Shadows Over Sol

System Hacks

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Shadows Over Sol is a game that has been optimized and streamlined for its particular setting, genre and tone. It does science fiction horror and does it well, but a bit of work may be required to adapt it to other universes or to give it a more heroic tone.

At the same time, the base system—***Saga Machine***—is an incredibly flexible roleplaying engine, and one which has already been adapted to several other tones and genres. Just check out ***Age of Ambition***, ***Dime Adventures*** or ***Against the Dark Yogi***! No seriously, if you haven't already taken a look at them, go buy a copy of each of them now!

This document is designed to help you adapt ***Shadows Over Sol*** to other settings, genres or tones of science fiction. Depending on the character options available, some work may still be required on your part, but we hope that these system hacks help get you most of the way there.

Character Hacks

Shadows Over Sol's character creation system is designed to emulate the tropes of of science fiction horror. Gear purchases are restricted and characters are tied to the setting through their geneline and subculture. The hacks below are intended to help the GM adapt the character creation system to other settings or to emulate other tones of science fiction.

Removing Geneline and Subculture

Geneline and subculture are the most obvious traits tying characters created in ***Shadows Over Sol*** to the particular game world described in the core rulebook, and one of the easiest ways to adapt the game to other settings is to remove them entirely.

To do this, use the stat and skill arrays presented below. These arrays work just like the ones presented in the core rulebook, except that their numbers are higher to account for the bonus experiences normally provided by geneline and subculture.

Assign one value to each of your character's stats: Strength, Dexterity, Speed, Endurance, Intelligence, Perception, Charisma and Determination. The array is as follows:

[7, 6, 6, 5, 5, 4, 4, 3]

Next, take the array of values below and assign each of these to the skills in which the character has training:

[3, 3, 3, 3, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1]

Finally, skip the Pick Geneline and Pick Subculture steps entirely.

At the GM's option, players may be allowed to decrease their Edge by one to gain an additional 10 experiences with which may increase their stats and skills.

Unusual Abilities

Characters with unusual learned or innate abilities are common in some subgenres of science fiction—from aliens with outlandish biological capabilities, to androids or other artificial lifeforms with their own host of computational aptitudes.

Below is a quick and dirty method for handling these sort of player characters. Other alternative ways of modeling unusual abilities and non-human characters are explored further in the *Beyond Human* supplement.

Ability Traits

The first thing to do when modeling an unusual ability is to consider how it might impact game play. For example, the ability to touch a restrained character and read her surface thoughts might have a substantial impact on interrogations. Conversely, having a natural lifespan that lasts centuries might give a character a sense of superiority, but otherwise is likely has little impact from session to session.

The next thing to do is to write up the ability in the form of a trait. Look at the *Shadows Over Sol* core rulebook's Non-Player Characters chapter for examples. A well written trait focuses on how the ability is likely to be used in play and its direct mechanical effects. It leaves the edge cases to common sense and GM discretion.

Ideally, a particular species or similar character type shouldn't have more than one to three special ability traits. This keeps playing the character manageable.

Edge Modifiers

If an unusual ability offers a major advantage or otherwise has a substantial impact on game play, the GM might consider lowering the character's Edge by one as the "cost" of taking the ability. This helps promote a sense of game balance. For example, the aforementioned ability to read surface thoughts is likely useful enough to cost an Edge.

Admittedly, this is more of an art than a science, and the GM should take whatever time she needs to think about the ramifications of any abilities that are available to player characters. Does the particular ability have about the same utility as one Edge? If the ability in question would need to reduce a character's Edge by two or more to feel balanced, think twice about offering it to player characters; the ability is likely more trouble than it's worth.

Stat Requirements

In many science fiction settings, individual species often are often known for their particular aptitude, or lack thereof, in specific stats. For example, there may be a "warrior alien" species that is unusually strong or a "cold and logical" species that is unusually smart.

A player character who is a member of one of these types may be required to put the highest number in her stat array in a particular stat to represent her species' natural aptitude. Conversely, for a character who is a member of a species with a well known weakness, she may be required to put the lowest number in her stat array in a particular stat.

Example: Chrix'ar is a member of the aforementioned "warrior alien" species. His people are known for their great strength and ferocity. When creating the character, his player is required to put the "7" in the stat array in either Strength or Determination. (This example assumes that the "No Geneline" stat array on the previous page is being used.)

Non-Abstract Wealth

Some groups may prefer to track the exact amount of money each character possesses rather than use abstract Wealth, Cost and Income ratings. This is easy enough to accommodate by simply translating each abstract rating into a concrete monetary value.

Use the table below. All monetary values are given in Unitech microcredits (umc), but if adapting the game to a different universe, use what terminology best fits the setting—credits, dollars, imperial marks, space bucks, etc.

Abstract Rating	Non-Abstract Value
15	128,000 umc
14	64,000 umc
13	32,000 umc
12	16,000 umc
11	8,000 umc
10	4,000 umc
9	2,000 umc
8	1,000 umc
7	500 umc
6	250 umc
5	125 umc
4	62 umc
3	31 umc
2	15 umc
1	7 umc

Costs

Using the above table, whenever making a purchase, simply look up the abstract cost and its corresponding value. For example, a USD-383 "Wasp" Light Pistol is **Cost 5**, which translates to **125 umc**. Similarly, a Supercomputer is **Cost 13**, which translates to **32,000 umc**. The GM is free to adjust these prices up or down slightly.

