

# NAME YOUR POISON

## A Few Intoxicating Rules for Shadowrun

by Chris Hepler and Jennifer Brandes

*This article was originally written for SHADIS magazine in 1998, shortly after the publication of our Cyberpirates sourcebook, as an apology for our drug rules which were cut out of the final product. Since that time, Shadowrun, Third Edition was released, and now Man and Machine, which contains Third Edition drug rules.*

*Curious to see if their rules would out-date ours, we skimmed the book in the store and saw the following paragraph:*

Once a character is drugged-out, roleplaying should be encouraged. Most people on drugs change dramatically, becoming less inhibited, euphorically happy, sexually aroused, paranoid, hyper-aware, mellow and incoherent, or in a berserk psychotic rage. Gamemaster characters often have Professional Ratings of 4 when on drugs, because they're too high to realize they could get hurt.

*You may not think of this as a particularly innovative or spectacular paragraph. But to us, it is something quite different than the text that surrounds it. That paragraph came from the Cyberpirates manuscript on the hard drive of our computer.*

*We wrote it.*

*A great many people are credited with contributions to Man and Machine.*

*We are not among them.*

*Anyone considering writing for Shadowrun professionally can draw their own conclusions about the ethics of the line developer and the FASA Corporation, and the chances of meeting a similar fate.*

In **Shadowrun**, the player characters are traditionally professional criminals, with alternate campaigns involving Mafia made men, medical professionals, police detectives, inner-city gang members, and moonlighting rock stars. All these people work within the so-called "shadowy underbelly of society." Inevitably, they come in contact with some of the ugly (or glamorized) aspects of criminal culture -- violence, weapons, and drugs.

The first two are dealt with extensively in existing **Shadowrun** products; the basic book alone has thirty pages of combat rules covering everything from fists to heat-seeking missiles, and the supplements have more weapons than a small NRA convention. But the last aspect is almost completely ignored.

While the published adventures often assume the PCs drink or are sleeping off hangovers, there is no system for GMs to determine how alcohol affects a shadowrunner's actions. There are no poisons with an onset time longer than "instantaneous." And no answer to the first two questions a DocWagon paramedic's player asks: "Do I have any morphine for these guys? How's it work?"

Though the *Shadowrun Companion* suggests substance addiction as a flaw for player characters, the *Shadowtech* rules for drug use ensured all addicts, whatever their size, strength and health, died within ten weeks, though real-life drug addicts (including alcoholics) usually live with their problem for years.

We are the primary authors of the supplement *Cyberpirates*, which includes settings and rules for playing Southeast Asian and Caribbean smugglers. We thought a book on this subject should deal frankly with the topic of illegal substances, and provide

adventure ideas using drug smugglers as both villains and protagonists. We also included rules for venomous animals in the book's exotic locations.

This and other text was cut from the manuscript. Over a third of the book was rewritten without our consent or knowledge, adding factual inaccuracies, internal inconsistencies, and statements and language we find offensive. We hope this article can give playable and accurate information to assist gamemasters who expected more from *Cyberpirates*, and serve as our personal apology for that supplement's shortcomings.

### **REALISM VS. REALITY or "Keep It in the Game, Stupid!"**

Some games shy away from mentioning drugs because they don't want to be accused of promoting them, an understandable fear. Let's get the disclaimer out of the way: this article does not say that doing drugs is an O-Kay Pastime. The authors don't condone anything harder than a two-liter of caffeinated soda. We think gaming is a lot more fun than potential addiction, jail time, and death by overdose. There's a reason we're covering drugs and poisons in the same article: intoxication is intoxication.

However, we feel creating a system and explaining the story potential of drugs is no more morally questionable than a combat system. A combat system quantifies conflict resolution for an imaginary character. A drug system quantifies changes in that imaginary character's health and perception. Context determines the rest. PCP can be an anesthetic or used recreationally, the same way killing a human being can be self-defense or premeditated murder. We write our articles to provide information a GM can use in descriptions. The real-world references and lists of symptoms are for the sake of detail: details that can be useful clues to shadowrunners trying to learn how a murder victim was poisoned or what to expect from a nervous, twitching junkie.

### **WHAT IF I DON'T PLAY SHADOWRUN?**

The descriptions here are as real-world accurate as our research and space allows, so they can be easily adapted to another game. For conversion guidelines, Shadowrun works on a loose scale of 1 to 6 for attributes, with cybernetics or magic increasing them to about 8 to 12. The letters L, M, S, and D refer to increasing deadliness of wounds (Light, Moderate, Serious, Deadly). The number next to these letters indicates how hard the damage is to resist (basically a scale of 1-6). The toughest unmodified human can reduce a potential Serious wound to nothing with a lucky roll, but will usually take damage. All poisons require three such rolls.

### **WHY FEATURE DRUGS IN A CAMPAIGN?**

Poisons have long been a hazard in role-playing games, but drugs may require more explanation. Drug effects, paraphernalia, and the drug "scene" can be used as descriptive characterization, a plot complication, part of a character's history, or their means of income.

### **Uppers**

When a character gets high, it gives a player or GM carte blanche to roleplay outgoing, impractical and *fun* behaviors. We ran a Caribbean cyberpirate game once in which an ork gang member from Seattle came down to lean on the incompetent pirates who'd lost a shipment of his fixer's. The ork was hostile to the pirates at first, making the

other players uncomfortable, nearly on the verge of intra-party betrayal.

Then he found the pirates' stash.

Within an hour, he'd gone water-skiing behind the pirates' speedboat, took on a fifty-foot shark single-handedly with a machine pistol, cooked up megalodon steaks for an entire bar, smacked around a local gang member after hitting on her girlfriend, and then went for a moonlit boat ride with said girlfriend while the pirates got into a running gun battle. These were stupid, incredibly unprofessional, self-destructive things to do. They were also hilarious, and in our opinion, any story material that gets quiet players to liven up and roleplay is worth it.

