



## Notes from the Bunker Elf in the Big City

by Rich Redman

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Welcome to your bunker. I'm Rich Redman, one of the designers of the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game**. I may not be an expert, but I'm experienced and opinionated. Here in the bunker, I explore some corners of the **d20 Modern** rules, create rules variants, and offer suggestions based on my experience writing and running games.

This month's column is for all you modern fantasy players out there. This article draws heavily upon material found in the **Urban Arcana Campaign Setting**. If you haven't checked that book out, you'll definitely want to! It covers a great many fantasy elements that can add depth to your **d20 Modern** game.

### New Around Here?

So you're a new arrival from some fantasy realm who has traveled by a mysterious mechanism (we'll call it Shadow) to the mundane or "real" world. That process has altered your memories in a way that some refer to as "the Gift of Lethe." You can speak the local language. You remember certain details of your previous life, such as your name, abilities, relationships, closely held beliefs, and personal experiences. But you no longer remember information about your old world, such as legends, tales, geography, politics, details of society and culture, and any nonessential secondhand knowledge. So while you remember how to cast spells or how to fight with a sword, and you may even remember experiences you had while using those abilities, you don't have any context. You don't remember where, or why, you used them.

The **Urban Arcana Campaign Setting** explains that some creatures that travel through Shadow adapt quickly and take the loss well. Others try to rebuild a comforting and familiar environment, gathering individuals of similar species, temperament, and motivation around themselves. Others spend their lives trying to find a way back, though no successes have been reported so far. Some, sadly, go mad.

Which reaction is yours? What are your goals? What do you think about the modern world? This column offers some ideas that you can use to add detail to your Shadowkind hero.

### Misconceptions

Let's get a few preliminaries out of the way. You probably don't understand particle physics, electrical engineering, or how a Wankel rotary engine works, but neither are you an aborigine from an isolated South American jungle village or a tiny island in the Pacific. You understand mechanical devices, though the ones you've used were most likely powered by muscle, enslaved elemental spirits, and other forms of magic rather than electricity or internal combustion. You don't think cars, trucks, trains, or jumbo jets are dragons. You've seen tattoos, body piercings, and sexual fetishes before. There's really not much in this world that shocks you.

In fact, in many ways, the modern world seems a bit primitive to you. Effects that you could produce elegantly with magic in your world require bulky equipment and vast infrastructures here. For example, if you wanted to see a remote location, you could do so with *clairvoyance* or with some item based on that

spell. A person from this world needs a camera, a viewing device, wires, a transmission network (such as the Internet), and a power network (either batteries or power lines). The ubiquitous nature of such devices seems strange to you. You may not remember a great deal about your old home, but the common usage of something like cellular telephones strikes you as odd. You're pretty sure that most people couldn't afford the equivalent items in your world.

Remember Clarke's Law: Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. Most humans couldn't tell you how a light switch works or how electricity is generated and transmitted to the light bulb -- though most of them could easily look up that information. They simply flip a switch, and voila! To a new arrival from Shadow, the process is the same as a somatic component that activates a magic item.

## First Lesson

Besides the noise, lights, and fast-moving objects that seem to be so much more prevalent than you're used to, the first thing you notice about this world is how people treat you. In a very few hours, you figure out that humans don't see the real you. For example, if you're an elf, they see a short, slender human -- perhaps an adolescent. While the treatment that comes with such a misconception may be annoying to someone who has already seen his first century go by, the advantage is equally obvious -- you won't be persecuted for being different.

## Your Biggest Hurdle

The biggest hurdle you have to overcome in the modern world is identification. Not only do you have no driver's license, no library card, and no credit card, you don't even entirely understand what those items are. When positive identification was required in your world, someone used magic. In this world, you need paper. You have three options.

**Legal:** The Displaced (**Urban Arcana**, page 179) are used to aiding "involuntary immigrants" such as yourself. If you can survive long enough to figure out who and where they are, the Displaced can help you legally acquire the necessary identification. Similarly, the Church of Pelor (**Urban Arcana**, page 173) and St. Cuthbert's House (**Urban Arcana**, page 196) may be of assistance.

