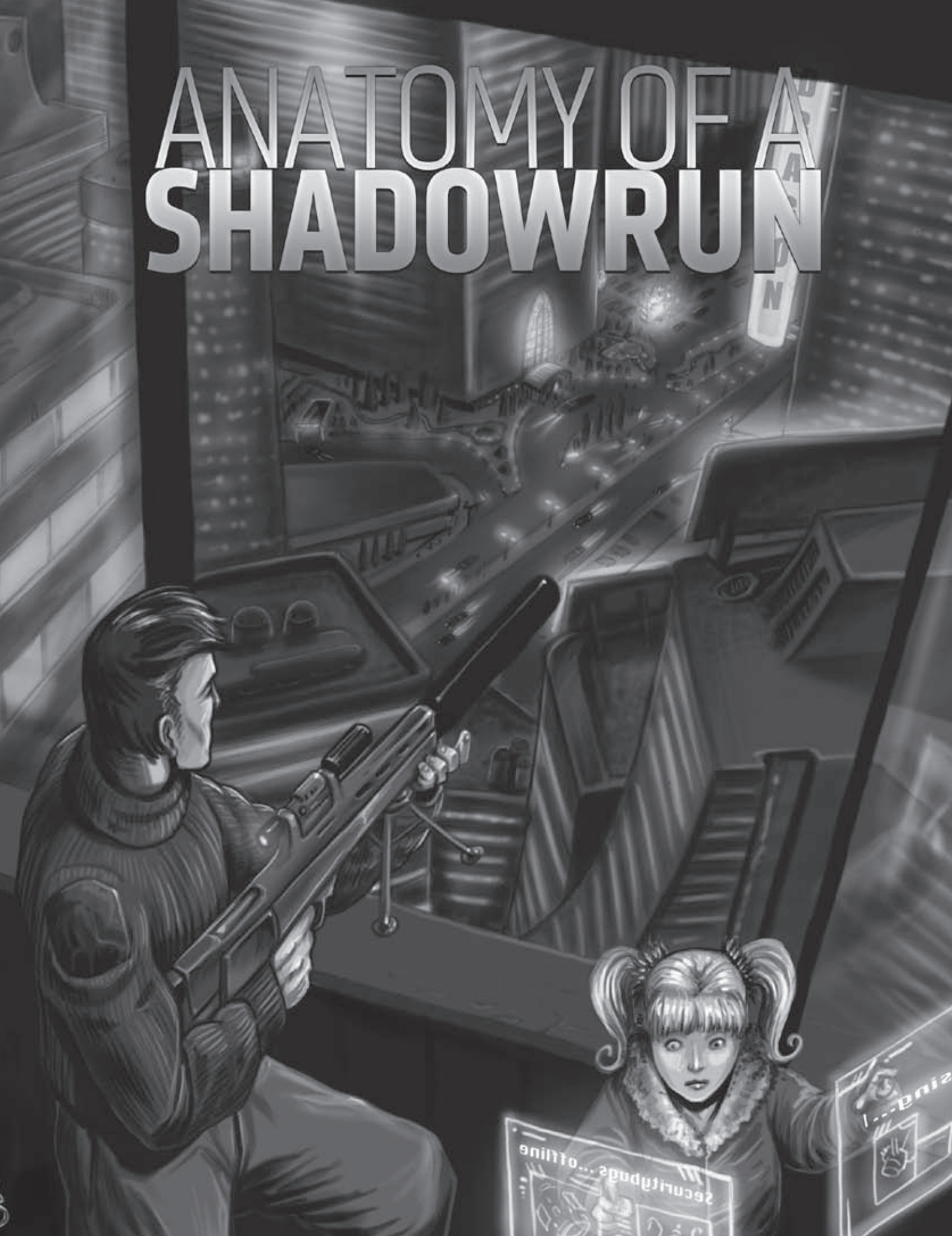


ANATOMY OF A SHADOWRUN



SHADOWRUNNING BY THE NUMBERS

This booklet presents a step-by-step walkthrough of a difficult shadowrun performed by a group of experienced runners known as the Smoker's Club. The run itself involves the assassination of important underworld figures, and each stage of the preparation and shadowrun is broken down into easy-to-follow Fiction and Game Mechanics sections. While intended as a walk-through to ease the learning curve for beginner gamemasters and players, it's also intended to be useful as an extended example of many of the commonly used *Shadowrun, Fourth Edition* core rules for more experienced groups.

Notation

Anatomy of a Shadowrun takes some liberties with the standard notation for Tests as described in *Shadowrun, Fourth Edition*, to better demonstrate the ratings and dice pool modifiers involved. Typically the examples in this walk-through will indicate values for stat ratings and modifiers involved in each Test next to the relevant Skill, Attribute, or modifier description.

Continuity

Gamers who have played through the *Ghost Cartels* campaign may recognize the following shadowrun as an adaptation of the *Tokyo Fireworks* adventure framework from the *First Taste* story arc.

THE MEET

Private Message...



To: Riser

From: Dae

My associate wants to discuss a possible contract. I understand you are very busy, but my associate is willing to make the trip worthwhile. You can find us at Aces in Redmond, ten tonight.

fiction

Jonathan Riser knew they were being followed when he stepped off the curb. The tail was a broad-faced Asian in black leathers and combat boots wearing sunglasses despite the hour and the haze fixed permanently above Seattle. As Riser glanced back casually, the Asian turned toward the nearest shop window.

He didn't look like someone who'd have much use for baby strollers. "By the children's store, looks Korean," Riser subvocalized. "Probably Seoulpa Ring. Ladybug, scan his AR profile and log a visual so we know if we see him again."

Ever since the Miami job, Riser's crew maintained overwatch on meets. Two runners went in the meat, Riser and someone for fire support, just in case. Their hacker did overwatch, moving in VR and hacking local systems so they'd have advance knowledge of any trouble. They weren't going to let Miami happen again.

Riser stuffed his hands into his pockets and shot a glance at Charlie. "Ready for this?"

Charlie nodded. Kai-lin usually came along for fire support, but Riser had brought Charlie Broken Horse instead. The adept was better suited for close quarters. Charlie's slender frame was all arms and legs, deceptive and fast. He wasn't much taller than Riser, yet there wasn't anyone Riser trusted more in a street fight.

The city was damp this time of year, and crowded. The uneven streets were littered with puddles. Gray slush gathered near drains. Riser was especially vigilant now. Winter meant long coats, which meant more places to hide firepower.

"Trai Nguyen, and he's Vietnamese not Korean," Ladybug piped triumphantly over the comm channel. Beside Riser, Charlie stifled a chuckle.

game mechanics GAME MECHANICS

Meets probably cause more anxiety for shadowrunners than all other parts of the run combined. Runners generally have to rely on the word of often untrustworthy acquaintances, who may have reason to sell them out. In addition, the advantage of surprise (frequently the only advantage runners have) is taken away. They are out in the open, exposed, unprepared for opposition, and they're often in a location chosen by the Johnson. The only thing forcing them into the situation is nuyen.

More experienced runners take precautions like Matrix or astral overwatch. Runners may feel less vulnerable if they come prepared for trouble—as much as they are able. Most importantly, they have an exit strategy.

Spotting the Tail

As Jonathan Riser and Charlie Broken Horse approach Aces, they are being followed by an NPC. Accordingly, the gamemaster calls for an Opposed Test between Riser's and Charlie Broken Horse's Perception + Intuition and the NPC's Shadowing + Intuition. The gamemaster rolls the NPC's Shadowing + Intuition and achieves 2 hits. The gamemaster applies modifiers to Riser's and Charlie's test: -3 for distance to the target, -2 for the crowd. Riser has vision enhancements that give him +3 dice, so he rolls Perception 4 + Intuition 5 with +3 dice from enhancements, -5 dice from modifiers, for a total of 7 dice. He scores 3 hits. Charlie rolls Perception 4 + Intuition 4 with -5 modifiers for a total of 3 dice. He scores 2 hits. Both locate the tail. Based on Riser's additional success, the gamemaster gives him the target's attire and possible ethnicity.

Matrix Overwatch

With the description Riser provided, Ladybug, their team technomancer who is accompanying them in VR, tries to locate the target's AR profile. She knows this will take time given the location and the crowds. She decides to augment her Scan through threading. In hot sim VR she receives a +2 modifier to all her Matrix tests; so she rolls Software 3 (Threading +2) + Resonance 5 with +2 modifiers for a total of 12 dice. She scores 2 hits.

Now she has to deal with Fading. Since threading raised her Complex Form Rating above her Resonance attribute, the damage is Physical. She chooses to use both hits, making the Damage Value 2P. She makes a Damage Resistance Test rolling Resonance 5 + Charisma 5 with



"Just keep an eye on him, okay?"

He glanced back as they entered Aces. Riser was familiar with this place, comfortable even. Briefly, he wondered if that hadn't been the plan all along, but he dismissed the thought just as quickly. If Dae wanted them dead, blah, blah, blah.

Nodding discreetly at the owner, Riser motioned for Charlie to fall back and deal with their tail. The adept vanished into the crowd. Riser turned his attention to the rear of the club where a nondescript door led to an unmarked back room.

Their tail peered above the crowd just as Riser reached for the door. Suddenly the Vietnamese man exhaled sharply and doubled over. Charlie pulled his stun baton from the man's side and helped him to an unoccupied chair before rejoining Riser. By the time he woke up they'd be long gone.

The door could have been a supply closet. Riser eased it open knowing what awaited them. The hallway was short and cramped. At the far end was the door they sought, battered and rusted with age. Between them and their destination was a hulking troll. The troll rumbled, "You twose ain't wanted. Go back to your party."

Riser cued his cybereyes to access the local AR scenery. A tillbox appeared next to the troll. He accessed his keychain of passwords and deposited the proper one and a five-credit bribe into the box. The troll subvocalized something, then, with some effort, pushed the door open, revealing Kaz Yakamura seated in the brightly lit room. Behind him, Dae stood impassively.

"I see you brought muscle again." Yakamura chuckled through crooked teeth. His gray-skinned face looked out of sync with the Zoë Executive Business suit he wore.

"I've heard you're very dangerous to be around, Mr. Johnson." Riser's gaze moved from Yakamura to the Asian beauty behind him, and back again. He was used to dealing with Dae. His crew had done several jobs for her recently. Dealing with Yakamura directly meant this was big. Kaz was the main distributor of tempo hereabouts, a Scoulpa Ring lieutenant masquerading as a drug czar.

"Only if you're my enemy. But we're not enemies, are we, Mr. Riser? In fact, I think we could become friends. Would you like to be friends?"

Riser didn't respond right away. The last time he'd met Yakamura, the man's demeanor had been different. He looked at Dae again. She met his gaze, then looked away nervously. Riser said finally, "I'd like to be business partners."

That drew laughs. "Good, good. I was hoping your crew was available for work. I need you to do a sensitive job. Wetwork."

"How secure a target are we talking about?"

"Very. Someone tried to kill me, and that cannot go unpunished."

"Is that why you had us followed? Making sure we weren't bringing unnecessary heat down on you?"

Another smattering of laughter. "I knew you were right for this job. I often send Trai out to tail people. He's never been caught before."

Riser didn't believe that, but he thanked Yakamura nonetheless.

"I should be thanking you. You've done a lot of good work for Dae and me in the past. I hope you're interested in doing more."

Riser sighed quietly. "Mr. Johnson, I'm interested in working with you, but I need more information about the target before I commit to a fee or the job."

"Very well. I want a message sent to the Shotozumi-gumi. They've overstepped their boundaries. It needs to be public, and it needs to look like the Gianelli family is responsible." He said it as if he was asking someone to pick a strand of lint off his shoulder.

"Mr. Johnson, this isn't how we usually work. Normally our clients pick a target and we try to make it look as natural as possible."

+2 modifiers for a total of 12 dice. She gets 3 hits, successfully reducing the DV to 0. Her Scan Complex Form is now Rating 7. While using her Scan Complex Form, Ladybug will not have any negative modifiers for maintaining the threaded form, but if she were to attempt any other action, she would have a -2 modifier.

Threading and Fading are both instantaneous; the act of threading does not take up any action (although using the Complex Form threaded involves the normal action associated with it).

She then begins scanning for the target. The gamemaster rules that the target is running his commlink in hidden mode. Additionally, given the number of nodes available in the area, Ladybug will need to make a Detect Hidden Node (15, 1 Combat Turn) Extended Test. Ladybug rolls Electronic Warfare 4 + Scan 7 with +2 modifiers for a total of 13 dice. She scores 4 hits. Fortunately, Riser and Charlie slow their pace to give her time to find the target. On her second roll, she gets an additional 5 hits. She is narrowing it down, but time is running out. Her third roll nets her 3 hits. She rolls once more and gets 4 hits, more than enough.

Since the target is running in hidden mode, his AR profile doesn't tell her much. She decides to hack his commlink. Dropping her threaded Scan, she uses threading again to increase her Exploit Complex Form. She rolls another Threading Test and gets 4 hits. With only 12 dice to roll to resist Fading, she decides to keep only 3 of the hits. She rolls her Fading Test, gets 2 hits, and takes 1 Physical damage. Her Exploit Complex Form is now Rating 8.

Now she begins to hack the commlink. The gamemaster rules that the target is only a low-level thug, and gives his commlink a Device Rating 3 to speed things along. Ladybug will need to make a Hacking on the Fly (3, 1 Complex Action) Extended Test. She rolls Hacking 4 + Exploit 8 with +2 modifiers for a total of 14 dice. This is an easy hack, and the gamemaster allows Ladybug to buy hits. She is in on her first Initiative Pass.

The gamemaster secretly rolls to see if the commlink notices the intrusion. Ladybug has Stealth (5), so the commlink makes an Analyze 3 + Firewall 3 (5, 1 Complex Action) Extended Test. The gamemaster rolls 6 dice, and gets 2 hits. So far, so good.

Ladybug needs to Browse for the target's name and perhaps some trid of him. The gamemaster rules that the information is easy to find, and so requires a Data Search (2, 1 Initiative Pass) Extended Test. Ladybug doesn't need to hack the commlink again, so she drops the threaded Exploit. With Data Search 3 + Browse 5 and +2 modifiers for a total of 10 dice, Ladybug rolls 2 hits. The gamemaster gives her a name and trid footage with a close-up of the target's face.

Ladybug downloads the information and logs out, data in (electronic) hand. She then messages the info to Riser and Charlie (no test required).

Dealing with the Tail

As Charlie moves into the crowd, he takes a Free Action to center himself and uses a Simple Action to boost his Agility. He rolls Attribute Boost 1 + Magic 8 for a total of 9 dice. Since the ability is internal and activation simple, the gamemaster allows him to buy 2 hits since nothing is likely to interfere with this Adept Power. For the next four Combat Turns, Charlie has Agility 7.

Next, he attempts to disappear into the crowd. He rolls Infiltration 5 + Agility 7 for a total of 12 dice. He scores 4 hits. The gamemaster rules that the crowd is a distraction (-3) for Trai. To notice Charlie, Trai rolls Perception 2 + Intuition 2 with a -3 modifier for a total of 1 die. Unfortunately, luck isn't with Trai. He gets 0 hits. He doesn't see Charlie coming.



"This is not a normal situation," Yakamura said. Something behind his eyes gave Riser pause. There was rage, but there was something else too. He waited for Yakamura to continue.

"Certain members of my organization were complicit in the attack. These are misguided men. However, for them to see the light, I have to prove myself by doing this. It has to be done in the way I ask or the Yakuza will retaliate. We are not prepared for that. Do you understand?"

"I do. You need us to make it look like a mob hit so the heat will be off you and you save face with your organization."

Yakamura nodded. "Are you interested?"

"Who's the target?"

"Toju Shotozumi and Kosuke Tomizawa."

Riser felt a shudder move through him. The chief sokaiaji of the Shotozumi-gumi and the Oyabun of the Kenran-kai? "You realize what you're asking? My crew will certainly face retribution if it gets out we did the work. If it's going to be public, our involvement won't be secret for long."

"Yes, that's why I'm being up-front about what I'm asking. I can get you whatever you need to tide you over until you can come home. But you have to stay gone awhile. I can't risk anyone finding out. Nobody can know you did this, and it can't be traced to me."

"Is there anything else I should know?"

The strain on Yakamura's face was evident. "It needs to get done fast. Five days. I can get you explosives or anything else you need to get it done."

Yakamura knows he's asking the impossible, Riser thought. "These are distinct targets—"

"There's a window of opportunity. They have a weekly poker game at Shangri-La with some other lowlifes. That's where I want it done." He leaned back, working to regain the self-control that had looked so natural moments ago. "I'll pay you two hundred and fifty thousand."

Hardly enough. Riser pounced. "We'll do it for four hundred. One hundred up front as a show of faith."

Yakamura glowered. He slammed his fist against the table and scowled. "I am not asking you to flatline Brackhaven himself! I can go to three hundred, no more. Dae can cash out sixty right now."

Riser felt, more than saw, Charlie tense slightly. He was pushing his luck, but he thought he could get more. The risk alone was worth more. "Mr. Johnson, I believe we can come to a fair arrangement for everyone. Tomizawa alone is easily a low six-figure job. You want us to take out two Yakuza top men and do it in five days' time. Why don't we settle on three hundred twenty? Dae can provide the twenty percent we're asking for?"

Kaz Yakamura's gray knuckles lightened and darkened from the strain of clenched fists. He thought for a long minute then said, "Dae, give them the money and the chip."

Riser accepted the money transfer and the file with information on their target and the fall guy. He thanked Dae, stood, and shook hands with his new employer. The troll held his hand a moment too long. He pulled Riser close and whispered, "That window won't stay open long. You have five days to get it done. Do this for me and you've made a friend. Screw it up..." He never bothered to finish the sentence.

Riser and Charlie silently left Aces. Activating his subdermal comm, Riser said, "Ladybug, call Seta and Kai. It's time to go to work."

Charlie decides to use his stun baton to dispatch Trai quickly without killing him. Because Trai has lost Charlie, he may be surprised. When Charlie moves into position, both he and Trai roll a Surprise Test. Charlie's modifiers are +4 for his Combat Sense and +3 for being aware of the situation. Trai, having failed on his Perception Test, has no modifiers. Charlie rolls Intuition 4 + Reaction 7 with +7 modifiers for a total of 18 dice. He rolls exceptionally well and gets 6 hits. Trai rolls Intuition 2 + Reaction 2 for a total of 4 dice and gets 1 hit. Trai cannot act or react to Charlie's actions for the first Initiative Pass of the next Combat Turn.

Now the Combat Turn begins. Charlie rolls Initiative, getting 4 hits. His Initiative this turn is 15. Trai rolls 2 hits for a total of 6. Charlie goes first. To hit, Charlie rolls Clubs 4 + Agility 7 for a total of 11 dice. He gets 4 hits. Since Trai cannot react to the attack, Charlie has 4 net hits from the attack. Trai cannot dodge or defend but he is wearing an armored vest, so he makes a Damage Resistance Test with Body 2 + half Impact Armor 2, getting 2 hits. He takes 6S(e) damage from the stun baton plus the 2 net hits (4 - 2 = 2), for a total of 8S(e) damage. Trai is hurt but still standing. However, electrical damage requires a Body + Willpower (3) Test (plus dice pool modifiers, including half Impact Armor) to avoid being knocked unconscious. Trai rolls Body 2 + Willpower 2 + half Impact Armor 2, for a total of 6 dice. He scores 1 hit. He will be unconscious for 2 + (net hits = 4) Combat Turns, or 6 Combat Turns. He probably won't be unconscious for as long as Riser and Charlie think, but it'll last long enough.

RULES REFERENCES

Electricity Damage, p. 163–164, *SR4A*

Hacking, p. 235–236, *SR4A*

Melee Combat, p. 156–159, *SR4A*

Surprise, p. 165–166, *SR4A*

Threading, p. 240, *SR4A*

Using Charisma-Linked Skills, p. 130–131, *SR4A*

Using Perception, p. 135–136, *SR4A*

Negotiations

On the other side of the nondescript door, Riser and Charlie are confronted by an Asian troll bodyguard. Riser has been in this situation many times before; he knows exactly what to do.

Riser rolls Etiquette 6 + Charisma 7 + Tailored Pheromones 3 for a total of 16 dice. He gets 5 hits. With a 5-nuyen bribe, the guard lets him past.

After hearing the specifics of the job and Yakamura's offer, Riser decides to negotiate. The gamemaster has already decided that Yakamura is willing to offer 250,000 nuyen, new fake IDs (Rating 5) for each of them, transportation costs out of Seattle, and supplies necessary for the job they can't procure themselves. He decides that for every net hit Riser achieves on the Negotiation Test, Yakamura will increase the payment by another 10,000 nuyen.

As Yakamura specifically asked for the Smoker's Club, he is aware of the runners' reputations. The gamemaster therefore rules that Riser can use his Street Cred as a bonus. Riser's Street Cred is 10, but the bonus cannot exceed Riser's Charisma, and so is limited to 7. Riser also has Tailored Pheromones for an additional +3 modifier.

Riser rolls Negotiation 6 (Bargaining +2) + Charisma 7 with a +10 modifier for a total of 25 dice. He scores 8 hits. He and his team would like to make as much as possible for such a high-risk run, so Riser decides to throw in a point of Edge. Rerolling all the non-successes, he gets 3 additional hits, for a total of 11 hits. Yakamura rolls Negotiation 3 + Charisma 4 for a total of 7 dice. He gets 4 hits. The runners now have 7 net hits (11 - 4 = 7), enough to increase the payment from 250,000 to 320,000 nuyen.