This means accepting that slimy characters can be fun. Hundreds of movies and comic books cast drug dealers as the bad guy. What's it like to *play* that bad guy? Smuggler characters would logically turn to drugs; they're more profitable than shadowrunning and addicts sustain their own market. A kilo of coke is easily 22,000 nuyen...a solid ton of 16-20% pure heroin (transportable in a motor yacht) can net about sixty *million*. Granted, the character has to *find* that much stuff and distribute it to twenty or more fixers, but each of those steps is an adventure hook or complication.

Some gamemasters might object to characters earning so much money so "easily," but a smuggling campaign doesn't end when the characters get rich. As long as the adventure problems can't be solved with money (rival smugglers, reputation problems, dealing with the law), being rich is just one more schtick. What does a sugar-daddy PC do with the money? Buy gold-plated limos and wreck them once a month? Toss hundred-dollar bills to kids as they walk down the street? Use a rock of crack the size and weight of Arthur Vogel as a deck chair? Buy that 100,000-nuyen "working gear facility" listed in the basic book and found a dope farm in the Jamaican highlands?

## Downers

Playing a poison-peddler means cops take you *seriously*. Lone Star sometimes takes bribes from shadowrunners because the cop knows they're just helping the corps screw each other; Joe Public doesn't really get hurt. But if the runners are driving a truck of dope aimed for high schools all across the country? They're a walking promotion for that cop and his whole department. Even if they bribe the entire precinct, vigilantes can come after them...like the heroes in comic books and movies. (Cybernetic troll versions of Batman and The Punisher, anyone?).

Drugs can be trouble even in games with the most morally upright PCs. In the "Saturday Night Hive" **Shadowrun** tournament at Origins '97, we pulled a nasty trick on the players by providing a "voice in the party" NPC with vital headware data. To make sure no group would rely on her to solve their problems, we made her more hindrance than help; she was a ghoulish heroin addict. The PCs had a dilemma; without the drug or human flesh, she'd shiver, shake, and get dizzy and irritable. Should they let her have the drug? Should they buy more? Or let her go through withdrawal and refuse to speak, thereby losing data that could expose a massive insect spirit conspiracy? Though the player characters didn't approve of her addiction, the winning teams helped her through withdrawal, got her cooperation in revealing the conspiracy and at the end, they brought her to a rehab clinic. Interacting with addict NPCs gives players a chance to roleplay situations they might not otherwise experience, and the gamemaster immediately knows some of the NPC's motivations and associates who could later be caught up in the story.

## DRUGS AND BTL IN 2059

The Better-Than-Life or 2XS chips are what **Shadowrun** supplements consider the drug of the 21st century. Simsense datachips record a full-sensory movie, edited to peak in some areas and fall in others so the experience feels natural and not jarring. Standard simsense equipment can crank the peaks up beyond what humans normally feel; not only are you in some actress' body while she skydives, sword-fights, and has sex with the leading man, a little jury-rigging makes it a "Better-Than-Life" chip where the skydive feels ten times as fast, the sword blows ten times as hard, and the...dramatic climaxes ten times as good. But this runs the brain ragged with too much sensation, eventually messing with the user's perception and killing neurons. They are, naturally, highly illegal. 2XS chips go further, taking over your autonomic nervous system to make the high even more intense. 2XS tears apart the body, but is even more addicting.

Gosh, with all this, would anyone still use old-fashioned crack and dope?

Yes.

If the PCs are gang members or other street-level characters, organics are what they or their contacts can afford. A legal 2-hour simchip is 50 nuyen, and the electrode hair-net to play it is 200. To use BTL and 2XS, you need a datajack: i.e. voluntary neurosurgery (25,000 nuyen plus), or lug around a simsense player weighing seven pounds with Concealability of 3. You can't stick a VCR in your pocket for a pick-me-up in the parking lot. Compare this with a rock of crack or a dime bag of pot: \$5-10 today, 5 nuyen in 2059. No contest. BTL is a drug for rich, hard-core addicts with cyberware: not the majority of drug users anywhere in the world. For smuggler PCs, growing or brewing organic highs is cheaper than finding the tech and expertise to splice BTL, especially in the Third World areas covered in *Cyberpirates*.

Drugs are also used socially. Far more people try drugs than become addicts; witness how many people drink beer and how many are alcoholics. BTL gives intense high, but the chiphead is alone, practically unconscious, and not interacting with the outside world. Not much fun for the party-girl character *or* the GM. For gamemasters using the "drug scene" in an adventure, organic drugs are more useful. Organic drugs can be passed around while talking, snorted off your sweetheart, or used to loosen someone up so a shadowrunner can get information from her (even if it's just her phone number). There's many ways organic drugs are used in a game -- friendly junkie NPCs, tools used by PCs, smuggler antagonists, attackers on angel dust -- but a bad guy on chips is either zoned out in a corner (no fun) or using a personality-modification chip (neat, but only good once, and the adventures *Dreamchipper* and *Mob War* already did it).

## INTO THE SYSTEM

There are detailed drug addiction rules in *Shadowtech* (p. 87). However, by that system, any addict, no matter how tough, lives a maximum of 70 days, losing a box from their Condition Monitors every week. These rules work for high-potency, high-risk Awakened or tailored drugs such as kamikaze and deepweed (below, based on descriptions in the novel *Shadowboxer*), but not real-world ones.

### Drug Rules

All drugs have three primary stats: Strength, Tolerance, and Addiction ratings.

The drug's Strength varies with its composition and purity; for example, a bottle of 80-proof (40% alcohol) liquor might only have a Strength of 2, while a bottle of 160-proof liquor (80% alcohol, twice the drug in the same size bottle) might be Strength 4. The Strengths listed are for common dosages; drug purity can vary the Strength of a dose from 1 (e.g. heroin that has been "cut" many times) to up to twice its listed rating (e.g. "freebased," or re-condensed, home-purified heroin). Some effects are dependent on the drug's Strength.

