

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

THE EDGE OF MIDNIGHT

THE NAKED CITY

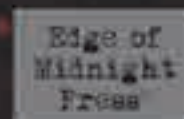
The concrete jungle hides a million dreams...
and a million ways to die.

The world of *The Edge of Midnight* is defined by her cities. Skyscrapers tower over blood-stained cement, as criminal syndicates pull the strings in the halls of power. Warlocks and private dicks rub shoulders with gaunt gangsters and femme fatales, each of them searching for that one lucky break to put them on top. There are fortunes to be made here, but the price is steep. Desperation and ambition walk hand-in-hand, and one wrong step could punch your ticket for good. Five of the most important — and dangerous — cities in *The Edge of Midnight* universe are covered in this collection. From the sun-drenched beaches of Paradiso to the dark alleys of New Eden, from the halls of power in Nova Roma to the gangsters' hideouts of Central City, no stone is left unturned. Each city has complete details on playing and running stories within them, including maps, locations, NPCs, and scenario hooks.

Take a walk through the Naked City... it may be the last thing you ever do.

EMP 1100

THE NAKED CITY



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THE NAKED CITY

A Guided Tour of the Concrete Jungle.

THE NAKED CITY

CONCEPT AND DEVELOPMENT

Rob Vaux

ADDITIONAL WRITING

Martin Hall, Ree Soesbee,
Katie Yates

MECHANICS DESIGN

Kevin Millard

MECHANICS ASSISTANCE

Marshall Smith

EDITING

Rob Vaux, Katie Yates

COVER AND INTERIOR DESIGN

Nate Barnes

ARTISTIC HUGGY BEAR

jim pinto

INTERIOR ART

Abrar Ajmal, Cris Dornaus,
Carl Frank, Daerick Gråtss,
Michel Koch, Ben Peck,
Ted Pendergraft

WEBSITE DESIGN

Dave Agoston

FOR STUDIO 2

Jim Searcy

PLAYTESTERS

Eric Aubrecht, Carl Ballard,
Kevin Barbour, Tyler Blount,
Eirik Bull-Hansen, Kyle Burck-
hard, Dave Cain, Ben Caplan,
Jeff Churchill, David Crabbe,
Steve Crow, Peter Blake Hindman,
Laura Heilman, Sean Higgins,
Sean Holland, Pat Kapera,
Paul Lalumondier, George Lichter,
Michelle Matusin, Christi McCray,
Vivika McKie-Woods,
Angus McNichol, Steve Mulhern,
Clayton A. Oliver, Jason Olsan,
Kent Peet, Andrew Popovich,
Justyn Pritchard, Jeff Rahn,
Ben Riggs, Tarik Salameh,
Marshall Smith, James Sparling,
Chris Tang, Rodney Thompson,
Seth Tupper, Rob Wieland,
James R. Wiley, Marcus Wishick

SPECIAL THANKS

To Rob Wieland, for all his help.

DEDICATION

To Ed McBain,
and the citizens of Isola.

™The city in these pages is
imaginary. The people, the
places are all fictitious.
Only the police routine is based
on established investigatory
techniques.†

- Introduction to the
87th Precinct novels

WARNING

This book contains images of
nudity and adult language.
Reader discretion is advised.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *The Naked City*, the first supplemental sourcebook for *The Edge of Midnight* role-playing game. This six-chapter volume encompasses five of the biggest metropolises in the Unified Commonwealth, plus the nation's various rural areas and the four nations that comprise the Borderlands to the south.

The heartbeat of *noir* begins with the city: its streets, its buildings, its neon signs, and its residents. It holds a thousand promises in its bosom and can break your heart a thousand ways. Urban predators prowl its thoroughfares, looking for new victims to rob, brutalize, or slay. Some of them carry switchblades and hide in dark alleys. Others wear expensive suits and work out of corner offices. The city gathers its citizens close with dreams of wealth, fame, and happiness. The lucky ones find enough to hold on. The rest are broken beneath the wheel and cast into shadow: sacrifices to whatever dark gods hold court beneath the skyscrapers.

Cities in *noir* have a unique mixture of specificity and timelessness. On the one hand, every setting in *noir* can be seen as a permutation of the same location — a single place where the genre lives and breathes, an über-city. The mean streets in one town play just as rough as they do in any other, and the seamy characters who inhabit the dark backrooms and third-rate hotels change very little from locale to locale. The names on the signs may be different, but they are essentially interchangeable: meaningless markers denoting a single omnipresent *noir* metropolis. You can see it in every *noir* film which declines to name its setting, from John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* to Alex Proyas' nameless, haunted *Dark City*.

Yet simultaneously, specific time and place are equally integral to the genre. Raymond Chandler's novels couldn't be set anywhere but Los Angeles, for example, and some have argued that *noir* couldn't have existed were it not for the false promises of fame and fortune that L.A. has always made. The rolling fog, which reduces the world to mist and silhouette, is an equally key part of *noir*'s make-up — and where could such fog exist if not San Francisco? The skyscrapers of New York, the gangsters of Chicago, the seamy bayous of New Orleans... all of these make invaluable contributions to the atmosphere of *noir*, and all of them inextricably belong to a specific city with a unique pulse and identity.

These are the paradoxical extremes of *noir* as a setting: the constant give and take between reality and formlessness. Between them lies a third kind of setting, blending elements of both. These are fictitious cities — fabrications and fantasies — which don't exist on any map, but which have their own distinct identity nonetheless. You can find Batman's Gotham here, as well as Ed McBain's Isola and Frank Miller's purgatorial Basin City. They live half in a dream, inspired by places in real life but occupying a landscape composed solely by the author and his or her readers.

This third notion is where we chose to set *The Edge of Midnight*: a land not of our reality, but drawing inspiration from it and reflecting distorted patterns of real places and things.

Paradiso holds the show biz glamour of L.A., spiced with the casinos of Vegas but truly beholden to neither of those cities. Washington's political corruption takes hold in Nova Roma, where no senator ever walked and no lobbyist ever orchestrated a pay-off. Chicago's gangsters have a ferocious doppelgänger in the Drago mob, while Manhattan's notoriously tough residents are reflected on the streets of New Eden. Each city takes a cue from the landscape, culture, and mythology of a real world counterpart. Yet each is uniquely its own, reflecting a truth that is equal parts distortion, distillation, and fabrication. These are the cities which you will explore in this book.

The Unified Commonwealth holds six major metropolises, five of which are covered here. The sixth, Gateway, was detailed in the *Edge of Midnight* core rulebook; the remainder are developed using the same format and outline. Each chapter covers a single city, and is broken down into several sections. "Overview of the City" presents its basic layout, its overall mood, and the essence of its soul. "Crime" describes the general nature of criminal activity within the city, as well as any major criminals or organized syndicates who operate there. "Law Enforcement" details the state of the police force, what kind of cases they tend to focus on, and the various levels of corruption within their ranks. "Neighborhoods" covers the different boroughs within each city, giving an impression of the local atmosphere. Each borough contains a series of detailed locales around which GMs may base a scenario or set a specific scene. "NPCs" covers some of the city's most interesting characters, who can either appear as foils for the PCs, as allies, or perhaps as a little of both. Finally, "Sample Campaigns" covers a few brief ideas for extended scenarios within the city in question.

Chapter Six covers those parts of the U.C. outside of the biggest cities. It includes a brief section on the nation's various rural areas, including a description of a small town with some dangling plot threads for the GM's use. The rest of the chapter covers the four nations to the south of the U.C. — representing freedom for those on the run from the law and damnation for nearly everyone else — and includes specific locales and NPCs as appropriate.

Finally, we have included a short appendix containing a few new rules pertinent to the material here. It includes new backgrounds and new professions which fit the atmosphere of one or more of the areas in each of the previous chapters, and can be used to either enhance existing characters or to create new ones.

All of this is intended primarily as a resource for the GM, providing settings, characters, and story ideas suitable for his or her *Edge of Midnight* campaign. Players may peruse these pages if they wish, but keep in mind that certain sections may reveal more than their characters would be expected to know. If you are a player, you should allow the GM to look through the book first, and then read only those sections which he or she deems appropriate.

So check the safety on your automatic, make sure you keep the motor running, and turn the page. The Naked City beckons, and if you don't watch your step, she'll never let you leave her streets alive.

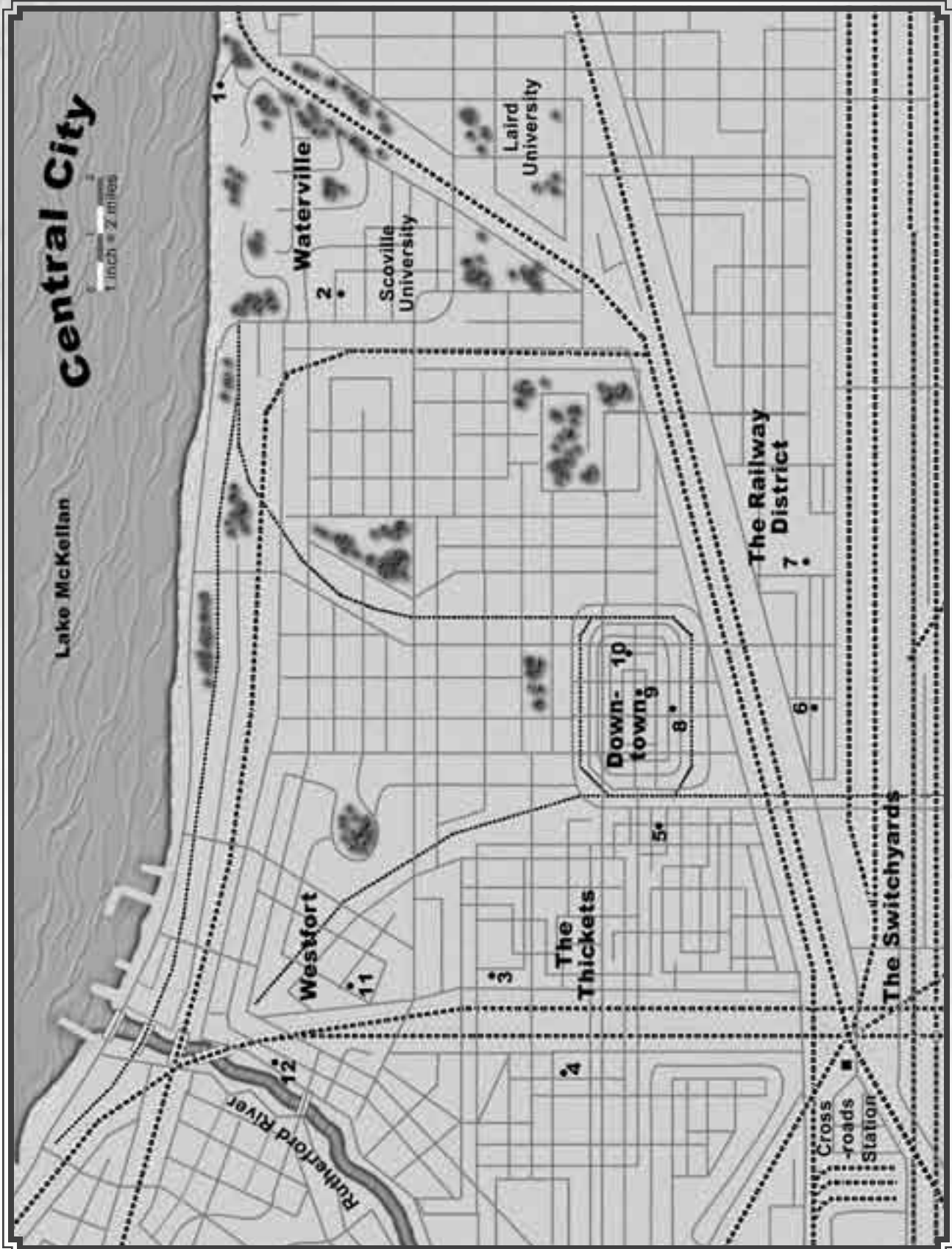
CHAPTER ONE CENTRAL CITY



™ ...a town where nobody could
forget how the money was made.
It was picked up from floors
still slippery with blood.†

- Norman Mailer, *Miami
and the Siege of Chicago*

THE NAKED CITY



CHAPTER ONE: CENTRAL CITY

OVERVIEW OF THE CITY

Blue collar sophistication and the artistry of the workaday world best describe Central City: the urban center poised between its origins as a transportation hub and the creativity necessary for a culture destined to define the future. Its beauty springs forth from the sweat and grime of the lower classes; its poetry is the voice of the man on the street. The two halves of its nature are not at odds, but rather have blended together to form the city's unique and uniquely balanced soul.

Completely surrounded by fertile farmland, Central City emerged as the nation's most natural shipping nexus. Produce and livestock traveled from here to every corner of the country, demanding the implementation of a decent highway system and an extensive railway line. Waterborne trade into and out of the city was facilitated by its proximity to Lake McKellan. History teaches that the city formed the embarkation point for settlers heading west, and in a nation with light feet, it became a natural destination for travelers of every sort. During the war, it was a hive of industrial activity as military cargo vital to the fighting was rushed hither and yon, and soldiers bound for overseas came here by the trainload on their way to New Eden and Nova Roma. All of which combined to give Central City its irrevocable nickname, "Crossroads of the World."

Its industrial base begins in the Switchyards, the huge maze of railway tracks on the city's south side. Cargo and freight move in and out of here at all hours of the day, loaded from processing centers on the outskirts of the city and bound for the far reaches of the Commonwealth. While farm goods are still its staple, manufactured products must often pass through here as well, dictated by the railway lines which clog the city from every direction. Warehouse and storage space will hold non-perishables until such time as they are needed, and trucking companies do a booming business transporting cargo along the roads and highways. The nation's rural areas depend on such companies for the bulk of their supplies. The harbor, too, sees a great deal of activity, though it is small in comparison to Gateway and New Eden.

All this requires an endless number of yardmen, longshoremen, and teamsters to help catalogue and move the goods. Central City's unions are the most powerful in the country, and under them, the city's working class dominates civic life. The wealthy, too, have benefited from their proximity to so much industry. But while New Eden consists of landed money dating back several generations, Central City's elite is *nouveau riche*: entrepreneurs whose fortunes were earned in the last twenty years. The city values hard work, and those who pull themselves up by their bootstraps are revered. Laziness is scorned — even among criminals — while persistence and reliability are cardinal virtues. Decadence has its place, of course, though most residents believe one must earn it before enjoying it.

At the same time, the sheer bulk of people and materials moving through the city has created a cosmopolitan ambience. The "Crossroads of the World" title refers to more than

simple vanity. Everywhere you go, movement pervades the atmosphere. The streets are hives of activity, ranging from local grocers delivering their produce to cargo trucks from Gateway, Terminus, and New Eden on their way to various destinations. Four major highways pass out of the city, each leading to one of the U.C.'s other major metropolises, and dozens of train lines all converge in the city's famous Switchyards. Travelers from all walks of life enter Central City every day, and the citizens are routinely exposed to new ideas and different points of view. The pragmatic realities of their lives temper any notions of grandeur with a strong dose of common sense, allowing them to retain their perspective without descending into pretense. Though they rarely express it, many City natives know more about the arts than the average New Edener, and can discuss politics as adroitly as any Nova Roman.

The metropolis is blanketed with extensive roadways and railways that facilitate transportation. Almost everyone in Central City owns a car, even though its public rail system is the most extensive in the U.C. While New Edeners often stick to their local boroughs and Paradisians live in a vast blanket of space without identity, the residents of Central City have forged a cohesive sense of civic unity, knowledgeable of the outside world, but taking fierce pride in the humble charms of their own backyard.

From those two elements — worldly sophistication combined with salt-of-the-earth hardiness — the city's art and cultural enterprises have taken on a unique identity. Though surprisingly sophisticated — devoid of the kitsch or populist pandering which one might expect — it venerates the ordinary, the common, and the humble. Art and painting tend towards simplicity and elegance, able to be appreciated by the underclass, but containing adequate subtext to linger in the intellectual's heart. Central City boasts numerous museums and galleries, as well as a world-class opera house, but they are as likely to see a group of longshoremen attending as a wealthy scion or respected professor. The purest expression of this attitude can be found in bars and nightclubs throughout the city: jazz. Unfiltered by commercialism or fame, its free-form poetry weaves through Central City's soul, bolstered by a tradition of blues and gospel which every resident instinctively understands. Its practitioners are wounded men and women, parlaying their pain into the music and exacerbating the damage as much as healing it. Their art is heartfelt — untainted by the homogenized marketing of New Eden — and strikes a powerful chord in all who hear it. Like much of their audience, the city's jazz and blues musicians are working joes, paying their dues and struggling their way up through the long nights required of performers. The stages are lonely and cold, and nobody sets foot on them to see their names in lights. They play because it's what they were born to do, not for big paychecks or instant fame. Every corner bar, it seems, has a musical master on it payroll. And all you have to do to hear them is order a couple of shots.

Sports are more than popular in Central City, bolstered by the area's populist leanings and by the affected competitiveness displayed by most residents. The Central City Switchmen are among the most heavily-supported baseball teams in the

country, with rowdy fans packing the stands at every game. Football too, is surprisingly popular, led by nationally ranked teams based at Laird and Scoville Universities. A semi-pro league of five teams has sprung up within the city, drawing brisk crowds to each of their modest matches. Auto racing remains a favorite, and the Central City Speedway hosts a half-dozen events throughout the year.

But the city saves its true passion for the squared circle of boxing. The UCB has its headquarters here, and bouts in every weight class take place nightly: from prize title fights to bottom-tier matches played in the worst dives. The last three heavyweight championships — in both the human and gaunt divisions — have been held here, and the reigning gaunt heavyweight champion, Randall “Rugged” MacReady, hails from Central City. His human counterpart, Royal Gillis, makes his home here as well, and is lionized by the media despite his standing reputation as an amoral thug. Back-alley matches are quite common in Central City, especially those illegally pitting gaunt boxers against normals. The UCB publicly discourages such displays, but secretly uses them to scout up-and-coming talent. Any given match draws a crowd, and many residents can quote boxing stats as easily as the current price of milk.

Gaunts have a strong presence in Central City, moreso than any other metropolis save Terminus. The backbreaking work in the Switchyards and along the lakeshore is a perfect fit for gaunts, and despite the city’s strong union roots, many companies bolster their operations with freelance leatherbacks. The gaunt district grows larger every year, expanding outward as more leatherbacks come to call the city home. Prejudice against them is as high here as it is anywhere, but jobs are plentiful for their kind — the demand for physical labor is too great. The presence of so many gaunts, however, often causes friction with the city’s unions, who believe the monstrous underclass takes needed jobs away from their members. Leatherbacks are denied entry to most unions, and yet they often work side-by-side with union members in places such as the Switchyards, which are too large to be run solely by human workers. The friction leads to periodic incidents of gaunt/normal violence, and routine union lobbying for more formal anti-gaunt laws.

Political machines — supported by the unions and engineered towards turning out votes in the most expedient manner possible — best define Central City’s pseudo-democratic government. Corruption has almost been institutionalized here, as accepted a part of the process as stump speeches and kissing babies. Dirty money often funds favored candidates, and the city’s considerable criminal element plays a direct hand in every election. Every now and again, a reform candidate manages to reach office, but he usually finds himself either co-opted by the system, or shut out of any real power. The left-wing Plebian Party, with its pro-union platform and propensity for government spending, dominates the political scene, but its opponents in the Citizen Party are beginning to make up ground by courting the gaunt vote. Most pundits believe it’s only a matter of time before the gaunt/normal labor conflicts spill over more directly onto the political landscape.

CRIME

The criminals of Paradiso like to put on a show, but Central City’s crime lords are the *real* underworld celebrities. Crime here is almost as legitimate as any other profession... and unlike the rotting corruption of Terminus, it does so while maintaining the façade of an honest, law-abiding society. The trains run on time in Central City, the police are out in force, and citizens can go about their jobs as normal. The government functions more or less as it should. But the movers and shakers of the Central City underworld color it all — every storefront, every beat cop, and every session in City Hall.

Crime originally flourished under the city’s widespread trading culture. With so many goods moving in and out, it was never hard to filch a few crates or barrels from the train yards. Money generated from black market sales supported extortion and protection rackets, which in turn supported prostitution and gambling enterprises, which in turn supported political bribery and electioneering. The lords of Central City’s underworld view politics as the respectable façade hiding their seamy deals. City officials are supported with huge campaign donations, which buy their silence and professed ignorance to the worst offenses. Union coffers are routinely looted, mob associates appointed to cushy posts, and government apparatus subverted to work for the local syndicates’ best interests. And it all stays below the surface, masked in the traditional fund-raising and backroom deal-making typical of most politics.

With the elected officials in hand and the police routinely bribed, the syndicates freely indulge in all manner of illicit activities. An NLEB audit estimated that nearly 65% of all Central City businesses pay protection money of some sort, and the tonnage smuggled out of the Switchyards is astronomical. If a criminal crew were to seize uncontested control of the railway lines, it could reap unheard-of profits on the sale of stolen goods alone. Gangs of hijackers work the highways for hundreds of miles in every direction, kicking what they take back to their bosses in the city. Liquor and cigarettes are preferred targets, but anything will do as long as it can be sold. Gambling operations are equally profitable, supported by underground casinos which transform the city’s sports mania into a wagering bonanza. Many crews sponsor back-alley boxing matches, exploiting down-on-their-luck pugilists for a few lousy bucks while making thousands in illegal bets. Most crews are beginning to dabble in narcotics as well, moving heroin and cocaine through the city disguised as legitimate goods.

The hierarchy of different syndicates has fluctuated over the years, but generally remains divided between four or five dominant groups. Social and racial divisions are quite obvious in the Central City underworld, as gaunt-run syndicates clash with normals-only groups and warlock crime lords. Friction between gangs has increased in recent years following a long period of harmony. When the war overseas ended, Central City’s crime had entered an era of stability. Led by the peace

CHAPTER ONE: CENTRAL CITY



offerings of Boss Augustin Lombard, each gang controlled a set territory: manipulating local political bosses and reaping the rewards for various illicit activities within their realm. They existed as a loose federation, rather than a hierarchy (so no egos were bruised), and the demand for gambling, prostitution, and stolen goods was great enough so that all of them could prosper. Massive amounts of goods were being shipped through Central City during the war. With shared control of the city, extortion and black marketeering reached an all-time high, as local officials paid to prevent the sabotage of key shipments and “spillover” goods disappeared into the night. It remained that way throughout the war years, and promised to continue so long as no one rocked the boat.

Then a short while after the war, one of the city’s bosses — a gaunt named Daniel Petrucci — was murdered by his enforcer/lieutenant, Jack Drago. No body was ever recovered, and Drago soon consolidated control of the Petrucci mob under his thumb. At first, none of the other syndicates complained — it was the Petruccis’ internal business and didn’t concern them — but Drago quickly demonstrated a recklessness that made them decidedly uneasy. He refused to respect territorial boundaries: launching operations in areas claimed by other crews, enforcing his whims with violence, and cutting down men previously considered untouchable. And he actively courted the press, drawing unwanted attention to what had

previously been kept under wraps. Lombard tried to rein him in, in the interest of keeping the peace, but he took the move as a sign of weakness. When word reached him of accusations from the Lombard camp, he asked Augustin for a meeting. Upon arrival, Drago tore Lombard and his bodyguards apart, shooting the crime boss in the guts before rending him limb from limb with his bare hands.

The results shattered Central City’s carefully-held peace, as the remaining syndicates united against Drago. But his ferocity and business acumen proved a sharp challenge, and what was supposed to be a swift resolution turned into a brutal series of assassinations and counter-assassinations. Finally, after three years of bloody struggles, Drago had amassed enough power to sue for peace. He retained the territory formerly belonging to the Petrucci mob and the Lombard mob. The remaining syndicates — now numbering only three — divided the rest of the city between them.

Since then, a semblance of Central City’s former order has prevailed, albeit a harsher and more brutal one. Other mob bosses have emulated Drago’s excesses, and cordial rela-

tions have given way to wary pragmatism. Everyone realizes the benefits of keeping the worst incidents out of the papers — the war cost everyone a fortune — but while “civilian” casualties are rare, quiet mob executions are still a part of doing business. Everyone sticks to their own territory, but the formerly content status quo is now disrupted with low-key incursions and unrest. The fault lies mainly with the Drago Combine, whose members have benefited the most from the increasing chaos.

Four primary groups jockey for control of Central City. Despite their differences, all of them follow the same basic structure. The bosses maintain a cushion of mid-level operators, who shield them from indictment and filter illegally acquired funds to them. Below that are the lieutenants (or “capos”) who run street operations, and below that are the footmen — the actual robbers, racketeers, and hoodlums who do the dirty work. Operations run the gamut from extortion to loan sharking to numbers operations to brothels and illegal gambling casinos to smuggling liquor and cigarettes to drug dealing (which most consider the wave of the future). The foot soldiers pay percentages of their take to the bosses in exchange for protection; those who don’t are either quietly enticed to join a crew or cut loose to face the police. The most persistent end up face down in the harbor.

THE NAKED CITY

Below is a brief rundown of each criminal syndicate in Central City, their methods, and the crimes they engage in. Any of these groups may be replaced with organizations involving player characters if you wish, or a PC mob can easily enter the picture as hot up-and-comers looking to knock one of the big boys off their perch.

THE DRAGO SYNDICATE

By far the most powerful and influential mob in Central City — and likely the country — is Jack Drago's combine, the band of butchers responsible for shattering the gangland peace and reaping an untold fortune in the bargain. Their leader is a massive gaunt with a murderous temper and a hunger for the lime-light, who dresses like landed gentry to better hide the blood on his hands. He marries his anger to a cunning, Machiavelian mind, choosing just the right time and place to let his rage fly. (Details on Drago can be found on page 80 of *The Edge of Midnight* core rulebook.)

The Combine's income started with stolen goods: hijackings and boosted cargo from the train yards can be turned around quickly, especially untaxed liquor and cigarettes for which there is always a market. From there, Drago expanded to illegal gambling dens which, by keeping the games honest, ensured a steady supply of loyal customers. Loan sharking and protection rackets were smaller operations, ironically considered too crude for the Combine's boss. He preferred union shakedowns: inserting his underlings into various labor groups, skimming from their membership dues, and arranging for stolen goods to vanish within their ranks. Though Drago has employed strikebreakers in the past, he now believes it better to keep the unions with him than against him. Drugs have recently been added to the Combine's repertoire, a growing trend which Drago anticipated before most of his rivals. Through it all, the crew has punctuated its activities with harsh, nasty violence. Its chief operators have a knack for inflicting pain: broken hands, punctured stomachs and faces covered with cigarette burns are not uncommon among their victims. Drago himself isn't above carrying out a beating or a killing personally, and he can take it as well as he can dish it out. He's survived no less than five assassination attempts in the past few years; his lieutenants believe that he cannot be killed. Mob-based deaths in Central City tend to be attributed to Drago as a matter of course.

He maintains a bizarre courtship with the press and public opinion. His fearsome appeal strikes a chord with the media, and his hunger for the spotlight is palpable. He's also good at garnering attention. The newspapers eat up his quips and comments, remarkable for their way of insinuating illegal activity without resorting to self-incrimination. He lives the high

life and rubs shoulders with the city's elite. He can count the mayor among his list of friends (Drago's financial contributions allowed His Honor to run away with the election) and a small army of competent goons protects his opulent mansion. His desire to see the Central City Switchmen in person supposedly played a part in Campbell Field's reversal of their "normals only" sales policy, and he can be seen during most games, watching the action from a private box. He's even attained cult status among his fellow gaunts, who view him as a strange sort of Robin Hood. He's responded by opening several soup kitchens in the city's gaunt district, and regularly funding Christmas dinners for destitute leatherbacks out of his own pocket.

Drago is currently mulling over the notion of nationalizing his syndicate, extending tendrils to every city in the U.C. His representatives have been spotted in Paradiso and New Eden, and his lieutenants have discussed a move into Terminus as well: perhaps allying themselves with one of the smaller crews in that city. His is the only criminal organization in the country with the clout to consider such a move. The other Central City syndicates have all targeted Drago, but lack the unity to seriously impair his operations. Unless circumstances change, his Combine looks to be the most powerful organization of any sort in the city for the foreseeable future.

THE SCARELLI MOB

The Scarellis are the most entrenched crime family in Central City, claiming to stretch back several generations. They control the harbor and the wharves, feeding on the longshoremen's union and the various vices sold to its membership. Underground gambling parlors, numbers rackets, and a healthy protection service encompassing every dock on the pier are their stock in trade. From there, they have worked to expand across the rest of the city, and had quietly set their sights on the Lombard mob when Drago did their job for them. Since then, they have jockeyed for position against the Drago gang, resulting in isolated spates of violence over the last several years.

The mob's leader, Angelo Scarelli, is an open bigot who despises gaunts and all that they stand for. He cites them as the root of the U.C.'s weakness, and refuses to allow leatherback criminals to enter his ranks. This earned the enmity of several smaller gaunt gangs, and mixed groups like the Westbrook Runners as well. Jack Drago has placed a \$500,000 bounty on the man's head; it's a testament to Scarelli's power that no one has yet been able to collect. In order to even the odds, he's recruited numerous warlock criminals to serve in his ranks; they often act as torpedoes or hired muscle in lieu of the leatherbacks who typically fill such positions. In addition, the Scarellis' prejudice helped them make further inroads into the unions, which have provided the political clout to cover most of the mob's activities.



CHAPTER ONE: CENTRAL CITY

THE SILVER MOB (AKA THE NORTH SIDE MOB)

Eddie Silver is almost the antithesis of Jack Drago. He's quiet where Drago is boisterous, reasoned where Drago is hot-headed. His discipline and discretion come from a lifetime of magic use: studying science as a means of accruing power. Now that he has it, he has no intention of losing it all by sticking his neck out. He operates out of an innocuous storefront in the city's north side, in the shadow of steel foundries and other heavy industry. He's never been indicted and his crew never meets on the premises. He always sends his orders out through intermediaries; as a result, he's the only mob boss in Central City to successfully avoid indictment by the authorities.

While the Silver mob engages in all of the standard criminal activities — they control a handful of brothels and drug dens, and have a modestly successful numbers racket going — their specialty is precious metals. Gold, silver, and copper shipments are stolen on a regular basis; the mob uses warlock magic to transport the heavy materials away with ease. Silver himself is a Master of thermal magic, making him powerful enough to melt the material down and recast it, which he then passes off as legitimately-acquired goods. The tactic is so successful that the industry considers him a straight businessman, with no idea that he has masterminded the very robberies which they bemoan. His honest operations make an excellent money-laundering front, and his contacts in the precious metal trade allow him to cherry-pick the choicest targets for robbery.

Silver vehemently opposes the Drago Combine, but is smart enough not to present a direct threat. Rather, he allows intermediaries to quietly support Central City's other two syndicates against Drago. When they all finally destroy each other, he intends to be the only one left to pick up the pieces.

THE WESTERBROOK RUNNERS

While the rest of the city's mobs define themselves along the gaunt/normal divide, the Runners have no such petty limitations. Gaunt criminals opposing the Drago mob have gravitated into their orbit, intermingling with normal criminals and strengthening their forces accordingly. Highway robberies and drug smuggling are their primary sources of income — emulating the Drago mob, only with less flair and organization. The other powers in the city consider them little more than an armed mob. For now, however, they have carved out a fair swath of territory — encompassing Central City's gritty downtown district — and have the clout to hold onto it.

A trio of thieves — Sam "Dancer" Bowles, Julius Grossman, and a gaunt named Rollie Shackleton — serves as the gang's uneasy governing council, coordinating the various scams and shakedowns. Sooner or later, one of them will make a bid for absolute control; whether that strengthens the Runners or tears the gang apart depends on how quickly and cleanly the shift in power takes place. In the meantime, they have their hands full fending off attacks from other crews and keeping their own house in order. Their membership is more independently-oriented than other Central City syndicates, but their leaders crack down hard on any overt disobedience. Grossman knows several reliable hitmen, and has called them in to "discipline" recalcitrant junior members.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Like Central City's politics, law enforcement has been largely compromised by the depredations of the criminal syndicates. Yet the mob's influence is not as all-pervasive as it appears — a fact which helps maintain the city government's legitimacy. Many cops take pay-offs to look the other way, especially for the so-called "harmless vices" such as prostitution or numbers running. But most criminals expect to be caught at least once or twice, and some crimes cannot be easily ignored. The balance between public safety and private understanding must be maintained, and the city's crime bosses — even Jack Drago — realize that. As a result, the police are able to exercise limited autonomy to keep everyone in line. In some ways, they could be considered Central City's fifth mob.

It helps that the underworld is both relatively stable, and divided between multiple entities. Each criminal organization exercises considerable control through bought policemen and political connections, but they lack the unified coordination to implement any large-scale control. Some individual cops remain dedicated and incorruptible, and public outcry can still result in swift action. Central City PD believes that a quiet city is a happy city, and flexes its muscle to ensure that crime stays out of sight. Robberies, homicides, and violent crimes draw intense police scrutiny, especially if the victims are "civilians" or unconnected with any illegal activity. (Drago's mob often pays a steep price for their brutality, though their boss' political connections help keep police attention down.) Small-time hoods, operating outside the umbrella of the major gangs, are often targeted as well, which the city's crimelords encourage. It eliminates potential competition and encourages similar "little fish" to seek protection with one of the established crews.

But the vast majority of Central City's underworld go about their activities unmolested. Gambling, prostitution, even low key drug deals will be ignored as long as those responsible grease the right wheels. Certain operations even cater to off-duty officers, providing a friendly wager or female company for a hard-working flatfoot. Truck hijackings often take place beyond the city limits, leaving it to rural authorities to solve, and while gangland violence is frowned upon, the department makes only token investigation efforts if the victim is a known mobster or similar undesirable.

Central City is fairly intolerant of magic, which is viewed as an affront to the community ethos of hard work and earning one's way. The ten warlocks who produced the White Light were based here during the war, and the city has since fought to live down the stigma. Laws for practicing sorcery carry automatic prison sentences, and the department's crystal ball squad is among the better-funded units in the country. A few sorcerers still operate clandestinely on the university campuses, and dilettantes will always "discover" a new trick or two, but the laws have driven most serious warlocks underground. Those heavily involved in magic often turn to crime as a matter of course, offering their services in exchange for

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mob protection and the freedom to continue their experiments. A warlock who lacks such security will soon find himself targeted by Central City's finest.

In the last year or so, a new player has entered the city's law enforcement scheme. The NLEB, concerned with the rise in gangland power, has dispatched numerous agents against the Central City mobs. Unburdened by ties of corruption and back-room deals, they constitute a genuine threat to business as usual. Their strategy is simple. Several agents arrived in town with a large public splash, announcing the formation of a task force and generally drawing undue attention to itself. This left an earlier wave of agents — unknowns who had quietly come to town months before — free to act without fear of discovery. The NLEB offices at Police Headquarters (see page 20) have endured the death threats, the harassment, and the newspaper questions, while the real agents quietly perform undercover work, gather evidence against corrupt officials, and target prominent underworld figures for indictment. Work has

been slow, but the national government has been happy with the results thus far. Prominent arrests are expected soon.

The intrusion hasn't gone over well with the local authorities. Ostensibly, Central City PD resents the NLEB's presence in their back yard, and there's a lot of truth behind their outrage. More importantly, however, the city's criminal syndicates are exercising their political clout to stymie this new threat. Local precincts receive orders to ignore or delay NLEB requests; individual officers refuse to speak with agents out of fear for their families. Tension has only grown as the investigation has proceeded, and while the local authorities are obligated to respond to any direct request for help, the NLEB in Central City is otherwise on its own.

NEIGHBORHOODS

WATERVILLE

The sandy shores of Lake McKellan provide shelter for the upper echelon of Central City's society. With the tides gently rising and falling and freighter traffic from the harbor chugging picturesquely along the horizon, the borough of Waterville becomes a pleasant respite from the gritty realities of life downtown. Along the shoreline, the wealthy and powerful make their homes, taking up huge swaths of beach for their own private resorts. Further inland, more modestly-priced homes give way to small squares hosting upscale businesses: doctor's offices, luxury car dealerships, and boutiques catering to bored socialites.

Central City's two universities are found here as well. The all-men Laird University is renowned for its scientific innovation and engineering programs, while the co-ed Scoville is steeped in the liberal arts. Both schools feature championship-caliber football teams, and Laird also sports a world-class rowing crew. The areas around the schools cater to the students, with less expensive housing, cheap eateries, and scholastically-inclined watering holes aplenty. But even here, the sense of privilege and escape pervades the atmosphere.

Parks and greenery are common sights in Waterville, unlike the rest of Central City which has little room for such frivolity. Public land has been exempt from development, providing a few precious patches of rolling grass, bicycle paths, and baseball fields. Residents make ample use of the space, especially on warm summer nights when the cicadas can be heard for miles around.

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The residents of Waterville are mostly scions of business: factory owners and entrepreneurs who have chosen this locale to revel in their good fortune. Several of the city's crime lords call Waterville home as well, eager for the legitimacy that such a venue brings to them. And while the rest of the city continues its relentless march of progress, Waterville remains unbound by the time clock, happy to indulge in a permanent day off. It's a reward only the luckiest — or if you believe the hype, the hardest-working — can experience.

1) The Drago Estate

Jack Drago rules his own universe, a self-made gaunt who has risen from anonymity to become the most notorious crime lord in the U.C. His residence reflects his grotesque appetites... and the siege mentality in which those in his position must constantly exist. The estate is surrounded by a ten-foot-high brick wall, topped by iron spikes and patrolled by a legion of goons from the Drago Combine. The only side not protected is the shoreline, which is patrolled day and night, and marked with nets designed to snare approaching watercraft. The sumptuously appointed mansion is surrounded by a vast lawn, marked with fountains and reflecting pools, and populated by peacocks and rare ebony swans. It provides no cover to anyone who wishes to approach; spotlights can illuminate the area as bright as day with the turn of a switch, and sharpshooters recruited from the police academy keep watch in shifts from the mansion's roof.

A covered garage maintains Drago's fleet of cars, with a driver and full-time mechanic housed in the apartments above. The crushed gravel driveway leads to a wrought iron gate, watched at all times by a pair of torpedoes who check in with the house every ten minutes via a private phone. Several butlers and chambermaids attend to the needs of the household, while a fleet of gardeners maintains the grounds and a world class chef cooks Drago's meals. The gang lord surrounds himself with dozens of bodyguards, who search everyone who enters the estate. Since he has no family, he has no one else to protect, and with the exception of a few close advisors and the high-priced call girls he brings home nightly, no one is allowed to enter his private quarters.

Unlike other criminals, Drago upholds a high standard of taste and refinement. The mansion is decorated in classical style, betraying none of the nouveau riche tackiness which one might expect. The huge foyer opens onto a polished marble staircase, which splits in two and flanks the entryway to the spacious dining room. The library is filled with handsome leather books (none of which Drago has bothered to read), and his private study contains detailed files on his crew's activities. Everything related to his criminal behavior is written in an elaborate code, worked out by he and his bookmaker (TN 12 Brains + Puzzles check to successfully translate) and stored in a gigantic wall safe when he isn't perusing it. A large map above the fireplace contains details of Central City: marking rivals' territory, noting police precincts and their level of friendliness, and pinpointing the locations of various crimes (both his and other gangsters). It looks like a feudal battlefield, complete with color-coded markers to differentiate between factions. Drago only allows his chief lieutenants in this area, and always keeps the door locked.

Kitchens, laundry rooms, pantries, and servants' quarters make up the lower levels of the mansion. The upstairs area contains a dozen bedrooms, a palatial bathroom, a private movie theater, and an immense balcony overlooking Lake McKellan. The balcony is arranged so that those who walk upon it cannot be seen except from the shoreline. All of the windows are barred, though a few of the upper stories are latched in order to allow a breeze in, and the larder down in the cellar is stocked for a siege (complete with jugs of water and canned food enough to last for a year). The basement contains a small arsenal capable of arming everyone on the premises, along with a private shooting range where Drago practices his aim. His targets are a trio of classical statues — redone in burnished steel — representing epic conquerors and heroes of the past. Drago claims they're the only opponents worth fighting.

Whenever Drago leaves the estate, a fleet of vehicles accompanies him: a motorcade bigger than that of the mayor himself. He switches cars each trip, so that observers can never know exactly which one he's in, and makes frequent use of decoys and body doubles. Sometimes, the fleet will depart without him at all; other times, he will leave in a single laundry truck, hidden in the back with the sheets and the towels. He's been the target of at least two assassination attempts while leaving his estate; both attempts failed and the perpetrators were hung upside down in his butcher's locker to await his tender mercies. Despite his justified paranoia, he delights in throwing parties at the estate, and has invited opera singers, movie stars, and big league ballplayers to his soirees. The security for such events rivals those held by the Praetorium Speaker himself.

Typical Drago Estate Guard

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 7, Build 8, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 40.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Evasion 7, Firearms 6, Intimidation 6, Melee 5, Perception 6, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Gaunt, Marksmanship, Rugged.

Profession: Gangster 1, Gunman 1, Street Tough 1.

2) The Law Offices of Bell, Bennett & McQuade

Central City's underground has a one-stop shopping network for lawyers able to spring them. The law firm of Bell, Bennett & McQuade specializes in criminal defense, charging exorbitant rates to find the tiniest flaws that will allow their clients to literally get away with murder. The firm's upscale address is a testament to their attorneys' effectiveness. It's built to resemble a prosperous country gentleman's estate: steeply sloped roofs framing ivy-covered red brick walls. A tall lawn jockey holds a sign announcing the partners' names; the secretary at the door never refers anyone without an appointment, and is trained in judo to handle any particularly insistent clients.

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Thirty of the most unethical attorneys in the country call the law firm home, assisted by an army of assistants, fact-checkers, paralegals, and snoops. They often hire private investigators to dig up dirt on key witnesses, and while they themselves never stoop to blackmail, they happily share whatever they learn with their clients (who usually lack such scruples). The partners handle the largest cases personally; smaller (i.e., less financially endowed) clients get one of the associates or a junior attorney fresh out of law school. All of them will bend the law as far as they can to free their clients. Surprisingly enough, none of them have ever broken it; they know exactly how much they can get away with, and several investigations into their practices have turned up nothing more illegal than a few unpaid parking tickets.

Their clientele reads like a Who's Who of scumbags. In addition to various underworld figures (including Angelo Scarelli and several lieutenants in the Drago Combine), they have defended wealthy socialites accused of murdering their husbands, corporate executives prosecuted for bilking their shareholders, hitmen and assassins unlucky enough to get caught, and at least one *bona fide* serial killer. Their track record isn't perfect — no one who defends such monsters can always come out a winner — but it's good enough to secure their reputations as legal miracle workers.

Their offices feature several safes (containing sensitive files on their various caseloads), and a private security guard keeps watch every night. Unscrupulous crime lords have proposed breaking in at points in order to sabotage a rival's legal defense, but they have always been overruled. After all, anyone who engages in such activities will not be able to call upon the firm's services in the future. Photos line the walls of the firm, depicting various happy clients shaking hands with one of the three partners. Two of the top dogs — Mordecai Bell and Charles Fitzsimmons McQuade — are fairly easy to approach; they dine every day at the finest restaurants in the area. The third, Bradford Bennett, is something of a recluse, and hasn't been seen outside the offices of his private home in over three years. When one of the partners is required to be in court, it's always either Bell or McQuade.

Charles Fitzsimmons McQuade

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 8, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 9, Drive (Car) 2, Etiquette 8, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 3, Forgery 6, Intimidation 5, Lore (Criminal Law) 10, Melee 4, Perception 8, Performance (Oratory) 6, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, High Society, Underworld Connections, Wealthy.

Profession: Businessman 2, Con Artist 2, Investigator 1.

THE THICKETS

Northwest of downtown, the pawn shops and all-night diners slowly give way to shabby apartment buildings and low-rent public housing. Working class ambiance slowly sours to something more desperate, and while the buildings still remain tall, they have none of the imposing grandeur upon which Central City is built. Locals refer to the area as the Thickets, though it has no formal name. In the past, it purportedly held immigrants new to the U.C. As new generations were born, a given ethnicity would be phased out, to be replaced by the next wave off the boats. Crime has always flourished here, although the residents are largely honest folk whose union jobs keep them out of the poorhouse. They're always up for a little vice, however, which means traffic in illicit sin flourishes beneath the green awning of their struggling stores. The Scarelli Mob and the Westerbrook Runners divide the various rackets between them, focusing on gambling parlors, opium dens, and a smattering of underground whorehouses.

On the edge of the Thickets lies Central City's gaunt district which, like most of its ilk, looks like it was transplanted from the bombed-out rubble of the war. Empty lots of cleared buildings are punctuated by rotting apartments, packed to the gills with leatherbacks who have nowhere else to go. Rows of cheap public housing — high-rise hovels stamped out like cookie-cutters — are criss-crossed by roads which lack even basic pavement. Several train lines, heavily fortified, pass through the area every day, the only signs of true modern technology to be found. The gaunts came here like the immigrants before them, segregated by the city's harsh dismissal of their kind. Most of them work south in the Switchyards, or scramble for the heavy labor jobs which the unions haven't snatched up yet. Many of them receive intermittent employment maintaining the nearby train lines, which must be closely guarded against the corrosion engendered by the residents' gauntism.

Like the other parts of the Thickets, crime runs rampant here. Trucks foolish enough to drive through are often stopped and looted, stripped down to metal skeletons. Boxcars on the rail lines can be robbed as enterprising gaunts climb aboard, break the locks, and toss the cargo onto the side of the tracks. The police have taken to ferrying such shipments out of town, posting armed guards along the train's length until it passes beyond Central City. But despite such measures, the practice continues, for it provides the gaunt district with a booming black market. The Westerbrook Runners end up with a huge cut of profits from this practice.

That may soon be changing, however. A consortium of Central City businessmen is pushing for a "revitalization" of the area: knocking down the dilapidated buildings and bringing strong vibrant companies to the Thickets. The effort is secretly funded by the Scarelli gang, whose construction interests stand to benefit and who hope to legitimize their operation by investing in the businesses which will spring up here. It also means forcing out the gaunts, which appeals to Anton Scarelli's hateful prejudice. Naturally, the leatherbacks have other ideas — they don't like their district, but it's literally the only thing they have left — and resist such efforts tenaciously. They're supported in this endeavor by the Westerbrook Runners (who

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have made a point of harassing Scarelli's men who enter the area), and more passively by Jack Drago, who uses his own political pawns to quietly stymie the revitalization effort. As of now, the gaunt part of the Thickets is still too dangerous to begin any serious construction. But tensions have been rising, and a serious "gaunt riot" may provide the political cover needed to begin relocating the leatherbacks en masse.

3) 3rd Street Chess Club

The chess club is amusingly misnamed. In point of fact, it doesn't offer chess at all. The name was an established neighborhood tradition dating back many years, and the various owners never saw a need to change it. It's now a pool hall, its dark, well-furnished interior featuring billiard tables, snooker tables, dartboards, and a low-key bar for serving guests. Physically, there's little to distinguish it from any other business of its type, though the trappings are more upscale than usual. Curling brass lamps provide illumination and the chairs are overstuffed leather, comfortable for smoking or resting one's feet for a few minutes. The tables stretch on in three neatly-ordered rows, their oaken frames supporting crushed green tabletops smelling of chalk and tobacco. The bar features a short-order cook who can prepare sandwiches and hamburgers with amazing speed, and while no one is denied entrance, the atmosphere leads most to dress up a little.

Like most of its ilk, the Chess Club is a breeding ground for the short con. Pool hustlers of all stripes come here to fleece the gullible, compare war stories, and test their skills against each other. The owner — a soft-spoken gentleman named Ellroy Martouse — takes bets for the Drago mob, and the old-style radio above the bar is always tuned to a fight or a horse race. Four or five sharks use the Chess Club as their base of operations, paying Martouse a percentage of their cut for the privilege. They're all superb hustlers, able to size up a mark within moments, and tailor a game to let him think he has everything in hand before fleecing him for all he's worth. There's a fair amount of friction between them, but Martouse never lets it get out of hand. Several hustlers have already been barred from the place because, in Martouse's words, they "couldn't play nice with the other children."

Typical Hustler

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 5, Moxie 7, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Appraise 3, Brawl 3, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Forgery 3, Lore (various cons) 5, Melee 4, Perception 5, Sleight of Hand 7, Stealth 5, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Lucky, Mean Streets.

Profession: Con Artist 1.

4) Citizen Party Recruiting Office

The Citizen Party in Central City has long been relegated to dissenter status. Co-opted by the mobs and flush with union money, the Plebeians have established an iron hold on the city's government, controlling a healthy majority of the City Council, and having elected every mayor since the war ended. The Citizens aren't necessarily any less corrupt than their rivals — the machines are equally ruthless on both sides — but the Plebeians have simply outmaneuvered them. Unable to solidify a base strong enough to match them, the Citizens have had to content themselves with whatever political crumbs they can snatch up.

But now that may be changing. An enterprising campaign manager realized that the growing number of gaunts in the city comprised a valuable voting block. Turned out of the unions and disenfranchised in most other areas, they were ripe for promises of reform and increased rights. Some claim that it only stirs up trouble, but the Citizens are more than willing to play that card if it means getting back into the game in Central City.

This large recruiting office based near the border of the gaunt district represents the front line of that battle. Volunteers and campaigners — many of them leatherbacks themselves — work tirelessly to get out the vote, register other gaunts in the Thickets (which isn't easy considering the red tape that accrues when trying to pinpoint their pre-gaunt identities), and make sure that Citizen candidates are known to each and every resident. They've also hatched a few dirty tricks of their own, and plan on giving the Plebs a run for their money on the next election day. Normals, for example, have a hard time differentiating gaunts, which means that it's easy for leatherbacks to vote multiple times. The Citizens have also made quiet overtures to the Westerbrook Runners, hoping to secure donations in exchange for stabilizing the protean syndicate's position in the city.

Naturally, none of it has come without opposition. The unions — fiercely anti-gaunt — have sent leg-breakers to harass the volunteers here, and more than a few legitimate political bosses have made repeated efforts to shut them down. A burly trio of gaunts have since been on hand to sort out any trouble, but the atmosphere is hardly safe. Several weeks ago, a Molotov cocktail tossed from a passing van engulfed the entire entryway in flames, and threatened to consume the whole building before it was finally put out. Workers here have since been on their guard and many have taken to bringing firearms to work each morning.

The office itself spans a wide, empty space occupying the bottom story of a six floor building in the heart of the Thickets. Picture windows let the sunlight stream in during the day, illuminating the misfit collection of desks and phones from which the workers go about their duties. Several windowless offices in the back have been reserved for party bigwigs, and host most of the dealmaking that has helped the Citizens make such inroads with the local gaunts. Posters and campaign paraphernalia dominate the entire office, admonishing the reader to vote for one candidate or another. The windows have been reinforced with iron bars, and the outside of the office has been blackened by smoke — remnants of the earlier arson

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effort. For all the difficulties the place has experienced, it still brims with optimism. The rank-and-file here genuinely believe that they're going to make a difference, and that come November, Central City will no longer be just a one-party town.

Typical Citizen Party Recruiter

Attributes: Brawn 7, Build 8, Brains 5, Gut 4, Moxie 5, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 40.

Skills: Brawl 7, Bureaucracy 5, Etiquette 4, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 5, Intimidation 5, Lore (Party Politics) 6, Perception 5, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Alert, Blue Collar Worker, Gaunt.

Profession: Politician 1.

5) Jungle Sax Club

The Jungle Sax lies on the eastern end of the Thickets, close to downtown and surrounded by coffee shops and other mom-and-pop businesses. A buzzing neon sign announces music and fine cocktails within, while small tables and a long glass-topped bar covered in the stains of too many spilled drinks cram the red-draped hall. It's a casually despairing place, filled with hopeless drunks and those struggling with life's hurdles, but it boasts some of the best music in town.

The Muller-Prescott Combo performs four nights a week at the Jungle Sax. Saxon Prescott plays the bass and his partner Willie "Jive" Muller is on the saxophone, with a gaunt drummer, Sammy MacKenzie, backing them up. The pay is lousy, but drinks are free, and the band's fiery, energized licks electrify everyone who hears them. Thanks to them, the Jungle Sax is still a going enterprise; their fans turn up for almost every performance. They received several notices in the local papers and a few recording artists from New Eden have cropped up, feigning interest in their sounds. Muller is happy to egg them on, though he can tell at a glance that they're not quite ready to buy yet. The music is still too far ahead of the curve for popular taste.

Unfortunately, the Combo may not be around long enough for the rest of the music world to catch up. Prescott is heavily involved in the city's growing heroin market, dealing to addicts from the alleyway behind the club. He shoots up almost as much as he sells, and the money he makes all goes to the bookies and the other minions of the Westerbrook Runners. His fast lifestyle has done wonders for his music, but sooner or later, it's going to catch up with him; the mobsters are co-opting his soul, piece by piece. Muller, who limits his narcotics to alcohol and nicotine, is deeply worried about his partner. He's debated hiring someone to kidnap Prescott and forcibly dry him out, but he worries how the Runners will respond. Prescott fetches a tidy sum pushing their product, and cutting him off would likely elicit some nasty payback. So he waits, trying to puzzle out a solution and watching his partner bury their future deeper and deeper.

Saxon Prescott

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 3, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Brawl 5, Contortions 3, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 4, Firearms 2, Lore (Composer) 7, Lore (Horse Racing) 3, Performer (Bass) 8, Performer (Sing) 6, Puzzles 3, Sleight of Hand 3, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Wise.

Profession: Gangster 1, Performer 2.

THE RAILWAY DISTRICT

The south side of Central City is collectively referred to as the Railway District, after the industry which dominates every aspect of life here. The famous Central City Switchyards — the heart of the nation's train service — sprawls across the landscape, employing tens of thousands of yardmen and servicing an equal number of passengers through the Crossroads Railway Station just a short distance away. The remainder of the area is taken up with support industries: warehouse space stretches on for miles, storing vast quantities of goods awaiting transport, while trucking firms house their fleets here to more easily move cargo from the yards. Union halls host monthly gatherings of the stations' employees, while flophouses and greasy spoons cater to switchmen and yardmen coming off of their shifts.

Most of the workers in the Switchyard belong to the National Railworkers Union, a powerful consortium of organized labor which represents everyone from the yardmen loading freight to the porters collecting baggage at Crossroads Station. Though based in Central City, their reach extends to every city in the U.C.; they can bring the nation to a halt with a collective strike and their lobby in Nova Roma makes sure the national government respects their interests. Naturally, they're thoroughly corrupt, paying kick-backs to various Central City mobs and often using criminal thugs to help make their problems disappear.

Originally, the NRU required everyone in the Switchyards to belong, but during the war, operations grew so big that even their numbers couldn't encompass everything. It was compounded by the fact that they refused to admit gaunts as members, and the railways' owners were quick to exploit the breach. The companies began hiring gaunts to load and unload the cargo which the NRU couldn't, keeping the leatherbacks on the trains themselves and moving them with the boxcars. Soon leatherbacks were working in the Switchyards themselves instead of just on the trains. The union didn't like it, but was so used to getting their way that they assumed they could just wait until the owners "saw reason."

They're still waiting. In the meantime, gaunts have risen to fill almost all of the non-union positions at both the Switchyards and Crossroads Station. They work harder than normals, can lift and carry more, are less prone to injury, and because they aren't protected by the union, they're forced to

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settle for lower wages. The money used to pay for property damage caused by their condition is minimal in comparison. All of which makes them infinitely preferable to the owners and management, and actively loathed by the normals in the unions. The NRU's prejudice has grown in leaps and bounds, as has the support of its membership who appreciate the hard-line policy against "job-stealing freaks." Indeed, were it not for the union's stranglehold on the Switchyards, leatherbacks would have replaced even more NRU members, and possibly set the organized labor movement back by decades. Tensions between gaunts and non-gaunts are palpable within the Switchyards. Managers have responded by segregating the lines into specified groups, or else by shift so that gaunts and humans need never work together. But the schism can still be felt. Hardly a week goes by without a fight or other incident marring the yards, and a large-scale strike is always looming in the minds of the NRU's leadership.

The division is obvious throughout the remainder of the Railway District. While warehouses cannot practically limit themselves to either gaunts or normals, other businesses are forced to strictly segregate their clientele. Cafés and hotels cater solely to one of the two camps (with gaunts-only facilities suffering consequential deterioration), while trucking firms often employ normals for every job save the most dangerous. Mechanics and repair shops are always filled with normal employees, while the area's junkyards and auto wreckers are the

domain of the leatherbacks. All of which means that the fractious labor situation can be felt throughout the district, setting everyone on edge and raising fears of new problems at every turn.

None of that stops the huge amount of railway traffic from passing through here every day. It's estimated that almost one-fifth of the nation's cargo is processed at the Switchyards at some point or another, and money has a way of solving a lot of problems. It's also an irresistible plum for the city's crime lords. The Railway District belongs almost exclusively to the Drago Combine, though other crews have made quiet inroads here and there. The number of possible scams is legion: goods stolen from the boxcars or hijacked trucks, smuggled items hidden in the vast stacks of crates and pallets, protection shakedowns from the local warehouses, liquor and gambling for yardmen off shift... to say nothing of kick-backs and bribes delivered by the NRU itself. Jack Drago calls the shots with the union; his lieutenants can easily manipulate key members and a hefty percentage of the membership dues ends up riding on the crime lord's hip (an irony, given the NRU's historic prejudice, which the gaunt kingpin greatly enjoys).

The other criminal mobs pick up what they can. Scarelli's gang has a few managers on the payroll, which lets them swoop in and cherry pick prime pieces of cargo from time to time. The Westerbrook Runners engage in snatch-and-grab runs from departing trucks, and everyone has their own slice

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of the protection racket. The Silver mob takes particular note of precious metal shipments, and has responded with lethal force when other gangs try to steal “their” gold and silver. All of which makes the Railway District a lively, if sometimes precarious place. The most ironic touch can be found just a short distance from the Switchyards. In the midst of one of Central City’s most divisive areas stands Campbell Field — home to the metropolis’ baseball Switchmen, the one subject guaranteed to unite the entire city beneath it.

Further south, the Railway District gives way to stockyards and slaughterhouses; Central City boasts a thriving meat packing industry, and the proximity to the Switchyards means that livestock can be transported with minimal fuss. (It should be noted that the law prohibits slaughterhouses and meat-packing industries from hiring gaunts out of concerns for the public health, which does nothing to alleviate gaunt/normal relations within the district.) From there, the territory expands further south to encompass vast plains of wheat and corn, along with the farming communities which work them. For all its sophistication, Central City never lost touch with its agricultural roots, and the vast surrounding territory is fertile enough to feed the entire nation.

6) Merriweather's Gym

This unassuming brick edifice houses boxers and pugilists of all varieties, as well as the heart of the U.C.’s national boxing association. The UCB — the sport’s organizing body — has offices downtown, but the core of the organization can be found here, amid the punching bags and medicine balls of George Merriweather’s training facility. Some of the best boxers in the league have trained here, learning the ropes from its hard-nosed personnel and taking the first steps on the path to a championship.

The gym itself is well-stocked, but fairly unassuming. It contains several sparring rings, a set of weights and other equipment, punching bags of all varieties, and lockers which may be rented by the day or the week. Posters of notable fights — all involving Merriweather “graduates” — can be found on the walls, and the no-nonsense décor resonates with the fighters who train here. A wide glass window in front highlights the heavy bags, where would-be pugilists are constantly working out. It makes for quite a show. Agents and promoters are a permanent fixture at Merriweather’s, watching the talent and determining which ones might be worth attaching themselves to. Other, murkier figures can be found here as well: self-appointed officials from the UCB, bookies looking over potential fighters, and criminal interests cruising for chumps who wouldn’t mind taking a dive or two for the right price. George and his staff keep the floor clear for the boxers, but there’s always a handful of hangers-on, flitting around like sharks before a shipwreck.



Merriweather’s is also one of the few business in the Railway District which doesn’t subscribe to segregation. Gaunt boxing is even more popular than normal boxing, and the leatherbacks flock here in droves, hoping to become the next Rugged MacReady. Normals can’t afford to stay away, since Merriweather’s sports the best trainers in Central City, and the owner doesn’t tolerate any friction. So gaunts and normals train alongside one another in an instance of coexistence unknown in the rest of the district. There have even been some impromptu gaunt-human matches held here: sometimes to settle grudges, sometimes as training exercises (a normal who can stay in the ring with a gaunt often does quite well against other normals). George earns kick-backs by alerting certain bloodthirsty underworld figures when such matches are going to take place, and even the most impromptu scuffle always gains an outside onlooker or two.

George Merriweather

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 8, Build 8, Gut 7, Moxie 5, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 40.

Skills: Athletics 7, Brawl 9, Evasion 8, Intimidation 7, Lore (Training) 8, Lore (Boxing) 10, Perception 3, Sport (Boxing) 9, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Huge, Rugged.

Profession: Athlete 2, Street Tough 1.

7) Ballyhoo Full Contact Racing

This bizarre form of spectacle opened about two years ago, determined to capitalize on the success of the nearby Central City Speedway. But the owners knew they couldn’t compete with the purses or the prestige of their rival — the racers they booked were third-rate at best — so they added a twist. Competition on their track is no holds barred. Deliberate collisions are legal and efforts to take the other drivers out of the race are considered a part of the sport. While it hasn’t evolved into a full-scale demolition derby — the racers must still cross the finish line first — it draws considerable crowds hoping to witness an epic pile-up or bone-shattering accident.

The track itself is a quarter-mile loop, wide enough for about four cars to pass side by side. There is no pace car, no warning flag, and no pit. Drivers must sign a waiver before being allowed to participate, and each car must begin the race with the capacity to finish it. If a vehicle is rendered immobile during the race, it’s considered out... and the crews must hustle to clear it before the racers come around again. The crowd loves the added sense of danger, leading to an increasing emphasis on the demolition aspects of the competition. Sixteen cars participate in each race; an average of six cross the finish line intact.

Races are held Friday and Saturday nights to substantial crowds. Gaunts, in particular, seem drawn to the primal thrill of it, and the Ballyhoo is one of the few public venues where normals and leatherbacks aren’t segregated. The stands hold about 1,500 people and the owners are thinking seriously of

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expanding. The area behind the raceway contains a large junkyard, where the owners sell off used parts and their mechanics work to repair damaged vehicles for the next match. It contains a large crane for moving wrecks, several tow trucks to help clear the track, and an industrial car crusher, capable of reducing even the sturdiest sedan to a tiny cube. The owners have allowed the Drago Combine to dispose of several bodies by placing them in cars to be crushed, and they wouldn't be adverse to expanding that operation if the price was right...

The junkyard shares a fence with the outer edge of the Central City Switchyards, and can be easily reached simply by hopping the chain links. A night watchman guards the area after hours, but spends most of the time napping; few people are interested in stealing a broken-down vehicle, even if they could get it off site.

Typical Racer

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Contortions 5, Drive (Car, Motorcycle, Truck) 7, Engineering 5, Evasion 4, Lore (Cars) 5, Perception 2.

Backgrounds: Lucky, Racer, Small.

Profession: Athlete 1.

DOWNTOWN

Central City lies on a natural plain, flat and featureless, which means its downtown can be seen for miles in every direction. The cluster of tall buildings lacks the grandeur of New Eden, or the vivacity of Gateway, but it stands out with distinction amid the rest of the city's pancake geography. The skyscrapers were built as part of the initial boom which preceded the war by a decade or so, and now have settled comfortably into their appointed roles. City Hall sits in the shadow of numerous taller buildings, attended by separate structures housing the police and fire department headquarters, and the city's main courthouse. They lie in the shadows of numerous office buildings and business capitals, mostly representing agricultural interests and the city's various heavy industries. A series of unadorned steel pillars are scattered throughout downtown: abstract art designed to evoke the dignity of Central City's working class roots.

The train system is limited to commuter rails, which are raised off the ground in a latticework of iron. The effect both frees the streets for automobile traffic and creates a constant interplay of light and shadow along the downtown sidewalks. It's easy to find places to hide downtown; the elevated tracks provide natural cover. They often pass uncomfortably close to the buildings as well; office workers on the second or third story must cope with a train full of hollow-eyed commuters passing right next to their office windows. A daring soul could even jump from a window onto the tracks (a fact which several destitute businessmen used to commit suicide following an

economic crash several years ago). Once on the tracks, there is no real way off, save by shimmying down the support beams to the street (TN 12 Brawn + Athletics check) or using one of the system's few maintenance ladders (resembling a fire escape). There are only about three or four stations downtown, most accessible only by stairs.

Flags of various sorts hang from most of downtown's buildings, constantly fluttering in the breeze or in the wind of a passing train. On sunny days, they resemble the banners of a castle, giving Central City the impression of a mythic "city on the hill." The metaphor extends far beyond the surface details. Important men can be found here, going about their tasks and indulging in an audience with those who require favors from them. Political bosses and public appointees hold court in their various offices, trading perks and pay-offs in exchange for influence in their departments. Even some of the gangsters hold meetings here, ensconced in back rooms or holed up in luxurious hotel suites. Those who walk the corridors of power often feel like they're in the presence of medieval lords, and that — for all its modern trappings — the metropolis resembles a much older model at its heart.

Central City boasts the largest number of hotels in the country, catering to the city's massive travel industry. The outskirts and the areas around the railway station sport cheap car parks or one-room efficiencies, but here in the center of town, luxury is word one. A dozen hotels, most over twenty stories tall, compete for customers along a tightly-delineated six block stretch. Rows of bellhops stand ready to greet new arrivals, often competing fiercely with each other for big tip-pers and the like. The Commodore Hotel is by far the best known (see page 79 of the core rulebook for more), but other establishments such as the DuMont and the Central City Towers provide an equally decadent alternative.

8) Scot Free Bail Bonds

The Central City jail lies a few blocks from the courthouse. While convicted criminals are ferried to outlying prisons in the industrial suburbs, those charged with a crime are kept here until they are processed by the courts. Across the street, the dingy offices of Scot Free Bail Bonds service those who have run afoul of the law. Barely a step up from the criminals they cater to, Scot Free specializes in screwing over those who have run out of options. They charge exorbitant rates, far higher than others in their line of work, and are known for posting high-risk bail which no one else would even consider. They do it largely to curry favor with the city's mobsters, which never works since their rates irk those who have to pay them. (Their efforts at cozying up to the Drago mob by bailing out two of his chief lieutenants ended when Drago himself paid them a visit. The gaunt crime lord saw through their naked toadying, and menacingly suggested that if they attempted to charge him for their services, he'd see them face down in Lake McKellan by sunrise.)

Not surprisingly, the number of their clients who jump bail is quite high. Several fugitives in the outlands around Central City owe their freedom to Scot Free, and the company often hires private detectives to serve as bounty hunters. Payment issues can be sticky as well. In their efforts to become "real

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underworld players,” Scot Free has accepted offers in IOUs, which their unscrupulous clients have a way of ignoring. Despite all that, they have kept their head above water, a fact which they credit to their extremely high rates.

Scott Masterson and Peter Scott, whose names were the rather heavy-handed inspiration for the company’s title, run the office. Masterson is a fat, slovenly man in his forties, whose shirt is constantly covered in food stains, while his partner is short and pockmarked, wearing his hair slicked back with pomade. Both consider themselves street-wise, though experience has shown they’re nothing of the sort. Their office is in a constantly disheveled state, with files stacked on the desks and wanted posters pinned unevenly to the walls. The two men each have a desk behind a low wooden railing, which separates the “work” area from the “waiting” area (featuring a row of hard-backed chairs and torn cushions). A dead-eyed secretary in her mid-fifties greets arriving customers when she finally takes a minute from her phone duties, and the far corner holds a used lockdown cage which the partners picked up from a police auction several years ago. They think it makes the place look dangerous; in truth, it’s never been used. Peter Scott has a large revolver hidden in a holster under his desk, and there’s a shotgun in the back room in case things get really hairy. They rarely meet with private dicks or bounty hunters during regular hours, preferring to conduct such business under the cover of dark.

Peter Scott

Attributes: Brains 3, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 4, Moxie 5, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 3, Firearms 6, Intimidation 3, Melee 2, Perception 5, Pick Lock 5, Stealth 4, Streetwise 1.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets, Small.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Street Tough 1.

9) Central City Police Headquarters

This gleaming edifice across the street from City Hall only opened its doors two years ago, in a ceremony of great pomp and circumstance. The mayor himself cut the ribbon before handing the ceremonial keys over to Chief Buck Watterson. Since then, Police Headquarters has become a potent symbol of law and order in the city... and the surprising thing is, it’s not entirely a gilded facade.

Central City PD is overrun with corruption, to be sure, and yet its leadership understands that it has clout in the city’s never-ending political game. From the building’s upper floors, Chief Watterson and his lieutenants monitor the movements of the city’s biggest crime syndicates, and take quiet steps to ensure the balance of power is maintained. Watterson knows that many among the rank-and-file report to the crime lords and that’s fine — hell, he’s taken more than his share of payoffs in

his lengthy career. So long as the criminals all understand that none of them demonstrably controls his department, he has the ability to make them pay if they step out of line.

The building itself was intended to provide a show of force — to convince the populace that their law enforcement isn’t actively working for the other side. The ten-story structure was designed with modernism and efficiency in mind. The main floor has a huge glass facade with multiple doors in and out, bolstered by stone pillars that blend in seamlessly with the remainder of the building. The main floor is dominated by a large marble staircase, while the wall on the southernmost side contains a monument to CCPD officers killed in the line of duty. The Chief and his various lieutenants have offices on the top three stories, while the lower floors contain Internal Affairs, radio dispatchers, headquarters for the city’s riot police, several floors’ worth of labs, and a vast Clerical Department containing records of every officer, precinct, and arrest logged within the city limits. The police academy holds its graduation ceremony outside Police Headquarters every year, closing off the entire block to allow new cops and their families to enjoy the day. All of it gives the appearance of supreme functionality and imposing authority. The better to let the world know that CCPD dances to nobody’s tune.

Recently, however, a fly has appeared in this well-conceived ointment. When the NLEB announced its task force to fight organized crime in Central City, it appropriated an entire floor for its agents (“in order to work with Central City PD as closely as possible”). The act displaced a number of CCPD detectives, who had to cram into lower offices never intended to house so many. The result has left a palpable tension within the building, and made the NLEB’s PR job much more difficult. The Bureau houses over two dozen agents in their offices here, and CCPD is not allowed onto their floor without direct permission from the national government. Chief Watterson routinely complains about the “fiefdom” installed in his building, but Nova Roma takes a supremely dim view of his claims. Until organized crime in Central City is contained, the NLEB seems to be here to stay.

Naturally the rank and file in CCPD do everything they can to make the “Nats”’ lives more difficult. They routinely misfile agents’ requests, obstruct access to important areas, and engage in petty acts of oneupsmanship like failing to hold the elevator for them. The NLEB, for its part, retains an air of smug superiority, the better to hide the presence of the real agents out in the field (see page 12). The more folks grouse about them, the less likely they are to notice the *real* work being done.

Unfortunately, the tension between national and local law enforcement has made Police Headquarters an unconscionably awkward place to work. The formerly smooth-running building is now rife with bitter glances and acrimony, and a simple conversation at the water cooler could make you enemies that you never even knew existed. Watterson does his best to keep things civil, but he hates the Nats as much as his underlings do, and has a hard time staying impartial when conflicts arise. He knows that it may cause trouble down the line, but for now, if the NLEB wants to use his building, they’d better get used to some sand in their gears.

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Typical Central City Cop

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 5, Evasion 4, Firearms 5, Intimidation 5, Melee 3, Perception 3, Pick Lock 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Marksmanship, Mean Streets.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Officer of the Law 1, Street Tough 1.

10) Dyson Street

Central City prides itself on its literate populace, as evinced by its plethora of magazines and newspapers. And the heart of this publishing bonanza lies on Dyson Street, a short distance from City Hall. The city's largest newspaper, the *Bugle* can be found there, as well as its two main competitors, the *Signal* and the *Enterprise*. The three papers occupy a four-block stretch, serving as home to journalists and beat reporters of all varieties. They pack the coffee shops and the newsstands which line its sidewalks, trading banter with their rivals on other papers and seeking to one-up each other on the latest scoop. A barbershop midway along the street — called the Deadline — caters solely to journalists, and serves as the headquarters for the scribblers' impromptu bull sessions. Similar institutions can be found throughout Dyson Street, all of them claimed by the hordes of reporters which flock to them like pigeons.

Rivalry between the three papers is fierce, but largely on the up-and-up. Their physical proximity means that dirty tricks or sabotage can be reciprocated in kind, and an unspoken code dictates acceptable behavior. Every morning, a bit of a scramble ensues as printing trucks leave from all three buildings, each trying to get their edition out first. The truck drivers all belong to the same union, however, which means that nothing more sinister arises from the rush. The reporters, too, share an easy camaraderie, working the same beats and even sharing information if it's not damaging to do so. Scoops heat things up somewhat, and individual journalists aren't above poaching a rival if it means increased circulation. It's made for some bad blood over the years, though it rarely lingers. The next day's news always wipes the slate clean.

Corruption on Central City's papers is actually based much higher in the organization, with the editors and publishers. They dictate the content of each issue, and their influence is felt on the streets and at the voting polls every election. Mobsters can buy off reporters who use them as "contacts" to help publicize evidence against their enemies, while the mayor and his cronies use the papers to push their particular agenda. The unions can make their will felt by shutting down the printers or refusing to deliver the papers. Fair and unbiased reporting is generally considered a fairy tale. The owner of the *Enterprise*, Fergus Grint, earned his position as a rabid Plebian, in bed with the city's political machine. His paper shows the naked bias of his leanings, to the point of ignoring stories which may paint Plebian officials in a negative light. The *Bugle* and

the *Signal* are more even-handed, but even they aren't above burying a story in exchange for a tidy pay-off, or directing their attention towards politically convenient places.

Dyson Street is accessible from the train system — with a large stop punctuated by a huge clock which keeps time fastidiously according to the trains — and from a fleet of taxis which make their bread and butter by whisking reporters to "hot zones" for their stories. Politicians and government officials rarely show their face here, but the sidewalks are as crowded as those in front of City Hall. The *Bugle* has debated expanding into radio, and even toyed with the notion of installing a broadcast tower atop its building in order to handle the whole thing "in-house." The contract to build such a tower would be quite sweet, which may be why the idea is still afloat; the paper could simply enter an agreement with an existing radio station, but then, of course, the unions would receive nothing.

Typical Reporter

Attributes: Build 4, Brawn 3, Brains 5, Gut 7, Moxie 6, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 4, Etiquette 5, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 6, Perception 5, Puzzles 4, Sleight of Hand 3, Stealth 5, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Alert, Charismatic, Education.

Profession: Investigator 1.

WESTFORT

The western side of the Central City gradually gives way to heavy industry: a gritty, depressing collection of ironworks, paper mills, and auto manufacturing plants known as Westfort. Here, the city's sophisticated trappings fall away, leaving bare the workaday grind to which thousands of citizens dutifully trudge every morning. The air is black with smoke from the factories, and the local river is choked with pollution. Nothing appreciable grows in Westfort, and it contains no residences beyond a few blocks full of gaunts too proud to consign themselves to the Thickets. Everyone here punches a union card; everyone pays kickbacks to the rackets and factory managers who won't fire them as long as there's a new twenty in the top drawer of their desk every morning.

The factory owners hold sway in Westfort, grudgingly ceding power to the unions when necessary, but otherwise running their business with unchallenged authority. The civic government rarely interferes with operations, save at the behest of the workers whose leadership is in bed with City Hall. As long as they keep people employed and contribute to the local economy, the authorities leave them to scheme as they will. Most of the factories either consist of steel processing plants, or associated products such as cars or farming equipment. The remainder focus on precious metal smelting (usually gold), paper manufacturing, or simple industrial products such as tires

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or bolts. The facilities are lined up in squat, unadorned blocks, many not even marked by a sign or other distinguishing feature. The workers recognize theirs; that's all that matters.

Trucks transport products due south, to be loaded onto the trains at the Switchyards. The rest head east into the city proper, or west across the river toward Gateway and small towns along the plains. Though business flourishes, a few closures can be spotted here and there, like missing teeth in a boxer's smile. Factories which go under are usually either quickly demolished and replaced, or else left to rust while a sale is brokered (a process which can take years, if it ever concludes at all). They give Westfort a few easy gathering places for wrongdoers, and criminals who work the neighborhood often use them as a base of operations. Warlocks, too, find the area enticing, situated far away from the roving eye of the police (the Drago mob sometimes curries favor with the locals by helping them hunt down warlocks here). Abandoned equipment makes an excellent target for practicing magic skills, and when efforts get out of hand, the effects can easily be blamed on an industrial accident. The area's gaunt residents keep a sharp eye out for warlocks when the sun goes down, and have been known to lynch lone practitioners when they catch them. The leatherbacks represent the only real danger to a cautious magic user, however, and the warlocks who gather here consider them a minor risk at best.

Some operations work around the clock, but most close down when the 5 o'clock whistle blows, leaving the area a deserted wasteland by the time the sun sets. Tiny clusters of gaunt shacks and bottom-feeding businesses can be spotted around the edges, their lights burning until the wee hours of the morning. A few storefronts peep out the closer one gets to downtown — mostly dealing in the area's metal trade or selling factory-rejected products at discount prices. Like the factories themselves, all of them are populated by sullen employees, keeping one eye on the clock until their allotted time is up and they can flee to less bleak surroundings. For all its grime and despair, Westfort is actually a prosperous neighborhood. But all that money goes to people who never have to enter it, earned upon the backs of those who find themselves trapped there.

11) 6th Street Boarding House

The sign advertises private rooms by the night or hour. Transients are welcome, it maintains, and the cashier carries less than \$30 in change. It hangs below a neon sign flanking an ugly brown edifice that looks as if it should have been demolished decades ago. The 6th Street Boarding House is typical of most residences in Westfort: a bargain basement flophouse catering to vagrants and bums, along with an occasional factory worker who gets too drunk to make it home. A clerk ensconced behind thick glass buzzes occupants through into the building after collecting the proper fee. The radio above his head emits a constant static-filled buzz, and the lobby usually holds a wino sleeping off a binge or a prostitute and her john discreetly engaged in the corner.

The boarding house contains seven floors, each with twenty rooms designed for single occupancy. A communal bathroom and shower sits at the end of each hallway, their cleanliness ranging from the barely tolerable to the actively repugnant. The building's single elevator broke down years ago, and now serves as a storage area on the ground floor. The door is propped open by a wedge of pipe, and to the right there is an intermittently illuminated set of rickety stairs leading off into darkness. Each room contains an industrial bed (bolted to the floor), a chair, and a desk/table. Most have been badly damaged by previous clients, but the manager keeps them moderately dry and free of dirt. It's a losing battle, but it's also the boarding house's solitary point of pride.

The clientele shifts constantly, most never staying more than a night or two. A handful of regulars cling to life here, hiding out from the world or simply too shackled by inertia to escape. Most of them have developed chronic coughs from breathing the polluted air from the nearby factories. It's not uncommon for the house manager to find a fresh corpse or two in one of the rooms: dead from a drug overdose or simply from the hopelessness which has locked the building in a death grip. Every now and then, someone more noteworthy passes through: dressed in fine clothes or carrying themselves in a manner that speaks to a higher standard of living. The staff usually assumes they're warlocks and gives them a wide berth, though some of them may just be members of the elite, slumming it for kicks or to engaging in some form of illicit business.

A low-rent gambling parlor operates out of the basement of the building, mainly serving factory workers whose pay burns a hole in their pocket. It features a few listless slot machines and a pair of card dealers, along with a stoop-shouldered bookie who plays fights and horse races on the local radio. Many of its patrons are ensconced in the flophouse above, unable to afford better accommodations and viewing the gambling den as their only form of recreation. If the police knew about it, they'd surely shut it down, but in truth, it's too pathetic for them to really bother. The owner pays a measly protection fee to the Scarelli mob, but still turns enough of a profit to justify its existence.

Typical Flophouse Wino

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 6, Gut 3, Moxie 3, Smoothness 3.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Brawl 5, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 3, Intimidation 3, Lore (Switchyard Shift Patterns) 7, Perception 4, Pick Lock 5, Sleight of Hand 4, Stealth 5, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Mean Streets, Rugged.

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12) Edward Silver Refinery Co.

This stout, ugly building along the banks of the Rutherford River has served Eddie Silver's operation since he bought it from the previous owner a few years ago. Ostensibly, it processes raw ore into pure gold. Several tanks of cyanide solution separate the precious metal from the surrounding minerals. The gold is then smelted down into bars, stamped with Silver's corporate logo and transported to his storefront for shipping elsewhere. The resulting industrial run-off empties into the nearby river, which is now utterly toxic from the pollutants. The factory handles raw ore, which Silver purchases from mines further west. It also recasts finished gold, which he purchases from his "buyers" overseas.

Of course, its true purpose is to aid him in melting down the metals which he and his gang have stolen. The gold arrives here via automobile, kept light by the constant efforts of the gang's warlocks. Once here, Silver himself melts it down in one of casting pits, then has his flunkies recast it into bars, which are seamlessly added to the factory's existing stockpile. Silver's private accountants smooth over the discrepancy, and the factory workers — who never keep track of how much gold they process — are none the wiser. Even the furnace shows no evidence of wrong-doing; Silver's magic does the job without firing it up (a process which takes quite some time). So long as Silver carefully regulates his intake of stolen metal, the operation makes a perfect false front.

Paperwork for the site is maintained at Silver's own offices, in another part of Westfort. Here, he greets potential customers in the legitimate metal industry, either selling him raw ore or purchasing finished bricks from him. Silver himself spends the bulk of his time there, though he still comes down to the factory at least once a week to keep up appearances. The refinery itself maintains no paperwork beyond the workers' payroll and time cards; it wouldn't do to have the books out of Silver's hands. The factory workers are well compensated, and even though they work hard, they maintain strong loyalty to their employer. They have no inkling of his true occupation and would be shocked to learn that he practices magic. Their naiveté helps ensure Silver's legitimacy and keeps him safe from the authorities and rival gangsters alike.

Typical Silver Mob Warlock

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 5, Brawl 4, Demolitions 5, Engineering 3, Evasion 6, Firearms 6, Gravity 7, Lore (Refining Process) 3, Perception 5, Stealth 4, Streetwise 5, Thermal Energy 5.

Backgrounds: Magical Aptitude, Marksmanship, Underworld Connections.

Profession: Gangster 1, Rogue Scientist 1.

NPCs

SARAH ALDERS, CONCIERGE

Central City's luxury hotels are among the most opulent in the nation, fed by the constant influx of travelers used to living the good life. The Commodore (see page 79 of the core rulebook) is the jewel in the city's crown, the centerpiece of a five-block area dominated by high-rise palaces of the transient elite. Its head concierge, Sarah Alders, is well aware of her employer's reputation and goes to great lengths to preserve it — in the little ways as well as the big.

The Commodore contains all of the expected features of its kind, as well as a few added attractions which aren't included on the brochure. "The 13th Floor," a collection of private rooms in which all manner of depravity may be securely indulged, is available on demand to those in the know. Alders handles each request for the Floor personally, carrying the keys with her at all times. No attention is ever paid to these rooms; guests simply check in and then inform Alders when they are finished. She takes care of any cleaning up, and ensures that the staff at large remains ignorant of the 13th Floor and its clientele. She also handles more traditional requests: cashiers' checks, prostitutes, exotic foods not normally available in the kitchen, and on one memorable evening, a performing tenor and string quartet.

In addition, any serious problems with the guests or the rooms automatically come to her. She has shielded rich guests from police inquiries, disposed of bloodstained sheets and other incriminating evidence, arranged for the removal of bodies without alarming the other guests, and the like. She has come close to being charged with obstruction of justice several times, but has also proven helpful to the police when it suits her employers. The Commodore prides itself on discretion, and Alders is the ultimate arbiter of that duty. If it threatens the reputation of the hotel and its guests, she attends to the matter herself.

Alders has worked at the hotel for as long as she can remember, and was elevated to concierge after repeated demonstrations of her loyalty. The Commodore has provided her with stability, security, and a modicum of class that places her (in her mind) far above her blue-collar roots. She has authority, she has respect, and she has an entire staff ready to do her bidding. Absolute loyalty is a small price to pay for that. She usually works the night shift, from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. when most of the hotel's strange occurrences take place. But like any good workaholic, she often comes in earlier and stays later, intending to be on hand for any trouble or emergency which takes place. She has a semi-permanent room on the 10th floor, which she uses more than her severely neat apartment.

The hotel's owners are a mysterious lot. No one knows their names and they communicate solely in written memos and telephone conversations. Alders speaks with them nightly, but she has never seen their faces and doesn't know their real names. But she follows their dictates to the letter, and never questions who they might be. In her mind, it simply doesn't

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matter. They pay the bills and their policies have made the Commodore a world-class hotel. If they choose to keep themselves anonymous, then so be it.