THE STRATEGY SESSION

fiction

"Questions?" Riser asked as he sat back and gave the team a chance to digest the mission and its parameters.

As usual, Ladybug piped up first. "We're definitely going to need to control the casino's sec nodes."

"Shangri-La is a high-security kind of place," said Kai-lin, running his fingers over his graying mohawk. "All due respect, but can the kid cut it? If she can't, we're going to be visible."

Ladybug's face started to twist into a scowl as Riser sat up and answered for her. "We'll do it this way: Ladybug will case the place, and if the IC is too thick, we'll change the plan. For now, let's assume we'll have some control over the electronic security. Will that work, Kai-lin?" The man absently nodded, his brow furrowed as his gaze wandered around the living room of the two-story house the team maintained on the south side of Puyallup. Either he was still recovering from his last binge, Riser thought, or something was bothering him.

"Why don't you find out what you can about the game, Riser?" Charlie asked. "You have a few contacts in the Yakuza, right?"

"I'm not sure that's a good idea." Riser shook his head. "Once this thing goes down, people are going to wonder why two guys I was asking about are dead. I don't want that kind of trouble knocking at my door."

"Not to mention we'd lose the frame-up," said Seta, the team's magician.

"Good point," said Riser. "Speaking of which, here's the intel on the fall guy." He zipped a copy of the file he had received from Yakamura to each of his teammates. "Harry Fingers' Barducci, a button man for the Gianelli family. We snatch him and leave him at the scene, trigger in hand."

"Fingers Barducci?" said Kai-lin, sitting upright. He was an expert on the crime syndicates of Seattle. Actually, he was an expert on any organization he'd spent more than a few weeks watching, a leftover skill from his time in Special Forces. "You realize what that's going to do?"

Riser nodded. "It's going to kick-start an underworld war. That's the primary objective of this job."

Seta whistled. "Seattle's going to be a bit hot for us for a while."

"That's why Mr. Johnson gave us new identities elsewhere as part of the deal." He paused to let that sink in and noted the looks of disappointment or annoyance on his teammates' faces. Ladybug's grin and faraway look caught his attention; he would have to have a chat with the teenager later.

"Anyway," he continued. "We need to get into the casino Friday night. At the very least, we need to get Barducci in there. Barducci's MO is explosives, so I'm thinking that's our approach. We're going to need to be there, though, to make sure the job gets done, so that means exit routes."

"I don't like it," said Kai-lin. "We're going to kidnap a Mafia operative from whatever security he's behind, break him into one of the most paranoid casinos in the sprawl, blow it up, and then try to escape? All in five days? There are better ways to do this."

"Maybe, but this is what we're going with for now. If we run into a snag, we can change the plan, but until then..."

"We don't usually take on this much..." Kai-lin's eyes narrowed. "Wait a minute. Is this your plan, or are these some bullshit marching orders from Mr. Johnson?"

Riser made eye contact with Kai-lin. "Johnson's specs. My plan," he said steadily.

Kai-lin shot Charlie a questioning glance. Of all his teammates, Charlie held Kai-lin's highest trust, but if Charlie somehow contradicted Riser with the look he returned to Kai-lin, Riser did not see it. Ladybug remained silent.

"Okay, this is what we're working with. Kai-lin, find out what you can about Barducci and where he lives. Charlie, see what you can find out about the casino building itself. Seta, same thing in the astral. Ladybug, you're on Matrix recon for now. I'll start talking to Mr. Johnson and make sure he comes through with any explosives or other equipment we need."

"Does it have to be a snatch and grab on our unwitting bomber?" asked Seta. "Could we maybe lure him in instead?"

"It's a thought. Let's explore that possibility, but for now let's assume we're going to do this by force. Kai-lin, if you find anything good, let us know."

"Okay, let's get started."

game mechanics

It's often a good idea to come up with a strategy for a run, even before you start the legwork. It shouldn't be a full plan—more like a framework. Once you know the approach your team will take to your objectives, it becomes easy to determine what legwork needs to be done, what resources you need, and what sort of time frame you have to plan and prepare. When devising a strategy framework, don't bother with too many details; those are better worked out once you've had time to gather intelligence and resources.

Dramatic tension within the team can be a great source of entertainment at the table. Characters who dislike or lie to one another can increase the depth of the story being spun by the players. Plots do not happen without some sort of conflict, and subplots like role-play between teammates are no exception. When using dramatic tension as a subplot, however, it is important to remember that while the *characters* might be antagonistic toward one another, the *players* never should be. Couple with that the fact that a shadowrunning team has to work well together in order to survive in the Sixth World; as long as the players and characters continue to work together, you can enjoy dramatic subplots for a great number of game sessions.



LEGWOR: FINGERS

fiction

Riser tilted his chair back and ran his fingers through his hair, trying to relax. This was the part of a run that got to him. Not the action, not the danger, not the blood. The waiting around for the big picture to come together.

His commlink signaled an incoming message from Ladybug. He skimmed it, but she merely confirmed that her Matrix digging had verified pretty much everything in Mr. Johnson's dossier on Barducci. The hitman was 45, a made man with the Gianelli family since the age of 25. He was pretty senior, but his temperament had kept him from making capo. Instead of setting up his own crew, Barducci made a name for himself as a button-man. He had pulled two stints in jail for arson, but dodged four felony indictments thanks to fancy Mob lawyer footwork. He was a person of interest in a couple of Lone Star investigations (a homicide and another count of arson). The other good news was that some digging on a hacker haven had turned up a Shiawase Power payment defaulter list with an address. Yakamura's dossier hadn't included one.

Kai-lin had been cautiously sounding out a few contacts about Gianelli operations in general. Riser was sure he was aware of the dangers, and as long as he kept his queries non-specific they should be safe given the amount of underworld action going on in Seattle. He had reported that Barducci's bosses were aware of Lone Star's interest and told him to lie low for a while. That meant he'd be hanging out either at home or in the family's social club.

Things were coming together, but Riser still had some phone calls to make. He would be going on a recon with Ladybug later, but there were already a few specific items they would need for the job that were going to take some time to arrange. He brought up his address book and selected Chessman.

As expected, his call went to voicemail. After the beep, Riser said, "Rook takes Queen," and waited for the call to be rerouted over an encrypted secondary link. Chessman was nothing if not cautious.

The fixer's voice eventually came through, though no visual was provided. "Riser! What can I do for you?"

"I'm working on something and I need some difficult items. Similar package to the Reynolds job, last year. Here's the list," Riser said as he mailed over the file.

"When will you need this?"

"Before Friday. Think you can do it in three days?"

"Hmm, a couple of these items will be difficult... I had a couple of weeks for the Reynolds job."

"So the question is, can you do it?"

"Of course, I can do it. It won't come cheap, though."

"How much?"

"50k."

Riser rolled the figure around his head for a couple of seconds and said, "Fine. There may be some additional items, but I'll update you if things change. Those are the basics."

He could imagine Chessman's bushy Russian eyebrows rising in surprise. "Consider it done. I'll be in touch with a pickup point."

game mechanics

This run presents the players with two separate jobs: capture Fingers Barducci and perform the network at the casino. This means gathering intelligence to ensure that they encounter no surprises and that the information Mr. Johnson provided is accurate. Unfortunately, the nature of the mission also means that the group cannot afford to be later linked to either event, restricting the amount of legwork they do for fear of being noticed and undermining the frame-up.

Nonetheless, they do attempt to gather intel indirectly. Ladybug performs some Matrix searches while Kai-lin asks around among his trustworthy contacts about the Gianellis in general, counting on the underworld fights to disguise his interest.

Matrix Legwork

Ladybug performs a Matrix-wide Data Search to gather intel on Barducci. The gamemaster decides that tracking down specific information on the asocial mobster on the open grid is extremely difficult. He assigns a threshold of 24. He also gives Ladybug a +2 modifier to the search since Yakamura's dossier gives Ladybug some details of Barducci's background to use as a starting point. Ladybug must make a Data Search (24, 1 minute) Extended Test. However, the gamemaster imposes the suggested limitation to Extended Tests, which reduces Ladybug's dice pool by a cumulative 1 die for every roll past the first. Knowing this, Ladybug decides to increase her Browse Complex Form by threading. She gets 3 hits on her Threading Test, and resists the Fading, increasing her Browse Complex Form to 8. She also performs the Data Search in VR, giving her an additional +2 modifier. Ladybug rolls Data Search 3 + Browse 8 (24, 1 minute), with +4 modifiers for a total of 15 dice. The interval is 1 minute. It takes Ladybug 8 rolls and 8 minutes to accumulate 24 hits. Unfortunately the gamemaster just confirms that Yakamura's research was pretty thorough and that there is little else on Barducci on the public and primary shadow nets. At least it confirms that the Johnson isn't setting them up.

Having dug what she could from the open Matrix, Ladybug logs on to the ShadowSEA, hoping to trawl the file graveyard where neo-anarch hackers dump low-grade paydata. Ladybug has ShadowSEA as a Virtual Contact with a modified Connection Rating 4 (12). (The base connection rating of 4 is modified by +4 [100–1,000 members], +2 [sprawl-wide influence], +2 [broad-reaching Matrix resources] for a modified Connection rating of 12.) The gamemaster rules that the ShadowSEA Connection rating is high enough for it to contain some relevant, if obscure, information (–2 dice pool modifier). Ladybug rolls another Data Search (24, Complex Action) Extended Test; 9 rolls later, she turns up an old file with an address.

Regular Legwork

Meanwhile, Kai-lin offers to buy a drink for Jack Morelli (Connection 3, Loyalty 2), a low-ranking made man in the Bigio family, and cautiously asks about Gianelli activities. Without mentioning any names, Kai-lin tries to discern whether Morelli knows anything by offering the information that Lone Star is looking into at least one Gianelli torpedo. The gamemaster decides that Morelli knows the Gianellis are aware of the Lone Star probe and have told Barducci to lie low, but that Morelli isn't particularly interested in spilling the beans. The gamemaster suggests that Kai-lin fast talk the information out of the contact with a Con + Charisma Opposed Test. Kai-lin thinks that the information could be important, so instead of relying on his Charisma and Con skill alone, he decides to boost his dice pool using Edge. Kai-lin rolls Charisma 2 + Con 1 + Edge 4 for a total of 7 dice. He gets a lucky 3 hits, Morelli opposes the

test with his Charisma 3 + Con 1 and gets 0 hits. With Kai-lin's 3 net hits the gamemaster has Morelli spill what he knows without giving it a second thought.

RULES REFERENCES

Using Charisma-Linked Skills, pp. 130–131, SR4A

Using Contacts, p. 286–288, SR4A

Using Data Search, p. 227, SR4A

Virtual Contacts, p. 129–130, *Runner's Companion*



LEGWORk: CASINO

fiction

Two discreet calls got Kai-lin a name; a third got him a face-to-face.

Brick truly lived up to his name. He was well over two-and-a-half meters tall, cut from thick muscle with olive skin. His horns were sharpened to razor points. His teeth looked like they'd seen the flat side of a whetstone as well. He looked like the kind of guy that belonged on a wanted poster. He also fit the "disgruntled former employee" picture to a tee—that had been the clincher—no way was he going to blab after the fact. He'd be implicated, and that would mean a death warrant.

"So, you Kai-lin?"

Kai-lin nodded, flashing a certified credstick in his left hand. The right stayed near his waist, ready to draw a stun baton if needed. Kai-lin wore a bulging lined coat and looked like he'd stepped out of a steampunk tridflick. Carrying weapons was a foregone conclusion in this part of town. Brick had picked the meeting place, an alley cut between a row of biker bars on the edge of Redmond. First Nations territory these days; ground zero for the tempo gangland war. The tension here was palpable. Brick had friends in the gang, while Kai-lin was a new face. Threats of violence lurked behind every glance. That was why Charlie had come along—as insurance.

"So, you gonna let me in on what I gotta do to get those creds you keep flashing?" Brick spat impatiently.

"Tell me how to get into the Shangri-la Casino without anyone knowing about it."

Brick's grin was more feral than friendly. He held out his hand expectantly. Kai-lin obliged, handing the credstick over to the ork, who checked the balance immediately.

"The creds are coded. You get fifty just for showing up, but I can release more if you have something useful to say."

"How about an entrance, guard routines, camera locations, and a route into the basement storage room? That useful enough?"

Kai-lin smiled, "I'm all ears."

Kai-lin shared the intel when the crew met on Tuesday. There were only three days left until gametime. "It looks like we can get into the basement undetected, so long as we can slice a hole through about a yard of plascrete."

They all looked at Seta. The mage shrugged, "An elemental would make a tremendous amount of noise moving that much processed material, but I could shield it with a silence spell. Might work."

Riser shook his head. "We can't take the risk that we might be pegged by astral security, or that we leave traces. Both of those are likely if we go the magic route."

Kai-lin scrunched up his face in thought and said, "If we can arrange for some demolisher nanites, it would look like a clean-burn shaped charge had cut through the plascrete. Next to no noise. Even fits Barducci's profile. Just need the nanites."

Riser and Charlie nodded at the same time. Riser said, "I'll ask Chessman to add them to our shopping list. Now let's talk about how we're going to recon the targets."

game mechanics

Researching locations typically involves unearthing security information, blueprints, floorplans, public records, and other details about the target site. Collecting this data allows a team to map out a run in advance, and not go in blind. Unfortunately, with this run the Smoker's Club can't afford to leave any indication of their involvement for the frame-up to withstand scrutiny. This means that many of the usual avenues for data collection, including most low-Loyalty contacts, are out of the equation.

The player of Kai-lin asks the gamemaster if he can make a test to see if Kai-lin knows any quiet ways to get through a wall. She has him make a Construction Practices 2 + Logic 3 Test with a threshold of 3. He gets 3 hits, and the gamemaster tells him about the special nanomachines.

Networking

Kai-lin contacts Oberon, a dependable fixer and trustworthy friend (Connection 5, Loyalty 5). Asking for absolute secrecy, Kai-lin asks if Oberon knows anyone who might have some intel that would help out on an extraction taking place at the Garden of Eden and Shangri-La hotel-casino. The fixer very discreetly networks to find a name. The gamemaster rolls Connection 5 + Charisma 5 with a threshold of 2. He also throws in a -4 modifier for Oberon being extra-guarded in his queries. Oberon still gets 2 hits and reaches out to identify Brick, a former bouncer at the casino who was fired for manhandling a VIP.

Brick is unfamiliar with Kai-lin, but agrees to a personal face-to-face, on his home turf. The gamemaster sets a preliminary price of 500 nuyen for Brick's intel. Kai-lin agrees, reasoning the team will be safe since Brick will be implicated if he blabs.

Since Brick has called for a meet on his turf, Kai-lin takes Charlie as backup. Thankfully, it isn't needed in this case, as the price for the info is reasonable and Brick doesn't hold back.

RULES REFERENCES

Networking, p. 287, SR4A

Using Contacts, p. 286–288, SR4A



RECON 1: FINGERS

fiction

Their research had pinpointed where Fingers Barducci lived. The Wilkerson Projects were a set of six tenements refurbished to suit the blue-collar clientele who had flooded the area in the late fifties. A series of low-lying shops had sprung up around the tenement like moths near a winter coat. Nothing high class; pawn shops, liquor stores, Stuffer Shacks, trideo outlets, and a pair of grocery stores all stood in neat rows surrounding the larger apartment buildings. Most of the traffic at this hour was to and from the apartments themselves. Wage slaves returned home from a day at the office. Parents walked with small children. Teens roamed in packs, looking for excitement to chase away their boredom. Riser knew they were a real threat; some had already turned to the gang lifestyle. Even in this working-class neighborhood, there would always be the lure of gangs—and kids who wanted to show how tough they were. By the time the sun set, the families would be locked behind the doors of their moldering tenements, while the teens stayed out trying to prove themselves. Lone Star drones would periodically pass through the neighborhood, making the kids scramble like rats as their spotlights swept the street.

Riser had decided to do the actual recon on Barducci during these after-work hours. The team's legwork had shown a beat-up playground in the middle of the tenements, complete with monkey bars, swings, and benches. A few scraggly-looking trees lined the park.

Riser and Ladybug got off the bus a few blocks away from Barducci's building. It meant a walk, but it would pull less attention to them. Ladybug walked beside him, silent, her eyes unfocused, chewing her lip. Riser wore jeans and a beat-up jacket, a ball cap pulled down, a day's worth of stubble on his jaw. He looked like every other guy in the neighborhood: drone-repair workers, factory line men, dockhands, construction laborers, all of them working their twelve-hour days and wondering if their job would be the next one outsourced to a drone or some skillwire-chipped SINless ork. Beside him, little Ladybug had a backpack slung over her shoulder, her red hair pulled up in pigtails. She looked younger than she was, maybe ten or eleven. Together, they were just another dad and kid walking home. Ladybug provided the kind of authentic cover that was hard to come by on the streets. Few things were frowned upon in the Sixth World, but using children—for sex toys, labor, or even bait—was still one of them. It was unlikely that even the Mob would expect a thirteen-year-old girl to be part of the team. And when the kid looked barely past ten...

And if it gave Riser a moment of guilt, he shoved it aside. Ladybug's age was one reason they'd kept her around. Maybe not a big reason, but a reason nonetheless.

Ladybug remembered what they were supposed to do. She played the role of timid daughter well, though it was an unconscious act for her. She didn't like open spaces, preferring the comfort of the Matrix. Still, she followed him to the park, stopping under a tree and crouching down over her backpack. Inside, she'd hidden some of her "toys." Riser stood beside her, sheltering her from the dozens of kids playing, their parents or babysitters sitting on benches watching them. He glanced around, then gave her a nod. She released two Fly-Spys, which flew up into the cover of the branches above them. Then she zipped up her backpack and headed for the swings.

"There's teralloads of information out there," she said, anxiously, as she sat on a swing.

"On Barducci, you mean?" Riser asked, standing behind her.

Ladybug nodded and said, "You know, he's not really paranoid. There really are a lot of people who have a reason to want him dead."

Fingers Barducci was a button man for the Gianelli family. He did the heavy-handed stuff, muscling businesses, wetwork, all the nuts and bolts that keep a crime family in power. That meant he knew where quite a few of the

game mechanics

In order to ensure that things go well, the team first investigates each of the locations they need to hit. Legwork and reconnaissance (recon) are practically mandatory in *Shadowrun*. Without critical information on security and layout, runners will find themselves dodging security countermeasures they never knew were there.

Physical recon is recommended for all runs requiring characters to get into or out of a place quickly. "Walking the field" gives them the most up-to-date information possible, as well as a sense of the scene that might be lost in AR or video recon. Likewise, Matrix recon is the best way to gather data on local nodes and security systems. Unfortunately, observing a target or location also means exposure to the security measures already in place. Blending into the surroundings to avoid attracting attention is important. Disguises help ensure that local security won't have a record of the runners lurking in the area to connect them to any evidence they might leave behind when executing the actual run.

Physical Recon

As Riser and Ladybug walk onto the scene, Riser begins to assess the area. He rolls Seattle Neighborhoods 4 + Intuition 5 and scores 2 hits. The gamemaster gives Riser basic information about the neighborhood, the class of people who live there, and its Lone Star security rating. To get additional information about response times for trouble, Riser rolls Security Procedures 5 + Logic 7 and gets 3 hits. The gamemaster tells Riser that first response to the area will come fairly quickly in the form of a surveillance drone, with a patrol car arriving several minutes later.

When they arrive at the park, Riser does a Perception Test, rolling Perception 4 + Intuition 5 + Vision Enhancement 3. He gets 4 hits, so the gamemaster decides that Riser can identify several groups of likely gang members and can differentiate between who he would consider to be civilians and combatants. He then rolls Street Gangs 3 + Intuition 5 and scores 1 hit to identify the gang as a small street gang: Wilkerson Park Projects, or WPP, which considers the area for three blocks in all directions to be their turf.

While Ladybug does her recon with the drones, Riser picks up the feed on the image link in his contact lenses to watch what they see. He doesn't pay close attention to the drone feeds, preferring to keep looking around, but he wants to be able to quickly look at anything Ladybug calls out.

Matrix and Drone Recon

Once she and Riser have arrived at the park, Ladybug issues a simple command to her Fly-Spy drones to leave the backpack and wait in the foliage of a nearby tree. This is an easy command and does not require a Comprehension Test by the drones' Pilot. After getting situated on the swing and firmly into her role, the young technomancer begins her recon of the building. To keep up appearances she cannot enter VR and jump into the drone, so Ladybug issues it a command to move to the planter on the fire escape. The drone rolls Pilot 3 + Maneuver (Aircraft) 3 and gets 1 hit on moving to the planter. She issues a command to the other drone to take a position 40 meters above the ground and circle the buildings, which the gamemaster rules is simple enough not to require a Pilot test.



bodies were buried, so keeping him safe was in the Mob's best interest. Still, this was a B-C neighborhood, which made for a different sort of security. Riser glanced around casually, drinking in the scene.

"Just do the survey. Keep an eye out for drones, cameras. I'll be right here." He gave her a push on the swing. He was counting on little Ladybug a lot for this, and he really hoped she'd come through. Ladybug swung with her head down, retreating to the comfort of AR instead of dealing with the meat world.

