



Sample file

CUTTING ACES



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INTRODUCTION

Every tool used on a shadowrun is, in the end, dedicated toward making people do things they don't want to do. Sometimes it's as simple as letting runners have some data or technology they're not supposed to have, or get into someplace they're not supposed to be. Other times it's a little more complicated—convincing someone to tell you something they know they're not supposed to divulge, or persuading someone who feels safe and comfortable in a job to upheave their life and go someplace else. Often, the tools runners use are blunt and not entirely sophisticated—threatening to make someone dead if they don't listen to you, or actually making them dead if they're too much in the way, can be effective but also loud and messy. Who hasn't dreamed about walking up to a tightly guarded facility and watching the guards smile as they invite you in? Or not even having to break into a facility to get some critical paydata, but rather have some corp suit bring it to you and then hand it over in some safe location with a handshake and a smile? That's the beauty of the con—it's the art of not just getting what you want, but making people want to give it to you.

Real con artists know they never have to ask anyone for anything—they just have to tell a convincing story, then let the mark take the steps they want to take. That's the broad outline of any con, but within that framework are multitudes of strategies and tactics, dozens of ways to win people's trust and then abuse it. Though if you're

really good, your marks will walk away from the process never fully understanding just what happened and how they got screwed. They might even harbor a lingering affection for the con artist, refusing to believe that the person who earned their confidence could have ever acted to hurt them.

Cutting Aces is the Sixth World guide to con artistry, with information on cons ranging from short-term efforts to wrangle a little spending cash, to more baroque affairs that can entangle runners in all sorts of intrigue for the chance at tremendous scores that would make bank robbers from the cash era jealous. The guide begins with *Fast and Loose*, an overview of some of the current events in the Sixth World that particularly lend themselves to shell games and the like. Then it moves on to *City of the World's Desire*, a look at the free city of Constantinople, whose location, culture, and history make it ideally suited for all sorts of confidence work. *Alibi Agents of Constantinople* lists some of the vital players in that sprawl, while *The Art of Confidence* is a detailed look at some of the con games people play and how some of the classics have been tweaked to remain relevant in the Sixth World. *Gats and Glad Rags* is a treasure trove of tools that con artists can use to get their job done—gear, spells, qualities, and more. Finally, *The Grifting Bible* offers enhanced social rules for *Shadowrun*, so that players wishing to play a con angle in their games have new ways to make the score go down. Taken together, the book gives runners the whole package, everything they need to make the world give them what they want, then beg to give them more.

CUTTING ACES CREDITS

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OPERATION: CONSTANTINOPLE

The trick was not coming up with a laundry list of things that might go wrong. The trick was knowing which of those options was right.

"Mr. Johnson hasn't been late before," Cadence said. "Three meetings so far, on time to every one."

"He was two minutes late to the third one," Dietrich said.

"Like that matters!"

Dietrich gave his "just saying" shrug.

"There's a problem, Cadence is saying," Pineapple said in his relaxed rumble.

"Of course that's what I'm saying! Something is wrong, which means someone is screwing us. And we have a limited few minutes to figure out who and why."

Beads hung down from an archway near their table, golden plastic in a tapering triangle, only slightly obscuring the four team members huddled around a square table, drinking sahlep. Pineapple had been conscientious for the first few sips about licking away his cream mustache, but he had been nursing the large mug for almost half an hour, and he didn't care anymore. Foam flecked his stubble.

"Two basic stories here," Cadence said. "First, Mr. Johnson is not here because he doesn't want to be here. Second, Mr. Johnson is not here because someone or something is preventing him from being here. There are no other alternatives."

No one could find a way to disagree with that.

"He arranged this meeting to get the thing he wants, a little chip

with no wireless capabilities that must have been developed in the Pleistocene Epoch. If he arranged a meeting and does not want to be here, it's because he wants to get the chip without paying us, and by sitting here we are just waiting for whatever he has planned to happen. If someone is delaying him—and if someone says 'Maybe it's just traffic,' I will slap them—it's because they do not want the handoff to happen, and delaying Mr. Johnson will not be enough for them. They'll want the chip either in their hands or destroyed. On top of that, it's very likely that the reason Mr. Johnson is being delayed is so they can find out how the handoff was going down, meaning in some form or another, they are working to find out where we are."

