.

Despite the mosque's condition, there's still a strange feeling of serenity and peace here, almost an aura of holiness about the place. You can all sense it as you enter and it grows stronger as you move further inside.

HOOKS

Start with desolation combined with peace and calm, then change over to conflict as the runners have to deal with their various adversaries in order to secure the Shroud and make their way out of the city. This scenario should be the resolution of the conflicts started in *City of Shadows*.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Once the runners reach the mosque, they don't have any trouble finding the Shroud. It's hidden in a hollow space beneath one of the heavy floor tiles in the main chamber. All that's needed is a Strength (4) Test to move the tile out of the way. Before the shadowrunners can claim the Shroud, however, other forces should intervene.

How this scene is run is largely up to you, based on what happened in *City of Shadows*. If the wraith is still dogging the characters' steps, then it makes a last play for dominating them, either trying to turn the runners against each other or using available NPCs as its pawns. It needs to create further conflict so it can continue to feed and grow in power. Keep in mind that the wraith can only use Influence or Empathy on one character at a time, which will somewhat limit its power, though it does its best to create maximum chaos and confusion.

The other opposition in this scenario is either Mack Donelley (and his mercenaries) or Musa Muqla (and his missionaries), perhaps even both. If the runners teamed up with one faction, the other can show up. The wraith will try to sow dissent between all of them. The other factions aren't going to let the runners walk away with the Shroud, and will do their very best to claim it for themselves.

A likely way of running the scenario goes like this: the runners (and any allies they have with them) reach the mosque and get to the hiding place of the Shroud. Before they can claim it (or just after they do), their rivals appear and demand that the shadowrunners stand aside. The wraith begins influencing those present to incite violence and a fight breaks out. Bullets and magic start flying, with mosaics blasting apart and plenty of debris and columns for characters to use for cover. The runners either overcome their opponents, then use the Shroud to destroy the wraith, or they take on the wraith (perhaps convincing their rivals to unite against the common enemy) and destroy it, whereupon the Shroud exerts its influence and allows the runners to negotiate with the NPCs rather than having to fight them.

Adjust things as you see fit to suit the characters' actions and plans. If the runners completely decimated the opposition in the previous scenario leaving none to confront them now, the wraith tries to turn the runners against each other.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

This encounter is easiest to handle with the runners only dealing with one, maybe two, other factions. To really complicate matters, you can throw in the other factions from *City of Shadows* and the *Cast of Shadows* section, coming in either for or against the shadowrunners. For example, the ghosts and *shedim* might have a showdown in the mosque (and the runners can use the Shroud to help defeat the *shedim* as well). The wraith might influence other people or critters to show up (including ghouls, local squatters or anything else you care to include).

If you want to make things harder on the runners, you can make the mosque a power site (p. 84, *MITS*) aspected against all uses of magic except attempts to dispel or counter magic. Therefore the runners' magical abilities are inhibited, but Musa Muqla's defensive magical abilities are not, making the fight between the runners and their mostly mundane foes more even. You can also give the mercenaries a mage of their own if you want to have more spells and spirits duking it out in the final encounter.

Finally, you can give the Shroud some additional security for the shadowrunners to overcome. Perhaps there is a bound spirit or paranormal critter guarding it, or some kind of high-tech security system or magical barrier that needs to be overcome. Doing this while dealing with the other threats in this scenario can prove quite a challenge.

DEBUGGING

If the opposition is overwhelming the shadowrunners, you can give them some help to even things out. Farah Al-Pasha



(see *Cast of Shadows*) may appear along with some fellow ghosts to aid the runners if they helped her out in *City of Shadows*. Musa Muqla's abilities may also allow him to overcome the powers of the wraith temporarily, turning some of the runners' foes into potential allies against the spirit. Clever players may also be able to arrange alliances against common foes, letting them deal with their rivals one at a time.

The players may not figure out that the Shroud is useful as a weapon against the wraith. This isn't necessarily a problem unless they're having trouble finding another way of dealing with the wraith. If they don't have the Shroud in hand when things start to get ugly and don't make any move to get it, you can always have one of the other factions go for it. Have the players make Perception Tests to notice that the wraith shies away from the Shroud and whoever carries it. As a last resort, you can have an NPC (probably Muqla) figure out that the Shroud has the power to smother such evil spirits and suggest using it in that manner. Keep in mind that whoever touches the Shroud has to make a Willpower (12) Test in order to take violent action (this does not include using the Shroud against spirits like the wraith, nor purely defensive actions like dodging or taking cover).

If the runners lose the Shroud to one of the other factions, you can give them a chance to reclaim it before Aden shows up. If the characters choose to let their rivals take the Shroud for whatever reason, you can assume that Aden reclaims it from them, which doesn't really affect the outcome of the adventure.

A MEETING WITH ADEN

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

Before the shadowrunners leave Tehran with the Shroud they have to deal with the great dragon Aden, who wants them to put the Shroud back where they found it.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

You're on your way out of Tehran and glad to be saying good-bye to the place when a dark shadow passes overhead and banks back toward you, bending sinuously in the air, coiling in on itself like a snake preparing to strike. Its body is at least fifteen meters long, not counting an almost equal length of tail that trails out behind its hind legs. Those legs are tipped with powerful, curving claws like scimitars. Wickedly pointed fangs jut from its mouth. The dragon dives down toward the ground and comes to a stop with surprising speed and grace for something of its size. Its coils move to surround you as its saucer-like eyes look down at you.

"I am Aden," a deep, rumbling voice says in your thoughts. "You have taken something that once belonged to another of my kind. You will return it, or you will die."

HOOKS

The shadowrunners are dealing with a hacked-off great dragon that means business. Whatever triumph they were feeling from getting the Shroud and being almost out of the city should disappear the moment Aden shows up. How the run-

ners handle the dragon's demands determines the success of their mission.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Aden placed certain magical wards to warn him of any attempt to remove or tamper with the Shroud of Shadows or its resting-place, so he has come to see what has happened. It wasn't difficult for him to find the runners on their way out of Tehran, nor should it be overly difficult for him to confront them.

Aden is in something of a conundrum. Technically, he rejects his own right to the Shroud of Shadows, since it was given to him in Dunkelzahn's will rather than properly won during the Rite of Succession. He doesn't consider the Shroud his. It still belongs to Dunkelzahn until it is claimed by another dragon in the proper manner.

Aden isn't going to allow anyone to simply walk in and take the Shroud, though. If he allows the Shroud to be taken, then he loses face for being unable to hold on to it. On the other hand, if he takes the Shroud from the thieves himself, he claims the Shroud as his own, even though he doesn't have a right to it. Therefore, Aden ideally wants the shadowrunners to return the Shroud to its resting place themselves, allowing Aden to remain somewhat uninvolved in the whole matter.

The dragon demands this of the shadowrunners: they will turn around and put the Shroud of Shadows back where they found it, or he will destroy them. The shadowrunners have three possible options: they can fight Aden, they can try to negotiate with him or they can try to escape him.

Fighting

Fighting Aden isn't much of an option. Even if the shadowrunners have close air support or an army of spirits or drones with them, they haven't got much of a chance against the power of a great dragon. Aden shows no mercy to anyone who attacks him, killing them immediately using either his fiery breath or terrible bite. He then reiterates his demand to the remaining runners.

The only real advantage the shadowrunners have in a fight is if they try to use the Shroud of Shadows against Aden. If they can drape the Shroud over the dragon, then even Aden finds his anger and aggression draining away and will find it difficult to attack. The runners can use this opportunity to negotiate or flee. Attacking while Aden is under the Shroud's influence won't do the shadowrunners much good, since its magic doesn't prevent Aden from defending himself and a great dragon is still an incredibly tough target.

Aden will be reluctant to kill the last shadowrunner if he is forced into combat, simply because then there will be no one to return to Shroud to its resting place, forcing Aden to go and find someone else to do it (or do it himself). Astute players may notice Aden's reluctance to wipe out the entire group at once, though shadowrunners fighting a great dragon probably have other concerns on their minds.

Negotiating

To a degree, Aden is bluffing. The rules of the Rite of Succession limit his ability to threaten the shadowrunners, though



they don't necessarily know that. Aden is not allowed to simply attack or kill the runners outright, though he can attack (and even kill) any of the characters who attack him first. So long as the runners don't attack, all Aden can do is threaten and try to negotiate with them. Smart players can definitely use this to their advantage.

Since he has little choice, Aden will negotiate for the return of the Shroud. He will offer the shadowrunners payment in the form of nuyen or other treasures from his hoard, payable once they have done what he asks. Aden doesn't exactly have his credstick on him, so all he can give the characters is his word that they will be paid once the Shroud is safely returned and Aden returns to his lair. The shadowrunners may be able to negotiate some other sort of arrangement. Aden will consider any reasonable proposal. Of course, the runners should keep in mind that returning the Shroud means betraying their employer and the terms of their agreement with Radek, which won't do much for their professional reputations.

In negotiations, Aden is canny about revealing exactly why he wants the runners to return the Shroud and careful not to reveal his own limitations in dealing with them. If the runners call his bluff about killing them, Aden will bluster and threaten, but there isn't much that he can do to the runners directly.

Escaping

The shadowrunners actually have a better chance of escaping from Aden than it appears, since the dragon can't attack them directly. He can, however, take measures to trap them or keep them from escaping, so long as it doesn't involve a direct attack against the characters. Aden could, for example, place a physical barrier spell around the runners to keep them where they are, but can't simply cast a Stunball to knock them all out or use Control Thoughts on them to make them do what he wants. Those things violate the rules of the Rite.

An attempt to escape from Aden becomes a chase scene with the dragon putting obstacles in the shadowrunners' path and the characters trying to get around them in order to get away. The characters may also run into various local hazards trying to flee from Tehran, like critters, packs of shedim-animated corpses and so forth.

The characters can also try to trick Aden in order to escape from him. For example, they might agree to return the Shroud, then give Aden the slip since the dragon won't change shape to enter a building with the runners. They might try to create a distraction that gives them the opportunity to run or place some obstacles in the dragon's path.

If the runners make it to their pick-up point and get away from Tehran, Aden lets them go.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

If the confrontation with Aden isn't dramatic enough, your players may be a little too jaded. Play up the menace of being face to snout with an angry great dragon. To drive home Aden's power, you can have someone pursuing the shadowrunners when the dragon shows up, either opponents from the previous scenario or other inhabitants of Tehran. Aden dispatches them with no effort whatsoever when they try to interfere with him (since they're not part of the Rite and therefore fair game). Seeing the dragon take out a band or mercenaries or another powerful critter with no more effort than they would take swatting flies should get the players' attention.

DEBUGGING

If the shadowrunners immediately cave-in to Aden's demands and return the Shroud to the mosque, then the dragon "allows" them to leave unharmed. The runners have failed in their mission and they don't get paid except for some cred to cover their medical expenses (if any). You can allow the players to make Perception (4) Tests to notice that Aden's demand that they return the Shroud themselves is somewhat odd, as is the fact that he simply didn't kill them right away. Either he's afraid of damaging the Shroud or he's afraid of the Shroud itself for some reason (the latter is at least partly true).

If the characters make a run for it as soon as Aden appears, they may have a chance to get away. Stage a chase scene with the dragon through the ruins of the city as the shadowrunners look for a way out or a safe haven. They may get one from somebody they helped along the way, such as the city's ghosts. If they can get away from Aden, they're home free.

Though players are likely to wonder why Aden hid the Shroud in Tehran in the first place, feel free to remind them of it if they don't. That should start them wondering why the dragon didn't keep such an important gift in his own hoard and may spark some ideas for negotiating with him.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

IT'S A WRAP

Once the shadowrunners have escaped from Aden or dealt with him one way or another, they can meet their ride out of the area and return home for their meeting with Radek. The fixer meets the shadowrunners en route, in a stopover along the way. A likely place is London, as the runners return from the Middle East and prepare to head back home.

Assuming that the runners still have the Shroud or Aden ended up with it, Radek congratulates the shadowrunners on a job well done and gives them certified credsticks in the amount of 200,000¥ each (or whatever amount it is they agreed upon for the run). The characters may be puzzled if they "failed" in the run by letting Aden take back the Shroud, but they should be smart enough not to ask too many questions (especially when a lot of money is at stake).

Radek tells the runners that there's been a change of plans and asks them to come with him. He takes them on board a private plane and tell them that their employer wants to meet them. He refuses to reveal any information until they get where they are going, though if pressed he will tell the characters that their destination is the California Free State. The plane lands at a small airport in northern California and a helicopter takes the team to the slopes of Mount Shasta and the Shasta Lodge. It's time for the shadowrunners to meet with Hestaby. Move right along to the beginning of *Lore*.

AWARDING KARMA

Award individual Karma according to the guidelines on p. 244, *SR3*. Award Karma to each team member based on the following requirements:

Surviving the run	2
Overcoming the wraith	1
Handling encounters non-violently	1
Getting the Shroud of Shadows	1*
Getting Aden to claim the Shroud	1*

* The runners only get one of these awards

LEGWORK

The runners really don't have much opportunity for legwork in this adventure, as they're immediately plunged into the thick of things. If you choose to start things off with the meeting with Mr. Radek to negotiate the terms of the run, you can allow the characters to do some legwork prior to heading off for the Middle East. Their inquiries can turn up information on the conditions in Tehran, but there's not much else for them to investigate. You may want to allow the players to read the section in *Year of the Comet* on the New Islamic Jihad (pp. 52-54) and in *Target: Awakened Lands* on Tehran (p. 98).

The Shroud of Shadows

True to its name, the Shroud of Shadows is surrounded in mystery and supposition. Little is known about it apart from what's mentioned publicly in Dunkelzahn's will, but there are a few rumors making the rounds. Shadowrunners who check up on information about the Shroud before their run can find out the following:

Appropriate Contacts: Any or Matrix Search (Target Number 6)

Successes	Result
0	"Wasn't that a sim-flick back in the fifties?"
1	"It's mentioned in Dunkelzahn's will. Something he left to the great dragon Aden. You know, the one that practically leveled Tehran?"
2	"Nobody really knows what the Shroud is or does, but I can tell you that a lot of people would love to know. There's never been anything public about it, not even about the Draco Foundation passing it off to Aden, which in itself is kind of strange."
3-4	"I've heard conflicting stories about the whole thing. Some say that the Draco Foundation quietly made contact with Aden to deliver Dunkelzahn's bequest to him while others say that Aden told them to go frag themselves and that he didn't want anything from the Big D."
5	"They say that the reason Aden didn't want the Shroud is because it's like a magical pacifier and the big, bad ol' dragon doesn't want anything around that's going to calm him down when he gets a good mad on. I know plenty of people who could use something like that, you know?"