Ladybug ignored her surroundings, letting her mind drift along with the two bugs. One she asked to go to the back of the building, to hover on a rusted fire escape among some sickly-looking plants some optimistic person had placed outside. It settled in among the leaves, almost disappearing from sight. From its hiding spot, she could monitor Barducci's back window, which had the curtains drawn, and the back door to the building, which was propped open for the moment while two kids snuck a cigarette. A dog was nosing at a pile of something, while some younger kids ran shrieking down the alley. She recognized the game of tag instantly. If it weren't for the Crash, for her abilities in the Matrix, she might've been outside, playing tag, running with friends and avoiding the call to come inside for homework, dinner, bedtime.

She shied away from that thought, as if it were physically painful.

The second drone she had slowly circle the building, flying high enough to stay unnoticed. She watched it in AR, looking through its multifaceted eyes and analyzing the exterior. There were hundreds of active nodes in the area, terabytes of information streaming through the Matrix.

When the bug finished its circuit, she ordered it to hover in the treetops, watching the front of the building. She shifted her attention to the building's system, to the nodes she'd identified. It wasn't too hard a hack, not when she did like the elders had shown her and wrapped Resonance around her to hide her icon. The firewall was good for a building like this, but then again, she expected that from a guy in Barducci's position. She wished she could drop into VR, just for a few seconds, but Riser had told her no. AR only. The firewall was strong, and she chewed her lip more as she contemplated it, looking for the underlying pattern of Resonance that made up the solid wall. There—a spot where the pattern had a gap. It wasn't a big spot, but she was little; she could squeeze through. With the Resonance sheltering her icon, she carefully slid through the gap in the firewall. Inside, she looked around the node. It didn't take long to identify the traces of another hacker, someone who'd left traces everywhere—like tangled, sticky strands of a spider's web connecting the cameras, the doors, the elevators... all back to one node. The sticky strands disappeared into the firewall, which was much more dense than the one for the building. Ladybug looked at the sticky strings, then at the dense firewall, and carefully avoided both as she examined the system. Finally, she slowed the swing, dragging her tennis shoes through the dirt. Riser sat on an empty swing beside her.

Riser twisted the swing to face her and asked, "What are we dealing with for electronic security?"

"There isn't much here. So far I've ID'd cameras on each corner of the building slaved to a security system located in his apartment. They run parallel to the complex security. Looks like he's hacked into every part of this place. He has a messaging script that tells his system every time someone enters or leaves his building. The IC is light around the building's system, but his node has a big enough firewall that he might notice something out of place if I take a peek."

"Don't then, not until I figure out a way to get into the building quietly. What kind of security on the door?"

"Simple passkey maglock. You can zero out the keycode with a scrambler, or I can spoof a user ID. Both are the sorta thing he'd notice, unless I took care of that script first."

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to it. Tell me about the building, the traffic."

Through each drone, Ladybug makes an attempt to Observe in Detail and rolls Perception 2 + Sensors 2. On the first drone, the one watching Barducci's apartment, she gets 2 hits. The gamemaster tells her that Barducci has pulled the curtains to keep people from being able to look inside, but she notices some sort of wire on the fire escape. On the second drone, she rolls 0 hits. The gamemaster tells her the immediately obvious details about children playing and teenagers smoking. Ladybug tells the drones to keep searching.

With the drones tasked to alert her if anything changes, Ladybug reaches out to detect wireless nodes. She can detect the primary node of the building management and various nodes of each apartment—commlinks for the residents as well as the household nodes that control the trid and domestic appliances. Ladybug doesn't have time to slowly probe the building security system, and so she begins Hacking on the Fly. First, she threads her Stealth Complex Form higher to make her harder to detect. Software 3 (Threading +2) + Resonance 5 earns her 3 hits, raising the rating of her Stealth form to 8. Because the new rating of her Stealth form is above her Resonance, her Fading damage is Physical, making her Damage Value 3P (each hit used adds to the Fading damage). Ladybug rolls a Damage Resistance Test, Resonance 5 + Charisma 5, and scores the 3 hits she needs. Because she is maintaining her threaded Stealth Complex Form, she will have a -2 modifier for all other actions.



“There’s the main door in front, and a fire door in the back, opens up into an alley. Pretty clean. People walking back there, kids playing,” she said, only slightly wistfully. “Looks like it’s got a maglock on it, too, and people use it frequently. Alley’s wide enough for a garbage truck—looks like they keep dumpsters back there. No one’s parked there, but there’s a lot of foot traffic right now. After dark, I dunno, but there’s security lighting. Lots of windows. He’s got his window blocked with curtains or something. Fire escape looked like it had some wires on it, don’t know to what.”

Riser thought for a minute, playing scenarios in his head. “I’m thinking we might try to fake a building-wide emergency. A fire would work. We can grab Barducci in the chaos. I’ll need you to get 3D layouts on the building as well as data on where all the panic buttons are. This has to be real in order to catch Barducci unawares, so once you have the information I’ll pick the best apartment to start a fire in. We’ll need to go full crew on this job. With so many of us on scene, we’ll look like just another fire response team.”

Ladybug looked at him with vacant eyes. Her mind was obviously elsewhere.

“Did you get all of that, Ladybug?”

Her eyes refocused. “You know, it’s alright to call me Layla, and yes, I got all of it.”

He shook his head angrily. She’d decided on the name Layla Lovitzki for her new identity. It was impossible to disappear into the shadows carrying your own name. It’d been so long since Riser had used his own last name that he had trouble remembering it. A lot of runners took street names. Most members of the Smoker’s Club used street names only when it suited the job. For Riser there was something too flashy about a street name. Besides, if you used it all the time it served the same purpose as a real name. People would attach your identity to it, and eventually you’d become that person anyway. He would much rather be called Jonathan Riser than an outlandish moniker like Shouta Boy. Still, he had a hard time accepting her as Layla. He had a hard time accepting her as part of the crew, despite her skills in the Matrix. The girl had a lot to learn about being professional.

“Okay, time to go. We’ve got to meet up with Charlie,” he said. “Will your bugs be okay here?”

“Yeah. There’s so much Matrix traffic, their signals won’t stand out. And I’ve encrypted their nodes, so anyone trying to hack them should be stumped.” She slid off the swing, her head down, scuffing her feet as she walked. Riser walked beside her, past the parents dragging their reluctant children away from the playground and toward home—dinner, baths, watch the trid—and wondered, again, whether he was doing the right thing bringing Ladybug along. And wondered what his team would do without her.

Prepared for the onslaught, Ladybug rolls Hacking 4 + Exploit 5 with a –2 modifier for a total of 7 dice, against a threshold of 4, the Firewall of the building management node. Hacking on the fly is an Extended Test, and she gets 2 hits on her first attempt and 3 hits on her second attempt for a total of 5. Each time she tries, the node makes a free Analyze 4 + Firewall 4 Test to detect her. This is also an Extended Test against a threshold of 8 (her current Stealth Rating). The node earns 4 hits on the first attempt and 2 additional hits on the second attempt for a total of 6. If Ladybug had not threaded her Stealth form, she would have been caught.

Once successfully inside, Ladybug drops the threaded Stealth Complex Form. She then begins to analyze the system, making a Matrix Perception Test. Because she is a technomancer, she has a +2 modifier for all Matrix Perception Tests. She rolls Computer 3 + Analyze 5 with the +2 modifier for a total of 10 dice, and scores an amazing 6 hits. Ladybug learns the rating of the system, detects a solitary IC program monitoring it, and notices the data trail of another hacker who has made several changes to the system. The gamemaster has her roll Hacking 4 + Analyze 5 to identify what the other hacker did. Ladybug gets 3 hits and can see the pattern of slaving multiple devices to a secondary node. Ladybug runs another Matrix Perception Test (Computer) to see what she can learn about the secondary node. She finds that the additional processes from the security system are tied to Barducci’s personal node and will likely alert him if an alert is triggered on any of the perimeter security systems.

RULES REFERENCES

Detecting Active/Passive Wireless Nodes, p. 229, *SR4A*

Matrix Perception, p. 228, *SR4A*

Street Knowledge Skills, p. 129, *SR4A*

Threading, p. 240, *SR4A*

Using Hacking, p. 227, *SR4A*

Using Perception, p. 135–136, *SR4A*

RECON 2: CASINO

fiction

Charlie was waiting for them in his own little Nissan Jackrabbit. For this job, Riser wanted them in vehicles. This wasn't a working-class neighborhood where people were out and about, where he and Ladybug could blend. Riser was making some assumptions on security outside the casino. He and Ladybug would wait in the car a few blocks away while Charlie did a walk-by. Charlie's strengths were in stealth and camouflage, even urban camouflage.

Riser sat in the driver's seat, with Ladybug slouched down in the seat beside him, only the seatbelt holding her in place. In VR, she controlled the car. At thirteen, she was a better wheelman than any of them. Her last two Fly-Spy drones were in the sky, waiting for deployment. Riser looked out through the shaded privacy glass of the windshield and scanned the area.

"Charlie, Ladybug's in position. You're on," Riser said over their encrypted commlines.

Charlie Broken Horse pulled his Jackrabbit into a parking lot a few blocks away from the Garden of Eden hotel. Casino Corner in Everett was a popular spot, getting more crowded as the evening grew later. Charlie walked slowly down the street. Hotels and casinos lined the pavement, flashing neon lights reflected by equally gaudy AR ads. His AR glasses were fitted with a camera—and he'd go over the recorded footage with Riser later. For now, first impressions were what counted.

"There is a concentration of civilians," he noted across the lines to Riser. "Streets are well-lit. Marquis Hotel provides a good vantage point." He kept walking, gauging the area. "Better choice for vantage point, Galloway Hotel. Third choice..." He eyeballed the distances and the lines of sight for other hotels in the area. "Starview Casino. North tower has limited line-of-sight. Rooftop access has possibilities." Over his link, he heard Ladybug's young voice pipe up that she'd start researching the three sites.

Content with that, he concentrated on moving through the crowd toward the Garden of Eden. The hotel shared a parking lot with the upscale Shangri-La Casino. Late-model cars, their paint glossy under the artificial lights, were parked in orderly rows.

"Shared parking lot between hotel and casino. Cars provide cover. Again, well-lit. Security cameras on light poles?" He directed the question toward little Ladybug.

"Umm..." the girl's voice came back, unsure. "I'm not picking anything up. Your signal's spazzing out, Charlie. I'm gonna send my bug up in the sky. Get a better signal."

Back at their car, Riser was reading through the data feeds on the three possible vantage points as Ladybug streamed the feed directly to him. On the link, Ladybug was grumbling about signal loss, her VR voice cranky.

"Can you hack the casino?" he asked her.

"No. They've got it wi-fi inhibited there. I think I need to be inside the building. There's a public node, but I can't find any back doors. Looks like the security system is totally offline," she said, her voice wobbling. He knew she hated it when she couldn't measure up.

"Sokay, kid," Riser said. "Some places design their security intelligently. Keep looking." He spoke encouragingly, but inside, he knew that if they couldn't control the external security, they'd have problems.

"Charlie, keep looking. See if you spot cameras," Riser asked.

Charlie squinted up toward the lights. If he were designing the security, he'd put cameras there. If the girl wasn't finding the signals, perhaps they'd been hardwired. He walked through the parking lot. Around the casino, some landscaper had created a narrow river, which flowed around low-slung hills and under decorative footbridges. Delicate trees were carefully placed, and a thick hedge wove through it all. Colored lights shone up from under the water.

"Casino parking lot has significant flow of civilians. High visibility. Landscaping provides good cover. Ladybug, we need to know what external security and surveillance they have on the site. We can't do this if we can't control the external surveillance," he said.

"Just do the recon, Charlie," Riser said. "We'll work on the plan after we've got all the data."

game mechanics

The second target site is even more secure, so the team takes a different approach, using its diverse skills and talents in tandem to perform unobtrusive on-site and Matrix recon.

Combined Recon

As the scene unfolds, Ladybug is in full VR and is jumped into their vehicle, driving casually. As she navigates into position, Riser wants to evaluate the casino's external security system. He rolls Security Design 5 + Logic 7 and gets 3 hits. The gamemaster tells Riser that casinos generally have heightened Matrix security and spiders, with limited external access to the security grid. Beyond that, the physical layout is designed to allow people to come in easily, but provide a slight resistance to them leaving. With these basic facts and the information found in the legwork, Riser begins formulating various approaches that will build into a plan once they all return to the safe house.

Charlie gets out of the Jackrabbit and immediately begins making active Perception Tests. The gamemaster states that there is currently Partial Lighting and Glare caused by the neon signs. Charlie has low-light vision in his glasses to counteract the Partial Lighting, but takes -1 from his dice pool for the glare. He also gets +3 dice for actively searching out security measures. This gives him Perception 4 + Intuition 4 with +2 modifiers, for a total of 10 dice. Charlie rolls and gets 3 hits for the front of the casino. The gamemaster gives Charlie the locations of the visible security cameras and tells him that he sees three potential locations from which to provide covering fire while remaining outside the casino's security bubble.

Charlie snaps and tags the locations on his image link and forwards the pictures to Ladybug, who compiles a data sprite to manage the data search on the three locations. Since she's still in VR, she gets +2 to all Matrix actions. She decides to call on a Rating 5 Data sprite and rolls Compiling 3 + Resonance 5 with the +2 modifier, opposed by the sprite's Rating 5. Ladybug scores 2 net hits and needs to resist Fading with a DV equal to 2 times the sprite's hits, in this case 4 DV. She rolls her Resonance 5 + Charisma 5 for a total of 10 dice; she gets lucky with 4 hits and reduces the DV to 0. Ladybug tasks the sprite to begin data searches on two of the three locations. She then rolls Data Search 3 + Browse 5 with the +2 modifier for a total of 10 dice, for her own data search (8, 1 minute). Within five minutes, she has the information needed about roof access to the Starview Casino.

When Charlie gets close to the casino, he runs into the interference created by the casino to inhibit wi-fi signals, and their landscaping. Shangri-La is designed to have maximum attenuation provided by the foliage. While the plants themselves aren't sufficient to noticeably block the signal, the casino has added Rating 2 jammers to the base of each of the plants. The jammers reduce Charlie's Signal Rating by 2 (the rating of the jammers). With the signal reduction, Charlie is out of range of his team. To counteract this, Ladybug sends one of her minidrones closer to Charlie. The drone then functions as a relay point, repeating back the communications between team members.

While the first drone acts as a broadcast point, Ladybug tasks the second drone to scan for wireless signals, a Detect Hidden Node Test. The drone's Pilot rolls Electronic Warfare 3 + Scan 3, gets 4 hits, and is able to localize the hidden node for Shangri-La from the other commlinks and nodes in the area. The drone reports



Charlie didn't argue. Riser was the boss. He looked over the front of the casino. "North entrance has ballistic glass and two sentries. Going around to south entrance."

Confident in his adept abilities, Charlie blended with the night, using the scant pools of darkness that hovered between parked cars and the shadows of the hedges to make his way past the civilian parking lot, to the back of the building. The employee parking lot was much smaller than the main lot. It also was stingily lighted, creating larger pools of darkness.

"Employee lot has single entrance to street, unguarded. Two back entrances, both metal doors, no windows, no external sentries. Wall around lot is 2.5 meters high. Plascrete. I see two cameras, one on each corner of the wall. No civilians out here. Two utility grates in parking lot, approximately 3 meters from building. Underground access to building?"

Charlie looked up into the night. From the back parking lot, the upper floors of the Marquis Hotel had a direct view. To the side, the Galloway Hotel had a good line-of-sight as well, although the Galloway had the advantage in being able to see both the front and back parking lots. Their intel said that the targets would arrive in the back lot.

"Sniper lines to both back doors from Marquis. Galloway has line to west entrance. East entrance line is blocked by dumpsters."

His survey complete, Charlie slipped through the shadows of the employee lot exit and to the sidewalk outside the walls.

Ladybug continued to scan the area, looking for some node that she might have missed. The team had already said she couldn't go inside the casino. She wondered if a sprite would be able to hack the system from the inside if she sent it in on someone's link. Once inside, it could talk to her through the Resonance ... but only if it were her sprite. She didn't know if she could control one powerful enough to do what needed to be done.

As she contemplated the options, her fingers were busy sorting through the various signals, nodes, each a fragment of the wireless matrix around the casino. In her mind, they appeared like distorted puzzle pieces. As she sorted through them, she attempted to form the full picture. One last piece ... and she saw it.

"Oh, geez. Geez!" she said, excited. "Wait. Are you serious? A TacNet! Who—" she quickly yanked the piece out, following the trail back to the other signals in the net, talking out loud the entire time. "They must be running their whole surveillance wirelessly! That would make sense, since, I mean, how many people really do stakeouts? Except us, of course," she said.

She was obviously excited, talking so fast that Riser only caught snippets, "What are you saying, Ladybug?"

She kept following the trail. A drone. A series of drones. All communicating back to a central hub—a rigger. She sliced through the encryption on the communication, saw what the data stream was sending.

"Oh, no," she said. "Riser, it's following him." Ladybug's voice cut through to Charlie, as he walked down the street toward his Jackrabbit. "Charlie, Charlie, you're being tailed!"

He didn't think before he spun around. It was a natural reaction, experience giving way to uncertainty. He turned back toward the Garden of Eden Hotel, expecting men on foot or even a car. Nothing. He looked up, right into the electronic eye of a Fly-Spy. The wasp-sized drone hummed above him, following at a safe distance.

"Shit, Ladybug. You were supposed to be doing overwatch! How long have they been on me?"

Riser's voice, calm and reassuring, joined the conversation, "Be cool, kids. You haven't done anything wrong, Charlie. Ladybug, track their origin now."

Easy enough to say. Charlie faked a yawn and stretched. It was all he could do to maintain composure. He was being followed, which meant that his image was already floating through the Matrix being analyzed, compared, deconstructed, tagged, and copied. Who knew where his face-shot would end up? It could mean the end of Charlie Broken Horse, an identity he'd grown fond of over the past few years. Sure, he'd be leaving Seattle soon enough, under a new ID. But the deconstruction of Charlie Broken Horse was a smattering of bread crumbs on the road to discovering who the Smoker's Club really was. Didn't they understand that? Charlie wasn't going back to

that the casino is not the source of the signals, but is connected to the local grid. Ladybug logs into the public data node. Because she is a technomancer, she is automatically spoofing her Access ID, and does not need to make a Spoofing Test. She takes a second for a Matrix Perception Test, Computer 3 + Analyze 5 with +4 modifiers, for a total of 12 dice. She scores 2 hits, and so the gamemaster tells her the system's rating and that the system is not connected to any other nodes. This lets Ladybug know that the casino's security is run off-line inside the inhibited area.

As he walks around the perimeter, Charlie makes several more Perception and Security Systems Tests to identify security features within the garden and around the building. When he approaches the rear of the building where visitors to the casino should not be, Charlie begins sneaking. As sneaking is generally an Opposed Test, the gamemaster has Charlie roll Infiltration 5 + Agility 5. The gamemaster notes the number of hits from the Test, and rolls against that every time a guard or camera might notice Charlie. This saves Charlie from having to reroll every time he comes into the line of sight of a camera or guard.

Ladybug persistently tries to find a way into the system, making a Detect Hidden Node Test to scan hidden nodes in case the casino or a guard plugged into casino security is ghosting. She threads her Scan Complex Form and rolls Software 3 (Threading +2) + Resonance 5 with a +2 VR modifier, scoring 4 hits. Ladybug chooses to use only 3 hits and temporarily raises her Scan Rating to 8. Ladybug must now resist Fading with a DV of 3P. Ladybug rolls 10 dice, getting 2 hits and suffering 1 box of Physical Damage. The technomancer rolls Electronic Warfare 4 + Scan 8 with a +2 modifier (16, 1 combat turn). As Charlie finishes his recon, Ladybug makes her eighth roll in the Test and trips across a hidden system.

Unable to determine immediately where the signal is coming from, Ladybug attempts to intercept and sample the traffic. She drops her threaded Scan before making a Capture Wireless Signal Test with a threshold of 3, rolling Electronic Warfare 4 + Sniffer 5 with a +2 modifier, for a total of 11 dice. It takes her a few tries, but she finds the exact signal and locks in. The signal is encrypted. Ladybug does not have Decrypt as a complex form, so she threads it. She rolls Software 3 (Threading +2) + Resonance 5 with +2 modifiers for a total of 12 dice, and gets 2 hits. While it isn't as good as she hoped for, Ladybug holds on to the form in her mind and her gamemaster allows her to buy successes to resist Fading.

Ladybug begins an Initiate Cryptanalysis Test, rolling Electronic Warfare 4 + Decrypt 2 (12, 1 Combat Turn). Slogging through encryption algorithms takes time, but she soon sees the streams of data actually being communicated. Ladybug uses a Knowledge Skill, making a Wireless Systems 4+ Intuition 5 Test with a threshold of 3 to identify the streams of signals as a TacNet with multiple command structures.

After her initial panic at finding a TacNet, and Riser's stern rebuke, Ladybug goes to the hidden node she found earlier. As before, she threads her Stealth Complex Form, getting 3 hits and takes 1 DV from Fading. Her modifiers are +2 for being in VR and -2 for maintaining the threaded Stealth. Ladybug begins hacking on the fly and launches a Hacking 4 + Exploit 5 (4, 1 Complex Action) Extended Test with 0 modifiers against the Firewall. She earns 2 hits on the first Test, and the drone's Firewall makes a free Analyze 4 + Firewall 4 (8) Extended Test. After her second attack, Ladybug has exceeded the threshold of 4 for the Firewall, but the drone has not pierced the Stealth form.

his car. The registration RFID on his plate was just another piece of the puzzle of who he was. Instead, the adept headed toward the nearest bus stop. He'd ride the metro for a while until Ladybug figured out where the heat was coming from. If he was lucky, he'd get into a crowded part of town where it would be easy to lose the tail. Then he would double back for his car. Two other people were at the bus stop, both immersed in some AR entertainment. They ignored him. Charlie could feel the electronic gaze of the Fly-Spy on the back of his neck, burning like a laser sight.

