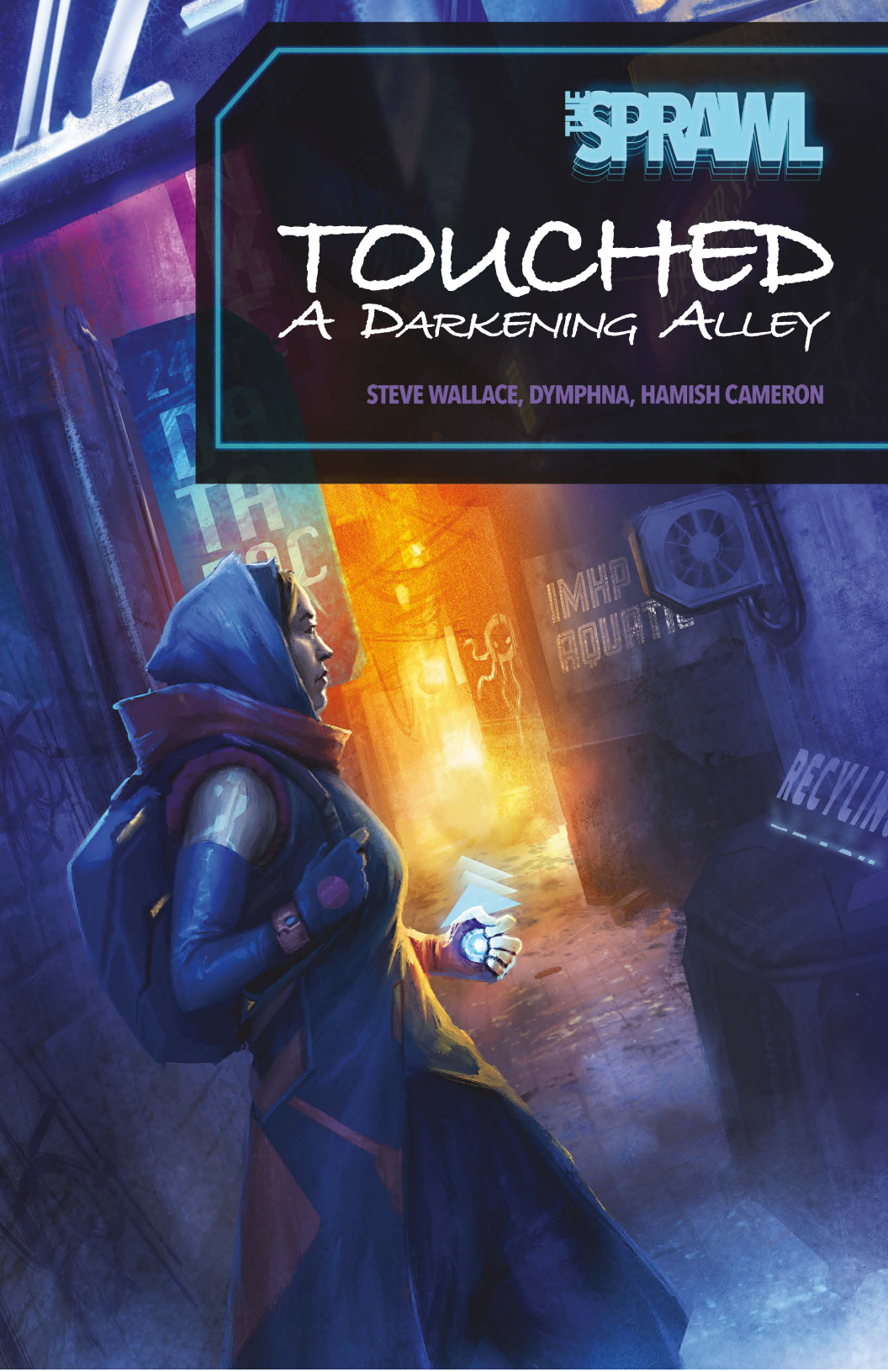


THE SPRAWL

TOUCHED

A DARKENING ALLEY

STEVE WALLACE, DYPHNA, HAMISH CAMERON



TOUCHED

A DARKENING ALLEY

Steve Wallace, DYMPHNA, Hamish Cameron

A DARK MAGIC AND HORROR SETTING FOR *THE SPRAWL* RPG

ARDENS LUDERE



The Sprawl: Touched, A Darkening Alley v1.0

Writing // Steve Wallace, J. Dymphna Coy, Hamish Cameron

Editing // Hamish Cameron

Original *The Sprawl* Layout and Graphic Design // Aaron Brown

Touched Layout, Interior Art, and Copyediting // Dana Cameron

Cover Art // Dawn Carlos [dawnccarlosart.com]

ISBN (PDF): 978-0-473-46619-0

ISBN (Print): 978-0-473-46618-3

My thanks to the Kickstarter Backers

© 2018 Hamish Cameron

CONTENTS

A RIFT-TOUCHED WORLD..... **00001**

THE SICK GET SICKER..... **00003**

THE RICH GET RICHER..... **00009**

..... Miskatonic Amalgamated, DMG Inc, IMHP Aquatic

THE STRANGE GET STRANGER..... **00015**

..... Rifts & Rift Moves, Horrors & Horror Clocks, Artifacts

THE WEIRD GET WEIRDER..... **00021**

..... Eldritch Trauma & Coping Mechanisms

THE TOUGH GET TOUGHER..... **00029**

..... Antiquarian Playbook, Antiquarians in *The Sprawl*

THE MEAN GET MEANER..... **00035**

..... Rituals, Touch Stat, Spell-Craft

RUNNING THE ALLEYS..... **00039**

A RIFT-TOUCHED WORLD

"The shit-holes are getting shittier, and no one wants to talk about it. The town that disappeared, that video of a lady giving birth to what looked like an octopus, or the leaked corp files about a continuous human scream emanating from Jupiter. Why aren't the news feeds talking about this? What are the corps hiding?"


