LAST STAND

An eerie yellow-green light emanated from the tunnel ahead as the team moved through the cramped corridor. Ramirez checked the nav data in his image link. *Looks like the right place,* he thought, holding his left hand up in a fist. The team crouched down behind him. Though his image link, he sent a text to Ziegler to broadcast to the team. Normally, he would be able to broadcast the message himself, but with no access to the Matrix here, he had to use an intermediary.

A short while later, a middle-aged Asian man crept up to his side. Lu Wendao was a specialist (a geomancer) brought in by Wuxing, and he had proved useful so far in dispatching several of the bugs.

"That's it. Something is wrong here. The mana, it swirls and gathers ahead instead of flowing." Lu Wendao whispered.

With no reply but a nod, Ramirez sent another signal to Ziegler. His second in command, Rodriguez, led the other *Cuachiqueh* forward, weapons ready.

The team approached the wan light, the tunnel widening into a large chamber, its walls lined with the same resin-like substance as the tunnel. Green, pulsating sacs attached to the walls and floor writhed as they were attended by huge armored bugs.

Ramirez shouldered his weapon, his smartlink changing modes on his gun to the underbarrel grenade launcher. Raising the weapon to fire, Ramirez was interrupted by automatic gunfire from behind. Checking the feed for his team coming in from Ziegler's deck, he saw the rear of his group. True form spirits soaked up fully automatic bursts before dropping and dissipating back to the Astral plane. Ramirez checked his team's status. Two down already. These things must have come straight out of the astral.

The large armored spirits in the chamber began looking around, scanning for the intruders, spotting Ramirez's aura. The beetle-like creatures towered above him, ready to crush him under their chitinous plates. Re-flexively, he squeezed the trigger on the launcher, and an explosion from the far side turned the spirits' attention long enough for Ramirez to bolt toward the tunnel.

"Fall back! Fall back, dammit!" he screamed at the ambushed strike force. Loading another mini grenade, he launched it at the chamber entrance, hoping the blast would kill whatever was following them.

A scream came from the right, and the network feeds went dead. Ziegler was either dead, or his deck just got destroyed. Ramirez grabbed the cowering form of a teammate before him and shoved forward. "Get moving!" he yelled, letting a burst fly from his rifle back toward the chamber and the bugs. A blast rocked the tunnel as the previously grenade launched earlier went off, causing a spill of greenish ichor from the beetle spirit behind him.

A white-hot burning sensation stopped Ramirez as he turned to flee down the tunnel. His flesh and armor smoking from the acidic attack, he saw a black claw emerging from his side, a disgusting insectoid mutant having attacked him as he was turned away. Gritting his teeth, Ramirez leveraged his rifle against the thing's head and pulled the trigger, splattering its mutated innards on the tunnel walls. With a grunt, he drew his combat knife and hacked the black limb off at what could be a wrist.

Looking up the tunnel, Ramirez saw movement in his low-light vision off in the darkness, illuminated by muzzle flashes from Ichiro's machine gun. A primal yell echoed from Ichiro as the barrel of his weapon begins to glow with heat, and still he stood his ground. Ichiro's form was overwhelmed as his ammunition ran dry, the barrel of the Ultimax white-hot.

Motion detection showed still more bugs, converging from multiple directions. Ramirez' thoughts raced for a solution, for an escape, "Four of us left. If we make it out of this one, it will be a miracle."

Introduction

SRM 08-06: Final Countdown is a *Shadowrun Missions* living campaign adventure. Full information on the *Shadowrun Missions* living campaign is available at facebook.com/SRMissions/ and includes a guide to creating Missions characters and a regularly updated FAQ. All maps, player handouts, and other playing aids are found at the end of this document.

Preparing The Adventure

SRM 08-06: Final Countdown is intended for use with *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*, and all character and rules information refers to the fifth edition of the *Shadowrun* rules.

Adventure Structure

SRM 08-06: Final Countdown consists of several scenes. These scenes form the basis of the adventure, which should be completed in approximately four hours. If you are running short on time, you should streamline each and be a little more generous with clues, target numbers, and other requirements to aid in guiding the players through the adventure.

Each scene outlines the most likely sequence of events, as well as how to handle unexpected twists and turns that inevitably crop up. Each one contains the following subsections, providing gamemasters with all the information necessary to run it.

Scan This provides a quick synopsis of the scene's action, allowing you to get a feel for the encounter at a glance.

Tell It to Them Straight is written to be read aloud to the players, describing what their characters experience upon entering the scene. You should feel free to modify the narrative as much as desired to suit the group and the situation, since the characters may arrive at the scene by different means or under different circumstances than the text assumes.

