



Sample file

CHROME FLESH



CONTENTS & CREDITS

INTRODUCTION	3
MY BROTHER'S KEEPER	4
CLUSTERF*CKED.....	8
FIXING WHAT'S BROKE.....	26
THE ENHANCED LIFE	54
SHINY: LATEST IN CHROME	62
THE BODY REDEFINED	94
STEELING THE FUTURE	126
HACKING THE METAHUMAN CODE	130
QUICK & DIRTY AUGMENTATIONS	168
THE MURKY FUTURE	194
COMPILED AUGMENTATION TABLES	222

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INTRODUCTION

The tragedy of a shadowrunner has always been, and always will be, that they, by themselves, cannot survive. Want to hit the streets as you are and just get by on your wits? Great. Have fun. Lone Star or Knight Errant or someone will dispose of your week-old remains when they accidentally stumble on them in some dark alley. The world is stacked against you, and the price you pay to survive everything it is going to throw at you is to give up some part of yourself.

That's not, of course, the way everyone sees it. To some people, the tradeoffs are not about losing a part of yourself, but instead cutting off a weakness to replace it with something better. The technological revolutions that have shaken the world mean that there is no part of the body that cannot be improved. Muscles can be strengthened, limbs can be replaced, cognitive functioning can be improved, senses can be sharpened, immune systems can be boosted, and on and on. You'll pay money, you'll lose a part of whatever it is that makes you you, but you'll also take a step to becoming a lean, mean, shadowrunning machine—as long as you can live with the “machine” part of that sentence.

Chrome Flesh is your ultimate guide to augmentations, medical technology, and more in the Sixth World. It starts with a chapter called *Cluster F**ked*, a rundown on how cognitive fragmentation disorder (CFD) has shaken the augmentation landscape and led to shifts in technology. Then we have *Fixing What Broke*, an explanation of medical care, including mental health care in the Sixth World, since shadowrunners are going to need all sorts of care at some point in their careers. *The Enhanced Life* offers qualities and Life Modules for use in building shadowrunners

who rely on augmentations in their work. After that, we get into the gear, with *Shiny: Latest in Chrome* surveying the leading producers of cyberware and the new gear they have come up with. The *Body Redefined* does the same thing for bioware, lining up the options and detailing the players. Then we get into the wild, changing worlds of nanotech and genetech in *Hacking the Metahuman Code*. Both technologies have been dealt significant blows by the arrival of CFD, and both have had to make significant changes. But they're not going away, because if the corporate engineers can find a way to sell people something that might give them a boost, then they're going to do it.

The next chapter offers goods that aren't often thought of as augmentations: drugs and chemicals people use to give them a little something extra. *Quick and Dirty Augmentations* lists plenty of new options to give yourself a quick boost. It may not drain your Essence like other augmentations do, but they still have a chance to enslave a part of your soul with the weight of addiction. *The Murky Future* shows what's coming in the future and where the bleeding edge of technology is headed.

Then we wrap up with a full shopping catalog, listing cyberware, bioware, nanotech, genetech, and drugs from this book, *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*, and *Stolen Souls*. Use it as your master reference to all the possibilities that are out there, so you can carefully pick just how much of your soul you might have to trade away to stay alive one more day, or even long enough to pick up your next paycheck. Which you can then use to buy the next augmentation, the next boost, and take the next step to becoming whatever you are making yourself into.

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MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

"Brother, where...?"

BLAM, BLAM!!!!

Taka awoke with a start, fading memories of guns, lots mingled with flashing light and cracking thunder. In the Seattle skies above, fat greasy raindrops fell.

He struggled to breathe; rain already pooled in his mouth and lungs. Taka marshaled his strength and forced the filth from his lungs with a massive heave. His custom Evo cybereyes were offline, leaving him blind, and his right cyberarm wasn't responding. He lay in the dumpster gagging as recent memories rushed back, almost mentally breaking him. But he forced the memories down, concentrating instead on the pain. Pain could be dealt with, overcome. It let you know you were still alive. Still, thank ghost for good body armor.

Taka rose on wobbly legs, and bits of trash fell from his body as his cybereyes re-booted, barely. Flickering diagnostic AROs filled his vision and confirmed his suspicions: all of his 'ware was damaged, including his internal chrono. He wondered how long he was out.

All of the chrome in his body was now just dead weight.