—Antonio Alvarez, editor-at-large THE CANT

Touched is a series of dark magic settings for Hamish Cameron's cyberpunk tabletop role-playing game *The Sprawl*. The first in the series is *A Darkening Alley*, to be followed by *Touched Prime*.

A Darkening Alley is a low-magic setting for *The Sprawl*. Weird, magical rifts are starting to crack open and humanity is beginning to feel the effects. Strange happenings are becoming more and more common. The street-side prophets are starting to sound a bit reasonable. The corporations smell power and have started pouring a lot of money into investigating and documenting these occurrences—that's where you come in.

Magical abilities become available to players through basic advances. Because players do not start with magical abilities, you can easily merge this setting with an ongoing campaign.

A Darkening Alley introduces the new **Antiquarian** playbook.



>>>...\run>artifact01.exe...>>>>

THE SICK GET SICKER

CONTINUE? [Y/N]



1965

In 1965, Nixon had turned his attention to the perceived threat of Soviet space superiority. He expanded the CCA to include a clause allowing for a twenty-year exclusive lease on all mineral rights for the first corporation able to successfully land a man on the moon. Many corporations, fat from their South American affiliates, poured millions of dollars into the endeavor.

1970

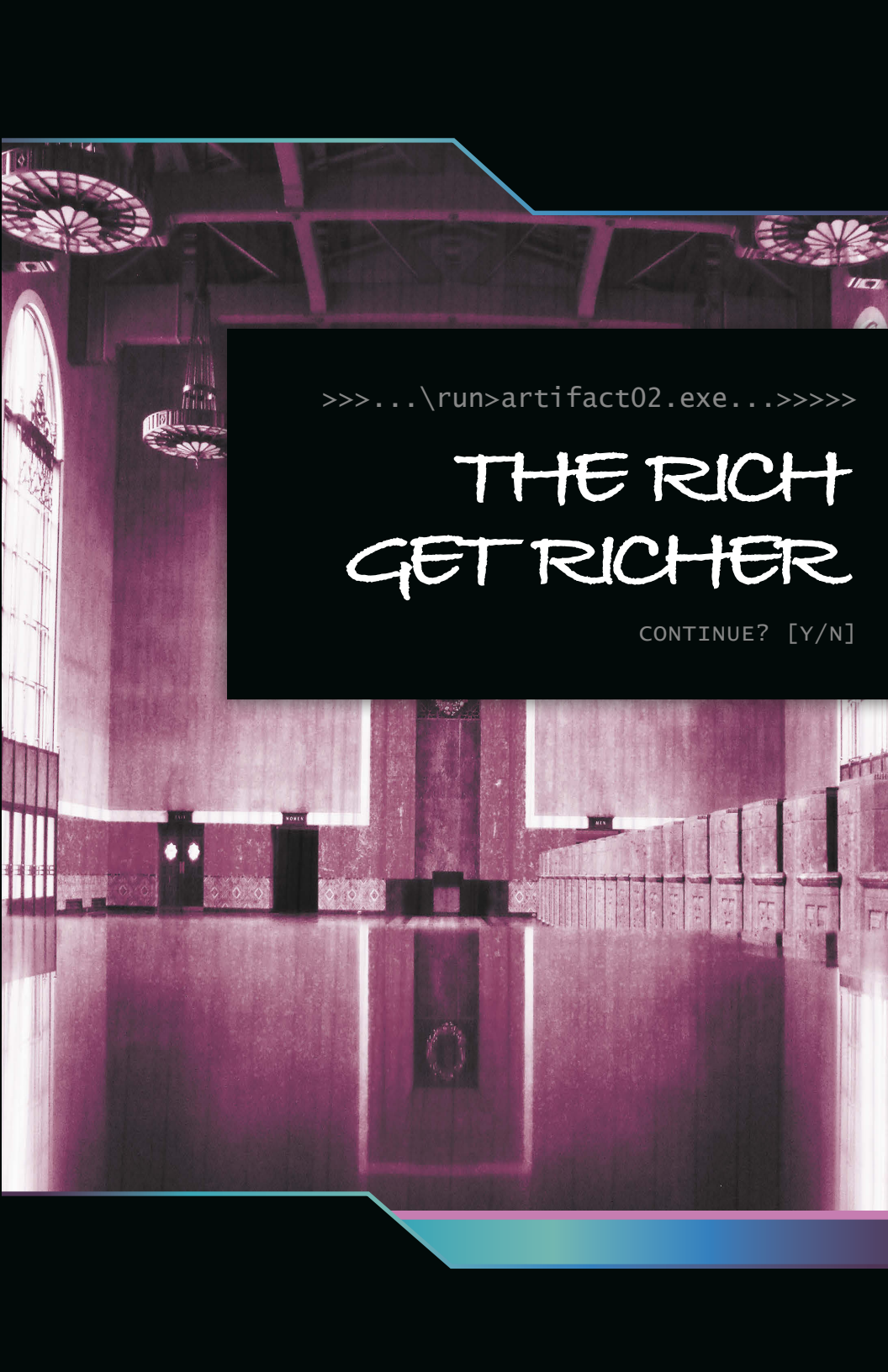
By 1970, Miskatonic Amalgamated was able to not only land the first man on the moon, Buzz Aldrin, but to begin the construction of the first moon base, Asteria 1. Over the next ten years, Miskatonic Amalgamated focused heavily on exploiting their lease. This work ushered in the age of advanced computers and the first brain/computer interfaces and cyberware.

The 70's saw a massive surge in corporate power within US borders. State level power became nearly inconsequential as corporations began to buy governors and senators. Federal level positions didn't fare any better—corporate money was simply too powerful. By 1972, Nixon was able to call in enough favors with the corporations to have the 22nd Amendment overturned, and he subsequently ran for and won his third term as President. The following years saw an unprecedented growth of technology. Unfettered by regulations or moral codes, and with massive surpluses of cash and natural resources, the corporations raced to outdo each other. Computers, cars, cyberware, weapons, food, entrainment—everything became faster and more ostentatious.

