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# REALMS

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REVIEWS





book if you are a combat junkie and want to explore the bloody intricacies of hack and slash. On the down side, there is a lot of repetition and restating of stuff here that has already seen the light of day in the *Player's* and *Fighter's Handbooks*. Purely optional.

The **Skills and Powers** book is a much more attractive proposition for mine, with many parts that probably would have made a 3rd Edition worthwhile. Under the Skills and Powers optional rules, character creation becomes very flexible; the introduction of a point system (slots) enables you to customise their PC's skills mix to suit your own view of what your character is, not what the rules say it has to be. The day of the sword-swinging wizard has arrived in AD&D, at last!

The optional non-weapon proficiencies rules are also much improved, and we're now approaching a truly "skills-based" game system, although goodness knows why we needed to split the six basic characteristics central to AD&D down into sub-statistics resulting in 18 numbers to fit on the already overburdened character sheet. There is some pretty pointless hair-splitting going on with some of the explanations for the various sub-characteristics, all with little noticeable addition to playability.

This book also provides a streamlined psionics system, bringing psionic combat into line with the standard d20/THACO-based combat mechanics of AD&D. A good move. Other optional goodies on offer are an expanded list of player character races, some character kits, and four schools of magic.

I'd say that these 'optional' rulebooks are bringing in a lot of useful refinements to the AD&D game but in order to create separate volumes under each title the designers are inevitably resorting to useless padding. This means you have a lot of chaff to sort through to find the wheat. Add to this the number of hardbacks that make up the core rules now, and you wonder if we AD&D players would not have been better served if TSR had bitten the bullet and produced the proposed but shouted down 3rd Edition.

## PLATT'S STARPORT GUIDE

Star Wars Supplement  
West End Games

Reviewed by Martin Gibbs

This is supplement fills in a gap in data files of any Star Wars referee. There is a brief introduction listing a few points on ship repairs, spaceport regulations, rules and penalties, some of which have been partly gleaned from earlier sources. There is a really nice Bureau of Ships and Services form to copy for your players starship starship profiles. I am sure that all faithful

Imperial spacefarers will complete them in correct and unambiguous detail. The remainder of the book contains details of seven major-spaceports, with statistics and written descriptions, new creatures, ships and adventure hooks. There are plenty of maps and diagrams of the facilities included, with much of the artwork in sketched colour.

Each Starport is a potential adventure in itself, leaving plenty of opportunity for development. Pulling into spacedock is rather analogous to fantasy PCs doing downtime in the village/city between adventures. There are plenty of opportunities for players to make repairs/modifications ("Do you have a permit for that turbolaser emplacement?"), make new contacts, and do a little wheeling and dealing... legal or otherwise. Just make sure that you don't score a Class 1 Infraction near a Stellar Class Port, a place that makes a Star-Destroyer look like a moped parked at a bus depot.

## HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC

Strategic Fantasy Computer Game  
Produced by New World Computing, Inc  
Reviewed by Nick Leaning

I really enjoyed playing the *Might & Magic* fantasy role-playing series, so receiving this CD-Rom for review was a trip down memory lane for me. Those earlier games presented great challenges (and value for money) because of their great size - it took many hours of play to explore the game world and complete all of the tasks you were set. Heroes of Might and Magic is also a great challenge but of a completely different kind; this time you play a warlord on a strategic quest to conquer the Realms and, so far, after several hours of learning and playing the game, I have yet to defeat any one of the three computer opponents. But I won't be giving up just yet because it is great fun to play, even when you are being beaten.

The game plays a little bit like the Realms office favourite, Warlords, in that you control a commander who from his starting town must recruit heroic allies and raise armies that then go out into the wider world to explore it, pick up the various resources on the map and slowly build wealth, resources, and power before taking on the other commanders that you are up against. Where this game differs is in the level of detail. Towns will only produce the various specialised troop types if you invest in new buildings. These buildings need more than gold to build, forcing you to explore for timber mills to provide the wood, mines to provide the stone and jewels and so on. The map is also peppered with various sites that improve the morale, luck and training of your heroes and their troops. Plus this game features magic (spells are found, or researched by increasing the size of your

Mage's Guild) and the actual combats are more interesting because you get to control some of the actions of your troops, making tactical level decisions that are not really in Warlords. Having said all that, there is less a sense of fighting a war in this game, it really does feel like you are in a lower scale conflict - there is almost an element of role-playing here as you embark on what really is an extended "strategic quest".

