Introduction

If you're reading this, you're a Shadowrun fan. You love the dice, the flavor, and have a special place in your heart for Cyberpunk. You also probably don't play Shadowrun as often as you play some other games. Let's face it--Shadowrun isn't the game you use for someone's first introduction to RPGs. There are a lot of rules, the world is complex, and the runs themselves range from an epic anime to a police procedural. Even the experienced players, while they love it, run into issues. Try explaining to someone that hasn't played since 3rd edition that, yes, most of your cybernetics can be hacked, because they connect wirelessly. To put it mildly, Shadowrun can be a handful.

If you're a die hard Shadowrun fan, and love the rules as they are in 4th Edition, this isn't for you.

If you're still reading, you're seeking a solution to the same problems we all have. You want things to go faster. You want it to be a little easier, so more people will play. You want to get around the basic formulas of Street Sam/Combat Mage/Hacker/other people. You're tired of watching everyone sit around as the magician and the hacker do all the research. Hopefully this will do the trick.

I've played Shadowrun since 1st Edition. It's grown and evolved a lot in the 20+ years it's been out, and a lot has improved. I've also played a lot of other games in that time, and I've learned a thing or two about simplification and what works for what group. This is my effort to share it around--the Shadowrun 4th Edition House Rules.

The House Rules are designed to give your group options while maintaining the flavor of Shadowrun. The House Rules exist in three tiers: Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced. Basic is just that--streamlined Shadowrun. Remember, though, that it's called Basic, not Easy--the Basic set has all the rules you need to play quick and dirty Shadowrun, leaving you the time to either get through a scenario quickly or to do more character development. Intermediate is just that--the middle ground. It layers on portions of the rules from the main book in a manner that adds more complexity but doesn't grind down play. Advanced is full tilt Shadowrun---everything from the book, plus suggestions on how you can enrich play even further.

As you read through, keep in mind the name of this guide--the House Rules. These rules are built to be adaptable, and were put together on some core tenants. First, **the rules should fit the troupe.** Shadowrun is considered inaccessible by many, which is

a shame. The best games are the ones that are easy to share. Second, **there should be options, not requirements.** Every edition of Shadowrun has worked to fix something broken in the game. The House Rules go further towards that goal. The Sixth World is full of color and possibility. It'd be a shame if you had to pass on those possibilities because someone has to be the Sammie and someone has to be the Magician. Finally, **it's all about the style.** Shadowrun came from cyberpunk roots, which has roots in film noir. Through all of these, the mood and feel is just as big a player as the plot and characters. The rules should never constrain the mood or feel--in fact, they should enhance it.

This leads to the final principle of the House Rules, which you've seen in many other core rulebooks: **it's your game.** This has to be carried to a higher degree with Shadowrun. 4th Edition, like all others before it, portray the rules in a specific and complex manner, in an attempt to encapsulate a complex world and reinforce a specific sort of play. It doesn't have to be that way. With these rules you can run a campaign focused on character and drama, a campaign that is the ultimate heist story, or a single session story of a quick and dirty Saturday night in Redmond. Whatever your flavor, you should be able to play it. **It's your game.**

Good hunting, chummer. Hope you find what you're looking for. Watch your back.

Brian Braddock

Matrix 4.0

The Matrix is second to none in Shadowrun for sheer complexity. Since the beginning players have been bogged down with the rules of the Matrix, and often would have to head off to the side with the GM to do anything involving their skills. 4th Edition attempts to remedy that problem with AR, wireless signal, and Technomancers. The idea is to get the Matrix character (Hacker or Technomancer) involved in the physical action, working on the same initiative, and not splitting from the group. It's a noble thought.

However, as we all have seen, this doesn't make the rules simpler. 4th Edition evokes new rules for electronic interface, breaking into wireless devices, interacting with AR, and all of this on top of the VR rules. This can add a lot of flavor and complexity, but in many cases it bogs down play. Most importantly, though, it loses a lot of the feel.

Remember where the idea of the Matrix came from? Stories of virtual reality, gliding through in your customized icon, using programs you tailor made that benefitted from your talent? The rush of taking out Black Ice and getting past security protocols? The feel and the style were critical in those days, and what kept a Matrix user alive was wit, skill, and sheer guts.