While he waited, Ladybug tracked the signal back to the rigger. It was too late to do anything about the image captured; when Charlie had looked up, the drone had gotten a full look at his face. She wasn't fast enough to cut the image out mid-transmission; she'd been trying to decrypt the encrypted signal.

The rigger was nearby. His node was nondescript from the outside. Inside ... who could tell? She felt her stomach clench. But ... but they had Charlie's face. She was supposed to be on overwatch. It was her mistake. She needed to fix it, now. She took a deep breath, felt the Resonance course through her. A tug to her sprites, Lancelot and Gidget. She'd need their help.

Concentrating, she wove the Resonance around her to bolster her exploit abilities. Then she looked over to where the little clockwork man waited, the gears that were his eyes slowly spinning.

"Gidget, I need your help. I'm gonna go in there, and I don't want them to see me. Can you help?" She turned to Lancelot, the sprite who looked like a shiny new Nutcracker Prince, wooden sword at his side, his black eyes shining. "Lancelot, protect me?" She felt them both extend their Resonance to her; it was like being wrapped in a warm hug.

Then she looked at the firewall. It was big. Really big. But it was still built by normal men and women, people who didn't know how to put the underlying Resonance together seamlessly. She looked it over, frowning, until she saw a slightly out-of-place piece. With a little jiggle, she could ... yes, she could slide through the gap. But would it be big enough for what she needed? *I need to be able to alter the files, alter the images they took. Security clearance, at least.* She thought it would work.

Her heart was pounding as she slid into the node. Around her, she still could feel the warm comfort of her sprites. There was the rigger, sitting at the center of the node, watching a dozen screens of data streaming in from his drones. Inside, the iconography was pure Lone Star. Ladybug almost froze, but she swallowed her fear and put her mind to the task at hand.

She tiptoed behind the rigger. Charlie's picture was hopefully somewhere in here—she couldn't bear to think what she'd have to do if the rigger had sent it off to Lone Star's home node already. She quickly began searching through files, glancing over to the rigger as she did so. It was only a matter of time before he noticed a second user in the system. She finally found the right file: a compilation of photos of multiple people. Charlie's was in there. The file was scheduled to be sent to Lone Star to be matched up with their databases every hour. An idea occurred to her, and she smiled. She only had a few more seconds of protection. She needed to get the job done, fast. And she knew the team would want to know more details. She got to work.

When the bus arrived, Charlie paid his fee and found a bucket seat in the back where he could curl up. As the bus pulled away, Riser contacted him.

"Charlie, everything's good now. Ladybug's got the situation under control."

"So, who is it that's following me?" he asked, once the bus pulled away.

Ladybug answered. "Lone Star. Organized Crime Task Force. I backtracked the drone's transmissions to the rigger. Looks like they've been watching the casino for a few months now. Their rigger noticed you hanging around, and keyed the Fly-Spy to follow you for a few blocks, just to see where you came from. The bus was a good idea. It broke off pursuit when you boarded."

"It doesn't erase the problem of OCT surveillance on the place where we're trying to make a hit. Or that they got a full view of my face."

"No, but I think I took care of it. I edited your picture. When they run your face, it should come back with a match to a known ID, an alias used by a known criminal."

"Anyone we know?"

"Fingers Barducci."

Slowly, a smile started to spread across Charlie's face.

Charlie makes a Composure Test to calm himself outwardly. He rolls a Charisma 3 + Willpower 4 (2) Test and gets 2 hits.

Meanwhile, in the drone, Ladybug makes a Matrix Perception Test, with the following modifiers: +2 for VR, +2 for being a technician, and -2 for maintaining the threaded Stealth Complex Form. She rolls Computer 3 + Analyze 5 with a +2 modifier for a total of 10 dice. With the 4 hits she scores, the gamemaster tells her the rating of the drone, that there are no active alerts, and that a connection exists to another node. Maintaining the threaded rating on her Stealth Complex Form, Ladybug attempts to jump the connection to what she thinks is the drone rigger's node. She asks Gidget to Assist Operation, adding its rating to her Stealth Complex Form; with her threading, this raises her Stealth Complex form to 10, and the task will last 2 Combat Turns. She asks her other sprite, Lancelot, to use his abilities to protect her. She decides to go for a Security-level access, which increases the threshold by +3. Ladybug begins a Hacking on the Fly Test again, and launches a Hacking 4 + Exploit 5 (8, 1 Complex Action) Extended Test against the Firewall. She earns 4 hits on the first test, and the node's Firewall makes a free Analyze 5 + Firewall 5 (10) Extended Test, getting 2 hits. On her second Initiative Pass, Ladybug gets 2 hits (total 6); the Firewall gets 3 (total 5). On the third Initiative Pass, Ladybug gets 3 hits (total 9); the Firewall gets 4 (total 9). Ladybug is through, exceeding the threshold of 8 for the Firewall, and the node failed to overcome her Stealth form—barely. Gidget's assistance will last one more Combat Turn.

Inside, Ladybug again makes a Matrix Perception Test, earning 3 hits. The gamemaster tells her that the system is not on alert, has three active connections, and that the node is Rating 5. She can see the rigger (he isn't running a Stealth program), but he hasn't detected her yet. Because she expects the node to continue to run Analyze, Ladybug keeps her Stealth threaded to make herself harder to detect, and the -2 modifier cancels out the +2 modifier she receives for running in VR.

She runs a Data Search 3 + Browse 5 (4, 1 Initiative Pass) Extended Test to find the image of Charlie. Ladybug finds the file on her second attempt and opens a connection to the tag in her jacket that she uses to store files. Using the information supplied by Mr. Johnson and her legwork on Fingers, Ladybug begins to edit the picture of Charlie. She rolls Hacking 4 + Edit 5 and earns 2 hits. Because she needs to make sure no one notices the edits, Ladybug uses Edge to re-roll her failures and scores 3 more hits for a total of 5.

Running out of time, Ladybug logs off before getting caught or triggering an alert. She doesn't have admin access, so she doesn't take the time to erase the security log.

RULES REFERENCES

Capture Wireless Signal, p. 229, SR4A

Compiling Sprites, p. 240, SR4A

Composure Tests, p. 138, SR4A

Edit, p. 230, SR4A

Hacking, p. 235–236, SR4A

Initiate Cryptanalysis, p. 230, SR4A

Matrix Perception, p. 228, SR4A

Professional Knowledge Skills, p. 129, SR4A

Spending Edge, p. 74, SR4A

Sprite Tasks, p. 240–241, SR4A

Using Data Search, p. 227, SR4A

Using Perception, p. 135–136, SR4A



PLANNING

fiction

"... And I think that's our best way in," Kai-lin said, wrapping up the last report of the team.

"I agree," Riser said, while the rest of the team nodded. "So let's plan this out. We're going to want some sort of overwatch outside and someone to go in through the sewer."

"The overwatch is going to want a sniper rifle," said Kai-lin, "and that would be me. Charlie's the only other one who knows about explosives, so that puts him in the sewer." Charlie sighed, but nodded once, curtly.

"We're going to have to get Fingers through the sewer, too," Seta offered. "So there's going to have to be at least two of us down there."

"Good point," Riser said. "And since it can't be me or Ladybug, that's you, Seta."

Seta nodded. "If I'm needed to sling some mana around, I'll have to be there, anyway."

"Chessman has our demolisher nanites on the way," Riser said. "I've never used them, so Charlie, you feel comfortable with those?"

"If I knew something about them, maybe," Charlie replied.

"Ladybug?" Riser started to ask.

"I'm on it," Ladybug chirped. "Oh, and here, I've plotted the best escape routes from the sewer and from the hotel." The data appeared on the runners' display links.

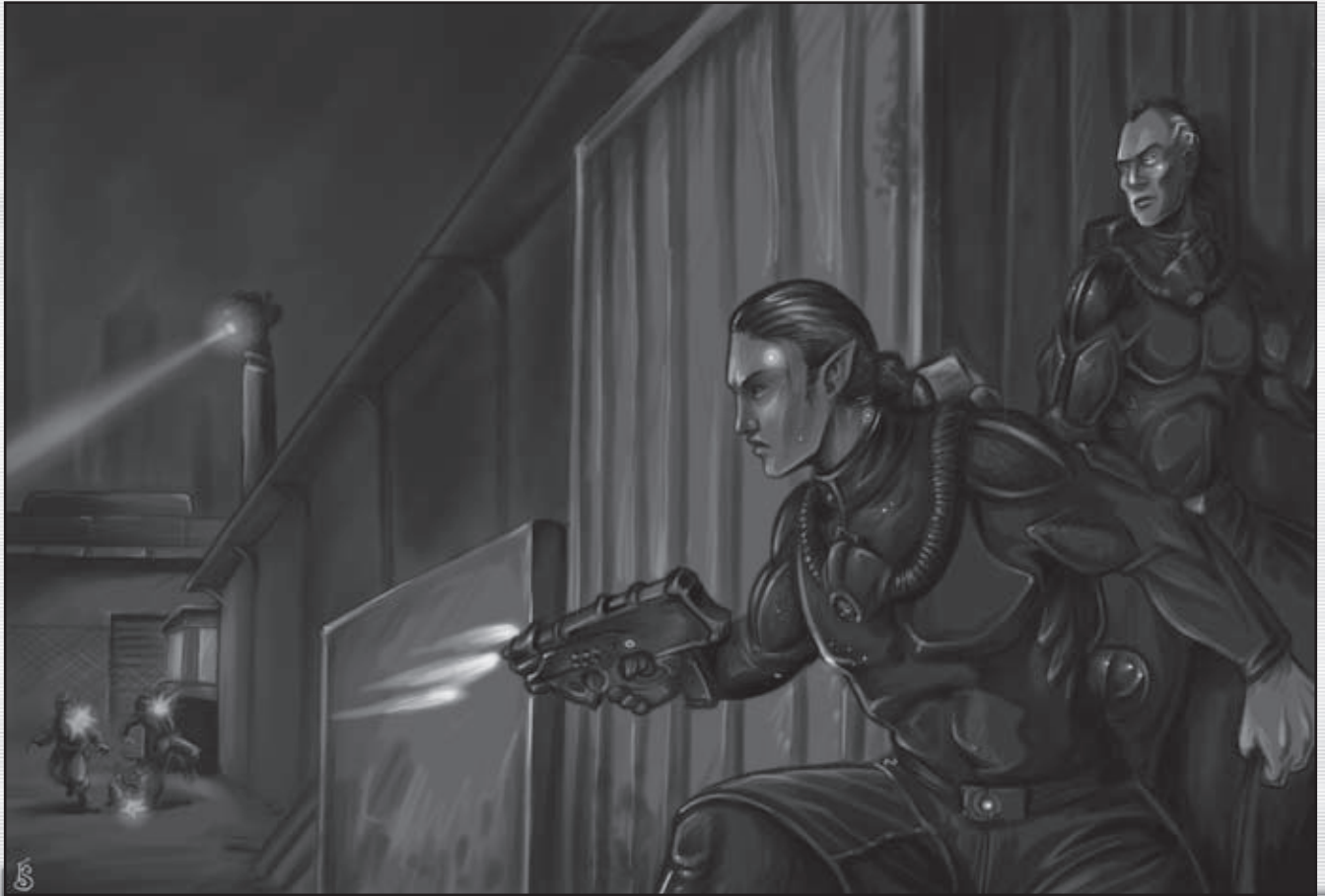
"Did you actually check the routes this time?" Charlie asked. "I don't want to go through another couple weeks of poison sumac rash." His tone was stern, but he couldn't keep from grinning when he said it.

game mechanics

Real-life professionals who plan an operation like a shadowrun, such as military, special ops, and law enforcement, use a method called "reverse planning." This is done by starting at the end of the operation and working backward through the timeline. This makes it easier to see what resources you need and what tasks you must accomplish at each point in the process. It also virtually eliminates the need to backtrack and revise your planning when you come up with contingencies.

Planning is an excellent time to roleplay with the other players, especially since you do not need to make many tests or use many game mechanics during that time. One way to do this is through improvisation, or "riffing," inventing past situations and playing off other players' ideas. The poison sumac episode here was never played at the table, but when Charlie's player invents it, Ladybug's player plays along, responding in character. When riffing, avoid attributing anything to other players' characters that would be uncharacteristic, and build off of other players' ideas rather than denying them (e.g., "That never happened!").

Even the most routine elements of a shadowrun can be deadly when an unexpected twist manifests. In this scene the gamemaster decides to throw an incidental threat at the team to keep them on their toes.



"Oh, please," said the girl, rolling her eyes but smiling. "I already apologized to you for that. And it's not my fault Seta doesn't know any spells for curing a rash. And good grief, we're in a city." She stuck her tongue out at the Sioux adept.

"Good job on the escape routes, kid, but what about the electronic security? Can you control the cameras, the alarms?" Kai-lin asked.

Ladybug's grin faded. "Their system is all off-line. I have to get into the casino to access it."

"Well, that's not a possibility," Kai-lin said. "It's a strictly adults-only establishment. No insult to the little princess, but she can't go in."

Ladybug worried her lip. "I could maybe put a sprite in one of your commlinks, and if you go in, it could hack the system..."

Riser raised an eyebrow. Not that he understood how her abilities worked, but the girl sounded extremely doubtful.

"Let's try something simpler. Charlie, you saw cameras in the lot?" he asked.

"Yes. Two on the back wall."

"And you didn't sense them, Ladybug?"

"No," she answered. "They must be hardwired."

"Okay. So we put a tap onto the hardwired cameras. You can access the system that way. I can do it, or we have Seta make you invisible and lift you up to do it yourself. Can you do that?" Riser asked.

The girl thought for a moment, then nodded. "But I won't know how tough the system is until I hack it. My chances will be better if I have some time to hack in slowly, a few days in advance."

"Which will also give them time to notice you and blow the whistle on the operation. We'll get the tap on ahead of time, but you'll have to hack it that night."

Ladybug sat back on the couch, pouting, but she didn't contradict him.

"So, assuming Ladybug hacks the security cameras," Kai-lin said, "we still need a contingency."

"Our back-up plan," Riser said gently to Ladybug, whose brow had furrowed. "Kai-lin could pick them off if they survive the explosion."

"Bad idea," Seta said. "We're going to want to leave the moment the bomb goes off."

The team fell silent in thought. Ladybug began chewing her lip.

"Well," Ladybug said slowly, "if I were an important mob boss and just survived a bomb, I'd want to get out of there. I'd be afraid of whoever it was that tried to kill me, not to mention the cops when they came to investigate."

Riser smiled; Kai-lin chuckled. "They'll go straight to their armored limos. If we plant explosives on the vehicles, we can catch them coming and going."

"Planting bombs on the cars is going to require stealth," Charlie said, a bit too quickly, "and that's me."

"Which puts me in the sewer," Kai-lin said indifferently. "Riser can handle the rifle."

"Okay," Riser said. "Ladybug and me in the hotel, Charlie in the parking lot, and Kai-lin and Seta in the sewer with Fingers. Let's move on to the part where we nab him. He's guarded any time he's out of his apartment, so we're not going to be able to lure him anywhere. It's going to have to be a grab from his apartment."

"He's not the only Mafia guy in the building," Ladybug said. "There's another apartment on the floor below his. Actually, it's the apartment right below his."

"Another guard," Kai-lin said.

"I don't know," the girl replied. "Whoever it is hasn't been home in a while." Riser opened his mouth and she continued, "I already put a sprite in the apartment's CHN. It'll let me know the moment whoever-it-is gets home."

"Clever girl, Ladybug," Riser said with a smile, eliciting a big grin from the girl. "Okay, we need an excuse to get in, nab him, and get out. Better yet, we're going to have to do it so that it doesn't look like a kidnapping and doesn't alert the Mafia, which means no calls out from Fingers and no suspicious witnesses."

"And he can't be missed until after the casino bombing," Kai-lin said.

"Sneaking in and taking him out, a little nighttime B&E?" Seta suggested. "With some invisibility and the kid in the system, no one would be the wiser."

"I'm worried about what Fingers has in his apartment. Those wires Ladybug spotted on the fire escape, plus his paranoia—he may have door and windows alarmed, hardwired so the kid can't get control of it. Maybe it's just on the window. Still, I'd rather flush him out of the apartment."

"We'll need a large diversion, then," Charlie said. "Something to keep everyone's attention off us when he comes out of his place."

"Seta?" Ladybug asked. "You can do big confusing magic, can't you?"

"I can certainly spread some mayhem, yes," the elf answered, "but it will be fairly apparent that magic was involved. We're going to need real chaos for this."

Riser nodded. "Which is why I was thinking a fire. Something small so it doesn't do a lot of damage to people or property, but enough to get the building evacuated. If we go in as an ambulance team, nobody will look twice if we bring out a 'smoke inhalation victim,'" he made air quotes with his fingers, "strapped to a gurney."

"We'll need an ambulance," Charlie said.

"I know somebody we can borrow one from," Riser said, "plus uniforms. We're going to be DocWagon employees for a night. Here's my plan: Seta starts a small fire and Ladybug pulls us up in the ambulance. Seta, Kai-lin, and I take the gurney to the front door and Seta pops Fingers with a spell in the ensuing confusion. We strap him to the gurney, load him up, and drive off."

"With enough confusion and panic, the background count should be high enough that no one investigating will see any traces of the spell," Seta said, nodding approval.

"Contingencies?" Kai-lin asked gruffly.

"I was thinking we put Charlie in the back in case he uses the back door or the fire escape, although I doubt he'll be using the fire escape since he'd be so exposed. Ladybug stays in front in the ambulance."

"Good. That also answers my question about what we were going to do with five people on a supposedly four-man EMS crew. What about the downstairs neighbor?"

Riser paused, and Charlie offered, "We can probably take out whoever-it-is too, between the three of us, and we don't have to be so gentle with him."

"Yeah," Riser nodded. "That's assuming he or she shows up. For all we know, the occupant of that apartment is in Sicily for the week."

"What if we nab him, too?" Ladybug asked. "It might look even better if we've got two bodies in the casino instead of one."

"Let's not over-plan this," Kai-lin said.

"Right," Riser said. "Let's take the low-probability situations as they come. Besides, taking out one guy gently and quietly is a lot easier than two."

"What happens when the real emergency services arrive?" Seta asked.

"Services in that neighborhood have a five-minute response guarantee," Ladybug said.

"Let's call it four minutes, then," Riser said. "That should be plenty of time for Fingers to get to the ambulance. Anybody have any refinements?"

"We should remember to carry non-lethal," Charlie said. "Just in case."

"Good point. Anything else?"

"Yeah," Kai-lin said. "Where are we going to get explosives, detonators, demolishers, and non-lethal rounds on short notice?"

Riser smiled. "Mr. Johnson's already pledged some extra pay for the resources and I have a line in to Chessman. All we have to do is pick it up tomorrow."

"Okay, let's plan that."

"Bah," Riser said, waving his hand. "There's no need. All we have to do is show up to the drop, grab the gear, and leave. It'll be easy."

PROCUREMENT

fiction

Ladybug backed the ambulance they'd picked up from Chessman's man into the alley behind the warehouse. The docks were quiet. "Did you know that between midnight and dawn is the time where people are most likely to die of natural causes?" chirped the chipper young technomancer.

"This is close enough," said Riser, prompting the vehicle to come to a halt. "Come on, boys, let's go get the rest of the loot." Riser, Seta, Charlie, and Kai-lin piled out of the back of the ambulance. Kai-lin drew his guns out of habit.

"That's the only door that isn't projecting a node in the Matrix," said Ladybug over their commlinks, using an ARO to tag one of the many roll-up doors along the alley, "it must be the deactivated one we're looking for."

Riser motioned Charlie toward the door and bent down to help him open it. It was annoying to open a door manually in this day and age, thought Riser, but at least they could open and close this one without their actions being logged somewhere.

"Do you hear that?" asked Kai-lin.

"Hear what?" said Riser as he and Charlie dragged open the door.

The next thing Riser saw was Charlie vanishing into the gloom of the warehouse like a card from a magician's hand. Before he had a chance to contemplate this, his vision tunneled and the world spun around him. He became aware of a sharp pain along the right side of his chest just before the ground slammed into his left side. He saw Kai-lin leap over him, the sniper's P93 Praetor charging itself in response to a mental command. Riser dragged himself to his feet and clutched at his Ares Predator, stumbling into the warehouse and rolling behind a stack of pallets for cover.

Charlie had spotted the street gang before they saw him, sprinting into the warehouse along one side of the open area between his team and the hostiles. Reaching the nearest ganger before she could react, he grabbed her by her studded dog collar and slammed her forehead against his rising knee. The ganger collapsed to the plascrete floor in a limp pile of flesh and bones.

As Kai-lin's first few bullets found their mark—an ork with a shotgun—he recognized their enemies as members of the Scatterbrains. The gang generally presented little threat, loving practical jokes more than violence. Still, they were between the team and the equipment they needed, so when the ork remained standing after the first burst, Kai-lin let the recoil from his first shot track his weapon up a few fractions of a degree and put the next burst into the ganger's face. Using his smartgun link, he switched his gun over to full-auto and poured a sustained burst into another ork who had turned toward Charlie.

