

TOXIC ALLEYS

Sample file

ADVENTURE: TOXIC ALLEYS

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FOR THE GOOD

Al Tennyson decided for the thousandth time his job sucked. But then, for the thousandth and first time, he remembered the size of his paycheck. So he once again set about walking another long tour of the outside perimeter.

Turning his long coat's collar up against the fat, greasy raindrops (which were pooling around his neck), he wondered—why couldn't they send a drone to do this?

That wasn't the worst of it, though. There was always something creepy about Ford's Theatre. Sure, ghost sightings of President Lincoln had been a staple for over two centuries now (and were mostly bulldrek), but there was something about that damn basement. When he started, the on-site supervisor had made it known that the basement was forbidden. Even if there was a problem, only those with clearance could go down. And he didn't have the clearance, which suited him fine. Closest he'd ever gotten was the stairs leading down, and he'd felt an unearthly chill skitter up his spine. Nope, he was a hired gun. His job was to watch for and, if need be, eliminate problems. Whatever was going on in the basement wasn't worth dealing with, period.

He started his first perimeter check of the night, slogging through shallow puddles, hand tucked inside his coat with fingers gripping the hidden SMG. The cybersystems in his eyes cut through the sheets of rain with ease, which was how he saw the delivery van parked near the south corner. Al wasn't exactly the brightest ARO on the grid, but he knew when something was out of place. He went to take a step back, seeking cover before calling it in, but his boot hit something in a puddle, and he staggered.

He then began to sub-vocalize into the mic on his throat, but a sudden, sharp pain accompanying the new hole in his throat robbed him of his voice. He tried to activate the PanicButton on his commlink and thought about how he wasn't getting paid enough for this.

And then everything went black.

In less than sixty seconds, the first phase was over.

Lt. Ben Maddox slammed a fresh magazine into his Ares Alpha assault rifle, smoke still wafting from the suppressed

barrel. While he swiftly moved over the two dead bodies at his feet, his weapon automatically chambered a new round, just in case there were a few waiting surprises. At the same time, a chorus of "targets down" and "clear" came over the team's tactical network before he added his own voice. A quick glance at the small windows aligned in the left of his field of vision showed several more dead bodies throughout the theater.

Those poor schmucks may have been good, but no one was better than a Firewatch team—a *true* one, not those other traitors.

Banishing those thoughts, Maddox chastised himself. Shot placement on his targets was more than sufficient but not up to his normal standards. The difference between target elimination and them still being able to return fire was sometimes millimeters. Now wasn't the time for mistakes. There was too much riding on this mission, and it wasn't complete.

Not yet.

"Horse to all units, rendezvous rally point one" he subvocalized, collecting himself for the task at hand. "We're not finished."

With the precision of a Swiss watch, the fully armored team assembled and stacked up outside of a nondescript door leading to the basement for phase two. The team's demotech, Heron, and the magician, Harrier, were already doing their checks. Using hand signals, Heron indicated an all-clear of any technological problems, but Harrier signaled "ward." Without missing a beat, Maddox signaled for a hard breach. Hare and Hammerhead readied their assault shotguns, while the massive troll Hippo raised her ballistic shield. Next to the door, spirits materialized as Harrier prepped a spell and Heron set shaped charges. Maddox leveled his Alpha, frag grenades ready in the under barrel launcher.

He allowed himself a fleeting moment of pride. They knew exactly what to do and how to do it. Words were unnecessary. He was their leader, and they trusted him with their lives. They would not fail.

Harrier's spell went off, magical energies bursting in the air. A nano-second later, Heron's charges went off, splintering the ancient door's frame. Hippo's massive foot sent the door flying down the stairwell and slamming into some unfortunate (idiotic) guard. To add insult to injury, Maddox followed up



with a frag, bouncing it off a wall and out of sight. The sound of a sharp *bang*, and the cries of the wounded and dying sounded out. Harrier's spirits surged forward, slamming into other conjured beings as they began battle.

