

CHALLENGE 64

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming US \$3.50

DARK CONSPIRACY™
Shadow Over New Brunswick
Dustin Browder

CALL OF CTHULHU®
Valley of Twisted Apes
Paul Sudlow

MEGATRAVELLER™
Missing Links
Ken Pick

8-page MegaTraveller Insert
WHEN
EMPIRES
FALL
8-page MegaTraveller Insert

GDW

LIVE BAIT

"I greet you anew," the dragon Lofwyr coughs. "I have another task for you." His toothy smile is not reassuring, and probably not meant to be. "This will be one of the most straightforward jobs you've ever had, and legal, too." Already it sounds bad.

By Craig Sheeley

A lone figure walks out of the rain, water streaming off his hat and slicker. A familiar man, short, silent and uncommunicative, approaches the designated meeting place—an awning. In a thunderstorm. In Seattle. He sets his briefcase vid player up on the shop windowsill and opens the lid. The flatscreen flickers to steady on an image of reptilian intellect and ferocity.

"I greet you," the dragon Lofwyr coughs. "I have a task for you." His toothy smile is not reassuring, and probably isn't meant to be. "This will be one of the most straightforward jobs you've ever had, and legal, too." Already it sounds bad. "Tomorrow morning, I want you to assemble at the address my man provides. Bring transport capable of moving a man-sized box, weight 75 kilograms. Such a box will be delivered to you at 0845 exactly. I want you to take the box and drive around the city with it, checking in with my organization by telephone for instructions every half-hour. At 1700 hours, I want you to deliver the box to a location you will be given at the last check-in."

He chortles, a sound like a rock-crusher. "You want to know the biggest joke of all? There's nothing in the box." He pauses for a moment to enjoy his jest. "Nothing at all. All you have to do is take an empty box around the city all day long. By the way, don't try to

open it yourselves. It's rigged with alarm systems and some fairly nasty active anti-burglary systems, for nosy types trying to get a look at the void inside. I'm hoping some of my enemies do try."

He sobers quickly. "Of course, no one will believe it is empty. There are forces that will strive mightily to relieve you of your cargo. Do not let them. Protect the box with your lives. You can tell them it's empty if you wish; they'll not believe you. But deliver that box to the specified contact point at 1700 hours if you wish to be paid."

The image is only a recording, but Lofwyr seems to have anticipated the shadowrunner reactions. "That's right. You're bait again. And I'm casting you to flush out some people. Of course, you'll have help—I shall have security forces with extraordinarily heavy armament following you, at a distance, to mop up troublemakers you can't handle. And you'll be cared for—any damage suffered in the course of this job will be repaired at my expense." He pauses again.

"Did I mention the remuneration? Fifteen thousand nuyen apiece, with 1000 of it in advance. That is the price of success when you deliver that box. As for the price of failure, you're still all far too young to even begin to imagine it. Do not fail me."

With that, the screen goes blank, and the small man closes the case. Silently, he takes an envelope from his pocket and hands it to the closest runner, picks up the case and walks out into the rain—which stops immediately like a thrown switch. He climbs into a small black city car and rides off.

ONCE YOU'VE BEEN BAIT

It don't matter whether you catch a fish or not; once you've been bait, you ain't much use for nothing else nohow.

Walt Kelly's Pogo

The envelope contains a sheet of paper with the address where the shadowrunners are supposed to be and the telephone number they're to use, and 1000 nuyen per shadowrunner in crisp 100 nuyen bills.

The adventurers have about 15 hours to prepare for their mission. They have to acquire a vehicle that can carry a man-sized, 75-kilogram box—no matter how strong they are, they're not going to lug the thing all over town! In addition, they can use their new

booty to grab some gear, stash in their account, go for information or just throw one really big farewell party.

Why a farewell party? If anyone taps the street telegraph, the drums are thumping, and the natives are restless. People with street-type contacts (street samurai, street mage, street shaman, gang member, bartender, fixer, gang boss, squatter, etc.) have a target number of 3 for gathering info; those without such contacts have a target number of 5 for finding out what the word is on the street. The appropriate skill is Etiquette (Street).