Charlie felt the world around him slow the way it always did when he let the mana flow through him like living lightning. He tried to stop a dwarf from firing an AK-97 carbine at Riser, but was a half-beat too late. Still, he prevented another shot, snapping the dwarf's wrist with a twisting grip and bringing his elbow down into the ganger's collarbone, driving it into a lung.

Kai-lin squeezed off another burst into the throat and jaw of an unarmed Scatterbrain, just in case she was a magician. He

game mechanics

Fight Scene

As the team opens the door, the gamemaster asks for Perception (Hearing) + Intuition Tests with a modifier of -2 for a sound not in the immediate vicinity and a threshold of 3 (muffled noise). Only Kai-lin succeeds, and so he is warned of the gangers inside the warehouse.

The door rolls up, potentially surprising everyone and leaving them at Short Range. The gamemaster calls for Surprise Tests (Reaction + Intuition) from the players and makes one for the gangers as a group of grunts. The results are Charlie 5 hits, Kai-lin 3, Seta 2, Riser 0, Ladybug 1, and the Scatterbrains 3. Only Charlie and Kai-lin will be able to act against the Scatterbrains, who in turn can act against any of the team except Charlie.

The gamemaster then calls for Initiative, rolling 13 for the gang. Charlie gets a result of 15, Kai-lin 12, Seta 9, Ladybug 9, and Riser 10.

RULES REFERENCES

Detect Hidden Node, p. 230, SR4A

Grunts, p. 280, SR4A

Initiative, p. 144–146, SR4A

Surprise Tests, p. 165, SR4A

Using Perception, p. 135–136, SR4A

Combat Turn 1: Initiative Pass 1

Charlie charges into the warehouse and attacks one of the gangers in hand to hand. Charlie makes an attack with Unarmed Combat 4 + Agility 5 plus modifiers (charging +2) for 11 dice. He gets 5 hits. The ganger does not get to make an Opposed Test because she is surprised by Charlie. Charlie adds his 5 hits to his Unarmed damage of 5P, causing 10 boxes of Physical Damage to the ganger, who gets no hits on her Damage Resistance Test; she takes all 10 boxes of damage and drops.

The gangers in the front row draw their weapons, each taking a Simple Action to do so while crouching for cover behind some crates. Three of them take shots at Kai-lin, who uses his Reaction to avoid being hit. His Reaction is 6, so he rolls 6 dice against the first shot, 5 dice against the second shot, and 4 dice against the third shot, due to the cumulative -1 penalty per attacker between Action Phases. The gangers get 2, 1, and 2 hits, respectively. Kai-lin gets 3 hits on both his first and second rolls, and spends an Edge on the third, getting 5 hits. All the gangers miss him.

Riser is not so lucky. He is surprised, so he is not allowed to make defense rolls, and he is being targeted by three Scatterbrains. The gangers all hit with 2, 1, and 3 hits, inflicting damage of 7P, 5P, and 11P, respectively. Riser's armor jacket changes the damage from the first 2 hits to Stun, since the Damage Values of those attacks do not exceed his Ballistic Armor of 8. Riser makes a Damage Resistance Test for each hit: Body 5 + Armor 8. His first Test gets him 4 hits, reducing the damage from the first shot to 3S, which he marks on his Condition Monitor. His second Test gets 5 hits, negating the damage entirely. His third Test gets him only 2 hits; worse yet, after spending Edge to reroll the 11 dice that had no hits, he did not manage to get a single additional hit. He takes 9P and, because the damage he takes is greater than his Body, he is knocked to the ground. His wound penalties are now -4 (-1 for 3 boxes of Stun Damage and -3 for 9 boxes of Physical Damage), and his Initiative Score for the Combat Turn is reduced to 6.

Kai-lin switches his Praetor to burst fire (a Free Action with his smartlink) and shoots at a ganger while moving toward cover. His first shot is Automatics 4 + Agility 7 modified by +2 smartlink, -2 recoil, +2 recoil compensation for a dice pool of 13, opposed by the ganger's Reaction 3 + 4 for Good Cover. Kai-lin



held off of the trigger a moment and assessed the battle. Five still standing. An open crate stood in the middle of the floor: their crate. Charlie was in the thick of things. The adept was fighting greater numbers than even he could handle if they all ganged up on him together, and they were starting to use just that strategy. "Seta!" he barked, "we need those guys dropped, now! No fire! Repeat, no—" Kai-lin cut himself short as a spray of bullets caused him to reflexively jerk his head back behind cover.

"*Llasthwilche!*" It was Seta's voice and yet not Seta's voice, simultaneously heard and felt. The air between the alley and the gangers seemed to fold and rush, and Kai-lin somehow perceived an invisible red blasting through the warehouse. The gangers fell, the thump of their bodies joining the clatter of their weapons. There was silence.

"Charlie?" called Riser weakly. "Charlie, report!"

"He'll be fine if I tagged him," said Seta, "he'll just need to sleep it off."

"I'm good," Charlie called, rising behind the open crate, "I heard Kai-lin and I took cover."

"I'm not good," moaned Riser, "I think I've got a couple cracked ribs, here."

Seta knelt next to the team leader and gently pressed on his sternum. Riser snarled in pain. "Cracked, hell. You've got a couple broken ribs, here. Let me take care of that for you."

"Oh, I hate this part," said Riser, "Could somebody get me a—*hrk!*" He stiffened as Seta's spell began moving his innards back into place, accelerating his natural healing processes.

"Try not to squirm," said the elf, who looked somewhat pale from the stress of spellcasting. "There, good as new. Everyone else okay?"

"I'm okay," said Charlie as Kai-lin shook his head, "Although I could use a nap."

"Me too," said the mage with a sigh.

"Nobody gets a nap until we get our stuff," growled Riser, rubbing his sore ribs. "Pack it up and let's get out of here."

There was some movement on the floor and, as one, the four trained weapons on an unconscious thug. The man was face-down, but his cyberarm was waving to the team. Ladybug's electronic snicker came over their commlinks.

"Stop it, Ladybug!" Riser snapped. "Okay, let's shift."

Seta, Kai-lin, and Charlie sealed the box and hefted it between them, carrying it toward the warehouse door. As they passed among the gangers living and dead, Seta giggled quietly to himself.

"Scatterbrains. Hee hee."

gets 3 hits while the ganger gets 1, giving Kai-lin 2 net hits. The SMG's damage is 5P, increased to 7P for a narrow burst, further increased to 9P by the net hits. The ganger rolls Body 6 + Armor 6 and manages 4 hits, reducing the damage to 5P. Kai-lin's second burst is Automatics 4 + Agility 7 plus modifiers (+2 smartlink, -5 recoil, +2 recoil compensation) for a dice pool of 10. The ganger again rolls his Reaction 3 plus modifiers (-1 for his wounds, -1 for defending against an additional attack, +4 for cover) for a dice pool of 5. Kai-lin gets 2 hits and the Scatterbrain gets none. Kai-lin inflicts 9P and the ganger makes a Damage Resistance Test, getting 2 hits and reducing the damage to 7P, still enough to kill him.

Seta uses his action to move into full cover.

Riser attempts to stand up, a Simple Action with a threshold of 2. He rolls his dice pool, Body 5 + Willpower 5 + modifiers (-4 wounded), 6 dice, and gets 2 hits, successfully rising to a crouch. He runs for cover and pulls out his weapon just in case.

RULES REFERENCES

Resolving Combat, p. 149, *SR4A*

Melee Combat, p. 156–159, *SR4A*

Combat Turn 1: Initiative Pass 2

None of the gangers have more than one Initiative Pass, so only the players have actions remaining this Combat Turn. Acting first, Charlie attacks another ganger. The ganger is no longer surprised, so he will resist Charlie's attack. Charlie's dice pool is Unarmed Combat 4 + Agility 5, or 9 dice. The ganger's dice pool is his Unarmed Combat 2 + Reaction 5, for 7 dice. Charlie gets 5 hits to the ganger's 2. Charlie inflicts (5P base + 3 net hits) 8P damage, which the ganger resists with Body 4 + Impact Armor 4; 8 dice for 3 hits. The ganger takes 5 boxes of Physical Damage.

Kai-lin switches to full-auto and fires a narrow burst at another ganger. He rolls Automatics 4 + Agility 7 plus modifiers (+2 smartlink, -9 recoil, +2 recoil compensation, -2 firing from cover) for 4 dice, which he boosts with Edge 4 before rolling for a total of 8 dice. Kai-lin rolls 5 hits, 4 of which come up 6 on the dice. Applying the Rule of Six he gets to count those hits and reroll those dice. His second roll is a 5 and a 6, giving him another 2 hits and a reroll of one more die; the second reroll is a 5: a hit but not a reroll. Kai-lin's total roll is (5 + 2 + 1) 8 hits. The ganger rolls his Reaction 3 + 4 for Good Cover to dodge, and gets 3 hits. Adding his 5 net hits to his weapon's base damage of 5P and +9 DV from the narrow burst, Kai-lin inflicts 19P to the ganger. The ganger rolls Body 6 + Armor 6 to resist the damage, but only gets 5 hits; he takes 14 boxes of damage and is torn to shreds by the burst.

Riser is feeling a little worse for wear and decides to stay where he is.

Combat Turn 1: Initiative Pass 3

The third Initiative Pass begins, and Charlie attacks the same ganger he injured on his last Action Phase. Charlie's dice pool is Unarmed Combat 4 + Agility 5, or 9 dice. The ganger's dice pool is his Unarmed Combat 2 + Reaction 5 + modifiers (-1 for his wounds), for 6 dice. Charlie gets 6 hits to the ganger's 2. Charlie inflicts (5P base + 4 net hits) 9P damage, which the ganger resists with Body 4 + Armor 4, or 8 dice. The ganger rolls a glitch on his Damage Resistance Test, and the gamemaster announces that the ganger is just plain dead.

Kai-lin switches back to a burst and fires on another ganger, rolling his dice pool of 11 against the ganger's Reaction 3 + 4 for Good Cover, getting 6 hits to the ganger's 1. Kai-lin inflicts 12P to the ganger, who only gets 2 hits on her Body 3 + Armor 6 Test, which kills her. He then uses a Simple Action to Observe in Detail, rolling Perception 7 + Intuition 4 + modifiers (+3 vision enhancement) for a dice pool of 14. He gets 6 hits and asks the gamemaster where all of the gangers are. She tells him the locations of each ganger, along with what they are

wearing and whether their fingernails are clean, and that they seem intent on rushing Charlie as a group. Kai-lin determines that Seta could take them all out with one area spell, and calls for support (a Free Action).

Combat Turn 2: Initiative Pass 1

That is the end of the first Combat Turn, so everyone makes Initiative Tests again. The Scatterbrains get a 14, Riser a 9, Kai-lin a 13, Seta 14, and Charlie 11.

Charlie hears the order to Seta and knows what is coming. He spends an Edge to go first in the Initiative Pass and uses his action to dive behind the crate, the only nearby cover from Seta and his area spell.

Seta and the Scatterbrains have tied Initiative Scores, so they normally act simultaneously. The gamemaster rules that Seta might be able to get his spell off before the gang can cause any damage, so she compares Edge ratings to break the tie. Seta's Edge is 4, which is higher than the gangers' Group Edge rating, so he acts first.

Seta casts a Force 9 Stunball, rolling Spellcasting 6 + Magic 6, + 2 power focus, - 2 for attacking from cover for a total of 12 dice, opposed by the gangers' individual Willpower ratings (3) plus 4 for their cover. As the gamemaster is using grunts for this encounter, he decides a single Test will apply to all the gangers with LOS (while the gangers are behind Good Cover, the gamemaster decides Seta has line-of-sight to all those still standing). Seta gets 4 hits, and the gamemaster rolls 7 dice for all the gangers and gets 3 hits, which leaves 1 net hit. Seta wants all the gangers to drop, so he applies the

net hit to damage and each ganger takes 10S. The entire group falls unconscious. Seta then resists a DV of 5P (base 4P + 1 from the net hit he applied to damage) using a dice pool of Willpower 5 + Logic 6 + 1 for Focused Concentration, 12 dice; he rolls 3 hits and takes 2 boxes of Physical Damage. (Note that the gamemaster is using the optional Increased Drain for Direct Combat Spells rule.)

After Action

The gamemaster ends the Combat Turn early, since the fight is over.

Seta then casts a Force 6 Heal spell on Riser, rolling Spellcasting 6 + Magic 6 with an additional +2 from his power focus. Riser has an Essence of 5, creating a -1 modifier, for a total dice pool of 13. Seta gets 6 hits, healing 6 boxes of Physical Damage and bringing Riser's total damage to 3 boxes of Physical Damage and 3 boxes of Stun Damage. The Drain for the Heal spell is Riser's Damage (9) - 2, or 7S. Seta resists 7S Drain using a dice pool of Willpower 5 + Logic 6 + 1 for Focused Concentration, for a total of 12 dice; he rolls 3 hits and takes 4 boxes of Stun Damage.

RULES REFERENCES

- *Heal*, p. 208, *SR4A*
- *Melee Combat*, p. 156–159, *SR4A*
- *Resolving Combat*, p. 149, *SR4A*
- *Spellcasting*, p. 182–184, *SR4A*
- *Stunball*, p. 205, *SR4A*

THE KIDNAPPING

"Target on the move," Charlie said over their encrypted channel.

"Follow and report," Riser acknowledged, then turned to survey Seta and Kai-lin as they loaded up the DocWagon Emergency Response Vehicle. They both wore their borrowed DocWagon uniforms, as did he. Ladybug sat in the driver's seat, wearing a heavy jacket and a knit hat. They didn't make uniforms in kid sizes. That wasn't a problem, though, as long as she stayed in the vehicle and provided overwatch.

"We're ready here," Seta said, jumping lightly into the back. Kai-lin followed him. Riser narrowed his eyes, watching the sniper. The man's hands were steady, his eyes clear, but Riser could smell the faint scent of alcohol. Damn it. He slammed the back door of the ERV closed with more force than necessary, then went around to sit beside Ladybug.

"Okay, kiddo. Time to move," he said. The girl gave him a quick glance, then slumped down, her pinched face relaxing as her mind leapt into the vehicle. It started up and pulled out smoothly onto the streets.

"My bug's got Charlie in sight. Looks like he's following Fingers a few cars back. They're heading toward the projects," Ladybug broadcast over their 'links. "I'm switching everyone over to our second encryption script."

Riser heard the click on his 'link as the channel switched over. He stared out the window, watching the damp roads, the other traffic. It was silent in the ERV, except for Ladybug's soft breathing. Tacoma was over an hour's drive. Riser settled back and went over the plan in his mind one more time.

"Target exiting vehicle at Wilkerson Projects," Charlie broadcast when they were still thirty minutes out. "Escort entering building with target. One escort remaining in vehicle, vehicle is still running."

"Let's hope they're just walking him to his door," Riser said. "Ladybug, you still have an eye on the back of the building?"

"Yes."

At the beginning of the actual run, Ladybug changes the encryption passkey that the team had been using in case one of them got compromised. She spends a simple action and begins the new encryption with an anagram of her favorite singers' names. Ladybug then exploits a weakness she found when slowly probing the system. She automatically logs in with administrator access and the system rolls an Analyze 3 + Firewall 3 (5) Test to detect her, and fails.

DURING THE DOWNTIME

During the downtime of planning, characters will choose to do activities that can be completed in a quick series of dice rolls without detracting from the group. An example of this is the day before the Smoker's Club begins their kidnapping of Fingers Barducci. Ladybug is not required for procurement of the nanites, so she spends her time slowly probing the system for Barducci's apartment building. The technomancer wants root or administrator



"Stream the video to me," he told her. She didn't reply, but a second later, he had a bug's-eye view of the back of Fingers' building. A red ARO highlighted a third-floor window, with curtains drawn tight and no lights showing. The back door was closed. Two teens were sitting on the back steps, making out.

Less than two minutes later, Charlie came back on. "Escort's leaving building. Target's still inside."

Riser let out a breath. Picking up Fingers without anyone realizing he was missing was imperative.

It was a quarter to midnight, sliding into Friday, when Ladybug pulled the ERV into a lot outside Fingers' building.

"Seta?" Riser asked, looking out at the building. Most lights were off. No one was out front. Everything was quiet.

"On it," the mage replied. Riser counted off the seconds, waiting. On the count of twenty, Seta spoke. "He's there. Awake. At the kitchen table. Tired, anxious. Everyone else on his floor is mostly asleep. Got a lady with a sick baby three apartments down who's up, a teen talking on a link across the hall, and a couple who're having some fun in the apartment directly across from the elevator."

"All right. Everyone remember the plan? Seta, you start the fire. Charlie, you're on the back, in case he uses the fire escape. Ladybug, you're in the system. Let us know the second the alarm goes out. And keep your bug watching the front door, just in case. Kai-lin, Seta, and I will take the stretcher in. Ladybug, when we give you the signal, pull the ERV up to the door.

"Remember, emergency drones will be dispatched within thirty seconds of the alarm. First response teams have a five-minute response guarantee. We've got less than four minutes to get him out. We don't want to run into any real DocWagon employees here. Ladybug, you're our clock."

Riser gave the orders. They all knew the plan, but it made him feel better to review it one last time. Mostly, that was for Ladybug's benefit. He knew everyone else could handle it, but he hated leaving the kid alone in the vehicle. As he double-checked his gun, he shut out the worry.

Charlie moved into position by the back door. The broad security light over the doors cast a multitude of shadows in the alleyway, and Charlie practically disappeared when he slid beside a dumpster. He patted each of his weapons, checking their position. Stun baton, taser, narcoject dart gun. Non-lethal weapons only; they needed Fingers alive.

Seta got out of the van, looking up toward the windows. He'd already decided on using a spell rather than an elemental. It was more personal that way. On the fourth floor, the third window over belonged to a hulking troll—he'd seen Ladybug's survey of the residents, and watched the video footage to confirm. The trog had hung some crooked curtains—what kind of idiot couldn't even hang curtains straight?—in the window. Seta felt his anger, always bubbling under the surface, rise up, searing hot. Herne, his ally spirit, felt the same hatred toward trogs, and willingly lent him even more power for the spell. Seta fistted his hands, clenching the heat, the fury, in them, then aimed his gaze at the crooked curtains.

"Death to troggs," he chanted in Sperethiel, then flung his hands out, casting the pent-up fury toward the curtains. With a flash of light, they erupted in flames. Seta smiled as he watched the flames lick the window. They'd be hungry for trog flesh. Perhaps, if he was lucky, the trog wouldn't be able to get out before the flames and smoke killed him ...

"Alarm's on," Ladybug said, over their links. "Automated fire alarm sent to Emergency Services."

Riser got out of the ERV and went around back. Kai-lin was pulling out the gurney. Riser flicked off the brakes, then the two men began to wheel it toward the building.

"Seta!" Riser commanded. The elf was watching the red flames lick the window of the building with a spooky smile on his face, a dreamy expression in his eyes. "Seta, clock's ticking!" The elf turned to look at Riser, and Riser felt a chill run down his back. No matter that they'd worked together for over a decade. Spell-slingers were an odd bunch, all of them. Seta walked to the back of the van and gave Riser a cheeky two-fingered salute.

"Aye, captain," the elf said.

"Asshole," Riser replied, but he was relieved the mage was back to normal.

"Building alarm activated," Ladybug said, and a second later Riser could hear a shrill alarm coming from the building. Lights blinked on in windows. He saw silhouettes framed in them as people looked out. With a loud pop, the window on the fourth floor exploded, glass shards spraying out like silver rain. With the fresh burst of air, the flames roared out of the window, flicking up the side of the plascrete building. The front door was flung open and the first residents began to pour out, parents clutching children, men and women in pajamas, all turning to stare, mesmerized, at the column of black and red flames shooting out of the window.

Riser, Seta, and Kai-lin all watched too, and Riser felt his draw drop. The "small fire" had just shot up five meters in the air.

access, and makes a Hacking 4 + Exploit 5 (10, 1 hour) Extended Test. Because she's taking the time to probe the system, she doesn't bother threading up her Stealth or Exploit complex forms. If the test is successful, she can save time during the actual run by triggering the Exploit she discovered previously.

Other examples of off-camera activities would be Kai-lin working to pre-shape the charges so that they're faster to place, Riser healing from his damage, or Seta recovering from his Drain.

Getting Fingers

Inside the system, Ladybug taps the security cameras and feeds the image across to her teammates. She does not want to make any commands or her presence known, so the gamemaster tells her to roll a Hacking + Sniffer Test that will set the threshold to detect her "eavesdropping" on the camera feeds.

Seta astrally projects from the ERV and goes to the apartment he is targeting for the attack. The mage wants to ensure that no one is prepared for the attack, so he makes an Assensing 4 + Intuition 4 Test. Seta then takes a few more seconds passing through nearby apartments to double check that each of their occupants is unaware of the impending attack.

Charlie jumps out of the van and makes an Infiltration 5 + Agility 5 Test, which the gamemaster will again use as a threshold for Opposed Perception Tests. He pulls up the feeds from the cameras and begins making Active Perception Tests so that the gamemaster knows he is looking for Fingers.

Back in his body, Seta refocuses and steps out of the van, targeting the troll's window. Seta chooses to cast the Ignite spell at Force 6; his basic dice pool for the Test is Spellcasting 6 + Magic 6 + 2 power focus, plus his Ally Spirit Aids Sorcery, adding its Force (6) to Seta's dice pool, for a total dice pool of 20. Seta gets 6 hits, which exceeds the Object Resistance threshold of 2 by 4 hits, making this a critical success. The gamemaster decides the fire explodes outward, consuming the ceiling of the apartment. Seta must now resist Drain. The Force doesn't exceed Seta's Magic Rating, so Drain is Stun damage. Seta rolls Logic 6 + Willpower 5 + 1 for Focused Concentration against a DV of 3S. Unfortunately, he gets no hits, and takes 3 boxes of Stun damage.