CAST OF SHADOWS

This section describes the major NPCs in this adventure.

THE WRAITH

Wraiths are a very rare type of spirit, similar to shadow free spirits (p. 114, *MITS*) in that they appear to feed off intense emotion. Unlike other free spirits, however, wraiths have the ability to *steal* karma from others to increase their Spirit Energy.

Wraiths generally appear as amorphous clouds of black or gray mist, illuminated from within by a deep violet light. They materialize in mist form or as a tall, dark figure wearing tattered robes, surrounded by mist. Wraiths seem drawn to scenes of intense violence, since they provide the best opportunities for "feeding." Their native metaplane is unknown, and wraiths have proven completely immune to summoning and banishing using Conjuring. Whether or not wraiths have true names like other free spirits remains a matter of conjecture. If they have, no one has ever discovered a wraith's true name.

Wraiths avoid direct confrontation, preferring to work behind the scenes. If faced with an overwhelming opponent in combat, a wraith usually retreats to its home metaplane, vanishing from the physical and astral planes entirely to a place where no one can follow it, then returning to the physical world at a later time.

Karma Tap: The Karma Tap power of wraiths is similar to the Karma Drain power available to shedim spirits (p. 153, *YOTC*). Wraiths do not need to touch their victims to steal Karma, but they must instead coerce the victim to commit an act of violence. Nor does stealing Karma cause damage to the victim (dead victims don't provide sources of nourishment, after all).

Wraiths use their powers of Fear, Empathy and Influence to inspire hatred, bloodlust and violence among other intelligent beings. At the same time it uses any of these abilities, the wraith also makes an Opposed Force (Willpower) Test against the victim (this does not take an action). If the test succeeds, the wraith has "tapped" into the victim's emotional energies.

Once it manipulates a victim to kill another intelligent being, the Karma Tap power allows the wraith to drain Karma from its victim. The victim permanently loses 1 point of Good Karma for each death it causes under the Wraith's influence, but not more than 1 point per minute. If the victim has no Good Karma, the wraith instead draws a point from the victim's Karma Pool.

Wraiths also draw power from the deaths of victims under their influence. If a wraith has influenced a victim into committing violence and that victim then dies while doing so, the wraith earns 1 point of Karma. For this reason, wraiths often influence both sides of a conflict, feeding off both the winners and losers.

This Karma is added to the Wraith's total and may be used to increase its Spirit Energy and/or Force. Wraiths tend to be fairly weak when they first appear (Force of $1D6 \div 2$) and so they use their Karma Tap power to increase in strength.

At the gamemaster's discretion, wraiths may also draw Karma from other extreme acts of violence, even if killing does not occur, such as torture, rape and other heinous acts.

Wraiths often enter into partnerships with corrupt magicians and even mundanes. Such relationships are always temporary. Once the wraith strips its follower of all his or her Karma, it moves on, usually inspiring a new follower to kill the previous one, and so forth.

If a wraith is ever destroyed (not merely disrupted, but permanently killed), its still-living victims regain all of the Karma they have lost to the wraith's Karma Tap.

Wraiths

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
F + 4	F + 6	F	F	F	F	(F)A	—	F+1

INIT: F + 11 + 1D6, Astral INIT: F + 20 + 1D6

Attack: Humanoid or Powers

Powers: Empathy, Fear, Influence, Karma Tap, Magic Resistance, Magic Sense, Materialization

FARAH AL-PASHA (SPECTER)

Farah Al-Pasha once lived in Tehran with her husband and children. She understood little of the Awakening or the other events that were changing the world until they collided forcefully with her life. Farah died trying to rescue her children from a terrible fire. Her spirit lingered in the world, forever trying to save her loved ones, always too late. Farah was broken free of her cycle of grief when a shedim possessed and animated her corpse. Farah considers this a terrible violation and believes that by *destroying the shedim, she can at least find peace*. She has become the de facto leader of a small group of ghosts who have been similarly violated. They struggle against the shedim, using all the powers at their disposal.

Farah is not inclined to trust anyone and she is intensely focused on her sole purpose in existence: to destroy the shedim and lay her body (and the others the spirits have animated) to a final rest. She speaks very little English (effective skill of 1) but speaks fluent Arabic. She respects other devout Muslims and is more likely to heed someone who can quote the Quran and speak Arabic.

Farah appears as a slim female figure, covered from head to toe in dark robes and veils that leave only her eyes and hands visible. Her hands are terribly burned and scarred and her eyes sometimes seem to glow with flickering reddish light, like the reflections of a bonfire. She is slightly transparent when she manifests but appears quite solid when she chooses to materialize.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
6	7 (x3)	3	5	5	5	5A	6

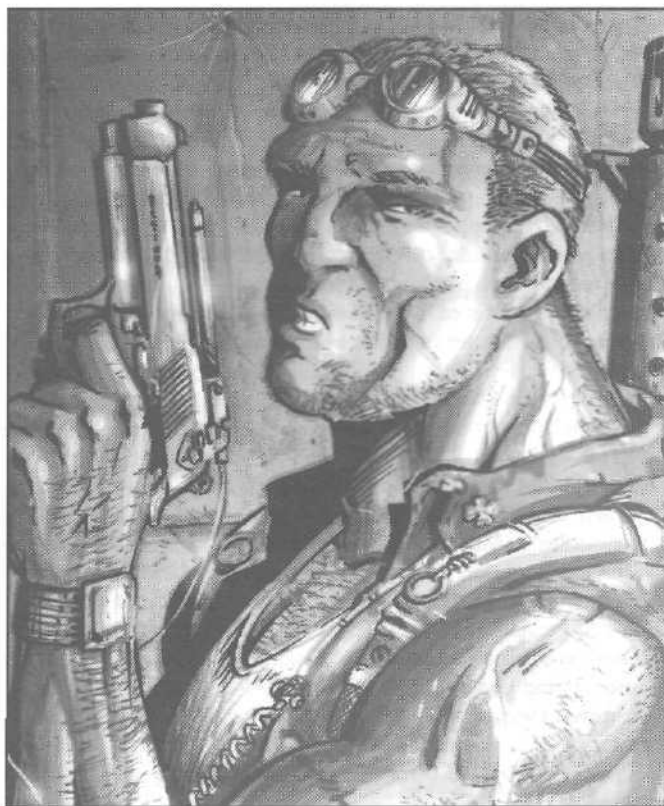
INIT: 16 + 1D6, Astral INIT: 25 + 1D6

Pools: Astral Combat 7, Combat 8

Force: 5

Attack: 3M

Powers: Fear, Materialization, Paralyzing Touch, Possession, Psychokinesis



MACK DONELLEY (MERCENARY)

Mack Donelley grew up in war-torn Belfast. He got out by signing on with a mercenary company and putting the skills he'd learned in the streets to work on the battlefield. In the years since he has become a veteran of a number of operations, including the Desert Wars, and earned enough cred to start his own small operation with a number of men. Donelley is a fairly simple man at heart. Being a mercenary is all he knows, but he loves his work. He doesn't particularly care about anyone other than the people under his command. He's just a man doing a job, and he'll do whatever it takes to get the job done.

His current job is retrieving the Shroud of Shadows from Tehran. Unfortunately, his employer wasn't able to provide precise information, so Donelley has wasted some time tracking down the particular mosque where the Shroud resides. He's also been distracted by the presence of the wraith and the other critters in the ruins. Donelley is a reasonable man. He'd consider an offer of an alliance from the shadowrunners if he thought it would get him closer to his goal. Of course, he'd also betray the runners at the first opportunity to make sure he comes out on top.

Donelley is in his mid-30s with the build of a champion weightlifter (though most of it is implants). He has a thick neck and close-cropped blond hair. He dresses in military-style fatigues in the field, and often has his goggles pushed up on his head or hanging loose around his neck. He's never without a weapon close at hand, though he's also deadly in unarmed combat.

B 5 (7) **Q** 4 (6) **S** 6 (8) **C** 4 **I** 4 **W** 4 **E** 1.05 **M** — **R** 4 (6)

INIT: 4 (6) + 1D6 (2D6)

Pools: Combat 6 (7)

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 4/4

Skills: Etiquette 1 (Mercenary 3), Heavy Weapons 6, Launch Weapons 4, Pistols 4, Rifles 6, Stealth 2 (Urban 4), Unarmed Combat 6

Knowledge Skills: Arabic 2, Desert Wars 4, English 5, Electronics Background 4, German 2, Mercenary Groups 4, Mercenary Hot Spots 4, Weightlifting 4

Cyberware (all alpha-grade): Boosted Reflexes 2, Electronic Vision Magnification 3, Flare Compensation, Muscle Replacement 2, Smartlink, Titanium Bone Lacing

Armor [6/4]: Armor Jacket [5/3], Titanium Bone Lacing [1/1]

Weapons: FN-HAR [AR, SA/BF/FA, 8M, 35 (c) w/smartgun]

Range (TN): 0-50 (2), 51-150 (3), 151-350 (4), 351-550 (4)

Beretta Model 101T [LP, SA, 6L, 12 (c) w/smartgun system]

Range (TN): 0-5 (2), 6-15 (3), 16-30 (4), 31-50 (4)

Ares Antioch Grenade Launcher [GL, SS, 6 (m) w/smartgun system and 10 HE grenades [10S]

GL Range (TN): 5-50 (2), 51-100 (3), 101-150 (4), 151-300 (4)

Gear: Goggles with low-light and thermographic vision, micro-transceiver (Rating 5), Nav-Dat GPS, survival kit, 3 trauma patches.

Donelley's Men (4)

For this mission, Donelley has four other members of his company along, men of similar abilities. They're trained and seasoned mercenaries and completely loyal to their commander. If desired, you can apply the appropriate racial modifiers to the stats below to make some of the other mercs other than human, if desired. Ork and troll mercenaries are fairly common.

B 4 (5) **Q** 4 (6) **S** 4 (6) **C** 2 **I** 3 **W** 4 **E** 1.75 **M** — **R** 3 (4)

INIT: 3 (4) + 1D6 (2D6)

Pools: Combat 5 (6)

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 2/3

Skills: Etiquette 1 (Mercenary 3), Heavy Weapons 4, Launch Weapons 4, Pistols 4, Rifles 4, Stealth 2 (Urban 4), Unarmed Combat 4

Cyberware: Boosted Reflexes 1, Flare Compensation, Muscle Replacement 2, Smartlink, Aluminum Bone Lacing

Armor [5/4]: Armor jacket [5/3], Aluminum Bone Lacing [0/1]

Weapons: FN-HAR [AR, SA/BF/FA, 8M, 35 (c) w/smartgun]

Range (TN): 0-50 (2), 51-150 (3), 151-350 (4), 351-550 (7)

Beretta Model 101T [LP, SA, 6L, 12 (c) w/smartgun system]

Range (TN): 0-5 (2), 6-15 (3), 16-30 (4), 31-50 (7)

Ares Antioch Grenade Launcher [GL, SS, 6 (m) w/smartgun system and 10 HE grenades [10S]

GL Range (TN): 5-50 (2), 51-100 (3), 101-150 (6), 151-300 (7)

Gear: Goggles with low-light and thermographic vision, micro-transceiver (Rating 5), Nav-Dat GPS, survival kit, 3 trauma patches.



MUSA MUQLA (SPIRITUAL LEADER)

Musa Muqla was a devoted follower of the Islamic Unity Movement and its Muslim religious leader, Badr al Din Ibn Eisa (pp. 52–54, *YOTC*). A devout Muslim, Muqla developed a reputation as an exorcist and curse-breaker over the years, which led him to become an *imam* (religious leader). He was drawn to Ibn Eisa's charismatic leadership and has become even more convinced of his holiness following Ibn Eisa's apparent assassination and miraculous resurrection (as described in *Year of the Comet*). He is not fully supportive of the New Islamic Jihad's calls for militancy, however, and has chosen to instead pursue his own quest.

Muqla has charged himself with the considerable task of assessing the possibilities of purging Tehran of the various spirits and creatures that haunt its ruins, so that decent people can inhabit the city once more and possibly restore it to its former state. A small cadre of fanatical followers assists him in his work, which consists of surveying the ruins and dealing with any ghosts, shedim, or other creatures that stand in their way. Muqla has made it a particular point to cleanse all the mosques and holy places of malign spiritual influence.

Muqla is a unique sort of aspected magician (p. 160, *SR3*). He has the ability to use magic defensively, to banish and negate magical forces, but cannot otherwise perform magic himself (this may simply be a mental block on Muqla's part, since he considers magic to be evil). Muqla can use his Con-

juring skill to defend against and banish spirits of all types and he can use his Sorcery and Spell Pool to provide spell defense or shielding or to dispel active spells. He can use astral perception to read others' auras and intent (and penetrate disguises and illusions with his Masking). He considers these powers a blessing from Allah, and not devilish magic (and he will be quite angered by anyone who implies otherwise).

Muqla does not yet know about the Shroud of Shadows, but he would certainly wish to claim it if he did. The Shroud is clearly a holy item in Muqla's view and he would want to deliver it into the hands of Ibn Eisa in Mecca, perhaps after using its powers to rid Tehran of some of its more malignant spirits.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
3	3	3	6	4	6	6	8	3

INIT: 3 + 1D6

Dice Pools: Combat 6, Spell 6

Skills: Aura Reading 4, Clubs 4, Conjuring 4 (Banishing 8), Etiquette 3 (Muslim 5), Intimidation 4, Leadership 4, Negotiation 3, Pistols 4, Sorcery 5 (Spell Defense 7)

Knowledge Skills: Arabic 3, Magical Background 4, Middle East 4, Persian 3, Quran 6, Spirits 5

Metamagic (Initiate Grade 2): Masking, Shielding

Armor: Lined coat [4/2]

Weapons: Heavy staff [4M stun]

Browning Max-Power [HP, SA, 9M, 10 (c)]

Range (TN): 0–5 (4), 6–20 (5), 21–40 (6), 41–60 (9)

Musa Muqla's Followers

These followers are completely devoted to Musa Muqla and his mission. They are somewhat frightened to be facing hordes of spirits and undead in the ruins of a dead city, but they have enough faith in Muqla's abilities to stand alongside him.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
4	4	4	2	3	3	6	—	3

INIT: 3 + 1D6

Pools: Combat 5

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 1/3

Skills: Assault Rifles 3, Etiquette 1 (Muslim 3), Pistols 3, Stealth 2 (Urban 4), Unarmed Combat 4

Armor: Lined coat [4/2]

Weapons: AK-97 [AR, SA/BF/FA, 8M, 38 (c)]

Range (TN): 0–50 (4), 51–150 (5), 151–350 (6), 351–550 (9)

SHEDIM

Shedim are predatory spirits described in detail on pp. 149–153 of *Year of the Comet*. Information about them is summarized here for easy reference.

