

SHADOWRUN[®]

AN INSTANT GUIDE TO THE SIXTH WORLD

The first thing that you need to know about the Sixth World is that what you don't know absolutely will kill you. So will what you do know. In fact, it's safe to assume that anything and anyone you see has both the potential and the desire to kill you.

That's good info to know, but not enough to keep you alive. So here's a rundown of what the Sixth World is, how it got there, and some of the power players who make sure a few people stay on top while the vast majority of the people wriggle uncomfortably under their mighty thumbs.

EVERYTHING HAS A PRICE

Read the sentence in the header there. Read it again. Got it? Good. Because if that's the only thing you take away from this, if that's the only thing you learn, then you'll still be getting something valuable about the world you live in. You walk around this world, you'll see a lot of heaps, and each one of them's got someone perched on top of it. Every megacorporation has its CEO, governments have their chief executive, gangs have their lieutenant or head man of chief head basher or whatever the hell they decide to call it. Even that one block in the barrens that has nothing more than a rusty dumpster, an abandoned car, and a shed whose roof has caved in has a scary-eyed guy named Rastool who has scared off all the other scary-eyed guys so he can claim that spot as his own. Each of them figured out what they would have to pay to get to the top of that particular heap, and each one of them ponied up when the time came and paid it.

So this is what you need to know. If we're going to talk about payments, we need to talk about currency. What I mean is, we need to look at the things you might need to give up in order to get ahead.

MAGIC: PAYING WITH YOUR MIND

When magic came back into the world in 2011, it didn't take too long for people to start trying to get a handle on how to use all the new mana floating around for themselves. Turned out some people had a knack for it. While the rest of us were wondering what they were looking at with glazed eyes and weird expressions, they were figuring out how to channel and shape streams of mana—a sort of magic energy that seems to be just about everywhere. Turns out, if you can suss how it's done, you can use mana to set the air on fire, make people do things they'd never do, or other truly esoteric and/or insane things. And mana

wasn't just for the spells and stuff we think of as magic. It gave some people the strength to punch through walls, others can shame a cobra with their reflexes, and there are some who can outrun a cheetah; and that's just scratching the surface. And you know all those magic goodies from legends and fairytales and myths? We got 'em all. Enchanted swords, magic rings, wands, amulets, mojo bags, every potion you can think of all exist. Not that they always work the way they did in the stories. Don't just grab up the sword of a legendary warrior and expect to slice and dice like she did, for example. The point is, magic is out there, and people are using it. It's not easy—it can be draining, physically and mentally, and some people push themselves to the point where their sanity drips out of their ears in a nice steady trickle. That's the price, and it's often gladly paid.

CORPORATIONS: PAYING WITH YOUR SELF

The way corporations work in the Sixth World isn't really anything new. It's just the latest iteration of the might-makes-right way of doing things. There's a lot of legal history we could cover to help you see how we got to this point, but in the end it boils down to one word: extraterritoriality. That's the word that allows corporations to say that whatever happens in their holdings, on the buildings and lands they own, is subject to their laws—and no one else's. Gaining extraterritorial status was a long-held dream of many of the world's largest corporations, and when judicial decisions in nations across the world gave it to them, they spent several years pissing on themselves and each other in utter delirium. Then they figured out their infighting was cutting into their bottom line, so they stopped fighting each other so much and concentrated on pissing on the rest of us.

Not every corporation in the world has extraterritorial status. To understand who does, you have to know about the Corporate Court, the body the megacorporations created when they realized they were spending too much time solving their disputes by ravaging entire small countries. The Corporate Court is sometimes mocked as a toothless entity, a puppet of the world's largest megacorps, but it manages—usually—to keep open warfare between the corps from breaking out, and that's at least worth something.

As part of its duties, the Court has created a ranking system to tell you how big and powerful a particular corp is. At the top is the Big Ten, the most powerful megacorps in the world. The main thing you need to understand is that these guys are bigger than big. Think of the world's largest manufacturer of computer equipment. Then add in a powerful magic supplies broker. Throw in a few banks, an insurance firm, and entertain-

ment conglomerate, and a snack-food giant, and you're still not a tenth of the way to forming one of the Big Ten. They employ millions and control trillions of nuyen. Each and every one of them owns a piece of land within one hundred kilometers of you, unless you're in the Sahara, the Amazon, or at the bottom of the ocean. And maybe even then. These are the people in the world who have the nuyen, and we want it, which means they determine what the rules of the game are. We just play it.