While the rest of her team triggers alarms, Ladybug is in the apartment building's node monitoring the situation by AR. She performs a Data Search 3 + Browse 5 (4, 1 Combat Turn) Extended Test to locate

"Doors are open," Ladybug said. "Front and back. The alarms should have overloaded Fingers' system by now."

"That's our cue," Riser said, shaking off the shock. He grabbed one end of the stretcher, Kai-lin picking up the other. Seta walked beside them.

More people had rushed out the front door by the time they got there, and Riser had to push his way through the crowd. Everyone was staring up at the building, watching in awe as the fire licked up toward the fifth floor. Some were crying, others were shouting into their 'links.

So much for a small fire that'd set off some smoke alarms and get the building evacuated, with little to no damage. Riser grimaced.

"A little fire, remember that part, Seta?" Riser asked, over the commlink.

"Building was supposed to be made of fire-resistant plascrete," Seta muttered. "Not my fault the damn building isn't to code. And not my fault the stupid trog doesn't have working fire suppression in the stupid apartment."

"Argue later," Kai-lin suggested. Riser gritted his teeth and muscled into the stream of hysterical people filling the hallway. The elevators were shut down by the building system due to the alarm. The stairwell was so crowded, Riser figured it might come to blows if they tried to force their way up. The plan might have to shift to catching him as he came through the front lobby, Seta knocking him out with a spell, and *then* strap him to the gurney.

"Ladybug, where's the target? On the stairs?"

"He hasn't opened his door yet," Ladybug replied, her voice anxious. "All the other doors on the third floor have opened."

"Shit," Riser said. "We're going up. Get the elevator for us, will you?"

"Okay," the girl replied. The elevator doors slid open. Real EMS would have bypass codes for the elevator during an emergency, so no one even blinked. The three men crowded into the elevator. The doors slid closed. Riser could hear grinding as the old elevator rose to the third floor, then the doors opened.

The hallway was crowded with people pushing toward the two staircases at either end. Smoke was starting to fill the space, bitter, acrid. And it already felt hot.

Damn, damn, damn.

A woman was holding a crying child of indeterminate gender, its shrill screams adding to the hysteria. A couple of men, heavyset, wearing nothing but boxers, were holding the door open to the stairwell, shouting for people to hurry. A panicky woman caught sight of Riser and his men exiting the elevator. She was holding a kid by each hand, and behind her a tall, dark-skinned man in red flannel pajama bottoms was carrying a toddler.

"Oh, god, officers! What's going on?" she shouted. Riser felt a dozen pairs of eyes swing his way.

"There's a fire, ma'am," he said, raising his voice above the rest, trying to sound calm and official. "We're evac'ing the building. Go ahead and take the elevator, it'll return to ground floor. That all your family?"

She looked at him with wide eyes, and Riser could feel the mood of the people turning toward mob-hysteria.

"C'mon, folks," he said, in his most official, commanding voice. "Keep things orderly. Let's let the people with children in the elevator. The rest of you, take the stairs. Fire response is on the way. Don't panic," he ordered. "You've got plenty of time."

Riser flicked a glance toward Kai-lin, who pushed the gurney out of the elevator. Seta stepped out, too, and stood to the side as the elevator was filled past capacity with a dozen panicky families. Riser could feel the seconds ticking off as he helped a hugely pregnant woman squeeze onto the elevator. But he didn't show the strain, not to them. He gave them all a reassuring nod.

"Ladybug," Riser spoke over the 'link. "Close the doors, return the elevator to ground floor, then bring it back up once everyone's exited."

The elevator doors closed and Riser could hear the gears turning.

"Clock's at 2 minutes thirty seconds," Ladybug commented.

The rest of the crowd was disappearing into the stairwells. No one was watching them now. And Fingers' door was still closed.

"His door's still closed," Riser said, over the 'link.

"Hasn't come through the front," Ladybug replied.

"Window still closed, curtains drawn. He hasn't left by the fire escape," Charlie replied.

Riser frowned. Things had quickly gone to hell. He moved cautiously to Fingers' door, staying away from the peephole. "Seta, check it out," he ordered.

"Catch me," the elf replied, and went limp. Riser was fast enough to catch Seta's thin body before he even began to slump.

the perimeter security log, which records when interior and exterior doors are opened. Having found the log, Ladybug locates the record for Barducci's apartment to alert her team when the door opens.

When the team enters the building, Ladybug opens a connection to the building's engineering subnode. She makes a Computer 3 + Command 5 (3) Test to force an administrative override on the elevator. With root access, this would normally be a threshold of 1, but the fire alarms require additional command structures to bypass.

Riser sees the panicking families and the chaos caused by his teammate's actions and decides to use Leadership to direct the tenants in a more orderly fashion. The gamemaster decides that because the results will be advantageous for the residents, Riser will get a +1 modifier, and he'll get another +1 modifier because their DocWagon uniforms make the team look like authority figures. Both modifiers are in addition to Riser's usual +3 for tailored pheromones. He rolls Leadership 6 + Charisma 7 with +5 modifiers for a total of 18 dice, opposed by Willpower 3 (the average of the group). Riser scores 4 net hits and is able to get the crowd more organized to facilitate moving some of the families through the elevator and the rest down the stairs.

The team expects Barducci to have left the apartment during the fire. When he doesn't leave, Seta astrally projects into the apartment and quickly scans across it. Because of the high level of panic, the gamemaster decides the background count in the apartment building has temporarily risen to 1; this will affect several of Seta's tests, including astral visibility (-1 modifier). The gamemaster calls for a Perception 4 + Intuition 4 (2) Test with -4 modifiers (-1 Stun damage, -2 Mundane Object, -1 background count). The initial test fails and the gamemaster describes what is immediately obvious. The gamemaster calls for another Perception 4 + Intuition 4 (2) Test with -4 modifiers when Seta sees Barducci dropping through the trapdoor. This time Seta succeeds, and sees the wires pulling taut on the trapdoor. The mage realizes that the canisters described earlier in conjunction with wires and a paranoid hitman will yield explosive results.

The gamemaster tells Seta that the trapdoor will trigger at the end of the Combat Turn. Seta drops back into his body and loses the extra Initiative Passes he had for astral projection. In order to act before the bomb, the mage spends a point of Edge for an extra

"Think we should try knocking, saying we're EMS?" Kai-lin asked.

Seta stepped out of his body and flew through the thin wall into Fingers' apartment. He glanced around the main room, noting the empty couch, the dark blob that was probably some entertainment center, the odd canisters stacked by the front door. Quick as thought, he went into the kitchen. Empty. Then the single bedroom. Empty—wait.

In the gray, lifeless void of the apartment, Seta caught a glimpse of a vivid aura, as someone slid through the floor. He flew over, looked down, and saw Fingers slip through a small trapdoor. The man's aura was a boiling mess of emotion. Then the trap door started to swing closed. Seta began to duck through the floor when he noticed a bundle of thin wires stretching away from the door, being pulled taut.

Fuck!

Seta raced back to his body, jerking back to life.

"Get down!" he shouted to Riser and Kai-lin. He frantically channeled mana, feeling his skin burn with the strain.

The explosion blew out the door and a portion of the wall, sending chunks of plascrete and razor-sharp shrapnel slicing toward them, followed by searing heat and a fierce lick of flame. The sound was deafening.

Riser lay flat on the ground, where his instincts had dropped him at Seta's exclamation. He looked up, amazed to be in one piece. A glowing blue dome surrounded them. Outside the dome, black smoke swirled, filling the hallway. The heat was almost unbearable. Flames licked up the jagged hole that was once a doorway, tickling the ceiling.

Riser looked over to Kai-lin, who was already crouched on the balls of his feet, ready. Riser felt like he'd just survived a full-on beating; every inch of him felt bruised. Seta was laying flat out, his eyes rolled back in his head. The heat had flushed his pale skin bright red. Riser shook his head, realized he couldn't hear anything.

"Seta, Seta, you okay?" Riser asked, getting cautiously to a crouch. The dome was barely half a meter tall. Beside the elf, a spirit manifested, making Riser's heart stop until he realized it was Seta's ally. The elemental bent to pick up the elf.

"I'm losing it," Riser saw Seta's lips shape the words, even if he couldn't hear. Then the mage went limp, and the smoke rushed in towards them.

Riser felt Kai-lin grab his arm.

He forced himself to hold his breath, close his eyes against the bitter smoke, and picture the hallway in his mind.

Twenty steps to the elevator. With his eyes shut, Riser stepped carefully but quickly. Kai-lin held onto him.

"Ladybug, I need that elevator open NOW," Riser said, although he couldn't hear any reply. At twenty steps, he turned, took two more steps, and felt the smooth door of the elevator. It slid open. Riser stumbled in, followed by Kai-lin. The ally spirit stepped through last. Smoke drifted into the elevator, swirling around them. "Take us down," Riser said. He looked over to Seta's spirit. Seta lay limp in the spirit's arms, and Riser had a bad moment until he saw the mage start to blink. Riser saw, with relief, the mage come to himself. He must have said something to his spirit, because the creature carefully set him down, then vanished.

The elf leaned against the elevator wall, holding his head.

"You okay?" Riser asked. Then realized he couldn't hear it if the elf answered.

Fingers went thru trapdoor. 2nd floor apt. Place rigged to blow when he closed trapdoor, Seta texted via his link. Riser saw the message appear in his AR vision and swore.

Ladybug? Charlie? Riser texted. Positions?

Riser! Riser, are you okay? Ladybug wrote back.

Report, Ladybug. Keep it together, Riser commanded. My ears are blown out. Use text.

I heard the explosion. He hasn't come through the front. Clock's at three minutes, Ladybug replied.

Target spotted, Charlie replied. I'll pursue.

Don't let him spot you! Riser replied. If he sends out a call for help, we're screwed. Ladybug, move the ERV to the back to intercept.

The elevator door opened and they moved out, Riser and Kai-lin helping Seta. Without speaking, they turned for the back door, heading out into the alley along with the dozens of people. More people were pouring out into the alley from the adjacent building. Smoke and flames were billowing up from open windows.

What a complete clusterfuck! Riser thought. He scanned the crowd, looking for Charlie, looking for goddamned Fingers. He didn't see either.

Charlie had been waiting outside the apartment building as the frightened civilians came running out. He'd heard the explosion, saw the building tremble. His heart had leapt into his throat when the links

Initiative Pass. He attempts to erect a Physical Barrier around the group. Overcasting the spell at Force 9, Seta rolls Spellcasting 6 + Magic 6 with 0 modifiers (+2 power focus, -1 Stun Damage, -1 background count) and earns 5 hits, but glitches the Spellcasting Test. The gamemaster rules that with the glitch, the noise of the blast wave will be funneled in, forcing the team to resist a secondary effect of temporary deafness. Seta resists Drain and rolls Logic 6 + Willpower 5 + 1 for Focused Concentration, against a DV of 8P (7P + 1 since the absolute value of background count increases Drain), scoring 4 hits, so he takes 4 boxes of Physical damage.

When the explosives detonate, a large amount of the energy is consumed in destroying the wall of the apartment, which fragments. The gamemaster rules that the explosion will be treated as flechette damage, providing additional Armor resistance. Each of the runners in the hallway needs to resist 10P(f) damage with Body + Impact Armor and +10 modifiers (+5 Flechette, +5 Seta's barrier spell). All three of them are wearing form-fit body armor beneath their ERV jumpsuits. Riser and Kai-lin each roll Body 5 + Armor 2 with +10 modifiers; Riser gets 4 hits, reducing his damage to 6 boxes of Physical, while Kai-lin gets 5 hits and so only takes 5 boxes of Physical damage. Seta rolls Body 3 + Armor 2 with +10 modifiers and gets 2 hits, which would give him 8 more boxes of physical—a fatal level of damage. He decides to use a point of edge to re-roll non-successes, and rolls 13 dice, getting 3 more hits, reducing the damage to 5P. Combined with his original 4 boxes of Physical damage, Seta now has 9 boxes of Physical damage—ouch! Because each of them took more damage than their Willpower, the gamemaster rules that they will be deafened for ten minutes (a result of Seta's glitch on the Spellcasting Test).

Seta's ally spirit materializes and picks him up. The mage refrained from using his ally to augment him with an Aid Sorcery Test earlier because the ally would have been exposed to the blast. Seta rests while the team makes a new plan.

Charlie makes a Perception 4 + Intuition 4 (2) Test with -2 modifiers (partial lighting is mitigated by low-light vision, -1 glare from explosion and fire, -1 light smoke, +3 actively perceiving, -3 subject is far away). He gets the 2 hits necessary to see Fingers moving through the crowd.

Charlie makes a Shadowing 5 + Agility 5 Test opposed by Fingers' Perception 1 + Intuition 3. Fingers has 0 modifiers, as the

echoed that loud boom. He'd forced himself to stay in position, to reassure little Ladybug, to not break from orders.

First response drones were flying through the air, ordering people to move away from the building. They were ignored. Charlie kept his head down, his face sheltered by the hood of a heavy sweatshirt. And he kept his eyes on the back door and fire escape.

And when he saw the stocky Mafia button man come stumbling through the back door, Charlie moved to flank him. The alley was so crowded, it provided great cover—for both of them, unfortunately. Fingers was swinging his head back and forth, his eyes wide, and Charlie could almost smell the stink of panic on him. The crowds blocked his line of sight to the target. If he pulled out a gun now, it might well be noticed. Instead, Charlie pulled out his stun baton, keeping it low against his leg. He was taller than most of the people out here, and so he slouched down as he moved to follow Fingers. He had to get the man away from the crowds to engage him ... but he couldn't give him enough time to call his Mafia associates for help.

Charlie balanced the two threats, then decided to move in. There were dozens of people back here. They were all staring up toward the third floor, where Fingers' apartment had just exploded in a gush of flames. He'd take the risk.

Fingers was still watching the crowd. Charlie moved up behind him, using every bit of his adept abilities to slip silently, unnoticed, through the crowd. When he was a hand's breadth away, Charlie swung out the stun baton, hitting Fingers in the small of the back. Lightning quick, Charlie followed up with a second blow to the stomach.

Fingers dropped like a rock.

At that moment, the ERV pulled up, its lights flashing.

No one was watching him; they were still paying attention to the burning building. In the distance, Charlie could hear sirens. He grabbed Fingers, as though assisting him, and "helped" him to the ERV. The back door popped open. Charlie heaved Fingers in, then nimbly jumped in himself and closed the door.

Target acquired, he sent to the rest of the team. What's our clock?

Ten seconds, Ladybug replied. Riser swung open the door at that moment, and Seta and Kai-lin climbed in the back. Then he carefully closed the door and made his way around to the front. Ladybug was still slumped down behind the wheel. Riser couldn't hear anything but the ringing in his ears.

He didn't get any calls off before he dropped, Ladybug told him. She flicked on the sirens, then made her way through the crowd and down the side street. More people were pouring out of the other buildings, windows open, staring at the huge fire billowing up from Wilkerson Projects number 5.

Good. Take us to the storage site, Riser replied. He leaned his head back against the seat, hurting everywhere. As the girl reached an open road, she gunned the engine, sent the emergency override codes to the gridlink, and raced along the wet streets; best wheelman the team ever had. A trio of fire trucks passed them, heading toward the Projects, followed by several Lone Star police cars, sirens and lights blaring. Then they were out of the projects, heading out of Tacoma, their target in the back. Riser wanted to close his eyes, but he forced them to stay open, to stay alert, to watch for any tails. The job was just starting.

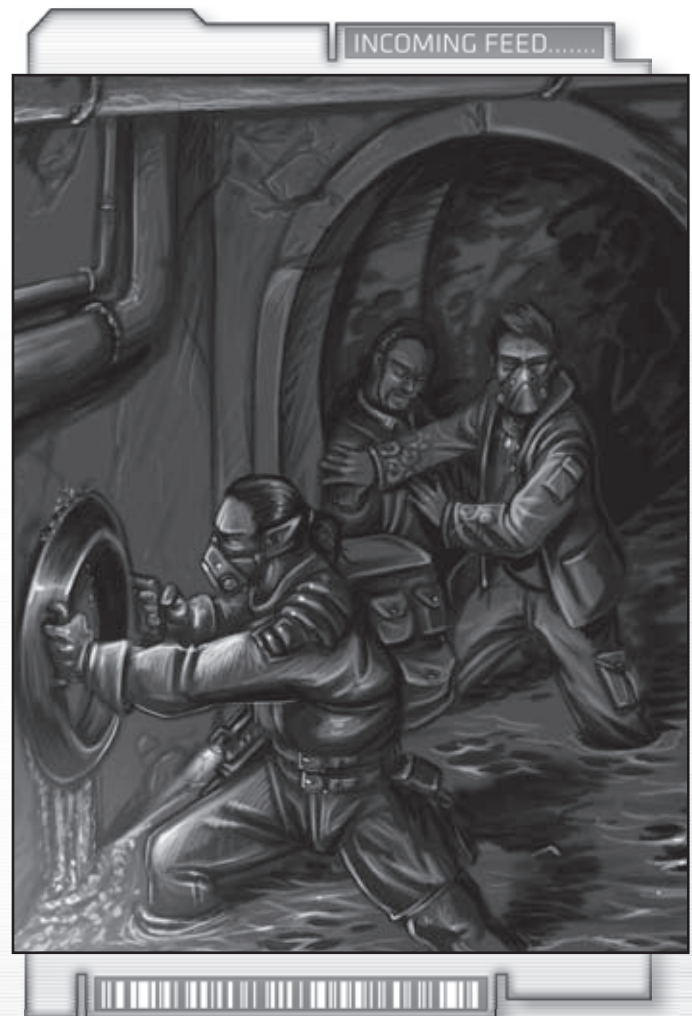
It took just under an hour to reach the automated U-Store-It facility. Ladybug had set up a fake account with a big unit toward the back. They drove the van in. The unit's door slid up, and Ladybug backed the van into it. Then she sat up, returning to her physical senses. The ringing in Riser's ears had faded, but he still hurt like a son-of-a-bitch.

"God, I think I'm gonna need Seta to heal me up," Riser groaned. Ladybug began to chew her lip, worried as she watched him carefully step out of the van. In the storage unit, they'd set up two cots, a folding table and two lawn chairs, and a rented port-a-potty. On the table, a plastic box of soy-bars, bottled water, and drugs was waiting. Charlie was lifting the unconscious Fingers out

Distracted -3 and Actively Perceiving +3 modifiers cancel each other out. Charlie earns more hits than Fingers and so stays unnoticed as he approaches. The adept draws the stun baton and rolls **Palming 5 + Agility 5** (a total of 10 dice) to set the threshold for people in the crowd to see it.

Prepared, Charlie lunges to attack. Because Barducci is unaware of the impending assault, the gamemaster decides that Charlie is ambushing, and so he gains a +6 bonus to his dice pool for a Surprise Test. Charlie wins Surprise and Initiative and attacks with **Clubs 4 + Agility 5 + Reach 1**. This attack is unopposed because Barducci cannot defend against surprise attacks. Charlie gets 3 net hits, which raises the damage of his stun baton to 9S (-half AP). Barducci rolls **Body** to resist the damage and is able to soak 4 boxes, only taking 5 boxes of Stun damage. The hitman now rolls against the secondary effect of the stun baton and makes a **Body 5 + Willpower 4 (3) Test**. He fails and is incapacitated for 5 Combat Turns.

To ensure that Barducci stays unconscious for a while, Charlie delivers a second quick jab with the stun baton to Barducci's helpless form as it drops to the ground. The **Clubs 4 + Agility 5 + Reach 1 Test** is again unopposed and Barducci takes another 5 boxes of damage after soaking. At this point, the combat is over and Charlie lifts their fallen target into the back of the van.



of the ERV. Riser saw that someone had bound his hands and feet. Probably Charlie. The adept put him on one of the cots. Once Fingers was on the cot, Charlie took out a bottle of aspirin and dry-swallowed a few. He shook the bottle toward Riser, but Riser shook his head.

"I'll cover first watch," Charlie said. "Seta's still out. You all need to see a medic. Although Seta looks worse than the rest of you."

"Thanks," Riser replied. "But we'll get Seta to a street doc, then hope Seta can patch us all up. I'd rather not have all of us show up at the street doc in the middle of this." Charlie shrugged, then slung his long frame into one of the lawn chairs, pulling out his gun and relaxing. Riser looked in the back of the ERV at Kai-lin and Seta. The elf was sleeping, laid out on the transport board. Kai-lin's face was red, like he'd been sunburned. A trail of dried blood ran from both ears. Riser figured he must look just as bad. He closed them in the back of the ERV, then got back in with Ladybug. She was anxiously waiting.

"Take us to our car," he said. "Then we'll return this ERV, get our clothes and go home."

"I think you should see a doc first," she said stubbornly.

Riser shook his head. "Follow the plan," he said. "I'm fine. Just a little banged up. I look worse than I feel," he reassured her. It was a bald-faced lie, but the girl didn't see that. Chewing her lip, she motored the van out of the storage unit and back to where they'd left their car.