It's now 1985, and all of this advancement has come at great cost to basic freedoms, human lives and ecosystems. The cities have sprawled out into multi-state behemoths eating everything in their paths. The New York Sprawl stretches from Old New York down all the way south to Washington DC and as far west as Hershey, Pennsylvania. The New England Sprawl covers most of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Southern Maine. The Eerie Sprawl encompasses the entire lake shore, including Toronto, Detroit, Cleveland and Toledo, and as far south as Pittsburgh. Dozens of similar sprawls developed across the globe. While a lot of the folks living in these hemorrhaging megalopolitan organisms have relatively normal lives, down in the gutter it's kill-or-be-killed. Corporations are waging a constant war with each other, with mercurial allegiances and even more mercurial objectives, and they're using the folks in the gutters, the operatives, to do it.

In the past year, the intensity of this war has picked up. You've been noticing that the jobs have been getting stranger and stranger. There's something going on, something dark and weird, something that has broken a lot of folks you once knew to be as hard as nails. Artifacts have become a big business for some reason. You've been working with academic-types on runs far more often—folks who can shoot but also read Sumerian, that sort of type. Maybe it's not for you to understand. After all, the pay is still good. Who cares if one corporation wants more statues than another, right?

The matrix is lit up with weird happenings that those in the know have dubbed Events. The corporations are sending operatives to these Event sites on the regular and, from what you've been hearing around the bars, the survival rates are pretty low. The folks who have come back are a bit... different. Just seems to be a lot more broken-down operatives huddled in the corners of the low-rent dives these days. It's getting dark. Still, you need that cred.



>>>...\run>artifact02.exe...>>>>

THE RICH GET RICHER

CONTINUE? [Y/N]



DMG INC.

DMG Inc. is one of the largest owners of land, buildings and mineral rights in the greater New England Sprawl. Founded in the early 1900s, the group made its early fortune on the instability of Eastern European and African governments. Whenever there was a war, coup or other instability event, they would rush in to secure land and mineral rights. These buy-ups led to massive profits, as rare minerals became critical to the technological advancement in the late 20th century. DMG Inc. bought out most of the larger chip manufacturers so that they could own the entire processor supply chain.

Recently, DMG Inc. has accelerated their land acquisitions; while seemingly random to the outside observer, those in the know realize these acquisitions are almost exclusively related to the Events.

CORPORATE STRENGTHS:

- Mineral Acquisitions and Sales
- Advanced Processor Technology
- Advanced AI

CORPORATE MOVES:

- Deploy Advanced AI
- Intervene in a Rival's Affairs
- Weaponize Advanced Mining Equipment

IMHP Aquatic is a large aqua farming consortium on the coast of the New England Sprawl. The algae grown by IMHP Aquatic is used in thousands of foods as a protein base and binder. This deep integration into the world food supply has led IMHP Aquatics stock to soar over the past thirty years; they are now one of the most valuable corporations in the world. These massive profits have allowed the corporation to diversify into other, more esoteric, endeavors. Its board, composed of a mysterious group of members who are rarely seen in public, has focused aggressively on undersea resource gathering and excavation in the past ten years.

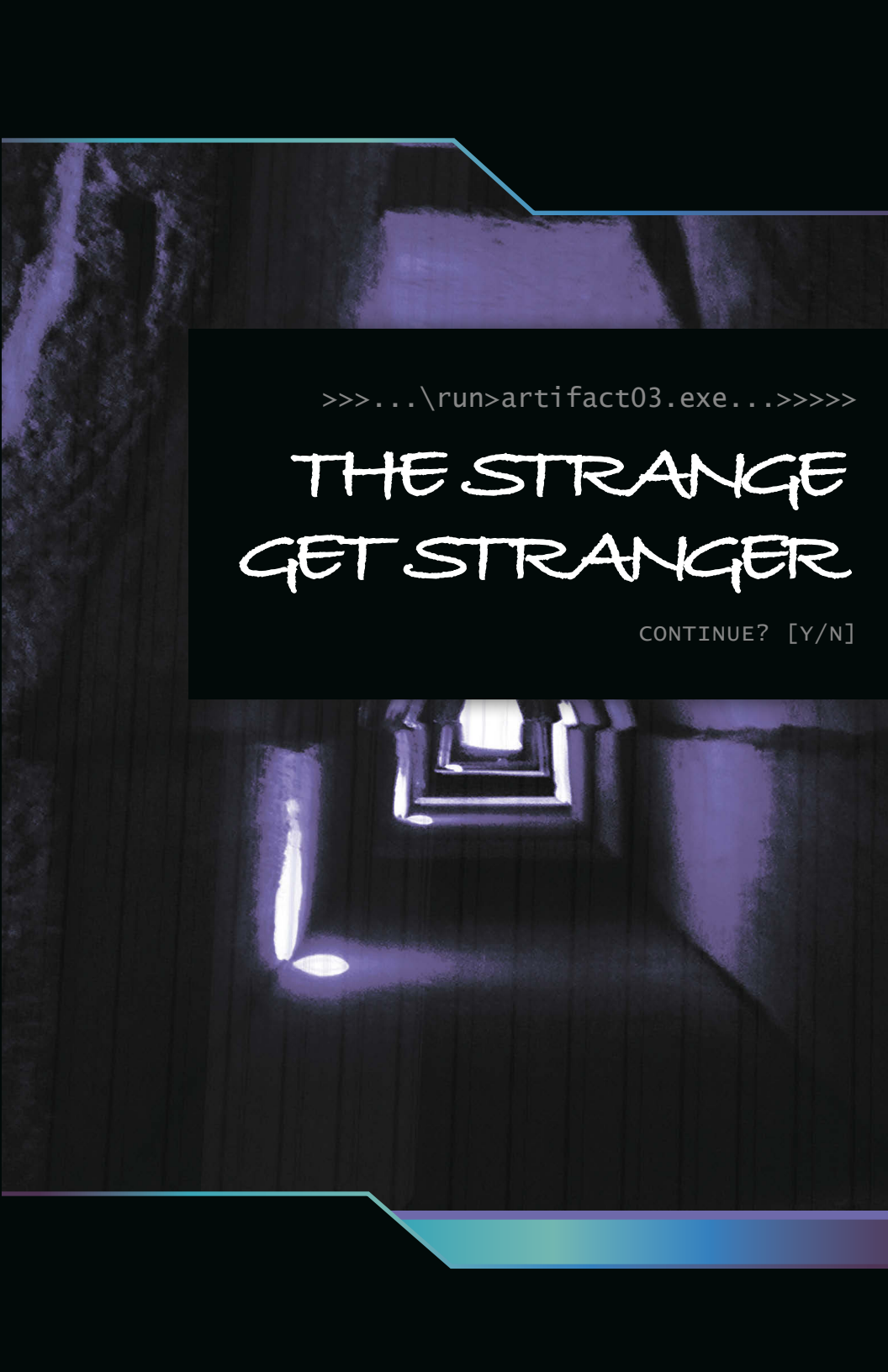
While there have not been any significant public announcements, many analysts have noted that year over year the funding for the associated departments seems to have grown exponentially.