I've been playing the game using the Normal difficulty rating (this is the third weakest of four computer levels of game difficulty) and against non-customised opponents (they can be made even tougher using the Smart or Ingenious opponents options). These options provide for long term playability as even if I do finally manage to win the game, my score will be recorded with the lower difficulty rating and if I want to improve my standing on the High Score table I'll have to go up against tougher computer opponents. In the meantime, perhaps I should try the multi-player game versus some easier human opponents. Also available is network & modem play.

This is a good fun game for lovers of fantasy who enjoy mixing war and conquest with their magical adventures. The graphics and sound effects make playing a pleasure (listening to the clip-clop of horses hooves as your heroes travel is very entertaining), and with the challenge of victory still unattained I feel I'll be playing Heroes of M&M for many hours to come.

## CYBERTECHNOLOGY

Shadowrun Sourcebook  
FASA Corporation  
Reviewed by Ron Fielding

A cyberpunk game wouldn't be cyber without the jacks, wires, chrome, and weird-tech gadgets to plug in and replace those all too fallible human body components with. Hang the social consequences - "Who was that dermal plated man?". The 102 page **Cybertechnology** book completely covers this dehumanising side of the Shadowrun game. And Shadowrun wouldn't be Shadowrun without magic, so they've also introduced a brand new kind of tech magic herein - *cybermagic* (is nothing sacred?). Add to this some new "not for players" archetypes, plus optional rules for 'running with cyberware and you have a very useful game aid indeed.

Art and text in this book are equally excellent, with generous doses of humour to sweeten what would otherwise be a bitter pill of rules about technology to swallow; the Shadowtalk is top notch.

Cybertechnology is a sound addition to every Shadowrun player's reference library.

Get wired. ■



# GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR METAHUMAN

## Simple Character Creation Tips for Players of FASA's Shadowrun RPG

By Craig Sinclair

Many of us regret that great risk that we all have to take some time or another, when we decide to create a metahuman character. Sacrificing your top priority can often mean the difference between life and death (my last dwarf character found this out the hard way.) Hence, I have compiled a list of benefits that players can take advantage of, and traps that they should avoid, when choosing to play a metahuman character in the Shadowrun role-playing game.

### I Am, Therefore I Think

Firstly; determine the character's overall purpose. Why are they here? What do they hope to achieve? An elf mage who is created merely for the sake of creating a metahuman character, with no real thought or strategy behind his/her existence, will invariably fall before getting established as a strong character in his/her own right. Sacrificing the top priority for race usually requires that the player will initially have to 'buddy up' with other characters within the party until they get a few adventures (and a few yen) under their belt. Only then can they hope to stand on their own unique merits and abilities.

Think about the role that you want the character to play before picking a race that suits that role best. This could mean an ork or a troll character for a party that requires more straight-up muscle, or an elf or dwarf character for a party that needs a more intellectual profession such as a mage or rigger. You'll need every advantage you can get when you're in the sprawl, so don't sacrifice your top priority for no good reason. You're really past the point of no return once you've put race up top, so think it through carefully, and make sure you know what you are letting yourself in for.

Beware of the attribute bonuses and penalties of each of the races. Though a troll may be stronger and tougher (and a lot bigger), they will be a lot slower and dumber, and may fail where an elf or dwarf would have survived. On the other hand, if you create a weak fighting character for a party that will invariably expect it to do a lot of hustling you may find that you suffer the same consequences. It all comes down to thinking things through before creating a character that will suit the purpose best.

Secondly; be careful what you put in your character's lowest priority, especially if you plan to have a mage. In this case you will have to work your way around some difficult problems involving money, skills or attributes. However, because race and magic will be your top two priorities, you will have to suss out the character's weaknesses and then place your priorities in a way that will hopefully minimise these problems. For example, a mage character who has little or no possessions will need resources in their third priority. Also, mages usually require resources for education and magical foci, so it will usually depend on the situation as to whether the mage's lowest priority is attributes or skills. However, this is only a hypothetical solution to the problem; a mage PC's generous father may own a huge corporation

in which case the character should have no problem acquiring the goods they need. (One may question the probability of such a character taking on the dangerous life of a shadowrunner, but anything is possible in character generation). It basically comes down to the situation that the character is in, and any behind the scenes help that they may consequently have.

