

on their toes. A complication can be as simple as a piece of equipment failing at precisely the wrong moment or as complex as the adventure's objective turning out to be something radically different than what the player characters originally believed. For example, the runners may be hired to perform a simple burglary, only to discover that the item they've stolen belongs to a dragon's treasure hoard.

Complications provide the perfect vehicle for the classic *Shadowrun* double-cross, as the events of the adventure make it clear to the characters that their Johnson didn't tell them the whole truth. A Johnson might lie about what corp he's from, set the runners up to be killed, pay them in traceable "screamer" technology that transmits their locations to the cops, and so on. These plot devices inject the unpredictability of real life into adventures and provide the intrigue that is one of *Shadowrun's* distinguishing characteristics. Like everything else in the game, however, use complications judiciously. Throwing too many complications at players may make them feel as if they have less and less control over their characters' lives, and can make the game frustrating rather than enjoyably complex.

### Adding Color

An adventure should engage the imagination, which is what roleplaying is all about. Players need to see the scenery, hear the gunshots, feel the sweat trickling down their necks. Some players will do most of the work. Others will make the gamemaster want to tear his hair out because they refuse to play along. Most will fall in the middle.

The best advice for gamemasters is, "Show, don't tell." Rather than reciting descriptions in a monotone, overact. Ham it up. Make the setting and situation as vivid as possible in your players' minds.

If possible, use some kind of display with miniatures to show players the territory. It's much easier to draw a wall with a door in it than to try to explain a building's layout verbally. This kind of display also avoids arguments as to who is standing in the line of fire, where the grenade goes when someone tosses it, and so on. (See *Tips For Less Stressful Shadowruns*, p. 270.)

Consider using other props as well. When the team taps into a datafile containing a fiendish corporate plan, don't just read it to them. Write one up before the adventure and hand it to them. Such props speed up game play and add color.

Make your NPCs as colorful as possible. Try acting in character when playing NPCs, complete with funny voices. Steal wholeheartedly from comic books, movies, TV, and fiction. If you want to play a fixer like Groucho Marx, go ahead. If, on the other hand, this kind of play-acting doesn't suit the group, don't bother with it.

Color should come from the player characters as well. Use subplots to help players flesh out their characters and advance their life stories when they're not in a firefight or hacking into the Matrix. An adventure should be about more than getting loot and earning Karma. Do the characters have love lives? If not, do they want them? Who are their friends? How do they spend their time? Try to spend at least part

of each adventure developing these details, because not only can they provide rich plot hooks, but these are essentially the reasons that keep a character going when all else is lost or failing.

### Prep Time

Players and gamemasters will need time to get ready for the run. Most players will want to do a lot of preparation before taking on anything they think is tough. They may want to scope the place out, check on the principal opposition's background, look for subordinates to suborn, etc. They can spend a whole game session getting ready. Don't let them. Instead, give them a set amount of time by which their characters must accomplish the preliminaries. Let them accomplish some things, but don't let them putter around endlessly or cover absolutely all the bases. If the clock is ticking, let them know. And if they're not moving fast enough, turn up the heat.

To keep things moving, have some of the preliminary info available for them. Pass it on through a contact or their fixer. If they want to double-check or do their own snooping, compress the time it takes. If the hacker wants to hunt around, have the player make a single dice roll and use the number of hits to decide how much info she finds. If one of the team wants to get friendly with somebody in the target organization, or monitor activities to learn schedules and procedures, let the player make one dice roll using an appropriate skill + attribute. Weigh the number of hits rolled and how little time is left before you give them the information they want, and make sure that it is at least partly accurate. ("You're pretty sure the wage slave thinks you're okay," or "They've changed the passcodes at two o'clock for three of the past four days. The other time, they changed at three o'clock and they had a fire drill that day.") After all, the characters are still only guessing that what they've seen or learned actually represents standard conditions. If they want special gear, let them put the word out—but you decide whether or not the stuff is available by the time the curtain rises.

### INTEGRATING NEW TEAM MEMBERS

Few gaming groups are willing to start a new campaign just to add a new player or player character. Every time a new player wants to join the game, however, or a new player character needs to join the team because a former character retired or died or because the team is lacking a necessary skill, the group must find a way to successfully integrate new characters into the existing shadowrunning team.

Using the team's contacts is perhaps the simplest way to introduce a new character to a group. A contact may introduce a new character at virtually any time and place. Following the contact's introduction of a new character or in place of it, a team might hold a "trial run" to test prospective team members. Gamemasters can easily fill such runs with interesting and fun surprises, because the prospective member and the team will be unfamiliar with each other's skills, abilities, work methods, personalities, and so on.

Finally, a chance encounter may bring a new character and a group together. Gamemasters can use nearly any ele-

