

## SETTINGS

Shadowrun is set only sixty-three years in the future, but the world has gone through tremendous changes. Two of the most significant are the Matrix and the astral plane—two “settings” that will come into play no matter where your shadowrunner is on the globe.

### THE MATRIX

The Matrix is the sweeping term generally used to refer to the worldwide computer network and telecommunications grid—or, more accurately, the millions of wireless computer networks and devices that, together, compose the Matrix—a mesh network with no central body. The Matrix is used for all types of communications—voice and vidphone calls are routed through the Matrix, as are text messages and emails.

Almost everyone in developed nations uses the Matrix on a daily basis for work, education, and recreation. In fact, most people are online all of the time, constantly interacting with the Matrix via their commlinks and augmented reality (AR) overlays. Almost everyone has their own personal area network (PAN), a micro-network linking together all of their personal devices with their commlink as the central router and Matrix hub. This wireless connectivity gives users a great amount of freedom, as they can access their files and resources from virtually everywhere, and interact with nearby devices and networks using AR visual sight cues and other sensory data to bring them information on the fly. This technology is described in detail in *The Wireless World*, p. 216.

Of central interest to most casual users are geo-tags that broadcast AR Matrix data that is linked to a specific location. For example, a geo-tag at a shopping mall may broadcast a mall map, information about new stores, and current sale specials. A geo-tag at the Seattle Department of Motor Vehicles would direct you to the proper line, desk, or terminal, inform you of the necessary ID requirements, and offer driving safety tips to everyone entering and leaving.

Matrix users can access multiple systems at once—they may be downloading their email in one augmented reality “window,” referencing research documents in another, and watching the security cameras mounted in their child’s daycare in a third.

Many Matrix services are public and accessible, such as some databases, social clubs, game rooms, or PR offices. Others are semi-private—dating services and stock market trading sites, for example—available to the public in exchange for a one-time or subscription fee. Others are private, layered with IC and security measures and patrolled by corporate hackers. These hosts contain the deepest, darkest secrets of corporations and other entities.

### THE ASTRAL PLANE

The astral plane is another reality entirely. Some magicians can perceive its depths or project their consciousness therein. Those who take astral form can move through the astral plane at the speed of thought, but few magicians can stay within this realm for longer than a few hours. The astral plane is the home of spirits, beings of quicksilver and shadow, and is a realm of mystery and danger. It parallels our own physical plane, and auras of living creatures and magic are reflected upon it, where those skilled in the Art can analyze them. The theory goes that the astral is actually sustained by the life force of the Earth and its creatures. From the astral plane, a magician can read the emotional imprints that linger on various items. Sufficiently strong feelings may even pollute the astral atmosphere. Sterile corporate offices, murder scenes, and toxic dumping

grounds, to give just a few examples, all have their own distinct (and unpleasant) astral “flavor.”

Beyond the astral plane are the metaplanes, realms of magic accessible only by initiated magicians. Little is known about the metaplanes—of which there may be an unlimited number, or only one, depending on whose theories you believe. Initiated magicians can travel to any metaplane they choose, though some have strict entrance requirements.

### BEYOND THE BASICS

Shadowrun contains many more interesting settings, too numerous to describe in detail here. Players may find themselves in corporate arcologies, self-contained and self-sustainable mini-cities that house thousands of corporate citizens; Awakened lands, where metahumans and dragons work together to purify the often polluted Earth; or the cold edge of space, where humanity is slowly populating numerous orbital habitats as it expands into the void. Most metahumans make their homes in vast urban sprawls, from the glittering skyscraper penthouses of the corporate elite, to the winding homogenous masses of corporate housing enclaves, to the crumbling and blighted ghettos long ago abandoned by civil authorities to gangs and worse. Even corporate thugs and cops fear to tread in many of the sprawl’s shadow regions.

## SHADOW ACTIVITY

In Shadowrun, the megacorporations make the laws, and they tend toward laws that favor themselves. Any shadowrunner knows that the corps will bend or break the law whenever they need to. When the corps choose to break the law, shadowrunners get involved as deniable assets. Therefore, when runners hit the streets, they also tend to break the law—a lot. Depending on their current objectives, random chance, or the actions of opponents, lawbreaking can occur in a variety of ways. Most runs involve several specific criminal operations, many of which are described below.