Behind the Scenes covers the bulk of the scene, describing what's happening, what the non-player characters are doing, how they will react to the player characters' actions and so forth. It also covers the setting of the encounter, going over environmental conditions and other properties of the location as well as providing any descriptions of important items.

Pushing the Envelope looks at ways to make the encounter more challenging for experienced or powerful characters and other ways you can add some "extra spice" to the scene. This subsection should usually only be used for home games, or games where time is not a factor. At most convention and Open Play events, gamemasters should omit this information. It adds to the scene, but does not contain important information.

Debugging offers solutions to potential problems that may crop up during the encounter. While it's impossible to foresee everything that a group of player characters might do, this section tries to anticipate common problems and other suggestions for dealing with them.

Running The Adventure

Gamemastering is more of an art than a science, and every gamemaster does things a bit differently. Use your own style when it comes to preparing and running the adventure and do whatever you feel is best to provide the best *Shadowrun* game you can for your players. *Shadowrun Missions* adventures are designed to run in a standard four-hour convention time slot.

Please keep this in mind when running the adventure. You should leave at least 15–20 minutes at the end of the time slot to complete any necessary paperwork and pass out the players' **Debriefing Logs**. (Make sure that you have enough copies of the **Debriefing Log** for this adventure to give one copy to each player after running the adventure.) This section offers some guidelines you may find useful in preparing to run *SRM 08-06: Final Countdown* (or any *Shadowrun Missions* adventure).

Step 1: Read The Adventure

Carefully read the adventure from beginning to end. Get a feel for the overall plot and what happens in each scene. That way, if something different happens, you won't be caught off guard and you can adapt things smoothly.

Step 2: Take Notes

Take notes for yourself while reading through the adventure that you can refer to later on. Possible things to note include: major plot points (so you can see them all at a glance), the names of various non-player characters, possible problems you notice, situations where you think a particular character can shine and other things you'll want to keep in mind while running the adventure.

Step 3: Know The Characters

Prior to the start of the adventure, examine the PCs' record sheets and Debriefing Logs for your reference and have basic information about their important abilities handy so you can refer to it during play. Also go over the characters and keep their previous events listed on the Debriefing Logs in mind when determining non-player character actions in various scenes if such a dynamic has been included.

Step 4: Don't Panic!

Gamemastering involves juggling a lot of different things. Sometimes you drop the ball and forget something or you just make a mistake. It happens, don't worry about it. Nobody is perfect all the time and everybody makes mistakes. Just pick up from there and move on. Your players will understand and forget about it once you get back into the action.

Step 5: Challenge the Players

Gamemasters should challenge the players, but should not generally overwhelm them. This is not to say that games cannot be deadly. If the characters die through their own actions and repercussions of those actions, then so be it. But the idea is to challenge the players and their characters, not to overwhelm them. If the enemies and challenges are too light for the characters present, then increase them. On the other hand, if the characters are badly outmatched by the enemies, then tone them down. Make things difficult but not impossible.

General Adventure Rules

Shadowrun Missions adventures use the rules presented in *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition* (*SR5*). Standard rules such as success tests, glitches, critical successes, and other common mechanics are described in *SR5* and are not repeated in this adventure.

Please keep in mind when preparing for the adventure, that the PCs will not necessarily be comprised of a balanced party. It's entirely possible that the party will be made up entirely of technomancers or back-to-nature shamans. If the characters run into a brick wall because of such complications, show flexibility and use your best judgment in how you lead them back to the plot.

Non-Player Characters

Non-player characters (NPCs) are essential to any adventure. They are the allies, antagonists, and background characters in the adventure that interact with the player characters. NPCs in this adventure have already been created and can be found throughout the adventure.

Minor NPCs are found in the individual scene that they appear in, and generally have a brief write up, noting only their important skills and the gear they are carrying.

Major NPCs can be found in the **Cast of Shadows** at the end of the adventure, and have more detailed write ups, and include most of the skills and the gear they have access to.

The NPCs in this adventure should generally stand up to the average player character but may need some adjustment to suit a particular group of characters, especially a more experienced and powerful group. The scenes and NPC descriptions offer tips on adjusting the NPCs to suit the abilities of the characters in your group. To adjust the power level of an NPC, refer to **Helps and Hindrances** (p. 378, *SR5*). Take the player characters' abilities into consideration when assessing the NPCs in this adventure and modify them accordingly.

