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Shadowrun Fifth Edition

Synopsis

"Created by Jordan Weisman ... [et al.]"--Colophon.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Shadowrun 3rd edition was the last RPG I played before taking a break from the hobby for about a decade. I've now bought the SR5 core book and played a couple of sessions. My initial, cursory impressions:As always, the Shadowrun setting is one of my favorites: a combination of cyberpunk and magic. If you're looking for Neuromancer meets Necromancer, Shadowrun is the standard. And as always, the wide variety of gear, weapons, and avenues for character improvement - cyberware, bioware, spells, foci, super-cool guns, etc. - is great. (Of course, this is also the reason SR has always appealed to powergamers, but that's another story.)In physical terms, the core book is well put together: massive, with good artwork, slick glossy pages, fold-out art, and story insertions to provide local color. It tends to "sprawl" here and there, with information on a single topic appearing in several different areas. This is a classic element of SR sourcebook organization, so it's no surprise that it's still around, if a little toned down. However, there are too many errors. Not errata, rules that need to be changed; errors, things that should have been caught in proofreading. (Like a citation for the cost of fake IDs directing the reader to page 367 when it should be page 443.) As a former copy editor, I know that manuals are much harder to proofread than, say, novels or articles; but for that reason, good proofing is much more important, because there's less context to guide the reader. (And citation proofing is especially important in as discursive a rulebook as this.)Shadowrun's game mechanics have always been famously (or notoriously) complex. That's both more and less true in SR5. On the positive side, the rules for deckers/Matrix play have been

dramatically simplified and made more playable since SR3 (as far as I can tell - I couldn't even read the SR3 Matrix rules without falling asleep). Now deckers can "brick" weapons and be much more of an on-site presence than they used to be. My GM didn't even have to run a decker as an NPC - one of the players chose to be a decker. (Old SR hands know how rare that used to be.) On the negative side, combat rules involve a lot of unnecessary rolls that could be unified into a single test, simplifying game play and speeding up the resolution of big combat scenes.Also, the "Edge" attribute, meant to represent a character's luck, "hot hand," "on the ball" quality, is too powerful. Using the "blitz" option for Edge during combat, our decker got to react even before our weapons specialist, who has level-2 synaptic boosters. (For those new to SR, this would be like the Matthew Broderick kid from WarGames getting into a shootout with Wild Bill Hickok, shooting first, and winning.) If you're playing a campaign where there's one or two combats a session, that drastically weakens the biggest advantage of any 'wared combat type.Another, more minor, quibble is with Ares weapons. In SR3, guns manufactured by Ares Macrotechnology were sort of the white bread of weapons: widely accessible, widely used, but neither the best nor the worst bang you could get for your buck. You knew that you wouldn't make a terrible choice if you bough an Ares Predator Heavy Pistol (for instance) but there were more interesting, dangerous, and/or limited options out there. Ares was the default. In the current rules, Ares isn't the default - it's simply the best option. The Predator is better than its nearest rival, the Browning Ultra-Power; the Ares Alpha assault rifle is better than any other except the Yamaha Raiden, which isn't available to new players (and it has a grenade launcher the Raiden doesn't); Ares even makes the best light and machine pistols. Maybe future supplements will restore the gun balance.It would also have been nice if the (admittedly good) concept art pullouts had included maps of the Seattle metroplex and North America, to orient new players.The final, most subtle, and most difficult issue is the Shadowrun universe. Back in SR3 days, there were half a dozen interesting, hinted-at conspiracies: What was going on in Tir na nOg (formerly Ireland)? What's the deal with dragons and elves? This dragon has become president! Now he's assassinated! What happens next? But you can't run a game universe for more than a decade and still keep it in roughly the same place. All of these mysteries had world-spanning scope and consequence - but if they were to be fully played out, it would mean massive, unpredictable changes in adventure settings and scenarios. The (completely understandable) result has been a game world with lots and lots of huge, important events in its timeline...but that has somehow stayed essentially unchanged (with the exception of ghouls and wireless technology).So...there it is. Shadowrun is worth playing, and the SR5 core book will become even more useful as the errata and sourcebooks on things like adept powers and new weapons emerge. For people happy with an