CORPORATE STRENGTHS:

- Algae Growth and Harvesting
- Undersea Excavation
- Undersea Mining

CORPORATE MOVES:

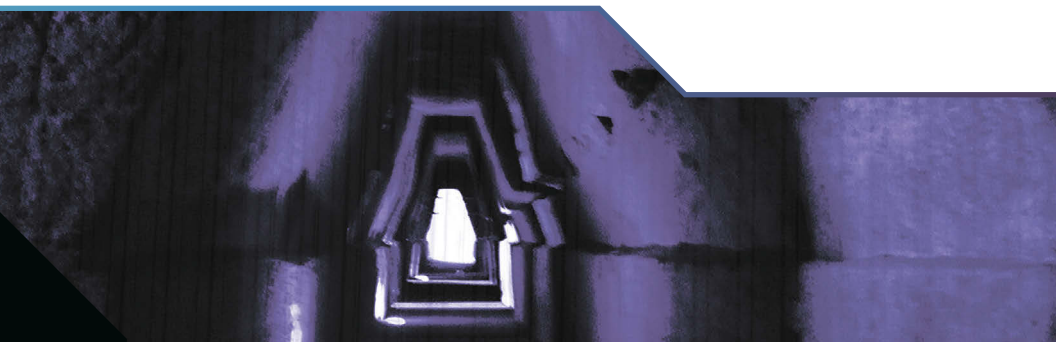
- Deploy Algae-based Toxin
- Perform Aggressive Excavation
- Deploy Capital to Interfere with a Competitor

The background of the entire page is a dark, atmospheric scene. It appears to be a tunnel or a series of nested rectangular frames, possibly a window or a doorway, receding into the distance. A bright, glowing blue light source is visible at the far end of the tunnel, casting a long, soft glow. The walls and floor of the tunnel are dark and textured, with some highlights from the light source. The overall mood is mysterious and suspenseful. The text is overlaid on this scene.

>>>...\run>artifact03.exe...>>>>>

THE STRANGE GET STRANGER

CONTINUE? [Y/N]



HORRORS

Horrors are rift-based entities that have taken interest in our world. Their motives are beyond our comprehension and their powers are beyond imagining. If you find yourself in their path, it's best to run away as fast as you can. Those who have faced some facet of a **Horror** are often left mentally and physically broken. Unfortunately, throughout *A Darkening Alley* more and more of your jobs will put you right smack in the middle of some **Horror's** schemes.

Horrors are rarely the centerpiece of a mission. Think of them as the winter storm, not the bear. They are a danger the operatives cannot hope to stop and can only hope to avoid or find shelter from. If they are caught in a **Horror's** path, the impact will be weird, horrific and likely catastrophic.

HORROR CLOCK

Throughout the game, a move may trigger the creation or advancement of a **Horror Clock**. A **Horror Clock** tracks the machinations of a rift-based entity directly or indirectly involved with the current mission. Create a **Horror Clock** in the same manner you create any other clock in the game. As a **Horror Clock** advances, increasingly weird manifestations of the **Horror's** influence will begin to intrude on the characters' reality.

When the clock advances to 2100 or beyond, those shadows at the edge of reality will start to manifest with increasing frequency—many will provoke **Eldritch Trauma**. When a **Horror Clock** reaches 2300, the players will be confronted with a servant of the **Horror** whose presence will directly influence the mission. When the clock reaches 0000, the **Horror's** current machination will be complete, intervening in the world in a way that is an immediate problem or danger to the characters. The nature of this intervention will vary based on your story, but it will be direct, meaningful and undeniably otherworldly. Under most circumstances, it will trigger an **Eldritch Trauma** roll.

Artifacts are historical objects tainted by the rifts. They can be anything from a piece of Assyrian pottery used in an ancient cult ritual to the gun that killed Hitler. Artifacts are used to power **Rituals** and **Spells**. Artifacts may be bought from certain Antiquarian shops, stolen from wealthy collectors, robbed from the graves of the long dead, or acquired via certain moves.