Roll Rumor

- | | |
|-----|---|
| 1-2 | Something ugly is gathering. The squatters and homeless are clearing the area, moving away from center city Seattle. It's not supposed to be healthy tomorrow. |
| 3-4 | The Rotters and the Gideon Goads have stopped fighting! This is the first time in two years they've ceased fire. Rumor has it that they're arming up for some important mission tomorrow. Heaven help anyone caught in between them. Something nasty is going down. |
| 5-6 | Gangs all over town are going after someone tomorrow. Whoever's in the middle is toast. The cops are bringing in heavy-armor riot gear, fearing an all-out war over some unidentified target. Stay away from downtown tomorrow, chummer. |
| 7+ | Someone is offering a 50,000 nuyen reward to anyone who recovers a large box. The word's out everywhere; it even seems that more than one reward has been posted, apparently by rival agencies. Every money-hungry gang in the city is preparing to do a number on the delivery boys—and each other, if the opportunity arises. |

Get the picture? All over the city, gangs and thugs are going into lock-and-load mode on that box.

And guess who's got the box. The adventurers. And who has to defend it? The adventurers!

Of course, the runners might decide to double-cross Lofwyr, sell the box for one or more of the rewards and bug out of Seattle. This won't help, naturally. Should they do something this stupid, assume they're sui-



cidal and let them run a bit before the dragon's forces crush them. The adventurers are certain to meet with a nasty end—at the short end of a colossal firefight against overwhelming odds, victims of a group of Adept ninja, captive experimental subjects of an excruciatingly disgusting spell or chemical process, etc. If they cross Lofwyr, they'll die, and their highly publicized deaths will serve as a warning to others who get similarly stupid ideas.

NICE DAY FOR A DRIVE

It looks like the adventurers are going to have an easy time of it (yeah, right). They arrive at the northwest corner of the South Jackson Street Bridge at 0845 hours, as ordered. There's a motorized rickshaw waiting there, its seat occupied by a box that looks like nothing so much as a coffin! The driver, an impassive dwarf dressed in a rain-slicker and boots, shifts his sucker in his mouth and passes the runners a piece of plastic with a phone number written on it. "Here's the number," he squeaks in a high-pitched voice. "Call it every half-hour. Use pay-phones; cell-phones can be tapped too easy. Don't lose the box. Cruise around the park for awhile." He kick-starts the rickshaw and puts off; from various vantage points around the bridge, groups of armed men and orks slouch away to unmarked vehicles and drive off.

At least the runners have a nice day to run around in. The near-perpetual cloud cover of Seattle has broken, and the sun beams down on the city, making it sparkle like a fairy-tale land. Blue skies serve as a backdrop for the skyscrapers and helicopters flitting from building to building. But the adventurers have work to do.

Their job is to drive around and defend the box. Each half-hour, they're to call their contact number and find out where to go next. The directions are very vague—pass every civic building, or cruise up and down Denny Way, or circle the Remraku Arcology, etc. For a half-hour at a time. You're bait; get out there and dangle!

What kind of vehicle are the adventurers parading around in? Are they showing any kind of heavy armament? Truculent displays of vehicle-mounted weapons, or hand-carried assault arms, are certain to attract the attention of Seattle's finest. Lofwyr did say the job was legal, after all. And in Seattle, the cops get nervous when a Beachcraft Patrolter slides by brandishing an autocannon and a missile launcher—they even get itchy when they see people in a normal car aiming assault rifles out the windows. If the runners are too blatant about their weaponry, the cops stop them and issue a ticket for violating vehicle safety regulations. (Under Se-

attle municipal code, even carrying a loaded weapon in a vehicle is a safety violation. Most of the time, the cops treat the ordinance as "we don't see it, we don't ticket it.") The fine is 100 nuyen for hand weapons, 500 nuyen for antivehicle weapons like autocannon and missile launchers, 1000 nuyen for turret-mounted vehicle cannons, Gatling cannons, autogrenade launchers and missile tubes! (Don't laugh, there are riggers who drive minipanzers mounting such hardware.) And that citation is only a warning; if the cops catch the adventurers on this again, they run them in for questioning.

