

# CHALLENGE<sup>TM</sup> 53

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TWILIGHT: 2000<sup>TM</sup>

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MEGATRAVELLER<sup>TM</sup>

**Wet Navy**

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SHADOWRUN<sup>TM</sup>

**Maiden Run**

*Craig Shesley*

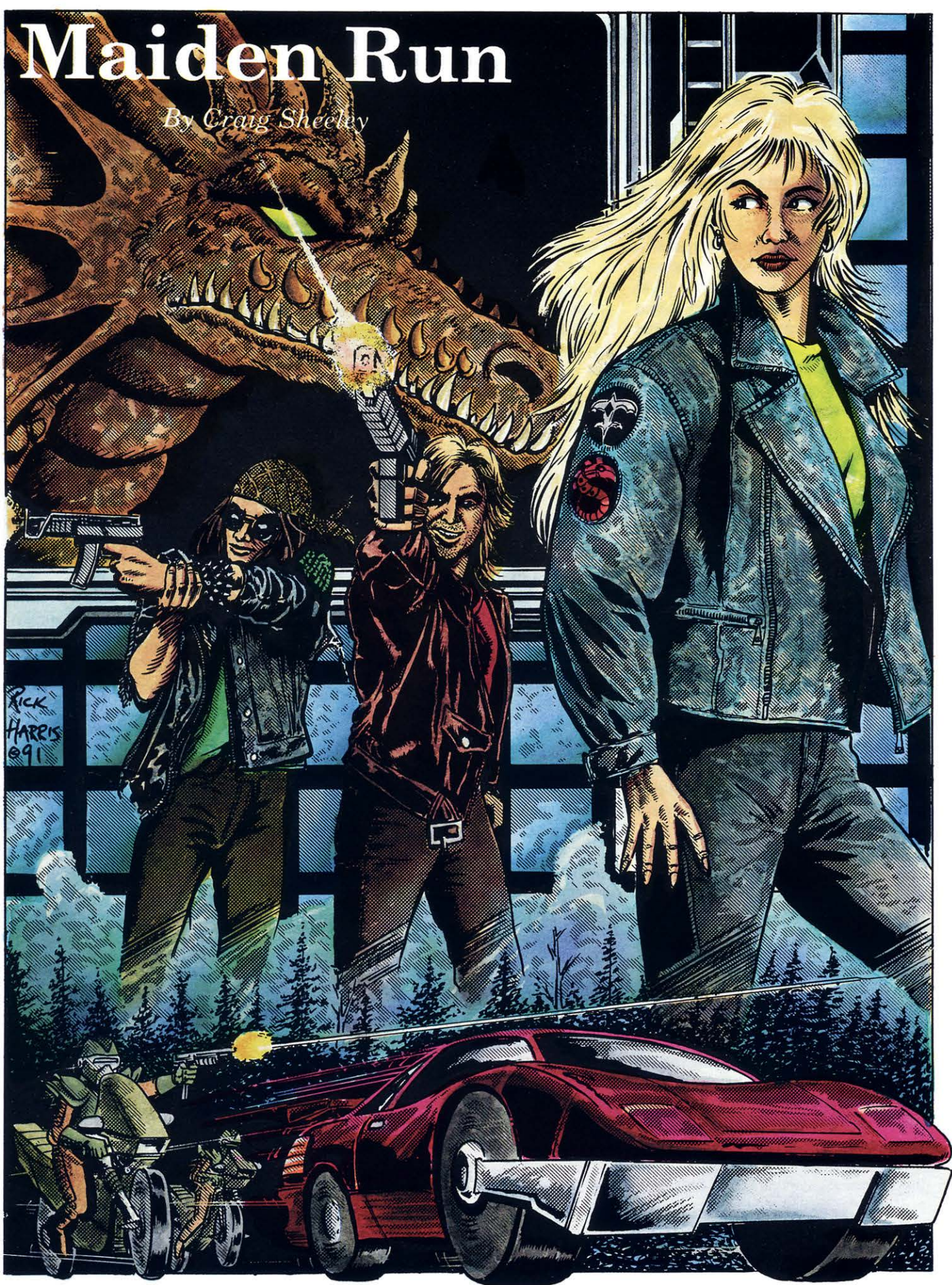
**GDW**





# Maiden Run

*By Craig Sheeley*





**T**he word was on the street—someone wanted your talents and wanted to meet you ASAP.

The meeting seems to have been sited as much for subterfuge as for privacy. Not many runs begin with terse orders to congregate beneath a deserted storefront awning at 1300 hours during a storm. Since when are rainstorms running on a timetable? But there it is, coming straight down in buckets and throwing lightning bolts from cloud to cloud. Couldn't ask for a better antisurveillance environment.

Your contact is a small, stout man in a long raincoat and snap-brim hat. He's too tall to be a dwarf, but doesn't seem tall enough to be a human. He waits until everyone has arrived, then sets his briefcase up on the store's window ledge, saying, "Here are your instructions." He opens the case to reveal a flatscreen, which lights up. The visage displayed on the screen isn't human. It isn't even remotely terrestrial: Fanged, scaled, horned, snouted—a dragon. The more politically aware members of your group realize, with a shudder, that it's not just any dragon—it's Lofwyr. *The Lofwyr*, the dragon that went corporate. One of the neighbors to the south that the city politicians don't talk about.

"I have a simple job for you." The dragon's voice is surprisingly deep and smooth, like a sub-bass croon. "I want you to take a person from my agents arriving at the airport and transport her to the borders of Tir Tairngire." He smiles, showing an impressive array of teeth. "Of course, it's not quite as simple as that. Other people will attempt to harm this person. Therefore secrecy is important. Above all, this person must not be harmed, molested or violated in any way." A rumble creeps into his voice. "Is that clear? And rest assured, if she is harmed, I will know."