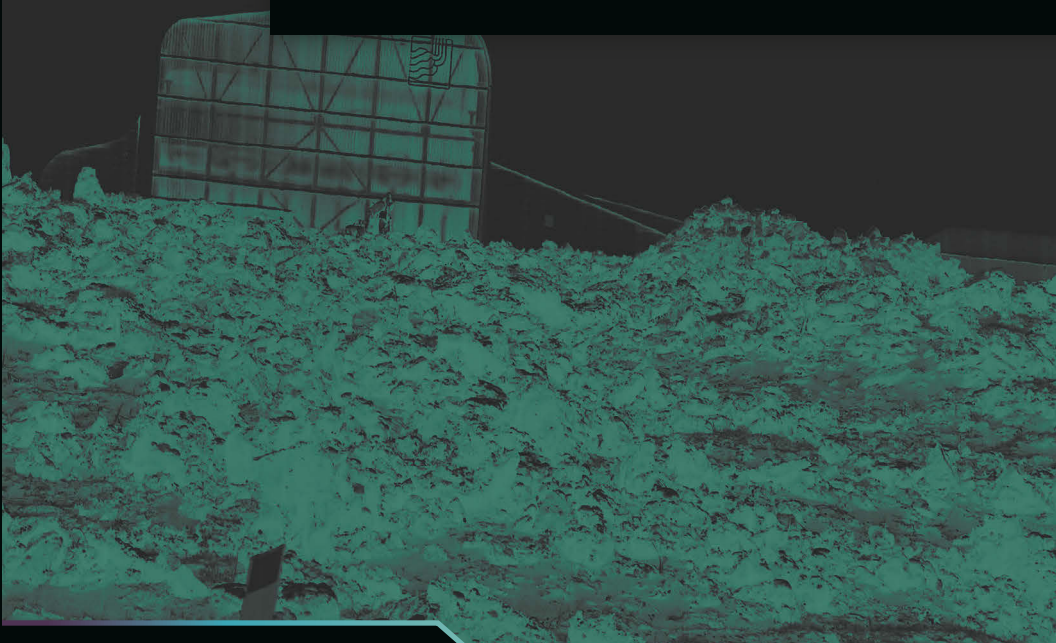
Touched uses a special kind of hold, [artifact], which works like [intel] or [gear]. When you receive [artifact], you can immediately describe what it is or wait until you need to use it and describe it at that time. Antiquarians usually have a few [artifacts] on hand at any given time.

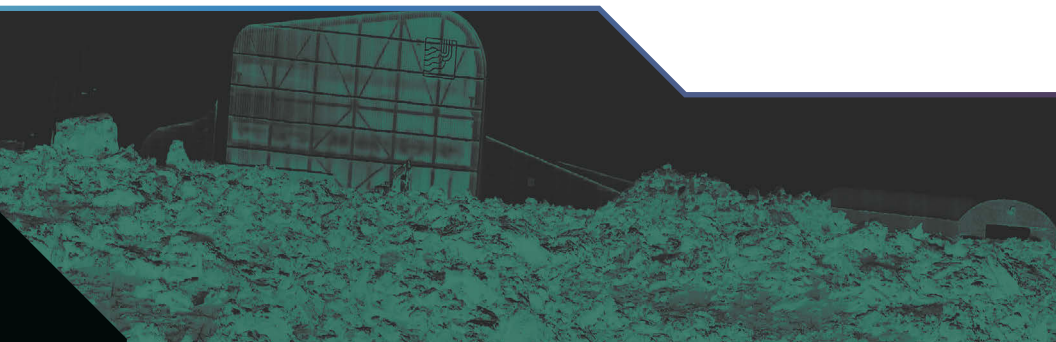
Equipment, including weapons, can also have the tag *+artifact*. This means that the item is magically significant in some way and can be used in **Rituals** that require the sacrifice of [artifacts].

>>>...\run>artifact04.exe...>>>>>

THE WEIRD GET WEIRDER

CONTINUE? [Y/N]





Note that the “-1 to all moves” applies to the harm move. Physical wounds sometimes seem less important when your mind is fixated on more pressing concerns.

Deep in the heart of an IMHP Aquatic aquaculture farm, Zelia watches with growing horror as the contents of an algae vat swirls into a whirlpool, folds in on itself, and falls through the bottom of reality, offering a vision of distant stars. She has a Touch stat of +1 and the first two boxes on her Trauma Track are marked. She rolls a 7 on the dice, adds one for her Touch stat, and subtracts two because the second marked box on the Trauma Track says “take -2 to Eldritch Trauma”, for a final result of 6 (7+1-2). She chooses another Behaviour, marks the third box on her Trauma Track (she no longer has -2 to Eldritch Trauma, but instead has -1 to *all* moves), and waits for the MC to make a move.

Eldritch Trauma


When you face an eldritch creature or force from the beyond the rifts, roll Touch. If you don't have Touch, roll at -1.

10+: your mind rationalises the horror. Lower your Trauma Track by one

7-9: you can only cope with the otherworldly horror by engaging in one of your Coping Mechanisms. Mark a Behaviour from one of the lists associated with your Coping Mechanisms

6-: the sense of otherworldly horror is too great to be overcome. Mark a Behaviour from one of the lists associated with your Coping Mechanisms. Advance your Trauma Track. The MC will make a move

Behaviours act as the keywords in a special directive. When you have a Behaviour marked, you gain an additional personal directive:

 **When a Behaviour hinders the mission, mark experience.**

Behaviours don't always hinder the mission when they come up. Coping mechanisms and behaviours (whether permanent or not) are aspects of a person's personality or affect, and like any aspect of a character's experience or existence, they are part of how we as a table determine fictional positioning.

This is *not* a space to grant "special powers" to the traumatised; rather, this is an encouragement to take a broad view of the ways that some manifestations of these behaviours and coping mechanisms can impact the life of the the person experiencing them in-person or second-hand.

RECOVERY

At the end of a mission, remove one of your marked Behaviours and unmark one of the boxes in your Trauma Track.

COPING MECHANISMS

Each of the five Coping Mechanisms has an associated list of Behaviours.

AVOIDANCE

- » Keep calm when it is dangerous to do so (and not merely inappropriate)
- » Insist that other people remain calm when it is wholly inappropriate to do (e.g., "you're overreacting" to a legitimate threat)
- » Ignore a problem until it is too late
- » Lie about something dangerous, because other people would be justifiably upset if they knew the truth
- » Say whatever you think you have to say to get yourself out of trouble, even if it hurts someone else
- » Run away from a dangerous situation, even if it puts your friends, teammates, or the mission in danger

CONTROL

- » Silence a legitimate concern with anger, violence, or mockery
- » Insist on maintaining a hierarchy when it is detrimental to do so, and punish people who disobey
- » Use excessive force when it is wholly inappropriate
- » Berate someone for being “too emotional”
- » Ignore something important because it wasn’t your idea
- » Verbally or physically abuse your teammates

UNREALITY

- » Fail to notice something important because you’re fixated on something insignificant
- » Assume that you are hallucinating when you are actually perceiving something important
- » Feel a deep and unsettling wrongness with the world that you cannot put into words; this feeling causes you to mistrust people who you should probably trust
- » Wildly misconstrue an ambiguous or nonthreatening stimulus in a way that puts you or the mission in danger or jeopardizes an important relationship
- » Hallucinate something distressing or distracting at a bad time