**Unlawful:** You can kill someone who looks like you, hide the body, and use that person's identification. Or if you survive long enough, you can obtain and pay for the services of a good forger to make you some papers. Or if you're headed for a life of crime anyway, your criminal "godfathers" may supply you with forged identification.

**Don't Bother:** Homelessness is a multigenerational problem. Many humans live with no ID and no home address for years and simply work as day laborers when they need cash. Day laborers need only report to a labor agency, or show up at a designated street corner or parking lot, to get work. It doesn't pay much and there are no benefits, but it's honest work.

## Predators

As a newly arrived and confused Shadowkind, your situation is much like that of an underage kid arriving at the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City. Predators that can see what you are roam everywhere, and most of them have their own agendas for you. Some operate under the auspices of governments, but

others -- such as the Eyes of the Beholder (**Urban Arcana**, page 182) -- are composed of the worst sorts of Shadowkind. Still others, such as the Fraternal Order of Vigilance (**Urban Arcana**, page 184) are human monsters. Experiences with people such as these may color the rest of your time in this world, unless the Knights of the Silver Dragon (**Urban Arcana**, page 189) come to your aid.

### **Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?**

Some Shadowkind have more racial cohesion than others. Those who traditionally stick together tend to help each other get settled in this new world. Doing so rarely involves more than showing you to the nearest shelter run by the Displaced. Some, however, do a great deal more. Goblin gangs take newcomer goblins back to their warrens -- sometimes by force -- because they always need new members to bolster their strength. Yuan-ti take newly arrived snakeblooded humans and yuan-ti back to their nests as well.

## **Shadowkind**

Here are some examples of how you might settle into this world if you're any of the following Shadowkinds.

**Aasimar:** You are beautiful, and beautiful people in need can often find support that eludes others. People in this world assume that you're human, so your situation is similar to that of Shadowkind humans (see below). Because your desire to help others is unstoppable, you actively seek out charitable and philanthropic organizations such as the Displaced, the Church of Pelor, St. Cuthbert's House, and the Knights of the Silver Dragon (See Chapter Six: Organizations in the ***Urban Arcana Campaign Setting***) in order to do good in your community.

**Bugbear:** You are the classic soldier of organized crime. You're tough, you're cruel, and you want only instant gratification. You may be spending a lot of time in jail until you make contact with the criminal elements that desire your talents. Of course, you could also meet someone from one of the charitable organizations that deals with Shadowkind and find honest work as a bodyguard, soldier, or law-enforcement officer. Alternatively, many professional sports organizations -- including hockey teams, football teams, and boxing stables -- would also be happy to recruit you.

**Dragonblooded Human:** You are tough and physically powerful, and you possess a strong personality. Your proud bearing ensures that many people defer to you as a leader. Once you acquire identification, you can easily find work in the military or in law enforcement. You can also excel in the modern business world once you rise above the level of corporate drone and reach the coveted executive status. You have a strong nesting instinct and a desire for symbols of class, excellence, and status. You are more interested in accumulating material wealth than most other Shadowkind are.

**Drow:** Humans in this world think you are an ethnic youth. Where other elves accept the attitudes of humans with patience and flee to rural areas as soon as possible, you resent the stigma and embrace the urban lifestyle. Unless some wonderful patron makes you her beneficiary soon after your arrival, a desire for control over humans and revenge against all of them begins to dominate your waking hours. Because you prefer night to day and possess a preternatural charm, you quickly become a trendsetter in your city's nightlife. Clubs become cool because you and your friends patronize them, and clothing styles begin to change in accordance with your tastes.

**Dwarf:** Humans often refer to you as a dwarf or a midget, though you quickly come to realize that humans who suffer from dwarfism prefer the term "little people." You have no use for vagrants or street people, but

they can point you to businesses that provide day labor. You can easily make your mark in warehouse or landscaping work and make other contacts from there. Antidiscrimination laws and your own capabilities should easily overcome any concerns about your height. The International Guild of Laborers (**Urban Arcana**, page 187) may offer you membership in the union and help you settle in and find steady work. Whatever path you take, you quickly find yourself among humans (and people of other races) who share your work ethic. Supervisors don't like to promote or transfer you because you're so valuable where you are. The items you create are particularly valuable in military, construction, mining, and exploration, where customers need rugged products that can survive rough treatment and harsh conditions.