earlier edition of SR, I'd say wait a little bit until SR5 is more fully supported; for those thinking of playing for the first time, I'd say it's a good game, a lot of fun, but be sure your group can commit to the game mechanics of this complex system.**************************ETA: I've now had some time to review and use the current edition of the rulebook, and I have to remove *at least* one star from my review. Here's why:1. The organization of the manual is actually more scattered and user-unfriendly than I thought at first. It's not uncommon to have to jump to three different locations in the manual to find all the information you need on a particular subject. On the same lines, the citations and the index have more mistakes than I thought at first. Add this to the difficulty of the rule system, and you can have new players hold up the action for ten or fifteen minutes, looking for the info they need. (My GM, who has been playing Shadowrun since at least the Second Edition, believes that the quality has diminished since the FASA team left active development of SR.)2. Although the manual is physically impressive - as I mentioned above - it's also very heavy, making it hard to use easily and carry to and from games. It's also unacceptably fragile: I actually saw a couple of pages come loose from the binding in my GM's hand. This is really shoddy for a newly printed book.With all of this in mind, here's my current, REVISED recommendation:SR5's setting and character options are still terrific; we just finished a fun session. If you decide to play the game, don't get the expensive, real-world book; buy the e-book (when available), which won't fall apart on you and makes finding the right information much easier. (Search Function, anyone?) Also, if you're going to be old school and use real dice (my personal choice) instead of an electronic dice simulator, get a block of 12mm (NOT 16mm) dice with rounded edges. You roll a lot of six-sided dice in SR, and this is a necessity. And finally, raise your voices - for a better organized, better produced, better proofread manual. Let Catalyst know that shoddy is NOT acceptable.SECOND ETA:I've also found that the prose can be confusing, leading to legalistic debates - for instance, using game terms without defining them.And, for those folks reading reviews, I have a suggestion: Ignore those reviews written within a week of receiving the book. Only trust the reviews that were written after a few weeks or months of game play. Why? Because initially, the book looks very good; it takes a few weeks for the flaws - poor binding, poor organization, poor prose - to become obvious.THE LAST ETA [I HOPE!]:I'm adding this final edit to describe something that happened during game play yesterday; I'm doing it because something comparable will probably happen to you if you play Fifth Edition.Midway through the game, I discovered that I would have to use something called a "physical limit" during some activities that didn't involve gun combat (my character's strong suit). Physical limits are the maximum number of hits your character can roll for some physical tasks. So these limits are clearly pretty important. Fair enough; I looked up the "Limits" section to find out how to derive my physical

limit from my character's physical attributes.It wasn't there.So I went where the Limits section told me to go - page 51, the "Attributes" section. It wasn't there, either. So I went to the index to look up every place in the book that uses the word "limits" - no joy.THIRTY minutes of leafing through the sourcebook later, and in the middle of the game, I finally find out how to derive physical limits. It's in a single table in a subsection of the Character Generation chapter entitled "Final Calculations." I found it through sheer luck. There were only 3 players in the game who knew its location before I did: one is a lawyer; one is the game master; and one is a guy who's read the manual cover to cover at least three times. There was no obvious, easy way to find this very important rule. The same thing happened, during the same game session, with the rules regarding armor and spirits - a very important armor rule was hidden in the "Materialization" section of Critter Powers.Sorry, guys at Catalyst Games - this isn't acceptable. Better editing. Better proofreading. Better organization. Better production values. Simpler game mechanics. More thought to world improvement. If these issues aren't addressed, I'll vote that we turn back to Third Edition, not forward to Sixth, if our group moves on from SR5.

*NOTE: The pictures attached are after getting it rebound at FedexKinko's as it arrived with the binding falling apart (both times).The Good:I love the ShadowRun Universe for its rich cyberpunk lore and background. The game itself is solid and while the 5th ed rule book might scare you away at 400+ pages i recommend you still get it if you also are interested in ShadowrRun or are looking for an alternative to fantasy worlds and want something nitty, gritty, and constantly beating down on you ShadowRun is for you. The book is filled with flavor, foldouts, and examples (some are suboptimal if you love min/max your character). It's definitely meant to be a 2nd ShadowRun book as the starter i think is perfect for new players and is great for when you want to graduate.The Bad:The reason why this didn't get 5 stars is two fold. The first is that the binding is garbage on the book. My first book arrived with the binding already falling out and the pages warped because of it. I returned for a 2nd book that arrived with the binding falling out as well. I figured i'd bothered 's Customer Service enough about it so i kept the second book and went to Fedex Kinko's and had them spiral bind it for me. Cost me bucks and some change but i HIGHLY recommend you do this to any players handbook if the binding starts to give. It'll allow you to keep the pages together and leave it opened to any page. The loss of the hardcover after being rebound is lamentable but i rather have functionality over a pretty cover and pages falling out.The other reason why i deducted a star is because the book is a bit confusing at times. Some of the rules were a bit unclear when first introduced. As other reviewers mentioned the rule on limits isn't where you would think it would be.

Also the index is abysmal for when you really need to find a rule that is less than obvious or common. For things you already know it's great, not that it helps that much.Conclusion:Great world, terrible binding, manual needs to be better organized or a new editor. If you buy one from or another retailer the binding will give eventually. This isn't 's fault as the books binding is cheap and unable to deal with the 400+ heavy glossy pages. Go to a local fedex kinko's and get the thing spiral bound to save it and to get extra functionality. I do this with most my tabletop manuals, eventually.

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