Please note that the cops aren't interested in what's in the box. They might care, but it's not their legal business.

The runners might try to fight it out with the police. Bad idea. Police cars use Ford Americar stats, but have 2 points of armor, Body 3 and Speed 60/160. These cars also mount a heavy MG under the hood and have a "sun-roof" mount for a grenade launcher on the roof (this is an auto-GL that fires three grenades per shot and has a 50-round belt). Use Corporate Security Guard stats for the police; they wear heavy armor and use heavy handguns and assault rifles. And even if the adventurers off a single patrol car, that just gets the rest of the force angry at them. And Lofwyr won't raise a claw to stop the police from doing their duty—that kind of business he doesn't need.

THE BOX

The box looks very much like a coffin. It's made of molded plastic, and apparently has no lid, hatch or other entry point. On the outside, it seems featureless, just a molded hunk of plastic. Obviously, it has a hollow center, or it would weigh a great deal more than the mere 75 kilograms it masses. It's pretty sturdy—treat it as having a Body of 6 if it's hit by fire or attacked.

What the adventurers can't see is that the box is wired, wired, wired—it's got more electronic security systems than a Nightsky parked in the slum zone. It won't do anything if moved, jostled or electronically probed. If it's struck hard or physically probed (i.e., hit by something that might do damage to it) the box speaks: "This unit is equipped with an active defense system. If the container is breached, an explosive charge will destroy it, as well as collateral damage extending in a 50-meter radius." It repeats this message again for effect, intending to deter anyone from breaking in.

In truth, the box does have an explosive charge in it, and the message is for real! Four kilograms of the box's mass is Compound 12 explosive, enough to devastate an area 48 meters in radius. The explosive is wired to detonate if the box is breached (that is, if the

box sustains damage that would "injure" it, or someone manages to drill a hole in it), on a 20-second audible countdown: "This unit will now self-destruct. Sequence started. Detonation in 20 seconds, 19 seconds, 18 seconds..." and so on. Lofwyr's men following the adventurers have a remote-control reset device, so they can turn off the self-destruct charge if they think the box really isn't in danger. However, they just might wait until that last second to turn off the charge.

Are the adventurers curious as to what's in the box? Well, there's no way to find out short of breaking it open. X-rays and other scanning methods reveal nothing but the speaker; apparently, the interior of the box is lined with metal. And it's dark inside, so clairvoyants can't see anything but blackness. The box has been systematically designed to frustrate attempts to see inside it.

MEAN STREETS

The forces arrayed against the adventurers are mighty, but fragmented. Over a half-dozen gangs are looking for the box, packing plenty of heat. Fortunately for the runners, these gangs are in it for themselves and will not cooperate with each other—indeed, they're more likely to fire on each other than on the adventurers!

Various gangs fix on the runners at various times. There is no timetable to their attacks; the referee can route them to his liking. If the referee is feeling merciful, or nasty, have two gangs show up at the same time and let the players dither as to what they're going to do! At least two of the gangs hit at almost the same time, though, to give the adventurers real trouble with a one-two punch (the final encounter below). All these encounters use standard NPC archetypes and weapons from the *Shadowrun* book.

Of course, these are not the only attacks and attempts that could occur. The referee is free to add or subtract attacks and attempts, according to his choice. If the adventurers seem to be catching on to the blatant attacks too easily, try slipping them a subtle approach—having some innocent-looking person crash into their vehicle, or showing them a victim in need of help (surely there's someone altruistic among the PCs?), etc.

Street Toughs: A small group of street toughs is going for the money. There are five Gang Member NPCs (with two Uzi IIs, one Remington Roomsweeper shotgun and an AK-97) and a Gang Boss NPC (with an H&K 227S). They have a description of the runners' vehicle and try to hijack it when the adventurers stop at a red light. This is a simple carjacking, where the gang members stroll out into the stopped traffic, walk up to the vehicle, poke their guns into the windows and yell, "Get out!" They will fire if the adven-

turers don't comply. If the runners kill or wound three of the gang members or kill the leader, the gang flees.