The Tolerance rating reflects the number of doses a character can take before his body gets so used to the drugs he needs a higher dosage to get the same effects. After the character has taken that many doses, he makes a Body test with a target number of the drug's Strength, called the Tolerance Test. If he fails, the drug Strength needs to be increased by 1 for the character to get high. If he succeeds, he repeats the test after another (Tolerance Rating) doses.

The Addiction number is the Target Number to avoid getting addicted. An "M" means mental addiction resisted by Willpower; a "P" means physical addiction resisted by Body. One with two numbers needs only one test failed for addiction.

Once the drug is in the bloodstream, the user makes a Body test with a Target Number of the Strength of the drug to see if their body or aura suffers long-term effects. This is called the Degeneration Test: see table for results.

### **DEGENERATION TEST TABLE**

<b>Body test result</b>	<b>Effect</b>
Critical failure	Remove 1 box of Condition Monitor and 0.2 Essence
Failure	0.2 Essence loss
1 success	0.1 Essence loss
2 successes	0.05 Essence loss
3 + successes	No penalty

### **Overdosing and Speedballing**

An overdose occurs if the Target Number for the Degeneration Test is more than twice the user's Body, regardless of the test's success. An overdosing character resists (Drug Strength)D physical and stun damage separately, as his system goes into shock.

Note that quality control in the illegal drug business is a grim joke. What happens when someone with a Body of 2 asks for a gram of powdered cocaine (Strength 4, barely safe) and instead gets a tenth of a gram of heroin? It's only a tenth the amount, right? It should be safe to snort...until you notice 0.1 grams is about Strength 10, because heroin is pound for pound stronger than cocaine; the average street dose is smaller or cut more.

This is what happened in the overdose scene from *Pulp Fiction*.

Multiple drugs in the character's system ("speedballing") combine effects, including drug Strength. It's one thing to smoke a marijuana joint and quite another to smoke one dusted with heroin when you've already had three beers. The Strength of all drugs in the system adds to the Power Level of any poisons, including Narcoject and Neuro-Stun. This is a very fast way for shadowrunners to end up dead.

### **STREET DRUGS TABLE**

Addict.	Toler.	Usual Str.	Avail.	Price	Street Ind.
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<b>Alcohol</b>						
Beer	2M	20	1	2/60 min	6Y/six-pack	1.25
Wine	2M	20	1	2/60 min	10Y/bottle	1.25
Liquors	2M	20	2	2/60 min	20Y/bottle	1.25
<b>Amphetamines</b>						
Dex/Ritalin	4M	10	3	4/6 hrs	20Y/bottle	2
Meth	5M	4	6	5/24 hrs	50Y/gram	1
<b>Cocaine</b>						
Powder	5M	3	4	6/48 hrs	60Y/gram	1
Carib special	5M/4P	3	7	6/48 hrs	100Y/joint	1
Crack	6M/5P	2	6	3/12 hrs	5Y/rock	1
<b>Deepweed</b>	7P	20	8	6/72 hrs	80Y/joint	2
<b>LSD/MDMA</b>	3M	8	2	5/48 hrs	20Y/tab	1
<b>Marijuana</b>	3M	8	2	4/24 hrs	5Y/joint1	
<b>Opiates</b>						
Heroin	6M/6P	10	5	5/48 hrs	15Y/.05 gram	2
Morphine	4M/4P	8	4	7/48 hrs	20Y/.05 gram	3
<b>PCP</b>	5M	4	6	6/48 hrs	50Y/5 mg	1

## COMMON STREET DRUGS

### Alcohol

People all over the world have fermented plant sugars to produce ethyl alcohol, including barley (beer or whiskey), rice (sake), grapes (wine), potatoes (gin, vodka), molasses (rum), and honey (mead). Legal almost everywhere, the listed Availability is for those under the legal age. When denatured with a substance like methanol (wood alcohol), it becomes unfit for consumption (causing blindness and poisoning) but can be burned for fuel. Alcohol is a depressant with a wide range of tolerance levels, so the rules are more fast than hard. The "proof" of alcohol is twice its percentage.

It is the amount of alcohol consumed that causes drunkenness, not the flavor and container it comes in. Beers in 2059 vary from 1.6% alcohol of standard beers (e.g. Budweiser) through 4% alcohol malt liquors (Schlitz) to Saeder-Krupp's own 8% brew designed for orks, trolls, and macho humans (Lofbyr). Wine runs from 6-20% alcohol; liquor such as vodka is usually 40-50%, but some rum reaches 75% and grain alcohol ("graino") 90%. Pure alcohol means a can of Sterno; some alcoholics have killed themselves by drinking it (it eats a hole in their stomach). Lighting alcohol on fire requires it to be 50% pure (100 proof) or higher.

**Symptoms:** At mild levels: poor judgment, talkativeness, dilated pupils, lack of coordination and slight drowsiness. Many inhibitions about sex, violence, and other taboo subjects disappear, though this is partly psychological and cultural conditioning. At moderate levels, speech slurs, and severely inebriated characters get nauseous, vomit, sweat excessively, and have blurry or double vision. Excessive intake leads to alcohol poisoning -- unconsciousness, convulsions, circulatory collapse, acidosis and hypoglycemia (alcohol replaces blood sugar), brain damage and death. Long-term usage can lead to anorexia, diarrhea, cirrhosis of the liver, optic atrophy (slowly going blind), mental deterioration (it kills brain cells, which never heal) and delirium tremens or alcoholic mania. A drug called Antabuse is used by alcoholic rehab clinics; it causes vomiting when any alcohol is imbibed.