**Elf:** Humans tend to see you as a slightly built adolescent. No matter how patient and humble you are, this attitude eventually gets on your nerves. You may find that your natural abilities lend themselves to work as a sneak thief or a pickpocket, or even as an entertainer or an acrobat. But in a world where "elfin beauty" usually describes a half-starved supermodel with a child's features, true elves can rarely find work in the media. If you're lucky, you may meet an emissary from an elven community soon after your arrival. Through such a contact, you may gain access to a rural community outside the city, where you can live in an isolated and usually wooded wilderness region. The Black Feathers (**Urban Arcana**, page 172) may also be of some assistance to you.

**Gnoll:** Your situation is similar in many ways to that of the bugbear, but you're a predator and a scavenger. When people offer you help, you steal their wallets or cash boxes. Your pack -- the collection of beings you trust -- is your family, even if its members lair in a dripping basement. Gold may be called cash here, but you still want enough of it to slake your hunger. Your ferocity is so great that even professional sports teams won't keep you on their rosters for long.

**Gnome:** You face many of the same challenges as dwarves do because of your height, except that many humans mistake you for a child. But you are delighted by the technological devices of this new world and eagerly seek opportunities to work with them. Unfortunately, doing so requires technical knowledge that you don't have. You may want to pick up some day labor to live on so that you can spend your free time in libraries and adult education classes trying to come to grips with the "science" that seems to run this world. Once you demonstrate your capability, many humans are delighted to have a coworker who can fit into tight access areas to trace faulty wiring or replace burned-out components.

**Goblin:** Arriving in this world as a goblin is a bit like being a n00b in an MMORPG, in that you quickly find yourself bullied into joining a guild just for survival. Other goblins want you to join their gangs to increase their strength, and you want to join because you're used to acting as part of a group. You're small enough that most humans mistake you for a child, albeit an ugly one, and you take full advantage of that misconception to rob them blind. Sure you have to pay organized crime families, but that's not much different than being bullied by orcs and bugbears in your own world. And some families, such as the Corsone Syndicate (**Urban Arcana**, page 177) are run by Shadowkind anyway.

**Half-Dragon:** You have all the qualities of dragonblooded humans, dialed up to 11. You want power, status, and wealth, and depending on your dragon ancestry, you may or may not pursue it legally. Wherever you go, you quickly rise to the leadership role, and those who underestimate you are quickly passed by. You are destined to dominate those around you, whether philanthropically or sadistically.

**Half-Elf:** Elves don't want you, and humans don't notice that you're different. Fortunately, your talents are such that you don't require an advanced technical degree to get work. The classified ads of any major newspaper are full of openings for salespeople, and that profession fits your gifts like a glove. You quickly find acceptance in any endeavor that involves negotiation -- be it hostage negotiator, corporate dealmaker,

preacher, or used-car salesperson. You have the gift of gab, and in time you might even find work in film, in TV, or on the stage.

**Half-Ogre:** You generally have the same kinds of challenges and opportunities as bugbears, half-orcs, and orcs. You're big, strong, and tough, but you're not particularly bright or charming. Many professional sports teams -- including hockey teams, football teams, and boxing stables -- are happy to recruit you. Because of your size, you would also make a formidable basketball player.

**Half-Orc:** At least one attitude is the same in both worlds: If you're big, people think you're stupid. Sadly, in your case, they may be right. If humans notice your fangs or your skin color, they assume that those features result from cosmetic dentistry or a skin condition. Day labor operations love you, especially the less scrupulous ones that can trick you out of your money. You can find work, and acceptance, in many fields -- including warehousing, construction, the military, law enforcement, and private security, but if you can't work alongside dwarves, stay out of construction. In addition, many professional sports teams -- including hockey teams, football teams, and boxing stables -- are happy to recruit you. Since you're not as bad-tempered or moody as your orc cousins, you tend to be more reliable and therefore more valuable to your employers -- a fact that the orcs resent.