He pauses theatrically. "The rewards for success are 2500 nuyen and the prospect of future contracts. As for the penalties of failure, none of you have the life experience to even begin to imagine." The image fades as the screen shuts off.

The short man closes the briefcase and takes a slip of notepaper from an inner coat pocket. "Here are the details of the pickup. You're to deliver her to the Tir Tairngire border ASAP. You'll be paid on arrival." He picks up the case and steps out from under the awning, just as the worst downpour in

weeks stops with the abruptness of a thrown switch. A small, black city car pulls up and he gets in.

## IF YOU ACCEPT

By accepting the invitation to show up in the first place, you've already committed yourself to the mission—or to a whole lot of trouble. The notepaper the PCs are given bears the words "Flight 1313 from Sweden. Ingra Swolderssen. 0545 hours."

## STREET RUMORS

Should the PCs go out into Seattle that night and look for more information, they can test the rumor mill with what they have. If they seek the information on the street, the appropriate skill is Etiquette (street). The target number is 4. The results depend on the number of successes:

No.	Results
1-2	Sure, chummer. There's been a big call lately for blondes. Some sorta babe market, eh? Word has it that there's a slavery ring outta Nippon.
3-4	"There is a slavery ring importing Cauc women to Nippon. Corp sponsored through the Yakuza. Watch your step, though; there's competition to this ring from another source.
5-6	The Yakuza are importing round-eyed, fertile women to Nippon for breeding purposes. They're trying to increase normal births. They're all afraid their pure blood'll have pointed ears. Seems that someone in the tribes doesn't agree with this; there's organized opposition from Tir Tairngire. But you didn't hear it from me, mind you.
7+	All the above, plus: There's a move on against Lofwyr. The word says he's importing virgins for some ceremony—something having to do with his longevity. Of course, the virgin won't survive the ceremony. The sacrifice is supposed to be taken to Tir Tairngire sometime in the next couple of days.