AUGMENTATIONS: PAYING WITH YOUR SOUL

Every bit of who you are can be improved with the right piece of gear. Think you've got quick reflexes? You can be quicker. An artificial neural network'll make you faster than a nervous jackrabbit. Think you're strong? Switch out the muscles you were born with for a set that's been custom grown for brawn and efficiency and you'll take strong to a whole new level. Think you're charming? Implant a few sets of specialized pheromone dispensers and people will swoon when you walk by and nod enthusiastically when you talk.

And that's just for starters. You can put actual plates of armor on your skin, or lace your bones with metal so that your fists and legs deliver crushing blows. You can make your senses sharper, your brain faster, and you can implant knowledge that you never learned in school. You can replace entire pieces of your body with artificial replicas full of extra strength, nimble agility, secret compartments, and hidden weapons that provide very unpleasant surprises at just the right time.

But it's not free. And we're not just talking money; there's a higher price to pay. All this stuff is useful and great, but it's artificial, and your body knows it. At a certain level, that's fine—you get different abilities, or restore lost abilities, and you're still you., or maybe even better. At some point, though, the balance tilts, and instead of making you into a better you, the augmentations start taking pieces of you away, until whatever it is that makes you you is lost. All the gear you bought just collapses and becomes indistinguishable from any other pile of silicon, steel, and chrome, and the person formerly known as you is gone. So go ahead and get yourself augmented up, but understand that each time you do this, another piece of your metahumanity slides away.

LIFE IN THE SHADOWS: PAYING WITH YOUR BLOOD

The megacorporations of the world prefer a docile population, a world of people who do whatever work they're told, build anything, carry anything, sacrifice anything for the mega, then spend all their money in the company

store and be glad they got it so good. Sheep. That's how megacorps see metahumanity: a flock of sheep they have to keep in line to serve their purposes.

Which means the rest of us face a stark choice: Accept their shit. Or not.

For some of us, corp life is not a life. The megacorps own enough in the world. They don't need to own us. So we drop out and find another way. We do the jobs corps don't want their regular employees to do, the things they don't want connected back to them. Espionage missions; missions of theft, sabotage, and assault—maybe assassination if you swing that way. That's how we survive. We still have to dance to the corporate tune to some degree, but if we live right and build up our skills, we can become the best at what we do and get paid what we deserve. Then, maybe, instead of being one of us, scrambling under the heels of the powerful, we can be one of them, and remake a small part of the world in our image.

RISK IT ALL

If we're going to survive, we have to find work. There are dozens, hundreds, thousands of jobs out there. You can make money off of them, but for each one, you'll have to put something on the line. You'll get a scar from a bullet that should have killed you. A leg that aches in the cold 'cause you broke it crashing your motorcycle on one of your less stylish getaways. A missing arm because you were standing just a bit too close to a bomb going off and a working cyber model is pricy. A fried brain lobe from lingering in the Matrix a second too long with security closing in on you. And that's just what will happen to your body. You'll be double-crossed, betrayed, and abandoned. You'll see trusted friends turn on you and watch others die. You'll have every last bit of you tested in ways you can't imagine just to see how much you can endure.



DAYS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD

You know how when you meet some piece-of-drek punk gangster in an alley, and he's all full of mouthy attitudes and sucker punches, and you find yourself thinking how if you looked into that little dirtball's past and learned more about his parents and upbringing, you'd understand how he became such a bastard? Well, our world is like that. I'll give you some of the highlights from the past that made the world into the snot-nosed asshole we all know.

2000: The infamous Shiawase Decision in the United States Supreme Court gives multinational corporations the same rights and privileges as sovereign governments. The era of national governments as the drivers of global events comes to an end.

