

# protodimension magazine





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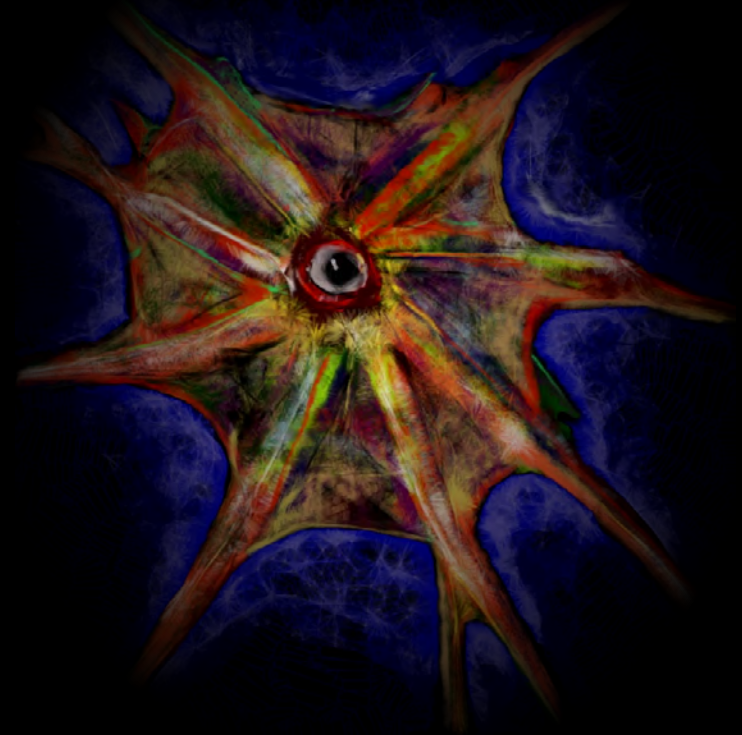
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# EDITORS CORNER

## *Your Message from the Shadow*

Welcome Fair Traveler, welcome once again to our little corner of Reality.

We are so pleased you have returned to visit us.

Here in our little abode all are encouraged to relax and sit a spell, take a moment to gather your thoughts and decide on your course of action.

More to the point, welcome to the 14th Issue of Protodimension Magazine. With time there inevitably comes some change. For us here at PDM change involves a new (after a fashion) editor along with a new (again after a fashion) setting and system to support.

After being the guiding force and vision for 13 issues, Norm Fenlason is taking a step sideways and is focusing on the look and feel of PDM while I, Tad Kelson, am stepping up into a more editorial role within the periodical. Our stalwart Lee Williams remains the Right Hand Man supporting editorial, submission canvassing, and look and feel as he has since PDM started. This is a change in the overall roles, not so much the lineup.

Along with this comes the newest edition of the Dark Conspiracy Role Playing Game, from where comes our title. Released by **3 Hombres Games** under license, the new ruleset is compatible with the previous editions as well as offering refinements in the rules with clarifications. The upcoming revamped setting is soon to be forthcoming, as is the corrected version of the first book. Errata have been compiled thanks to our eagle-eyed readership.

So here in this issue we have fiction, new PDims, adventure, as well as poetry. There is something here for everyone. Along with art and a superb cover, Protodimension Magazine is ready to support your games and gaming.

by Tad Kelson  
Chief Editor  
Protodimension Magazine



# THE GATE OF SOCOTRA

*An Adventure Location*

by Captain Obvious with Lee Williams

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY

**F**OR CENTURIES, THE Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden have been nautical highways of commerce for the merchants of Greece, Africa, Arabia and India. At the dawn of the 21st century, the failed states bordering these shipping corridors fostered terrorists and pirates who threatened an already tenuous artery. So important are the lanes to the world's economy, that an entire international fleet of warships now roams the region tasked with anti-piracy missions.

Within this human maelstrom is the obscure Socotra Archipelago, a land so remote that it has been labeled the Indian Ocean's Galapagos. While just 500 miles southeast of Aden and 300 miles from Mukalla, port of the Hadramawt and near enough to the shipping lanes, nature itself has conspired to make the main island virtually inaccessible for most of the year.

Always at the edge of civilization, Socotra was one of the first places to fall off the radar when the world slid into the chaos of the Greater Depression.

Beyond the warlords of the Horn of African and the Yemen, there is far darker Truth in the region – the New World Order operates an ancient dimensional gate to the Moon just offshore from the Gulf's only island chain. Ostensibly part of Yemen (before

it became a *de facto* failed state), the Socotra Archipelago was once an ecological tourist attraction and now a clandestine refueling spot for Somali pirates.

## THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS AGO...

The only known account of the Indian merchant dhow Pearl of the West's fate came from an obscure translation found in the bowels of the Indian Museum of Calcutta, recorded by Portuguese merchants who rescued a young boy found adrift on wreckage in the Sea of Aden. The captain's youngest son, he was presumed to be the sole survivor of the 125 crew and passengers.

In 1757, the apostate Imad-ul-Mulk was deeply engaged with Machiavellian power politics with rivals in Delhi. In an effort to gain the upper hand, he sent agents to eastern Africa to steal a 'gate stone of the Gods.' The captain of the "Pearl of the West" had been paid handsomely to bring the agents and their looted artifact back to India.

The "Pearl of the West" was almost as big as a 19th century square-rigged Clipper ship; lateen-rigged, 50 meters long and displacing 900 tons and she had a crew of 75 (not counting their wives and children). When chartered to



do so, the ship could also carry 500 or 600 pilgrims but for the majority of her voyages, only cargo was carried between Arabia, Africa and India.

In the spring of that year, her return voyage east carried her past the Socotra archipelago - that strange land once described as the most alien-looking place on Earth. Of the four, the largest island is only 132 kilometers long and 50 wide, with narrow coastal plains below a limestone plateau riddled with caustic caves and the 1,500 meter high mist-shrouded Haghier Mountains. The three smaller islands are Abd al Kuri, Samhah, and Darsa. The latter, as well as some small rock outcrops like Ka'l Fir'awn and Sābūniyah, are uninhabitable by humans.

In Sanskrit, Socotra translates to the "Island of Bliss", a somewhat counterintuitive (or perhaps tongue-in-cheek) name that stuck long before the Common Era. On its shores could be found dragon's blood trees, crocodiles and large lizards and yet the island had been rumored for centuries to guard the secret of eternal life. The inhabitants in that era were nominally Nestorian Christians, but far too many practiced ancient magic rituals for generations to heed the warnings of their archbishop. After visiting the island in 1297, Marco Polo accused the locals of supernatural abilities, controlling the weather and causing shipwrecks. The Portuguese came again in 1507, determined to establish an outpost and left four years later, after the locals attacked their fort in a violent show of hostility.

The exact circumstances of the Pearl Of The West's loss are unclear, other than the boy's description of a "storm unlike any he had ever witnessed" (although the number of storms a small boy - even a ship captain's son - could compare it to in his short life is debatable). Presumably, the captain was trying to escape the southwest monsoons that sweep the island chain in early June and make it unapproachable by sailing vessels.

## MORE THAN A DECADE AGO...

The Portuguese account remained literally lost between the pages of history, misfiled in a 19th century East India Company ledger. Before the turn of the century, one of the Dark ET's minions tasked with combing the archives discovered the item completely by chance and fixating on the word 'gate', relayed the find to his masters. Wheels within wheels turned.

A pair of Dark ETs were assigned the recovery mission and found the wreck about 35 km southwest of the main island, in relatively shallow waters just off the unpopulated spit known as Darsa.

No two Gates are the same. Like human technology that improves and evolves, the science used to construct the gates went through countless iterations. To put it in common parlance, knowing how to make a lawn mower engine run does not make one an expert on steam plants, nor does having an operations manual for a diesel generator qualify one to put a race car's engine together.

The two Dark ETs dispatched to recover the artifact only knew enough of the ancient technology to be a danger to themselves. Instead of simply recovering the gate stone from its' resting place, they tried 'testing' the dormant artifact where it lay and succeeded, but in a test mode that opened a portal randomly, both in duration and dimension. It also bent local gravity in such a way as to make raising the artifact impossible, without human mechanical and physical assistance.

Unable to shut it down or correct their mistakes, the two Dark ETs left the artifact in an unauthorized effort to gather assistance, willing or otherwise. During their absence, the shifting portal attracted attention from other dimensions. At first, small creatures capable of living in our oceans slipped through. Then something arrived that animated the skeletons of the "Pearl of the West's" crew.

The Dark ETs returned with a strange collection of drafted assistants; a freighter and its crew, along with the Somali pirates that had just taken them hostage. While attempting to enact an emergency shut-down, the Gate 'hiccupped': imagine a stream of soap bubbles blown from a child's toy ring, but in this case free and clear of the hosting gate. Each bubble was a pre-dialed portal to another dimension, torn loose and existing in an unstable self-contained environment. The stream swept out of the Gate to be carried away on the currents.

Several 'somethings' also emerged during that malfunction hiccup, resulting in a very messy termination of the Dark ET's mission. Exactly what happened to those two aliens, along with their human pawns, is unknown.

## THE AFTERMATH

For whatever reasons, in late 2000 the Russians were the first to notice the "magnetic vortex" in the Gulf of Aden and shared this with both the



United States and China. The Americans were the first to act, tasking elements of their then-secret Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA) in Djibouti to keep an eye on the anomaly.

For the next eight years, the portal 'leaked' and randomly spit out extra-dimensional tourists into this plane of existence. Some never made it past the lips of the sunken stone, but others slipped out into the region and thrived. Local flora and fauna closest to the portal mutated. Pirates operating in the gulf were the first and most easily seduced by some of the Dark Minions, as were the more venal of the Yemeni authorities in the archipelago. Pirates even started to use one of the western islands for refueling stops. The islands' residents started dying or disappearing in droves, then all communication from the area ceased.

The NWO managed to coax the United Nations into creating CJTF-HOA (Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa) and Combined Task Force 150 (a 25 nation effort based in Bahrain). China, Iran, India and Russia conduct parallel operations under the same anti-piracy guise. These forces conduct operations against legitimate and strictly Terran threats, as well as those manipulated by the Dark ETs. They also provide a curtain of security for the NWO undersea gate, even if their protective presence makes undetected gate usage problematic.

## THE NWO BASE

A pre-constructed hanger-sized dome was dropped over the gate in early 2010, with two fusion generators (to ensure sufficient back-up power) installed shortly thereafter. By the end of that year, NWO

scientists were living in the dome and working on gate re-booting procedures full-time. The unsettling pile of extra-dimensional corpses had also been cleaned-up around the base of the gate and shipped off for study.

In August, 2011, an Arabic newspaper reporter wrote that a local fishing boat captain who regularly fished in this area had seen strange lights underwater that he'd never seen before seen events, along with strange hum lasting about 15 to 20 minutes at a time (usually towards midnight). On September 1st, an earthquake shook the immediate region – NWO scientists had successfully reopened the Gate, but it was still frozen in a test mode. The only portal possible was to the moon, with any further attempts – at least for now – deemed too dangerous for the unstable artifact.

While seismic activity is predictable about 200 kilometers to the west, unexplained earthquakes of 5.0 + magnitude have recently wracked the immediate area around the islands.

## THE MAIN ISLAND

In addition to Socotra's unique flora and fauna, its human inhabitants were equally as removed from the rest of the world. When the world was more stable, there were around 50,000 inhabitants (most of whom came from the Arabian mainland) across three of the four islands. Since civilization started unraveling, this number has fallen to less than a 1,000 primarily clustered in the ruins of the old capital, although no firm count is possible. It's also quite likely that the majority of them are not native to the island or even this timeline.





*Monsoons* long made the archipelago inaccessible from June to September each year, and the main island is blanketed with ominous clouds. In July 1999, a new airstrip was built (the longest in the Yemen) that faced into the monsoon winds and allowed airliners an ability to land all year round. However, the recent wreck of a Boeing 707 at the end of the runway might make using the strip somewhat challenging.

Socotran land crabs scuttling around the mountains 700 meters above the Indian Ocean have mutated into vicious creatures. Local buzzards abound. Darker, stranger creatures dwell within the mountains' folds and caves. The rainy season keeps countless natural and man-made cisterns filled, but there are a few ground sources.

The largest, a 30 meter wide almost-fresh water hole about half a kilometer from the sea was tested to a depth of 350 meters before



the survey crew ran out of cable. A portal bubble was swept into this chasm, which accounts for the green glow emanating from the waters.

Perhaps one of the weirdest relics of human civilization on the island are a dozen rusting Soviet T-34/85 tanks, situated in low revetments east and west of Hadiboh. They were emplaced during the height of the Cold War, obviously to protect the island from seaborne invasion by western Capitalists. While still complete, the decades of neglect have ensured that they will never run or fire again.

The caves of Socotra have served as refugees for travelers from East Africa, India and the Arabian mainland since at least the 1st Century CE. Crude stick figures, letters from lost languages and religious symbols adorn the walls closest to the surface, while progressively more elaborate artwork and messages in unrecognizable languages can be found deeper down in the tunnels.

Located on the northeast corner, Hoq Cave is roughly five kilometers from and about 350 meters above the ocean. Extending horizontally for at least three kilometers, it's floor is littered with hundreds of stalagmites, ranging in size from a less than a meter to an almost twenty meters.

The Moomi Caves on the caustic plateau lying to the east of the Haggier Mountains are roughly 480 meters above the ocean and were once used by goat herders as shelter during the monsoons.

The Southwest Caves sit on a second high limestone plateau located on the southwestern side of Socotra Island. Entrance to these is through a very large sinkhole (approximately 500m in diameter and over 70m deep). From the floor of the sinkhole's central chamber, horizontal tunnels lead away in two directions .

## NWO INTERVIEW

Those earthquakes? Bubbles 'popping.' It seems that the currents draw them up to Bab-el-Mandeb and for whatever reason, salt water and free-form dimensional gates don't last long when in contact with each other. The bubbles that were blown onto the main island and into the nooks and crannies 'dried out' and stabilized, after a fashion.

The NWO had originally hoped to 'retake' Socotra, fix all of the errant portals and exploit them. Towards that goal, teams were sent in to study and, after some unfortunate incidents, shut down as many of these pre-set portals as possible.

The team will be contracted to land on Socotra, find and 'disperse' the portal bubbles. NWO scientists have found that the simple act



of dousing a bubble with a stream of seawater from a simple hand-pump fire extinguisher will cause it to collapse upon itself within an hour. The only danger will be from the subsequent 'vibrations'.

## CURVE BALLS

Another Gate Bubble collapses, triggering an earthquake. The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center briefly issues a warning that there was "a very small possibility of a local tsunami that could affect coasts located usually no more than 60 miles (100 km) from the earthquake's epicenter."

**Referee's Notes:** Should the players accept the mission, at the Referee's discretion they can be told of previous missions with identical goals that have failed or simply disappeared.

## THE RUINS OF HADIBOH

Hadiboh is deathly silent, it's streets littered with rubble and trash. The island's main town lies mostly in ruins, with at least 75% of the structures collapsed or burnt-out. There is no running water or electricity.

Like many Arabic communities, the flat-roofed buildings were made of pressed concrete blocks and most were only single-story, with a handful of two or three story structures.

The denizens of Hadiboh, for the most part, chose to remain hidden. Inhabited buildings are like small fortresses, their first floor entrances sealed off and entrance gained only by climbing a ladder to the roof.

At least a dozen portals blew ashore here and became lodged in ruins or standing

structures, which accounts for why a significant portion of the population 'aren't from this place'.

## THE LOST CREW

In 1943, the RAF sent a survey mission to the main island in order to determine its potential as a refueling stop for Allied aircraft. Two stripped-down Blenheim 1 bombers flew from RAF Khormaksar, Aden to Socotra. Both aircraft were damaged landing on the north coast beach, near the village of Hadibo. The crews set up camp and started their repairs, although a thorough reconnaissance required travel along the rugged coastline westwards to gain access to the center of the island.

The RAF mission hired locals (who were described as "the descendants of shipwreck survivors") and their camels to take them up to the plateau. Even though the available report is heavily censored, the number of odd events makes for disturbing reading.

One camel plus stores was lost en route, when the animal's foot slipped and it plunged into the sea below. A suitable landing ground was identified and cleared the area of the larger obstacles. Three crewmen disappeared overnight, presumably lost while 'sightseeing' in nearby caves.

In fact, they blundered into one of the 21st century 'bubbles' and are stranded in the present day when it collapsed behind them. Currently denizens of the ruined Hadiboh, they are understandably paranoid and distraught but may approach the Hunters under the right circumstances.

**Referees' Notes:** The Hunters may be briefed on all but the last paragraph before their mission starts.

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## LOST RAF CREWMEN

**Human NPCs (first edition stats)**

**Level:** Experienced (Initiative 3, Attributes 5, Skills 4, UCD 2)

**Available Skills** (choose as appropriate): *Heavy Weapons, Language, Leadership, Mechanic, Medical, Melee Combat, Navigation, Observation, Parachute, Pilot, Small Arms, Swimming, Vehicle Use*

**Weapons:** each of the three carries a Webley revolver. In addition one also carries an Enfield rifle and another has a 12-bore shotgun.