**B&E** stands for breaking and entering. Most runs involve B&E in some way, whether to steal research, commit sabotage, plant false evidence, or otherwise further the nefarious plot of this week’s Mr. Johnson. Security in 2072 has become an art form, ranging from mundane retinal-scan maglocks to concertina wire electrified fences to patrolling spirits to full-blown security hackers and riggers mixing metahuman sensibilities with the unblinking eye of technology. Any runner team worth its name is going to need the know-how, the creativity, or the brute force to bypass these defenses.

**Courier runs** are glorified delivery jobs. Most often, the object to be delivered is of strategic or monetary importance or is otherwise valuable and so needs protection from others who want it. Runners hired for these jobs must make sure the object reaches its destination safely and intact.

**Datasteals** are jobs where a hacker works his way into a computer system and steals information. While this can often be done from a remote location, hackers often prefer to work on site, working their technical magic in concert with the other members of the team—disabling and obstructing security systems, allowing the team to penetrate to the core of even the blackest facilities. This infiltration is often necessary, as many government and corporate computer hosts remain disconnected from the Matrix for security reasons.

**Extractions** are frequently arranged by corporations who wish to steal valuable personnel from other corporations. Top research scientists, skilled financial agents, and other suits with valuable

knowledge are hot commodities and are suitably protected. The “victims” in many extractions are willing targets—employees who have decided to defect to another corp. Some corporations consider certain personnel so valuable that they would rather see them dead than working for a rival; attempts to extract these people may fall afoul of deadly contingency plans.

**Hooding** is robbing from the rich to give to the poor, a definition that has gradually expanded to include any run spurred more by a commitment to social justice than anything else. Examples include destroying a pollution-producing factory, mugging the Yakuza protection-racket enforcers and returning the money they stole to the neighborhood, or defending a metahuman community from attacks by human supremacists. Corporations and authorities typically view such acts as “terrorism,” while more cynical people may view such social concern as a weakness to be exploited.

**Smuggling** is similar to courier work, though smugglers usually have their own specially equipped vehicles for sneaking goods across borders and outrunning (or outrunning) the law. Smuggling can be quite lucrative if the runner knows the markets. Such work usually goes hand in hand with piracy, as pirates are often the cheapest source of illicit goods. Smuggling is done through various means and with many different vehicles, but the smuggler’s choice is undoubtedly the Scout-class, vectored-thrust, low-altitude vehicle (LAV) known as the thunderbird, or t-bird.

**Structure hits** are sabotage runs intended to do structural damage to the target that will cost time, nuyen, work, and perhaps more to repair or recover from. Runs of this nature often involve large explosions, making demolitions a useful skill. Structure hits can be accomplished via other methods, however, from smart corrosives to rampaging elementals to pushing the right button at the wrong time.

An additional twist is the **tailchaser**, or **distraction run**, where a team of runners may be hired to pull off a flashy run like wetwork or a structure hit ... but really, they’re just around to distract corp security and confuse everyone while another runner team takes on a more understated job such as an extraction or B&E. While security is busy dealing with the fallout from the first runner team’s actions, the second team sneaks in and takes what they want—whether it be a metahuman, a piece of hot tech, or some paydata. This second job may not be fully discovered for hours or even days.

**Wetwork** is assassination, pure and simple. The world of 2072 contains many factions, each with multitudes of enemies whom they may find most convenient and cost effective to simply remove. Corporations or underworld figures sometimes place bounties on certain individuals; collecting on these can be profitable, if risky. Many runners refuse to take these jobs and view dirtying their hands for money in this way as vile, though equally many have no such moral qualms.

These types of criminal operations are just the beginning of a long list of shadowrunning possibilities. Some runs may be simple investigations or may involve low-level criminal activity such as BTL-dealing, Matrix bank fraud, or holdups. Breaking the law can easily become an everyday occurrence for runners. In fact, some runners break the law simply by existing, because they possess illegal cyberware, practice magic without a license, or are not allowed within certain countries. While some runners have legitimate jobs, many do not have SINs, so they work and travel with false identities. Much of the weaponry and gear associated with shadowrunning is also restricted, and so runners must take care to cache their gear and maintain safehouses. This gets even more complex if the runners have to cross borders, a common occurrence for established shadowrunner teams. Some jobs will take runners across borders or overseas because the sponsor backing the job wants to use operatives that are unlikely to be recognized, or maybe because the sponsor has simply burned too many bridges in that country. Other jobs may lead runners across the globe in unexpected ways—they could be chasing a sim star gone missing, or a piece of art that “walked away” from its museum home.