Motorcycle Madmen: A cycle gang tries a "stage robbery," bringing their cycles right up behind the adventurers' vehicle(s) and opening fire. The gang consists of four people—three Gang Member NPCs and a Gang Boss NPC (the boss has Bike 5). All carry Uzi III SMGs, wear synthetic leathers, armor vests and helmets. The bikes are Harley Scorpions mounting an AK-98 apiece—and the minigrenade launchers are loaded with explosive 6M3 minigrenades. The cyclists burn rubber and scoot if the runners wound two of them or damage two of the bikes.

Magick Show: While the runners are driving through a section of the city where roadwork is going on, they are slowed to a crawl by heavy traffic jammed at a lane blocked by heavy equipment. A group of down-and-out runners hired to prey on their brethren strikes.

These runners consist of a Burned-Out Mage NPC, a Former Company Man, a Former Wage Mage (the Former Company Man's wife) and a Street Samurai. Their plan is to raise a Force Rating 5 Earth Elemental from the mass of clay and earth exposed by the "open trench" works and send the elemental to retrieve the box. The Former Wage Mage summons and controls the elemental from the rear (she's hiding behind a piece of earth-moving machinery). The Former Company Man stands guard over her. The Burned-Out Mage and the Street Samurai are positioned in cover (in the trench, behind other vehicles, whatever) to provide cover fire for the operation. The elemental is the group's big attack.

These are shadowrunners, not stupid, low-rent gangers. If the adventurers knock out the elemental, the runners break off their attack and retreat. They do the same if the adventurers wound or kill one of the runners.

Corporate Strike Team: It gets nasty here. One of Lofwyr's enemies has dispatched a strike team to recover the box, disguised as a gang. Of course, anyone watching the team members in action will soon figure out that they're no bunch of undisciplined gangers.

There are two teams of three Company Men NPCs. They are dressed in synthileathers, but wear armored vests with plates. They are armed with stun batons, Super Shock tasers, Ares Sliverguns and three-shot grenade launchers (full-sized), with one concussion grenade, one Neuro-Stun VIII gas grenade and one HEDP (6D4/3S2 vehicle damage). The attackers have had the proper injections to allow them to breathe Neuro-Stun VIII without effect.

The two teams are on opposite sides of the street, hiding in building doorways. They

announce their presence by shooting a concussion grenade in front of the adventurers' vehicle(s), hoping to make them crash. Then the teams shoot all their Neuro-Stun gas grenades to make a fog of stun gas in the area—anyone exposed to the gas has to take 652-Stun damage each combat turn while they are in the 20-meter-radius gas cloud. In addition, the gas smoke cuts visual range to six meters. Only people in sealed suits or vehicles are exempt from the gas effects.

If the concussion grenades don't stop the adventurers' vehicle(s) because of heavy armor or chance, the attackers fire two HEDP grenades at each vehicle (or at the first three, if there are more than three enclosed vehicles), aiming to stop the vehicles rather than destroy them.

Once the area is smoked, the attackers move out, trying to fight their way to the vehicles with their stun batons and tasers. They're deliberately trying to avoid killing people. The attackers retreat if over half their number are wounded or killed.

Mercenaries at Play: A squad of human and Ork mercs make a play for the reward money, doing it the proper way—with overwhelming firepower! There are three Ork mercenaries and two human mercs. The human mercs have a missile launcher loaded with three HEM missiles and one AVM missile (as well as another pair of AVM and a pair of HEM missiles for reloads). They set up an ambush at a T intersection, at the cap of the T. The plan is for the human mercs to use the missile launcher to stop the adventurers' vehicle(s) when they close to 100 meters range, then for one merc to use the HEM missiles while the other uses his Ingram LMG to lay down coverfire for the Orks moving forward to retrieve the box. These are professional soldiers, and they retreat when two of their number have been immobilized, trying to take their wounded with them if they can.