## CORPORATE RUMORS

If someone wants to try the corporate grapevine on for size, he requires the Etiquette (corporate) skill and at least



one Corporate Secretary or Mr. Johnson contact. The target number is 3. The results are as follows:

No.	Results
1-2	There's a plot going on against Lofwyr. We're not involved, but the execs have been making contingency plans.
3-4	Someone's trying an attack on Lofwyr. Not a hostile takeover, but an attempt on his person. We're bracing for the aftermath; if he dies, we can clean up. If he lives, his opponents are in a world of hurt, and vulnerable. Whaddaya mean, vultures? That's business, chummer. Live and let die. It's an ill windfall that blows nobody good.
5-6	Lofwyr's in trouble. Some sort of plot on his life. It has something to do with a woman arriving soon. Rumor has it he needs her for a secret magical ceremony. There are people trying to stop it. No, I don't know who they are, and I wouldn't spill even if I did know. It's worth a man's life at this point. The operation begins tomorrow. That's all I know.
7+	All the above, plus: It's a plot worthy of a spy novel. The Yakuza are in this up to their noses. Heavy hitters have been headed for Seattle for a week. Some are Lofwyr's, some are independent, and some are here to stop the transfer. Probably some are just here for confusion factor. I pity the poor suckers doing the carry job. What, <i>you</i> ? Been nice knowing you. You want your relatives informed now or later? Here's a tip: Watch out for the woman. She's not what she seems.

If any of the characters tell their contacts they're the people hauling the girl, reactions should range from pity and swift avoidance ("Uh, I just remembered an urgent appointment—see you

again sometime. How about next century?" to avaricious interest ("You're hauling the sacrifice? How interesting. Sure, I won't tell anybody, no matter how much money they give me. Trust me. Tell me more. How do you intend to go about this?"). It should become apparent to the PCs that there is enough information on the street to place them in jeopardy.

## THE TASK AT HAND

The straightest, easiest way to get from Seattle to Tir Tairngire is by taking Interstate 5 south to Portland. It's about a 350-kilometer run (almost 300 kilometers as the crow flies), a little over three hours in the average vehicle (one and a half in a fast plane). Counting in the time for the round trip, that's around 600 nuyen an hour. Not bad wages, boyo.

If the PCs don't have any vehicles, they need to rent some. Rental fees are based on the new cost of a vehicle. For vehicles priced under 100,000 nuyen, the rental cost is a deposit equal to 2% of the new cost and a rental fee equal to 1/2% (.005) of the new cost, per day. For instance, renting a Ford Americar would cost 400 nuyen for the deposit plus 50 nuyen per day.

Renting vehicles costing 100,000+ nuyen gets expensive. The deposit is 5% of the

vehicle's new cost, plus 1% of the new cost per day. A rented Fed. Boeing Commuter chopper has a deposit of 12,500 nuyen and costs 2500 nuyen per day.

Any vehicle adapted for rigger operation has its cost for rental purposes based on the new cost, plus the cost of the Adaptation Rig. The Ford Americar above would have a deposit of 600 nuyen and a rental cost of 75 nuyen per day if it were adapted for rigger operation.

Warning to the runners: If their main plan is to fly from Seattle to Tir Tairngire, they'd better have a backup plan. The weather report isn't favorable; there's an extremely heavy storm cell moving in off the ocean.

## D-DAY, H-HOUR, M-MINUTE

The next day dawns without the sun. The heavy clouds that cover the sky barely let in enough light to show that it's day. Any metahumans that have problems with sunlight can leave their sun-screen home today. The dark purple clouds loom over the city, threatening to drench the entire coast with heavy rain. As the PCs head to the airport to pick up their Swedish cargo, the clouds make good on their threat, turning the gloomy day into an even gloomier (and wetter) one.

At the airport, any hopes of taking the aerial route are quashed. The storm

clouds are generating lightning, hail, and ice, and there have been radar hints of cyclonic activity approaching from the sea. Flying anything smaller than an airliner is out of the question.

Flight 1313 is late, delayed by the rain and heavy weather. The PCs have to wait in the airport lounge, along with the others waiting for their aircraft to arrive.

Airport security is tight. No one was allowed to enter with any weapon heavier than a knife; even pistols were checked at the door. Most people don't even bring heavy guns there; checking them is a hassle. In addition, heavily armed guards are positioned in bullet-proof glass hardpoints, ready to sweep the terminal building with fire in the event of a fight. So the characters are left without their heavy armament, with nothing to do but wait and watch.