The Basic version of the House Rules seeks to bring that feel back to life. It's closer to a rewrite of 4th Edition Matrix rules than you'll find in any other section. These rules are built to put the emphasis on style and creativity, recapturing the console cowboy mentality of the Matrix users of old. They're also built in a manner to streamline the overall rules, so that someone that's played non-Matrix characters can make an easier transition into the Matrix rules.

Take a look, see what's in the toolbox. And welcome back to the Digital Frontier.
MATRIX RULES

BASIC:

Hackers vs. Technomancers. The introduction of the Technomancer in 4th Edition added a lot of flavor to the world that was in line with the metaplot of Shadowrun. However, their existence has been a source of debate. Are they better than Hackers? Worse? The core question: why play one or the other?

The idea behind the Technomancer is that they are a digital Magician, capable of working with programs naturally while Hackers have to use equipment. They spend Karma on their Complex Forms, they have a version of Initiation that lets them get better, and gives them special powers on top of what they already have. Hackers, on the other hand, can get Ware that boosts their abilities in the Matrix as well as outside. They can upgrade their decks and programs--if they have the nuyen. But performance-wise, which is better?

The answer is, they should be apples and oranges, not better or worse. Whether one is or not in 4th Edition standard rules is irrelevant to the Basic rules.

Here are some ways you can handle the issue.

1. BAN TECHNOMANCERS. If you're going for that old school cyberpunk feel, there's no real place for otaku, Technomancers, or any version of their ilk--at least as PCs. They're built to give a magical feel to the Matrix, and that's not what the Matrix is about. They're out of here.
2. BAN HACKERS. Times change, and in this case, for the better. The Hacker had his day, and while they may be good for a couple of things (fixing comms for Sammies), real Running work is best left to the next evolution--the Technomancer. No one in the Matrix can hold a candle to the Technomancer, so leave the hard work to someone with real mojo.
3. Six of one, a half dozen of the other: If you're going to allow both Technomancers and Hackers to exist in the same world, you have to balance them. They don't have to be carbon copies of each other (and in fact shouldn't), but they do need to be roughly equivalent in power. The end result should be that a player looks at the two options, understands quickly what the differences are, and picks the flavor they want.

HACKER VS. TECHNOMANCER: BASIC RULES

Assuming you're running both character types, here's how you can balance them in streamlined fashion in the Basic rules.

Guiding Principles:
Both character types should carry the console cowboy feel, which is emphasized in Basic Rules: Matrix Travel and Matrix Combat. The big difference should be feel (bootstrapping norm v. gifted mystic).

Practically, the hacker should get their advancement through spending money and Essence. That means Ware, programs, and a highly modified comm. The overall benefit of being a Hacker should be the range of options available through Ware and the creation of Daemons, tailor-made assistants in the Matrix. The boosts that a Hacker gets from Ware should be a little higher than boosts from a Technomancer's Echoes. Ware has an Essence limit, a Nuyen cost, and can have a chance of a bad side effect.

The Technomancer should get their advancement from spending Karma. What separates them from the Hacker are Sprites and Echoes. Whereas the Hacker has a specific, tailor made Daemon they can use, a Technomancer can summon a variety of Sprites, each with its own specialty. Their Echoes let them mimic some of the best effects of Ware, and give them special abilities in working with the Matrix.

In the end, each type should have a plethora of ways to customize within the type, and choice of type should be a matter of flavor. If you want to play a mystic type, whose abilities are coded in their bones, play a Technomancer. If you want to play more of a tech based punk, play a Hacker.

MATRIX TRAVEL:

One of the massive complexities of playing with the Matrix has been dealing with Matrix layout and travel within. Each edition has had an iteration, and it's almost always been confusing. 4th Edition has a feel that is very rooted in the real world, reflecting real world Internet architecture and protocol. While true to the tech, it's not true to the source--VR. It's a fantasy, after all.

If you want the full feel of Internet design, go Advanced and play with the full SR4 rules. Basic emphasizes the feel over the layers of rules, and streamlines it for both the player and the GM.

AR vs. VR:

This distinction is critical. VR and the Astral Plane have begun to mirror each other mechanically--there's plenty for the Magician or the Matrix User to do in the physical world, but they can travel to their special worlds to do more, at a cost of dropping out of the action. AR work should be fluid, and is dealt with in the Matrix Combat section.