**Game Effects:** When mildly inebriated, reduce Reaction, and Control and

Combat Pools by 1. When moderately inebriated, add +1 to all skill target numbers and Perception Tests, but gain Pain Resistance 1. When very drunk, add +2 to all target numbers and reduce Reaction and Control and Combat Pools by 2. Walking requires a Quickness (2) test to avoid falling.

### **Amphetamines**

These stimulants range from diet pills through prescription Ritalin (used to treat Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, though it makes normal people attention-deficit ...go figure) to crystallized methamphetamine hydrochloride ("crystal meth" or "ice"). They are most frequently taken in capsule or pill form ("speed," "black beauties"), though meth is often injected. They are more popular in Hawaii, the Philippines, and CalFree than the UCAS proper. Truckers, megacorporate executives, and workers at high-stress, long-hour jobs like DocWagon often abuse amphetamines. Amphetamines also enlarge bronchial passages and increase oxygen flow; thus, they are useful for a DocWagon HTR team to keep around, and corrupt doctors or hospital workers can sell them.

**Symptoms:** Paranoia, fevered exercise. Chronic users may have heart failure, insomnia, diarrhea, and tremors. Overdose leads to cyanosis, convulsions, coma, and cerebral hemorrhages. The *Shadowtech* drug Kamikaze, a tailored amphetamine, does all this in spades.

**Game Effects:** Ritalin and dextroamphetamine add +1 to Reaction, Body, and Quickness. Methamphetamines have the above effects, +1D6 Initiative and +1 Willpower. High characters add +2 to target numbers for Technical, Knowledge and Social skills, and drop Combat Pool by 2 due to hyperactivity. Amphetamine doses last for 4D6 hours.

### **Cocaine**

A stimulant derived from coca plants growing mostly in South American mountains, seen in wealthy areas as a white powder ("blow," "coke"). The user lines it up with a razor blade on a mirror so they can see every speck, and snorts it through a rolled-up dollar bill or cut soda straw. The powder numbs the tongue if ingested, and burns the nostrils if inhaled. Cocaine is widely used in nasal surgery to constrict blood vessels and prevent excessive bleeding (doctors don't exactly keep kilo bags around to steal, though). It can be mashed into paste and eaten (common in the Carib), or injected, which is far more dangerous. Powdered coke is often combined with other drugs. Caribbean trolls are noted for "Carib specials," marijuana joints dusted with cocaine and heroin to get a high that could kill a human.

Crack ("rock") is purified cocaine that looks like a little pellet of soap or dirty rock candy sugar, sold in vials with colored tops. It is smoked in glass pipes, gives a high within minutes, and ten percent of first-time users OD and die. Crack is so cheap it leads to a lot of petty theft: even five bucks for a pawned watch will get an addict's fix.

**Symptoms:** Rapid heartbeat, dilated pupils, and numbness. Long-term use may lead to irregular respiration, muscle spasms, abdominal pain or heart failure. Users' behaviors vary widely (addicts can be hyperactive or lethargic) but weight loss, paranoia, and a burned-out, sniffling red nose is a pretty good sign.

**Game Effects:** Powdered cocaine or chewing coca leaves (the way Incas did) gives -1 die to Combat Pool, -1 Willpower, +1 to Reaction, and Pain Resistance 1. Crack

or coke beyond Strength 6 also gives +1 Target Numbers to Knowledge, Technical and Social skills and Perception Tests, and +1D6 Initiative. Carib specials give Pain Resistance at half the drug Strength, +2 to all target numbers, and +2 to Body and Willpower. Cocaine effects last 2D6x10 minutes.

### **Deepweed**

An Awakened form of kelp that grows all over the Caribbean, also known as "bad karma." Its naturally narcotic, nicotine-and-THC-laden leaves are smoked or eaten. Its dangers are great, but magical wannabes buy it like candy. Megacorporate research into synthesizing its effects is illegal in many countries, but the potential profit is incredible.

**Symptoms:** Euphoria, hallucinations, feeling of power. Magically active users automatically astrally project for the duration of the high, even adepts without normal astral access. (Note the duration and the problems of extended astral projection). Most other symptoms resemble marijuana's.

**Game Effects:** +2 to all target numbers, +1 to Willpower. Effects last 10D6 minutes.

### **LSD and MDMA**

Lysergic acid diethylamide ("acid," "MK-Ultra"), and 3, 4-methylenedioxy-methamphetamine ("ecstasy," "X") are both lab-manufactured designer hallucinogens. LSD is a clear liquid synthetic derivative of the ergot fungus. It can be injected or ingested, and soaking sugar cubes, paper, soda, or candy in it is a common method of delivery. It takes effect within about twenty minutes. Nobody's sure how LSD works beyond saying "it plays around with the neurotransmitters in the brain." Though people don't often die from excessive LSD, hallucinating users may be a danger to themselves or others. Just imagine what it does to a rigger jacked into a building's security system.

**Symptoms:** LSD users have exaggerated reflexes, psychopathic personality disorders, comas, tremors, hyper-excitability, and/or prolonged mental disassociation (e.g. staring at an orange for an entire weekend, believing men made of soap bubbles are after you, etc.). Flashbacks can occur years after the last dose since it permanently damages neural processes. MDMA hallucinations are milder, and, being an amphetamine, it also energizes the user. It's often called the "hug drug" for its euphoric turn-on qualities.

**Game Effects:** +1D6-1 to all target numbers for 2D6 hours.

### **Opiates**

Tranquilizing narcotics made from the fruits and juices of the opium poppy. In liquid form, opium resembles dark, sweet syrup. From opium comes heroin (diacetyl morphine), an odorless, bitter crystalline powder that can be brown (Mexican/Aztlán style) or white ("China white") if impure. Heroin can be smoked in a hookah, on the end of a cigarette ("ack-ack"), burned with barbiturates and the smoke inhaled ("chasing the dragon"), injected into the skin ("skin popping") or veins ("mainlining"). Injections eventually cause "needle tracks" from collapsed veins. Pure heroin is rarely sold; this is a physically addictive drug, so addicts will pay for stuff as little as 5% pure (thus the term "junkie"). Users often freebase (purify) their stash to get a decent high. Rehab clinics issue methadone, a chemically similar drug, to wean addicts, but methadone can be

abused, too.