Sarah stands about average height, with honey-blond hair and darting hazel eyes. She speaks with a clipped self-assurance that suggests a state of constant stress kept under control by a sheer act of will. Her suits are always neatly-pressed, with nary a button out of place, and she walks with a short stride that screams at you to get out of her way. She always wears a name tag while on duty, and the staff has learned to look busy when the sound of her heels comes clicking across the floor. She never raises her voice while in the presence of guests, though she will curse a blue streak at employees behind the scenes. For all that, however, she's very good at her job, and none of the requests she receives — even the truly bizarre ones — knocks her off stride. She remembers everything she sees and can use it like a weapon against those who challenge her. When it comes to the smooth operation of her hotel, nothing is out of bounds.

Sarah Alders

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 8, Moxie 6, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 3, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 6, Etiquette 6, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 4, Forgery 6, Intimidation 4, Lore (Central City Blackmail) 6, Medicine 4, Perception 7, Pick Lock 5, Puzzles 4, Sleight of Hand 3, Stealth 6, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Alert, Underworld Connections, White Collar Worker, Wise.

Profession: Con Artist 2.

EDDIE SILVER, CRIME LORD

Jack Drago's chief rival for control of Central City's underworld is virtually unknown. Indeed, most people don't even know he's involved in criminal activity, and that's the way he prefers it. Silver began life as Edward Soderbergh, a chemist studying at Laird University with an eye on a humble tenure track position. His mentor was Julian Montgomery, a famed teacher with a secret devotion to magic. The young Edward emerged from his tutelage a brilliant metallurgist... and a warlock as powerful as the man who taught him. He intended to apply for a teaching position, but when Dr. Montgomery was arrested on suspicion of magic use, he was forced underground. The incident proved deeply troubling to him; the injustice of Montgomery's incarceration burned in his mind. Unwilling to let it go and move on, Edward decided he would make his fortune outside the bounds of legal society. He would become a criminal.

He set himself up as "Eddie Silver," a dealer in precious metals, and quickly established an impressive false front. Under the façade of his business, he could move large amounts of gold, silver, and copper, claiming that the bulk of it came from overseas. Then he contacted a group of underworld figures

— including several fellow warlocks — and made them an offer. He would make them rich beyond their dreams if they would work for him exclusively. After seeing what he had in mind, his key lieutenants were more than willing to do his every bidding. In the next year, they robbed three shipments of gold and silver, mostly from armored cars or guarded safes on the train line. They could move the metal easily using gravity magic, then take it to Silver for "processing." He would arrive at the chosen locale with the stolen gold, smelt it to remove all traces of its origin, reduce its weight even further, and slowly disperse it through his legitimate precious metals trade. Through the slow and careful application of this formula, he soon built up a substantial fortune.

His lieutenants used their money to branch out into more conventional forms of crime — mostly prostitution and drug running. Silver, however, was more pragmatic than that. He insisted that they pay him a percentage, then kept his hands off, building up a series of go-betweens to insulate him from the criminal activities of his underlings. The more they expanded, the more he legitimized, until he appeared to have no connection whatsoever to the ruthless men beneath him. The rest of the city believes that his underlings control the "Northsiders," and while some have whispered of a single boss orchestrating their activities, none have conclusively pointed the finger at him.

In his own quiet way, he's as ruthless as any member of his gang. He doesn't particularly like killing as a rule, but if it must be done, he insists on doing it properly. He has personally disposed of nearly a dozen inconvenient human beings, from innocents who stumbled across his involvement to lieutenants who sought to challenge his authority. Their deaths were messy, but quick, and with so many warlocks in his crew, it was easy for the police to point the finger at them. He has numerous quiet connections with Central City's political machines, but rarely chooses to exercise them, leaving it to his lieutenants to apply pressure as necessary. He works out of a modest office on the north side, near several smelting plants which he owns. As far as most of his employees are concerned, he's a quiet businessman with an eye for deals and a fondness for an afternoon martini. The fact that no one has ever seen his "overseas contacts" and that he handles the company books with a private accountant has yet to strike anyone as suspicious.

Beneath it all, he revels in his successes. The former Edward Soderbergh would never have believed he could accomplish so much... or the cost it would exact on his soul. He has no regard for decent society (which rejected him and destroyed his mentor), for the lives he's taken (evil men, or else normals who would cower in fear of his magic), or for the illicit money he's made (all earned, in his mind, by hard work and planning). The world could pay for destroying his life, and he has no problems collecting the debt with interest. As long as he isn't caught — which in his mind would invalidate everything he's built — his revenge could not be sweeter.

Now in his 50s, Silver shows his age. He's developing a good-sized gut and he moves with the soft shuffle of a man accustomed to leisure. Crows' feet branch out from his hazel eyes, and the scars from metalworking can be seen burned into his forearms. His limbs lack the strength they once had,

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and his breath comes short beneath the expensive silk suits he always wears. His magical abilities are potent, however, and he's mastered them with severe discipline: he never shows the signs of burnout which plague most at his level. Indeed, he's one of the most powerful warlocks in the U.C. today, though his diminished reflexes limit his effectiveness in combat. His minions sit in hushed awe of him; he's made them wealthy and all he's asked for in return is loyalty. They would happily die for him; those who wouldn't met a messy end long ago in the furnaces of his smelting plant.

Eddie Silver

Attributes: Brains 10, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 3.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 10, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 6, Density 8, Evasion 2, Firearms 3, Forgery 7, Gravity 9, Intimidation 8, Kinetics 6, Magnetism 9, Perception 8, Stealth 3, Streetwise 6, Thermal Energy 10.

Backgrounds: Education, Magical Aptitude, Prodigy, Wealthy, Underworld Connections.

Profession: Businessman 2, Gangster 1, Rogue Scientist 4.

JESSICA BENNETT, BLUES PIANIST/DETECTIVE

Jessica Bennett has come a long way from the quiet small-town library where she once worked. Her husband went off to war and the town soon had the library boarded up — there simply weren't enough people left to justify the expenditure. She moved to Central City, looking for work. Her classical piano training landed her a spot at a local bar, and she quickly learned to transpose her musical talents to improvisational blues and jazz tunes. A band sprung up around her — fellow cast-offs, many with family members in the war, who clung to each other as the U.C. gritted its teeth and hunkered down.

Her husband was shot dead on the day the White Light ended the conflict. She received the notice a few days later. With nowhere else to go and no prospects beyond what she currently had, she stayed with the club: drowning her grief in her music, which took on a raw, authentic quality it never possessed before. Regulars kept coming back, and by the time Bennett came up for air, she was an established musician with a solid reputation. The bar eventually closed down, but by then she was famous enough to make a go at it on her own, moving from locale to locale and playing for whatever they were offering.

It was in one such locale that fate gave her life yet another turn. One of the customers was shot by a masked assailant in the middle of her set. The cops believed it was mob-related, and the culprit likely a gaunt. But Bennett felt otherwise; the assailant's skin looked gray, but it lacked the mottled leathery quality of most gaunts. Furthermore, she thought she smelled perfume on the man — a ladies' scent which she herself favored, and which would have been most unusual if worn by a leatherback. On her own recognition, she investigated the matter, and eventually uncovered the killers: the man's wife and her lover, who were hoping to throw off the police with a flimsy disguise.

The results got her picture in the paper and an additional bit of name recognition. Moreover, it gave her a taste for mystery, and she periodically found herself returning to the role of amateur sleuth. She still makes her money on the keys, playing where she can and usually saving enough to get by. But every now and then, she catches word of a case that piques her interest, or is approached by a desperate soul in need of help. She's naturally



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inquisitive and has a good head for facts, a holdover from her librarian days. The police regard her as a benign nuisance, but no more so than any other private dick, and her unlicensed status means they're rarely obligated to put up with her. She's even made a couple of friends on the force — enough to make them go easy on her as long as she behaves.

The piano still pays the bills, and remains her full-time profession despite what her irregular detective clients may think. It helped her through the pain of her husband's death and she feels that she owes it. She has taken lovers since her husband died, but never thought of remarrying. Indeed, her first marriage itself has faded to a dull ache, and there's times when she can't even remember what her husband looked like...

Jessica is a pretty woman of 35, who never quite shed her baby fat. She stands approximately 5'3", with bright blue eyes and brown hair that may have once been considered mousy. Now, she has it cut in a stylish bob that blends well with the man's shirt and pants she wears while performing. She finds that the boyish look plays well with her customers; indeed, it's only off-stage that she flaunts her gender more openly with skirts and dresses.

She has a knack for sarcasm, but is much more sensitive than she appears; she often makes cutting remarks and then immediately apologizes for them. She has few combat skills, though her aim is decent and she carries a small revolver when she thinks there will be trouble. She has yet to fire it, though; when things look uncertain, she'll usually just call the police before going in herself. Jessica is intimately familiar with most of the bars in Central City, along with the various brands of bourbon therein. She's on a first-name basis with bartenders and bassists alike, and while she has yet to land a permanent gig, she's still holding on to her modest one-bedroom apartment downtown. When money starts falling out of the sky, she'll be the first one to hold out her hands. In the meantime, she'll keep getting along like she always does, and never looks askance at her good fortune.

Jessica Bennett

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 8, Moxie 6, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 5, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 4, Firearms 6, Intimidation 2, Perception 8, Performance (Pianist) 7, Puzzles 6, Pick Lock 4, Sleight of Hand 3, Stealth 5, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Alert, Lucky, Wise.

Profession: Investigator 2, Performer 1.



SINCLAIR COCHRAN, GAUNT REPO MAN

Before his transformation into a gaunt, Sinclair Cochran was a top-notch mechanic. He retained his skills after the change, but lost his business: no one wants a leatherback's draining aura to affect their car. Since he could no longer fix people's vehicles, he decided to steal them instead. He got a job as a repo man, taking autos from owners who had fallen behind in their payments. The intensity of the work got into his blood, and he was soon looking for new ways to feed the adrenaline rush. He began offering his services as a "freelance booster," driving getaway cars during bank robberies and other high-profile crimes. It's been heaven.

His job at the repossession agency makes a perfect front. He has access to numerous records in the Central City area: bank loans and the like depicting makes, models, and addresses of owners. When he needs a car for an illegal job, he simply finds an appropriate type, steals it just before the heist, and then returns it or dumps it nearby (burning it if it contains evidence like bloodstains or bullet holes). In some cases, the owner doesn't even realize that it's gone; there's no need to worry about evidence tying him to the crime because the car never goes where he lives or works. Cochran always wears gloves on a job, and insists that everyone in the car do so as well. He prefers big sedans which can hold a lot of people, and he usually removes the license plates and other identifying marks beforehand, returning them once the job is completed. The police have investigated him in connection with various armed robberies, but have never been able to pin anything on him: a testament to his meticulous preparation habits.

He's an excellent driver, and never loses his head in a crisis, a fact which has given him a sterling reputation among the underworld. Unfortunately, his addiction to thrills means he sometimes *provokes* crises which could be avoided, and Central City has been privy to several spectacular chases involving Cochran and his associates. He continues to work for the repo agency during the day (the owners are clueless about his extracurricular activities) and still does mechanical repairs from time to time (he's the only one willing to work on other gaunts' cars). This latter activity is what first put him in touch with his underworld contacts, when gaunt members of the Westerbrook Runners came to him for help in retooling their vehicles. They respect his ability to adapt to his new condition and hold onto his dreams, even when they no longer seemed attainable. Plus, he drives really fast.

His day job holds almost as many thrills as his criminal life. Central City law states that car repossession must be a peaceable affair, meaning that breaking the owners' doors down and beating them until they surrender the keys isn't an option. He prefers to take vehicles during the day, tailing the owners to work or the store, then boosting the car while they're preoccupied elsewhere. In the early days, he used a slim-jim (a flat metal rod inserted under the window) to gain entry, but most people assumed he was a thief, and he now uses an elaborate set of skeleton keys which can open most any car door on the market. For a real thrill, he'll take the car in the dead of night, when he often purposely makes enough noise to wake

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the owner. He enjoys the thrill of screeching away while they come charging out of their house, preferably ready to blow his head off with a shotgun.

Cochran is lean and well-proportioned, with a jaundiced smile that actually looks disarming on him. He chews on matchsticks while he works, though he's cautious enough to never leave any behind him. He lives in a ramshackle garage inside the gaunt district, stowing cash from his holdups in the mechanics' well. His apartment above the garage is spartan and simply furnished, with a lone radio being the only concession to luxury. Cochran adores automobiles — a passion that endured through his transformation — and spends almost all of his time tinkering with them in one form or another. He keeps a beautiful trio of restored cars in a private garage far from the gaunt district, and has plans to add a fourth. Most reliable underworld sources know him as a first-rate wheelman, and if someone has need of one for a heist or other job, Cochran is the go-to guy in Central City.

Sinclair Cochran

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 6, Gut 5, Moxie 3, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 5, Demolitions 3, Drive (Car, Light Watercraft, Motorcycle, Truck) 9, Engineering 8, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 2, Firearms 4, Intimidation 4, Perception 2, Pick Lock 6, Stealth 5, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Gaunt, Racer, Underworld Connections.

Profession: Gangster 1.

"THE MAGIC MAN," ASSASSIN

Nelson Sharper is one of the most fearsome figures in the Central City underworld, but few call him by that name. To his clients, he's simply "The Magic Man," a contract killer who uses magic and sorcery to assassinate his targets. As an aspiring warlock, he combined his affinity for scientific extremism with a sociopathic detachment from other people's emotions. He became fascinated with the human body's natural resistance to magic — the way sorcery could never affect living things the way it affected inanimate objects. He refocused his studies on indirect use of magic, specifically to harm or kill. His "experiments" quickly turned toward the ghoulish, using innocent bystanders to test "theories" regarding the force, speed, or temperature required to harm a human body. Killing for hire simply evolved as a matter of course.



Sharper is adept in multiple forms of sorcery, which he uses in creative ways to destroy his chosen targets. He once increased the weight and density of a piece of birthday cake just as it was being swallowed, causing it to tear through the target's innards like paper. Another target was dispatched by increasing the speed of the man's shoes as he fled, causing him to run straight into an oncoming bus. Like most professional assassins, he prides himself on keeping excess casualties to a minimum, and he can direct his powers such that even those closest to his target are not harmed in the slightest.

He works through intermediaries, fielding assignments as he sees fit. Central City's organized gangs make use of him only when one of their own can't do the job, or if they wish to hide evidence of their involvement. A client will approach a trio of associates; they will proceed to contact him and arrange the details. He always speaks to them from a pay phone. Contracts are nonnegotiable and he never quibbles over price. Once an agreement is reached, he usually takes three or four days to study the target before making his move. It's often a matter of improvisation over planning: once he has the target's rhythms and habits down, he begins searching for an opportune means (and moment) to strike. It provides him the flexibility he needs to try alternating methods if his first doesn't go according to plan. It also helps him to keep cool in a crisis, which is invaluable in his line of work. To date, he has never failed to carry out an assignment he has agreed upon. He regards his work as an extension of his earlier experiments. Each new killing is a way to further understand the effects of magic on the human body. Because of this, he rarely uses the same *modus operandi* twice.

His reputation has garnered him numerous out-of-town contracts, and he has often traveled to other cities in the U.C. to carry out his work. The local police are baffled as to his identity, though the NLEB has a file on him which grows with each successful hit. They haven't delved further into the case, partially because many of his targets are criminals and other undesirables, but mainly because he forms an ideal example of the "warlock menace" which the NLEB can use to secure more funding. If they were to capture him too early, they might lose the excellent scapegoat he makes.

When not engaged in his work, he obsessively practices his sorcery, researching new areas and scribbling his findings in a series of poorly organized notebooks. He has a few connections in the Central City warlock community, who largely have no idea what he does for a living. They consider him talented but undisciplined — a starry-eyed amateur who will invariably draw attention to himself. Because of that, most other warlocks tend to keep him at arm's length. When not studying, he spends his leisure time south of the border, gambling in the casinos of Iberana and generally keeping a low profile.

Though he rarely asks questions of his clients, he's very good at obtaining information about them. The fate of his victims matters to him not one whit, but he does feel a need to know how his actions will affect the big picture... which means finding out who has hired him and why they might want certain people dead. In the process, he's collected quite a few interesting facts... including the true nature of "gold

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merchant” Eddie Silver’s business. The Magic Man has rubbed shoulders with him more than once, and he knows enough about Silver to figure out where all of the man’s merchandise comes from. He’s kept it under his hat for now, even though he knows that some would pay through the nose for it. Silver has done business with him in the past and the Magic Man sees no need to burn that particular bridge anytime soon. Besides, it provides a nice chip to play in case Silver ever decides to cause trouble.

Sharper is thin and angular, with long dexterous fingers consumed by nervous twitching. He wears innocuous dark clothing and rubber-soled shoes — a standard warlock’s trick to keep from being inadvertently harmed by sorcerous electricity. He gives the impression of a man on edge: eyes darting, voice nervous, feet shuffling in place. It belies a calm and perceptive soul beneath, one used to careful observation and attention to details. The edginess comes from so many years of practicing magic. His passion has begun to take its toll on his mind. Despite that, he remains reliable, and since his clients never see him face-to-face, they have little reason to fear his slightly hysterical demeanor. He keeps no real friends, and few acquaintances beyond his go-betweens and a handful of fellow warlocks who know him by sight. He lives in a rotating series of sparsely furnished apartments: classy, empty, and easily disposed of on a moment’s notice.

The Magic Man

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 5, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Demolitions 5, Density 6, Disguise 7, Electricity 6, Gravity 5, Intimidation 6, Kinetics 7, Lore (Human Resistance to Sorcery) 8, Medicine 2, Perception 7, Puzzles 7, Stealth 7, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Alert, Fanaticism, Magical Aptitude, Prodigy.

Profession: Rogue Scientist 3, Investigator 1.

JOHN KOWALESKI, GAUNT SWITCHMAN

Johnny Kowaleski holds the dubious title of the highest-ranking gaunt in the Switchyards: a night-shift senior switchman who orchestrates the transfer of cars between lines. His supervisor, a grumbling bean counter, dislikes dealing with a leatherback, but can’t deny that Kowaleski does a great job at bargain rates. He works from midnight until eight, hours in which the union demands extra pay and where the Switchyards are relatively quiet. Even so, Johnny faces a great deal of discrimination from the normal workers on site. He’s been

beaten several times, and spent the night in jail once for deigning to defend himself with a broken bottle. An unemployed gaunt from his apartment building sometimes helps him by standing guard over his dingy office with a huge piece of plywood, but generally Kowaleski has to watch his back himself.

And for all that, he’s still grateful for the work. His former job in a steel mill dried up when the outfit went union, and he fears losing this position to the same fate. Working cheap is the only thing keeping him from the soup line, and he’s determined to hold onto his career no matter what. There are eight switchmen under him (all gaunts), who depend on him for steady work as well. He’s saved up quite a bit in his time at the Switchyards, and even without benefits, it still pays better than what the normals get for loading cargo. He distributes his paycheck as best he can amongst the other gaunts in his building. Many of them are on the dole, and while he can’t afford to give up much, he at least



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makes sure they have enough to eat. He's been quietly talking to other leatherbacks in the yard about forming a union of their own, but most are too afraid. Should the normals overhear such talk, they may have a full-scale race riot on their hands.

He rarely talks about life before becoming a gaunt. There was a wife, that much he knows, and an infant girl who shrieked the first time she ever saw her father. Beyond that, there's very little, and he finds he prefers it that way. However hard life was before his transformation, it must have been a step up from his current situation. Memories of it would just pour salt in the wounds. He's integrated very well into the gaunt community, however, and for all its hardships still finds moments worth savoring. He's come to know the Railway District very well and navigates its tangle of streets and lines with uncanny accuracy. He's never taken a pay-off and refuses to associate with criminals... though he's certainly received offers. Instead, he just keeps his mouth shut and looks the other way. On occasion, cargo has disappeared on his watch. His supervisor initially tried to blame the incident on him, but Kowaleski knew enough about the Switchyard's dirty secrets to prevent more than a show of bluster. Nobody wants to stir up that cauldron too deeply.

Kowaleski is a short, stocky gaunt with meaty ribs and forearms like a sailor. He wears a peaked cap turned backwards while on the job, as well as the ubiquitous railroad overalls. He's not an eloquent man, but when he chooses to speak, his words have conviction. He cares little for anyone beyond his immediate community, having seen nothing but hatred and anger from the rest of the world. He keeps a stiff upper lip at work because it's in his best interest to do so, not out of any nobility or altruism. Kowaleski has found a secret stoop at the top of a nearby warehouse; the owner lets him store his things there and catch a nap when he's too tired to take the train back to his apartment in the Thickets. The rooftop provides a sterling view of nearby Campbell Fields, and he stops in for games up there when he can — often inviting his fellow gaunts up to cheer on the Switchmen with him.

John Kowaleski

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 8, Build 8, Gut 5, Moxie 3, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 40.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 2, Demolitions 2, Drive (Car, Train) 4, Engineering 6, Evasion 7, Intimidation 4, Medicine 2, Perception 3, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Blue Collar Worker, Dense Bone Structure, Gaunt.

Profession: Street Tough 1.

FREMONT VANDERWAHL, ART DEALER

Most of the art world knows Fremont Vanderwahl as the premier dealer of classical paintings in the U.C. He has connections throughout the Commonwealth and more overseas (with whom he only communicates through telegraphs). Every major museum in the country has him to thank for at least a few of their paintings, and he has a knack for turning up "lost masterpieces" of some of the best-known artists from the last century. He credits it to his experiences during the war as a quartermaster, and to an uncanny ability to track down artworks lost during the fight with the Order of Nu. Because of that, he often makes deals with black marketeers who may not have arrived at a given piece legally, but the museums and collectors overlook that, since it spares *them* the unpleasantness of dealing with the black market themselves. Whatever his methods, he's earned a sterling reputation in the artistic community, and the pieces he's brokered constitute a significant part of the U.C.'s national collection.

Few people know that Vanderwahl is himself an outstanding artist, on par with any of the masters whose work he handles. He'd rather keep his talents secret: public knowledge would destroy his business. For while many of the pieces he sells are exactly what he claims, many more are nothing but fakes. Or more accurately, original works which he has creatively mislabeled. His talent for painting was always impressive — even as a child, he recalls — but he never had the vision to become a true artist. His works were technically effective, but devoid of spirit. His early efforts proved frustrating, as he realized that while he was skilled enough to scratch out a living, he would never be rich and famous the way he longed to be. Eventually, he drifted to dealing, which provided a better lifestyle at least. It wasn't until after the war when it finally hit him: his work could still fetch astronomical prices if he so wished. All he had to do was pass it off as somebody else's.

He first tried his theory by creating a new painting in the spirit of the late genius Mark Sampson. It was utterly derivative, but flawless in terms of form and technique. He signed it in Sampson's name, and sold it to the Barrett Museum in New Eden as a "lost classic" of the master. It fetched thirty times the amount it would have had he signed it himself (if the Barrett had deigned to purchase it at all), and opened the floodgates for a scam of massive proportions. In the last eight years, he has passed nearly thirty of his own paintings off as someone else's and made millions of dollars in the process. Every major museum in the country has at least one or two of his pieces, cleverly disguised as someone else's. He still deals in plenty of originals — masking his activities nicely — and the sting at being unable to take credit for his own work is easily assuaged by the size of his bank account. Vanderwahl's mimicking abilities are unparalleled: he's emulated the style of at least five different artists during his stint, and he could easily add more should he wish it. But he's cautious and careful (he faces a lengthy prison term should he ever be caught), and has no plans to test his luck.

It's just as well, for ironically, his more "legitimate" dealings have earned him a great deal of unwanted attention. His black market contacts are often thieves who have stolen the work

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from its rightful owners, or plundered it from overseas during the war. The police know it, and sometimes they'll lean on him to coerce him into revealing a name or two. He rarely does so, knowing the damage it will cause his reputation among the underworld. Even so, he has proven instrumental in assisting the authorities on several occasions, arranging for the return of stolen paintings (sometimes offering one of his "forgeries" to the thieves as a trade) instead of ransom. He's also rescued quite a few paintings from potentially harmful conditions, buying them from illicit owners who haven't the first idea how to properly store them.

All of this has given him a unique perspective on the history of art... and through it, some clues as to the nature of the *Edge of Midnight* universe. He's noticed that the details about particular pieces seem haphazard and indistinct, even from those who are supposedly "experts." His imitations have never been seriously questioned, and while he knows he's good, he's certainly not that good. It's strange to him that his pieces should blend so seamlessly in with older masterworks... why a painting he completed a month ago should be equal in essence to one nearly two centuries old. Questions have led him to suspicions, and suspicions have led him to full-bore doubts. Despite that, however, he cannot be counted as a member of the Few, for while they seek to improve the world's lot, he's perfectly happy leaving it as it is. Life has been good to him, he feels, and while issues concerning the past are certainly troubling, they have no real bearing on his happy and prosperous present.

Vanderwahl is about average height, with a nonchalant bearing and a look of practiced intelligence about him. He dresses in expensive yet casual clothes, and smokes cigarettes in a short, elegant holder. While not physically imposing, he is quite difficult to intimidate, and the prospect of bodily harm doesn't flutter him in the slightest (he accepted the reality of his own death during the war). He lives in a penthouse apartment near Central City's lakeshore, and regularly travels via train to New Eden, Nova Roma, and other cities with important museums. Auctions of his work are always held in Central City; as a native, he insists upon the prestige it conveys.

He paints in a locked room at the center of his apartment, where he claims to keep valuable works still seeking an owner. The room's two doors are locked and reinforced, making it exceedingly difficult to penetrate. He never keeps any actual masterworks there — the insurance companies insist — but there's enough evidence to shed light on his "imitation" scam. He keeps the key to both doors with him at all times, even sleeping and bathing with it.

Fremont Vanderwahl

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 5, Moxie 8, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Appraise 8, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 3, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 5, Forgery 10, Intimidation 3, Lore (Art) 10, Perception 7, Performer (Artist) 6, Puzzles 5, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: High Society, Prodigy, Underworld Connections.

Profession: Businessman 3, Con Artist 2, Performer 1.



CHAPTER ONE: CENTRAL CITY

MARVIN HAMPTON, CARD SHARK

Marvin was born with a fascination for cards, and the way they could turn into money. His father, an alcoholic slaughterhouse worker, bought him his first deck before he was old enough to properly hold them. He was running a three-card monte game by age nine, and soon graduated to blackjack, poker, and various other games of chance. When his father died in an auto accident, he hit the road, plying his way through low-rent pool halls and smelly casinos in search of the perfect game. Gambling proved a smooth fit for him and he quickly amassed enough money to claim a stake with the big boys. The neon-lit palaces of Paradiso and high-rise nightclubs of New Eden welcomed him with open arms and he rarely disappointed them. His gutsy betting and savvy calculation of the odds made for an A-list attraction.

But Marvin spent his winnings almost as soon as he made them. Money burned a hole in his pocket, tossed away on cheap thrills, women, and liquor. He borrowed from bookies to pay off his debts, then used his winnings at the table to keep ahead of the interest. It quickly became a vicious cycle, pulling him into the clutches of some very unsavory people. When it hit bottom, it wasn't pretty. He hustled a gaunt named Johann Shylock into paying off his bills and promised a return on the investment through a poker tournament held at the Four Leaf Casino. He'd be the odds-on favorite to win the event; Shylock could bet heavily against him, then at the pivotal moment, he would simply fold, allowing the leatherback to walk off with a substantial pot of cash.

But when the pivotal moment came — the last hand of the final round — Marvin couldn't bring himself to fold. He held a straight flush — an almost unbeatable hand — and as badly as he wanted to do what his creditors told him, his card-player's instinct would not let him pass the opportunity up. He took his opponent for all he was worth, winning the hand and the tournament. But the cash he received didn't even begin to cover his debt, and now Shylock had lost a bundle on him...

The gaunt and his associates caught up with Marvin at the train station. They took pity on him: instead of being killed, he was only beaten senseless. Shylock then carved the word "LIAR" into his forehead and left him with a ticket out of town, suggesting that if he were still in Paradiso come sun-up, they'd finish the job.

Two days later, Marvin stumbled off the train in Central City, his chest and torso marked by nasty purple bruises. He checked himself into a cheap fleabag hotel and spent three days drinking. When he emerged, he began looking for a game again, but his spirit had been broken and he no longer possessed the thrill for it. He finally landed a position as a dealer in a two-bit gambling hall near the Switchyards. Here he remains, dealing out hands to lowlifes and gunmen, earning a few extra bucks as a mob informant, and doing his best to drink himself into an early grave. Members of both the Drago and Silver combines routinely shake him down, collecting what few funds he makes on the grift and occasionally cutting him some slack in return for tidbits about their rivals. He lives

in a tiny one-bedroom apartment in the basement of a nearby laundromat; his landlord is a beefy Hindu woman whose lack of proficiency with the English language is the only thing that buys him enough time to pay the rent. The way he's going, it soon won't matter one way or another.

Marvin is a thin, pasty-faced man dressed in threadbare suits and sporting a permanent five o'clock shadow. The "LIAR" scar can still be seen on his forehead; he wears his hair in unseemly bangs to hide it from view, and never leaves home without a wide fedora pulled low over his forehead. He often mumbles when he speaks and has a hard time looking other people in the eye. He can barely summon the will sit up straight, though he retains enough moxie to try a few minor-league dodges every now and again. His hands still shuffle the deck with uncanny speed and skill, and he can still palm an ace or witch out a queen without anyone being the wiser. He's never entirely sober, but during the daylight hours he manages a conversational drunkenness which people confuse for lack of tact. Sometimes he contemplates just hopping the next freight car for Paradiso and waiting for Johann Shylock to finish quickly what the booze is doing one day at a time.

Marvin Hampton

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 2, Build 3, Gut 7, Moxie 4, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Appraise 2, Brawl 1, Evasion 8, Fast Talk 6, Intimidation 1, Lore (Games of Chance) 10, Perception 7, Puzzles 3, Sleight of Hand 9, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Lucky, Mean Streets, Wise.

Profession: Con Artist 1.

SAMPLE CAMPAIGNS

Central City forms the hub of the Commonwealth, the beating heart of her commerce and industry. The tight grid of its streets, and the sprawling steel arteries of the rail yards, hem in the population and provide a constant stream of pickings for the powerful crime syndicates that carve up the city between them. The labor movement represented by the unions retains shreds of hope and idealism, blended with an equal amount of suspicion, bigotry, and corruption. The second-largest population of gaunts in the Commonwealth toils in deplorable conditions while the actions of their most infamous son bring suspicion on the community as a whole. And at the heart of it all, the White Light that ended the war was born in Central City.

As the crossroads of a nation, Central City finds that many of the Few are drawn to it, though few can say why. Perhaps it is the queasy air of mystery that pervades the creation of the White Light. Perhaps they feel driven to clean up a town so

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thoroughly compromised by wicked men. Perhaps it is simply that they are lured along the rails with the drifters, seeking solace in the teeming crowds. Whatever their reasons, they find this town more a lion's den than a nest of vipers — complacent and silent, but liable to erupt into brutal violence at the slightest wrong step.

CITY ON THE HILL

The NLEB has adopted the risky practice of organizing a task force to clean up Central City's endemic mob rule. Agents with diverse areas of expertise have been charged with the task of slipping into Central City and making inroads into the city's criminal fraternity. Their activities are assisted by a public team — highly visible agents, ensconced in the city's police station, publicly devoted to hunting crime within Central City, and doing justice so that it can be seen to be done.

A task force campaign in Central City comes with massive risks, and many choices. The target of the task force, though a matter for the GM to decide, can be influenced by the players, who take on the role of agents working to bring down the syndicates. Are they concerned with triggering a gang war, regardless of casualties? Would they rather eliminate one prominent crime family, in hopes of sending a message to the others? Players can opt to play a public team, raiding drug dens and warehouses packed with stolen merchandise, fending off hitmen, and engaging in running street battles with goons from every combine and syndicate in the city. Or they can act as an undercover team, quietly gathering information and building a network of connections, waiting for the right moment to twist the knife and bring the seedy dealings of their criminal contacts kicking and screaming into the light of day. Regardless of their initial choices, they should know that danger awaits them at every turn, whether it is a bullet striking them down in an ambush, or the fear of betrayal by ostensibly loyal cops dancing to the tune of their criminal adversaries.

The public team should always be able to trust each other — and only each other. Local law enforcement is thoroughly compromised, and the player characters should have no initial idea of which officers are on the mobs' payroll. The undercover team is out of contact and may fall prey to the city's lures just as easily as the local law. The Bureau in Nova Roma — while able to offer assistance to the agents — is distant and slow to react. The public team is under siege from day one, and can only succeed by being tougher, smarter, and more audacious than their opponents. Perhaps the task force will court the press, building up an image just as their enemies in the combines do. Perhaps they will swoop without warning on mob holdings, trusting on secrecy and surprise to carry the day. Their activities will be defined by their enemies to a certain extent, and the public task force should feel as if they are under siege at all times. Any sign of weakness will be rewarded with vindictive and brutal violence.

The shadow team, on the other hand, is in at the deep end. They have no contact with Nova Roma, no option for public support (or the double-edged security of the media's spotlight), and no environment of trust. They live and work under assumed names — the lies that protect them only as strong as their own duplicity — and any corruption in the Bureau could bring their identities to the ears of Central City's criminal elite. Worse, the people they deal with are distrustful and violent by force of habit, and the slightest wrong word could result in their deaths. They must tread a fine line, working with the syndicates while subtly undermining them from within.

(Several fine motion pictures depict the rigors of undercover work, most notably Mike Newell's *Donnie Brasco* and Sidney Lumet's *Prince of the City*. GMs interested in running an undercover campaign would be well advised to study these films beforehand.)

LET MY PEOPLE GO

The unions are powerful organizations in a city that lives and thrives on labor. Most of the criminal syndicates have interests in at least one of the unions, and the Drago Combine regards them as an important source of revenue and influence. On top of this, the unions themselves only represent normal workers, marginalizing gaunt laborers and keeping them in only the most menial of positions. Yet every so often a fresh-faced ideologue — or perhaps a party of them — comes along, determined to save the labor movement from the tired old men taking kick-backs from the gangs. These socialist firebrands can cause no end of trouble — stirring up workers the bosses want kept docile, stringing the gaunts along with promises of more rights, or even attracting unwanted attention from the police. If one of these activists were to get into trouble, he or she would need some protection. And if one were to disappear, the concern of family and friends could stir up a hornet's nest of corruption and dark secrets.

The laborers of Central City can also find themselves in the middle of gang wars — even a simple working joe who pays his dues, or a freelance gaunt laborer, can be used as leverage in the constant struggle for influence and power conducted within the syndicates. An ambitious lieutenant in the Scarelli Mob, for example, could try to turn disenfranchised gaunts against the unions, hoping to lessen Jack Drago's power. Drago's men, in turn, could stir up the unions against the companies, calling strikes with one hand and offering to brutally end them with the other.

A union-based campaign covers a vast swath of Central City life — players can easily fit a group together from pretty much any social group in the U.C., and they can interact with all strata of society, from low-rent hoods and street-level scum all the way up to the mayor and, um, scum with better tailors. At the end of the day, maybe the group will have made the life of the working stiff a little better, or maybe they'll just save the one guy who can from getting rubbed out.

CHAPTER TWO NEW EDEN



TMI moved (there) for my health. I'm
paranoid, and it was the only place
where my fears were justified.}

- Anita Weiss

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CHAPTER TWO: NEW EDEN

OVERVIEW OF THE CITY

New Eden is a bipolar city, day and night jostling for the same overcrowded position. Nowhere else does wealth move so effortlessly among poverty, culture compete so fiercely with trash, or unity blend so completely with factionalism. It's white ties and tails with a ballpark hot dog. It's bums and millionaires standing next to each other on the subway. Millions of souls are packed so tightly together than they have nowhere to go but up... and the sky literally is the limit.

The city is built on Eden Island, a large landmass just off the U.C.'s eastern coastline. The island's western side makes a natural harbor, sheltered from the currents of the Neptunic Ocean and easily accessible by the mainland. Historians hold that the harbor soon attracted shipping interests, giving the burgeoning town a business base that allowed it to grow in leaps and bounds. When the space ran out, architects were commissioned to raise the buildings higher. New construction first expanded west from the mainland shore, then straight up as real estate prices on the island skyrocketed. The suburbs expanded onto the mainland to the west while the island itself witnessed a new architectural phenomenon: the skyscraper. It rapidly transformed New Eden into a gleaming forest of steel and glass, reducing the streets to shadowed ravines and setting the city's famous skyline in the public imagination.

Today, the city is still defined by the tower edifices on Eden Island, even though the city proper encompasses most of the surrounding territory. To the north, the metropolis gives way to picturesque woods, marked by quaint towns and the sheltered property of the rich and prosperous. Within the city itself, conditions are best described as a "big squeeze." Space is at an absolute premium. Housing rates shoot through the roof, and apartment complexes holding thousands of people in a single square block are not unheard of. With privacy at a premium, the natives have adopted an odd sort of insular nosiness. Everyone is constantly in each other's business; neighbors are aware of each other's slightest mood, and news spreads like wildfire among the populace. Yet at the same time, city residents have an infamous habit of refusing to lend a hand. Robberies and rapes take place in open daylight, with passersby pointedly ignoring the victim's cries for help. It's not so much active callousness as it is a simple fear of getting involved. It's perfectly all right for a New Edener to nose around in someone else's business, as long as it isn't dangerous.

As a consequence, the populace adopts a resilient self-reliance: independence born from fear of counting on others. Old men pride themselves on being able to fight off attackers, while children growing up on the streets become as predatory as any animal. Self-defense courses are taught in many neighborhood community centers, and the national government estimates that there is one firearm for every two people on the island. New Edeners are nothing if not ready for a fight. Social manners too, tend to be on the coarse side, despite the fact that city's elite often set the etiquette trends for the rest of the country. Visitors are shocked by the rude and short-tempered behavior which longtime city-dwellers take for granted.

Getting around in New Eden is often an adventure in and of itself. The island is laid out along a strict grid pattern, making it difficult for anyone to become lost. The narrow streets are a challenge for automobile traffic; cars tend to crawl sluggishly beneath the buildings' shadows, sometimes taking hours to travel a handful of blocks. Residents usually have two options: walking or taking the subway. Few cities boast even a fraction of the island's foot traffic, and the sidewalks are often packed with pedestrians bustling along their way. Many people would prefer to walk to their destination than drive, despite the abundance of cabs prowling the streets.

The other primary form of transportation is the underground railway system, which has several lines running beneath the island and spurs out to the mainland suburbs as well. The subway cars are battered and noisy, but they run on time. The tunnels are largely a recent creation, having been carved out in a massive public works project sometime before the war. As a consequence, they're well-mapped and contain few surprises. Though criminals often use the underground to move around safely, they are nowhere near as prevalent as they are in Gateway's sewer system (which dates back to that city's founding). A special unit of the police has been formed specifically to deal with illegal activity on the subway: anything from purse snatchings to contraband being smuggled through the tunnels. Subway stations can be found every twenty blocks, and a series of grates (theoretically accessible only by the police and the public works department) links the tunnels and maintenance corridors to the sidewalks above.

New Eden is also the home to an inordinate number of war veterans. Many returned from overseas to find their former lives dissipated — jobs filled, sweethearts remarried, farms and townships shriveled up and blown away. Quite a few ended up on the streets of New Eden, searching for work and trying to put memories of the conflict behind them. Some began running with the street gangs, while others joined the ranks of homeless vagrants searching endlessly through the trash bins for food. Many others found decent work in the offices and factories, but despite their example, the image of the veteran as "crazy street person" has stuck among the populace. In the wrong circles, saying you fought in the war is enough to be greeted with open distaste and hasty departures.

The principle business of New Eden is business itself. To the south of the city, massive factories and production houses deliver all manner of merchandise, from processed foods to radios to books and magazines. The ebb and flow of such product is controlled from the towering offices that form the city's core: skyscrapers based on the famous Banker's Square and radiating out for blocks in every direction. The U.C. Stock Market can be found here, where fortunes are haggled over like fruit at the local grocery store, and the boardrooms and offices burst with self-important men and women casually dictating the fate of thousands of employees. New Eden's financial community has a rock-solid base in the families who first settled here; many retain controlling interest in the companies their ancestors founded, creating an entrenched upper class of owners, part-owners, and executive CEOs.

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Beneath them is an organized bureaucracy that rivals Nova Roma's in scope. Each company controls an army of employees — designers, advertisers, accountants, junior executives, and office workers of every stripe — who work solely to keep product moving and the books in the black. Work is plentiful here if you have the right qualifications, but competition is fierce. Individual businesses scuffle for every advantage over their rivals, and intra-office politics are cutthroat in the extreme; workers will fight for limited promotions like cornered dogs. The free market is lionized in Banker's Square, with the government giving open access to companies trying to maintain the bottom line. Even in such a *laissez faire* atmosphere, however, legal and ethical lapses are regular, entailing anything from insider trading to blackmail and worse. The New Eden police department handles more white collar crime than any two other cities combined. Old money consolidates financial power in the hands of a select few, who use the promise of promotion to maintain a constant glass ceiling. There are almost no formal unions in the office environment, and while workers are often paid well, they have little recourse if the company turns against them. Nepotism and old boy networks protect those lucky enough to be in the club. The rest have to take their chances.

The presence of so much established wealth does have one benefit, however. Patronage of the arts flourishes in New Eden, allowing aspiring talents to showcase their efforts and wealthy families to flaunt their altruism (as well as getting some sharp tax breaks). East of Banker's Square lies the Fairway district, home to posh museums, cluttered galleries, and loft apartments where tortured geniuses struggle with their muse. The finest exhibitions cater to classical tastes — paintings and sculptures brought from overseas, or homegrown art donated from private collections. The avant garde, on the other hand, haunts whatever small galleries they can find, eagerly searching for the next Big Thing. Art in the *Edge of Midnight* universe lags slightly behind its real world counterpart. Constructivism never quite took hold, but Cubism and more recent surrealist artists are enjoying the spotlight. The beginning of Abstract Expressionism can be seen in the most daring quarters. The core of a bohemian counterculture has formed in Fairway: young, disaffected artists who spurn the "anything for a buck" mentality that dominates the rest of the city. They crowd coffee bars to discuss the latest showings, speaking in world-weary tones and adopting an air of distaste for their "betters" in Banker's Square. They're fed by the odd rebellious child from the well-to-do, who turn to these protean beatniks as a way of standing out.

Art and commerce meet in one very important industry in New Eden: music. The jazz born on the streets of Central City and the rhythm and blues of Terminus slowly filters its way here, where it is homogenized, pepped up for the masses, and sold in record stores across the country. The biggest bands and the most famous names call New Eden their home, playing in the city's glamorous nightclubs and basking in the glow of adulation and respect. Several prominent recording companies have offices here, stabling singers, songwriters, and bandlead-

ers under instantly recognizable brand names. Big band swing still holds sway over the popular charts, led by such performers as Mickey Woods, Rose Montgomery, and "Slim" Jerry DeWitt.

Entertainment is a palpable escape in New Eden, from the music in the nightclubs to the theaters along Cavalier Street. Plays and musicals are common indulgences of upper crust and working class alike, almost as common as the movies in other cities. Sports fans have three baseball teams to choose from — led by the beloved Gallants — and collegiate football has a fierce following here. New Edeners are as passionate about their pastimes as they are about everything else in their lives. It helps distract them from the constant stress of work, family, neighbors, and the sheer seething number of people surrounding them. Life in New Eden is like a slow vise, squeezing and squeezing you until you finally pop. Those who thrive in such conditions can handle anything life throws at them. Those who can't? Well, at least there are plenty of things to see before they go nuts.

CRIME

New Eden's close quarters means significant secularization among its populace. This filters down to crime as well, resulting in low-level crews — little more than street gangs — laying claim to a few square blocks of turf. Their numbers are large, but the constant jockeying for position prevents significant consolidation. Street-level crime overruns New Eden like a plague: purse snatchings, thrill-kill armed robberies, penny-ante card games, and the like. But more sophisticated organizations simply don't exist. The "honest" crooks in the boardroom easily trump any would-be capos on the street, and what few crime lords exist must be content with whatever tiny empires they are able to carve out in the shadows.

Consequently, criminal organizations tend to be small, tightly-knit and extremely loyal to each other. Five- to ten-man crews — both gaunt and normal — devoted to a wide variety of illegal pursuits (as opposed to a few specialties) are the norm. Larger groups can be found, but they're typically targeted by multiple bands of smaller rivals, and brought down before they become too big a threat. "Know your own," is the watchword among New Eden's criminals. Carve out a place for you and yours, defend it to the death, and don't get greedy. New Eden is home to a thousand tin-pot kingpins, each one ruling a tiny little corner of their universe.

Pre-planned crimes are uncommon in New Eden. Permanent operations like gambling dens, brothels, and the like are well-established and draw as little attention to themselves as possible. Most are based in the basements of bars, the backrooms of liquor stores, and other inconspicuous fronts. Confidence games are based on quick (or "short") cons, and little is undertaken which can't be hidden in thirty seconds if the police pull up. The most high-profile form of crime is bank robbery; New

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Eden leads the nation in the number of banks held up each year, and the papers buzz with the latest daring hold-up, or empty vault. With that exception, however, most other crime is inconspicuous. It rarely seeks to draw attention to itself. Thieves stay quiet and below board, blending in with more upright citizens. The less noticeable you are — the less distinguishable your crew is from the twenty crews surrounding you, or the law-abiding civilians in your building — the longer you're likely to last.

Which isn't to say it's violence-free. Quite the opposite; there's so much crime in New Eden that when criminal groups tangle, it's nasty and fairly permanent. Street gangs clash on a regular basis, fighting over turf, money, or general principles. More sophisticated crews are just as direct, planning daylight hits and open gunplay to remove their rivals. The losers of such conflicts never last; they're either absorbed into some other gang or wind up in the morgue with tags on their toes. And for every gang gunned down on the asphalt, another up-and-comer rises to take its place. The criminals of New Eden breed like roaches and occupy the same basic spot on the food chain.

They're also quite vicious. The lack of criminal imagination results in many more heavily-armed miscreants, preferring to stick a gun in a man's face instead of devising more ingenious methods of separating him from his cash. The general stress levels in New Eden (resulting from the crowded conditions, the constant noise, and the work ethic set to permanent overtime) deeply influence everyone's psyche, including the criminals. Hair-trigger tempers often escalate incidents that would otherwise end relatively peacefully. Countless street thugs have

had murder added to their rap sheet because they lost their cool, or because their would-be victim fought back with more vigor than expected.

Nor are crimes of passion limited to professional hoodlums. Assaults, rapes, and second-degree murders are daily occurrences in New Eden, often perpetrated by ordinary citizens who simply snapped. Their frequency skyrockets in the summer months, when hot weather and stifling humidity turn the entire island into a giant pressure cooker. With no previous record or easily-deciphered motive, these are the most difficult crimes to prevent — though thankfully for the police, they're the easiest to solve. (While a smart career criminal knows how to hide from trouble, a wife who just shot her philandering husband is much more apt to panic... leaving a trail a mile wide for diligent police to follow.)

The Fairway district hosts a more high-brow form of malfeasance. The counter-culture is generally limited to heated coffee-table discussions and the support of subversive art — harmless as far as the police are concerned. But their particular form of discourse is also highly conducive to the practice of magic. Sorcery use has grown steadily here, fed by the curious and disaffected who crowd the cafes searching for a release from life as usual. Many of them consider sorcery the epitome of social rebellion, and warlocks the ultimate philosophical outsiders. Here, magic users are revered and protected, a fact which has not been lost on the New Eden PD. Crimes involving magic use invariably result in sweeps through Fairway, as police roust the "misfits" in search of promising leads. Naturally, that only strengthens the community's resolve, and allows magic to take further hold in their imaginations. Se-

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cret gathering places are becoming common, and New Eden warlocks have adapted the bohemian fashions and mindset of the more normal artists in their presence. A few of the most daring have actually proposed “performance art” involving a display of magic, or “warlock sculptures” created through the judicious manipulation of stone or metal with sorcery.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

If the crooks aim to blend into the scenery in New Eden, then the cops do just the opposite, making themselves as visible as possible. New Eden favors uniformed cops over plainclothes detectives, emphasizing crime prevention rather than elaborate sleuthing after the fact. Its senior officers usually handle criminals on the run or crimes of passion committed in the heat of the moment. Long-term crooks simply don't get big enough to merit large-scale attention. Instead, the police focus on street presence. Beat cops, patrol cars, and a badge on every corner mark the department's philosophy. This increases the chances of catching criminals in the act, and also draws attention away from undercover operations and similar activity. Unlike Paradiso's PD, this has nothing to do with publicity. It's simply the easiest and most expedient way to prevent trouble. Considering the impulsive nature of their quarry, it's a wise policy.

Unfortunately, it's not a very effective one. The sheer density of law-breakers in New Eden means that no one can contain them, and for every crime prevented, two more go forever unsolved. The law of averages means that most career criminals will get pinched if they keep it up, but with the courts and prisons overwhelmed, they usually end up back on the streets within a few months. New Eden policemen learn to do what they can, and accept the fact that the problem is just too big to ever really be solved. Beat cops can be bribed much more easily than their superiors can, which means a lot of police will take a pay-off rather than arrest the perpetrator of a comparatively minor infraction. Con artists and dealers in stolen goods are the most likely targets for a shakedown, while more violent criminals will likely be roughed up before being coerced into emptying their pockets. Money rarely covers up for the most serious crimes, and the police will often drag in repeat offenders on general principles, but “fining” a perp instead of arresting him becomes an enticing alternative to yet another round of revolving-door bureaucracy.

On the other end of the spectrum lies vigilantism: a serious problem within the ranks of New Eden PD. The frustration and feelings of helplessness often build up to a breaking point, leading officers to take actions they never would have considered before joining the force. When the cops go out, they go out loaded for bear, and they're usually willing to shoot first and ask questions later. Weapons can easily be planted post-mortem on a suspect, and no one asks many questions when some thug falls off of a rooftop or stumbles in front of an oncoming car. Internal Affairs has their hands full dealing with unlawful raids, questionable shootings, and suspects who “re-

sisted arrest” all the way to the morgue. Like everything else in New Eden, it's easier just to shrug and let it roll off your back than to grapple with a problem far too big to solve.

The police in New Eden have at least one unit unique to their city. The Underground Division is concentrated solely on apprehending criminals who use the subway system as their primary base of operations. Underground cops patrol the subway cars and the empty tunnels, rousting vagrants and pursuing fugitives who seek to hide down there in the dark. Their more mundane duties include watching for pickpockets and the like on the trains themselves, but their true *raison d'être* comes in the tunnels, where ordinary street cops will hesitate and falter. Underground officers move through the dark as if they were made of it, spotting hidden niches and crawlspaces that others would walk right past. Crooks hoping to evade them must often cross the dangerous subway railing, risking electrocution or decapitation from the roaring trains. A series of well-mapped passages and catwalks gives them access to every corner of the system, and like cabbies who memorize the streets they work, every Underground cop knows the tunnels like the back of his hand. Underground Division utilizes unique equipment in their duties, including rubber-soled boots to mitigate damage from the subway's third rail and officer's caps with lights built in like miner's helmets. Gaunts have been heavily recruited into this branch, since many can see in the dark far better than normals.

NEIGHBORHOODS

The center of New Eden, both literally and figuratively, is Banker's Square: the financial heartbeat standing like a colossus in the middle of Eden Island. From there, wealth and power flow slowly outward, as evinced by concentric “rings” of wealth. Unlike most sociological patterns, the wealthiest areas remain the closest to downtown: the rich museums of Fairway to the east, the glitter of Cavalier Street, and the sumptuous penthouses of the rich and famous. From there, New Eden stretches out in a patchwork of individual neighborhoods, varying in income levels but gradually growing poorer the further out one travels. It ends along the shoreline, where the docks and harbor hold back an encroaching array of working-class shanties and slums. Across the harbor, the mainland is filled with middle-class brownstones, constituting four principle neighborhoods: Brenton, Candesco, Hart Beach, and Hoyle Ridge. Crime is considerably less problematic here than on Eden Isle, though a few warlocks and numbers runners poke their heads up every now and then.

Those dwelling on the island tend to look down their noses at suburban residents, often refusing to even visit for anything more than a ballgame or a few hours at the beach.



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BANKER'S SQUARE

The heart of the U.C. business world rests in the midst of this wide, chilly square, some four blocks long per side. The national stock market, the office of currency, and a dozen or so of the largest and most successful companies in history define its boundaries, forming a bastion of financial acumen and greed. The sharks and the power players stride through the landscape with self-assured steps, their tailored suits perfectly matching the sharp briefcases clutched in their hands. An Alpha dog confidence marks all who work here, from the highest-paid president to the lowliest clerk. Bragging comes easily, especially when stocks are up and the speaker is convinced he's going to make a killing. But the market shows no mercy to those who falter, and yesterday's millionaire may be sobbing on the sidewalks today, wondering how the hell it all went wrong.

The Square itself is sparse and under-decorated, consisting mainly of broad concrete sidewalks and two rows of trees that form a line between the northern and southern ends. A large fountain marks the center of the square, surrounded by hot dog vendors and similar kiosks. Businessmen come here to eat their lunch, many taking off their shoes to rest their aching feet. The pigeons gather in Banker's Square by the thousands, pecking up scraps and rising in great clouds whenever passersby approach. The city pays an astronomical amount to clean up the droppings, but every time they've tried to exterminate the birds, more have shown up.

The buildings surrounding the square are an eclectic mix of classical and modern architecture. The Stock Market and the Office of Currency are laid out with granite pillars, taking their cue from Nova Roma and giving the impression of an ancient temple or palazzo. The privately-owned skyscrapers around them are far more recent, and feature modern architecture designed more for efficiency than grandeur. Tourists to the area can be spotted from the way they gawk at the towers rising high above them. Natives, of course, never look up from their coffee.

For all the area's signs of financial success, however, it also attracts large numbers of the homeless. Panhandlers and vagrants lurk in the shadows, asking for hand-outs or just looking for a warm place to sleep. The police routinely roust them, but they invariably return. Many are war veterans, some of whom still know how to handle themselves and who dislike being pushed around by the authorities. Scuffles are rare but noticeable, as several officers are sometimes required to subdue a particularly stubborn squatter. The businessmen and other office workers have raised a fair fuss about the "homeless problem" to the mayor, and increased police presence in the area is likely.



1) Grenadier Shipping

The tallest building in New Eden is owned lock, stock, and barrel by the Grenadier family, scions of the largest shipping and export company in the world. Much of the country's railways were supposedly built to facilitate Grenadier shipments, and Grenadier trucks can be seen in all corners of the Commonwealth, delivering anything from furniture to machine parts. It's all run from this 60-story tower, straddling the square like a champion prizefighter.

The upper stories are reserved for Grenadier's owner, Silas, and the inner circle whom he trusts to help run his company. His younger brother Winston handles day-to-day operations, while his childhood friend Bruce Fitzpatrick administers the building itself. All of them have private suites on the building's highest two stories, populated only by their secretaries and personal assistants. Below them, the lower floors hold a truly baffling array of managers, assistant managers, overseers, accountants, customer service providers, and telephone operators, spreading out in an ever widening web. Regional offices throughout the country stay connected to New Eden through telephone and wire messages delivered daily. Shipping orders arrive and depart, requiring several floors of bureaucrats to organize and route correctly. Grenadier has its own truck drivers' union with offices stationed here, as well as "courtesy suites" for representatives of external labor groups. Their benefits package is more generous than most "legitimate" unions, and Grenadier shipping fosters a loyalty unheard of among the rest of the industry.

The firm's conflicts with organized crime are heated and contentious. Trucking has always been of interest to syndicate families — both as a means of transporting illegal cargo and for the power exercised by the unions — and a fish as big as Grenadier is often too tempting to resist. Rival truck-driving groups have targeted Grenadier Shipping for sabotage, and criminal syndicates often put bounties on cargo delivered by Grenadier. Silas has responded by hiring private gunmen to ride with their cargo: not every shipment of course, but enough to make hijackings risky for those contemplating an easy score. The gunmen come out shooting at the first sign of trouble and have racked up a body count that rivals most of the gang lords they oppose. While regional Grenadier officials can be bribed and corruption in the lower levels is rampant, no organization has yet to permeate to the top of the company; Grenadier is perhaps the least corruptible shipping firm in the entire nation.

Which isn't to say it's without sin. Silas is a merciless businessman, with designs on a shipping monopoly throughout the U.C. He's never broken the law, but he knows how to bend it as far as it will go; new tax loopholes are a specialty of his legal team. He treats his business opponents as inhuman obstacles, to be overcome and then destroyed. Numerous smaller companies have been driven out of business by his fierce competitiveness, and larger rivals have often pooled their resources to keep him from landing a desirable contract. Those under Grenadier's umbrella are well-cared for — employee loyalty is a firm part of Silas' business plan — but everyone else regards the company as unspeakable bullies, willing to destroy lives in order to retain their dominance.

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The building itself has not escaped harm in the course of doing business. Private detectives patrol the offices in search of potential sabotage or other signs of foul play. Bombs have been discovered more than once (though none have as yet gone off), and minor cases of arson and destruction of property are reported every year. In the most infamous example, a Central City assassin snuck into the building disguised as a night janitor and attempted to murder Silas Grenadier while he was working late. His bodyguards cut the man down, but rather than reporting the incident to the police, he had the body dismembered and shipped back to the gangsters who had ordered the hit. Since then, incursions have dropped off, but Grenadier employees are perennially holding their breath, waiting for the other shoe to drop. (More on Silas can be found on page 83 of the *Edge of Midnight* main rulebook.)

Typical Grenadier Trucker

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 5, Build 6, Gut 5, Moxie 3, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Brawl 6, Demolitions 4, Drive (Car, Motorcycle, Truck) 7, Engineering 6, Evasion 5, Firearms 5, Lore (U.C. Road System) 8, Perception 6.

Backgrounds: Alert, Marksmanship, Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Street Tough 1.

2) Knights of the West Local 543

The Knights of the West is a fraternal organization dedicated to charitable works across the U.C. Its members attend meetings steeped in ceremony, and membership is generally viewed as a sign of social success. Their endeavors have helped fund hospitals, raised money for returning veterans, and aided young entrepreneurs getting their start in the world of business. The Local 543 chapter was once based several blocks east of Banker's Square, but it has since changed locations to accommodate a large swell in membership. The old meeting hall now sits unused and abandoned, still owned by the Knights due to clerical oversight, but boarded up and seeing no activity whatsoever.

At least, that's what most people think. In truth, the clerical error was facilitated by a Knights bookkeeper, sympathetic to the causes of its current occupants. The Silent Scepter, a group of warlocks once affiliated with the Knights, now uses it as a secret meeting place. An entrance from the subway system, invisible from the street, allows them to gather without fear of discovery. The premises include sleeping quarters, a central meeting room, and a small printing press for use in generating forged documents.

The Scepter's primary purpose here is to protect and shield fugitive warlocks from persecution. A set of secret compartments in the walls holds enough space for two people to hide, and with the printer and an on-site photo laboratory, they can quickly manufacture any papers necessary to mask a warlock's identity or help him escape the city. The proximity to Fairway means that warlocks can be slipped into a tolerant atmosphere without suspicion, and few police think to investigate the boarded-up clubhouse which constitutes the group's headquarters.

The members of the Silent Scepter number about two dozen, and never meet anywhere else in large numbers. Many have feelers in the law enforcement community (two even belong to New Eden's crystal ball squad) and spend their time monitoring possible threats to their numbers. They still adhere to the ceremonies of the Knights of the West, invoking formalized greetings at the start of every meeting, and identifying each other with a variant of the Knights' secret handshake. Strangely enough, there's little actual magic practiced at the meeting hall and no spellbooks can be found here. Should the authorities ever seize the place, the warlocks want as little evidence as possible to tie them to magic use. There is, however, a good-sized library of official documents — passports, work orders, licenses to practice magic, and the like — which they use in their forging operations. They also keep a supply of money, and a series of standing passes which may be converted into train or airplane tickets with no questions asked. Rooms facing the street remain unoccupied; all activity takes place in the windowless inner recesses. The Knights' seal can still be seen above the front door, faded and covered in bird droppings. The Scepter keeps similar trappings around as a sign of its past, and to further defer suspicion should unwanted attention come its way.

More on the Silent Scepter appears in the *Edge of Midnight* core rulebook, and in the upcoming *Warlocks and Detectives* sourcebook.

Typical Silent Scepter Warlock

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 4, Disguise 4, Electricity 5, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 3, Forgery 6, Lore (Silent Scepter Customs) 8, Magnetism 6, Medicine 5, Perception 5, Puzzles 7, Stealth 5, Throwing 4.

Backgrounds: Education, Magical Aptitude, Prodigy.

Profession: Rogue Scientist 1.

CAVALIER STREET

To the west of Banker's Square lies the famed stretch of Cavalier Street, an avenue of nightclubs, high-end restaurants, and theaters playing the biggest and most successful plays in the country. Its neon lights turn night into day, attracting high rollers and wealthy playboys by the score. Every evening before the curtains rise (usually around 8 p.m.), the street becomes packed with taxis, limousines, and old fashioned hansoms delivering the well-to-do in style. Following every performance, the audience adjourns to the nearest nightclub, there to down champagne by the bottleful and dance to the latest hits until dawn touches the sky. It's like a scene from an older world, garbed in modern dress and tugging coyly at forgotten memories.

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Cavalier Street itself runs almost the length of Eden Island, but the theater/nightclub district only encompasses about ten blocks. Those companies lucky enough to be on the street itself enjoy the bulk of attention. Smaller clubs and theaters lie on surrounding streets, hoping to collect the crumbs which more successful operations leave behind; some are little more than gussied-up dance halls. The elite consider Cavalier Street their playground, but crowds of tourists, middle-class couples treating themselves to a night on the town, and even a few bums and panhandlers fill the sidewalks as well.

The alleys just off of Cavalier Street offer a strange alternative to the pleasures found in the thoroughfare. Short-time hustlers and drug dealers lurk in the alleyways, catering to those in need of a boost before hitting the next bar or nightclub. The best learn to dress well, passing themselves off as fellow theater-goers in case they need to get lost in the crowd. Others use the offer of illicit goods as a lure, baiting wealthy *bon vivants* away from the bright lights, and then robbing them of their worldly goods. More peaceable dealers don't like it since it scares away business, but it happens often enough to add a little spice to the transactions. Three or four decent-sized gangs work various alleyways and side streets in the area, with numerous other lone operatives chiseling out a living between them.

In the daytime, the street looks depressingly ordinary. Sun makes the marquees appear dingy and faded, and the vast rows of theaters are quite an eyesore. The crowds are more diminished as well, consisting largely of cast and crew members from the various shows, drinking coffee or smoking cigarettes before heading back to rehearsals. A few tourists come by to take pictures of their favorite locales, and the all-night coffee shops are always open for business, but they lack the magic appeal of their after-dark counterparts... now shuttered until the following dusk. As if to compensate, most theaters use garish, brightly-colored posters to advertise their productions in the daytime. "Hangers," young men paid to slap posters on nearby walls, do a brisk business competing for available space. Since they're often paid by the number of ads they post, rivalries between them can be quite fierce, and fights are not uncommon.

The theater and nightclub owners are the barons of Cavalier Street, controlling the city's zoning boards and determining who has the right to set up shop in their domain. Like the rest of the city, they are fractured and diffuse, with no one member strong enough to assert dominance. Their rivalries are uncommonly petty, squabbling over box office receipts, sidewalk space, and which popular bands have permission to play where. Record promoters and casting agents cater to their every wish, hoping to land a client on the bandstand or center stage. Most owners venture out each night to eye their domains, or perhaps look in on their competitors' operations.



3) Max's Taxi Stand

"Max" is Maximilian Alescu, a first-generation immigrant who came to New Eden from overseas following the war. He served as a courier in a diamond-smuggling operation before the war, and escaped with a small handful of precious stones, which he parlayed into a garage and a small fleet of taxis situated on the southern end of Cavalier Street. He's set up taxi stands all along the theater district, transporting nightclubbers and theater-goers by the score. The centralized location makes collecting customers a breeze, and he employs several dozen cabbies to ferry the nightlife between their front door and whatever entertainment has been selected for the evening.

Smuggling, however, has never entirely left Alescu's blood. In addition to normal duties, several of his cabs feature hollowed-out trunk space, sufficient to hide a good-sized briefcase. Alescu has informal agreements with a number of underworld figures, who pay him quite well to ferry illicit goods from one end of the city to the other. It's a clever set-up. Alescu prepares a brown suitcase in the trunk. The cab then picks up the bagman, who carries the goods in an identical brown suitcase. They drive a route to an innocuous location (the train station or the like) and when the bagman leaves, he takes the empty suitcase instead of the loaded one. Anyone tailing him will assume he still has the goods and ignore the cab, which then drives unmolested to the real pick-up man (sometimes after taking three or four other fares in the meantime). It's a nearly fool-proof system which has thrown more than a few would-be snoops off the scent.

Alescu never asks the precise nature of the cargo he carries, lest he ever be implicated in more than just trafficking. Whenever possible, he himself makes the run — he's more interested in the thrill of the deed than the money — but he has a trio of cabbies whom he trusts enough to lend a hand if he's overbooked. (They take a percentage of the cut while kicking the rest upstairs to him.) He's occasionally asked to ferry VIPs in a similar fashion, but has always refused. If they want a getaway car, they can find their own. In the meantime, the taxi stand itself does good business and ferries a large number of Cavalier Street's regulars, unaware of the smuggled goods lying just behind their seats.

Max's main garage is a large, two-story building with enough room for some twenty-eight taxi cabs. Three mechanic's stalls are present to keep the cabs in working shape, along with tools and spare parts. The drivers have their own lounge with lockers and hot showers, while the customers queue up in a waiting room out front. The second floor contains offices for Alescu, a huge map of the city, and spare storage rooms which are slowly gathering dust. Every cab is equipped with an army surplus radio, which is monitored from a back office and can direct cabs to potential fare. The taxi stands scattered along Cavalier Street are little more than a few benches and an awning to keep out the rain, with radio-equipped "concierges" present to call in potential fares. Underworld types interested in Max's surreptitious service are instructed to appear at one of the cabs and call in using a false name. Max will make

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the pick-up and listen to the proposal during another leisurely drive. If he's convinced of the fare's legitimacy, the details of smuggling run will be arranged from there.

Max's drivers have a running craps game at the end of each shift; cash is the preferred means of betting, but articles forgotten in the backs of one's cab are also fair game. A glove or handbag which isn't promptly claimed may soon find itself on the floor of the motor pool, being haggled over with a pair of casino dice.

Max Alescu

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 4, Gut 7, Moxie 5, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 9, Brawl 6, Drive (Car, Motorcycle, Truck) 8, Engineering 6, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 6, Forgery 5, Intimidation 2, Perception 7, Pick Lock 4, Sleight of Hand 6, Streetwise 6.

Backgrounds: Lucky, Racer, Small.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Con Artist 1.

4) Hi Notes Music

Like Stefan Fallager's Shooting Star, Hi Notes Music sits in the catbird seat of Cavalier Street. The undisputed king of broadcast and recording artists, it boasts an undiminished string of hits and musicians loyal to its name throughout their careers. Under the tutelage of Hi Notes founder Arlen Eaton, the stable has blossomed into some of the industry's current icons. It's one of the few more formal businesses on Cavalier Street, but it doesn't feel a bit out of place. The offices are housed in an older building, a former law firm now given to less solemn pursuits. The lower floors contain an entryway decorated in abstract art, junior offices holding bean counters and lower-end promoters, and a large fountain brought back from overseas when the war ended. The middle floors house recording studios — Hi Notes cuts all of its records in-house — as well as a vast library of masters, alternate tracks, and released vinyl LPs. The top two floors are reserved for the board and for Eaton himself, who works from a lush corner office tastefully decorated in cherrywood furnishings. A large billboard stands on the roof of the building, traditionally advertising whichever artist is tops on the charts at that time.

The company's success is due solely to its owner. Eaton is a bit of a hatchet man: cunning, underhanded, and sharp enough at business to be suspected of any number of wrongdoings. More of them are true than not; Eaton has hustled, cajoled, or blackmailed every executive in the industry, using supreme political acumen to maintain his place at the top of the heap. As nasty as his fights get, however, there's rarely any ego or self-importance in his demeanor. He does what he does for the talent, he says; the music always comes first. While he's utterly merciless towards the business side of the community, he never applies any of his dirty tricks to the musicians or their representatives. The talent — *any* talent — is treated with fairness and respect, and while he's made plenty of enemies, none of them actually perform for a living. He's even

helped several struggling artists kick their drug or alcohol habit, and one singer on the Hi Notes label actively credits Eaton with saving his life. Cynics point out that the tactic makes the talent incredibly loyal to him, but his behavior is still unusual in an industry known for draining its musicians dry like vampires.

Altruism forms part of Hi Notes' benevolence, but not all of it. With so many musical acts scattered across the city, it's easy for Eaton to keep tabs on various comings and goings. Headliners stand out, but few people notice a back-up horn player or drummer; they're just part of the scenery, and as such, can overhear the most extraordinary things. Eaton pays well for information, and his stable is smart enough to keep their ears open and their mouths shut. Strangely enough, he rarely concerns himself with garden-variety secrets — other people's skeletons are immensely boring to him — but instead is interested in the strange or unusual. Odd happenings, people asking questions, the location of items deemed "quirky" or off the beaten track... all of them are enough to entice a few bills out of his wallet. He records what he hears in a large green ledger, which he keeps in a safe hidden in the floor of his office. None of it would make any sense without him (his handwriting is nearly illegible), but he's been known to impart it to people — free of charge — inquiring into matters which he deems important. He always conducts such business in the Hi Notes offices, where he can invariably be found after an evening of scoping the clubs for new talent or listening to his latest hitmaker deliver another triumphant performance.

More on Arlen Eaton can be found on page 83 of the *Edge of Midnight* core rulebook.

Typical Hi Notes Talent

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 7, Moxie 8, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 4, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 5, Perception 4, Perform (Instrument or Song) 7, Streetwise 2, Throwing 3.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Lucky.

Profession: Performer 1.

FAIRWAY

The neighborhood to the east of Banker's Square begins with high-tone classicism, then turns slowly into a ramshackle demonstration of individuality. The heights and the depths of artistry can be found here, from immortal icons to starving painters struggling to pay the rent. Closest to Banker's Square lie some of the most important museums in the world, housing well-loved pieces rescued from the war overseas, Commonwealth works brought in from across the country, and regular exhibits featuring acknowledged masterpieces. They're New Eden institutions, steeped in tradition and catering to the most artistically conservative social mores. The museums flank the inviting green confines of Hopkins Park, where picnickers and carriage rides speak to the area's pedigree

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As one travels further east into Fairway, the galleries become smaller, their exhibits more avant-garde. The streets grow narrower, filling with bookshops, lofts, and corner cafés. The “working” artists make their home here, where they struggle with their talent and attempt to define a vision that will rank them in the pantheon of greats. Of course, few of them ever get within shouting distance of true genius, but the lucky ones make a decent name for themselves and a precious handful even gain widespread praise and acceptance (enough to keep the rest of them working away, lost in whatever impulses drove them to creative expression in the first place). Most of Fairway consists of their homes, their galleries and exhibits, and the places where they meet to discuss the latest fads or philosophical theories.

On the far eastern edge of the neighborhood, the cast-offs and forgotten eke out their meager lives. The galleries drop away, leading to flophouses, drug dens, and the sour tang of broken spirits. Some artists have been inspired by the despair and raw humanity to be found in such conditions. Others are driven here themselves: pretenders whose free rides finally ran out, or the genuinely talented whose demons finally drove them over the brink. They cluster here in shabby groups, losing themselves in the dope needle or drinking themselves into oblivion. Those who simply couldn’t make a go of it had other means of escape: they renounced their dreams in favor of day jobs or family life. Those with nowhere else to go — whose souls were claimed by their artistic pursuits — invariably find themselves here. Though there are more squalid neighborhoods in New Eden, few can match this tiny handful of blocks for sheer existential woe. The neighborhood improves somewhat on the northern corner, housing low-rent apartment buildings and dominated by the city’s mental institution that marks the end of Fairway as a neighborhood.

Most of the area’s culture is taken up with ivory tower pursuits. New creations are posited, displayed, and debated endlessly. The timid and elite alike can go to the big museums, open to the public, where embalmed notions of greatness can be viewed for two dollars per visit. Deeper into Fairway, artistry approaches its cutting edge, where theories, movements, and concepts of greatness are argued over as fiercely as the Praetorium elections. Every restaurant, it seems, has its resident experts; every bookstore and junk shop holds an “enlightened” employee who will happily speak for hours about the merits of this or that piece. Not surprisingly, warlock magic flourishes in these conditions. The combination of intelligence, education, and a willingness to push boundaries results in a large number of active practitioners, and numerous other “dabblers” who experiment with magic as they would with alcohol or recreational drugs. The police raid Fairway as a matter of course when on the lookout for a warlock fugitive, convinced that evidence of *some* kind is bound to turn up here. The residents take such brutality in kind. It fits in nicely with their self-proclaimed status as outsiders, and gives them a tangible form of authority to resent. After the cops come blasting through, they simply shrug, light another imported cigarette, and sweep up the mess.

5) The Andrea Barrett Memorial Museum

The Barrett, a staple of New Eden’s cultural life, holds the oldest and most respected collection of art in the Commonwealth. It regularly hosts gala fund-raisers for various philanthropic causes which bring in posh altruists of all stripes. Its collection is adored by the public, boasting such masterworks as Emile’s *The Country Road* and Mark Sampson’s *All Things in Time*. New openings are announced with breathless aplomb, and every citizen of New Eden has walked through its halls at least once.

The Museum itself was apparently once a country estate, built on the edge of Hopkins Park and devoted to public exhibitions following the dictates of its late owner. No one living recalls it as anything but an art gallery, though the building’s gentrified origins are obvious. It stands out with the gleaming skyscrapers of Banker’s Square in the background, its imposing old-world granite tempered by graceful wooden framing around its doors and windows. The servants’ entrances and rear entries have been converted into emergency exits, while the public enters through the grand stone steps and sweeping foyer, which now act as a central hall. From there, four principal wings, bound by the hall in an “H” pattern, display a series of paintings, sculptures, textiles, photographs, and other items. The permanent collection is housed in the nearest section of each hall, requiring visitors to scurry past them if they wish to get to a new or rotating collection. All told, the museum houses nearly 200,000 works of art, with some 5,000 on display at any one time. The upper stories are largely given over to bureaucratic functions, such as office space and storage for some of the smaller pieces.

The origin and history of many of these pieces is strangely hazy. None of them have dates of completion, and the artistic movements they represent — while discussed aesthetically in great detail — are mysteriously short on concrete facts. Some of the pieces don’t even have their creators’ names attached, and details about the artists themselves never come to light. The exception is the modern exhibit, where pieces from the last few years are lavished with attention.

Several pieces in the museum are outright fakes. A dealer in Central City has been passing off his own original works as the “recently discovered” masterpieces of famous painters (see page 29 for more). None of the museum’s personnel are aware of it: the combination of the artist’s skill and the overall murkiness of *The Edge of Midnight* universe has rendered the fraudulent pictures indistinguishable.



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The museum has two underground levels used to store unused artwork. The rooms here are rigorously temperature-controlled and kept free of dust, mold, and other detrimental conditions. The most valuable works are stored in a trio of great vaults, modified from the house's originals and accessible through three colossal steel doors. Art conservators and other officials frequent these offices often during the day, but at night, it's locked up tight as a drum. Valuable pieces are either in the vault or on display; they're never allowed into the less secure portions of the museum. Security guards are posted at every entrance, and two more guard the vaults each night. The displays themselves boast further measures to dissuade potential thieves. Picture frames and display cases are bolted to the wall with hex screws, making it extremely difficult to remove them. Valuable pieces have alarm triggers as well; removing them from the wall or pedestal will activate a series of alarms throughout the building. The alarms run on electricity, but are designed to deliver a brief burst of noise should power to the building be cut. There are ten units scattered through out the museum, each of which must be disabled individually before any pieces can be removed.

In addition, the Barrett has been completely cut off from alternate means of access. The surrounding lawns and gardens mean that no other structures are near to provide cover or observation posts, and cars are not allowed to stop in front of the building for more than five minutes at a time. Sewer tunnels and other means of subterranean entrance have been bricked up and filled with dirt, denying any ready means of underground access. The museum has even toyed with setting up a camera near the entrance, to record anyone who comes in or out. The logistical problems of

changing the film render the idea impractical, but the museum staff believes it has possible merits for future application.

To the east of the museum is Hopkins Park, a mixture of beautiful green lawns, well-marked paths, and several duck ponds scattered across its expanse. In the daytime, the park adds much to the area's upscale atmosphere. Families stroll the grounds, concerts take place on the warm summer nights, and romantic couples snuggle in the midst of old-fashioned carriage rides. At night, the Park takes on a more sinister hue, as muggers and drug dealers take advantage of the poor lighting to prey on the unwary. The Barrett is technically considered part of the Park — they were originally part of the same estate, history claims — but the four lanes of Boyle Street separate the two quite succinctly. Prominent fund-raisers often close the street down, as wealthy partygoers move freely between the green expanse of Hopkins and the stone stairs of the Barrett.

Anthony Cawson, Principal Curator

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 4, Moxie 5, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 9, Bureaucracy 8, Craft (Art Conservation) 9, Engineering 2, Etiquette 4, Evasion 2, Lore (Modern Art) 9, Lore (Classical Art) 3, Medicine 3, Perception 2.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education, Small.

Profession: Academic 1, White Collar Worker 1.

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6) The Dormouse Coffee Bar

In the depths of bohemian Fairway, indistinguishable from dozens of similar establishments on surrounding blocks, sits the Dormouse: home to misfits, cast-offs, and rebels of all varieties. The store once housed a defunct dry cleaning business, and its cavernous interior still sports the automated hanger system from its former owners. The regulars love the fact that it has few windows and lets in so little light. While not actively gloomy (the paint on the walls is quite bright), it lends an air of privacy and inclusion that matches very well with the august pretensions of its clientele.

The Dormouse specializes in coffee, tea, and fruit juice, with sandwiches and crackers offered to those who ask. (Unlike the Starbucks-glutted environment of today's society, such fare is decidedly unusual in *The Edge of Midnight* era.) Its customers are disaffected philosophers, alcoholic poets, and a few genuine artists seeking inspiration. Fearsome debates arise every night from the small circular tables, tempests in a teapot where life, death, and the meaning of existence are contested over a few cups of black-with-two-sugars. Local musicians perform every now and then, and the walls are festooned with paintings from artists hoping vainly to get noticed by someone other than their peers.

Magic has become particularly popular at the Dormouse. Everyone from owner Jerry Zimmermann to the flakiest regular has caught the bug, and while they lack the discipline to conduct any serious research, most can manage a few minor parlor tricks. This makes the bar an ideal hiding place for genuinely powerful warlocks hoping to escape notice. The cops have roughed up the regulars a couple of times, but such obvious bush-league practices rarely get anyone into serious trouble. A place with no magic activity is bound to appear suspicious. But a place full of amateurish poseurs trying to look more impressive than they are? No one raises an eyebrow at that. Accordingly, the Dormouse has unknowingly harbored numerous wanted fugitives in its past, who spend their days here reading and sipping coffee, staying off the streets until an opportunity presents itself to move on.

Typical Beat Poet

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 5, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 4, Craft (Writing) 4, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 5, Lore (Fairway Scene) 7, Perception 5, Perform (Recital) 7, Pick Lock 2, Sleight of Hand 4, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Lucky, Small.

Profession: Con Artist 1.



7) Carlisle Asylum

While the museums mark Fairway's high-toned triumphs, the Carlisle Asylum represents its despairing depths. An ultra-modern facility built shortly after the war, it was originally designed to replace New Eden's scattered and inadequate mental institutions with a single, efficient edifice. In that sense, at least, it has fulfilled its purpose admirably. Overall, the asylum lends an air of draconian order, like a stern schoolmaster staring disapprovingly down at Fairway. Residents like to joke that the building represents their guilty conscience, reminding them of the extremes to which creativity can lead. The giant structure is built of white brick some sixteen stories tall, dominating the brownstones and apartment buildings surrounding it. Burnished steel letters announce its title to the thoroughfare, punctuated by the comings and goings of white-clad employees who blend seamlessly with the surroundings. A fleet of ambulance hearses sit in the rear entrance, like dogs waiting for their master to unleash them.

Inside, it's little different. Linoleum tiles gleam beneath harsh florescent lights; sounds of the nurse's shoes squeaking along the severely polished floors can be heard throughout the building. The white doors are fitted with stout locks, and bars grace the upper-story windows where the criminal offenders are housed. The dress code among the doctors and nurses is severe; women's hair must be worn in buns and men cannot sport facial hair, while uniforms must match an unyielding standard of cleanliness. The nature of their work demands such stringency. Medical instruments are strictly accounted for and even pens and pencils have a paper trail to mark who uses them and where. Employees must sign in and out each day upon entering, and several security guards are on duty at the front desk at all times. The padded cells are cleaned rigorously, and dangerous inmates must run a gauntlet of locks, gates, and on-duty personnel to even make it to the door. There are no dark corners or shadows here; the overhead lighting is all pervasive and inescapable.

The constant emphasis on order and precision takes its toll on the staff, who often complain more about the place's terminal fastidiousness than any trouble from the patients. Senior staff recognizes the need for such sterility in their work, but newcomers find it quite dehumanizing. Contrary to the popular conception, many of the patients here have either come voluntarily or been peaceably committed by relatives. Though troubled and in some cases dangerous, they remain relatively controlled most of the time, and some even have hope of rejoining society.

The top floor, however, is reserved for criminal cases, holding some two hundred killers, arsonists, and demented madmen too dangerous to be placed anywhere else. Most are kept in padded cells for twenty to twenty-three hours a day, let out only to receive treatment or speak to their psychiatrist. Facilities for electro-shock therapy can be found on this floor, as well as the most stringent security measures in the building. Elevators can only be controlled by a special key, and doors to the stairway require two sets of keys to unlock. Since it opened its doors, Carlisle has had only one successful escape attempt, and that patient was recaptured before he could do much harm.

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Among the lunatics and lost souls here are several members of the Few, whose suspicions about the nature of the world have led to full-blown insanity. Most have been diagnosed with various pedestrian mental disorders, and filed away for their own safety. They live out their days in rubber rooms, bound by straitjackets and occasionally by less enlightened devices as well. Thorazine and various other pharmaceuticals ensure that they rarely know what day it is, let alone who or what they are. If any of their fellows could get to them, however, and manage to somehow wean them off their meds, such patients could reveal secrets that would shock even the most stalwart souls to the core.

Typical Orderly

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 8, Build 7, Gut 5, Moxie 3, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 3, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Evasion 6, Intimidation 5, Medicine 2, Melee 7, Perception 6.

Backgrounds: Alert, Huge, Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1.

HART BEACH

Contrary to its title, there's no actual beach at Hart Beach. It's merely a shoreline suburb, facing Eden Island to the east. It encompasses a modest middle class borough, full of commuters who work in the city but can't afford to live there. They overlap with a Hassidic Jewish community, who largely work as gem dealers and diamond merchants. The gem industry is Hart Beach's primary industry, save ferry traffic which is slowly declining due to the bridges which have made their usefulness obsolete. Synagogues and churches exist side by side, and while there's a little low-key sniping between faiths, the area has none of the tensions of Matty's Lantern or similar neighborhoods. Everyone minds his own business in Hart Beach and respectable fronts are all-important. It wouldn't do to get the neighbors talking.

The borough constitutes a large swath of land, accessible from Eden Isle by a pair of bridges. The Hart Beach Bridge is newer, more modern, and consists of two levels dividing traffic flow to and from the island. The Jackson Bridge is much older (though it was upgraded during the war) and has fewer lanes, making it more congested than its counterpart. To the north and west, the borough slowly disperses, giving way to open woods and the large estates of the wealthy. Railroad tracks and highways splinter off to the south, heading in the direction of Nova Roma and Central City.

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The blocks closest to the shore are taken up by pleasant, fence-lined houses belonging to the area's most prosperous residents. A concrete promenade winds along the ocean, providing a spectacular view of ships arriving across the bay and the towering skyscrapers beyond. Further west, the streets give way to townhouse apartments, co-ops and community centers, and, in the northern corner, the sounds of the gem-cutting district. Jewelry and diamond shops line every corner, discreetly advertising a small fortune in stones. Security measures in each building rival those of a military fortress, and most owners hire bodyguards or other forms of private muscle to protect their assets. It's not unusual to see a Hassidic Jew, payes framing his face and a copy of the Torah in his hand, accompanied by a hulking pair of gaunts glaring suspiciously at the passersby. Many merchants go armed themselves; one can never be too safe in a city such as this.

Despite the paranoia, the district is generally a calm place, marked more by cordial rivalries than any true enmity. A few modest protection rackets operate here and there, but it's tough to make crime pay in such conditions — there's a far greater chance of getting beaten or shot in any endeavor. Thefts tend to be either of the spectacular variety (with an entire store being cleaned out) or simply nonexistent. The rest of Hart Beach is similar; the neighborhood bars and carefully tended back lots lack the undercurrent of menace that exists over on the island. People lock their doors at night, but more through habit than fear. Residents never worry about going out at night like they do on the island, and while the odd mugging still takes place, it is noted more as an anomaly than a habit.