Income

Income works the exact same way as cost, except it results in a character gaining money. So, for example, if a particular mission is offering each scrapper an **Income 9** payment, at its completion each of the characters would gain **2,000 umc**.

Lifestyle

The GM may opt to either keep the abstract Lifestyle rating or to simply charge the player characters as necessary. If keeping Lifestyle abstract, at the end of every month each character pays an amount equal to her rating, using the chart on the left. For example, a scrapper with **Lifestyle 4** would accumulate **62 umc** in assorted expenses—not bad for keeping the lights on!

Starting Wealth

When using non-abstract wealth, a character's starting money works a little bit differently than other income. Use the table below. These values reflect the number of purchases that would otherwise be built into the system. When using non-abstract wealth, there is no need to restrict the number of purchases at character creation.

Horror Mode	Starting Money
Survival Horror	250 umc
Investigative Horror	1,500 umc
Action Horror	8,000 umc
Epic Sci-fi	16,000 umc

Combat Hacks

A roleplaying system's combat rules are often one of the primary aspects that distinguish a grim and gritty game from one of cinematic heroism. As **Shadows Over Sol** is already on the lethal end of the spectrum, the options here primarily focus on ways to tailor the game towards the cinematic.

Streamlined Initiative

Shadows Over Sol's system of phases and combat rounds does wonders to emphasize the uncertainty of combat, but can sometimes bog down with a large number of opponents. The alternative system below presents a more streamlined approach, without sacrificing the fundamental tradeoff of speed versus reactivity.

Beginning of the Round

At the beginning of each round, before the combatants take their turns, all players must choose whether to take a fast turn or a slow turn this round.

Turns

Each round, turns are resolved in one of three phases, in the following order:

- **Fast Turns:** Players who chose to take a fast turn this round resolve their turns first, in whatever order the players decide among themselves. Those who opt for a fast turn may take one action.
- **NPC Turns:** All NPCs take their turns, in whatever order the GM wishes. Unless a rule specifies otherwise, all enemies may take two actions. Particularly dangerous enemies may have traits that allow them to take actions outside of this phase.
- **Slow Turns:** Players who chose a slow turn resolve their turns at the end of the round. These, likewise, are resolved in whatever

order the players decide. Those who opt for a slow turn may take two actions.

Surprise

Characters who are surprised may not take a fast turn during the first round of combat and may only take one action that round.

Reactions

Characters who opted for a slow turn may sacrifice one or more of their actions in order to take a reaction, such as Dodge, Wait or Zone of Control. This is declared when the reaction is triggered, usually during an NPC turn.

Enemies With More AP

In **Shadows Over Sol**, some powerful enemies gain additional Action Points. When using streamlined initiative, these enemies instead gain the ability to either take an extra action before fast turns are resolved or to take an extra action after slow turns are resolved.

"Mook" Opponents

Some subgenres of science fiction are filled with stories where the protagonists take down hordes of weaker opponents. To represent this trope, simply have "mook" opponents fall down unconscious or dead whenever they would otherwise enter their Dying Gasps.

It also helps to use Streamlined Initiative to more easily keep track of large numbers of foes.

Fighting In Spirit

Fighting in Spirit is a special action you can take when you're out of the fight entirely. Once per combat, you may specify how you are "fighting in spirit" alongside a team member, coming up with a nugget of wisdom you once said, something you've done to boost morale, training you've done together, etc. Assuming your idea is applicable, it grants the ally a +2 bonus to a single flip.

Burning Edge

Whenever a player character would die, the player may choose to permanently reduce her Edge by one. In place of dying, she instead sustains a Lingering Injury and collapses unconscious.

This option eliminates the possibility that a few bad flips will forcibly kill one of the PCs, while still maintaining significant consequences for such would-be lethal situations. The GM may also choose to also extend this ruke to a few select "plot critical" NPCs.

Cinematic Vigor

For settings where the player characters are supposed to be cinematic heroes that can withstand tremendous physical punishment, use the following alternative formula for Wound threshold:

Wound = Strength + Endurance

This roughly doubles the number of wound consequences a scrapper can take before entering her Dying Gasps. Use this formula only for player characters and for certain select "boss" NPCs. Other characters should use the usual formula found in the *Shadows Over Sol* core rulebook.

Considering Critical Effects

Additionally, for a cinematic campaign, the GM should generally avoid choosing the Lingering Injury critical effect when one of the player characters is struck by a critical hit. Instead, consider selecting Dazing Hit, Disarm or Knockback.

Unconscious Dying Gasps

Finally, the GM might consider instituting a rule where instead of gaining the **Bleeding** consequence when a character enters her Dying Gasps, she instead is rendered unconscious. The **Bleeding** consequence is then only applied if she goes for more than an hour without medical attention. This gives combat in the game a "safety valve" and where players are unable to press the attack, and thus less likely to accidentally get themselves killed.

Cinematic Healing

In a cinematic campaign the GM may want to increase the effectiveness of both first aid and natural healing.

First Aid

Consider allowing first aid to heal wounds in combat. With a successful **Dex/medic-10** flip, a healer either reduces the severity of the patient's most severe wound or heals all light wounds. This healing is still restricted to once per wound, as usual.

Natural Healing

Additionally, cinematic characters may heal a number of wound severities equal to their Endurance for every night of rest and relaxation, rather than for every week. A dose of Regenasone heals this amount in an hour.