

*Watch your back. Shoot straight. Conserve ammo. And never, ever, cut a deal with a dragon.*

—Street proverb

2070. Handbasket still in motion.

Since the turn of the century, the world has changed in unimaginable ways. The mystical energies of the universe have been steadily rising in power and concentration, bringing magic back to the world—The Awakening. Elves, dwarfs, orks and trolls have assumed their true forms, throwing off their human guises. Creatures of the wild have changed as well, transforming into beasts of myth and legend. The many traditions of magic have returned—magicians from all walks of life have carved out a place in the new world for themselves. Though many aspects of the Awakening remain mysterious, modern society has learned much about the workings of magic and how to harness it as a force just as important as technology.

The decades that followed the Awakening were years of panic and turmoil, as the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse seemed to race across the Earth. Cultures that had never lost touch with their mystic heritage used magic in uprisings against the nations that had suppressed them for centuries. The vast global telecommunications network collapsed under an assault by a mysterious computer virus. Dragons soared into the skies. Epidemics and famine ravaged the world's population. Clashes between newly Awakened races and the rest of humanity became common. All central authority crumbled, and the world began to spiral downward into the abyss.

But man and his kin are hardy animals. Out of the devastation and chaos, a fragile new social order slowly emerged. Advanced simulated sensorium (simsense) technology helped eradicate the last vestiges of the computer virus. Amerindians, elves, orks and dwarfs formed new nations. Where environmental degradation and pollution have made many areas uninhabitable, eco-groups wage war on polluters, and Awakened powers use incredible magic to heal the earth. Central governments have balkanized into smaller nations and city-states, as fear of the world's changes drives wedges between people of different backgrounds. Vast metropolitan sprawls known as metroplexes cover the landscape; these urban jungles swallow whole regions. Police departments, unable to contain crime waves and civil unrest, have been privatized or had their work contracted out to corporations.

Megacorporations have become the new world superpowers, a law unto themselves. The entire planet speaks their language; the nuyen has become the global monetary standard, and the highest court in the world is the Corporate Court, made up of members of the top ten megacorporations. The megacorps play a deadly game, paying pawns in the shadows to help them get an edge on the competition. Meanwhile, corporate executives and wage slaves hole up in their own enclaves, safe behind layers of security and indoctrination. Outside the walls of these arcologies and gated communities, whole stretches of the sprawls have become ungovernable. Gangs rule the streets; the forgotten masses grow, lacking even

a System Identification Number (SIN) to give them any rights. These outcasts, dissidents, and rebels live as the dregs of society, squatting in long-abandoned buildings, surviving through crime and predatory instincts. Many of them attempt to rise above their miserable existences by slotting addictive Better-Than-Life (BTL) chips, living vicariously through someone else's senses. Others band together, some for survival and some to gain their own twisted forms of power.

Technology, too, has changed people. No longer content with the limitations of flesh, many have turned to the artificial enhancements of cyberware to make themselves more than human—stronger, faster, smarter. Others prefer more natural enhancements, augmented organs grown in clinic vats: bio-ware. Still others deck themselves out in powerful and wearable computing equipment, and manipulate the Matrix or vehicles as if the optical chips and run-flat tires were parts of their own body.

In the harsh reality of 2070 where profit is the most important mistress, the bigger the metroplex, the deeper the shadows. In the cracks between the giant corporate structures, criminals of all shades find their homes. When the megacorps want a job done but don't want to dirty their hands, they turn to the only people who can pull it off: shadowrunners, deniable assets. Though only the blackest of governmental or corporate databases will even register a shadowrunner's involvement with a corporation, the demand for his or her services is high. Hackers can slide like a whisper through the databases of giant corporations, spiriting away the only thing of real value—information. Street samurai are enforcers for hire whose combat skills and reflexes make them the ultimate urban predators. Riggers can manipulate vehicles and drones for a variety of purposes. Magicians, those rare folk who possess the gift of wielding and shaping the magical energies that now surround the Earth, are sought after to spy on the competition, sling spells against an enemy, commit magical sabotage, and for any other purpose that their employers can dream up. All these individuals sell their skills to survive, taking on the tasks too dangerous for others; many of them illegal, all of them unsavory.

Welcome to the dark side of the future, pal. It's going to be a hell of a ride.

## THE BASICS

*Shadowrun* is a roleplaying game set in the dystopian near-future of 2070, a world where cyberpunk meets magic, where criminal subcultures rub shoulders with corporate elites, and where advanced technology competes with the power of spells and spirits. It is an age of high-tech lowlives, shrouded in danger and mystery and driven by intrigue and adrenaline. Those who play in it stand on the edge, always on the cusp of adventure.

*Shadowrun* is designed for two to eight players. Like many other roleplaying games, it has an open-ended style of play. That means the game has no definitive ending—no preset time limit, number of turns to play or single goal to reach that marks the game's end. Unlike most other games, *Shadowrun*