Straight morphine is used in hospitals and by military teams to kill pain in severe trauma cases (like after every **Shadowrun** gunfight). It is typically much purer than street heroin, but less addictive. Weaker still is codeine, developed from morphine and available over the counter to relieve allergies (but also abused).

**Symptoms:** Constricted pupils, disturbed vision, weak pulse, shallow respiration, lethargy and low blood pressure. Ultimately, coma and death result from respiratory paralysis.

**Game Effects:** Heroin and opium give Pain Resistance at half their Strength, +1 to Target Numbers, -1 to Reaction, and +1 Willpower for the duration of the high (1D6 hours). Morphine is similar, but the quality control in an average hospital is higher: it gives Pain Resistance equal to its Strength.

## **Marijuana**

A narcotic, analgesic, hallucinogenic sedative made from the leaves and flowering parts of the hemp (cannabis) plant, commonly called "ganja," "weed" or "dope." Its potency is largely dependent on the concentration of delta-9-tetrahydro-cannabinol (THC) in the plant. Most marijuana in the U.S. is less than 0.5% THC; it is made from male plants with little quality control. Jamaican, Amazonian, and Aztlan versions use female plants; the strongest high comes from "sin semilla" ("without seed"), unpollinated female plants that range from 5% to 20% THC. These are slightly more expensive pound for pound than cocaine. Marijuana is usually smoked in a cigarette (joint) or water pipe (bong), though can be baked into brownies and eaten. Hashish is an oil from the plant's resin, fried into a blackish cake that is smoked. Users often get the munchies afterwards.

**Symptoms:** Blurred vision and depth perception, drowsiness, uncontrolled laughter, memory loss, weakness, lethargy, and loss of consciousness, not to mention hallucinations. Lung cancer and emphysema also occur in long-time users (it's like smoking unfiltered cigarettes), as well as loss of fertility and genetic defects in their children. On the bright side, it helps the nausea associated with cancer chemotherapy, and there are several medicinal properties as yet unexplored. Marijuana overdoses from smoking do no physical damage -- the smoker passes out long before the chemicals get near lethal levels -- however, ingested doses can kill. Marijuana stays in the body for a long time; between six weeks and six months later, the user's body still feels the drug's effects.

**Game Effects:** -2 Reaction, +1 to physical-related Target Numbers for each 2 points of drug Strength. Its effects last 4D6x10 minutes.

## **PCP**

Phencyclidine ("angel dust") is a lab-manufactured disassociative stimulant that depresses the nervous system. It was originally a horse tranquilizer called Sernyl, and that should tell you a lot. It is a white crystalline powder when pure, but is usually cut with so much junk it resembles brown sugar. It comes in tablets and capsules, but is often applied to leafy material (e.g. marijuana, parsley) and smoked. It goes from the bloodstream to the stomach and is reabsorbed into the intestines, making it last a long time.

**Symptoms:** Like a disassociative mental disorder such as schizophrenia, PCP produces image distortion, auditory hallucinations, rapid mood swings, involuntary eye

movement, acute anxiety, and paranoia.

**Game Effects:** Pain Resistance equal to its Strength and +2 Strength for 1D6 hours. +4 to all Perception Tests and non-physical target numbers for 12D6 hours. In other words, a character on PCP is on Mars...and they're scared...and they don't feel pain...for an entire weekend. Stick a gang of trolls or pack of wolf shapeshifters on this stuff sometime before your player characters raid their hideouts.

## DEADLIER DOSES

The basic book lists powerful toxins such as Narcoject and Fugu-5 that can incapacitate or kill a victim between combat phases. Yet the Antidote spells only work if administered before the toxin does damage...with a casting time of 5-20 turns, making them functionally useless. Oddly enough, the paranormal Venom power does (Essence)S damage with no way to make it lethal other than a second bite. Even a venomous dragon has to nip you twice to kill you, but somehow the toxin is powerful enough to work within three seconds. (Okay, it's magic poison, sure, but shouldn't one bite be deadly?)

Our system makes the following adjustments.

Poisons operate over time to deliver three "wounds," killing the victim by degrees while they sweat, shake, vomit, get dizzy, become blind, and spasm. When poisoned, a character resists damage with Body three separate times, making a new Resistance Test at each listed interval. The poison's Damage Code stays constant for each test unless otherwise noted. The Antidote spell may be applied before the first interval.

The "interval time" is counted from the point of contact. The "5, 10, and 20-minute intervals" left in the mamba statistics in *Cyberpirates* means someone bitten at 12:00 resists at 12:05, 12:10, and 12:20. In this system, the Venom power of paranormal animals works instantaneously (0 minutes) and at 5 and 10-minute intervals, doing (Essence)S damage. Poisons in this system aren't sudden take-down weapons, but a terrifying guarantee of death.

Being poisoned, whether or not damage has occurred, is considered a "non-resting" condition and normal healing is not possible. Heal and Treat spells do not heal poison or overdose damage. Specific chemical antidotes lower the Power Level by their drug Strength. Target Number penalties from other drugs increase the Target Number of poison Resistance Tests, just like speedballing.

Damage codes for poison are not increased due to successes made on an attack, but multiple poisonings are resisted separately.

## SAMPLE POISONS

Shadowrunners and globe-trotting pirates may run into any of the following toxins. Statistics for these venomous animals are hardly necessary: rattlesnakes won't be shrugging off power bolts or jellyfish dodging and parrying. For the purposes of attack dice, they have Reaction 4.

