



SHADOWRUN[®]

ADVERSARY



BY RUSSELL ZIMMERMAN

ENHANCED FICTION

They say everybody's got a little voice in their head. Mine's a little louder than most. He speaks to me—and yeah, I assume it's a “he,” for the same reason I assume a serial killer making headlines is a he—in all sorts of different situations, at all kinds of different times. Sometimes it's in the ringing silences between gunshots, or in the breathless moment after a spell turns all the air in the room to fire and burns everything and everyone but me. Sometimes it speaks to me in the hissed intake of breath before throwing another punch. It can be the snarl of an engine, the growl of a dog, the sound of a bone breaking. I hear his voice when I'm first half-awake and not sure if life's still a dream or not, when I've stayed up too late and had enough to drink that reality goes fuzzy 'round the edges from exhaustion, when I take a good solid punch to the face and a concussion threatens. I hear him clear as can be, in those moments.

The whispers in the pointy ears of one James Mitchell Kincaid—Jimmy, to my friends—are real, you see. It's not my conscience warning me away, it's not memories of my mom or pop trying to steer me straight, it's not quite a god or devil, and it probably ain't even a chemical imbalance, quite. It's not even a vivid imagination and an imaginary friend-type of gig.

No, when I hear a bodiless voice commanding me to do bad things, I know just who it is. The cartoon devil on my shoulder watching the cartoon angel punch out at the end of the day and go home is actually a verifiable, quantifiable, metaphysically recognized entity; the pointy end of my moral compass, stabbing me until I bleed, is my mentor spirit. My totem. My life coach.

Adversary.

You ask an assortment of hermetic, shamanic, and everything-in-between-ic spellslingers to describe Adversary, and you'll get answers ranging from neo-anarchist manifestos about Robin Hood to Biblical warnings about the devil himself. And the thing is, none of them are wrong. That's his spectrum. That's him. Adversary is what you make of him, and what you let him make of you; he can urge you on to fight The Powers That Be, no matter how hopeless the struggle seems, or he can give you a wink and a nudge and the encouragement you need to kick a puppy, just because society says it's taboo.

That's between you and him, chummer.

I keep the bastard around because Adversary's more than bad life advice dribbling into my ear in moments of crisis; he's power. To a Black Mage like me, a mojo-man who lives his sorcerous life almost entirely by the adage of *do what works*, power is worth something. Worth everything. Worth all I've got.

I only have a few shredded tatters of magic left to me, you see. Ol' Jimmy Kincaid, well, I managed to end up on the wrong side of some vampiric fangs a while back, and then about a hundred clicks of bad road since then. I've had ugly luck, I've made ugly decisions, I've lived an ugly life, and it's taken cuts of my soul away from me. So I have to maximize what's left of my sorcerous potential. I have to do the best I can with what little's left to me, after all these years. I have to use leverage.

Adversary's my lever. He gives me that little extra oomph when I need it, especially when I'm acting in a way he approves. He helps me take power from others and hold it with both hands. He's how I get the most out of my own little bit of power. He's how I scrape by. And just like any good lever—a crowbar, for instance—sometimes he works like a club.

This was all fresh on my mind because those whispers came back, with a vengeance, one particular night. A stray hold-out pistol shot from the back seat had busted up the radio in my car, and I couldn't even lean on my skull full of Transys headware to get any tunes, because my favorite underground radio station, a 24/7/365 guerilla jazz fest, was offline thanks to some Ancients shenanigans across town that had ended with a dump truck running headlong into their live studio set-up. There wasn't a distraction that would do the trick, so I found myself on a stakeout with nothing bouncing around in my head but dark thoughts and boredom, as dangerous and sickly-sweet a combination as Jack and Coke.

You should just kill her, Adversary whispered to me.

I ignored him, glaring off into space as I scrolled through my case's files in my heads-up cyberoptics display. The files weren't really arguing against my mentor's dark urges, though.