Shedim are spirits from an unknown metaplane able to possess living or once living bodies, provided there is no other spirit already present (thus shedim cannot normally possess living creatures unless their spirit has already vacated, such as a magician using astral projection). Shedim have the ability to drain Good Karma from their victims by touch, making an Opposed Test between its Force (plus Spirit Energy) and the

victim's Willpower. Each net success allows the shedim to steal a point of Good Karma from the victim. After that the shedim drains 1 point of Karma Pool per two net successes. The shedim can use this stolen Karma to increase its own Spirit Energy and Force.

The shedim in Tehran have mostly possessed bodies left behind by Aden's destruction of the city and the ongoing violence since then. This means that the majority of shedim vessels are badly decayed, little more than shuffling corpses (reflected in their stats below). The shedim seek better host bodies, usually by stalking and killing any living, intelligent creatures they encounter. The shedim are in a state of war with many of the ghosts inhabiting Tehran, who resent the spirits desecrating their mortal remains. This has slowed the expansion of the shedim as they grapple continuously with the vengeful ghosts.

The shedim are dimly aware of the existence of the Shroud of Shadows, and avoid its resting-place because they sense that the Shroud is inimical to their kind. They will attack to keep the Shroud from being used against them.

Typical Shedim (corporeal form)

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
3	2	3	—	4	4	4A	—	3

INIT: 3 + 1D6

Force: 4

Spirit Energy: 1

Attack: 3M or Karma Drain

Powers: Deathly Aura, Immunity (Age, Pathogens, Toxins), Inhabitation, Karma Drain, Regeneration

ADEN

The great dragon Aden is described on p. 17. Aden's role in this adventure revolves around the Shroud of Shadows, which was Dunkelzahn's bequest to him. Aden has deliberately not claimed the Shroud for two reasons. First, he disapproves of Dunkelzahn's use of a will to distribute his hoard in defiance of draconic tradition. The Shroud is not something Aden rightfully won, therefore he does not wish to take it. Second, Aden actually feels some trepidation about having and holding the Shroud. He knows of its properties and how it can be used and wonders what its effects would be on him. Moreover, what would his responsibilities be as owner of such an item? *Better to keep the Shroud hidden away than to have to worry about such things.*

The actions of Aden's fellow dragons and matters in Tehran, however, give him little choice. Aden must take action regarding the Shroud, which he does at the end of this adventure. Exactly what happens is up to the actions of the player characters.

No game statistics are provided for Aden: he's a being that leveled an entire city and fought off an army. Nothing that a group of shadowrunners could do can affect him. Allow

Aden to accomplish whatever tasks are necessary in the adventure and have him ignore any attacks. His purpose is to interact with the characters, not fight them (for which the runners should be grateful!).

THE SHROUD OF SHADOWS

The object of the characters' quest, the Shroud of Shadows, is a square piece of cloth about three meters to a side. It's a sheer, filmy black material, as fine as silk, shot through with silvery threads that gleam in the light and hemmed all around with delicate silver stitches that form a border like twining vines with tiny flowers. Despite its incredibly light weight, the fabric of the Shroud is supernaturally strong. It can't be torn or burned and ordinary weapons have no effect on it. It is similarly immune to magical attempts to damage it. Anyone wrapped in the Shroud of Shadows gains the benefit of 12 points of hardened armor, both Ballistic and Impact.

Anyone astrally examining the Shroud can see that it is clearly a magical item of considerable power but unknown origin. On the astral, the cloth radiates a sense of peace and serenity that reduces temporary background count associated with negative emotions by 1 point per minute until it is gone. It has the same effect on permanent background count, except that the background count is only suppressed. It returns to normal at the rate of 1 point per hour once the Shroud is removed. This effect only takes place in an area the Shroud covers.

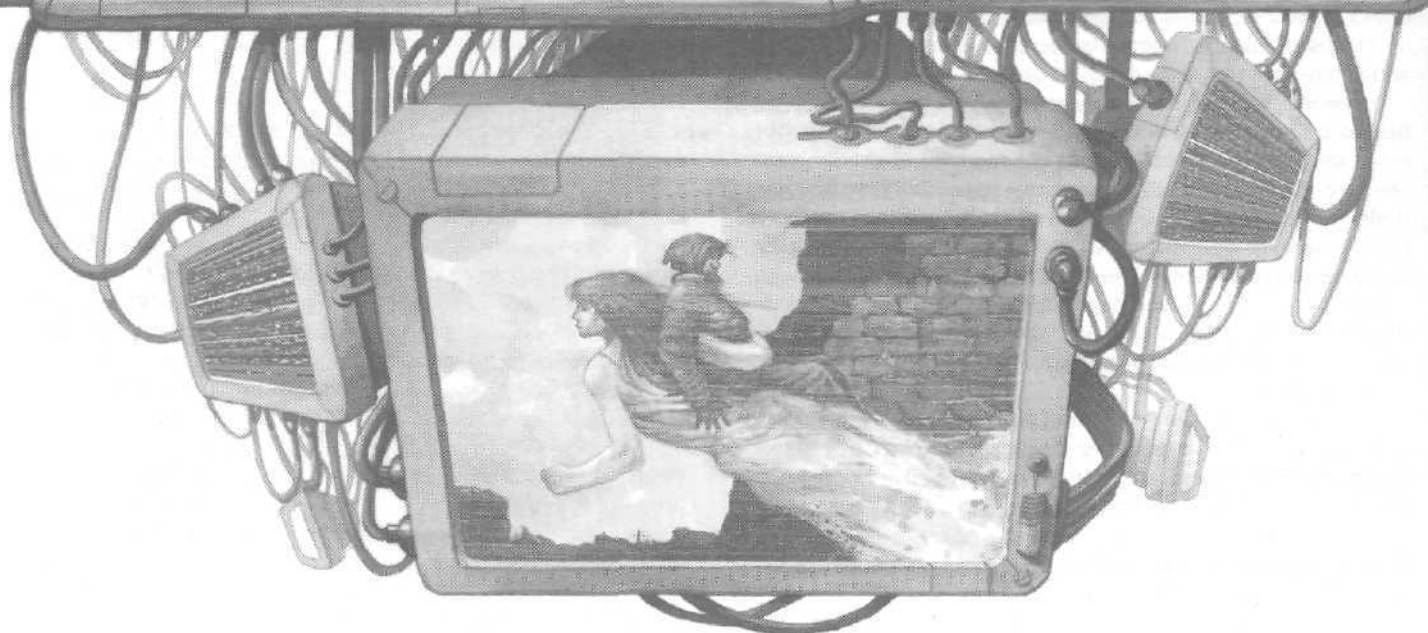
The Shroud of Shadows soothes and calms negative emotions. Anyone touching the Shroud is affected as if by a Force 12 Control Emotions spell (p. 196, SR3), making them feel nothing but peace and serenity, regardless of what they were feeling before. Among other things, this means it is extremely difficult for a holder of the Shroud to take any violent action.

If the Shroud of Shadows is draped over a person possessed by a spirit (including a corpse possessed by a zombie or shedim spirit), the spirit must make an Opposed Force Test against the Shroud's Force of 12 or be immediately disrupted, driven back to the metaplanes. This test is required each round the possessed form is covered by the Shroud.

If a wraith or blood spirit is covered with the Shroud, it must make an Opposed Force Test as above or be immediately destroyed. The test is required each round the spirit is covered by the Shroud, which is dual-natured and can affect the spirit even in astral form. A spirit can be covered with the Shroud by making an Opposed Unarmed Combat (4) Test against it and scoring 2 or more net successes.

Finally, any creature or object covered in the Shroud of Shadows increases the target numbers of all attempts to locate it magically (using detection spells, ritual sorcery, the Search power of a spirit, etc.) by +12. This property extends to the Shroud itself, making it very difficult to locate or track using magic.

LORE



To Lofwyr, I leave the Jewel of Memory and a bit of advice: consider your works and the possibility that, in the eyes of the Universe, you are no more or less than any of the Earth's creatures. I tried it, and it works wonders.

—From the *Last Will and Testament of Dunkelzahn*

PREPARING TO PLAY

This is it, the conclusion to the Rite of Succession and *Survival of the Fittest*, determining the future of dragonkind and the outcome of Hestaby's gambit. True to her own beliefs, Hestaby takes the player characters into her confidence in this adventure but they're also tempted with the opportunity to betray her trust. Ideally, this adventure should follow right on the heels of *Rest*, keeping a fairly fast pace as events begin heading toward a conclusion.

This adventure is also different from the others in that much of it takes place in the depths of the metaplanes, in the realm of imagination and spirit. It allows the shadowrunners to operate on an entirely different level. They will have a direct impact on the outcome of the Rite even to the very end—assuming, of course, that they survive the experience.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The shadowrunners are brought to the Shasta Lodge for a meeting with Hestaby, who explains much about the events the characters have been involved with in the prior adventures. She explains to them what is at stake and wants to hire them for one more job, one that can make all the difference. This particular run is against Lofwyr.

The mission, however, doesn't take place in the material world. Instead, Hestaby will send the shadowrunners into the depths of the metaplanes. There they are to make their way to the Citadel, claim a magical gemstone that they will find there and bring it back with them. The gem holds the key to Hestaby's victory in the Rite of Succession. Of course, it won't be easy to get since there will be various challenges standing in the runners' path.

The shadowrunners pass the Dweller on the Threshold and make their way into the metaplanes, where they find themselves in a kind of fantasy world. They have to overcome the challenges that lie between them and the Citadel to reach the gemstone. But when they





actually get to the Citadel, they find one more challenge waiting for them: Lofwyr has anticipated Hestaby's move and he is waiting for the shadowrunners.

Though he's forbidden from directly interfering with the characters by the rules of the Rite of Succession, Lofwyr does offer the shadowrunners a deal. If they are willing to betray Hestaby, they can practically write their own ticket. Lofwyr will give them anything that they desire. Given that he's the most powerful and wealthy creature in the Sixth World, that's no idle boast. Lofwyr also makes it clear that if the shadowrunners *don't* do what he wants, he will make their lives a living hell for as long as they may last, and he certainly has the means to do that. The characters are faced with a choice: stay true to Hestaby and their professional word and risk Lofwyr's wrath, or betray Hestaby to Lofwyr in hopes that the great dragon will keep his promises.

Once the shadowrunners have the gemstone, they return to the material world, but not back to their bodies as they might expect. Instead, the runners' astral forms appear at the dragon conclave that will decide the end of the Rite of Succession. They learn that Alamais has arranged to steal the Jewel of Memory from Lofwyr, not knowing that Hestaby's agents (the shadowrunners) have obtained the Jewel's magical essence, making the physical stone worthless to Alamais' claim (particularly since Lofwyr all but *let* him steal it, knowing what Hestaby was planning). The shadowrunners hold in their hands the accumulated lore and wisdom of dragonkind, and who they choose to give it to will be the ultimate victor of the Rite of Succession.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

Lore is a different sort of *Shadowrun* adventure, so the gamemaster is advised to read through the entire adventure carefully before running it, noting any places where things need to be modified to suit the player characters or the campaign. There is plenty of room to expand the adventure into a multi-part epic of its own, if desired, though that will require some additional work on the gamemaster's part.

The *Magic in the Shadows* sourcebook may be useful for the information it offers about the metaplanes, but it is not necessary in order to run this adventure. The *Critters* sourcebook is also quite useful for providing additional challenges for the shadowrunners to overcome, but it is not required, since various creatures are described in the adventure itself.

Two-Pronged Attack

An option for gamemasters looking to expand this adventure is for Hestaby to mount a two-pronged attack to acquire the Jewel of Memory. One team of shadowrunners is sent into the metaplanes to acquire the Jewel's magical essence, while another is sent on a run into Saeder-Krupp headquarters in the German Alliance to acquire the Jewel itself, overcoming S-K security and possibly running into rivals working for other dragons (notably Alamais). If you want to run the adventure this way, it's up to you to come up with the physical challenges that the shadowrunners will face

in trying to break into Saeder-Krupp headquarters and steal the Jewel of Memory.

A MEETING WITH HESTABY

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The shadowrunners return to Mt. Shasta, where Hestaby fills them in on some of what has been going on for the previous adventures and about the Rite of Succession. She asks them to take on one last shadowrun for her.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Radek hasn't told you much of anything about the mysterious employer that wants to meet you. You just know that he arranged transportation immediately after you finished that business in Tehran. Now, a couple of plane-rides later, you're on board a helicopter flying through northern California. Radek rides along with you but says little, postponing any questions until you've arrived at your destination.

It isn't long before you see the vast shape of a mountain looming ahead of you, the slopes of Mount Shasta, in fact. The chopper circles the mountain, dropping lower before zeroing in on the grounds of the Shasta Lodge, where it puts down gently on a helipad outside the lodge itself. Radek opens the door and climbs out, waiting for you to follow.

"Let's not keep our host waiting," is all that he says.

He leads you inside the lodge, where security guards acknowledge you with a glance and a nod before letting you pass. He stops at an elevator and places his hand against the print scanner next to the door. It hums and glows for a moment, then the doors chime and slide open. The elevator takes you down some distance, you're not sure exactly how far, before the doors open again. Radek leads you down a corridor to a broad set of carved redwood doors, which open by themselves as your approach. A voice speaks in your thoughts.

"Come in, I've been expecting you."

Radek pauses and gestures for you to precede him through the doorway. Inside is a large room paneled in the same redwood as the doors, with a sunken seating area in the middle. A state-of-the-art home theatre system occupies one wall, with a wide flatscreen display. Tribal-looking artwork occupies the other walls, mostly carved wooden masks, weapons and paintings.