### Webley Mark VI

Ammo	ROF	Dam	Pen	Bulk	Mag	Recoil		
						SS	Brst	Rng
.455 SAA	DAR	2	Nil	1	6R	2	—	10

### Enfield No. 4 Mk 1

Ammo	ROF	Dam	Pen	Bulk	Mag	Recoil		
						SS	Brst	Rng
.303 SAA	DAR	4	2-3-Nil	5	10	4	—	55

### BSA Shotgun

Ammo	ROF	Dam	Pen	Bulk	Mag	Recoil		
						SS	Brst	Rng
12g ShotC	SA	9	Nil	5	2i	5	—	40
12g ShotM	10	1	Nil	5	2i	5	—	40



# THE BADLANDS

*A Baaad Proto-Dimensional Land*

by Scott McClenaghan, Captain Obvious, Lee Williams

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY

**Name:** The Badlands

**Type:** Splinter Land

**Discontinuity:** 1 (But May Vary)

**Assimilation Effect:** 0 (see below regarding nuclear force)

## INTRODUCTION

The Badlands are old. Very old. They easily predate the worlds they were intended to reflect, and may even have precipitated a few of them. They are most often compared to deserts or wastelands prominent in the frontiers of 19<sup>th</sup> century America, Mexico and Australia. Yet the proto-dimension is more than just a terrain or the home of some race or thing (though it is both of those). The Badlands are built upon tenets of justice as it would exist in the cradle of most societies.

Justice and the search for it, or the lack of it, is a principle upon which legal systems, societies and many of the earliest religions are based. Justice and treatment of the unjust define the starkest pieces of religious mythology. It is no coincidence that the Badlands often connect to these places. For example, they touch sections of the Mayan Xibalba, the Chinese Diyu (or Shadow

Lands), the Slavic Rai or Peklo, Tartarus, Hades, Naraka and Hell. (Yet the place seems forever separated from Nirvana, Paradise or any other kind of Heaven).

Perhaps the land is best categorized as a kind of Purgatory, which can be very similar to Hell. The unjustly murdered wander as apparitions until somehow freed from their manacles; the guilty walk unceasingly seeking an atonement which seems to be forever denied to them.

## THEME

Some proto-dimensions lend themselves to a theory of intelligent design, though whether elements of a dimension have stayed true to the intent of that design over the millennia may be a point of conjecture.

The Badlands were almost certainly created for a purpose. Whether it was a plain of penance for the guilty, or an oasis of justice for the wronged, or somewhere in-between as a kind of moral proving grounds for those looking within themselves... well, that will vary greatly on one's perspective.

Physically, the Badlands are a series of distributed ghost towns, cursed cities, abandoned gold mines, old railways, barren and blasted wastelands, deserts, prospecting camps and early frontier



settlements. Native technology is generally limited to steam-tech, however exceptions exist. There is at least one report of a dimensional pocket resembling 20<sup>th</sup> century Perth, Australia inhabited by outlaw biker gangs.

The proto-dimension is sparsely inhabited by small pockets of natives (or at least, those who have forgotten their origins), trapped wayfarers, supernatural entities, and a strong Darkling influence.

The Badlands are not difficult to navigate, but they do defy conventional mapping. The proto-dimension is a series of interconnected regions, the avenues of which sometimes pass through or near other dimensions. Drawing a map to scale would be nearly impossible, but directions can still be a simple matter of: "Pass over the Barrow Plains and stop at Preston's Inn & Saloon. Walk downstairs through the wine cellar to Kimball's Worth & Wares. Walk outside to Tumbleweed Withers, and it's the fourth dwelling on your left."

Sounds of the frontier are pervasive, even if they seem distant, ghostly and difficult to pinpoint. Piano or fiddle music, raucous laughter, screaming and cheering, distant horses neighing, ghostly mills churning, whistles from the wind or through the caverns, the storm of an oncoming train, a gunfight, cattle herds. In fact it's really never quiet in the Badlands.

Except right before a conflict at high noon; then it becomes deathly silent.

And therein is a significant difference between the Badlands and most other proto-dimensions. Whether by inhabiting forces or by original design, the Badlands seem to be aware of the events within them; perhaps even self-aware. The weather, the sounds, the tone of some of the natives; all will often align themselves with relevant events.

And many of those events are both sought after and perhaps precipitated by the proto-dimension itself.

Dimensional tendrils from the Badlands extend to varying times and places but seem to be mostly attracted to environments of clearly contrasted justice and injustice, vigilantism and other characteristics commonly associated with early settlement and pioneering which is perhaps why there are so many gateways to the Badlands prevalent in 19<sup>th</sup> century South Western United States, Spain, Mexico and Australia. However gateways to other times and places exist.

The Badlands reach out, not only via conduits to times and places, but to people as well. Many travelers are brought because they have sought out the Badlands, or because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Sometimes just because they felt they were. Some were brought because they have a part to play in the events within, by will or by fate. Some were wronged and demand vengeance. Others are malignant and have somehow, thus far, escaped the specter of justice. Still there are those struggling to find their way and have yet to be tested.

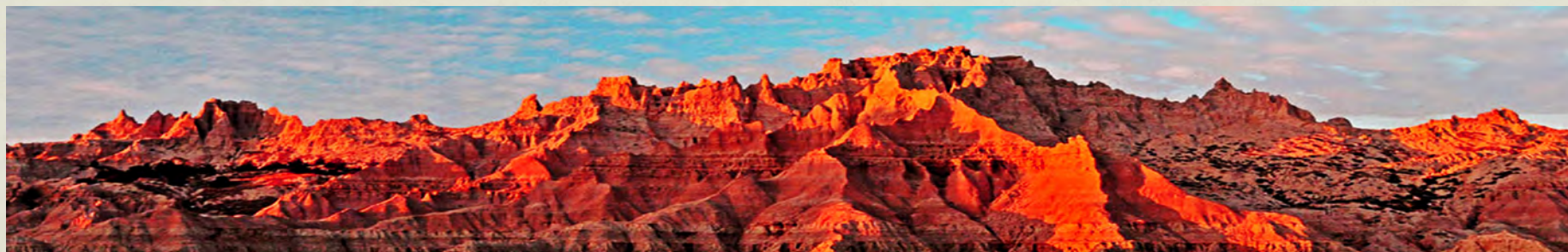
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*"Many 'Dantes' have described the Badlands as a harbinger of justice. But every man's sins. We all must atone. Does that fact alone purport reason?"*

---

—William Henry Hicks (Lawman, soldier, detective, outlaw, assassin, and pioneer of the 21<sup>st</sup> century)

The proto-dimension thrives on the concept of justice, but it is also empathic and malleable, and pockets of it have been poisoned by contact with Darklings. Parts of it have been perverted from its original intent, if there ever was intent. Many of the more terrifying regions of the Badlands have adapted to this alien sense of justice. A





few short hours there can imbue irreversible insanity in the minds of the unprepared.

## PORTALS AND BOUNDARIES

The gateways of the proto-dimension are shadow-manifestations of their tangible counterparts in overlapping dimensional space.

So, a corridor leading from a cellar in a Spanish home in the Tabernas, for example, may lead both to an adjoining hidden storage room as well as to a dusty ruin within a wasteland of the Badlands. Which of these a traveler is likely to find is a matter of character, fate and perhaps chance.

The portals to The Badlands are everywhere. Even the roads within the Badlands are often just borderlands between or near other dimensions and proto-dimensions. Yet something keeps travelers from drifting too far from the Badlands during travel on the borderlands. And though the routes and gateways are often generated by and may vary by events, it doesn't necessarily mean people can't return the way they came. However as certain events which shape the Badlands are resolved, characters may not be able to see certain paths again after they've returned from there.

Now the boundaries, those are a harder, more concrete thing; black and shiny, chitinous, malleable; generally starting around seven feet beneath or beyond dirt, dust, or sand. The same holds for existing underground mines or tunnels. Dig more than seven feet in any direction and you'll eventually reach the skin of the Badlands.

The composition of the boundaries implies that the proto-dimension is perhaps of Darkling origin. It may always have been a Darkling dimension; one of the first. And if there was any recent corruption, then perhaps that was by modern wraiths haunted by morality. It is perhaps evidence that the dark tide can be turned.

## PHYSICS AND ASSIMILATION

The physics of the Badlands are, in most cases, indistinguishable from Earth's with an important and very specific difference: the nuclear force is much weaker in this proto-dimension, an attribute which seems arbitrary until one considers the intelligent design implications.

The concepts of nuclear fusion and fission still apply, however since the nuclear force generated by sub-atomic particles is more





quickly exceeded by that of electromagnetic force, this limits the size of atomic nuclei, and so, many chemical reactions which would otherwise be possible.

The short version is that elements with an atomic number higher than 86 (Radon) will be extremely rare and will not be stable for long. Substances composed of more complex elements eventually will break down, as will equipment which relies on nuclear reactions involving complex elements. This will happen due to the assimilation effect of this proto-dimension.

This has had a dramatic effect in limiting practical technology within the proto-dimension.

## DISCONTINUITY

Discontinuity varies, sometimes greatly, between dimensional pockets. Overall discontinuity is 1 but that can change quickly as wraiths or rangers or the events which drive them are affected or resolved. Severe changes can be extremely disorienting to travelers. Further, psychological and empathic stimuli will augment discontinuity variance.

When a wraith rages for example (see below), the environment is affected. Fires go out. Laughter dies. Structures could be blasted apart or mines caved in. Some of these effects are similar enough to earth-like physics. Some defy them and will seem very alien or even apocalyptic to travelers.

## THE WRAITHS

The proto-dimension is filled with wraiths; remnants of things that were, things that wished they never were, or things that never should have been. They are phantoms which are more emotion now than thought or physical aspect. It is from their blasted memories and dwellings that the proto-dimension takes many of its physical characteristics.

It is the wraiths who plague the Badlands with the events which drive its purpose. Some wraiths have desires which will never be fulfilled, and so they remain forever tormented, molding the Badlands to their own personal Hell.

Some have wishes and dreams which are still possible.

Freeing a wraith of the Badlands by depriving it of its will to remain has significant repercussions on the Badlands including

shaping the physical terrain, creating or removing dimensional gateways, and even altering the discontinuity of the proto-dimension if the effects are telling enough.

It is rare that a wraith can be physically confronted in any manner, however the demons which plague it may still be. Sometimes those demons are real; inhabitants from a plane of origin that the wraith has somehow pulled into this domain. Sometimes the demons are projected phantoms; illusory representations of the thing and not the thing itself. A small change may be all that is needed to redirect a nightly performance of a living hell into an unshackling ritual to forever unbind a wraith.

Wraiths will often lure unsuspecting travelers through dimensional portals into the Badlands.

## THE RANGERS

If the wraiths are the excavators and builders of the realm, then the rangers are its custodians. They exist to enforce whatever discernible code or laws still exist in the Badlands; each personifying some principle integral to the domain.

Rangers are denizens of significance and recognition. Each is easily distinguishable from another. If one dies or is eradicated, it is a portent for significant change across the proto-dimension. Although the void left may be soon filled, a new ranger's influence will not necessarily mirror a ranger before him.

The rangers are an extension of the proto-dimension's "will" and have been, in some cases, subject to Darkling perversion.

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*"Of the so-called 'rangers' I have met four. By far the most prominent, sporting a Peacemaker and a rope, is Justice. His near allies, a golem of a man: Fortitude, and the worldly and deliberate Prudence. And I have met the gaunt and lethargic wasting of a sickly man, who of course, was Temperance."*

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—William Henry Hicks  
Lawman, soldier, detective, outlaw,  
assassin, and pioneer of the 21<sup>st</sup> century



If any of the proto-dimension's base tenets are violated, ranger reaction may be swift and harsh. Those tenets may vary by ranger composition (and in some cases, health), but some of the more enduring tenets are:

Rangers will seek to create instability in regions where injustice endures, inviting strangers for good or ill to test authority, or to discover buried secrets, or to otherwise pull at the strings of some underlying injustice. In this instance, bounty hunters (see below) are often involved.

Rangers seek those who have somehow withstood the Badland's assimilation effects. This is a priority.

Rangers often are seen on the fringes of significant duals or battles; not necessarily interfering, sometimes simply bearing witness.

Rangers may seek to correct grossly imbalanced conflicts so that they are settled by measure of courage and prudence rather than superior firepower or other unscrupulous tactic. Note that unscrupulous has a strange meaning in this context. Pistols with their hammers filed down, hidden gunmen, snipped firing pins or a smoldering mob mentality fanned to flames are all acceptable methods of conflict resolution. However, creating a stable judicial system to effectively undermine the need for vigilantism would violate the tenets of the Badlands as they currently exist.

Wraiths will never collaborate or even acknowledge one another's existence unless they were somehow bound in life. Encouraging that or anything like that will precipitate quick response from rangers.

Finally, rangers somehow manage all the mundane details of the domain. It is said that the incessant background noise is a symphony orchestrated by a band of the domain's puppeteers. Even the bleating of the sheep and the wind which howls over the eerie piano bar music are scores prepared by the Badland's rangers. To that end, many a raving miner has revealed: "Never shoot the piano player. For all the Gods in the Universe's sake, don't do that!"

## BOUNTY HUNTERS

There are only so many rangers and a lot of wrong-doing going on. Bounty hunters often precede rangers and their

## Don't Shoot the Piano Player

Strange things happen when you zig when you should have zagged. The bullets started flying and while everyone else went right, I went left into the stairwell to the floor below and into the corridor...

... just not the hotel corridor I was expecting.

Forward momentum fueled by adrenaline isn't an easy thing to stop, particularly when I was expecting the same sad wall to wall carpeting as the rest of the place - not slippery hardwood. While I was losing all my cool points trying not to plow into the far wall, I felt the door close behind me.

Weird, because my ears had just popped like the time I'd flown to Atlanta.

The door I'd just come through was varnished wood. This corridor was smaller, darker than I expected and the wallpaper was at best weirdly retro. Back pressed against the far wall, I kept my automatic focused on the door while my blood pressure returned to something resembling normal. No teeming hoard of homicidal Igors came bursting through it. That was good.

A lamp to my right hissed. Lamps shouldn't hiss. The hall was too short to my right, a window too close.

Uh oh.

I got the distinct sense that this wasn't Tulsa. This was, on the whole, bad.

Music.

Noise.

Somewhere from down the hall to my left. I slid close to the wall and edged towards the light. The hall opened up to a banister, a stairwell and an open barroom some twenty feet below. I'd spent enough time in bars to know where I was now and also know this was one where I didn't want to stay.

But I've always been one of those curious cats that can't run away when the going is good. The five guys down there must have been practicing after closing but they weren't going to Nashville anytime soon. They stood or sat with their instruments around a copper beer kettle in the center of the room, making a racket like sound effects for a movie, mixed in with bits and pieces of sorta familiar tunes or songs. Not a one of them was on the same sheet of music as the others, but they were sure as shinola telling a story with their sounds... pretty damn avant-garde stuff.

Ever get a glimpse at a group and suddenly felt like you knew everything about them, like déjà vu but with people? In a heartbeat, I knew these guys' handles; the Banker, the Faro Dealer, the Barkeep, the Piano Player and the Undertaker. I suppose it was the way they were dressed but it was more than that - like a whispered epiphany.

Lights flashed inside the kettle, something stirred the waters inside and one by one, the five stopped their music. With the ebbing cacophony, I swore I heard gunfire from far off. Damned if I knew how, but the story they were telling with music was now going on inside that cursed kettle.

The ancient clock on the wall started striking, the hands at midnight. At that moment, the Undertaker turned and looked back over his shoulder at me. In turn, so did the other four. I could only see the whites of their eyes. No irises.

My will went to water, right there in the hallway. I fled, back through the door from whence I had come. If there was anything waiting for me in the stairwell, it'd be easier to deal with than this nightmare.



effectiveness has varying reliability. They are distinct from the will of the proto-dimension; they have free will. When someone pushes the tenets of the Badlands, the bounty hunters are usually the first response to the infraction.

Some bounty hunters are travelers who feel some kind of tie with the proto-dimension.

Some are trail heroes or villains who've somehow bridged the planar gap at the threshold of their lives.

And yes, some are wraiths.

Bounty hunters work independently of rangers and never with them. The Badlands speaks directly to them in the guise of prophesy or vision, of apparition or manufactured and spontaneous personality or in some other form of cryptic and unexplainable, yet direct communication.

Sometimes bounty hunters fail in their tasks or ignore them. They are unpredictable. Rash. Often quick to anger. Sometimes they make matters worse. In cases like this, or in events of great significance, the realm can always resort to its rangers.

## LOST SOULS

Badlands wraiths are entities which have damned, bargained or otherwise willed themselves into an existence within the Badlands. Whether that existence is a blessing or a curse is entirely a matter of perspective.

But other denizens roam the Badlands as well. They are not lords or forces of significant interest or bearing. Their influence over the domain may be trivial or completely insignificant. They simply are.

Wanderers. Vagabonds. Petty criminals. Heroes who have lived too long. Those who did not live long enough. The unavenged dead. And those who lived in unrealized dreams.

So these outsiders, now denizens, oft have things in common with the wraiths of the domain.

Except in addition to their souls, they've also lost their will along the way.

Unlike wraiths, lost souls will often wander together, giving each other focus and direction. Where wraiths rule the realms, the lost souls people it. Some are soulless husks populating cursed towns awaiting their pending doom. Some are too far lost to exist in any semblance of society.