2001: Realizing they had only been half-heartedly exploiting Native Americans for the past century or so, the U.S. government puts their whole heart back in the job and lets corporations run roughshod over the resources found in Native American reservations during the so-called Resource Rush. This leads to unrest and resistance with serious consequences further down the road.

2010: Virally Induced Toxic Allergy Syndrome (VITAS) appears in New Delhi, India. Eventually it kills a quarter of the world's population.

2011: The Awakening, or at least the beginning of it. Dragons appear, people develop talents and abilities that can only be described as magic, babies are born in ways that exactly resemble elves and dwarfs of legend, and the world reveals itself to generally be much weirder than anyone suspected.

2018: After the Great Ghost Dance of the previous year, in which Native American shamans spurred natural disasters such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions across the globe, the United States and Canada agree to the Treaty of Denver, in which large portions of both nations are given to aboriginal populations to become the various states that make up the Native American Nations of the Western Hemisphere.

2021: In a process known as Goblinization, some adults spontaneously mutate into creatures that become known as orks and trolls (a wider range of forms emerge as time passes). People react with fear and loathing, which, after more than half a century, has generally eased to fear and extreme distaste. Though some people prefer to stick with loathing. Dwarfs, elves, trolls, orks, and the like are collectively labeled "metahumanity."

2029: The Matrix, the interconnected wonder of the computer world, crashes, and crashes hard. The virus that caused the crash takes years to eradicate, and the whole dynamic sets the stage for cyberwarfare in the years to come.

2030: After losing so much territory to the Native American Nations, the remnants of the United States and Canada merge to form the United Canadian and American States (UCAS). In subsequent years, the Free State of California, the Confederation of American States, and the Caribbean League claim parts of what used to be the United States. This mirrors political fracturing and re-alignment occurring across the world.

2039: The fear and loathing against elves, dwarfs, orks, and trolls (particularly the latter two groups) comes to a head in the Night of Rage, a worldwide series of riots targeting metahumans and their families. The pain and scars inflicted that night still linger, nearly forty years later.

2055: After a cult known as the Universal Brotherhood introduces the vile creepies known as bug spirits to the world, Chicago became the most infested city on the planet. When containment did not seem to be solving the problem, the Ares Corporation set off a nuke in the city, an event known as the Cermak Blast. The combined infestation of bugs, removal of anything resembling law and order, and destruction levied by the nuke made central Chicago the blasted wonderland it is today.

2057: The citizens of the UCAS collectively throw their hands in the air, say "What the hell?", and elect a dragon named Dunkelzahn as president. Dunkelzahn serves for just under ten and a half hours before being blown to kingdom come. A huge astral rift hovers at the scene of the assassination for years.

2061: Halley's comet passes by and shakes up the world. It initiates the Sudden Unexplained Recessive Genetic Expression (SURGE) event, bringing changelings to the world as some people take on animal characteristics. A new dragon named Ghostwalker emerges from the rift left by Dunkelzahn's assassination and decides to take up resident as the tyrant of Denver. For good measure, storms, earthquakes, and volcanoes keep the entire population of the world on their toes.

2064: The combination of a massive corporate IPO, the machinations of a crazed artificial intelligence, and an assault by a terrorist group known as Winternight bring about the Second Matrix Crash, or Crash 2.0. A new Matrix emerges in its wake, bringing wireless accessibility to all. Also emerging: technomancers, who can access the Matrix with nothing more than their mind. This causes many to freak out.

2075: After campaigning for years about the lack of security in the wireless Matrix, activist and philanthropist Danielle de la Mar convinces the corporations of the world to revamp Matrix protocols to be stricter, less open, and more subject to corporate control. Because that was something they really needed to be talked into.

2076: A new condition known as cognitive fragmentation disorder (CFD) is spotted, where people suddenly and abruptly completely change their personalities, or become a battleground for warring personalities.

2079: AAA-rated corp NeoNET eventually takes the blame for generating the conditions that led to the creation and spread of the CFD virus. The punishments leveled on them by the Corporate Court result in their loss of AAA status; Spinrad Global, the result of a merger between Spinrad Industries and Global Sandstorm, takes their place in the Big Ten.