Mission Difficulty

Gamemasters are encouraged to use their own judgment, and to adjust the difficulty of the encounter to take into account the abilities of the players. If the players have no magical support, replace magical defenses with mundane ones. If the players are weak on combat, reduce the number of enemies by one or two. Conversely, if they're steam-rolling the opposition, add one or two enemies to the fight. Missions should be difficult and something of a challenge, but should not be insurmountable.

A simple method for adjusting difficulty is to simply increase the dice pools and Professional Ratings of the enemies. A simple +1 or +2 to all combat and defense tests gives enemies a minor boost in power, while a +3 or 4 will make them truly formidable. Adding to their Professional Rating will give them a larger group Edge pool to draw from, and gamemasters are encourage to use this Edge when logical.

Often a combat scene will tell you if it's supposed to be challenging or is simply there to serve as filler or a minor obstacle that the players should steamroll through. When possible, use this as a guide to know when to tweak the enemies and encounters. If it doesn't say, assume the scene should present a challenge to the power levels of the players.

A Note on Loot and Looting

Gamemasters should be careful what they allow players access to, because they can and will try to steal everything not nailed down (and even then, they often have pry bars and claw hammers to deal with those nails). *Shadowrun Missions* operate under the assumption that two players who have run the same missions will have roughly the same amount of resources available to them (give or take some negotiation and a little bit of minor loot fenced), so when players are able to steal and fence a lot of gear or are able to get their hands on high-priced vehicles, cyberdecks, or foci, it can unbalance the game and make it unfair to players who didn't have the opportunity to get those items. Gamemasters should avoid letting the players get into a position to do high value looting whenever possible.

Chicago, The CZ, Noise, and Background Counts

While for many the Chicago and the Bug City Containment Zone are synonymous, the CZ comprises less than 1/3 of the total landmass of the city of Chicago proper, not counting suburban areas and farmlands connected to the city. But the CZ is still big, and it is the rotted, gutted, feral heart of the Windy City. It starts at 115th Street to the south and runs nearly 30 km North way to Belmont Avenue to the north, and reaches from the Lake Michigan an average of 15 km to Harlem Avenue to the west. A mass of torn down buildings and hastily-erected barricades were added to and reinforced over the three-year period that the Containment Zone was in effect, and even now nearly 20 years later this barrier stands as an imposing divide between the Zone and the outside world. Anyone can supposedly freely travel between the zone and Chicago proper, but Lone Star watches those coming out and the gangs and warlords watch those going in very closely.

Over the last three years, the Astral Preservation Society in partnership with The Ash Union and various megacorp thaumaturgical divisions have made headway in cleaning up the background count within the CZ and the surrounding area. Thanks to their work, unless otherwise noted in the scene, assume a background count of zero anytime characters are within the Containment Zone. The count will fluctuate wildly at times, so players should expect to encounter everything from high background counts and mana voids to various aspected backgrounds and mana warps. (See p. 30, *Street Grimoire,* for full rules). Areas of Chicago outside the CZ may also suffer background count bleed from the Zone.

With the megacorps construction efforts moving forward in the CZ and surrounding areas, matrix connectivity has improved dramatically. Noise levels will vary from area to area, but unless otherwise specified in the scene, assume a default Noise level of zero anytime the characters are within the Containment Zone.

Paperwork

After running a *Shadowrun Missions* adventure, there are several important pieces of paperwork that need to be filled out.

The first is to make certain to distribute a copy of the adventure's **Debriefing Log** to each player. As the gamemaster, please make certain to fill this out and sign off on it for each character. In the interests of time, you may have each player fill out the sections, with appropriate values that you give them. Please consider the PCs actions in the scenario when providing Reputation modifiers, per those rules (p. 372, *SR5*).

The second is to make sure that all players have updated their character's **Mission Calendar**. PCs are al-

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BACKGROUND COUNTS

Background Counts impose a negative Dice Pool penalty equal to their rating for all tests that are linked to or utilize magic in any way (i.e., spellcasting, summoning, assensing, any test made while astrally projecting, and any active skill that benefits from active adept powers such as killing hands, critical strike, great leap, or improved skills, etc.). Dual Natured creatures and spirits suffer this penalty to all actions.

Aspected Background Counts grants a boost to any Limit that utilizes magic in any way (see above) to any metahuman, spirit, or Dual Natured creature that matches the Aspected Domain. This includes spellcasting Force Limits, so spellcasters need to be careful as it can be hard to control the additional surge of mana. Any magically active being that does not match the Aspected Domain should treat this as a normal Background Count and suffers penalties.