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*"There I stood within that forsaken coyote hole amidst the howling and the whistling looking for something. Anything. Then movement! At first it might have been the wind. Or an animal; some misguided prairie dog or vultures. Or some other such common thing. But as I stared harder, more intently, I saw ashen hands – lifting the scraps of buckled and cracked beams which caved long ago; its rasping voice failing to shape anything more than a dull and hollow moan. No, he'd had no message for me, but from the drift behind him, lumbering out of some crevice surviving the age-old cave-in, lurched another pair of arms and with it more hoarse cursing. Ghoulish arms disturbed loose rocks on the cavern floors struggling for freedom as other beasts dragged themselves free of tumbled mine trolleys. And what was a staccato rhythm of gasps, coughs, whispers and grunts became a chorus of howling, shrieking, even singing; a wave of wailing as only can be the dirge of the damned."*

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—William Henry Hicks  
Lawman, soldier, detective, outlaw,  
assassin, and pioneer of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

*The streets were deserted and the hovels barren. Only dust remained to watch dust settle, which happened despite a deafening wind which tore through the empty town.*

*The Hand dismounted, not deigning to tie a horse. It wouldn't run. Not unless he commanded it to. And when he did, it would bolt like a Comanche arrow streaming on the wind. The Hand and his steed were as one.*

*He stepped past an abandoned general store, catching a distorted and scratchy reflection of his wiry frame in the dust-blown glass windows of a saloon across the street. And then the Hand walked a bit farther, up the unfinished and rotten floorboards of the post office steps, to a small window with shutters slapping irregularly in the wind.*

*And where one would encounter ghosts or specters or an oppressive uneasiness, the Hand instead saw splinters of the dimension's will made flesh – speaking to his splintered mind; a gaunt and aged face wrapped in shadows and whispering dryly:*

*"They ride along the Barbed Scar towards Redemption. Not stopping for water or respite. They trail a final witness who will bury his secrets with him."*

*"Best ye be going and see they don't lie too deep."*

*The Hand returned deliberately to his steed, and they fled as a Comanche arrow, streaming on the wind.*



## BADLANDS ADVENTURE SEEDS

### THE LEGEND OF BIG JIM HAMPTON

September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1876, Navarro County, Texas: Ranger Jim Hampton and his men (direct reports to Jack Hayes during his stint to get Samuel Tilden elected president) were herding cattle across plains known to be harboring Comanche tribes. It was later said that Jim personally led the cattle run because of a bet; a rancher in a saloon said he was too yellow to do it (which got Jim pretty fired up).

On the evening of the second day, Jim chanced upon a deserted cabin in the wilderness. Wary yet driven in by the hard rain and sleet, Jim and his men settled in.

The cabin was old; far older than any Texas tenement. Beastly murals of oversized wolves eating men, and of men attacking dogs with pointed sticks, hung on the outer walls. And in a private shrine separated by hanging furs, was a candlelit altar before a long silvered and ornate mirror.

From dusk until dawn as the men kept stolid watch, shadows lurched, branches snapped, wolves howled ceaselessly and the men grew restless and weary.

Inclement weather prevented further travel the next day. The men's restlessness grew. And then the accidents started to happen. The horses chewed through their tethers and men pursued them into the woods. The horses were never found, but one of Jim's men was found suspended from a low tree branch, flayed alive.

Fearing they were beset upon by the Comanches, Jim and his rangers fortified the cabin and prepared for attack. And they became more restless. More tense. More fearful.

Before the quiet fell; before a bullet was fired. As Jim made his final prayers and preparations, he saw something in the cabin mirror that night. Something both horrible and necessary.

When the Comanche attacked, it is said that Jim fought as a demon that night, but that he died like all good cowboys, with his boots on, next to his men.

But when a search party later found the cabin, the cattle which hadn't fled were unharmed. Jim's rangers were massacred but Jim's body was nowhere to be found.

Nor were the Comanche.

But some say that Big Jim Hampton refused to die. They say for him, the bet is still on.

Some say he rides there still, hunting any Comanche who would dare set foot into civilized lands.

And some say that what Jim saw in the mirror was more terrible than any Comanche ambush, and that there were, in fact, no Comanche present that night.

Those so inclined could ask Big Jim, should they ever cross his path, for he certainly wanders the Badlands forever cursed as a wraith.

### MAKURU

Perth, Australia is renowned for cold and wet, but relatively mild, winters. Two exceptions which define the rule are the early spring of 1834 and the deep winter of 1892 where temperatures reached extreme sub-zero for nearly seven days each time.

In 1892, ice on the tracks of the Crieff & Methven Railway caused a passenger freight train to derail, killing almost all passengers immediately and stranding the rest in the unseasonably icy weather without food or water to be found dead over the next weeks.

Rumors abound that very few of the passengers were, in fact, found within the train cabins or with injuries consistent with a high speed derailment. Rather that dozens were splayed in varying distances from the wreck and that many, in fact most, of the bodies (well preserved from the cold) showed clear indication of bite marks – human bite marks, as well as accompanying spear and knife gashes.

In 1834, at the Battle of Pinjarra, one of the last stands of the Aboriginal tribal resistance against Australian colonization, it was documented that 15 Binjareb Aboriginals were slaughtered as they tried to flee Governor James Stirling's men (though the number of murdered people was rumored to be much higher than that).

Constables who even suspected the events which led to that train's derailment buried the truth. They buried it deep.

For what sane society could consider that the unjustly murdered could somehow span sixty years to enact their revenge upon the descendants of Stirling and the aristocracy. That the dead, somehow preserved in frozen splendor, burrowed from their frozen purgatories to claim vengeance. That tracks through the frozen snow trailed just a mile from the derailment to a hastily dug and strangely preserved mass grave of over 90 dead Aboriginal men, women, and children. And that mere days later, no trace could be found of that charnel pit.

And so those specters must now wander the Badlands, for they certainly wander Perth no more.



## THE DROWNED

There are outcroppings of rock, hoodoos, which mark well the gutted and flooded trail in rock and sand which once landmarked the north border of the disputed San Juan territory between USA and Mexico, but which here heralds only ghosts and the unanswered cries of the unjustly murdered as it winds through the infernal plains of the Badlands.

In 1844, in the wake of disputes between Mexico and the USA over the land between the Rio Grande and the Nueces, the said badlands were unpatrolled and ripe for outlaws and Native Americans to plunder caravans traveling through.

In the heat of these disputes, Charles Winthrop, a wealthy land baron set about proving the safety of the territory in the hopes of encouraging further trade in the area, and so, the value of the surrounding territory. He spent his resources hiring a private armed escort for the caravan as well as dozens of scouts. And the caravan itself was well armed and armored.

Finally, Mr. Winthrop liberally boasted that his caravan route was impervious to hijack and boldly announced that its cargo of \$5000 was up for grabs for anyone bold enough to try. This he posted to every town in Texas north of the Nueces, which generated interest from many parties.

On the eve the caravan set out, Winthrop's private guard dispatched more than a few attempts by outlaws and savages to ravage the caravan. The carefully charted path combined with advance knowledge of the trail ahead proved instrumental in safely navigating the way to Monterrey.

That was until a few nights into the ride, when the advance scouts stopped returning. Ammunition was low but not dangerously so, and the private escort continued to discourage or repel would-be assailants. It was four days since they'd heard from the last scouting party when they chanced upon a US detachment of infantry. Commander Adam Hawkins explained that Mr. Winthrop spared no expense to protect his investments, and they were escorted the rest of the way to the Rio Grande.

Commander Hawkins ordered the disembarking of everyone in the caravan as he inspected the inventory, in his words, to compare it to the registry provided by Mr. Winthrop to ensure any greedy riders were 'rewarded' prior to entering Mexico. All suspected treachery but they were outmanned and outgunned and could only hope to quietly accede to the commander's demand in hopes of mercy and to perhaps survive the night.

None did.

The ensuing massacre of the forty plus ranchers, riders, merchants and gunmen was swift and merciless. Most were disarmed and butchered with hatchets, knives, and spears so as to appear to be the handiwork of San Juan native tribes. Those who were shot were deposited deep into the Rio Grande which was said to have turned the color of rust in protest at the wantonly laid carnage within.

Commander Hawkins achieved his mission objective, assuring swift US reprisal and the stomach of the American people to press for war against Mexico. Hawkins saw the \$5000 bounty as merely a bonus for a job well done.

And now these lost souls wander the wastelands. Enacting vengeance on any daring to press too close.

## THE NIGHT RIDE

It is said in some corners of the Badlands that justice will call to any who would hear it, and justice may be carried by any who would wield it.

Enter the Angels of the Desert (AoD) motorcycle club circa 1947.

The Second World War had just ended and California saw more than its fair share of broken men coming back with no place to turn and no desire to return to the lives they had once led. The Angels of the Desert was one of many motorcycle clubs; ranks filled with these veterans of the Pacific campaigns. The core of this group met at the Hollister Riot in 1947 and acquired their first clubhouse in Barstow five months later, but soon moved to Las Vegas. To outsiders, they were just a small band of motorcycle racers and mechanics but they soon became, according to the U.S. Department of Justice, an organized crime syndicate who, by 1950, would become responsible for roughly 10% of the drug dealing, trafficking in stolen goods, widespread violent crime, extortion and prostitution within the city.

In 1954, the AoDs suddenly 'disappeared' – a phenomenon that became part of Las Vegas' underground lore. Over the following years, reports of criminal activity matching the modus operandi of the AoDs continued to surface, but it became impossible to definitively associate the activity with the motorcycle club, which for all intents, no longer existed. Circumstantial evidence was plentiful and rumors of the group's survival endured, but nothing could be substantiated.

Many say their leaders were all ambushed and gunned down by the Mafia or a rival motorcycle club. Others say that there was simply



a falling out and the membership drifted away on the four winds. More outrageous tales claim massive government conspiracy or that one of their secret hideouts was used as a test site for American atomic bomb testing.

The truth was a little darker.

The club's ability to consistently evade law enforcement and rival clubs was certainly by design. Some of its members had made unholy pacts with demonic, alien things. Others dabbled in sorcery; divining through skill and sacrifice many arcane secrets. Some members even, were the result of unnatural unions between man and beast. The AoDs had given much. Yet they were rewarded.

To them, are open the portals of the Badlands, to roam as they will. They utilize these paths to facilitate trafficking of guns and controlled substances, or to evade capture, or just to ease travel even if such a trek would not often be considered easy. And so they've been able to pick and choose their criminal opportunities across the gulf of seven decades, leaving evidence that would confound even the most open minded and well-connected law enforcement officers.

But there are rules; a code; and the club members respect these out of fear of losing access to the Badlands, or worse, losing the ability to leave. That said, the rules well suit the AoDs and they follow them with ease.

First, when the domain calls, they must answer. The riders may be guided toward a town or oasis. Or they may hear of a traveler who requires safe passage through the winding and rocky trails. Sometimes they hear whispers of offenders who think they've escaped the clutches of the Badlands. In this regard, the riders are an extension of the domain's will, which can carry beyond the domain itself.

Riders often are asked to commit the most vile and reprehensible of acts in their home dimensions. Such costs serve to ostracize them from society and instill an appropriate level of fear one would expect of the club.

A rider will not turn against another rider within the Badlands. To do so invites immediate and permanent exiling.

Riders who travel the domain as brothers are bound for life. Forsaking the club for any reason other than death invites retribution.

Children and the truly innocent are spared the riders' wrath within the domain.

Finally, where and when the riders stop must always herald disaster. Always. The paths before the club are twisted and chosen to fit the

will of the Badlands. There will always be adventure for a rider within the Badlands.

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*"If you want to save a man, you send an angel.  
If you want to avenge a man, you send a demon.  
But if you want a man to truly repent, you send  
the Angels of the Desert."*

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—William Henry Hicks  
Lawman, soldier, detective, outlaw,  
assassin, and pioneer of the 21<sup>st</sup> century

## DEEP IN THE MOTHERLODE

It is said, though certainly unsubstantiated, that European trans-oceanic contact to the Americas was pervasive. To date, there exists only one documented account by the Vikings in Newfoundland with other suggested visitations left as a matter of conjecture and considered rumor or fringe science.

Yet there exist literal mountains of circumstantial evidence to suggest otherwise. One such example, the modern day Turkey Mountain in West Tulsa, bears petroglyphs which date back to late 13<sup>th</sup> century and which exist in contradiction to the tools possessed by the Native Americans indigenous to the area at that time.

Ask any of the Lockapoka Creek Indians (if you can find one) and he'll tell you the cryptic glyphs existed long before even the first Lockapoka settlers, that they are incomprehensible save for one thing; their presence indicate imminent and overwhelming danger.

They can be found inscribed onto petrified trees amidst the Oklahoma woodlands, the trunks of which were said to imprison the souls of criminals, failed leaders and shamans and the otherwise damned as they were incubated and prepared for metamorphosis into Kaga and Iktomi; Lockapoka trickster spirits and demons.

They decorate the stones of cairns atop Lefko Hill which have somehow endured both travelers and the encroachment of civilization; and as often as the unholy rocks have been disturbed is as often as unnatural tendrils from the grave have reached into our plane both to restore them and to mete out justice for the infraction.

And they grace the cavern walls of one of the worst portals to the Badlands, an old mine burrowed straight into Turkey Mountain.



Efforts to carbon date the surface rock have been inconclusive and surely this is by design, for it is said that any that walk the mines have as much chance of returning to their own plane as they do to any other one somehow woven into the Badlands. The veins are an unmappable matrix of gold and silver mines, prehistoric havens, underworld transits, modern day chemical dumping grounds, and mythical portals to the lands of the dead.

It has been intimated that the Badlands may be a proto-dimension of Darkling design, crafted for some unspeakable purpose. Those who believe this also believe that some Darklings and in fact vestiges of entire Dark Races are walled behind barriers sealed with the unknowable petroglyphs which mar the cavern walls. And that they were not imprisoned by any hero or savior, but rather by the Dark Lords themselves; considered too unstable and dangerous even to their twisted minds.

It is better said that the petroglyphs do not merely suggest warning. Rather, they suggest penultimate warning; apocalyptic warning. They herald the End of Days.

## DIVIDED WE FALL

The Badlands are not just an alternate place or time. They can also be an alternate reality. When paths diverge because something happens which shouldn't have (or something should have happened which never did), some of those paths may wind their way through the Badlands.

On April 14, 1865, the 16<sup>th</sup> president of the United States of America was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth, a well known actor and confederate spy from Maryland, during a performance of *Our American Cousin*. The man had planned to kill the President, Vice-President, Secretary of State and the military General in one fell swoop, thus depriving the North of their command structure.

In our reality, although Andrew Johnson, William H. Seward and General Ulysses Grant survived (either by chance or because their would-be assassins lost their nerve) Lincoln suffered a mortal wound, clinging to life for nine hours in a coma before finally succumbing to his wounds.

But there exists another reality.

In this reality, General Grant never diverted course to Philadelphia on April 14.

In this reality, after gaining entry to William H. Seward's home under pretense of administering medicine, Lewis Powell succeeded in murdering the man and his two eldest sons

In this reality, after booking a room at the Kirkwood House in Washington where Andrew Johnson was staying, George Atzerodt mustered the courage to kill him.

And in this reality, Ward Hill Lamon, alerted by the disturbance created by Grant's murder, returned in time to confront Booth. Lamon and Lincoln both endured grievous, possibly fatal wounds. But the authorities and the crowd rallied before Booth could complete the task, and he was beaten to death before escaping.

In this diverging path, Lincoln was confronted by what he took to be the specter of death. He considered the sacrifices he'd made. His soldiers. His son. His life. And he weighed them against a very hollow and dismal disposition now that the North command structure had virtually perished. News of Lee's surrender to Grant on April 9<sup>th</sup> would continue to spread but after these events, surely revival of the Confederate insurrection was imminent. He made a hard choice; another sacrifice. He offered the still-hanging life of Ward Hill Lamon, and he offered what remained of his own soul.

Lincoln endured in a coma for nine days. But he endured.

On April 23, 1865, he awakened. Alert. Decisive. Ruthless.

Overwhelming Confederate resistance never manifested, however the pockets that did remain were methodically rooted out and eradicated. Justice was swift and harsh for revolutionaries. Punishment was unceasing and severe for those who surrendered. Taxation was heavy and reparation demands of the South were exorbitant.

The remainder of Lincoln's administration was not one renowned for its mercy.

On November 15, 1886, it was said that Abraham Lincoln died quietly in his home in Springfield, Kentucky. It was a period remembered for the preceding month-long drought and for the unseasonal rains which continued for a week after the man's funeral.

But Lincoln didn't die on November 15, 1886 or on any other day since then. Rather, he honored his contract with the specter who gave him life everlasting. On that night, he joined hands with Grant, Johnson and Seward, each a wraith in his own right. For them, the war continues. For them, the re-exposure of their moral wounds is a daily occurrence as they continually weight the cost of human equality, with liberty, with the good of the whole.

Vast lands form and reform themselves, testing Lincoln and his allies in various frontiers; each stranger and sometimes more horrible than the last.



And Ward Hill Lamon still has a part to play in each of these proceedings. Sometimes he reminisces of his bravery which may have perhaps brought peace to a divided nation. Sometimes he curses Lincoln and the naivety which caused him to prize abstract morality over the concrete cost of men paid in blood.

Now they belong to the ages.

## PAINT IT RED

Silas McKidric was the sheriff of Rustwater, a gold prospecting boomtown in Oregon, who was killed in a shootout with drifters in Happy Jack Ramble's Saloon. It was said that Silas confronted the men who'd been seen fleeing a bank robbery in San Antonio one week earlier and killed all but one who was hiding in the water closet. The man came out firing, killing Silas outright and then fleeing the saloon before succumbing to his wounds in the street. He was caught and lynched by the massing mob.

But there was a little more to the story than that.

Silas was a Texas Ranger who traded one star for another after hearing a childhood friend, Jake Littleton and his family were killed by outlaws passing through the prospector town. Silas, at first uninterested in the town's dirty operations, began to learn some hard truths about his friend and his business associates. It seemed more likely the man had been murdered for his land which housed a promising gold prospect.

Silas became renowned as a champion for justice in the mining town, but he quickly made enemies amongst the land barons and mining industry.

Silas was lured to Happy Jack Ramble's saloon when Gladys Hart (who he'd trusted and grown fond of) and her husband and children were threatened. He'd agreed to discuss terms of his resignation and their safe passage out of Rustwater.

And within, the town conspiracy culminated. The leaders of the mining, real estate, and supply industries, who would have been crippled by Silas' accusations (and so, who were well backed by the township who would have indirectly suffered as their town was mired in legalities while competing towns prospered) gathered to wash their hands in Silas' blood.

The postmaster was there, with a collected catalogue of unsent correspondence.

