

DATA TRAILS

Sample file

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INTRODUCTION

Lots of classic adventure stories talk about fantastic realms, weird kingdoms full of wonders and hidden dangers, where one of the prime risks of being entranced by the sights around you is that you'll be too distracted to notice the death about to lunge out of the shadows.

One of the great things about the Sixth World is that everyone carries around such a realm right in their pocket.

The Matrix is the vast, wild, and wooly frontier, an infinite land of secrets, oddities, and sensations that will make you forget that none of it is physically real. This being the Sixth World, it is also full of things that can kill you.

The great attraction of the Matrix, of course, is that every great secret in the world has been on it at some point. Most, if not all of those secrets are still there, buried deep in the vast anomaly known as the Resonance realms. The power and the information the Matrix contains makes it attractive to shadowrunners, who are always willing to risk a little brain fry if it means obtaining a small piece of power and a few nuyen to help them live unfettered for one more day.

Data Trails offers expanded information and rules for using the Matrix in *Shadowrun*, providing new options for existing characters, new ways to create Matrix-based characters, and a whole lot of information and tools to make the Matrix-based parts of your games even more entertaining. Specifically, here's what you'll find:

The World in Your Pocket provides an overview of how the Matrix is used in the current *Shadowrun* setting and information on how different groups of people are responding to the new design.

True Hackers, Lusers, and Dirtballs is a glimpse into hacker culture—what motivates them, how they deal with

each other, the different ways they can help on a Shadowrun, and some of the organizations and tribes that bring them together.

On the Bleeding Edge offers new qualities for characters with a Matrix emphasis.

Born to Hack presents decker- and technomancer-based life modules for use with the Life Module Character Creation system outlined in *Run Faster*.

Killer Apps and Razor Forms presents new programs and complex forms for the denizens of the Matrix.

The Guts of the Matrix offers new gear, including new cyberdecks and ways to customize your commlink.

The All-Seeing GOD contains a briefing on the hard-hitting security forces of the new Matrix, with outlines of some of the differences between security at various megacorporations and sample security NPCs.

The Perfect Host offers more details on the immersive world of hosts in the Matrix, with detailed examples of several host archetypes.

Deeper and Deeper sets up deep Matrix runs for players, giving them the chance to bring the whole team into untamed areas where they can pit their wits against feral data.

Principles of Insanity covers the bizarre fringes of the Matrix—artificial intelligences, e-ghosts, dissonant technomancers, and more. It also discusses using AIs as player characters.

Mastering the Matrix offers advice on different ways to integrate Matrix work into *Shadowrun* campaigns, along with plot hooks to get you going.

Nothing could ever cover everything there is to know about the Matrix, but with the essentials in this book, you'll be ready for some of the wildest, strangest campaigns the Sixth World has to offer.

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GOD SPEAKS

Lurker's heart pounded. He crouched within a clasp of kelp on the bottom of the ocean floor and yanked with trembling fingers on the chain that locked him into the host. He knew the intrusion countermeasures were nearby, but he couldn't see them. The pressure gauge on his wetsuit pointed toward the red, indicating Grid Overwatch Division knew his location. He should have been kicked out of the host, bleeding from biofeedback damage. He should have been dueling IC to the death. Instead he was hiding. Anchored to the bottom of the ocean, crushed by his phobia of being underwater. This had been a straightforward job. What the frag had gone sideways?

✕

The meat-world view of the inside of a van shrank away and blinked out at the same time the crisp, clean, vibrant lines of virtual reality shot forward to encompass the hackers. The host, a massive yacht, drifted on unseen waves before them. The stamp on the hull displayed the logo of the corp whose exploration division would soon be missing one file, provided all went well.

The rigger, serving as mastermind for the evening, patched the two hackers and the rest of the team into a tac-

tical network. Numbers flared and faded out in their shared view: "3, 2, 1, Go!"

With a flick of his wrist, the elf threw a pair of red marks that looked like a rubber-stamp of the word "Approved" on the host and slipped in. Once inside, he gasped; his persona, along with everything else here, floated. *Some drekhead built this place with an underwater theme.* He scowled as he surveyed the surroundings and took deep breaths, trying to calm his increasing panic. The already deep lines on his face creased more, and he ran a hand through his pale hair in aggravation.