Background Counts above 12 are called either a Flux (For Aspected Domains) or a Void (For magically dead zones), and are very dangerous. Any being that is magically or astrally active in any way (dual natured, astrally perceiving, casting a spell, has an active adept power, has an active focus, etc.) takes Background Count-12 unresisted Stun Damage each turn that they are active and exposed to the Flux or Void.

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lowed to go on one run per week. The calendar is used to track the character's monthly lifestyle expenses, adventures, and their downtime exploits.

Mission Synopsis

The runners are contacted by Juan Xihuitl for a meet at a Taco Temple. He says he wants to meet in such a location due to the lack of surveillance by the UCAS armed forces. Directing them to the walk-in cooler, Juan tell the team of a joint corporate strike team who penetrated the tunnels under Chicago, and were subsequently killed, but for two members, a Wuxing geomancer and an Aztechnology *Cuachiqueh* (an Azzie black ops operative.) The geomancer is alive, though the Aztechnology operative died of his wounds shortly after making it back to the surface. Juan hires the team recover data from the cyberware of the dead *Cuachiqueh*, and to contact and extract the geomancer, who is currently being "debriefed" in the UCAS army encampment surrounding the ruined and demolished remains of Wrigley Dome. Once this is finished, the team is to head into the

hive, using a distracting force to pull most of the bugs away, and end the threat to Chicago once and for all.

The team makes plans to infiltrate the encampment, gather the data, and extract the survivor, Lu Wendao. Once the team gets Lu Wendao out of the encampment, he tells them the ley lines under Chicago have become corrupt due to the presence of an artifact in use by several insect shamans. The geomancer is also aware that due to the failure of the joint corporate strike force, the UCAS military has moved up the timetable on what they call the "Ripley Initiative," a plan to destroy Chicago and the insect spirits with gratuitous use of neutron bombs. Armed with this information, the team returns to Juan to get the team into the insect tunnels to retrieve and destroy the artifact.

Around the time of this meeting, the team is contacted by Dr. Martin Tate with an offer to simply leave town for a few weeks. If the team takes him up on his offer to leave, they may do so, but Chicago is done for.

Should the team decide to tell Tate to stuff it, and finish Juan's mission to destroy the artifact, they must enter the bug tunnels through one of the known access points, and using the navigational information lifted from the cyberware of the dead *Cuachiqueh*, the team finds the chamber where the artifact resides. After defeating the remaining soldier spirits set to guard the artifact, the team can recover the object and destroy it through one of many ways.

While deep within the tunnels, the muffled sounds of a battle reach the runner team from above. As they exit the hive tunnels, they find themselves in the midst of a battle, where the UCAS military and corporate forces have engaged the Queen spirit but have been largely overrun by many spirits on the ground. While the battle rages around them, the team must find a way to destroy the Queen spirit or flee for their lives.

Scene 1:
Taco Tuesday

Scan This

The team is contacted by Juan Xihuitl to meet at a Taco Temple. He offers a job to extract a survivor from the joint corporate strike force, held by the UCAS military in the encampment at what's left of Wrigley Dome.

Tell it to Them Straight

Work's been fairly steady recently. With the bugs having moved back into Chicago, the corps have been gung-ho about securing their assets. Even lowball street runs are thriving, with gangs and organized crime looking to take advantage of the situation while law enforce-

ment is on the ropes. It's no surprise when your comm beeps the ringtone you have set for work calls. On the other end, the stoic, craggy face of a troll greets you.

Juan Xihuitl wastes no time with pleasantries. "I have an offer of employment for you. If you are amenable to a meet, come to 9467 West Higgins, near O'Hare. Be there by 2 p.m."

What's the worst that can happen from going to talk?

Read this when the PCs arrive at the address:

Arriving at the address you look around for the bar, or discreet building you are used to holding meets in. The address points to this address, but there's nothing here but an empty parking garage and a busy Taco Temple.

Read this when the PCs enter Taco Temple:

Inside, the Taco Temple is loud and crowded as hungry folks stand in line, waiting for food they ordered off the AR menu. Looking around briefly, you see who you are looking for. Juan Xihuitl, normally formal and extremely businesslike, sits in a troll-sized plastic booth dressed in casual street clothes and mirrored aviator sunglasses, the remains of some sort of burrito on the table. As far as you can tell, he's been eyeballing you since you approached the Taco Temple, the large windows providing an excellent vantage point for anyone coming in through the front. Acknowledging you, he balls up the half-eaten burrito and wrapper, and deposits it in the trash on the way to you. He motions for you to follow him as he enters the short hallway near the restrooms, stopping at the door marked "Employees Only." Opening the door and walking through into the kitchen area, your team and Juan are stopped by a gangly looking teenager.