Sitting curled up on the couch is a striking woman. She's clearly tall, even seated as she is. Long auburn hair falls down her back, framing a beautiful, almost elven face, though the woman is clearly human looking. She's wearing a bulky gray sweater and a pair of blue jeans. Her feet are bare and shapely. She sets aside a book that she's reading (not a datapad, but an actual dead-tree edition book) and gestures for you to join her in the seating area. As you draw closer, you can see that her eyes are a deep honey-amber color that matches the golden undertones to her skin and hair.

"I've been looking forward to the opportunity to talk with you," the woman says, in a voice much like the one you heard in your minds in the corridor outside. "My name is

Hestaby, and I've brought you here to discuss the future—yours and mine."

Once the shadowrunners are settled, read the following:

"I wanted to meet with you to explain some of what you have accomplished for me lately, and to hire you for one more job.

"The truth is that I am the one who hired you for your run on the Shasta Lodge a while back. The data-file you acquired is worthless, but it was a useful blind. I wanted to see how you handled yourselves and I wanted others to believe that you worked for someone else, not for me. That allowed me to employ you on other operations through intermediaries like Mr. Radek. You've done well on those other operations, which makes me think that you're suited to handle the mission that I have in mind.

"I can't go into a lot of detail right now, but there is a ... contest of sorts taking place between many of the great dragons. A long time ago, we ritualized many of the aspects of our dealings with each other as a way of avoiding direct, physical or magical conflict. Battles between great dragons can be unpleasant to say the least, and they can do a great deal of damage. To minimize conflict and avoid needless deaths, we created certain rites and rituals to settle disputes among us. You have been participating in one of those rites recently, as my agents. The other great dragons have their own agents and their own agendas in this contest.

"One of the important rules of the contest is that we must act through our chosen agents, like you. We cannot attack another dragon's agents directly. That would be a serious violation of the rules. It's important for you to know for what lies ahead. Until the contest is over, other dragons cannot directly attack you unless you attack them first. That's the exception to the rule. We're allowed to defend ourselves, otherwise we could simply send agents to attack our rivals. But as long as you follow the rules, we must do so as well. That's what gives you a fair chance. Of course, there's nothing stopping the agents of the other dragons from attacking you or you from attacking them. It's actually not all that different from the way megacorporations operate these days.

"I have one more mission that I would like you to take on, that may decide this contest one way or another. It involves the recovery of a very precious jewel, but to reach it, you will have to go into the depths of what you call the metaplanes. There are certain to be challenges and dangers along the way, and even I can't tell you what they may be. If you're successful, I will pay each of you half-a-million nuyen, plus you will have my personal gratitude.

"What do you say?"

HOOKS

Try and set the characters at ease while at the same time impressing them with Hestaby's wealth, power and influence. She wants them to feel welcome and comfortable, which is one of the reasons she chose to meet them in human form. There may well be some concern among the shadowrunners at returning to Shasta Lodge (where they





undertook their first shadowrun in *Survival of the Fittest*). Have Radek (and Hestaby) reassure them that they're not walking into a trap, if necessary.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Once the shadowrunners have arrived, Hestaby excuses Radek, who shuts the door behind him as he leaves. She asks if the runners want any refreshment or need anything to make them more comfortable. If any of the characters are suffering from injuries from the previous adventure, Hestaby heals them magically with a touch, restoring the characters to complete health (they'll need it for the upcoming mission).

After seeing briefly to the shadowrunners' comforts, Hestaby settles down opposite them and begins to explain why they are there and what she wants from them. Use the material from *Tell It to Them Straight*, modifying and improvising as needed to suit the characters and the events in the campaign to date. If the characters interrupt Hestaby with questions, she'll answer them to the best of her ability before continuing.

What Hestaby Tells the Shadowrunners

In addition to the material in *Tell It to Them Straight*, Hestaby will provide the following information to the shadowrunners if they ask her the right questions:

- She has been ultimately behind all the runs the characters have done in *Survival of the Fittest* and they have benefited her, directly or indirectly (depending on how well the runners did).
- The astral quest she wants them to undertake is a daring move because she suspects that no other dragon would entrust their agents with the task she is giving them.
- Nearly all of the great dragons are involved in this contest to one degree or another.
- Hestaby stands to benefit greatly if the shadowrunners are successful.
- Hestaby didn't want the contest and she believes that dragons and other intelligent races should be able to work together toward mutual goals. "Things are changing for everyone," she says, "but some do not want change, and will do anything to avoid it."

What Hestaby Isn't Telling

Though she wants to be as candid as possible with the shadowrunners, there are definitely some things Hestaby won't tell them, either for their own protection (since they can't reveal what they don't know) or because she feels that they (and humanity in general) aren't ready to know certain things. She will tend to deflect such questions with answers like "You're better off not knowing that." Major things Hestaby won't reveal include:

- The nature of the jewel the runners are seeking. Hestaby will only tell them that it's important, but not why or what it is. If someone happens to guess that it's the Jewel of Memory from Dunkelzahn's will, she will neither confirm nor deny it.
- The reason for the contest between the great dragons and the ultimate prize. She'll only indicate that it would be in everyone's best interest if she won.

- She won't reveal any secrets about herself or about her fellow dragons. If there's secret information in the campaign that the gamemaster would like the player characters to have, she can reveal that, but otherwise she keeps quiet about such things.
- She won't discuss her business with Tir Tairngire or any unrelated matters, saying simply "That has nothing to do with the matter at hand."

Negotiating With Hestaby

Players may get the impression that they're in a strong negotiating position with Hestaby and may try to take advantage of it. Though Hestaby's offer is quite generous, there are sure to be shadowrunners who will look to squeeze all that they can out of the deal. Keep in mind that while Hestaby considers the player characters valuable and useful assets and is willing to negotiate in good faith, she's canny and she can always find someone else to take on the mission, if necessary. If the shadowrunners really push their luck, Hestaby stands firm on her offer. She may also point out that if the shadowrunners refuse, she will have to keep them as her guests, at least until the matter is resolved, since they know a little too much to be out wandering around.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

This scenario is a lead-in to the main action later on; meeting and speaking with Hestaby is the main activity here. If you want to push things, you can have the shadowrunners attacked by agents of another great dragon en route to meet with Hestaby. They can either take the place of the chopper's crew, attempting to kill the runners and dispose of them, or they can attack the helicopter directly using another vehicle, drones, spirits or surface-to-air weapons. Attackers don't even have to be (meta)human; airborne creatures like air spirits or wyverns might attack the runners en route. Perhaps the damaged chopper crashes in the wilderness of northern California (or even a neighboring nation like Tir Tairngire or the Ute nation) and the shadowrunners have to make it to safety on foot, pursued by the people who shot them down. See *Hunting* (p. 79) for some ideas on handling this as an encounter or separate mini-adventure.

DEBUGGING

If the characters assume the trip to Mt. Shasta is part of some sort of double-cross and try to escape without even speaking with Hestaby, have Radek reassure them as best he can. He'll reveal that Hestaby was behind the initial run on the Shasta Lodge if it seems like it will mollify the runners' suspicions. If necessary, he will allow the shadowrunners to pick a neutral meeting site and Hestaby will come to them. She might be a bit less forthcoming, depending on the place the characters choose, and she may insist that they come to the Lodge after an initial meeting to defuse their suspicions, citing the need for tighter security. At any rate, Hestaby will try to convince the characters to begin their run from the Lodge, since it is the safest place for their physical bodies and it has considerable magical protection.



If the shadowrunners flat-out refuse Hestaby's job offer, she will attempt to persuade them, but won't press if they continue to refuse. She will, however, have the runners detained at the Shasta Lodge while she finds some other agents to carry out the mission. They simply know too much to be out wandering around until the Rite of Succession is resolved. The runners are treated well enough, but kept prisoner until the end of the Rite (which doesn't take more than a few days). They're then released with a stern warning that revealing anything they've learned would be hazardous to their health.

If characters heavily dependent on the real world (like deckers or riggers) balk at going on an astral quest and leaving all their techno-toys behind, Hestaby assures them that they have a role to play and that their abilities don't depend on their possessions, but on what is inside. She will encourage them to join the rest of the team, unless you plan to run two teams going after separate goals (see *Two-Pronged Attack*, p. 108).

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The shadowrunners embark on their quest into the metaplanes and encounter the mysterious Dweller on the Threshold.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Hestaby has you lie down on the comfortable couches in the room and asks you to take a few deep breaths and relax—easy for her to say!

Closing your eyes, you feel a slight tingling throughout your body, almost like when your arm or leg falls asleep. You feel a bit numb, then the darkness around you seems to deepen, darker and darker until it is an utter blackness. You're only barely aware of your body, adrift in nothingness—you don't know for how long.

Then a light appears. Just a pinpoint at first, it steadily grows larger. You don't know if it is moving toward you or you are moving toward it, but the light gets bigger. You can see a figure standing, silhouetted in the light. You can't make out its features yet. You see the rest of your team appear close by, stepping out of the darkness and into the circle of illumination created by the light behind the dark figure. It silently regards you for a moment before speaking.

"Why have you come here?" it asks.

HOOKS

This is an opportunity to creep the players out and allow them to roleplay as they meet and deal with the Dweller on the Threshold. The mundane characters in the group may be venturing into the metaplanes for the first time, so they may not know what to expect. Even the Awakened characters in the group probably haven't visited the metaplanes under the guidance of a great dragon, so things may not necessarily be what they expect, either.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Hestaby magically sends the shadowrunners' astral forms off into the metaplanes while their physical bodies remain at the Shasta Lodge. Keep in mind that the characters' sense of time is distorted by the experience of the metaplanes. The rate time seems to pass there does not necessarily correspond to the rate of time passing in the physical world. An experience on the metaplanes may seem to take days or weeks but only last for hours in the material world, or vice versa. The runners have no way of knowing how long they've been "gone." They also have no way of knowing the exact condition of their physical bodies, something that will become relevant later in the adventure.

The Dweller

The shadowrunners' first obstacle is the Dweller on the Threshold, the guardian of the metaplanes, who stops them to question their reason for entering the metaplanes and to test their resolve. More information about the Dweller can be found on p. 92 of *Magic in the Shadows*. Suffice it to say that the Dweller is effectively all-knowing and all-powerful in its domain on the threshold of the metaplanes. It can cause anything to happen (or at least seem to, which is much the same thing where the astral plane is concerned) and it knows everything about the shadowrunners, even things of which they are not consciously aware.

The Dweller does three things: it asks the characters why they wish to enter the metaplanes, it reveals something personal about each of the characters, and it gives each shadowrunner a test to overcome in order to proceed on the astral quest.

The question, "why have you come here?" is little more than a formality. If one of the shadowrunners answers, the Dweller will begin with that character. If multiple characters answer, the Dweller will begin with the character who spoke first, taking the others in turn. In truth, it doesn't matter to the Dweller one way or another what the characters are after.

Secrets Revealed

"Are you prepared to face what lies ahead?" the Dweller asks the first shadowrunner. If the runner answers "yes," the Dweller's response is intended to shake the character's confidence. If the runner answers "no," the Dweller seems to be confirming the character's fears or concerns.

In either case, the Dweller reveals something about the character to everyone present, preferably something secret and embarrassing or shameful. It might be a misdeed from the character's past, a secret kept from the other characters, a deep personal fear or anything similar. You should consider all the characters in advance and decide what the Dweller is likely to mention about each one. If there isn't anything suitable, you can always ask the players to come up with something in advance, without necessarily telling them why. This is a good opportunity to give the characters some additional depth and maybe even spark some conflict between them when the truth comes out.

The Dweller can simply mention the character's secret aloud or, if you prefer, the characters can all see a vision of the

secret, as if they were watching a scene unfold in the darkness outside the circle of light. This allows you the opportunity to play out the scene with each player, either re-enacting something from the character's past or creating a new scene to go with the character's secret. Such a shadow-play can give the scene a greater realism, since the players feel like they're privy to the events as they're happening.

After revealing the character's secret, the Dweller moves on to the testing.

The Test

The Dweller gives the character a test to prove that he or she is worthy to pass into the metaplanes. This test can be anything you can imagine, since the Dweller can create any condition or situation at will. Some possibilities include the following:

- Choose the character's highest rated skill. The Dweller creates a test of that skill, from

overcoming a foe—perhaps even the Dweller itself—in combat (Combat skills) to navigating a Red host system loaded with ice (Computer skill) to facing down a powerful spirit (Conjuring). The skill test doesn't have to be physical; it may be a test of the character's knowledge instead. In either case, the player should make a Skill (6) Test.

- The Dweller confronts the character with a seemingly impossible task: lifting a mountain, fighting a dragon armed with nothing but a dagger (or even bare hands), jumping across a vast and bottomless chasm and so forth. The point is not to succeed at the task, but to demonstrate the courage and willingness to try, despite impossible odds. The player makes a Willpower (6) Test to represent the character's strength of will.
- The Dweller gives the character a puzzle or riddle to solve. You can handle this in two ways. Either have the player roll an Intelligence (6) Test for the character to get the answer, or let the player come up with the answer. In the latter case, give the player an automatic success on the Intelligence Test for coming up with the correct answer.





- The character is asked to do something against his nature or beliefs. The test is whether or not the character is willing to sacrifice his moral code in order to succeed. If the runner remains steadfast to his beliefs even though it means failure, he succeeds. If he demonstrates a willingness to sacrifice for the greater good, he also succeeds. Have the player make a Willpower (6) Test for the character, with one automatic success if the character makes the right choice (and the player roleplays it).

If the character achieves no successes on the test, the Dweller says, "You may pass, but you are not ready for the challenges that lie ahead. You will fail." If the character achieves one or more successes, the Dweller says, "You may pass. May you be as successful in your quest." Every two full successes the character rolls on the test grants a temporary bonus point of Karma Pool, useful only for the duration of the astral quest.

Once the Dweller has revealed a secret and tested the first character, it moves on to the next, repeating the process until all of the shadowrunners have been tested. Then the Dweller steps aside and allows them to proceed with their quest.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Rather than sending the shadowrunners off on their quest from the Lodge on Mt. Shasta, Hestaby might need to bring them to a particular location. It might be a power site, an astral shallow or an astral rift where the mundane characters can more easily get into contact with the astral plane (see *Target: Awakened Lands* for more information). Getting to the site might be a scenario in and of itself, particularly if the site that Hestaby needs happens to be in someone else's possession, or another dragon catches wind of Hestaby's plans and sends agents to intercept the shadowrunners and eliminate them. The site may also have guardians of its own that Hestaby and the runners need to negotiate with. Even great dragons have only so much influence in the Sixth World, and part of the ritual may require that the shadowrunners do the talking (so the characters can't rely on Hestaby to solve the problem).