THE FINAL RUN

Four hours to game time and two men moved cautiously through the sewers. Kai-lin carried a third man, unconscious, over his shoulder. They'd been at this for more than an hour, carefully picking their way around any sensors that might still be active down here. The ground sloshed with each measured step. Refuse bots thrummed through a sea of filth, making the waste ready for reconstitution. The men moved by map, Kai-lin leading them to the spot they had chosen along the southern wall.

The only sound was the gentle *slosh, slosh* of their movement. Suddenly, Kai-lin heard a quiet curse followed by several splashes. "Ah, shit!" said Seta behind him.

"Exactly," Kai-lin said without turning to see what he already knew. He waited a few seconds before continuing on in silence.

"It's here," Kai-lin said after another fifteen minutes of walking. He set Barducci down on the ground almost effortlessly, leaning him up as he did so, as protection against the muck. It wouldn't do to have him die too early. The air stank of methane fumes. It was almost as strong as smelling salts. He wondered if the stench would be enough to counteract the Twilight Sleep cocktail keeping Barducci so incredibly cooperative.

Seta said, "I'm going for a look. Keep me out of this, will you?"

Kai-lin fixed his arm around Seta's waist to hold him up. The mage shut his eyes and went limp. A hiccup-space later, Seta's eyes opened.

"All clear inside."

They'd brought all six canisters, uncertain how much of the nanomachine paste would be needed to push through the wall. That was what he intended to do, push through. Kai-lin took the first canister and a hard-shelled nozzle from one of the duffels they'd been carrying and fitted them together. Kai-lin and Seta strapped on breathing masks, then the sniper started spraying the wall. Very slowly the wall started to corrode inward with a slight hissing sound, a light dust of concrete flakes filling the air. It was boring work, but Kai-lin continued to apply the nanites while Seta kept watch on the unconscious Barducci. Two hours later they had eaten a one-meter hole in the cement, the edges perfectly smooth. He could see straight through into the storage room beyond.

The team will be spending the time between now and their primary run recovering; luckily, Riser knows a competent street doc. Once Seta receives treatment, the mage will be able to magically heal the other members of his team—and will likely spend the next two days resting to heal the remainder of his Drain damage.

RULES REFERENCES

- *Ally Spirits*, p. 103–106, *Street Magic*
- *Background Count*, p. 117–119, *Street Magic*
- *Detect Hidden Node*, p. 230, *SR4A*
- *Ignite*, p. 210, *SR4A*
- *Melee Combat*, p. 156–159, *SR4A*
- *Physical Barrier*, p. 211, *SR4A*
- *Street Knowledge Skills*, p. 129, *SR4A*
- *Surprise Tests*, p. 165, *SR4A*
- *Using Perception*, p. 135–136, *SR4A*

It all comes down to this: Showtime. The grand finale. Time for the runners to earn their nuyen. Naturally, every shadowrunner hopes that everything will go smoothly according to plan, by the numbers, every time. *Players* may have different expectations, however. A perfect, no-shots-fired run may be what a shadowrunner desires, but blazing guns, flashing spells, and flying fists are often what make for exciting, entertaining games.

It's up to the gamemaster to reward the players' careful research and planning, but to ensure that there are still a few surprises along the way. Runners may discover too late that they missed a vital piece of information, that their plan had a crucial flaw, or that luck simply favored the opposition. That's when they have to improvise, adapt, and overcome. The rare ability to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat is what separates the truly great shadowrunners from the dead ones.

Preparation

Subsequent to loading weapons, checking the explosives, and other last-minute preparations, all the runners subscribe their commlinks to the same chat node. This ensures Ladybug isn't overloaded with communication duties and allows everyone to converse without going through her first. The team has also placed a Wireless Adapter (p. 200, *Unwired*) on one of the hard lines of the Casino's security system (during their downtime). This device, along with Ladybug's drone acting as a relay point, will allow the technomancer to remotely access the Casino's Security node from a safe distance.

Underground

Because of the detritus and filthy sludge, footing in the sewer is slippery and uncertain. Therefore, the gamemaster calls for a Gymnastics Test to get into position. The gamemaster rules the threshold will be average (2), but applies a –1 modifier for uneven footing and murky water. Kai-lin takes an additional –2 modifier for

Taking the canister, Kai-lin crawled through the opening first. Seta pushed Barducci's limp body through and then followed after. Down here in the darkness of a forgotten storage room, the jovial sounds of slot machines and up-tempo music were faintly audible beneath the steady drone of industrial machinery. The pair maneuvered past sleeping slot machines, dusty tables, and stacks of chairs, then stopped to listen at the door. No human voices greeted them. Now was the time for spells. Seta began chanting in the language Kai-lin had come to recognize by sound alone. In a whisper, Seta said, "We're ready."

Kai-lin eased the door open and stepped into the hallway. Invisible, he and Seta began walking toward the supply room directly below the table where their target would be sitting down to play poker in less than twenty minutes. He needed the magic and the extra arms. There was no way to be stealthy with the amount of hardware he was packing. The team had stretched Kaz Yakamura to the limit of his resources, but they needed every ounce. Blowing through a considerable length of concrete was a complex operation, requiring several meters of linear cutting charges. However, the samurai needed to do more than just slice a hole through the floor into the room above. He needed to make sure that his explosives blew straight up with enough force to kill anyone unfortunate enough to be in that room. That meant a more complex combination of explosives.

Riser had worked their Johnson for the linear cutting charges and as much plastique as Kai-lin could safely carry. The linear cutters would separate the floor of the room from the rest of the building. The plastique would turn that falling slab of concrete into nearly a ton of high-velocity shrapnel, hopefully killing anyone in the room. If that didn't work, and the players upstairs came crashing down into the basement, Kai-lin had to stick around long enough to make sure they were finished off. He didn't like the plan. He cursed the plan, but it made sense to stay nearby to pick off any survivors, and unfortunately, Kai-lin knew he was the best shooter they had for the job.

The samurai set down Fingers Barducci against a wall. When the two broke contact, the spell keeping the unconscious man invisible faded. He'd certainly be killed in the blast. If he wasn't, who would believe he was kidnapped from his home in the dead

carrying the body. Kai-lin has Athletics Skill Group 3 + Agility 5 + Muscle Toner 2 + Balance Augmenter 1, for a total of 8 dice (11 - 3 = 8). He scores 3 hits. Seta doesn't have any Gymnastics Skill, so he rolls Agility 4 - 1 for defaulting, for a total of 3 dice. Unfortunately, he scores 0 hits. Not wanting to waste his Edge yet, he deals with the fall. Yuck.

Before cutting through the wall with the nanites, Seta does a quick astral recon of the space on the other side. Kai-lin will have no trouble holding Seta's body, so the gamemaster doesn't require a test. Seta takes a Complex Action to astrally project. He only wants to move a few meters, so movement isn't an issue. In addition, because the wall is constructed, Seta can project through it. On the other side, Seta takes a quick look around to see if anyone is in the room. The gamemaster informs him that there is no one immediately apparent. Not wanting to take any chances, Seta decides to make an Assensing Test. The gamemaster knows the room is empty, but allows him to roll regardless. Seta rolls Assensing 4 + Intuition 4 for a total of 8 dice. He gets 2 hits. The gamemaster informs him the room is empty.

Using the nanites requires no skill, Kai-lin just has to ensure he sprays a small section of wall. The gamemaster judges that it will take the demolisher nanites about two hours to eat through the wall.

Once inside, Seta casts Invisibility at Force 6 on them both. He rolls Magic 6 + Spellcasting 6 + Force 2 power focus for a total of 14 dice. He gets 3 hits for his own spell (which he writes down in case any opposition tries to resist it). To resist the DV of 3S, he rolls Willpower 5 + Logic 6 + Focused Concentration 1 for a total of 12 dice. He gets the 3 hits needed, so he takes no Drain damage. He continues casting the spell on Kai-lin. This is the second spell he'll have going, so he takes a -2 modifier for a total of 12 dice. He gets 2 hits and takes 1 box of Stun damage.

On the move now, both runners try to be quiet coming out the door. The gamemaster calls for an Infiltration Test. Kai-lin rolls Infiltration 3 + Agility 5 + 2 for his Muscle Toner bioware for a total of 10 dice. He scores 2 hits. Seta rolls Infiltration 3 + Agility 4 for a total of 7 dice. He scores 1 hit. Fortunately, the hallway is empty and their preparations weren't needed.

Once Seta is on his way, Kai-lin takes out the explosives and tools he needs to do the job. He wants to set up a simultaneous detonation. The plastique should explode just as the cutting charges slice through the floor. To do this, he sets up a radio detonator for each of the explosions. It will be keyed to Kai-lin's commlink. The runners are not trying to blast through a load-bearing wall, just a floor, so the gamemaster rules that it is Heavy Structural Material (AR 16, SR 13). Both the plastique and cutting charges are Rating 10 (the best they could get in time). To cut a two-meter circular hole through the floor, the gamemaster calculates they need 1.1 kilograms of shaped charges. To turn the slab into shrapnel, they'll need an additional 4.2 kilograms of plastique. Placing the cutting charges is the most important issue and the most time-consuming. The gamemaster rules that this will require a Demolitions (13, 5 minutes) Extended Test. Kai-lin gets to work. He rolls Demolitions 2 + Logic 3. After 11 rolls, he has 14 hits. Placing the charges took 55 minutes. Now he must set the plastique. Fortunately, placement is much less exact. The gamemaster rules it will require a Demolitions (5, 1 minute) Extended Test. Five minutes later, the plastique is in place. Finally, Kai-lin sets the detonators. As they are a bit sensitive, the gamemaster rules Kai-lin must make a Demolitions + Agility Test to see if he mishandles them. Because of his balance augmenter, the gamemaster gives him a +1 modifier for the roll. The number of hits isn't important; the gamemaster wants to see if Kai-lin critically glitches. Kai-lin rolls Demolitions 2 + Agility 5 + Muscle Toner 2 + Balance Augmenter 1 for a total of 10 dice. He scores 2 hits and no glitches. The explosives are ready. Kai-lin moves away from the blast zone and hides in a storage closet.

Aboveground

To sneak across the parking lot, Charlie begins by centering himself and taking a Simple Action to increase his Agility. He rolls Magic 8 + Attribute Boost 1 for a total of 9 dice and gets 3 hits. For the next 6 Combat Turns he has Agility

Private Message...

To: Assistant Director of Organized Crime Task Force
From: Mobile Surveillance Unit 54

Status Report for Operation 687-Delta-4, for the hour 18:30:03-19:30:23 inclusive. A number of low-interest targets are currently on the premises (see attached trid and accompanying profiles). Interestingly, there has been a 20 percent decrease in average attendance. This may have to do with the higher than normal turn-away rate for security at the door. Alternatively, a number of similar reports from independent C.I.s points to another possibility. According to their information, several high-interest targets should be arriving this evening. If so, the lower than average attendance could be related to security concerns. Will report again at 20:30.

of night and planted in the basement of a casino? Seta dropped Kai-lin's invisibility as well. The samurai nodded his thanks to the blurred space where he thought Seta was. He fingered his communicator and said, "I'm in. Planting the charges now. Seta's headed back up to help cover the kid."

The ghostlike blur retreated down the hall and back toward the surface.

Riser and Ladybug were in place a few blocks behind and partially covered by the Marquis Hotel. It was a good vantage point to see the parking lot and the OCT team staked out near the Galloway Hotel. It wasn't perfect, but if anyone got curious, they'd waste a lot of time looking inside the hotel before realizing their mistake. It'd give them the time necessary to get out. He was watching the OCT team now to see if they noticed his man sneaking through the parking lot. Even with his optical magnification maxed, Riser could hardly see Broken Horse himself. The adept was a skilled infiltrator. He imagined that talent had served Charlie well in the Sioux military before circumstances forced him into the shadows. Dressed all in black, Charlie dipped between rows of nameless sedans and Japanese sports cars, timing each step to coincide with the movements of shadow from nearby trees or flashes of headlights from yet another vehicle searching for a space in the parking lot shared by the Garden of Eden Hotel and its casino, Shangri-La. He wore a knapsack, as Kai-lin had; the same sort of load, only lighter. Charlie Broken Horse was Plan B, in case things didn't work out with Kai-lin in the basement. He stopped at a hedge of trees, waiting for the right time to cross the forty yards of manicured grass that separated the common lot from the members-only area.

"Beautiful, eh?"

Riser took a moment to enjoy the scene. Shangri-La Casino was surrounded by a narrow, fish-filled river that coursed in and out of nooks and crannies. The landscaping was a work of art. Low-slung hills dotted the complex, parsed by tightly packed hedge walls and the featured Katsura trees positioned expertly to maximize feng shui.

"You think so? I hadn't noticed from the sound of the static. That place seems to be built for signal attenuation. I can feel it. Even from way up here. The salt river, the hills, the flowers, everything. It makes my brain itch just thinking about it."

The technomancer walked around Riser, eyeing the long-barreled rifle to his left; a Barrett sniper rifle. Riser's Plan C. She fingered the muzzle absently, opening her mouth as if to ask a question, but then thinking better of it. He knew what she was going to ask. She wanted to know how much practice he had using a sniper rifle, but there was a larger question looming behind that one. She wanted to know what he wanted to know, what he kept himself awake thinking about the night before every run. If the operation didn't go the way he planned, would he be able to get everyone out?

The plan wasn't optimal, but it was what they had. Riser was on the fifty caliber because he was the one left to do it. He wasn't the best marksman on the crew, but their resident combat monkey was otherwise occupied. That was a part of teamwork. Each member had overlapping skill sets, so they could pick up where another one left off if needed. Riser was a decent shooter and he knew a little bit about the Matrix; enough that he could do a few

8. He is wearing his camouflage suit (night side out). The gamemaster calls for an Infiltration Test. Charlie rolls Infiltration 5 + Agility 8 for a total of 13 dice. He scores 4 hits.

As Riser watches the scene, he tries to spot Charlie. The gamemaster calls for a Perception Test, which is at threshold 4 because of Charlie's successes. The camouflage suit applies an additional -2 modifier to anyone trying to spot him, but Riser has a +3 modifier for actively looking. Riser rolls Perception 4 + Intuition 5 + Vision Enhancement 3 with a net +1 modifier for a total of 13 dice. He gets 4 hits, barely making out Charlie's motion through the parking lot.

While Charlie sneaks across the lot, Ladybug hacks the casino's cameras in an effort to loop the footage (and delete any sign of Charlie). She doesn't have time to do this slowly and carefully, but she does drop into VR for the actual hacking attempt, giving her a +2 modifier for all Matrix actions. She decides to use threading to help her Exploit Complex Form. She rolls Software 3 (Threading +2) + Resonance 5 with a +2 modifier for a total of 12 dice and scores 2 hits, increasing her Exploit to 7. To speed up events, the gamemaster allows Ladybug to buy the hits to reduce the Fading DV to 0 since she has enough dice.

Hacking the Casino

Now the gamemaster calls for a Hacking Test. Lancelot, her paladin sprite, comes along just in case. Because she knows the team is depending on her, she decides to ask Lancelot to Assist Operations, adding his rating (3) to her Stealth Complex Form. One task will now last 3 Combat Turns—which should be plenty to get her *into* the system. The casino node has Firewall 5. In addition, Ladybug wants administrator access. However, given the extra hits necessary, she decides to make do with security access, which increases her threshold by +3. She can still make changes, but must roll dice. To succeed, she needs to make a Hacking on the Fly (8, 1 Complex Action) Extended Test. Ladybug rolls Hacking 4 + Exploit 7 with a +2 modifier for a total of 13 dice. Her first roll scores 5 hits—very good.

The gamemaster secretly rolls to see if the node notices her. It needs to make an Analyze (8, 1 Combat Turn) Extended Test. It rolls Analyze 4 + Firewall 5 for a total of 9 dice and scores 2 hits.

On her second attempt, Ladybug gets another 3 hits, the node another 2. She's in, in two Initiative Passes. Lancelot's task has 2 more Combat Turns to go.

Her first task is to find the security cameras. The gamemaster calls for a Browse Test. With security access, it's a Browse (2, 1 Combat Turn) Extended Test. Ladybug drops her threaded Exploit form and rolls Data Search 3 + Browse 5 with a +2 modifier for a total of 10 dice. She gets 4 hits. The gamemaster informs her she's found the cameras, but a strange icon is accessing them. She wisely decides to figure out what it is before continuing. She uses threading to aid her Analyze skill, getting 2 hits and increasing her Analyze Skill Rating to 7. She successfully resists Fading of 2P. The gamemaster rules the icon is Device Rating 3 running Stealth and Analyze, so it requires a Matrix Perception (3) Test. Ladybug rolls Computer 3 + Analyze 7 with a +2 VR modifier and a +2 modifier for being a technomancer, for a total of 14 dice. The icon rolls Rating 3 + Stealth 3. Ladybug gets 3 hits and the icon gets 1, so she learns it's a sophisticated Analyze program that looks for micro-evidence of trid looping.

She decides to spoof the program into thinking there is no looping. She drops her Analyze thread and starts threading for Spoof. She scores 4 hits, but decides to take only 2, and resists the Fading DV of 2P. She rolls Hacking 4 + Spoof 7 with a +2 VR modifier for a total of 13 dice and gets 3 hits. The icon rolls Pilot 3 + Firewall 3 for a total of 6 dice and gets 2 hits. She successfully spoofs the icon.

Because she made a Hacking Test, the gamemaster decides to roll to see if the node notices her. This is the last combat turn where Lancelot's Assist Operations is in effect, so her Stealth is still 8. The node rolls Firewall 5 + Analyze 4 and gets 3 hits while Ladybug rolls Hacking 5 + Stealth 8 and gets 5 hits; she's safe for now.

simple hack jobs. Kai-lin had worked meets with him so long that he could pitch in where necessary. Charlie Broken Horse wasn't wired for it, but he was a natural born wheelman. They always joked that his adept abilities weren't channeled into his martial arts like he thought. They were channeled into a steering wheel. Among the five, Seta was the only one they couldn't replace in a jam. For that reason alone, they sheltered him the most. You could work the streets without a mage, but it made a lot more sense to have one.

"You got me, Riser?" Charlie whispered over the comm.

"Yeah, left-hand corner of the members-only lot. Right beside the '48 Westwind. Stay frosty, kid. I'll let you know when they show."

Shangri-La was a members-only establishment, but a grand waded in the right face bought you a membership. So, to separate the truly exclusive patrons, Shangri-La had developed an exclusive membership lot. It was a gimmick; another thousand nuyen a year bought you a pass to the lot. But the gimmick worked. A lot of patrons, fishing for social credit, bought their way into this next circle of membership. Many of them drove their own custom rides, and they expected to have them parked where everyone could see them. Unfortunately for the Smoker's Club, that lot was out in front of the casino, and it was the same lot where the limousines parked. According to the profile, both targets traveled exclusively by limo to the weekly game. The poker face started before the cards were even dealt, each player trying to impress the others with the manner in which they traveled. It wasn't all that different from dealing with Johnsons. They always brought muscle, wore fancy suits, picked out meet locations where they felt safe and figured Riser didn't. Everything was poker. Truth was, the fancy fuckers, the Johnsons, were usually the ones who were bluffing. If tradition held, both limousines would arrive via the employee entrance. They would unload their passengers and then park out front where everyone could see the limos. At that point, dumb luck played a role. Generally the poker games went on for hours, during which the drivers would catch a performance inside, walk over to the Garden of Eden for a meal, or otherwise occupy themselves. Because the lot was so high profile, they didn't worry about staying with the cars. So Charlie could plant explosives on the vehicles without worrying about the drivers noticing. One less worry on a list that ran as long as Riser's arm.

Ladybug walked over to the window, arms folded across her chest. She was wearing an oversized bulletproof vest over her tee shirt and baggy jeans. Her long red hair was split into pigtails that shot up over her head. She sighed.

"How are you doing with the lot cameras? Are you looping the footage?"

"Their hidden security scripts are pretty tough. The system looks for blowing dust particles and that sort of thing. If it sees anything moving in a looped pattern, it goes to alert status. It's supposed to prevent hacking in and using looped footage." She shrugged and continued, "But it's a binary script, just yes or no. So I spoofed it. Now 'Yes' is 'No.' That way it can't see when the footage is looped, like it is."

Riser had hoped for a binary response from his hacker, too. He figured her answer for a yes. Sighing, the shadowrunner called up a chronometer on his AR display. 7:50. Seta was still on his way back from the sewers. Kai-lin was in place in the basement. All they had to do now was wait. Each second toward 8 p.m. thrummed like

The last thing she has to do is loop the video. She doesn't need a lot of footage because the Analyze icon is already controlled, so the gamemaster calls for a Hacking + Edit (2) Test. Dropping her threading, she rolls Hacking 4 + Edit 5 with a +2 modifier, for a total of 11 dice, and gets 3 hits.

That means another roll to see if the node notices her. Her Stealth has dropped down to 5. Ladybug rolls Hacking 5 + Stealth 5 and gets 4 hits, while the node rolls Firewall 5 + Analyze 4 and gets a lucky 6 hits, triggering an alert and allowing the node to immediately begin its Alert Response Configuration (Alert Spider). The spider does a Matrix Perception Opposed Test, rolling Computer 5 + Analyze 4 with a +2 modifier, for a total of 11 dice. He gets 3 hits. Ladybug rolls Hacking 4 + Stealth 5 + 2 VR modifier for a total of 11 dice, and gets 3 hits also. Ties go to the defender, so she escapes notice for now.