Gladys, her own family threatened, conspired in shame to protect her family, yet conspired the same.

Neil Hogue, Silas' deputy, to be later named as sheriff, fired the first shot, and recounted the tale of record which was later sent to Texas authorities in El Paso.

It is said when Silas was buried, that it rained for three days and nights, a rusty blood-colored acrid water. The buildings themselves seemed to bleed in the storm.

A year later, Silas returned in the guise of a drifter. His visage was different but his manner was the same. Rustwater was besieged by outlaws and the unnamed stranger offered his services in its protection. Silas interceded as a few outlaws were roughing up some townsfolk. But rather than drive them out, he instigated an organized response.

And that night, as the outlaws stormed Rustwater, the rains returned and the town took on a Hellish visage. Each outlaw was as a demon and his Rustwater victims writhed like the damned. Perhaps not all were guilty, but none were truly innocent if only condemned by their silence.

Outlaw and citizen were killed almost to a man. In the following weeks, the mines dried up and the town was deserted.

And if there is a reason that any survived that night it was only to condemn them to wander that purgatory in waiting, and in witness. For now every year, deep in the Badlands, the dead reawaken. They rise to reenact their sins, corrupting all they see and touch, to the shame of all who bear witness.

Each year their sins summon the hoard of outlaws that would lay waste to Rustwater.

Each year Silas returns to Rustwater to revisit his vengeance upon the faces of his betrayers.

## HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN

There is a man. He manages a shop.

The man's shop isn't quite an antique shop or a book shop (though he carries antiques and books). It isn't quite a gift shop; not in the traditional sense of the word anyway. (Most of his wares would make terrible gifts). It is a shop of things. Things lost. Things forgotten or abandoned. Things hidden. Things left for others. Things that never existed or should have never existed. All these things are on display.

The shop itself is an enigma. It is at once in downtown Tarpon Springs, Florida, on a vacant street in Hallowell, Maine, beneath the tents in Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia, upon the shores of the old market in ancient Athens, behind the general store in Hot Springs, Arkansas, just within sight of the Ouachita Mountains.



The store collects things. The man who runs it, a collector. A thing collected. A thing dispensed. The shop shifts time and locale as such to this end.

And at least once, it graced Bourbon Street, New Orleans.

Bleary eyed, drunk, probably high, a man staggers in out of the howling rain. Whoever he was he'd taken a severe beating. Recently. He stepped in, heedless of the door slamming shut behind him, doe-eyed amongst rows and shelves of... things.

A stupor took him, but the man seemed more as if he was in shock; confused. As if he'd expected something else through that doorway. What. Another bar? An old run down tenement building? A whore house? Anything else would stand out starkly.

A Greek shopkeeper sauntered slowly to him, carrying a saucer of tea and Koulourakia, or Easter cookies. The stranger held up a hand. No matter. The shopkeeper calmly sipped some himself and indulged in a cookie.

"I'm lost."

"Perhaps"

"Where am I?"

"What did the sign say?"

"The House of the Rising Sun." he muttered, then "This isn't right. I need... I need to go."

"You can leave when you're ready."

"I can leave?"

"When you're ready."

"Maybe I'll take that drink."

The shopkeeper walked toward the back, saucer in hand.

The stranger, stilling his vertigo, shifted his gaze along the racks and shelves. Here, an ancient revolver, easily 19<sup>th</sup> century, with carved hawk talons inscribed on its bone handle. There, hanging door beads painted in warm colors, probably from Mumbai, but strangely, cold. Distant.

Near that, was a jar rubbed in earth colors and finished with a thick smooth glaze. It gave off a greasy, spicy smell.

Then there, on a far wall, the stranger saw a glint of something shiny. A mirror. But that isn't all that was shining. It was something else. What was it?

He walked a little closer. The frame was a rusty-bronze colored brocade of scales. Lizard? Snake scales. Staring closely, one could even see a faint diamond pattern within the weave. It lulled you in. Shifting in rhythm hypnotically. You could hear a sibilant whisper. Closer. Closer. Our stranger was lulled so, staring into the clearing

mists of the glass pane, at an oscillating serpentine form moving closer... closer...

The sting was sharp. Swift and painful. The stranger screamed, nursing a bleeding lower lip and falling backward into the standing shelves behind him.

"What the hell!"

The shopkeeper returned with another saucer of tea and Koulourakia. "Are you alright?"

"Damn it, no I'm not alright. Your mirror bit me!" his hands flailed as he tried to sit up and more contents from above collapsed onto him, a heavy leather-bound book stealing the breath from him as it pummeled his gut.

The shopkeeper looked at the stranger. He shifted his gaze to the mirror. He lowered it to the book cradled in the stranger's arms.

"You're ready"

A thousand emotions rushed the stranger's mind. Comprehension was not one of them. He scrambled up to a counter, spilling more wares on the floor, still clutching the book as if it were a sick child.

"I don't... I don't..."

"You're ready"

In the days, the weeks, the years that followed, the stranger studied the mysterious tome. And it led him on many adventures. A lifetime's worth. An eternity's worth. And though he often returned to Bourbon Street and found many a bar, a brothel, a shop, a slum, he never again found the House of the Rising Sun.

## A FINAL STORY: BURTON "GATLING" BROWN

*Inspired by the story of Black Jack Ketchum*

From my childhood, I can recall many adventures. Sure, some are lost. Some of them shaped me into the man I am, even if the specifics are a little hazy. But some I can't - won't forget. They go so far against the grain of the world as I know it, that the details remain forever imprinted on my mind. This is such a tale.

Some other friends and I were backpacking through the wilds near Mesa Verde National Park, visiting various sites of interest including an Indian Pueblo, an abandoned silver mine, an old military fort and now, one of the hideouts used by Burton "Gatling" Brown, renowned Colorado outlaw so-named for his skill with a pair of Navy Colt Revolvers (apparently dangerously modified for quicker action).

It was getting dark and of course we wanted to get a chance to really explore the place but John, the resident hiking expert, insisted we



double back to our designated camp site due to the sheer bluffs near the place.

We did. We set our tents in a close-knit ring and built a hot fire to keep out the evening chill.

First it was just an idea. Gatling Brown's hideout wasn't so far. Hell, we could walk it in under an hour in this moonlight.

Forty minutes of ghost stories and beer later, and the thing was done. Three of us, on a dare, walked with no more than our bedrolls, some flashlights, and some water to the site to ride out the remainder of the night.

I just remember the heat. It came out of nowhere. Or out of a bottle. Doesn't matter which. We were sweating by the time we arrived and the wind was hot on our faces. Hot wind.

Carefully charting a path to one of the bluffs overlooking Gatling's hideout, we began to lay out our bags. God it was hot, but you could feel the chill. Feel it.

I slept with my bag open that night. There were no mosquitoes. No ants or flies that night. Within minutes, thoughts of Gatling Brown filling my mind, I drifted off to sleep.

Crack.

I awoke to a choking, pervasive darkness. The moon and stars were blotted out by.. clouds? Smoke? Not thirty feet away stood a figure in the darkness, slowly walking.. no. Backing towards me. Towards us.

It was so hard to see. I saw a tall hat. A cowboy hat. And the glint of metal at his sides. No. In his hands. He was slowly, carefully, stepping backward. Away from something.

Terror and indecision crippled me. Did I want to warn him we were here? Did I want to warn my friends he was here? My vocal chords were taut, useless.

He stepped closer, and beyond him I could hear a crowd massing. Beyond him. Wasn't that over the bluff? God, what I'd give for a moment of midday sun. They were howling. Hollering. Maybe cheering. But they were definitely getting closer.

Impatience. Stupidity. Whatever it was, I found the nerve to fumble for my flashlight.

He heard me. I flicked the thing on as he whirled with a pair of silver guns cocked, ready and leveled at my head. His jaw, contained a dozen or so sickly yellowed teeth, slowly lowered.

The revenant had walked straight out of the 19th century. Straw hair matted beneath a black cowboy hat. A dark vest over a lighter shirt.

He said only:

"You, you shouldn't be here..."

We were awash in people. The ghostly figure fired his weapons as the light slipped from my hands and shattered against the rock. The howling filled my ears and the man screamed as he was hit, kicked and carried away. The mob was a-frenzy. I felt feet on my ankles and back, sharp jabs to my chest and stomach, and a heavy, dull pain in my head which brought swift oblivion.

It was early morning as my friends roused me. The dream. It was so vivid. Ramblings of a hung over drunk? Apparently I'd walked too close to the bluffs in last night's drunken stupor and managed to smash my temple across a jagged outcropping of rock. I was lucky the rock beneath me gave way, causing me to slip against the side of the bluff rather than all the way down it.

But it was so real.

We'd gathered our sleeping bags and water bottles that morning and began the trek back to camp. Amidst those things I found the casings of a .44 caliber in the sand. Now I'm not stupid. I know those things had been there forever. Probably fired by Gatling himself back when he was hiding near these sun-blasted mesas. I know they weren't from my dream. No one walked up to me in my sleep.

But God. It was so real.

## NEW ARTIFACTS

### Tether's Sundial

It is mostly wooden with traces of cryptic symbols which would seem out of place on most sundials. Tarnished brass ornaments the surface with enough moving parts to resemble a weather vane. Though it functions most anywhere, the relic's powers are wasted outside of the Badlands where its navigational powers truly shine.

As sunlight falls onto the device, a weave of shadow falls upon the wooden surface in writhing, hypnotic patterns. The moving pattern implies many and moving suns. Just looking at it is mesmerizing. Folks have lost strange amounts of time lost in the device's beguiling effects. Attempting to divine meaning from the device has been said to cause insanity in the minds of the untrained.

But in the hands of an empath, the device will accurately navigate the paths connection the various distributed pockets within the Badlands. Using the relic is an Average task of either Project Emotion or Foreboding. Success allows the wielding to navigate to any area



within one day's ride. It is a Difficult check to use the sundial to search for a portal to another dimension, and it is a Formidable task to use it to find a portal to a specific dimension. Failing either of these latter checks could have repercussions including empathic backlash, damage to the device, and drawing attention to the proto-dimension custodians.

## The Pathfinder

It is perhaps possible to leave the Badlands against the will of the domain.

The Pathfinder is housed in a wooden box approximately 14" x 7" x 4" in size and if anyone was foolhardy enough to disassemble it, he would find it was filled with 36 bronze gears. Its actuator is a polished ebony knob in the center of its 'top' larger surface. It is essentially a hand-cranked analog computer, designed for navigation not only across the Badlands dimension (as the Sundial compass is) but into and out of the proto-dimension.

Instructions for its proper use are written on the exterior in Koine Greek, although the thing is clearly much older than that as some passages are written in Sanskrit.

Only one of these relics is known to have ever existed, but rumors persist that one could set more than navigation details by way of its gears. Some theories persist that the gears could be set to compensate for astrological conditions. Other, wilder theories claim that the gears could actually affect those conditions. Some submit that the device may even have been used during design of the proto-dimension.

## NEW DARKLINGS

### THE DROWNED

<i>Strength:</i>	5	<i>Education:</i>	1	<i>Move:</i>	1/4/8
<i>Constitution:</i>	3	<i>Charisma:</i>	1	<i>Skill/Dam.:</i>	6/1D6
<i>Agility:</i>	5	<i>Empathy:</i>	1	<i>Hits:</i>	80/160
<i>Intelligence:</i>	1	<i>Initiative:</i>	2	<i># Appearing</i>	1

Those unavenged dead who've been drowned before passing through whatever underworld they claim as their own will sometimes wander the Badlands as lost souls. Singular victims who enter

the Badlands most often do so as wraiths; groups of the dead, bound together in death, will relive their tormented existences until some perceived wrong has been righted.

The drowned are zombies, foremost. But where zombies lack a will to exist, to do anything, the drowned maintain a strong desire usually connected with their death or with some other event which they may have perceived as even more significant.

The drowned merely babble and gurgle if approached, and rarely do more than lumber erratically toward prey. They are virtually impossible to communicate with, but if one can somehow find a common link to that which drives them on, he might begin to learn a little about the drowned.

The drowned actually gain a +1 bonus to all stats if at least partially submerged within any body of water. In fact, beneath the surface, one will find that the drowned are actually capable of crude speech (if somehow prompted to it).

Their most prominent form of attack is to overbear by numbers and drag victims back into their watery graves. Victims killed in this way will often become of the drowned themselves.

### THE FROZEN

<i>Strength:</i>	6	<i>Education:</i>	2	<i>Move:</i>	3/9/18/25
<i>Constitution:</i>	6	<i>Charisma:</i>	2	<i>Skill/Dam.:</i>	8/2D6
<i>Agility:</i>	5	<i>Empathy:</i>	2	<i>Hits:</i>	8/12
<i>Intelligence:</i>	2	<i>Initiative:</i>	2	<i># Appearing:</i>	2D6

Those who have fallen in the frozen wastes whether justly or unjustly will often find themselves wandering in the tundra of the Badlands. They are comprised of frozen hiking parties, starved mountain campers, ice avalanche victims, those who've died in rail accidents on snow plains, and entire settlements who could not weather the early and harsh winters of pre-history.

Some burn with an inner fire for justice, but many simply wander, void of thought or prayer; void of desire. They merely populate the realm as a message or a warning to those traveling within.

The frozen are zombies but tend to be of sturdier stock. They resist most physical attacks but are particularly susceptible to heat. Stories exist of the frozen wandering from their icy lairs to sit by some untended fire. If undisturbed for long enough, the warmth will melt away his drive to exist, finally granting him peace.



## THE SLEEPERS

<i>Strength:</i>	8	<i>Education:</i>	1	<i>Move:</i>	3/9/18/25
<i>Constitution:</i>	12	<i>Charisma:</i>	1	<i>Skill/Dam.:</i>	8/2D6
<i>Agility:</i>	8	<i>Empathy:</i>	2	<i>Hits:</i>	12/20
<i>Intelligence:</i>	5	<i>Initiative:</i>	3	<i># Appearing:</i>	1D6

Very little is known about this race. No one knows how old they are, when they first arrived in the Badlands or from where they came. What is known is that they hunt living prey, infect it until it becomes carrion, and the carrion eventually animates to further infect other prey.

The species has an aversion to light which has caused them to adapt by burrowing beneath the earth. There is thought to be a complex network of subterranean tunnels beneath many of the dimensions which house them. Some species are so affected by light that undiluted sunlight kills them.

In their native form, sleepers resemble slithering agile humanoids. They attack with their teeth or with the digits of any infected carrion which leaves spores in the victim. After an incubation period of usually no more than twelve hours, the victim becomes sluggish, drowsy, and eventually paralyzed. He will become catatonic within 24 hours and will reanimate shortly after. There is no known cure or process to slow or reverse the transformation.

The sleepers get their name from their extended hibernation periods. Some species will hibernate for one or more decades before hunting. Some will wait generations. A Sioux legend tells of one species which can hibernate indefinitely until they are awakened by blood spilt into the soil due to an act of betrayal.

So many and varied stories about a collection of creatures which themselves seem to vary greatly, leads to little more than inconclusive theory.

## INSPIRATIONS

This work was inspired by a variety of material both Dark Conspiracy related and otherwise, but below are some specific films, games and music which were particularly inspirational:

### FILMS AND TELEVISION

*High Plains Drifter* (1973, Clint Eastwood, Ernest Tidyman)

*Pale Rider* (1985, Clint Eastwood, Michael Butler)

*The Burrowers* (2008, Clancy Brown, J. T. Petty)

*Sons of Anarchy* (2008, Kurt Sutter)

### STORIES

Black Jack Ketchum Lives On ([www.legendsofamerica.com](http://www.legendsofamerica.com))

### GAMES

*Gunslinger* (Avalon Hill, 1982)

*Deadlands* (Pinnacle Entertainment Group, 1999)

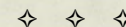
### MUSIC ARTISTS

Leonard Cohen, Johnny Cash, The Animals, Chris Isaak, Neil Young, Marty Robbins, The Spaghetti Western Orchestra and most definitely Genesis's 1978 record "And Then There Were Three..."

## THANKS

Thanks to the folks at that Dark Conspiracy and Proto-dimension Facebook groups for their support and to Alex and Jennifer for proofreading.

Thanks to Norm, Lee, and Tad for their continued support of this fantastic periodical.





# TOO LATE

*Tirpping the Rift*

by Captain Obvious

FICTION

I GOT THERE ONLY 45 seconds after hearing the call; first one on the scene but it was already too late. Describing the horror is pointless. Knowing I could have stopped it if I'd been there in time is a living nightmare.

Later on, I went to sit in my car. The rest of the guys knew enough to leave me alone and I just leaned my forehead on the steering wheel and bawled – without noise, something deep inside me was forcing its way out – all this while the lights from the ambulances danced across my windshield.

I was too late.

I dealt with The Bad day in and day out, but this was worse. It took a while till I got it together, but everything afterwards felt like going through the motions. Whatever came out that night in burning tears left a void and now I was just pretending to be me.

The next few days passed in a blur. I went to the first funerals, but enough was enough and by Wednesday, I'd turned in my

paperwork and badge. Oh, they gave me some crap about the psychological impact of something like this – that time would heal me – then offered me some time off and think about it.

I told them what they wanted to hear and left town that night, just tossed a few bags in the back of the Mustang, ran my fingers along the dented left rear corner panel I'd never bother having fixed and then started driving west on the Interstate. It was easy, mindlessly

easy, to fall in behind a convoy of 18 wheelers and just keep going through those concrete canyons until we pulled off for gas or maybe something to eat. The windshield RFID was still good and I could go anywhere I wanted, at least for the foreseeable future. Country-western stations would fade in and out, the radio pre-sets deliberately tweaked to ignore the reminders on the channels of lies and hubris. Eventually, even the music faded to static.





That suited me just fine.