One-Two Punch: Two gangs hit one after another. In a congested part of town, the first gang sets up an impromptu roadblock of stolen cars—if the ad-

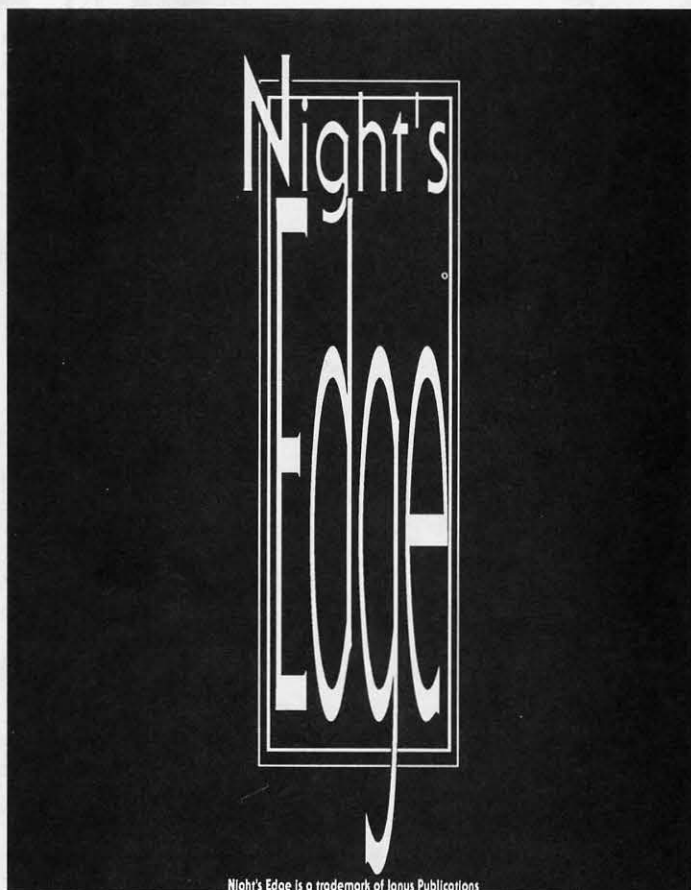
venturers want to go through it, they've got to bash their way through! The gang, consisting of 10 Gang Member NPCs and one Gang Boss, wait to mug the runners' vehicle(s) when they try to run the blockade or stop to move it.

The Gang Members are equipped like the NPC archetype, but they have clubs and improvised pole arms as well (the ones with the pole arms go for tires in order to stop the PCs' vehicles). The Gang Boss has an Enfield A57 shotgun. They flee if three of their number are seriously wounded or killed.

While the runners are engaged with fighting off the first gang, a second gang strikes! Led by their Street Shaman (a Rat shaman, a Deceiver, substituting invisibility for Entertainment), the gang of two Street Samurai sneak up to the adventurers' box-carrying vehicle from the rear, under a cloak of invisibility (two successes for each person, the two Street Samurai and the Street Shaman). They intend to steal the box while the adventurers are busy. If discovered, the Street Shaman backs off while the two Street Samurai stage a fighting withdrawal.

BACKUP

It might seem that the adventurers stand no chance, with so many attacks by foes ranging from the comical to the hyper-armed. Lofwyr did promise back-ups, though, and he meant it. A large force of unmarked



vehicles packed with nasty characters is following the runners around. These folks are experts, and hard to make since they're disguised. One car looks like a quartet of teenage boys out cruising; another looks like a businesspersons' carpool; a third is a pair of Elven girls out on the shopping prowl; yet another seems to be a delivery truck with Ork driver and assistant. There's even a quintet of classic bikers, complete with leathers and tattoos—yup, those are Lofwyr's people, too.

These people are all Company Men NPCs, expert special agents equipped with armor jackets and heavy weapons. Each team has a full-sized grenade launcher (see Corporate Strike Team, above) with plenty of offensive and HEDP grenades. The other team members are armed with H&K 227S SMGs and FN HAR rifles (half the team carries one kind of gun, the other half carries the other kind).