And yet, beneath the surface, an odd tension permeates the district: a sense of walking on eggshells, of politeness masking an open scream. The domestic complacency breeds boredom, which shifts in turn to denial, deceit, and the stress of the unspeakably *ordinary* pressing down behind the scenes. Runaways are a frequent problem here, as disaffected children head east for the bright lights of Eden Isle, while alcoholism and spousal abuse have increased steadily in the last few years. Every now and then, the papers report a story of a housewife who buried a kitchen knife in her husband's throat after being barked at one time too many, or the good neighbor who burned down the slightly more upscale house next door. Darkness exists in Hart Beach as it does anywhere else. Only here, it's framed in white curtains and kisses its wife good-bye every morning.

8) Shelby Park

New Eden hosts three Elite Class baseball teams, whose rivalry is an enthusiastic part of the local color. While the New Eden Grays and Brenton Haporth are quite popular in particular neighborhoods, it's the Gallants who truly unite the city with their passion, their dedication, and their status as perennial contenders. Shelby Park has been their home since before the war began, a beautiful shoreline facility which boasts the only lights for night games in the whole of the Unified Commonwealth. It seats nearly 50,000 spectators and is filled to capacity for every game as the fans loudly and enthusiastically cheer on their team.

A consortium of Hart Beach businessmen owns the stadium, having reached an agreement long ago to host New Eden's marquee sport franchise. The Gallants have a 99 year lease, and the revenue they bring in allows the stadium owners to dictate the inclusion of certain luxuries. Gallants' owner Percy McVale pressured them to install the huge bank of lights which currently halo the park, convinced that night games were the wave of the future. Rumor has it he resorted to blackmail to persuade the most reluctant members of the board.

Nor is that the only legend floating about the park. The most enduring story involves an underworld informant who was executed during the stadium's construction; his associates buried him alive beneath the infield, and his ghost continues to haunt the third base line. Whenever an opponent's fair ball skids along the line, a Gallants left fielder or third baseman struggles with a routine out, or an overenthusiastic fan stumbles over the railing attempting to catch a foul ball, they say it's the doing of the Third Base Ghost. A Catholic priest, a Baptist minister, and a Jewish rabbi are asked to bless the stadium before the start of every season, in hopes of exorcising the "spirit."

Other stories, less ghoulish but equally colorful, circulate about the park: that if a certain seat (Section 22, Row 34, Seat F) isn't occupied on opening day, the Gallants will have a losing year; that a cap from each of the team's Neff Division rivals is ground up and mixed into the hot dogs over the course of a season; that privileged gaunts are sometimes allowed into the press boxes to watch the game; and so on. Management encourages such stories, but refuses to verify any of them; they feel it helps with ticket sales. Through it all, the Gallants keep playing, the groundsman keep the turf green, and the Ethan's Bagels sign on the outfield wall keeps reminding fans that the team shines day and night.

Typical New Eden Gallant

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 6, Gut 6, Moxie 5, Smoothness 8.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 8, Brawl 5, Contortions 3, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 5, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 2, Intimidation 3, Lore (Baseball Tactics) 6, Melee 6, Perception 2, Sport (Baseball) 9, Streetwise 3, Throwing 8.

Backgrounds: Acrobatic, Lucky, Rugged.

Profession: Athlete 3.

9) Gulfstream Ferry Service

Of the struggling ferry lines still operating in Hart Beach, the most successful is Gulfstream, with services every fifteen minutes between the island and the mainland. It maintains its margin of profitability by catering to the growing number of commuters, offering twice as many ferry lines between 6 and 9 a.m. as the rest of the day combined. Gulfstream also specializes in moving secure cargo, particularly the diamonds which provide the area with its economic foundation. Trained couriers can deliver shipments arriving at Shoreline Harbor from overseas, and private crossings may be purchased to ensure

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security for important shipments. Some dealers prefer the understated approach, moving their merchandise casually and quietly without drawing attention to themselves. But for diamond merchants concerned about getting from the shipment points on the island to their shops across the bay in safety, the Gulfstream is happy to accommodate their wishes.

The service itself is based out of a slightly rundown pair of docks on the Hart Beach shoreline. A bored ticket agent takes fares and lets commuters line up along the pier for the ferries to arrive. They're large, flat-bottomed barges, once used to haul cargo but now modified with seats and a stand which dispenses coffee. When the weather's bad, it's a fairly unpleasant ride, but the pilots are all experienced and their safety record is blemish free. Those interested in a private ferry, for whatever reason, must contact Gulfstream's owner, Luther Flint. He rarely comes down to the docks themselves, but will always meet personally with anyone who wishes a secure crossing. If he doesn't like their looks, he'll turn them away... though he might be willing to make an exception if the price is right.

Typical Ferryman

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 7, Build 7, Gut 4, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 6, Craft (Whittling) 5, Drive (Barge, Car, Truck) 6, Engineering 6, Evasion 3, Intimidation 3, Melee 5, Perception 3, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1.

10) Turnkey Locksmiths

Turnkey is a small shop in the heart of the diamond district, selling locks, keys, and safes of all shapes and sizes. The owner, Miles Rothman, grew up with an insatiable urge to paw through his father's things. The elder Rothman responded by locking his desk and files, which Miles learned to circumvent through every manner of ingenious techniques. But he was no thief; he simply disliked hidden things. Once he learned what was in a locked box, he generally left it where it was. As he grew older, he accumulated a vast knowledge of locks and safes, but rather than turning to crime, he took the opposite route: selling products to keep criminals out.

Naturally, his talents are in great demand among the diamond sellers of Hart Beach. He counts most of the area's merchants among his clientele and has installed more safes and deadbolts than any two of his competitors combined. And he remembers every detail of every job, from the cheapest door jam to the most impregnable vault. If he could be persuaded to give up what he knows, he could make knocking off his customers' shops exceedingly easy. He's no fool however. His son-in-law is a burly ex-boxer named Herschel Krenski, whose small but compact frame can topple most men twice his size. Krenski hovers around Rothman all the time, keeping the old man safe from any threats or innuendo. An old service pistol sits behind his desk in case things get really ugly. They rarely do. His clients are close-lipped and his store doesn't go out

of its way to advertise. He will happily chat about his work, however, and those wishing to know about locks or bolts in general could do well by seeking him out.

The store itself sits on an unremarkable block of shops, stuffed between a delicatessen and a fairly prosperous pawnshop. The wall is decorated with all manner of keys, from tiny locket openers to industrial steel keys the size of a man's forearm. A battered display case holds several varieties of door locks, while a series of safes line the wall on the right-hand side. Rothman's workroom in the back holds an array of neatly arranged tools, and various design schematics which he keeps in a safe of his own devising. The key is hidden on the wall with the others: a needle hidden in a stack of needles.

Miles Rothman

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 8.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Appraise 6, Bureaucracy 2, Contortions 4, Craft (Locksmith) 10, Etiquette 2, Evasion 3, Lore (Locks and Security) 10, Perception 5, Pick Lock 10, Puzzles 4, Sleight of Hand 5, Stealth 3.

Backgrounds: Lucky, Small, Wise.

Profession: Thief 1, White Collar Worker 1.

MATTY'S LANTERN

The northern end of Eden Isle stitches together a patchwork of lower-middle class neighborhoods and gaunt-occupied slums. The island's crowded nature means that gaunts can't be segregated as completely as they are elsewhere, which leads to considerable friction with those normals who have to live near them. The area known as Matty's Lantern is just such a locale, a largely gaunt district holding just enough normals to keep everyone on edge.

The area is named for the rocky northern shore, where according to legend, a local woman plunged to her death while waiting for her lover to return from the sea. Thinking she had spotted the lights of his ship, she rushed forward to get a closer view, only to fall headlong into the surf. Locals claim the area has been cursed ever since, and take a grim pride in enduring its supposed bad luck.

These days, of course, civilization has crowded all the way up to the water, making it unlikely that anyone else will share Matty's fate. The north-south streets end abruptly at concrete barriers, preventing cars from crashing down into the water. Local gangs often gather at these dead ends, as do less malicious youths looking for a good meeting spot. The view out to sea is not easily dismissed, despite the fact that oil and other pollutants choke the water near the shoreline, and industrial factories dominate the far shore of the mainland.

Urban legends are filled with horror stories about the Lantern: rich men getting lost in its bowels and never being seen again; cars stripped down to the framework after being parked for less than two minutes; mutant gaunts breeding living monsters in the underground sewers; and so forth. It's all pop-

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pycock, but the neighborhood has done little to assuage its reputation. Individual blocks are communal and insular, distrusting outsiders but remaining fiercely loyal to each other. Such tribalism feeds into the area's criminal activity; gangland skirmishes are a matter of course here, as bands of youths squabble over petty turf claims. Most of the law-abiding residents remain heavily armed, and thefts and robberies are an everyday event. Occasionally, such incidents escalate, especially if the perpetrator is a gaunt acting against a normal or vice versa. Normal neighborhoods live in constant fear of the gaunts surrounding them, and it doesn't take much to spark them into violent action. The city has debated a formal segregation of the area (making it gaunts only), but real estate is such a premium on the island that some normals insist on staying there, even if it is in the midst of the leatherbacks.

Despite that, the Lantern still fosters a strong sense of community. Residents walk with a certain swagger, convinced that they've seen the worst the world can offer. The area's urban legends have created an impromptu oral culture, and the swapping of tall tales on street corners is slowly being elevated to an art form. Outsiders — even gaunt outsiders — can be spotted from miles away. Street gangs happy to disembowel each other over the right to loiter in a particular alleyway will close ranks like Roman legions in the face of external pressure. Even gaunt-normal tensions are mitigated in such circumstances, leading to grudging cease-fires in exchange for dealing with common threats. Consequently, the police loathe coming into the Lantern in force. While their general presence here is as high as it is anywhere else, large-scale raids and riot control efforts are avoided at all costs. It rarely succeeds at anything except uniting the locals against them.

11) Templeton's Fine Cigars

For all their fearsome surroundings, small businesses can do fairly well in Matty's Lantern... especially if they run other operations on the side. Brutus Templeton's cigar shop is no exception. Though outwardly catering to tobacco aficionados and those in need of a quick pack of cigarettes, he makes his money with a tidy bookmaking operation run out of the back room. Templeton is a gaunt, a former accountant who moved here from Central City after the disease ran its course. Rumor has it he was set up in New Eden by the Drago syndicate in payment for some unspecified debt. Templeton denies any such connections, but his operation is the only one in Matty's Lantern that pays no protection money to the local gangs, suggesting that *someone* is watching out for him. The beat cops who walk his route and the sergeant at the local precinct get a decent kickback, but otherwise, all of the shop's illicit profits stay in Templeton's hands.

His specialty is baseball, though he takes bets on horse racing and other sporting events too. A wizard with mathematics, he compiles statistics with maddening diligence, and has curried informants from every ballpark in the country (assisted, it is suggested, by his friends in the Drago mob). If a star hitter goes down with a strained wrist, he knows about it that afternoon. If an All-Around Class reliever gets the sniffles, it'll be reflected on the mammoth list of odds he carries around in his head. He takes bets on everything: scores, game length, how long a slump will last, which inning a batter will score on, whether a game will end in a strikeout... anything. Surprisingly enough, he's never actually been to a baseball game. He finds the sport itself quite boring; it's the numbers and the stats that fascinate him. He's also a master at balancing the odds, which means regardless of the outcome, he invariably makes money. Consequently, he pays off winners promptly (which has helped curry a strong reputation in the neighborhood) and makes sure his informants are compensated for their tips.

He runs it all from his back room, a large ostensible storage space filled with cigar boxes and bags of tobacco. A large blackboard tracks scores and stats for the day's matches, while a bank of six phones lets him keep in touch with his tipsters across the country. A pair of girls — twins — work the phones, as well as the telegraph machine which Templeton won from a Quicktime Wire manager several blocks over. With it, he can stay completely up to date on all of the major events taking place across the country.

The front room is much more spartan, filled with a few glass display cases and a shelf full of ci-



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gar boxes across the back wall. Templeton himself usually sits behind the cash register, taking bets as they come in or serving the odd customer actually interested in the tobacco. His girls keep careful track of orders by phone, and everyone in the neighborhood has laid a bet with him every now and then. The shop is regularly populated by a grumbling quartet of old men — three normal, one gaunt — who engage in poorly-strategized games of chess and listen to the Gallants on the store's ancient radio. They like to make fun of customers who come in to place a bet (though only after the target has left) and ride Templeton constantly about the "crooked" game he runs. None of them have ever bet themselves, or indeed purchased anything in the shop beyond a few cheap cigars, but Templeton lets them stay around anyway. They make him smile.

Brutus Templeton

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 5, Build 7, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Appraise 6, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 3, Craft (Accountancy) 9, Evasion 2, Lore (Baseball) 10, Lore (Mathematics) 10, Melee 4, Perception 7, Puzzles 8, Streetwise 6.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education, Gaunt.

Profession: Academic 1, Gangster 1.

12) Number 53 Station

The New Eden subway originally terminated at the far end of Matty's Lantern, a few blocks before the sea. But it had to be abandoned because the second-to-last stop on the route — Number 53 — was built atop large sinkhole which revealed

itself in the middle of the morning commute. Fourteen people died that day and the subway line was consequently rerouted around the anomaly. But budget cuts prevented the station from being demolished, and it still sits in the midst of Matty's Lantern to this day.

A rusty pair of gates marks the subway entrance from the street, its lock having long since fused to the bars. A series of posted signs warn passersby that the station isn't safe, but the upper left-hand corner has been bent back, allowing nimble characters to scramble over it and down the wide stairs. A pair of passageways branch off just below ground, terminating in the north and south platforms respectively. The station itself is caked with dust, and patches of rubble clutter the tiled floor. The sinkhole was centered on the entry platform, stretching out across the tracks in a sloping crater. The wreck of the subway car which triggered the collapse is still half-buried here, the twisted pieces of track corkscrewing upwards from its bulk. The city Corps of Engineers bolstered the support beams with steel struts, preventing the threat of further collapse, but the place still has an unstable feel to it... as if at any moment it will fall apart like children's blocks.

That doesn't prevent vagrants and other ne'er-do-wells from hiding in its depths. The stench of wine and urine speaks to years of transient habitation, and drug addicts looking for a quiet place to take a hit gather here every night. The station is quiet, dry, and unobtrusive, save for the rats who fill the tunnel and the odd street person sleeping off their latest bout with cheap booze. Anyone who manages to get into the subway car can find a few rows of undamaged seats which make a lovely bed for those too tired to be choosy. The only real danger comes during rainstorms, when sewer tunnels often back up and flood the entire station. The police periodically fish a body or two out of here following each lengthy rain.



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This hasn't been lost on the local gaunt gang, the Reekers, who have used the station as a cruel, but very effective means of execution. A few months ago, they resolved to knock off a local wise guy, whose temper and lack of couth was making trouble for them in the neighborhood. They abducted him as he left a nearby pool hall, using the pouring rain of an arriving thunderstorm to mask their tracks. They tied him up like a Christmas turkey and left him down in the station, scaring off the two bums who were struggling to start a fire there. He drowned as the water rose up from the sinkhole, and the filthy sewage removed all traces of evidence. The police didn't trouble themselves over the death of a known ex-felon, and the Reekers were rid of an annoying thorn. The next thorn will probably receive similar treatment, and the Reekers might even consider claiming the station as turf — lest someone else get the same bright idea as they did.

Typical Reeker

Attributes: Brains 3, Brawn 8, Build 8, Gut 6, Moxie 3, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 40.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 6, Contortions 5, Evasion 3, Firearms 3, Intimidation 7, Melee 5, Perception 4, Pick Lock 5, Stealth 6, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Gaunt, Reduced Light Vision, Sinewy Joints.

Profession: Street Tough 1.

THE SHORELINE

The western edge of Eden Isle forms a natural harbor, which has since become the staple of New Eden's financial acumen. Though not as large as Gateway's, it's still the largest port on the Neptunic, and forms the bedrock for New Eden's economic might. It stretches almost the entire length of the island, punctuated by the odd bridge here and there, but otherwise unbroken. Passenger ships and ferries dock at the center portion of the island, while the "Upper" and "Lower" Ports handle cargo traffic above and below it. Every well-established company makes use of the harbor in some capacity, while pleasure boaters and day sailors often depart from the south end for cruises around the island.

Like any similar area, the Shoreline has much to offer an enterprising criminal. But unlike elsewhere, little of that potential is realized. The fractious nature of New Eden's underworld and a lack of coordinated efforts has kept incursions limited to snatch-and-grab operations. Smuggling and other large-scale crimes take place, but often at the behest of distant crime lords, not anyone local. The Drago mob in Central City has attempted to exert its influence here — sending several operatives in the hopes of seizing control of the Shoreline — but the locals conspired to keep the outsiders away from the ports until a warlock hitman could be dispatched to take care of them. Since then, no other group has yet proved strong enough to take appreciable control of the Shoreline.

Instead, it's the white collar criminals who call the shots here. The cargo loaded and unloaded along the Shoreline each year totals close to one billion dollars — assets which the companies on Banker's Square will go to great lengths to protect. Many of them flat-out own the piers they operate, allowing only ships carrying their cargo to dock, or else charging usurious fees for the privilege. The Harbor Authority serves as a rubber stamp for the business consortiums which run the shoreline, ensuring that inter-company schisms are solved equitably and that crime (at least the overtly illegal sort) within the harbor doesn't impact the bottom line. Small-time theft is accepted as the price of doing business, but anything larger than a truckload of crates draws considerable ire, and the Harbor Authority goes to great lengths to hunt down those responsible.

An eclectic mix of small businesses and elite residences occupy the buildings along the Shoreline. The harbor's general unseemliness keeps rent prices relatively stable, allowing all manner of companies to work in the shadow of the great ships. As one proceeds further south and the atmosphere improves, the prices go up. Cramped offices and greasy spoons slowly give way to higher-end business, branch offices for companies based in Central City or Gateway, and eventually, penthouses for the rich and famous. The proximity to the New Eden Yacht Club makes such property quite desirable for the right sort, and the lights of arriving ships can look romantic in the moonlight. Every building has a doorman or armed guard, ensuring that the riff-raff and longshoremen to the north keep a healthy distance.

13) The New Eden Yacht Club

While the remainder of the harbor toils to load and unload its cargo, this little corner caters to a different set of demands. The gentleman sailors of New Eden's wealthiest families congregate in this elegant edifice to drink, play cards, and discuss their nautical exploits. It's become a very desirable alternative for those who find the nightclub scene too draining. Next to the roaring fire and with the lights of the harbor visible out the window, the New Eden Yacht Club is the perfect home away from home.

The club's current president is Carlyle Van Drachenberg, youngest son of business magnate Horatio Van Drachenberg. Troubled by the recent illness of his father and a family tragedy which took place shortly after the war, he devoted himself to the club's welfare, hoping to transform it into a "civilized" haven from the pressures of obscene wealth. In so doing, he also hoped to restore some of his family's besmirched reputation. A skilled sailor, he hosted several events in hopes of raising awareness of the club, including races around the island and a luxury cruise to the Borderlands city of Balesca. His actions helped cement the club's standing, and a horde of new members poured in. Today it serves as a backdrop for icy rivalries, conspiratorial backslapping, and under-the-table agreements whose perpetrators don't wish to expose their actions to the boardroom.

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The club sports an open bar and a kitchen featuring two gourmet chefs hired from Terminus. Chess and backgammon are popular activities, held in the large library. Charts and nautical instruments are available for those interested, and while only a handful of the members are skilled sailors, decorum dictates that everyone have at least basic seamanship skills. Parties on the luxury yachts often begin here, culminating in a midnight cruise or a weekend jaunt down the coast toward Nova Roma. In the wintertime, the pleasure boats remain tied down, but the club stays open, always ready with a brandy and a cigar for those long cold nights. Carlyle Van Drachenberg spends most of his time here, reluctant to return to the family homestead where his increasingly frail father stands morbid watch over an empty house. His toasts are always witty, however, and everyone marvels at the job he's done with the place. It's enough to make you forget that unpleasant business with his elder brother James...

Carlyle Van Drachenberg

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 8, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 5, Drive (Car, Motorcycle, Yacht) 7, Etiquette 8, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 8, Perception 4, Sport (Yacht Racing) 7.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Loyal Retainer, Lucky.

Profession: Lady Killer 1, Wealthy 4.

For all of Double Dare's low-rent aspirations, they keep selling, and the borderline alcoholics who populate the writers' desks have their share of fans. Many of them associate with private eyes and warlocks, hoping to glean some tidbit to help them meet the next deadline, and they're always willing to tag along on a stakeout or spend a night throwing their paycheck away on poker. As a result, they've made a fair number of odd and quirky contacts on the fringes of society. Sometimes, they even invite their "friends" back to the offices, to relate whatever story they have to tell and see it transformed into barely fictionalized prose. Double Dare's owner, Simon Van Dutton, is a bit of gadfly and rarely comes down to the offices, leaving his editors to manage things as they see fit. As a result, both the writers and their questionable associates tend to come and go as they please. As long as the stories are in on time, it's of little consequence.

Jack Goines, writer and warlock

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 5, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 3, Craft (Writer) 6, Disguise 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Perception 6, Stealth 6, Streetwise 4, Tensile Energy 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education, Magical Aptitude.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Investigator 1.

14) Double Dare Publications

Just off the harbor is a shabby set of offices occupying the bottom two floors of a building that has seen better days. Double Dare Publications specializes in pulp magazines and lurid fiction; the sort of things found in cheap hotels and the bedrooms of impressionable teenagers. Founded by an ex-tennis pro hoping to parlay his savings into a genuine business, it has survived by keeping costs down, volume up, and the feverish imaginations of a dozen or so writers working overtime. The offices have the jaundiced air of a neighborhood poker game. Cigar smoke and liquor fumes rise up to a pair of slowly turning ceiling fans, while the office's central bullpen rings at all hours of the night with friendly curses and grumbles.

Double Dare publishes nine magazines which are sold at newsstands, bus depots, and second-hand bookstores. Their lowest titles — *Dirt* and the suggestively titled *Rising Heat* — are little more than erotic smut, barely legal under New Eden's current vice laws. On the higher end, *Horizon Tales* specializes in cheesy science fiction, while a pair of action mags — *Double-Barreled Adventure* and *Crime Street, U.C.* — constitute the bulk of Double Dare's sales. The editors have considered branching out into women's mags, but most of the writers on staff haven't the faintest idea how to write for a female reader. The editors have floated bringing women on staff, though God knows what that would do to the office's shabbily comfortable masculinity.

NPCs

STEFAN FALLAGER, OWNER OF THE SHOOTING STAR

Fallager is what the established elite refer to as a "bad seed," heir to a vast fortune which brought him neither comfort nor peace. He had his mother committed in the last year of her life, consigning her to Carlisle Asylum following an unexplained incident in the family's penthouse apartment. His brothers and sister never spoke to him after that, and when his mother died, they hired a lawyer in an effort to cut him out of his inheritance. The plot failed — as eldest son, Stefan claimed the largest share — but the family was for all intents and purposes destroyed. The remaining Fallagers moved south to Nova Roma and never looked back.

Stefan was always an avid club-goer, intoxicated by the prospect of a never-ending party. When the legalities were finally settled, he announced the formation of a dream: a lavish nightclub whose brilliance would dim the lights of Cavalier Street. Construction on the Shooting Star began on the top floors of a newly minted hotel and was completed just last year. It cost him nearly his entire fortune, but since then, it has become the toast of New Eden. The main dance floor overlooks the lights of Cavalier Street, providing a breathtaking view of the city. Crowds pack the club every night, bringing in

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revenue by the fistful. Three of the city's biggest bands — The Minstrels, The Sliding Scales, and Rose Montgomery's Easy Street — play regular rotations, knocking them dead every time and leaving other recording artists scrambling to fill the remaining docket slots on the schedule. The elder elite turn up their noses at such a "vulgar" business endeavor, but to the city's avant garde, Fallager's a genius.

His secret lies in nepotism, and in the connections he made during his wilder days. He attached himself to numerous movers and shakers in the music industry, cab companies, and elsewhere, greasing the skids with a few generous contributions of cash. When the time came, he deftly turned them into assets for his club. He booked the sharpest acts, enticed high rollers to fly in for a visit, and kept the doors open long after other clubs had wrapped up for the night. His friends helped spread the word and his reputation as a generous host made sure there were never any problems with licensing or civic ordinances.

Nor was such wheeling and dealing limited to the right side of the law. Though he never had need of underworld connections before, he realized that drugs and call girls could serve as further enticements for the Shooting Star, and made the same inquiries for them as he would for a bartender or electrician. His sources gave him what he wanted — and the city's debauchers now know that the Shooting Star is the place to be — but they occasionally asked for favors in return. Fallager always accommodates them without hesitation. The back rooms have hosted an array of stolen goods, and Fallager himself has even served as a courier passing drugs and money between his most exclusive clientele. But the underworld has helped him out in other ways as well. The Minstrels' front man had his playing hand broken after he tried to duck out on his contract with the club, and Fallager's family in Nova Roma has endured a series of unpleasant (and eminently untraceable) altercations at his behest.

Through it all, Fallager maintains the same mixture of egotism and entitlement. The way he sees it, this is his birthright, claimed from the grasping hands of his siblings and reshaped into an image which pleases him. He treats people in much the same way: emotional resources to be used and rearranged as he wishes. Despite his immense arrogance, however, he's no fool. His business acumen is razor sharp and he takes careful steps never to cross the wrong people. As long as the club keeps producing, he doesn't care about anything — least of all other people and their problems. The fact that the Shooting Star might one day lose its popularity has yet to cross his mind...

Fallager is a slick, blonde, ferret-like man, his aristocratic cheeks framing a sanctimonious smile. He dresses in a white tuxedo every night at the club and a similarly hued business suit for those few transactions he conducts during the day. He maintains his upper-crust manners at all times, and insists that his guests do so as well; even street thugs are prompted to deliver a "please" or a "thank you" at the right times. His easy charm can get past even the wariest defenses, but he has little empathy for anyone beside himself. He sizes up everyone he meets for useful attributes, masking his callous appraisals beneath a carefully practiced smile. He has an endless number

of casual acquaintances but few actual friends. His current girlfriend Ellie is the embodiment of vulgar fashion; her tanned skin has the consistency of beef jerky and her heavy-lidded expression suggests both a willingness to copulate with anyone and a certainty that no one involved will enjoy the experience. What he sees in her (and vice versa) is anybody's guess.

His bouncers have standing orders not to let any of his family members past the door. Rumor has it, however, that they keep tabs on his activities and are searching for some way of bringing the Shooting Star down in flames. More on the nightclub can be found on page 82 of the *Edge of Midnight* core rulebook.

Stefan Fallager

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 7, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 7, Bureaucracy 5, Etiquette 6, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 3, Lore (Music Scene) 5, Perception 3, Perform (Piano) 2, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Loyal Retainer.

Profession: Con Artist 1, Lady Killer 1, Wealthy 2.

STACY AND AMY GRENADIER, HEIRESESSES

The children of Silas Grenadier are beneficiaries of the immense fortune which he has cultivated. At the moment, their greatest skill is finding new ways of spending it. Their *bon vivant* lifestyle has electrified the nightclubs of New Eden, where they come every night to drink, dance, and generally scandalize their ultra-rich papa. They constantly sport the latest fashions and never wear the same dress twice. A fleet of cars is at their disposal, including a luxury roadster clocking in at nearly \$20,000. They tip lavishly, spend exuberantly, and aren't afraid to lay out the green for whatever extralegal indulgences happen to strike their fancy.

Silas retained custody of the pair following an ugly divorce with his wife Sharon. The girls had been benignly neglected for most of their lives, raised by a series of nannies and regarded as little more than favored possessions by their materialistic mother. Silas himself virtually ignored them, focused as he was upon his shipping empire, and the girls were treated as assets during the divorce — fought over in the same vein as the cars and the houses. They emerged with inherent feelings of worthlessness, glossed over by their spoiled lifestyle and silenced through the lavish catering to their hearts' every desire. "Hellion" is an understatement when describing the Grenadier sisters.

They share their father's knack for manipulation (though not his prudence or sense of fair play), which they use to ignite petty little turf wars within their elitist clique. Men are seduced and disposed of, friends coerced into compromising positions, and caretakers flummoxed by an endless series of mischievous pranks. It's all in the name of having a good time. Silas originally assigned them bodyguards, but they easily ditched their burly "protectors" and the senior Grenadier

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has since turned to more subtle methods. A series of private investigators now tails them as they would a criminal suspect, keeping constant tabs on their activities, but never alerting the girls to their presence. The PIs periodically send reports to Silas, the contents of which would appall him if he ever bothered to read them.

And it doesn't seem likely to change any time soon. Presumably, they will eventually settle down and marry, but beyond finding a good husband, neither of them has any responsibilities or cares about anything beyond instant gratification. At times, their wild behavior has bordered on recklessness — Amy's driver's license has been revoked numerous times, and the two were recently spotted chatting up a pair of army paratroopers with questions like "is it possible to have sex while skydiving?"

Lately, their paths have taken them into the bowels of Fairway, where the beatnik warlocks have entranced their imagination. They already knew a little magic — what naughty girl doesn't? — but its application towards creative betterment has struck a chord with them. For the first time, something other than hedonism seems important. They have recently begun affecting bohemian clothes, and begin their evenings at coffee shops and poetry slams before turning back to the party on Cavalier Street. It's likely just a passing fad (and the residents of Fairway have already dismissed them as poseurs) but it's put them in touch with a few decidedly dangerous figures who might wish to take advantage of their obscene resources...

Stacy, now 23, and Amy, 19, are slim African-American girls with athletic builds and lovely faces. They're both clever conversationalists, and can shift verbal gears with remarkable ease. Smiles come easily to them, but they hold a grudge like nobody's business. The New Eden social scene is littered with casualties of their rapier-like wit. Their education, though traditional, is spotty, having barely graduated from the various finishing schools to which they were unceremoniously packed. Amy is a little smaller than Stacy, quieter, and slightly more contemplative. She takes her cues from the elder girl, whom she adores, and generally does whatever Stacy thinks is best. Stacy considers Amy the only real member of her family, though she does enjoy the rare moments when their father takes enough notice to get angry. They tend to dress in either black or white clothing — mostly the former since entering into their latest phase — but they always look sharp and their styles invariably set the trend for New Eden's upcoming fashion season.

Stacy and Amy Grenadier

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 9, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 3, Contortions 4, Disguise 4, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 4, Etiquette 4, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 7, Kinetics 3, Pick Lock 3, Sport (Tennis) 5, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Lucky, Magical Aptitude.

Profession: Femme Fatale 2, Wealthy 2.

MARIO MARTINEZ, UNDERGROUND COP

Few cops in the Underground Division have seen the things that "Marty-Marty" Martinez has. From his earliest days in the Academy, he prepared for joining the elite unit; it was a way of distinguishing himself from his father, uncles, and elder cousins, who were also a part of the force. With a compact build perfect for navigating the tunnels and a sharp eye for suspicious details, he soon earned the laudatory attention of his superiors. But he has repeatedly turned down promotion to a desk job. His work will always lie in the subway tunnels.

Marty-Marty specializes the storage and transportation of stolen goods. Crooks often store caches down in the tunnels, away from the prying eyes of the surface. Martinez has a knack for sniffing them out: finding cached guns and drug money where no one else thought to look, and spotting hidden corners in even the gloomiest corridors. Early in his career, he cultivated a reputation for fearlessness by pursuing suspects through extremely dangerous conditions. One such pursuit ended when the suspect leapt across the subway tracks ahead of an oncoming train and then relaxed, convinced that Martinez wouldn't dare follow. Marty-Marty crossed the breach just as the train barreled down on top of him, avoiding the car by scant inches before slapping the cuffs on his shocked prey. He possesses an impeccable sense of balance, and his time on the surface is spent studying the maps of his "beat" provided by the city's engineers. He is one of the only Underground Division cops not required to have a partner when going on duty.

He's also sticky-fingered. A wife and four children are waiting for him at home each night, and he has no intention of making them settle for the life earned on a cop's salary. While Marty-Marty would never stoop to taking a bribe — criminals, he believes, are irrevocably corrupting — he's not above keeping some of the illegally-acquired swag he finds. Loose cash, rings and gems, a few scattered baubles... all of them can be easily pocketed and removed with little difficulty. Since they're never counted among the stolen goods, no official record exists; the thieves still go to jail, justice is served, and Martinez has enough to buy a good future for his children. He quietly launders the money through his brother-in-laws' businesses (a shoe store, a cleaning service, and a Borderlands restaurant, respectively), transferring it to an unmarked account in a local bank. He hopes to use it as a trust fund for his children's education. He never touches the funds for fear of discovery, but a bank book hidden in a hollow leg of his bed will provide access to it. Only his wife knows about the book, but anyone who finds it would be able to trace the dirty money back to him. Marty-Marty doesn't believe that will happen until well after his children are grown.

In the meantime, his work keeps him occupied. He currently holds the rank of Sergeant, and is considered Underground Division's de facto second-in-command beneath Lt. Sean Masterson. He gives regular lectures at the police academy on the nature of underground crime, and his memos on subway protection often find their way all the way up to the chief's desk. The criminals he pursues have come to know his name, and there's little they wouldn't give to see him removed from their favored haunts for good.

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Marty-Marty is small, about five-foot-four, and weighs a lithe 145 pounds. His large dark eyes are beguiling, especially when matched to his easy smile and throaty laugh. He's easy-going and affable above ground, with a long list of friends and an open warmth that endears him to others. In the tunnels, it's a different story. Curt and business-like, he rarely speaks except to note minor details, and his moves come suddenly and without warning. Few of his topside friends would recognize him during his Underground duties. Perhaps because of the unhygienic confines of the tunnels, he takes special pride in cleaning up quickly. His New Eden policeman's uniform is well-pressed and neat each morning, no matter how much filth he's had to wade through the night before.

Mario Martinez

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 7, Gut 8, Moxie 5, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 8, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 5, Contortions 7, Engineering 4, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 2, Firearms 5, Lore (New Eden Underground) 8, Melee 6, Perception 7, Pick Lock 5, Puzzles 4, Sleight of Hand 8, Stealth 6, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Acrobatic, Alert, Small.

Profession: Officer of the Law 1, Underground Division 1.

FATHER ANDREW MOORE, GAUNT PRIEST

Father Moore was one of the first confirmed people in the Commonwealth to succumb to gauntism. He spent some time as a wandering vagrant, working odd jobs when he could and trying desperately to scrape together a few bucks. His past was a complete mystery to him; he had no recollection of any life before the disease. Then one evening, he sought refuge in a church outside of Central City, where the priest spoke to him of God's infinite mercy. It struck a chord with him, and he begged the father to grant him a position at the church. He worked there as a janitor for several years, cleaning up in exchange for a cot in the basement and a few odd dollars from the collection plate. Then when the war ended, he made a stunning announcement: he wished to attend seminary and enter the priesthood.

Church officials were aghast, but with that country friar as a sponsor, he was sent off to New Eden for studies. It was seen more as an act of pity than any legitimate belief in his piety, but Moore proved them wrong. He applied himself diligently to the task, supported by contributions from his adopted parish, and earned the respect of his teachers (though not always his peers). Upon completion, he was assigned to a decrepit church in the bowels of Matty's Lantern: a newly-forming gaunt neighborhood whose residents were dearly in need of spiritual guidance.

Since then, Father Moore has risen to become a voice in the gaunt community, a source of spiritual comfort and a leading proponent of social change. He has fiercely espoused in-

creased rights for gaunts, leading candlelight vigils and protest marches in support of new anti-discriminatory laws. His parishioners — almost entirely gaunts — hang on his every word, and while he has a gentle spirit, he's seen enough to know that turning the other cheek doesn't necessarily work. His sermons are fiery and apocalyptic, but always contain a ray of redemptive hope. To the destitute people of the Lantern, he's a beacon of inspiration. Thieves once broke into his church to rob it. They were cornered in the street by an angry mob and beaten nearly to death before Father Moore could intervene. Since then, his church and his person have been untouchable to New Eden's criminal community.

Father Moore stands about average height for a gaunt, with the rough build and bulging muscles of all his kind. His priestly robes lend him a formal dignity, made fearsome by the inhuman visage of his face. But he speaks in soft tones that immediately set people at ease, and those who get to know him find him a peaceful and pious soul. His orations unleash a fair amount of gaunt fearsomeness, but are usually more inspiring than terrifying, and one look at the parishioners who attend his sermons is enough to certify his political skill. He maintains correspondence with his old parish back in Central City, but otherwise has few dealings with the normals. His kind are all that matters to him these days, and while he treats normals with a clipped politeness, he sees them more as obstacles to gaunt equality than fellow sinners in need of guidance.

Unbeknownst to everyone (including Father Moore), one small piece of his pre-gaunt life remains. A tattoo, hidden in the small of his back, survived the warping of his flesh and is still recognizable upon his leathery gray skin. It depicts a winged man plummeting into the sea, an apparently mythic image that — if he were aware of it — he would likely attribute to a pre-transformation spirituality. He hasn't seen it, however, nor has anyone else. The police in Terminus however, have a description of it in one of their oldest, dustiest files. Its owner is wanted in connection to a series of brutal stabbings...

Father Andrew Moore

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 7, Build 8, Gut 4, Moxie 6, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 40.

Skills: Brawl 7, Bureaucracy 4, Etiquette 2, Evasion 4, Intimidation 5, Lore (Theology) 7, Medicine 6, Perception 4, Puzzles 4, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Gaunt, Wise.

Profession: Clergy 1.

BILLY SPECK, CRIMINAL

William Speck began his career as a political racketeer, rounding up voters for "election drives" in which feckless citizens were driven from polling place to polling place to cast multiple votes. He also engaged in the intimidation of opposition members, and was suspected of firebombing the headquarters of a prominent city councilman running against his candidate. A spate of reforms at the end of the war signaled

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the end of his political career; he was indicted for corruption and served two years in Vineland Prison upstate. When he emerged, his former associates refused to have anything to do with him.

But that didn't stop Speck. The tactics he had used in "legitimate" operations could easily be turned to crime. Within a few years, he had his entire neighborhood — a seedy little corner of southeastern New Eden — dancing to his tune. Numbers running and protection shakedowns were his specialty; he charged businesses a premium to keep their doors open and turned the profits into an effective loan-sharking operation. Residents of the neighborhood refer to him as "The Bank of Speck," and he even has a quasi-legitimate office above a barbershop near his home. From there, his crew of about twenty leg-breakers scours the surrounding blocks, putting rivals out of action and making sure the money keeps flowing to their boss.

Speck hasn't ruled out political blackmail either. He still seethes with resentment at his prison sentence, compounded by the fact that his former associates now hold high office in the city. He knows enough about them to cause some embarrassing headlines, though he hasn't squeezed them for fear of the bigger muscle backing them up. Now, he feels confident enough to make a go of it, provided the time and the circumstances are right. As long as his more reliable interests are producing, he'll let sleeping dogs lie, but should he ever come up short of cash, he may turn to his old buddies for a return on his long-ago campaign contributions.

Violence comes readily to Speck's crew, as it does to most street gangs of their ilk. The disaffected youths who comprise his muscle regularly mix it up with encroaching outside gangs, and every year Speck buries at least one or two who have been struck down in the streets. They give as good as they get, however, and while neighboring gangs speak in dark tones about Speck's crew, they have yet to make a dent in his operations. Speck himself is suspected of no less than half a dozen murders, all committed following his release from prison. The police haven't been able to make any of the charges stick, however, and his one indictment ended when a key witness developed a sudden case of the I Can't Recall. To his men, he's a hero: tough enough to rebound after a royal shafting, and smart enough to avoid making the same mistake twice. His flashes of temper only cement his reputation in the tiny corner of New Eden which he rules.

Speck is a sallow, unhealthy-looking man with deep acne scars and a perennial scowl on his face. He rarely wears a jacket, instead preferring suspenders and a tie too wide for his reedy chest. He chain-smokes unfiltered cigarettes, giving his breath a poisonous odor. His raspy voice speaks to the internal ravages of his habit. But he still packs a nasty punch, and his pistol aim is spot on. He's never afraid to get



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his hands bloody to make a point; he often uses darts (which he plays compulsively in his office) as an impromptu form of torture. His cronies haunt the barbershop below — no one's ever seen a legitimate customer there — and local merchants often bring their protection money directly to him rather than risking a visit from one of his underlings. The last lieutenant who skimmed off the top is now a permanent invalid; Speck broke his arms and legs before dumping him just below the Jackson Bridge. Mention of pretzels while in his presence always elicits a hoarse, phlegm-filled laugh.

Billy Speck

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 6, Build 3, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 8.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Appraise 7, Brawl 4, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 5, Firearms 8, Forgery 4, Intimidation 7, Lore (Political Blackmail) 6, Perception 4, Pick Lock 6, Stealth 6, Streetwise 7, Throwing 9.

Backgrounds: Marksmanship, Mean Streets, Small.

Profession: Gangster 1, Gunman 1.

MILES TRUDEAU, GOSSIP COLUMNIST

Words hold the power to crown a king or ruin a city. In the court of public opinion, no political clout or gangster's machine gun can hold a candle to a few well-placed lines in the right column. New Eden's preeminent gossip writer knows full well how to ply his trade; he's been doing it since before the war, and it's brought the entire island right to his door. Miles Trudeau may have more enemies than the worst hoodlum in Matty's Lantern, but the public absolutely eats up whatever he has to say.

He cut his teeth during the war, serving as a correspondent overseas. He witnessed the White Light personally while covering a forward unit on the front lines, and conveyed the essence of the soldier's on-field victory celebrations back home to the U.C. Upon returning to New Eden, he had his pick of assignments. To everyone's surprise, he took a post at the *New Eden Clarion's* society page, covering debutante's balls and the goings on of the rich and famous. "It's safer than covering wars, even if the natives are more hostile," he quipped upon starting the job.

Since then, his ability to uncover dirty secrets has made him beloved by the man on the street, and feared by those in power. In addition to his weekly column, he broadcasts a radio show every Friday night from Cavalier Street... just when the movers and shakers are heading out for the evening. Record companies actively court him, hoping that a kind word can help launch an artist, and a half dozen bands in the New Eden area owe their careers to him. Similarly, he has destroyed no insignificant number of reputations with his eager reporting, and has defied a plethora of slander suits in the process. He pays top dollar for hidden information, and can coax secrets from the most trustworthy secretary or hanger-on. He's particularly harsh on warlocks — he knows what kind of damage they can cause — and his exposés on magic use have resulted in no fewer than ten criminal indictments.

Trudeau's secret is learning everything he can... and then deciding what to publish and what to keep hidden. It's almost useless hiding anything from him; sooner or later, his army of informants will ferret it out. The question is whether he keeps what he learns to himself or reads it live over the air. His office is filled with files that have never seen the light of day, either because their subjects have paid (in some form or another) to keep them quiet, or Trudeau himself has deemed it inappropriate to air them. He does maintain a sense of decorum — unlike the more salacious rags which follow in his footsteps — and won't embarrass anyone unless he deems it necessary for the public good. Of course, what he thinks is necessary doesn't always jibe with the beliefs of his targets, and while the dirtiest laundry rarely gets aired, there's usually more than enough to do serious damage regardless.

He's also not above settling a personal grudge or two. He was once barred from a wealthy socialite's party, and condemned by the hostess as a "worthless little guttersnipe" on her front lawn. He responded by publicly reporting a lesbian love affair she had supposedly held several years earlier. There was only the barest precept of truth to the story, but it ended the socialite's marriage and branded her untouchable amongst her circle. Such incidents have made him quite a few mortal enemies, and in his more narcissistic moments, he wonders why none of them have yet to take a serious swipe at him.

Still, many of New Eden's elite are grateful for the good word he gives them, and his praise is as generous as his condemnations are harsh. He remains on the A-list for the best parties, and he always holds his tongue when away from his work. The column and the radio show are the only places where he comes out shooting.

Trudeau is a tall man with an ample frame just this side of chubby. He's fairly vain about his full head of dark hair, constantly treating it with pomades and conditioners. While hardly handsome, he has no shortage of female admirers, and he plays the field with the robustness of a man twenty years his junior. He dresses sharply at all times (he favors a fresh rose in his lapel) and speaks in melodic tones which immediately put the listener at ease. He holds meetings with his informants during ball games at Shelby Park; his private box is easily entered and hidden from public view. Trudeau has many acquaintances, but no real friends... which makes everyone else either a potential source or a potential target.

Miles Trudeau

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 8, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 5, Craft (Writer) 7, Etiquette 8, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 5, Firearms 2, Intimidation 6, Lore (Gossip) 10, Perception 8, Perform (Radio Announcer) 7, Puzzles 9, Stealth 3, Streetwise 6.

Backgrounds: Alert, Charismatic, Huge.

Profession: Investigator 3.

SAMPLE CAMPAIGNS

In a city as mammoth, as diverse, and as compact as New Eden, offering suggestions on campaign style and content can be difficult. The sheer wealth of opportunities — the diversity and fury held in tight confines — make New Eden a very flexible home base for any campaign. The characters can find themselves rubbing shoulders with the city's financial elite in one session, and engaged in a life-or-death knife fight with a street gang the next. The session after that, they could be squeezing through the fetid depths of the sewers, avoiding the Underground Division. New Eden can be all things to all people, and sometimes the greatest victory can simply be making sure that you wake up in the city that never sleeps.

SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT

Double Dare Publishing is the definitive purveyor of almost every kind of pulp entertainment imaginable, from the lurid to the perverse to the ridiculous. Zap-guns, torn dresses, and severed heads have an equal place of pride on their covers, and the writers who produce prose for them have contacts seeded throughout the darkest aspects of society. Few are the impressionable youths of New Eden and beyond without a few well-thumbed volumes of *Double-Barrelled Adventure* or *Horizon* scattered about their room.

None of this should really matter to the PCs (save for some interesting reading material scattered about as background), until they learn from one of the editors, Bob Burnley, that a writer has gone missing. Jack Everett Goines works on *Double-Barrelled Adventure* and *Crime Street, U.C.*, and was — until he didn't turn up on Monday morning — one of Double Dare's most prolific writers. To add to the problem, Goines has been called to testify before the National Assembly's Commission on Moral Issues in a week's time — Double Dare has come under government scrutiny and criticism for the supposedly lurid themes running through its publications, and the timing of the summons could not be worse.

The truth behind Goines' disappearance is linked with the government's efforts to shut down Double Dare as a warning to pulp publishers. Goines spends a lot of time working his contacts in the criminal element, and he soaks up information like a sponge, rattling it all out onto his typewriter as soon as he can get to the office in the morning. This has usually gone unnoticed, and would have done so indefinitely had not Lenny Scrumm — head of notorious street gang the Tigers — had to wait for a dentist's appointment. Flipping through an issue of *Crime Street, U.C.* for pictures of dames, Lenny was surprised to see what amounted to a print confession of a heist he'd pulled off with the backing of one of the big Central City

outfits. The names had been changed, sure, but the account was essentially fact. Lenny found four more stories he could fit to the activities of other gangs in the city. Thinking he could turn this to his advantage, he decided to send a couple of guys around to lean on Goines, who fearfully vanished before they could find him. Scrumm then turned to Central City and spilled the details. His backers leaned on lobbyists, who leaned on politicians, who were always eager to score some popularity anyway. Now, thanks to Nova Roma, Double Dare is in danger of being shut down for good while the Tigers (along with a couple of hired hoodlums) comb the streets looking for Goines.

Finding the fugitive writer will be tricky — Goines has learned a lot from talking to crooks, and has a heck of an imagination. He can operate under assumed names with relative ease, and can lay a false trail about as well as anyone. Many are designed to endanger pursuers — they will lead to bad neighborhoods, inflame local gangs, make anyone following him look bad, and generally cause problems. Goines thinks that only Scrumm will be looking for him, and hopes that Van Dutton (the publisher) and Burnley wouldn't send anyone after him.

Finding Goines will involve more than one confrontation with the Tigers, and probably even the "specialists" Scrumm has hired from Central City. Even if the players locate the writer, he won't come quietly — Goines is a warlock of little skill but big ideas, and bringing him in can be as dangerous to him as it will be to the party. Even when they have him, they still need to elude Scrumm, the Central City boys, and anyone else they've managed to antagonize along the way. Regardless of the outcome, questions will still remain about the crimes depicted in his work, and Goines will have to face a Nova Roma subcommittee with magic use in his past.

Regardless of Goines' final fate, the episode should prove enlightening to the PCs. Real life, in this case, may be writ grander than shocking fiction, and the party may find themselves turning the pages of the pulps to seek out the killers and thieves of New Eden. It's all in there for anyone who thinks to look.

DUNGEON CRAWL REDUX

The underground and sewers of New Eden are more than just a public utility — they are a shelter for the truly desperate, and a conduit for criminals who prefer the risk of being crushed by a train to a witness being able to identify them. Working either in New Eden's underground or directly for the NEPD's Underground Division, invariably means that PCs spend a lot of time beneath ground.

A campaign in the underground will sport a more open-ended structure to it than many other *Edge of Midnight* campaigns. The focus on the varied nature of life beneath the grimy towers of New Eden (though it by no means forces the PCs to spend their entire lives like troglodytes) allows a wide range of adventures to unfold whilst maintaining the structure of the game in an episodic format. The players will deal with crime, corruption in the city government, perilous gunfights on busy subway tracks, and attacks from any number of fugitives hiding in the dark: all in the name of keeping the town clean.



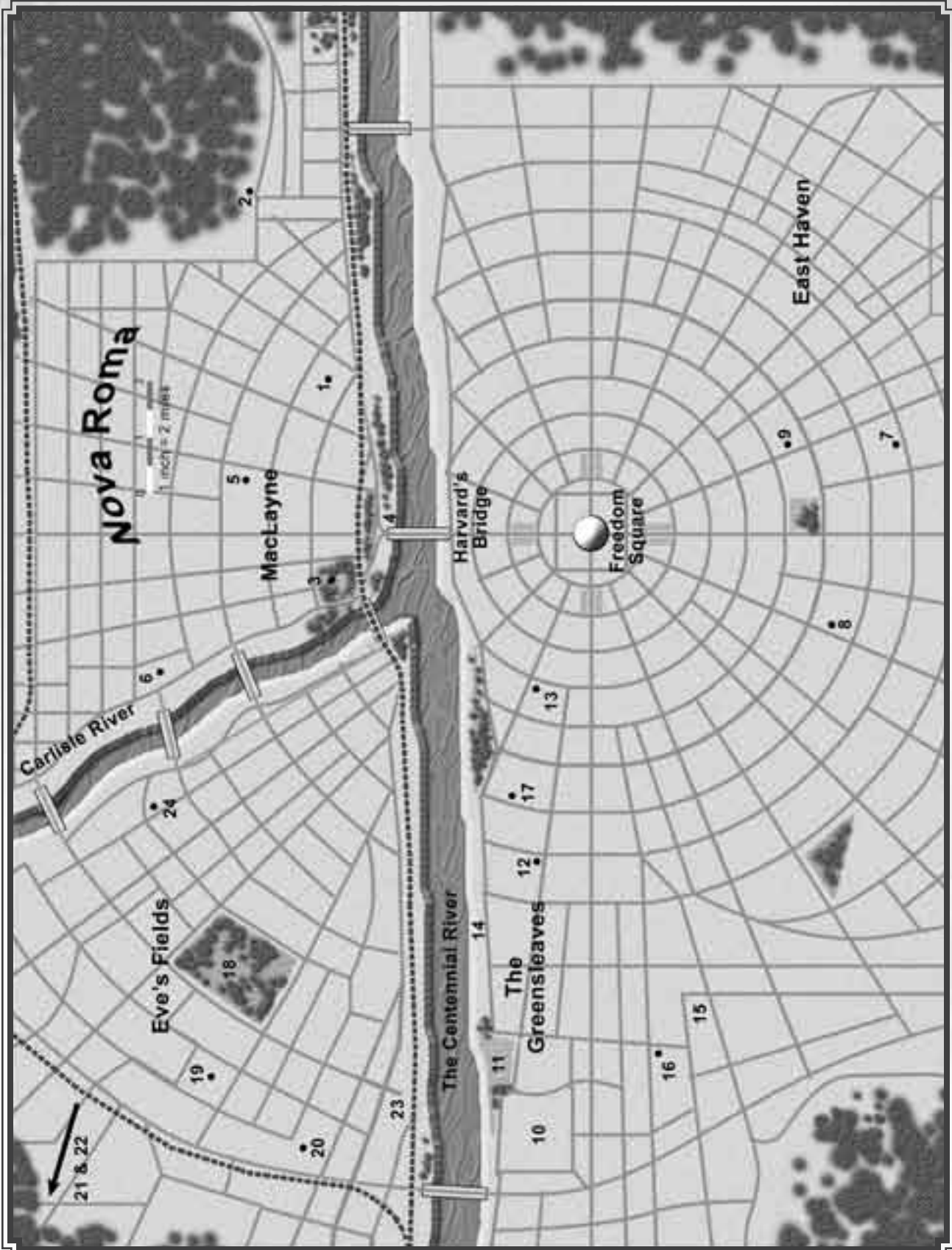
CHAPTER THREE NOVA ROMA



™ Democracy consists of choosing
your dictators after they've told
you what it is you want to hear.}

- Alan Coren

THE NAKED CITY



CHAPTER THREE: NOVA ROMA

OVERVIEW OF THE CITY

The capital of the Unified Commonwealth houses the gentlemanly, the educated, and the politically Machiavellian. When people speak of it, they speak in measured tones; one spontaneously remembers the lyrics to anthems and hymns memorized in grammar school and boy scouts. A hushed tone pervades activity inside these governmental gates. Sports events are dignified, and store windows display carefully orchestrated stacks of goods. Gardens are carefully manicured all across the city. Although a quintessential U.C. town, it seems in many ways to maintain an old world charm, like those across the sea. On a good day, its temperate climate gives it a familiar cheerfulness as flowers bloom easily a good part of the year. Many a family-run orchard, vineyard, or brewery can be found in the outskirts, and many a God-fearing soldier calls Nova Roma home.

Designed to be the seat of the U.C. government, the architecture is planned and orchestrated on a circular grid that extends out from its center. Most buildings downtown are gray marble, cool in the humid summer season. There is a feeling of lost time here: that advances in technology have not been recognized or even considered. For the most part, this is a river city — damp and humid, but a good place for evening outings. The continental attitude in Nova Roma masks its government-sponsored repression with an air of international intrigue and scandal.

Inhabitants of Nova Roma are divided along class lines. The service sector employs a large number of gaunts, while those in leadership positions work to keep the door closed to anyone not in their social circle. The river serves as a dividing line between the haves and the have-nots: worlds which function as two completely separate realms. But this tension is so old it barely registers. Neighborhoods are well-established, and natives know which streets not to walk down after dark. Certain sections are burned out: left in disarray following various incidents of social upheaval and never rebuilt. One thinks at once of both a genteel aristocracy and a poorly zoned industrial city, mixed together but never integrated.

Nova Roma serves as a legislative center, and all national policy for the U.C. is made here. It hosts foreign nationals and establishes international policy, adding a population of international diplomats into the mix. Intrigue is unparalleled here, though also understated. Glamour fits into its social fabric more easily than any other city save Paradiso. Evenings are gallant, over-dressed, and imperial. Parties feature many languages spoken simultaneously, and women are treated as exotic and well-cared-for pets.

On the other hand, Nova Roma also features a vast, undefined clerical staff: a blasé bunch riding the trains and buried in newspapers, oblivious to weather and local circumstance. Plaids and solids, canes and business ties, all mark these stenographers, court reporters, and desk clerks. There is no shortage of work here, but creativity and interpersonal relations are severely lacking. One never breaks the distinction between various classes. Centuries of intense social hierarchy

define the total lack of social mobility. No real upward mobility exists here, though some individuals cross over occasionally.

Authority comes from the top in Nova Roma, meted out with sharp squads of overly trained police wielding steel batons. The authorities are far more draconian here than in other cities. Order will be maintained at all cost, and the cops learn to perform their duties quickly and silently. As such, very little blue-collar crime takes place on the streets of Nova Roma. Muggings and purse snatchings are contained in the ghettos which isolate the haves from the have-nots. White-collar crime, on the other hand, flourishes in spades: a routine calling card for the well-heeled cad. Art theft is endemic, as is the trade of illegal animal skins and powders, rare oils, gems, silks, artifacts, and rare books.

These activities are often punctuated by more devastating crimes involving weapons, new technology, and top secret science experiments. Private firms pay handsomely to learn what the government is studying, hoping to render their work irrelevant by beating them to the marketplace. Foreign governments, too, do a brisk trade in secrets, and there are more than enough “private investors” who will to pay top dollar for a stolen rarity or a classified file. Nova Roma’s upscale criminals act as heartlessly and selfishly as one can imagine, operating from a largely privileged position, and rarely considering the consequences of their behavior. Tearing one of their number apart, robbing one another blind, committing fraud, perjury, blackmail, and even murder figure easily into a day’s work. And many of them cloak it in the façade of public service. They get up like everyone else, comb their hair, and head to the office, but once they arrive, they commit deeds to harrow the soul — all properly notarized and filed in triplicate. The least corrupt merely line their pockets with public funds. Others abuse the public trust in appalling displays of greed, selfishness, and Machiavellian skullduggery.

Nova Roma does not tolerate the use of magic in any way, shape, or form. They treat it as a dangerous and potentially apocalyptic weapon. Only the government should wield such power, they believe; individuals who seek to usurp it represent a menace to themselves and those around them. Any hint of magic use is punished through interrogation and murderously lengthy trials. The NLEB has specific orders to ruthlessly stamp out magic use, and most warlocks who operated here have either been imprisoned, or else they have relocated to friendlier cities. Not that that stops the government from speaking incessantly of the “warlock menace.” Ambitious politicians find ready scapegoats in magic practitioners, and the public is always willing to be whipped into a hateful anti-warlock frenzy by any representative with a sufficient soapbox. What magic use does exist is kept quiet and secretive, though the government itself is known to engage in sanctioned “experiments” featuring warlocks groomed on public funds.

Cunning legislators and an educated, charismatic populace best delineate the value system in Nova Roma. Fiercely self-centered and willing to toe the line just to get a little bit ahead, it forms an insular social bubble that sabotages efforts to establish a stronger national presence. Its population is largely self-serving, especially in the uppermost ranks. They place a premium on appearing upstanding and suave, but pass their

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time manipulating spreadsheets, clients, and each other in order to put themselves in better social standing. They offer you riches for your lifeblood without blinking an eye, and discard used-up relationships like last week's garbage. Insiders learn to beware that perfect vodka tonic and the smooth whispers accompanying it; it means they're about to lose everything they have.

Feminism has yet to permeate Nova Roma the way it has in other cities. The woman are far less likely to hold positions of authority... though the most elite strata is as equally balanced as anywhere. Lower authorities — judges, police, fire fighters, and the like — are still almost exclusively male, a sharp contrast from elsewhere in the Commonwealth. Women in Nova Roma tend to embody “traditional” female desirability, exuding a unique blend of softness and bluntness that men can't help but be attracted to. Cigarettes while playing tennis are as *de rigueur* as stockings and fashionable clothes. When the sun goes down, the evening gowns come out. Sequins are always in style, as are elbow-length gloves. The forgotten era of the chanteuse, the soft-spoken mistress, and the debutante's ball still reigns in Nova Roma... which makes it an ideal playground for world class female spies.

Blue-collar positions are still open for women, and a fair number can be found in heavy industry and other positions (though never as a foremen or managers, only as humble laborers). And such positions must never intrude upon more “traditional” duties of wife and homemaker. These women must be able to build a ship or a bridge with the best of them, and then go home to make dinner for five.

The men of Roma Nova, on the other hand, are more thoughtful than their counterparts in other cities. They keep their noses to the grindstone, their guns in their desks, and their alcohol in a filing cabinet next to a pile of embezzled cash. They are masculine without being macho: strong, but unafraid to show their emotions. Work comes first for them. Nova Roma stresses an intense work ethic rivaling that of Central City. Entrepreneurs and independent operators are frowned upon. Everyone joins a team, giving themselves over to a greater goal or organization. For men, this translates into doing a good job and doing it well; not necessarily being recognized for it. The habit of maintaining the status quo leads to easy bribes, enhancing the city's corruption and allowing breadwinners to pocket a little extra for their efforts.

Everyone here fits the description of a criminal in some sense of the word; everyone has a misguided value system with no social conscience to speak of. In Nova Roma, it's not thought of as “crime.” It's simply the way the world works. Thus, the elite use their privileged status to enrich their pocketbooks and not much else: the public money trough is often too much to resist. Instead of investing in humanitarian causes or the betterment of the nation, inhabitants of Nova Roma invest in games of mah-jong at the Black Hook Fishing Club, or a mistress in a posh downtown apartment. The National Legislature collects billions in tax revenues every year, which is spent on pork barrel projects, personal agendas, and fraud. It's led to a gradual decline in the national government's influence, as other parts of the country have turned away from them in favor of their own local problems. Consumed by longing for the power

it once held, Nova Roma can no longer recognize how much it has lost. Wrongdoing hovers on the edges of consciousness: spoken about in cliques, and discovered in notes and overheard phone calls. Backroom deals — the lifeblood of Nova Roma — are as widely accepted as they are unspoken.

In general, the city's traffic is leisurely if not slow. Vehicles still function as a luxury item, and the working class goes about their business in buses or trolley cars. The elite travel in secured limousines, and motorcades carrying the rich and powerful often bring the thoroughfare to a halt. People get about on foot with decent regularity — though they barely register compared to the walking patterns of New Edeners — and the streets are designed to allow pedestrian traffic as easily as automobiles. A sense of safety pervades the entire city, but so too does a sense of unease. Many streets are unlit and unattended to, carrying the atmosphere of a blackout. Curtains are often drawn, even in wealthy neighborhoods. No one ventures out, save on specific business, and even then, they hurry to their destination without lingering. The riverfront climate ensures plenty of muggy days and nights which keep folks indoors or close to protective covering. And everywhere, there is a constant sense of scrutiny. Someone is watching, paying attention, and noticing all the little secrets that you're trying desperately to hide. That's the price of order, and the people of Nova Roma seem prepared to pay it.

CRIME

The city's criminal activity goes down in the dark. The newspapers only report the most mundane offenses: grocery store lootings, lost wallets, perhaps a murder once or twice a year just to keep people from growing suspicious at all the silence. In effect, most of the criminal activity here is conducted by legitimate sources, who don't consider what they do as crime. Everything stays silent and out of sight; no one wishes to air any dirty laundry for fear of exposing themselves. Illegal activity blends with genuine business until the two are almost indistinguishable. Intrigue, contraband, and political sabotage are the order of the day. The diplomatic community with its inherent privileges allows much to go on beneath the radar. Diplomats and politicians need not adhere to the laws of the land. A flash of their passport gives them the go ahead, and the authorities know better than to ask questions. A thriving stolen documents market — especially those relating to state and military secrets as well as advances in the medical field — makes the acquisition of such items lucrative. In addition, a lively trade in exotic merchandise flourishes: jewels, silks, oils, skins, illegal substances, and the like, all purchased and designed to make one's home or dinner party the talk of the town for weeks and months to come.

Organized crime, even on the street gang level, rarely succeeds here. The authorities take great pains to stamp out such activities, and law-breakers hoping to make a career out of their malfeasance can do much better in almost any other city. The individual criminal or enterprising long operative, hop-

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ing to engage in larceny or second-story robbery, might set up shop in Nova Roma, but they are rare. Talented amateurs can be as successful here as the pros. What otherwise upstanding bureaucrat hasn't secretly dreamed of absconding with that all-important file, and then selling it to the highest bidder? In Nova Roma, those dreams become reality far too often. Trade of military secrets is prominent, since many military institutions have headquarters here. Opportunities to profit from selling secrets and for exposing covert operations prosper; the number of foreign diplomats, rival units competing for funding, and private businesses hoping to exploit sensitive data is almost beyond counting. A day doesn't go by when a soldier, general, sergeant-at-arms, or infantryman doesn't commit some kind of fraud. The money is addictive, but so too is the danger associated with such activities. With no war on and the military largely idle, nothing equals the classified document trade to spice up a boring assignment.

Biological contraband emerges as an equally profitable enterprise: germs and secret experiments on the human body fetch a high price in certain quarters. Gaunts and prisoners have a way of disappearing in Nova Roma, secretly abducted and exposed to any number of awful treatments from ambitious chemists and surgeons hoping to make a name for themselves in the right circles. Others are claimed by the government itself, which violates its own rules of due process in the name of protecting the U.C. from future threats. Such incidents are uncommon to be sure, and limited to those who won't be missed, but the fact that they take place at all makes a lie of the values the Commonwealth supposedly holds so dear. The occasional prisoner who escapes the confines of these laboratories readily confirms their mistreatment to those willing to listen.

More traditional forms of contraband abound here as well, establishing a vigorous trade in stolen and smuggled goods. Quiet bars and other hidden venues make for good hand-off locations, and the ever-rotating cycle of foreign diplomats ensures that there will always be more customers. Goods exchanged range from silk kimonos to rare paintings, mail-order brides, exotic spices, and even wild animals. These salacious objects generate enormous prestige for those willing to risk their standing to get them, especially the wives and other family members protected by the immunity clauses granted to them by their diplomatic relatives. The nightclubs which house these operations sparkle and shine — in strong contrast to the dark streets of downtown Nova Roma, with their monotone silence. Small wonder that the market for contraband is so successful. It's an outlet for passion in a city stifled by decorum.

Untrustworthy guests create troubling circumstances, since almost every venue in this city hosts a party or gathering of some sort. Each get-together is fraught with gate crashers, nefariously charming stand-ins, and desperate characters difficult to distinguish from the regular crowd. The fountains, the servants, the exotic lighting and live music, the extensive flourishing gardens, the accents, all make for a lush, disarming environment: it's easier just to shut up and have a good time rather than call attention to the strange young man rifling through the desk. Thus, only the most experienced and well-trained security operatives can ferret out thieves in this

environment. And the police can do little to prevent such crime; they can only clean up the mess afterwards and hope that the perpetrator left enough of a trail to follow.

Women run a large number of the crime schemes here, since their male counterparts are burdened by their heavily bureaucratized work lives. They command the parties, soirées, opera nights, balls, and other black tie functions that govern the political scene in Nova Roma. In another city, they might have been call girls, or scheming femme fatales. Here, they form a class all their own: a small industry of cleverly orchestrated sales and purchases gleaned from a thousand rifled safes or stolen handbags. They operate largely without accountability — no one wants to expose such a profitable enterprise — which gives them carte blanche to control larger more corrupt types of ventures. They're always willing to pay a good thief for filched goods, or pad a clerk's pension in exchange for a few misplaced files. The police refer to them simply as "Moniques," inhabiting a lost world of sophisticated courtship where they make the rules. In truth, they aren't nearly so organized enough to merit their own name. They're more of a loose class of profiteers, simply filling a niche in Nova Roma's criminal economy.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Given the nature of crime in Nova Roma, law enforcement takes many forms: there is a branch for every classification, and academies to train each type of special operator. Law enforcement tends to run operations with little surveillance. Checks and balances do not exist in the system as it currently exists. The National Law Enforcement Bureau calls the shots in Nova Roma, reducing the local authorities to mere extensions of their whim. Every large-scale operation must gain NLEB approval, and local police are often reduced to walking beats or maintaining order during large public events.

The NLEB itself has an entire division dedicated to Nova Roma, which is itself divided into several smaller units detailed below. Most are named after the room at NLEB Headquarters which houses their offices: drab, numerical rotations which have transformed through use into something more colorful. (More on the NLEB as a whole will appear in the upcoming *Warlocks and Detectives* sourcebook.)

MOVE8

MoVe8 (MV8) works to track contraband traffic among the Foreign Service elite and their U.C. counterparts. Trained as linguists and dandies, these operatives permeate each and every social gathering from cocktail parties to state dinners in search of smugglers and high-class thieves. For the most part they look out for the thousands of handoffs that take place in these chaotic environments, and to I.D. key players in the illicit trade. If it weren't for the ambiance and the natural allure of these parties, little contraband-based crime could exist. Those caught by MoVe8 are usually forced to plea bargain, fingering

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their accomplices in exchange for immunity from their shady activities. Members of MoVe8 are quiet, rigorously trained, and approach their duties with piety. In their spare time they participate in school enrichment services, neighborhood watch programs, and the like. The NLEB likes to cite them as sterling examples of such institutions.

THE CRYSTAL BALL SQUAD

Nova Roma's crystal ball squad has been more or less absorbed into the NLEB, consisting of government-trained warlocks working specifically to hunt down others of their kind. They specialize in surveillance and countermeasures, blending in with the populace until sorcery rears its ugly head. In the darkest hours of the night, they wait in phone booths and hotel lobbies. In inconspicuous servant's clothes, they serve drinks in country manors. They tend storefronts throughout the night, and position themselves in city parks and school yards, prepared to retaliate in strong measure against the first sign of sorcery. As might be expected, they don't exhibit the brutality of other branches of the law enforcement community, though it has more to do with their effectiveness in

hunting down other warlocks than any proclivities on their part. Indeed, so successful have they been in apprehending rogue warlocks that much of their time is spent honing their technique, assisting other government branches in sorcerous research, or simply existing in their undercover roles, waiting for the next criminal magic user to crop up.

THE FLYEBYES

The FlyeByes (FB12) represent the most traditional branch of the NLEB. Most of them are ex-soldiers, veterans of the war who can't live without the sound hierarchy of a military operation. They patrol the ports, arrest petty thieves and arsonists, and even direct traffic if called upon. They also serve as liaisons between the Bureau and the Nova Roma Police Department, facilitating various requests and making sure the uniformed cops don't feel too bent out of shape. Most of its members are dull and bureaucratic. They do their job with colorless efficiency and pay close attention to the clock. Though they serve their purpose well, this group is not cut out to recognize the intrigue that cloaks most of Nova Roma's criminal activity... which is probably just as well.

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THE MAHJUNGS

The MahJungs (MJ3) work to put an end to the commerce of military secrets. They man the airports and the waterways, the bus stops and the train stations in an effort to intercept any classified military information: stolen, mishandled, or misappropriated. As such, they work closely with the U.C. military police, and have many agents posing as officers at various bases. They consist mainly of ex-engineers, and have proven very adept at unraveling means in which documents can be hidden or moved in secret. An office pool exists to reward those who can come up with new ways of smuggling military contraband.

THE WORMS

An increase in medical crimes — biological research, illegally-manufactured germs, etc. — following the war prompted the establishment of the WorMs (WM7), a group of scientist-manqués who gave up their careers to help prevent the spread of biological contraband. Since this is a new concern in Nova Roma, its members have been given far too much leeway where their power is concerned. With access to countless state secrets and biochemical formulas, they could easily instigate widespread chaos should they so choose. Even a coup would be within their reach, provided they had access to the right people. Luckily, none of their ambitions have yet reached very high, so concerned are they with their vials and formulae. The WorMs also handle incidental medical crimes, such as organ harvesting and back-alley surgery, though such crimes are far less important than the unit's primary focus.

Beneath them, the Nova Roma Police Department fulfills all of the usual duties of their ilk: largely limited to street crime, keeping the gaunt slums in line, and making a show of strength when required. Nova Roma cops are often semi-competent: good at following orders and not much else. Their counterparts in other cities often look down on them, and the NLEB routinely steps in when a case becomes too important to "risk" their attention. Despite that, they rarely complain. The pay is good and the pension fund has grown fat with public taxes. Life for them is surprisingly easy, so long as they keep quiet and do as they're told.

There is one other law-enforcement group in Nova Roma worth mentioning. They call themselves Old Dogs, a consortium of socially conservative citizen activists who would like to put an end to any questionable social behaviors within the city they love. They are unarmed but can be quite annoying: always on the lookout for anything aberrant. They see themselves as preservationists, maintaining Nova Roma's elevated cultural milieu. They keep strict notes on the goings on at both official and non-official social events, which they dutifully turn over to the police for enforcement. Though it is hard to take their authority seriously, they can be quite a nuisance to clandestine call girls, thieves, and those involved in high-level secrets trade. They have a knack for interrupting the best-laid plans with their pious inquiries, and the police often use them as de facto informants. Quite a few members of Nova Roma's criminal echelons would love to see them close up shop.

NEIGHBORHOODS

MACLAYNE

Contemporary and posh, this planned community is designated for the sacredly ambitious. You must be interviewed and are subject to an extensive background check before you may purchase real estate here. It's all about appearances: houses painted to code (down to the mailboxes), driveways and parking lots following strictly defined parameters, and shopping, swim lessons, and the thriving boutique commerce rigidly pursuing conformity in the same manner as one's neighbors. Threaded with bike paths that run along a small creek between the housing developments and the bluffs above the Carlisle River, MacLayne attracts elite families interested in maintaining their privileged status.

Intermittent hot springs have been corralled and now serve as bathhouses for those who can afford membership. The baths are a mainstay of gossip and community networking, and a favorite venue for political bosses looking to talk turkey. For the most part, the baths are frequented by the over- forty crowd who conduct their love affairs here in decent seclusion. The baths are really the only extant public domain for decadence in this town.

Most people here work for the STAR departments — the various branches of the U.C. military which are headquartered nearby. They love stability and work hard to improve their stats among their peers. It's dog-eat-dog in this suburb. Not a single bowling alley can be found here for a rainy night game or nor a bookstore catering to the intellectually curious. Wedding shops boom, however, as do specialty stores catering to all manner of upscale whims. Restaurants require not only a reservation well in advance but also a strict dress code (usually enforced by polite but insistent gaunts on the payroll). Women must cover their legs and wear a hat, while men must always wear a sport jacket and tie.

STAR employees relish MacLayne's residential qualities: the good schools, the parks, the buses, and the library system which adds so much to their sense of security. And such security naturally lends itself to boldness — often of the extralegal kind. One in five STAR employees is involved in some kind of contraband activity. Gardeners, chambermaids and garbage men act as willing go-betweens, passing material out of the suburb to contacts closer to the center of Nova Roma. They receive a little extra bonus with their paycheck, and the residents of MacLayne can go on pretending that theirs is a pure and pristine lifestyle.

1) STAR MacLayne

This is essentially the heart of the U.C. military. Each branch of the service has representatives in residence here, confirming a complete matrix of personalities clustered in the confines of a glorified barracks known as STAR MacLayne. The colossal building makes an excellent target for those hoping to see the city's ever-brewing top level corruption in action. Although most essential military activity takes place elsewhere, this building houses a most impressive brain trust.

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Obsessed with keeping the peace, these military types perpetrate a surprisingly wide range of activities in pursuit of their goals. They're also extremely diverse, contrary to the "tightly-wound militant" reputation which they have garnered. You can't really pigeonhole someone who works with STAR because they have pulled people from all walks of life.

The building is bigger than it should be given its external appearance. Decorated in imported black-and-white ceramic tile, with small cylindrical windows rimming the ceiling, it has an impenetrable (if not outright alien) look to it, especially on foggy nights. If you ever had doubts about the government, one look at the STAR headquarters will confirm your worst suspicions: it can't be anything but duplicitous. Surrounded by a decorative moat, the building comes across as xenophobic and grim. In order to maintain a good relationship with the public, STAR has paddleboats available for employees to borrow at their leisure. It lends the moats an aspect of the ridiculous, but does little to alter the building's imposing reputation. Visitors are rarely allowed inside of STAR, and employees must sign security documents preventing them from discussing their work.

Department of Strategy

This arm of STAR serves mostly to keep track of scientific institutions and laboratories headquartered in Nova Roma. The politicians in the National Dome are wary of the scientific method, due to its nebulous connection to magic and warlocks, but what research does go on is handled here. Everything from weapons testing to war game coordination to the creation of government-sponsored warlocks falls under the domain of the Department of Strategy. A brigade of dull public servants manages the ways and means of laboratories scattered throughout the city, the countryside, and inside the various academic institutions. According to the information they file, the scientific agenda of the U.C. proceeds without a hitch. Projects contracted by the government are easy to identify such as the planetary or the atmospheric research projects, biomedical experiments, arms development, technological studies, and those projects having to do with agronomy and agriculture.

Department of Tactics

This arm of STAR is by far the largest: responsible for dealing with any manner of crisis from hurricanes to air raids to threats to the political operating system. The employees figure among the more elite compared with the majority of those who work for Strategy, since they coordinate responsibilities and resources on a broader scale and their resources are more all-encompassing. They must maintain a variety of monitoring devices, as well as supply military bases, OK promotions, and manage the structure of the three branches of the military (army, navy, and army air corps). In addition, they must make sure all pertinent military data is kept current and accessible. Many who work in the Tactics bureau were engineers or meteorologists at one time, but joined STAR as a patriotic gesture. They toe the line without fail and take their work morosely seriously. Put a few drinks into them, however, and they reveal an ironic sense of humor about the military bureaucracy, and the duplicitous realities of life in Nova Roma

Department of Access

This arm of STAR keeps track of who comes and goes from the U.C., and monitors its borders for possible attack. Access workers are low key, but they possess a well-developed sense of paranoia that matches their work well. They cannot arrest people, but they file reports which go to the NLEB. Illegal immigrants, foreign smuggling, political insurgents, and nebulous "external military threats" all fall into their jurisdiction, and they've developed quite a few monitoring techniques which violate the nation's dearly held right to privacy. It seems a bit of joke to the employees... so long as they aren't the ones being monitored. They tend to be very sharp, however — smarter than other STAR employees — and their approach betrays a sort of off-hand casualness that infuriates the more spit-and-polish elements of the military.

Department of Radar

This arm of STAR is given to the technicalities associated with navigating the rivers and oceans of the U.C., and with monitoring the border. These employees maintain and upgrade the equipment necessary to keep the ports open and safe for trade. They also serve as a security agency, patrol the warehouses and neighborhoods near the nation's docks, and work with the Department of Access to track inbound traffic. This work looks more like an outdoor job than a pencil pushing one. Its employees are willing to get their hands dirty, and can often be found in the field, coordinating rescue activities or setting up new meteorological equipment.

Typical Security Guard

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 8, Build 7, Gut 6, Moxie 3, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 5, Drive (Car, Truck) 4, Engineering 2, Evasion 5, Firearms 6, Intimidation 6, Melee 7, Perception 7.

Backgrounds: Alert, Huge, Marksmanship.

Profession: Officer of the Law 1, Street Tough 1.

Typical STAR Employee

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 8, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 9, Demolitions 5, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Engineering 7, Etiquette 3, Evasion 5, Firearms 4, Lore (Area of Expertise) 9, Medicine 3, Perception 5, Puzzles 7.

Backgrounds: Education, Prodigy, Wise.

Profession: Academic 2.

2) Smiling Mike's Gas Station

The place for cigarettes, pop, a newspaper, and milk in the neighborhood is this lower-end service station and market where information changes hands under the flashing green neon sign for Smiling Mike's Gas. The gas station attendants tend to be sleepy, and a little off key: very helpful given cer-

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tain kinds of deals that need to be made here on the edges of MacLayne. You can count on a fair degree of anonymity here. The station's owner, Mike Lawler, doesn't ask questions and lets his customers be. The parking lot is unlit, unpaved and borders a forest stretching out into the countryside around Nova Roma. In the summers you can barely carry on a conversation above the deafening din of the insects. In the winter, the snow and the mud keep the uptight people with their fancy automobiles far away. It's really too *déclassé* a joint for most MacLayne folks to frequent except in an emergency.

As a result, it's readily used for all manner of clandestine activities. MacLayne residents use it as a meeting point to transfer files and other sensitive documents (the gardeners and other servants can easily mask such meetings as a trip to pick up cigarettes) while the area's remote locale makes it ideal for any conversation that one wishes to go unrecorded. Even a few warlocks come out here to practice, hidden by the trees of the forest and free of intrusion from the NLEB. Smiling Mike's happily to caters to all of them. After all, they're paying and without the likes of them, it would probably go out of business.

Typical Furtive Warlock

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 7, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 3, Electricity 5, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 5, Lore (Magic Theory) 6, Perception 6, Sleight of Hand 6, Stealth 7, Streetwise 3, Tensile Energy 4.

Backgrounds: Education, Fanaticism, Magical Aptitude.

Profession: Rogue Scientist 1.

3) Glenn Hellen Park

This park lies in the midst of the suburb but also affords a great deal of privacy. It's a decent meeting place if you want to be more exposed; one can't sneak up on someone in Glenn Hellen. The landscaping includes flowering trees and shrubs, lilac bushes, and thick foliage arranged in a tangle that creates good places to hide in the summertime. It's more barren in the winter, when the flora subsides, but even then it attracts more than its share of visitors.

When unlawful activity takes place in Glenn Hellen, it does so under the guise of extreme civility. The murderers work silently, the victims poisoned rather than shot through the head. Huge amounts of money pass between the haves and the have-nots here, buying and selling all manner of unspeakable services. Many criminals unofficially make their headquarters here in the summer (moving down near the river in the winter), arranging meetings and concluding deals. This is the place to come if you're in the market for recreational drugs, for a mercenary or bodyguard, for a magic spellbook, or for a rare imported ointment. All that matters is the timing.

In recent months, a fair number of unsuspecting STAR employees have been whisked away during walks in this park, interrogated in undisclosed locations and returned here by invisible means. Sometimes their personalities and point of view have been strangely altered: as if they've been emptied of their experiences and their every corner of consciousness has been thoroughly examined. They have no recollection of their abduction, and though they often show signs of physical torment, they can't put their finger on any details. Many of them would be unaware that anything was amiss if it weren't for the frantic efforts of their loved ones.

Victims of these kidnappings have begun to recognize each other recently. Invisible pain binds them together like a halo — a humming that they can't ignore. They have begun gathering at each other's houses, to try to iron out the details of their capture and release, but thus far, they have been unable to break through the blocks in their memories. They take comfort in each other, however, for the presence of others in the same situation assures them that they are not crazy.

Typical Civil Ne'er-do-Well

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 7, Moxie 6, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 7, Brawl 7, Bureaucracy 5, Contortions 5, Craft (Poison) 5, Disguise 8, Etiquette 7, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 6, Perception 6, Pick Lock 7, Sleight of Hand 8, Stealth 8, Streetwise 6.

Backgrounds: Education, Marksmanship, Rugged.

Profession: Con Artist 1, Investigator 1, Thief 1.

4) Harvard's Bridge & Parkway

Harvard's Bridge connects MacLayne to the center of Nova Roma... or separates it, depending on your point of view. The political types dominate the goings on downtown while MacLayne is the domain of the military strategists and intellectuals. The bridge serves as visual demarcation of these two cultures, giving each party the opportunity to fully develop its own community without threat of competition or discrimination. Built from limestone quarried from the Bannion Mountains, the bridge is an architectural delight, seamlessly joining the two banks of the river in a symphonic design. The Parkway that leads up to it is wide and old-fashioned, constructed in the early days before concrete was used. There is more limestone here than in any other place in the city. The parkway in and of itself gets rather dingy, but offers an impressive view of the cityscape surrounding it. Taken together, the bridge and parkway represent the symbolic union of some of the best qualities of Nova Roma: an overt desire for fairness or equilibrium, and the value of a common effort. In these turbulent political times, the essence of that message has been lost on the tens of thousands of commuters who pass over its byways each day.

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5) The Hammond Mansion

Home to an entire legacy of politicians, this majestic but cozy setting serves as the home of one Molly Hammond, whose ten children have all become synonymous with Nova Roman politics. This family, with its charming lifestyle and old-fashioned ways, was always in the forefront of the city's culture. Their successes and failures mirrored that of Nova Roma, and of an entire generation who believed in their idealistic speeches. The Hammond children represented what everyone hoped to achieve for themselves, as well as embodying the great tragedies that mark every human life. When a Hammond died, the Commonwealth mourned the loss of their brightest, put the body in state, and lit an eternal flame in honor of such selfless sacrifice. When a Hammond was scandalized, it felt as if the entire nation lost a piece of its innocence. When a Hammond gave birth, all was forgiven, meaning returned to everyday existence, and hope and exaltation were resurrected from the dead. Molly Hammond became the prototype of motherhood, she who would bear the grief of an entire Commonwealth and who would always keep hope alive in her heart. Who could ask for more than what this family had given: a sense of values in a time bereft of them?

The truth, of course, is much darker, though not as sinister as it might be elsewhere in the Commonwealth. The family has made its share of enemies over the years, and buried more than its share of skeletons in the closet. Noblesse oblige gives the Hammonds a dark sense of entitlement, and younger members are inclined to wild behavior before settling down to the political careers for which they have been bred. But their good deeds outweigh their bad ones more often than not, and if they have been compromised, then at least they have bought something with it that the entire Commonwealth can benefit from. The Hammonds are the U.C.'s light, and they make good on that as best they can... even in those moments when necessity forces them to walk in darkness.

Their homestead symbolizes a world where justice and wisdom arise co-dependently even if born of confusion and difficulty. The mansion bears within its stones the magic that can be evoked from good deeds, and the value of believing in a brighter future. It plays host to stump speeches and political rallies of all sorts, and Molly Hammond refuses to let it be monopolized by any one party. The wide lawn can fit several hundred people in comfort, and the large estate beyond it makes a perfect backdrop for photo opportunities. A small staff of NLEB agents — generously assigned by the national government — makes sure that Molly's beloved homestead remains safe and secure.