INTERNAL FOCUS

- » Blame yourself for things that are not your fault
- » Avoid standing up for yourself or your friends at an important time
- » Show passivity, hopelessness, or indifference in the face of a threat to yourself or others
- » Give up when a task proves difficult
- » Point out problems in other people’s ideas; offer no solutions
- » Sacrifice yourself needlessly

EXTERNAL FOCUS

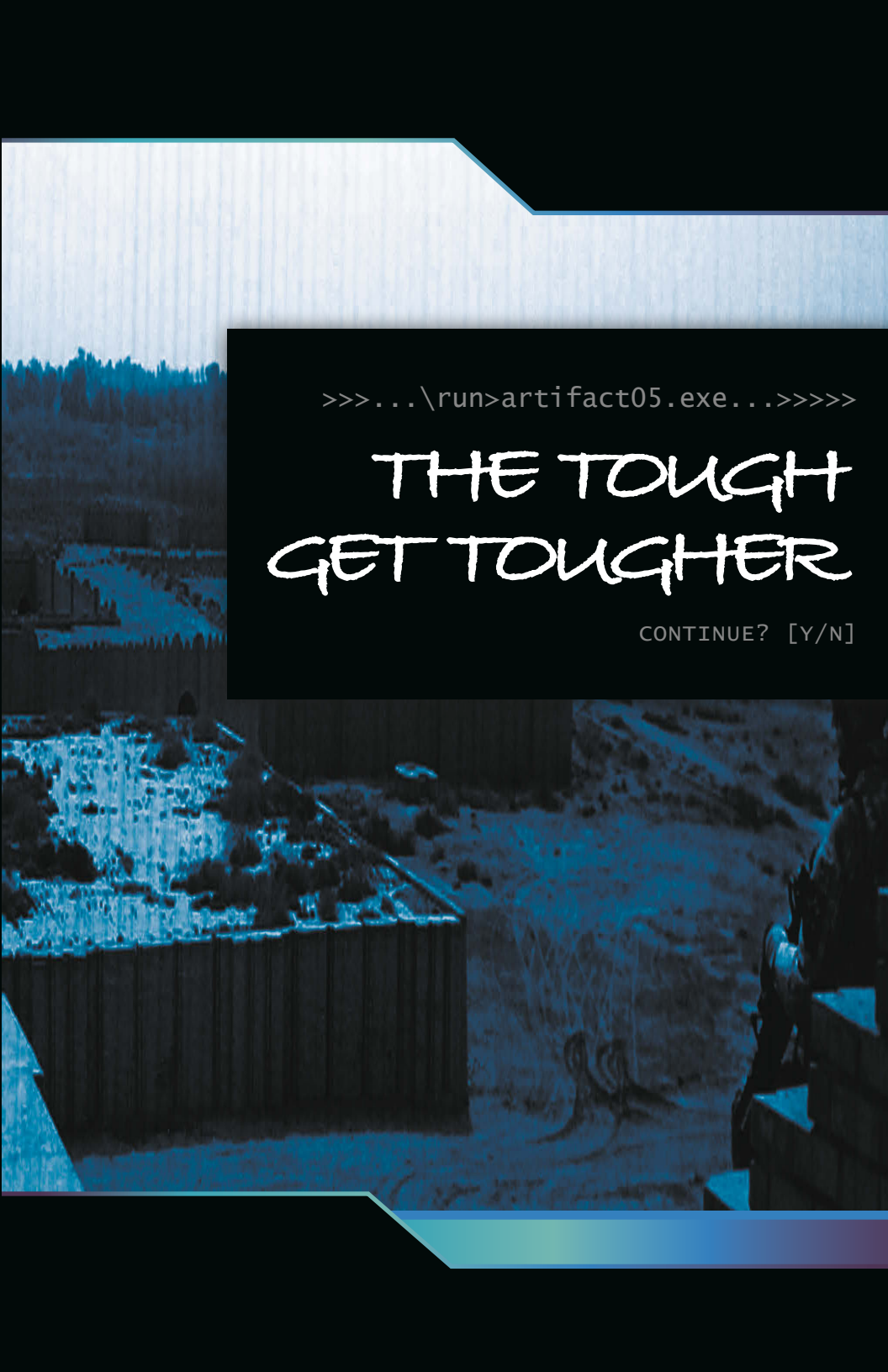
- » Project your feelings onto other people
- » Ignore your own shortcomings
- » Be vindictive and mean-spirited to a clearly unwarranted degree
- » Insist that any problem is someone else’s fault when it is clearly yours
- » Insist that any problem is someone else’s fault when it is clearly an external force
- » Assume that others are acting with malicious intent

TRAUMA DESIGN PRINCIPLES

These rules are meant to give players a way to model reactions to stress and trauma. This has been typically called "madness" or "mental illness" in other games.

These rules work from the basis of several underlying assumptions:

- » Having a mental disorder does not presuppose that someone will be incapable of functioning.
- » Consequences are about how people act, and not about how they feel or what they think. There is not a right or wrong way to think or feel.
- » No one is "too crazy" to be a playable character.
- » There is not a quantitative or qualitative difference between "crazy people" and "normal people."
- » Getting hurt follows a predictable pattern; healing is not as straightforward.



>>>...\run>artifact05.exe...>>>>

THE TOUGH GET TOUGHER

CONTINUE? [Y/N]



CHOOSE YOUR LOOK

Eyes: penetrating, calm, inquisitive, burdened, milky
Face: wizened, friendly, serious, scattered, nervous
Body: toned, heavysset, wiry, slight, ungainly
Wear: tactical, dandy, professorial, tattered, haphazard

Skin: artificial, otherworldly, asian, south asian, decorated, black, hispanic/latinx, indigenous, middle eastern, _____

Stats. Antiquarians start with the Touch stat. Assign each stat one of these numbers: +2, +1, +1, +0, +0, +0, -1; your Mind should be +2 or +1.