### POISON LETHALITY TABLE

Poison	Damage	Intervals
Beaked sea snake	3D	30 min/4 hours/6 hours
Chlorine gas	5M/5S/5D	30 seconds/1 hour/6-hour
Curare	4S	Instant/3 seconds/6 seconds
Mickey Finn	2D Stun	25 minutes/50 minutes/2 hours

Oleander	4S	30 seconds/1 minute/2 minutes
Ordeal Bean	5S	Instant/2 minutes/5 minutes
Portuguese Man o' War	See text	Instant/1 minute/2 minutes
Rattlesnake	5M	15 minutes/45 minutes/2 hours
Stonefish/scorpionfish	4M	10 seconds/30 minutes/3 hours
Stingray	6L/6L/6M	Instant/15 minutes/30 minutes
Vacor rat poison	3S	10 minutes/20 minutes/30 minutes

### **Beaked Sea Snakes**

These snakes vary in color, but usually have dark and light rings (black and white, black and olive, etc.) and grow up to 1.6m long with a flat, vertical tail. They live in the Indian Ocean, Philippines and Australia near reefs, shores, and the mouths of rivers...just the thing to complicate a pirate's stealthy swim.

**Symptoms:** The bite feels like a pinprick, so the victim may think he's home free until his big muscles start feeling sore. Then the tongue and mouth become paralyzed. The eyelids droop. Urine turns red. The kidneys hurt. The heart stops.

### **Chlorine Gas**

Chlorine gas was used in artillery shells in World War I, but is more commonly encountered when a moronic shadowrunner posing as a janitor mixes ammonia and bleach.

**Symptoms:** Chlorine gas immediately stings the eyes, mucus membranes and skin, and eventually corrodes tissue into a black mess, leaving permanent scars. What it does to the digestive system is disgusting. Let's just say the tissues and blood darken and fall apart. The victim chokes, coughs, is dizzy, and eventually has a chest seizure before foaming at the mouth, turning blue, and dying.

### **Curare**

Made from an Aztlan and Amazonian plant's sap, crude curare is dark, smelly, and sticky, an intravenous poison that is harmless when swallowed, though the rest of the plant isn't. The Orinoco Indians often put it on blowdarts.

**Symptoms:** The eyelids and facial muscles get paralyzed first, then throat and neck, then the lungs. During the death throes, the victim's liver is inflamed and the skin turns blue.

### **Mickey Finns**

Made of chloral hydrate, either a clear liquid or little red capsules, "knockout drops" are a staple of hard-boiled detective fiction.

**Symptoms:** Sleepiness and neglect of personal appearance gradually gives way to incoherence, confusion, slow respiration, flaccid muscles and coma.

**Game Effects:** Double any target number penalties incurred through stun damage from a Mickey Finn. Slipping them into someone's drink should take into account any alcohol imbibed; mixing the two can kill.

### **Oleander**

An Asian shrub with milky, highly toxic sap and white, pink, or red blossoms, well-loved by murder mystery authors. A typical use is for a cunning hitman to give the

victim a thoughtful gift, such as hot dog skewers made of oleander branches, or ornamental flowers in their tea. Bees sometimes use oleander pollen to make honey, making for a sweet and deadly honey cake. Burning oleander wood creates lethal smoke, so inspired and careful hitmen may make "incense sticks" for toxic holiday presents.

**Symptoms:** Sweating, vomiting, bloody diarrhea, respiratory paralysis.

### **Ordeal Beans of Madagascar**

Seeds of a sweet-smelling plant called tanghin, which has blue five-pointed flowers. The seeds were mixed in a drink and served to accused murderers and witch doctors among the Malagasy before French colonization. Legend says that if the drinker sips slowly and timidly, as if afraid, the toxin can be absorbed. If chugged all at once, the shock to the system causes vomiting and the drinker lives. In reality, death was usually predetermined because the judge measured the poison's strength beforehand. French colonizers destroyed all the tanghin shrubs they could find, but bringing back the ordeal for pirates in 2059 Madagascar could make a great scene. Tanghin also grows in Hawai'i.

**Symptoms:** Like with digitalis (foxglove), the victim gets headaches, aberrant color vision, and death from heart contractions.

### **Portuguese Man O' War**

These jellyfish appear in warm waters worldwide, including the Gulf Stream. The jellyfish's several thousand tentacles hang as far as 165 feet down from its pink, blue, or purplish float. The Australian sea wasp is similar, but the tentacles aren't as long, and it shows up nearer to shore. It takes a Perception (3) test to spot the tentacles in clear water with good light conditions (malicious laugh).

**Symptoms:** Severe chest pain, fever, shock, and difficulty swallowing.

**Game Effects:** The sting acts immediately and does damage with a Power level of 5, repeated at 1 and 2 minute intervals. Depending on how many tentacles the victim blundered into, the wound category can range from Light to Deadly. The stung character makes a Quickness (5) test. No successes is Deadly; 1 is Serious, 2 Moderate, and 3 or more Light.

### **Rattlesnakes**

Timber or diamondback rattlers are an infrequent hazard in the Native American Nations and California desert. The CAS is still home to "rattlesnake roundups," conventions where normal and Awakened rattlers are fattened up, hunters are given prizes for the biggest snake, and then the animals are methodically slaughtered for boots, tie clips, and belts (a novel place to meet a Mr. Johnson, we might add). While rattlers are the leading cause of snakebite death in the United States, most cases are compounded by alcohol and stupidity (i.e. someone got drunk and thought playing with venomous snakes was fun).

**Symptoms:** Rattler bites feel like a jab from a hot needle before the wound goes numb. It swells dramatically within two hours or so, turning reddish or black and bleeding extensively, as tissue dies. The victim is excessively thirsty and shocked.