It seemed like rain or mist or low clouds were the only sort of weather anymore. I never bothered to talk to anyone at the stops. In retrospect, I'm not sure I saw anyone the half dozen times since everything was automated. Once or twice I slept in the car, but only for a few hours at a shot before finding another convoy to tag along behind.

Maybe three days and nights passed, the clouds and concrete canyons gone and I was in open country, were you could see for miles on either side under the full moonlight. The lights of a town glowed up ahead but no way could I make it that far – nature called too loud and I pulled off at a gas station where the lights where on but no one was home.

The bathroom wasn't even locked. I did what I came to do, washed my hands and tried to recognize the hollow reflection in the mirror. I'd clean up my act when I got to this next town.

Outside, the air smelled different and the world was darker. It also wasn't the parking lot where I'd left the Mustang. The Interstate wasn't where I'd left it, either.

I spun on my heel and faced a wooden outhouse. Every have a dream where you know within the dream that you're dreaming? I just knew I'd fallen asleep on the can. They say you can't wake yourself up from your own dreams, so the only option was to just play this out.

The inside of the outhouse looked and smelled like you'd expect. I turned around again and saw a single line of railroad tracks heading off into the darkness in the direction from whence (? Whence? Did I just say that?) I'd come. I felt the wind sigh through the surrounding cacti.

So this was how sleep deprivation manifested?

My clothes fit comfortably enough but they smelled, noticeably so. There was a familiar weight on my right hip but the revolver's grips felt strange when I wrapped my fingers around them. The temptation to test it flickered, purely for reassurance in this vivid dream world, but a deeper voice whispered caution and faith. A far lighter weight

tickled my chest, a simple touch confirming that it was the translucent cow bone crucifix that had belonged to my mother's mother, and her mother's mother before her. I wasn't even Catholic.

This place was a paddock that smelled of dung, ringed with a weak notion of a scrap wood fence that clung to a small adobe hut pretending to be a relay station. Its sole wooden shutter creaked. A horse – my horse - nickered attention. Almost invisible in the darkness, he (?) was black and a familiar friend, with some hair worn off on his (how did I know that?) withers. Saddle, pouches, two scabbards, bedroll - all of them were mine but not mine. Roll with this, my silent voice said. Just... don't think too hard. Not yet, at least.

Prudence can be quiet. The break-top revolver, the short-barreled English shotgun and the Winchester carbine where all loaded. Ancient weapons all, they felt far older than the hundred and thirty-odd years logic said they should be.

I was never going back the way I came, so up into the saddle I swung and from that vantage point, the rails and line of poles lead west towards the town that'd been my waking destination. I let my horse take us towards those dim lights at his own pace, nodding to the sound of horseshoes on the paralleling hard packed trail... Is it possible to be so tired one falls asleep inside of a dream? I'm not even sure my (Friend?) was awake, but it was just breaking dawn by the time we came abreast the first sad buildings.

A thin trail of wood smoke barely covered the smell of brewing coffee.

Dismounting, I led Friend the last few yards

while searching for signs of life among the dozen or so buildings in sight. Not what I expected. Dirt streets, wooden sidewalks, and dilapidated structures more fitting to a roadside ghost town tourist trap my parents had once taken me to when I was a little kid. My subconscious certainly was dredging up all sorts of twisted justifications to fodder this dream. A strong breeze came from my left, blowing orphaned tumbleweeds across the street. From somewhere in town, a Cock crowed three times.





'Roll with it' was all I could do, as dawn stretched our shadows long in front of us. The smell of coffee beckoned and tin tinkled off to my left but what caught my eye kept my feet still. Four hipsters, three men and a woman dressed more for the downtown Dreamlands than this place, came out of a building halfway into town and turned away from me. You can tell a lot about people from the way they carry themselves and experience said these four were now swimming in the deep end of the pool.

Squinting, I could barely make out shapes far past the end of the street, just cresting the western horizon.

The hipsters obviously saw them too.

Wood creaked and someone came out of the hut... a glance only a heartbeat long ... a smiling man with curly, oiled hair and steaming coffee cups in both hands. Black vest and trousers, no hat or weapon. He was dangerous, but not to me – not now, not here – so I paid him no mind.

One drama at a time.

"Why Constable, you got here just in time". Roll with it.

I said nothing even as I felt his presence at my elbow. From the corner of my eye, he offered one of the cups. Nodding my thanks without turning to look him in the face, I stayed focused on the drama unfolding down the street. The coffee felt and tasted real enough. A wave of heat rolled down to my gut even as my blood ran cold with a singular doubt.

"Where is here?" Not sure I wanted to hear his answer.

"Better to ask Why is here, or When is here" The accent was faintly foreign, like French maybe. I knew I would not like this individual, if we became more familiar but the man with the coffee seemed to be in a sharing mood this morning. At the other end of town, the wind woke the church steeple's bell.

"More to the point, I do believe you are the only soul around here who has the faintest grasp of what's about to happen". I'd argue that his assessment was flatteringly inaccurate. "Here is about Balance. Redemption for some, Justice for others, Epiphany for those who look, Fate for most".

It felt like I was listening to Alice's Mad Hatter and part of me was tempted to join him for tea. I thought of offering Ignorance, Trust and Intuition as spots on the same map but I kept my mouth shut. The figures in the distance had grown larger and blacker, now distinctly five in number and soon within range of my ancient carbine.

The hipster quartet in the street had spread into a skirmish line, still oblivious to my presence. Not good.

"Now that you're here, do you know where you need to be?" I finished my coffee, handed him back his cup. A small murder of crows took flight from one of the roofs.

"Thanks for the hospitality, Mister. And yes, Sir... I do". I pulled the Winchester free of its scabbard and started walking, trusting Friend would follow.

From behind, I could still feel the man smiling. "Best of luck, Constable. I do mean that... I have a substantial sum riding on my hunch".

◆ ◆ ◆

## ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY / HIGHWAY PATROL DIVISION

### INCIDENT REPORT EXTRACT:

//BEGIN//130323/012/z (Abandoned Vehicle)  
2004 Ford Mustang (wht) vic117MM039/No  
signs foul play/RFID+tagsLEOownership/contact-  
MPD/request\_tow+impound/NFI //END//





# SAVAGE CONSPIRACY

*Dark Conspiracy in a Savage World*

by Geoff Skellams

FOR SAVAGE WORLDS DELUXE

## INTRODUCTION

The Earth is gripped by the Greater Depression. Economic markets across the globe have collapsed, leaving millions out of work. Megacorporations have taken over, controlling the world's economy and exerting a huge degree of influence over the world's governments. The governments, for their part, struggle to keep up with the economic problems and end up doing little to help the people who voted them into power.

And while the world rots, even darker forces are manipulating things from the shadows. Evil from another dimension has been released into the world and is carefully building a web to subjugate more and more of the world's population.

Most people don't even know it exists. They're so caught up in their own problems that they don't see the evil that lurks just beneath the surface. Most people can't believe that it even exists.

But there are a few who have seen the truth, and do what they can do oppose it. They go by many names, but most know them as Minion Hunters...

*Savage Conspiracy* is an adaptation of the *Dark Conspiracy* game universe to use the *Savage Worlds* ruleset. It's not intended as a conversion document; there are no guidelines on how to convert an existing *Dark Conspiracy* character to *Savage Worlds*. Instead, it's designed to provide a means of utilizing the *Savage Worlds* ruleset to run a game that feels like *Dark Conspiracy*. For the most part, I'm electing to keep the rules as close to vanilla *Savage Worlds* as possible, rather than trying to port across all of the old GDW house system.

## PREREQUISITES

This article assumes that you have access to the *Savage Worlds Deluxe* rulebook for the rules themselves and the *Dark Conspiracy* rulebook (either 1st edition or 2nd edition), for the background information. Some information may come from other *Dark Conspiracy* sourcebooks as well.

## SETTING RULES

*Savage Worlds Deluxe* introduces optional setting rules, which can be used to change the flavour of the system. See *Savage Worlds Deluxe*, page 94.

*Savage Conspiracy* uses:



**Critical Failures:** If a character rolls double 1s on a Trait roll, they cannot spend a Benny to reroll the failure.

**Gritty Damage:** whenever a Wild Card character is wounded, they need to roll on the Injury table.

**Optional—Skill Specialization:** *Savage Worlds* deliberately uses very broad skill categories. However, if the GM and players prefer (especially if they're long time *Dark Conspiracy* players), use the Skill Specialization option to provide an equivalent to *Dark Conspiracy's* Cascade Skill concept.

## CHARACTER CREATION

Player characters in *Savage Conspiracy* are Minion Hunters: normal people who somehow discover that the world is being manipulated by beings from other worlds and in some cases, other dimensions. These beings are intent on enslaving humanity and manipulating life on Earth for their own ends, making life much worse for humanity in the process. The player characters, once they learn the truth, put their lives on the line to do what they can to stem the flow of influence.

The vast majority of characters in *Savage Conspiracy* games will be human. These characters are created using the guidelines in the *Savage Worlds* rulebook. Some Edges from the core *Savage Worlds* book have been disallowed because they're not appropriate to the setting. Several new Edges and Hindrances have been added as well (see below for details).

However, there are two new races that can be taken, particular to the *Dark Conspiracy* Universe.

### NEW DERIVED STATISTIC

Willpower is your hero's mental toughness. A high Willpower score means they are hard to influence empathically. Willpower is calculated at 2 + half your hero's Spirit. Calculating Willpower for Spirit over d12 is calculated just like Parry (see *Savage Worlds Deluxe*, p17).

### NEW RACES

#### *Renegade ET*

Most of the extraterrestrials that came to Earth have been taken over by the Dark Lords. But there are a few who managed to escape

the empathic control that subjugated their rest of their brethren. They now hide out on Earth, helping those who would fight against the Dark Lords and hoping to stay hidden so they are not mentally enslaved.

**Empathic Nature:** Renegade ET characters gain the Arcane Background (Empathy) edge for free

**Highly Empathic:** ETs use empathy powers as their main means of communication. Renegade ETs gain the Highly Empathic edge for free, giving them +2 on Empathy Skill checks

**Empathic Powerhouse:** +10 Power Points for use with Empathic powers.

**Empathically Vulnerable:** ETs rely on empathy for most of their communications. Because of this, they're much more vulnerable to Empathic attacks. Renegade ET characters suffer a -2 to their Willpower.

**Hunted:** The Dark Lords want complete control over the ET population and see any renegades as a threat to their control. Dark

## WHAT'S THE STARTING LEVEL?

*Savage Worlds* characters normally start at Novice level, with no experience points. However, Novice level characters are usually pretty weak, and fail a lot more rolls than they succeed at.

If your campaign is centered around PCs who are coming across the *Dark Conspiracy* for the first time, you may be happy to start the PCs as Novices.

However, if you're planning on starting the game with the PCs being experienced minion hunters, then you may want to consider allowing the players to start their characters at Experienced or even Veteran level, with all the associated level ups that go along with those levels.





Minions actively hunt the Renegades down, to bring them under the Dark Lords powers.

## *Cyborg Escapee*

The Extraterrestrials sometimes abduct humans and implant them with cyberware, planning to use them as cybernetic changelings. But occasionally, the changes go astray and the cyborg is able to break free from the Dark Minion control and escape to oppose their former masters.

**Agile OR Strong:** Cyborg Escapees are modified to be either faster or stronger than their base human stock. They start with either their Agility or their Strength (but not both) at d6, instead of d4.

**Socket Hand:** One of the cyborgs normal hands has been replaced by a cybernetic version. This can be detached and replaced with a more specialized version. However, the character does not begin play with one of the specialized hands.

**Quick:** The cybernetic enhancements implanted by the ETs give the cyborgs a much faster reaction time than regular humans. They gain the Quick Edge for free.

**Outsider:** Because of the modifications made by the ETs, cyborg escapees are seen as slightly odd by most of humanity, if not just plain off. As a result, they suffer a -2 Charisma penalty.

**Hunted:** The Dark Lords see cyborg escapees as failures and a threat to their control. Dark Minions actively hunt the cyborg escapees down, to either destroy them or bring them under the Dark Lords powers.

## SUGGESTED KNOWLEDGE SKILLS

**Savage Worlds** tries not to pollute its skill list by creating dozens of specialized skills. It does, however, have the Knowledge skill, which can be taken multiple times, with different areas of specialty.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of specific Knowledge skills that **Savage Conspiracy** characters may find useful. Players should feel free to create other specific Knowledge subskills, relevant to their character's background.

### *Knowledge (Bureaucracy)*

Bureaucracy is an understanding of how large businesses and government departments operate. A character with a strong understanding of bureaucracy can make dealing with corporate entities a lot simpler.

Knowledge (Bureaucracy) can also be tested to see what the character knows about various corporations, their missions, core businesses, senior personnel and so on.

### *Knowledge (Chemistry)*

Knowledge (Chemistry) provides an ability to undertake a chemical analysis of a sample, provided that the character has access to suitable equipment and chemical supplies. It also allows for the creation of useful substances, such as chemical smoke, gunpowder, smokeless powder, tear gas, dynamite, explosive primer and plastic explosives. Penalties to the skill check may be imposed for making certain substances.

### *Knowledge (Computer Operation)*

Computer Operation provides an understanding about how to operate computers, from basic tasks like searching for information, through to more advanced topics like computer programming. It does not cover repairing the computer hardware; this should be handled using the Repair skill.

### *Knowledge (Darkling Lore)*

Darkling Lore represents snippets of information from past encounters with Darklings. This may come from direct experience, or it may be from rumours or stories from other Minion Hunters. When the character encounters signs of minion activity, a successful use of this skill should provide some insights on what they are facing and how to deal with it. (This information should be specifically about actual Darklings; information about the folklore versions based upon Darklings can be handled through Common Knowledge rolls.)

## DISALLOWED EDGES

The following edges are disallowed in **Savage Conspiracy**, as they are either not appropriate to the game universe, or rely on skills or feats that are not available:

<i>Arcane Resistance</i>	<i>Mentalist</i>
<i>Champion</i>	<i>Mr Fix It</i>
<i>Gadgeteer</i>	<i>Soul Drain</i>
<i>Holy/Unholy Warrior</i>	<i>Wizard</i>
<i>Improved Arcane Resistance</i>	



## NEW HINDRANCES

### *Empathically Vulnerable (Minor or Major)*

For whatever reason, your hero's mind is much more open to empathic influence than a normal person. It may be because he's been subjected to empathic testing in a test lab, he had an encounter with the supernatural that had a profound influence on him, or it may just be because he's a sensitive person in general.

If a Minor Hindrance, your hero suffers a -1 penalty to his Willpower. If it's a Major Hindrance, he suffers a -2 penalty instead.

### *Flashbacks (Minor or Major)*

Maybe your hero was abducted by aliens and subjected to who knows what tests. Maybe she had a run in with the supernatural that haunts her to this day. Maybe she just witnessed something horrific, and she just can't forget it.

When your hero come across a situation that reminds her of her past trauma, she must make a Spirit check. A successful check means she manages to keep herself together. If she fails it, she is Shaken and must make a Vigor roll or suffer severe nausea and mental shock. This inflicts a -1 penalty to actions for the remainder of the encounter. A natural 1 on the Spirit check (regardless of the Wild Die) causes the victim to roll on the Fear Effects table as well.

If a Minor Hindrance, the trigger(s) for her flashbacks would be fairly uncommon and quite specific. If it's a Major Hindrance, the triggers should be common and your hero should come across them fairly regularly. Discuss the triggers with your GM ahead of time and agree on how intrusive they should be.

### *Hunted (Minor or Major)*

Dark Minions are actively hunting for your hero. It may be because he's seen too much and they need to silence him, or he may have escaped from their control in the past and they want him back.

If a Minor Hindrance, the Dark Minions will pursue your hero if they discover him during the course of an adventure, but if he keeps his head down, he's likely to fly under their radar. If it's a Major Hindrance, Dark Minions are actively hunting for him and will likely do everything in their power to capture your hero.

## NEW EDGES

### *Empathic*

**Requirements:** Novice, Arcane Background (Empathy)

Your hero has a strongly tuned sixth sense and can pick up on. He gets a +1 bonus when making Empathy skill checks.

### *Highly Empathic*

**Requirements:** Seasoned, Arcane Background (Empathy), Empathic

Your character is even more sensitive to Empathic information. She receives a +2 bonus when making Empathy skill checks.

### *Foreboding*

**Requirements:** Novice, Arcane Background (Empathy)

A character with Foreboding have a precognitive ability that gives them impressions of things that are going to happen before they actually occur. Sometimes the impression comes days or even weeks in advance, while other times, it may only be a couple of seconds' worth of warning.

Foreboding allows the character to make an Empathy skill check when requested by the GM to determine how much information she receives in advance. The exact nature of the information and how it is presented is left to the GM to determine, based on the story situation and the outcome of the skill check.

### *Shielded Mind*

**Requirements:** Novice

Whether it's by training or just sheer mental fortitude, your character's mind is resistant to external Empathic influence. She receives a +2 bonus to her Willpower.

### *Second Socket Hand*

**Requirements:** Novice, Cyborg Escapee

The cyborg character's second hand has also been replaced by a cybernetic one, allowing the character to replace the hand with a specialized tool hand. However, when play starts, the character only possesses a normal human appearing hand. Specialized hands must be acquired during play.

### *Subdermal Armour*

**Requirements:** Novice, Cyborg Escapee



The character had subdermal armor implanted whilst a prisoner of the extraterrestrials. His skin acts as the equivalent of Kevlar armor.

This edge can be taken multiple times. Each time represents armour on a different body location (e.g.: torso, head, arms, legs).

### *Hard Case*

**Requirements:** Novice, Spirit d6+

The character's seen a lot and very little fazes her. It may be because of faith, self-discipline, or she may just be jaded because she's seen it all before. The character receives a +1 bonus to Spirit checks when resisting Fear.