Next to him, a young human slipped into the host and nodded to himself. A scuba wetsuit zipped up from his feet to his head, corralling his mop of shaggy dark red hair. His perpetual grin disappeared behind a snorkel and regulator.

"Hey, suit up before someone sees you," the young man said to the elf.

The elf started. "Right," he said, and a replacement icon in scuba gear folded over his persona as if swiped over him by an invisible hand. "Sorry," he muttered. *Underwater*, he thought to himself. *Why did it have to be underwater?*

Water—or the digital appearance of water—was everywhere. Colorful schools of fish darted past drone submersibles, snorkelers swam slowly by, and a cluster of nattering





BY CZ WRIGHT

merfolk passed through an arch of coral with the words "Archangel's Cathedral" spelled out in bright neon. Lights and music pouring out of the arch identified it as the local social media hangout. Past the din, wide disks of beige coral covered an expanse of sea floor, and giant fronds of kelp stretched up out of sight.

"Come on," the elf said. "Let's find the cameras."

The two swam forward into the green water. The younger one said, "You know, I hate to say it, but—"

"Then don't say it," the elf snapped. "You might call yourself 'Kid,' but you don't have to act like one."

"What I was saying," the Kid said, unconcerned, "is that this seems pretty straightforward. Clear the team in meatspace: cameras, locks, alarms. The team gets in by the servers and plugs in a tap. We jump in, grab the paydata, and we all get the hell out of here. Okay, we're talking about AA-corporation's property here, but it's pretty straightforward."

The elf scowled and called up his agent program. A thinner duplicate of the decker, nearly skeletal in his fine suit, dark glasses, and trench coat, gathered into focus from the surrounding data.

Agent Birdwatcher said, "What may I do for you, Lurker?" The elf winced at the name.

"Hey, I've heard of you!" the Kid said.

"Keep me apprised on the communications coming in and out of Security," Lurker said. "Notify me if there's trouble."

The agent gave a curt nod and disappeared. Lurker spared the Kid a glance. "It's not by choice. That's the problem with names. People remember them." He spotted a submarine nearby and nodded toward it. "Let's go."

"Nothing wrong with people remembering who you are," the Kid said with a grin.

Lurker shook his head. "You're a hell of a lot safer if no one can find you."

"Suit yourself," the Kid said. "I think it's better if they know what's coming. Maybe it'll make them think twice before messing with you."

They swam toward the submarine, and Lurker checked his gear. The dial on his pressure gauge indicated their slowly rising overwatch score. If the dial reached the red, the Grid Overwatch Division, or GOD, would bring the hammer down, ejecting them from the Matrix. Law enforcement would pick up their dumpshock-addled meat bodies moments later. The watch on his wrist showed the real time their team would follow in meat space. This *was* a straightforward job, though thinking as much rankled him.



The submarine, where they would find all the door and camera controls, was the first target. They spotted some patrol IC in the form of anglerfish, hideous with their giant lower jaw, spines, and rows of long teeth. Instead of bioluminescence glowing off the dorsal spine that hung in front of their faces, a searchlight shone slowly back and forth. The fish drifted past, taking no notice of a couple of personas running silent. The men boarded the submarine.

They sat in the seats at the control console. Lurker pulled up the feed from the cameras with the team in meat space. The Kid waved his hand across a control panel, and the map of the facility glowed into view, complete with icons representing the team members' positions, cameras, locked doors, and anticipated security routes. Lurker set his hand down on the map display and pulled it free like a sheet of film. He threw it forward into the air and it clung to space, visible to them both.

Rooster, the team's covert ops specialist, was on point. His icon crept down the hallway. The Kid stuck his finger into a view screen and made a spinning motion. The image swirled like a tiny tornado, clinging to his finger as he pulled it away. It stretched out a few centimeters and then snapped back from his hand onto the screen, settling into a two-minute loop of empty hallway. Rooster led the team past, unseen and unrecorded.