**Game Effects:** Violent spasms shake the body, adding +2 to all Target Numbers.

### **Stonefish, Scorpionfish, and Stingrays**

These animals live in the tropical Indian Ocean and southwestern Pacific, with the stingray and stonefish also in the Caribbean and California. Spotting these reef and shore creatures requires a Perception (5) test in good light conditions. Importantly, stonefish spines can penetrate flippers and even light tennis shoes. Stonefish and scorpionfish venom is incredibly painful but not often lethal.

**Symptoms:** Swelling, spastic convulsions and limb paralysis. Naturally, this is extremely dangerous while swimming, and subsequent gangrene is common. Stingray venom, applied from its barbed, whipping tail, is milder, causing erratic heart rhythm, falling blood pressure, cramps and weakness.

**Game Effects:** An additional +4 to all target numbers while the damage remains unhealed. Stingray venom only adds +1 to target numbers.

### **Vacor**

A rat poison resembling yellowy corn meal. Though banned in 1979 in the U.S., it's still used in other parts of the world (such as most locations in *Cyberpirates*) by industrial exterminators (whom shadowrunners don't impersonate nearly often enough).

**Symptoms:** When ingested, this anticoagulant kills insulin-producing cells in the pancreas, causing diabetes or hypoglycemia (which is usually permanent), abdominal pain, numb legs, disturbed balance, twitching, and vomiting.

### **ADVENTURE PRESCRIPTIONS**

These adventure ideas show the variety of roles these chemicals could play in your campaign. Though intended for **Shadowrun**, they can be modified for **Cyberpunk**, **Trinity**, most *World of Darkness* games, or even fantasy campaigns. Heck, smuggling is even a staple of **Star Wars**, though selling drugs and poisons is best used to characterize Dark Side villains (and makes the game grittier than average).

#### **Dose 1: Patchwork**

Benjamin Flanders, a DocWagon executive, dies in a DocWagon hospital, allegedly of pneumonia. His wife suspects that his death is not natural -- Flanders was making waves in DocWagon, exposing corruption among employees, and several people may have wanted him dead. She doesn't want to tell the police her suspicions since a killer within DocWagon could get to her easily, and hires the runners to investigate. They can break into the funeral home to see the body, where forensic analysis reveals that he has oleander in his system, probably put on the antibiotic patches he took for the illness. (The coroner is corrupt and didn't perform a full analysis.)

Talking to the nurse on duty that fateful night, the runners find out that Richard Jacobi, Flanders' chief rival, had visited him frequently while he was ill. Jacobi was also at the investigation, although he seemed to be giving orders, not answering questions. Looking for Jacobi, the runners learn that he has left town; in the Matrix are a pair of plane tickets to Haiti in his name.

Following him there, the runners find that he has holed up at the Johns Hopkins Institute of Health, a supposed rival of DocWagon's. If Jacobi is on to them, JHIH employees try to exterminate the runners via poisons; oleander wooden forks and candles in their hotel rooms, DMSO/Vacor on their rental car handles (which takes effect as they're driving), etc. And guess who runs the hospital where they go for treatment? This

should make the PCs even more paranoid than usual.

A final dramatic break-in to the monolithic corporation lets the runners learn of Jacobi's backroom price-fixing deal with JHIH, who supplies DocWagon's patches. Flanders was going to expose the deal. If they recover the proof in the JHIH Matrix, Mrs. Flanders gives it to the press and DocWagon experiences a massive overhaul of corrupt employees. And the runners better never trust a slap patch again.

### **Dose 2: Heroes and Heroin**

The local oyabun asks yakuza-affiliated characters to take a "working vacation" for him. A half-million nuyen of "merchandise" from the Philippines didn't come through, and he would like them to clear up his pipeline. Since he isn't sure if the shipment was intercepted by pirates or if the other yaks are burning him on a deal, the runners should travel to the Philippines disguised as tourists, find out what's happening and get the "merchandise" back. Metahuman and non-Japanese runners are less likely to be targeted by rebel pirates than his inner circle of yak enforcers.

In the Philippines, the runners get to see a real totalitarian state. Play up the atmosphere as the runners talk with local yaks: Marines everywhere, metahuman player characters being hassled, etc.. The yaks deal straight with the runners, but their supplier went missing since his last trip to Laos, and they suspect interception by rebel pirates. The runners investigate in an Olangapo slum, talk to yakuza-owned low-lives and eventually find the mole who sold the supplier out.

He doesn't know where the shipment is, but he knows where the pirate cell who pulled the job live, a base on one of the new volcanic islands. Roleplaying-heavy groups can infiltrate the Huk cell and get in quietly, or commando-raid groups can try to strong-arm them (note all the poisonous things in the water/jungle around the Huk base: maybe a dockside jellyfish pen to execute traitors?). The leader of the cell admits to taking the shipment, but tries to get the runners to switch sides and fight against the oppressive government; with their skills and weapons, they could make a real difference.

As they're talking, the Marines show up, having tracked down the rebels' hideout. The runners have to choose sides in a final fight between ill-armed pirate hordes against heavily armed soldiers, who'll throw the runners in jail along with everyone else (yakuza inside connections *might* get them out after a while, but do the runners want to risk it?). This is a pull-out-the-stops boat battle with collapsing docks and exploding fuel drums. The only escape is underwater, or through a temporary alliance with the Huk. Once the smoke clears, the runners have a decision; fulfill their duty to the oyabun back home or join the revolution. Either way creates honorable recurring enemies.

If the runners retrieve the shipment, they learn for the first time that they are expected to smuggle a half-million dollars of heroin into the UCAS. This may be the final straw for "good guy" characters. Note: If you aren't comfortable using drugs in a campaign, this can be run with a shipment of guns, cyberdecks, chips or real meat.

### **Dose 3: A Friend In Mead**

This is best for a session where not everyone can make it -- one to two runners (without area effect spells) who want to avoid stand-up fights.