Johnston, Mary Jo. Human. Female. Thirty-four years old. Husband, Marcus (divorced), two kids. The ex was the one who hired me, and those two kids had been why; Mary Jo had laid hands on them too many ways, too many times. Marcus had put up with her anger and her sickness for a long time, been poisoned by her deeply enough that he kept giving her new chances, internalized enough of the abuse that he thought he deserved it ... but when he walked in on Mary Jo leaving bruises and scars on their kids, internally and externally, Marcus found it in him to leave, and was lucky enough to have friends that could help him. Marcus was a clerk at Puyallup Hall, working for the city and handling the occasional paycheck or hot tip sent my way. Eventually, he reached out for my help.

MJ owed him alimony, and Knight Errant didn't have it in 'em to care. I was for hire, and didn't have it in me to let her off the hook, so here I was. Mary Jo wasn't at home or at work, so I was checking for her here.

The years since the divorce had done wonders for Marcus and the kids, but Mary Jo'd just turned her anger at other targets, taken out her vitriol elsewhere, spewed her bile on others. Johnston had gone full, bingo-card, pants-on-her-head extremist since then; hated elves, hated orks, hated trolls, hated dwarfs, hated changelings, hated magicians, hated Europeans, hated Aztlaners, hated NANners, hated, hated, hated. She'd racked up eight charges and sixteen months in a facility in the time since my buddy Marcus had left her, ranging from terroristic threats and destruction of property to battery and carrying an unlicensed weapon (to a political rally, no less, stirring up trouble at some of the Ork Underground debates). She had a head full of dumpster juice and a heart to match, and in the years since the divorce she'd just given up on being anything else.

One to the back of the head, Jimmy. C'mon. You'd be doing her a favor, I heard. *You know that much hatred comes from inside, not outside. Kill her. Break the cycle. You'll help her out, help out those kids, help out everyone else. Do the world a favor.*

But I wasn't here to kill her. Honest. I was here to serve her papers, I was here to deliver a message, I was here to—maybe, if things went sour—put hands on her or any of her friends in self-defense only. Legal-like. Square. By the book. I was Jimmy Kincaid, Investigator For Hire, just serving some documents on behalf of an on-the-up-and-up legal employer. I was a good boy. That was the plan.

So there I sat, in the graveyard quiet of my Ford, trying to hum the tune of any song I could think of to take my mind off what a piece of shit this gal was, and to distract myself from the dark urgings of my vengeful mentor (who just hated to see me follow the laws). I was leaning hard on my cyberoptics from a block away, scanning faces as they came and went from the local Humanis chapter house, zooming in, trusting facial recognition protocols and pinpoint-accurate schematics of Mary Jo Johnston's facial features, and just waiting. She was a dumb, ugly creature without any friends anywhere else, so like a devil rat that only ran with the rest of her dumb, ugly herd, I knew I'd eventually find her here.

"Here" was where I found lots of dumb, ugly creatures without any friends anywhere else.

Puyallup's official Humanis Policlub chapterhouse had, once upon a time, been a humble office building. Small and simple, but productive. A part of the community. In decades past, someone had, I dunno, filled cubicles with workers, whiled away their work week, turned a profit or two, made a product, shipped goods, whatever.

These days, though? These days it was a tumor. A cancerous growth made up of hatred and fear in equal measure, with a dizzying assortment of flagpoles out front. Some were ancient symbols that everyone associated with bigotry and World- or Civil-War losses, some were newer logos imported from European haters or kit-bashed together by soulless marketing companies. Some were outright corporate logos, flaunting their favorite defense companies or hardline CAS and UCAS "buy native" jingoists.

Every flag was as ugly as the sumbitches I saw coming and going.

Kill them, too.

I sighed.

Burn those flags down. I'll give you the juice to do it, Jimmy. I'll help. Or I could lend you a spirit. A fire spirit! Slave it to your will, send it to destroy, and just sit here and watch the show.

"Nah." I spat my WhiteBrite gum out the window and popped in a fresh piece. "I'm good."

"Good." Adversary snorted disdain at the very notion. *You and I both know you don't really think that.*

"I meant it like 'full.' Politely declining a—you know what, why am I even arguing with you?"