And if you succeed? If you stay alive? Money, first of all, but more. You become a legend. You join the ranks of the people we tell stories about, the shadowrunners whose names we all know. Dirk Montgomery. FastJack. Sally Tsung. The Smiling Bandit. You'll have lived your own life, survived, and even thrived. You'll have stuck it to every man the Sixth World has to offer.

As long as you can pay the price.

THE BIG TEN

Since these are going to be the guys paying you a lot of the time, you should know who they are.

ARES MACROTECHNOLOGY



Corporate Court Ranking (2080): 9

Corporate Slogan: "Making the World a Safer Place"

Corporate Status: AAA, public corporation

World HQ: Detroit, UCAS

President/CEO: Damien Knight

You Know Them For: Making your favorite gun, arresting you for using your favorite gun.

AZTECHNOLOGY



Corporate Court Ranking (2080): 4

Corporate Slogan: "The Way to a Better Tomorrow"

Corporate Status: AAA, private corp.

World Headquarters: Tenochtitlán, Aztlan

President/CEO: Flavia de la Rosa

You Know Them For: Great PR, selling

microwave burritos at thousands of worldwide locations. Also, ruthlessness and blood magic, but they keep those under wraps.

EVO CORPORATION



Corporate Court Ranking (2080): 7

Corporate Slogan: "Changing Life"

Corporate Status: AAA, public corporation

World Headquarters: Vladivostok, Russia

President: Ysil

You Know Them For: A billion commercials pitying you for not being awesome enough to sport their entire line of enhancements and augmentations

HORIZON GROUP



Corporate Court Ranking (2080): 10

Corporate Slogan: "We Know What You Think"

Corporate Status: AAA, private corporation

World Headquarters: Los Angeles, PCC

President/CEO: Gary Cline

You Know Them For: Your favorite trid shows, your favorite music, and your favorite off-book bunraku parlors offering the services of people who look like your favorite performers.

MITSUHAMA COMPUTER TECHNOLOGIES



Corporate Court Ranking (2080): 1

Corporate Slogan: "The Future is Mitsuhaman"

Corporate Status: AAA, public corporation

World Headquarters: Kyoto, Japanese Imperial State

President/CEO: Toshiro Mitsuhaman

You Know Them For: The cold feeling of fear in your heart whenever you hear the words "Mitsuhaman Zero-Zone."

RENRAKU COMPUTER SYSTEMS



Corporate Court Ranking (2080): 3

Corporate Slogan: "Today's Solutions to Today's Problems"

Corporate Status: AAA, public corporation

World Headquarters: Chiba, Japanese Imperial State

CEO: Inazo Aneki (Honorary)

You Know Them For: That big flat-topped pyramid downtown that sends a chill through your heart every time you see it. Also, computers.

SAEDER-KRUPP HEAVY INDUSTRIES



Corporate Court Ranking (2080): 2

Corporate Slogan: "One Step Ahead"

Corporate Status: AAA, private corporation

World Headquarters: Essen, Allied German States

President/CEO: Lofwyr

You Know Them For: Perhaps being singlehandedly responsible for the adage to never cut a deal with a dragon.

SHIAWASE CORPORATION



Corporate Court Ranking (2080): 5

Corporate Slogan: "Advancing Life"

Corporate Status: AAA, public corporation

World Headquarters: Osaka, Japanese Imperial State

President/CEO: Korin Yamana

You Know Them For: Their desperate attempt to get as cozy with the Japanese Imperial State as Aztechnology is with Aztlan.

SPINRAD GLOBAL



Corporate Court Ranking (2080): 8

Corporate Slogan: "For a better life"

Corporate Status: AAA, private corporation

World Headquarters: Lisbon, Portugal

CEO: Johnny Spinrad

You Know Them For: Having a CEO who somehow gets paternity lawsuits while skydiving.

WUXING INCORPORATED



Corporate Court Ranking (2080): 6

Corporate Slogan: "We're Behind Everything You Do"

Corporate Status: AAA, public corporation

World Headquarters: Hong Kong, Free Enterprise Enclave

President: Wu Lung-Wei

You Know Them For: Making you move several times during your meet-ups so that you don't mess up the feng shui of that particular room.