"Brother, why?" he thought to himself. But answers had to wait; he had to move. No one wanted to be wounded and in the open in the Barrens. He stood slowly, legs stiff and breathing painful. With his good arm, the elven street samurai hauled himself out of the dumpster, falling to the pavement with a thud of meat and metal. His body was a mass of pain, especially behind his right

shoulder. Taka looked down at his right cyberarm. The fingers were bent at odd angles, and the internals exposed. Reaching over with this good hand, he wrenched the fingers into a fist and looked around to determine his location. As it turned out, he was only a half-kilometer from home. Despite the pain in his meat-parts, he began walking. The Barrens was a rotting, decaying cesspool, but he knew every alley, crumbling building, and shortcut. Everything here, everything he passed, had a memory attached to it.

Twelve years ago.

"What'cha think ya doin', ya fraggin' keeb?"

"Yeah, where do you get off wearing that shirt around here?"

"I think he deserves to get those pointy ears ripped off!"

The young elf boy tried to run, but four ork teens began pummeling him. He tried to fight back, but his punches flew from wild desperation. The ones that connected inflicted little damage to the stout orks, who only laughed.

The beating seemed to last forever, bright blossoms of pain punctuating each blow. The elf was about to pass out when, through swollen eyes, he saw one of the teens crumple forward, clutching his crotch. Then another's head snapped to the side before he too fell to the ground. The other two backed off, hands up defensively.





BY RJ THOMAS

"What are you *doin'*? Can't you see what he's wearing? Fragging dandelion-eater's mock ..."

The ork's speech ended mid-sentence when several of his teeth and one tusk broke off in a splash of blood. A vicious elbow smash from someone who had just rushed in did the damage.

The fourth ork teen fled.

The elf looked up at his rescuer. He was also an ork, barely pre-teen, but his physique indicated regular training. He was bald, and spatters of blood dotted his white t-shirt.

"So, you gonna sit there bleeding all day?" the ork said as he extended his hand.

Hesitantly, the elf accepted and was hauled up with little effort. The ork chuckled.

"What?" the elf said, blood oozing from busted lips.

"Your shirt. It says 'Human is right.' And those first two words are really close together, making it easy to read them as a single word. Humanis. No wonder those drek-heads jumped you. No offense, but you're either really brave or really stupid," the ork said with a tusky grin.

"I ...I just needed a shirt. I don't know what it says. Or what 'Humanis' or whatever is." He took a breath. "Why'd you help me?"

"Simple. I hate bullies. But you went down swinging, and I like that. Say, you got a name, or do I call you 'keeb'?"

"I hate that word. But I don't have a name. Not a real one."

The ork thought about it. "Taka. I'll call you Taka."

"Taka?"

"Yeah, it's Japanese. You know what Japanese is?"

"No."

"Well, come with me, and Sensei will teach you."

"Who?"

"My teacher. She's a one-hundred-percent-certified, hoop-kicking street samurai! How'd you think I know all those wiz moves? Besides, you need a new shirt."

Taka looked down at his ruined shirt. "Okay. But what's your name?"

"Gumo," the ork said, puffing his chest out as they walked.

"That's a goofy name. Ow!" That last remark came as Gumo slugged him in the arm.

Taka rounded a corner and walked along a rusty chain-link fence as the storm continued. Normally, he'd have encountered all sorts of nastiness by now, but even in the Barrens people got out of the rain. The pain in his chest was now a dull ache, while the rest of his body felt like pressed drek. Thoughts of how he ended up in that dumpster kept him going. He wanted answers in the worst possible way.

Eventually he came to a small gate, and his internal red flags went up. He should have seen the sentries by now, both the obvious and hidden.



Looking through the fence, he saw a familiar courtyard that lead to the back of a five-story apartment building. Known simply as "Oasis," the small commune was one of the few safe havens in the Barrens. Almost a hundred SINless called Oasis home, and each resident contributed to keeping it operational and safe.

Just like Taka and Gumo did as Oasis' primary guardians.

This task, this sworn duty, gave Taka his purpose in life. And now something was horribly wrong. As he crossed the broken basketball court, memories replayed in his mind. He tried to block them out, to stay alert, but they still came.

Seven years ago.

"BEGIN!"

In the blink of an eye, Taka and Gumo cleared weapons from their holsters and blasted away at each other. Using superior agility and foot speed, Taka moved laterally, trying to spoil Gumo's shots as his Scorpion machine pistol sprayed lead. But Gumo came straight in, Ares Predator firing as he tried to close the distance before his brother could get a solid bead on him.