You're right. Don't sit here talking to yourself, go update her file to "deceased." I'll give you the power you need, Jimmy. You can do it.

"We don't even know if she's in there, dummy." I chewed my minty, tooth-whitening, drug-laden gum. It kept me alert and awake, kept me sharp—and kept me agitated and energized enough to sit there and argue with my murderous, otherworldly patron. Out loud.

Plenty of Johnston's buddies had stumbled, half-sober at best, across the parking lot and to their parked trucks and SUVs to make their drives back to impotent mundanity, but no matter how late the night got, I hadn't spied *her* with my little eyes. Her car was there, though, and had been for hours. That might've meant she was in there, still drinking, serving drinks, playing cards and rambling incoherently with her friends, but that might've meant her car got left there earlier in the night, and she'd gone somewhere else when I ha—

"Hell-o, what have we here?" I sat up a little straighter behind tinted windows, squinted and refocused my cyberoptics to peer at an arriving panel van. It trundled past me and then backed awkwardly through

the chapterhouse parking lot and tried to align its rear doors with the building's entrance.

A man and a woman climbed out of the front seats—both human, naturally—and I filled my Transys headware with their information to cross-check later for outstanding warrants, bounties, child support being in arrears, or any other reason I could get paid to fuck with them a little.

I eventually spotted my mark, MJ Johnston, climbing out the back of the van. Two things were different about her; her face had taken enough of a beating that my subroutines had trouble identifying her, and she was shoving an ork—an ork with her hands tied behind her and a face that looked like a fucking meatloaf—out of the van.

It's her! Finally! Kill her!

"Shut up." I focused on my headware and the heads-up displays on my optics, doing my stalwart best to ignore Adversary's blood-soaked urgings.

The ork came up a blank on my facial recognition scans, even when cross-checked with the district records and my licensed-investigator Knight Errant files. I didn't know if that meant she'd been beaten so badly she was unrecognizable to a headware commlink, or if she was SINless and wasn't in any particular records bank. I didn't know who she was, but that didn't matter compared to what I *did* know; I knew she was at a secondary location, and I knew she was an *ork* whose secondary location was a *Humanis chapterhouse*.

Nothing good was going to happen to a person like her inside that place.

I don't know what they had planned, I don't know which of them she'd made eye contact with or mouthed off to or fought back against to earn their ire, I don't know why they were feeling their oats. I wasn't gonna wait and find out. I wasn't just gonna serve some papers tonight, after all. Marcus would understand.

I sighed and swiped my thumb across the starter panel of my Frankenstein-monster Ford. The engine snarled to life.

Summon Ariana, my mentor snarled along with it. Call down your ally spirit! Send her to wreak bloody vengeance! Defy their power! Destroy them!

"Nope." I tugged on my favorite driving gloves, wiggled my fingers into them for snugness and ritual. Then I reached up to fasten my safety belt and sent mental commands through my wireless network, checking on the ammunition load—very specifically—of the big, blocky, Colt handgun in its smart-holster on one hip.

"This is gonna hurt."

I reached down and pulled my wand from its own tactical holster and held it sidelong in my teeth, like a football player's mouthguard or the stick a Civil War soldier bit down on when a doctor grabbed a bone saw.

Going in yourself?! Hah! Yes! Show the world you are strong enough with only me at your side! Get your own hands bloody! You don't need spirits for this! Do it yourself!

"That's the plan."

My Ford was a beast. Me and an ex, herself a shadow legend and street driver named Turbo Bunny, had really done a number on it, back in the day. We'd had to chop up and reshape the whole frame just to make it work; the engine had literally belonged to a car twice the size, and it fed power meant for a sleek limousine into the body of an American-ugly semi-compact. It was lots of horsepower. Absurd horsepower. Too much horsepower.

As the door closed behind Johnston, her friends, and their prize, I floored it.

Adversary howled alongside the engine and my abused tires, and I fired my Ford like a bullet, up and over the curb, across their parking lot, a bullseye. I kept both hands on the wheel, white-knuckled under my gloves, and used a mental command to metaphorically lean on the horn. It blared, a warning, a war-cry, as the car hit home.