Molly Hammond, Dowager -
Queen of Nova Roma

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 8, Moxie 8, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Bureaucracy 4, Etiquette 10, Evasion 3, Lore (Nova Roma Society) 10, Perception 8, Perform (Piano) 6.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Lucky, Small.

Profession: Politician 1, Wealthy 3.

6) Metro Land Fun Faire

Candy apples. Candy floss. Candied popcorn. If you can imagine eating it, an entrepreneur at Metro Land will doubtless have already coated it in sugar or fried it beyond recognition. The quiet suburb of Brightland, nestled in the patchwork farmland in the rolling hills beyond MacLayne, became an overnight sensation three years ago when they opened the Metro Land Fun Faire to coincide with the holiday weekends in the big city. Pitch 'n' Toss, pie-eating contests, coconut shies with cheap but cheerful prizes, and strongman games filling the air with the triumphant ringing of a tinny bell gave the city folks something they felt they were lacking — good, clean fun. Over the next two years, Metro Land found itself open more and more frequently, until the Town Council took a vote to leave it open permanently. Brightland became more prosperous every time the big holidays hit, and still found itself solvent on the weekends. An extra platform was built on the train station, and a bus service was instituted from there to Metro Land. Since they found that they had the sole pass for clean living and honest, nostalgic fun for the people of Nova Roma, the Fun Faire has since become the suburb's financial right arm.

Of course, nothing is ever simple, and while Metro Land goes from strength to tacky strength, its influence encroaches into the town itself. Some look out on a Brightland changed in the space of a year — changed into a tawdry caricature of itself — and they don't like it. Recently, sinister things have been happening at Metro Land. Ropes are found to be weak. A stall burned down late one night, almost killing the owner as he struggled to put out the blaze. Blackie, one of the prize pigs in the popular pig races, was found butchered in his pen. Metro Land is living under the threat of the next unpleasant incident and the people of Brightland are torn between the terror of something bad happening to their cash cow and the terror of the people of Nova Roma finding out. A prestigious detective firm has been brought in, but only to keep the "accidents" away from the public eye, as well as covering up the Faire's own involvement. If the people of Brightland don't find out what's been happening in their amusement park, Metro Land may suffer an accident they may not be able to hush up.

The Phantom of the Faire

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 8, Moxie 4, Smoothness 8.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 7, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 7, Contortions 5, Demolitions 7, Disguise 7, Drive (Car, Light Aircraft) 5, Engineering 4, Etiquette 5, Evasion 6, Firearms 3, Perception 5, Sleight of Hand 6, Stealth 8, Tensile Energy 7.

Backgrounds: Acrobatic, Education, Lucky.

Profession: Politician 1, Rogue Scientist 1, Wealthy 1.

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EAST HAVEN

Though cozy in name, East Haven has a reputation as a borough with a mean core. The condition of the buildings here (among the oldest and most dilapidated in the city) suffered in the fires of recent riots, resulting in a full-scale show of force by local authorities. Arson destroyed an entire section of the neighborhood, the cause of which has yet to be officially determined. Territorial disputes ensure difficult relationships between gaunts and their neighbors, though the locals, as usual, are tight-lipped about it. Housing issues should not disrupt the community the way they do, but certain segments of East Haven are sacred to certain groups, who grow resentful when interlopers enter their space.

Gentrification has not taken place here in large part due to the thick presence of so many ghosts and bitter memories. Murders are reported every day and armed robbery is common: it's a desperate situation for many. Most choose to blame the gaunts, who were shuffled here en masse when the city began to formally segregate them. In truth, it was always a grim place, which was one of the reasons why the city chose it for the gaunts. Indeed, the influx of new residents has qualified the area for public funds under Nova Roma's Byzantine zoning laws, leading to a few precious creature comforts. For all its troubles, it still has its share of outdoor parks and swimming pools. Most of the residences are brick row houses, crowded beyond their capacity, but still a better deal than most in other gaunt districts. Neighbors are in close contact with one another, and, as is typical with gaunts, a strong sense of community has developed over the years. And unlike the bland sterility of MacLayne, East Haven has a genuine soul that endures beneath the crime and dilapidation.

7) East Haven Library

Part of the charm of East Haven ("charm" being a relative term, of course) is the East Haven Library on East Street. Donated by Marvin von Treer and his wife Lucretia, the building itself catalogues every variety of book or periodical. The books are stacked on shelves that rise up out of the floor for hundreds of feet. A set of glass elevators takes the visitor to the section of the stacks as required. Iron lattice divides the shelves into floors — quite stable despite their rickety appearance. Although one cannot effectively browse here, the gentle sounds of the elevators rising into the sky are at once pastoral and sleek, soothing to those conducting their research.

East Haven Library houses the most selective collection of early scientific documents in the U.C., an open secret which has helped solidify its reputation. Though it was meant to serve as a neighborhood library, it has become the favorite domain of hacks on the make for scientific data... as well as a few NLEB agents hoping to spot any curious warlocks. The obscure location ensures anonymity for the writers and amateur scientists who frequent it, and as valuable as the documents are, they hold no concrete magical knowledge — leaving the place safe from government crackdown. Living in East Haven is palatable in part because of this excellent resource.

Typical NLEB Plant

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 5, Build 6, Gut 8, Moxie 5, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 7, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 5, Disguise 5, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 5, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 8, Firearms 6, Lore (Physics) 8, Medicine 4, Perception 8, Pick Lock 5, Stealth 6, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Acrobatic, Education.

Profession: Con Artist 1, Officer of the Law 1.

8) No Politics Bar

The bluntly named No Politics is a smoky, dimly lit hangout for young government employees: rowdy and intellectually active. The owner — a retired leftist Assemblyman named Jack Brockhurst — opened the bar as a way to encourage freedom of expression. Countless benefit performances have been held here, championing any number of causes, and the open mike serves as a stump-speech-in-training for young politicians of every variety. This place remains under fierce observation by the NLEB, who keep careful tabs on the regular customers. It's a silly endeavor, since no one here has broken any laws, and the real criminals are nowhere to be found (they ply the streets, or else have cushy jobs in the government). The No Politics serves only earnest, naïve folk with a propensity for very minor recreational drug use: hardly the types to start a political revolt, no matter how fiery their rhetoric.

Typical Idealist

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 5, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 7, Lore (Politics) 6, Perception 4, Perform (Oratory) 7, Puzzles 6, Sport (Swimming) 6, Throwing 5.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Education, Lucky.

Profession: Academic 1, Con Artist 1.

9) Perles Before Wines

Cliché and classy in one fell swoop, irresistible to those in the right frame of mind, the domain of Rachel O'Neill (see page 80) is equal parts restaurant and social club. A chanteuse of extraordinary proportions, she sings a lullaby with the same passion she might render a ballad. Her presence permeates the air of this place like a perfume. After a while, female patrons of Perles Before Wines even begin to dress like the matron — loose-fitting gloves, tight slips, and nightdresses in blue, black, or white. And gaunts are as welcome here as normals. Rachel doesn't approve of anyone being denied her charms, and the clientele generally behave themselves no matter who they're rubbing shoulders with.

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Perles offers an assortment of foods and wines, though dishes tend toward hors d'oeuvres rather than anything more sophisticated. Its smoky interior borders on the kitsch, but Rachel's voice has a power and honesty that makes one forget the painted-on ambiance. Indeed, the music and the atmosphere blend delightfully with one another, creating an zeitgeist where any cheap floozy or two-bit hustler can be transformed into paragons of idealism. The place is popular with bureaucrats, who enjoy the "danger" of crossing into East Haven without having to actually brave the mean streets, and Rachel turns a tidy profit with her voice and the practiced application of false sentiment. Perles may be a ridiculous dream, but it's one even the hardest hearts have a tough time denying.

Typical Patron

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 5, Athletics 6, Brawl 5, Disguise 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 5, Firearms 4, Perception 5, Pick Lock 6, Sleight of Hand 8, Stealth 5, Streetwise 6.

Backgrounds: Alert, Lucky, Rugged.

Profession: Thief 1.

THE GREENSLEAVES

The Greensleaves, which borders on the National Dome and St. Bernard's Academy of the Political Sciences is a well-established but quiet neighborhood. In the springtime, when the trees flower, it has inspired many visitors with its natural beauty. The neighborhood stretches along the river thus providing a gorgeous view of the water. Most of the people who own property here have done so for a while. The latecomer won't have much luck buying his way into this neighborhood. Many residents keep boats moored at docks on the river. Numerous Praetors and Assemblymen make their homes here, as do political appointees to various and sundry posts.

The proximity of the Greensleaves to downtown institutions ensures good protection from riff-raff; private bodyguards are a prominent fixture, and property owners hire lackeys whose sole duty is to attend to the well-being of this area and its residents. A security firm known as the Myhrrmen offers private justice to those who can afford it, and many members of the community hire them to provide for their safety. They maintain a well-appointed barracks down by the riverfront, along with a barn, a motor pool, and an extensive gymnasium for keeping in shape. Its members are thugs made good, glorified leg-breakers who have traded in their pool cues for neat uniforms and cushy jobs. But the Greensleaves appreciates them, and for all their uncouth back-



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grounds, they make a great deal of money protecting the locals from their fears. Someone looking for a quiet place to hide, or an inroad as a bodyguard or security consultant would do well to send them a resume.

The climate of Greensleaves closely matches that of the city as a whole. A polished and refined surface masks the sad potential for underhanded duplicity, regret, and loss. Fear of change palpates among the residents, coupled with a fair helping of paranoia. Unfinished business reeks in the air like garbage: the fear that misdeeds of the past may finally be gaining ground. So the residents disappear into their garden parties, add another room on the house, and laugh with their neighbors, using nonchalance to disguise the fearful pits of their eyes.

The neighborhood fosters an intense behavior code: complex, archaic, and the subject of off-color jokes. All manner of ordinances have been instituted to keep folks in line, and people who violate them quickly find themselves shunned by their status-conscious neighbors. Many of the homes here evoke haunting memories, though of who or what a viewer can never quite say. When one enters the gates that announce the neighborhood, amnesia settles in, and when one leaves, the recollections are the stuff of dreams. A hazy ennui pervades every aspect of life here, calcified by elevated expectations and limited by the strict social code which binds every resident. Crimes take place, as they do anywhere, but they're rarely prosecuted or reported. More likely, a perpetrator will merely dispose of the evidence, grease a few wheels at the NLEB, and arrange for the file to disappear. The river can dispose of a great deal of evidence (or at least move it downstream), and blanket investigations rarely penetrate the confines of Greensleaves. Only the criminal's guilt remains, framed by a white picket fence and slowly eating away at what's left of his or her soul.

10) St. Bernard Academy of the Political Sciences

This university has given birth to a generation of quick-witted men and women with diverse talents. Entrance exams have a prohibitively difficult reputation, resulting in a highly selective group of students with strong analytical and verbal skills. St. Bernard graduates go on to hold top-level positions in the government and military. You can spot them from miles away in their khaki or dark blue suits, out for lunch or a snack in the city's countless restaurants. Few St. Bernard graduates move far, since the hallowed streets of Nova Roma provide all of the political potential they could possibly hope for. Those who have tried to work from more remote locations find themselves out of the loop and too far away to benefit from their prestigious alma mater.



Most of the professors at St. Bernard's are involved with government and military affairs, in addition to their academic commitments. They are the cornerstones when it comes to determining the next generation of strategists (both political and military) and are an excellent source of information (and misinformation) about current affairs in the National Legislature. Most of them have written seminal texts in their fields, and a great swirl of gossip surrounds their personal lives due to their extensive influence on the halls of power. It's difficult to parse this group — the professors here are as versed in the game as the canniest Praetor — but if any bright underling can detect who's really at the head of the pecking order, who to trust, and who can make you disappear with a quick phone call to a well-placed alum, then he has the city by the throat.

St. Bernard avoided the warlock purge that took place at many of the city's other universities, mostly because its science classes are very mundane and unexceptional. Accordingly, its reputation has never suffered, and Nova Roma residents look upon it fondly as a place of learning untainted by "those" people. While other universities struggle to restore their reputation under the watchful eyes of the NLEB, St. Bernard continues on its way, forging the politicians of the future and collecting a hefty fee for the service.

Typical Professor

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 8, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 10, Drive (Car) 2, Etiquette 5, Evasion 3, Fast Talk 5, Forgery 4, Lore (Politics) 10, Lore (History) 8, Perception 5, Puzzles 7.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Education, Wise.

Profession: Academic 2, Politician 1.

11) Bernardine Greenes

The St. Bernard campus sits on the banks of the Centennial River, a major waterway that sees more than its share of clandestine activity. The extensive lawns between it and the buildings of the university are well-known and beloved, open to the public and site of numerous weddings, parties, and memorial services. A day doesn't go by when there isn't a report in the society column enumerating the dignitaries present at a party on the St. Bernardine Greenes. A beautiful granite courtyard forms the centerpiece of the area, allowing a classic and appealing layout for any event. And with so many events taking place, the Greenes plays host to more than its share of intrigue. Fatal deals have been brokered over cocktails at a wedding reception, and hand-offs between rival political factions can be disguised as a simple after-party rendezvous. So much is left unsaid during these events that guests often wonder what really happened there. Transformed and transported by the music, the theatrical lighting, the dancing, the service, and the sparkling expanse of the river, one's customary defenses diminish, allowing for all sorts of sophisticated mischief to bubble up between the lines.

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Typical Party-Goer

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 7, Etiquette 9, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 5, Firearms 7, Intimidation 6, Lore (Politics) 8, Perception 3, Puzzles 4.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Loyal Retainer, Lucky.

Profession: Politician 1, Wealthy 1.

12) Nova Roma Beacon

The *Beacon* is generally considered a newspaper of worldly intent, but only middling impact. Readership falls among society's outsiders, who pick it up for a point of view outside mainstream rags like the *Nova Roma Times* or the *National Pulse*. It also features surprisingly good journalism. Everyone loves the witty and informative columns written by Candace Coy (otherwise known as Kit the Cat), who blends political humor with surprisingly nasty insight. Those who keep up with her column know how to read between the lines and get a good look at the next potential scandal brewing beneath the Nova Roma social scene. The offices of the *Beacon* are downtown in a nicely construed neighborhood near St. Bernard's so the staff has good access to the goings on from their windows which look out onto the streets.

Candace Coy, Kit The Cat

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 8, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Bureaucracy 7, Craft (Writer) 8, Disguise 5, Drive (Car) 2, Etiquette 8, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 9, Perception 8, Puzzles 7, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Alert, Charismatic, Wise.

Profession: Investigator 2.

13) The Du Buque Museum of the Sacred Arts

Cleopatra du Buque (see page 79) established this sanctuary at the behest of her close friend, historian/archaeologist Joseph Alpine. She was not fully aware, however, of the ramifications of making his research available to the public. She established a museum for his collection — the only way she could officially take care of these items — and pledged to maintain the trust for as long as her family endured. A grant from a U.C. cultural foundation made it possible to purchase a building downtown near the National Dome, and to hire a staff of qualified archeologists to catalogue the material. Most visit out of a perverse sense of curiosity to take in paintings of 1,000-armed gods, the absurdly accurate lexicons of long-dead faiths, and statues depicting religious icons from the far-flung corners of forgotten worlds. Each painting, statue, and ritual object describes a specific worldview. There is also a collec-

tion of ritual musical instruments: hand-held drums, trumpets, bells, and gongs which served as pathways to other realms of the human spirit, now lost to the citizens of Nova Roma.

The collection has a strange effect on many who see it, evoking primal emotions, and memories of something familiar. Naturally, there are few details as to an object's history; most are very specific about the theological significance, but have precious little information on the culture which created it or the nation in which it was found. Most visitors never think twice about it, but members of the Few may come away with more than just religious enlightenment. Beneath the museum is an underground research library, which only the staff knows about. It contains all the known information on the pieces above (little more than what the plaques and markers reveal) as well as more theoretical material attempting to trace some common connection between them.

Reinhard Cross, Curator

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 3, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 10, Bureaucracy 4, Craft (Artifact Care) 9, Etiquette 4, Evasion 3, Lore (Theology) 10, Lore (History) 9, Lore (Religious Art) 10, Perception 7, Puzzles 9.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education, Wise.

Profession: Academic 3.

14) The Corridor

The focus of the Greensleaves area is known as the Corridor: a collection of monuments, statues, museums, and rotundas set up along the river. It's a utopian vision of Romanesque pillars and marble domes, designed to inspire, uplift, and infuse hope. Flags flutter in the wind, bands play patriotic melodies, picnics and parties are held every weekend, and tourists come and go at all hours of the day. Most of the sites are abstract, paying tribute to diffuse ideals rather than specific figures. The only monuments to actual persons come from the recent war, and even they are devoid of dates or details. A marble pathway depicting the names of those killed in the war winds its way along the greenery between the monuments, a "road to victory" admonishing those who walk upon it to remember the sacrifices made for the U.C. It opened some three years after the war ended, and makes a popular tour for those visiting the monuments.

Amidst it all, a tiny kiosk stands out as a brief statement of low-key humanity. John's Hot Dogs and Trinkets, a go-cart selling frankfurters, popcorn, and souvenirs of all varieties, has become a Nova Roma staple. Restaurants on the Corridor are in remarkably short supply, making John's the go-to spot for anyone wanting a bite to eat. Its coins, flags, and pinwheels (all in patriotic colors, of course) are immensely popular with the tourists, and those attending political gatherings or rallies in the Corridor often turn to John's for a tacky memento or two. John, for his part, is a keen observer of the area's goings-on, and could make an excellent source of information if anyone cared to ask him.

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John, Patriotic Comestibles Vendor

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 8, Moxie 5, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 4, Craft (Cooking) 4, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Engineering 5, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 3, Perception 6, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Huge, Lucky, Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1.

15) The Mausoleum

Situated underground with ready access to the main research hospital, the Mausoleum allows the government to conduct many questionable experiments in both sorcery and biological warfare under state-of-the-art conditions. Geneticists and government-sponsored warlocks arrive at the imposing front gates and vanish underground, there to conduct their dark research in the name of keeping their country safe. Collectively, their work encompasses viruses, biomedical threats, analysis of wartime atrocities, and the application of magic in large-scale combat. Far from any kind of routine surveillance, the scientists and philosophers go about their experiments unchecked. No one is allowed in the building except those with top-level security clearance, though certain employees of the nearby Robert Road Hospital have permission to be on site. Theoretically, the NLEB keeps track of what goes on here, though the military easily circumnavigates their rather flimsy oversight.

Much of the research going on in the Mausoleum entails fairly mundane activity — straightforward autopsies and the like — but some stray into venues which would disturb even the most jaded politician above ground. Good and evil intentions blend here like hot and cold streams of water. At any given time, the projects could spell disaster, either politically (leaks of unethical practices to the press), or in much blunter terms (a contagious pathogen being released into the populace). Science is neutral, the workers here would claim; they are merely pursuing it to its logical end. Yet the applications they have found for it ostensibly serve the greater good by embracing the most unspeakable evils. Deep down in their hearts, the researchers here understand the cost that their work takes on their souls. Not that that changes anything; most of them are willing to make that sacrifice if it means aiding the country that they love.

Typical Scientist

Attributes: Brains 9, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 4, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Bureaucracy 8, Engineering 7, Etiquette 5, Evasion 2, Intimidation 4, Lore (Forensic Medicine) 9, Lore (Chemical and Biological Weapons) 9, Medicine 10, Perception 4, Puzzles 4.

Backgrounds: Education, Prodigy, Wise.

Profession: Academic 1, White Collar Worker 1.

16) The Robert Road Hospital

A classy laboratory and topflight research facility, Robert Road utilizes the most innovative approaches to medicine known anywhere. Major discoveries take place within its confines every week. Lives have been saved or drastically improved due to the tireless efforts of the men and women at work here. The hospital is best known for its Trauma Unit, which is renowned across the U.C. for its ability to reach the severely injured quickly, and apply life-saving techniques before time runs out. For reasons heretofore unknown, Nova Roma has the highest rate of trauma victims in the country — from traffic accidents to industrial mishaps to military snafus from various bases around the city. The Road Hospital cares for nearly all of them.

Psychologists at Robert Road spearhead all-important advances in their field, coming up with explanations and cures for mental ailments of all varieties. Much of the therapy bases itself on language, speech, talking, and tracking perception: cognitive behavioral approaches undermining a large streak of Freudian thinking. The Hospital's most unique research takes place where its two most renowned fields connect: psychological trauma resulting from an accident or stressful situation such as combat. Some victims — especially those without family or identifiable next of kin — are held in labs for further study... at least according to published hospital records. A little probing, however, might uncover a few more disturbing facts: patients subjected to a vicious array of psychological torments designed to measure their emotional response; medical operations geared toward removing such emotions as fear, desire, or sadness; and prolonged isolation in tiny cells barely wide enough to stretch out in. Such experiments are severely limited (perhaps two or three patients undergo them at a time), and the hospital's chief administrators ignore any purposeful wrongdoing. It's no surprise, however, that the doctors who conduct them are also on the staff list at the Mausoleum...

Typical Psychiatrist

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 8, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 5, Etiquette 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 5, Intimidation 8, Lore (Psychiatry) 9, Medicine 5, Perception 7, Puzzles 4.

Backgrounds: Education, Prodigy, Wise.

Profession: Academic 1, White Collar Worker 1.

17) Daughters of the Colonials

A well-recognized organization with its domain downtown near the banks and insurance agencies, this time-honored women's group makes it their business to uphold a moral standard for everyone... whether everyone wants it or not. For the most part, their edicts and admonitions are taken with a grain of salt, for their belief system is archaic if not laughable. No one really takes their motivations to enforce good behavior, etiquette, and dress codes seriously, but the organization endures simply because of tradition. The Daugh-

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ters offer scholarships to young women who exemplify the values they champion, and teach a variety of finishing classes to those of proper breeding. Somehow they maintain a position in society through sheer inertia. One never wishes to be put on their black list, even though everyone knows that it's a joke.

Besides that, however, they don't have much clout — except as a home for gossip, which makes the Daughters a valuable resource for the right sort. There simply isn't a better source of intelligence than well-connected women upholding the moral standard. Their eyes and ears hover everywhere. The Daughters track the personal agenda of everyone in Nova Roma. They see it as their destiny to ensure the well-being of the Commonwealth by monitoring the moral behavior of those in power. For those whom they trust, their Saturday afternoon tea sessions can be a mother lode of dirty laundry.

The Daughters maintain their headquarters in an archaic mansion plopped down in the midst of the city's business district. The property was willed to them by a long-dead member, and now serves as offices for the various senior officials of the organization. A small kitchen is on hand, with a chef to prepare hors d'oeuvres and tea. A wine cellar is in the basement for more formal occasions, and the wide lawn behind the building hosts all number of social get-togethers. Admission into the building is by appointment only, and while there are no security measures onsite, arriving without properly notifying the residents is tantamount to social suicide.

Typical Moralism Gossip-Monger

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 5, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Bureaucracy 4, Etiquette 10, Evasion 3, Intimidation 5, Perception 5, Sport (Bridge) 8.

Backgrounds: Alert, Loyal Retainer, Wise.

Profession: Investigator 1, Wealthy 1.

EVE'S FIELDS

The neighborhood of Eve's Fields is best known as the home of the popular Nova Roma Zoo. Public transportation works, restaurants, and affordable homes allow for an eclectic mix of classes and cultures. A handful of gaunts live here alongside everyone else, enduring less of the prejudice and harassment which befall others of their kind. Since Eve's Fields lies outside the main governmental and tourist districts, the tension levels drop significantly here. The dress codes relax, people hang out on the stoops and talk with one another, and the unbending conformity that marks other areas of the city is nowhere to be found. Fewer instances concerning politics crop up here: less hype, less prestige, less money, and less talk. A lot less talk.

You'll find no reminders of exclusivity in Eve's Fields; one can rent an apartment with no questions asked. In other parts of town, you almost need a recommendation from an Assemblyman to qualify for a sublet, but here, everyone is welcome.

As result, the borough makes an excellent hiding place for those who need to cover their tracks. People on the run from the NLEB, and who have enough money to mask their identity, can come here and be reasonably assured that their pursuers will not find them. So, too, do outsiders looking for a fresh start come to Eve's Fields, as do those whose troubles aren't limited to the national government.

Eve's Fields is by and large the place to go for dinner, with countless small and unassuming cafés and brasseries hidden throughout the neighborhood. Important business can readily take place far from the gaze of the downtown crowd. Streets do not quite meet up here, the grid is off-kilter and business districts blend with residential ones, making it easy to escape from a suspicious shadow into an alley or a corner park. The residents call it charming, and so it is; but more often than not, they prefer its confines for the safety and maneuverability it ensures.

18) The Fielding Zoo and Botanical Gardens

The Zoo, located in the center of Eve's Fields, is an excellent place for family gatherings. Not known for the range of its animals, it is still much loved by the residents — especially a family of mountain gorillas featured on the logo at the entrance to the park. The animals provide welcome respite from the slings and arrows of political talk, the lawyers, the security guards, and the con men masquerading as public servants. People from all walks of life come to the zoo to revel in the atmosphere, enjoy the children's chatter, and talk to each other about normal things, unconnected to the snake pit outside.

The Botanical Gardens have a slightly different feel than the Zoo. A distinctly calmer, more subdued tone floats about here, which fits in nicely with the animals' energy. Countless rare plants bloom, thriving in the city's hothouse atmosphere, or else arranged in carefully controlled greenhouses. Botanical samples are available upon request, though rare plants are off-limits and certain types (poisonous varieties for example) require a thorough explanation before being released. The Zoo and Botanical Gardens make living in Eve's Fields sweet: a common thread to bring everyone together and give them a sense of community devoid of the dark secrets they might otherwise be hiding.

Typical Zookeeper

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 7, Build 6, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 5, Drive (Car, Truck) 4, Evasion 5, Firearms 3, Lore (Zoology) 7, Medicine 4, Melee 4, Perception 3, Throwing 6.

Backgrounds: Huge, Lucky, Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 3.

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19) White Horse Conservatory and Theater

Set back from the quiet environs of Rosen Street by a low wall, decorative gates, and a garden that winds its way past the boughs of a large oak, the White Horse Conservatory houses the Commonwealth's most prestigious dance academy. As a ballet school and theater, the Conservatory has always attracted the nation's best and brightest, and most of the "old money" families from New Eden and Nova Roma send their daughters to attend the White Horse. The tradition stems from social reasons rather than any real desire to see them on the stage. With its reputation and exclusive clientele, the White Horse has long been seen as a breeding ground for the next generation of industrial aristocracy, as well as an ideal place to establish contacts and broker deals among the families of students, away from prying eyes.

Aside from the old networking practices and back-room dealings, the Conservatory has also attracted a significant amount of interest from the city's more shadowy quarters for its own reasons. As a place where poise, balance, and the social graces are held to the highest standards, the White Horse has often found itself unwittingly training government spooks, or grooming future second-story men for a life of crime. Though "organized" elements, either from the NLEB or criminal syndicates, attend the school for this reason, they aren't the only ones with an interest in the students. Independent operators are drawn to the promise of wealth like moths to a

flame, working small-time cons on the debutantes or training themselves to pluck what jewels they can from the princes of society. If the law looked hard enough, many a crime could be traced back to former students of the Conservatory.

For all that, its reputation remains sterling, and the White Horse hosts prestigious ballets and theatrical productions annually. Famous alumni often return to showcase the skills they learned while studying here, and Nova Roma's elite attend shows at the Theater with the same pomp and circumstance that Paradiso showers a movie premiere. This is the image that most people associate with the White Horse. Dark rumors about nepotism and thieves in training are met with clucked tongues and disapproving stares. No one wants to ruin the image of such a highly touted Nova Roma institution.

Typical Thief-In-Training

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 5, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 6, Smoothness 8.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 3, Athletics 7, Brawl 2, Contortions 7, Disguise 5, Etiquette 8, Fast Talk 3, Perception 4, Perform (Ballet) 7, Pick Lock 3, Sleight of Hand 3, Stealth 6, Streetwise 1.

Backgrounds: Acrobatic, Lucky, Small.

Profession: Performer 1, Thief 1.

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20) Hofstедder Military Academy

The finest officers in the Commonwealth's military have been trained for generations at the Hofstедder Military Academy. The noble and inspiring façade of the Academy's main building looks out over an impeccably kept parade ground, flanked by two squat and unassuming dormitories. Every morning, they raise a pristine flag and salute a crisply dressed student body, and every night, the grounds are patrolled by sharp-eyed uniforms obsessed with military protocol. The Academy runs to clockwork-regular timing and mercilessly strict discipline, maintained under the regime of Commandant Eric Powell, himself one of the academy's most honored graduates. Order and obedience are the watchwords of Hofstедder, and nobody argues with the results.

Another tradition of Hofstедder is vigilance. Powell himself served in the war and though he can remember little of it, he has become increasingly suspicious of the outside world since then. Warlocks, in particular, have drawn his ire. It stands to reason that such deep-rooted suspicion would be passed on to his students... even if he made great efforts to hide it, and he has not made any effort at all. Fear and mistrust of warlocks is an open secret at Hofstедder, and has become a more pressing issue this year, with the arrival of new cadet Edmund Burke. Studious, quiet, and decidedly academic, Burke almost immediately found himself at odds with the powers that be in Hofstедder. Commandant Powell routinely leans on his contacts within the NLEB and the police to learn what he can about suspected "troublemakers" among his cadets, and any information he finds is passed on to an inner circle of fanatically loyal senior cadets who share his prejudices to the letter. A few phone calls put him on to Burke, who was on an NLEB watch list as a suspected warlock. With this information in hand, Powell began a regime of systematic harassment in an attempt to get Burke to quit the academy. Recently, one of Powell's inner circle was found in the parade ground, suffering from burns and swearing that he had been struck by lightning. The next day, Edmund Burke disappeared from Hofstедder. The implications were troubling in more ways than one; the NLEB had Burke pegged as a gravity specialist and primarily a theoretician, with no ability or interest in the "magical" applications of other branches of science. How, then, could he have inflicted those burns? What injustices have the secret cliques that run Hofstедder committed in the name of their

commander's intolerance? Was Burke killed by the vengeful inner circle? Or is he merely hiding and biding his time before inflicting a horrible revenge on the Academy? Whatever the reason, Commandant Powell has kept it all out of the papers. For now, the Academy continues to enjoy its sterling reputation... while waiting for the other shoe to finally drop.

Commandant Eric Powell

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 5, Build 6, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Brawl 7, Bureaucracy 9, Demolitions 5, Etiquette 5, Evasion 7, Firearms 8, Intimidation 9, Lore (Warlocks) 6, Melee 5, Perception 8, Puzzles 3, Sport (Football) 5, Throwing 7.

Backgrounds: Alert, Charismatic, Marksmanship.

Profession: Soldier 4.

21) The Lincoln Air Dome

The Air Dome soars in the wind like a beautiful tent — set in a natural valley between the Centennial River and the nearby foothills. Though mostly a recreational airport, other sorts of business take place there besides joy rides. A hangar houses paramilitary equipment and a crew of top-notch mechanics working on undisclosed projects. The hangar is set away from the airport access road and the more public parts of the airport, surrounded by a high fence and guarded by a pair of NLEB agents disguised in mechanics' overalls. The folksy, nonchalant atmosphere of Eve's Fields is a good cover for operations of this kind; it has a way of disarming suspicions with the bare minimum of explanations. The nearby residents and pilots who use the air dome are pretty insulated, and rarely involved in politics or any kind of Machiavellian maneuvering.

Besides the military experiments that go on here in secret, the air dome has a very public profile: lessons and seminars for those interested in piloting or for students of aircraft technology. The airport hosts an annual display of advances in air technology that draws crowds from all over the region. It is widely known that the best military navigators often live in Eve's Fields following completion of their formal service, and many of them spend a great deal of time at the air dome. Some of them, of course, are more willing to discuss their current projects than others.



Typical Pilot

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 7, Moxie 4, Smoothness 8.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 4, Drive (Aeroplane, Car, Truck) 8, Engineering 7, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 5, Firearms 5, Perception 5, Throwing 4.

Backgrounds: Acrobatic, Racer, Small.

Profession: Soldier 1.

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22) Bannion Mountains

Though quite a ways away, this mountain range insulates Nova Roma from the west, and plays a pivotal though distant part in the city's activities. Heavily forested, and with several fire watch stations dispersed throughout the range (ostensibly to guard against natural calamity), the mountains protect many a secret.

Foremost among them is a series of government detention camps, holding suspects for questionable purposes. Civil liberties may be ignored here, and the men who run them indulge in all manner of torments without surveillance. The camps are well-hidden and inaccessible save through a few fire trails. Escape is difficult and survival in the wilderness next to impossible for those not carefully trained. A set of small landing strips allow for clandestine entrances and exits, and the government ensures that flights into and out of Nova Roma never pass over that part of the mountains. The rural setting keeps the press at bay, and most journalists would never think to look out here, preferring the parties and skullduggery of the city to wandering the dusty fire roads in the Bannion Mountains. To the government — or at least the more shadowy corners of it — the area makes a perfect hiding place for their embarrassing little secrets.

Typical Detention Camp Inmate

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 5, Contortions 4, Demolitions 5, Disguise 3, Electricity 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 3, Medicine 4, Perception 4, Pick Lock 3, Stealth 4, Thermal Energy 5.

Backgrounds: Education, Fanaticism, Magical Aptitude.

Profession: Academic 1, Rogue Scientist 1.

23) The Rail Center

One of Nova Roma's main train lines runs along the river, mostly carrying timber logged in the Bannion Mountains and granite quarried in the nearby valleys. These natural resources made it possible for Nova Roma to build its strong and enduring monuments. The rail system transported the supplies needed to build the city into its current state. Today, however the rail system has undergone a slowdown as the demand for timber and granite declines. In its place, military shipments and cargo have begun to make use of this line, which necessitates keeping it in top shape. Three stops along the river provide access points for various cargoes to be loaded and unloaded — usually bound for Central City to be dispersed throughout the country. Passenger trains mostly travel along lines further north, but a few platforms for commuters can be found at the three stops. They are otherwise fastidiously clean and sterile constructions — formed of gray concrete and

designed for utility rather than style. Cranes and pulleys load the cargo, and each station sports a loading platform several times the size of the passengers' sections. Military trains travel without stopping, and are given priority when traveling across the city's rails; each station in the area is manned by a squad of armed guards while a military train passes through.

CENTENNIAL RIVER GANGS

The Centennial River allows for a small harbor in Eve's Fields, and thus a lively commercial enterprise flourishes here. Goods and supplies are sent down the river via ferries, which dock at the harbor by the dozens. The ports on the Centennial River are not stringently monitored, so they become an easy avenue for criminal activity. In fact some of the most active gangs make their homes on the banks of the Centennial. Real estate is inexpensive, since the river is known to flood the north bank periodically, and the idyllic locale provides many convenient hiding places during the dry season.

The gang culture in Eve's Fields is essentially nomadic. They do not occupy permanent structures for long, and none of them possesses a "headquarters" as such. When the river floods they simply go upstream until the waters recede. Trade is the main economy of the Centennial River gangs — dealing in stolen goods supplemented with an occasional medium-range armed robbery. Flooding actually makes their job much easier, and intense rainy seasons always see a sharp rise in looting and other activities from the ten or so enclaves that comprise the gangs.

The police experience few real problems with them, however, since the gangs limit their activity to small-time crimes. In a city of smooth operators, their rather crude smash-and-grab tactics stand out like a sore thumb, and violent arrest and interrogation are usually the order of the day. Ironically, the Centennial River Gangs are rarely violent among each other. They're a safe haven for persecuted gaunts, and the black market easily supports all of them. Most of them spend too much time chasing the next score and avoiding the police to make trouble with each other.

Typical River Gang Member

Attributes: Brains 3, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 3, Brawl 7, Drive (Boat, Car, Motorcycle) 6, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 3, Firearms 6, Intimidation 5, Melee 5, Pick Lock 5, Sleight of Hand 2, Stealth 4, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Huge, Mean Streets, Rugged.

Profession: Gangster 1.

Typical Rail Man

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 4, Moxie 3, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Brawl 4, Drive (Car, Motorcycle, Train) 7, Engineering 8, Evasion 5, Firearms 4, Intimidation 5, Perception 5, Throwing 4.

Backgrounds: Huge, Racer, Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 3.

24) Mrs. Graham's House of Fun

A celebrated brothel, Mrs. Graham's boasts a decidedly unique environment. Indeed, it's so mild-mannered here that it's barely even considered a brothel. Its atmosphere is genteel and relaxed, its customers sipping iced tea in the garden when enjoying the company of a fine young women in a sun dress and hat. Here, you instantly forget the headaches of a military command position or the pressures of a medical examiners' life. Poker tables stand available for those so interested, and the house's library contains newspapers from around the country. Brandy and cigars can always be acquired, and the rooms upstairs are sound-proof and discreet. The clientele figures amongst the powerful and sophisticated... usually married men who know how to keep things under wraps. Nova Roma society still considers such dalliances acceptable, however, and Mrs. Graham's discretion makes visits to her establishment well within the bonds of social decorum.

Mrs. Graham, Discreet Madame

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 7, Moxie 5, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 6, Disguise 5, Etiquette 9, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 5, Forgery 4, Perception 7, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Small, Wise.

Profession: Femme Fatale 1, Wealthy 1.



CHARLOTTA K. I. MANILLA, BARTENDER

As a teenager, Charlotta left her working-class family to live with the Holton family as governess for their seven children. Her family didn't offer her much choice: it was this, jail, or monastic vows, so Charlotta chose the lesser evil. Her employers ran one of the most successful boarding schools in Nova Roma. A richly diverse, highly excitable bunch, they welcomed the energy Charlotta brought and she flourished under their care, which likely saved her from her self-destructive tendencies. She had no regrets; her own family clearly offered her little, and she felt no need to return to their cold, callous threats. Following the pace set by her adoptive family, she studied math and chemistry with unmatched fervor. With their support, she attended university during the war, and emerged as one of the most promising scientists of her generation. A military training course earned her top level security clearance and she looked set up for the fast track in service to the government.

Then, in a fit of flightiness, she turned her back on it. She stepped away from her schooling, her growing list of political connections, and her apparent destiny to take a job as a humble bartender. The position brought her good money and a lack of heavy responsibility which agreed with her. Her military training proved popular with the professional military and government personnel who frequented her establishment — a dressy little bar near STAR headquarters.

She soon found herself privy to many an unmonitored conversation, which she's sometimes turned around and sold to other interested parties... though only if she believes it will serve a greater good. One night, she overheard plans for a secret transfer of information: a group of ex-military officers were planning to sell a list of known warlocks to the NLEB. Charlotta passed word of it on to a detective — a member of the Few who managed to intercept the envelope before the NLEB got their hands on it. He went on to warn the people on the list and destroy the records before any further harm could come to them. Similar incidents have peppered her tenure tending bar, and thus far, none of them have been traced back to her.

She is also a writer, which she combines with her academic proclivities to produce works of startling complexity. Writing controls the insight that she has gleaned, positing in fiction the things that she dare not breathe in the "real" world. Many an overheard conversation and careless comment has turned up in her stories. Since her work as a bartender keeps her up late, she spends her days working on a series of contemporary detective novels. The series is in effect a detailed social history of the infamous Nova Roma espionage culture, its foibles, and its sexiest dimensions. The collected works — titled *Still in the Dark* — has yet to be published, but she has a good publisher on the verge of signing a deal. The results could make her a cult heroine... and likely earn her some powerful enemies in the process.

CHAPTER THREE: NOVA ROMA

Charlotta's morals are usually in a strange state of flux. She's not sure what to believe, or whether or not her path is the right one. It depends on who she comes in contact with and whether or not she's taken into custody by the NLEB, which would pitch a fit if they knew what she was up to. She could change directions again, and take up a new position elsewhere. Her mercurial nature could keep her one step ahead of those who wish to silence her. On the other hand, her job tending bar provides her with endless fodder for her stories. Should she take another job — say, dust off her degrees and return to the science community — that resource could disappear. For now, she keeps showing up for work, hoping that when the time is right, she'll be able to make the right decision... hopefully before it's made for her.

Charlotta is now in her early thirties, with advanced degrees in both chemistry and astrophysics. She dresses in a natty shirt and bow tie that blends well with her surroundings, and maintains just enough of her long-forgotten wild streak to keep those around her on their toes. Her status as a hip bartender is working well for the moment thanks to her innate ability to compartmentalize. She can turn everything off and go in to work, mix drinks, and think nothing of her books or the impact they might have. She'd be a good person to sit down with for a chat but she's very protective of herself, so conversations rarely reveal anything of value. Like most bartenders, she can soak up information like a sponge, and remembers everything she sees and hears. It made her an excellent chemist in school, and now ensures that her life stays interesting... no matter which direction it finally heads.

Charlotta K I Manilla

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 7, Moxie 7, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Craft (Bartender) 6, Craft (Writer) 8, Engineering 5, Etiquette 6, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 7, Lore (Chemistry) 9, Lore (Astrophysics) 8, Medicine 4, Perception 8, Puzzles 6, Stealth 5.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education, Lucky, Wise.

Profession: Academic 1, Blue Collar Worker 3.

CLEOPATRA DU BUQUE, POWERMONGER

Power is not easily wielded, but Cleopatra du Buque truly seems born to the task. A solid and well-known politician turned entrepreneur, she has done much good in her life, despite her adherence to a corrupt and corrupting system. Cleopatra was a star graduate of an extremely prestigious academic institution, hailing from a long line of professional diplomats known for their expertise in foreign policy, governmental law, and debate. Following a glowing career in school (replete with a solid tenure as the captain of the tennis team) she went on to get married in the style expected of her class, and began a career track amongst the city's best and the brightest. She met every goal she set for herself, she was always in the right place at the right time, she got all the lucky breaks, and she never

made any mistakes. Her election to the Praetorium was only a matter of time, and her service as Praetor earned her the respect of her peers. While she was still in the political arena, she donated a library to the city out of funds from her own pocket, which all but guaranteed a lengthy political career.

This was before the rise in anti-magic hysteria, however — before the rise of demagogues and book burnings, before her friends and classmates began appearing on lists of suspected warlocks. She herself was never accused of magic use, but the growing intolerance in Nova Roma left her on the wrong side of political correctness. Her opponents began painting her as “soft” on the warlock issue, pointing to the creation of the new library — formerly an asset to her — as evidence of coddling the sorcerous minority. She retired from politics after her second term without running for a third, a fact which the Praetorium's hard-liners still chortle over in their private back rooms.

Since then, she's moved into the business sector, where she launched a financial empire that brought her far more fulfillment than her political career ever had. It's made her rich beyond her wildest dreams, and allowed her to indulge in her philanthropic side more readily. On her list of civic achievements is the development of the Museum for the Sacred Arts (see page 72) which came about quite by accident. She picked up the collection of a dying historian, her lifelong friend, who willed it to her. He was a student of magic with some odd theories about mankind's past; he begged her, from his deathbed not to allow his life work to be dispersed. She agreed and within days after the funeral, had laid the groundwork for the Museum. She's kept the most important items away from the public eye, though scholars can view them if they put in a request early enough. No permanent marking devices or cameras are allowed in the building (though pencils are OK). Cleopatra claims that it was part of her friend's dying request, but those close to her suspect other motives. The items kept off limits often have a strange and disturbing quality to them, and certainly wouldn't enhance her reputation with the anti-warlock movement...

Cleopatra has been married several times, though she is currently single. She maintains intermittent contact with most of her ex-husbands, though none of them plays a large role in her life. The first one was mainly a political necessity (it was expected from girls of her class), but the others she likes to tell herself were for love. Now, her love life is currently off limits where the public is concerned. She's not dating, officially speaking, though rumors constantly swirl of love interests both respectable and illicit. She's happy to keep the stories circulating. At least they're not talking about her alleged magic use.

Her role in the social scene is that of a patroness. She is invited to parties for the sake of solicitations, and hosts charitable benefits of all varieties. Her role as a doyen allows her immediate access to all manner of people, from former political foes to volunteers and participants in various charities. She is an excellent hostess, able to coax the entire city into costumes for a masquerade ball or trunks for a swimming party. No one misses her events if they can help it. She can get anyone to come out of the woodwork.

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Her home stands on a bluff, overlooking the river with a patio that can accommodate up to 500 guests. Parties always involve a concert, time for a swim, a poetry recital, and the best menu in town. Indeed, so smooth and polished are her gatherings that they attract an endless number of gadflies who have no intention of donating to whatever cause she hopes to benefit. Though lacking true malice, there's a seductive quality to them that draws you in and doesn't let go. Cleopatra plans them that way; the better to entice wealthy donors into parting with their hard-earned cash.

She also hosts auctions of various rare and original items, some from the museum's collection, but most from her own purchases. She owns several antiques of interest and is in regular contact with collectors throughout the country. All of the proceeds go to charity, and she's usually able to coax an exorbitant price out of her buyers. She's not entirely scrupulous about where the auctioned items come from, and may have sold a stolen *object d'art* or two while retaining an air of willful ignorance. All auctions are held at her estate and while she sometimes employs a professional, she often conducts the sale herself. It gives her a chance to maintain her speaking skills.

Cleopatra is a tall, big-boned woman beginning to slip into the softer comforts of middle age. She dresses in hand-tailored outfits of premiere quality and moves with the air of a natural aristocrat. She rarely judges others (to a fault, her critics would say), but her flashes of anger put the fear of God in everyone. She remains a jovial, friendly woman for the most part, readily charming friend and foe alike. Though she's been out of politics for many years, she retains key contacts both in the Legislature and in the instruments of bureaucracy which do their will. Should she wish, she can still exercise a little clout. For all the rumors swirling around her, she has never even witnessed a display of sorcery; her warlock friends — some now serving time in prison — always engaged in their art while she was elsewhere.

Cleopatra du Buque

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 8, Moxie 8, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 8, Bureaucracy 9, Etiquette 9, Evasion 3, Fast Talk 7, Lore (Magic) 5, Perception 4, Perform (Oratory) 6, Puzzles 5, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Education, Wise.

Profession: Con Artist 1, Politician 1, Wealthy 4.



RACHEL O'NEILL, MUSICIAN

Rachel belongs to the city's dark side, though few would know it to look at her. Her deceased parents worked in the old cotton mills before they were forced into bankruptcy. Mr. and Mrs. O'Neill were devoted parents, able to send their daughter to music school — a dream they held dear to their hearts since each of them were talented musicians who never had a chance to hone their gifts. They made a promise that their daughter would not suffer the humiliation they bore. Luckily, Rachel took easily to music lessons and was admitted to Tall Oaks Conservatory before she turned sixteen. She decided to live at home, much to the delight of the entire neighborhood. While in school she studied voice and mandolin, making extra money in the evenings singing in nightclubs. She was so successful, in fact, that she was able to make a good living with her act. Her subsequent fame as a nightclub singer and her highly regarded local radio show keeps her in business.

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Now as the successful owner of a prestigious blues club in the heart of the city (see page 69), she's inviting, invigorating, and soothing. As radio show host she's quite suave and as the owner of a now incredibly fruitful business, she's rich... which does one no end of good as far as social networking goes. There is some evidence that Rachel moonlights as a well-paid call girl, but no one mentions it within earshot of her social circle. If she exploits her wild side, she does it off the map, in another neighborhood, or on days when the press is not on duty. She'd rather keep her name out of the tabloids and in the society pages if she has the choice.

Rachel has never been married officially but she has certainly been in love. It is also true that she killed the man in question one night in self-defense, then buried the body deep in the Bannion Mountains. Given her emotional extremes, it is no surprise that she was involved in a crime of passion. Were it to come out, it would probably add to her reputation in the long run. Following a lengthy prison sentence, of course.

Unfortunately for her, the men who finally found her lover's corpse had other things on their mind. They contacted her soon thereafter with an offer: dance to their tune and she would be rich beyond the dreams of avarice. Defy them and they would ensure she rode the lightning for her crime. Since then, she has served as their spy and political informant, watching, observing, and seducing those who they wish in order to learn of any illicit activities. This she has done, dutifully and without fail. Sometimes, the people she reports on end up being robbed or plagued by an embarrassing scandal. Sometimes, they just disappear. She doesn't think too hard about any of it. If she did, she might go mad.

Her unseen benefactors have certainly made good on their part of the bargain. Rachel is eagerly sought after by everyone from everywhere. Her status as an acclaimed singer gives her immediate access to anyone with any power, as has long been the domain of a talented artist. There isn't a social group, a clique, or a band of visiting military officers who wouldn't happily enter into a relationship with her without realizing they are compromising their integrity. She plays all sides, the good, the bad, and the infamous because her unseen masters will it so. She dives head-first into any intrigue which comes her way, knowing that it will always produce something worthwhile. Yet she never takes any direct action, content merely to observe and report back. She leaves it to others to act on the knowledge she ferrets out over lovers' sheets or overhears amid the din of her club. Otherwise, her life can be snuffed out in a heartbeat... and she just can't summon the will to bring the party to a close.

Rachel O'Neill

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 3, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 8, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 2, Disguise 3, Etiquette 4, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 6, Medicine 3, Melee 2, Perception 5, Perform (Singing) 7, Perform (Mandolin) 7, Stealth 2.

Backgrounds: Charismatic.

Profession: Businessman 3, Femme Fatale 2, Performer 1.

KEWEN GREEN, RETIRED SPY

Kewen is a military espionage operative who dropped out of the army in order to rescue what remained of his sanity. After authoring several clandestine high-risk operations for the government, he decided to retire. The high pressure of those operations deeply affected his delicate psyche, and he knew it. It was only a matter of time before he cracked. So he vanished one day, reemerging with a new government-issued identity that included adopting a girl from a foster care home. She was named Pearl; in the two years since, they have become inseparable. Together they make a cozy home in the bohemian depths of Eve's Fields. He now spends his days working as a gardener, enjoying what is left of his life and trying to forget the intensity of his former existence. Theoretically he could be called up at any moment to take part of another operation the likes of which he hopes never to see again. They promised him that they wouldn't, but you can never effectively retire from the undercover business. There's just too damn much of it these days.

Haunted by memories of his past life as a spy, he manages to maintain a fairly balanced existence at this point. But the scars remain, hidden under the surface, and if for some reason he is placed under too much pressure... things could get messy for anyone involved. Only a handful of people in Nova Roma are aware of his past so he is safe from contact for the most part. His commitment to Pearl has changed him inside and out, so even those who knew him from before might not be able to recognize him. He's content now, believing he's made the right choice.

His daughter is a straight shooter and an extreme extrovert, which contrasts with Kewen's quieter nature. An avid reader, and a natural actress, she spends a good deal of her free time with Kewen while he works the gardens downtown. Pearl is aware of her dad's nightmares and is anxious to protect him. Old beyond her years, she's able to manage his states of mind fairly well; indeed, she's rapidly becoming quite the manipulator. But she doesn't know about his past, which protects them both. Her main interests are rowing, painting, and theater — hobbies Kewen supports by attending classes with her. Since Pearl spends most of her time with her dad, she doesn't play well with other children, but she gets along well with adults. She's a natural at whatever she endeavors to learn. Kewen tries to keep her on track for a grounded and ordinary life, but given the climate of Nova Roma, he's not sure he can protect her from its dark side. He tries to instill in her a good sense of confidence and an applicable set of analytical tools. She's utterly fearless, which he suspects may come in handy if the two ever need to flee from a fresh "assignment."

Kewen has one close friend from his military days: a four star general named Raymond Atherton who is the only person able to abate his state of mind when it escalates out of control. Atherton knows what his friend has been through, and was at his side throughout most of it, so he has some notion of what he's dealing with. Men trained in intelligence careers receive little that would help them in any other career. Kewen is hoping to beat the odds, and Atherton does what he can to keep the powers that be from calling on him ever again.

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Part of the problem is that Kewen knows too much. The information he learned during his military career could destroy several prominent politicians. He's no fool, however, and is perfectly willing to let sleeping dogs lie at the moment in order to enjoy some of the simplicities of ordinary life. In the event that someone tries to take that away from him, however, he might use it to neutralize the threat... provided he doesn't snap and kill them all with his bare hands first.

Kewen Green

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 5, Build 4, Gut 7, Moxie 5, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 7, Contortions 5, Demolitions 4, Drive (Car, Motorcycle, Truck) 7, Etiquette 6, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 6, Forgery 7, Lore (Gardening) 5, Perception 8, Pick Lock 3, Puzzles 5, Sleight of Hand 5, Stealth 5, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Lucky, Wise.

Profession: Con Artist 2, Investigator 1.

MALCOLM AL RASHE'ED, NLEB DETECTIVE

A tall, wiry black man, Rashe'ed has made it to the top of the detective ladder in Nova Roma. A model gentleman in what can be a haphazard and clandestine world, he's learned the ins and outs of this city's crime scene like the back of his hand. Initially allowed into the NLEB simply based on his incomparable physique and mental skills, Rashe'ed is now the prototype for any new recruit. In fact, his profile has become the blueprint for anyone wishing to enter the Bureau. Psychological tests almost follow Malcolm's profile: the closer you are to matching his qualities, the better. Legendary as he is, Malcolm remains a humble man: a confirmed bachelor with a penchant for theater when he has the evening off. He could have chosen any career and excelled, but he chose investigative work, which comes as a blessing for the good folks of Nova Roma. Or so the NLEB maintains.

Everyone knows he works for the government but few know how much power he truly controls. Deceit fascinates him, as do the lies and delusions people cling to in order to function. Constantly discriminating between true reality and the expedient pipe dreams manufactured by the government can make anyone a little uneasy, but Malcolm excels in those fuzzy lines between perception and reality. His underlings have befriended everyone at all levels of society without them having even the vaguest suspicion they are being mined for information. Before they know it, they have been arrested and are undergoing rigorous questioning about their activities, their families, their loyalties, where there money goes... all of it coordinated with soft efficiency by the NLEB's dark prince.

Born with a proverbial silver spoon in his mouth, Malcolm has thus far escaped any real hardship in life, which is the source of so much of his confidence. He's simply never failed at anything. He's been decorated with every medal and every honor the Bureau has to offer. Women can't resist him, men want to buy him a beer, and while his darker activities might lead others to question their morality, he has never felt any twinges of conscience. How could one such as he do anything wrong?

His current project is a little unsettling to him, though he hasn't taken the time to figure out why. He's made some observations, noted activities that run counter to the wishes of the government, and arranged for some arrests. The perpetrators have been placed in custody and subjected to the usual array of techniques designed to produce results. None of it feels odd or out of the ordinary. So why is he so bothered by it? What is it about these subjects that makes him so uneasy? Maybe it's the notebooks he collected, which speak of strange worlds beyond this one, and



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a past which never existed. They had little to do with the case itself, and nothing to do with the charges against them. And yet he can't seem to let go of it. He's trying to get to the root of his unease, but necessity dictates a low profile, which means he needs to move cautiously. It's a lonely, wrenching task, one which may force him to open up a little if he can ever find a sympathetic ear.

He does most of his work by night. During the day, Malcolm generally stays at home and sleeps in the company of his cat Mochi. Work keeps him focused on the mysteries set before him, though his reputation demands regular appearances at the city's gala functions. Secretly, he has little patience for the parties and soirees, but he knows they do a great deal of good for the NLEB. The PR they generate means much less scrutiny for his department... which means they can do their jobs and keep the country safe with much less interference.

Besides, the drinks are usually free.

Malcolm al Rashe'd

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 7, Moxie 7, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 9, Drive (Aeroplane, Car, Truck) 7, Etiquette 8, Evasion 7, Firearms 5, Lore (Military Law and Procedure) 9, Perception 7, Puzzles 5, Sport (Long Distance Running) 5, Throwing 6.

Backgrounds: Alert, Charismatic, Wise.

Profession: Politician 3, Soldier 1.

RADIO MCQUEEN

Radio is your typical remorseless criminal who will swindle you for hell of it. He can't help it; it's in his nature. He's become the ringleader of a narcotics organization which provides Nova Roma with all manner of socially acceptable uppers and downers. A former medical doctor who turned against his vows to heal the sick, Radio now maintains an industrial-sized lab hidden in the countryside west of Nova Roma. He has a staff of over 100 employees — from chemists to truck drivers — all involved in his expanding, prosperous illegal drug commerce. Besides his labs, Radio owns a string of laundromats and dry cleaners, giving him a perfect front to move his goods. It's a great cover for housewives who need to get a fix but don't want their children to know they're addicts. They go into the dry cleaners to pick up an evening gown or a stack of freshly starched shirts for their husbands, and leave with a little bottle of "prescriptions" in their purse.

Radio represents what happens when one gives in to power: wanting enjoyment, wanting to be a renegade, wanting to live outside conditions that the rest of us are placed under. He does this because he hates the constrained bounds of society: the rules that told him how to behave and what to do when. His position as a doctor showed him a very ugly side of Nova Roma's life: an elite who wanted to be perfect, but didn't want to pay for it. The illegal pharmaceutical business arose from a

late night with a colleague who was also going through a mid-life crisis. They just decided to experiment — make a little cash on the side for a trip away from the bright political frenzy of Nova Roma — and it worked. They were able to make a good chunk of change easily just by writing prescriptions for people they knew. From there, it just grew and grew and grew. Radio is still technically licensed, but he no longer practices. Why should he?

He still keeps his cover as best he can, writing his profits off to inheritance from a recently-deceased aunt. No one asks questions, and the money that comes in maintains him in the style to which he is accustomed. His 27-year marriage was solid enough, but with the influx of his new criminal lifestyle, he found it extremely stifling. Divorce papers were summarily issued, and he's now learning to enjoy life as a newly re-christened bachelor. His ex could turn him in if she wanted to but she likes her cut of the money, and as long as there are profits rolling in, she'll happily live off of Radio's alimony.

Of course, nothing this good can last forever. While Nova Roma's criminal community isn't powerful enough to come sniffing after him, several out of towners might. The Drago mob has begun edging around his organization, hoping to use him as leverage to enter Nova Roma's underground. The Baron's Men in Terminus also have their eye on him, though they'd likely be satisfied with simply taking a cut of the profits. None of these groups has yet entered Radio's perceptions; as far as he knows, he's still the king of his tiny little hill. He's swimming with sharks, blind to their presence which his regular profits are drawing out like blood in the water. Sooner or later, one of them will make a move... and then Radio McQueen will learn what crime is really all about.

Radio McQueen

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 6, Evasion 5, Medicine 8, Perception 5, Puzzles 5, Stealth 4, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Education, Prodigy.

Profession: Academic 1, Gangster 1, White Collar Worker 2.

SAMPLE CAMPAIGNS

The bright Grecian columns and stately buildings of the capital conceal a honeycombed network of back rooms. Every speech laced with hope and idealism conceals a true agenda borne of cynicism and greed. The wide, flat suburbs and spacious, low city center hide things just as well as the clustered skyscrapers of New Eden or the gabled hills of Gateway. A campaign in Nova Roma may not necessarily involve the Assembly, but it will definitely involve power. While the national influence of the government in Nova Roma is decaying, it is still

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strong — the only difference is that now the legislators are a little more edgy, a little more desperate. Porkbarrel politics and well-heeled lobbyists are the order of the day, and almost every Assemblyman has his price in this cradle of democracy. Nova Roma is deadly, but its dangers differ vastly from the unrestrained fervor of Terminus or the sporadic bloodbaths of Central City. Here, power is sensed in the wind, and every word is a weapon.

MAKOT MITZHAYIM (THE PLAGUES OF EGYPT)

Nova Roma holds many secrets, none more terrible than the Mausoleum — an underground research station working on magical and biochemical weapons for “official” use. Government-appointed warlocks and geneticists are sequestered within its confines, and conduct psychological experiments on a handful of patients at the prestigious Robert Road Hospital — patients without friends or family to miss them. While Mausoleum staff members ostensibly serve the national interest and the greater good, their experiments feature distinctly unethical methods.

A campaign based around the secrets of the Mausoleum could begin with either the escape of a patient at Robert Road, the discovery of an experiment at the teaching facility by a nurse, or one of the inmates having a loved one or friend who nobody at the Mausoleum counted on. This could clue the players in to the fact that something is amiss at Robert Road, and initial investigations could suggest that the isolated patients are being hidden at the bequest of a powerful figure. Perhaps the hospital has a doctor in the pay of an out-of-town syndicate, or is doing a favor for a prominent politician by holding witnesses in isolation far from the public eye. As the campaign progresses, the players will discover more at stake here than simple mob corruption or politicians sweeping their mess under the carpet. Offices will be ransacked, characters will be followed, and nameless government officials working for no identifiable department will direct questions and veiled threats at them.

Further investigation could turn up the existence of a hidden facility near Robert Road, but it would also increase the facility’s profile. Others, including criminals, would no doubt find out about its existence through the grapevine. Will the players discover the Mausoleum first? How far will the government go to keep them quiet? The existence of the Mausoleum could destroy the last of the people’s faith in their own government. Thus, there is every likelihood that the parties responsible for the Mausoleum will attempt first to pre-emptively ruin the party’s credibility, and then to silence them — either by framing them for a crime, or by killing them. The middle arc of the campaign will be centered on fending off numerous attacks from all quarters as they draw slowly closer to the source of their trouble.

The conclusion of the campaign should be centered around the Mausoleum itself, ranging from the party tailing the administrative arm of the facility back to where they live and confronting them, to breaking into the Mausoleum itself and getting into a blazing gunfight amid sealed canisters of viru-

lent pathogens. The party should have learned that a secret government research facility within Nova Roma is behind the attempts to discredit, frame, or kill them, and should know its purpose. From this point, the campaign can diverge — the group could attempt to shut down the Mausoleum, hoping it will not resurface elsewhere. There could be a splinter group within the Mausoleum’s staff, or warlocks from overseas eager to recreate the White Light as a form of revenge; this group would naturally be the threat the players must confront, leaving the Mausoleum to continue its morbid work while they strike out against a lunatic fringe intent on destroying the U.C. from within its very heart. Perhaps criminals who have learned of the Mausoleum decide to steal a canister of bio-engineered super-germs and sell it to the highest bidder, unaware that the seal is broken and that they are slowly disseminating a horrible disease throughout the city. However the campaign concludes, the players should know that the stakes are high: if they fail, one of the country’s great metropolises could be reduced to a ghost town.

An alternate spin on this scenario might involve the party as government agents, initially unaware of the Mausoleum. Then one of the patients breaks out, carrying with him a virulent disease that quickly begins to spread. The party must track and isolate the disease’s carriers before it gets out of hand... all the while weighing the ethics of allowing a place like the Mausoleum to exist. Will they blow the whistle on the place, risking more than their standing in the process? Or will they keep quiet, perhaps attempting to leverage those behind it into advancing the player characters’ agenda? All of that assumes that they’ll be able to stop the disease, of course. If they can’t, then the Mausoleum may be the least of their problems...

(GMs interested in running such a scenario should take a close look at Elia Kazan’s classic 1950 film, *Panic in the Streets*, which deftly combines *noir* sensibilities with the threat of a widespread viral outbreak.)

G-MEN

The law is often called a harsh mistress: not so in Nova Roma. Here, the law is more like a bucking bronco — a furious beast trampling all beneath it, that can only be brought to heel by those with the strongest will. In a law-oriented campaign, the players can operate within the NLEB, local law enforcement, or any of the labyrinthine sub-divisions of the Bureau present in Nova Roma. The long-term aim may be to clean up the city, or — for a more focused effort — to take down a central and powerful figure controlling one of the city’s more corrupt departments (perhaps even the characters’ own boss). Working for the Man in Nova Roma is not as clean-cut an issue as it is in, say, *Gateway* — the players will have to be at least as ready for enemies within the government as they are for more obvious enemies. Themes within this campaign will include preventing abuses of power, preserving the integrity of the law, and restoring, if not the public’s faith in the badge, then at least the characters’ own. In a city as riddled with corruption as Nova Roma is, standing for justice can require great sacrifice.

CHAPTER FOUR PARADISO



™They were monsters and pirates
and bastards right down to the
bottom of their feet, but they
loved the movies.}

- Richard Brooks

THE NAKED CITY



CHAPTER FOUR: PARADISO

OVERVIEW OF THE CITY

Paradiso lies on the edge of the great Sola Diablo Desert, the defining natural feature of the nation's frontier. The Columbic Ocean shapes the city's western border, while the Harrison Hills guard the eastern edge from the sand and rock beyond. Between them lies a wide swath of semi-fertile land, warmed by the sun and protected from the heat by soft tropical breezes. The perfect place for dreams to take hold and grow.

The city began as a minor harbor (junior cousin to Gateway to the north), supplemented by a thriving citrus industry facilitated by the area's sunny climate. Orange and lemon trees dominated the valley, and prosperous farms still mark its outer limits. Popular belief has it that early settlers came here to escape the cold and corruption of the east. Here, a man could be himself, pursuing his dreams unmolested in the sunshine without caring a whit what other people thought or did. It was a coveted oasis, a pleasant hideaway promising freedom and prosperity to any who could reach it. Like lemmings, they swarmed across the Unified Commonwealth, seeking out a new beginning. Paradiso is where they finally ran into the sea.

Those humble beginnings are rapidly being swallowed by a newer, more all-encompassing dream. Decades ago, filmmakers arrived here from the east, attracted by the climate which allowed them to produce their work year-round. The public's appetite for motion pictures was insatiable, providing a ready market for glorified carny hucksters to exploit. Amid the orange groves and the fresh air, they cranked out celluloid stories of love and heroism for an eager nation to consume. The money flowed like wine, and with it came a new wave of modern settlers, eager for a sip. The opening of the Highwater Reservoir shortly after the war allowed the city to expand in leaps and bounds.

Today, Paradiso is an industrialized fantasy factory, a palm-lined playground created by show business in its own narcissistic image. Farmers still work the outlying areas, and tourists come every year to bask on the sandy beaches, but the movies are king here. Everyone in Paradiso worships at that altar, and those on whom it smiles become richer than the most powerful Central City gangster or the biggest New Eden tycoon. But the goddess has her price. And as usual, the innocents are the ones who pay it.

Six colossal movie studios control the lion's share of motion picture production in the U.C.: Privateer, Triumph, Gillis & Desmond, Foxfire, Oasis, and SBG Pictures. Together, they are the dominant force in Paradiso's economy, and their leaders exercise powers akin to medieval lords. Production is vertically integrated, with each studio controlling its own distribution networks and theater chains. There's little civic oversight into their activities, and price fixing and other forms of collusion are common. No one cares. The studios are a cornerstone of the economy, supporting thousands of workers and facilitating numerous subsidiary industries. They operate according to their own rules, and everyone in Paradiso is either a part of their system or on the outside looking in.

Within their lots, the moguls are the undisputed rulers. Many of them come from working class backgrounds and have bitter memories of growing up on the same dirty streets as hardened criminals. In many respects, their business practices reflect that upbringing: hard-nosed, uncompromising, and as scrupulous as a nest of scorpions. Everything flows from their dictates, every walk-on part or creative hiccup must meet their stamp of approval. Under their watchful eye, new stars are created, exploited, and destroyed, with only the barest handful achieving the longevity necessary to dictate their own terms. Directors are often saddled with prohibitive long-term contracts, forcing them to toil away under whatever hackneyed project their employers feel will fill the most seats. Which isn't to say there aren't perks. Those whom the moguls anoint with their approval enjoy worldwide acclaim, basking in the spotlight of magazine covers and premieres, and earning salaries that would shame the scions of avarice.

Naturally those in charge use such a lifestyle as a carrot for those who would work beneath them. Everyone keeps their eye on the shining potential of such a life, and the moguls bear in hand the keys to the kingdom. Work well, do as they say, and maybe they'll choose you to headline their next blockbuster, or script the newest Scott LeClerk picture. As long as they keep their employees' heads in the clouds, nobody complains about the muck they have to slog through in the meantime. Long hours, brutal contracts, emotional abuse and worse indiscretions, all of them can be assuaged with assurances of brighter times around the bend... or offers of contract work in the future... or even a bottle of whisky or another line of blow. The studios will do anything and everything to keep production rolling and their coffers filled with cash.

All of that lurks beneath the surface. The average joe sees nothing but a fantasy: magic on the screen, spilling out stories that capture the imagination. It's all stars in black limousines and spotlights reaching to the sky; the unseemly realities never make it to the tabloids or walk the red carpet with the U.C.'s latest golden girl. No one in Paradiso wants to disrupt that façade. The city's livelihood depends upon it.

In addition to the six giants, Paradiso hosts a plethora of independent outfits. Most of them produce quickie B-list movies: tawdry horror flicks and melodramatic soap operas, destined for the grindhouse or other short-run theaters. Those whom the studios have discarded, or who cannot work elsewhere, often find themselves here, cranking out cheap quickies at the rate of two or three a week. They cling to their dignity as best they can, eking out a working-class living and taking great pride in the fact that they haven't "sold out." But the lower echelons gradually blur into exploitation flicks, pornography, and worse: some make a convenient money laundering front for organized crime.

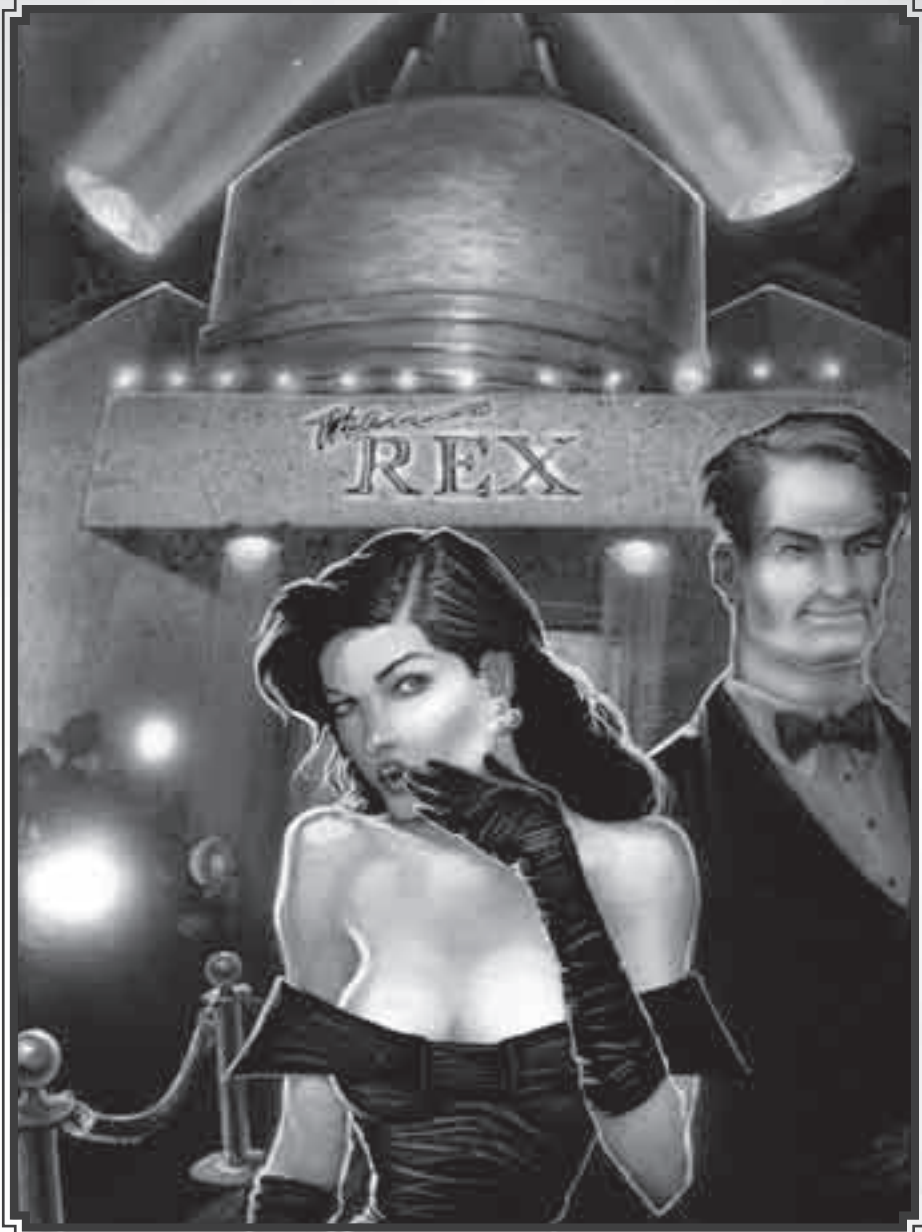
Against the power of the moguls, trade unions have made the most notable inroads. Backed by mob muscle and the threat of mass work stoppages, they sometimes manage to wrangle better wages and working conditions among their members. Most of the "blue collar" elements of filmmaking (grips, electricians, even members of the actors and directors guilds) belong to some union or another. Together, they constitute an influential plurality, which could cause the moguls

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distress if they so choose. The studios respond by paying off union leaders: bribing or coercing them in exchange for keeping the workers in line. Much of that money goes to various criminal syndicates back east (who can cause troubles of their own by targeting local theaters). The moguls regard it as the unpleasant price of doing business, and rarely call the unions' bluff. The few instances of labor unrest within the film industry have been nasty in the extreme, resulting in clashes that leave dozens injured or killed.

Moviemaking is the umbrella beneath which the rest of Paradiso thrives. The inner circle of studio elite, A-list stars, and high-priced directors creates a ripple effect, which expands to the various echelons beneath it. Subsidiary industries attempt to reflect the film industry's glamour, posting autographed pictures of stars who frequent their establishment or boasting about having once employed the new hot actor of the day. Tourists come from all over the U.C. to spend a few days in the sun. They too hope to catch a glimpse of the ephemeral magic, and while the city has numerous "ordinary" attractions (the warm beaches, the scenic mountains, amusement parks at the Bianco Memorial Pier and elsewhere), it's the sensed proximity to the best and brightest which keeps them coming (even if those "best and brightest" exist only in the imagination). Paradiso is home to a thriving tabloid industry, reporting on the latest gossip, romance, and scandal from the ranks of the elite. Studios court tabloid reporters as a form of alternate publicity; a few words in the correct column can make or break a career. Even the orange growers can't escape the ravenous world of make-believe which has sprouted in their midst. Every year, they get pushed back a little further to make room for the next housing development, or the newest department store. Sometime in the not-too-distant future, they'll be just another memory.

For all its delusions, however, Paradiso still has good qualities. Bigotry and prejudice are far less prevalent here than elsewhere; the notion that one can "reinvent" oneself means that few are judged on who they once may have been. Past misdeeds are forgotten, and while no one ever forgives a slight (careers have been destroyed over a passing comment), few



truly care what you did before arriving in the city. Paradiso's Lethe-like qualities are particularly attractive to gaunts, who have settled here in large numbers. They get a better shake than they would elsewhere; the pleasant weather makes slum-dwelling easier, and many have found work building movie sets, paving the roads, or even acting (though parts are limited to criminal thugs and other stereotypes).

The sunshine covers up as many secrets as the shadows in Paradiso: a warm, blinding glow rendering those beneath it oblivious to anything else. It's an enviable existence in some ways. The streets are paved with fantasy, and hardships and pain seem nothing but distant dreams. But it's all a phantom, a surface mirage built on hogwash and mutual denial. Beneath the palm-lined streets and neon marquees, the desert sands wait to swallow it all up again.

CHAPTER FOUR: PARADISO

RADIO

While a poor second in popularity to motion pictures, radio drama remains a staple of U.C. leisure time. AM stations from coast to coast relay the latest news bulletins, music ranging from classical to big-band swing (often broadcasting out of New Eden), sporting events of every kind, and audio plays which dominate the evening hours between six and nine. Material ranges from screwball comedies to family dramas, though the most popular are action-adventures like *The Amazing Adventures of Jack Foster*. With television still in its infancy, radio remains to fill in the gap in family life.

Most radio dramas originate in Paradiso, which has the facilities to produce them in copious amounts. The major studios all have branches which produce radio teleplays, and numerous smaller stations work to develop their own programming as well. The glut of actors within the city means that there's no shortage of talent, and major stars often moonlight on popular programs in between shoots. In addition, "sound-only" adaptations of popular films are a staple of radio programming, and original cast members often come together after a production has wrapped to recreate their characters for the airwaves. Radio is much more workaday than filmmaking — there's no extra perks, and even the medium's stars rarely appear in public — but the competition is less cutthroat, and those who operate under its banner rarely do so for personal aggrandizement.

CRIME

"Even the scumbags act like movie stars," the D.A. is fond of saying, and Paradiso's criminal elements wouldn't disagree. Crime is show business here, and the more razzle-dazzle they can do it with, the better. Drug dealers and pornographers wrap their wares in the sheen of respectability, posing as legitimate businessmen or filmmakers. They thrive on exploitation of the needy and naïve, pushing their wares before their customers know what's hit them. The story of the earnest young actress coming to Paradiso in search of fame only to fall into the hands of exploitative smut peddlers is an old and sad one. In this town, it's also all too common. The brothels are filled with broken women — kept virtual prisoners by domineering pimps, drug habits, or both — and streetwalkers are bound through fear and intimidation to a life no one would wish on their worst enemy.

Vice of any sort is generally tolerated in Paradiso. Like Dorian Grey's painting, it reflects the secret impulses of its populace, hidden away by its brighter face but unable to be discarded or forgotten. The elite need their pleasures, which means that drug use, prostitution, and other unwholesome delights are available at a moment's notice. And there is plenty

of demand lower down on the pecking order as well, as people eager to forget their broken dreams turn to mind-altering substances to facilitate an escape. The city's fantasy life always appears brighter under the prick of the heroin needle, or in the arms of a beautiful woman who will say she loves you if you give her enough money. Paradiso is full of those who never made it, those who made it and lost it, and those who watched the undeserving make it in their stead. Sometimes, a respite from that pain is all they need... and the city, in her cruelty, is more than happy to grant it.

Naturally, it's covered in a pleasing façade. Tourists never come to the red-lit hills of the North Side, where strip joints and dope dens have crowded out more respectable businesses. Those who traffic in sin dress in the same tailored suits as studio executives, deflecting suspicion and pretending to be something they're not. As always, organized criminals have their fingers all over the puppet strings. For the most part, however, they keep a diminished profile, counting instead on front men and pimps to do the dirty work. They send representatives to collect their dues and deliver supplies (usually by truck or boat), and the occasional underworld assassination reminds the lowlifes who's in charge. Otherwise, they generally leave the city be, content to fleece money from the clientele and tend to their own business back east.

The only place where mob influence can be overtly detected is in the various workmans' unions at the studios. Eager for a piece of the lucrative film market (and able to influence the shipping firms who deliver film prints to theaters across the country), criminal syndicates can extort studios through threats of work stoppages, or instances of sabotage on set. The moguls are too smart to oppose such shakedowns, content to pay off the union heads and keep the cameras rolling. Law enforcement regards it as one of their chief concerns, allowing them to point the finger at out-of-town targets and ignore the more intractable "victimless crimes" of porn and drug use. The periodic arrest of an eastern underworld figure — caught with his pants down far from home — keeps the unions on their toes, and gives the moguls occasional relief from the shakedowns.

Magic use is not a big problem in Paradiso. While the city has its share of sorcerers (and Privateer Pictures actually employs some as special effects artists), warlocks generally dislike all the lights and attention. Paradiso's vacuous fixation with celebrity doesn't sit well with their intellectual outlook, and most are too wary of drawing attention to themselves to indulge in the cultural magnifying glass under which the city appears to live. On the other hand, the preponderance of illegal activity means that magical activity draws less attention than most, and the city's faux sophistication ensures that even significant displays of power are treated with a "been there, done that" spirit of ennui. Warlocks with a knack for the sensuous can earn a living simply by demonstrating their powers at drug-addled parties, and while libraries and laboratories are thin on the ground here, an enterprising sorcerer can find more than enough resources to keep him going.

There is no single dominant underworld figure in Paradiso. Hustlers come and go like the tide, and the city's *laissez faire* attitude towards vice means that there are almost more op-

portunities than criminals to fulfill them. Overt violence is rare and limited to single incidents; power struggles consist more of jockeying and posturing than muscle. Every time someone climbs to the top of the heap, the sheer number of rats beneath him ensures that he loses control and takes a hard fall. Between such hubris, Paradiso's crime is led by an ever-shifting series of con men, sleaze kings, and petty crooks.

One permanent fixture in recent years has been "One Thumb" MacKenzie, a lieutenant for the Drago mob who has helped his boss establish a foothold in Paradiso. Though a perennial outsider, the muscle he represents has intimidated his competition, and his extortion rackets have led to considerable scrutiny from the Paradiso PD. Several of his competitors are debating whether they can afford to let him continue unchecked... and whether they can handle the backlash from Drago if they take the notorious gaunt's representative out of the picture. (More on One Thumb can be found on page 110.)

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Paradiso's law enforcement has an unimpeachable reputation, renowned throughout the Commonwealth for its effectiveness and dedication. This is largely by design. The department has long courted a squeaky-clean image, which kicked into high gear shortly after the war. Then-Chief Nathaniel Powers realized he had the most potent PR tool available in his city's film and radio industry, and began quietly encouraging "officially-sanctioned" material depicting Paradiso PD in the best possible light. Positive stories were planted in newspapers and other periodicals. Movie stars were asked to endorse the police and police functions, or appear at official department events. A series of successful films featuring Paradiso detectives helped elevate the department's standing, but it wasn't

THE ANGEL EYES KILLER

On a cold spring morning, while the coastal fog slowly burned off beneath the sun, a busboy from the Full Moon diner noticed something odd as he took out the trash. A pale white mannequin had been stuffed into a nearby dumpster, its legs sticking out in an unsettling manner. As he got closer, he realized that it *wasn't* a mannequin, but a mutilated human corpse. Dropping his garbage can with a clatter, he stumbled back into the diner to call the police. Then he called the *National Scoop*... and three other papers in rapid succession.

By the time detectives arrived, the alley was swarming with reporters and photographers, cataloguing every detail of the murder scene for publication in the late editions. The victim was Cleo Fitzsimmons, an aspiring actress and would-be socialite with a taste for Paradiso's swankiest nightclubs. She had been stripped completely naked, with stab wounds around her belly and ribcage; rope marks could be seen burned into her wrists and ankles; and perhaps most grisly of all, her eyes had been plucked from her skull, leaving two ghastly empty sockets to stare from her lifeless face. The papers immediately dubbed the killer "Angel Eyes," and the most infamous murder case in Paradiso's history was born.

In the ensuing months, three more victims have been found. Sally Dicolleta, a part-time model and cigarette girl at the Diamond Mirror club, washed ashore beneath the Bianco Memorial Pier. Arthur Grimme, an assistant booking agent with connections at Foxfire Pictures, turned up spread-eagle in front of a Buddhist monument in the Harrison Hills. And Valerie Richmond, secretary for a studio accountant who also had dreams of performing, was dumped unceremoniously on the hood of her employer's car. All of them had wounds like Cleo's; all of them were missing their eyes, which had been removed with a care that belied the trauma of their other injuries.

The police were baffled. The victims had attended (or were working at) various popular nightspots when they disappeared, and all of them vanished without garnering notice... in Richmond's case despite the fact that she had come with a large group of people. None of the patrons could recall whether anyone had paid particular attention to them, and the bodies had been doused in kerosene before being dumped (removing fingerprints and making forensic detection all but impossible). While the police pore through the files searching for common threads, the city braces itself, wondering who the next victim will be... and where he or she will be found.

The missing eyes have been the case's most sensationalized aspect. News reports speculate wildly on the reason and purpose for the grisly trophies. Some believe they serve a symbolic function: the killer erasing his guilt by robbing the only witnesses of their sight. Others suggest a more basic motivation — claiming trophies from the "hunt." But the one which attained the most credence involved the use of the eyes in sorcerous rituals: a notion scoffed at by police, since a warlock's scientific methodology has no place for such superstition. Despite that, the notion — first published in one of Paradiso's more hysterically-inclined tabloids — took hold amid the populace and sparked a brief rash of anti-warlock violence. The fervor (quite unusual in Paradiso) has since died down, but local warlocks remain wary of the lingering associations drawn between their activities and the murders.

The inability to catch the killer has given the city police a rare black eye. With salacious details appearing in newspapers across the country and the victims' pasts publicly exhumed in search of new bits of gossip, Chief Turner is concerned that the situation is getting out of control. The city is now consumed with the newest tidbits or pieces of gossip, and with the appearance of the next victim, it will likely go ape. The police only hope that some new piece of evidence will reveal itself before their embarrassment grows... and Angel Eyes claims a new pair for his collection.

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until the radio drama *Shield of Gold*, which premiered some six years ago, that Chief Powers' notion really caught fire. Featuring actor Jeff Maxwell in the lead role, *Shield* showed cops as ordinary, hard-working men and women who solved crimes not through intellectual brilliance, but diligence and hard work. It became an overnight sensation... and Paradiso PD reaped the results. New recruits flocked in, eager to be a part of the "renowned" department. Press coverage trumpeted the "real *Shield*," and printed laudatory stories about big arrests and shining track records. Within five years, the department was considered a model for how police work gets done, and Chief Powers never let anyone forget it.