**Halfling:** Being treated as a child isn't new to you. People made that mistake in the old world, too. Your advantages include being athletic, lucky, agile, and curious. The field of espionage, whether corporate or government, is tailor-made for your talents. People say all sorts of things when they think only a kid can hear them, and you use that fact to your advantage. Chances are good that wherever you go, there's already a network of halfling information brokers hard at work and recruiting. You're also a good thief, but stealing often means dealing with goblins (who dislike you as much as you dislike them) and organized crime (whose leaders don't show you the respect you deserve).

**Ogre:** You are the epitome of physical power. Even half-dragons take a back seat to you in terms of sheer physical strength and endurance. Too bad you're so dumb and ugly. You actively frighten people, whether they can perceive Shadowkind or not, merely by your size and attitude. Partly for that reason, criminal organizations will probably fight over the right to employ you. So smash a few windows, bust a few heads, do a little time in the pen, and watch the job offers roll in. Or if you're one of those rare ogres without an allegiance to evil, you can follow the same route as dwarves and half-orcs and find a rewarding career doing physical labor for the rest of your life.

**Orc:** You love to fight, and the modern world gives you plenty of opportunities. After some muggings, a few bar brawls, and the occasional back-alley bare-knuckle bout, a jail cell will begin to seem like your second home. In jail, you can meet like-minded individuals of many races and develop contacts that lead to work as a thug, bodyguard, professional fighter (sanctioned or not), or mercenary. Like half-ogres, half-orcs, and bugbears, you are a likely recruit for hockey teams, football teams, and boxing stables.

**Shadowkind Human:** Your first lesson is not that people see you differently than you are, but that they can't see the same kinds of things you can. You have an advantage over most humans specifically because you can see Shadowkind creatures for what they really are. If you work in construction, the boss is likely to make you shift supervisor or shop steward for the half-orcs and dwarves. If you work in law-enforcement, you'll probably be assigned to the precinct with the weirdest crimes or to the "zombie squad" that works bizarre cases. You can even find steady work as a cross between a private investigator and a parapsychologist. The Fellowship (**Urban Arcana**, page 183) finds people like you extremely useful, and it may well offer to help you get settled in return for your services.

**Snakeblooded Human:** You don't know why, but no matter what you do, you get a visit from other snakeblooded humans and yuan-ti soon after you arrive. If you wish, you could follow the graffiti trail back to the Infinite Serpents (**Urban Arcana**, page 185). Because of your heritage, you automatically have support, but it comes at a price. The yuan-ti nest that helps you expects your loyalty, your silence, and your service.

**Tiefling:** You're smart and quick, but a little scary. People in this world assume you're human, so your situation is similar to that of Shadowkind humans, except that your incessant, petty cruelty makes it hard to keep jobs. You're likely to take up a life of crime the moment you enter this world and never look back. Unlike bugbears, gnolls, half-orcs, ogres, and orcs, you are smart enough to become a real power in the underworld, quickly rising above simple, petty crime to manage more complex and lucrative operations.

## Summary

If you want to play a Shadowkind character, remember the following points.

- Technology doesn't scare you, and you're not an unsophisticated hick who can't even grasp the use of simple tools. All this technology is just magic by another name as far as you're concerned.
- You can see Shadowkind beings for what they really are, but the majority of humans cannot, and that fact works to your advantage.
- Without identification, you can't get far in this world. If you don't find the right resources, the wrong ones will find you.
- This world contains plenty of predators that are looking to take advantage of confused new arrivals. Stay on your toes.
- Where you go and what you do depends on your Shadow nature and the talents you brought through Shadow with you.

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## About the Author

Before [Rich Redman](#) came to the RPG R&D department at Wizards of the Coast, Inc., he had been an Army officer, a door-to-door salesman, the manager of a computer store, a fundraiser for a veterans' assistance group, and the manager of Wizards of the Coast, Inc.'s Customer Service department. Rich is a prolific game designer who has worked on the **Dungeons & Dragons** game, the **d20 Modern Roleplaying Game**, the **Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game**, and **Dark\*Matter**. When he's not working as vice president of [The Game Mechanics](#), a d20 design studio, Rich does freelance game design, cooks, and practices yoga, tai chi, and silat.