Since the shadowrunners are not embarking on a typical astral quest, you can feel free to modify the encounter with the Dweller on the Threshold as much as desired to suit the needs of the group and the campaign. The Dweller's tests and questions can be more elaborate or more difficult. Perhaps each character has to overcome several tests, such as a physical, mental and spiritual test or tests of ability, courage and character, or any combination you deem appropriate. The tests shouldn't be impossible, unless the point is to test how the characters handle impossible challenges or no-win situations.

DEBUGGING

If the shadowrunners try to muscle past the Dweller on the Threshold without answering its questions or facing the tests, they simply fail. The Dweller is all-powerful in its

demesne, so the runners have to play by its rules or they don't play at all. They can wait at the Threshold for as long as they want; the Dweller's patience is seemingly infinite. If the characters dawdle too long, you can always have Hestaby call them back to their bodies and ask them why they haven't gone on, perhaps giving them some advice on how to deal with the Dweller (basically by cooperating) and sending them back to try again.

Players familiar with the astral quest rules from *Magic in the Shadows* will note that those who fail the Dweller's test are not normally allowed access to the metaplanes. In this case, however, the Dweller has to allow the runners to pass, whether they succeed or not, so long as they go through with the formalities. Working for a great dragon does have certain benefits. Of course, the next time any of the characters go on an astral quest, all bets are off.

PLACES OF POWER

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The astral quest for the Jewel of Memory begins and the shadowrunners pass through several different Places in the metaplanes, overcoming challenges between them and their goal.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

You pass through the white light of the threshold and for a moment you are blinded by it, surrounded by white nothingness. When the light begins to fade, you find yourselves elsewhere entirely. More than that, you notice that you have changed.

You're definitely not in the sprawl anymore, chummer.

HOOKS

Shadowrunners, meet Wonderland. The metaplanes offer the opportunity to introduce the player characters to some of the most surreal and different experiences of their imaginary lives, so make the most of it. The runners can go literally anywhere, be anyone (or anything) and face any challenge or foe. The material in this scenario only scratches the surface of the possibilities. Feel free to come up with some of your own as well.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The shadowrunners must pass through a succession of Places on the metaplanes to reach their ultimate goal, the Citadel that lies at the heart of the metaplanes themselves. When the runners cross over the threshold, roll 1D6 and consult the *Metaplaces Table* to see which Place they end up in first.

After the runners overcome the challenge in that Place, roll 2D6. Starting for the runners' current Place, count down that many Places on the table. If you get to the bottom of the table, go back to the top and continue counting. If the runners land on a Place they've already been, they go to the next



AVOIDING DEADWEIGHT

One thing to keep in mind when choosing the shadowrunners alternate identities and abilities is not to leave out any of the characters, regardless of their normal abilities and how foreign the astral environment may be for them. In fact, this can be a good reason to change some or all of the character's identities: some of their normal abilities are all but useless in the depths of the metaplanes, unless you provide them with an opportunity to use them. All the characters should be on relatively equal footing.

Therefore, consider the abilities of characters like deckers and riggers, who are definitely out of their element on the metaplanes. Deckers could become cunning thieves (their Computer skills translated into the ability to overcome security like locks and traps and to pick pockets when no one is looking) or they could be magicians (giving them Sorcery equal to their Computer skill and spells based on their various Matrix utilities). Likewise riggers can be daring horsemen or knights in a fantasy setting, wheelmen, starfighter pilots, dragon-riders or something similar in other settings.

Place up on the table. If they've already been there, the next higher Place, and so forth. If a random roll or Place-shifting brings the characters to the Citadel, go on to *Citadel of the Dragon Lord*.

The material in this scenario offers a number of possible challenges the runners may face in each of the Places of the metaplanes. These are by no means the only challenges, just some examples to choose from and use as springboards for your imagination. Gamemasters may want to consult pp. 92–94 of *Magic in the Shadows* for additional information on astral quests and metaplaces.

The Runners' Identities

The astral medium is infinitely mutable, so it is not necessary for the shadowrunners to retain their normal forms or abilities. In fact, it can make for a much more interesting adventure if they do not; instead they have to make use of whatever abilities they do have in each new Place. If you want to handle things simply with a minimum of stat-juggling, you can assume that the characters retain their normal, physical abilities in each Place they visit and that they have their normal equipment along with them (but not necessarily things that aren't a part of their self-image).

For variety, you can change the shadowrunners' identities along with the Places that they visit. Just a few of the possibilities include:

- **Fantasy Characters:** The characters may take on the forms of fantasy analogs of their normal identities. Street samurai become barbarian warriors and knights, for example, while street mages become wizards, adepts

martial artists, deckers cunning thieves, and so forth. The characters may retain their normal race and appearance or those might change, too. Characters should keep abilities appropriate to a fantasy-style setting while other abilities and equipment change to suit the genre. Cyberware can become adept powers, magic items or even magical prostheses like silver arms, crystal eye implants and so forth. Any foci that Awakened characters have with them retain their normal form, appearance and function.

- **Animals:** The shadowrunners turn into various animals, either normal animals (but with the ability to speak to and understand each other) or anthropomorphic animals (that is, animals with human-like bodies). The characters may all become the same sort of animal or they may become different species. This way the runners can experience anything from being rabbits that have to escape from a pack of wolves to fish swimming in the sea or birds flying in the sky. They can be paranormal creatures from the *Critters* sourcebook or even become dinosaurs or primitive mammals inhabiting Earth's distant past.
- **Dracoforms:** Characters can take on the characteristics of drakes (see *Threats 2* or Branwen's abilities in *Hunting*, p. 79), allowing them to assume dragon-like forms. They might even experience some metaplaces in the forms of dragons, allowing them to experience a little of what it is like to be a dragon.
- **Contemporaries:** Some places might put the shadowrunners into the identities of other people they know or have heard of. They could assume the forms (and abilities) of friends, acquaintances or even enemies. They might even become fictional characters from a particular sim or popular story.
- **Historical Figures:** The characters can take on the identities of famous people from history or mythology, allowing a Place to represent any historical locale or event. It can range from the battlefields of any war ever fought to the great debates of history. If you have a favorite time period or genre related to it, this is an excellent opportunity for the shadowrunners to pay it a visit.

METAPLACES TABLE

Die Roll	Place
1	Place of Battle
2	Place of Charisma
3	Place of Destiny
4	Place of Fear
5	Place of Knowledge
6	Place of Magic
7	Place of Spirits
8	The Citadel

Theme of the Challenges

The themes of the challenges that the runners face along the astral quest should match the themes of the Rite of Succession itself. Specific examples are provided for the various Places below, but general possibilities include: dealing with or overcoming dragons or other dracoforms (wyverns, drakes, etc.) in some way; experiencing events from a draconic perspective; dealing with important events that dragons have been involved with in recent (or not so recent) history; struggles between old and new (tradition vs. innovation, rebellion vs. order, etc.).



The Place of Battle

The shadowrunners must fight and overcome a foe or foes in order to successfully move on from this Place. Generally, it's best if all the runners have some sort of combat abilities here (see the *Avoiding Deadweight* section previously). The combat fought in the Place of Battle is real for all intents and purposes. Characters that suffer Deadly Physical damage return to their physical bodies and are dying. You can generally assume that Hestaby (or one of her agents) saves the lives of any dying shadowrunners using magic. Characters that suffer Deadly Stun damage are *not* sent back however. They remain with their teammates and recover completely when the group moves on to the next Place.

Some recommended challenges for the Place of Battle include:

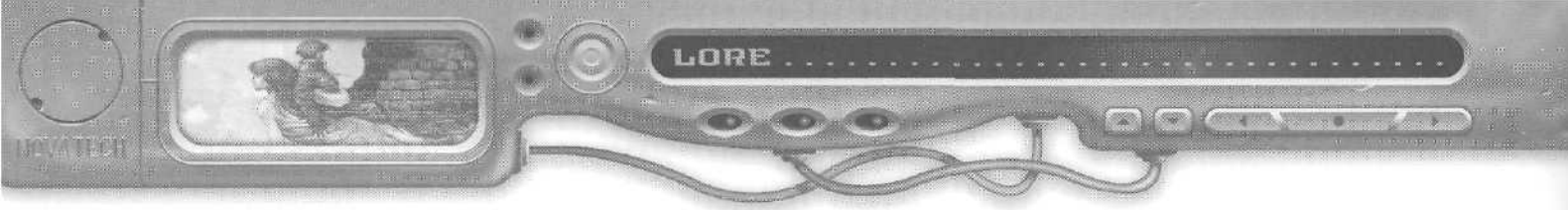
- The runners, in their normal forms, face off against a drake, group of drakes or even a dragon. Use Branwen's stats from *Hunting for the drake(s)* or consult *Threats 2*. Dragon stats can be found on p. 268–269 of *SR3*. The threat should

be commensurate with the shadowrunners' abilities. Don't send them up against a dragon unless they have the strength to take on such a powerful opponent. Alternately, the shadowrunners might be fantasy-world versions of themselves going up against a dracoform of some kind.

- The runners, in the form of dragons, must fight against other dracoforms. Use the dragon statistics from p. 268–269 of *SR3*. This battle gives the shadowrunners the opportunity to appreciate what it's like to have the power of a dragon and should also demonstrate the kind of devastation that a battle between dragons can inflict. Ideally, have the battle take place in the middle of a city (ancient or modern) with plenty of buildings to demolish and innocent bystanders to drive home the point. The players should get an understanding of why dragons don't often fight openly among themselves.

The Place of Charisma

The shadowrunners must use their wits and social skills to resolve a conflict in this Place. This offers the opportunity



for a lot of roleplaying, though you can handle this challenge by having the players make Social Skill Tests for their characters as appropriate. It can be more fun to play things out, however.

Possible challenges in the Place of Charisma include:

- The runners take on the identities of great dragons at the council described in *A Gathering of Dragons* at the beginning of this book. They must argue for or against the traditional ways of dragonkind and the Rite of Succession. The player characters may all be on one side of the argument or they may be on both sides of it, with the outcome dependent more on how well they make their arguments rather than which side wins. This gives the players insight into the workings of dragon culture and the reasons for the Rite they're now involved in. You may want to copy information from the descriptions of the great dragons on pp. 15–17 and give them to the players to brief them on their "roles."
- The shadowrunners appear before a council of great dragons (either the ones they know from the physical world or different dragons unknown to them). The dragons inform them that they have decided to wipe out the young races (metahumanity) as a threat to the world, unless the shadowrunners can convince them why metahumanity should be spared. The characters succeed if they make a good, impassioned argument (particularly one that supports the idea of dragons and other creatures cooperating).

The Place of Destiny

In the Place of Destiny, the characters must overcome themselves in some way. On this quest it is not so much a literal face-off between the shadowrunners and themselves, but the shadowrunners learning about their role in the whole Rite of Succession and the ways they might be able to affect its outcome.

Possible challenge in the Place of Destiny include:

- The shadowrunners see two powerful dragons locked in combat. As they watch, the dragons take on different identities. Sometimes they're Lofwyr and Alamais, then Lung and Ryumyo, Rhonabwy and the Sea Dragon, Hualpa and a dark and twisted feathered serpent with which the runners aren't familiar. Each pair seems evenly matched as they fight savagely for supremacy. Both dragons call on the shadowrunners to help them, saying that they can tip the balance in their favor. The proper course of action is for the runners to choose neither side and either try and put a stop to the battle or walk away from it. If they choose one side or another, you may want to subtly reflect that in the physical world when the runners return. For example, if they aid Lung against Ryumyo, the runners can later learn that Lung scored a significant victory over his rival during the Rite of Succession.
- The characters find themselves at the Council of Dragons as described in *Endgame* on p. 120. They have the essence of the Jewel of Memory and they're called upon to decide who to give it to. This is an opportunity for a "dry run" of the conclusion of the campaign, giving the players a pre-

view of what is to come and a chance to think about their decision, and perhaps make a different one when the time comes.

The Place of Fear

The characters must face their greatest fears in the Place of Fear and overcome them if they are to move on in the quest. Though the Place of Fear is often intensely personal, on this particular quest it is more likely to be associated with fears involving the Rite of Succession and the shadowrunners' role in it.

Possible challenges for the Place of Fear include:

- Facing down a powerful dragon that refuses to allow the shadowrunners to pass beyond and continue their quest. The dragon asks them what they would be willing to sacrifice for their goal, then demands that one of the characters give up his or her life so that the others can go on. If a character volunteers to do so, the dragon apparently devours the character, but the character reappears with the rest of the team when they appear in the next Place. The willingness to overcome fear and make the sacrifice is what was important.
- The shadowrunners find themselves clustered inside the backseat of a limousine (it's a *big* limo). The only other individual there is a man dressed in a tuxedo. The characters should instantly recognize him as the late President Dunkelzahn in human form. He doesn't seem surprised at their appearance. Instead, Dunkelzahn tells them that he's having second thoughts about the sacrifice he's about to make for humanity and about the ripples he's going to create among his fellow dragons with his will. It's up to the shadowrunners to convince Dunkelzahn that he's doing the right thing. If they're successful, they leave the Place just as the limo goes up in a huge fireball, with a profound "thanks" from the First Wyrms. This gives the runners a chance to see first-hand that dragons aren't all greedy monsters and feel a little more of a stake in Dunkelzahn's vision of the future.

The Place of Knowledge

This Place is a test of the characters' knowledge and understanding. In this particular case, their knowledge and understanding of the Rite of Succession and their role in it is being tested.

Possible challenges for the Place of Knowledge include:

- An image of Hestaby appears to the shadowrunners and asks them if they know what her role is in recent events. The characters may answer her however they wish, but to overcome the challenge they must demonstrate some understanding of Hestaby's involvement in some of their prior shadowruns and an idea of what she is looking to accomplish. The characters may be able to piece together clues from their previous runs or just make educated guesses about what's going on.
- The characters have to demonstrate that they've learned from their past mistakes. Perhaps they relive a prior point in



the campaign where they made a serious mistake or error in judgment, but now have a chance to do it over. If the shadowrunners make the right decision this time around and show that they've learned something from their mistakes, they succeed.

The Place of Magic

The Place of Magic challenges the shadowrunners' skill and understanding of things magical. Though it might seem like a Place focused on Awakened characters, in this particular astral quest it is not. The Place of Magic in relation to the Rite of Succession involves a greater understanding of the Awakened world and the conflict between the old ways and the future.