Through a cracking, nervous voice, he says "I'm sorry, uh, sir and everyone, this area is off limits for …"

He is cut off by Juan, who thrusts his arm forward carrying some form of identification, "We're from corporate. We're here for an inspection."

The teenager swallows hard and nods, letting your team pass. Juan leads you to the rear of the

fast-food joint, and through the door of the walk-in cooler. Inside is barely enough room for your team to stand among the boxes of refrigerated and frozen tacos waiting to be re-thermalized.

Juan finally addresses you as the cooler door shuts. Small drones on tracks occasionally enter the cooler through miniature doors to gather more supplies as he speaks. "Thank you for coming. I understand the circumstances of this meet are unconventional, but I needed to make sure I was at a place where I was not being watched. Earlier today, forces of several corporate interests attempted to penetrate the insect hive below Chicago. After a prolonged firefight, they were repelled. Because of the apparent failure of this mission, the UCAS military is attempting to get approval to go forward with what they are calling the 'Ripley Initiative.' This operation would be the destruction of the greater Chicago area through the use of multiple high-yield nuclear weapons, finishing the task Ares started many years ago. That's right, we're talking about the nuclear destruction of a major city in North America."

"We need to finish the job of the strike team, and that's where you come in. I need a team to get into the UCAS base and extract the strike-team survivor so we can get what he knows. His name is Lu Wendao, and he is the only member of the team who's biomonitor still reads in the green. He's a geomancer, brought in from Wuxing to examine the ley lines. Last communication from him had him finding the hive at a junction of lines that have some kind of 'corruption.' Get him out alive and find out what he knows about this corruption. I know he's alive, and his biomonitor says he's in the camp at the Dome, likely in the infirmary. Once you have what you need, turn him loose."

"Your secondary objective in the UCAS base is to find where the body of another operative is being stored and recover the memory from his cyberware. His head data will have navigation and tactical information critical to finding your way through the hive tunnels."

"Once you recover both of these, contact me, and we will insert your team into the tunnels,

create a distraction for the spirits in the hive, and giving you a window to stop the bugs for good. Hopefully, we can draw that nasty Queen Spirit away and give you a chance. Get this done, and I'll pay you 15,000 nuyen per person from my personal slush fund for operations. What do you say, amigos? Ready to be heroes?"

Behind the Scenes

Juan Xihuitl, an Aztechnology Mr. Johnson, has found himself behind the eight ball. A few weeks ago, Juan received intelligence that showed beyond the shadow of a doubt, the bugs were not only back but were getting ready to make a move on Chicago. Pulling several high-powered strings, Juan attained authorization to put together a joint corporate strike force with assets taken from several of the Big Ten, as well as support from the UCAS military. The mission was simple: penetrate the bug hives below Chicago and eliminate the Queen Spirit.

Juan wasted no time in getting this team together, enlisting the Aztechnology *Cuachiqueh* (or "Shorn Ones," Aztechnology's crack Black Ops division) as the spear tip. The team penetrated the hives under the city, killing every flesh-form it encountered. The *Cuachiqueh* were guided through the hive tunnels by Wuxing geomancer Lu Wendao, who was following the energy of the ley lines. They met their fate when the team broke into the hive chamber containing a major ley line intersection under Chicago. Unfortunately for them, it also contained the Queen. Immediately, the team engaged the Queen, fighting off many powerful spirits in addition to the infested dragon. The insect spirits proved to be too much for them, and the team was forced to withdraw. By the time they made it to the surface, only two had survived: Lu Wendao, who was swiftly quarantined for debriefing, and Hector Ramirez, a *Cuachiqueh* who quickly succumbed to his wounds.

When they were given the mission, the joint corporate strike team was tasked with the mission of eliminating the insect queen spirit and destroying the central hive. Failing this, the UCAS government would proceed with the "Ripley Initiative." Juan does not know what this is, beyond its name. When the strike team was assembled, Aztechnology instituted a travel ban on all its employees from entering or leaving Chicago. Similar bans were put in place for other corporations as well. Juan suspects something big is about to happen if they cannot produce proof the hive has been dealt with.

With the failure of the strike team, Juan now turns to a local runner team to help finish the job before the UCAS military moves forward with their Ripley Initiative. Juan also suspects certain elements within the UCAS military are pushing this agenda, so he calls a meet out-

SCENE 1: TACO TUESDAY

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