Yes! Let them hear us coming. Let them know they can't stop us. Make them afraid!

The ram bar smashed into the front doors like the fist of an angry god, and my car slewed to a stop halfway across their meeting hall amidst plaster, glass, fear, splintered tables, and confusion. I reeled against my seatbelt and trusted the harness do the job as I rolled with the impact and bounced around in the driver's seat.

The horn went quiet. The headlights went off. My cyberoptics went wide and white in the dark as I cycled through vision modes until I could see them clearly.

I spat my bloody wand into one waiting hand and bared my bloody teeth like a wild dog.

Yes, Adversary purred, pleased with the damage.

My mentor spirit filled my head, heart, and stomach with rage, and my cyberoptics pierced the dark tint of my windows and the plaster dust and shadows in the air to find me targets. The Humanis goons were reeling, shocked, and terrified, but—only slowly—going for guns. Their orkish prisoner was prone somewhere, smart enough and scared enough to hug the ground, or maybe just knocked flat and stuck there due to her cuffs.

Yes! Adversary urged me on.

The raw, pure mana welled up inside me almost like it had in the good old days—the golden boy of Lone Star days, the trained combat hermetic days, the powerful days—and I held it in until I felt like I'd burst. Scanning for targets, scanning for targets, filling myself with power, pouring it into myself right to the brim, as I looked at the faces of the human-shaped monsters all around me.

All of them, Adversary insisted.

All of them, I agreed.

"All of them," I breathed it out like a prayer. It wasn't my usual Enochian for Centering, but the *sentiment* was there, so the power flowed cleanly.

The belly full of mana blasted away from me in a hurricane of unadulterated power, swirling, eye-searing blue-white, a ripple in reality like lightning in a bottle. There was no attached elemental power, no piggybacking real-life energy involved. No plasma, no acid, no cold. Just hurt. Just pain. Just force. Raw from the tap.

One good spell. One display of power. One overwhelming use of force. Adversary-style. Utter domination.

Every one of the bastards got blasted clean off their feet, more dead than alive.

Now, I won't lie, I wasn't the sort of mage that could sling that kind of mojo any more, not safely. It tore me up good, battered me as badly as slamming my car through a wall had, bruised me like going the distance against a boxer, wore me out like a wrung dishrag. I felt a rush of blood pouring from my nose, knew that if my

eyes weren't cybered I'd've gone red and teary, and I reeled from it as my pulse roared in my temples.

Hell, Adversary pushed me to cast so hard, I hurt myself almost as bad as I hurt all of them.

Almost.

"Ma'am." My voice slurred as I hauled myself out of the car with my Colt in my hand. I shot the nearest whimpering Humanis punk as he tried to rise, blasted him back down to the floor.

Gel round.

Wait, what?!

"Ma'am, if you can hear me, you let me know." Another hint of movement, another shot. Another Humanis thug fell from his knees to lie face down.

Gel round.

No!

"Ma'am, it's okay, they won't hurt you, and neither will I. You're safe now. I promise."

Kill them! Idiot!

Another shot, another. Another. Another. Then I remembered bullets—especially gel rounds—cost money and my wingtips were already paid for, and I just started kicking them to sleep, instead.

The ork finally clambered to her feet. She stood there, without my help, backlit by the city behind her, shoulders high despite the beating she'd taken.

The all-important kicking Mary Jo Johnston was a job I left to her. Serving those papers could wait. A little paycheck was more important than my errand.

It's not too late! There's still time! Kill them! Adversary gnashed his teeth in my ear. I listened to the oncoming sirens, instead. We were in Puyallup, but not the Barrens part, and that meant they'd show up eventually. *Your knife! Use your knife!*

"Just take it easy," I said to her *and* to him, then I ignored him. I scanned the lot of Humanis wreckage on the astral, saw that they were all, even if just barely, clinging to life. Their auras weren't dim yet, just their souls.