The truth is not so different from the image as much as some would suspect. Paradiso's PD isn't nearly as compromised as other departments across the country and corruption, while present, isn't as seamy or far-reaching as it is in, say, Central City. The department's principle failing comes in believing its own hype. With all the emphasis on image, appearances become more important than results. Splashy arrests are made without proper follow-up, public criminal lynchpins are persecuted without pursuing the hidden associates pulling the strings, and plum cases (i.e., those with a lot of press coverage) are squabbled over like children's toys. All of which detracts from the unpleasant chores required of effective police work. The gilded image has trumped the messy reality.

This trend has only intensified under Chief Powers' successor, Jude Turner. Powers died of a heart attack less than two years ago and Turner — a sleek ferret who took full advantage of the department's PR makeover — claimed the position over several better-qualified rivals. Charming and well-organized, Turner has a knack for running the three-ring circus which the department has become. He's less adept at handling issues involving manpower and investigative technique, aggravating his more result-oriented underlings to no end. While scene-stealing officers like "detective to the stars" Angela Valentine (see page 91 of the *Edge of Midnight* core rulebook) are given the choice assignments, more experienced and dedicated cops often languish away beneath dead-end cases, their prowess going to waste because they don't necessarily look good on camera.

Generally speaking, the city's elite are immune to police persecution. As long as they keep things quiet and out of the papers, what goes on in the opulent mansions of Bailey Canyon is none of the department's concern. Investigations into the studio unions and grandstanding sweeps through the North Side are more than enough to occupy the public's attention, leaving the moguls and movie stars to frolic as they please. Of course, every now and then, the police get a chance to land a big fish: some bright young thing on the cover of all the magazines, or a studio boss who takes his private obsessions one step too far. The department relishes the opportunity to knock a high roller off his cloud, and celebrity arrests are accompanied with great fanfare and drama. Chief Turner keeps such spectacle to a minimum, but feels the occasional "shake-up" helps remind everyone where the line is. And there's just something so satisfying about seeing one of those big shots taken down a peg...

NEIGHBORHOODS

Like its real-world *doppelgänger*, Paradiso has no centralized locale — no core to form a beating heart. It's a mad tangle of neighborhoods, suburbs, and mini-communities, spreading out from the sea with little rhyme or reason. The studio hegemony rules from Bailey Canyon to the south, slowly giving way to middle- and working-class neighborhoods the further north one travels. Outlying farms crowd around the edges, gradually being pushed into the desert by expanding construction. It's a kaleidoscope of the new and the different, its only defining identity being the lack of an identity at all.

BAILEY CANYON

Bailey Canyon is actually more of a glorified slope, pulling away from the south side of the city to form a series of ridges and valleys. It extends outward from the beach in a gentle arc, marked by quaintly winding roads, warm breezes, and spectacular views. The streets curve leisurely into the hills, screening opulent mansions and providing a breathtaking view of the rest of the city to the north. Here, Paradiso's cinematic elite have staked their claim, building studios that are townships unto themselves and estates that would put the crowned heads overseas to shame. The little people never linger among its hedgerows and gated driveways; not unless they're working as a chauffeur or a maid, that is.

The studios have always been working in Bailey Canyon. The landscape allowed for a reasonable variety of settings, and the canyon's sloping walls meant that directors never had to disguise their background shots. Three studio lots are found here — Privateer Pictures takes up the biggest tract of land — with three more fairly close by. The pleasant surroundings meant that moguls and stars could live close by and still receive "the best." The mansions have been here almost as long as the movie lots. A few photo processing labs and other satellite industries mark the outskirts of the Canyon, where the landscape's ups and downs finally give way to Paradiso proper.

"Excess" is the watchword on these hallowed streets. Everything is permitted and nothing is beyond reach. While the moguls preach hard work on the lot — and their schedules are so tight that no one has a spare moment to breathe — after hours tell another story altogether. While some prefer the nightclubs of Playa Villa, fame and notoriety means that few can enjoy themselves without being mobbed. So they stay here. Every night, the mansions crawl with revelers and party-goers, sampling the pleasures which unlimited money can buy. Upper echelon prostitutes are brought in from the North Side flesh parlors, while dealers and hustlers make discreet appearances to drop off their wares. The fruits of success are irresistible to those who have clawed their way to the top of the heap, and they indulge in them all without thought to the consequences. There's never a problem with the police, who patrol the Canyon mainly to watch for thieves or to politely

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ask particularly wild revels to keep it down. The only difficulty comes when someone goes too far: when a besotted party-goer ends up convulsing on the bathroom floor or flaring passions push someone over the edge. Even then, steps are taken to keep things quiet. As long as the press isn't involved, the police are usually willing to make a deal, and even victims can be quieted with the right amount of goodies from the slush fund.

Of course, "as long as the press isn't involved" can be a tall order sometimes. The tabloid industry has a permanent presence in Bailey Canyon, ready to spill fresh ink on the neighborhood's ongoing shenanigans. The smart residents have learned to spot paparazzi from miles off (there's a reason most residences are set far back from the road), but that doesn't prevent embarrassing pictures from cropping up on the newsstands every week. The *National Scoop* has a quartet of reporters stationed full-time at the Canyon, eager to slip into forbidden soirees disguised as a caterer or busboy. Up-and-comer *Voyeur* takes a more high-tech approach, using the latest in zoom lenses and microphones to spy on the most secretive locales. All newspapers pay for tips and rumors, and a disgruntled employee can make a year's salary just by dropping word on a few good parties. The stars may rumble about lawsuits, and bodyguards may get rougher, but as long as the public is buying, the smut rags will continue to circle Bailey Canyon like sharks.

1) The McGillis House

Everyone remembers Evelyn McGillis, shining star of stage and screen. The "Grand Old Dame" of filmdom was on just about everyone's A-list, and while few can remember the specifics of her films, her legacy could be felt in every corner of Paradiso. Young actresses expressed their admiration for her; directors spoke fondly of the way the light caught her face. She steered away from the vices that claimed many of her cohorts, and while she doubtless had her share of flops, there wasn't a studio in town that wouldn't sign a deal with her in a heartbeat.

No one wishes to remember the circumstances surrounding her death. She had engaged in an illicit affair with a married man almost forty years her junior. They met discreetly in fine hotels and secluded beach cottages, expertly avoiding the press' roaming eye. She spent a small fortune to keep him happy... but when she found out he was sending it all to his wife, she tried to break it off. He shot her in the face, stealing her purse and the diamond necklace she was wearing, and slipped out via the hotel fire escape. The police cornered the man and his wife at the Central City train station. Apparently, the whole affair had been a scam to bilk the old woman out of her fortune. The pair were gunned down trying to flee; the money they had hustled — nearly \$3 million, including the necklace — was never recovered.

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That left McGillis' estate in an odd position. Her will stipulated quite clearly that her beloved Bailey Canyon mansion was not to be sold, but rather maintained in its current state as a monument to her life. She was to be interred in a tomb in the spacious backyard, the servants were to be kept on to maintain the mansion exactly as it was, and adoring fans were allowed to visit and see how their screen idol lived.

Unfortunately, without the money bilked by her erstwhile paramour, the trust fund set up for it all was severely lacking. The funeral and internment drained away even more resources, leaving precious little to maintain the grounds. Some servants left; those who remained did so mainly out of loyalty to their former employer... or because they simply had nowhere else to go. They did their best to fulfill their appointed task, but the money simply wasn't there, and the mansion fell into sad disrepair.

Today the property is a colossal white elephant, drawing the idle curious but little else. It stands on a cliff overlooking the Columbic: a spectacular view tarnished by the decay around it. A half dozen butlers and chambermaids work as hard as they can to keep up key areas of the house, but the remainder has fallen into ruin. The private dance floor is now scuffed and covered in dust, while moths dominate the wardrobes where McGillis' famous gowns have been eaten away. Room after room sits covered in white sheets and cobwebs, the furniture beneath slowly succumbing to neglect. When full, the pool was designed to merge seamlessly with the ocean beyond. Now it is filled with leaves and the redwood deck chairs have become swollen and splintered. The lawns are overgrown and covered with dandelions and crabgrass. A chauffeur keeps up an outdated limousine in the red brick driveway (the servants still use it to buy groceries) and living quarters are neat and tidy, but the rest of the house is slipping away bit by bit.

McGillis' tomb can be found on the far side of the pool, a simple white marble edifice with a large plaque in front. Fans still occasionally gather there, leaving flowers or small pictures behind. They take efforts to clear the leaves away (sparing servants the task) but only the most faithful linger longer than a few minutes. The rotting mansion behind them — its gap-toothed windows staring at them from across the brown-ing lawn — is an unpleasant reminder of their beloved icon's final days.

Typical McGillis Estate Servant

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 4, Etiquette 8, Evasion 6, Firearms 4, Lore (Employer's Career) 9, Medicine 5, Perception 6, Pick Lock 3, Sleight of Hand 4.

Backgrounds: Blue Collar Worker, Loyal Retainer, Rugged.

Profession: None.

2) Foxfire Pictures

If Privateer is the grand dame of Paradiso movie studios, then Foxfire is the flashy showgirl: all brassy wit and street-walker wiggle. It specializes in "genre" pictures — earthy melodramas, horror movies, and science fiction serials — at which it absolutely excels. Foxfire can turn out a feature length movie in a fraction of the time it takes its nearest competitor, and if the quality sometimes struggles, the audience never complains. The end of the war brought a boom in new theaters, which Foxfire was quickest to capitalize on. They're still basking in the glow of their hugely successful Nelson Littleford pictures — a quartet of horror movies which are rapidly becoming classics — and while their latest epic *She Kittens From Beyond the Stars* is somewhat less lauded, it's playing well enough to begin ramping up for the sequel.

Foxfire's other great distinction is the "discovery" angle: claiming to stumble across the next great star in a garage or truck stop and raising him or her to the greatest heights. It's mostly balderdash — the studio spends a great deal of money locating and training its talent — but there's enough truth in it to feed the image. Plenty of people check out Foxfire's pictures hoping to see the next big thing, and the studio's marketing machine has a remarkable way of elevating their in-house stiffies to larger-than-life status.

Screenwriters and directors, on the other hand, are handled much more roughly: valued for their ability to get the job done and not much else. Most of them came here with dreams of telling brilliant stories, only to be slowly ground to dust by the factory-like production process that the studios excel in. Many of them are heavy drinkers and their ranks are marked both by hard working hacks stripped of their delusions, and former greats who have peaked and are now on their way down. While the beautiful young faces on the Foxfire marquee are replete with charisma and enthusiasm, the words they speak and the settings around them are usually hackneyed, uninspired, and by-the-numbers.

Foxfire stands on a relatively small lot, compact and easy to navigate. The manic activity surrounding it means that productions are often tripping over each other, but CEO Myer Thorpe feels it adds to the creative energy of the place. A pair of water towers flanking the sets have become Foxfire's signature; its logo depicts a movie camera suspended almost perfectly between them.

Typical Bright Young Thing

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 8, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 5, Contortions 4, Etiquette 2, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 6, Intimidation 2, Lore (Studio System Politics) 3, Melee 5, Perception 2, Sleight of Hand 3, Sport (Tennis) 5, Stealth 3, Throwing 6.

Backgrounds: Acrobatic, Charismatic, Lucky.

Profession: Performer 1, Femme Fatale/Lady Killer 1.

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HIGHWATER LAKE

The Harrison Hills mark Paradiso's natural geographical boundary, where the modestly fertile coastal land gives way to the sands of the Sola Diablo. Perched atop a shallow basin overlooking the city is the source of her lifeblood: Highwater Lake, a vast man-made reservoir that allows Paradiso to hold the desert at bay.

The location was selected due to its wide area and its lack of appreciable housing. It was originally owned by orange farmers, who used the basin to cultivate their groves. Then, sometime before the war, a group of real estate investors realized that Paradiso would never expand beyond a certain size unless it had access to more water. They petitioned the U.C. government to fund construction of a massive aqueduct through the desert, then set about acquiring the rights to the land where the lake would be filled. It was a considerable fight. The farmers were reluctant to give up their property; the investors responded by smoking them out. Those who wouldn't sell were intimidated into leaving, or had their groves irrigated with salt water. Many were assaulted and a few just disappeared. Once the investors had the land, they defended it with hired muscle and political intimidation. The displaced farmers fought madly to regain what they had lost, but few others could be bothered. After all, it was just empty farmland. What good could it do?

The benefits could be seen, however, by the time the aqueduct arrived. The investors leased use of "their" lake to Paradiso shortly after the war ended — hydrating the thirsty city and allowing the population to swell. The land increased its value tenfold and Paradiso transformed from a mid-sized industry town into one of the biggest metropolises in the Commonwealth.

Emboldened by their success, the investors sought to turn the outlying land into a tourist retreat, building bungalows and gated communities on the shores of Highwater Lake. This endeavor, however, was less successful than their first. Fears of sabotage led the city to fence in the reservoir, giving it a dingy, industrial feel. Few wealthy buyers could be enticed away from Bailey Canyon, and the bungalows touted as ideal vacation homes rapidly fell into disrepair. While the area mostly caters to lower- to middle-class vacationers, unable to afford a more luxurious retreat, it also makes an excellent hiding place for those wishing to avoid attention, and the area gaunts have begun moving in in increasingly large numbers. The lake's vital importance single-handedly keeps the area from falling into ruin.

Still, Paradiso owes much to the ruthless vision of the men who built here. Highwater itself fills several dozen square miles, fed by a regular supply from the aqueduct and the rare winter rains which strike the hills. The Department of Resource Economics (a branch of the Paradiso government) oversees maintenance of the lake, even going so far as sending police officers to patrol the perimeter. Foul play is not uncommon in the areas around the lake, and officials have turned up everything from human limbs to briefcases full of heroin in the bottomless gray waters.

3) Tartan Circle Vacation Homes

Tartan Circle exemplifies the dwellings found in the Highwater Lake area. Marked by faded cul-de-sacs of shoreline villas, its units have slowly fallen into a sort of shabby lived-in look, neither wholly appealing nor entirely repugnant. The fronts of the houses form a long row, joined together by spotted lawns and semi-cracked sidewalks, while the rear sides sport wooden porches which open onto the lake. Each unit is a uniform green color (slowly yellowing under the sun). In the summer months, they actually spring to a form of life. The owners charge rent by the week for vacationers, mostly working-class families who do their best to enjoy the tiny strip of beach permitted by the DRE. The summer months attain an air of desperate nostalgia, and the streets deliver a brief, sticky respite from the reality which nibbles at their edges.

When the weather turns cold, the vacationers leave and the doors are locked up, interrupted only by the occasional bit of half-hearted maintenance. But the units are hardly unoccupied. Workers from the nearby pumping station often use them as a meeting place, spending the night between shifts and playing poker or ogling pornography purchased from some North Side sleaze pit. (The DRE pays a small fee to the owners in exchange for such privileges.) Petty criminals occasionally meet there to complete some sordid deal or another, and transients and migrant farm workers can find a warm place to spend the night on their way from Point A to Point B. And every now and then, lovers engaged in a sordid tryst will make their way here — paying rent as they would in a cheap hotel and meeting in the darkest hours of the night. In the spring, the cleaners find broken bottles, soiled mattresses, and other detritus to sweep up. It's the things they miss, however, that merit the most attention.

With all that goes on in Tartan Circle, it's inevitable that some interesting items show up on the premises. For example, one unit contains \$50,000 in small bills, tucked into the walls amid the paper-thin insulation. Occasionally, the cleaners find bullet casings — some fired from guns the police would be interested in locating, others which roll beneath the floorboards or behind the sink, never to be seen again. More than a few bloodstains have been scrubbed from the carpets and as a place to hide stolen goods for a few weeks, you could hardly do better. If you're looking for dirt and aren't particular about where it comes from, all you have to do is find a quiet hiding place at the Circle. Something is bound to turn up.

Typical Vacationer

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 4, Moxie 5, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 2, Bureaucracy 6, Craft (Business) 5, Craft (Gardening) 5, Drive (Car) 3, Engineering 2, Evasion 3, Lore (Local Politics) 4, Sport (Baseball) 4.

Backgrounds: Education.

Profession: White Collar Worker 1.

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4) Playa Villa Freeway

At the foothills below Highwater Lake, a unique construction project is beginning which promises to revolutionize life in Paradiso. The city council gave its okay approximately six months ago, the culmination of a series of increasingly ambitious projects starting with Highwater and continuing with Playa Villa (see page 100). This latest endeavor aims to link the two — a nonstop “freeway” running from the edge of the Harrison Hills all the way down to the beach at Bianco Pier. When it is completed, the whole of Paradiso can be traversed in less than fifteen minutes, rendering stoplights and traffic jams a thing of the past. The plan calls for the incorporation of several existing boulevards, but largely relies on new construction — great concrete pillars and a four-lane blacktop carved straight through the landscape. Homes in the path of the bulldozers are being bought up or forcibly emptied, and other property is slowly being bled dry by an increasing series of tariffs to pay for the project. The city council intends this to be their crowning achievement, cementing Paradiso’s status as one of the greatest cities in the world.

It all starts here, a short distance from the terminus of the Silver Ribbon highway. A fleet of concrete mixers is being employed, along with earthmovers, bulldozers, and hundreds of workers to bring the grand design to life. In the coming months, they’ll move steadily west until they hit the ocean some two years hence. Then it will be formally linked to the Silver Ribbon and open to the public. The construction crews are grateful for the work it provides, and devote themselves wholeheartedly to the project. Numerous farm workers, left destitute by the Highwater project, have found new employment on the freeway, and gaunts are flocking to the project by the dozens.

Not everyone is happy with the idea, however. Public transit companies fear a decline in their business, and local unions are incensed at being locked out of the project (the city is hiring freelance laborers and trusting its corps of engineers to keep the project on track). Some members have begun to do more than complain. Sabotage is becoming increasingly common, and fistfights have started at the local bars between freeway workers and more established tradesmen. Union leadership has not-so-subtly suggested that such clashes will get worse if the city doesn’t bring their members into the fold or provide generous compensation to their coffers.

Property owners in the path of the proposed thoroughfare are also feeling the squeeze. In some cases, they’re willing to be bought out (the city pays good prices), but others are reluctant to pull up roots in the face of such “progress.” Many of them have been targeted by secret harassment campaigns: burglaries, vandalism, and in one case, a spectacular fire that razed an entire city block. The Paradiso council has vowed to act swiftly in such instances — and several high profile arrests have already been made — but whispers have begun that perhaps they have had more to do with the mayhem than they let on.

In any case, the current site, still in the shadow of Highwater, has become a hotbed of distrust. Workers are wary of any strangers appearing in their midst, while union agitators and other malcontents gather beyond the chain link fence, hurling

insults and chanting slogans. Paradiso PD is keeping a close eye on the situation, but the sheer magnitude of the project is more than they can monitor; if things blow up, it could easily spread to the rest of the city.

Typical Freelance Engineer

Attributes: Brawn 5, Build 5, Brains 5, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 6, Demolitions 5, Drive 4 (Car, Truck), Engineering 7, Etiquette 3, Evasion 5, Firearms 5, Intimidation 4, Lore (Local Geography) 5, Perception 4, Sport (Baseball) 3, Streetwise 1.

Backgrounds: Alert, White Collar Worker.

Profession: Businessman 1.

THE NORTH SIDE

Paradiso has no formal name for it, but “North Side” has come to stand for all that’s wrong with its golden dreams of stardom. Here, the city’s come-hither sexuality bursts into full, vulgar bloom: strip clubs, massage parlors, and peddlers in pornography can be found on every block, while more blatantly illegal operations flourish amid the neon lights. Tourists sometimes come here for a little walk on the wild side, but they invariably scuttle back to Playa Villa, their wallets empty and their eyes filled with fear. No one who sees the North Side returns from it unaffected. The dreams of Paradiso crawl here to die, sucked dry by the studio vampires and tossed aside like garbage. The fresh-faced kids who arrived full of hope and visions of lighting up the silver screen often end their days here, performing acts in the back alleys that further deaden their already-shattered souls. Cynicism walks in the open, not hidden behind pretty lies and betrayal.

Most of what goes on in this neighborhood is illegal, though the government does little to seriously address the problem. Common thinking in City Hall is that the North Side is a “safety valve,” keeping violent crime down by providing more “victimless” crimes as an outlet. The police make sweeps and their presence can be felt, but generally, they leave the denizens to their own devices. Neon lights flicker on every block, promising all manner of temptations and delights: from peep shows to pornographic book stores to production companies specializing in the “mature/erotic” genre. Streetwalkers ply their trade in front of every red light establishment, and business is always booming. The pimps of the North Side make more money in a week than most middle class families earn in a year... most of it blown on the district’s omnipresent drug trade. Junkies huddle in every doorway, and dealers operate behind barely-hidden front stores.

No one comes to the North Side willingly, though everyone does so of their own volition. Failed actors, skid-row dancers, the lonely, the desperate, and the wounded all find their way here — either to drown themselves in its corruption or to profit from it. Gaunts often work as bouncers or cashiers, since their visage rarely bothers people as it might in a more

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respectable setting. “Victimless” hardly describes what goes on here, but at the same time, everyone — from the nattiest gangster to the most desiccated whore — made a choice to be here. The North Side invariably ensures that they live with it.

Here and there, a few “legitimate” businesses can still be found: mostly liquor stores, but also more sedate attractions like card rooms and pool halls. Respectability is too much to ask for on the North Side, but these endeavors manage keep their head above the cesspool surrounding them. Many of them turn a brisk profit and the recent success of the Four Leaf Casino lends the hope that the area’s sleazy core can finally be tamed.

In addition, the North Side makes a convenient headquarters for criminals on the run. Few people look at faces here, and those who do are very good at forgetting the details. The open sewer of humanity often leaves police searching for a needle in a haystack, and every business has a back room or similar locale which they’re willing to rent out for a price. It’s no surprise that many of Paradiso’s warlocks can be found here... and that some maintain permanent boltholes where they can disappear when the heat comes down.

5) The Four Leaf Casino

A poisonous jewel in the North Side’s shabby crown, the Four Leaf is high-class enough to get legitimate citizens to visit the neighborhood, and illicit enough to fit right in with its low-brow neighbors. A warehouse-sized edifice of green and gold neon, its cloverleaf sign rises above the surrounding blocks, visible for miles in every direction. The cavernous floor is decorated in subtler forest tones, but maintains an air of faux-Celtic smarm to it. Several bars service gamblers with an endless supply of drinks, while a nearby restaurant provides food for those with any money left. Several hotels in the immediate vicinity maintain high

enough standards to book respectable clientele (the notion of a combination hotel/casino has not yet caught hold in the U.C.). The Four Leaf features a variety of expected games of chance. Poker and blackjack tables number in the dozens, several roulette games are always going, and an “exotic” corner contains more esoteric games such as baccarat and mah-jong. Sports betting is popular too, and the phones are constantly ringing with off-site high rollers looking to put a few hundred down on the Gallants game or the latest heavyweight prize fight.

Its biggest draw, however, comes from slot machines. Row after row of the one-armed bandits line the expanse of the Four Leaf’s main floor, each occupied by gullible tourists obediently feeding it quarters. The profitability margin is staggering, allowing the casino to play a little more loosely with some of its other games. While poker and blackjack always make money, the ownership sometimes sees fit to let a particular high roller — say a member of Jack Drago’s crew on vacation from Central City — clean up. It keeps the Four Leaf on the right people’s good side, and with money pouring in from the slots, they can well afford it.

And indeed, its profits seem to be endless. The casino’s reputation attracts plenty of legitimate visitors, willing to indulge in a little “danger” without actually braving the streets outside. Professional gamblers view it as the Sistine Chapel of their community, while Paradiso itself benefits from the taxes it provides. Middle class dabblers rub shoulders with slick sharks clad in silk shirts and snakeskin boots, while prominent judges share tables with gangsters and hitmen. The games are all above-board and legitimate: an overseer from the Paradiso city government comes in once a month to ensure that everything remains on the level. It’s utterly unnecessary. Profits are such that any crooked gaming would hurt the casino as much as help it.

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Its success makes it a natural front for money laundering, and the casino's ownership quietly facilitates several large syndicates in such endeavors. A gangster will come in and slowly gamble away a set amount of money, which is tracked and invested in a variety of shell accounts. Multiple rural banks — whose doors have long since closed — still exist on paper as subsidiaries of the Four Leaf's owners. They pass through a complicated web before ending up in legitimate businesses in Central City, Gateway, and elsewhere — all owned by known leaders in the nation's criminal underworld. With gambling legal in Paradiso, it's hard to track such funds; the Four Leaf is positively rolling in syndicate loot.

Several dozen security guards constantly patrol the casino floor, searching for troublemakers and monitoring the games for cheats. They also serve doorman duties, keeping the entryways safe while scaring off the riff-raff. Suspected cheaters are turned over to the police (usually after being savagely beaten) while those creating a public nuisance are merely shown the door and told never to return (savage beatings being withheld for the second offence). The casino basement holds a series of secure counting rooms, offices for the manager and other personnel, and the vault — an imposing chamber of concrete and steel — which keeps the profits secure until one of the weekly transfers to the bank via armored car. The Four Leaf has suffered several attempted robberies — mostly in the counting rooms and the armored cars, since the vault itself is nearly impregnable — but none have succeeded thus far. Considering the amount of underworld money which the casino processes, robbing the Four Leaf isn't recommended.

Typical Casino Security Tough

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 7, Build 7, Gut 6, Moxie 3, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 8, Evasion 7, Firearms 4, Intimidation 6, Melee 6, Perception 6, Stealth 5, Streetwise 4, Throwing 3.

Backgrounds: Blue Collar Worker, Rugged, Underworld Connections.

Profession: Street Tough 1.

6) The Cat's Cradle Escort Service

Though indistinguishable from the dozens of similar operations throughout the North Side, the Cat's Cradle has a strange streak of purity to its ethos. The girls here are healthy and well-treated, and the local junkies steer clear of the place. Its clientele are carefully screened and undesirables are discreetly but firmly denied entrance. It caters mostly to the well-to-do: married men with secrets to hide and others who have good reasons not to cause trouble. The owners wouldn't have it any other way.

The Cat's Cradle is run by a gaunt madam named Ida Fletcher, whose steely demeanor and eloquent speech suggests a background far from the fleshpots in which she currently resides. She claims to have established the Cradle as a "realistic alternative" to the numerous churches and outreach programs try-

ing to save the North Side from itself. Her girls see her as a protecting angel, sheltering them from the streets outside, while her associates have learned not to test her resolute will. She carries a gigantic revolver in her purse and has pistol-whipped recalcitrant johns with a relish that belies her slight frame. She even has a doctor on staff — Emile Poulain — who served as a combat medic in the war and can back up his employer with a service submachine gun if need be. She pays off several local criminals for protection and doesn't go looking for trouble if she can avoid it. The combination of toughness and flexibility has kept the Cradle safe from the worst of the compost outside.

Fletcher's altruism exists for a reason, as does the presence of a doctor with Poulain's skills. The two are lovers — deeply devoted to each other — and their passion has forced them out of the respectable jobs they once held. Poulain was blackballed from his hospital for trumped-up reasons once the administrator learned who he was seeing, while Fletcher was "politely asked to leave" following an undisclosed incident in the gaunt neighborhood where she had been training other females as telephone operators. They tried several other occupations with little success; their romance was simply intolerable to those with whom they associated. Finally, they ended up on the North Side, where Poulain ran a small clinic using whatever supplies he could scrounge up. A grateful hooker began splitting her fees with them after Poulain healed an infected knife wound, and the business built from there.

Today, the two rarely leave the Cat's Cradle, which they converted from an abandoned flophouse into a clean and reasonably safe place of business. It's starting to show signs of wear — the effects of Fletcher's gauntism — but she and Poulain pay to keep it maintained as often as they can. The girls use the rooms on the first floor, while the second and third floors are held for living quarters. Most of the occupants know the pair's status as a couple, but they're in no position to pass judgment, and Fletcher and Poulain take care not to let their affections show in public. They also use "preemptive measures" to keep their clients in line. The first floor walls have been hollowed out and peepholes have been drilled in every room. They charge exorbitant rates to allow voyeurs to "watch," but more importantly, it allows them to secretly photograph anyone visiting the girls. Blackmail is limited to a few infrequent instances — the Cat's Cradle does more than enough business — but they have no problems using the pictures to keep people quiet about things they have seen or done. Should they wish, the photos could do a lot more than just silence recalcitrant customers.

Besides escort services, the Cat's Cradle also serves as a back-alley surgery center. Poulain willingly repairs gunshot wounds and other injuries for a price, and can be persuaded to undertake more questionable operations provided there is no danger to the subject (he draws the line at organ harvesting). The pair keeps records as to who uses such services: a potential bargaining tool should the need arise. It's not the life they would have chosen, but they have each other and their efforts have made a grim situation somewhat bearable for those under their protection. If the Cat's Cradle is the best they can give to the world, then it will have to do.

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Ida Fletcher

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 5, Brawl 3, Etiquette 5, Evasion 7, Firearms 6, Forgery 3, Intimidation 7, Melee 6, Perception 6, Pick Lock 4, Puzzles 4, Stealth 2, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Gaunt, Underworld Connections, Wise.

Profession: Investigator 1.

Emile Poulain

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 2, Etiquette 1, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 3, Firearms 7, Medicine 8, Perception 4, Sleight of Hand 6, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Education, Military, Prodigy.

Profession: None.

OLYMPIC FLATS

East of the flashy seaside hotels and movie star palaces lie the modest working class charms of Olympic Flats. The neighborhood is one of the few in Paradiso with a sense of history. A high percentage of Borderlands immigrants and second- and third-generation citizens give it a strong Latino feel, and the houses have a certain dignified weight to them: as if they'd been around for longer than a week or two. If the city has a true soul — something besides the ever-changing mask it shows to the world — then it can be found in these streets.

Which isn't to say it's free of problems. Unemployment is a constant specter here, and the crime rate, while not nearly so bad as it is on the North Side, is a recurring issue. Disaffected youths — "zoot suiters" garbed in broad-shouldered fashions and outrageously large hats — prowl the streets looking for fun or trouble, and clashes with the gaunt slums to the south are not unheard of. Police presence here is viewed as an untoward intrusion, especially among the young and rebellious. Yet despite that, the Flats is a fairly friendly place, where neighbors know each other's names, and troubles are more passing concerns than constant issues. Paradiso's unions are strongly represented here, and those working under their banner usually have little to complain about.

Like most of Paradiso, Olympic Flats once contained farmland, and unlike other neighborhoods, evidence of that still exists. Citrus trees flank its widest streets, in marked contrast to the palms found elsewhere in the city. A series of canals,



once used to irrigate orange groves, criss-crosses the north-eastern corner of the neighborhood, rendering car traffic impassable, but allowing lovely paths for pedestrians to stroll. The whitewashed houses are small, but claim such amenities as back yards and garages: a far cry from the ghettos of Terminus or New Eden. Paradiso City Hall straddles the far western border of the neighborhood, providing a nice landscape for the politicians' photo ops. On bright days, the streets gleam in the sunlight, and visitors get a sense of the past here that feels more authentic than elsewhere in Paradiso... or indeed, the Commonwealth itself. Residents smile and say that the Flats has that effect on people. In the meantime, there's work to be done, chores to complete, and those no-good Benitez boys to harangue about cleaning up their act.

7) The Marketplace

Amid the canals of Olympic Flats, one space opens into a huge square, once holding a vast grove of grapefruit trees. Long since paved over, it now houses the area's biggest draw: a gigantic open marketplace, selling everything from used 45s to produce brought in from nearby farms. Vendors set up tents and carts every Saturday morning, anticipating the hordes of shoppers who descend upon the place as the sun climbs. Spots for the stalls are well-marked and claimed far in advance, forming a loose grid which allows pedestrians to move freely along the thoroughfare. Crowds are invariably large, ranging from local housewives looking for food to pawn-brokers hoping to find a forgotten treasure. Street performers dominate every corner, ranging from musicians to painters to jugglers and dancers. Most happily work for spare change. Fruits, vegetables, flowers and baked goods cover the stands. The Olympic Flats Marketplace (or just "The Marketplace" to most residents) stands as one of the last places where a small-time farmer can market his goods, and plays host to other, more unusual products as well.

While grapes, corn, and citrus fruits are abundant, the market also hosts an endless garage sale of odds and ends. Hand-woven rugs may be sold in one stall, used books and broken appliances in the next. Locals say if you look long enough and hard enough, it will appear at the Marketplace: battered, dusty, and on sale for \$1.99. That's a bit of an exaggeration. There's far more junk than useful items amid the throng, and unless you're after fresh-picked apples, your search is apt to be frustrating. But every now and then, something of interest appears amid the wares: a bank robber's confessional, for example, tucked into the pages of an old book, or a student's microscope from one of Terminus' most notorious warlocks.

Criminals are also beginning to discover the Marketplace. While a few young hoodlums make do with the odd purse-snatching, savvy lawbreakers have learned to use the hustle and bustle to disguise bigger scams. Illicit exchanges can be made under the pretext of regular bartering, and drugs or other illegal goods can easily be hidden inside some knickknack or another. The public venue means neutral ground for meetings, and it's quite easy to lose a pursuer in the crowds. While the street-level thugs keep the police occupied, those higher up the criminal food chain are slowly making their own impression on the Marketplace... perhaps tainting it forever.

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Typical Stall Owner

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 5, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Drive (Car, Farm Machinery) 5, Engineering 6, Evasion 3, Firearms 5, Intimidation 4, Lore (Olympic Flats Gossip) 5, Melee 3, Perception 3, Sport (Baseball) 4.

Backgrounds: Blue Collar Worker, Military, Rugged.

Profession: Street Tough 1.

Louis Perriwinkle

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Appraise 3, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 5, Drive (Automobile) 3, Engineering 4, Etiquette 5, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 2, Intimidation 5, Perception 5, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Lucky, White Collar Worker, Wise.

Profession: Businessman 2, Con Artist 1.

8) KPDS Radio Station

KPDS AM, “the paradise of Paradiso” is the area’s most popular radio station, playing an appealing mixture of popular music, news bulletins, and fiction dramas created right in its studios. It’s the home of the supernatural adventure show *The Specter*, and many of its radio plays are carried by stations around the country. Its wire service is as good as any news organization, and it retains a small staff of reporters who work solely for the station. All of which gives it tremendous clout, which it wields with delicate, yet inescapable authority. Competitors are quietly disparaged and while numerous other stations exist, none have assembled the ratings necessary to challenge KPDS’ dominance. Owner Louis Perriwinkle considers himself on par with the moguls over in Bailey Canyon, and doesn’t let any of his employees forget it.

The on-air personalities consist mainly of out-of-work actors, grateful for employment, who contribute both to radio plays and the news bulletins which come in over the wire. In that sense, Perriwinkle is an innovator; he realized that a calm speaking voice was far more important than any kind of legitimate journalistic experience. Denied the opportunity to read their own copy over the airwaves, the reporters on his staff complain bitterly, but the ratings bear out... and none of the writers can enunciate worth a damn anyway. Besides original programming, KPDS also specializes in film adaptations — radio versions of popular movies, often performed with the same cast. Perriwinkle has contracts with all the major studios, allowing him to record radio versions of nearly a dozen films a year.

The station itself occupies a cluster of large adobe buildings, a former farm which has long since given way to the demands of modern life. A huge radio tower stands in the center of the facility, easily the tallest structure in the neighborhood. The broadcast equipment is consolidated in the nearest two buildings, with the rest serving as reception areas, business offices, and recording studios. The “Hacks’ Shed,” home to the station’s six journalists, is located next to an old barn, which now serves as a de facto storeroom. Of particular note is a huge collection of “audio effects generators” — simple props which can simulate anything from an airplane propeller to a bubbling coffee pot — lining an entire corner of the barn. During station parties, the props are often raided by drunken revellers, requiring substantial efforts to track down and recover.

9) Miracle Street Alley

On the surface, there’s nothing unusual about the trash-lined alley behind a closed mechanic’s shop on Miracle Street. The garage went out of business some time ago and now sits abandoned, its cobwebbed spare parts rusting where they stand. A tall green wooden fence separates the alley from a junkyard in the next lot. The Harrison Hills can be seen in the distance beyond it, along with a patch of blue sky flanked by the brick of surrounding buildings. Hundreds of similar locations litter Paradiso, most utterly indistinguishable from any of the others.

But there’s something about Miracle Street which sets it apart: a vibe, a feeling, a sense that things are not quite focused here. It reverberates out from the alleyway, possibly contributing to the sense of nostalgia and history so prevalent in this neighborhood. The alley feels more tangible than the surrounding area; the brick and mortar have more metaphysical heft to them. Those who enter it often feel disoriented and confused, and the tiny handful of the Few who have come here sense even more — like their entire being is detaching from its moorings. The air itself hums with energy, and moving through it is akin to moving through semi-permeable gauze. One woman, a librarian named Holly Westmoreland, actually reported hallucinations: she claimed that she could see letters across the Harrison Hills spelling out her name.

Such incidents invariably end with a few brief bouts of nausea, then a return to normal. The phenomenon isn’t constant — it ebbs and flows, depending on the time of year, meteorological conditions, and the like. No one has yet made any concrete hypotheses regarding the site; it’s still too obscure to draw any real attention. Warlocks know about it, however, and several have come to investigate the phenomenon. None have learned anything worth knowing, although the area around the alley is much more conducive to magical effects (–2 to the TN of any rolls made to generate magic within 20 yards of the alley’s center). The Few, too, are gradually hearing word of it, though it comes in precious whispers and its exact location is a matter of some question. The owner of the nearby mechanic’s shop cannot be located and no records exist of its sale in the city’s (admittedly spotty) archives.

PLAYA VILLA

In a city that reinvents itself every day, individual neighborhoods take on the task of civic identity. Most are defined by the residents who live there, the landmarks they contain, or the geographic region they occupy. Playa Villa, however, is defined not by what can be found there, but by who visits it. A tourist mecca the likes of which could not exist anywhere else in the Commonwealth, it services travelers and visitors of all stripes, catering to their impressions of what Paradiso should be. Hotels and high-toned bars crowd the beachfront, the famous Bianco Street Pier overseeing miles of golden sand beaches. There are few actual residents of Playa Villa; its occupants are bellhops, bartenders, and cabbies, earning a wage off of an ever-changing crowd of middle-class tourists, vacationing big wigs, and retirees looking for someplace warm to roost.

The area was the brainchild of eccentric millionaire Winston Walls, a former pilot who now runs the U.C.'s fourth-largest airline company. Paradiso Municipal Airport is essentially his property, purchased from the military as part of the city's efforts to become "world class." With the bus and train depots only a few blocks away, Walls figured that visitors to the city wouldn't ever need to leave the area. All they required were enough enticements within walking distance. He petitioned the city council to rezone the surrounding areas, opened his own luxury hotel right next to the airport, and encouraged other businesses to invest in similar endeavors. By carefully manipulating his pawns in City Hall — and providing concrete plans for the entire area — he was able to bring his vision to life in the space of five short years.

Playa Villa is a deliberate creation of civic engineering, crafted to provide a specific impression that doesn't reflect any unpleasant realities. The area is laid out on an easy-to-navigate grid, flanked by palm trees and always kept meticulously clean. The streets accommodate a great deal of foot traffic, augmented by "colorful" cabbies who pull small two-person hansoms via bicycle. Stores and restaurants crowd the thoroughfare, selling souvenirs to the gullible while offering margaritas and other exotic drinks at exorbitant prices. The world-famous Beachfront Boulevard winds along the shoreline, separating the sand and the surf from the local hotels.

As is to be expected, the area is host to numerous diversions and amusements. Bianco Pier contains street entertainers, musicians galore, and a series of carnival rides open year 'round. Bowling alleys are common, as are pinball arcades featuring a variety of novelty games. The Walls Museum of Aviation draws the curious to see artifacts of the millionaire's life and times, while a decommissioned naval U-boat is open to the public on a small dock north of the pier. Percival Field, home of Paradiso's baseball team, marks the area's eastern boundary. Sell-outs are common there, though the stands are often packed with out-of-towners rooting for the visiting team against the woeful Buccaneers. For the well-to-do, several luxury hotels provide the highest service imaginable, while those less financially endowed stay in smaller motels and trailer ports. All of the buildings adhere to strict architectural pa-

rameters, laid out by Walls and subsequently enforced by the city council. Beige stucco is the predominant wall covering, while the roofs are done in Spanish tile or similarly "tropical" patterns. Enough variety exists to please the eye, but the further time one spends in Playa Villa, the more anonymous and interchangeable the buildings appear.

Despite that, however, the soot of reality still filters in to this plasticine oasis. Bums and panhandlers are a recurring problem, clustering mainly around the pier, but also venturing elsewhere in search of liquor money. A few bitter independent businesses still hold out: seedy bars and card joints which the surrounding hotels fob off as "local color." Bianco Pier remains a convenient rendezvous point for smugglers, being far enough away from the bright hotel lights to avoid generating attention, and many of the Pier's carnival attractions are crooked. But the money rolls in and the tourists keep coming, so no one complains. For better or worse, Winston Walls' idea has become an institution, and a few warts here and there aren't going to change that.

10) Paradiso Municipal Airport

The Paradiso airport once hosted only crop dusters and private enthusiasts, but thanks to Winston Walls, all of that has changed. Shortly after the war, Walls Airlines began featuring transcontinental flights out of the airport, going as far east as New Eden (with only four stops enroute!). Today, commercial planes feature multiple flights per day, heading for any of the U.C.'s biggest cities, and while train and bus travel are still the dominant means of transportation, airplanes have carved a significant niche in the industry.

The airport still plays host to smaller planes, however, and most of the area's orange groves depend on the pilots here for crop-dusting. A terminal on the south end checks in commercial passengers while private planes and the uncommon freight shipments are housed across the airport's twin runways on the north end. The tower has a powerful beacon on its roof and the runways are all lit, allowing planes to land in foggy conditions.

Though the property theoretically belongs to the city, most of the hangars and outlying buildings are owned by Walls Airlines. Walls mechanics service most of the planes which fly out of here, and Winston Walls has a contract with the city to keep the airport in working order. Indeed, he himself never leaves the property these days. A private hanger on the far side of the field has been converted into living quarters: a virtual fortress where Walls lives with two of his three daughters. The main floor now holds a colossal model of the Playa Villa area, which Walls obsessively modifies and re-modifies daily (an army of photographers is employed to catalogue every square inch of the area, down to the cracks in the concrete). Offices on the second story serve as living quarters — complete with fireplaces and balconies looking out over the airfield — while the former mechanics' offices now house kitchens, laundry rooms, and servants' quarters. Walls employs dozens of bodyguards to patrol the hanger and ensure that no one approaches without authorization... which almost never comes. Business papers and other supplies are brought in via a trusted courier (his

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daughter) and a two-way radio connected to a private corner of the airport tower is Walls' only means of communication with the outside world. Even his attorneys and business associates must climb the tower stairs and speak with Walls through the CB.

More on Winston Walls can be found on page 108.

Typical Walls Airlines Mechanic

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 5, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Drive (Aeroplane, Truck) 5, Engineering 6, Evasion 4, Lore (Aeroplane Construction) 6, Perception 4, Pick Lock 4, Throwing 3.

Backgrounds: Blue Collar Worker, Rugged.

Profession: Street Tough 1.

11) The Mandarin Theater

The Mandarin Theater, a nationally renowned icon, hosts countless premieres and even appears on Paradiso's civic seal. The lobby displays signed pictures of every star who has attended since the war — a huge collection which draws tourists from around the world. Six colossal spotlights out front ignite the heavens each night, marking the location for miles

in every direction. A dozen are lined up for every red-carpet event. The spacious auditorium features carved semblances of dragons, lions, and other mythic creatures from the Empire of the Golden Sun; the screen is the biggest in the world and private balconies are available by reservation... an unheard-of luxury for movie going. Yet despite that, the theater opens its doors to the public for most screenings, and ticket prices are as affordable as anywhere else in the city.

This last detail makes it the perfect location for its lesser-known purpose: the Mandarin serves as a hidden meeting place for the city's warlocks. The chief projectionist, Martin Anderson, has practiced magic for many years, and secretly transformed a pair of bricked-up old storerooms into a meeting room and library containing almost a dozen highly sought-after manuals. Warlocks in the know are told to simply "go to the movies" at a specified time (determined by an ever-changing mathematical code). When the currently-running reel ends, they excuse themselves and make their way to the projection room, where Anderson lets them through a series of locked doors to the meeting area. The movie's soundtrack easily masks any noises the warlocks make, and when they're done, they simply excuse themselves like any other patron. Anderson never allows warlocks to remain longer than a few hours, and the owners are completely in the dark about the extracurricular activities going on right under their noses. Premieres are a particularly desirable time to make an ap-



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pearance; the mad throng outside ensures that warlocks can shake any tails on them, and the image-conscious police know better than to blunder around with so many photographers present. Anderson has a number of special passes (courtesy of the management) granting access to a premiere to anyone who carries them. To Paradiso's warlocks, they're worth their weight in gold.

Martin Anderson

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 4, Brawl 2, Evasion 3, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 5, Electricity 5, Firearms 4, Forgery 6, Kinetics 6, Perception 5, Puzzles 4, Stealth 4, Streetwise 4, Tensile Energy 6.

Backgrounds: Alert, Blue Collar Worker, Prodigy.

Profession: Rogue Scientist 3.

12) Brenton Downs

Paradiso is home to a trio of horse tracks — Agora, Sunset, and Brenton Downs — all located within a ten-mile radius of Playa Villa. Together, they constitute the hub of the sport on the west coast. Gamblers and bookies flock here daily to bet on the latest racers, and while the most famous thoroughbreds are generally limited to eastern locales, one or two of them always make their way here each year. Brenton Downs is the best known of the three locales, a renowned sports track which hosts half a dozen major races each year and a regular slew of incidentals in between. Its velvety green infield and carefully sequestered stables remind those in the know of horse farms back east, while the ocean stages a gorgeous backdrop in the distance.

The view is lost on most of the fans, however, who are too preoccupied with the ponies to appreciate Brenton Downs' ambiance. Paradiso's gambling laws permit bets to be made on the premises, and the bookies are kept busy confirming wagers from casinos like the Four Leaf. Admission and refreshments are cheap, ensuring that many patrons are tipsy before laying their wagers, and desperate debtors can always come here and place a few bucks on a longshot in hopes of making their problems disappear. A series of private boxes is available for the horses' owners and their guests, though a wealthy spectator can rent one for an exorbitant price. The funds are carefully tabulated and go straight into the hands of the Downs' owner, Rex Lunde. He rarely comes to the races himself, leaving operations in the hands of a pair of competent managers. The horse owners require his verbal permission, face-to-face, before entering their ponies in a race here — a slight eccentricity which does little to endear him to them. Driving out to the furthest end of Bailey Canyon to wait, hat in hand, while he finishes signing papers or writing checks — all just to get a one-word "okay" from him — is one of the most exasperating things an owner can ever do.

Surprisingly, Brenton Downs itself sees little in the way of illicit activity, at least directly. Though the target of several police probes, nothing untoward turned up in its operations, and all of the regular employees have undergone a thorough background check. Illegal activity is present, but largely peripheral, perpetrated by those outside the racetrack's reach. The underworld tends to target jockeys directly if they want a race fixed, and while employees sometimes engage in shift behavior off-hours, none of them are allowed to make any money at the track beyond their regular salary. If someone's found a way to make a dishonest buck out of Brenton Downs, they're being awfully quiet about it.

Typical Inveterate Gambler

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 3, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Brawl 3, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 6, Forgery 3, Lore (Racing Form) 7, Perception 5, Sleight of Hand 5, Stealth 3, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Charismatic, Lucky.

Profession: Lady Killer 1.

THE SOLA DIABLO

A city built on emptiness can never quite rid itself of that void. It crawls along the edges, nibbling at the tract homes and the suburban borders in search of a way in. It reflects Paradiso's true nature, harsh and implacable beneath the blazing sun. The bright lights and honeyed dreams keep it at bay, but it's always waiting just over the hilltops, ready to swallow up those who try to escape. Officially, the Sola Diablo is not a part of Paradiso — it's unclaimed wilderness, too imposing to ever be settled. However, the city owes a strange debt to it. The desert keeps Paradiso from descending completely into delusion: an inescapable mirror that always reminds it of its roots.

The desert itself is the largest in the U.C., occupying a substantial corner of its southern border, and extending all the way to the mountains and farmland of its central corridor. It's bereft of any substantial townships, though numerous small villages cater to those traveling across the vast expanse. Its main signs of civilization are a pair of lifelines linking Paradiso to the rest of the country. The Silver Ribbon, Highway 263, cuts an unwavering path across the sand, bisecting the Sola Diablo almost perfectly. To the north, the great Sola Diablo Aqueduct dips and curves through the forbidding landscape, providing drinking water for two million thirsty souls in Paradiso. A series of pumping stations, funded by the national legislature and intermittently manned by government engineers, keeps the water flowing towards the city to the west.

The Ribbon serves as a revolving door for the pleasures of Paradiso. More newcomers arrive from its length than any other means, drawn in by the romantic songs about the road, and anticipating the wonders which the city may hold. For those already in Paradiso's grasp, the Ribbon represents something entirely different: an escape. Those on the run invariably turn

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to the desert, avoiding the close surveillance of the harbor, airport, or train station. When the city lights fade behind you, and the cactus and Joshua trees turn into open sand, you can fool yourself into believing that your troubles are over. Even the gas stations and cheap motels dwindle after a time, leaving nothing but hope that life on the other side of the desert will be better.

The western edge of the Sola Diablo yields oil — first tapped before the war and now pumping a modest supply for those lucky enough to have found it. Paradiso's easternmost suburbs are dotted with derricks, slowly pumping out black gold for owners who have long since moved to grand estates further west. The communities here consist of rig workers, farm workers, and desert rats, sprinkled with a few service-industry professionals working the diners and fleabags along the Silver Ribbon. Hitchhikers are a common sight among the derricks, and criminals can make an easy score from suckers willing to give them a lift. Truckers who drive the route have learned to keep a tire iron close by, and even the rig workers are wary of roving hijackers willing to shoot you for a truckload of goods.

Gaunts find the Sola Diablo strangely comforting; the open spaces and dearth of people can be quite an enticement to the right sort. Clusters of leatherbacks gather in the furthest suburbs, or in tiny townships along the Silver Ribbon where there are no normals present. Such townships usually have signs attesting to their residents, and while non-gaunts can stop briefly for gas, longer stays are greeted with suspicion and hostility. They came to the desert to be left alone, and would prefer that outsiders heed their wishes.

13) Triumph Oil Derricks

Triumph Oil was founded during the war, when a local entrepreneur named Carson Turtledove sank a half-dozen productive wells here on the western edge of the desert. The oil is mostly gone now, but the derricks are still pumping, squeezing out whatever they can to keep their owner in the style to which he is accustomed. Turtledove himself never comes out to the rigs, his mobility limited by the gout which ravages his lower joints. He's confined to a wheelchair, which doesn't present much of a problem in the city (his gaunt manservant can wedge the chair anywhere), but is simply untenable over the rough terrain of the oilfields. He meticulously monitors reports from the derricks still pumping in the desert. They're all that remains of his fortune, and the only thing holding the bankers at bay.

The rigs employ some two dozen workers, mostly gaunts and drifters without any union ties. Half the payroll is delivered under the table, to keep their skinflint employer in the dark. Turtledove is constantly demanding reports and updates, agonizing over every barrel brought laboriously from the dwindling supply. The derricks themselves are not up to code, the safety measures having fallen off along with the money. The foreman keeps the

equipment up as well as he can, but the place is extremely dangerous. He refuses to run more than a handful of pumps at any one time, which has little impact on the amount brought up, but drives Turtledove out of his mind. The site has a sad, faded look, with a few stunted eucalyptus trees struggling vainly against the industrial waste surrounding them. Several half-empty storage tanks sit rusting in the sun, while the derricks themselves are clustered on a central hilltop. A maze of pipeline — once intended for a much grander operation — slumps down the hill from the derricks towards the tanks. Some of it even carries oil from time to time. Work is exceedingly slow, and ennui often claims those employed here. Bouts of drinking and the occasional fistfight are not unheard of.

Mark Hallis, Site Foreman

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 7, Build 6, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Engineering 7, Evasion 4, Firearms 4, Intimidation 6, Lore (Geology) 3, Perception 3.

Backgrounds: Huge, Rugged, Wise.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Street Tough 1.



THE NAKED CITY

14) Longbaugh Gorge

The Sola Diablo is an excellent place to make problems go away. Especially cold, stiff, 185-pound problems that were stupid enough to show up without Big Vern's money. Many a killer, unsure how to dispose of the evidence, has loaded a corpse into his truck and taken the drive out to the abandoned wilds of the desert. With no witnesses save the wind and coyotes, and little chance of anyone ever stumbling across the remains, the Sola Diablo is now the final resting place for hundreds of the untimely deceased.

Longbaugh Gorge is the only site where the dead are buried in any significant number: a unique situation resulting from nepotism, laziness, and the location's nearly ideal conditions of corpse disposal. The gorge plummets into steep walls with many nooks and crannies, and yet most cars can drive into it fairly easily. The soil contains heavy concentrations of lime, increasing the speed of decay and discouraging any wild animals from digging up a free lunch. Some twenty bodies are interred here, most in shallow graves no more than two or three feet deep. The area was first used by "Killer" Nicky LaRue, a North Side gangster with a notoriously short temper. He deposited several victims here — mostly low-life thugs who got on his bad side — and when he got big enough, he passed the location on to his chief lieutenant... who promptly added him to the canyon's collection.

Since then, it has gone through a dozen "owners," each of whom believes he is one of only two to have ever used it. Any number of specific bodies can be found here, waiting for determined diggers (or the elements) to unearth. Most have decomposed beyond recognition, but personal effects may have endured, along with teeth, bones, and bits of cloth. No one has yet stumbled across a previously buried corpse, but considering the growing number of them, it's only a matter of time.

Typical Disposal Man

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 7, Build 7, Gut 5, Moxie 3, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 6, Disguise 4, Drive (Car) 2, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 2, Firearms 6, Intimidation 7, Lore (Layout of Longbaugh Gorge) 6, Melee 3, Perception 5, Stealth 5, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Huge, Mean Streets, Rugged.

Profession: Street Tough 1.

15) Sky-Hi Motel

The Sky-Hi has little separating it from any other weather-beaten roadside flophouse along the Silver Ribbon. It features fifteen units, all in various states of disrepair, and a swimming pool that looks like it was last filled when dinosaurs roamed the earth.

A puddle of muddy brown sludge is constantly congealing in the deep end, and the rusty ladder will collapse if the slightest weight is placed on it. The rooms all feature air conditioning, though the boxy devices frequently malfunction due to the dust from the surrounding desert. A buzzing neon sign advertises the motel from the road; it's the only lodging to be found for 100 miles in either direction.

The Sky-Hi's principle distinction is that the owner is a gaunt: a haggard, bleary-eyed leatherback named Casey Weintraub. He came from Central City to invest his meager savings in a business that would assure him peace, quiet, and a modicum of dignity. His presence behind the front desk puts "respectable" travelers ill at ease, ensuring that the Sky-Hi caters largely to the underclass, criminals, and Weintraub's fellow gaunts. Theoretically, there's no "don't ask, don't tell" policy at the motel, ensuring that clients are unmolested, but it's so isolated as to make such concerns moot. Weintraub minds his own business, and as long as the customers pay, he doesn't much care what else they do.



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He does, however, look out for his own. The Sky-Hi offers several gaunts-only rooms where the conditions are much cleaner and the air conditioning works fine. Weintraub spends what little profit he makes on ensuring these rooms stay comfortable, while the rest of the place slowly goes to pot. Gaunt customers receive an unspoken discount when checking in, and Weintraub has even gone so far as to cover up evidence of a crime if he believes a gaunt is responsible.

The Sky-Hi employs a single maid to clean up after guests — an ex-prostitute named Delana Fitzgerald with an ugly series of knife scars across her face. She came to the motel fleeing trouble in Central City and while she doesn't care for her employer, he keeps his hands off her and doesn't ask questions. She stays in her meager quarters while guests are around — her face disturbs them — but she has a little nest egg hidden under the floorboards, which she gained from some unknown source back in Central City. She would have used it to get away long ago, but she honestly has no idea where she'd go. Here, she's safe and forgotten, which is good enough for now.

Casey Weintraub

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 7, Gut 4, Moxie 5, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Appraise 6, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 3, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Evasion 6, Firearms 6, Medicine 2, Melee 5, Perception 5, Stealth 5, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education, Gaunt.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1.

NPCS

NELSON LITTLEFORD, GAUNT ACTOR

Even for a gaunt, Nelson Littleford was ugly. A lingering knife scar from before his transformation twisted his face into a terrifying mask, pulled taunt over his severe, pointed bones. Women were given to shrieking when he passed close by; grown men would recoil in horror. During a brief stint as a factory worker, he wore a hood to the job, unwilling to deal with the looks of revulsion on his fellow workers' faces. Most gaunts in such a situation would be devoured by bitterness, but Nelson was smarter than that. He went to Paradiso.

He took screen tests at every studio in town, presenting himself as "the monster they love to hate." Foxfire Pictures finally agreed to a contract, casting him as the heavy in their low-budget horror flick *The Crawling Skin*. The film was a huge hit and Littleford, while not quite a household name, was suddenly in demand. A string of successful horror films followed, casting him as everything from a misunderstood supernatural creature to a brutal serial killer. Though the roles were invariably villainous (and often cast gaunts in a derogatory light), they provided Nelson with money, security, and even a fan base

who, as he promised, loved to hate his despicable characters. He proved adept with make-up, able to mold his visage into a variety of memorable roles. He could even appear somewhat normal, though as a gaunt that meant simply being ugly as opposed to outright horrifying.

He parlayed his celebrity into a variety of philanthropic causes, emceed fundraisers for destitute gaunt families and lobbying the Paradiso city council for increased gaunt rights. Success has had its downside, however. Many of his fellows are critical of his onscreen portrayals — some have even threatened him and he has twice been assaulted during public appearances. His few efforts to break out of the stereotype were embarrassing failures (the would-be weepy *I Married a Leatherback* is the most prominent example), and he's still greeted with as much fear as admiration. Even die-hard fans are taken aback by his features when they meet him.

Littleford is actually a very gentle soul, friendly and abhorrent to the notion of violence. His sensitivities make him quite shy in real life, but in front of the camera, he's free to let his inner beast snarl. Despite it all, he's grateful for the life he's been given. It's more than most of his kind could hope for and if he perpetrates a bad image, then so what? It beats going to work with a hood over his face. He's even made a few friends — real friends, both human and gaunt — on the lot, and has a knack for picking up studio gossip. Anyone looking for an inside source on Paradiso's film industry would do well to look him up.

His drinking habit is prominent, however (though not yet a considerable problem), and his dangerous image sometimes attracts the wrong sort of attention. He has recently taken to walking dilapidated gaunt neighborhoods, reminding himself of where he came from and what his work has allowed him to escape. It's not the wisest of moves, since any gaunts upset at his derogatory film portrayals can take a shot at him.

Nelson is taller than most gaunts and a trifle thinner, his bone structure well-matched by wiry muscles. His eyes are quite large and the scar from his knife wound pulls his lips away from his mouth, giving him the look of a fanged skull. Despite that, his diction is quite good and he speaks with the eloquence of the classically trained. When not in costume, he dresses in the latest fashions (pinstripe suits flatter his frame quite well), though he occasionally takes to appearing in public in the black tuxedo and opera cloak which he wore in *The Crawling Skin*. His annual Halloween parties (held in a modest Bailey Canyon estate) are the stuff of legend.

Nelson Littleford

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 6, Build 8, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 40.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 3, Contortions 4, Disguise 6, Etiquette 5, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 5, Firearms 1, Intimidation 9, Melee 6, Perception 3, Perform (Acting) 7, Sleight of Hand 3, Sport (Golf) 5, Stealth 2, Throwing 3.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Gaunt, Sinewy Joints.

Profession: Performer 2, Wealthy 1.

SCOTT LE CLERK, IDOL OF THE SILVER SCREEN

Currently residing at the top of Privateer Pictures' pecking order is Scott Le Clerk: actor, bad boy, and the biggest movie star in the world. With the roguish good looks that make women weak at the knees and a string of swashbuckling romantic hits like *Guns on the Water*, he appears to have Paradiso at his feet. He commands a staggering figure for his appearances, and while Privateer holds his contract tight, they provide him with every perk and comfort his heart could desire.

Unfortunately, that sometimes means looking the other way at some of his less sociable traits. Though a heartthrob on camera, the off screen reality is far, far darker. Le Clerk started out as Scott Clarkson, a sometime vagrant who wandered the U.C. performing a variety of low-rent jobs. When he arrived in Paradiso, he fell in with a rough crowd (whose company would later include "One Thumb" MacKenzie; see page 110) and may have turned to crime had he not landed a small part as a bank robber in Privateer's latest film. The picture was forgettable, but he made a huge impression and the box office receipts reflected his smoldering charm. Charlie Beekman quickly signed him to a long-term contract and Scott Clarkson, reprobate drifter, became a thing of the past.

Except he really wasn't. Despite his newfound success, Scotty didn't cease any of his underworld flirtations. He just had more money with which to impress the goon squad. He gambled at the Four Leaf night after night, blowing scads of cash at the roulette and blackjack tables. He was involved in several auto accidents resulting from drunk driving, and prominent gangsters were routine guests at his home. He was recently spotted in Central City (there to film his new picture) watching a Switchmen/Buccaneers game with the infamous Jack Drago. On-set, his behavior is little different. He treats underlings with naked contempt and co-stars with the grudging tolerance of a spoiled brat. One of his leading ladies filed rape charges against him, which were only dropped after Privateer destroyed the woman's reputation through tabloid smears. He's been banned from several other lots, and one mogul even threatened him with violence.

Scotty just laughs it all off. The way he sees it, the world owes him for his rough upbringing, and the movies have finally allowed him to collect on the debt. His narcissism and sense of entitlement know no limits. Girls throw themselves at his feet and his name is in lights; why shouldn't he enjoy himself? He's going to take this sorry town for all it's worth, and he doesn't intend to leave his "friends" out in the cold in the meantime. After all, there's no way the party can ever end, right?

Privateer is a little more far-seeing than its reigning *enfant terrible*, however. As long as he's hot, they'll pick up after him, but Charlie Beekman has seen his type come and go before. The final straw is already in play: Le Clerk has moved up from his usual cocktail of booze and prescription pills to heroin. The habit is now costing a thousand dollars a week, which Privateer takes care of... for now. When he falls, Beekman intends for him to fall hard. Sooner or later, the fans will catch on or the box office will dry up. When it does, Privateer will drop Le Clerk like a hot rock and let his "friends" clean up the mess.

Scott is tall and firm, with a well-built body and wavy black hair which he combs back from his face in a style which is emulated all over the Commonwealth. His dark eyebrows give him a dangerous air, but his half-cocked smile is utterly disarming. He can speak honeyed words with the best of them, and has a way of making people instantly forget about the horrible things he's done. He dresses in fine suits and has an instinctive sense of taste, but his manners are still those of a vagrant. Scotty has a fondness for motorcycles and is building quite a collection at his estate. They're the only things which he truly loves... besides himself, that is.

Scott Le Clerk

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 7, Gut 6, Moxie 9, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 7, Brawl 6, Drive (Car, Light Aircraft, Motorcycle) 8, Evasion 5, Firearms 3, Intimidation 5, Melee 5, Perform (Acting) 6, Sport (Tennis) 7, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Lucky, Racer.

Profession: Performer 1, Lady Killer 4, Wealthy 2.

ARCHIBALD RUSH, BOOKIE/INFORMANT

Brenton Downs does a brisk business in wagers, overseen by a semi-official group of bookmakers. They tally all of the receipts at the betting windows and handle those which come in across the wire. The necessity of their profession places them in incidental contact with a good cross-section of underworld figures, making them a reliable source of information concerning the comings and goings of various ne'er-do-wells.

That's what Paradiso PD thought when they subtly arranged for one of their own to take up residence at the Brenton Downs accounting office. Archibald Rush, a nebbish little man with an eye for figures and a habit of keeping his mouth shut, immediately began insinuating himself with the staff and patrons. Within a few years, he had the ear of the horse track's owners and personally handled all of the Downs' known high rollers. The mobsters who bet on the horses respected him for his fastidiousness, and because he occasionally slipped them inside information which allowed them to clean up. The park loved him because he ensured that profits stayed high, and managed bets such that any heavy losses were immediately absorbed by incoming revenues. And the police loved him, both for the overheard tidbits he fed them, and for the way he contacted them without drawing the slightest bit of attention to himself.

On race days, Rush works the phones, taking the high rollers' bets while keeping one eye on the ticket windows. He's a very good observer of human nature and can often tell with a single glance how a man's fortunes are faring. He always takes time to chat with the biggest wheels, and is sometimes invited out for drinks after the races. He remembers everything he hears. The gangsters haven't the first idea who he works for — he passes the information via code through a blind drop and only blows the whistle when something big is

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afoot. His discretion has allowed him to burrow fairly deeply into the Paradiso underground; he could close the Downs for good if he saw fit, but both he and the police see more value in keeping it open. The honey pot attracts an awful lot of flies.

Rush has another secret, of which neither the police nor most of his associates are aware. He's a practicing warlock, his middling magic skills improving markedly in the last few years. He originally picked it up as an extension of his mathematics skills, but his current position gives him a unique opportunity to exploit it. With the subtle manipulation of the track surface or a particular jockey's reins, he can influence the outcome of a race with eerie accuracy. He's parlayed that into quite a little fortune, accepting payments for "sure things" which he passes off as insider details about the horses' health and so on. Sometimes, he uses a shill to place bets for him, then ensures the right horse wins and splits the results with his partner. As with his informant duties, he takes care to apply such schemes infrequently so as not to arouse suspicion. His meticulous nature serves him well in this regard, and no one has yet caught on that his inside details are self-created. Should he ever be uncovered, however, the results would be dire. The police would likely arrest him (more for keeping secrets from them than for any wrongdoing) and several of his regulars are gaunts.

Rush is a neatly dressed African-American man of about thirty-five, with a thin mustache and horn-rimmed glasses over his eyes. He dresses in a neatly pressed chino shirt and his hands are often stained blue with writing ink. An expert accountant, he can perform complex mathematical equations without a calculator and has been known to entertain his underworld associates with math-based bar tricks. He remains tight-lipped about his personal history, however, and rarely speaks unless prompted (in which case he replies using as few words as possible). Most attribute it to shyness. He has no family to speak of (he's a lifelong bachelor) and devotes himself wholly to his job (and the various schemes and angles entailed therein). His desk is always kept fastidious and neat, as is the tiny one-bedroom apartment where he lives. The money he makes through sorcery — nearly \$75,000 — is stuffed in his mattress, along with a copy of the Downs' accounting log. Though he sometimes accesses the warlock's library at the Mandarin Theater (see page 101), he's far too cautious to keep any magic evidence at home. Similarly, his history at the police department has been completely eliminated from his personal space. He even gave back his badge, which he claims he never had much use for in the first place.

Archibald Rush

Attributes: Brains 9, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 8, Moxie 4, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 6, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 7, Evasion 7, Firearms 2, Gravity 6, Kinetics 4, Lore (Mathematics) 10, Perception 8, Puzzles 8, Stealth 4, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Education, Magical Aptitude, Prodigy.

Profession: Academic 1, Gangster 1, Officer of the Law 1, Rogue Scientist 1.

CHARLIE BEEKMAN, MOVIE MOGUL

The head of Privateer Pictures and arguably the most powerful man in Paradiso has more in common with the thugs of the North Side than any of the artists in his stable. A focused, implacable bull of a man, he strides through his studio like God through His Heaven, a cigar perennially clenched in his chubby fist. His underlings fear him and his competitors revile him, but no one can argue with what he's done to Privateer. The studio unquestioningly rules the show business world, setting new box office records each year and boasting a trophy case full of prestigious awards. Beekman takes sole credit for it all.

He has an almost instinctive sense of what audiences want, and how to assign the right people to the right projects. As an advertiser, he constantly conceives of new ways to get the public's attention. And his nose for talent is unparalleled; Privateer boasts the biggest stars in the world, most signed to five or six-picture deals which Beekman refuses to modify in any way. His message to those beneath him is clear: play ball and he'll make your dreams come true. Cross him and you'll be lucky to make the bus back to Nowheresville alive.

Oddly enough, the creatives beneath him have little to complain about... professionally, at least. When he gives a director a project, he generally trusts that director to develop it free of interference. Screenwriters can pen their own scripts on company time (Privateer will own everything regardless) and stars on set are treated like royalty. Beekman's keen eye for talent means that no one gets a green light unless they can do the job, and the penalty for failure is strong enough that few choose to test the boundaries of his benevolence. As long as they're on time and under budget, they're free to work as they wish. The creative atmosphere he fosters has played no small part in Privateer's success.

Beyond that realm, however, Beekman is an absolute ogre. He can spot weakness from miles away and will exploit it to the utmost. His rants reduce sensitive employees to tears; he fires and hires new underlings at will. For all the artistic license he grants, many filmmakers refuse to have anything to do with him. Only those who can match his ferocity are allowed to stay on. He's particularly harsh with actors — many of whom he launched through careful image manipulation and role selection — and while his largesse extends to writers and directors, the performers in his fold have no creative freedom at all. ("As far as I'm concerned," he told one starlet complaining of too few lines, "you're just a lamppost with tits.")

And his control-freak tendencies extend far beyond the studio walls. He routinely has his employees' homes bugged, listening in on private conversations and late-night revelries. Privateer workers are actively encouraged to spy on each other, and he issues professional edicts which dictate minute aspects of personal behavior (such as who one can date or whether one can grow a mustache or not). Those who refuse are summarily fired. Beekman is particularly obsessive about his leading ladies — most of whom he groomed personally and is more than willing to take sweaty-handed advantage of. He calls them his "china dolls." In some cases, they're veritable prisoners within the studios — sex symbols kept in his own private display case.

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The latest one is causing problems, however. Lilith Helm, Privateer's current It Girl, has begun rebelling against his edicts. He has fewer goods on her than other employees. Her father is a wealthy New Eden lawyer, so she doesn't need his money, and several directors in Beekman's stable are sweet on her. Also, her last three pictures were huge hits, and with three more films on her contract, Beekman is unwilling to fire her (it would be a PR disaster if one of his rivals simply snapped her up). A cagey battle of wills is ensuing, pitting the pudgy mogul against his most cunning china doll and involving the length and breadth of Privateer Pictures. Helm pushes for more creative control over her pictures, and has made a game out of finding Beekman's bugs in her apartment; Beekman, for his part, tries to limit her influence as much as he can without riling her legions of fans. An office pool actually exists at Privateer, wagering on which of the two will come out on top and when. For now, Beekman appears to have finally met his match... though God help Helm if her next picture flops.

One of his former employees once described Beekman as an "evil baby." He's of average height, but his overall pudginess and the authority with which he moves gives him the impression of being bigger. A fringe of strawberry blonde hair frames a mostly bald head, wreathed by the smoke from his omnipresent cigar. He wears a pair of pince-nez when he reads, giving him the appearance of an Old World tailor. His large eyes look watery and innocent, augmented by the lenses on his nose. A stranger would consider him quite foolish... until he opened

his mouth and the torrent of profanity-laced assaults came spilling out. Beekman has no aspirations to be loved; being feared is all that matters to him. That and making the best damn movies in the world.

Charlie Beekman

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 5, Build 7, Gut 8, Moxie 8, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Appraise 7, Brawl 3, Craft (Advertising) 9, Etiquette 2, Evasion 2, Fast Talk 7, Intimidation 9, Lore (Moviemaking) 10, Perception 8, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Alert, Lucky, Wise.

Profession: Businessman 3, Wealthy 4.

WINSTON WALLS, AIRLINE MAGNATE

The brilliant, addled Winston Walls is considered one of Paradiso's patron saints. A former pilot and serviceman, he grew up amid the orange groves of the Harrison Hills, and claims to have always envisioned Paradiso as a world-class city. He founded Walls Airways at a very young age, and soon built it into a massive financial empire. His factories produced the engines for most of the planes used by the U.C. during the war. The end of fighting left him rich beyond the dreams of



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avarice, and eagerly looking for a new challenge. He parlayed the transportation nexus near his beloved airfield into Playa Villa (see page 100), which helped transform Paradiso into the beacon he always dreamed it could be.

Unfortunately, the effort took a serious toll on his mind. He grew secretive, afraid that his rivals would anticipate his next move, and convinced that there were moles in his company. He began spending more and more time at the airfield — first flying his planes to clear his mind, then conducting business from there instead of his offices, and finally moving there full-time to escape the enemies he was sure lay just beyond the gates. His mansion sat discarded and gathering dust, and while the Walls Building near City Hall contained fifteen floors of dedicated employees, none of them ever caught sight of their increasingly reclusive boss. With Playa Villa occupying his every waking thought, he trusted a series of underlings to handle day-to-day affairs for the rest of the company. Power remained firmly in his hands, however, and those wishing to accomplish anything of significance needed to go through the increasingly elaborate security measures in order to see him. (The company's slowly declining fortunes attest to his behavior, though it remains a formidable entity nonetheless.) Finally, Walls even gave up flying, convinced that he would be blown out of the air by some unseen assassin. He shut himself up in his private hangar — barricading it from all threats — and refused to leave under any circumstances.

Walls is a widower, with no family beyond his three daughters. The eldest, 28 year-old Megan, was driven out by her father's obsessive madness and subsequently disowned. She works as a chef in a hotel belonging to one of her father's rivals. Middle daughter Melody just turned 23, and serves as her father's sole conduit to the outside world. She delivers his mail and business packages, ferries in groceries from the delivery boys, and arranges for his associates to speak with him via CB. Her devotion has concentrated a great deal of power into her hands, and most people believe she'll inherit her father's empire when the old man finally dies. The youngest, 13-year-old Mandi, has virtually grown up within the hangar and has little inkling of the world beyond. Both Winston and Melody dote on the girl, though neither will permit her to leave the grounds.

Walls himself is still as sharp as he always was, though delusion and paranoia are starting to strip that away as well. He rarely bothers getting dressed anymore, usually puttering around in a dressing robe and slippers. His formerly tall frame is growing stooped and his graying black hair has begun falling out. Despite his condition, he still enjoys the privileges of wealth (Melody often performs the distasteful duty of securing prostitutes for her father's enjoyment), and Playa Villa remains

his pride and joy. He spends every free moment poring over a huge scale model of the neighborhood, tweaking and adjusting it to get every detail perfect. A good photographer looking to make some money would do well to join his ranks of "documenters," paid to bring him every conceivable angle of every conceivable object found within Playa Villa. Some might balk at spending an afternoon photographing the same fire hydrant from a thousand different perspectives, but the meaty paychecks can often subsidize a dozen more interesting projects.

Winston Walls

Attributes: Brains 9, Brawn 3, Build 3, Gut 7, Moxie 4, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 15.

Skills: Appraise 6, Bureaucracy 8, Engineering 7, Etiquette 1, Firearms 2, Intimidation 6, Lore (Playa Villa) 9, Perception 9, Puzzles 8.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education, Loyal Retainer.

Profession: Wealthy 6.

OSSIE HERRMANN, NEWSPAPER EDITOR

Ossie works as an executive editor for the *National Scoop*, Paradiso's nationally distributed bastion of muckraking and yellow journalism. Ossie's father, Walter Herrmann, owns the paper, having perfected its mixture of sensational headlines, tawdry gossip, and inflammatory editorials through decades of practice. With the senior Herrmann living in secluded retirement, Ossie is free to run the paper as he sees fit... though he lacks the wherewithal to truly control anything. A large, shambling bear of a man, he's considered something of a spoiled brat by his underlings. He has none of his father's instincts for journalism and though he takes an admirable glee in raking the latest celebrity targets over the coals, his other dictates have largely fizzled. He would seethe at perceived slights, throwing fits whenever someone implied that he wasn't really in charge of anything. Eventually, the staff left him alone in his huge office, feeding him enough of a line to prevent any tantrums and otherwise ignoring him.

It might have stayed that way indefinitely but for the Angel Eyes killer (see page 90). Something about that story seemed different, and Ossie caught word of it a few precious minutes before anyone else. The first reporters on the scene belonged to the *Scoop* (drawn there by a call from the busboy who discovered the body) and they procured several untainted pictures of the crime scene — pristine images untouched by the Roman legion of reporters which arrived on their heels. The pictures made the *Scoop* the go-to source for news about the Angel Eyes killer, and brought Ossie a few shreds of respect from his underlings. He has since pursued the story with a showman's zeal, and barely a day goes by when the *Scoop* doesn't post some new piece of information, rumor, or unfounded speculation about the case.

Lost in the shuffle is a single, very disturbing fact. Ossie dispatched his reporters to the crime scene twenty minutes before the busboy called the paper.



THE NAKED CITY

Walter Herrmann's little boy became dangerously unhinged shortly after joining the *Scoop*. His upbringing was marked by repression, verbal abuse, and callous indifference, leaving deep wounds beneath his rich-kid façade. He wanted so badly to measure up in his father's eyes — to become a great reporter or a magnetic editor — but he simply lacked the temperament. Walter made no attempt to hide his disappointment in Ossie, and never failed to remind him what a failure he was. The pain was at first mitigated by his appointment to the *Scoop* (it showed that perhaps Walter cared about him after all), but it returned with a vengeance when he realized the employees treated him with the same mixture of contempt and dismissal that the senior Herrmann did. The combination of rage and wish-fulfillment finally became too much for his overburdened mind. If it bleeds, it leads, the saying goes. And if Ossie couldn't get attention any other way, then he would create the bloodiest, most wonderful lead he could.

He soon had a series of victims carefully picked out: young and pretty, with no apparent connections beyond their propensity for nightclubs. Cleo Fitzsimmons was too drunk to drive, and readily accepted his offer of a ride. Sally Dicolleta thought she was being interviewed for an "up and coming" puff piece. Arthur Grimme wanted to discuss upcoming projects for his studio, while Valerie Richmond thought he wanted to talk to her about a job. He dispatched them all with practiced ease, then further mutilated their corpses to play up the sensationalistic elements of the story he was crafting.

The plan worked perfectly. The press ate it up — led by *The Scoop*, which always seemed to have access to obscure and unreported little details at its disposal. The police remain in the dark, canvassing the nightclub scene which appears to be the victims' only connection. Meanwhile, Ossie plots out his next victim (he has six more lined up) and adroitly directs his reporters to follow up on the leads. He's doing it solely for the headlines; he has none of the fetishistic motives attached to most serial killers, it simply makes for good copy. He buries the eyes in pickle jars on his father's estate; they hold no value for him, but he has to maintain the killer's *modus operandi*. The moral implications of his actions are completely lost on him, and in his insanity, he's developed a real taste for the work. Each new victim means another chance to revel in the sordid details... and to prove to his father that he really does know a good story when he sees it. As far as he's concerned, it can keep going on forever.

Ossie possesses a tall and rather baggy frame, topped by an uncombed mop of hair and a blank face marked by the faintest of sneers. He dresses in expensive yet soiled clothes, preferring to simply buy new suits rather than send the old ones to the cleaners. He's mastered the snappy patter of his junior editors, and can sound just like a seasoned newspaperman whenever he chooses. His temper tantrums abated once the Angel Eyes story broke, and his employees have all noticed

how much more pleasant he is to be around lately. They attribute it to the rise in sales, which makes him secretly laugh. He's put one over on the entire town — a whole city full of cynical sophisticates who wear their skepticism like badges of honor — and he couldn't be happier about it.

He thinks the next victim will come on the full moon. It makes better copy that way.

Ossie Herrmann

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 5, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 5, Disguise 2, Drive (Car, Light Watercraft) 4, Etiquette 7, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 5, Firearms 3, Intimidation 1, Melee 5, Perception 3, Sleight of Hand 5, Stealth 7.

Backgrounds: Alert, Marksmanship, Rugged.

Profession: Con Artist 1, Wealthy 2, White Collar Worker 1.

"ONE THUMB" MACKENZIE

Contrary to what others believe, "One Thumb" actually has both his thumbs; the nickname refers to the habit of putting an extra digit on the butcher's scales when weighing meat (making it appear heavier and thus charging more for it). A long-time numbers runner for the Drago mob in Central City, MacKenzie cut his teeth on cheap short cons and three-card monte games, which he ran from the back of a meat shop in the old neighborhood. He became an enthusiastic member of the Drago mob when the infamous gaunt murdered his superior and took over the man's operations. For a time, MacKenzie worked the protection racket, shaking down storeowners and intimidating reluctant workers to sign on for the (thoroughly corrupt) Central City unions. He also had a fascination for the movies, which he translated into the gleeful extortion of Central City's theater owners. His favorite assignments involved sabotaging projectors or ensuring that film cannisters never arrived at their destination; his apartment contained a "private collection" of movies which never reached their behind-on-their-payments recipients.

When Drago decided to expand operations to Paradiso, he made One Thumb his official representative there. The ambitious lieutenant made quick inroads into the studio unions; Drago engineered the elections to put men in his pocket in charge, then had One Thumb explain exactly who they owed and what was expected of them. Shortly thereafter, he approached various studio heads, and threatened "significant problems" if they didn't give a 10% raise to the electricians' and stagehands' unions. One studio — SBG — balked. The ensuing labor unrest destroyed their main set and delayed two of their A-list movies for almost a year. The others quickly decided to play ball. The "raises" were delivered directly to MacKenzie's hotel room in brown paper bags. Drago bought another summer home, the union members never saw a dime, and One Thumb was on the map in Paradiso.



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With the film industry secure, he turned his attention to drug trafficking. He has since convinced a number of underworld figures to use the Drago mob as a supplier, and (using a series of underlings) ensured the delivery of heroin, cocaine, and other narcotics through Drago's shipping interests. This too has met with considerable success, though the remainder of the underworld is growing wary of the power he's amassing. Normally, he wouldn't extend his reach any further, but if Drago orders him to, he'd rather risk the wrath of his local colleagues than cross his murderous *capo*.

In truth, he's not particularly loyal to Drago. But he's no dummy and his inherent cowardice means he'll never try to double-cross or outfox his superior. He was with Drago the night the gaunt overlord killed Augusto Lombard, and he has no intention of risking a repeat performance. Every penny he earns goes back to Central City and those found skimming off the top are dispatched without so much as a warning. Out here, he has prestige and respect, and he's not prepared to disrupt that unless he's sure Drago can be taken out of the picture permanently. And after what happened to Augusto Lombard, he's not sure anyone who yet draws breath is up to the task.

One Thumb (whose real name is Clarence) dresses in an out-of-fashion bowler derby, which clashes awkwardly with his top-of-the-line suits. He's small and thin, with a large Roman nose and hair slicked close to his scalp. Though he rarely engages in violence, he's still a mean shot, and he carries a

large revolver with him at all times. An old switchblade (a throwback to his street hood days) is linked by a watch chain to his wallet. He speaks in even, measured tones, but his position has led him to put on airs. He often uses big words whose meaning he clearly doesn't understand, and has the swagger of a classic toady, intimidating less for who he is than for who he works for. He likes the reputation his nickname has given him (the implied mutilation suggests that he's tougher than he actually is), and indeed, the misperception once saved his life. A hitman from one of Drago's rivals was sent to dispatch him but — confused over the nickname — mistakenly targeted another mobster with a mangled hand. One Thumb dispatched the would-be killer before the sucker even realized his mistake.

™One Thumb f MacKenzie

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 7, Build 7, Gut 6, Moxie 5, Smoothness 8.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Appraise 7, Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 7, Forgery 5, Intimidation 5, Melee 7, Perception 6, Pick Lock 5, Sleight of Hand 7, Stealth 5, Streetwise 8, Throwing 5.

Backgrounds: Lucky, Marksmanship, Mean Streets.

Profession: Con Artist 1, Gunman 1, Street Tough 1.



SAMPLE CAMPAIGNS

The bright lights and wide smiles of Paradiso hide an ugly, blackened soul. A city built on naive youngsters' dreams of stardom that corrupts everything it touches, Paradiso is a logical city to wear down PCs' idealism, and it excels at the bright, the gaudy, and the shallow. PCs could become famous for a genuine act of good, only to find themselves manipulated by the media, the studios, and the police, before being tossed aside when the public grows bored with them.

Besides the spotlights of fame, Paradiso is a city of contradictions: a national success story built on the fringes of a heartless desert; a city with an undistinguished history that lies under an expanding flood of cheap new housing; a flat expanse of metropolis viewed as little more than an extended back-lot by the people who hold the reins of power; and a devouring monster eating into a swath of farmland that should not exist. Paradiso is the darkest shadows cast over shining white buildings by an unforgiving sun.

THE SCOOP

The Angel Eyes killer is Paradiso's most notorious case at the moment, and the failure of the local police to clear it from their books is making Chief Turner particularly anxious. There are any number of reasons that could motivate a group to track down the killer: a contact (an aspiring actress, perhaps) with information of interest to a member of the Few could become the killer's next victim. Perhaps the group wants to collect a reward from the studios, or sell the movie rights if they should nab the killer. Maybe they just want to make a difference in the city, and have one less monster preying on the vulnerable people whose shattered dreams are injury enough.