VR work is different. Here we borrow a page from the Magician side of the table. Just assume the Matrix User can go. Any rules about node access, interface, etc. for non-

critical areas should simply be ignored. A starting level Matrix User, like any starting level character, is assumed to be a capable operative. Basics such as jumping from one public node to another should come naturally to the character, and shouldn't bog down game play. Same goes for basic actions. Don't make the player roll for a basic public search, a general look at the area, or any of that. If you can do it without effort on a laptop, the PC that makes its living doing amazing things with code 70 years in the future can, too.

Build systems like real world structures. At least, in principle. As GM, you should be describing the look and feel vibrantly. Part of the joy for the PC should be letting their anime angel or ork soldier fly through the digital air and stare at the glowing structures below them on the Seattle Network. But the Matrix was built to make computer work easier for everyone. That said, working through a Renraku mainframe should feel like working through actual hallways, rooms, etc. It's practically easier for the characters, since metahumans will interface most easily with something that looks like real life. It's also easier for you and the PC, since you're both using (for the most part) the same rules you use for physical combat. The look and feel are different, as well as the enemies and rewards, but the rules aren't.

Defend the structure using basic ideas. If an area is intended to be a challenge, but not a significant (or time consuming) one, give the area a Threshold rating, and force the player to either use a Program or make a Hacking roll. If they fail, they don't get in, and the level of Alert goes up. Let the PC have a certain number of failures before the Alert level goes up another notch, and have the appropriate actions happen. What those actions are is up to you. To keep it simple for the GM, pull from the Basic Programs list, invent your own, have ICE roll in, or have a security Hacker start hunting for the PC. It's up to you.

When it comes to the important areas, put the same level of effort into it that you would for a physical structure. Make the access point only accessible to a certain type of program, sleaze past a guard, whatever. Make the node interesting, not just in the defenses, but visually. You have a special advantage here--reality filters. The Matrix is built to mirror the real world for ease of use---for most people. When you want to keep something secure, you're not doing It for most people. Here you can play with the structure and reality of the node, and force the PC to use their creativity, Hacking skills, and program mojo to solve the riddle. This doesn't require special rules per se, it's just one of the added benefits of playing in the Matrix.

Jacking Out: Normally a Matrix User can just jack out of wherever they are. You can say that, in order to infiltrate certain sectors, they have to maintain connection, or if they jack out an immediate Trace and Report or Trace and Burn program will be launched. This is the joy of customizing programs. You don't have to make it complicated or make up a special rule (unless you want to).

MATRIX COMBAT

Matrix Combat should mirror physical combat. You shouldn't have to learn new rules for this, except which skills and attributes are substituted out.   The basic role for any Matrix combat should be Main Attribute + Hacking. If they have a program to use, that should work like a weapon, including additional effects. Defense and Dodge should work similarly. Armor should come from the strength of your Comm or Persona. Resistance traits should come from Attributes. Everything else should be programs, Ware/Echoes, or Daemons/Sprites. That, and of course, situational modifiers. Play it fast, play it hard.

DAEMONS VS. SPRITES

Daemons and Sprites should come from the same pool. The in-game reason can change in your game, but the basic idea presumed here is this: Daemons are programming creations from hackers. Sprites are mysterious digital creations from the Matrix. Both of these are similar to spirits. The big difference is this: daemons are tailor made, but a Hacker can have only one of them, and a hacker cannot change out a daemon during a run. What you have is what you have. A Technomancer can change out their Sprite, which has the benefit of both changing up the powers available to the Sprite as well as getting a fresh, undamaged Sprite. However, unlike a Hacker, the Technomancer does not get the benefit of having a Sprite available that has their favorite powers available at once.

NOTE: You can see the peril here. Daemons can be severely abused. Just remember the balance here: they cost the Hacker, they can be heavily damaged, and they have a limit on the powers they can use. You can take advantage of all these thing. The same goes for a Technomancer--while they whistle away one Sprite for the sake of another, that Sprite may not have all they need. Plus, depending on how you see the nature of Sprites, if they see one of their number abused, mangled, then released, and another one of them gets summoned, they may not want to go. Daemons don't argue.

DAEMONS:
Set a cost for them, relatively high--say, 5k per Rating Point. The Rating Point determines Attribute value as well as the number of powers it can carry. The designer can make Hacking rolls to shift points around, and when designed, can pick what

powers the Daemon gets. This should be from a standard list--anything out of the ordinary should require either something special (GM discretion), possibly even warranting a special mission. Once designed, it occupies a program slot on the comm. It takes damage like a Sprite, but cannot be repaired while on a mission--repair requires an extended Hacking roll or a specific program. A Daemon has no type. Daemons work like Sprites in terms of services: a Hacker must make a Compiling roll to determine how many services they can get out of it before the program requires reboot. Reboot requires another Compiling roll. Drain taken by the Hacker goes to the Persona. Daemons can be unruly.