Lurker turned a key a quarter-turn to the left, and the accompanying maglock on the door ahead of the team shone green.

"Hold," Lurker sent over the network. A guard meandered into camera view on the other side of the door. His head swung back and forth in a cursory scan, and he exited the room. "Go," Lurker said.

The last runner's boot disappeared inside the room, and the door closed with a soft "shush" just as the guard rounded the corner and wandered into the hall. The Kid snapped his fingers over the view screen and it returned to normal recording. They watched the guard stroll past on the feed.

For minutes they leapfrogged looping cameras, unlocking doors, and keeping automatic alarms silent as the team moved deeper into the facility. Two of them working in the Matrix made the job go much faster.

"We're getting a little warm," Lurker said, showing the Kid their overwatch score displayed on the dial of the pressure gauge.

"I got it covered," the Kid said. He stared at the gauge for a moment and the dial moved backward, easing the heat.

"Good work," the elf said. They watched the team approach a pair of heavy doors. "Last one," he murmured. Three stamps of approval, and the door lock was his. The lock shone the green light of entry, and the team disappeared into the server room. There was nothing to do but wait for the team to connect the dataline tap to the proper server.

They exited the submarine and hid in a nearby cluster of coral. A figure in scuba gear swam their direction.

"Spider," Lurker whispered, pointing out the figure.

The figure switched on a flashlight, and several anglerfish joined him as he scanned the submarine. Beams of light

passed in and out of the portholes and past the coral where the hackers sat motionless. After a few moments the flashlight beam switched off, and the security spider swam away into the dark. The anglerfish drifted off aimlessly.

Lurker let out a breath. His eyes swept the area and noticed a new feature. A massive trench had appeared in the sea floor. A huge cloud of bubbles rose out of it, and he found himself beginning to hyperventilate. He took advantage of the distraction to still his breathing. *Pull it together!*

Jagged, broken masts rose from the trench, followed by the ruined shell of an immense eighteenth-century man-of-war. The shipwreck shouldn't have held together for all its damage, but there it was, looming before them.

"There's the archive. That's where we'll find our payday," the Kid said. Together they swam into the wreck.

Thin shafts of grainy light warbled through the holes in the structure, providing the thinnest of illumination, but when they found the target it was as visible as if hit with a spotlight. A wooden chest bound in shining metal gleamed at the base of a short ladder in the belly of the vessel. Lurker pulled a set of long picks out of a wrap attached to his belt and started work on the lock.

Agent Birdwatcher materialized. "Chatter indicates Security is aware of your presence," it said.

"File!" Lurker said. The top of the chest swung open, revealing a fat paper file bound with a chunky lock. A muffled "thunk" sound spun them around in time to see a creature—with the head and front legs of a lion and the body of a large fish—flail back from the recoil of a blunderbuss roughly as large as it was. A bola of anchors and chains spun past Lurker's head, and he dove for cover.

"Crack that file!" Lurker ordered Agent Birdwatcher. Lurker's arm waved in a downward sweep toward the sea lion. Two cannonballs catapulted out of nowhere toward the creature; one connected, momentarily smashing its tail but otherwise doing no damage.

"Get him, Spike!" the Kid shouted, and a dog materialized in mid-leap at a wave of his hand. The beagle, which appeared to have abnormally large teeth, dove at the sea lion and took a large chunk out of its side.

The creature fired again, narrowly missing Lurker. With a grunt, the elf leapt up and brandished a short sword glistering with blue binary code. Lurker landed, and the sword sunk into the sea lion's back. It exploded into data streams that quickly dissolved into the surrounding water.

A fleshy tentacle smacked into and around Agent Birdwatcher's neck. Lurker swore and shut down the agent program. He typically wasn't seen and was unaccustomed to fending off intrusion countermeasures; he didn't need to defend his deck on two fronts. Birdwatcher faded into nothingness, and Lurker found and removed the marks the attack left.

The Kid's hand made a twisting motion toward the approaching creature, a dark green humanoid with black eyes and tentacles covering the space where its nose and mouth should have been. It twisted like a sponge being wrung-out, and when it returned to normal, its formerly beefy body