Regardless of their motivation, the hunt for the Angel Eyes killer should be a desperate race against time — any attempt to chase up evidence, follow a lead, or interview a witness will be dogged by the radio and newspapers, and their exploits will be gleefully reported by the *National Scoop*. All the while, Ossie Herrmann will tweak the details of his next victim to increase the eventual sales. There are any number of dead-end leads and false connections that can be investigated, and in hunting for the killer, the PCs can stir up all sorts of hornets' nests. At the end of the day, though, they should be able to notice that the *Scoop* is always on hand — sometimes too early for its own good. Once they're onto the paper, Herrmann will immediately become more dangerous and unpredictable. Even if he's the central suspect of a manhunt, his mind will still be on the story — and bringing him in will be an extremely dangerous proposition: to Ossie, going out in a blaze of glory would be more fitting (and make better headlines) than a lengthy, tedious trial.

FIFTEEN MEN ON A DEAD MAN'S CHEST

The Lawton Heist was one of the most famous armored car boosts in living memory — a huge payday was stolen in broad daylight. Unfortunately, Charlie Lawton was sent up to Gunmetal Island before giving up the location of his loot. While three members of his gang died resisting arrest, and a fourth member is thought to have long since fled to the Borderlands, Lawton himself is the only living gang member who knows where the loot is buried. He has sent word out that he'd be willing to divulge the location to anyone who breaks him out of Gunmetal Island. Lawton's old associate in the Borderlands has sent an intermediary to the PCs with a proposal: spring Lawton, and they can have 25% of the take — approximately \$60,000, give or take.

Breaking Lawton out of Gunmetal isn't an easy proposition — if the PCs are the sort of people who'll free a known hijacker for financial gain, they have a police record. This will make getting to Gateway an adventure in itself, never mind formulating a viable plan to get a convict off of Gunmetal. How they achieve this is up to you — reward ingenuity on their parts, but don't let them just walk in there, guns blazing. Also, unless they anticipate a proper getaway, they're going to have a devil of a time getting through the massive manhunt that Lawton's escape will prompt.

Back in Paradiso, things will heat up pretty quickly. Lawton's associate arrives from down south to ensure he doesn't get double-crossed, and has a few local goons ready to back him up. The PCs have whatever precautions they made, and Lawton has been busy on the inside — a number of gangsters from Gateway have made their way down to Paradiso and are now in position to back his play against his old comrade (and his rescuers if necessary). None of the hired goons has any knowledge of how much was really stolen — the matter was kept out of the papers, and Lawton and his buddy have both downplayed the total, in order to keep down the cost of hiring the goons.

The stage is set for a bloodbath once the loot is exhumed, but for one problem: Lawton buried it in the desert, and the spot has since been given over to other uses. It now rests directly beneath the Sola Diablo Aqueduct. Getting the loot out from there will require excellent bluffing or stealth skills, some knowledge of demolitions, and a lot of equipment. Once the loot is retrieved (beneath Pumping Station No. 15's shallow concrete foundations), the preparations come into play. Lawton's Gateway goons will appear from their hiding place in the Pumping Station, as will his old associates' local muscle. They're more or less evenly matched, so they'll attempt to persuade the PCs to side with them, but none has any intention of sharing the loot with anyone else. How the PCs handle it from this point is up to them — they could play the leaders against each other, against their goons, or just duck into the machinery and start firing, trusting to luck and gunplay to let them walk out with a fortune in stolen cash.

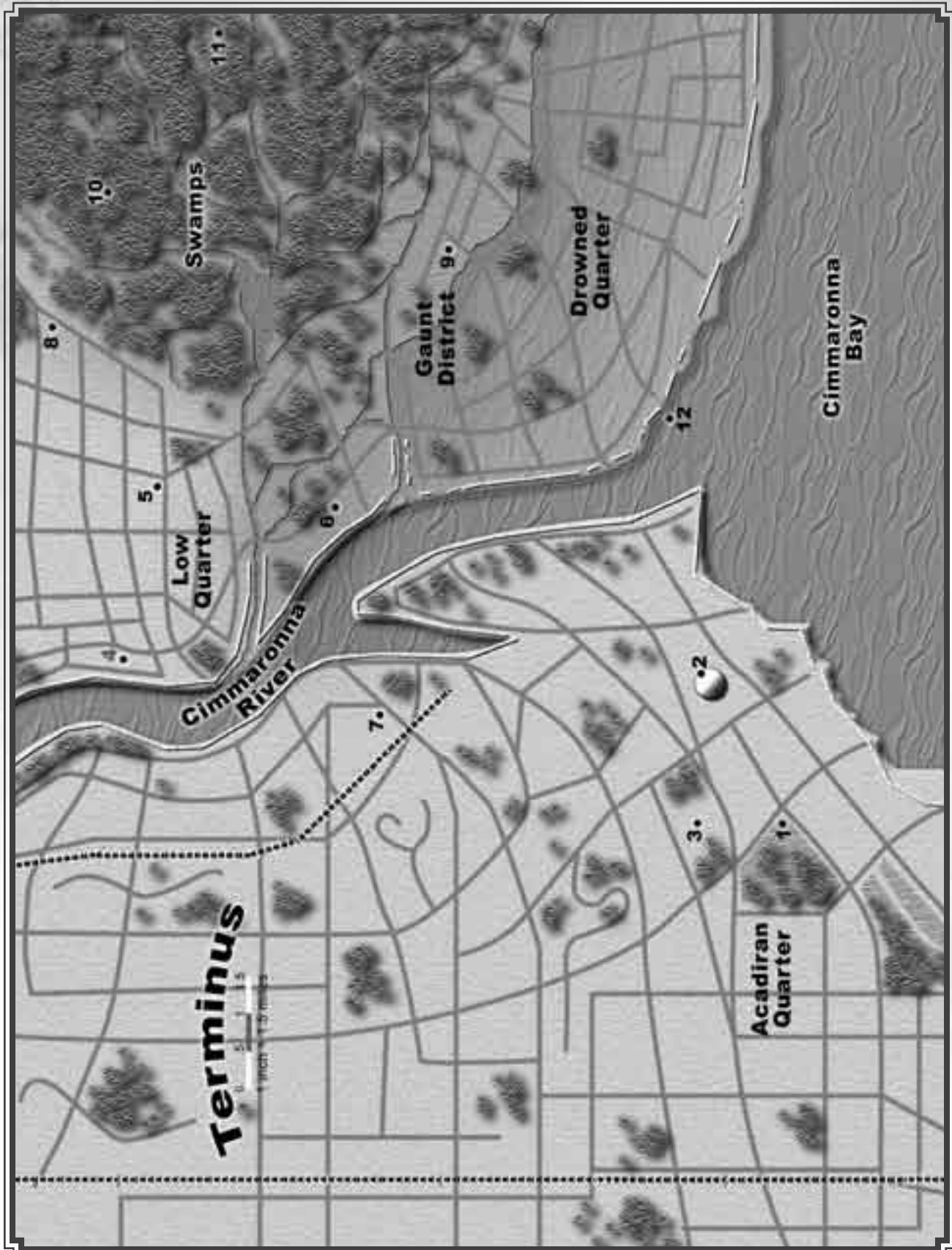
CHAPTER FIVE TERMINUS



™ Look at my queen all dressed in red
Iko iko an de
I bet you five dollars she'll kill you dead
Jock-a-mo fe n'an n'ae.}

- Sugar Boy Crawford,
™ Jock-A-Mo}

THE NAKED CITY



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OVERVIEW OF THE CITY

Some people talk about a city's underbelly like it's something you have to search for: something dark beneath the surface, hiding behind lies and deception. If there's one thing Terminus is proud of, it's that lies don't come in that flavor here. The underbelly of the city is her dark face, turned up to the sun and completely unashamed of the evils the light shows. While Paradiso hides its flaws in blinding light, and New Eden pays you to look the other way, Terminus sells depravity on the sidewalks — just another day in the city known colloquially as the Steamboat to Hell.

In some ways, the metropolis is waking from a deep sleep, far thicker than that experienced by the world around it. While other cities vaguely remember their pasts, Terminus feels free to ignore its, making up lies and histories each night and discarding them just as easily in the morning. It is inaccurate to say Terminus doesn't have a past — more truthfully, she just doesn't care. The mystery is part of her allure. Those with any sense of the days before the war don't bother to tell the truth about what they know. The information isn't as titillating as the possibilities of a little casual embellishment.

But somewhere in her tarry, rotting core, Terminus still knows what she once was. The Acadian Quarter puts on its Mardi Gras and side-shows with flair to catch your attention; her three-card monty game ensures that the audience always looks the wrong way. Blues music blows past on warm, salty winds, encouraging you to close your eyes and dream. The city sleeps until noon, constantly dreaming of dancing, creole, and nightmarish things just below the surface of the bayou.

There are two parts to Terminus that any traveler must recognize. There is the city herself — dark and glistening on the beach — and there is the bayou. Like two worlds brushing up against one another, the laws of one simply don't apply past the borders of the second. "Bayou justice" reigns supreme beyond the city limits, and even the most fanatic beat cop knows better than to set foot on the flatboats and chase a criminal into the swamp. Those who live in the bayou recognize that things are different on paved streets and under wrought-iron balconies. Much like the two languages of the city — English and French — the differences are concrete and real.

According to tradition, the area in the center of the street is known as "neutral ground" between north-going and south-going travelers. The idea carries over into other aspects of life in Terminus as well, and the gangs who rule her respect sacred territory. There are places in Terminus where no one will spill blood, either from respect or from fear of the supernatural repercussions (even though everyone knows such things don't exist). Old houses hold stories even the most jaded citizen respects, and a history that entangles every action in the half-remembered past. Even the strongest groups in the city take these neutral grounds into account, regardless of any truth to the superstitions.

Terminus lives in the fanciful. From the 100-year-old carousel in the center of its main celebratory plaza to the palatial steamboats that sail in and around the port, the city lives in

an eternal dream. The wax museum draws as many visitors as the haunted tours, and graveyards are perfectly acceptable tourist sites. Voices drop around the half-built White Light Museum, the never-finished memoir to the recent war. Those who know no better visit the Voodoo Canals — as far from the heart of real backwoods *voodoo* as Paradiso's movies are from reality.

And the residents of the swamps encourage such superstitions. A lone radio signal from the heart of the bayou — KMIN — calls out every evening, telling tales of horror at dinner time for entertainment. Late into the night, a nameless announcer breaks open the city's political secrets for everyone to hear, raking councilman and crime lord alike over hell's coals. People have searched the swamps for the origin of the signal, but no one can find it. The station talks, morning to night, playing sweet jazz and passing on news of the day. And every evening, the cajun tunes give way to a dark, slow southern voice, laying open the city of Terminus and her gangs as expertly as a fisherman flaying his daily catch. On clear nights, you can hear him whisper in every corner of the city.

Terminus' history — such as it is — comes from a few library books and agreed-upon myth. It was founded several centuries ago by colonists from across the oceans, but the first colony was eradicated — man, woman, and child — by the native tribes in the swamplands after they encroached on holy sites. The second colony, nearly a hundred years later, respected the bayou and therefore prospered, building the city on the bones of the first colonists who were murdered in their sleep. Buildings were raised on the backs of slaves of all colors: hard working but completely without hope. Suicides were the only thing more prevalent than new building permits, and more blood flowed into the ocean than tobacco money into the coffers of the city's ruling elite. Jews were forbidden in the city until recently, and slavery was widely (though quietly) practiced here even after it had been outlawed by the Commonwealth. Some say it still exists, men and women sold for dark purposes and forced to live a life beneath someone else's rule. Black, Jew, gaunt — whatever the minority, they aren't safe in this city. Banding together despite their differences was historically the only way to survive the Terminus streets.

The greatest slave revolt in history occurred in St. Sebastian Square, a holy ground in the center of an otherwise unadorned slum. Hundreds died here, fighting for freedom — imagined or real — that they never truly received. The incident is retold a hundred different ways with a hundred different heroes, and one night out of the year the *houngans* come here to appease the army of souls that supposedly haunt the square. Windows shutter tight in the burrough on that night, and children are told to sleep under their beds in case the *houngans* fail. The belief is more than a legend to the people of Terminus — it is a critical and integral part of life. Here, the citizens claim, the ghosts walk the night as solidly as any street vendor — and they don't care whose soul they steal.

The one thing that unifies the disparate groups in the city is the Mardi Gras: three days of celebration before Lent (penance paid by the inhabitants of the city for their sinful ways). Mardi Gras is taken very seriously in Terminus. Like the peace of the angels who painted blood on the lintels before destroy-

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ing ancient lands with plagues, Mardi Gras is sacred to all the factions. Holy. Inviolable. Gangs in the shadows sponsor Krewes (public faces): groups of men and women who build floats, hire dancers, and throw beads into the city to remember happier times. The wealthy hold grand masquerade balls; the poor hold carnivals in the streets and pubs of the city.

For all her exploitation, Terminus holds immigrants close to her heart when no one else will have them. Hobos from New Eden, settlers from Central City and Nova Roma, washed-out stars from the Paradiso film companies — everyone can find a home in Terminus. The city doesn't ask questions and it doesn't name names. This is the place of last resort. If you have come to Terminus, it is because there is nowhere else in the world you can go: nothing left to spend, or break, or betray. Those who end up here are on the last strings of their frayed lives. If they can't make it here, then even Hell won't take them.

No one in Terminus denies that the city's heart lies in tobacco. Tobacco fuels the port, the inland shipping companies, and the streets themselves, making millions of dollars for the plantation elite. They say you either work for the tobacco industry, or you work for someone who does. Even foreign-made tobacco products, such as the famous cigars made by Iberana, must pass through Terminus on their way to the rest of the U.C. The barons who run the industry always take their cut, ensuring that their monopoly on the nation's most prevalent addiction will never be broken.

One thing the city remembers with crystal clarity is the storm. They remember because an entire borough of the city still lies beneath the waves. The levees there are shattered and useless, their stone walls sunk beneath thick, stagnant water. Citizens call it the Drowned Quarter, and few besides gaunts make their homes there. A few hardy leatherbacks keep living quarters in the second and third floors of old stone buildings that jut up above the slow-moving waters. The levees, shat-

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tered and moldering, are now little more than bridges across the street-like rivers. It is a watery hell, a grave for those not yet dead, but some still call it home.

Swelteringly hot in the summer, with a soft chill on winter nights, the swamps around Terminus hold the heat long after the sun goes down. Rain can be an everyday occurrence in this part of the world, and there are times of the year that natives can pin down the afternoon showers as precisely as preparing for tea. Popular myth says that the swamp mosquitoes make off with a few dogs every year, but that's more likely the alligators, who form a parasitic partnership with the city's criminals. The Cayuck Docks are recurring feeding grounds for the great reptiles, ensuring that no troublesome corpses ever come bobbing up in the harbor.

The bayou's water is foul and the sea is salt, so most of the city's drinking water comes from small fresh streams that find their way south toward the ocean, or wells from far beneath the buildings of Terminus. The city was founded because it is the only hilly territory above the swamps, with just enough water to sustain life and create byways for movement. It certainly wasn't founded because it's an easy place to live; every day is a fight in the poor districts, to find food, water, and the basic necessities of life. Poor residents on the edge of the city still use outhouses instead of plumbing, and the roofs of tombs in the graveyards are far more durable than many of the huts where members of the living dwell.

There's a tremendous, clearly structured class difference within the population of Terminus. Wealth is determined by more than how much you make in a year, or where you live in the city's more elegant districts. Although lush plantation life still thrives in some areas — weeping oaks watching over long grassy driveways and misty-windowed houses — simply being able to purchase such a modern palace does not make you one of the city's elite. The bastions of the city's history — the families Cobb, Buckner, DuMont, and Chauviteau — decide who is allowed to walk among them and who is not. Even God doesn't argue with their decisions — whether made on a whim or executed through years of political negotiation — and some of their more infamous soirees make it quite clear that He isn't on the invite list.

Of all the cities in the Commonwealth, Terminus is the one most willing to accept warlocks. While they're not exactly everyday citizens, the ancient legends and familiarity with *voudoun* practitioners make the addition of genuine magic a acceptable part of the city's mix. Superstition is the warlocks' shield and myth their sword, cutting into the populace of the city and making their own caste within its strata. Where other cities are just a few steps away from witch-burnings, Terminus addresses it with the same lazy bigotry that she offers to every new immigrant. If warlocks know their place, they will be tolerated.

The middle class consists mainly of businessmen, both legal and illegal, treated with the same indifference as warlocks and leatherbacks. No one cares much what your work is, so long as you wear a face of propriety and keep the cash flow moving through the city. Men and women work businesses, lead companies, and manipulate society's lowest class for profit. Contrary to some popular opinion, Terminus is just as progressive

THE FOUR

The four most powerful, socially elite clans in Terminus are the families Cobb, Buckner, DuMont, and Chauviteau. Since the founding of the city in the distant past, these four have held on to the highest esteem of the metropolis as if it were the rope in a hanged man's hand. Although memory is shady on the matter, the Cobb family has over three hundred years of history in the city... and they're still considered new faces. The Buckners, only one generation into wealth, are practically reviled.

Every social gathering in the city, every major masquerade or planned event, every society wedding or debutante ball, is thrown by one (or more) of the Four. Your social position (or lack thereof) every year hinges on whether or not you're invited to the New Year's Day celebration held by the DuMont family; your business' prospects are determined by the annual Buckner Charity Ball.

The Chauviteau clan, the smallest and poorest of the Four, fight to hold their position. Only years of political acumen and the city's static nature keep them in position among the top families of Terminus. Bad business dealings destroyed their fortunes in the war, and while they struggle to keep their shipping interests alive, the city's various crime syndicates steal as much business as cargo from their holds. Their grand house has fallen into moldy ruin, and their last surviving son (the others were killed overseas) fights to maintain the family name and reputation.

The social war between the Buckner and the Cobb family is the stuff of legend. The Cobbs, tobacco farmers since the days of sharecropping, owned most of the land in and around Terminus, slowly making their fortune from fields of cropland to blocks of cheap apartment housing. As the most prosperous "old blood" of the city, they fight any sort of incursion — and the greatest of the city's nouveau riche are the loud, obnoxious Buckners. What the Buckners don't have in class or taste, they make up for with profits from the petroleum gathered in the deep bayou.

Lastly, there are the reclusive Coalitionate DuMonts with their overseas interests and their fingers in political pies from New Eden to Gateway. They are considered the leading family in the Citizen party, helping shape its policies through every election cycle; the Praetorium Speaker himself keeps Jacques DuMont's number in his pocket for difficult days. They are the least public of the four families, but the most deeply entrenched. Their power is impossible to topple conventionally — besides mountains of inherited wealth, the DuMont hotel empire stretches through every city on the continent, and more in the Coalition. They have their finger on the pulse of the world, and they can make it dance to their beat whenever they wish.

VERY SUPERSTITIOUS, NOTHING MORE TO SAY

Like its real world counterpart, Terminus is a city drenched in superstition. Ghosts are rumored to linger in every empty home and the spirits of *voudoun* supposedly fly thick through the bayou skies. With the existence of magic and gaunts in *The Edge of Midnight* universe, it's tempting to give such notions an actual basis in fact: to assume that spirits and the supernatural really *do* encompass the city. GMs are free to pursue such ideas, of course. However, for the purposes of canon, most of the superstitions in Terminus are just that: beliefs with no basis in fact. *Voudoun* warlocks may cloak their spells in the trappings of their faith, but in the end, the effects still rely on the same principles as normal sorcery. Ghosts exist only in the citizens' minds, and *loa* spirits are as intangible as Christian angels or devils. The Theatre du'la Damned (see page 123) has some rational explanation at its core as well (though what exactly is up to the GM) as do any other incidents that seem to have some supernatural basis.

The lone exception to this caveat is the ESP demonstrated by Sylvestre Constans Beauvais-Chauviteau (see page 136). Sylvestre is technically a member of the Few, and his visions are an offshoot of his unusually strong connection to the "real world." But otherwise, Terminus' haunted atmosphere is just what it would be in our world — a product more of belief than fact.

More on Sylvestre and his vision of the city's destruction can be found on page 132.

about the fairer sex as the rest of the Commonwealth. Women are welcomed in the business world as long as the business is appropriate, or they aren't too loud about their mannish ways. More often, however, a woman in Terminus will run the show through a man: manipulating or outright purchasing utter loyalty and using his name as a cover for her own superior schemes. Indeed, it's not only common for a woman to hold power behind the puppet of a man in Terminus, it's expected. After all, it's tradition.

Down in the dirty wharves of the blues districts — the real heart of the city — the poor and the unfortunate alike find ways to forget their pain. From the smoky bars to the fortune dens, gin parlors, and shantytowns, Terminus has a hundred ways to fill lazy evenings. Prostitutes gather in number on the docks, and any indulgence you seek to fill can be found there. Where other cities hide their sex and drugs, Terminus doesn't bother. Her sins are laid out in the streets, sometimes winking behind glittering masks and flashing sequins, but always paid for with a broad, unabashed smile.

Sprawling like a lazy cat between the humid bayou and the sweet ocean air, Terminus is a bigoted, self-indulgent city whose traditions — even those she can hardly remember — hold more value than human lives. Her cultural strata force conformity, but also provide a place where you can vanish and become one of the crowd. People who want to forget come to

Terminus to do exactly that, leaving themselves behind and taking a place among her highly regimented society. How easy it is, to be just like everyone else. Stay where you are, keep quiet, know your place, and Terminus will shelter you. Indulge you. Allow you the space you need to forget. But shake those boundaries, climb that ladder, and you risk the wrath of generations — both above and below. The city doesn't allow for such things.

It isn't her way.

CRIME

Terminus makes little show of hiding its crime, parading lewdly on the streets after dark and keeping quietly to itself by day. Police don't bother addressing petty crime problems, but trust to the criminals to keep themselves in order. And for the most part, they do. The odd social stratum of Terminus applies to the crooks as well as honest citizens, segregating them according to background, gang predominance, and even criminal type. Homicides are rare, but "missing persons" cases are common; it's difficult to find a body once it's lost in the swamps, and those that are can rarely be identified even if the alligators give them up. People vanish every day, under circumstances as strange as *voudoun* myth. Superstition runs the back alleyways, and paying a fee to protection rackets is as common as hanging a black-painted chicken's foot over the doorway to ward off evil.

Magic in Terminus is of a slightly different flavor than magic practiced elsewhere. The city boasts more warlocks than any other — even Gateway's lax enforcement is nothing compared to the freewheeling chaos found here — and magic use has seeped in to the culture on a fundamental level. It takes on a different aspect here as well. Nothing about the act itself has changed — the scientific principles which govern it are the same as they are anywhere — but the culture has chosen to divest it of its dry scientific trappings. Some Terminus warlocks fit the classic stereotype of "physics professors gone bad," but many others regard it as a form of faith, tied in to *voudoun* and other superstitions. Their understanding of the natural laws governing magic is couched in terms of spirits, mojo, and astrology. Other warlocks dismiss them as superstitious simpletons, but the magic they wield is no less effective. Everyone in Terminus is involved in secret religious or quasi-religious ways, and the city's woeful state of law enforcement means that sorcery has expanded far and wide. Magic is the domain of no single group, no particular gene pool, no exclusive transmission; it comes as faith comes from myriad sources, some more obvious (and palatable) than others. The glaring exception is Christianity, whose firebrand preachers vilify all forms of sorcery as tools of the devil. But most of the populace treats it as they would any other sin: indulge it when you have need, and absolve it in the confession booth afterwards.

Professional warlocks — whether local *voudoun* sorcerers or the more typical varieties — are actively courted by the city's organized crime syndicates, ensuring a steady living for

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anyone willing to ply their talents in the service of the underworld. The NLEB has tried to put a damper upon such activity, but with the civic government such a shambles, there is little they can do save nab a few here and there.

THE DARK RAILROAD

The bullying, controlling crime syndicates of the city (known collectively to Terminus society as the “Dark Railroad”) have an incredible amount of power on the Terminus streets. Although a number of smaller gangs in the city rise and fall on a daily basis, struggling to keep themselves together and make a name for themselves, they are nothing more than raindrops on water, causing ripples and then being swallowed up as swiftly as they came.

The largest names in the city's underworld consist of seven factions. Three stand at the top of the heap: the Baron's Men, the Roughhousers, and the Silent Scepter. Under them lie the Green Riders, the Shadowmakers, Déjà Vu, and the Widows of Fortune. The syndicates don't break down by area or quarter of the city, nor do they maintain easily defined lines in the sand. They overlap in significant areas of crime as well, in ways that would make most criminal associations bloody the ground on a nightly basis. But in Terminus, there are codes. Rules. Ethics. Social mores that must be followed, even by the most depraved and power-mad. To break them gets you blackballed by every other organization in the city — legal and otherwise. You can murder, steal, and cheat, but you can't move outside of these unwritten rules of behavior; otherwise everything you have is forfeit. The criminals know the codes, and they know what to do with those who don't understand them. In the swamp, the alligators grow fat on failure.

CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS OF TERMINUS

The Baron's Men

Remy Favroux — man with a vision. It burns brightly behind his eyes, noticeable to any who meet him, and it drives his every action with a power and determination that none can hope to oppose. Willing to kill for his vision, he barely cares for those who fall by the wayside along his journey towards achieving it. The butcher's son who worked his way quietly from street thug to power behind the throne in a number of small Terminus gangs, Favroux was content to run his operations from the shadows through smokescreens, intermediaries, and patsies, until one night late in summer four years ago, when he met the warlock Valmont. Elegant as if carved from shadow, Valmont spoke little to Remy, but he placed his thumb on the smaller man's forehead and commanded him to look. When Favroux opened his eyes, he saw his vision. He saw Terminus at his feet, and he saw himself crowned king. All bowed before him, and there was peace and plenty in his city. When the vision passed, Favroux knew that he could no longer operate as he once had, in the shadows. The time had come for the little butcher's son to cease fearing the city, and for the city to start fearing him.

The next night, he appeared to each of his gangs, gathering them together and uniting them under his public leadership — from then on they were known as the Baron's Men. As a mark of respect, his underlings always refer to Favroux as “My Baron” or “The Baron Favroux.” They intimate that the Baron rules Terminus, and they are not far from wrong. Remy has controlling interests in many of the city's black market operations and criminal rackets, and at least a third of Terminus comes directly under his sway. His city councilors on the payroll give his quasi-legitimate interests in tobacco a helping hand, and City Hall favors Remy's company — *La Belle Plantation Exports* — above all others, at his instruction. The Baron's Men rarely have trouble with the law, at least half of which is in their leader's pocket. With the advice of the warlock Valmont and his own talent for turning his rivals against each other, Remy has created an environment too fragile to sustain an alliance against his men. Every gang deals with him, either secretly or openly, to at least some extent.

Remy is never seen in public without his advisor, Valmont, and some believe that Valmont truly controls the Baron's Men. Such nay sayers claim that Favroux's gaze comes not from his belief in his vision but from a cocktail of drugs fed into him by his *voudoniste* advisor to keep him suggestible. The Silent Scepter, in particular, believe that the power base of the Baron's Men comes from the henchmen of Papa Miroir (see page 121), who fear Valmont as they do no other. A *voudoun* warlock who seems more powerful than they could believe possible, who claims generations of priests in his ancestry, and yet is unknown to even the most distinguished and ancient of the bayou families raises plenty of suspicions. Their hope is that the uncertainty they put forth will chip away at the Baron's Men, shaking their faith in their leader and his vision, until they dissolve in internal conflict. The Baron's Men still do not speak to Valmont, even when he issues edicts on Remy's behalf, but deal only with their leader. Whether he is drugged or merely wishes to appear so to lure his enemies out of hiding is uncertain... but Remy Favroux never got where he is today by being easy to second-guess.

More on Remy and Valmont can be found on page 94 of the *Edge of Midnight* core rulebook.

The Roughhousers

The toughest gang in Terminus. The bloodiest brawlers in a city that respects no man's life. Even membership in the Roughhousers puts one in harm's way — and that's without the concern of the other gangs. Despite their power in the city, the Roughhousers have always remained little more than a collection of thugs — disparate cells held together by greed and mutual respect. Founded by poor immigrants from the northern cities, the Roughhousers developed a reputation as brawlers, muscle-for-hire, and extortionists whilst portraying themselves as friends of the little guy. They have no love for the poor, but they know that squeezing the penniless gets you nothing, so they prefer to shake down Terminus' businesses. The gangs control very little of the city outside of the poorer housing and the gaunt district, though their stranglehold on gaunt territory is completely unquestioned. Consequently, they are the only major gang with no heavy reliance on warlocks to back up their threats.

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While they lack the manpower and eerie good fortune of the Baron's Men or the scientific expertise of the Silent Scepter, the Roughhousers have held their own in Terminus due to two factors in their favor: tenacity, and the backing of the gaunt community. Simply put, the Roughhousers do not give up. A lifetime of beatings on the mean streets of New Eden and Central City has pushed their backs to the wall. Their fighting spirit and refusal to give in when faced with overwhelming odds — coupled with their background in the poorest sections of society — led a number of gaunt criminals who had previously been affiliated with the other gangs to the Roughhousers' banner, giving them a great increase in manpower and important information on the other gangs. Since they have rallied the city's gaunt underworld to their cause, the Roughhousers have tried their best to ensure that they have a monopoly on leatherbacks — they feel that it will give them an advantage over the Baron's Men and, in the long term, the Silent Scepter to have a ready supply of warlock-hating gaunt bruisers on hand if it becomes necessary.

Colin O'Neill heads the Roughhousers, a hard-won privilege gained after leading one of the smaller cells on a series of big scores. He has maintained leadership through a mixture of guile, diplomacy, and what he refers to euphemistically as "pruning" of particularly vocal and violent members of the gangs. Under his tenure, the Roughhousers have maintained a tenuous truce with their rivals in the Silent Scepter and the Baron's Men, though O'Neill is well aware that both of Terminus' other bosses will not rest until he is dead and the Roughhousers' assets are theirs. As a result, he plans to stand with the Scepter against Favroux and Valmont when the time comes, and then turn on his warlock allies afterwards. O'Neill is the brightest spark in the Roughhousers, and is thoroughly confident of his plan, but in all likelihood it will simply ignite a gang war he has no ability to control.

The Silent Scepter

Less a cartel than a cabal, the Silent Scepter is one of the largest warlock-based organizations in the Commonwealth today, dedicated to helping warlocks persecuted by society. They have contacts in every major city in the Commonwealth, and they do business through a network of favors that gives them leverages in the halls of power — someone whom they have helped out before, someone on whom they have all the dirt they need. The Scepter has prospered in Terminus as they have nowhere else: Terminus, where everything and everyone comes when they don't want anybody to find them.

The Scepter primarily traffics in warlocks and information — they've helped many fugitives hide their pasts, and have a number of expert forgers on call within Terminus' bounds. The Mezzaluna Café on Deacon Street (see page 128) is one of their many safe houses dotted throughout the city. Beneath its simple quiet business, they carry out their work as a latter-day Underground Railroad, moving people who can crush buildings and burn cities throughout the Commonwealth in exchange for favors and assistance.

Founded by a group of warlocks expelled from the charitable organization the Knights of the West after the passing of the Anti-Sorcery Act, the Scepter draws its membership from

the wealthy and genteel gentleman's clubs and fraternities of the big colleges of New Eden and Nova Roma, though they are strongest in Terminus and Central City. Education and inherited wealth have allowed the Scepter to stave off the encroachments of Favroux and the Roughhousers, permitting them to move against their rivals with veiled threats and enough power to ensure that only the most desperate — or confident — of enemies would take them on directly.

None in Terminus know who leads the Scepter, which is organized along the lines of a true secret society. The leadership of the cabal is hidden behind layers of deceit and false fronts, directing the group's efforts to maintain their holdings against encroaching rivals. To date, the Scepter's efforts within Terminus have been steered towards promoting the lot of warlocks within the city, raising the public profile of the sorcerous community, and keeping the criminal element away from "their people" (save when it suits them, of course).

The Green Riders

Little more than a jumped-up gang of thugs who rely on motorcycles to conduct hit-and-run hold-ups, the Green Riders have taken their name out of a desire to appear more mysterious than they actually are. Led by a gutter-born brawler and founded in the wake of a brutal high summer crime wave just two years ago, the Green Riders struggle to maintain their position in the shadow of the Baron's Men and the Roughhousers. That they exist at all is a surprise. That they prosper at their bloody work without drawing the attention of the law or the larger syndicates to their operations is nothing short of a miracle.

The Green Riders have no turf to call their own, but they sometimes meet up to get drunk at an unused gas station and garage on the old Louisville road on the outskirts of town (see page 130 for more). The gang's specialty is raiding and violent crime — they don't have the finesse or the savvy to deal in any of the "softer" crimes that most syndicates dabble in, and only one of the gang's contacts has any facility for shifting stolen goods. The main asset of the gang is their mobility — every member possesses a motorcycle, and they've been known to ride down cops if the worst comes to the worst.

Bill Evans heads up the Green Riders... when he isn't in prison, that is. He studied hard during his various stints inside, and has acquired a working knowledge of the basics of most science. He isn't a warlock: he just likes to affect their style. He tries to use his rudimentary knowledge to impress the Silent Scepter's warlocks, and hopes that his violent charms will put him in good stead with the Roughhousers. In truth, neither gang can stand Evans or his vicious underlings, but they allow him to operate in the hope that his heavy-handed crimes will draw attention away from their operations. Evans himself is starting to crack under the burden of leadership — he's really little more than a common hood with some education under his belt, and he knows that he isn't capable of out-thinking people like Favroux or the Scepter. He never asked to head up the Riders, but he fears that if he loses his position, he won't be long for this world — and that's something he's willing to fight to the death to prevent.

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The Shadowmakers

The watchword of the Shadowmakers is style. Trained in Nova Roma and on the streets of Terminus, this small gang of thieves specializes in going where nobody else can. Jean-Xavier St. Etienne founded the Shadowmakers with his inheritance, hoping that the rewards and thrill of crime would lead to a far more exciting life than simply frittering away his trust fund. Starting small and keeping his area of expertise honed down to a point, St. Etienne has made a fortune for himself and the few expert safe-crackers and second-story men who work with him. They arrange everything from museum heists to bank robberies with the same air of elegance, mystique, and swashbuckling bravado that St. Etienne likes to cultivate.

The Shadowmakers' clientele is extremely diverse, and they increasingly find themselves working at the behest of others: the Big Three of Terminus' underworld, the Drago Combine, the mayor's office, New Eden old money, and even (on one occasion) the NLEB. A flawless theft, however, is not something that one can perform off the cuff — it requires extensive planning and legwork. Filling their small but necessary niche in Terminus' underworld has left the Shadowmakers with the powerful drive to pull off bigger and grander scores... scores which are drying up as Terminus decays languidly into the swamps that hem it in. With desperation now following him at every step, St. Etienne has already begun to plan his greatest heist — to steal from the city's powerful criminal masters before vanishing along with his gang. If he pulls it off, he will be a legend. If he fails, his death will be equally spectacular.

Déjà Vu

Blood is power. So claims Simon Dickinson, better known to all as all as Papa Miroir, head of Déjà Vu. Operating out of a series of shacks hidden deep within the shifting mires of Terminus' fetid bayou, Déjà Vu is one of the most mysterious and frightening criminal syndicates in the Commonwealth. The gang is based on *voudoun* practices and local superstitions and folklore, with a power structure firmly rooted in its members' ability to perform magic. Like their "big brother," the Silent Scepter, Déjà Vu deals in sorcery, yet unlike them they have turned their backs on the scientific principles that govern their magic, instead cloaking them in fearful invocations and blasphemous rituals. Somehow, their fanaticism has lent them power, and they revel in the terror and mystery their name has brought since they emerged from the swamps.

Members of Déjà Vu rely on the old rackets for their income — protection is one of their primary markets, though it is rumored that they possess massive potential for blackmail as well. They say Papa Miroir made a deal with the Devil, and now all the rats that infest the city's gutters tell him their secrets. They say he can see through any window in the city by looking through a broken mirror in his shack. They say a lot of things, and Dickinson himself is behind more than half of the rumors. Though he fosters the image of a fright-show *voudoniste*, Dickinson was once a rational man who figured he could make his name by playing on the legends and fears in the city. When his underlings — all of whom believe in *voudoun* with all their hearts — began to work magic themselves, Dickinson began to lose his grip on reality. Now with each day

that passes Dickinson comes to believe more strongly that he has unleashed something terrible on the world, and flees into the safe oblivion of heroin. In the process, he has bought into his own mythology, and is now more Papa Miroir than the scientist he once was. His advisors, with whom he speaks alone in his shack in the deep bayou, tell him that if the sorcerer Valmont dies, he can steal his power, and claim the entire city as a personal fiefdom. Dickinson, however, believes that he need not kill the sorcerer himself, and greater power will be his if he can use his enemies in the Silent Scepter to do his work for him. He watches both groups carefully, waiting for his moment to strike.

The Widows of Fortune

The Widows of Fortune are a very small group; smaller than one would expect, given the impact they've had on Terminus. Most of their enemies would estimate that there are twenty to thirty active members of the syndicate, but when pressed, they fail to conclusively name even one. In reality, there are only four, and they aren't looking for active recruits; the Widows of Fortune are incredibly good at what they do. And what they do best is sow anarchy and strife. Any one of the four members can best six or more regular thugs, and when Hannah Grier is at her best, she can take twice that number alone. Their complete secrecy and trust is their strength. In order to build their mystique, they leave a tarot card behind at each of their crimes — a Wheel of Fortune with her eyes blackened out by the scratching of an ink pen.

The leader of the Widows is Eleanor van Raache, an *émigré* from one of the Coalition nations, along with her sister, Laura, who serves as chief lieutenant. The two are extremely competent spies, costumers, actresses and performers with excellent physical training and other skills. The third is Hans Uborg — known in Terminus as Alan Borstein — a for-hire PI with little apparent ambition. In actuality, he is an exceptional detective with knowledge of both Commonwealth and Coalition law. He's also a crack sniper and extremely strong, often serving as the muscle in the group. The fourth and last member of the Widows was once their information network, a warlock with some ability and an incredible mental agility. Hannah Grier — pale, blonde, and fragile — knows seventeen languages and can crack codes as easily as she can crack safe doors. That is, she could before she went mad.

The Widows ended up in Terminus, like everyone else, because they had nowhere to go. The reason? Everyone in the Commonwealth remembers the White Light. Everyone remembers the war. And everyone — except the Widows — knows that the right side won. But not every member of the Order of Nu was destroyed in the Light, and not every agent of theirs was brought to justice. From the odd flag with its twisted red cross that hangs in the hidden room inside the van Raache apartment to the strange typewriter-like code machine that Hannah weeps over on a nightly basis, Eleanor and the others keep vigil over their past — when they served as spies for the Order of Nu. They were sent here to cause trouble for the Commonwealth, to provide inside assistance on any counter-intelligence missions, and to launch a final strike against the Praetorium Speaker should the war fail.

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The war has, indeed, failed. The Order of Nu is no more. And the Widows of Fortune have only one thing left to do: one last standing order from their superiors who are now dead and gone. They must destroy the security of the Commonwealth, beginning at the top. But to do that, they need money, power, and the items to build a large-scale bomb. So they work Terminus like masters, peeling apart the layers of the onion and using the other gangs against one another as adroitly as a soldier takes apart and reassembles his weapon. They make it appear as though their “gang” is far larger than it really is; the better to spread respect for their name and keep people guessing. Eventually, they plan to abandon the name and parlay their influence into a place in respectable society: to get closer to the Praetorium Speaker when he visits Terminus on his next election campaign only eighteen short months from now.

But Eleanor is immensely concerned for Hannah. Without her, the Widows are fumbling along in the dark: trying to parlay their information into a useful process, building plans without details, and trying to scrape up any knowledge they can find about other cells of the Order of Nu that may have survived. If they could find assistance in other cities, their job could be coordinated and far more successful. And such a group may know more about any members of the Order itself who may have survived the White Light.

Hannah is the key to such information, but the combination of habitual magic use and the weight of the past has shattered her mind. She sits over the strange machine day and night, muttering to herself, typing, and reeling out foot after foot of empty paper in frantic movements. She repeats strange things that make no sense, about reaching “them” and making “them” listen, or about widespread genocide in countries that have unfamiliar names. Her magic, too, seems completely uncontrolled, snapping out dangerously whenever she panics or has one of her frequent neurotic breakdowns. Eleanor and Laura dislike sedating her, but there is often no choice. Over a pot of coffee, while Hannah sobs softly in her sleep, the two women discuss what to do next. Replace Hannah? Find someone capable of easing her ailment?

While they plan, Alan continues to work as a detective, gathering whatever information he can during the course of his work. He’s close with most of the police force, and knows the city streets better than even the most rugged beat cop. For her part, Eleanor runs a jazz joint down in the heart of the city, keeping an eye on every would-be politician and businessman in Terminus. In that same club, Laura once seduced Grahame Buckner (see page 135) while posing as a cocktail waitress and sometime singer. She is now his mistress, and uses his money as a portal to society events. They are in a position to move when the time is right, but Hannah is a tremendous hole in their operation. Eleanor still hopes she’ll be able to contact the Order, or another splinter cell, before Hannah’s insanity finally overwhelms her.



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THE FLESH TRADE

Criminal society in Terminus is as cutthroat here as in any other city in the Commonwealth. They're just a little more obvious in their dealings. They're part of society, along with the jazz clubs and tobacco refineries. Terminus does a brisk trade in crime, particularly shipping drugs and illegal items inside the Commonwealth from faraway lands. But more than drugs and possessions, Terminus loves trading in flesh. In the deep bayou, flesh is a commerce that is bought and sold — to death, and beyond. The *voudoun* warlocks are always looking for fresh parts; bodies don't keep in the sweltering bayou.

The living have it even worse. There are those in Terminus who believe slavery should never have been abolished. There are those, too, who don't realize it ever was. Gaunts work for a pittance, their strength bought and sold like any other commodity on the docks and industrial centers of the city. Most owe their existence to the companies they work for, a form of subsistence labor that chains them tightly to the company store and the manufactured housing developments that serve as little more than prisons. Those unfortunate enough to owe their lives to the gangs of Terminus end up in similar circumstances — doing underground work (usually of a deadly nature) for the Dark Railroad until such time as their debts are cleared. If, indeed, that day ever comes.

Terminus doesn't pretend or hide its tracks. People come here and disappear so often, it's like a carnival ride. Where they go is uncertain; sold into slave work in the deep bayou, shipped to primitive countries south of the Commonwealth border, or taken into the wide wilderness and abandoned to some unknown death. Some few who go missing are found again (usually after they've perished from harsh conditions) and there is one urban myth about a man who changed into a *voudoun's* zombie and recovered before losing his mind completely. But such things are myth indeed, and for the most part, those who disappear into the mists of the bayou are never recovered. It is the ultimate dumping ground for human waste.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

The peculiar unearthly nature of crime here leaves the authorities appointed to deal with such matters in a less than enviable position. It's difficult to unveil suspects in a city so laden with magic and mystery, where memories of the present are so fused with the half-forgotten dreams of the past. Add to that an all-pervasive underworld organization, shrinking budgets, and a populace which shrugs its shoulders at the depredations of the lawless, and the police have their work cut out for them. Law enforcement protocol is kept under wraps here; there is no blatant presence in the streets or neighborhoods, or banks of uniformed security personnel. They keep a very low profile, which is all they can do in the face of Terminus' primal psychological fog. Quiet operations tend to succeed much more than public ones, leading the PD to adopt trap-pings more akin to a secret society than a civic law enforce-

THE THEATRE DU'LA DAMNED

There is one more "gang" in Terminus, an eighth group that isn't spoken of in polite society. If you ask about them to any of the leaders of the seven internal gangs, you'll likely get no more than a snarl and a muttered curse. These men don't live in the city. They live in the bayou — and for all that is known of them, they've lived there since long before the city was built. That they occasionally walk the city streets is a fluke and a nightmare, something no one counts on — and only few have seen.

Known only as the Theatre to colloquial parlance, the Theatre du'la Damned is a legend that goes back to the first settlers. The name was coined by an early *voudouniste* witch with a flair for the dramatic. Her tales are whispered even today, and suppliants mark red chalk crosses on the pavement in front of their houses (as she taught them), to keep away the evil and bad luck of these "walking dead." Vampires, zombies, ghosts of those lost forever to the bayou — no one knows exactly what the Theatre are. They have been described as immortal, twisted, and driven mad by the nature of death itself. Sometimes people claim to recognize the face of one of the Theatre seen in the misty paths around of Terminus, but no one claims to have ever spoken with one. The few who have tried were found in the morning, red chunks and flayed skin marking their gruesome end.

Whatever you call the Theatre du'la Damned, they are creatures of the deepest bayou and the most haunted creeping bog. *Voudoun* sorcerers leave trinkets and offerings for them on pathways in the swamps, praying not for their intervention, but for them to stay away. Some few times it is said that a member of the Theatre has appeared within Terminus' graceful streets, but their pure white skin has always heralded dark times and blighted days ahead. They do not speak, and rarely seem to have a purpose other than to retrace their steps through the city as if drawn by some ancient path.

Some say that the Theatre are merely gaunts, and the two do seem to have much in common — strange, pale or greenish skin, haunted eyes set in deep sockets, unusual abilities or strength beyond mortal ken. It is suspected that the Theatre moves into and out of Terminus through the Drowned Quarter — the area where most of the gaunt population lives. But the question then becomes: did the Theatre exist before the gaunts the same way the *houngans* existed before popular warlock abilities? Are they linked in some way, one creating the other? The answer is unknown, but few are willing to dig deeply into the bayou to find out.

GMs are free to create whatever explanation they wish for the Theatre du'la Damned. The answers are likely less supernatural than they appear, but who knows what goes on in the swamps outside of Terminus?

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ment unit. The city's criminal mobs have their claws sunk deep into the department, with bribery and corruption even worse than it is in Central City. The police of Terminus are as corrupt as any other, but they make no secret of it. It's considered a badge of honor to be bought off by the "right people," and the crystal ball squads on the force pay open homage to *voudoun* gods and join in secret celebrations in the swamps right beside their criminal counterparts. During working hours, they wage battles in the ether, but when badges are put away and the holidays of the *voudoun* saints come, all sides are one before the eyes of the spirits.

Those few members of the police force (and the non-*voudoun* warlocks in the city) who aren't on anyone's payroll are lone wolves, vigilantes within the system. They don't make the city safer; they're fighting a system that has worked for generations. Considered dangerous and easily swayed from the city's moral codes, such individuals are usually held back by their superiors until they learn to work "within the rules." It drives the unified mobs of Central City crazy. They can't get a foothold in Terminus until they're among the who's-who of society... and are so severely indebted to the local underworld that they can't move a muscle without asking for permission.

Unions don't have much hold in Terminus, not the way they do in other areas of the Commonwealth. Immigrant workers, scrubs, and the tumult of forgotten people who make their way here keep any sort of organization in the workforce from taking hold. In a place where workers change their names weekly to avoid attention, where more than half the city's desperately poor change jobs and locations more often than they change their clothes, and where an entire contingent of the lower-class live off the land in the depths of the swampland surrounding the city, the unions can't seem to find their way. The same can be said for the police force; no matter what they try to do to enforce society's laws, it's like holding a handful of sand and watching it slide through their fingers.

NEIGHBORHOODS

ACADIRAN QUARTER

Not really a "quarter" per se, the Acadiran section of Terminus comprises the wealthiest areas of the city as well as those hilly plantation homes outside and to the west, away from the bayou. Gardens that rival the fantastic pastures of an earlier age spread out on mossy ground, marked by willows, broad oaks, and sprawling houses. Horses run in fenced acreage; in the city, small gardens mark the inner territories of rich, high-rise city homes. Everyone who is anyone has an address here: proof of their social strata. The New Year's ball hosted by the DuMont family spreads out from their townhouse into the streets, turning the Acadiran Quarter into a masquerade ball with jugglers, gold coins and wrapped candy thrown into the crowds, and the who's-who of the city making waves with their glittering costumes and ornate masks.

The beginning of the Acadiran Quarter is built between wealthy houses, buttressed against one another with flowering gardens at the center of brickwork plazas surrounded by high, windowed walls. The St. Xavier streetcar runs down this historic street, and the area is shaded by majestic oak trees layered in Spanish moss. The district is renowned for the collection of mansions and sprawling gardens, but Victorian homes were later built that have become a well-known part of the neighborhood. Their gardens are opulent, though small, and some choose to conduct business as well as garden parties among the sweeping vines. Small fountains trickle down the dark walls, or up from cherubic statues and into basins of pure crystal wealth. Wrought-iron balconies sweep over the streets, forming vine-laden arches along which one can walk from home to home without ever touching the ground. They are filled with people during the parades, but empty most other days, save during the nights when lovers use them as private meeting places.

From there, the two main roads lead into the plantation district just outside the main city walls. Sixteen grand manors still stand here between sweeping willows along a wide, slow-moving riverbed. Children play quietly in short-mowed lawns, watched by nannies and house servants. The houses are surrounded by thick misty forests, just on the edge of the bayou and within sight of the sea. Cliffs sharply delineate the end of the Quarter, marking the vast divide between civilization and the wildness of nature far below. The ocean crashes on rocks at its base, blending into the thick bayou through a hundred tiny tributaries and winding, choked streams.

The roads that lead back into the city are old cobblestone, barely marked with wheel stains or tire ruts from cars. Stairs sweep up in grand curves to doors that open only at two and four in the afternoon — lunch and teatime — for visitors. Here, the people don't speak of money or debase themselves with jobs. The idle rich live here like parasites, sheltering themselves from the world with thick brown walls and sweetly scented vines. It would be a haven if any of it were truly real.

But even now, the mortar in these stones crumbles, and the old architecture begins to sag from termites and other vermin. The Acadiran Quarter is rotting from within. On the outside, it is lacy and sugar-coated, but in reality it is nothing more than a rotting husk. Half of the people living in the Acadiran Quarter don't have the money to maintain their lifestyle; they've mortgaged their brownstones, they've sold the antiques that used to litter the inside of the magnificent manor houses, and they've traded all but the last shred of their decency just to maintain the façade. Those still wealthy enough to live here earned their money by sucking the blood from their neighbors. They are hated and reviled, feared and cursed in soft whispers by every other family in the Quarter... and some hatreds burn hot enough to kill.



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1) St. Lafayette Cemetery

The St. Lafayette Cemetery is the largest and most prominent burial ground in Terminus. It is entirely above ground, for all bodies buried in soil become overwhelmed by the marshy swamp and brought back up to the surface. Marble tombs — some large enough to keep an entire family — sprout like toadstools under the long fronds of willow trees that brush the murky ground. Small streams wending their way toward the ocean mark the edges of the large cemetery, the paths dark brown against mossy green earth. Visitors walk to and fro, some sitting for hours on the marble benches scattered through the gardens.

Even though most of the tombs have names, the marble is weathered so thoroughly that only a few letters remain on the most sheltered markers. Names may appear, but dates are almost totally obliterated, though recent headstones are quite clear, of course. People visit because they remember that they used to, or they believe that a particular marker belongs to a family member... or an entire ancestral line, in the case of the Cobb family. Flowers are delivered to the family's huge marble mausoleum every Tuesday, rain or shine. Relatives send them in lieu of appearing there themselves.

Most of the graves here are done in traditional Greek and classical styles, but some few are designed with an insane grace reflected within their twisting iron ornamentation. They seem to be almost livable residences, standing free among the twisting rows of graves and tall statuary. Beggars and thieves hide among the eaves and pillars of the cemetery, seeking shelter despite the ghosts that supposedly whisper in the night winds. Lovers come to the edges at night, sitting on the marble benches and speaking of their futures; *houngan* bring offerings to angry spirits and ancestors alike, and *voudoun* parishioners leave ivy and flowering vines twined into the iron bars all around the largest marble tombs.

Everyone in the city knows that the St. Lafayette is a meeting ground for warlocks. Those with any sense realize that the Silent Scepter "owns" the surrounding territory, and puts two and two together. Even so, there is a dark reputation around the St. Lafayette. Deals with the devil, dark pacts, ancient witcheries — all these and more can be traced back to the cemetery's grave soil. Other groups meet here as well, with more interest in politics or crime. The police post banners all along the walls facing the cemetery, reminding the public that unregistered warlocks will face serious charges — but they invariably burn and crackle to ash after a few nights, untouched by any hand.

The Cobb mausoleum, in particular, seems touched or cursed by darkness. Large enough to be a house in and of itself, its white walls hold layer after layer of family members, their names inscribed on brass markers hung on the plaster filling of each alcove. The flowers delivered to the front gates shine like ice for three days, then vanish away every Friday without a soul approaching. And there are some who walk the graveyard paths at night — *houngan* and warlock alike — who claim to have seen members of the Theatre walking around the mausoleum as if searching for a way inside. No one knows why, and no one dares to ask them.

Typical Warlock

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 4, Disguise 6, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 5, Gravity 6, Kinetics 5, Lore (Physics) 6, Perception 5, Puzzles 7, Stealth 5, Throwing 4.

Backgrounds: Education, Magic License, Magical Aptitude, Voudoun Warlock.

Profession: Rogue Scientist 1.

2) City Capitol Building & Police Station

The grand central building of Terminus' government stands in northern end of the quarter, its glittering golden dome sparkling like a small sun upon the earth. The building is as old as the city, though it has supposedly burned to the ground twice in the past. The last time took place just after the levees broke from the storm and the populace of the city rioted. As for the first time — well, shattered memory says it was long before that, in another war that no one remembers. There are marks of it, where ancient stone work was marred and metal was melted, but no one can give it a name.

The building is inhabited by several hundred policemen, all sworn to protect the city — and all on someone's payroll. Gang war filters its way into police loyalties, twisting them against one another even as the metal framework of the building was once twisted by fire. You can't find a straight policeman in Terminus, but you can find someone who isn't affected by your particular problem. And that's about all the justice you can buy in this town. The government of the city still meets within the dome, passing laws and reviewing important documents. It may be a waste of time to initiate such bureaucracy when all the laws are bought and paid for by the gangs, but it is maintained, pencil-marked and in triplicate, exactly as it always has been.

The area around the Capitol building is potentially the only crime-free portion of the city, standing like a bastion within Terminus' corruptive core. Police stand on every street corner, watching for the slightest hint that this small patch of virtue might be overwhelmed. Yet they don't stop the crime lords, and they can't prohibit the drugs and corruption flowing into and out of the city. It's a mask that Terminus wears, a small bubble of peace in a city of dark desire — because without it, there's nothing to compete with the shadows.

A massive fountain stands in the center of the square, cascading thousands of gallons of water beneath a tall golden horse and rider: the symbol of the city's glorious past. Some say the man on the steed is St. Lafayette, the city's angelic protector. Others say that it is the general who freed the city from the savages who once lived in the bayou. There is no plaque or marker, no sign even that the form is truly male: curls flow down androgynously beneath a shining golden helm. Whoever it is, the form smiles down with slightly curved lips, sightless eyes glinting in the sunlight, reflecting no hint of mercy or emotion on the quiet streets below.

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A few cafés and restaurants are scattered on the streets around the police station, but no houses. No one wants to live too close to the city morgue, which is located directly behind the station. It has visitors, too, much like the station — but of a darker and more unwholesome style. Bodies are buried, burned, or borrowed, and not everyone has a say in which fate will befall their mortal remains. The *houngan* community visits the morgue on a regular basis, and leaves behind tokens of respect tied to the iron bars of the fence that surrounds it. Feathered trinkets, ropes made of alligator leather, and other odds and ends flap lightly in the wind that sweeps the city streets, covering the iron of the morgue like a corpse's shroud.

Typical Terminus PD Officer

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 5, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 5, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 4, Evasion 6, Firearms 6, Intimidation 5, Melee 5, Perception 4, Pick Lock 5, Puzzles 3, Sleight of Hand 7, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Huge, Marksmanship, Rugged.

Profession: Gangster 1, Officer of the Law 1.

3) The Carousel

In the center of its main celebratory plaza, Terminus provides entertainment year 'round for those who walk the city's lit streets. Kiosks line the sidewalks, pushed by hawking salesmen selling paper umbrellas, fans, and other trinkets. Cotton candy is a common sight, as are steaming mugs of cider (and harder beverages), and jazz musicians playing on street corners with their instrument cases open for your spare change. But the center of the city's nightly festival is the plaza garden — and the carousel.

It is an antique from the tips of the horse's noses to the wide brass ring that hangs in the center. Cared for by a janitor paid to perform only this task, the gleaming golden hooves of the horses shine brightly for each night's turn. The carousel shows a few small signs of ill treatment nevertheless, from the bullet hole in one of the horse's manes to the water damage on the undercarriage. Despite the damage, it remains a perfect representation of its type, with fifty-four horses, six tigers, three ostriches and two great lions that circle to the sounds of "Beautiful Dreamer" on the central pipe-organ.

Tables surround the carousel, and restaurants often send a single waiter with a few trays of *hors d'oeuvres* or samples of their appetizers to tempt passersby. It is a frequent meeting place for society mavens, who bring their children to play on the carousel while they sit at tables in the surrounding garden. There's a sense of hard-earned peace here — a quiet lull in Terminus' decay and despair — but it is tinged with a deep feeling of loss. The children's laughter isn't quite as bright as it should be, and the few cracked pipes of the organ form a faintly chilling descant within the music.

Although the property technically belongs to the city (and the city council pays for its upkeep), the land itself is owned by the Cobb family. The twin Cobb daughters, Esmeralda and Lucille-May, are often seen among the children, themselves just on the verge of womanhood. Debutante balls here are all the fashion, and when the two turn sixteen, an immense celebration at the carousel is all but assured.

Ernie Jackson, Carousel Technician

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 4, Moxie 3, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Craft (Carousel Maintenance) 7, Engineering 5, Evasion 4, Perception 3, Pick Lock 4, Throwing 5.

Backgrounds: Huge, Rugged, Wise.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 3.

LOW QUARTER

The Low Quarter is Terminus' answer to the glittering corridors of New Eden and the palm-shaded avenues of Paradiso. The original twenty blocks which comprise the heart of the district were built before the rest of the city. The houses which stand to either side of the main thoroughfare are covered in delicate ironwork and overwhelming trellises of wisteria and flowering vine. Although the area is not well-maintained, it is wildly beautiful, like the last sap moving through a dying tree. It isn't rich, or even modest, but it is real, and those who live here still remember days in the distant past where the summer wind flowed through trees, bringing with it the scent of the ocean.

The Low Quarter is the celebration area, with a hundred bars catering to any desire, no matter how dark or decadent. The streets are moss-covered cobblestone, and many are too small and narrow for cars. The buildings are all "historic" (i.e., dilapidated and weary), and their tall archways sag beneath the weight of too many years. The bars here have signs that haven't been painted since before the war. There are cheap wooden Indians carrying cigars on the sidewalk, women calling to the passers-by from high iron balconies, and jazz musicians playing on every street corner. It is a paradise for the uncaring, filled with a thousand scents, sounds, and visions to keep the senses busy... so you don't waste time remembering the things you long to forget.

And that is the heart of the Low Quarter: forgetting. Terminus is a filthy city — a dark, rotting void on the face of the Commonwealth — and it knows it. Further, it knows that once, it was something else entirely, something grand and beautiful and now just outside of its reach. It's lost forever, and the entire city feels the pain of that loss. So they come here, in ones and twos and groups, paying to forget everything that ever was, or could have been, or never had a chance. You can buy drugs of any kind in the Low Quarter, and booze enough to drink a thousand elephants into a stupor. You can purchase

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flesh — young and beautiful or tough and muscled — whatever your pleasure or your business. Gaunts sit in empty lots, holding signs begging for transitory work. Street gangs patrol their favorite bars, their small sections of unchallenged turf surrounded by the shifting wilderness of Terminus' "neutral zones" and protected harbors. Gunfights are so common, it's boring, and hardly anyone shuts down just because an out-of-control vehicle has smashed the front window of the bar.

The police patrol here, but they come for the drink, like everyone else, and not for enforcement. You can't enforce these streets, but you can play the game Terminus excels at — pretending that all is well, despite the obvious movement around you. No matter what evidence you find to the contrary, main-

taining the façade is everything. This is the heart of the city's corruption, amid the center of the small memory it maintains of its glorious past. Here is the hub of the sickness, the barter of flesh and drugs and lies. But this is the justifying brain, forgetting and covering with sickly logic and finance, not the black heart of the city. To find that, you must go elsewhere. But if you want to traffic in a thousand vices, the Low Quarter has everything you need.

4) The Old Curiosity Shop

Step right up, pay your nickel, and see the most amazing sights in the Commonwealth! In an area laden with tourists, curio shops, and trinket merchants, the Old Curiosity Shop is a special place. The windows are filled with glittering, sequined masks, costumes, and sideshow curiosities. In the rear, a visitor can pay a small fee to tour the wax museum, or see artifacts of the strange and unusual, such as a two-headed duck or a unicorn skull. Unusual antiques, gifts, and oddities can be found here for those with an adventurous spirit. Skulls, both real and fake, as well as kitschy burlesque memorabilia are on display; one of the largest collections of playing cards, tarot cards, and other oddments round off the shop's main room.

The Allez-Conté Wax Museum in the rear of the building, however, is another story. Those memorialized never gave their permission, and some of the statues bear little or no resemblance to the faces they claim to imitate. Historical figures, city politicians, famous heroes of legend and myth — the

plaques say little of substance, just enough to titillate and encourage whispers in the dark. Young couples often like to tour the long dark halls of the wax museum in private, seeking a sanctuary out of the reach of prying eyes.

The curators of this establishment are the venerable Mssr. Emil and Madame Cecille Allez. They bought out their partner, Lillian Conté some years ago. Along with the wax museum, they purchased something that has become their greatest treasure — a single newspaper, dated some time before the war, and detailing strange events that seem almost familiar to them. The couple guards the object with their lives. It is hidden within one of their wax sculptures — an Argonaut, to be

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precise — and Cecille cannot help but draw it out from time to time and marvel at its mysteries. Emil chides her, fearing what would happen if the information got out, or if the “wrong people” knew what they had uncovered. Who knows what would happen to them if it ever did?

More on Cecille can be found on page 137.

Mssr. Emil Allez

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Craft (Carpentry) 6, Drive (Car, Tractor, Truck) 6, Engineering 5, Evasion 4, Firearms 5, Perception 3, Sport (Baseball) 5, Throwing 5.

Backgrounds: Rugged, Wise.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1.

5) Mezzaluna Café

The Mezzaluna Café, on Deacon Street, is one of the many safe houses used by the Silent Scepter throughout the city. Side-shows and circus geeks visit here nightly, parading their wares before the eager audiences. The stage here rarely hosts singers or “easy music,” preferring freak acts and shocking performances to the everyday fare of Terminus. The Café caters to visitors and tourists, but it’s also a community connection, the unusual entertainment doing nothing to dissuade local clientele.

The most common customers are the members of the Silent Scepter, holding their warlock society meetings in the wide back rooms of the Mezzaluna and keeping to themselves. The café is owned by Gregg Feinburg, a young Jewish man whose involvement in the Silent Scepter (and, once, with the crystal ball squad in New Eden) is much disputed in the city. Feinburg has never shown any signs of magic use, nor has he ever claimed to be a warlock, and those rude enough to ask are told merely that the “claims are far exaggerated.” This has led many to believe he’s not a warlock at all, but merely a sympathizer. Regardless if that’s the real truth of the matter, the Silent Scepter finds an open haven within the walls of the young man’s café.

Feinburg runs a legitimate business, but beneath his quiet surface, the society carries out their work: research, secret inductions, and a freedom trade for those trapped in Terminus against their will. Slavery is commonplace within the city, and the Silent Scepter has made it its cause to help the oppressed when its can. Members ship people to Central City mostly, but other places where necessary, piggybacking their trade along the DuMont hotel chain. Jacques DuMont has no idea of his business’ involvement in this strange underground railroad, though some of his employees are on the roster of the Scepter, trading small favors such as magical training or “assistance” from experienced warlocks.

The Mezzaluna itself holds secret passages, twisting staircases and hidden rooms containing a wealth of warlock books. Because the materials are so valuable to the Scepter, at least three members remain on the premises at all times, watching out for their enemies. Some are quite subtle, while a few

THE NEWSPAPER

What does the newspaper say; the one that Mssr. Emil and Madame Cecille Allez possess? That is entirely up to the individual Game Master. Perhaps it says nothing more than the everyday news — weather reports in cities whose names make no sense, society pages that serve no purpose, and other odds and ends. It can open small vistas, raise questions of society — or it can be a wealth of information about the White Light and the war. It can be a copy of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, detailing the real world which spawned this universe, or it can be a paper from Terminus, providing perhaps the only concrete evidence of this world’s existence before the White Light. Whatever the GM decides is best for his campaign can fit here. As a unique item, it can also be completely forged or fake, and there’s no real way to prove it — though the information it can provide to members of the Few would be worth its weight in gold.

If it does get out, either in rumor or with the paper coming to light, a hell of a lot of trouble is bound to follow it. Murders, suspicion, the paper moving from hand to hand or vanishing mysteriously... objects like this attract danger like flies to honey. That sounds like a job for any number of low-lives, detectives, and scoundrels dying to make a buck.

Literally.

prefer to play the part of the dark and brooding warlock in the back corner chair. One in particular, calling himself Reverend Kulkin, refuses to leave the building between nightfall and daybreak, shutting himself up in the secret rooms with the books and scientific tools at all hours — even if it means he must stay there all night long.

Gregory Feinburg

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 7, Moxie 5, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Brawl 3, Craft (Restaurateur) 8, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Etiquette 4, Evasion 6, Lore (Warlock Society) 7, Lore (Physics) 6, Medicine 3, Melee 6, Perception 5, Puzzles 6, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education, Wise.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 5, Gangster 1.

6) La Belle Plantation Exports

Remy Favroux keeps his tobacco interests in excellent order, giving even the well-established Cobb family a run for their money. Although the Cobbs own three times the land, and have huge production overheads, Remy’s *La Belle* caters to those who think “expensive” means “exclusive.” He keeps his land tilled fresh and all but buttered with fertilizer. The tobacco is of better quality than the average Cobb cut, but it is nowhere

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worth the price Remy charges. Yet it sells like crazy in Terminus, and those who smoke *La Belle* let the wrapper hang from their pockets like a badge of honor. Even his enemies claim it's the finest tobacco in Terminus — though some of that is flattery to keep the greatest gang boss in the city pacified.

If *La Belle* isn't a reputable business, it's through no fault of its accountant, Kincaid Duvoi. Duvoi keeps the books, pays the payroll, and basically does all the work that Remy doesn't do personally. In order to keep them safe, he maintains the books in a special code, hiding them in his house when he sleeps so that no one can track their money or make use of the business' export information. Of course, it's also to hide the influx of money from other sources in the city — protection, gambling, racketeering, and more — that the Baron's Men dabble in. Without Duvoi, the books are worthless, so Remy keeps a careful eye on the shy and reclusive accountant. Duvoi even sleeps in a luxury apartment right above one of the warehouses in a district tightly controlled by Remy's men.

Easily recognizable trucks and railroad cars with the *La Belle* logo on them race through the streets of Terminus at all hours of the day. The image of a white rose twined about a golden trellis is famous through the Commonwealth, but it means something different to the citizens of Terminus — it means that Remy is watching them. And if there hasn't been a *La Belle* shipment to a given store, then something is so deeply wrong that people scatter in the street and avoid it like mad until one comes. Protection money is easily covered by tariff fees and shipping taxes for tobacco throughout the city.

La Belle maintains multiple warehouses, a wide tract of fenced and patrolled land northwest of the city where the tobacco is grown, and several small shops throughout Terminus that exclusively sell their tobacco products. Besides serving as excellent money laundering facilities, they make for a very effective spy network. Remy's hand reaches into all corners of the city, and the people who work in those locations serve as his eyes and ears. The Baron's Men are cemented in the city, stronger than the other gangs and maintaining their lead through sheer audacity and quick action. Remy's *voudoun* priest, Valmont, has blessed all the stores personally. Thieves and beggars cross the street when they walk past the warehouses, leaving the stores alone even if the doors are left unlocked. Perhaps this is because they fear the Baron's Men, and perhaps their superstition of Valmont plays a part, but it remains a certainty in the city.



There's another rumor, darker than any other. The land on which *La Belle* tobacco is farmed is said to have once been a cemetery, and before that, a native burial ground when the city of Terminus was nothing more than straw huts and roped tents on the shore of the ocean. The soil on the other side of those barbed-wire fences is rich and black like the darkest slave of old, distinctly different than the earth which surrounds it. The tobacco is only tilled and harvested at night, the fences manned by the Baron's Men with pistols in their holsters and shotguns in their arms. No one who isn't sworn to Remy gets near the fences at night, and no one has ever met the workers who harvest the *La Belle* fields. Zombies? Gaunts? Slaves? Whatever secrets Remy is hiding in the shantytown of cottages on the far side of the field are kept completely silent and empty by day, and fully shrouded in the darkness of a hot Terminus night.

Kincaid Duvoi

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 4, Bureaucracy 8, Craft (Accounting) 7, Etiquette 5, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 4, Firearms 6, Lore (Finance) 8, Perception 7, Puzzles 6, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education, Wise.

Profession: Gangster 2, White Collar Worker 3.

7) The White Light Museum

On the corner of Pekinpah Street and Altman Avenue stands a building under constant construction. Its tall walls are lined with insulation, complete on the outside (if unfinished), and the empty, sweeping wooden interior is clearly visible through the greasy, still-marked windows of the front hall. A few chairs for workmen, hammers, and sawhorses adorn what might someday become a grand reception hall. In a corner, a few pillars and glass tanks wait to be installed, and presumably filled with exhibits large and small. Outside, by the street, a haggard sign reads simply, "Coming Soon! The Commonwealth White Light Museum." Empty windows look out over the bustling thoroughfare, and not a sound of construction can be heard anywhere.

The White Light Museum has been buried under bureaucracy and paperwork, its funding cut and workmen displaced to other projects. At this point, hardly anyone even remembers which construction company did the original work, or where the plans might be in City Hall. There is no sign of the items to be exhibited, nor does anyone remember who the sponsoring agencies were for the initial building. It stands alone now, ignored by the passersby as a matter of course: a gigantic eyesore that nobody wants to talk about. The businesses surrounding it are losing money from lack of foot traffic, which avoids the area subconsciously. And no one seems to want to dedicate the time and energy to either finish the museum or tear it down. And so it remains, a venereal disease that no one discusses. It's too close to memory, too near to pain, and Terminus simply won't stand for it.

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Typical Passerby

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 4, Moxie 5, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 2, Bureaucracy 6, Craft (Business) 5, Craft (Gardening) 5, Drive (Car) 3, Engineering 2, Evasion 3, Lore (Local Politics) 4, Sport (Baseball) 4.

Backgrounds: Education.

Profession: White Collar Worker 1.

8) Bernadotte's Garage

The Green Riders have no turf to call their own, but they sometimes meet up after a big job to get drunk at an unused gas station and garage on the old Louisville road on the outskirts of town. The site is called Bernadotte's Garage, named by a smitten mechanic on the altar of his true love. The story ends tragically, however: she was forced to marry a wealthy man. The mechanic worked on her new husband's car in a drunken fit. Instead of making their way to Paradiso for their honeymoon, the couple was killed when their brakes failed just outside of the city. The mechanic was so overcome with grief when he awakened in the morning that he shot himself dead in the garage.

The new owner, Delphine Evans, likes to tell the story over a shot of homemade gin any time someone asks. She claims no relation to the original owner, but she keeps the name out of sympathy for the two (and the knowledge that the legend brings in customers). Her brother, Bill, claims he's seen the ghosts of both lovers: the man weeping in the empty garage, the echo of a shot, and a woman dressed in bridal white walking down the long and lonely road toward the station.

Bill Evans, of course, is the head of the Green Riders. He's a self-educated man who likes to show off his learning, and he expects a high degree of decorum from his followers — an expectation that they loudly and bawdily fail at every opportunity. It's almost comical to see them gathered at the garage, wavering back and forth between lewdness and forced courtesy. Like a pack of wolves, they circle in and out of the garage environs between jobs, snapping at one another and behaving like a band of drunken revelers. This would make the garage unpopular, except that the prices are routinely the best in Terminus — and the water in the gasoline doesn't seem to hurt engines at all (at least not within earshot of the garage).

Bernadotte's Garage has a few other secrets as well. A hidden room beneath the risers accounts for many of the strange noises in the middle of the night, and a secret passage large enough to push a motorcycle through leads out into the swamp. For the most part, the Green Riders use it to smuggle guns into the city, as well as illegal immigrants and outlawed goods. Those who don't know the way will find themselves deep in the bayou at the end of the tunnel, with only the distant swamplights of the city and the sound of animals in the depths to guide their way back home.

The garage is a full-service station, working during the day and offering repairs to all the shipping trucks and expensive cars of the city. Their mechanics have a good reputation, and a little extra money ensures that your car's "troubles" (such as bullet holes) can't be traced.

Delphine Evans

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 7, Build 6, Gut 6, Moxie 5, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Brawl 5, Drive (Car, Motorcycle, Truck) 6, Engineering 7, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 3, Firearms 6, Perception 3, Pick Lock 5, Sleight of Hand 3, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Lucky, Mean Streets, Racer.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 3.

DROWNED QUARTER AND THE BAYOUS

A few in the city still remember the Drowned Quarter as the Southern Levees, before the dams broke and the ocean came in. Now the area is deep in water, most portions reaching depths far over a man's head. The roads are now waterways, the buildings sunk deep into the marshy divide. A majority of the foundations are stable, holding aloft buildings two, three, and even four stories above the water — and it is here that the city's poorest and most unfortunate tenants live.

The Drowned Quarter looms through the water — graying and faded by the waves — the buildings holding no trace of their former glory. Once, the area was a thriving industrial and business district, with small apartment buildings wedged between warehouses, business complexes, and shops along wide streets. Then came the storm, and the levees broke, and the water came. Within a single night, the entire district was submerged two stories deep in water... and the sea refused to give back what it had taken. Thousands died, while thousands more fled the area and clustered into the other districts of Terminus. They abandoned their homes, shops, and businesses, leaving behind everything they owned to the weather and the wanderers. Now the area is populated only by those who have nowhere else to go, and nothing to lose if the water rises. Because of the war, Terminus never raised the money or the manpower to rebuild the levees and pump the water out. The national government in Nova Roma made a big show about repairing the damage, even sending the Speaker and several other senior officials out for high-profile photo ops. Nothing ever came of it. The area was left as it was, to rot and fall apart as nature willed it.

There are three ways to move from building to building in the Drowned Quarter. You can take the rickshaws — the slow-moving junk boats that carry passengers the way cabs do elsewhere in the city. Secondly, you can walk across the many ramshackle "bridges" built from roof to roof (sloping where the stories are inconsistent), usually built from rusted parts of cars or bits of fencing that still hold against the weather. These bridges are usually unstable, shifting and swaying with

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the wind, and reinforced willy-nilly by whoever uses them the most. Too often, they snap and dump their passengers into the brine below. The third way through the Drowned Quarter is cynically admonished by those who know it best — swim. But given the foul and brackish condition of the water, all but the hardiest gaunts risk more than just wet clothes from such a recourse. It is said that on some of the roads where the water is clearest, the Theatre du'la Damned has appeared: rotting zombie corpses traveling along the passageways, or looking up from the waves as boats slither overhead. True or not, few choose to swim here unless they must. Usually, the only ones braving the filthy water are those who don't know the Quarter — and their presence is a dead giveaway.

The Drowned Quarter has a few landlords and slum lords that hang onto the best of the rotting structures here, but for the most part the apartments and ruined houses that jut above the rippling waves are first-come first-serve, inhabited by the city's gaunts, the poorest of the poor, or the gypsies who travel through the city selling their wares during the day. These vagabonds retire here each night to hope for safe haven. Some maintain a single home for months or even years, fixing it up and protecting it against interlopers or other vagrants, but others shift their home from night to night, never staying in the same place twice. They risk the sinking floors and rotting walls of different buildings in order to ensure that they can't be found. Gangs of gypsies travel through the area night and day, stealing anything they find unprotected and attacking those too weak to defend their "territories" from such thieves. There is a sort of law here: an understanding among the city's poorest to take care of one another when faced with these packs of wolves. Those who live here don't ask questions, and they don't care about the past — more than a few of them are here to forget it.

A thriving community of gaunts lives in the Drowned Quarter, primarily because there is no one to take away their make-shift homes here. They've created a sort of rooftop shantytown, an entire community of one- and two-room buildings constructed out of scrap metal, billboard signs and anything else that will keep the rain off them. As many as five thousand gaunts live here, among the scattered rooftops of district's relatively solid buildings. They've built numerous small bridges, relatively solid due to the shaped and twisted metal holding them together (gaunt strength has its uses). They don't like visitors, and they treat the wandering bands of gypsies with extreme prejudice.

Beyond the Drowned Quarter, the swamps and bayous wait to swallow Terminus up. Criminals and outcasts, even of this city of the damned, find their way here, eking out a meager living among the snakes and alligators. Criminals looking to hide from the law dwell here in the swamps, where a thousand abandoned shacks provide respite for those willing to search for them. *Voudoun* warlocks prowl the waterways, seeking out the spirits which provide the justification for their twisted version of magic. No one lingers here without good reason, and the police never venture past the city limits. Only a few desperately maintained strips of highway mark civilization here... a place even the damned would find discomforting.

9) Buckner Company Housing

The Roughhousers control the city's gaunt district, no questions asked. If there were an election and only gaunts could vote, Colin O'Neill would be king of Terminus. Those who live here are very insular, keeping out as many normals as possible and attempting to live their lives in peace. Only Colin, whose younger brother Nelson is a gaunt, is fully accepted by the populace of the district. Well, he and his Roughhousers, whose symbol is known to even the most illiterate gaunt in town.

The district lies near the edge of the city, amid the Drowned Quarter in an area thick with methane and petroleum waste rising to the top of the bayou. The stench is incredible, and the water in the nearby swamps is completely undrinkable. Gaunts must bring their drinking water from other areas of the city, carried in buckets and kegs, and stored in their rickety houses. A few of the more daring have been known to hijack tanker trucks, risking years in prison in exchange for the gratitude of their fellows. The housing is shoddy, rapidly constructed in long, identical rows of pasteboard and plywood. Most of the gaunts here work for Buckner Enterprises, the company that fuels Terminus' petroleum and mechanical industries. The swamp that stinks up the city brings a tidy profit to the pockets of the money-hungry Buckners, and they use hard-muscled gaunt labor to propel it forward. This means that in the gaunt district, Buckner's paid thugs and the Roughhousers work together, forced into an uneasy truce by circumstance. The populace here is unspeakably dangerous, their strength and temperament a threat to everyone. Like a powder keg ready to explode, even the smallest thing can incite a riot in this district.

Only two bars dare to stay open here; one in a corner house midway among the company dwellings, and the other a large open clearing called Labor Creek, just inside the swamp. Shoddily erected tents tied to the limbs of trees provide some faint protection against the elements, and slat board paths over waterways show the path to the unwholesome gathering. The first bar is run by Jeb Myer, who charges the lowest prices in the city for what has to be the worst gin in the world. He's the friendliest gaunt you'd ever know, however: uncommonly cheery and pleasant despite the hideous smile on his uneven features. He has few ulterior motives, and plenty of chairs and tables on his wide porch to keep people resting while they sip his bathwater stew.

Labor Creek, on the other hand, is a loud, rollicking party that echoes through the depths of the bayou. The site is over a mile into the woods, marked by wooden paths and thick marshy terrain with no neighbors to complain about the ruckus. The tents are patchwork, sewn together by earnest (if clumsy) hands. They stretch from tree to tree, marked with the blazon of *La Belle*, movie posters, and random wagon covers salvaged from God knows where. The booze is mostly rotten, with the occasional keg "liberated" from the backrooms of legitimate bars or off the backs of trucks. Non-gaunts aren't allowed at the party, and few try to crash it — the leatherbacks have more strength than patience, and they value the privacy of a rare safe haven.

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The gaunt district is also one of the few areas of Terminus whose roads run completely straight. The rows of company housing — provided by the Buckners for their *de facto* slave labor — are a very recent addition, built by gaunt hands for gaunt habitation. The roads aren't paved; no trucks or cars come here. It's a rough district, but gaunts protect their own. They need to. Few of the crimes in this district are reported, much less investigated by the lackluster police force.

Typical Inhabitant

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 8, Build 7, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 4.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Brawl 4, Craft (Industry) 6, Evasion 6, Intimidation 4, Sport (Football) 5, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Throwing 5.

Backgrounds: Gaunt, Mean Streets, Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1.

10) KMIN, Pirate Radio

"Hello, Terminus. It's 1:15 in the a.m. and three people just died downtown in an alley behind Courleon's Speakeasy. The police don't know yet, and passers-by won't tell you, but you just sit back and listen to the voice of Truth, and I'll explain exactly what occurred..." — *The Goodnight Announcer, KMIN*

Is he a warlock? Is he psychic? Does he have paid eyes all across the city, or is he in tight with one of the gang bosses? Maybe he's just a murderer who enjoys reporting his crimes. No one in the city knows how the Announcer gets his information, but by day soft jazz music plays from KMIN, and by night the Announcer's frequent news broadcasts interrupt the sounds of blues and backwoods folk music. All across Terminus, the sound carries local musicians and popular bands on a radio wave for all to hear. But it never stretches beyond the city. And no one claims to be the Announcer, or to know who he is. People have tried to follow the signal, and spent days on end searching the bayou for the radio antenna or any sign of the station, but with no result. It's one of the greatest secrets in Terminus — and it had better be. The number of people who



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would like to silence the Goodnight Announcer forever are multitudinous, from the police who suspect he's behind many of the murders and crimes he "reports" to the gang bosses whose secret dealings he's blown open on the air. But none of them can track this fox to his lair in the bayou, nor even triangulate his signal. And yet, he still announces. He keeps silent during the day with only music playing, but at night, he is the disembodied eyes and ears of the city.

The radio station is actually located underground, which is why even the most experienced trackers and woodsmen can't find it. The entrance is underwater, with a long tunnel that must be swum in high water (a low-bottomed boat can be used in low or drought conditions). The owner and operator — the Goodnight Announcer himself — is a man named Sylvestre Constans Beauvais-Chauviteau, a bastard of the Chauviteau clan. He spent three years constructing the station, raising the antennae within a gigantic, long-dead tree, and painting the top of the wire brown to make it as indistinguishable from the surrounding foliage.

KMIN is an illegal station, stealing bandwidth and programming from other stations all over the Commonwealth (Sylvestre's education in electronics is doubly matched by his talent in that area; he tinkers with anything electric that he can scrounge). He steals recordings from local jazz clubs, smuggles them out of rival stations, buys them from travelers — anything that can't easily be traced. The station's hardware looks like a jumble of wires sticking out of a wall full of metal parts: some great robotic beast hardwired together like Frankenstein's monster. The ground around Sylvestre's desk is littered with cigarette butts and empty whisky bottles, but his voice — immaculate and smooth as dark molasses — resonates through the hot Terminus nights.

Although Sylvestre has a small apartment in the city, he usually sleeps here during the day, so long as he thinks he won't be missed (a great deal of the time, since his landlady is a whore and a drunk). A small cot in the corner acts as his bed, and the desk on which his microphone and turntables lie is covered in newspapers, scratch paper with electronic patterns, and the remains of machines he's gutted while he talks on into the empty air. There are no special effects machines, only an antique saxophone and the hum of the antenna above.

Government agents, bloodhounds, and syndicate thugs (particularly the redneck Green Riders) occasionally plow through the bayou in search of the station, ready to murder (or worse)

anyone they find with even the slightest ability to broadcast. Ham radio operators in the area hide their boxes for fear they'll be mistaken for the Goodnight Announcer, and polite society in Terminus acts as though the entire thing is little more than another radio opera — a play for their approval, not a real rendition of the city's darkest secrets.

More on Sylvestre can be found on page 136.

Typical Bayou Searcher

Attributes: Brains 3, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 7, Evasion 5, Firearms 6, Intimidation 5, Pick Lock 4, Stealth 5, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Huge, Mean Streets, Rugged.

Profession: Street Tough 1.

11) Houngan's Hollow

Deep in the bayou lies a small hump of land that is sacred to every *voudoun* practitioner in the area. It is covered in low grasses, a fire pit in the center rendered black and greasy with ash. They say that flames burn blue here when you light a fire, and that in the leaping of the light you can see into the tortures of the underworld. The surrounding trees grow twisted, moss hanging curtain-like around the glade. White and black wax colors the earth beneath the trees and around the rocks of the fire pit.

From the wildest feral witch to the savvy Valmont himself, every *voudoun* practitioner defends this place despite other allegiances or vendettas. They say that the Dark Baron himself, the greatest spirit of *voudoun*, walks in circles here at night creating his plans for the souls of the world. Rituals here celebrate the seasons, the tides of the moon, and the walking of spirits on their holy days. The warlocks of the Silent Scepter won't approach the site, superstitious of the magic invoked there which follows their patterns but none of their dry scientific theories. Or perhaps they are fearful of reprisals from a unified force of warlocks beyond their control. Whatever the reason, the secret hump of land in the center of the marsh remains the inviolate center of magical activity just outside the city's borders.