Paytah stood, looking ready to pounce, since he always looked that way, even asleep. "Sounds like it's time to go."

Cadence and Dietrich stood immediately. Pineapple slammed down the last bit of his sehlap, then unfolded himself to his full archway-scraping height. He didn't stoop. Pineapple perpetually walked as though he would much rather the world got out of his way rather than vice versa.

"Where do we go?" he asked.

"We stay in the Bazaar," Dietrich said. He ran his hand down his purple-streaked Van Dyke, possibly for re-assurance. "Gather some clues for what's going on, maybe get ahead of it."

Cadence pulled a handgun, held it in her right hand while awkwardly tapping at the cyberdeck on her left arm, then sighed,





BY KAI O'CONNOR WITH STEVEN "BULL" RATKOVICH

holstered the gun again, and let her hand move faster.

"If they're going to do something using the Polis or Bazaar security, they haven't made their move yet," she said. "No alerts."

"Police action is too obvious," Dietrich said. "They want to play it in a lower key. Or at least involve guns not held by official hands."

Pineapple sighed theatrically. "Don't people just try to blow up shit anymore to get what they want? What kind of world do we live in?"

"Do you have a lock on Mr. Johnson's link?" Paytah asked.

"No," Cadence said. "Lost it a few days ago. Dietrich, are your eyes in the sky?"

Dietrich looked offended, then briefly jerked his head up. A ghostly white outline of a bird briefly appeared.

"Of course," he said.

They walked through the broad corridors, with merchants calmly making their pitches as they walked by. The Bazaar drew in hundreds of thousands of customers daily, so the merchants did not feel the same urgency to pull in individual customers that they might in other Constantinople markets. If one customer passed them by, another hundred thousand was behind them, weighed down by all their tourist money. The merchants could be patient.

The team reached a four-way intersection and took a right, passing by stalls of rugs. They jogged by a few more intersections then took a left, now passing by bracelets and necklaces and all sorts of things that attempted to look like gold without actually being gold.

Cadence studied AROs the whole time, private ones that only she could see. Sometimes she flicked at them, sometimes she tapped on her cyberdeck, but she kept them flitting by, scanning the experiences of dozens of different shadowrunners, looking and learning. Then, by the time they were approaching the crowded auction space, she had come to a conclusion.

She took a few quick steps and then turned, stopping in front of the other members of her team.

"I've got an idea," she said. The team looked attentive. "But somebody's probably going to get hurt."

The call finally came an hour and fifteen minutes after the scheduled meeting time. Mr. Johnson didn't bother with any pleasantries. "I hope you're not still at that damn café."

Dietrich was on voice, but everyone else was listening. "No, we weren't about to stay there. What happened?"

"Got ambushed. I'm out now, but they're looking for you. Four of them—two humans, an ork, and an elf. They've probably changed clothes from when I last saw them, but there's no erasing the face tattoos on the elf. Asymmetric triangles, black and white."

Dietrich looked at Cadence. She nodded.

"All right, we'll steer clear. How are we going to get the chip to you?"



"I've sent an assistant named Cagri. Go to the center of the Ic Bedesten and wait. It won't take her longer than fifteen minutes. She'll find you and ask you if you have seen any Koral ceramics in the Bazaar. You tell her you've got no eye for pottery. Then you'll know each other, and you can take care of business. She'll make sure you get paid."

"Sounds easy enough," Dietrich said.

"I hope so. Sorry about the delay."

"Everything's forgiven when we're paid." Dietrich kept his tone light.

"Then all will be well shortly. Certified credsticks, as agreed." He disconnected.

Overhead, a ghostly white form gently circled. Paytah glanced up.

"This is the plan?" he said.

Cadence nodded. "This is the plan."

They didn't spread out in order to make it easier for Cagri to find them. It didn't take long. Twelve minutes after Mr. Johnson's call, as the team pretended they could somehow accurately appraise the value of copper pots, a woman in a white blouse and a brightly colored skirt casually walked over to the team. She stopped nearby, looked at the pots, looked left, looked right, then looked at Cadence, apparently unfazed by her visible weapons and body armor.

"Excuse me, but I don't suppose you have seen any Koral ceramics in the Bazaar?"