SPRITES:
Sprites work like Sprites. See the rules. Summoning requires a Compiling roll, with Drain equaling twice the successes the Sprite got on the resist roll.
PROGRAMS

This is the flash and sizzle of any Matrix User. Programs are built to accompany a Hacking roll, with the Program's Rating limiting the number of hits a User can achieve. The Rating is also the Power of the effect.

Hackers can buy Programs at whatever rating they wish for Nuyen, and Technomancers for Karma. They can also design their own programs with extended Hacking rolls. The Threshold can be what you want it to be, depending on what effect is being sought. A good rule of thumb is that the time should be at least a day per Rating, one roll per 8 hour stretch, Threshold = whatever difficulty you think it should be, cumulative successes = 3x Rating. Making a program should be a big deal.

PROGRAMMING ON THE FLY
The Art of Hacking is what makes a User a User. Hacking should be the default for any strange situation. By this standard, Users should be able to hack together an impromptu program when they need it, but it's not the same as having a program. You can give a User a chance to create an impromptu Program. Make a Hacking roll, with penalties depending on whether they have a copy of the program, have seen the program in use, or are whipping something out of nothing. Successes = the effective rating of the program. This takes an action. The impromptu program lasts a number of rounds equal to their System Rating. There's a downside, however. Impromptu programs aren't as effective as full tilt programs. Not only is an impromptu program bound by the improvised rating, but impromptu programs take a -2 penalty on use. If this penalty is not enough, you can rule that Edge cannot be used on impromptu programs, or that glitches automatically become Critical Glitches.

Programming On The Fly can also be used for overdriving programs. Make a Hacking roll. For every two successes you get on the roll you can boost the temporary value of a program by 1 for one round. This is the only case where you can push a program past the Persona Rating. Soak with Persona Rating + Matrix Body, with the total to soak = 2x number of successes on the roll.   If the value of the modified program is below the value of your Matrix Persona, your Persona takes the damage. If it is above the Persona Rating, the damage comes back as lethal feedback on your deck and YOU take the damage in Stun.

DECK RATING/RESONANCE RATING = PERSONA RATING
This is one of the be-all, end-all standards of Users.   You Persona rating determines how powerful of a program you can run as well as the max power level of a Sprite/ Daemon compiled.   Your stats in the Matrix are your Mental stats, converted to Physical stats as per the Magic rules. HOWEVER, even with the help of Ware, Echoes, or Programs, the maximum value of an Attribute is capped (in the Matrix) to your Persona rating. In addition, your Persona rating acts as the basis of your Armor and your Wound Boxes. Your Armor = your Persona rating (added to your Matrix Body for soak) and your Wound Boxes = 2x Persona Rating.

ECHOES
Most Echoes reflect the nature of the Technomancer's connection to the Matrix. However, the nature of the Technomancer can also be turned inward to attune to Cyberware and Nanoware (not Bioware). As a Technomancer Submerges, they get two benefits: they raise the maximum value of their Resonance (point paid for separately) and they get an Echo. Instead of choosing an Echo, the Technomancer can choose to attune their Essence to accept Cyberware and Nanoware. Every time the Technomancer selects this option, they can attune one point of Essence to accept these two forms of ware. They can mix and match as usual, but if the total Essence expenditure exceeds the attuned Essence, they still lose Resonance as usual.   This rule exists to allow Technomancers to cross over a little into the Hacker's world, and to give them an option to spend money on their character instead of constantly searching for means to obtain Karma.

Everything Else

With the Matrix out of the way, this section will focus on covering the bases on everything else.   Remember, the Basic rules are there to keep things simple, make play go quickly, and maintain the feel. As you advance in the level, you advance in the complexity, until you're back where you started. However, with the rest of these rules, you may not see much difference.