With the enemy spirits occupied, Hare, Hammerhead, and Hippo rushed down, Hippo's shield offering initial protection and drawing fire while Hare and Hammerhead's shotguns thundered away. Maddox, Heron, and Harrier followed suit, cleaning up the remaining resistance.

"Something's not right, boss," Hammerhead said, kicking a dead security guard aside. "This doesn't look anything like a bug hive. Or even the beginning of one."

Maddox spun on his fellow ork, clicking his tusks. It was his only odd habit, a move he performed when he was thoroughly pissed. Everyone on the team knew what it signaled. Despite being a head taller than his CO, Hammerhead flinched.

"Are you questioning my—our—orders?" Maddox growled, his eyes drilling into Hammerhead.

Hammerhead swallowed "No, *sir*! Just ... maybe the intel is all wrong. This could be a set up."

The rest of the team looked on, uncertainty on their faces.

Maddox let a breath out through his nose. "Okay, point taken. But we still need to do this. So get up top and help Hawk with overwatch," he said, slapping his teammate on the shoulder.

Hammerhead nodded, relief on his (and everyone else's) face as he swapped his shotgun for his suppressed Alpha. "Yessir!" he bellowed just before his faceplate clicked back into place and he bounded up the steps.

Maddox looked over at Heron. She was hunched over something roughly the same size and shape as a standard beer keg, checking various diagnostic readouts. No one knew exactly what it was; everyone on the team simply called it "the Device." Not very original, but at one point someone had decided to crudely spray paint "party time" on the side. All Maddox knew was what he was told, which was that this would temporarily seal any metaplanar breaches and portals. Getting it in here was phase two; phase three was setting it off.

"Okay, we're all green sir." Heron called out as she closed several panels.

"Good, transfer detonation protocols to my 'link." Maddox said.

"Sir?" Heron queried.

"Did I stutter?!" Maddox bellowed.

Two seconds later, protocol confirmation transfer was complete, and Maddox gave the signal to exfiltrate. Everyone moved deliberately, though not quite as well as before. An air of uncertainty developed, but Maddox ignored it. Soon it wouldn't matter. He was their leader—they needed to obey, first and foremost.

"Hawk, are we clear for exfil?"

"Copy, Horse, everything's secure."

"All right people, let's *move*!"

The team quickly piled into the delivery van outside, popping out face-plates to breathe in some fresh air. Hare ran his fingers through his scraggly beard, grateful for the chance to finally take care of the itch he'd been enduring since the mission began. Near the front of the van, Hammerhead sat, face-plate still in place.

"Come on, you big tusker, take that damn thing off," Hare said, punching his friend in the shoulder. In response, Hammerhead fell to the floor. A bloody hole sat in the back of his helmet.

"Frag!" Hare yelled as he scrambled back. For a few precious moments, the team was stunned. That was their downfall. Suddenly, the van's doors closed and locked as several packs of green gas burst open. The team scrambled and tried to re-engage their armor's systems, but to no avail. Hare managed to make it to the van's rear window and watched Horse and Hawk staring stone-faced at them.

Maddox watched as Hare impotently tried to claw his way out of the van. Beside him, Hawk just smirked.

"No way they're going to get out of that. Not even with Hippo's strength."

Maddox ignored the comment and watched as the hate, along with every other emotion, faded from Hare's eyes. The betrayal was almost palpable. Still, it had to be done. His orders were clear. It was for the corporation's continued survival. At least that's what he kept telling himself.

"You have disposal taken care of?"

"Indeed, boss. Already have a route set in the nav-system. The dog brain, combined with the local GridGuide, will take this heap right to a nice spot near the Potomac. By the time they get there, that gas will have dissolved them into a gooey mess. No way even the best forensics will be able to lift any DNA."

Maddox nodded. "Do it."

With a kiss and a wave, Hawk activated the van's auto-nav. "Nothing like tying up loose ends, eh, lieu..."