Possible challenges for the Place of Magic include:

- The shadowrunners are caught in a conflict between an Awakened and modern mundane civilization, such as the border wars of Siberia, Amazonia, the Yucatán or Cambodia (see *Target: Awakened Lands* for some ideas). The characters have to bring the two sides to a mutual compromise in order to move on. Since this may take some time, it may be preferable to involve the characters in a negotiation between representatives of the two sides right away.
- The characters find a woman imprisoned inside a magical diagram. She pleads with them to help free her. Doing so requires a total of 12 successes using a Magical skill like Sorcery, Conjuring or even a Knowledge skill like Magical Background to overcome the protection of the diagram safely. In truth, the "woman" is a malevolent and dangerous shadow free spirit. The true test is for the shadowrunners to refuse to free her, at which point they move on to the next Place. Consider the spirit to have Aura Masking with an effective Force of 6 and Spirit Energy 3. Penetrating the spirit's masking allows an Awakened character to discover its true nature.

The Place of Spirits

In the Place of Spirits, the characters must overcome a spirit. Naturally, for this quest it is a dragon spirit. The shadowrunners must fight a spirit with all the abilities of a western dragon (p. 268, *SR3*). It has the Innate Spell (Flamethrower) power in addition to a dragon's normal powers, but no spell-casting abilities (unless you feel the shadowrunners *really* need a challenge). The characters have their normal abilities and equipment, including weapons, spells, bound spirits and even drones and vehicles if you feel that it will give them a fair chance against the dragon. If the shadowrunners have ever actually killed a dragon before, this dragon looks and acts exactly the same.

If slaying a dragon is beyond the runners' abilities, you may choose to confront the shadowrunners with a weaker foe, such as a few drakes (see Branwen's abilities on p. 90) or a great spirit of some type (see pp. 266–268, *SR3* and p. 107, *MITS* for details). Perhaps it merely *looks* like a dragon but its abilities are closer to those of a materialized spirit. Adjust the encounter as needed to give the shadowrunners a good, hard fight.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

Though you can use the random method of choosing which Place the shadowrunners visit next, you can also simply pick the order of Places and challenges to suit the kind of story you want to tell. The shadowrunners might even have to go through all seven Places before they can reach the Citadel, or be required to confront the spirit dragon in the Place of Spirits before they can get there. After all, it's no ordinary astral quest they're on.

Feel free to modify or vary the challenges from those suggested here. If you want, you can extend the quest by making each Place a mini-adventure in and of itself, with the shadowrunners completing a task, then moving on to the next Place and the next adventure. You can also tailor the different challenges to suit the abilities of the characters. The metaplanes are infinitely changeable and anything is possible there, so you can make the situations as challenging and as different as you want.

DEBUGGING

If the characters all die or fail to overcome the challenges to reach the Citadel, then either their quest fails and Hestaby loses the Rite of Succession or you can choose to let the characters try again, increasing the difficulty of the challenges a bit this time.

If this scenario begins to drag out, feel free to decide which Place the characters move on to next rather than rolling it at random. You can move things along to *Citadel of the Dragon Lord* when you feel that the characters have seen and done enough.

The shadowrunners are completely out of touch with the physical world during their astral quest, unable to communicate with anyone and unable to return without giving up on the quest. In fact, the characters cannot turn back: they either have to succeed in the quest or die trying. Smart shadowrunners may realize that all their Stun damage goes away when they move from Place to Place and use that to their advantage by casting spells like Heal and Treat, letting the characters recover quickly in between challenges. You may wish to suggest this if none of the players think of it.

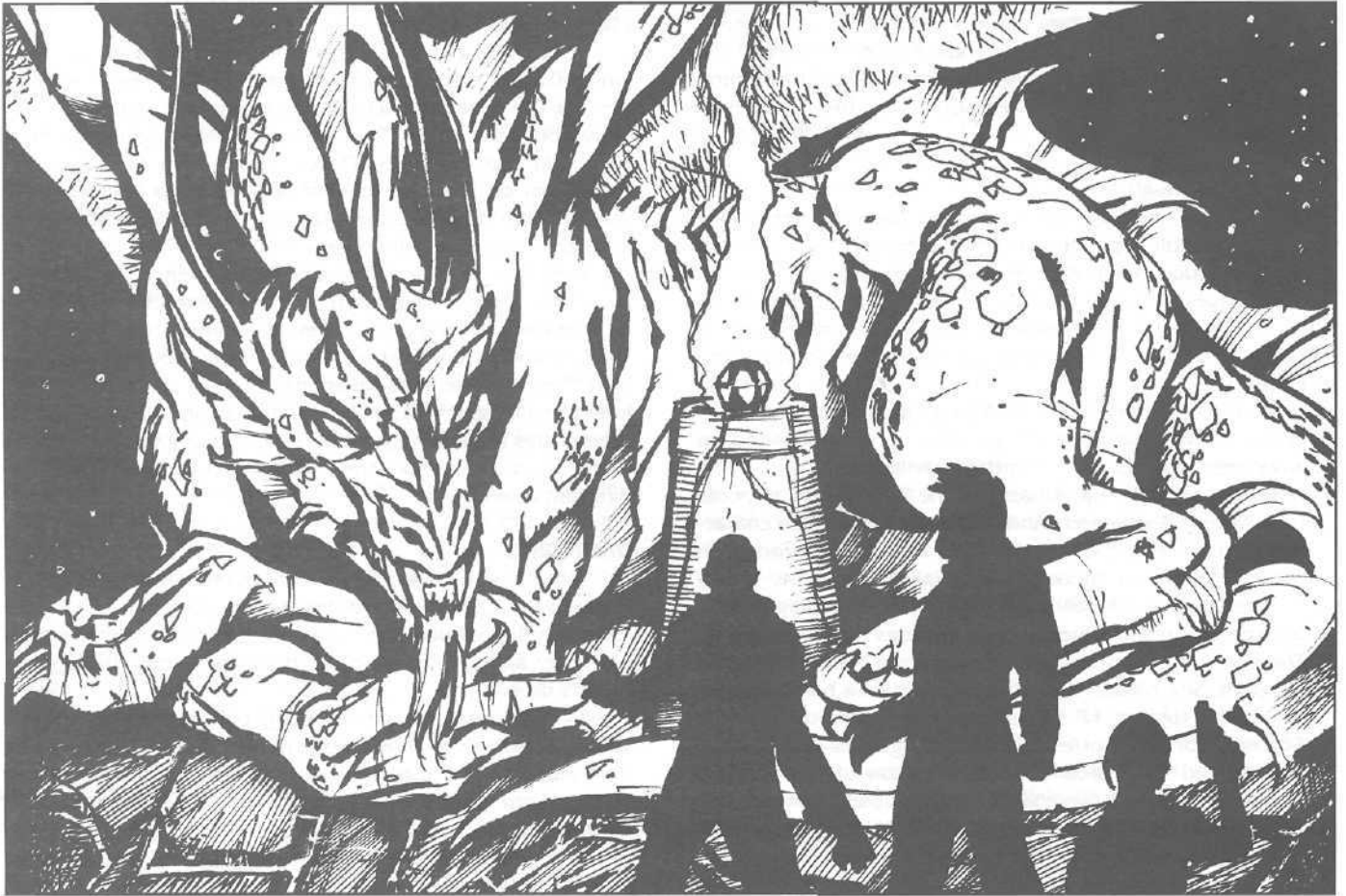
CITADEL OF THE DRAGON LORD

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The characters reach the Citadel at the heart of the metaplanes and their goal, but they also find Lofwyr waiting with a tempting offer for them.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

As the Place around you begins to fade and you brace for your next challenge, you suddenly find yourselves standing on the parapet of some great castle or citadel. As you look out from its walls you can see that it rests suspended in the air hundreds of feet off the ground. A rolling green countryside spreads out like a quilt below you, cut through by a mighty, winding river. You can see what looks like a city of graceful white spires in the distance and you spot white-



sailed ships out on the river. The sky overhead is a vivid blue, with scattered white streamers of cloud. The sun is sinking toward the mountains in the west, casting a golden light over the land.

Great archways pierce the wall behind you, opening into a vast chamber with a vaulted ceiling supported by tall, fluted columns. The dome overhead is a deep, dark blue, set with gold and gemstones that sparkle in the shape of the constellations of the night sky. The floor is inlaid with tiles of finely cut stone of different colors, creating a map of some strange land you've never seen before, though you suspect that it's the place that lies outside the walls.

In the midst of the room is a carved stone pillar about a meter tall. Just above it a beautiful red gemstone hangs suspended in the air, rotating slowly on its vertical axis. It is easily the size of a troll's head, its deep crimson facets throwing reddish spots onto the ceiling and floor as it glows with a fiery inner light.

As you take in the whole of the chamber, you hear a sound like metal brushing against metal. A shadow fills one of the great archways. Suddenly a flatted, elongated head and neck emerges, followed by the body of a great dragon, its wings folded close against its back. The dragon's scales are

like burnished gold and brass, darkening toward its back, pale toward its belly. Its bulk nearly fills half the chamber as it enters, claws clattering against the stone floor. Its eyes are like pools of red fire, matching the glow of the gemstone. Trickles of smoke pour from its nostrils as you can almost imagine that it's smiling at you.

The dragon bends itself around the pillar and the gem at the center of the room, its neck to one side, its tail to the other. It looks down at you and its voice speaks in your minds.

"Welcome to the end of your quest, shadowrunners. I have been expecting you. I do not believe that we have been properly introduced. I am Lofwyr, and I have an offer that may interest you."

HOOKS

The characters should be relieved that their trials on the metaplanes have come to an end and they have reached their ultimate goal. That is, until Lofwyr appears and the shadowrunners realize that he has been expecting them for some time. Stress the otherworldly nature and majesty of the Citadel and Lofwyr's menacing presence.



BEHIND THE SCENES

Hestaby did not expect that Lofwyr would anticipate any other dragon sending agents to a place where only dragons normally tread, particularly since none of the young races would know how to reach the essence of the Jewel of Memory in the depths of the metaplanes. She isn't the first to underestimate Lofwyr's cunning. It only remains to be seen if she has overestimated the shadowrunners' loyalties.

Astute players will quickly realize that Lofwyr poses no threat to them. As Hestaby has told them, Lofwyr cannot directly harm any of them unless they attack him first. The great dragon is therefore only there to talk. The runners reached the Citadel and there is nothing that Lofwyr can do about that, but he can and will attempt to snatch victory from Hestaby at the eleventh hour.

Lofwyr praises the shadowrunners for their cleverness and courage in reaching the Citadel. He is impressed with their abilities. He also reveals that he knows that they have come for the gemstone that rests in the center of the room. Before they take it, he would like to make them an offer. All he asks is that they listen and consider what he has to say.

If the characters make an immediate grab for the gemstone, Lofwyr can do nothing to stop them. Go right on to *Endgame* and see how the Rite of Succession plays out. Lofwyr will do all that he can, however, to persuade the shadowrunners to listen to what he has to say first.

The great dragon's offer is a simple one: if the characters agree to give him the gemstone when they return to the physical world, Lofwyr will give them whatever they want, within reason. Given that he owns and controls the largest and wealthiest megacorporation in the world, there's not much beyond Lofwyr's reach. "Within reason" includes nearly anything that the shadowrunners can imagine. Lofwyr may even list a few of the possibilities to get the characters' imaginations going: delta-grade cyberware, magical knowledge and lore, limitless wealth, gene-therapy longevity treatments, reconstructive surgery, their own island. Those are just a few of the things he has to offer them.

Lofwyr will swear a solemn oath that he will deliver on his promises and tell the characters that a promise made in the place they are in is not easily broken. What's more, Lofwyr is telling the truth. He'll gladly bribe the characters with whatever it takes in order for him to win the Rite. Even a billion nuyen is chump change to a being of his wealth, and Lofwyr considers it money well spent if it gets him what he wants.

If the characters seem reluctant, Lofwyr also points out that the only thing as great as his gratitude should the runners do as he asks is his anger if they refuse him. While he can't directly harm them, Lofwyr points out that he can, and will, make their lives a living hell if they choose not to do as he asks. Imagine all the resources of a mega-corporation the size of Saeder-Krupp dedicated to ruining a handful of lives. Lofwyr paints a picture just as vivid as the rewards he offers,

one of the runners' family, friends and contacts being tortured and killed, of everything they value being taken from them, leaving them with nothing. The characters can have it all, anything they want. All they have to do is betray their professional ethics and go back on their agreement with Hestaby, betraying her to Lofwyr.

If the shadowrunners agree to Lofwyr's proposal, he will negotiate with them—individually or as a team—until they reach an agreement about what he will give them in exchange for their cooperation. Keep in mind that while Lofwyr's resources are truly vast, they're not limitless. Lofwyr can't, for example, promise to make a player character President of the UCAS, though he certainly can provide everything that's needed for the character to have a shot at it. He likewise isn't going to declare war against another megacorporation on some shadowrunner's say-so, though he can provide that character with the ability to wage an effective shadow-war against that corp (which may be to Saeder-Krupp's ultimate benefit). Lofwyr is a vastly powerful individual, not a wish-granting genie.

The Gemstone

The gemstone at the heart of the Citadel is the magical essence of the Jewel of Memory that is in Lofwyr's possession. It represents the accumulated knowledge of the Ages of dragonkind. If any of the characters deliberately take it from its pedestal, all of the characters present are whisked from the metaplanes back into the material world. Go on to *Endgame* for the conclusion of the *Survival of the Fittest* campaign.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

If you'd like to end the shadowrunners' quest for the jewel with a bang (assuming the characters didn't come right from a fight at the Place they were in), you can always have guardians of some kind waiting for them at the Citadel. Powerful spirits, dracoforms or other creatures from the *Critters* sourcebook are all possibilities. Once the characters have overcome the guardians, they vanish and Lofwyr puts in his appearance, much as described above.

You can also make the astral quest more complicated by having Lofwyr send agents of his own on a quest after the player characters. Create a team similar in strengths to the runners and make part of the challenge of each Place to see which team can succeed at the goal first, perhaps even putting the two teams in direct competition. If any of Lofwyr's agents survive to reach the Citadel, they runners may have to deal with them before they can get the Jewel. Though Lofwyr can't harm the runners directly, he can have his agents do so.