Typical Voudouniste

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 6, Build 6, Gut 7, Moxie 5, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Disguise 3, Evasion 6, Intimidation 8, Kinetics 6, Medicine 5, Melee 5, Perception 3, Puzzles 6, Sleight of Hand 5, Stealth 6, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Fanaticism, Lucky, Magical Aptitude, Voudoun Warlock.

Profession: Street Tough 2.



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12) Black China Steamboat Casino

The *Black China* is the last real steamboat operating in Terminus, and the most famous gambling casino that has ever run in the city. Although laws make gambling technically illegal in the city limits, those laws do not reach into the swift-moving waters of the Cimmaronna River, nor the large bay beyond the river's mouth. Once the cruise liner has sailed fifteen minutes from the city, all the tables open and the party commences.

While three such boats operate in the Terminus bay, the others are shoddy replicas of the *Black China*, lacking her atmosphere or grace. The bids on the tables are far lower on those other vessels as well, and the returns significantly smaller. The casino on the *China* features Dixieland music, a world-class buffet, and slot machines, as well as card games and craps tables. The sound of the calliope echoes on the water, fueled by the steam rising from the engines. Visitors are reminded that once the *Black China* takes to the water, she stays out until three the following morning, and the only way back to the shore during that time is to swim.

Typical Croupier

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 7, Moxie 5, Smoothness 8.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 5, Brawl 2, Etiquette 3, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 7, Firearms 3, Lore (Gambling) 8, Perception 7, Sleight of Hand 6, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Alert, Small, Wise.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 2, Con Artist 1.

NPCs

BILL EVANS

From a young age, Bill Evans was always on the wrong side of the law. He abandoned school in the fifth grade, preferring to steal and hunt rabbits for a living. It wasn't that his life was hard or his parents uncaring — they just didn't notice. He was seventh of ten children; the Evans family was just another huge Irish clan in the gutters. When he ran away from home at age twelve, nobody came looking for him. He doubted they even set a chair at the table after the third day he was gone.

He was taken to trial for the first time at age sixteen, unable to whimper his way out of the charges as he had routinely done the four years previous. Convicted of theft and assault, Bill was sent directly to prison. It was the first of fifteen such visits he would make throughout his life. He spent his time there more industriously than his life on the streets, learning the basics of a thousand different con games, extortion projects, and — most importantly — fighting techniques. He used those lessons when he got out the final time, three teeth shorter but his good looks still turning heads at age twenty-four. He built the Green Riders from scratch: a rough and

tumble group of forgettable thugs just like himself. They were nothing more than another small gang teetering on the edge, drinking away anything they earned or stole. Then they tried a bank heist — a job that was supposed to put them “on the map” of Terminus’ lowlife... and it went wrong.

Three men died. Four more had to flee the city. Evans himself went up for murder in the Terminus court. A good lawyer pled him down to manslaughter (he hadn't held the gun himself), and reduced his sentence to eight years. By the time he got out on parole five years later, he'd done more than learn the ropes — he'd earned his high school degree and taken a few tentative steps into the world of math and physics.

Now he's out of jail, and determined to stay away. Evans has a keen mind, and a deep fear of returning to prison. He bears the scars of his time there, and more than any of the other bosses in Terminus he knows exactly what he'd be returning to if they catch him again. He weaves a detailed web when the Green Riders move, and if any of his men act out of line, they're likely to find themselves hanged on the gallows or rolled into the bayou. There's a deep-seated fear lurking in Bill's sharp brown eyes, and he handles perceived threats with a ruthlessness borne of pure Darwinian survival.

Though he's no warlock and has no command of magic, Bill Evans is a rudimentary scientist. He subscribes to popular magazines on mechanics and engineering, and he can take a car apart and put it back together in half the time of any other man. And he doesn't need magic to be dangerous. Those looking for Bill can usually find him at the Weeping Stone pub, or his sister's garage (see page 130). He peppers his language with quotes from literature, snippets of mathematics, and other technical and high-minded bits in his thick brogue. He still has his good looks, though they've become a bit worn around the edges. When he wants to dress up, he has a single gray suit and a thick felt hat with a wide brim, pulled down low like the heroes of the screen that he loves to emulate.

Bill Evans

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 8, Demolitions 4, Drive (Car, Motorcycle, Truck) 6, Engineering 8, Etiquette 2, Evasion 6, Firearms 7, Intimidation 5, Lore (Physics) 4, Lore (Warlock Culture) 4, Perception 4, Puzzles 6, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Education, Rugged.

Profession: Gangster 2, Street Tough 2, Thief 1.

“FOUR-CARD” MONTY STONE

The most notorious card shark on the streets of Terminus is so named for his habit of hiding an extra ace up his sleeve — even during a shell game. Uncommonly stupid and yet uncommonly gifted, Monty Stone is a dark-skinned man with a huge smile and a rollicking, rhythmic mode of speech that owes more to vaudeville than to modern schooling. He can

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be found all over the city, holding illegal craps games, three-card shell games, and other run-of-the-mill rip-offs. He's also a whipping boy for more than a few Terminus criminal organizations, as well as the police and the Buckner family. When pressed, Monty will whimper on about his palsied wife and the three little girls who will be pressed into whoring if he doesn't make money to support them. Few people believe his tales, and they'd be right. Monty has no wife and no children — but what he does have would surprise them.

Monty lives in a little apartment in the back of a hardware store in the darkest corridor of the city's fish district, where the stench keeps most people off the streets at all hours of the day. The apartment above him belongs to a quiet young scholar named Gerald Brown Kelley, a member of the Silent Scepter but otherwise a man of no real consequence. The two have been lovers for the last three years, which could bring them more heat than their respective criminal activities combined. For while Terminus routinely ignores the most depraved sexual deviancies, it still considers gay love an abomination, unsanctioned by the police and punishable by years behind bars.

Not that either man would change things for a minute. Jerry is the only individual other than himself that Monty cares about, and the only person he trusts. Their relationship is his biggest weakness, but his love for the gentle young man only drives Monty to wilder and wilder tales and greater criminal rackets on the streets. A small-time criminal trying to find one big score, Monty keeps his illegal activities secret from his lover, who believes that he has a job bussing tables in a fancy restaurant in the tourist section of town. Monty's earnest dream is to make enough money to get them both to Paradiso, and live happily ever after — and to do so quickly, before anyone finds out about their affair. Whether or not he can make enough money to make that dream a reality — particularly while being squeezed by every syndicate in town — is the real question.

In chasing this dream, he's tried to find a way into some of Terminus' various big gangs: the Baron's Men, the Roughhousers, or Déjà Vu. However, with little to recommend him and a need to keep his personal life a secret, it's hard for Monty to get any real trust from these groups. If he can just be involved on one big mission, do one job with enough profit to get himself out of Terminus... the risk is more than worth the reward. So he goes out every night, turning games on the streets and trying to win friendships where he can. He jumps at anything that looks like an opportunity, often without stopping to think. As a con man, he looks more like a patsy than his own marks. Too eager, too frantic, and desperate to keep Jerry from finding out his real source of income, Monty's own personal shell game is teetering on the edge of disaster, in danger of being blown wide open from any of a hundred angles.



™ Four-Cardf Monty Stone

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 7, Moxie 5, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Appraise 6, Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 6, Perception 5, Pick Lock 5, Sleight of Hand 7, Stealth 7, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Alert, Mean Streets, Small.

Profession: Con Artist 2, Thief 1.

GRAHAME ELIJAH BUCKNER

The father and head of the Buckner family, and one of the loudest and most uncouth people in Terminus, Grahame Buckner is nevertheless a wealthy and powerful man. His petroleum interests flood money into his bank accounts, though that still doesn't make him acceptable to the city's elite. Most abhor him for his rude behavior, his gutter sense of humor and the smoke-belching cigar he keeps clenched between his teeth (*La Belle*, of course; he'd never touch a leaf of that stinking Cobb stuff). His wife is a first cousin to the Chauviteau family — a tenuous link that allows him to force his way into soirees and country club doors that would otherwise be slammed shut in his face.

Graham Buckner (he added the "e" when he made his first hundred thousand dollars because it made signing his name "finer") was born in a shack outside Terminus to a tenant farmer and his wife. As their only son, he learned to work hard and value every dollar. When his father found petroleum on their land, it was only a small increase in their income — until the automotive industry was born, and the increase became a windfall. At seventeen, Buckner was sent to the Hofstetter Military Academy in Nova Roma (see page 76), where his backwoods demeanor and lack of pedigree made him a constant target of bullying. He learned to bear it, joining the boxing squad early, and honing a wicked left hook that often saw action outside of the ring. He made his name there, but was never really accepted by his peers in the school. On the last day of his tenure, the other students stole his uniforms and burned them in the kitchen stove, forcing him to endure the graduation parade in nothing more than his pajamas.

The chip on his shoulder hasn't faded, nor has his complete and abject hatred of the upper class. He takes it out on his business associates, shearing them of as much money as he can through fiendish financial manipulations that often trump their genteel social lobbying. He also takes it out on his blue-blooded wife, who has her maid purchase powders and jars of crème to cover the bruises on her face and arms. And most of all, he takes it out on the Cobbs, whom he considers the epitome of social bigotry and elitism. He has sworn to bring them down by any means necessary, even if it ruins his life or the life of his young son.

Buckner is a tall, stocky man whose girth is slowly fading from muscle to flab. He still has the fighting style of his college days, and his hands are permanently calloused from the hard work of his youth. He's not afraid to get dirty in the

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course of his interests, but he currently has an army of working men who look to him for their wages — which means he's got plenty of thugs when he needs them. More than half of the gaunts in the city work for Buckner, owing more money to the company store than they make in wages. They belong to him, and he knows it. Soon, if he has his way, the whole city will belong to him, too.

Grahame Elijah Buckner

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 7, Build 8, Gut 7, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 40.

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 8, Bureaucracy 8, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Engineering 5, Etiquette 3, Evasion 7, Firearms 5, Intimidation 8, Perception 5, Streetwise 6.

Backgrounds: Education, Huge, Rugged.

Profession: Street Tough 1, Wealthy 4.

SYLVESTRE CONSTANS BEAUVAIS-CHAUVITEAU

Sylvestre is the kind of man more often forgotten than cared about: the bastard son of the famed Chauviteau family. Sometime before the war, his mother took up with a family servant, and bore the man's son despite her father's rage. The two were married, but public scorn drove them out of Terminus to live in a small but well-appointed cottage outside the city. Her father cut off all money and wrote the girl out of his will, but the two managed to make a living on her embroidery and his hard labor — and a large but secret gift of cash from the girl's weeping mother. Sylvestre isn't certain what happened to them — his memories of that time are muddled — but he visits their graves regularly and lays flowers against the headstone.



Shunned by high society and able to make friends only with the gaunts and the outcasts, Sylvestre lives a classic life of bitterness and waste. He's a mulatto (his father was black), but his race means very little in this brave new world; the circumstances of his birth are enough to brand him an outcast. He makes a little money as an investigator, assisting police or private detectives with simple tasks where they need help but rarely doing anything on his own. He doesn't have the motivation for it, and he can't keep away from the whiskey long enough to carry through on any jobs of his own. At least, that's what he makes everyone believe.

In truth, Sylvestre Constans Beauvais-Chauviteau is an anomaly: a man who can see clearly in a world that chooses to be blind. He's blessed (or cursed) with an incredibly powerful gift. He can stare into his whiskey glass and see things: things that happened, things that are happening, things that will happen. Sometimes, they're muddled, encompassing people and places he's never heard of before. But most of the time, they appear very clearly within the confines of Terminus. If the Silent Scepter knew what he could see there, they'd turn green with envy — or white with fear. Unlike true warlocks, his gift is paranormal — a natural phenomenon, perhaps the only one of its kind. But along with the gift come splitting headaches, gushing nosebleeds, and nightmarish, uncontrollable visions. Once, Sylvestre tried to leave Terminus in the hopes that his second sight would abandon him once outside the city. It nearly killed him. He returned to his home in the bayou with a face covered in blood, completely convinced that he would be chained to this city forever.

With little hope for himself, he tries to use his gift for the good of the city. He spent what little inheritance he had building his radio station, and from there, he reaches out through the Terminus nights to those who will listen to him. He hovers over the large microphone, hands clasped around a full glass of whiskey, and he lets the city know what he sees. Then, when the fits pass him, he leans back and listens with the rest to the strains of sweet saxophone jazz on the airwaves. Someday, they'll catch him — he's already seen it. It makes him feel better, knowing how it will all end, though he doesn't look forward to the day. He has already seen the horrors of the night he dies, looking into his whiskey glass and finding no solace. That same night, Terminus will burn to the ground, destroyed by a dark beast set loose by the whims of a madman deep within the bayou. Sylvestre has foreseen it, and his visions are never wrong.

Sylvestre Constans Beauvais-Chauviteau

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 7, Moxie 4, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Brawl 3, Contortions 6, Craft (Electrician) 9, Disguise 5, Electricity 7, Engineering 9, Etiquette 6, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 4, Firearms 4, Languages (English, French), Lore (Electronics) 9, Lore (Radio) 9, Perception 8, Pick Lock 6, Puzzles 8, Stealth 7, Streetwise 8.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education, Wise.

Profession: Academic 1, Investigator 3.

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MADAME CECILLE ALLEZ

Unlike her husband Emil, Cecille cannot simply put away thoughts of the newspaper in their curio shop (see page 128). She reads and rereads it at almost every available opportunity, creeping into the museum with a candle at night. With shaking hands, she takes the folded pages from their hiding place inside Jason's wax chest cavity. Although her mind is clear and her memory good, she cannot hold the information in her thoughts for more than a few hours before it all slips away again, leaving her with an insatiable curiosity to read it once more.

Cecille tried to talk to her husband about this strangeness when they first found the newspaper, but he angrily urged her to forget it even exists. Emil can't bring himself to destroy it — its power is too strong — but he can put it out of his thoughts. Cecille, however, feels it gnawing at her like a thing alive. She knows he's being protective — trying to ensure that their secret isn't discovered — but she can't help herself. Though she doesn't remember what is in the pages of the newspaper from day to day, she knows deep in her soul that the information is *important*, that it is *horrible*, and that it gives an explanation of so many things she'd taken for granted about her life and her past. But each day, she forgets again, and is left with that gnawing ache to remember. Asleep in her bed, she has nightmares of what she reads: the stories and the secrets revealed inside. Nothing stays with her after daybreak, however.

She knows that if she keeps sneaking to the statue every night, someone will eventually notice. One of the janitors, perhaps, or a visitor who notices the odd shift in the wax sculpture's clothes. It might be Emil, who could burn the newspaper once and for all... or it might be someone worse. *They* might find her, take it away, destroy it, or use it for purposes she can't define. Who *they* might be and what their true purpose is, she cannot say... and that frightens her even more.

Terrified and confused, Cecille has only one real thought about how to handle the matter. She has to take this newspaper to someone more capable of understanding its contents, using them if possible or making the informed choice to destroy it if necessary. Someone with power enough to protect the newspaper and who cannot disappear the way a poor couple with a wax museum easily could. But who? Most of the gang bosses in Terminus are despicable thieves with no thought beyond their next score. Cecille doesn't trust warlocks, and she certainly doesn't trust the police or the government. Whoever it is, he has to listen to her, for the good of Terminus. For the good of the world.

Madame Cecille Allez

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 4, Craft (Waxwork Modelling) 8, Disguise 5, Etiquette 4, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 3, Firearms 2, Perception 5, Puzzles 6, Sleight of Hand 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Lucky, Wise.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 3.

TERRENCE "LONGBONE" MARSALIS

A consummate entertainer, Terrence Marsalis seems to embody the old-time-spirit of the city — laid back, swinging, and joyous all at once. He smiles as he plays his brassy trombone, whether on street corners or in classy bars. He doesn't care about his clientele or his fame, the money in his pockets or his new suits. He cares about the music, and he cares about bringing joy to those who need it.

His sets feature classics from the past, and his own free-spirited, bluesy original material. Many of his songs are famous, some played by his own hand and others sold to bigger production labels. He isn't worried if his material becomes famous under someone else's name. Why should he? The music is all that matters, and the smiles it brings to people across the Commonwealth.

Terrence is a lanky, slender black man with excellent taste in clothes and a different pair of shoes for every day of the week. Though he's never married, he keeps company with three ladies who have been his companions of choice for more than twenty-five years; each one of them is proud of their association with him. Jealousy erupts from time to time, but it is an old companion, and all of those involved in the strange arrangement have come to terms with their position. Terrence is over six feet tall and well into his fifties, but his hand is as steady as ever on the slide of his instrument, and his white teeth shine behind a wide smile as he plays.

A refreshingly sober and content man in a city of broken dreams, Terrence is on the inside of every major theatre and musical production in the city, although often with a subtlety that belies his large frame. He has friends in every bar and on every bandleader's payroll, and he can play a command performance at any venue in the city with just a phone call. He's connected, friendly, and has an eye for talent. He specializes in finding kids on the street and giving them a chance to make it big in jazz, eager to both encourage young talent and keep himself stocked on favors from up-and-coming musicians. Between his own work in Terminus and friends like Arlen Eaton in New Eden (see page 83 of *The Edge of Midnight* core rulebook), Terrence is well connected throughout the Commonwealth, and can get his songs and his sponsored artists a place to play in just about every city on the continent. This is the good life, and Longbone knows it.

Terrence TMLongbone^f Marsalis

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 8, Moxie 8, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Brawl 2, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 4, Lore (Jazz Musicians) 9, Perception 5, Perform (Trombone) 10, Perform (Song) 8, Puzzles 4, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Alert, Charismatic, Wise.

Profession: Performer 4.

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JANEIKA "SAXOPHONE DOLL" MONARCH

Janeika is a tall, lanky, and evidently still growing, but the teenager's memorable moniker has nonetheless stuck. The nickname was first applied when, at age five, she was spotted in a second-line parade playing a saxophone longer than she was tall. "Like a little china doll with a toy sax," the newspapermen said as they took snapshots of the curly-haired cherub. Since that day some ten years ago, Janeika has lived with one of Terrence Marsalis' three mistresses (a woman named Lamelia Jefferson), though both publicly deny the child is theirs. Janeika has never spoken of her parents, nor where she got the shiny saxophone that was her only possession other than the clothes on her back. In fact, in the ten years they've been raising her as their ward, she hasn't said anything at all.

Abnormally quiet, though not actually mute, Janeika is a bright child with a prodigal talent for the saxophone. If it wasn't for her feminine sex, Terrence is convinced she'd be the next rising star on the big band circuit. When he lets her play on stage, the outcry is enormous — both for and against her — but her talent is unmistakable. It's a quandary that he puzzles over each time he hears her play.

The other question about Janeika is her real parentage. Though Terrence has raised her as his own, he has no idea where she actually comes from. When she first began performing publicly, several con artists tried to claim her as their long-lost daughter, but Janeika recognized none of them, and had no response at all to the idea of going anywhere other than home with her foster mother. She isn't looking for her parents, Terrence surmises, which may mean that she knows what happened to them. But are they dead, have they turned into gaunts, or does the girl simply not remember any life before her time as his ward?

At fifteen, Janeika is blossoming into the beauty her childhood promised, with soft honey-brown skin and wide dark eyes under amber curls. She attracts attention onstage and off, and Terrence often has to chase off the hounds that come to sniff out this particular fox. The girl notices none of it, enjoying her music more than romantic possibilities, but in a few years that will likely change. Her foster father's coddling has produced a wonderfully talented, practiced musician, but also a girl completely unprepared for the challenges and hardships of the real world outside her window. A china doll, indeed.

Janeika™ Saxophone Doll† Monarch

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 4, Moxie 8, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 2, Evasion 5, Perception 3, Perform (Saxophone) 9, Puzzles 3, Stealth 5, Throwing 4.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Lucky, Prodigy.

Profession: Performer 2.

CAPTAIN JAMES COBB

One of the captains of the Terminus police force, and a loyal member of the notable Cobb family (a cousin to the main branch, but one welcome at all the society gatherings), James prefers to take the graveyard shift at the Terminus police headquarters. He organizes night missions, keeps an eye out for everything that happens after the sun sets, and organizes anything necessary to keep down trouble on the streets. He has a canny eye for such things, but more importantly, he's exceptionally good at thinking on his feet. Let the other officers handle drug busts, homicide investigations, and long-term stings — he's the man you call when something needs attention *now*.

It's pretty obvious to all that Jimmy is an "owned" policeman, especially with a last name like the one on his badge. Still, most people would be surprised to hear that he's also a member of the Silent Scepters — or used to be. He left the Scepters to go to New Eden, there to train on one of the first crystal ball squads in the nation. Thought not a greatly gifted warlock, he has managed to turn a small talent into a profitable career in law enforcement. Now he brings that skill to bear in Terminus. Though the city's own crystal ball squads are undermanned, pathetically bumbling, and consistently lackluster, Jimmy always spins it so that it's someone else's problem. Since the day he left the Silent Scepter, they've been his favorite scapegoat of all.

Jimmy Cobb is a fair-haired man with the build and stride of a bulldog. His legs are slightly bowed from time spent as a mounted policeman (a lingering throwback to Terminus' genteel past) and he's an excellent marksman. He has a military bearing, but a disarming smile whose slightly crooked, sympathetic bent has charmed many a panicked woman at the scene of the crime. He speaks softly, but with a clear authority behind his words. Short-tempered, he lives the fast-paced life, taking risks that skim the line of proper police work. If it can't be solved *now*, it only makes him angry, and when he's angry, he's likely to take his frustrations out on the face of some poor sod in the drunk tank.

He has an immense talent for immediate decisions, and carries through with a brutal force that stops those who oppose him cold in their tracks. He's not a planner, and spends little time researching or tracking, but with a single clue and a steady lead he'll spin the area in a split second and turn up his man. If the criminal's gone beyond immediate reach, then it's no longer his problem. Let the screw-heads behind the desks deal with it then; Jimmy's got better things to attend to.

Captain James Cobb

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 7, Build 6, Gut 5, Moxie 7, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 7, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 6, Drive (Car, Horse, Motorcycle) 8, Engineering 3, Etiquette 6, Evasion 4, Firearms 7, Gravity 4, Perception 4, Puzzles 3, Sport (Horse Racing) 8, Stealth 4, Streetwise 5, Tensile Energy 3.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Magic License, Racer.

Profession: Officer of the Law 4, Rogue Scientist 2.

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BAYOU BRAU

The *houngan* known as Bayou Brau claims to have never set foot in a city during the course of his long life. Nearly eighty (at least), his wrinkled and ancient figure is a permanent fixture at Houngan's Hollow: a powerful warlock that few dare to question. At first, when sightings of Valmont were still rare, many thought the two were the same man. Clearly, they are not: Valmont is young, strong, and spry, educated in speech and erudite, while Bayou Brau is crass, dark, speaks with a deep woods accent, and does not seem to be able to read or write save the names of the *loa* and the spirits he supposedly commands.

In fact, though few know the truth, he is Valmont's father. He raised his son in the deep bayou on the truth of *houngan* lore, taught him magic and the ways of the spirits, then spat in

his footsteps as the boy left for "modern schooling" that Brau considered useless and above the boy's reach. He waited in the woods for the spirits to send him a sign about his son — long nights awake beside a burning fire in Houngan's Hollow — but only recently has he seen what the *loa* wish.

They want Brau to kill his boy. But how?

Valmont almost never leaves the city anymore, and Brau himself is geas-bound never to enter (he believes he will lose the favor of the *loa* gods if he does). Valmont is caught in his own web, tied so strongly to Remy Favroux that the two are almost inseparable. Because he cannot afford to leave Favroux unless it is extremely important, Valmont only risks the bayou to go to Houngan's Hollow on sacred days. Brau won't break the peace of that small island, no matter what the spirits have decreed, and he's had no luck tracking or catching Valmont on his way to or from the ritual site. He's taught his son every

piece of sorcery and spirituality he knows, so Brau can't count on being more powerful than the younger warlock. Furthermore, Valmont has likely added to his store with "citified" tricks and sciences that Brau does not understand. So he has only one real choice.

He must summon the darkness within the bayou itself, and send it after his son. It is known as Kublai Samethi — the Tortured Man — though it was never human at all. It is a deep, primal force, more powerful than any warlock alive. If he can control it, this beast will be able to hunt down Valmont within the Terminus streets and kill him in some appropriately agonizing way. If he can't control it, the *loa* will exact their vengeance on Brau for daring to try. Worse, if the ritual fails or is incomplete, the creature might be released to do as it pleases for the span of one evening, hunting both city and bayou without leash or restraint. This is a phenomenal risk even for a self-styled King of Houngan such as Brau, but what else can he do? The more he studies the quandary, the fewer choices he seems to have.

Brau has dedicated every scrap of his study and practice to this for nearly a year, interpreting the original demand of his twisted vision and attempting to find the dark heart of the bayou from which the Tortured



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Man will rise. The paintings and depictions of the being are monstrous. Vaguely reminiscent of a gaunt but seen through a shadowed, fractured lens, the Tortured Man's visage can drive the human mind completely mad, turning the hair of any who witness it as white as snow. Brau is willing to destroy himself if necessary to fulfill the geas the spirits have laid on him, but he's neither a fool nor suicidal. If he can trick some young *houngan* into completing the summons, then seize control of Kublai Samethi himself, he has a far better chance of escaping the creature's rage. After the original *houngan* who dared call upon the Tortured Man is dead, Brau can deal with the *loa* and perhaps come to an arrangement. Now he has to find a patsy willing to do anything to gain the knowledge that the canny Brau promises, and teach this new "student" a few lessons that will serve Brau's cause. Then, for one terrible night under a dark moon, madness will physically walk the Terminus streets. At last, Valmont will die. No matter what the cost.

Bayou Brau

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 4, Build 5, Gut 9, Moxie 5, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Contortions 4, Evasion 6, Gravity 5, Intimidation 7, Lore (Voudoun) 10, Medicine 5, Melee 6, Perception 5, Stealth 8, Tensile Energy 5, Thermal Energy 5.

Backgrounds: Fanaticism, Magical Aptitude, Voudoun Warlock, Wise.

Profession: Rogue Scientist 2.

JACQUES DUMONT

Wealthy and cultured, his cajun accent softly touching each syllable of his smooth-as-silk voice, Jacques DuMont may be the single most powerful man in Terminus. His family is old money, the kind this city was built on, and he can pull strings from Paradiso to New Eden and far beyond. Jacques DuMont has more money than several small countries, and a personal security agency for his hotels that defines the term "professional soldier." Some people compare him to God, watching him dismount from his car at the side of his young bride and enter their Catholic church, and they wouldn't be far off. He's powerful, he's elite, and simply put, he doesn't give a damn about this city or anything in it.

DuMont was born to class and culture, but not intelligence. His family was wealthy, but resting on their laurels, their hotel chain filled with crooks and embezzlers, and rotting away beneath them. His father accrued so many gambling debts in Central City that he feared they'd have to turn the entire hotel chain over to the Drago mob. Jacques took over management of the DuMont Hotel in Terminus at age 18. By the time he was 20, he had restored it to its former glory, rebuilding the hotel's reputation and glamour as well as its profitability. Then, one by one, he seized control of the other DuMont hotels throughout the Commonwealth, managing them all with an uncanny

GM'S EYES ONLY: A FATHER'S GAMBIT

Though cloaked in *voudoun* mysticism, Bayou Brau's spell is actually a variation on *The Edge of Midnight*'s existing cosmology... though that doesn't make it any less dangerous. In the simplest terms, he figured out how to create a gaunt — to activate the process whereby the universe replenishes the energy taken away by magic use (see page 159 of *The Edge of Midnight* core rulebook). But while the cosmos exercises some finesse when it creates a gaunt, Brau's method is as crude as a sledgehammer. The resulting spell will knock a hole in the universe, centered around the form of whoever Brau's chosen victim will be. The resultant "creation" will be powerful, hideous, and quite mad. Stats for such a being are as follows — essentially a gaunt, but in a much more concentrated form:

The Tortured Man

Attributes: Brains 2, Brawn 12, Build 12, Gut 6, Moxie 3, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 60.

Skills: Athletics 10, Brawl 10, Evasion 8, Intimidation 10, Melee 5, Perception 6, Stealth 10, Throwing 9.

Backgrounds: Accelerated Immune System, Alert, Bone Spurs, Dead Zone, Dense Bone Structure, Enhanced Teeth, Fanaticism, Gaunt, Huge, Reduced Light Vision, Rugged, Sinewy Joints.

Profession: Athlete 3, Blue Collar Worker 2, Street Tough 3.

How and if such a being will instigate the destruction of Terminus — and whether the party or an NPC can somehow stop it — are up to the individual GM.

finesse and business acumen that earned him stunned amazement from his competitors — more than a few of whom were bought out within five years of DuMont's ascension.

The elder DuMont, Yves, was forbidden from gambling by his son and under local house arrest in their Terminus family plantation. He soon sank into a stupor of drunken self-pity, and remains there even today, literally locked in the building until he dies. Whatever happened between the two men is unknown, and Terminus' social elites consider Yves DuMont's sentence a just one, though they can't remember exactly why. Jacques, on the other hand, expanded and built the crumbling DuMont empire into a monument. He's already immensely powerful, and though some have suggested that he run for the highest office in the land, it is more likely that Jacques will remain a power behind the throne. His hotel chain gives him information from across the nation at a moment's notice: the teletickers report every move of friend and enemy alike. He assimilates this information ceaselessly, remembering every detail and using it with ruthless effectiveness to achieve his goals.

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The head of the DuMont empire is a young man just fading into middle age, with jet-black hair and sharp European features. His green eyes are striking, and his pencil-thin moustache just brushes the top of his lip. Always ahead of fashion, he dresses impeccably, and the most important ornament in his collection is his wife, Jeanne l'Amiste DuMont, a stunningly beautiful and cultured woman from overseas. He dotes on her with the complete fascination of a man who owns a unique creature, and escorts her protectively around the city. Publicly, the two have no offspring as yet, but both are young and strong, and there are gambling pools betting on the eventual birth of their first child.

Although others in the city claim the DuMont name — cousins and distant relations — none of them are close enough to the main line to claim any sort of inheritance. If something should happen to Jacques and Jeanne before they have a child, his empire will be left without a clear successor. The resulting clashes would rival full-scale gang wars in scope. Jacques is canny enough to play on that knowledge, letting each underling know they are “his favorite” just enough to keep them loyal, and making them question his affection just enough to make them fight each other for the prize he holds just out of their reach. In fact, he and Jeanne already have a son, born in secrecy and now being raised in Nova Roma with no ties to their name — just so that Jacques has an ace in the hole should he ever need one. It saddens his wife and drastically worsens her already poor health to be separated from their boy (whose name is Constantin), but she understands why, and would never be fool enough to disobey her husband on this issue.

Jacques DuMont has one thing the rest of his family hasn't had in generations: ambition. Ambition enough to raise the DuMont hotel chain to its immensely prestigious status, and enough to seriously consider his eventual goal — to rule the Commonwealth. It seems ludicrous — the scope of Paradiso radio plays — but Jacques is a worldwide thinker, and as much a gambler as his failed father before him. Terminus isn't enough. He wants the world, and he's keen enough to find a way to roll the dice. Manipulate the Commonwealth until it's under his control, whether he has the title of Praetorium Speaker or not, and then blackmail, bargain, or buy every politician strong enough to challenge him, and unify both sides under his rule. Only with such power under his thumb will Jacques be happy. Only then will his ambition be satisfied. If any man in the world has an honest shot at such a massive goal, it is Jacques DuMont. All he needs is an angle.

Jacques DuMont

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 7, Moxie 8, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 9, Drive (Car, Horse, Motorcycle) 7, Etiquette 10, Evasion 7, Firearms 6, Intimidation 8, Perception 7, Puzzles 8, Sport (Polo) 7, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Alert, Charismatic, Loyal Retainer, Lucky.

Profession: Lady Killer 1, Politician 1, Wealthy 5.

ELEANOR AND LAURA VAN RAACHE

Lovely, cultured and graceful, Eleanor van Raache catches as much attention from the men who frequent her club as the singers on stage. Her pale hair swings like a dove's wing over one shoulder, long lashes hiding expressive dark eyes. She prefers blue so much that the regulars call her “Bluebird,” and her voice is smooth and completely free of any accent. Clever as a fox, she does all the accounting and bills for the club, and maintains a band, wait staff, and bar completely on her own. The club is well-known, the name “Strictly Taboo” eliciting smiles throughout the business offices of Terminus. They come for the whiskey, and for the music, but they stay for the smoky atmosphere and the feeling Eleanor gives each and every patron who walks through her doors — that they are not alone.

The only time people turn their attention away from Eleanor is when her sister appears onstage. As dark as her sister is light, Laura sings only slightly over an octave's worth of notes — but it's how she sings them that catches everyone's attention. She exudes dark sensuality, the devil's own honey, and when she walks the stage, the world falls silent to watch. The booth in front, directly to the left of the stage, belongs to Graham Buckner and he fills it every night that Laura's in the lineup. The table in the center of the room used to belong to Peter Cobb, Buckner's rival, but recently Cobb has been avoiding the Taboo. Whether he finally took Buckner's threats seriously or if he's planning something big to woo Laura back to his side is unknown — but you can be sure Laura is waiting eagerly to see which is the truth. Such things excite her. Eleanor worries that her sister is too interested in such petty games, that the rivalry between the two suitors could compromise the Widows' final objectives, but so far everything has turned out fine. For now.

More on the van Raache sisters can be found on page 121.

Eleanor van Raache

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 7, Moxie 7, Smoothness 8.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Athletics 7, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 5, Demolitions 7, Disguise 5, Engineering 4, Etiquette 6, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 7, Languages (English, German), Lore (Order of Nu) 8, Perception 5, Perform (Singer) 7, Pick Lock 5, Puzzles 4, Stealth 6, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Acrobatic, Charismatic, Loyal Retainer.

Profession: Con Artist 2, Femme Fatale 1, Performer 1.

Laura van Raache

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 6, Build 6, Gut 5, Moxie 9, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30

Skills: Bureaucracy 5, Contortions 6, Demolitions 8, Disguise 3, Drive (Car) 5, Etiquette 4, Evasion 7, Firearms 8, Forgery 5, Lore (Order of Nu) 5, Perception 6, Perform (Singer) 6, Stealth 8, Streetwise 4, Throwing 6.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Lucky, Marksmanship.

Profession: Con Artist 2, Femme Fatale 3, Performer 1.

SAMPLE CAMPAIGNS

THE MIRROR CRACK'D

The city of Terminus is unique in the whole of the Commonwealth for the character of its supernatural flavor. Whereas cities such as Gateway and New Eden have their share of warlocks, the sorcerous element there practices its craft in rigid theory and chalk-stained leaps of logical brilliance... unlike the fetish-choked and ritualistic *voudoun* invoked by the savant warlocks of Terminus. The strength of fanaticism can sometimes give greater power to instinctively learned magic, and the appearance of an otherworldly nature has led to an air of mystery, illusion, and vague, pervasive dread over the city of Terminus and the damp, fetid bayous beyond. Ghosts are said to walk the night, sorcerers are reputed to have power to command men's wills, and it is whispered that inhuman beasts dwell in the deep bayou. In an environment like this, the right sort of criminal can prosper, and it takes the right kind of mind to catch him.

The shadowy cartel known as *Déjà Vu* has operated for years in the shadows of Terminus, content to pluck what meat it can from the city's carcass and operating as a cult as much as a syndicate. The practices of *voudoun*, coupled with the fanaticism of near-compulsive warlocks, has led them to become more feared within their home city than their reclusive counterparts in the Silent Scepter. The leader of *Déjà Vu*, however — the mysterious Papa Miroir — is both more and less than he appears. Once a rational man and a wanted warlock, Simon Dickinson escaped to the Bayou and adopted some of the trappings of *voudoun* to cover the distinctive traces of his art beneath the trappings of stage-show occultism. Dickinson quickly became a focal figure for "lesser" figures in the local scene, and has recently gone mad as their devotion has manifested itself in the appearance of warlock abilities among a high number of *Déjà Vu*'s adherents. Having cloaked himself in mystery, legend, and obscurity, Dickinson gradually lost contact with reality as he saw all that he once believed in wash away in a tide of spirits, rituals, and drugs.

A gang of fiercely proud warlocks with no scruples regarding secrecy is naturally a great danger. Investigators can easily run across *Déjà Vu* in a number of situations, and a campaign set on confrontation with the gang can reflect a wide section of Terminus' life and themes. Whilst the syndicate is on the verge of either hitting the big time or starting a turf war that will wreak untold devastation on the city, they are at a disadvantage. In his more lucid moments, their leader does not share their beliefs. A group of investigators can be put on the trail of Papa Miroir by Dickinson himself through either attention-grabbing heists with curious methods, or a method as simple as a crumpled letter shoved under a door.

Déjà Vu are set to make a play for a bigger slice of the underworld's pie, as well as the occult power they believe they will gain from murdering the warlock Valmont. They may start small, with a few pushes here and there — a hit on a police official that looks like the work of a warlock, or a direct attack

on one of Favroux's holdings — but their aim is to turn the Silent Scepter and the Baron's Men against each other. On Fat Tuesday, they aim to bring terror to the city and strike — warlocks will clash in the streets, gangsters will fight to remain hidden among a tide of humanity, and Papa Miroir will return to the city, his mind unhinged, to claim the power he feels is his by right. It will be up to the players to dig into the confusing mass of stage voodoo, fanatical adherents, gangsters, lies, and trickery to uncover the truth of *Déjà Vu* and, if not bring justice to Terminus, then at least set the bloody gang war that is surely coming aside for another day, and maybe see that one gang gets broken up in the process.

ENIGMA VARIATIONS

Terminus, crumbling and humid, suits a war in the shadows very well. The Widows of Fortune (see page 121) are desperate people, with all the strength and cunning they can muster, still fighting on the lost side of a vanished war that nobody can properly recall. The van Raache sisters work the criminal underworld of Terminus while attempting to bring the mind of Hannah Grier back to the reality it is leaving behind. Over the past few years, the small group has been posing as a larger gang and raiding shipments and laboratories across the Commonwealth to assemble a large-scale bomb; a bomb designed by Hannah, combining her warlock science with cutting-edge scientific theories.

Taking on the Widows would be an especially appropriate task for any character who ever served in the war, or any characters with a background in science, engineering, or magic. A small mystery, possibly even one in Nova Roma — a burglary or raid that results in a lot of damage but little missing property — could lead the players towards the squat, dank streets of Terminus, and a cat-and-mouse game with enemy sleeper agents while the players pierce the veils of mystery and confusion surrounding the existence of the Widows. It is likely that, should they come close to piecing together what the Widows are working on, the van Raache sisters will send Alan to kill the PCs without a second thought.

Hannah provides another wrinkle in the van Raaches' plot. Whilst she is lucid at times, Hannah is one of the Few. Unfortunately, her tortured, half-lucid memories of a world before the White Light have raked the depths of her mind, and broken her sanity like a cheap vase. Eleanor and Laura hope that she can be cured and could try to get close to PCs they think could help them, particularly warlocks with potential — either as aid, or as a replacement should Hannah break down completely.

Dealing with the Widows should be equal parts Cold War thriller, action adventure, and *film noir* ambiguity — the van Raache sisters are charming but deadly, and the war they fight is not one that they completely understand. They have muscle — the Widows of Fortune are more a legend than a known faction of the Terminus underworld — and the items stolen by their agents would make any scientist very nervous. Nonetheless, the stakes are high, and finding a ghost gang in a city like Terminus before they can strike out against the Commonwealth could be nearly impossible.

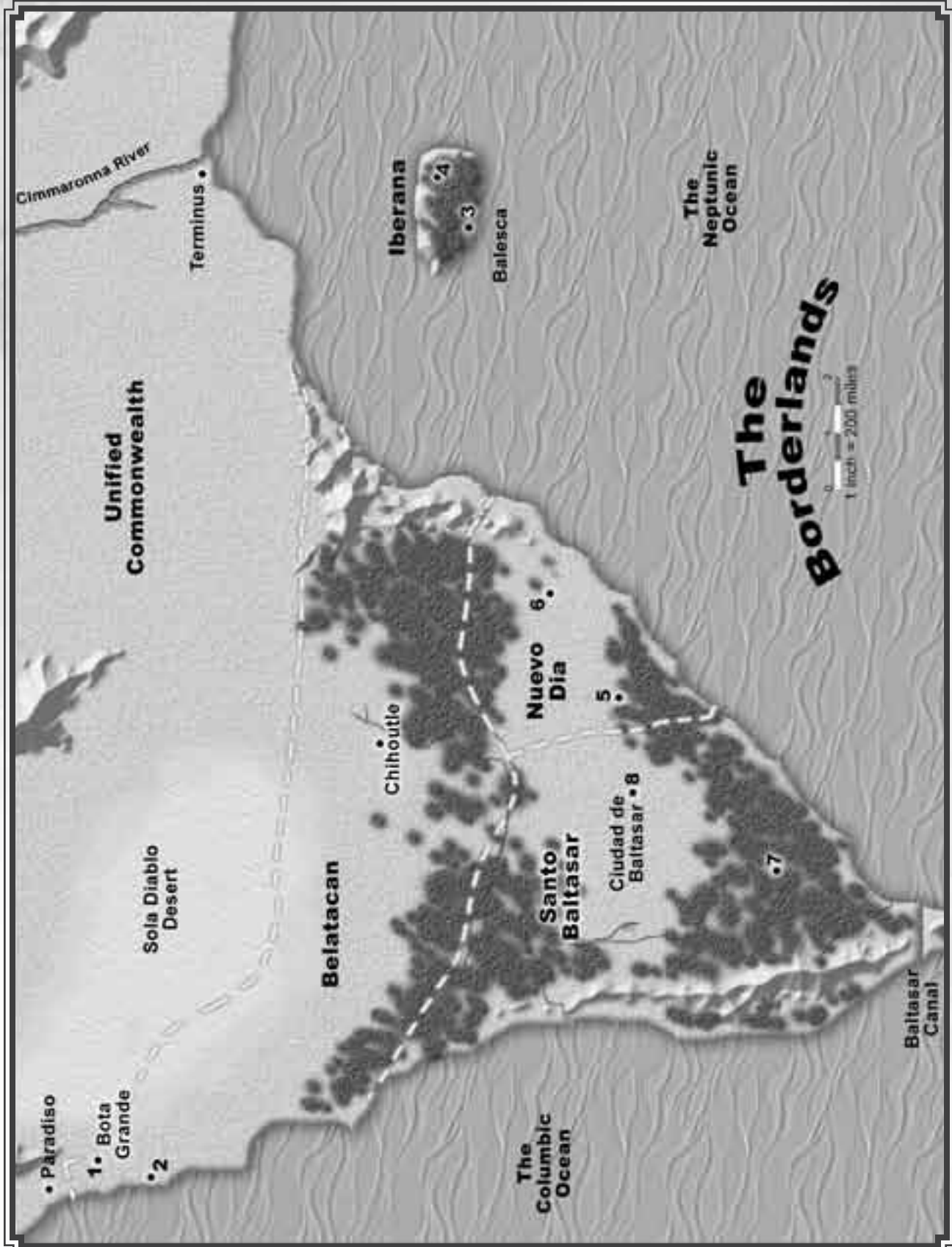
A composite image featuring a man in a cowboy hat, a large clock, and a map. The man is on the left, wearing a light-colored shirt and a wide-brimmed hat, looking towards the right. A large, detailed clock is on the right, showing the time as approximately 10:10. The clock face has a small sub-dial at the 6 o'clock position. The background is a faded map of a city street grid, with a street labeled 'E ROAD' visible. The title 'CHAPTER SIX ELSEWHERE' is written in a bold, stylized font across the middle.

CHAPTER SIX ELSEWHERE

™I'm hiding in Honduras
I'm a desperate man
Send lawyers, guns, and money
The shit has hit the fan.}

- Warren Zevon, ™Lawyers,
Guns, and Money}

THE NAKED CITY



CHAPTER SIX: ELSEWHERE

This section covers those areas of the U.C. which are not incorporated into its six metropolises, and the foreign nations which constitute the Borderlands to the south.

RURAL AREAS

The U.C.'s six largest cities — the five covered here and Gateway, which was dealt with in *The Edge of Midnight's* core rulebook — contain over half of the nation's population and dominate both her cultural and social enterprises. A few smaller cities can be found here and there — the border town of Rio Flats, for example, or Great Bear situated among the lakes west of Central City — but they exist in the shadow of the giant metropolises. The remainder of the populace dwells in small towns and villages — most within a few hours drive of a big city. They produce the raw materials upon which the U.C.'s industrial base thrives. The most prosperous farms are within a day or so of the nearest metropolis, ferrying in their produce with minimal fuss. Mines, dams, and rural industry can also be found here, all of which serve the needs of the larger entity nearby. For most "small town" Commonwealth citizens, life exists as a satellite to a larger entity... as a lonely moon orbiting an all-encompassing, all-dominating center.

Beyond those outlying townships, the Commonwealth slowly succumbs to the wilderness. The small villages that once littered the landscape have dried up and blown away, destroyed by the dreams promised in the city lights. The remainder pull into themselves, centering around the farm, the factory, or the general store. They become insular, watching out for themselves and no one else. They cling tenaciously to the rural lifestyle, embracing their small town values and forming an almost xenophobic sense of community. The nation's highway system keeps them connected with the larger world; they often host truck drivers making cross-country hauls, travelers moving from one city to the next, drifters hoping to find a nice hole to crawl into, and cast-offs seeking respite from the city's dark temptations. Every now and then a representative of the national government comes through, angling for votes or hoping to engage in some public works project. But these incursions notwithstanding, most of the nation's small townships are left to fend for themselves: isolated pinpoints carpeting the great expanse of the continent.

During the war boom, a large percentage of the populace moved away to work in the factories, leaving many towns only half-filled or worse. Those remaining have more space than they know what to do with. The average township contains perhaps twice as many buildings as are required to adequately house its populace. A single building — usually a diner or general store — becomes the centralized meeting place, while the nearest factory or farming combine serves as the base of employment. Residents live and sleep along the main drag, reclaiming abandoned businesses or government buildings as private homes. In one town, an old bicycle shop might house

two or three families, while in another, an former post office could now shelter the local factory manager (mail service having long since shifted to the town's more active center). Such reclamation helps keep a sense of community intact by pulling the residents closer together, and also helps save costs on street maintenance, garbage collection, and the like.

With the town now focused into a handful of streets, the remaining structures are boarded up and abandoned. The local sheriff's office usually patrols at irregular intervals and some enterprising townships will tear down their unused buildings, but the rest remain standing, to be swallowed up by time or the elements, or to serve as a makeshift home for vagrants and wanderers. In some cases, the towns have been completely abandoned, their streets now filling with grime and dirt.

With so much more free space, the U.C. military has taken the opportunity to fill in the gaps. They build bases far from prying eyes, stationing their surplus supplies and conducting tests on newer, better, and more destructive weapons. With lowered budgets following the end of the war, the U.C. Army and Air Corps could save a great deal of money by simply finding an abandoned town and converting it to military use. Most retain their original names, leading to confusion on the rare occasion when former residents return for a visit. Most of the time, however, they are unmolested, save for supply convoys and the odd member of the press. The new wilderness of the U.C. countryside provides plenty of cover to hide their activities.

Because they often have no one but themselves to depend upon, most towns develop an inhumanly strong sense of community. Neighbors look after each other in ways that would shock most city dwellers; everyone pulls together in the face of a crisis or common task. Friendliness is the order of the day, and those who come to the country from one of the U.C.'s metropolises often comment on the idyllic lifestyle which most rural citizens lead. Many come to look at these ghost towns as a form of respite, a place where no one has secrets and no one is alone. Of course that also means that no one has any privacy, that snoops and gossips are the order of the day, and that demagoguery becomes second nature, but compared to the evils of Terminus or New Eden, it's probably an even trade. The U.C.'s remaining rural residents are self-sufficient and know how to look after themselves. If they are alone in this world, then they have accepted it, and will fight tooth and nail to hold onto what they have.

CRIME AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

While cities have their own police force and the national government uses the NLEB (and in rare cases the army) to enforce its edicts, local townships rarely have the manpower to throw into their police service. Rural cops (sheriffs) are given a jurisdiction, set by the national government, which usually encompasses both the town in question and a vast swath of the surrounding territory. Within that jurisdiction, the sheriffs are expected to handle everything from traffic tickets to domestic disturbances and armed robbery. It's a big responsibility.

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ity, compounded by the fact that many jurisdictions no longer exist, having been effectively abandoned by its residents. This leaves patches of territory which fall under no jurisdiction at all, and are essentially ungoverned. It would be a much bigger problem if those areas had any appreciable number of people in them.

Sheriffs usually limit their duties to the towns themselves. Organized crime isn't typically a problem outside of the big cities, so they focus their efforts on individual incidents. Crimes of passion are expected — marriage disputes which get out of hand, or robberies or other incidents committed on a semi-whim. Outsiders tend to be regarded with suspicion, and vagrants or drifters are encouraged to move on as soon as possible. Luckily, few serious incidents trouble these out-of-the-way locales, and though stretched thin, the nation's sheriffs keep more or less on top of their caseload.

The NLEB has also provided some respite. Citing the importance of the nation's highway system, the national government authorized the creation of a new branch of the NLEB, charged with patrolling the roads and keeping them safe. Other NLEB agents consider them little more than glorified traffic cops, handing out speeding tickets and guarding truck convoys, but in truth, they play a far more vibrant role in their duties than those hampered by stronger police departments in the big city. Bus drivers, truck drivers, and others who work the highways are grateful for their presence, and the recurring problem of hijackers suggests that they are needed now more than ever.

The other case of national assistance in rural affairs involves the incarceration of prisoners. While local jails are usually sufficient to hold a suspect for trial, few small towns have access to a real prison. The national government takes custody of anyone convicted of a felony outside of a major city, transporting them to a proper facility to serve out their term. The NLEB handles such transfers, and has a fleet of buses and armored cars specifically designed for prisoner transport.

Rural criminals are markedly different from their urban counterparts. Few of them turn to crime as a career, limiting themselves to isolated incidents or the like. Those who pursue a life outside the law are usually loners with no real ties, happy to take what they can and move along when the heat grows too intense. Short cons are common in small towns, where a charismatic drifter can scam a few hundred dollars before

catching the next train down the line. Circuses and sideshow carnivals play the sticks in large numbers, bringing a little spectacle (as well as a plethora of scams and shakedowns) to their quiet lives. Theft tends to follow this pattern as well, as individuals or small gangs target wealthy houses or general stores, then escape before their larceny is discovered.

Two of the most persistent forms of rural crime involve the highways, which led to the NLEB establishing formal jurisdiction over such roads. Hijackers can make hundreds of thousands of dollars by holding up trucks and selling the cargo on the black market. Those closer to the cities are often in league with nearby syndicates, paying a percentage of their take in order to keep functioning. Those further out have no such worries, but must also work harder to find a buyer for their wares, whereas urban criminal organizations can easily help out their "junior partners" in such matters. Hijacking tactics vary from gang to gang; some use fast cars to overtake and board a truck, while others rely on hastily manufactured roadblocks, or lay traps by posing as stranded motorists. Most of them are well-armed regardless, and all of them have speedy methods of escape handy. With increasing numbers of truck and bus drivers on their guard, they prefer to take no chances.

A similar form of criminal organization has sprung up after the war: the motorcycle gang. Bands of disaffected outsiders — many of them war veterans — group together in a nomadic existence, rejecting traditional society in favor of their own wild culture. Their numbers range from twenty to one hundred in any single band, driving top-of-the-line choppers and a few "crash cars" to carry supplies. While some of them have "civilian" lives away from their bikes, many of them fully embrace the way of the outlaw, and live day-to-day with nothing on their minds but the next good time. Usually, they limit themselves to general rowdiness — riding into a town, drinking and brawling with the locals, maybe shooting out a few windows — but lately, their tactics have taken on a more insidious tone. Many of them have begun dealing drugs, enjoying an uncontested market in the towns they visit, and others have dabbled in extortion and murder-for-hire. They make particularly good hijackers, and a truck driver willing to tough it out against normal criminals will often surrender his load without a fight if faced with a large motorcycle gang. Considering their reputation for reckless violence, such discretion rarely helps the driver escape injury.

As stated elsewhere, the large number of abandoned townships means that there's no shortage of places to hide in the rural U.C. Numerous small-time gangs will hole up in an old farm or school for several months while conducting operations in the area. It's usually perfect, with the odd wandering bum or circus troupe being the only competitors for space. Local law enforcement effectively doesn't exist, and the NLEB tends to concentrate on the roads rather than the crumbling villages themselves. The one wild card is the army, which may show up as part of a convoy, or stake an area out for a new base. And of course, actively wanted criminals will be tracked wherever they hide, turning these would-be havens into inescapable traps. But most gangs will happily take the chance of discovery in exchange for a place free of intrusive law enforcement and unfettered by the entanglements of urban syndicates.



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SAMPLE TOWN: WARD HILLS

The town of Ward Hills is typical of the U.C.'s rural areas, and can be used as a substitute for any similar locale in your campaign. More of an outlying district than an independent town, Ward Hills is technically a remote borough of Nova Roma, though it carries a cultural identity all its own. It is also fairly inaccessible to mainstream traffic of any kind. Located inland away from the rivers, it has no links to the railway system, the airport system, or the highway system. Few travelers come here, and even the residents of nearby Nova Roma barely register its presence. In and of itself, it's completely unselfconscious; you don't have to keep up any appearance whatsoever here, doing your laundry is optional, and ironing simply does not happen. It's fine to not shave or bathe, it's fine to land a homemade airplane in your back yard, and it's fine to fly unconventional flags (as many as you want) in your front yard. No one will stop you.

Some might think it a dangerous place to live, but nothing could be further from the truth. It's an agrarian community; dairy farms and orchards are the mainstay of commerce. There is not much crossover between the people who live in Ward Hills and anyone else in the U.C., though their economy is completely entwined with Nova Roma's to the east. Like most townships of its kind, certain areas have been abandoned (though its proximity to the city means that its financial base is still solid). Access to Ward Hills comes through a series of two-lane roads devoid of traffic save for the farming trucks which deliver their produce to market in Nova Roma. Only about a third of the population owns an automobile; bicycles

are common and a few horse carts still see use now and again. The main highway runs some three miles to the north; a bus stop there services several lines, which will pick up any resident who wishes to leave their idyllic splendor and sample the temptations of the Commonwealth's great metropolises.

Ward Hills Volunteer Fire Department (WHVFD)

The Ward Hills Volunteer Fire Department is a place where men can be men and women can be men too if they want. There are no suits and ties here, no combs, no brief cases, no typed memos, and not a single hint of decorum except the coffee, newspapers, and the quiet chatter of the radio. Living is relaxed and unassuming here: the antidote for the *soirée*, the debutantes, the crime, the secrets, and the unknown of Nova Roma. Here, things happen above board. No business plans get discussed, just the red-blooded task of fire prevention and the maintenance of equipment used therein. Tales are told every night of disasters averted and rescues performed: this is an outspoken place, fun and rampant. If you want to know the ropes or are new in town, come here.

The department has no dog, but a bevy of half-wild cats call this building home. The chief likes to joke that they are all rescued from trees, though in truth most were brought in by townsfolk who use the firehouse as a jury-rigged animal shelter. The cats come and go as they please, knowing they are welcome in the yard or in the break room. The firemen find that the animals have a calming effect, especially after a fire or some other crisis. They also give the WHVFD a cozy and practical air, touched with just a hint of the unknown.

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The house itself features three main rooms: a bunkroom, a kitchen, and a break room that serves as common area. A pianoforte dominates the break room: a gift from the chief's mother who feels her son should not forget how to play. The remainder of the structure consists of a large garage where two bright red engines wait, and a small obstacle course behind the building, where the men hone their rescue skills. A faux tower allows them to practice their aim with a fire hose, and to sprint up and down the wrought iron staircase within. Just next door is the post office, and a small café lies across the street. Most of the crew take their meals there while on duty.

Typical Fireman

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 7, Build 7, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 3, Demolitions 6, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Evasion 6, Firearms 4, Medicine 3, Perception 4, Throwing 5.

Backgrounds: Acrobatic, Lucky, Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Street Tough 1.

The Observatory

Ward Hills boasts a state-of-the-art observatory, the envy of the U.C.'s scientific community. It houses one of the most sophisticated telescopes in the country, and despite the relative proximity of Nova Roma, it suffers little from light pollution. A team of astronomers together with a small group of retired generals oversees the research facility here. They enjoy exclusive access to this telescope, and can generally go about their work unmolested. Their observations are based mainly on tracking solar flares, and their effect on terrestrial phenomenon such as radio waves and the like. A high-tech listening device monitors signals, and records the readings for further analysis. For the most part, it behaves as it should, though every now and then, it picks up lower atmosphere readings, such as ham radio signals or communication from airplanes. Records of such anomalies are quietly disposed of, and the scientists there tend to ignore them as a matter of course. In the process, however, they've overlooked a fair number of unpleasant secrets, secrets which could make their owners' lives difficult if they ever came to light...

The observatory personnel live in town, either in the local boarding house or in a few abandoned structures that they've been able to claim as theirs. The townsfolk remain a little stand-offish but they've slowly grown to trust the astronomers, and while invitations to dinner aren't forthcoming, a few smiles and jokes down at the coffee shop are now par for the course.



Typical Astronomer

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 6, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Bureaucracy 7, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Engineering 5, Etiquette 6, Evasion 3, Fast Talk 5, Lore (Astrophysics) 9, Lore (Physics) 9, Medicine 4, Perception 3, Puzzles 8.

Backgrounds: Education, Prodigy, Wise.

Profession: Academic 2.

The Gunslinger Academy

The Gunslingers are a group of militaristic locals who play soldier in their spare time. They get together for target practice, survivalist oriented lectures, and "The Power of Snow," a martial-based philosophical practice taught by a guru of questionable insight; the result is the Gunslinger Academy. Based out of a run-down Knights of the West building, it's become a haven for young men looking for something to do on a Saturday night. Most of them work outdoors on the farms or in orchards, and have nothing better to do with their off time. Some are ex-military types, transplanted from Nova Roma. They often serve as instructors, conveying a rough sense of discipline and hierarchy onto what would otherwise be just a glorified shooting club. Women are not welcome here, nor would they enjoy the experience if they were. An air of drenched machismo is palpable, and sometimes leads to trouble. Drinking is quite common, though it's normally limited to "post-action parties" after the firearms have been safely put away. When membership gets together, however, it often takes on a mob mentality, structured by their paramilitary trappings, but threatening to spin out of control at times. The arrival of a gaunt in town, for example, or a crime against one of the locals, might prompt them to rash behavior. Thankfully, nothing like that has happened in many years, leaving the Gunslinger Academy a moderately benign outlet for boredom and aggression.

Typical Gunslinger

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 7, Build 7, Gut 5, Moxie 3, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 7, Drive (Car, Truck) 4, Engineering 6, Evasion 4, Firearms 6, Intimidation 5, Sport (Baseball) 6, Throwing 5.

Backgrounds: Huge, Marksmanship, Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1.

Apple and Adam's Grocers

Another outpost that seconds as a gathering point, Adam's sells the range of merchandise designed to fill just about any human need: measuring tapes, baking soda, straws, basil, batteries, propane, bottles of sloe gin, and the like. The store is a godsend out here, providing Ward Hills with anything and

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everything that they might need. An ancient cigarette machine hovers in one corner of the store, refilled by the equally ancient shopkeeper from supplies he purchases surreptitiously from the Centennial River Gangs (see page 77). His assistant, Sarah Montejoy, is a quiet girl with eyes that speak of secrets she longs to forget. She helps stock the storeroom, runs the cash register when her employer isn't around, and sweeps up after the place has closed for the night. She's actually a former Nova Roma debutante who was arrested for practicing sorcery. The resulting scandal nearly destroyed her family, who threatened to administer Antidox to her rather than go through the shame of a trial. She fled here after planting evidence that she was on her way to Central City, dying her hair and passing herself off as an amiable drifter looking for work. The ruse seems to have worked, and she's quietly decided to try and make a life for herself here. She never practices her magic anymore, though now and then, she'll use it to help someone out with a chore or mundane task — always anonymously, however, and never while anyone is watching. The hard work has added to her disguise. Friends from Nova Roma would never recognize the former social princess, now clad in a simple skirt and wearing short red hair over a face growing creased by the travails of a day job.

Sarah Montejoy

Attributes: Brains 9, Brawn 3, Build 4, Gut 4, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Athletics 4, Craft (Storekeeper) 5, Disguise 5, Etiquette 6, Evasion 4, Fast Talk 7, Gravity 2, Kinetics 4, Medicine 3, Perception 6, Puzzles 5, Stealth 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Magical Aptitude, Wise.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 1, Rogue Scientist 1.

SMALL TOWN CAMPAIGN IDEAS

The landscapes and small towns of the U.C. are disappearing fast — another symptom of a nation's innocence lost, as white picket fences and pies cooling on windowsills become part of the country's collective past while rural folk migrate to the grimy, cramped confines of the cities. The sense of isolation is tangible in the communities that remain — a PC group based in a small town will probably require a tremendously-detailed roster of NPCs, simply because the characters will probably know every single person within their community. If they are drifters or people leaving city life behind for other reasons, they will be treated with suspicion, and the town's life will be as mysterious to them as rituals from some strange religion. A campaign based around small towns will either tend towards American Gothic, pervaded by claustrophobia and suspicion, or an aesthetic similar to a Western with mistrusted drifters righting wrongs to assuage their own inner demons. Many towns are just a hair's breadth from giving vent to their inner frustrations in public. They are held together by decorum and resentment, ready to boil over at the slightest provocation — such as the arrival of strangers in town.

The ever-present threat of biker gangs and hijacking operations can also be a hook to draw an NLEB team out of the cities and into the hinterland, where they will have to deal with blank hostility from local communities, obstinate local sheriffs, violent confrontations with agents of organized crime, tense face-offs with aggressive bikers, and pulse-pounding highway races with escaped criminals. A road-based excursion for an NLEB team should play somewhere between the Teen Rebellion race genre and *Seven Samurai* — the PCs are the first line of defense for a community that is suspicious and fearful of them, and the open roads are where their fates will be decided.

And of course, there's always the chance that the PCs are criminals themselves, hiding out in some forgotten township while the authorities search vainly for their presence. The theme of such a campaign will be encroaching paranoia, as the characters attempt to pass a false front on to the locals and make it stick for as long as they remain... all the while watching for signs of the law which is never more than a few steps behind them.

THE BORDERLANDS

To the south of the U.C. lies a series of small nations, collectively known as the Borderlands. Rich in natural resources, but far less developed economically, they have been beholden to the U.C. for financial aid, favorable trading deals, and high-tech exports for as long as anyone can remember. The Borderlands' manufacturing base is much more limited than the U.C., their infrastructure is far less developed, and their government attends to only the barest precepts of democracy and freedom. Despite that, they fiercely maintain a proud cultural identity, and their leadership resists tying themselves to their northern neighbor any more than is necessary.

The Borderlands' main export is farm goods, specifically tropical fruits, tobacco, sugar, and rum and similarly exotic vintages of alcohol. Oil has been discovered in some of the higher mountains (most of which is now managed by U.C. companies), and all four Borderlands nations have enough traditional crops to support themselves, but the big money comes from shipping these various delicacies north to the U.C.

On a darker note, the Borderlands also supply the Commonwealth with the majority of its illegal drugs. Opium poppies grow in the mountains of the region, and poor villagers can make more in one year farming these wildflowers than they could in ten years harvesting corn or wheat. The coca plant, too, grows in the jungles of Nuevo Dia and Santo Baltasar, where it is refined into cocaine for shipment north. Processing plants are scattered throughout the Borderlands, and syndicates often pay peasants far more than they could ever hope to earn otherwise in order to work them. The criminal empires in the U.C. are only too happy to distribute the drugs once they arrive. The market is still growing — it only picked up after the end of the war — but the U.C.'s appetite for such poisons appears to be insatiable.

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To citizens of the Commonwealth, the Borderlands embody escape: a way out of whatever troubles they are in, where the forces of law cannot ensnare them. But it's also an area of untoward danger — exotic and wild, where the rules don't apply and the jungles can swallow unsuspecting northerners alive. Immigration from the Borderlands is a considerable problem, as natives periodically cross into the U.C. in search of a better life. On the other side of the fence, Commonwealth citizens trickle down to the Borderlands as tourists or fugitives, eager to spend time in the sun or flee from whatever worries may be harrying them. The U.C. maintains four embassies scattered throughout the region, charged with keeping up good relations with the local government and ensuring that Commonwealth citizens receive all the protection and deferred treatment they need.

The Borderlands consists of four large nations, and several smaller principalities and outlying territories. The population is widely scattered and the countryside is marked by great swaths of jungles, deserts, and mountains. Though hardly a wilderness in the strictest terms, it has an untamed quality to it that tugs at the average Commonwealther's psyche. (Most chalk it up to nostalgia for the U.C.'s "pioneering past" and never give it a second thought.) Each nation maintains its own armed forces and has its own way of doing things, though law-breakers of all varieties flourish here amid the rugged coasts

and rain forests. Several large cities — most overcrowded and choking on pollution — mark the center of commerce and government. The most advanced areas are comparable to the U.C.'s in wealth and amenities, though the poorest neighborhoods lack even basic services such as sewage and electricity. Used consumer goods are standard issue here: run-down cars and other appliances which have long since passed their expiration date, but which are kept running through a combination of ingenuity and the simple impossibility of replacing them. Citizens of the Borderlands are harder than most Commonwealthers and they need to be. Life isn't necessarily day-to-day survival down here, but there are times when it certainly feels like it.

GAUNTS AND WARLOCKS

The Borderlands also has its share of gaunts and warlocks, though none of them appear in nearly the same numbers as they do in the U.C. The local governments are far less tolerant of magic use (warlocks who practice magic down here can expect to be jailed in perpetuity without a trial), which — coupled with the less-developed educational system — makes them much thinner on the ground. Those who do exist are either very powerful or very weak, and never display their magic save in the most isolated or desperate incidents. They

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congregate in the cities to exchange information on occasion, but most live far in the wilds, ensconced in tiny oil-drilling villages, or farming poppies with peasants in the mountains. A few — notably those in Nuevo Dia — attribute their ability to spiritual powers, similar to their counterparts in Terminus. Most, however, prove surprisingly grounded and practical, doing what is necessary to survive and continue the practice of their art.

Perhaps because of the limited warlock presence, gaunts constitute a much smaller percentage of the Borderlands population than they do further north. For that reason, they tend to have even fewer rights and privileges, and most lack even the modicum of support that they receive in the U.C. The transformation can be truly horrifying, and some areas of the Borderlands are still unaware of its pathology. Lynchings are not uncommon, nor is exile — tantamount to passive murder — in the smaller villages. Doctors in the largest cities will treat gaunt patients, but many country physicians refuse to have anything to do with them, handling them like plague victims or carriers or some infectious disease. Those gaunts who survive the first weeks without being imprisoned or shot congregate in the darkest corners of their society, eking out work as hired muscle or contract killers. Some escape to isolated communities with others of their kind, far from civilization. They farm what they can (often dealing in raw opium or setting up processing facilities), or find security under the umbrella of Commonwealth companies working abroad (oil rigs and gold mines always need strong backs). Many Borderlands gaunts immigrate to the Commonwealth, their looks allowing them to blend in with their northern fellows unseen. But they operate under no delusions, and maintain no false hopes. They know how the world truly sees them, and refuse to harbor dreams that tomorrow will ever be any better than today.

NATIONS

Below is a description of each of the Borderlands' four biggest nations, along with a set of locations for each, and pertinent NPCs where appropriate.

BELATACAN

The nation of Belatacan is by far the largest in the Borderlands, and easily the most stable. Though elections are dominated by a single political party, they have the pretense of legitimacy, and the country's Prime Minister is limited by the constitution to two terms in office. The legislature, while corrupt, still succeeds in going about the people's business, and the government has enough authority to keep the nation stable. Residents enjoy a modestly comfortable standard of living, and consumer products are available here at the same general level as they are in the U.C.

Like other Borderlands states, a substantial trading gap exists between Belatacan and its northern neighbor, which persists to this day. U.C. goods flow south with little commensurate return to the north. For much of its history, the nation was dominated by foreign-owned businesses, though that has recently changed — straining relations on both sides of the border. Before the war, the ruling Vanguardia party consolidated its hold on power by seizing the assets of multiple foreign oil companies doing business in the country. The results earned them widespread popularity among the people, who felt that Belatacan was being exploited by foreigners. Initially, the U.C. and other countries boycotted Belatacan's oil, claiming that it was unlawfully taken from the businesses which owned it. The war, however, forced them to reconsider their options, and they were soon importing Belatacan oil to serve the effort. Vanguardia responded by nationalizing the electrical company and utilities, a move which cost the U.C. companies that had been running them millions and restored much of the nation's faith in its government. In a major diplomatic coup, they kept relations with the U.C. strong, mainly by enthusiastically supporting the war. Many Belatacan soldiers traveled across the seas to fight, most of them side-by-side with U.C. troops.

Since the war, Vanguardia has cemented its hold on power, and now dominates every aspect of the political process. They do not seek to invalidate opposition parties because there is simply no need to; their actions in the oil and electrical industries instilled a popularity undiminished even after ten years. In the decade since the war, they have redistributed land to the poor, made steps to improve the education and transportation systems, and acted with the cool efficiency of unquestioned authority.

Belatacan has a reputation for lawlessness that is somewhat undeserved... especially considering the deplorable state of other Borderlands countries. All the same, it wears its corruption more openly than northerners may be accustomed to. Political pay-offs are the norm here, and those in charge make little pretense of hiding it in pretty speeches. Though standards of living are higher than elsewhere in the Borderlands, poverty is still a huge problem, and the gap between the haves and the have-nots has not diminished despite a host of social programs. Vanguardia is accepted simply because they are less exploitative than the U.C. businesses which used to run things (many peasants still remember those days with scorn and hatred) and because they restored a sense of national pride to a people long denied it. But while things have improved on their watch, theirs is still a country with considerable problems.

With the high level of corruption comes an equally high level of crime. Belatacan gangsters thrive on the importation of opium products, which are grown in the mountains to the south and shipped to the U.C. across the border. Police corruption facilitates much of this trade, as officers working for desperately low wages happily take a few extra pesos to look the other way. Badges and other official forms of identification are sold openly on the streets of some towns, and drug runners often avoid police entanglements simply by posing as

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policemen themselves. Violent crimes are on the rise as well, especially in the nation's three largest cities. Belatacan leads the world in kidnappings each year, with gangs of well-organized criminals seizing wealthy businessmen or their families and ransoming them back. In the past, such activities were relatively sedate and professional, but recently, the kidnappers' viciousness has grown more pronounced. It's not uncommon for them to rape or torture their victims while holding them, and to mail severed ears and other appendages back to the families. Many victims refuse to go to the police, both out of fear for their loved ones and the belief that the authorities may be complicit in many such crimes. A group of mercenaries, calling themselves El Corte, offers extensive services as bodyguards and negotiators in lieu of the police. They have carried a strong reputation both among the ruling class and the criminal underground, and may be the only reason why the kidnapping rate isn't much worse.

Border towns, too, see a large contingent of crime, as hijackers cross north into the U.C.'s dilapidated rural areas, robbing convoys or lone travelers, and then returning to Belatacan before the northern authorities can act. Recently, some U.C. officials have begun coordinating operations with their counterparts across the border, but with the Commonwealth's national government focused elsewhere, it's difficult to extend such cooperation beyond a few provinces. Complicating the issue is the fact that many of Belatacan's border towns cater to debased U.C. tastes, openly offering services which are illegal (or at least frowned upon) north of the border. Cockfights are a popular pastime in these areas, and professional gamblers can clean up fleecing rich *gringos* looking for a taste of the exotic. More mundane pleasures include the usual bordellos and drug dens, along with illegal fishing ventures on the shores of the Columbic.

The border also sees human trafficking on a modest scale (though nothing compared to the vast number of illegal immigrants in our real world). Immigrants cross over into the U.C. seeking work in the biggest cities and in the Commonwealth's vast farmland. "Snakehead" smugglers can extort thousands of dollars from those hoping for a better life in the Commonwealth, and border crossings often take place in dangerous, unpatrolled areas such as the Sola Diablo desert. Immigrants are packed into boxcars or smuggled under trucks; many face natural threats such as drowning, dehydration in the deserts, and hypothermia. Snakeheads are often ready to cut and run at the first sign of trouble, and may abandon their "cargo" in precarious situations. Belatacan immigrants face a better deal in the U.C. than their real world counterparts do — racial prejudice is far less pronounced, and the gaunts make much easier scapegoats for political demagogues — but the journey there can be every bit as harrowing and dangerous.

Traffic in the other direction sometimes takes place as well, though in exponentially smaller numbers. U.C. criminals and fugitives often see Belatacan as an easy escape from their pursuers, and crossing the border holds a fleeting promise of freedom beyond. As the only Borderland country actually shar-

ing a border with the Commonwealth, Belatacan becomes a jumping-off point to the criminals' haven of Nuevo Dia, and to other points further south where the reach of U.C. authorities becomes very short indeed. Snakeheads earn the bulk of their pay smuggling immigrants into the U.C., but shrewd ones can charge ten times as much to smuggle a single wanted criminal out.

Despite the blight and corruption so clearly present in Belatacan, it boasts a vibrant, thriving culture, and its reputation as a vacation spot makes it a popular destination for visitors. The beaches along the Columbic are renowned for their gentle, rolling tides, and festive cities host thousands of Commonwealth citizens looking to relax in the tropical sun. Belatacan's culture is heavily Catholic, with strong societal ties to the Church. Holidays such as the Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) are cause for great festivities, and religious observances often entail entire families gathering together to feast and attend Mass. The countryside, though poor, is often friendly, and Belatacans are deeply proud of their national heritage. Businessmen and those of obvious wealth are looked at askance, but those on the run, trying to get to Nuevo Dia or Santo Baltasar, can often find help from unexpected sources.

PERTINENT LOCATIONS

1) Policia Nacional Office, Bota Grande

Belatacan's national police force, the Policia Nacional, has a stronger grip on the country than the NLEB north of the border. With a one-party government calling the shots, the need for greater centralized authority has consolidated power in the PN's hands. Local police must often answer directly to them, and the friction between national and local jurisdiction which characterizes relations in the U.C. simply doesn't exist here. The "Nacionales" run the show, and everyone knows it.

The PN outpost in the small border city of Bota Grande typifies the way the Policia Nacional does business. It's a small, two-story office built in the middle of town just across the street from the city hall. Half of the personnel never leave the office, working behind their desks to organize active cases, trace connections between known criminals, and work with the local police to make sure nothing slips between the cracks. The remainder conduct field investigations along the wide strip of border between Bota Grande and the coast, tracking drug runners, kidnappers, and fugitives from both sides of the line attempting to flee their jurisdiction. They work hand in hand with Paradiso's PD in cases involving both countries; their natural assumption of superiority is countered by Paradiso PD's fame and reputation, making ego clashes common, but also facilitating an enthusiastic pursuit of their duties which has served both sides well. A local prosecutor, Pedro Acevedo, works against those whom the PN captures, and does most of the trial preparation before turning his cases over to other attorneys in the national capital. The Policia stay in constant contact with his department, and he has carte blanche around their office.

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In addition, the PN office here works with cases involving the nearby Los Gatos prison, which houses nationally convicted criminals out in the steaming heart of the Sola Diablo desert. Escapes from there are rare, but when they do occur, the Bota Grande PN is usually tasked with their recapture.

The building itself is heavily fortified (earthquakes are common in this part of the world) and made of the same dull stone as the nondescript City Hall across the street. Sand and wind have scoured the surface clean, making the walls smooth to the touch. The front doors are doubled up to avoid blowing debris into the entryway. The first and second floors contain a series of cramped offices, a large filing room, a rickety coffee table servicing the entire building, and a secretary's desk where visitors must check in before proceeding. An armory occupies a corner of the second floor right next to the section chief's office. It holds mainly shotguns and revolvers, with a small number of army surplus carbines for emergencies. Captured criminals are housed in a small jail complex on the lower floor. With cells for up to a dozen prisoners, and shower and toilet facilities, it's more secure than the facilities of the Bota Grande police, and can easily facilitate transfers to the capital of Chihoutle for trial. A loading dock behind the building allows prison buses to back right up to the doors and prisoners to be loaded onboard without moving them to the upper floors. A steel door, manned by a guard, can be sealed to prevent access to the upper floors.

Corruption can be found in the Policia Nacional just as it can in any other aspect of law enforcement. Of the thirty agents who work here, perhaps twelve are actively on some cartel's payroll, and another dozen willingly accept bribes if the circumstances feel right. They can't hope to compete with the Bota Grande police in that regard, but since the local authorities handle mostly vice cases and the odd tourist who loses his wallet, the NPs' influence extends much further. They make smuggling goods into Paradiso quite difficult, and without a generous greasing of the wheels, an overconfident criminal may find his entire operation cooling its heels in the basement, waiting for transport to trial.

Pedro Acevedo

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 6, Build 5, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 8, Drive (Car) 2, Etiquette 6, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 7, Forgery 6, Intimidation 3, Languages (English, Spanish), Lore (Belatacan Law) 7, Perception 7, Puzzles 7, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Alert, Prodigy, Wise.

Profession: Officer of the Law 1, White Collar Worker 2.



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2) El Toro Gordo cantina

Two hours south of the Commonwealth border, on the shores of the sea near a small fishing village, stands the El Toro Gordo cantina. It serves the local mescal and Borderlands brands of cerveza, along with homemade tortillas and a few fish dishes for those so inclined. A large building constructed in the traditional adobe style, it lies outside the jurisdiction of the local sheriff, and is ignored by the Policia Nacional. The owner, a rakish woman in her mid-forties calling herself Tattoo Emma isn't strictly a law-breaker, but she has no love lost for the police, and set up her establishment out from under their prying eyes. Thugs occasionally show up, looking to get rowdy and mess up the place, but Emma broaches no wild behavior. A pair of gaunt bouncers back up her admonitions, and in extreme cases, there's both a baseball bat under the bar and a service pistol hanging over the mirror. She's never had to use either, but they usually convince the wilder elements to move along.

Most of the time, El Toro Gordo caters to the quieter sort: those looking for a friendly drink and others who don't wish to draw attention to themselves. The beach beyond is sandy and warm, occupied by a few fishermen's boats and a rickety pier extending about twenty feet into the water. A pair of female performers — Franky and Charly — play at the cantina four nights a week. Franky is a decent Flamenco dancer while Charly plays the guitar; both have had intermittent affairs with Emma in the past, and she remains jealously possessive of their virtue. The girls enjoy leading flirtatious men on, only to watch their employer pound their would-be beaux senseless in fits of protective rage.

The cantina's employees all work in the nearby village, and have curried friendly relations with the fishermen there (many of whom are customers). Emma's motorcycle (complete with sidecar) is a well-known sight, and any resident can happily point out her modest apartment. If need be, Emma, Franky, Charly, and the rest can use their connections here to make incriminating evidence disappear. It wouldn't be hard for one of the fishermen to row a boat, a body, or a bloody knife out into the ocean and let it drop. Of course, there is a price for such a service, though it's negotiable depending upon how convincing the sob story attached to it is.

As a neutral meeting place, El Toro Gordo has few peers. There are two rear doorways in addition to the main entrance, making for an easy exit, and a low roof — easily accessible via stairs — allows one to drop onto the ground with a minimum of difficulty. The patrons mind their own business and the dim lighting means that drinkers here are extremely hard to identify. A recurring poker game breaks out most weekend nights, allowing the destitute to put a little money in their pockets if they play well enough, and the beach makes an appealing rendezvous point for meeting up with ships. The dusty road is quiet, but eventually connects to the main highway, leading further south into the heart of the country. Emma even makes sleeping quarters available on occasion, mostly to drunks who are too soused to make it home but also to others if the price is right. Fugitives crossing the border from Paradiso would do well to make El Toro Gordo their first stop.

Tattoo Emma

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 7, Build 6, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Brawl 7, Craft (Bartender) 8, Drive (Car, Truck) 4, Engineering 4, Evasion 6, Firearms 3, Forgery 5, Intimidation 7, Languages (English, Spanish), Perception 4, Pick Lock 3, Streetwise 6.

Backgrounds: Huge, Mean Streets, Wise.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 4, Gangster 1.

NPCs

Gonzalo de Mosquera, Crime Lord

Belatacan's capital of Chihoutle is run by the Vanguardia Party — an authoritarian regime which enjoys widespread support. But within the shadow cast by their towering edifice, other players make their influence felt. Gonzalo de Mosquera stands foremost among them, a criminal overlord whose influence extends back to before the war, and who has no small say in how Belatacan's ruling party goes about its business.

De Mosquera was born in the city's extensive slums, rising up (as many of his ilk) through acts of petty theft and larceny to seize control of the growing drug trade. He acted with ruthless efficiency, but also with a palpable code of honor, treating friend and foe alike with respect and dignity. The violence he used, while often brutal, was never wantonly sadistic; it was merely a means to an end for him. And when he gave his word, he kept it unto death. As a result, he curried an image of dignity and respect on both sides of the law, in stark contrast to the animalistic bloodletting that many of his rivals practiced.

It was no surprise, then, that Vanguardia came to him for help during their scheme to rid Belatacan of its U.C.-owned business interests. The party needed muscle and de Mosquera had it: honed by years of extortion and strikebreaking. On the chosen day, his thugs broke into the offices of several prominent oil companies, and announced that the employees would be going home for the day. Those who tried to resist were beaten. When the employees appealed to the government, soldiers were sent in to "roust" the miscreants, only to remain in force once de Mosquera's men were gone. Similar incidents took place on the rigs and refineries all over the country, and those companies which proved more adept at resisting the takeover suffered shutdowns from sabotage and other events. Sympathetic countrymen on the rigs deserted their posts, leaving them unguarded for de Mosquera's men to do as they please. When the dust settled, Belatacan's oil industry had been nationalized and the U.C. firms found themselves without a foothold in the country.

All of it served to put de Mosquera in quite well with Vanguardia, which now had uncontested control of Belatacan thanks to him. In gratitude, they turned their attention away from his operations, concentrating instead on those of ri-

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vals and on more “pressing” matters of state. He made large donations to their party every year, and while he never threatened their relationship by making his influence clear, he was more than happy to ask for quiet favors when it counted. The relationship has worked out well, and de Mosquera’s organization has enjoyed an uninterrupted growth since the end of the war.

Kidnapping and drug running are his specialty. His men process the opium poppies harvested in the eastern mountains, turning it into heroin to be shipped north across the border. He had previously established routes for liquor smuggling and gun running, which gave him ready access to the resources required for this growing form of illicit commerce. The Belatacan government is as yet unaware of heroin’s ensuing importance to organized crime, which means de Mosquera’s men go about their business with few interruptions from the authorities. Kidnapping, though more harshly condemned, is an equally profitable enterprise. De Mosquera ensures that his captives are well-treated and released promptly upon payment of the ransom. If the money is not forthcoming, he makes their deaths quick and painless. This stands in stark contrast to his competitors, who return their victims with missing fingers or ears... if they return at all.

Indeed, Belatacan’s newer, more vicious breed of criminal has proven the greatest impediment to de Mosquera’s continued dominance. They don’t play according to the rules so long adhered to, embarking on nihilistic patterns of ultimately self-destructive crime. The desperation and poverty in which they were raised has turned them into animals... or so he maintains. Conflicts — always a part of the business — are growing harsher and harsher, as young turks seeking to make a name for themselves strike at his minions with ferocity and guile. Men aren’t just killed; they’re butchered like hogs, forcing him to retaliate with increasingly uglier force. He fears that, in order to keep what he has built, he will be forced to become just like his enemies — destroying his hard-won code of honor and alienating the legitimate politicians who proved instrumental to his ascent. The fact that such tactics lead only to destruction doesn’t occur to his enemies; they think only in the short-term, concerned solely with grabbing what they can in the here and now. It makes him feel old.

De Mosquera isn’t particularly tall, though he has an imposing presence which makes him loom large in most people’s eyes. His thinning salt-and-pepper hair does nothing to diminish the steel in his eyes, and his tightly-clipped mustache enhances the short cigarette holder he clenches constantly between his teeth. He dresses in fine-yet-conservative suits,

giving every impression of being an honest businessman, and walks with a limp resulting from a long-forgotten gunshot wound. His oak cane is inlaid with silver, and conceals a sword within its length; he is a skilled fencer and once used the weapon to fend off a would-be assassin. He never allows himself to grow excited or angry in public, and he speaks to friend and foe alike with a disaffected politeness which sets them at ease. Many of his rivals mistakenly view his mannerisms as a sign of weakness, an impression which he fears he will never cure them of no matter how many of them he kills. He has recently acquired a quintet of crocodiles to whom he feeds those who displease him. He felt it suitably theatrical to impress the miscreants trying to usurp his operations, and on several occasions he has dispatched a would-be rival by inviting him over to show him his “luggage collection.”

Gonzalo de Mosquera

Attributes: Brains 7, Brawn 5, Build 6, Gut 8, Moxie 8, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Appraise 6, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 8, Etiquette 9, Evasion 8, Fast Talk 8, Firearms 7, Intimidation 5, Lore (Politics) 8, Perception 6, Puzzles 7, Streetwise 8.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Loyal Retainer, Wise.