Before Hawk could utter another syllable, Maddox moved. His hand clamped over her mouth and nose, and he brought up a long, thin blade that pierced under her left armpit and traveled straight to her heart.

After the rigger went limp, Maddox dumped the body in a nearby dumpster and tossed in a thermite grenade.

Looking around one final time, he signaled the Ford Americar he'd stashed a block away the day before. As he drove away, he activated the device and destroyed his 'link.

"It was all for the corporation," he said over and over in his head. "All for the greater good."



INTRO

Toxic Alleys is a standalone adventure for *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*. It follows up on plot developments in *TOXIC ALLEYS* and *Dark Terrors*, but players can launch into this adventure without having used that previous material.

Players should note that only gamemasters should read beyond this point. The following text reveals secrets and plots that, if read prior to the adventure, could impact their enjoyment of the adventure (and the surprises in store).

PREPARING THE ADVENTURE

Toxic Alleys can be run with only the *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition* rulebook. However, many of the characters presented in this adventure draw from the additional core supplements such as *Run & Gun* and *Run Faster*. All rules in this adventure are assumed to follow the core rules presented in *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*. Gamemasters can, of course, use any of the optional rules as best fits their game.

This adventure takes place in the DeeCee sprawl, with maps of particular locations included.

ADVENTURE STRUCTURE

In *Toxic Alleys*, the runners become intertwined with the dealings of the powerful and secretive law firm Stark, Theissen, and Van Der Mar. The adventure has a series of chapters describing the different scenes, including all the appropriate stats and information for that scene. The scenes are divided into the following sections.

MAIN SECTIONS

This book is divided into several sections designed to assist you in running this adventure at your table:

- **Preparing to Play:** A plot synopsis, necessary background information, and other useful details and data.
- **Adventure Scenes:** The adventure itself, broken down into individual scenes.
- **Legwork:** Summaries of information and data the player characters might find during their research.
- **Cast of Shadows:** Profiles of the primary NPCs with whom the player characters will interact during the adventure.

ADVENTURE SCENES

The adventure itself plays out over a series of sequential scenes. Each scene contains some, or all, of the following subsections:

- **Scan This:** A brief summary of the events in the scene.
- **Tell It to Them Straight:** A text selection that can be read directly to the players or paraphrased when the player characters reach specific points in the scene.
- **Hooks:** Descriptions of ways that characters might be encouraged to play a scene.
- **Behind the Scenes:** The mechanics behind each scene, including NPC motivations and any secrets or special instructions for the scene.
- **Subplots:** Secondary adventures—or red herrings—that offer avenues for gamemasters to develop to make the adventure less linear for players.
- **Pushing the Envelope:** Suggestions for gamemasters on altering the scene to challenge more experienced players or more powerful player characters.
- **Debugging:** Suggestions for getting the adventure back on track if the player characters' actions derail it.
- **Places of Interest:** Locations featured in the scene, including descriptions and ratings for security systems and Matrix systems.
- **Grunts and Moving Targets:** NPCs in that particular scene. NPCs that are featured in multiple scenes are found in the *Cast of Shadows*.

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Non-player characters (NPCs) are key to bringing any adventure to life; they include the allies, enemies, and contacts the characters will interact with during the shadowrun. Important NPCs have relevant profiles, including stats, in the *Grunts and Moving Targets* section for each scene. Major NPCs who appear in multiple scenes are listed in the *Cast of Shadows* section at the end of this book. Gamemasters can and should tweak the NPCs to make them more or less challenging opponents (see **Prime Runners**, p. 385, SR5). NPCs in groups benefit from Group Edge (p. 380, SR5), while individual NPCs in this adventure possess their own Edge stat to use.



Toxic Alleys is an adventure designed for *Shadowrun, Fifth Edition*, and it will plunge the runners into the chaos caused with some of the more secretive forces of the Sixth World mix it up with each other.

Here are a few suggestions that will make the adventure, and gamemastering it, proceed more smoothly.