Otherwise this scenario should present plenty of excitement for the player characters. After all, it's not every day that a group of shadowrunners has Lofwyr offer them their hearts' desires. Play up the enormity of what Lofwyr is offering them.



DEBUGGING

There's actually fairly little that can go wrong here. Either the shadowrunners accept Lofwyr's offer or they don't, and the results play out in *Endgame*. Neither one is the "correct" answer; it depends on the group. Still, there are a few problems that might crop up.

First, if the characters are foolish enough to attack Lofwyr at any point in spite of Hestaby's warning, then they've sealed their fate. Lofwyr simply kills them. Roll some dice if you feel it's necessary, but Lofwyr's power—especially here in the metaplanes—is so great that no player character should be able to survive his attack. If this allows Lofwyr to kill all the player characters, then Hestaby's gambit ultimately fails and Lofwyr wins the Rite of Succession, though it will be of no concern to the shadowrunners at that point.

Second, some of the shadowrunners might agree to Lofwyr's deal while others refuse. That's largely up to them to decide, and there's no restriction keeping the characters from fighting amongst themselves. Indeed, savvy players may realize that's just the sort of thing Lofwyr wants, since he comes out ahead if the runners wipe each other out. Lofwyr cannot interfere directly in any conflict between the characters, but he will try and persuade balky shadowrunners to come over to his way of seeing things and nudge runners willing to cooperate to eliminate their associates, if need be. If an inter-group conflict is getting out of hand and seems to be ruining everyone's fun, then you may want to put a stop to things or force a quick decision. Have the runners start to fade from the Citadel along with the jewel and move on to *Endgame*, or decide that democracy works in the metaplanes as well and the will of the majority of the characters is what happens (assuming the group isn't split 50/50).

ENDGAME

WHAT'S UP, CHUMMER?

The shadowrunners' astral forms are summoned to attend the Council of the great dragons that will decide the outcome of the Rite of Succession, and the ultimate future of dragonkind rests in their hands.

TELL IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

The Citadel fades away around you, replaced by endless darkness, lit only by the glow of the jewel you carry. You float there for a time; you can't say how long, a matter of minutes perhaps. Then you find yourselves on a mountain plateau, surrounded by high, snow-capped peaks. The night sky overhead is clear except for a scattering of clouds.

Arrayed in a circle around the plateau are dragons, about a dozen or so: eastern, western and feathered serpents. You recognize some of them, enough to know that they are all great dragons. Hestaby is closest to you, sitting on her haunches with her wings folded against her back. She turns her head to look at you and you can see that she's glowing, surrounded by an aura of multicolored light. In fact, so are all of the dragons and so are you.

Several of the dragons look up as the golden form of Lofwyr appears overhead. He glides silently down to take his place in the circle, and the other dragons bow their heads and move in a ritualistic way, as if to greet him. Lofwyr doesn't look at or acknowledge you in any way from the opposite side of the circle. He merely takes in the other dragons before rearing up to his full height.

Something seems to pass between the various dragons. You can feel it in the air, even if you can't tell exactly what it is. One by one, each of the dragons drops its head down toward the ground in a low bow and remains there. The last four dragons standing upright are Ghostwalker, Alamaï, Hestaby, and Lofwyr. Then Alamaï almost sheepishly lowers his head toward the ground. Ghostwalker follows, his expression cold and unreadable. Then Hestaby bows down and Lofwyr rises up, spreading his wings.

Just then, Hestaby rises as well. She spreads her wings and you are suddenly drawn into the center of the circle, standing in front of Hestaby, before all the gathered great dragons.

"Orange Queen," Lofwyr says. "Why have you brought these outsiders to our Council?"

Hestaby lifts her head in a defiant gesture. "It is my right," she replies, "and they are instrumental in settling this matter once and for all."

"Now," Hestaby's thought-voice says to you. "Present the jewel."

If the shadowrunners present the jewel to Hestaby, read the following:

Hestaby takes the glowing crimson gemstone into one clawed paw, lifting it for the assembled dragons to see.

"Behold," she says. "The essence of the Jewel of Memory, the lore and knowledge of dragonkind made manifest. It lies in my grasp and is now mine by right, according to our ways."

There is a long moment of silence, as the gathered dragons seem to be discussing matters among themselves. Then, one by one, they begin to bow their heads toward Hestaby. Lofwyr is soon the last dragon standing at his full height and he too slowly lowers his head toward Hestaby.

Then she moves forward toward Lofwyr, the glowing jewel held in her claws, and places it gently on the ground in front of him. Lofwyr lifts his head slightly and the other dragons glance at each other. Clearly this is unexpected. Even Lofwyr seems taken aback for a moment, though his inhuman features are difficult to read.

"You have been a good caretaker of this, Gold-Master," Hestaby says. "More importantly, Far Scholar intended you to have it. So I return it to you. Guard it well."

Lofwyr says nothing, but scoops up the jewel from the ground and holds it. Hestaby turns to the assembled dragons.

"This contest is done, but I will not claim the title of Lore-master. As I have maintained for the beginning, it is time for us to change our ways. Far Scholar showed us a beginning, a new path to follow where we exist in cooperation with the



Young Races and take our places in this new Age that has grown up around us. I embrace that new path, and I encourage you to do likewise. We can all of us be Loremasters and share our insight with others, learning from them in turn. As such, I declare that the dispersal of Far Scholar's hoard shall stand as he intended it. We will respect and honor his memory, and I hope that we will not forget his vision for us as well."

If the shadowrunners present the jewel to Lofwyr, read the following:

Lofwyr takes up the jewel and holds it in his claws, presenting it for the other gathered dragons to see.

"The Jewel of Memory and its lore remain mine, and are now mine by right as well as bequest. You see my understanding of the old ways remains, but I also understand the potential of this Age and the new tools at our disposal. The rules of the game have changed, but the game itself goes on. Those who cannot—or will not—change will not survive for long in this Age. This is a time when only the strongest among us, in body, mind and spirit, will prosper.

"Go now, return to your domains, and let no more be spoken of this. If you would challenge me in the future, think carefully about what you have learned here today before taking that risk."

HOOKS

A great deal hangs in the balance, based on the shadowrunners' decisions. They have the power to hand victory to whatever dragon they choose, which is as Hestaby intended it. Ultimately the future of dragonkind is tied to metahumanity and now it is quite literally in their hands. It's a momentous occasion and the shadowrunners should feel it.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Hestaby has summoned the shadowrunners' astral forms to the dragon Council that will decide the outcome of the Rite of Succession. Her intention is to present her fellow great dragons with a *fait accompli*; having the runners give her the astral essence of the Jewel of Memory. Of course, if the shadowrunners have made other arrangements with Lofwyr, things might go differently.

What happens is entirely up to the player characters and their actions. The material in *Tell It to Them Straight* should only be considered a guideline. Adjust things as necessary to give the shadowrunners a chance to speak their piece, if they want, or handle the situation in their own fashion. Though it's highly unusual for agents to address the Council, the dragons permit it, if only because they're curious what the characters have to say.

There's no "wrong" choice for the shadowrunners here, simply choices with different consequences. If they choose to remain loyal to Hestaby, they earn Lofwyr's enmity. Fortunately for them, Lofwyr's threats in *Citadel of the Dragon Lord* were largely empty. The agents of the Rite of Succession are protected against retribution for their actions during the Rite. Lofwyr can't go after the runners (at least not openly, but he

can still look for revenge and it's likely that he will). Hestaby is as good as her word and does her best to use the influence and prestige she gains to bring other dragons into the twenty-first century and remains true to Dunkelzahn's dream of cooperation between dragons and the young races.

If the shadowrunners choose Lofwyr, then things remain much as they were, except Lofwyr's authority and power are confirmed and strengthened. Ghostwalker loses some status in the eyes of the other dragons and keeps a grudge against Lofwyr. If Hestaby wins, Ghostwalker is initially suspicious of her motives, but consoled somewhat by Lofwyr's humbling before the Council.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE

The only real challenge for the shadowrunners in this scenario is how they handle their decision about the Jewel of Memory. Do they turn things over to Hestaby as planned or do they accept Lofwyr's offer and turn the Jewel back over to him? Or do they come up with something else altogether? (See *Debugging* for some ideas about this.)

Perhaps Lofwyr plays a final card and has agents of his own on hand to fight the shadowrunners in single combat for control of the Jewel and the runners must either fight or surrender the Jewel to Lofwyr. The battle would ultimately decide the outcome of the Rite of Succession.

DEBUGGING

It's quite possible the characters who come up with an option other than giving the Jewel to Hestaby or Lofwyr. Here are some of the likely possibilities and their outcomes:

The runners choose Ghostwalker: If Ghostwalker is given the Jewel, he immediately claims the title of Loremaster and victory in the Rite. He is smart enough to know that he cannot hope to reclaim all that was given away in Dunkelzahn's will, but he will lay claim to all of the items given away to other great dragons (though some dragons will make efforts to take them back in their own time). Perhaps surprisingly, Ghostwalker will acknowledge that the modern world calls for changes and adaptation, but he will emphasize that not all dragon traditions and customs should be casually discarded. Ghostwalker will come out of the Rite having proven his position of prominence among dragons, placing him as a solid rival to Lofwyr, Hestaby and the others in the future.

The runners choose another dragon: The shadowrunners might decide to give the Jewel to a different dragon entirely, upsetting the whole Rite. The outcome depends on which dragon they choose. If it's a fairly neutral one, like Rhonabwy, Celedyr or Hualpa, then the other dragons may accept the outcome as a reasonable (if surprising) compromise, though intrigue and scheming is certain to continue among them. If the runners choose a more extreme dragon for whatever reason, such as Alamais, Masaru or Ryumyo, the other dragons will object. The Rite will either be declared invalid and begin again or the dragon closest behind Hestaby in terms of success—which is Lofwyr, of course—will claim victory. This can lead to another Rite (and another series of



adventures) or even open warfare among the great dragons, if that is the direction you'd like to take it.

The runners destroy the Jewel: If they truly want to, the shadowrunners can destroy the astral essence of the Jewel of Memory, effectively snuffing out untold millennia of accumulated draconic lore. No test is required, but the runners must agree to destroy the Jewel. If they do, then Hestaby wins, in a way, since no one can be named Loremaster. The great dragons will be shocked, some outraged, but Hestaby will defend the shadowrunners and point out that they cannot be harmed. The dragons will honor this, but the shadowrunners have still made many powerful enemies. Only a few more progressive dragons will come to appreciate what they've done, and may offer them aid in the future.

The runners split the Jewel: If the shadowrunners try to take a lesson from Solomon and split the Jewel of Memory's essence into two or more parts, they can do so. This option actually works surprisingly well, since it places the dragons that receive the portions of the Jewel on fairly even footing and creates a true Council rather than a single Loremaster. Naturally there may be competition between the dragons to reassemble the different parts of the Jewel or to find pieces of lore that others now possess.

The runners try to keep the Jewel: Any such attempt fails, since there is no way the great dragons will permit the shadowrunners to keep one of the greatest treasures of their kind. They'll get one warning that they must turn the Jewel over or face the consequences. If they refuse, they've forfeited the protection of the Rite and will face the anger of the Council of dragons.

If the players come up with some other clever scheme for handling the situation, deal with it as you see fit based on the material given here. A particularly clever plan is worth an extra point of Karma for the team or player that comes up with it.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

IT'S A WRAP

Once the Council of Dragons is over, the shadowrunners wake up to find themselves back in their physical bodies, safely resting at the Shasta Lodge. Radek shows up to congratulate them on a job well done and to pay them the money Hestaby offered at the start of this adventure. He has also arranged for a private plane to take the characters wherever they want to go, be it back home or off to another job opportunity. Radek mentions that it's quite likely the shadowrunners' services will be in demand "in certain circles" following the recent events. Still, he cautions them to always be careful in the future when dealing with dragons.

AWARDING KARMA

Award individual Karma according to the guidelines on p. 244, SR3. Award Karma to each team member based on the following requirements:

Surviving the run	1
Completing the astral quest	2
Making a good decision at the Council	1

You may also want to award the shadowrunners a bonus of 2–4 Karma for the end of the *Survival of the Fittest* story, particularly if they did well overall during the campaign.

FURTHER ADVENTURES

Survival of the Fittest may well be the end of a campaign, particularly if characters take Lofwyr's offer and acquire great wealth, influence or the like that lifts them out of the streets and the shadows. On the other hand, the conclusion of the campaign may just be the start of a new level of operations for the shadowrunners, as they graduate from small-time to working for the big-boys, with resources and contacts to match. Certainly their work in the adventures in this series will bring them to the attention of many beings of power and influence that could find a use for their abilities in the future.

If the shadowrunners helped her win the Rite of Succession, Hestaby will certainly continue to employ them, going through Radek for most of her business. Hestaby's plans have in many ways only begun with the end of the Rite, and she's sure to need a team of capable shadowrunners if she intends to continue Dunkelzahn's legacy.

The adventures in this campaign may have left some loose ends for the shadowrunners to deal with in the future, or NPCs that can reappear as allies or adversaries (or both).

The shadowrunners have the protection of the Rite of Succession and draconic tradition. Though odds are that they've hacked off a number of powerful great dragons, they can't be directly targeted for revenge schemes or payback. Of course that doesn't mean their newfound enemies won't be waiting for the shadowrunners to slip up and offer them an opportunity that they can exploit. The characters had best hope that they never find themselves in need of, say, Lofwyr's assistance in the future if they helped win the Rite for Hestaby.

Also, while the Rite of Succession has settled this particular issue among the great dragons, it doesn't mean that Hestaby is now in charge (actually, she has abdicated what little power she gained) or that the dragons will now begin cooperating—far from it, in fact. Each of the great dragons still has schemes of their own and many of them will change or accelerate following the outcome of the Rite of Succession. The shadowrunners have earned the dragons' attention, and many of them will be in need of skilled and capable shadowrunners in the future.

CAST OF SHADOWS

RECEIVING



MR. RADEK (FIXER)

Radek (the only name that he gives) is a fixer with a growing reputation in the shadows. He's quietly efficient, preferring to let his experience and his prior satisfied customers speak for him. His manner and his connections suggest some previous corporate experience, perhaps with one of the megacorps, although Radek no longer works for any one employer. He's a middle-man, arranging "special personnel" (i.e. shadowrunners) for clients in need of them. He doesn't often deal with his clients directly, working instead through other fixers and middle-men, to keep things discrete.