Both were testing the limits of each other's abilities.

As much as they tried, neither Gumo nor Taka could connect. The ork closed, his Predator's slide locked back, while Taka ejected the clip from his weapon and reached for another. Sensing an opportunity, Gumo tossed his sidearm away and gripped the custom wakizashi at his belt. In one motion, he drew and swung his blade in an upward motion, missing Taka by centimeters.

Taka countered by throwing himself backwards on the ground, arm tucked and locked on his hip, pistol aimed squarely at his opponent. A single shot rang out, hitting Gumo in the gut with a paint round. Taka quickly rolled left, free hand reloading the weapon. Gumo continued his attack, reversing the blade and bringing it down.

"Halt!" a stern Japanese voice called out. Both combatants froze, with Gumo's blade hovering above Taka's heart and Taka's pistol pointing at his brother's groin.

Gumo flashed Taka an "Are you serious?" look. Taka just winked.

Across the courtyard, an ancient-looking human Japanese woman stood up gracefully, metallic hand resting on the ornate katana at her hip. Faint whirs from worn cyberlimbs came from beneath her kimono as she walked. Both students held their positions.

She nodded to her students who then stood and bowed. "Evaluations?" she asked, red cybereyes blinking.

"I didn't realize Taka had one more round in the chamber. He suckered me," Gumo replied.

Sensei nodded.

"My tactic was risky. I got lucky," Taka said.

Sensei nodded again. "You're both evenly matched. Both of you would have died."

"Hai, Sensei," they said in unison.

"Still, I am proud. You've both trained hard and learned all my lessons. Tomorrow, you'll receive your first augmentations and become true samurai, protectors of our home. But remember, your enhancements are nothing more than an extension of your body, mind, and will. A house will not stand unless the foundation is strong. And remember our code: Protect the weak, treat those who deserve it with respect, keep your honor, and in combat show no hesitation toward an enemy. We are true samurai, not mindless killing machines, despite what some may think."

"Hai, Sensei!"

"Now it's time for tea. Until tomorrow."

Taka and Gumo bowed again.

"Can't believe I fell for that," Gumo blurted out when Sensei was gone.

"Well, I doubt I'll be able to use it on you again. You ready to get chromed?" Taka asked.

"Oh yeah, gonna get me some new legs. Maybe then I can keep up with you."

"Only way you can!"

Gumo playfully punched his brother. "Uh-huh. Well you'd better get some new arms so your punches can finally do some damage!"

"Oh, frag you!" Taka said as he smacked Gumo's bald head and ran away.

"Hey, get back here!"

The chase was on.

Taka knew what he'd find even before he entered Oasis.

The first body was just inside the back door. It was a human boy named Jaiden; double-tap to the head. Jaiden was training to become the next generation of samurai, just like Taka. Now he was only inert meat. The rest of the building was more of the same. Bodies strewn about, dead from a blade or bullet, their blood and guts coating the walls. The entire place was a slaughterhouse, not a safe haven.

Gumo's gut felt like a dull knife was rattling around inside, tearing with each move. He'd failed them, the only family he'd ever known. Worse, he'd failed to see it coming.

Six months ago.

"I say zero witnesses," the mercenary said as he leveled his Colt SMG at the technicians lined up along the back wall. In the corner, the team's decker worked frantically at a cyberterminal, oblivious to anything else.

The team leader, a human named Dasher, pondered for a moment, hands twitching.

Strill, a mage, nodded. "They'll identify us later," she said, playing with a medallion around her neck. "Just their bad luck things went like this."

Taka and Gumo exchanged looks. The run was supposed to be a datasteal, not an execution.

"No, that's not what we came for," Gumo said.

Dasher cocked an eyebrow, his face twitching. "Really? Who put you in charge, tusker?"

Gumo glared, hands now on his Predator and wakizashi.

"Job is what I say it is. Johnson only cares about results, scan?" Dasher said, hand gripping a shoulder-holstered Ruger Warhawk.

Gumo stepped forward. "No, afraid I don't, *smoothie*"

"Back up!" the merc cried, raising his weapon toward Gumo. The mage's hands started to move.

Taka and Gumo reacted before Strill could cast her spell. It was over in seconds.

Taka's Scorpion put three rounds into the mage's face. She was dead before she hit the floor. Gumo rushed Dasher, putting the shadowrunner between him and the mercenary. The merc tried to geek the ork samurai, but instead drilled Dasher through