"Wouldn't know them if they bit me on the ass. Because I've got no eye for pottery."

The woman, presumably Cagri, nodded and spoke lowly. "Good. Do you want to go somewhere?"

"Just got to do a simple exchange. Here is fine."

Cagri nodded again. "The item?"

Cadence pulled out a small chip from her vest. "Right here."

"Of course you'll understand if I verify it first?"

"I'd rather have cash in hand."

"Have other employers been sloppy enough to work that way?"

Cadence reached out her hand. "I can always hope."

Cagri produced a small cable and plugged it into her commlink, then slotted the chip into the other end. She looked up and smiled. "This cable is so old I don't think even the antiques dealers here have any of them." She looked at readouts on her commlink screen—per Mr. Johnson's instructions, at no point was the data from the chip ever to be transmitted wirelessly to any place, even in the form of an ARO.

She looks up. "This looks fine. I'm happy to ... oh, no."

Four heads turned to see where Cagri was looking. Four people were moving their way through the crowd, giving off the sort of determination that made people move out of their way. The person in front had asymmetric black-and-white triangles on her cheeks and a pixie cut with ragged bangs. All four of them had weapons on their hips but nothing drawn.

"We have to move," Cagri said.

"We haven't been paid yet."

"You want to live to spend this money? Move!" She obeyed her own instructions, walking in the opposite direction from the team closing in.

"I want to at least hold it!" Cadence said, but she was without a

choice. Her money was moving away, so she had to follow.

The pace of pursuit picked up immediately, but no words were exchanged. So far, so calm.

But when Cagri and the runners with her picked up the pace to a run, so did the pursuit. People started to notice, and the chances to do this subtly faded. The pursuing team pulled out their weapons.

They weren't too far from the eastern edge of the Bazaar. A good sprint might take them outside. So of course it was not going to be that easy.

There were not guards at every entrance to the Bazaar—it wasn't a military fortress—but the Polis station for the Bazaar was not far from the eastern wall, and some officers streamed out of the station to head off the chase before anyone got away. They had their weapons out.

Magic amplification made the voice of the lead officer easy to hear. "Please drop your weapons and raise your arms," the officer said. He and three of his fellow officers had pistols leveled at the people in front of them.

But not up. The white ghostly bird became less ghostly, screaming down from the ceiling at the surprised officers. They raised their weapons and fired into insubstantiality. By the time they noticed that the bird was a phantom and re-leveled their guns, Cadence and her team had veered right at a full run. The second team was right behind them.

"Pineapple, up front!" Cadence called. Pineapple took three long troll strides to draw ahead of the others, and he kept sprinting as he flew into the rear of the auction area. He slowed down so he could start throwing things. Pots, vases, rugs, a large wooden chest, and a few crates flew into the air, covering enough distance to clear his teammates but bother the pursuit. It also caused chaos in the crowd, which was part of Pineapple's normal mode of operations. He kept moving, grabbing the auctioneer's podium and ripping it from the slightly elevated platform while the auctioneer sprinted toward anyplace that looked safe. With a tremendous heave, Pineapple sent the podium sailing after the other merchandise he had tossed. His grin seemed as wide as his chest. He turned and looked at the pit of bidders, most of whom were scrambling away. He jumped off the stage, like a predator going after something slow and tasty, and watched people scatter even faster. The rest of his team followed.

"Direction?" he yelled.

"West," Cadence said. They sprinted.

They were close to the southern edge of the Bazaar, but there were not many gates at this area, so fewer opportunities for Polis or other troublemakers to run in and cause chaos. Which was fine, as there was no particular need for the chaos to increase. Screams had started in the auction area and spread, so people were screaming all over without knowing why. They were also running and occasionally diving behind stalls, which did not make the shopkeepers happy, though some of them were panicking too, so they didn't notice. And yet while people were running and screaming, Cadence did not see anyone pointing a weapon at her. The path ahead seemed clear enough, despite the aforementioned chaos, that she thought it was entirely possible that they could make it to the Carsikapi Gate and out of the Bazaar without further difficulty.

Which is when Cagri decided to turn right, moving back into the heart of the Bazaar.

"What the hell are you doing?" Dietrich yelled, as a show of surprise was important. Cagri didn't answer, she just ran. She crossed

Sample file