There are plenty of people to watch. Perhaps 50 souls lounge about, some sleeping, some immersed in their simsense plays, some reading (!), some watching the vidscreen, plus a gaggle of three-pieces (street-slang for businessmen and corporates) huddled around the coffee machine, talking insider trading in low voices, a trio of hardcases in armored dusters sitting like statues with only their eyes moving, a pair of young children running around getting in everyone's way while their harried mother keeps calling them back to her side. Any of them might be trouble for the pickup; with so many pros in town, even the children might be trained assassins.

Of course, the people most likely to attract the PCs' attention as possible killers are the three armored stoney-faces—they look like professional murderers, and they act like it. They shouldn't be armed, but everyone knows that the corps have weapons and gear that can't be detected on normal scans—and who knows what cybernetics they could have.

Nobody bothers the adventurers as they wait. The hardcases watch them and everybody else. The children run past, shrieking in unbearably high-pitched voices, eliciting groans from the waiting people trying to sleep. The three-pieces swill strong coffee, listening intently to a lecture from the single fem exec in their midst.

Finally, at 0713, the computer-generated perfect contralto intercom voice announces the arrival of Flight 1313.

## Ingra

Despite appearances, the rumor that Ingra is not what she seems is true. She is actually an agent—a young, relatively inexperienced agent, but a highly trained one, gifted with natural acting talent. She has been specially trained by Lofwyr's organization for jobs needing an agent without a record.

### Attributes:

Body: 5  
Quickness: 5  
Strength: 4  
Charisma: 6  
Intelligence: 5  
Willpower: 5  
Essence: 5.9  
Reaction: 5

### Skills:

Unarmed Combat: 6  
Armed Combat: 3  
Firearms: 4  
Stealth: 3  
Athletics: 4  
Psychology: 2  
Swedish: 6  
English: 2

### Special Skill:

Acting: 6

**Notes:** Ingra has no cybernetics, but she does have an interesting weapon: Her canine teeth have been replaced by ceramiplast duplicates, each containing a small toxin reservoir. If she bites someone (requiring that she grapple with her target) the toxin is injected into the bloodstream. The toxin is artificial, an enhanced chemical reproduction of Lofwyr's own poisonous bite. Ingra's teeth have enough toxin for five bites. This is a last-ditch weapon, and she won't use it unless she has to.

**Ingra's Bite:** Damage 5D2, Speed instantaneous, no side effects other than an intensely powerful burning sensation at the bite wound.



The kids run to their mother, shrieking, "Daddy's plane is here!" The corporates pay it no mind; several people shift in readiness, including the three gunsels, moving for the first time.

The boarding tube is extended to the supersonic delta-wing plane, and the passengers start to stagger into the reception area. Apparently they had a rough flight; some of them look green around the edges. The characters move to wait for Ingra Swolderssen, accompanied by the other waiting people. Ominously, the gunsels station themselves by the doors to the reception area, cutting off the exits.

The characters wait once again as the passengers are checked in by customs and processed. They can't tell which one is Ingra; they have no descriptions or photo ID, after all. And there are plenty of women among the passengers, several of whom might be their pickup. Eventually, a matronly woman and a pretty blonde pause by the runners. The older woman hisses to the nearest character, "Hsst! Here she is. We've gotten clear—take her and get going!" She passes the blonde's arm to the character and tells her, "Go with these people, Ingra. They'll take you the rest of the way." If the characters hesitate, the older woman growls at them to leave, *now!*

## TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS

As the characters and their charge exit the reception area, the three armored men follow, moving silently, deliberately trailing the group. They continue to follow as the PCs move across the lounge. As the PCs pass by the coffee machine, they are suddenly attacked—not by the three obvious killers, but by the three-pieces! All four of the suits leap into action, one of them sprouting a short-sword-length spur from his palm, another using retractable blades in the toes of his shoes, and the woman flashing hand razors.

They go for the girl, attacking any characters in the way. But before they grab her, the three armor-coated hardcases move into action, assisting the PCs! The three-piece attackers get two rounds of combat to attack the PCs before the gunsels come to the rescue.