As always, mix and match as you see fit.   You may use Basic for the Matrix, Advanced for Magic, etc. Whatever works for you. **It's your game.**

MAGIC 4.0

The Magic system in 4.0 represents the most refined version of the Magic rules, already very unique to Shadowrun. Not an immense amount has changed in the mechanics between 3rd and 4th, except the use of Spirits by all types of Magicians. That said, there's not a lot to "fix". The rules below separate the Magic rules into levels of simplicity that can get players of Magician characters up and running quickly. NOTE: This section does not address Adepts. That system is pretty basic already, and isn't really broken. You know what they say when it ain't broke…

BASIC
ASTRAL COMBAT: Astral Combat is discarded as a skill in the Basic rules. Magicians are already a Karma suck, which can be a check on their advancement, but puts pressure on any Cash To Karma system you may have in place. To take the pressure off, remove this skill. Even though Astral Combat exists on a different level, it can still be represented by the experience of the Magician in Astral Space and whatever martial skill they've chosen to learn. This fits well with the idea of Elves learning Carromoleg as a martial skill, and also works with using Weapon Foci.

ASSENSING: Eliminated as a separate skill. Have the Magic User make Perception roles instead, taking a special action to Assense. Same reasons as above.

FORCE CODES: While there are unique rules that players have to learn up front with Magic, one of the big rules that *keeps* them running back is Force Codes. While there is a logic to what spells have what codes, it keeps the player running back to look them up. If you want to keep things running smoothly, use this rule of thumb to keep Force Drain Codes simple:

DRAIN = FORCE /2 + GM MODIFIER.

This serves two purposes. First off, this keeps the understanding of the power of the spells simple and level between player and GM. Is it a basic spell, one frequently used that doesn't level the playing field? Keep it as is. If it is a more powerful spell, one that has more serious impact, raise the Drain by 1. If it's a big impact spell, like an area effect combat spell or a powerful Detection spell, like Mind Probe, raise the Drain by 2 instead. If, somehow, the player has obtained an epically powerful spell, raise the drain by 3. It will help the player learn the value of their spells and keep the power levels in check. You, as the GM, have to be consistent. The other option this rule allows is the idea of mana spikes and ebbs. If you want to give an environmental bonus or penalty to casting, add to or subtract from the Drain value.

COMBAT 4.0

The combat system is relatively sound, but addressing a couple of things can speed up play significantly.

BASIC
INITIATIVE: Instead of rolling your Initiative Rating and adding the hits to your Initiative Rating, just roll a d6. Add what you get to your Initiative Rating. This gives more credit to those with enhanced Initiative, while not radically overbalancing the game.

ARMOR (SPECIAL OPTION): If you want to run a quick and dirty game where combat is lethal, enact one (or both) of these rules: First, halve the value of armor. Nothing says injury like less soak. Second, don't convert damage to Stun if the damage is less than the armor rating.

MODIFIERS: Aside from learning what actions can be done when, the other source of players putting nose in book is combat modifiers. Shadowrun presents a plethora of modifiers to keep the action interesting and the physics lively. If you are running a Basic game, however, it's faster to simply dismiss them. Give bonuses or penalties within the range of 1 to 5, and let them stack as needed. The sources can come from all kinds of circumstances--light, weather, obstacles, you name it. By stepping away from the list, you not only eliminate the concern for the player, but you give yourself more options to modify a combat. Want to make things more interesting? Add in some rain. Want to make it *really* interesting? Add in chemically-modified rain from a helicopter above. It'll

be even more of a surprise, and by not going strictly from the book, there's less room for rules lawyering.   That said, the modifiers in a situation should not get above a +5, nor should it go below a -5.   If you are dealing with a more epic game, feel free to ignore that cap.

RIGGING 4.0

Rigging in 4.0 isn't spelled out clearly. To make things simple, see below:

BASIC
VEHICLE CONTROL RIG: If you don't have a rig, but you are attempting to pilot a vehicle via VR, use your Matrix Reaction + (Vehicle piloting skill) to drive, using the Pilot program to substitute for the appropriate skill if you're missing it. Take the usual +2 dice for Hot Sim in this situation. HOWEVER, users without a Vehicle Control Rig have their Matrix Reaction limited by the rating of the vehicle's Pilot program. The process just has too many bottlenecks, and even a VR pilot has their limits. If you are a Rigger, however, this rule does not apply--your full Matrix Reaction can be used. In fact, if the user's stats are greater than the vehicle's programs in any circumstance, the Rigger's stats take over. Moreover, a Rigger can dodge using a vehicle. Take the bonus for Hot Sim and whatever bonus may be conferred from the Rig.