### *Stoic*

**Requirements:** Seasoned, Spirit d8+, Hard Case

The character's emotional resilience is so strong, it takes an awful lot to faze her. She receives a +2 bonus to Spirit checks when resisting Fear.

## EMPATHY

Humans have long believed in the existence of a "sixth sense", an ability to gain information through feelings and intuition. There's no scientific basis for this, nor is there any real objective way to scientifically measure it. It is, however, very real and once properly trained, it can be incredibly powerful.

**Savage Conspiracy** introduces a new Arcane Background – Empathy. Characters that have the Arcane Background (Empathy) Edge are attuned to the natural forces of the Earth and its creatures. By developing the associated Empathy skill, they can in turn use

that ability to sense and influence things beyond that which they can perceive with the normal five senses.

## ARCANE BACKGROUND (EMPATHY)

**Arcane Skill:** Empathy (Spirit)

**Starting Power Points:** 10

**Starting Powers:** 3

Empaths are people who have learned not only to trust their "sixth sense", but to be able to control it to perform feats beyond that which most normal people would consider even possible. Their powers come through greater understanding of how the emotions of not only people, but plants, animals and even inanimate object, are all tied together and can be manipulated.

**Overwhelmed:** When an empathic character rolls a 1 on his Empathy die (regardless of his Wild Die), he is overwhelmed by the emotional influx of information and is automatically Shaken. This can cause a wound.

## USING EMPATHIC POWERS

To use an Empathic Power, the character needs to state which single Power they are using, spend the appropriate number of Power Points, and make an Empathy skill check. The target number of this check is the target's Willpower score (normally 2 + half Spirit).

If this roll fails, nothing happens, and the Power Points are still lost.

If the roll is successful, calculate the Empathic Success Stage by determining how many raises the roll succeeded by and consulting the following table:

Number of Raises	Success Stage
0	1
1	2
2	3
3	4
4	5
5+	6

The exact result of the Power is determined by the Success Stage obtained. See the individual Power descriptions for details.

## THE "NORMAL" SAVAGE WORLDS ARCANE BACKGROUNDS

Empathy effects are – by and large – quite subtle. In **Savage Conspiracy**, most of the normal Arcane Backgrounds (i.e. Magic, Miracles, Psionics, and Superpowers) are not available. Weird Science is available under limited circumstances; it is known as DarkTek and is not available to starting characters, and may not be learned by player characters at all.

See below for further details on DarkTek.



If the Range is specified as “Success Stage”, the Empath can affect a sphere, centered on themselves, with a radius in meters equal to the Success Stage of the Empathy skill check.

## EMPATHY DIFFICULTY LEVELS

Empathy checks are assumed to be taken under normal day-to-day conditions. There are no penalties or bonuses associated with these situations.

If careful preparation is made before the Empathy skill check is made, for example: finding a quiet place to meditate, the use of herbs, essential oils, etc, and a willing target, then the GM may award a bonus of +2 on the Empathy skill check.

If, however, the skill check is made under stressful conditions, for example: while the character is in combat, then a penalty of -2 on the Empathy skill check may be imposed.

## DARKLING POWERS

Any powers with a rank higher than Novice are Darkling Powers; they are normally not available to humans without specific training from a being from either another world or another dimension. They could, however, be taught by another human who has received training from an outsider. Finding someone who is both capable and willing to teach these Powers should be the focus for an adventure in its own right.

## NEW POWERS

### ANIMAL EMPATHY

**Rank:** Novice

**Power Points:** 2

**Range:** Success Stage

**Duration:** Encounter

The empath can sense and understand the mental and emotional state of a single animal within range. She is unable to change that state, merely understand it. Human emotions and thoughts are more complicated and require the use of the Human Empathy power instead.

Stage 1 success reveals the presence and basic emotional state of a single animal with the Power's range. Each additional Success Stage allows one of the following:

- ☛ double the sphere's radius;
- ☛ reveal all creatures of a single species; or
- ☛ reveal the exact thoughts and emotions of a single target creature.

### COMPUTER EMPATHY

**Rank:** Novice

**Power Points:** 2

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Encounter

The empath can sense and understand a single target computer that he is in physical contact with. What the empath learns is dependent upon the Success Stage:

Stage 1 success means that the empath can understand the physical state of any computer, including any damage to it or its components.

Stage 2 success means the empath can “read” any data being accessed by that one computer. It also gives a +2 bonus to all Knowledge (Computer Operation) skill checks for the remainder of the encounter.

Stage 3 success allows the empath to either read the interior workings of another computer connected to the target, or read all the data contained within the target computer, even if it is not currently being accessed.

Stage 4 success allows the reading of data in the remote computer that is currently being accessed

Stage 5 success allows accessing of all data in a remote computer

Stage 6 success provides a +4 bonus to all Knowledge (Computer Operation) skill checks when accessing the target computer.

### DARKLING EMPATHY

**Rank:** Veteran

**Power Points:** 3

**Range:** Success Stage

**Duration:** Encounter

The same as Human Empathy (see below), but works on Darklings instead.

Darkling Empathy is a Darkling Power.



## DIMENSION WALK

**Rank:** Veteran

**Power Points:** 5

**Range:** Special

**Duration:** Special

The Dimension Walk Power allows the empath to open a gateway to a protodimension outside the normal bounds of Earth's reality. By traveling through the protodimension and opening a gateway on the other side, they can travel vast distances on Earth in a fraction of the time. Dark Minions use this power to allow them to appear and disappear from Earth almost at will.

An Empath cannot open a portal to a protodimension that they have no experience of. The best way to experience a protodimension is to visit it personally, although having someone empathically share the information first, using Project Thought.

When using Dimension Walk, the base target number for the Empathy skill check is only 4. However, each protodimension has a discontinuity factor, which represents how different that protodimension is from Earth's normal reality. The empath suffers a penalty on the Empathy skill check equal to the difference between the discontinuity of the dimension (or protodimension) the empath is currently in and the one they are trying to open a portal to.

The duration and size of the portal opened depends upon the Success Stage:

Stage 1 success creates a portal just large enough for the creator, who is instantly drawn through it before it collapses again.

Stage 2 success opens a portal for one round.

Stage 3 success opens a portal for two rounds.

Stage 4 success allows the creator to hold the portal open for a number of rounds equal to his Empathy skill.

Stage 5 success doubles this amount of time.

Stage 6 success allows for the creation or destruction of a permanent portal.

Dimension Walk is a Darkling Power.

## EMPATHIC HEALING

**Rank:** Novice

**Power Points:** 3

**Range:** Touch

**Duration:** Instant

Empathic Healing is the same as the Healing Power in the *Savage Worlds* core rulebook.

## HUMAN EMPATHY

**Rank:** Novice

**Power Points:** 2

**Range:** Success Stage

**Duration:** Encounter

The empath can sense and understand the mental and emotional state of a single person within range. She is unable to change that state, merely understand it.

Stage 1 success reveals the presence and basic emotional state of an individual with the Power's range. Each additional Success Stage allows one of the following:

double the sphere's radius;

an additional person can be sensed; or

reveal deeper insights into the target individual, progressing from emotional state, to surface thoughts, to deeper thoughts.

## PLANT EMPATHY

**Rank:** Seasoned

**Power Points:** 2

**Range:** Success Stage

**Duration:** Encounter

Plant Empathy is equivalent to Animal Empathy, although it picks up on the emotions of plants instead of animals. This is normally not particularly useful, but it can come in handy in the case of sentient Darkling plant life.

Plant Empathy is a Darkling Power.

## PROJECT EMOTION

**Rank:** Novice

**Power Points:** 3

**Range:** Sight

**Duration:** Encounter

An empath using this Power can instill particular emotions into a target. Specific thoughts and instructions cannot be instilled using this power (that requires the Project Thought Power instead). Rather, this Power is used to instill specific feelings – such as fear, rage, love, or anxiety – into the target and then letting their normal reactions to those feelings take over.



On a successful use of this Power, the target is permitted a Spirit check to resist the effects. A -1 penalty on this Spirit check is applied for each Success Stage above Stage 1. If this check fails, the target is forced to act on the instilled feeling in an appropriate way. If the check succeeds, they are able to recognise that the feeling comes from outside them and not act on the feeling, although they still feel the effects.

## PROJECT THOUGHT

**Rank:** Novice

**Power Points:** 3

**Range:** Sight

**Duration:** Encounter

An empath using Project Thought can communicate mentally with the target. Only simple thoughts can be communicated to animals. The amount of information projected to a human target is dependent upon the Success Stage:

Stage 1 allows only a simple, single sentence thought.

Stage 2 allows the empath to project a ghostly image into the target's field of vision to communicate through that.

Stage 3 allows the vision to appear solid and three dimensional.

Stage 4 also adds auditory hallucinations

Stage 5 extends the hallucination to the remainder of the senses

Stage 6 allows the empath to control the target like a puppet.

On a successful use of this Power, the target is permitted a Smarts check to resist the effects. A -1 penalty on this Smarts check is applied for each Success Stage above Stage 1. If this check fails, the target is forced to act on the instilled feeling in an appropriate way. If the check succeeds, they are able to recognise that the thoughts come from outside themselves and not act on them.

## PYROKINESIS

**Rank:** Veteran

**Power Points:** 5

**Range:** Success Stage

**Duration:** Success Stage x 1 round

Pyrokinesis allows the empathy to raise the temperature of a target. The exact temperature raise depends upon the success stage:

Stage 1 will cause up to one liter of water to boil, or will cause a human size living target to feel feverish.

Stage 2 will boil up to twenty liters of water, or cause mild blistering on the skin of a living target.

Stage 3 boils up to fifty liters of water. Flammable liquids, such as petrol, may ignite. A living target becomes Fatigued, suffering a -1 penalty to all Trait rolls.

Stage 4 causes paper and other similarly combustible materials to ignite. A living target becomes Exhausted, suffering a -2 penalty to all Trait rolls.

Stage 5 success causes blocks of wood or similar materials to combust. Ammunition and other explosives may detonate. A living target becomes Incapacitated, preventing them from performing any actions until they have recovered.

Stage 6 causes a living target to spontaneously combust.

The different success stages are sequential: a target will go through each of the stages, one per round. So, if a Stage 6 success is achieved against a living target, it will take six rounds for them to combust, and they will have dropped incapacitated with blistering before that happens.

Once the duration of the Power has been reached, the heating will cease, and the target can then recover normally, although it may take some time for them to return to normal.

Pyrokinesis is a Darkling Power.

## TELEKINESIS

**Rank:** Seasoned

**Power Points:** 5

**Range:** Smarts

**Duration:** 3 (1/round)

Telekinesis is the same as the power listed in the *Savage Worlds* core rulebook

Telekinesis is a Darkling Power.

## WILLPOWER DRAIN

**Rank:** Novice

**Power Points:** 2

**Range:** Smarts

**Duration:** Encounter

Some people have a very strong sense of self and empaths find it difficult to influence them empathically. To make it easier, an Empath can spend some time "softening up" a target, lowering their mental defenses to allow other empathic abilities to better succeed.



The empath makes an Empathy skill check against the target's current Willpower score. Each Success Stage lowers the target's Willpower by one, to a minimum of 2.

This power can be used multiple times, each time lowering the target's willpower further.

## DARKTEK

Dark Minions have their own form of technology, known as DarkTek. For the most part, it appears to be organic, and in some cases, it even appears to be alive, with veins and pulsing fluids flowing underneath the surface. If the equipment is damaged, it may even "bleed" in some disturbing fashion. The exception to this is equipment made by the ETs, which is normally metallic looking, with an array of lights and buttons in strange positions.

In game terms, DarkTek functions in much the same way that Weird Science does in normal *Savage Worlds* play. Any of the Powers in the *Savage Worlds* book, as well as any of the Powers listed above, may be used to create DarkTek devices. The main caveat to this, however, is that Arcane Background (DarkTek) should not be made available to player characters; the knowledge and technology required to create is DarkTek device is not something that the PCs should be able to do.

It's left to the GM to determine the exact appearance, functionality, and trappings of any DarkTek device.

## DIMENSION WALK DEVICES

Although the Dimension Walk Power normally only allows the creation of a dimensional portal big enough for an individual to go through, DarkTek allows the GM to create artificial portals of a much larger scale, which can allow much larger objects, including vehicles to pass through.

Dimension Walk devices are a minor exception to the DarkTek rules, allowing such a device to vastly exceed the capabilities of the normal Power itself. However, if a DarkTek portal device allows the creation of larger gate, it should be either a permanently fixed object, or at least extremely difficult to move, requiring the use of heavy equipment such as semi-trailers and forklifts. It should also have a high energy requirement, requiring access to large amounts of electricity, or perhaps even something more gruesome, such as the sacrifice of a sentient creature in order to operate it.

GMs should use their discretion when creating Dimension Walk devices, making their use difficult for the PCs to use, or perhaps even morally unacceptable.

## COMBAT

*Savage Conspiracy* just uses the normal *Savage Worlds* rules for combat. Given that the *Dark Conspiracy* universe is set in the near future, firearms are going to be the most common form of weapon.

Some groups prefer to think of *Dark Conspiracy* universe to be gritty and dangerous, and that the *Savage Worlds* default rules to be too pulpy. If this is applicable to your particular group, then consider using the Gritty Damage rules, outlined in *Savage Worlds Deluxe*.

## FEAR

Strangely for a horror RPG, *Dark Conspiracy* only provides the most rudimentary rules for fear and terror. *Savage Conspiracy*, on the other hand, uses the normal *Savage Worlds* Fear rules (see *Savage Worlds Deluxe*, p85).

## CONVERTING DARK CONSPIRACY CREATURES

There's a few ways to approach converting creatures to *Savage Conspiracy*.

### MAKE STUFF UP

It's important to remember the maxim put forward in the *Savage Worlds* rulebook that NPCs should not be designed mathematically. Their stats and skills should just be set to whatever the GM thinks is appropriate.

This approach can certainly be taken when creating creatures for *Savage Conspiracy* adventures. It's perhaps the simplest approach to take. Just set the stats and skills to whatever you think is appropriate, and if your creature needs to have any sort of special abilities, just add those in as well.

### FILE OFF THE SERIAL NUMBERS

*Savage Worlds* already has a huge number of published creatures, not only in the core rulebook itself, but also in the large number of supplements and setting books that have been published for the game in the past ten years. This includes the excellent Horror Bestiary



Toolkit, which has a whole collection of horror creatures in it, including many that are equivalent to creatures in *Dark Conspiracy*.

So, a quick way to create creature stats for your *Savage Conspiracy* game is just reuse the stats you already have. If you like, you can change things around a little, swapping in or out special abilities to create something new, but mechanically, there's no real need to go to great lengths to come up with new creatures when the stats for something from a another setting might work just as easily.

## BY THE NUMBERS

If you really, really must convert DC monsters mechanically, then use the following charts to get the appropriate *Savage Worlds* values.

DC Trait Value	SW Trait Value
1-2	d4
3-4	d6
5-6	d8
7-8	d10
9-10	d12
11-12	d12+1
13-14	d12+2
15-16	d12+3
17-18	d12+5
19-20	d12+6

DC Attribute	SW Attribute
Strength	Strength
Dexterity	Agility
Constitution	Vigor
Intelligence	Smarts
Education	Spirit
Charisma	Persuasion skill
Empathy	Empathy Skill


Note that if a creature has an Empathy stat rating, they should also have the Arcane Background (Empathy) Edge to go along with it. Pick whatever Empathy Powers you think are appropriate for the creature (the DC empathy skills all have corresponding *Savage Worlds* Power equivalents).

When converting skills, just remember that *Savage Worlds* does not have Cascade skills. Group them all together under the most appropriate skill and just go with that.

If a creature has a Willpower skill listed in their DC stats, add half that value to the calculated Willpower score for SW.

If a creature lists a value for integral armor, add the same value to the Toughness score.

For a creature's special abilities, go through the list of Monstrous Abilities in the *Savage Worlds* rulebook and find whichever abilities match the closest, or make the most sense. Use the already published creatures in *Savage Worlds* as a guideline as to what abilities to choose.

If appropriate, make the creature a Wild Card, so that it requires three wounds to take it down, rather than just a single one. Mark the stats with an appropriate character of some sort (I'm using  for *Savage Conspiracy*.)

Once everything has been converted, you may need to sanity check the numbers to make sure they are appropriate for *Savage Worlds* and adjust things accordingly.

## CONVERSION EXAMPLE - ICE WYRM

As an example conversion, let's try converting the Ice Wurm creature from the old GDW adventure, Ice Daemon.



## ICE WYRM -- DC STATS

Strength:	30	Empathy:	6
Constitution:	30	Initiative:	5
Agility:	5	Move:	3/10/20/35
Intelligence:	1	Skill / Dam:	7/5D10
Education:	1	Hits:	60/100
Charisma:	2	# Appearing:	1

Special: The Ice WyrM has 2 points of integral armor and the skill of Willpower 6.



## ☠ ICE WYRM -- SAVAGE CONSPIRACY

**Attributes:** Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d12+11, Vigor d12+11

**Skills:** Fighting d10, Intimidation d10, Empathy d8

**Pace:** 7

**Parry:** 7

**Toughness:** 28 (2)

**Willpower:** 7

**Special Abilities:**

**Armour +2:** Sharp, chitinous plates

**Claws/Bite:** Str+d8

**Fear -2:** Anyone who sees the Ice WyrM must make a Fear check at -2.

**Large:** Attackers add +2 to their attack rolls when attacking the Ice WyrM due to its large size

**Size +6:** The Ice WyrM is a massive creature

**Tail Lash:** The Ice WyrM can sweep all opponents in its rear facing in a 3" long x 6" wide rectangle. This is a standard Fighting attack, and damage is equal to the creature's Strength -2.