The three-pieces use the Company Man archetype (*Shadowrun* page 164), while the gunsels use the Street Samurai

archetype (page 46). The shoe blades and hand razors have a damage code of (Strength/2)L2, while the arm spur has a damage code of (Strength)M2, like a sword. The three-pieces are wearing armor clothing, while the gunsels are wearing lined coats.

The PCs can use the gunsels' interdiction as a diversion to mask their getaway; in fact, one of the gunsels yells advice to that effect. If the PCs stick around and wait for the airport guards to react with stun rounds and tasers, they'll be delayed for several precious hours while airport security tries to find out just what's going on.

Once clear of the airport, the characters have a chance to examine their charge. Some women acquire beauty, while others borrow it through cosmetics. Ingra was born beautiful and has been getting better every day. She is a perfect blonde, perhaps 18 years old. Blue-eyed, red-lipped, rosy-cheeked, tall and voluptuous, Ingra seems made to carbonate male hormones and inspire women to jealousy. She also inspires sympathy. Only a man with a heart of stone (or plastic) could stand by and not feel some compassion as she weeps, frightened, friendless and lost. She clings to the first person to comfort her, tears gradually waning to an occasional sniffle. In the meantime, she obeys orders with alacrity, understanding that danger is all around.

Ingra seems utterly incapable of defending herself—if she's in danger, she screams and cringes. She knows what guns are, but wants nothing to do with them, and will not even strike someone in anger.

If asked, Ingra will freely tell of her life (her English is good but is stilted by her Swedish accent). She grew up on a small farm in Sweden, went to school in a nearby small town, was engaged but broke it off when her beau mutated into a troll, and has never been in a big city until now. Men contacted her family, promising an incredible amount of money if she came on this trip. It would be dangerous, they warned, but she would be protected, and the service she was to perform would be perfectly safe and nominal—she'd be winging her way back home within 48 hours.

## ROAD TRIP

With the weather turning the heavens into a flier's purgatory, the PCs are left with surface transport as the only



way to get Ingra to Portland. The PCs may have already procured transport (a Rigger character is in his element right now). Sneaky PCs might suggest ocean transport, getting to Portland via Astoria and the Columbia River, but the same weather conditions that rack the atmosphere have raised six-meter seas; nothing is sailing from Seattle today! And only a submarine could cruise beneath the turbulent surface; unless the PCs have chartered a sub, they're stuck with the interstate south.

The trip through the lower end of Seattle is calm, the streets cleared of traffic by the force of the storm. This is a boon, as it allows the PCs to slip heavily armed vehicles out of the city without being roused by corp-cops or the municipality's finest—they're normally somewhat wary of vehicles boasting autocannons and missile launchers.

The journey down I-5 is equally dull—the monotony of the lonely road is broken only by sudden gusts of wind that rend the veils of heavy rain and threaten to force vehicles to veer from their path. The runners (other than the drivers) can occupy themselves with their own amusements, which can range from simsense entertainment to sleep to trying to put moves on Ingra. If any enterprising male PCs try to befriend her, she will respond with open cheerfulness. If male PCs try to seduce her, she responds with innocence and sincerity. Indeed, she fixes on the suitor with the highest Charisma and acts totally smitten. This may be risky, however, since Lofwyr ordered that she was not to be "harmed, molested or violated in any way."

Of course, the adventurers can't just rest and take it easy—there are enough mysterious incidents to keep them properly paranoid. For one thing, the heavy rain makes traction uncertain and maneuvering treacherous. As noted on page 72 of *Shadowrun*, rain makes normal roads Restricted terrain and turns country roads into Tight terrain. In addition, it lowers visual sighting range to about 50 meters.

**Raiden Sedan:** As the characters' vehicles wind their way through some curves scarcely 20 kilometers out of Seattle, going through Salish Shidhe territory, they spot a pair of tail-lights ahead in the rain. They have no problem passing a lone Raiden sedan (the Japanese equivalent of the Ford Americar). They can't see who's inside since the car boasts tinted windows. (The car actually holds four Japanese businessmen headed to Portland.) A few kilometers further on, the road straightens out, running between forests of impressive conifers. After 10 minutes of cruising on the straightaways, a set of headlights is seen behind them, closing fast. Radar detectors beep their warnings—the characters are being probed by a strong signal. Unless the characters decide to blast the approaching vehicle, a Raiden whips by at insane speed, passing the adventurers' convoy with a spray of water.