"I want to go home," the ork was able to mumble when she was done, which happened before Johnston was dead. I was impressed by her restraint. The orkish woman had taken a beating, but wasn't out. She had one eye swollen shut, was talking like she had a mouth full of glass instead of shattered teeth, but she lifted her chin.

"Just get me out of here."

Kill her, too! She can't tell you wha—

"I can do that," I said, helping her to my car. We took down another section of wall on the way out.

I left Mary Jo Johnston and the rest of her hateful crew for Puyallup. Let the city decide.

Maybe the cops would show up and protect them all, get them medical attention, take down their story, fill out a report. Maybe their neighbors—staring at that hatred all day, every day—would get here before Knight Errant did, and none of that would happen. In the end, that wasn't for me to decide. It the cops got here first, fine. The bastards would keep. I knew where to find them.

Sometimes I listen to Adversary. Sometimes I follow the rules. Sometimes I do what I want.

Sometimes I do what's right.

ADVERSARY

Adversary provokes rebellion whenever possible and doesn't care why; he leaves it up to his followers whether it's for the noble pursuit of freedom or for entirely selfish reasons, the disruption of the status quo is the ends, to him, not merely the means. The chain of command is a bludgeon that Adversary refuses to be beaten with. He and his followers are experts at cosmic Jiu-Jitsu, turning an enemy's position of authority against them, subverting power in order to someday seize it. Adversary is by turns proud and cruel, and may, at times, seek to destroy what he cannot rule. Many Adversary followers turn toxic, but many of Adversary's rivals say there's little difference between his toxic followers and his true.

ADVANTAGES

All: Gain a point of Edge when targeted by enemy spells.

Magician: Edge Boosts cost 1 less point of Edge for spells, preparations, and rituals in the Combat or Manipulation category, or for Counterspelling (choose two).

Adept: Gain the Spell Resistance power.

DISADVANTAGES

Adversary followers have issues with authority figures and a constitutional inability to shut up about the indignation of subjugation. When given orders or instructions that don't match their own desires and goals, or even when given those orders brusquely or rudely, an Adversary follower must succeed on a Composure test (3) to follow those instructions instead of doing what they want, instead. In addition, if browbeaten, bullied, or controlled (such as by successful application of the Intimidation skill or by certain Manipulation spells), they take a -1 dice pool modifier on all actions until

they (often violently) re-assert their dominance and independence. Finally, whenever an Adversary follower takes part in Teamwork tests as a helper, they add one die to the leader's dice pool for every *two* hits they roll.

JIMMY KINCAID'S 'TURBOBUNNY SPECIAL' FORD AMERICAR

Dealing with the trauma of magic loss by falling headlong into better-than-life addiction, a younger, dumber, Jimmy Kincaid got all tangled up in the addictions of his fellow elf, Turbo Bunny. While they mutually agreed that the relationship was grounded in harmful behavior and backed away from one another, there is one lasting legacy of their time together: a monstrous Frankenstein Americar overhaul.

This heavily customized Ford started as a Lone Star pursuit Americar, and it has the brawn, armor, and push bar to show for it. A handful of Bunny's tricks kept the handling from suffering despite the monstrous increase in raw power, which is where the meat of the monster is focused. Their project piece largely entailed cramming as much muscle as possible into the semi-compact sedan, and to do so they heavily scavenged parts from more powerful cars found throughout Black's Junkyard, including every horse hidden in the engine block of a Mitsubishi Nightsky.

With advances in technology in the many years since the two giggling BTL-heads set to work, Kincaid's customized Ford might not be the unstoppable street monster it once was, but its straight-line speed still impresses many a skell who might otherwise escape. Stats similar to these could be used for any supercharged muscle car, Lone Star or Knight Errant pursuit/chase special, or similar snarling beast on four wheels.

JIMMY KINCAID'S 'TURBOBUNNY SPECIAL' FORD AMERICAR

HAND	ACCEL	SPD INT	TOP SPD	BOD	ARM	PILOT	SENS	SEAT	AVAIL	COST
4/5	26	30	260	12	10	2	2	4	4	40,000¥

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