Street samurai usually require attributes or skills in their top three priorities, and aren't totally fragged without much money. (Professional mugging is a lucrative profession in Seattle, but your GM may have other thoughts; so be careful). The main advantage of the street samurai is the fact that they usually have strength, fitness and reaction on their side in a battle. To comply with these ideals, they will need at least above average attributes, and good skills to allow them to develop into more efficient fighting (or should I say *killing*) machines.

Of course, resources are helpful. A street samurai with all the latest cyberware will have a distinct advantage over the street warrior who can't afford more than the clothes he wears. However, if your street samurai character has some strange fear of (or allergic reaction towards) cyberware, they no longer really require large amounts of money, and could possibly be better off with attributes or skills in the gap caused by this absence of a priority.

A rigger requires good attributes for a sound reaction score and agile work; and above average resources for the gear on which they entrust their lives, and the lives of the rest of the party. Imagine how angry you and the rest of your party would feel if your characters were all killed in an auto-duel because your rigger character couldn't afford an armoured car, and had to make do with





something less resilient. As with any non magic-using character, magic should be the bottom priority, unless you have an overly lenient gamemaster, and wish to make your adventures more of a challenge by disabling your character. Otherwise, you should try to take every advantage you can get.

The main concerns of a metahuman decker are those of resources and skills. Without enough money, they could find themselves doing runs on ten yen decks for the rest of their lives. Remember, the better your deck, the better performance you get while inside the matrix; and that could easily mean the difference between life and death for your decker.

Secondly; skills. Decking, computer theory (hardware) and computer theory (software) are all skills that your character will find invaluable and should be well educated in. Apart from this you will also need to provide them with basic survival skills such as martial arts, firearms and stealth. On the other hand however, a character may find that they have access to resources and education. In this case they will be able to put the attributes priority up higher, and will have access to more points for their required attributes. A good willpower score is very helpful, as you will be able to resist damage against intrusion countermeasures that exist inside the matrix system. It will also help the decker to be able to jack out faster when attacked by the dreaded black IC.

## The Skill's the Thing

However; the road towards a successful metahuman can't be that hard, surely. The following is an outline of how to play your metahuman most effectively, including various strategies to make use of their many advantages, and lessen any disadvantages that may arise from playing them. Often all it takes is a thorough reading of the rulebook, and some common sense, to make the most of your character's many advantages.

Firstly, when generating your character, try to specialise in certain skills, especially weapon skills; for two reasons. They will give you a bonus amount of dice for that skill, which will help if your skills priority isn't so good, and metahumans (dwarves especially) may find that they can only use a few weapons because of size restrictions anyway. If you generate your character in enough detail, they may have certain weapon preferences, such as katanas or berettas, so take advantage of them.

Also, generate your attributes so that you will yield above average reaction ratings by allocating higher intelligence and quickness ratings. This will not only help riggers with their vehicle control, but will also boost the initiative score of any other profession. Depending on the character's profession, you should generate attributes that will give deckers more dice in their decking pools, wizards more dice in their magic pools, riggers more dice in their rigging pool, and so on. You have to think carefully to get every possible advantage you can for your characters, or they simply won't survive.

Next, to get the most out of your metahuman character, you'll have to use them in a way that is advantageous to your party, and not so good for your opposition. Use your character's abilities unscrupulously, to gain every possible advantage over your enemies. These abilities may include low light vision, increased attributes, bonus karma points, disease or poison resistance and so on. Determine exactly how much light your character can see in, this way you can turn a darkness advantage against a human opponent. Depending on your opponent's numbers, it is possible to use blitzkrieg (frontal assault) or guerrilla tactics to give your party even the slightest advantage over your opponents. Remember, every advantage is a necessity when you're trying to survive in the sprawl.