CYBERWARE

Choose one:

- 🔌 **Cybereyes:** When you have cybereyes installed, choose three of following tags: *+thermographic*, *+light amplification*, *+magnification*, *+flare compensation*, *+recording*, *+encrypted*, *+inaccessible* partition. When your enhanced sight helps, you may roll Synth for **assess**.
- 🔌 **Cybercoms:** When you have cybercoms installed, choose two of following tags: *+encrypted*, *+jamming*, *+recording*, *+satellite relay*, *+inaccessible* partition. When monitoring communications or giving orders in a tactical environment, you may roll Synth for **assess**.
- 🔌 **Neural Interface** with **Data Storage:** When you use research to search internally or externally stored data, gain an extra [intel] on a hit. Choose two of following tags: *+inaccessible* partition, *+encrypted*, *+high capacity*, *+high speed*. You may take the Hacker move **jack in** as an advance.

MOVES

🔌 **Academic research:** When you roll **research**, add the following questions to the list:

- What is the historical significance of _____?
- What other subjects have I researched that are related to _____?
- What unexplained events surround _____?
- What artifacts are associated with _____?

🔌 **Publish or perish:** Your research is leading you into some very interesting places and you've started to connect the dots. When you work to connect current events with historical precedent, roll Mind.

This move creates a **History Clock**. This clock works like other standard clocks and is advanced through the usage of this move.

10+: you've found a connection, advance this **History Clock**

7-9: you get the evidence you need, but your research has opened you up to retribution by dark forces. Advance both this **History Clock** and the **Horror Clock**

6-: you know too much—your mind recoils from the awful truth you glimpsed and purges it from your memory. The MC will advance the **Horror Clock** and make a move

When a **History Clock** reaches 0000, you have connected a complex web that spans centuries; explain it to the group. The implications of this history will vary based on your story, but it should be significant and direct. It will expose some truth about the rifts and possibly about the **Horror** you're currently involved with. It may trigger an **Eldritch Trauma** roll; the MC will decide.

Choose one more:

🔌 **Quite the collection:** You have collected a number of unique items throughout your career. You gain 2 [artifacts] at the start of a new mission.

🔌 **Academic underground:** You know people who will do anything for a bit of knowledge. Once per mission you can exchange any number of [intel] for a like number of creds, or vice versa.

🔌 **It belongs in a museum!:** When you use **fast talk** to convince someone to hand over or provide information on an [artifact], you may roll with Mind instead of Style.

GEAR

Choose two weapons:

- 🔌 Ancient dagger (2-harm hand/close +*artifact*)
- 🔌 Flechette pistol (3-harm close/near quick flechette)
- 🔌 Hand taser (s-harm hand reload)
- 🔌 Light revolver (1-harm close/near reload)
- 🔌 Monofilament whip (4-harm hand messy area dangerous)
- 🔌 Shotgun (3-harm close/near loud messy reload)

Choose two:

- 🔌 Glasses or goggles (Choose one: +*light* amplification, +*recording*, +*magnification*)
- 🔌 Library card (once per mission, use the library to gain [intel])
- 🔌 Leather jacket (1-*armour*)
- 🔌 Recording equipment (+*audio*, +*video*, optional tags: +*simsense*, +*discreet*, +*encrypted*)
- 🔌 Trauma derms (allows you to **apply first aid** to characters at 2100 or less harm)

You start with 5 Cred.

DIRECTIVES

Choose two:


Academic addiction: When you put the pursuit of knowledge over the safety of your allies, mark experience.

Behavioral: Describe your ethical code. When adhering to your code hinders the mission, mark experience.

Well-respected: When your desire for the respect of your peers hinders the mission, mark experience.

ANTIQUARIANS IN THE SPRAWL

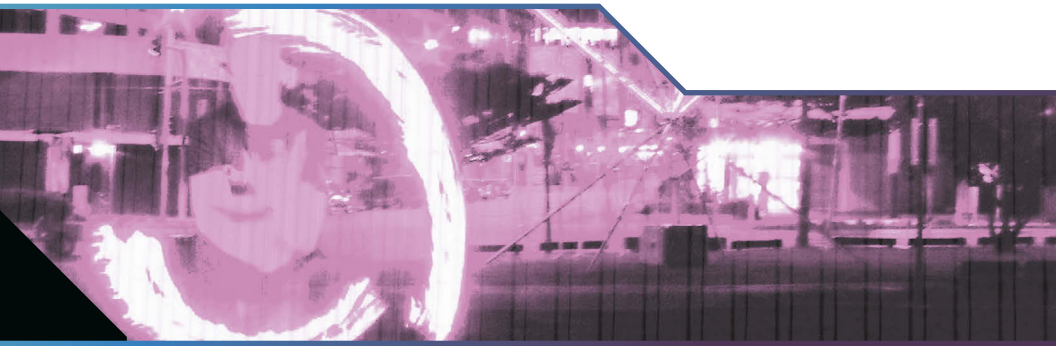
Antiquarians are crack researchers who can connect the dots between complex histories and the correlated events of the present. Their **academic research** allows them to add clarity to unusual information and to better understand its context within the wider picture. Their need to **publish or perish** drives them to create and test hypotheses and gives the team a leg up on others pursuing the same goals. Because they may have **quite the collection** of artifacts, they are the best suited to perform **Rituals** and interact with the rifts and the things that lie beyond.

A night scene of a city street. In the foreground, a person is wearing a glowing, futuristic costume that looks like a large, illuminated mask or helmet with a wide, glowing visor. The person is standing on a sidewalk. In the background, there are tall buildings with lit windows and a street with some traffic. The overall lighting is dark with some bright spots from the buildings and the glowing costume.

>>>...\run>artifact06.exe...>>>>>

THE MEAN GET MEANER

CONTINUE? [Y/N]



SPELL-CRAFT

In *A Darkening Alley*, **Spell-Craft** works by crafting phrases to describe the spell you are casting. If you roll a **7+**, you are able to create a **shape** of a certain **effect**—for instance a *ray of cold* or an *orb of darkness*. You have lists of both **shapes** and **effects** to choose from. You can combine any **shape** with any **effect**.