Profession: Gangster 4, Wealthy 4.

Jorge Villa Lobos, Snakehead

No one knows the ins and out of border crossings better than Jorge Villa Lobos, and no one makes a better living in the smuggling of human goods. He arranges each crossing carefully, using a fleet of trucks with compartments designed to be hidden under crates of fruit. His contacts in the Commonwealth can release his subjects in Paradiso or Terminus, and farmers near the border often depend on him to deliver migrant workers for each harvest. He knows garment makers and the owners of sweatshops in most of the big cities, supplying them with a regular stream of employees to labor in their stores. He has contacts with forgers and government officials, able to provide excellent documentation to those who pay his price. And he’s developed an extensive system of underground tunnels, which he can use to slip dozens of immigrants across the border at will. He also has a series of remote locations where his men can bury those who don’t survive the journey.

The moral implications of his work are utterly lost on him. He sees his charges as nothing more than a meal ticket, and has no problems exploiting them for every penny they have. That said, he prides himself on doing a good job, and if someone pays his exorbitant fees, he’ll do his utmost to ensure that they cross the border alive (though what happens after that is none of his concern). He can be brutally violent to those who welsh on his good graces, however. In one case, a client made a good-faith deposit, and then tried to run when he reached Paradiso rather than pay the rest. Villa Lobos and his men finally caught up with him in New Eden; police were finding pieces of the man in trash dumps for weeks.



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Villa Lobos also offers services for those seeking to flee the Commonwealth, using his connections farther south to arrange for transportation to Nuevo Dia. Criminals come to him hoping for sanctuary and willing to pay through the nose to get it. He complies mainly by allowing them the use of his tunnels, or by providing a car and false identification papers. In rare circumstances, he'll offer to do the smuggling himself, but most of the time, the fugitive is too rushed to bargain. Once in Belatacan, the clients have access to a series of safe-houses, traveling incognito to a southern harbor where they can catch a boat for Nuevo Dia. By then, Villa Lobos often has an entirely new identity prepared for them; in extreme cases, he retains the services of Dr. Beauregard (see page 162) to alter their appearance.

All of it has proven lucrative enough to set him up for life. When not engaged in his occupation, he lives in a sumptuous villa on the shores of the Columbic, frolicking in the sun with any of a dozen beautiful girls. His colleagues don't know the location of his house — he never mixes business with pleasure — and he contacts them through an answering service in the capital city of Chihoutle. Villa Lobos has an unreasonable hatred of gaunts. He refuses to work with the leatherbacks under any circumstances, and in some cases has even feigned a willingness to help them, only to turn his “clients” over to the nearest authorities. Considering Belatacan's comparatively harsh treatment of gaunts, he usually makes sure it's on the southern side of the border. He has a prison record, both in the U.C. and in Belatacan, and sometimes turns informant when the police lean on him too hard. The authorities mostly consider him a necessary evil, dealing in a so-called “victimless” crime while maintaining contacts with “real” criminals in narcotics and black marketeering. He's happy to let them go on believing that. His gang maintains a rough dominance over human trafficking on the border, assaulting or even murdering those perceived as competitors.

Villa Lobos stands about five-foot ten, with the hands of a farm worker and the lean muscles of a permanent outdoorsman. He sports a tattoo of a hawk in flight on his left shoulder blade, telling his clients that it will fly them to freedom. His face is essentially pleasant, though darkened with a hunter's dead eyes, and a clinical expression that betrays no hint of human emotion. He carries a pair of revolvers tucked into his cowboy boots at all times, and a knife hidden up his shirt sleeve. When working, he usually wears a black cowboy hat with a snakeskin band. At home, he dresses in the latest fashions and always has a drink in hand. For all his unpleasant qualities, he has a crude sense of honor, and genuinely works to fulfill his end of any bargain (except with gaunts, whom he regards as less than human anyway). This unusual honesty has given him his reputation as the best Snakehead on the border, and ensures a steady stream of customers desperate for his help.



Jorge Villa Lobos

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 6, Gut 7, Moxie 4, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 8, Disguise 4, Drive (Boat, Car, Truck) 7, Engineering 4, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 7, Forgery 8, Intimidation 6, Languages (English, Spanish), Lore (Border Territory) 9, Perception 3, Pick Lock 7, Sleight of Hand 5, Stealth 6, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Huge, Mean Streets, Rugged.

Profession: Con Artist 2, Snakehead 4, Street Tough 1.

IBERANA

Iberana is a large tropical island off the southern coast of the Unified Commonwealth. The government is a military dictatorship operating under the guise of a growing democracy. The President, General Cristobal Asensi, serves as the head of the army, and has won each of his nation's national elections since the end of the war. The average margin of victory was 92%. Rival political parties are routinely harassed by military thugs, and in some cases outright arrested as part of ongoing “operations” against guerillas operating from remote villages. The rebels are poorly funded and disorganized, but the nation's intense poverty means a steady supply of discontented soldiers are always willing to take up arms against El Presidente.

Much of the nation consists of jungles, though the beaches and large cities can be inviting. Its main exports are rum, molasses, and cigars, which are sent to the U.C. in large quantities through Terminus. In his efforts to “modernize” his country, General Asensi has encouraged the development of hotels and casinos, hoping to draw in rich tourists from the north. Before the war ended, they had achieved only middling success. Most of the gambling houses ran crooked games, bilking the customers out of their money. The horse races at the tracks were invariably rigged, and the few winners would often be robbed by local thugs working for the casino owners. It did little to enhance Iberana's reputation north of the border.

In order to counter that impression, Asensi turned to another crook: Remy Favroux of Terminus, who agreed to “legitimize” Iberana's casinos by bringing in pit bosses and dealers from his underground gambling operations. Members of the Baron's Men roused the card sharks and crooked gamblers, Favroux bought up controlling interest in several beachfront hotels, and surprisingly enough, he kept it all honest. He knew that straight gambling could make just as much money as crooked gambling, and with far less risk. Under his tutelage, Iberana has become an exotic hot spot, raking in money from *El Norte* just as Asensi wished. His government took a substantial slice off the top, and Favroux gained an excellent set of laundering operations away from the scrutiny of the NLEB. (See Chapter Five for more on Remy and his operations.)

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Naturally, the profits from these endeavors have lined the pockets of Asensi and his cronies, and were not poured back into the economy as was promised. The Presidential Palace and similar buildings are opulent to the point of excess, and the wealthier neighborhoods rival New Eden in their amenities. The hotels and casinos, too, are oases of luxury, providing visitors with a few sheltered square blocks in which to play. Several of the largest beaches are for tourists only, and the capital city of Balesca actually has a wall separating the hotels and their staff from the surrounding neighborhoods.

Beyond these isolated areas, Iberana is mired in poverty. Asensi's public works program goes woefully underfunded, leading to miles of unpaved roads, and hospitals and fire departments which lack even the basic supplies necessary to do their jobs. The entire island has electricity, thanks to an ambitious project launched after the war, but sewers and trash services struggle to keep up with demand. Most of the populace lives in appalling conditions, and though there's always food to put on the table, there's very little else unless you belong to the army or are one of Asensi's privileged elite. None of it matters to the Commonwealth gangsters (who have formed a direct partnership with the Iberana government), nor to the U.C. government (which views the development of business on the island as helpful to Commonwealth economic interests). And the tourists who come here in increasing numbers willfully ignore the dilapidated tenements that lie just beyond their bright hotel room lights. To them, Iberana is a glittering vacation spot with a touch of the exotic and the loosest tables in the hemisphere.

The city of Balesca is easily the biggest on the island, housing most of the major industries as well as the hotel district and the instruments of Asensi's government. The city is ringed with a series of military bases, commanded by El Presidente's cronies, and used to make periodic displays of law and order when they aren't being dispatched into the interior to do battle with the rebels. Military parades mark the first day of every month, and the populace is dutifully released from work to attend the festivities. Balesca has a tropical colonial feel, marked by the warm breezes and clear blue waters of its harbor. The whitewashed buildings have pleasant demeanor... though they have slowly been encroached upon by the slums which now dominate the bulk of the city. Tiny shacks and crowded tenement apartments cluster around local centers of business— usually either the local marketplace, or the factory to which most of the neighborhood residents owe their employment. Rum distilleries, fruit consortiums, and cigar factories are the norm, along with sugar refineries which work hand-in-hand with the plantations in the countryside. Heavy manufacturing is limited, though Iberana does produce a car — the Burro — whose factories are based solely in Balesca. (The vehicle fails to meet U.C. safety standards and is generally found only in the Borderlands.) These factories pay uniformly poorly, though Asensi's government has implemented a modicum of safety rules which keep the facilities from being actively dangerous. Most residents live their lives in the same few blocks, trudging to work each morning and returning to their squalid hovels by night. They generally sympathize with the rebels in the hills, but don't honestly believe that they have the numbers to topple Asensi's government. At least not yet.

PERTINENT LOCATIONS

3) Santa Margarita Square

This large, seagull-filled square in the heart of Balesca is flanked on one side by the Presidential Palace, and on the other by a pair of luxury hotels which form the cornerstone of Asensi's tourist mecca. The flagstone surface dates back hundreds of years as one of the earliest parts of the city to be established. A smart row of Iberanan flags lines the palace, and a unit of guards stands on constant duty here. Their daily drills up and down the square draw large crowds, and tourists looking on from the hotel balconies are treated to a vivid spectacle of "old world tradition" in their smartly marching lockstep. Benches line the edges of the Square while dignitaries and officials walk briskly up the stone steps of the palace to do the will of El Presidente.

Here, the luxurious world of the nation's tourism meets the iron fist of Asensi's rule. The two hotels — The Nacional and the Monte Blanc — cater to the wealthiest elite, and each sponsors a nearby gambling casino which (among their other functions) launders money for Remy Favroux. The proximity to the palace allows foreign dignitaries to be housed there in regal comfort, and the constant presence of soldiers and guards means that the guests may be protected without a great show of force. Favroux has even considered holding summits here for his rivals, since the security would be guaranteed. (His man in Balesca, Eric Rondeau, has repeatedly talked him out of it, however; see page 160 for more information). The hotels' guests can stroll the beaches in comfort, secure in their luxury and seeing nothing of the stifling poverty which lurks just a few blocks away.

The Square has another function, of which Asensi is well aware. It can be cordoned off easily, transforming the Palace and the two hotels into an impregnable fortress with just a few lowered gates. The tourist brochures mention its defensive qualities as a throwback to the days of piracy, but Asensi has no doubts that it will prove equally valuable in the event of a modern public uprising. Indeed, he rarely leaves the confines of the square these days, content to have his creature comforts brought to him rather than risk exposure to public unrest or an assassin's bullet. The street behind the palace is wide and devoid of trees. With a little effort it could be walled off and used as a landing strip — a handy means of escape if the worst should come to pass. Guard posts line the corners of the surrounding buildings, ostensibly for ceremonial purposes, but making handy sniper points during a riot or public disturbance.

In contrast, the hotels on the other side of the Square are bright and open, their security measures blending seamlessly into the background. Casinos occupy the bulk of the remaining buildings, dominated by roulette wheels, card tables, and betting parlors where visitors can wager on Iberana boxing matches or races at any of the city's numerous horse tracks. Nightclubs are attached to the casinos, distributing tropical drinks to the sound of the island's famous rumba bands. The balconies on the upper stories offer spectacular views of the

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Square on one side, and the white sand beaches on the other. The warm blue expanse of the South Neptunic extends to the horizon, providing an extraordinary vista... for hotel guests only, of course.

The top floor of the Nacional has been set aside for use by the Baron's Men, Asensi's partners in this endeavor. Eric Rondeau maintains a suite of rooms here (where he oversees all of the syndicate's hotels), and high-rolling friends of Remy Favroux receive exclusive rooms on the top floor. Rondeau runs a training center for local card dealers, bartenders, and pit crews — there to staff the syndicate's hotels — in the Nacional's basement. (The project is subsidized by the Iberana government, billed as part of its "job creation" program). The gangsters routinely rub shoulders with government officials, particularly during parties in the Square, when the nation's rulers don their tuxedos and revel in the joys that the night holds for them and them alone.

Typical Iberana Soldier

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 7, Build 6, Gut 5, Moxie 3, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 4, Demolitions 5, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Evasion 6, Firearms 5, Intimidation 6, Perception 4, Streetwise 3, Throwing 6.

Backgrounds: Alert, Marksmanship, Mean Streets.

Profession: Soldier 1.

4) Rebel Camp

Presidente Asansi's biggest mistake may be his overconfidence, and his need to find a scapegoat on which to blame his country's problems. To that end, he arranged for the release of several notable political prisoners — including a pair of student malcontents named Felix Guerrero and Esteban Trueba — hoping that they would stir up enough trouble to justify taking action against them. If he could paint them as the cause of Iberana's difficulties, then he could justify their assassinations while conveniently projecting all of the country's problems onto them. They proved wiler than he had anticipated. After defusing a bomb planted in their car, they fled to the island's interior, where opposition to Asansi's policies ran high. They were soon joined by a small army unit, led by a former captain who had been stripped of his rank after the onset of gauntism. Together, they formed the core of Iberana's resistance movement.



Two years later, they carry on the fight. Iberana's dense jungles make an ideal hiding place, and the local villages contain many sympathizers willing to help keep them safe. Military incursions are a regular occurrence, but they have yet to locate the rebel's central camp — hidden beneath camouflage netting in the midst of a heavily forested basin. A collection of tents and semi-permanent structures, it houses the coordination center for pockets of resistance throughout the nation's interior. A central building stores maps, radios, and a supply depot, while guerillas are housed in the outlying structures. The largest tent serves as a crude mess hall, and a corrugated tin shack nestled deep in the foliage constitutes the compound's toilets. Weapons and other equipment are cached throughout the surrounding area, buried beneath the earth and marked with a cunning series of naturally-appearing signs. Conditions are crude, but the camp's secrecy demands it. The Asensi regime makes periodic flybys of the area, and anything more elaborate is bound to be spotted.

One of the rebels' three leaders is always on location at any given time, but rarely more than that. They emphasize a loose, decentralized structure so that, if an important figure is lost, the fight will go on. The camp holds one of the rebels' key advantages in that regard: an encoded radio transmitter, smuggled in from the U.C. after the war. It allows different cells to communicate with each other without the Iberana government tapping in; the trio of leaders can thus discuss their tactics without revealing their position. Should the radio ever be captured or destroyed, the rebels would be hard-pressed to engage in more than perfunctory resistance; if that happened, they would go to any lengths to replace it, including soliciting help from the criminal elements of the U.C.

The rebels are hard-pressed enough as it is. El Presidente has a good military mind, and uses his superior resources to harass them mercilessly. Most of the rebels' raids consist of hit-and-run strikes, using the terrain and good will of the locals to their best advantage. They have also resorted to fifth column activity, posing as civilians and launching surreptitious bombings of military targets. They refrain from placing civilians in harm's way, which has hampered their activities somewhat, but they cannot incur the wrath of the populace if they are to ever gain the upper hand.

The group's military leader is Fernando Alizar, the former captain who succumbed to the curse of gauntism. He retained much of his tactician's instinct after the change, and his men were loyal enough to revolt en masse following his dismissal. His knowledge of small-unit combat makes him invaluable to the resistance, and his position has helped rally many of the island's gaunts to his side. The leatherbacks are cruelly repressed under the Asensi government, and many of them fight in hopes of more equal representation. Guerrero and Trueba emphasize egalitarian rights, and have spoken eloquently about the need for the gaunts' unique abilities in "the new Iberana." The residents of the camp include a fair number of gaunts, who interact with their normal companions with little friction. The leaders take steps to prevent their condition from destroying precious supplies — sleeping quarters are segregated and the de facto quartermasters are all normals — but otherwise treat the leatherbacks as equals in all regards.

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There are game trails which lead to the camp, but they are all hidden as fastidiously as the camp itself. Guards maintain a vigilant watch around the local roads, aided by the locals who swiftly report any military movements in the area. Most of the rebels oppose any involvement from the U.C., which they view as a complicit partner in the Asensi regime, but their lack of supplies means they must sometimes deal with Commonwealth elements. Arms dealers (mostly from organized crime syndicates) trade with them through neutral locales in Belatacan, and black marketeers sell them supplies stolen from military bases near Terminus and Nova Roma. The rest are gleaned from local sources, either donated by local peasants or stolen in raids against the government. The main camp holds the largest cache of supplies, but many smaller caches are scattered throughout the countryside, in case the resistance has need of them.

Fernando Alizar

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 8, Build 8, Gut 7, Moxie 4, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 40.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 7, Bureaucracy 5, Demolitions 7, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Evasion 6, Firearms 7, Intimidation 5, Lore (Tactics) 8, Melee 4, Perception 6, Puzzles 7, Stealth 7.

Backgrounds: Accelerated Immune System, Gaunt, Wise.

Profession: Soldier 4, Street Tough 1.

NPCs

Presidente Cristobal Asensi

Iberana's beloved president for life began his political career during the war, when — as a colonel in the country's home office — he shrewdly suggested sending a token force to assist the U.C. against the Order of Nu. The move gained the respect of the U.C. government, and allowed Iberana to share in the fruits of victory without commensurate risk (some 1,000 Iberanan soldiers were sent to war; less than a dozen were killed in action). Asensi was soon promoted to the president's personal staff, overseeing the Office of Military Affairs. He used his military muscle to increase his political clout, and within a few years was running Iberana in all but name. Through proxies in the government, he arranged for the expulsion of then-President Augusto Martinez — aided by support from the U.C. and several of Martinez's political rivals. The man had largely been viewed as weak and spineless. Asensi's show of strength galvanized the populace, who saw him as precisely the bold, decisive leader to take their nation into a brighter tomorrow. He was elected in a landslide victory and immediately set about remaking the government to his liking.

Asensi started by altering parts of the Iberana constitution, drafting new laws which "re-imagine the spirit of government while staying true to the essence of our ideals." The changes included striking one clause which forbade the president from

being a military officer, and another which granted workers the right to strike and organize. He began systematically harassing opposition parties with his military police, arresting key figures and breaking up meetings with hired thugs. A curfew was enacted in Balesca, which allowed the army to establish its control throughout the city. By the time the next election rolled around, he was firmly in command, the country's democratic foundation nothing more than a hollow sham. He has won every vote put to the public by a ridiculous margin, and his ruling Democracia party controls every aspect of the government.

None of this would have been possible without the support of the Unified Commonwealth to the north. Asensi has carefully curried favor in the halls of Nova Roma, while rubbing shoulders with gangsters and illicit strongmen in cities like Terminus. He's offered deals to a number of U.C. business firms, contracting them for all manner of costly construction projects. Airports, bridges, roadways, and power plants are all being built by Commonwealth firms... often with public Iberanan funds. The lack of regulation means that the companies can cut corners in myriad ways, reducing overhead and increasing profits exponentially. And naturally, a substantial kickback goes directly into Asensi's pockets.

Add to that El Presidente's organized crime connections, which are even more extensive than his legitimate ones, and the flow of dirty money into his pockets has been almost constant since he took power. Under his regime, Iberana has flowered into a gambling paradise, fed by steady streams of money from the Baron's Men and other syndicates, and liberally exploited by Asensi and his inner circle. The U.C. government turns a blind eye to such connections, since Iberana is so good for Commonwealth business, and Asensi's regime is stable and predictable, which further puts the diplomatic corps at ease.

All of it has been carefully orchestrated by El Presidente, who has a deep understanding of Machiavellian politics, and knows how to exploit both sides of his northern neighbor's power base. His quarters in the Presidential Palace dwarf even those of the hotels, and with the money he's made, he could alleviate his island's ills in an instant. Nothing doing, of course. He has a lifestyle to maintain, an army to bolster, and a large number of beautiful mistresses to pamper. Naturally, the people are unhappy, but wouldn't they be unhappy anyway? Asensi has turned Iberana into a jewel of the Borderlands — the most popular hot spot this side of Paradiso. It's only fair that he should wet his beak a little.

Asensi keeps tight control over both the military and the Democracia party: the instruments of his rule. He personally coordinates the attacks on the rebels in the interior, and his secret police busily track their money men through Belatacan and the U.C. He has thwarted several attempted coups during his tenure, and he is supremely confident that his forces can rout the rebels without difficulties. The populace maintains a potent mixture of awe and fear for him, which he exploits beautifully. His government controls all major radio stations and official newspapers, while opposition press runs a constant risk of being shut down. As an authoritarian ruler, he has few peers.

Asensi stands just under six feet tall, with the fit, lean frame of a career military man. Good living has begun to soften him up, but he maintains a strict exercise regimen that includes daily sparring matches with some of the country's best boxers.

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He always dresses in his military uniform — a beige affair marked with gold piping and blue and scarlet medals for various acts of heroism (real and imagined). Around his guests, he has an air of informal charm, making light of his position and becoming positively self-effacing at times. That changes during meetings with his staff, when he acts with the cold calculation of a born leader. He is not accustomed to being disobeyed, and while he tolerates a certain amount of naysaying from time to time, he keeps his underlings on a very short leash. The army remains loyal to him — much of his illicit funds goes to making them comfortable — which gives him the confidence to act as he pleases. This is his island, and everyone who lives on it will dance to his tune... one way or another.

Presidente Cristobal Asensi

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 7, Gut 7, Moxie 8, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 7, Bureaucracy 9, Etiquette 5, Evasion 8, Fast Talk 5, Firearms 6, Intimidation 7, Languages (English, Spanish), Perception 5, Puzzles 4, Streetwise 7, Throwing 6.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Lucky, Wise.

Profession: Gangster 4, Politician 4, Soldier 5.



Eric Rondeau, Casino Owner

Eric Rondeau originally operated out of Terminus, where he ran a series of illegal gambling operations for many years. The police landed on him with both feet, forcing him to close his operations and threatening him with a lengthy prison term. It took every ounce of his resources just to pay for his defense, and he went deeply into debt before finally securing his acquittal. He left the courthouse with no money, no casinos, and a massive IOU to a creditor whose name he did not recognize.

That creditor turned out to be Remy Favroux, who had seen Rondeau's organization in action, and was impressed. By funding the gambler's defense, he essentially placed Rondeau in his pocket, and soon presented the bill come due. Soon after Rondeau's release, a group of burly men came to his door and explained the situation. In order to pay off the debt, Rondeau would work for Favroux, running his gambling consortiums and deferring the bulk of his wages. If he agreed, the Baron's Men would take good care of him. If he declined, then he wouldn't leave the room alive. Rondeau didn't like it, but he knew better than to cross Terminus' most powerful gangster.

To his surprise, he found the new accommodations even more fulfilling than the old. Favroux had resources he never dreamed of, and the lax policing in Terminus meant that he need never fear persecution again. Trouble sometimes arose when rival gangs tried to shut down his operations, but Favroux always gave him the muscle to keep such disturbances to a minimum. When the Baron's Men struck their deal with Presidente Cristobal Asensi, they sent Rondeau down to oversee operations, and make sure their new business venture succeeded as it should. He's been down here for some time, and his superior in Terminus is pleased. Under his guidance, the casinos have flourished, and with the protection of the Iberana government, they have gained legitimacy undreamt of back in the U.C. They also provide Favroux with a power base separate from his rivals in Terminus, and thanks to Rondeau, they may soon equal or outpace every other operation in which the Baron's Men involve themselves.

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None of this is lost on Rondeau, who always chafed under Favroux's yoke. He secretly resented the gangster for manipulating him so brazenly, and resolved to free himself from the Baron's Men by any means necessary. The casinos in Iberana have given him the leverage to do it. He's been secretly skimming profits, squirreling them away in a local bank account, and building up his resources. He also set up quiet negotiations with El Presidente, scheming to wrest the casinos from the criminals on the mainland. When the time is right, they'll cut ties with Favroux, the Baron's Men in Iberana will be assassinated, and the government will assume full control over the hotels and casinos. Rondeau will become the new "Minister of Gaming," and live a life of luxury safely protected from retribution. Favroux is powerful, but even he can't challenge a foreign government, can he?

Rondeau is a neat, soft-spoken man with straight blond hair and watery blue eyes. When he first arrived in Iberana, his pale skin burned quite badly, but it has since given way to a deep and permanent tan. He speaks with eloquence and forthrightness, giving every impression of an honest man while keeping his Machiavellian nature hidden. His pencil mustache curls over a perennially cheerful smile, and he has a way of charming the socks off of casual acquaintances. Only those closest to him see the steel trap in which his mind operates: the way he covers every conceivable angle before embarking on a course of action. He dresses in white tropical suits and always wears a broad Panama hat. Though he's no slouch with a weapon, he prefers other men to handle his safety. He's hired several bodyguards from the local populace, in anticipation of his move against Favroux.

Eric Rondeau

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 4, Build 6, Gut 8, Moxie 6, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Appraise 7, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 7, Etiquette 5, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 6, Firearms 8, Forgery 5, Languages (English, Spanish), Lore (Gambling) 10, Perception 6, Puzzles 7, Streetwise 7.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education, Marksmanship.

Profession: Gangster 3, Wealthy 2.

NUEVO DIA

The newly rechristened Nuevo Dia has recently been seized in a revolutionary coup. Socialist guerrillas stormed the capital city three years ago, deposing the ruling military council and installing an elected parliament in its wake. Since then, the nation has been a bit of a disaster. Pockets of loyalists still trouble the governing council, and the lofty ideals of freedom and equality are being severely tested by the country's overwhelming problems. Law and order are routinely threatened both by loyalists and by roving bands of warlords; inflation is spiraling out of control, and the cost of basic goods is steadily rising as the economy worsens. While Nuevo Dia has a decent infrastructure, much of it remains isolated; the nation is domi-

nated by imposing wilderness where central authority has a difficult time asserting itself. The rain forests along the coast and northern border are nearly primeval, and with the military thrown into disarray by the revolution, the country's drug lords have had carte blanche to act as they please. A pair of hurricanes struck the coast regions in the last year — including the nations' two biggest cities — and some areas are only just now being cleaned up.

All of which makes Nuevo Dia an excellent place to make money if notions of decency don't trouble you. Arms dealers can generate a fortune selling guns to the government, the loyalists, or both, while the drug lords pay top dollar to move their product north into the U.C. The revolutionary council maintains a series of gold mines — the only thing stabilizing their rule — and with the current state of insecurity are willing to use it to bolster their position. The isolated villages make ideal hiding places; fugitives for whom even Terminus isn't safe enough often find themselves here, secure amid the swirling chaos and equatorial humidity.

Warlocks find the confines welcoming, despite the death sentence which the government has imposed for practicing magic. Many survivors from the Order of Nu fled here after the war, enticed by the previous government's lack of extradition treaties and secret encouragement of magic practices. The revolutionaries have done little to address that situation and several dozen fugitives from the Order of Nu — many of whom are wanted by various nations for war crimes — now live quiet lives here as financiers or gentleman farmers. The mess in the countryside seems to bother them not a whit; most of them are powerful enough to ensure that their privacy is respected.

The black market, too, can pay huge dividends in Nuevo Dia. The country is primarily agrarian, with few sophisticated goods produced domestically. Everything is imported — mostly from Belatacan or the Unified Commonwealth — and the revolutionary council has been raising tariffs in an effort to generate more income. But the rugged coastline is ideal for smuggling operations, and a boatload full of radios or candy bars can often fetch ten times their normal worth here.

Recently, the government have begun taking firmer steps to restore order. The army has been beefed up and can now provide a firmer hand. The cities fall under strict curfews — no one on the streets after 10 p.m. — and bandits and looters are now being engaged with increased ferocity. The drug lords in the mountains provide a greater challenge — many of them are practically governments unto themselves — but the council has made it a priority to bring them to heel.

A more radical permutation of this development has been the induction of gaunts into the ranks of the military. Most other countries — certainly those in the rest of the Borderlands — would never entrust leatherbacks with such a responsibility, but the way Nuevo Dia sees it, they're solving several problems at once. Gaunt units have a sense of purpose their lives previously lacked, and thus are less likely to oppose the established order through insurrection or criminal activity. It's also a demonstration of the regime's expressed egalitarian principles — the fact that no one will be denied opportunity based on bias or prejudice. Furthermore, the leatherbacks' increased strength and stamina means that they make more effi-

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cient soldiers, and their fearsome visage can often stop trouble before it begins. Few people want to cross an armed gaunt, let alone a whole platoon of them. Leatherbacks in neighboring countries have heard of Nuevo Dia's "enlightened" policies, and many of them are flocking across the border to sign up.

The U.C. looks at Nuevo Dia as a troubled, but unimportant nation. Far away and possessing few resources worth coveting, it is ignored by all save the criminal element, who see it as a cash cow for those with no other options. Tourist visas are still issued to those who wish it, but there's little in the chaotic region to see. Beyond the thugs in hiding and a few members of the diplomatic corps, few citizens of the Unified Commonwealth bother to cross its borders.



PERTINENT LOCATIONS

5) Dr. Beauregard's Cosmetic Surgery

This quiet and secluded clinic has little to distinguish itself from any of the larger buildings in the nearby towns. Built on the former site of a Catholic church, it retains the unused bell tower, and the whitewashed walls stand in stark contrast to the lush greenery of the jungle surrounding it. The conditions stress secrecy over hygiene, which suits its customers just fine.

Dr. Clarence Beauregard was a respected cosmetic surgeon in New Eden, until he was accused of rape by one of his clients. He was innocent of the crime, but his accuser's husband

had money and connections, and after the jury passed down a guilty verdict, he was sentenced to twelve years. Fortune gave him a made man as a cellmate: an underlord to a now-bygone Terminus crimelord who had no intention of waiting for his boss' rivals to come after him in jail. The pair engineered a daring escape and, using funds the underlord had squirreled away, fled to Nuevo Dia.

There, Dr. Beauregard learned there was a price to pay for his newfound freedom. The underlord wanted him to operate — to change his face so that neither the authorities nor his underworld enemies could recognize him. Still angry at his wrongful conviction and under the threat of death should he refuse to go through with it, Beauregard agreed. The surgery took place in appalling conditions and took many hours, but in the end, Beauregard's partner emerged with a new face and a promise to set the doctor up for life. When the man left Nuevo Dia, his bandages removed, Beauregard breathed a sigh of relief. He would receive money from the mob, re-establish a practice here, and begin to build something resembling his old life.

Soon, however, it became clear that the money wasn't quite in the form he envisioned. He began receiving a stream of new clients: fellow mobsters, many wanted by the law, hiding out and seeking his skills to give them an unbreakable disguise. Many of them were wealthy criminals from Iberana, evading their nation's draconian militarized police; the rest were U.C. criminals with the means to disappear more efficiently. They all paid, to be sure, but the work was odious — reconstructive surgery, changing faces and removing distinguishing marks. All told,

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nearly a dozen criminals have gone under Dr. Beauregard's knife; the results have left them free to move without being hunted by the authorities. It sits very poorly with the good doctor, and while he tries to make up for it by providing free services for the neighboring villages (a fact which keeps the revolutionary government from prying too closely into his affairs), he knows in the end that he is actively aiding some of the worst people in existence.

The surgery center is as modern as possible considering the conditions. The former church is clean and uncluttered, and there's plenty of space for an operating theater and recovery room. Through his connections, Dr. Beauregard has obtained advanced surgical tools, proper anesthetics, and monitoring equipment which allows him to conduct operations safely. He's even trained a pair of the local girls as nurses, and they do their job as well as any RN in the Commonwealth. There's more than just professionalism to such standards: Dr. Beauregard is terrified of what would happen if one of his patients died on the table.

In addition to the operating theater, the compound contains a small house for the doctor, and a secure shack containing the electrical generator. The compound is actually quite secure: the brush has been cleared for fifty yards around the church, and a single dirt road is the only easy access point. The surrounding jungle is thick and impenetrable, and the villages in the vicinity are loyal to Dr. Beauregard for the services he provides them. The doctor's "sponsors" have also assigned a pair of keepers/bodyguards to him, protecting him and also ensuring that he never tries to bolt. They remain with the doctor at all times, accompanying him on his rounds to the villages and ready to strong-arm him if one of his "important" clients has need of his services. Beauregard is still wanted by the authorities in the Commonwealth, and even if he were to escape his present circumstances, he hasn't the slightest idea where he'd go. Someday, he might commit an act of self-destructive revolt, just to make the bastards who hold him pay. But for now, he knows he can still do some small good, which stays his hand and keeps him locked in this limbo-like existence.

Dr. Clarence Beauregard

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 7, Moxie 5, Smoothness 9.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Disguise 3, Drive (Car, Truck) 3, Etiquette 4, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 4, Firearms 2, Languages (English, Spanish), Lore (Cosmetic Surgery) 9, Medicine 9, Perception 4, Puzzles 5, Streetwise 4.

Backgrounds: Education, Loyal Retainer, Prodigy.

Profession: Academic 1, White Collar Worker 2.



6) El Pasado Dynamite Factory

Typical of Nuevo Dia's industrial base is this dilapidated factory, based in the country's foothills and employing most of the residents of a nearby village. They produce explosives, mainly for mining operations but occasionally for construction and other uses. It does brisk business — indeed, it is the largest producer of dynamite in the country, and allows firms to purchase explosives domestically, instead of buying expensive imports. Working conditions, however, are appalling. The company has no safety standards, and the caustic chemicals being used puts the workers' health in considerable danger. Numerous employees have lost digits or other appendages, and the factory's chemicals have led to a drastic increase in asthma and other breathing difficulties throughout the region. Toxic runoff has poisoned the nearby streams, and the foliage in the immediate vicinity has rapidly withered and died. While the factory has avoided any large-scale accidents, it has the potential to go up like a powder keg at any time. Only the region's stifling poverty keeps anyone employed there.

El Pasado's manager, Leocadio Aguilar, is a nervous, corpulent man, as much a prisoner of the place as his workers. The factory's owners arranged for an illegal kidney transplant for his young daughter, and have held the marker over him as a long-term incentive to stay. Should he quit or fail to make quota, he's convinced that they'll find his family and take it out on them. He has yet to miss a shipment, but his incessant worrying and orders for speedy production has led to a number of accidents at the plant. He's surreptitiously appealed to the government several times for help, but they simply lack the resources to adequately address the situation.

In the meantime, the dynamite continues to trundle out, driven from the factory by large trucks whose drivers are almost as stressed as the workers within. Shipments are often the targets of raids by loyalists, hoping to steal supplies for use in their campaign, and natural accidents are bound to occur on the treacherous jungle roads. While the dynamite is reasonably stable, the haste with which it is assembled means that the odd "sweaty crate" is a statistical certainty. The drivers know it, and take extreme care when transporting their goods.

When he can afford it, Aguilar isn't above selling excess product off to black marketers. He's good enough at cooking the books to disguise such transactions, and the pay goes directly into his pockets instead of the owners. Every now and then, he kicks a little back to the workers — particularly those who have lost a limb — but most of it, he squirrels away, vainly hoping that it will help him cut ties with the place someday. In the process, he's made a few interesting connections with Nuevo Dia's underworld, which might provide him more help than he realizes.

As for the plant's mysterious owners, no one has yet seen them. They don't live locally, and they never visit the facility. All financial transactions take place off-site — payment is mailed in cash once a month — and Aguilar only speaks with them by phone. They continue to turn a profit, but hardly enough to demand such secrecy... nor explain the hold they exert over Aguilar and his workers. Perhaps, given the state of Nuevo Dia's finances, any successful business is worth holding onto, even one as miserable and forlorn as this.

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The nearby village of El Pasado (after which the factory is named) is a wretched collection of huts and corrugated tin shacks. Sustenance farming helps keep everyone fed, but no one has any money, and possessions are sometimes limited to the clothes on one's back. A de facto bar — really just a larger shack with a few tables scavenged from the factory — sells vile bottles of the local tequila, and a few precious imports from Belatacan and the U.C. The villagers learn to treasure the small joys they can find, while life in the factory slowly grinds their souls to dust.

Leocadio Aguilar, Nervous Foreman

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 5, Build 6, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 6, Craft (Explosives Manufacturer) 7, Demolitions 5, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Engineering 5, Evasion 4, Firearms 5, Lore (Chemistry) 4, Medicine 3, Puzzles 5, Sleight of Hand 5, Streetwise 5.

Backgrounds: Huge, Lucky, Mean Streets.

Profession: Gangster 1, White Collar Worker 1.

NPES

Gabriel Jorel, Exiled Warlock

It is widely accepted that the Order of Nu perished to a man upon the release of the White Light. Holed up in their capital city, cut off from exit or retreat, they were all consumed by the magical energy which brought an end to the war. Or so they say. In truth, a small handful of Order members were elsewhere when their organization was decapitated — usually acting as spies or long-term moles. Some of them were killed in the chaos following the war, but others survived and escaped to different parts of the world. There, they lived as hunted exiles, forming new identities but constantly looking over their shoulders for fear of pursuit. Nuevo Dia made a welcome spot for these fugitives to relocate. The country's previous dictatorship had been unusually pro-warlock, viewing magic as a potent military and economic resource despite fierce opposition from the populace. The Order had invested heavily in Nuevo Dia's gold mines before the war, and the funds from those investments lay untouched in secret accounts after the war.



Most notable among their number was Gabriel Jorel, a member of the Order's inner circle who was dispatched to the Borderlands shortly before the White Light in order to seek further allies. He was mid-transit when the ship's radio broadcast news of the war's conclusion; shortly thereafter, he stole a dingy and some supplies, escaping into the stormy Neptunic mere hours before a U.C. destroyer boarded the ship in search of him. He was rescued by a fishing boat, then proceeded to kill the occupants and make his way south to Nuevo Dia, (then called Extacion). It was not difficult to manufacture an identity as a refugee banker; he quickly divested all holdings that would connect him to the Order of Nu, and laundered his money through a series of Santo Baltasar banks. Many of the records tying him to the defeated Order had been obliterated by the White Light. With nothing remaining to conceal him to the old world, and his pursuers vainly chasing their own tails, he disappeared into Extacion's background.

The revolution three years ago caused him some small consternation, but the new government had no more idea about who he was than anyone else. His foreign holdings, along with a cache of gold buried under his property, allowed him to remain solvent, and he offered no resistance to the change in regime. The country's increasing chaos meant a threat from bandits, who saw his country estate as easy pickings. But his warlock powers remained intact, and after a few "foraging parties" failed to return, others in the area learned to stay away from him. He now has a reputation as a strange and sinister hermit — quiet enough, but clearly possessing secrets which are not to be tampered with. Most, however, assume those secrets are of the mundane variety: that he's a gangster on the run, or perhaps an escaped convict from the U.C. No one could possibly believe the truth.

And he is not ready to abandon his nation's lost cause yet. Not by a long shot. He continues to surreptitiously support pro-warlock groups through intermediaries in Santo Baltasar, funneling money into the U.C. and tracking certain highly-prized texts to their current resting places. He employs unknowing Commonwealth detectives to help him in this endeavor, contacting them via his banks and offering payment in gold. He is quite surprised to hear rumors of the Order of Nu's rebirth as a secretive organization in the U.C. (see page 114 of *The Edge of Midnight* core rulebook), and would pay dearly for hard information concerning their activities. He is as yet unaware of the Widows of Fortune (see page 121), but word of their existence might entice him to move more directly towards restoring his old order. They, of course, would be quite interested to learn of him... as would the Commonwealth government, though for entirely different reasons.

His powers as a warlock are considerable, and he continues to study when he can. The occasional bandit incursion provides an excellent opportunity to hone his skills; no one who thought to rob him has yet to leave his estate alive. His basement contains a jury-rigged laboratory and a few books which he's managed to acquire over the years. He believes quite strongly that magic is the key to human progress, and that if the world could only be open-minded enough to embrace

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its potential, it could accomplish great things. He views the Borderlands as an ideal location for a new Order of Nu, though he recognizes that the world is not yet ready for such a bold endeavor. When the time is right, however, he intends to be ready.

Jorel is an average-looking white man in his mid-fifties, with rimless spectacles and dark brown eyes flecked with gray. His prematurely white hair is only now starting to go bald, and regular exercise has kept his body fit. He betrays the nervous tics of magic addiction only rarely, and his isolated location ensures that the magical marks he occasionally sports are never seen by human eyes. He lives the life of a gentleman farmer, raising grapes for wine on his estate and maintaining a small coop of carrier pigeons which he has trained to deliver messages. A boy from the nearby town brings him groceries and supplies every week, along with newspapers from most of the world's great cities — usually weeks old and stained yellow with time. Like everyone else in this world, Jorel finds he has difficulty recalling the years prior to the war. While his passions and philosophy of warlock supremacy have never dimmed, he wonders sometimes if the period during the war was nothing more than a delusion. His old friends in the Order have faded from memory, and while he reads articles from time to time of fellow exiles here in the Borderlands, he's not certain he wants to contact them. Starting a new Order — free from the memories of the past — somehow feels purer than attempting to reincarnate the old.

Gabriel Jorel

Attributes: Brains 9, Brawn 5, Build 6, Gut 8, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 3, Contortions 4, Disguise 5, Drive (Car, Motorcycle) 4, Electricity 9, Evasion 6, Firearms 3, Gravity 7, Kinetics 8, Languages (English, German, Spanish), Lore (Physics) 9, Lore (Order of Nu) 9, Magnetism 8, Medicine 4, Perception 6, Puzzles 7, Sleight of Hand 5, Stealth 7, Streetwise 3, Thermal Energy 9, Throwing 7.

Backgrounds: Education, Fanaticism, Magical Aptitude, Prodigy.

Profession: Rogue Scientist 4, Wealthy 1.

Sgt. Carlos Gutierrez, Nuevo Dia Revolutionary Army

Sgt. Gutierrez is the senior NCO at a supply depot in Nuevo Dia's largest port town, El Ray. From here, motorboats and convoys supply Revolutionary Army units throughout the north-eastern section of the country. With their grip on power so tenuous, and loyalist units still operating in the countryside, the government takes care to keep the army well-supplied; it falls upon the 305-NE to keep the troops in guns and foodstuffs.

It also give Gutierrez the opportunity to run an unbelievably profitable black market operation. He's in charge of requisitioning goods, filing the routing orders, and keeping in contact with combat units in the field. As such, he can control the flow

of weapons, ammunition, blankets, foodstuffs, and anything else the army needs with a few strokes of his pen. It's not hard to requisition more than he needs, then line up a buyer from Nuevo Dia, the Belatacan underworld, even the U.C. if the price is right. Ammunition is his specialty, but he also sells machine guns, diesel fuel, engine parts, motorboats, and even a few trucks and motorcycles when he can. The government's growing state of anarchy helps mask his activities nicely, and no one above him has thought to question him. He has a small group of five soldiers who help him out, and the MPs on base receive a kickback for looking the other way. All in all, it's translated into a nice little nest egg for Gutierrez and his colleagues.

He's savvy enough to draw certain lines, however; not because it's the right thing to do, but because it will lessen the impact if he ever gets caught. He refuses to sell to anyone conducting business with the loyalists, and he limits arms sales to out-of-country clients only. If he's caught black marketeering, he'll likely face a lengthy prison sentence. If he's caught selling guns to the enemy, he'll be summarily shot. So he moves carefully, screens his clients judiciously, and never risks more than he's prepared to lose. He also never gives away "freebies" from the base's supplies the way other quartermasters do. The odd bottle of liquor or box of candy bars never gets passed to a back-slapping buddy or visiting colonel. His operation is too lucrative to risk undue attention from such trifles.

The ramshackle nature of the nearby port helps him in his task. The army maintains strict control over it, but with little oversight, it's easy for experienced ne'er-do-wells to slip in and out. Naval boats are used to ship many supplies (the loyalists lack a substantive waterborne presence), and few bother to give more than a cursory examination of any official-looking ships passing in and out. With his connections, Gutierrez can load a client's vessel up with black market goods and send them on their way under the auspices of another convoy. Once they reach open water, they simply sail away, with no one the wiser. Gutierrez alters the records, pays off the MPs, and pockets the rest as a tidy profit.

His superiors are completely in the dark, of course. Indeed, the base commander has given him several commendations for efficiency, and there has been talk of promotion to a higher post. Gutierrez has always begged such accolades off, a sign, his superiors say, of excessive modesty. Naturally, he just doesn't want his status as a soldier to get in the way of his real career. Gutierrez views his activities as simple pragmatism, especially in view of his nation's precarious state. He doesn't wish to weaken the government or short-change the army. He simply believes that neither of them are going to be around much longer. When they implode, he intends to have something left with which to start again.

Gutierrez is tall and angular, with an easy-going walk that makes him appear shorter than he actually is. He dresses in green army fatigues, and speaks English and Spanish with equal ease. He wears his hair relatively long for a military man — often letting it grow over his ears — and a scruffy beard and mustache constantly frame his mouth. He's an adept card player and knows how to hold his liquor, a trait he uses to good effect while negotiating with his clients. He's

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also a natural accountant, and can retain numerous figures in his head with minimal effort. The talent has allowed him to keep track of his operation without much incriminating paperwork (which is invariably destroyed once he's finished with it). He keeps his money stashed in a footlocker beneath his bed, which he periodically transfers to a friendly Belatacan bank. Should the existing government fall, he will likely flee there to begin life anew.

Sgt. Carlos Gutierrez

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 7, Build 7, Gut 7, Moxie 5, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Appraise 9, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 10, Drive (Boat, Car, Truck) 6, Engineering 6, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 9, Firearms 4, Lore (Military Procedure) 7, Perception 5, Pick Lock 5, Sleight of Hand 6, Streetwise 6.

Backgrounds: Loyal Retainer, Lucky, Wise.

Profession: Gangster 2, Soldier 4, Wealthy 1.

SANTO BALTASAR

The site of an important canal linking the Columbic and Neptunic Oceans, Santo Baltasar has long been in the pockets of large economic interests. Six corporations effectively control the entire nation: buying the politicians, making the laws, and employing nearly 75% of the populace — mostly in menial jobs at factories or on large corporate plantations. The Baltasar Canal is a vital link to trade in the Borderlands, sparing ships the arduous trip around the treacherous waters of the southern continents. It stretches across the narrowest point between the two oceans, an isthmus marked by mountains, jungles, and tropical diseases. The canal was formed by creating an artificial lake, which regulates the water level, and by a series of enormous locks which raise and lower the ships to the sea. Though operated by a branch of the U.C. government, Santo Baltasar is paid a “rental fee” for its use, which is maintained by charging vessels to cross (by international law, the Baltasar Canal is not permitted to make a profit). Thousands of ships pass through its length every year... leaving plenty of opportunities for money-making, legitimate and otherwise.

A service-based economy, bolstered by the heavy traffic along the Canal, accounts for a huge percentage of the nation's GNP; the remainder comes from agricultural interests, mostly bananas and coffee. Ship registry, commerce facilities, and currency trading are common, and the nation is renowned for its “tropical banks” — hush-hush institutions where no questions are asked and no information revealed. The robber barons who run them place a high priority on securing their own funds, and are happy to share their protective measures if it makes them a tidy profit. There is no government oversight, and the banks never ask questions, making them the ideal place to store illicitly-gained funds. Santo Baltasar forms a key part of drug trade in the Borderlands, and the Canal facilitates all manner of smuggling and illegal commerce.

The government is effectively beholden to an oligarchy of six huge companies, mostly representing banking and mercantile interests. With ties to the U.C. business community, and a willingness to concede control of the Canal to the Commonwealth, they enjoy favored status with their northern neighbor, and huge contributions allow them to remain in power regardless of public opinion. Like other Borderlands states, poverty is an unresolved problem here, and while the elite party the night away in Baltasar City, the rest of the nation is consigned to hard work with few benefits. Workers along the canal routinely take pay-offs to help ferry strange packages and the like, and couriers can make good money by helping “ease” the transition from one ocean to the next. It's often all they have to make the next month's rent.

But what chafes the populace the most is the notion that their most important feature is in the hands of foreigners. The Canal has become a focal point for nationalist unrest, prompting demonstrations and even riots from time to time. The ruling oligarchy has more than enough clout to stymie any corrective efforts put forth in the legislature, but reform candidates are slowly gaining ground by waving the flag of national independence from Yankee influence. They point to the advances Belatacan has made, and hope to follow in that larger nation's footsteps in asserting freedom from U.C. interests. Most of the time, their efforts are kept in hand, but labor unrest takes place from time to time, and minor sabotage attempts are fairly common along the Canal. Ships spout leaks, cargo is “accidentally” dumped overboard, and while the Canal itself is impervious to harm, the locks can prove troublesome when subjected to unwanted attention. The Commonwealth has an army unit permanently stationed at each end of the Canal, which helps keep things under control, but the issue doesn't look to go away any time soon.

Away from the Canal, things are somewhat more equitable. The farms and coffee plantations are reasonably self-sufficient, and while property owners still hold the cards, they cannot afford to openly block the wishes of those beneath them. The jungles of Santo Baltasar are famous for their tropical birds, and poachers often work the interior, capturing parrots and cockatoos for (often illegal) import to the U.C. Coca fields grow in the higher mountains—not enough to compete with Nuevo Dia's, but enough to support the modest production of cocaine and other drugs. The proximity to the canal means that it is much easier ferrying such drugs north. Of all the Borderlands nations, Santo Baltasar has the most developed infrastructure, and its lush wilderness is slowly giving way to the trappings of civilization.

The unrest has consequences in Nuevo Dia to the east. The revolutionary government there has yet to establish diplomatic ties with Santo Baltasar's ruling plutocrats, and indeed has publicly hinted at attacking the intensely capitalist regime. Consequently, the Baltasar government has offered support for the loyalists fighting Nuevo Dias' rulers, in the form of weapons, money, and safety across the border. As if that weren't complicated enough, most of Santo Baltasar's citizens hate the loyalists, and while foreign invasion isn't what they had in mind, they wouldn't object to seeing a new order re-

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place the companies which currently control them. All of this combines to make the Nuevo Dia/Santo Baltasar border a hotbed of gun running, firefights, and unauthorized “incursions” which have brought the region to the brink of open conflict. The Santo Baltasar army routinely patrols the area and the border is closed to travelers, but the dense jungles are too thick to prevent routine crossings.

That rarely affects foreigners, however. Commonwealth citizens don’t usually have any business in the nation beyond the Canal and the single large metropolis, Baltasar City. Foreigners crowd those two areas to conduct some transaction in the banks, wrangle some new shipping deal, or simply get a boatload of goods from one side of the country to the other. The remainder of the nation is essentially forgotten, little more than a footnote to Santo Baltasar’s “true” purpose.

On its far southern end, the jungles swallow up all traces of civilization, and human presence of any sort vanishes. Travelers report losing their path and becoming lost for days; the lucky ones finally emerge far north of where they expected to be, back in the civilized areas of Santo Baltasar. The remainder are simply never seen again. Several nations supposedly exist below this one — small principalities, struggling islands, and glorified artists’ enclaves — but no one can recall traveling there, and no one has ever met a citizen of those lands. No embassies or diplomatic corps exist for them, and the tiny handful of the Few who have ventured so far south suspect that they don’t even exist...

PERTINENT LOCATIONS

7) San Rattan Prison

Even the most hardened convicts speak in hushed tones about San Rattan: the most reviled prison in the known world. Located deep in the jungle primeval, it holds the worst of the worst within its savage walls. It was supposedly built by its first inmates, who were chained together in teams of ten and slept in tents beneath the muck of the jungle. Seventy-five percent of them died from yellow fever before the prison was completed. The remainder, it is said, wish they had.

The high stone walls stand atop a crest of rock; the south and east sides end at a sheer drop 200 feet to the jungle floor. The west and north sides sport more gentle slopes, but the thick jungle foliage cannot be penetrated more than a few yards without a serious cutting implement... leaving an obvious trail to follow. A ramshackle road winds up the crest to the main gates on the north side, making it the only effective point of entry to the prison. It is guarded round the clock, and a visitor must pass three heavily-armed checkpoints before arriving at the prison.

The convicts are kept in appalling conditions. Most are chained together when outside of their cells, bound by the ankles in groups too large to move any faster than a crawl. The cells are cataclysmically tiny and swarming with vermin;



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toilets consist of two filthy buckets, one filled with brackish water. The lucky prisoners get work detail, keeping the prison upgraded and clear of the encroaching jungle. It's back-breaking work, but it allows for a few brief hours of fresh air and sunshine each day. Some of the other prisoners haven't seen the sun since they arrived. Showers are delivered via fire hose once a week; the most hygienic prisoners learn to ration their drinking water enough to have some left over to wash. The rest just count on the hose and the periodic application of painful delousing powder to keep themselves clean.

Punishment is brutal and meted out for the slightest infraction. Solitary confinement is a series of malaria-infested pits, dug out of the bedrock beneath San Rattan and now filled with mosquito-laden muck. The guards inflict savage beatings on those who cross them, and inventing new tortures is a favored pastime. The prison's sharpshooters sometimes take "William Tell" target practice by placing a cantaloupe on a chained prisoner's head, and a trio of car batteries are permanently arrayed in the prison's interrogation rooms. The guards are uniformed thugs with few legitimate job prospects. Work here is nearly as stressful as being a prisoner. The senior guards take checkpoint duty, leaving the youngest and least experienced to watch over the inmates. Though it often means a horrible death, a prisoner will sometimes overpower and kill one of his keepers; if they're going to go, they reason, they should at least take one of their tormentors with them.

San Rattan holds approximately 2,000 inmates, though it was originally designed for 600. Double- and triple bunking is common and fights break out among the prisoners almost every day. Though some inmates are mere victims of circumstance, many are guilty of the most horrible crimes. The rest quickly come up to speed, as the Darwinian atmosphere forces them to kill or be killed. Parole is unheard of here; once the gates close, the only way out is escape or death. A Catholic priest comes to the prison every Sunday, to pray for the inmates' souls, hear confession, and administer last rites. His presence provides one of the few rays of light in the prison, and a number of inmates have embraced God through his sermons, hoping for a better life after this one.

Gaunt prisoners — some 20% of the population — are theoretically segregated, but the overcrowded conditions render true separation impossible. Their decaying aura increases the workload of the crews, and their appetite for raw foods means they can stomach the prison's repellent meals much more readily... all of which marks them more than their monstrous looks. Brawls and attempted assassinations take place regularly, with the gaunts' increased strength and stamina the only thing evening the odds against the greater percentage of normal prisoners.

Escape from San Rattan is a virtual pipe dream, unheard of in all but a handful of incidents. Those caught attempting to escape are shot as a warning to other prisoners, their bodies dumped in the lime pit which serves as the facility's graveyard. A few escapes have been successful, but those who manage it face a long, hard road out of the jungle. Most who clear the

prison try to head east to Nuevo Dia, hoping that pursuit will drop away once they reach foreign soil. Indeed, many escaped prisoners have crossed the border... only to die in Nuevo Dia's jungles as surely as they would have in Santo Baltasar's. The only comfort such a fate offers is that the bodies are almost never recovered, meaning that pursuers will never know if their quarry might still be alive and sipping margaritas on a beach somewhere.

Diplomatic necessity prohibits foreign prisoners from being held at San Rattan, though that means very little. More than a few unlawfully detained foreigners have vanished within the walls, forgotten by the outside world. In one infamous case, a U.C. gangster engaging in a routine banking transfer was arrested and sent to San Rattan before the mistake could be corrected. When Commonwealth officers arrived to transport him back home, they found he had been torn apart by his fellow inmates. The money he intended to exchange was never located — withdrawn from the bank shortly before his arrest and ultimately lining the pockets of the bank's corrupt manager and his cronies.

For all its fearsome reputation, few criminals ever see the inside of San Rattan. Those with sentences of less than life are furloughed to more humane prisons, and those who know they're being sent here sometimes kill themselves rather than endure its torments. Long-term inmates are survivors to the core, shaped by their environment into some of the harshest and most brutal men on the planet. The rest of the nation's underground lives in fear of being incarcerated there: it's their personal criminal boogey man, promising everlasting damnation to anyone stupid enough to get caught or arrogant enough to cross the wrong authorities.

Typical Guard

Attributes: Brains 4, Brawn 6, Build 7, Gut 6, Moxie 4, Smoothness 5.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 35.

Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl 6, Bureaucracy 2, Evasion 4, Firearms 8, Intimidation 6, Lore (Prison Society) 6, Melee 5, Perception 6, Streetwise 2.

Backgrounds: Marksmanship, Rugged.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 2, Officer of the Law 1.

Typical Inmate

Attributes: Brains 3, Brawn 8, Build 8, Gut 7, Moxie 3, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 40.

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 8, Evasion 7, Firearms 4, Intimidation 8, Melee 6, Perception 4, Sleight of Hand 7, Stealth 5, Streetwise 3.

Backgrounds: Alert, Huge, Mean Streets.

Profession: Street Tough 2.

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8) Banco de Santo Baltasar

Typical of the nation's airtight banking industry is this imposing specimen located on the main thoroughfare of Baltasar City. Its owners belong to the Baltasar Financial Group, one of the large corporations who effectively control the country. The bank is their pride and joy, a symbol of the security and privacy for which their nation's commerce is known. The huge vault is guarded by one of the strongest doors in the world, locked to the wall with twenty sealed shafts and encoded with a time lock that only the bank's three managers can open. The safety deposit boxes can only be moved under the presence of an armed guard, and while customers are granted extraordinary privacy when examining the contents, they must pass through a rigorous screening before being allowed onto the vault level. Bars and gates block all of the exits, and even the fire escapes are guarded in case a thief tries to make use of them.

Yet for all that, the bank has witnessed one of the nation's few incidents of robbery since the end of the war. A year ago, a daring team of bandits entered the facility and used tear gas to incapacitate the employees. The manager's wife had been kidnapped a few hours earlier, and they threatened to kill her right there on the bank floor if he didn't open the vault. All told, they got away with nearly \$100,000 in bonds and small bills. A massive police manhunt ensued; for nearly three weeks, the streets were crawling with officers searching madly for the perpetrators. It ended when riot squads cornered the gang in an isolated tire yard not far from the Canal. A ferocious fire-fight followed, claiming the lives of six policemen and all five members of the gang. The money was recovered: stained with the thieves' blood, but intact save for a few hundred dollars. The robbers were in the midst of dividing it up when the police came knocking.

Since then, the bank has taken extraordinary measures to increase its security. The guards have been doubled and personal bodyguards have been assigned to each of the managers and their families. A "panic button" has been installed in the manager's desk, allowing him to quietly alert the police whenever an intruder enters the premises. It's been enough to reassure the bank's customers... along with the fact that none of the infamous robbers survived long enough to spend their money.

Like many other things in Santo Baltasar, the bank's security disguises a monstrous hypocrisy, for most of the funds it stores are in fact stolen or illicitly gained. Commonwealth gangsters and Nuevo Dia drug kingpins all use the Banco de Santo Baltasar to store their money, as do wealthy shareholders in the nation's ruling corporations. The bank specializes in washing illicit funds through dummy accounts and the like, initiating convoluted transactions that render their custom-

ers' ill-got gains as pure as the driven snow. The local authorities do nothing, of course, and without jurisdiction, the NLEB and similar organizations can't touch what goes on here. That immunity makes the bank irresistible to those on the wrong side of the law.

The main floor has teller's windows and a series of offices for the junior bankers to work. The employees are drably-dressed and a trifle dull, but they know their business, and never make a mistake with their math. The customers are a colorful lot, ranging from local shopkeepers interested in investing their savings to wanted Commonwealth criminals wearing loud tropical shirts to draw attention from the briefcases handcuffed to their wrists. Comfortable couches are scattered about for those who need to wait, and the bank offers coffee and iced tea on a little counter in the corner. Important clients are fussed over with fawning adoration; some are attended to by the owners themselves. There are never less than ten security guards on duty at any given time, always alert, and always well armed. Since the robbery last year, the bank has taken no chances; the guards are all combat-trained and most have prior military experience. The upper floors are reserved for private meetings between the owners and "investors," and are usually off-limits to employees. Even the guards aren't allowed upstairs; the owners value their privacy too much to permit it. You can tell who the movers and shakers are at the bank by the gold key attached to their watch chains — the one that opens the barred doors to the building's only two staircases up.

Typical Bank Employee

Attributes: Brains 5, Brawn 4, Build 4, Gut 5, Moxie 4, Smoothness 6.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 20.

Skills: Bureaucracy 7, Craft (Banking) 8, Drive (Car) 2, Etiquette 6, Evasion 5, Fast Talk 3, Languages (English, Spanish), Lore (Banking) 8, Perception 6, Puzzles 4.

Backgrounds: Alert, Education, Small.

Profession: Blue Collar Worker 3.

NPCS

Nicholas Grendel, Accountant

Nicholas Grendel is a U.C. expatriate, living in Santo Baltasar for the last four years. He has established an extremely successful accounting practice, and routinely aids the country's elite in balancing their books. It's a tricky job: the nation's sordid dealings in market manipulation, illicit banking, and drug commerce leave most accounts a mess. Grendel and his company untangle the webs to his clients' satisfaction, and never speak a word about the things they notice in the process.

And they notice quite a bit. Grendel Accountancy includes among its clients the slimiest businessmen and political racketeers in the country, funneling skimmed profits, extortion funds, drug pay-offs, and flat-out bribes into clean accounts.



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He charges an arm and a leg for his services, but he's well worth the trouble. The reason he's acquired so many clients is that he's the only one with a reputation for unimpeachable trustworthiness. He has close ties with the nation's banks, and invests heavily in the shipping and mercantile interests near the Canal. His understanding of arbitrage allows him to disguise untold amounts of funds simply by switching the currency types under which they are declared. He also entertains foreign clients — those wishing to hide their money in Santo Baltasar, and who need a local to help navigate the financial waters. The nearby telegraph service keeps busy carrying messages to and from his offices.

The fees he collects are astronomical. In other circumstances, he might be tempted to bilk his clients for all he could, but in truth, it hardly matters. They are happy to pay what he charges, and he makes so much that any more would be unseemly. The accountants below him are kept honest as well; should any be caught bilking their customers, they will be promptly fired, and their name brought to the attention of the offending party. Grendel has worked hard to build up what he has, and he won't let it be compromised by some greedy flunky. He knows how to spend his money, too. His luxurious house overlooks the most picturesque part of the Canal; a huge pool comprises a recycling fountain along its southern edge, making the waters appear to spill over into those of the great waterway. His annual Canal Parties, in which he ferries his favorite clients up and down in a gigantic private yacht, has become the watchword for high-end soirees, and he often parties the night away at one of Baltasar City's swankiest nightclubs.

All of it is based on a fraud. In truth, Grendel came down here following a stint in prison, serving time for cooking a New Eden financier's books. He had been fleecing money from his firm for years, and when they found out, they arranged for him to take a fall. His time in Vineland Prison was harsh — far harsher than he had expected — and he left sporting several scars (both physical and emotional), and a hunger for respect which has never fully abated. Denied a license in the U.C., he came down here and re-invented himself as a world-class accountant, which helped his business attract exactly the sort of movers and shakers he desired.

He's a skilled liar, and can spin utterly convincing stories about his days among the upper crust in New Eden. His success has helped him maintain the delusion that he's recreating that city down here, lending a dash of glitz and glamour to the overheated tropics of Santo Baltasar. His clients love it, allowing his fictions to inflate their egos and pretend that their little banana republic is something much grander. Most of them know that it's probably a lie — Grendel was nothing

more than a middle-tier paper pusher in New Eden — but his lies are much more comforting than the dull, listless truth.

Grendel is a nondescript man in his mid forties, with curly brown hair and a charmingly cleft chin. He embroiders his initials on all his clothes and handkerchiefs, a symbol of vanity that covers up his still-shaky self-esteem. He's a mathematical genius, and his knack for creative accounting constantly finds new ways to shift, hide, reprocess, and transform money into legally pleasing forms. Few people can navigate the hills and valleys of Santo Baltasar's finances the way he can; he has inroads at every bank, and he knows the nation's elite circles like the back of his hand. If he could be convinced to serve as a guide, he could lead people to untold numbers of buried secrets. He speaks in clinical, matter-of-fact tones, though his natural charisma makes every word sound like the heights of drama. He loves telling stories, but he knows better than to mix details about his clients into them: what he carries in his head could have him killed many times over. He has no problems with his financial malfeasance, and indeed considers it an entitlement after those years in the pen. Though technically guilty of enough crimes to send him straight to San Rattan, he never worries about such things anymore. After all, the people who could send him there are all on his Christmas list.

Nicholas Grendel

Attributes: Brains 6, Brawn 5, Build 5, Gut 5, Moxie 8, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 25.

Skills: Appraise 7, Brawl 4, Bureaucracy 9, Craft (Accountancy) 8, Etiquette 6, Evasion 7, Fast Talk 10, Firearms 5, Forgery 8, Languages (English, Spanish), Lore (Financial Law) 9, Perception 7, Puzzles 6, Street-wise 6.

Backgrounds: Charismatic, Education, Lucky.

Profession: Gangster 1, Investigator 1, Wealthy 3, White Collar Worker 2.

Rafael Cristos, Police Detective

Santo Baltasar has no crystal ball squad — like most Borderland states, it abhors the use of sorcery — but it does have Rafael Cristos, a Baltasar City detective who specializes in magic-related cases. Though much more rare than in the U.C., magic-based incidents still take place here, especially near the centers of international commerce. Cristos is invariably the man tagged with hunting the miscreants down, and he's very good at what he does.



CHAPTER SIX: ELSEWHERE

Unbeknownst to anyone except his lieutenant, he's also a warlock himself. He began studying magic as a means of understanding his quarry, and soon began practicing it in the course of his work. He was careful and quiet, but it was just so easy to let the magic help out a little bit — to even the odds against the warlocks he was pursuing. He eventually let his lieutenant (an earnest man named Reynaldo Boca) in on his secret, though it may have meant prison. He couldn't keep it to himself forever, and he needed someone else to help conceal evidence of his abilities. Cristos did good work, and considering the number of corrupt policemen on the payroll, taking him to task for magic use seemed like the height of hypocrisy. So paperwork was altered, eyewitnesses were quieted, and Cristos received leeway to do what he had to do.

But there was more to it than that. Both Cristos and Boca despised the system in which they operated. They hated the double standard of Baltasar society, the open oppression, and the corruption through which they both swam like fish. At first Cristos' magic use felt like a small way to get back at that system — to quietly flaunt a forbidden power or ability. But as time went on, it occurred to them that they could do much more with such power. If they played their cards right, they might even start a revolution.

To that end, Cristos began committing secret acts of sabotage with his magic — usually holing ships or ruining cargo along the Canal, though he once incurred a rockslide which shut down ship travel for almost two days. He has also been seeking allies to assist him: reform-minded peasants who aren't above indulging in a little sorcery. Though some were reluctant to embrace an art which they felt would damn their souls, the more intellectually minded saw it as just another weapon. Through pamphlets and occasional lectures, he has tried to pass on what he knows to as many of them as he can. If enough flock to his side, he may be able to assemble a fifth column unseen since the days of the war.

He has recently received unexpected help in this arena. Funds from an anonymous source have appeared in his account, along with secret messages admonishing him to use them to help “ferment unrest.” Ever suspicious, he has investigated the source of this aid, but come up with nothing. All he knows is that the sender originates in Nuevo Dia, and that he doesn't belong to either the government or the loyalist fighters. From there, the trail goes cold. As skeptical as he is, however, it hasn't prevented him from using the money as best he can. His policeman's salary barely gives him enough to live on, and without the money, he would be hard-pressed to push his little movement forward.

In the meantime, he still has a substantial caseload. When magic-related crimes run dry, there's no shortage of homicides, robberies, beatings, muggings, and rapes to occupy his attention. Despite his “extracurricular activities,” he diligently applies himself to his cases, and his arrest record is better than any other detective in the department. Though his duties never set him against the powers that be (cases affecting the city's rulers fall to more compromised officers), he still feels like he's aiding the downtrodden with his work. Taking killers and drug runners off the streets cannot help but improve the lot of the common man.

As for the warlocks he hunts down, he certainly doesn't view them as brothers. He's hunting them for the crimes they commit, not their use of sorcery. Furthermore, when the time is right, his position will enable him to cover the tracks of his fellow conspirators, and ensure that magical crimes which further his cause will never be solved.

Cristos is darkly handsome, with straight black hair and a clean-shaven face that radiates intelligence. The heat and humidity of Baltasar City means that he usually dresses in shirt sleeves, and his tie is perennially loosened. He eschews the business shoes that his colleagues wear, preferring sneakers which assist him when pursuing a suspect. His large revolver is always carried in a holster in the small of his back. He's soft-spoken and rarely volunteers information, though his good looks come in handy when grilling a suspect. He's had a string of passing romantic flings, but nothing solid; it's often days before he returns to his small two-room apartment.

Rafael Cristos

Attributes: Brains 8, Brawn 5, Build 6, Gut 6, Moxie 7, Smoothness 7.

Wounds: 5, **Vigor:** 30.

Skills: Athletics 6, Brawl 5, Bureaucracy 7, Demolitions 5, Drive (Car, Truck) 5, Electricity 7, Evasion 6, Fast Talk 5, Firearms 6, Gravity 5, Languages (English, Spanish), Lore (Magic Use) 8, Perception 8, Pick Lock 5, Puzzles 7, Stealth 5, Streetwise 6, Tensile Energy 5.

Backgrounds: Alert, Charismatic, Fanaticism, Magical Aptitude.

Profession: Investigator 2, Officer of the Law 2, Rogue Scientist 2.

CAMPAIGNS IN THE BORDERLANDS

Latin America has always played a role in *noir* films. *Touch of Evil* was set in a seedy border town, while *Out of the Past* and *The Lady From Shanghai* both featured extended sojourns in tropical locales. Batista's Cuba was an historic haven for American gangsters, and the Cuban Revolution played a big part in *The Godfather, Part II*. *The Wages of Fear* and its American remake *Sorcerer* were both set entirely south of the border, while contemporary movies like *Blow* used Latin America as a pivotal point in their plots. Though set almost exclusively in the Unified Commonwealth, *The Edge of Midnight* universe wouldn't feel complete without its own darker version of Latin America to tempt and trouble its characters. Like the cities to the north, they are more overtly corrupt than their real world counterparts: the worst elements distorted and warped without the balance of the best.

THE NAKED CITY

In simplest terms, the Borderlands represent the anonymous “elsewhere” in *The Edge of Midnight*: an area which is not shrouded by the mysterious fog blocking the remainder of the world, and yet is decidedly not a part of the Unified Commonwealth. As such, it has two main permutations in an *Edge of Midnight* campaign: the Alien and the Escape.

The *Alien* refers to a sense of otherness, a world where the rules you understand no longer apply. Things work differently in the Borderlands: the corruption is more open and the schisms between the entitled and the impoverished are more easily seen. The natives converse in a foreign tongue and practice strange customs. Visitors feel out of place, even more so than in the U.C., and danger could literally come from every direction. The politics are unstable, the power brokers more transient and insecure. It is unfamiliar ground to the characters — ground that could open up and swallow them at any time.

From a role-playing standpoint, the Borderlands can help reestablish that sense of alienation for a campaign that may have lost it. If a setting is becoming too comfortable — if the city in which the characters dwell feels too well-known — then an excursion to the Borderlands can help shake things up a bit. The same threats exist, but they now wear strange faces, and the characters don’t have the advantage of being on their home turf anymore. The Borderlands can also be used to throw an unexpected twist in the characters’ plans; perhaps a gangster they’re working with wants to open a casino in Iberana, or a corrupt cop they’re trying to nail has connections to smugglers in Nuevo Dia. They may have to travel south and involve themselves in such operations, or even open new avenues of their own, to get what they need. The ramifications of such a journey could send them begging for a return ticket to the U.C., and any enemies they make down south could easily come back to haunt them in the future.

The *Escape*, on the other hand, is the exact opposite of the Alien. In this instance, the Borderlands is seen as a place of peace and security, far away from the grasping hands of one’s enemies. The sun is warm and inviting, and the beaches go on forever. The U.C. has no jurisdiction down here, and the infrastructure is still fairly undeveloped, making it possible for someone to disappear and stay gone. Wanted criminals look to the Borderlands as the only refuge they have left, while scheming thieves see it as the place to spend their money after the mythical Last Big Score.

In this sense, the Borderlands should be as ephemeral as anywhere else on the globe. It’s a pipe dream — a place of rest and peacefulness that never really exists. Those who yearn for it may have experienced the countryside only once, as a fleeting memory to which they cling amid increasing desperation. Those who get there find that their sense of persecution has not abated; they’re constantly on the run, looking over their shoulder for signs of pursuit which haven’t diminished with the change in locales. Even those without such concerns can have a whole new set of worries crop up. A revolt in Iberana, a crossed gangster in Belatacan, and suddenly that pleasant dream of sipping margaritas on the seashore will go up in a puff of smoke.

In campaign terms, the Escape can be represented in two parts. The initial experience with the Borderlands should be pleasant, idyllic, and calm: a much-needed break from the party’s usual activity. Perhaps they engage in a steamy romance, or undertake a local crime with ridiculous ease. They may deposit money in a Santo Baltasar bank, or win big in one of Iberana’s casinos. The experience should emphasize how wonderful the Borderlands can be: what a balm it is from the problems and tension of the Unified Commonwealth.

With the seed in place, the second part comes into play when (or if) the characters wish to get back. Returning to that state of happiness — re-experiencing the fulfillment they felt while south of the border — becomes an overarching goal... one that likely cannot be achieved. In such circumstances, reaching the Borderlands successfully likely means the end of the campaign, with adventures geared solely towards escaping their present circumstances for it. Can the PCs get out of town with their winnings before the cops catch on? Will the Drago mob find them before they reach the border? Reaching safety in Belatacan or Nuevo Dia can make the satisfying conclusion to a lengthy campaign, while failure can emphasize the sense of fatalism and entrapment, as the dream of happier days slips away forever.

Of course, there’s no reason why a transfer to the Borderlands can end things, or indeed why a campaign set entirely in the Borderlands can’t work as well as one set in the U.C. The corporations and government are no less corrupt here, and the little people still have dreams that might lead them in any number of dark directions. It may be that the characters move heaven and earth to reach some nice sandy beach, only to find that the ghosts of their past have a longer reach than they anticipated. Nothing hammers the sense of ephemeral escape more than being snatched out of paradise for “one more job,” and nothing brings home the sense of alienation more than arriving at a refuge only to find that it’s just as bad as the pit you left.

Those who start out in the Borderlands may wish to free their nation of its current oppressive regime or rid it of crime, just as their U.C. counterparts do. And of course, the hazy jungle wastes in the southern end of the Borderlands foster strange questions in the right minds — minds which might easily turn to fellow members of the Few for answers. Player characters can hail from the Borderlands as easily as anywhere else, and may burn with the same desire to make a difference.

Regardless of how (or if) you use the Borderlands in your campaign, it should contain its own unique identity and sense of place. The four nations dealt with here are similar, but not alike, and they are all *very* different from the large cities of the U.C. Which one you choose to set your adventures in will have a big impact on the character and flavor of your campaign. They should be developed carefully, and tailored to be refreshing and memorable... not just the same old streets with snakes and ponchos.

APPENDIX NEW RULES



™In this city, you have to pay attention.
In this city, things are happening
all the time, all over the place,
and you don't have to be a detective
to smell evil in the wind.}

- Ed McBain,
The Big Bad City

NEW RULES

The following pages contain a few new rules pertinent to other areas of this sourcebook. They mostly entail new professions of the type encountered in the U.C., or new backgrounds which tie in to some of the book's earlier chapters.

NEW BACKGROUNDS

Rules for backgrounds can be found on pages 25–29 of *The Edge of Midnight* core rulebook.

Borderlands Knowledge

You're a native of the Borderlands, or were raised in surroundings with a strong connection to Borderlands culture. As such, you are used to a more rough-and-tumble standard of living than most people in the U.C.

- You know one person in the Borderlands who owes you a favor. Once per session, if you are in the Borderlands and in a situation where he or she could logically help you, you may call upon him or her for aid. He or she might have a spare room where you and your companions can lie low, or have access to the proper papers which might get you through a specific province. Note, however, that retainers seldom carry unique or expensive objects. One might, for example, have a backup gun or a few hundred pesos, but he's unlikely to have the Hope Diamond or a brick of gold. The exact nature of the contact and his or her relationship to you should be worked out with the GM. Note that the contact can only aid you while you are in the Borderlands... and likely only in the particular nation where he or she lives.

- You gain 2 additional points in the Streetwise skill.
- You gain 3 additional skill points that may only be used to learn a foreign language (or languages).

Dead to the World

You are legally dead. All official records indicate that you are deceased, and there's even a grave with a tombstone somewhere if you wish it. This makes it very easy to keep your identity secret, though it can be troublesome if someone you care about wishes to contact you.

- The TN of all Bureaucracy, Etiquette, and Streetwise rolls that are intended to track or locate you is automatically raised by 5.

A Face in the Crowd

No matter where you're at, you look like you belong there.

- You gain a +5 bonus to any Evasion roll made while in a large crowd (GM's discretion).

Voudoun Warlock

While your magic is based on the same physical loopholes as more typical warlocks, you and those like you have cloaked them in the trappings of *voudoun*, positing them as a form of religion rather than science. According to *voudoun*, the effects of magic are caused by *loa* (spirits), who either possess the practitioner during ritual, or manifest the magic at the practitioner's behest. Whether you truly believe in *voudoun* or not is up to you, but *voudoun* warlocks have found that practicing magic is much more difficult without the trappings of their religion.

Prerequisite: Magical Aptitude background.

- Provided you have access to the right materials and take a moment to chant the proper incantation (requiring one simple action for each magical effect generated), the TN for you to generate any magic effect is reduced by 1. In all other circumstances, the TN for you to generate any magic effect is increased by 1.

PROFESSIONS (ADVANCED)

Advanced professions work exactly like basic professions as outlined in pages 29–34 of *The Edge of Midnight* core rulebook. The only difference is that they require a basic profession as a prerequisite before they can be taken. They represent more developed forms of such professions, allowing characters to focus their abilities into a specific field or similar endeavor.

Note that one need not possess a certain advanced profession in order to practice it. Like regular professions, they represent the way your character does things, rather than the specific occupation he or she holds.

Assemblyman/City Councilman

These politicians have reached the heights of elected office. They either sit on a city council, controlling one of the U.C.'s great metropolises, or they act as representatives to the people at the National Assembly in Nova Roma. Either way, they are powerful individuals whose will is not easily thwarted.

Prerequisite: Politician profession.

- Once per session per level, when the Assemblyman/City Councilman makes a Bureaucracy roll, the player may roll a second time and keep whichever result he prefers.

Bartender

Bartenders know how to sling drinks... and keep one ear to the ground when it comes to rumors and news of the street.

Prerequisite: Blue Collar Worker profession.

- Once per session per level, by spending one evening at his duties, the Bartender can overhear one piece of information which he finds interesting or useful. For example, he may learn the name of the police investigator handling a particular murder, or the hideout of a gang wanted for armed robbery. The GM determines the exact nature of the information, as well as the customer who reveals it (and how).

APPENDIX: NEW RULES

Bum

Bums form the faceless masses of hobos, wanderers, and homeless vagrants crowding the streets of the U.C.'s cities. Their hard lives have taught them many survival skills which can come in handy at the most unexpected time.

Prerequisite: Street Tough profession.

- Once per session per level, a Bum may attempt to make a skill roll for which he does not possess the proper tools. For instance, he may attempt to pick a lock even though he does not possess a set of proper lock picks, or repair an engine even though he doesn't possess any mechanic's tools. This even applies to combat skills, with jury-rigged shivs and zip guns in the place of regular weapons (stats for both can be found on page 35 of *The Edge of Midnight* core rulebook). The Bum must still have the applicable skill in order to attempt the roll, and all standard modifications for success and failure still apply.

Cabbie/Chauffeur

Cabbies/Chauffeurs drive a cab or a limousine for a living. The experience gives them a special expertise behind the wheel, and also makes them extremely familiar with the streets of the city in which they work.

Prerequisite: Blue Collar Worker profession.

- Select one city in the Unified Commonwealth. The Cabbie/Chauffeur may never become lost or disoriented while driving on the streets of that city.
- When making a contested skill roll in an automobile (i.e., while being chased or tailed), the Cabbie/Chauffeur gains a +2 bonus per level to the roll.

Debutante

Debutantes are newcomers to the social scene — young and dashing recipients of great wealth who are just beginning to enjoy their privileged position.

Prerequisite: Wealthy profession.

- Once per session per level, a Debutante may treat a failed or partially successful Etiquette roll as a full success.

Doctor

Doctors are trained MDs and are qualified to prescribe medicine, perform surgery, and the like.

Prerequisite: Academic profession.

- The cost to purchase the Medicine skill is reduced by 1 point per level (minimum 1).
- Income: Doctors are well-paid; you pull in \$75 per week per level, and have an accumulated savings of \$1,000 per level.

Gambler

Gamblers have learned how to win at games of chance, using their acumen to make a living at card games, dice games, and the like. They can be found at high roller casinos, underground poker games... wherever there's a game to be had.

Prerequisite: Street Tough profession.

- Gamblers make their money by knowing when to walk away from the table. Once per session per level, a Gambler may eliminate the results of a failed skill roll related to gambling. It is as if the roll were never made, the bet never laid down. The Gambler may choose to make the roll again if he wishes (and live with the results, if he is unable to effect another re-roll).

Jockey

Jockeys make a living riding horses, and have experience in the often-compromised world of horse racing.

Prerequisite: Athlete profession, Small background.

- Once per session per level, a Jockey may treat a failed or partially successful Drive or Athletics roll as a full success, provided that roll pertains to riding a horse.



THE NAKED CITY

Lawyer

Lawyers argue cases before a judge, as well as representing their clients in other legal and business dealings. Some are crusading district attorneys, while others serve corrupt unions and even more corrupt criminal syndicates.

Prerequisite: White Collar Worker profession.

- Once per session per level, a lawyer can treat a failed or partially successful attempt to bribe someone (Moxie + Fast Talk) as a full success.
- Once per session per level, a lawyer can arrange to have an arrested individual released from jail. This doesn't mean that the charges against the individual are dropped, and they will still have to face trial when the time comes. But for now, they are free with no questions asked.

Movie Star

Movie stars are icons of the silver screen, known for their performances in motion pictures of all varieties.

Prerequisite: Performer profession or Wealthy profession.

- When making a skill roll using either the Etiquette or Perform skill, the Movie Star gains a +1 bonus per level to the roll.

Reporter

Reporters work for newspapers, radio stations, or other forms of mass media. They can be extremely influential when they turn their attentions towards a particular cause or person.

Prerequisite: Investigator profession.

- Once per session per level, the Reporter can temporarily raise or lower a character's Moxie or Moxie-based skill by 1 point. The effect lasts for one week plus one day per level, and requires three days of notice (in-game time) in order to properly craft a story. This ability can affect both PCs and NPCs, but no single character's Moxie score or Moxie-based skill can be raised or lowered by more than 1 point at any given time by this ability.

Singer/Musician

Singers and Musicians have learned to ply their skills on stage, swaying the emotions of crowds with their powerful lyrics or musical rhythms.

Prerequisite: Performer profession.

- By performing in a nightclub or similar venue, a Singer/Musician can influence anyone who is listening. For an hour after the performance, anyone attempting a contested Fast Talk, Etiquette, or Streetwise roll against someone who heard the Singer/Musician play gains a bonus equal to the Singer/Musician's level to the roll. The performance must not appear forced or artificial, and the listener must hear it willingly for this ability to have any effect.

Snakehead

Snakeheads make a living smuggling human beings across the line between the Borderlands and the U.C. Usually, it entails bringing Borderlands residents into the Commonwealth illegally. Occasionally, it means sneaking wanted fugitives out of the U.C. to (presumed) safety in the Borderlands. Either way, they are very good at hiding people in inconspicuous places, and know enough safe houses, sweat shops, and unseen drop zones to make the endeavor worthwhile.

Prerequisite: Street Tough profession.

- Once per session per level, a Snakehead may temporarily impart a single skill that he possesses to another person. That person may then choose to make his or her next appropriate skill roll as if the Snakehead were making it — with the Snakehead's pertinent skill and attribute ranks instead of his or hers. The skills with which the Snakehead may use this ability are limited to the following: Contortions, Disguise, Evasion, Fast Talk, Sleight of Hand, Stealth, and Streetwise. This ability may not affect any other skill, and the effects last only for a single skill roll per use of this ability. The Snakehead must spend two rounds in earnest discussion with the other person — taking no other actions — in order for this ability to work. There is no limit between the time the Snakehead speaks to the other person in this manner, and the time when the other person makes the skill roll; he or she is presumed to have retained the knowledge in the interim.

Underground Division

These policemen belong to New Eden's vaunted Underground Division, trained in pursuit and crime detection in the tunnels beneath the city. Alternately, they belong to a similar force or have a similar assignment in another city (GM's discretion).

Prerequisite: Officer of the Law template

- The cost to purchase the Contortions skill, the Perception skill, and the Stealth skill is reduced by 1 point per level (minimum 1).

Union Boss

Union bosses stand at the head of the labor movement, fighting for the rights of the working men and women beneath them. They are also major players in the political game, taking advantage of kick-backs, corruption, and backroom deals to get what they want.

Prerequisite: Blue Collar Worker profession or Politician profession.

- Once per session per level, a Union Boss may call for and receive aid from 1-6 union thugs. These men do not normally aid the character except when pursuing union business, and can only be used for a single scene, at a single location.