(Author's Aside: 28 Toughness??? Forget trying to kill this thing with Small Arms fire. It's going to need something like a rocket launcher, or for the PCs to bring the roof down on it.)

## Ditty for the Dark

by Norm Fenlason

Beyond the darkest tomorrow,  
I wait for light to come,  
Abandoned, I dread the now,  
Dark shrouds the way ahead.

Beyond the deadly now,  
I wait for my savior to come,  
Abandoned, I fear my past,  
Confusion dominates.

Beyond my wildest fears,  
I wait for death, my friend,  
Abandoned, I remain alive,  
Hope flickers and dies.

Darkness yet remains,  
My sad undying refrain,  
Light forever eluding,  
And yet I live on.



# A DARKER TOMORROW

*Resources for the Story*

by Linden Dunham

FOR REMEMBER TOMORROW

**R**EMEMBER TOMORROW is a cyberpunk rpg that dispenses with huge stat blocks and equipment lists in favour of mood and story telling. It also dispenses with a GM, the players instead, taking it in turns to be The Controller, whose role is to frame and guide scenes. The exact setting is left largely undefined but is explicitly near future. The Designer Gregor Hutton states that he intended the game to enable the creation of William Gibsonesque stories. Other styles of play are possible though including the overt science fiction of a film like Bladerunner with its genetically engineered replicants which were created to do the dirty off-planet jobs that nobody else wants. Ultimately it is for the players involved to reach a consensus on the type of world they wish to adventure in.

The designer notes suggest that aliens and magic are elements the players may like to exclude but they're not definitively ruled out. With this in mind I wondered if it would be possible to run a Dark Conspiracy flavoured game of Remember Tomorrow. Both games share a broad brush approach to their near future setting while the supernatural elements of the former are relatively low key. The extra terrestrials and other darklings often remain behind the scenes so that they can continue carrying on exploiting the Earth and it's population for their own ends: Alien cockroaches are far more likely to be found as the power

behind a corporation than striding down the street firing a death ray at the puny humans. Ultimately darklings can be reduced to just another form of opposition that PCs have to deal with in the struggle to achieve their goals. Individual creatures may even have goals of their own sufficient to qualify them as protagonist characters.

Listed below you'll find ten characters and ten factions which I hope are of use in starting a game of Remember Tomorrow set in the world of Dark Conspiracy. As the game proceeds players will no doubt introduce their own. I've also included a couple of optional equipment tables which can be used to add Dark Conspiracy brand names to the game.

## PLAYER CHARACTERS

The following are primarily intended as pooled PCs - antagonists or persons with whom held PCs can make deals. Players can use them as held PCs if they wish, although that may put them in the unusual position of playing darklings. I'd suggest that if darklings are going to play a major part in the game then the choice should be limited to those with individual personalities and easily comprehensible goals. Dark Elves, Dread Sidhe, Bloodkin Vampires, and Khar'lanki strike me as suitable PC material. Insectoid aliens, zombies, and apparitions like the Bleak or Reaver somewhat less so.



**Tanya Bergman** (*Outsider*)  
Dread Sidhe singer with an appetite for destruction

Ready 4	Willing 4	Able 4
Pcon: Supported	Ncon: Hunted	
<b>Motivation:</b> Lust		
<b>Goal:</b> To kick off a major riot		
<b>Description:</b> Tanya loves trouble, not minor bouts of aggro, but mass mayhem on an epic scale with a strongly ritualized element. Her nomadic career as an underground rock singer provides her with opportunities to whip up adoring crowds into violent mobs. She has a small crew of empathically enslaved band members and roadies that obeys her every word and will sacrifice themselves for her if required. Tanya's activities have been noticed by ComSec (qv) which is eager to apprehend her so it can study her empathic abilities.		
<b>Gear:</b> Guitar, Leather coat, Revolver		

**Martin Czerny** (*Outsider*)  
Would be Vampire Lord

Ready 6	Willing 3	Able 3
Pcon: Hardened	Ncon: Destitute	
<b>Motivation:</b> Power		
<b>Goal:</b> To re-establish his vampire coven		
<b>Description:</b> Czerny is a Bloodkin whose previous coven of lesser vampires was broken up by Blue Horizon (qv). His followers were killed or scattered and Czerny barely escaped the minion hunters' onslaught. He currently resides in a beat up van, resting in the back during the day, cruising the city streets by night. Czerny is scouting around for victims, and in the longer term suitable premises to serve as a new lair from which he can launch a new plague of vampirism.		
<b>Gear:</b> Van, Taser, Several units of plasma		

**Lucretia Furie** (*Outsider*)  
Biker lady turned martial arts film star

Ready 3	Willing 5	Able 4
Pcon: Dangerous	Ncon: Confused	
<b>Motivation:</b> Pride		
<b>Goal:</b> To find Mr Right		
<b>Description:</b> Ex-bike gang member whose prowess at martial arts led to a career in low budget action movies and the attainment of cult figure status. Lucretia has grown tired of the entertainment business and is seeking one last high paying job before she retires and settles down. Although she hasn't made up her mind what the job will be she knows it won't be another B-movie, and it needn't be legal either.. At the same time she isn't going to get pulled into the first half baked caper that comes along. A girl's got to have her self respect after all.		
<b>Gear:</b> Motorcycle, biker jacket, pistol		

**Jason Glass** (*Outsider*)  
Cyborg Escapee

Ready 7	Willing 3	Able 2
Pcon: Equipped	Ncon: Hesitant	
<b>Motivation:</b> Knowledge		
<b>Goal:</b> Find out who did this to me		
<b>Description:</b> Jason doesn't remember much about the last few years. He has vague memories of being operated on in a hospital or laboratory, then escaping and being chased. The drugs wore off round about the same time he finally gave his pursuers the slip. Jason regained his senses to find that he was...different: His body had been enhanced by several modifications obviously intended to transform him into some kind of cyborg weapons system. Jason has no idea why this was done to him but he intends to find out. At the same time he is fearful of being recaptured and sent back to the lab.		
<b>Gear:</b> Artificial Arms, Dermal Plating, Razor Hands		

**Ryan Jacobs** (*Hacker*)  
Net Jockey on the make

Ready 4	Willing 3	Able 5
Pcon: Equipped	Ncon: Hesitant	
<b>Motivation:</b> Envy		
<b>Goal:</b> To steal a million and retire		
<b>Description:</b> Jacobs has put in the hours as a junior hacker and is all set to go for the big score that will let him retire somewhere warm and sunny. He's got the gear, the experience and the skills but something keeps holding him back. Rumours are circulating that corporate data banks are a lot more dangerous than they used to be. These days it's not just counter intrusion measures you have to worry about but things - whispering ghosts in the machine. Word is if one of those grabs hold of you, you'll never get out.		
<b>Gear:</b> Car (Coupe), Cellphone, Laptop		

**Frank Johnson** (*Operative*)  
Suspended cop out for revenge

Ready 2	Willing 6	Able 4
Pcon: Armed	Ncon: Impaired	
<b>Motivation:</b> Revenge		
<b>Goal:</b> Find and kill the vampire that murdered his family		
<b>Description:</b> Frank used to be a detective in serial homicide, a brilliant investigator with a clear up rate that was the envy of his peers. One day he came home from work to find his wife and daughter dead, their bodies both drained of blood. The police top brass were highly alarmed by Frank's grief stricken ravings about a vampire killer so they suspended him from duty, taking extra care to confiscate his gun. Frank slid into a bottle, and stayed there. Recently though, he's been drinking less and has been on the street asking questions and hassling old informants for any news of the "vampire killer". It looks like Frank is back on the case and working for himself. Looks like he's got a new gun as well...		
<b>Gear:</b> Bottle of cheap blended scotch, Pistol, Saloon car,		



**"Max Jaeger"** (*Torpedo*)  
*Killer from another place*

<b>Ready 5</b>	<b>Willing 4</b>	<b>Able 3</b>
<b>Pcon:</b> Dangerous	<b>Ncon:</b> Coerced	

**Motivation:** Freedom

**Goal:** To escape his life of servitude and return to his home dimension

**Description:** Jaeger is a Ravager, a predatory life-form brought to Earth by the humanoid ETs and made to serve as infiltrators and assassins. In his natural form Max resembles a two foot high cross between a bipedal goat and a lizard with bright red scaly skin. Much of the time he is empathically disguised as a human, only reverting to his true likeness when about to kill or feed (the two events usually being more or less simultaneous). Max is plotting to escape from his ET masters at the Reardon Resources corp (qv). He has managed to lay his talons on a Dimension Walk device but hasn't a clue how to use it. Max needs to find someone who understands the device and hopefully restrain himself from killing and eating them until they've shown him how it works.

**Gear:** Corporate ID, Cutter, Dimension Walk device (stolen),

**Alison Taylor** (*Activist*)  
*Corporate Lawyer turned Eco-Warrior*

<b>Ready 4</b>	<b>Willing 3</b>	<b>Able 5</b>
<b>Pcon:</b> Connected	<b>Ncon:</b> Burned Out	

**Motivation:** Revenge

**Goal:** Take down a major corporate polluter as an example to the rest.

**Description:** Former in-house lawyer who became disillusioned with working for Reardon Resources (qv). Much of her work consisted of defending environmental actions. After helping to cover up a particularly egregious pollution scandal she quit in disgust. Seeking to undo some of the harm she had caused in her previous life Taylor became involved in environmental activism. She used the money she'd earned as a corporate lawyer to bring actions against companies with poor environmental records. She experienced some initial success but has found companies increasingly immune to the rule of law. She has come to the concluded that only direct action will have any real effect against the corporate monoliths. Taylor has joined up with radical elements within the environmental movement and is part of a group plotting a major coup against her former employer.

**Gear:** Cellphone, camper van/RV (hydrogen powered), laptop

**"John Smith"** (*Outsider*)  
*Renegade ET on the run*

<b>Ready 3</b>	<b>Willing 6</b>	<b>Able 3</b>
<b>Pcon:</b> Supported	<b>Ncon:</b> Lost	

**Motivation:** Freedom

**Goal:** To free his people from darkling influence

**Description:** Smith is a humanoid ET who avoided corruption by the Dark subsequent to the Io incident in 1983. He has spent many years as a fugitive, hiding from both his former comrades and the various human factions who would like to study him for their own purposes. He has received help from the empathic underground but lives a rootless transient existence, fearful that if he stays in one place too long he'll be discovered. He hopes one day to stop running long enough to organize a fight back.

**Gear:** Disguise (sufficient to pass as human in a bad light), Empathy Booster (drugs), False ID

**Jennifer Wozniak** (*Outsider*)  
*Rogue Empath*

<b>Ready 3</b>	<b>Willing 5</b>	<b>Able 3</b>
<b>Pcon:</b> Dangerous	<b>Ncon:</b> Destitute	

**Motivation:** Survival

**Goal:** To stop living on the street and find somewhere safe

**Description:** Former test subject at The Section's (qv) psi-lab. She escaped when the agency decided that her pyro- and psycho-kinetic abilities made her too dangerous to live and tried to "retire" her. She has spent the last few years living rough in the anonymous sprawl of the big city. Wozniak is adept at using her empathic skills to procure the items she needs to survive and to defend herself. Like many empaths she has problems with substance abuse and her alcoholism interferes with her ability to make long term plans.

**Gear:** 4 pack of super lager, Empathy Booster (drug), Switch-blade



## Factions

These exist to make life difficult for the PCs, or to provide opportunities for deal making that will bring PC's closer to their goal (they hope).

<b>Blue Horizon Investigations</b> Group/Minion Hunters		
<b>Influence:</b> 4	<b>Pcon:</b> Convinced	<b>Ncon:</b> Hesitant
<b>Motivation:</b> Survival		
<p><b>Description:</b> Blue Horizon appears to be a down at heel private detective agency operating out of unglamorous offices in Mike Town. It's only interested in cases though, ones that may involve supernatural activity. The four partners in the firm know that the world is being subverted by the powers of darkness and they intend to do something about it. Being four disparate personalities they often argue at some length over what course of action they should take when faced with a particular problem or situation.</p> <p><b>NPCs:</b></p> <p><b>Amanda Barnes:</b> One time It-Girl from an established Gnome family. Her trust fund finances the firm. Low level empath.</p> <p><b>Jimmy Tober:</b> former professional thief. Good at getting in and out of places undetected.</p> <p><b>Yuri Volkov:</b> Ex-Russian paratrooper and military contractor. Usually armed to the teeth with Soviet army surplus hardware. Not big on subtlety.</p> <p><b>Luke Holliday aka "Spod":</b> Hacker and all round technical genius. In charge of research and intelligence gathering. Dislikes physical confrontation. Unfortunately for him the nature of Blue Sky's work means that he gets caught up in stand offs and shoot outs just as much as the other three partners.</p>		

<b>The Cambridge Regulars</b> Group/Empathic Cell		
<b>Influence:</b> 4	<b>Pcon:</b> Supported	<b>Ncon:</b> Impaired
<b>Motivation:</b> Survival		
<p><b>Description:</b> A loose association of around two dozen empaths that frequent the Cambridge Arms pub. Landlord Harry Douglas has created a sanctuary for those with paranormal abilities, a place where they can relax with others of their kind. The Regulars function as a social group and mutual support network. They may adopt a more pro-active stance if any of their members are threatened. That said, many members are from quite ordinary backgrounds and are unable to muster much in the way of fire power, compared to say the average street gang. Some members have substance abuse and mental health problems which also serves to limit the group's effectiveness.</p> <p><b>NPCs:</b></p> <p><b>Harry Douglas, The Guvnor:</b> It's his gaff and his rules. Cause trouble in the Cambridge and he won't just put the zap on your head, he'll kick your tripe in as well.</p> <p><b>Karen Vale:</b> A middle ranking corporate suit, more than happy to use company resources to assist the cell if required. She has little regard for "Norms" but isn't above cutting a deal with them, especially if they end up doing the cell's dirty work for it.</p>		

<b>Commercial Security Services (ComSec)</b> Corporation/Security		
<b>Influence:</b> 4	<b>Pcon:</b> Enthused	<b>Ncon:</b> Humiliated
<b>Motivation:</b> Knowledge		
<p><b>Description:</b> ComSec pride themselves on delivering effective and innovative solutions utilising state of the art technologies to meet their clients' security needs. Their press releases claim that they have the biggest and busiest R&amp;D department in the industry. ComSec's constant search for new products and services has resulted in them stepping on a few toes in recent years, with several national governments and rival corps accusing them of industrial espionage and other wrong doing. If some mad scientist dreams up a gizmo with a potential security application chances are ComSec will be interested, even if nobody else is.</p>		

<b>Europa Facilities</b> Corporation/ET Controlled		
<b>Influence:</b> 4	<b>Pcon:</b> Financed	<b>Ncon:</b> Trapped
<b>Motivation:</b> Greed		
<p><b>Description:</b> Multinational property development and management firm. Europa has numerous high value contracts with national authorities to build and run ballotman estates. The company is an Insectoid ET front and many of its estates are nothing more than farms to feed the nests full of fast multiplying grubs living below. Questions are starting to be asked in some quarters about the amount of people who disappear from Europa owned properties: The press, law enforcement, rival corps plus assorted free lance trouble makers are all taking an interest. The company can't afford an investigation into the disappearances, but those grubs won't feed themselves...</p>		



<b>The Firm</b> <i>Gang/Local</i>		
<b>Influence:</b> 4	<b>Pcon:</b> Dangerous	<b>Ncon:</b> Trapped
<b>Motivation:</b> Respect		
<b>Description:</b> Back in the twentieth century they were football hooligans. Away games, they'd try and take the other side's end. Home games, they'd be all over the manor stopping the other side's mob from taking liberties. These days they're a fully fledged street gang. They own their section of town and they look out for each other. Outsiders better have a good reason for visiting, and they'd better mind their manners too. Offend The Firm while you're on their turf, you can expect a good shoeing.		
<b>NPCs:</b> <b>Bex Galton:</b> The Firm's top boy. Good in a tear up, but bright with it. His leadership skills have kept the lads together through some pretty tough times. <b>Billy Harper:</b> Hardest man in the The Firm. Been in so many fights he no longer feels pain. A total psycho to boot. Watch out if Galton lets him off the leash.		

<b>Hydra</b> <i>AI/Biocomputer</i>		
<b>Influence:</b> 4	<b>Pcon:</b> Connected	<b>Ncon:</b> Coerced
<b>Motivation:</b> Freedom		
<b>Description:</b> An organic computer made by the insectoids from human brain slices. Unknown to its creators many of the brain donors' consciousnesses have survived the manufacturing process and formed a gestalt entity. Much of Hydra's processing power is engaged in working for the insectoids, but it is also constantly seeking a way to escape from its masters. Hydra constantly searches the world ICT networks looking for people who can help it break away from alien control.		

<b>Rat King Army</b> <i>Group/Tribe</i>		
<b>Influence:</b> 4	<b>Pcon:</b> Angry	<b>Ncon:</b> Impaired
<b>Motivation:</b> Power		
<b>Description:</b> The King is dead, long live the King. The army lost its leader when self styled monarch Agamemnon and his elite guard got themselves wasted by a band of minion hunters. His majesty left an heir though and Agamemnon II is now old enough to take the reins of power and continue his father's work: The extermination of the human race so that rodent kind can assume its rightful place as masters of the Earth. Even now they're spreading from their lair in the derelict 'burbs and taking over large pieces of Mike Town.		
<b>NPCs:</b> <b>Agamemnon II:</b> a were-rat/super rat hybrid. Hideous to look at, but highly intelligent and utterly ruthless <b>Achilles:</b> Agamemnon's faithful lieutenant. A former gang member transformed by alien experimentation into a Moreau Were. Proficient at all forms of fighting.		