Each time the adventurers are stopped or attacked, the special reinforcements spring into action. The first response team arrives in two to six combat rounds (roll 2D3), with an additional team arriving each one to three rounds thereafter.

LOSING THE BOX

The adventurers might actually lose possession of the box! If they do, they have to go after it—otherwise, Lofwyr will take it out of their hides!

If any of the attackers grab the box from the adventurers, they'll try to take it back to their own territory. Most of the street gangs have turf nearby, hiding places where they can stash the box until they can unload the sucker for the reward (more than one reward, if they can pull off such a masterpiece of double-dealing). Alternatively, they may pile the box into a transport and make a run for it right there. The professionals will definitely have a transport vehicle waiting to take the box to a pay-off point.

This means that no matter what, the adventurers are going to have to trail their enemies, trying to get the box back. This can make for some fun foot or car chases, as well as some street-combing roleplaying if the attackers get such a lead on the adventurers that the PCs lose track of them.

The backup reinforcements will also be trailing the box. They have detectors that can pick up the homing signal the box is broadcasting, so they have no problem following the box. Lofwyr doesn't really care if someone else grabs the box and takes it to someone who wants it—that way, the dragon finds out who his enemies are. And he can rely on his own private forces to recover it for him.

Of course, this leaves the adventurers

hanging. If they don't recover the box, they've failed. Not only did they botch the job and have to pay back the 1000 nuyen advance fee, but Lofwyr will make sure they don't work in Seattle again! Their jobs will dry up; merchants won't want to deal with them; their friends and acquaintances will avoid them, and so on. Being blackballed by a dragon is a hard thing to shake.

(This way, Lofwyr not only punishes them for failure, but also sets them up for a highly dangerous "suicide" job he wants done in the future. They'll be so desperate, they'll be willing to grasp at any straw he gives them. But that's another adventure.)

AT THE END OF THE DAY

The last check-in call, at 1630 hours, directs the PCs to a nondescript warehouse on Occidental Avenue. They're supposed to drop off the box and collect the 14,000 nuyen apiece reward for a "cushy job." As soon as the box is unloaded, their cash is doled out by the same silent little man who's been their contact all along. After that, they're free to go and spend their new wealth on whatever they please (considering the day's activities, hospitalization might not be a bad idea).

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE?

Lofwyr lied. (*Never trust a dragon!*) He was telling a partial truth when he said he was trying to flush his opponents, since he leaked the news of the box all over the city. But he lied through his pointed fangs when he said there was nothing in the box. It contained chemicals he needed to get from a lab to a factory. The lab was practically under siege, and slipping the chemicals out would have been impossible, so he arranged for the stuff to be sealed in the box and taken out. Then he talked up the rumor that the box was a decoy to make sure his competition would not make a play for it, and he shipped it all over town in plain sight. ☹

Check It Out!

Call or write for your free pilot issue of the following GDW newsletters:

Command Post
for **Command Decision**

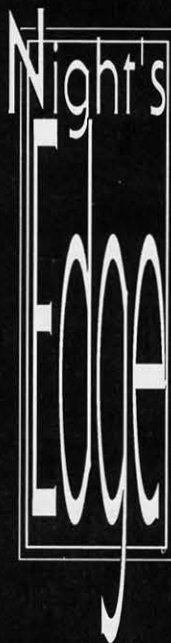
SitRep
for **Harpoon**

Ether Society
for **Space: 1889**

Eternal Soldier
for **Twilight: 2000** 2nd ed.

Imperiallines
for **MegaTraveller**

GDW
PO Box 1646
Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA
Phone: 1 (800) 383-3512