A runner's contact is planning a wedding, with the PC as best man or bridesmaid. But his fiancée gets cold feet a week beforehand and leaves him for an elf hairdresser

from Jersey. The contact goes to a nightclub with the runners, gets very, very drunk, and babbles their life story. On the way out, the contact bumps into some gang toughs and mouths off. They mouth back. Think fast: what do the runners do when outnumbered, possibly wasted, and with an inebriated friend starting this mess?

If the runners whup butt, the gang loses face in their hangout, and even dying gangers last long enough to get back to their friends and ask for revenge. If they don't fix their rep by publicly beating/killing the runners and contact, rival gangs will think they're soft. The gang is made up of anything that your runners would fear when twenty of them get mad: trolls, cybered-up ex-cons, wiz-kid mages, the Mafia, a drug cartel, or all of the above. And they've got enough connections to find out where the runner or contact lives.

The gang gets their courage up through heavy drugs, then sends hit squads to do drive-by shootings, machine-gun the runners' and contact's houses, follow them on dates to target their squeezes, put rattlesnakes in their mailboxes, and douse the rigger's car in kerosene when he's out getting groceries (fwoosh). Enough of this will make even timid runners burn for revenge. (For variety, maybe one ganger is a friend of a runner, but can't interfere on their behalf, or the fiancée comes back to apologize/argue just before a gang hit).

If the runners retaliate, the gang sends an ultimatum: the leader wants to settle this one-on-one in an abandoned junkyard. If the PCs and contact show up, the whole gang is waiting. Showdown time, with fists, chains, or knives. Smart PCs can appeal to the gang's honor, and make them stick to a one-on-one fight, but the rest of the gang keeps the guns trained on them in case the runner tries something funny.

If the fight is evenly matched, the gang lets it go. If it's too fast one way or the other, they join in to hurt or toy with the PC. Use the setting -- falling cars, slippery muck, even fights on top of the car crusher. Ultimately, the runners and contact crawl out together, severely hurt but victorious (aww). Note that this adventure works anywhere; West Africa, Carib, or Seattle.

#### **Dose 4: Tumble Weed**

Pirate characters get a tip: there's a vulnerable Aztechnology ship moving medical supplies from Aztlan up to CalFree. They raid it and find a motherlode of highly illegal deepweed. The buyer that offers the most money in the least time is based in Albuquerque, Pueblo Corporate Council. The street contacts directing them to the meet seem awkward, inexperienced, not likely to drive a hard bargain. Too good to be true.

At the deal, the buyers are wearing spanking new armor, paying in certified credsticks and acting ultra-pro. Unfortunately, the sticks are screamers which alert a cleanup team to follow and try to silence the pirates. Encourage the survivors to chase down the people who double-crossed them on such a big haul.

Without contacts in Albuquerque, it takes some smooth talking and bribery to get anywhere in the legwork. If they mention descriptions of the hit squad, word eventually gets to Ellen Kiakime, a former PCC government hit-shaman. She identifies the squad's employer: Phoenix Biological Technologies. PBT was the intended recipient of the Aztech shipment, and when they heard the pirates were selling it, they struck to make back their loss, hiring the initial contacts to look "street," so no one would get suspicious.

PBT wants the weed to isolate its thaumaturgical properties without the addictive effects and ultimately use it to discover latent magicians at the earliest possible age. Ellen

finds this abhorrent for religious and personal reasons; she thinks children shouldn't be exposed to astral space or told they are magical before they find the will to discover it themselves. She gives them a lead to a PBT drug synthesis lab.

The pirates and Ellen go after the stolen cargo in a well-guarded corporate facility out on the mesa which has lots of shamans, scorpions, and rattlesnakes about. Maybe a fire starts from the spells and the deepweed burns, getting everyone wasted during the fight. Ellen takes a share as her payment, becomes a good contact for magically active pirates, and the team can sell the remaining weed to another source.

### **Dose 5: Handle With Care**

The runners are hired by Osei Agyemang, king of the Asante Nation of West Africa, to find his missing younger son. After the boy disappeared, three different corporations -- Saeder-Krupp, Yakashima and DeBeers-Omnitech -- all offered "assistance" tracking him down in return for loosened sanctions on their corporation within Asante. Osei suspects one of them orchestrated the kidnapping, but doesn't know which. He doesn't want to risk offending any with an accusation. Instead, he wants the runners to find and bring back his son, unharmed.

Legwork in Accra leads the runners to the single surviving member of the team who pulled the original job. The man, Asubonteng, is hiding out in Suyani, a town in the no-man's-land between Asante and Anyi territory. His other team members were killed the next day (to prevent them from talking), but he escaped and is lying low. He's spent most of his haul on medical care and is hurt and scared, so a fair-sized bribe can get the information out of him easily. He was hired by DeBeers-Omnitech, and he delivered the kid to their facility up the Volta on the border of Asamando.

The place is heavily guarded by cybered soldiers and paracritters (a real challenge for low-tech local characters). Inside, they find the kid in a wage-slave holding cell. He seems strange and incoherent, and some observation reveals he is heavily drugged. Analyzing his blood or symptoms, the runners learn that he's on heavy doses of "Ajani," a physically addictive Awakened African opiate. If the boy is denied the drug for more than twelve hours, he'll get comatose and may die. The runners need to search the DeBeers building for a supply, get an independent stash or substitute, or find a way to wean him from it before returning him to his father.

This can translate to a fantasy setting very well. Simply replace DeBeers-Omnitech with an Evil Overlord in a castle, and Osei with local nobility.

### **CONCLUSION**

Hopefully, these toxins have given you a workable system and a few adventure hooks for your games. We strongly encourage gamemasters and players to think about the wide world of chemicals and extrapolate from these lists. There are millions of substances that can interfere with the human body if consumed or injected. As Paracelsus said, "All things are poisons, for there is nothing without poisonous qualities... it is only the dose."