This incident is repeated several times on the road to Portland. The Japanese in the Raiden have a sophisticated autopilot driving the car—it pushes the car to its operational limits on flat straightaways, but slows to cautious speed on the curves. The end result is that the PCs keep passing the car on curvy road sections, and the car blows their doors off when the road levels to straight tracks. If the PCs want to outrace the sedan and keep it from passing them, treat the terrain as Restricted (meaning that the maximum safe speed is Cruising/Handling) and roll the Opposed Success test for opening distance, according to the rules on page 72 of *Shadowrun*. The car's autopilot has a skill of 6.

**Harley Scorpions:** A third of the way to Portland, a quartet of rain-slickered men riding Harley Scorpions trail the adventurers' convoy at about 75 meters range, sticking behind them as they navigate a series of blind curves. The bikers trail the heavier vehicles for about 10 kilometers until they hit another straight section of road. Once the curves cease, the bikers punch it and roar loudly past the PCs' vehicles to vanish in the rain ahead. If the PCs attack, the bikers are treated as Street Samurai, wearing lined coats. Each has two AK-94s fixed forward on his cycle.

**Mysterious Vehicle:** After the bikers pass the characters, another vehicle shows up behind the convoy and paces

it at a distance of 100 meters. It doesn't speed up to pass or drop back to turn off—it just matches the runners' moves and lurks out of visual range. (This is only a tractor-trailer rig on the way to Portland. The driver is following the PCs' tail-lights, watching them to discover curves in the road. He's in no hurry and has no desire to out-distance his pathfinders.)

## RIDERS ON THE STORM

The PCs are two-thirds of the way to Portland when their mystery follower (the rig) is passed by several vehicles, moving fast. The mystery follower drops back, and his lights vanish as a trio of bikes flash past in pursuit of a low, sleek red car. The bikes are Yamaha Rapiers, manned by heavily armored bikers firing Uzi IIIIs as they guide their fleet motors (treat them as Street Samurai with Motorcycle 6). The car is a Westwind 2000, driven by someone less skilled than the cyclists.

The cyclists seem to have no compunction about shooting wildly. They fire continually at the Westwind 2000, hitting it several times (but not critically) as it slashes through the rain, outdistancing the PCs' vehicles in the other lane. At the same time, one or two of the adventurers' vehicles sustain Uzi hits; resolve the damage as per vehicle damage rules. The bikers pull up abreast of the adventurers' convoy by the time the PCs can react, presenting targets at a range of 5-10 meters.

No sooner have the bikers been splattered all over the rain-soaked road (is there any doubt?) than the Westwind 2000, now about 100 meters ahead of the PCs, blows a tire weakened by too many bullets. The vehicle spins across the pavement into the ditch that divides the highway. The PCs have to slow drastically to avoid the debris left by the crashing Westwind (perform a crash check; failure indicates that the PCs' vehicle has crashed as well).

The truck that was following the PCs stopped several hundred meters back to wait out the vehicular combat.

Inside the PCs' vehicle, Ingra cries, "That poor man! He must be hurt. We've got to stop and help him." If the characters are reluctant to succumb to Ingra's charms and grant her wishes, and are too hard-hearted to offer succor to an injured man, remind them that the fellow was driving a Westwind 2000,

an obscenely expensive vehicle, which hints that he may be a man of means.

Once the PCs have come to a stop, they see someone stagger out of the driver's side door of the 2000, proof that its touted shock couch and air bag are effective. The driver totters over to the roadside and sits down, his head in his hands, seemingly oblivious of the rain.

The man is lightly injured—a few scratches that bleed messily. He's still stunned from the wreck. His Westwind 2000 is undrivable; it needs a replacement rear wheel. He accepts the characters' evaluation of his car's condition without comment. "I suppose I should have expected trouble," he tells them, "but I hoped I could outrun it. Have you a spare seat? I can make it worth your while to get me to Portland—I have extremely important business." His subdued but expensive (and now wet) clothing reinforces his appearance of wealth; his only weapon is an Ares Viper in a shoulder holster.