In *Survival of the Fittest*, Mr. Radek is working (indirectly) for Hestaby. He's the runners' primary contact in most of the adventures in this book, setting things up and giving them the parameters of the mission, and providing them with their payment. As far as the runners are concerned, Radek is their employer, and he expects them to act accordingly. He rewards success and professional behavior, and understands mistakes and setbacks happen, but he has little tolerance for unprofessionalism or amateurs. Radek intends to be successful, and that means working with successful shadowrunners.

Radek fits right into the corporate world. He's a human of slightly above average height, with a trim build beneath his designer-cut suits. He appears to be of Mediterranean heritage, completely bald (or he shaves his head), with a neat black beard and moustache. He frequently wears dark glasses (even indoors) which hide his intense brown eyes and provide a screen for data displays that he's constantly checking and updating. He usually wears a couple pieces of tasteful jewelry, like a gold watch and a ring set with a red stone (which does not appear magical to any character who assents it).

As his name implies, there may be more to Radek than meets the eye. How much more is up to the gamemaster to decide. He may simply be an up-and-coming fixer, only slightly more clued-in (at first) than the player characters about what's really going on and what the stakes are in the game that they're playing. Radek may also be a more direct agent of Hestaby, if you prefer. He may even be a drake (see "Dealing With Dragons" in *Threats 2* for details) disguised as a human. The game statistics for Radek are merely suggestions. Feel free to adjust them as needed to make Radek a viable character. He's not intended to be a combat powerhouse, but he may have an ace in the hole of some sort if the situation turns ugly during the adventure.

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	M	R
3	3	3	6	4	5	5.23	—	3

INIT: 3 + 1D6

Pools: Combat 6

Karma Pool/Professional Rating: 5/3

Skills: Computer 3, Drive 2, Etiquette 5 (Corporate 6, Street 7), Interrogation 4, Intimidation 4, Negotiation 6, Pistols 3

Knowledge Skills: Cityspeak 4, Data Havens 4, English 5, Fine Art 3, Japanese 4, Shadowrunners 5

Cyberware (all alpha-grade): Datajack, Display Link, Headwear Memory (200 Mp)

Armor [2/0]: Armor Clothing

Weapons: Fichetti Security 500 [LP, SA, 6L, 12 (c)]

Range (TN): 0-5 (2), 6-15 (3), 16-30 (4), 31-50 (4)

Gear: Pocket secretary with cell phone and display link

EPILOGUE



Hestaby watched her chosen agents depart from the Lodge. She'd learned even more about the young races and how they thought from their group. The events of the Rite of Succession had certainly given her a great deal to think about.

She walked from the Lodge alone. It wasn't until she was some distance away that she resumed her true form, her body stretching out, wings sprouting again, amber-colored scales covering her skin. With a sweep of her mighty wings, Hestaby leapt into the air with surprising grace and speed for a creature of her size. Ponderous wingbeats lifted her higher and higher above the rocky slopes of Mount Shasta below her.

She looked out over the misty mountains and the rolling green landscape that spread out from the foothills, as she had done hundreds of times before, with a new appreciation. She thought about all of the creatures there: the young races, spir-

its, beasts, and others, all of them unaware of what had transpired, knowing nothing of the politics or the rites of dragonkind, but focused on trying to survive in a strange world.

She envied them, in a way, their ignorance could be seen as a blessing. Sometimes it was better not to know what was happening, or what was coming, for that matter. How did the expression go? "If you can keep your head while all others around you are losing theirs, you probably don't understand the problem." She gave a toothy smile, thinking about the time one of the Lodge shamans had told her that.

A stiff wind blew across the face of the mountain and Hestaby caught and rode upon it, letting it take her up toward the mountain peak, capped in snow and wreathed in thin ribbons of cloud. There she settled, claws crunching in the snow and finding craggy stone to grip, wings slowly folding around her



body like a cloak. Hestaby had learned to enjoy the cold and solitude of the windswept peak of Shasta, using it as a place of meditation and contemplation. She had much to contemplate.

There was no sound above the rush of the wind, but Hestaby turned anyway, sensing a presence before there was any outward sign. The cold air shimmered and a form appeared, scales golden and bronze, eyes pools of molten fire, posture stiff and formal, as always.

"Gold-Master," Hestaby said, addressing him by his username. "To what do I owe the pleasure?" Though her tone was conversational and polite, Hestaby was alert and prepared. Lofwyr was weaker in his astral form, but he was still more powerful than many.

"Orange Queen," he replied, dipping his head in a gesture of regard, indicating that his intentions were in no way hostile. "I have come to say that I underestimated you. In truth, I didn't believe you would achieve as much as you did. It's rare that I make such a mistake regarding a rival." He paused and looked her straight in the eye. "You can be certain that it will not happen again."

"A rival, Gold-Master?" Hestaby returned. "Is that what I am? Is that what I must be?"

Lofwyr seemed taken aback by her conciliatory question. He had clearly expected bluster, defiance, perhaps even gloating, but not this. His brief look of surprise was replaced by something else: slyness, perhaps, or even amusement.

"I stand corrected," he said. "I have underestimated you again. Do you believe that we can be other than rivals, Orange Queen?"

"I do not believe that it is necessary for us to be enemies," Hestaby replied carefully.

"You would find me a formidable enemy," Lofwyr said.

"I could say the same," she replied. "But I'd prefer it did not come to that."

"Then do you propose a mating?" Lofwyr asked.

Now it was Hestaby's turn to be taken aback. That hadn't been what she'd had in mind at all. She and Lofwyr were both supposed to be well past their mating years.

"Perhaps," she said, curious to keep the line of discussion open. "I had something more like ... friendship in mind, or at least cooperation."

"Friendship?" Lofwyr's thought-voice reflected his incredulity. "You have become too enamoured of the young races and their ideas, Orange Queen. What is friendship to us?"

"Perhaps it's the one thing we don't really have," she replied.

"Because we have no need of such things," he said.

"I think we do, more than most of us care to admit."

"You're beginning to sound like Far-Scholar," Lofwyr said. "He had strange ideas, too."

"Thank you," Hestaby said with a nod of her head. "High praise indeed."

Lofwyr's expression and posture clearly said that he hadn't intended it as a compliment. Rather than replying, however, he bowed his head and backed a step away.

"I've said what I came to say. I will be watching your work with interest, Orange Queen."

"And I yours, Gold-Master."

With that, Lofwyr's spirit form took wing, vanishing back into the mists of the astral plane. Hestaby sat atop the mountain and watched him go until he was out of sight. Then she turned and looked out over the land surrounding her home for a time before finally taking wing herself and returning to the Lodge.

She gave instructions that she was not to be disturbed for a time and withdrew into her private chambers. There she activated the holographic display screen linked to the private computer system. Such interesting and useful things humanity had created while the dragons slept. Computers were almost as efficient as memory crystals in storing information, and they could manipulate it as well. She could see why Dunkelzahn had been so fascinated by technology and why he chose to rely on it rather than traditional methods for certain things. There were some things not kept in the Jewel of Memory.

She called up the file that she had found in the Zurich Orbital datastore, kept safe and secret until Dunkelzahn's death gave her the key to unlock it.

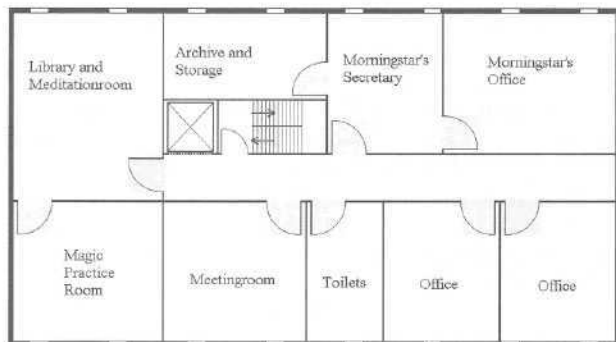
"My dear Hestaby," the letter began. "I am sure there will soon come a time when you face a challenge among our kind. When you do, consider my advice for dealing with our fellow dragons ..."



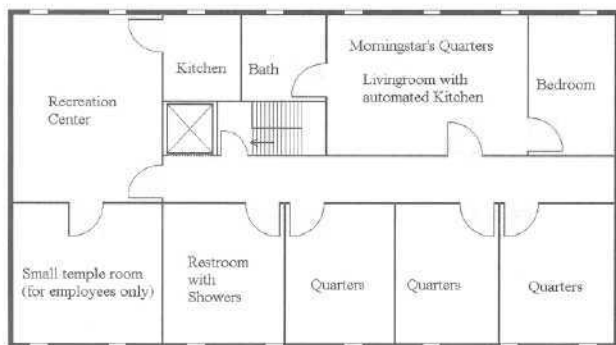
First Floor



Second Floor

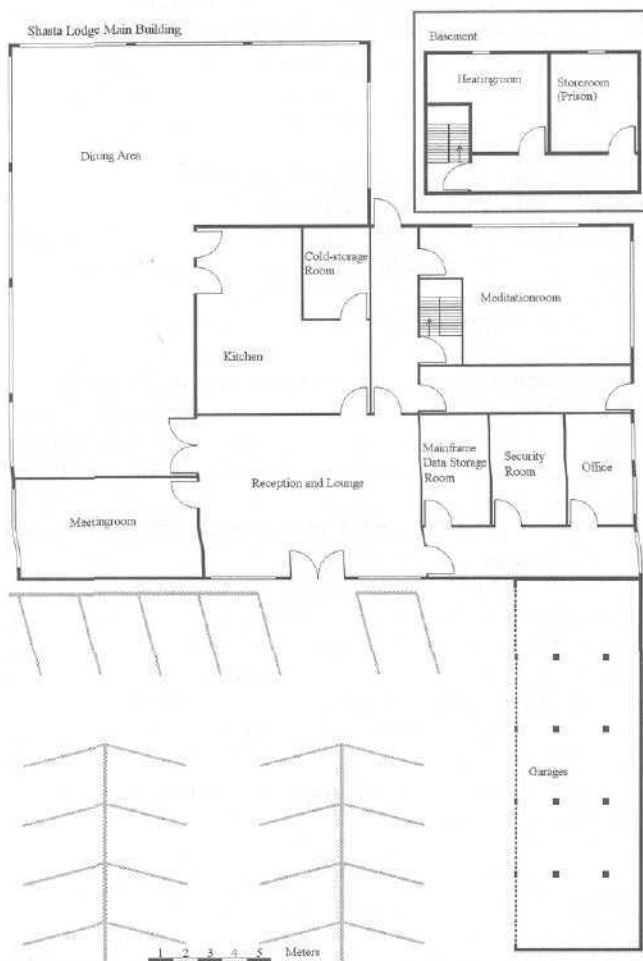


Third Floor

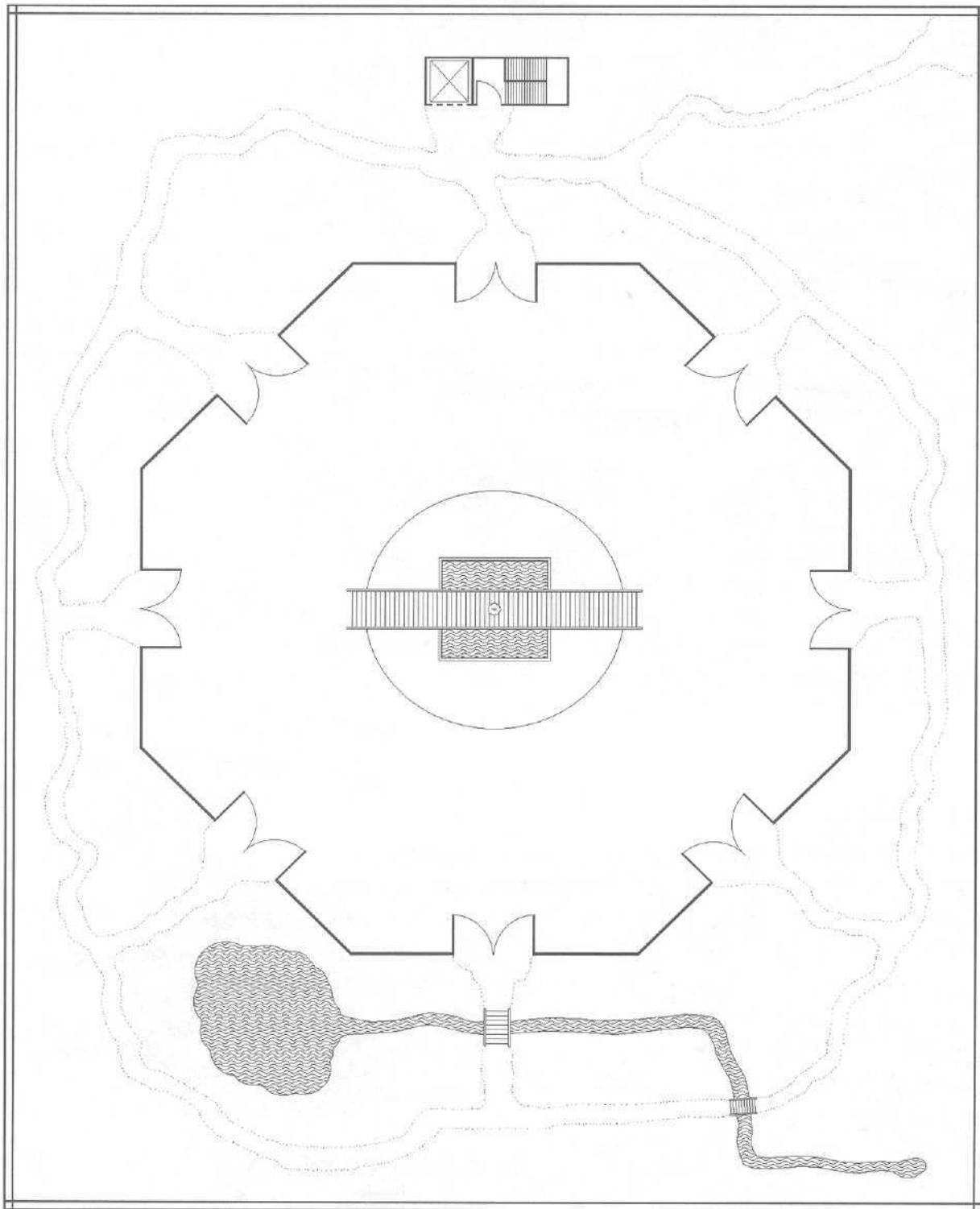


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Shanta Lodge Main Building



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