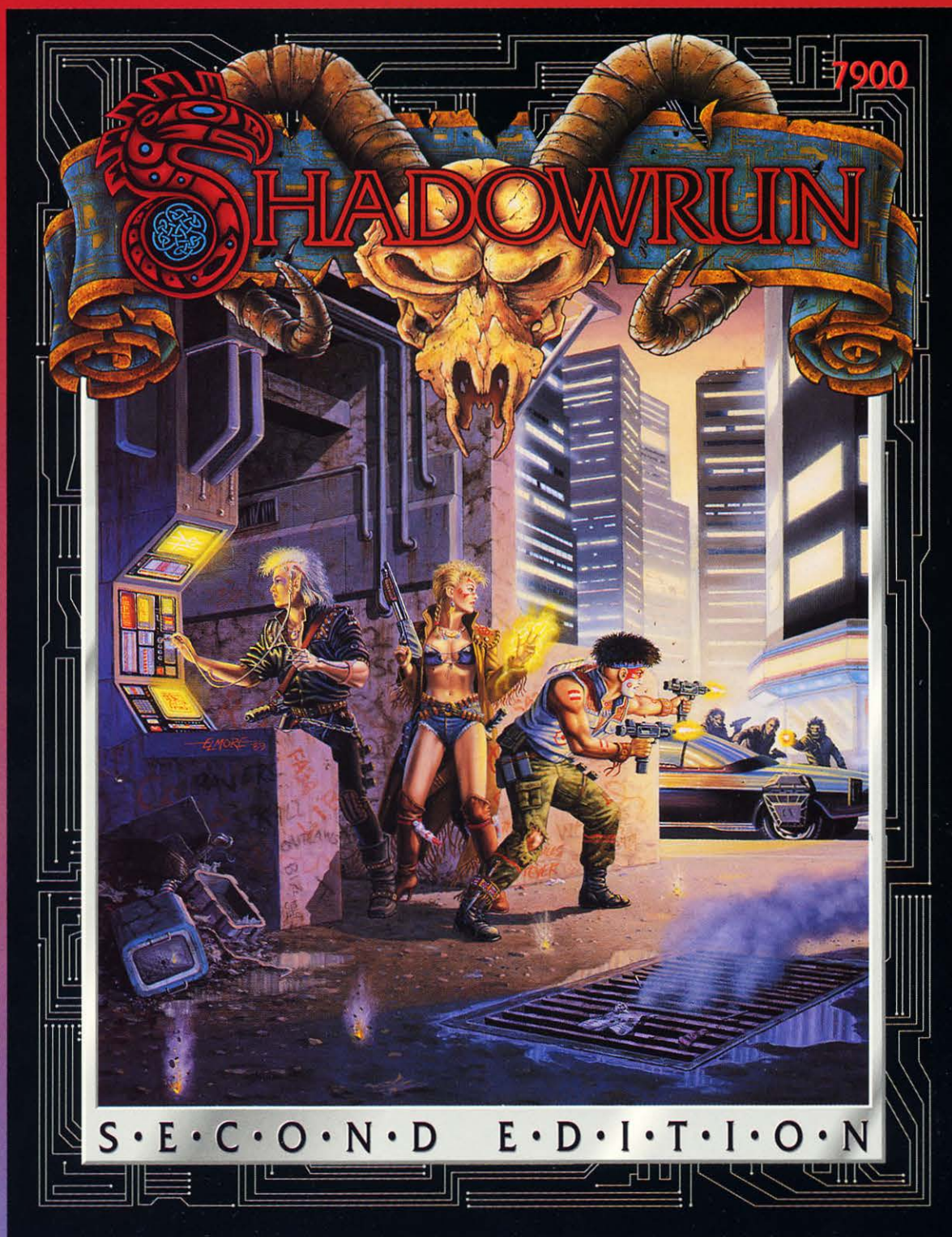


Something really dark for

CYBERPUNK

CyberPunk is a trademark of R. Talsorian Games. Used with permission. Night's Edge is a trademark of Ianus Publications

THE UNIVERSE JUST GOT DEADLIER!



★ Streamlined! ★ Updated!

ON SALE
THIS
SUMMER!

★ Expanded! ★ Compatible!

EXCLUSIVE UK DISTRIBUTORS—**chart** STATION ROAD • EAST PRESTON • LITTLEHAMPTON • WEST SUSSEX • BN16 3AG

SHADOWRUN Second Edition™ is a Trademark of FASA Corporation. Copyright © 1992 FASA Corporation. All Rights Reserved.

FASA
CORPORATION