## Didn't You Kill My Bruvver?

Apart from the big bonuses of playing metahumans, such as improved attributes, low-light vision and the like, which are rarely overlooked, there are other bonuses which can sometimes be missed in the rush of a battle. Against stubborn gamemasters you really have to scratch and bite to get your character bonuses recognised consistently, but that's fun anyway. These little things can really help you to survive, if you remember them.

Firstly, all metahumans get an extra point in their karma pool during character generation (however in the case of the *More Metahumans* rule this advantage is cancelled out). This can be particularly useful because it allows you to purchase new skills or attributes before even starting any adventures, while humans have to complete at least one adventure before having access to enough karma to make a purchase.

Secondly, because many metahumans, especially the less tolerated ones, hang around in groups or tribes, some of them may have the power to call upon their friends for help. Trust me, no one likes going up against a gang of trolls. Buddies, gangs and followers can be purchased during character generation by the same methods used in purchasing contacts and 'fixers'. One of the many street sayings I have discovered which is true in the Shadowrun game is, "you are who you know". Trust me, the character who has the contacts is the character who has the advantage over their enemies. Contacts and buddies can also help you as fencers to set up jobs and runs for you.

Although racism is supposedly on the decline, you may still encounter people who have a mortal hatred of those who are not humans, like members of the Humanis Policlub. "Filthy swine" you may say, but you will have to learn to live with them, as many GMs will throw armies of them against your metahumans. When encountering them, you may find that they do not have many extremely deadly warriors or mages, but their sheer numbers and horrific fanaticism make them dangerous enemies. They tend to hang around in gangs, and will generally have sufficient back up to get them through most battles. Often the best tactic is to walk (or run) away clean.

Metahuman Rights Activists may prove valuable allies for you against racism, although many of them prefer peaceful protest and not many of them will join you in arms just because someone called your ork character a "filthy dog". However, should they be with you when you come across a mob of Humanis Policlub Members, take cover, 'coz the fight ain't gonna be clean! True, they are mortal



enemies of the Humanis Policlub, but don't expect them to come running at your beck and call every time you come up against someone who is a racist. They have real jobs, remember? So don't take their help for granted, because they don't have as much strength as the Humanis Policlub Members, and won't be there for you whenever you need them.

When playing a dwarf character, hard terrain such as dense bushes or foliage, swampy land, hilly terrain or thin tracks can work to your advantage because of your character's smaller size. In this situation a dwarf who uses the correct guerrilla tactics can find many battles quite a lot easier than what they thought they would be. They can hide behind bushes, rocks, trees etc. far more effectively than their human (not to mention troll) counterparts. To help your character if you wish to make use of this strategy, you should create them with a good number of dice in their stealth skill. (Specialise in urban or farmland stealth if necessary).

High dice pool ratings, although not technically an advantage for metahumans only, can help you to survive when another character would not. To get high dice pool ratings, your character should preferably have attributes or skills (depending which affects the total) in the top three in their list of priorities. Street samurai should have high intelligence, willpower and quickness ratings, the higher these are, the more dice they will have in their combat pool. Deckers require a high computer skill to supplement their hacking pool, and magicians will need a good sorcery skill and (if possible) power foci to increase the value of their magic pool. Finally, riggers require a high reaction and vehicle control rigs to supplement their control pool. Keep these in mind when generating characters, and use dice pools to their full extent while playing your metahuman.

If you find that when you play metahumans, sacrificing your top priority is still too much, don't despair yet. You could suggest to the gamemaster the "More Metahumans" rule (Shadowrun II, p46). Although this rule means that you are only given one starting karma point instead of two, it is far outweighed by the fact that you can put race in your second priority instead of the top priority. This will allow you to choose another priority for your top spot. (You will still have a tricky choice for your bottom priority if you have a magic using character).

If you are desperately wanting to play a true metahuman shadowrunner, the key is, practice. Like all things, you can't expect to be a world champion in your first gaming session. The more metahuman characters you play, the more experience you're going to get with regard to playing them. If your characters are continually dying because of chancy dice rolls, don't be disheartened. You probably have either a sadistic gamemaster, or just plain bad luck. Sooner or later you will avoid both, and your character will begin to advance and become more proficient at surviving. So don't give up, just keep trying. Besides, isn't that the whole aim of a newborn character; survival? Let the other players take the risks until you become strong enough to take it out like the big guys. ■

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