Fortunately, Ladybug is finished and can simply move into the public area of the node. Knowing that she may have to hide out in the node awhile, she uses threading to increase her Stealth. With the stress over, she buys 2 hits for threading, increasing her Stealth to 7. She is unable to reduce the 2P Fading Damage completely and takes a box of Physical Damage. As an afterthought, she sends Gidget to the main floor men's room to wreak havoc with the toilet sanitization mechanisms for 3 Combat Turns. She then switches out of VR mode and begins monitoring everything in AR.

Ladybug is browsing the casino's menu when she notices the spiders. Lancelot prepares himself. As she watches, the spiders suddenly take off toward the casino maintenance node. Safe for the moment, Ladybug attempts to comply with Riser's request to locate Tomizawa. It'll take forever to narrow down his comm node, but maybe there's a shortcut. The OCT team across the street might have his comm number somewhere in the data files. It takes just a thought to open a new window and search for the OCT node. She's been watching them on and off all night, so she knows exactly where their node is. All she has to do is get in. She leaves Lancelot to protect her in case the spiders return and goes after the OCT van node.

The gamemaster rules the van is Device Rating (3), and so Ladybug rolls a Hacking on the Fly (3, 1 Complex Action) Extended Test. As she is still maintaining her threaded Stealth, she has a -2 modifier to her Hacking Test. She rolls Hacking 4 + Exploit 5 with the -2 modifier for a total of 7 dice. She scores 3 hits. The van is not running Analyze and so rolls just 3 dice, getting 0 hits. She's in.

The gamemaster rules the data is uncommon, so she must make a Data Search (4, 1 Initiative Pass) Extended Test to find what she's looking for. She rolls a total of 8 dice. It takes 2 Combat Turns (she has one IP per turn in AR) to get what she's looking for. On her next action she logs off.

Using the codes, she searches for calls going into or out of that commlink along with its location. Normally this search would be threshold 16, but since Ladybug has the codes, the gamemaster lowers it to threshold 8. Another Data Search (8, 1 Minute) Extended Test is required to find him. In four minutes, the gamemaster explains he was "unavoidably detained" by his current love interest. He'll be arriving any second.

Moving back to the casino node, Ladybug finds that Gidget has returned. It's only a matter of time before the spiders come for her. She resets the security node to remain undetected and wisely logs off.

Stealthing In

Back in the parking lot, Charlie is waiting near Toju Shotozumi's limo. The gamemaster has been rolling Perception (4) Tests occasionally as security makes sweeps through the parking lot. Charlie's camouflage suit gives these tests a -2 modifier. The corp security goons don't have Perception, so they roll Intuition 3, with -1 for defaulting and -2 for the camouflage suit, for a total of 0 dice. The gamemaster knows that the goons only have Group Edge, which he won't be using, so Charlie is effectively invisible.

The gamemaster rules his wait has been longer than 6 Combat Turns, so Charlie has to deal with Drain from his Attribute Boost. With the 3 hits he achieved, his

a gunshot in his chest. Kai called in twice before the clock eased mercifully to 8. The samurai knew his position in the basement was not secure. If anyone stumbled upon him in the storage locker, he would have no choice but to kill them. Despite their profession, Riser wasn't a fan of killing. He didn't enjoy taking lives unnecessarily. If the job called for it, or if someone got in the way, he did what he had to; killing came easily, automatically. Afterward, he dealt with the regrets, the aftershocks of his actions.

At 8:01 a sleek black Mitsubishi Nightsky pulled around to the side of the building. Seta, in position on the far end of the employee lot, watched as Caesar Ciarniello, heir apparent to the Ciarniello crime family, stepped out with a petite blonde on each arm. Toju Shotozumi arrived next, complete with a retinue of bodyguards. Riser announced his arrival over the comm. His heart felt tight in his chest. He picked up the sniper rifle and locked it into place on its tripod. All they needed was Kosuke Tomizawa for this party to begin.

But Kosuke Tomizawa was nowhere to be found. Charlie was the first one to panic. "Do I go now or what? I can't stay hidden here forever, and if I plant the charges on Shotozumi's limo now, I don't know if I can get back in position to plant charges on the second limo."

Ladybug's outlook was less rosy. She clicked off her comm before whispering, "I can't stay in there forever either. Their Spiders are everywhere. They're gonna figure out what I did to the cameras. Do something, Riser."

There was nothing they could do. The job called for two hits. If the Smokers took out Shotozumi now, there'd be no opportunity to get to Tomizawa. Riser peered through the sight of the gun, looking first at Shotozumi's limousine, then over toward the motel where the OCT surveillance hardware was set up.

"Fuck it. Get those charges planted, Charlie. We don't even know if Tomizawa is going to show up. Better to get the guy we can than miss that chance entirely. Ladybug, find out what happened to Tomizawa. Kai-lin, don't blow the room until I give the call. We clear?"

It was ten minutes after the hour. Each member of the Smoker's Club signaled their acknowledgement. Charlie Broken Horse started moving toward the row of limousines.

Shadowrunning is about timing, and it's about luck. The good runners, people like Hard Exit, learn to plan well enough that timing becomes automatic, then their natural fortune carries them the rest of the way. But sometimes, it's like what happened to Fatima. Your planning falls victim to bad timing, and to make matters worse, your luck runs dry.

Katsuke Tomizawa arrived at 8:15 p.m., just as Charlie Broken Horse was planting the second charge underneath Shotozumi's limo. Seta called it in over the comm. Charlie cursed under his breath. He was almost done with the first limousine, but if the second drove up and parked now, there was no way he could avoid being spotted. He called back over the comm, "I'm going to make a run for it."

"Don't, Charlie, I'm not sure about the cameras!"

The adept froze in place. "What are you talking about?"

"Spiders found Gidget. I had to clear out, quick. I won't know if the Spider found anything 'til he leaves."

"Fuck that. I stay here and I'm dead. Riser?"

"Stay put, Charlie." Riser peered through the sniper scope,

Drain Value is 3S. Charlie rolls Willpower 4 + Body 4 for a total of 8 dice. He gets 2 hits and takes 1 box of Stun damage. Before moving, he takes a Simple Action to reactivate his Attribute Boost. Since this is a stressful situation, the gamemaster does not allow Charlie to buy hits. He rolls Attribute Boost 1 + Magic 8 and gets 3 hits.

All Hell Breaks Loose

At Riser's command, Charlie moves under Shotozumi's limo and begins planting the explosives. The plan is just to make a huge explosion, so he intends to simply plant two 2-kilogram bombs under the engine and passenger compartment. The gamemaster calls for a Demolitions (2, 1 minute) Extended Test to ensure proper placement. Given the tight quarters, the gamemaster applies a -2 modifier. Fortunately, Charlie has Adept Centering and his Initiate Grade (2) means he can ignore the penalty. He's using the same plastique as Kai-lin, so 2 kilograms should be plenty. Charlie rolls Demolitions 2 + Logic 3 for a total of 5 dice. He gets 1 hit. On the next roll he also gets 1 hit.

Now he must place the detonator. The gamemaster calls for a Demolition + Agility Test. Charlie rolls Demolition 2 + Agility 8 for a total of 10 dice. He gets 2 hits.

He moves on to the second placement, repeating his actions. One minute and one successful Demolition + Agility Test later, Plan B is ready.

After Riser gives the order, Kai-lin sends the signal to the radio detonators. Fortunately, he has sound dampeners in his cyberears that protect him from the shockwave and noise of the blast. He comes out of his hiding spot to assess the



readying himself for action. "Let the limousine park. Once they see you, all hell is going to break loose. Seta, I need you over there backing him up. Elementals, spells, whatever you got, throw it out there. Kai-lin, get ready."

Riser didn't know exactly how long it took to get from the employee entrance to the game room. They'd measured it out in meters on the 3D map, but that didn't take into account how fast or slow Tomizawa walked. They'd expected to give him plenty of time to get there before pulling the pin. They'd expected him to show up on time. None of that had happened. So now, as his limousine cut white beams of light across Charlie's hiding place, Riser gave the order to blow the room. He inhaled deeply. There was a raucous bang, followed by a shockwave powerful enough to shake the window of his hotel room. Then he saw smoke streaming out of the open doorway at the side of the building. The limousine skidded to a stop. The driver slammed the car into reverse and raced toward the employee door.

"Time for stealth is over, Ladybug. Kill everything external. Do what you do."

Riser could see the girl smiling at him. It was the false smile of a child worried she'd disappoint her parents. Out of the corner of his eye, he watched hotel security reacting with his finger caressing the trigger. Some were going inside, others manned the doors, guns drawn against further attack. He saw one turn toward Charlie, who had sprung up and was running hard toward the street. Before Riser could squeeze off a shot, the guard crumpled.

"Got him!" Seta cried, his breath labored from running. Suddenly the outside lights went dead and all hell broke loose in the parking lot. Riser mentally adjusted his cybereyes for the best view, but he feared the worst. Somebody had marked them.

His cybereyes, however, showed him a different story. Several targets in the parking lot were shooting randomly in the dark. Either that or it was the Azzie New Year. No doubt they'd panicked as the lights went out. The security guards at the door, fearing a coordinated attack or raid by the OCT team, fired back.

Riser moved the scope of his rifle toward the OCT van. Fortunately, they seemed busy trying to figure out why their cameras had suddenly gone black. Riser snorted silently. The kid is good, he thought as he turned to watch the triumphant gleam in her eyes. She was obviously enjoying the chaos she was creating in two different nodes at the same time. Riser shared her satisfaction for just a moment, until he realized they had a problem. Normally, the confusion would help his team get out. Unfortunately, this time Charlie and Seta were down there in the middle of it.

"Charlie? Seta?" Riser growled into the comm, trying to stem the rising panic in his voice.

"Just a sec." It was Seta, barely audible over the staccato sound of gunfire echoing up from the parking lot. The seconds lasted forever. Riser tried to forget Ladybug's unasked question from earlier.

The seconds ticked away accompanied by the quiet pop, pop of irregular gunfire down in the parking lot. Riser had a bird's-eye view, but all he could do was sit helplessly while he

damage. The gamemaster rules that the explosion has killed Ciarniello, Shotozumi, and most of their goons. Those not killed instantly have had their eardrums burst by the shockwave. From his position, the gamemaster rules that Kai-lin cannot see Tomizawa. Risking attack, Kai-lin decides to peer out of the hole.

To spot Tomizawa, Kai-lin needs to make a Perception (2) Test. The gamemaster adds a -2 modifier for the smoke and dust. Kai-lin rolls Perception 7 + Intuition 4 + Vision Enhancement 3 with the -2 modifier for a total of 12 dice. He scores 3 hits and sees Tomizawa. The gamemaster reports that Tomizawa is bleeding from the ears and nose and there is a large plascrete beam lodged in his chest. Kai-lin quickly heads back into the sewer.

When Riser tells her to kill the externals, Ladybug goes to work. Time to crash the security node. As she's just recently hacked the security node, the gamemaster decides she can use the same Exploit form to enter it again, bypassing the need for another Exploit Test. Before she does so, she orders Gidget to go turn off the cameras in the OCT node.

At this point, the gamemaster calls for everyone to roll Initiative Tests. Riser gets 4 hits, Initiative 15; Charlie gets 4 hits, Initiative 15; Kai-lin gets 2 hits, Initiative 12; Ladybug gets 1 hit, Initiative 9; Seta gets 2 hits, Initiative 10; Gidget rolls 1 hit, Initiative 5 (VR).

Combat: Initiative Pass 1

Riser takes his action to aim the rifle.

Outside, Charlie's Attribute Boost is up. He takes a Simple Action to boost his Agility once more and shrugs off the Drain rolling 4 hits. Then he stands up. He wants to leave as quickly as possible, and that means no Infiltration. He's still wearing the camouflage suit, but that's it. There are several guards loitering in the area, and the gamemaster secretly rolls a Perception (2) Test for them. He also rules that Charlie's quick movements give the guards a +2 modifier. The guards roll Intuition 3 -1 for defaulting, -2 for the Camouflage suit +2 modifier for a total of 2 dice. One of the guards gets 2 hits. He turns to take aim at Charlie's retreating form.

Kai-lin continues making his way through the sewers.

Ladybug uses threading to increase her Exploit Complex Form. Threading is instantaneous, so it does not take up an action. She rolls a Threading Test with 10 dice and gets 4 hits, increasing her Exploit form to 9. Rolling her Fading Test with 10 dice, she scores 3 hits and takes 1 Physical. She uses a second task from Lancelot to Assist Operations by adding his rating (3) to her threaded Exploit form (a free action).

Ladybug decides to crash the security node's operating system. The security node is DR (4), so the gamemaster calls for a Crash Node Test, rolling a Hacking + Exploit (System 4 + Firewall 4, or 8, 1 Complex Action) Extended Test. Ladybug rolls Hacking 4 + Exploit 12 for a total of 16 dice. She scores 6 hits. She decides to use her final point of Edge to re-roll non-successes and gets 4 more hits, successfully crashing the node. The security node crashes, dumping the security rigger, who must now resist 5S damage from dumpshock. This causes the security lighting to shut off, as well as all security devices.

The guard has Initiative 9, so even though he's seen Charlie, Seta will go before he does.

Seta has been watching Charlie via Astral Perception, so the gamemaster rules he can make a Perception (2) Test to see if he notices the guard. Seta rolls 8 dice and gets 3 hits. He decides to cast a Stunbolt spell at the guard. To avoid the guard getting a shot, Seta decides to cast at Force 6. He rolls Spellcasting 6 + Magic 6 +2 power focus for a total of 14 dice. He gets 5 hits. The guard has no magical defenses and so rolls just Willpower 3 to resist. He gets 1 hit. Seta applies all 4 net hits to damage and the guard takes 10S damage. That fills his Condition Monitor, dropping him on the spot. Now Seta must deal with a Drain DV of 2S + 4 from the net hits (the gamemaster is using the optional Direct Combat spell drain rule). Seta rolls Willpower 5 + Logic 6 + 1 Focused Concentration for a total of 12 dice. He scores 5 hits and takes 1S Drain.

Finally, Gidget attempts to take out the OCT van's cameras. Rather than take control, the gamemaster decides it will use its Gremlin power on the cameras. To do so, it must first be *in* the node. Because it cannot hack into the van's node, it searches for

waited. Just in time, he realized that tension was making him hold the trigger a bit too hard. He took his finger out of the trigger well. But he didn't move it far; they might need him at any moment.

"All right," Seta's voice came over the comm. "I thought I saw Charlie go down just after the lights went off. I sent Herne to track him down 'till I get there."

"Unnggh." Riser couldn't tell whose voice that was, but the comm indicated that it was coming from Charlie.

"Charlie, talk to me."

"I'm here." Charlie's breathing was labored. He wheezed and hacked up something wet. "I'm hit. But stay where you are."

"What are you talking about?" Seta asked.

"I think ..." Charlie gasped for air. "I think I've been marked. There are people running all over the place. I think the shooter is trying to find me."

"If anyone does, Herne will take care of them. I'll be there in a second, just *hold on*," Seta commanded.

"Thanks. Now to check the butcher's bill," Charlie wheezed.

The comm chatter went silent for a few seconds until Seta, almost out of breath from running, whispered, "Well, is it bad?"

"It ain't good. It's a simple through and through. But my lung is collapsing and I'm going into shock. I'm having trouble ..." The channel remained open. Riser could hear labored breathing as Charlie struggled to catch his breath.

"Charlie, get your trauma patch, Now!"

"I'm trying, damn it. Just hard to concentrate."

Riser was on the verge of going down there himself when Seta's voice interrupted. "I got him, Riser. He's right, it was a nice clean shot, small caliber. Herne says no one's coming. Just a shot in the dark, I guess." He stifled a chuckle at his inadvertent humor. "The gunfight will give us plenty of cover. I'm going to risk healing him down here, with Herne covering us. I'll have him up and moving soon."

Ladybug sat up and yawned like it was naptime. "It's gonna be awhile before they figure out how I did that." From the look on her face, Riser couldn't decide if it was triumph or bravado. Truth was, it didn't matter. They'd succeeded. And everyone made it out alive.

Everyone. Suddenly, Riser realized that with all the chaos in the parking lot, he hadn't heard a word from Kai-lin.

"Kai-lin?" Riser asked nervously.

"Moving now. I'm okay. Both targets are down."

Jonathan Riser let out a breath he hadn't even been aware he was holding. "All right. We're packing up here. See you at the rendezvous."

an active, open node attached to the van. There are none, and it does not have a Scan complex form, so it cannot Detect Hidden Nodes. Stymied, the sprite communicates its problem to Ladybug.

Combat: Initiative Pass 2

Riser sees the lights go off in the parking lot, then sees the muzzle flashes as several groups open fire.

Charlie takes off running. To increase his distance, he rolls Running 4 + Strength 4 for a total of 8 dice. Unfortunately, he gets 0 hits. Worse, he's rolled 5 ones, a critical glitch. If he had Edge left, he could use it to turn this into a regular glitch, but he's out.

The gamemaster rules that one of the random shots has struck Charlie. Because it's a critical glitch, the gamemaster adds that the bullet missed his armor. Finally, the gamemaster rules that the ones Charlie rolled are the hits for the bullet. As the weapon is a Fichetti Security 600, its 4P damage + 5 hits equals 9P damage to Charlie. Charlie cannot use his armor, so he rolls Body 4 to resist the damage. He gets 1 hit and takes 8P damage. Charlie survives, but now he is limping badly and has a -2 modifier to all his actions.

The gamemaster decides that everyone will fall out of Initiative at this point, although the action continues.

Seta was watching Charlie as he started running, so the gamemaster rules he doesn't need a Perception Test to locate him. Seta uses a Simple Action to call up his ally spirit, Herne, and orders it to protect Charlie. He then starts moving in the direction he saw Charlie go down.

While Charlie's player knows the critical glitch caused the damage, Charlie does not. Therefore, he spends his action making Perception Tests to see if he was marked. The gamemaster does not require a roll. Meanwhile, Seta moves toward Charlie.

At the OCT van, Ladybug realizes the problem and begins hacking the node. With her Exploit already threaded, and Lancelot's assistance continuing for another 2 Combat Turns, her Exploit is still 12, for a total of 16 dice—more than enough to buy the successes to hack the Device Rating 3 node. She orders Gidget to use its Gremlins power to mess with the OCT surveillance systems. Gidget rolls Rating x 2 for a total of 4 dice, and gets 4 hits. The van node rolls its DR x 2 for a total of 6 dice. It gets 0 hits. Four net hits are treated as a critical success; the van's monitors short-circuit and burn out.

Charlie rolls a First Aid Test on himself. The gamemaster rules that the difficulty of working on yourself imposes a -2 modifier. Charlie rolls First Aid 3 + Logic 3 + Wound Penalty -2 with the -2 modifier for a total of 2 dice. He scores 1 hit. It's enough to tell him the obvious, but nothing more.

Seta finally finds Charlie and casts a Force 6 Heal spell on him (this caps the number of boxes that might be healed at 6). Seta rolls Spellcasting 6 + Magic 6 + Force 2 power focus for a total of 14 dice, and scores 4 hits, healing 4 boxes of damage. Because the DV is based off Charlie's total damage (8) - 2, the Drain DV is 6S. Seta rolls Willpower 5 + Logic 6 + 1 Focused Concentration, for a total of 12 dice. He gets 2 hits and takes 4 boxes of Stun Damage.

Charlie is still wounded but is now at Wound Modifier -1.

At this point the gamemaster determines that the combat is over. With no one chasing them, the runners can easily leave the scene.

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... INDEX OF TESTS USED ...

Assensing Test	24	Hacking Test to edit video	26
Attribute Boost Test	3, 24	Hacking Test to identify other hacker's activities	10
Body + Willpower Test to stand up	17	Hiding in a crowd	3
Browse Extended Test	25	Infiltration Test	12, 19, 25
Capture Wireless Signal Test	12	Initiate Cryptanalysis Test	12
Compiling Test for a data sprite	11	Initiative	4, 16, 28
Computer Test to operate systems at root level	20	Knowledge Skill Test	7, 8, 11, 12
Composure Test	13	Leadership Test	20
Con Test	6	Legwork through Contacts Test	7
Crash Node Test	28	Locating a target's AR profile	2
Damage Resistance Test	4, 16, 17, 18, 21, 28	Matrix Perception Test	10, 12, 13, 25
Damage Resistance Test vs. Drain ..	18, 19, 21, 24, 26, 28, 29	Melee Combat Opposed Test	4, 16, 17, 21
Damage Resistance Test vs. Electricity	4	Negotiation Test	4
Damage Resistance Test vs. Fading	2, 3, 9, 12, 26	Node Test to detect intrusion	3, 10, 12, 18, 25, 26
Data Search Extended Test	3, 6, 11, 13, 19, 26	Observe in Detail Test	17
Demolitions Extended Test	24, 27	Perception Test	8, 11, 16, 20, 21, 26, 28, 29
Demolitions Test	24, 27	Perception Test using drones	9
Detect Hidden Node Extended Test	3, 12	Pilot Test for drones	8
Detect Hidden Node Test using drone	11	Ranged Combat Opposed Test	16, 17
Etiquette Test	4	Ranged Combat Opposed Test involving cover	17
Exploit Complex Form	25, 28	Running Test	29
Gymnastics Test	23, 24	Shadowing Test	2, 21
Hacking Extended Test	19	Spellcasting Test	18, 19, 21, 24, 28, 29
Hacking on the Fly Extended Test	3, 10, 12, 13, 25, 26	Spoof Test	25
Hacking Test	29	Surprise Test	4, 16
Hacking Test to alter picture	13	Threading Test	2, 3, 6, 9, 12, 25, 26, 28



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