

has no winners or losers. The object is to have fun with the exercise of imagination. When this happens, everybody wins.

Those with roleplaying-game experience will find some of the following familiar. Such readers may want to skip ahead to *Game Concepts* (p. 51), or turn to *A History Lesson for the Reality Impaired* (p. 22) or *Life on the Edge* (p. 35) and delve into the history and background of the *Shadowrun* universe. For those new to roleplaying, the following introduction may not answer all of your questions, because a roleplaying game is more easily learned from experienced players than from a book. This brief overview will give you the general concept behind roleplaying. To learn more, find others who already play *Shadowrun*, and learn from them.

WHAT IS A ROLEPLAYING GAME?

A roleplaying game is part improvisational theater, part storytelling, and part game. It is played by a gamemaster who runs the game and a group of players who pretend to be characters. These characters are created by the players, given a history and personality, and then further defined by a set of statistics that represent the character's skills and attributes—as developed in the character creation process (see p. 70). The gamemaster presents the setting and situation; through their characters, the players interact with the storyline and other characters.

Think of it this way: everyone has read a book or seen a movie in which the lead character does something that the reader or viewer finds so utterly wrong that he or she wants to shout out a warning. But no matter what we say, the character will do what the plot demands; we're just along for the ride. Even throwing popcorn won't help.

In a roleplaying game, the players control their characters' actions and respond to the events of the plot. If the player does not want his or her character to go through the door, the character will not. If the player thinks the character can talk him- or herself out of a tight situation rather than resorting to that trusty pistol, he or she can talk away. The script, or plot, of a roleplaying game is flexible, always changing based on the decisions the players make as characters.

The gamemaster controls the story. He or she keeps track of what is supposed to happen when, describes events as they occur so that the players (as characters) can react to them, keeps track of other characters in the game (referred to as non-player characters), and resolves attempts to take action using the game system. The game system comes into play when characters seek to use their skills or otherwise do something that requires a test to see whether or not they succeed. Specific rules are presented for situations that involve rolling dice to determine the outcome (see *Game Concepts*, p. 51).

The gamemaster describes the world as the characters see it, functioning as their eyes, ears, and other senses. Gamemastering is not easy, but the thrill of creating an adventure that engages the other players' imaginations, testing their gaming skills and their characters' skills in the game world, makes it worthwhile. FanPro publishes game supplements and adventures to help this process along, but experienced gamemasters always adapt the game universe to suit their own styles.

In roleplaying, stories (the adventures) evolve much like a movie or book, but within the flexible storyline created by the gamemaster. The story is the overall plot, a general outline for what might happen at certain times or in reaction to other events. It is no more concrete than that until the players become involved. At that point, the adventure becomes as involving and dramatic as that great movie you saw last week, or that great book you stayed up all night to finish. In some ways it's even better, because you helped create it.

There is no "right" or "wrong" way to play a roleplaying game—some may involve much more storytelling and improvised dialogue than others, while other games may revolve more around combat situations and tactical battles. The important part is keeping a balance of these activities that keeps all the players in the game happy!

ROLEPLAYING SHADOWRUN

In *Shadowrun*, players characters are typically shadowrunners or other members of the criminal underground. Many varieties of runners exist, of all races, genders, and sizes, each with their own area(s) of expertise.

WHAT RUNNERS DO

Shadowrunners commit crimes, usually for money. When a corporation or other sponsor needs someone to do dirty work, they look to the shadows. As "deniable assets," runners make advantageous—and expendable—tools.

Runners usually operate in teams. A team can be any combination of character types, depending on what the players want to do. The team should have a plausible reason for working together, such as being old friends or cellmates, having the same interests, or being forced together by circumstance. Different teams will have different capabilities, and the gamemaster should plan accordingly. For example, one team may excel at breaking and entering, while another might be a squad of bruisers who work best as hired muscle. While runner teams will want to work within their strengths, a staple of drama is the protagonists being pulled out of their element and over their heads.

Runners have contacts, who represent other potentially useful people they know. Some of these will be other underworld types, such as gang members or hit men. Others may be ordinary people, useful for information or for "special arrangements"—for example, the corporate secretary who lets you know when the wiz research scientist you're supposed to kidnap will be leaving the building. The more you rely on any particular contact's skills, information, and resources, the more you'll owe them in the end—even between long-standing contacts, money and favors are usually necessary to grease the wheels. A player character's relationship with a contact need not be friendly. Sometimes, the people that can help you out the most are those you like the least.

The most important contact for shadowrunners is the *fixer*. A fixer acts as a middleman and can usually help the runners find gear, other contacts or work—all for a fee, of course. A corporation or other employer that needs shadowrunners