You *must* have the Touch stat to take this move.

Spell-Craft

When you use an [artifact] as a conduit to call upon the energy of the rifts to shape raw magic into physical effects, roll Touch.

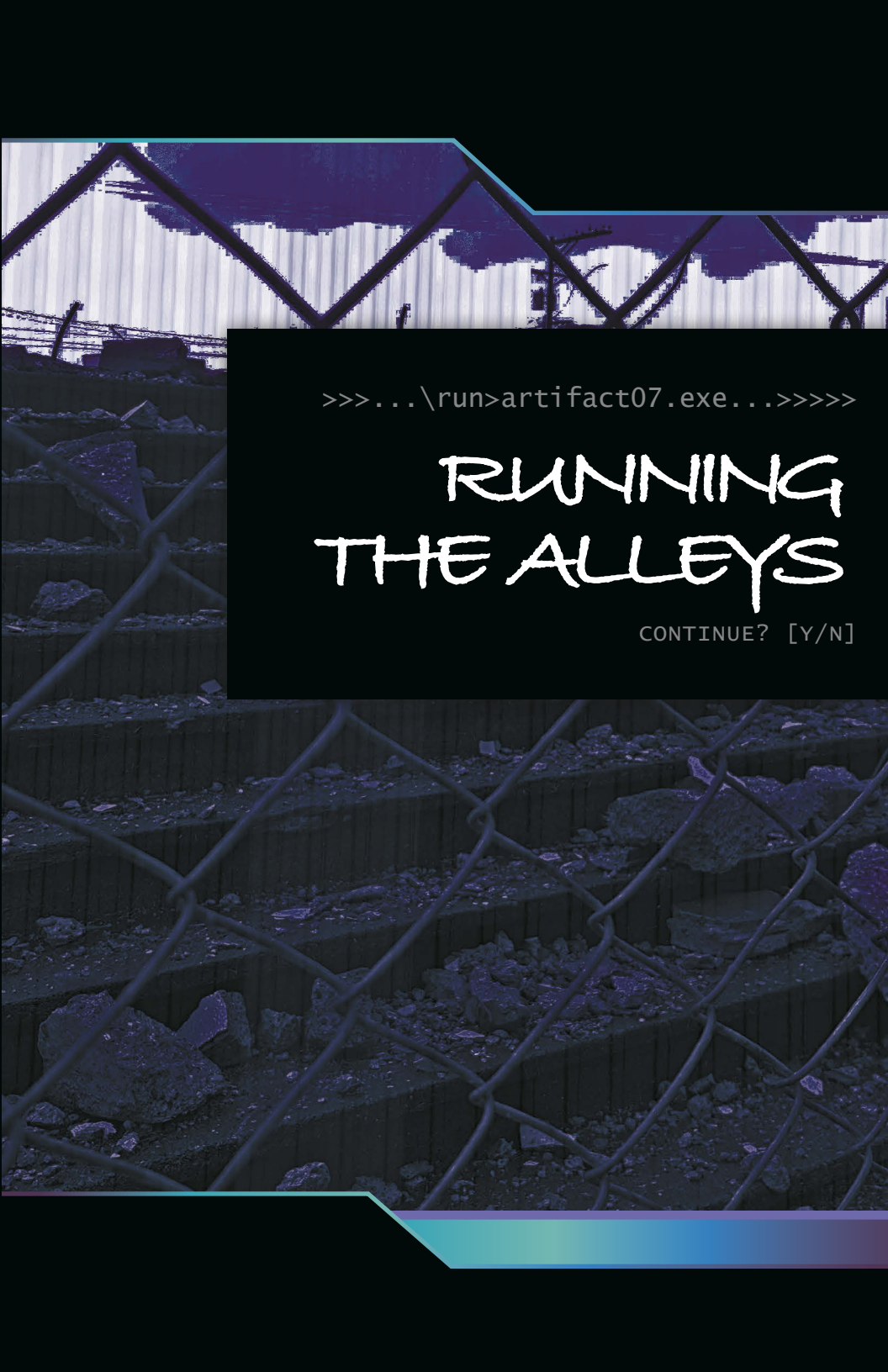
10+: you control the raw power of the rifts and create a supernatural **shape** of **effect**. Your [artifact] is not consumed

7-9: you barely control the raw power of the rifts, but manage to create a supernatural **shape** of **effect**; your [artifact] is consumed

6-: you fail to control the raw power of the rifts. Your attempts to draw on the otherworldly realm may fail completely, escape your control with disastrous effects, or attract the attention of something from beyond. The MC will make a hard move

Shape: *ray, orb, dart, slick, gas, cube*

Effect (1-harm): *electricity, stunning, fire, acid, magnetism, cold, wind, light, disease*



>>>...\run>artifact07.exe...>>>>>

RUNNING THE ALLEYS

CONTINUE? [Y/N]



The following books, movies and TV series are good touchstones for the sort of horror that you can work with: *As Above So Below*, *Cloverfield*, *Cloverfield Paradox*, *Dark City*, *Event Horizon*, *Hellraiser*, *Pontypool*, *Stranger Things*, *The Corridor*, *The Ritual*, *The Shrine*, *The Thing*, *The Void*, *True Detective Season 1*, *Yellow Brick Road*, as well as all the works of H.P. Lovecraft.

PHOTO CREDITS

the following photos are by Hamish Cameron
and manipulated by Dana Cameron
p 03, 05, 09, 11, 21, 23, 35, 37

The following photos are by Bridget Swirski
and manipulated by Dana Cameron
p39, 41

the following photos were used under the 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0) license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)
and manipulated by Dana Cameron
p 29, 31 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dvids/4454694086/>
p 30 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/davidtaquin/21471448008/>
p 41 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/eneas/3471986083/>

the following photos were used under the CC BY-SA 2.0 license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/>)
and manipulated by Dana Cameron
p 15, 17 <https://www.flickr.com/photos/carolemage/8138863706/>