STEP ONE: READ THE ADVENTURE

Read through the adventure before introducing it to your group. Being familiar with the adventure lets you see how everything connects. This helps you adapt when your players (inevitably) come up with something not in the adventure.

STEP TWO: ASSESS THE ADVENTURE

Rarely does an adventure go exactly as it's written. Some may want/need more of a challenge while sometimes adjustments for specialized teams (such as all mages) may be needed. Others may switch NPCs for characters with whom the players are more familiar. Assessing the adventure lets you customize it to make it more enjoyable and fit your own gamemastering style.

STEP THREE: KNOW THE CHARACTERS

You should have complete information on each of the player characters prior to the adventure so you can assess their individual (and group) skills, contacts, and abilities. For example, if a scene calls for them to fly a plane and no one has the Pilot Aircraft skill, you may need to tweak the scene. If a character is sidelined for parts of the story because of lack of abilities or skills, consider adding scenes that play to that character's strengths.

GAMEMASTERING THE ADVENTURE

STEP FOUR: TAKE NOTES

Written notes keep things organized and make it easier to present the adventure smoothly and effectively. Taking notes during the adventure, including the things the players do and say, and the choices they make is useful in awarding Karma and handling contacts at the adventure's conclusion. More importantly, the choices made in one game will affect the players' options—and the consequences they face—in the next adventure. Players will sometimes make choices they'll regret, and in the shadows that means there's a good chance those decisions will come back to haunt them.

STEP FIVE: DON'T LET THE DICE RUN THE GAME

Dice rolls are used to determine the outcomes of events in a roleplaying game. However, sometimes these rolls interfere with the story. As gamemaster, you have the authority—and the responsibility—to tweak the dice to enhance the story. As a rule of thumb, don't fudge the die rolls to hurt player characters, but an occasional tweak might help them out (going from death to serious injury for example) or recover the story from a catastrophic run of bad luck.

STEP SIX: DON'T PANIC

You will make mistakes. *Everyone* makes mistakes. Forget a roll, misread a scene, or forget an important clue—don't worry! You're there to have fun, which is more important than a flawless performance. When a mistake is made, do your best to straighten things out and move forward.

BACKGROUND AND SYNOPSIS

The UCAS capital has long been a hotbed of intrigue and conspiracies, and now the various plots contained in its borders are about to go to a new level. Working against them are all the forces that like the way the Sixth World works, since they make a lot of money off of it and enjoy the power they possess. At the nexus of all these various forces is the law firm of Stark, Theissen, and Van Der Mar, which has an increasing presence in the UCAS capital of DeeCee. They represent people of with all sorts of power—money, magic, money and magic, and more. Sometimes the various clients they represent pull them harmoniously in a single direction, but other times the tensions between factions of the world show up within the firm, pulling different parts of the firm in different directions. In these instances, the goal of the firm is to get ahead of the problem and resolve it without blowing up a significant portion of the world.

Right now, three factions who are intertwined with Stark, Theissen, and Van Der Mar are headed for a conflict.

The Black Lodge has been making steady inroads into all levels of UCAS government, but recent setbacks have left them feeling like they need to do something dramatic to preserve their forward momentum. Shedim are working a number of gambits to try to regain a connection to their home plane. And bug spirits are engaged in their continual quest to build their hives and do whatever it is they plan to do.

The inciting incident of this adventure is an attack on Ford's Theatre by Ares Firewatch operatives. This was made to look like an eradication of a bug hive, but it was in fact an attack on Black Lodge property, seeking to eliminate a metaplanar portal that is an important tool to them. Stark, Theissen, and Van Der Mar know they need to find out what motivated the attack and who, ultimately, was responsible. As it turns out, that investigation leads down a winding path that uncovers an Ares operative playing bugs, shedim, and the Black Lodge against each other, powerful artifacts being put to dangerous uses, buildings with space for arcane rituals, hidden shedim lairs, and more. At the end, the runners will need to find a way to deal with the building pressures in a way that does not blow up the entire sprawl.