If the runners don't take him along with them, Ingra chides them and accuses them of being thugs, street scum and worse. Then she lapses in sullen silence for the rest of the trip.

If the runners do take him along, he introduces himself as Geraldo Vincent. He does not mention what his business is or what he has to do in Portland. Geraldo is, surprisingly, an Elf, although he displays none of the naturalist affectations of the rural Elves. He's handsome, with a dashing Spanish accent, and a natural flirt, speculatively eyeing every female present. When he spots Ingra, he makes a beeline for her.

As the trip progresses, Geraldo charms the young Swede, persuading her to tell him of her life back home and thrilling her with stories of his travels. He's lived an interesting, globe-trotting life—or at least he says he has, and his stories seem authentic. The end result, however, is to cut out any of the PCs formerly vying for Ingra's attentions.

Use the Company Man archetype for Geraldo, but delete the skillwires and add +3 to his Charisma.

## ATTACK

The rain slacks off as the adventurers approach Portland and the border. Suddenly, a pair of modified Americars charge the PCs' convoy from around a bend, going the wrong way on the divided highway! Both cars are modified



to pack an assault cannon under the hood, as well as carrying three armed passengers. Use the Company Man archetype, but the drivers have Gunner 4, as well. The passengers are armed with AK-98s. Their tactics are simple—close with the PCs' convoy, guns blazing, and destroy any vehicles except the one containing Ingra and Geraldo. The attackers get one pass before their speeds move them past the adventurers. The Americars slow and turn to follow, setting up a running gun battle—they are most vulnerable while they are turning, because they have to slow to five meters per turn to turn around.

The running gun battle stops as soon as the Americars have destroyed or incapacitated the outrider vehicles, leaving the one carrying Ingra to proceed to Portland. They break off and turn back north, soon vanishing from sight.

During the attack, Geraldo administers a nerve hold that stuns Ingra and feeds her a poison capsule hidden in his sleeve cuff. Geraldo is actually the enemy agent sent to deal with Lofwyr's package (Ingra). The small capsule will release a subtle and powerful neurotoxin into her system when swallowed. The poison won't harm her, but it'll stay in her body for a week and is almost

instantly fatal to dracoforms when ingested (15D5 damage).

## A JOB WELL DONE

The customs post at the border to Tir Tairngire admits the PCs without question—they've been cleared by Lofwyr. An escort vehicle (a patrol car) is assigned, and the adventurers are led to a restaurant. Inside, in a private conference room, they meet with their contact, the same short, stocky man who contacted them at the beginning of the caper. Ingra is led off by a trio of hard-looking women, and that's the last the PCs see of her.

The stocky man tells the characters to be seated; there will be a short wait. After a few minutes, he stirs and activates a wall screen. Lofwyr's visage peers out of it. The dragon clears his throat, a sound like a volcano warming up for the main event.

"You succeeded in delivering my package, although not without some difficulty," he rumbles. "Payment, as promised, is 2500 nuyen apiece. My agent has cash, if you don't wish to have the transaction recorded via cred account." If Geraldo was successful in his attempt to plant poison on Ingra, or if any of the PCs had sexual relations with her, he adds, "Less 500 nuyen



apiece for not delivering her completely intact." He signs off, and the man pays the adventurers. They are to leave Portland immediately, unless they need medical assistance.

## WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

Lofwyr knew there was a plot against his life, but he didn't know what quarter it would come from. Furthermore, he knew that one of his aides was a leak, an information conduit to his enemies, but he didn't know which one. So he cooked up separate plots and gambits, letting each aide in on a different plot. Other mercenary groups, similar to the PCs, have spent the day involved in somewhat similar situations. The only adventure which attracted deadly attention was this one, revealing the guilty aide to Lofwyr. The runners were only pawns in a deadlier game. But they've been paid for their troubles and may expect more business from Lofwyr in the future. Ω

# GDW

## How Does That Grab Ya?



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