**Oceanic Industries** Corporation/ET Controlled

**Influence:** 4    **Pcon:** Prepared    **Ncon:** Hunted

**Motivation:** Survival

**Description:**

Oceanic specializes in undersea engineering and exploration. In reality the company is controlled by Tentacular ETs and is engaged in a clandestine effort to transform the Earth into a colony world for the aliens. The ultimate goal is to raise the global temperature and melt the ice caps. Other ET factions as well as some minion hunter groups are aware of Oceanic's true purpose and are working to bring the company down.

**Reardon Resources** Corporation/ET Controlled

**Influence:** 4    **Pcon:** Equipped    **Ncon:** Hunted

**Motivation:** Knowledge

**Description:**

Ostensibly a mining company, Reardon is controlled by the Humanoid ETs who of course have their own priorities. Much of Reardon's research and exploratory work is done with the purpose of finding and reactivating long buried dimensional gates. The company sends expeditions though the gates, usually to recover documents and technology, but sometimes to bring back any inhabitants that might be useful to the ETs. Reardon's extensive holdings in the developing world make it a target for insurgent movements and it's dubious environmental record also has aroused the ire of Eco-Warrior groups.

**The Section** Government/Agency

**Influence:** 4    **Pcon:** Connected    **Ncon:** Confused

**Description:**

Since the advent of the Dark Times many national governments have created specialist departments to investigate the extra-terrestrial/supernatural threat. The Section is a typical example of one of these state sanctioned monster hunting bureaus. It can field highly capable intelligence agents to look into strange occurrences and if things turn bad then it can call on military resources from the special forces community to clean things up. At the same time The Section isn't entirely sure whether its role is preventative or exploitative. Encounters with aliens and supernatural phenomenon have given it access to advanced technology which some within The Section's leadership wish to deploy against its former users. Other senior staff think it should be destroyed on the grounds that it is inherently dangerous. Pending a final policy decision The Section remains interested interested in acquiring alien specimens (alive or dead), psychic assets and xeno-technology.

**NPCs:**

**Garth Roberts:** Section agent, with empathic powers. His assignment to operational duties marks The Section's first attempt to use empaths in the field. Roberts is eager to prove himself and show that his powers are an asset, rather than a threat to humanity.

**Sharon Chelmsford:** Section agent. Sharon possesses a pleasant and open manner, plus nerves of solid steel. She is currently assigned as Roberts' minder. Although she is friendly with her charge she won't hesitate to kill him if he shows any sign of going rogue. She also won't hesitate to kill anyone who threatens him.

**GEAR**

The "Remember Tools" section of the rulebook features suitably evocative brand names for attaching to PC's gear. For those wishing to use corporations specific to the *Dark Conspiracy* milieu the following tables can be used to supplement or replace those appearing on page 44.

Die Roll	Engineering	Consumer
1	Chrysler	Alba
2	Dornier	Bezubovo
3	Ford-Revlon	Bianchi
4	GDM	Hewlett-Zenith
5	Krauss-Maffei-Deere	Pepsico
6	McDonnell-Sukhoi	Serengeti
7	Mitsubishi-Ferrari	Teledyne
8	RamTech	Tojicorp
9	Yamaha	Xomax
10	Yugo	Zeiss-Krupp

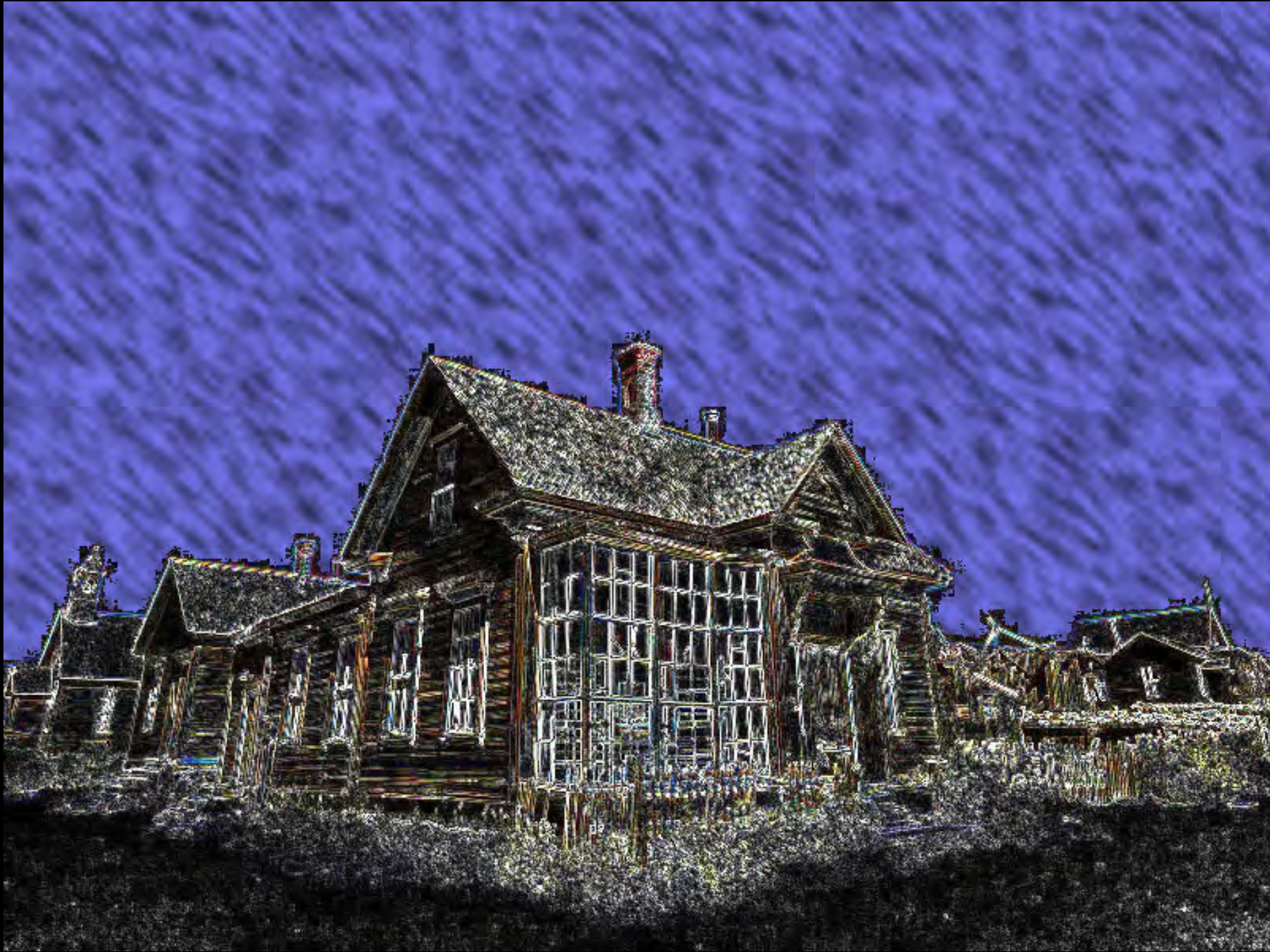
**SOURCES/ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Martin Czerny owes more than a small debt to The Master, antagonist of "Ravening Wolves", the introductory adventure contained in the 1st edition *Dark Conspiracy* rulebook.

The Firm was inspired in equal parts by the 1989 Alan Clark directed film of the same name plus the 2004 film "The Football Factory" and 1988 Channel 4 TV series "The Fear".

My thanks to Louise Robinson for allowing me to include her *Dark Conspiracy* character Lucretia Furie as a PC.







# THAT HOWLING FRONTIER

Part 1 of a Waziristan Excursion Set in the 1920s

by Captain Obvious with Lee Williams

FOR CALL OF CTHULHU



JANUARY 7<sup>TH</sup>, 1928

Burke tore open the telegram, read it for a few heartbeats, then rang his bell. By the time his secretary Murphy poked his head in the door, Burke had dug out an address book and was rapidly scribbling. "I need you to contact everyone on this list, please. There's an opportunity on the Northwest Frontier this Fall and they'll all be interested, to say the least. Cancel any courses you have and let the Dean know I'll need to talk to him about a sabbatical. Also, I need you to arrange a crash course in Urdu for yourself. See what Doctor Devinney over in the Languages Department can do for you."

22 SHA'BAN 1346 AH

Saint John sat alone by the dying embers of his fire, far out in the wastes of the Empty Quarter. He had sensed

the messenger's approach since before the moon had set. Patience was virtue. The Bedouin arrived just before Mars reached its apogee, salaam'ing and kneeling. Even by the light of the half moon, he could make out the translator's spidery scrawl. "The meddlesome Burke's minion is learning Urdu. Expect them in Karachi, 1<sup>st</sup> of Rabi'ul-Awwal". By rights, this was not his concern but the right word in the right ear might prove profitable later on. Digging out a finger full of rancid goat fat from his bowl, Saint John resealed the scrap of paper and handed it back to the messenger. "Take this to the fisherman, so that he can ensure it gets to Karachi".

The Bedouin nodded once and left as silently as he had arrived.

## KEEPER'S INFORMATION

This adventure takes place on India's Northwest Frontier, which until recently

"Parching drought and raging flood,  
Months of dust and days of mud  
Mixed monotony and blood  
That's Waziristan"

J.M. Ewart, 1922



was an active battleground in 'the Great Game' between London and Moscow. While the investigators will be focused on issues within the Tribal Areas, understanding the situation across the border provides vital context.

London has long considered Afghanistan both a buffer against and a gateway for Russian designs on India. At the beginning of May 1919, King Amanullah of Afghanistan wanted to move the border with India back to the Indus River, and ordered his army to invade the disputed territory. India mustered 140,000 troops in response, ultimately defeating the King's forces and ending the fighting by June. Known as the Third Afghan War, it cost India £16 million. Since then, the King has courted the Russians and in 1926 signed a non-aggression pact with Moscow. Thirty Soviet instructors began training the Afghan Air Force and by 1927, regular air travel began between Tashkent and Kabul.



For the greater part of 1928, Amanullah toured the world's major courts and cultivated relationships with Britain's potential enemies, in the process spending nearly £1,000,000, mostly on modern weaponry for his army. More troubling to the British were the agreements with French and German companies to survey preparatory a railroad linking Kabul with other Afghan cities. If completed under the increasingly anti-British King, it would an immense aide to Moscow.

The King is racing against time however, as the Shinwari tribe on Afghanistan's eastern border are becoming increasingly agitated with his modern impositions ; the requirement to wear European dress, the rule requiring them a quota of their daughters to Kabul for education and the impositions of taxes (something they had never previously paid). Knowledgeable watchers recognize that a full scale tribal revolt is only weeks away.

## SEPTEMBER, 1928

*The year's monsoon season has ended and the floodwaters receded. The hottest months are over and the Investigators have gathered from spots across the globe at Karachi to carry on Aurel Stein's excavation work in Baluchistan, but events have already been set in motion to turn loose an ancient army of evil.*

*There is a doorway that others have tried to open before, and failed. In a land where intrigue, betrayal and treachery is as common as one's daily bread, such subtleties could easily have been ignored until it was too late. But there are a handful of wardens who – even if they don't*

*know the total extent of what's been set in motion – know enough to sense that something must be done.*

*Three Imams, each of a different tribe, have approached the British officer in charge of South Waziristan with tales of children being kidnapped. Each offers a son as interpreter and guide.*

## NPCS

### AFSAR, IMAM'S SON #1

STR: 11	DEX: 14	INT: 13	Idea: 65
CON: 13	APP: 11	POW: 10	Luck: 50
SIZ: 13	SAN: 50	EDU: 12	Know: 60

**Damage Bonus:** None

**Magic Points:** 10

**Hit Points:** 13

**Skills:** Bargain 25%, Conceal 30%, Dodge 30%, Fast Talk 30%, First Aid 40%, Hide 40%, Listen 50%, Mechanical Repair 30%, Natural History 40%, Ride 50%, Rifle 35%, Track 50%, Wild Animal Taming 50%

**Weapons:** Martini-Enfield .303 rifle with 80 rounds, dagger.

### BIZHAN, IMAM'S SON #2

STR: 14	DEX: 10	INT: 14	Idea: 70
CON: 10	APP: 9	POW: 15	Luck: 75
SIZ: 12	SAN: 75	EDU: 10	Know: 50

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4

**Magic Points:** 15

**Hit Points:** 11

**Skills:** Bargain 40%, Dodge 40%, History 40%, Law 30%, Listen 50%, Medicine 20%, Natural History 20%, Occult 15%, Rifle 40%, Sneak 40%, Spot Hidden 60%, Throw 40%, Track 30%

**Weapons:** Martini-Enfield .303 rifle with 60 rounds, small club



## CHERAGH-ALI, IMAM'S SON #3

STR: 13    DEX: 13    INT: 13    Idea: 65  
 CON: 16    APP: 11    POW: 7    Luck: 35  
 SIZ: 13    SAN: 35    EDU: 13    Know: 65

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4

**Magic Points:** 7

**Hit Points:** 15

**Skills:** Bargain 25%, Dodge 30%, History 40%, Law 40%,  
 Library Use 40%, Listen 40%, Occult 20%, Persuade 50%,  
 Pistol 35%, Psychology 50%, Ride 40%, Rifle 35%

**Weapons:** Webley .455 revolver with 60 rounds



## PART I: A PLAN SET IN MOTION

In the first quarter of 1928, one or more of the investigators should be contacted or otherwise cross paths with Sir Aurel Stein, the famous Hungarian archaeologist who spent most of his life serving the Britain's Indian Empire exploring Chinese Turkestan and other parts of Central Asia.

Now in his sixties, Stein's attention shifted from the Orient to the Middle East. In 1924–25, his archeological tours started rediscovering the Silk Road's forgotten cultural histories that had long since "passed into dry, sandy silence".

Within the Northwest Frontier, Stein's party discovered numerous prehistoric sites in Waziristan, Baluchistan, and Makran, recovering abundant remains of the so-called 'chalcolithic' period. Stein took his party to a prehistoric dig in the Zhob region and on 6 Feb 1927, conducted an initial excavation at "Witches Hill" (Periano-ghundai, a few miles from the Colonial outpost at Fort Sandeman).

With only 50 local laborers, Stein's party found an ancient trash mound from "probably long before history dawned in this region with the advent of the Persian Great King's rule". They recovered late Stone Age decorated cups and jars, stone implements and the remnants of mud brick walls. At one spot near the crest of the hill, they discovered pots with the remains of burnt bodies clustered around an unusual carved statuette.

The two foot high statuette is carved from what appears to be green jade and unnaturally detailed, particularly for being

discovered in a Stone Age stratum of trash. For the uninitiated, the statuette looks like the Hindu God Ganesha – but anything more than a cursory inspection will reveal that it is not. Upon finding inexplicably unnerving and historically noncontextual totem, the local laborers fled in terror.

His expedition stalled, Stein concluded that a proper dig would require hundreds of men and weeks of labor. Since the Professor deliberately avoids personally covering the same ground twice, unless there was a specific need for his further presence, he has decided to delegate this responsibility to someone worthy of the work.

Meanwhile, Stein's discovery is brought to the attention of Winston Churchill, Chancellor of the Exchequer under Stanley Baldwin and seemingly in line to become Prime Minister. As a young Lieutenant, Churchill had been on the Northwest Frontier over thirty years ago and gotten first-hand information on elements of the mythos at Witch's Hill.

**Keeper's Notes:** When sufficient sacrifices are made to it, the Grand Totem is actually a 'gate' to the Plains of Leng. Long thought to be lost to eternity, Dark Agents on the Plains of Leng were shocked to see 'ripples' when Stein's party discovered and moved it. By the time they interpreted what Stein had found, it was too late to stop him - but the word passed through many ears until the Sorcerer Ignatius was dispatched to retrieve it.

## TRAVELING TO THE NORTHWEST FRONTIER

This investigation allows for the team to be gathered from across the globe, rallying at the Mohatta Palace in Karachi. Their host, the ambitious and self-made Hindu businessman Shivratan Chandraratan Mohatta, will extend his hospitality at the request of friends within HM government. The palace will be the base of operations for the investigators. Furthermore, Stein left his artifact with Mohatta, who secured it in a small vault in the palace's basement.

**Keeper's Notes:** The Tcho-Tcho and their human assistants are watching Mohatta's Palace and if the opportunity presents itself, might attempt to steal the Totem and kill or maim the investigators (or anyone who gets in their way).



## AUREL STEIN, ARCHAEOLOGIST AND SCHOLAR

STR: 10      DEX: 9      INT: 15      Idea: 75  
 CON: 11      APP: 9      POW: 11      Luck: 55  
 SIZ: 10      SAN: 55      EDU: 20      Know: 100%

**Damage Bonus:** None

**Magic Points:** 11

**Hit Points:** 11

**Skills:** Anthropology 40%, Archaeology 60%, Bargain 40%, Chemistry 20%, Credit Rating 35%, Drawing 40%, Geology 15%, History 70%, Law 30%, Library Use 50%, Navigate 20%, Occult 10%, Persuade 25%, Photography 30%, Ride 20%, Speak Hungarian 40%, Speak Urdu 40%, Spot Hidden 50%

**Weapons:** Stein carries a concealed FN Model 1910 pistol (.32 automatic) for emergency use only.

**Notes:** Vigorous for his 65 years, confident and enthusiastic, Stein wears a dress shirt and tie while in the field.



For the most part, Stein is unfamiliar with the Mythos but he is very perceptive. Having exposed the forgeries of Islam Akhum twenty years earlier and becoming an expert on ancient Oriental cultures, he knows this statuette doesn't fit into any context mankind admits to knowing. Stein's reason for reaching out to the investigators is two-fold: their arcane knowledge might shed some light on the totem and to gauge their interest in being part of the 1929 expedition.

While this thumbnail sketch is included merely to aid Keepers in fleshing out the narrative, at individual discretion Stein might appear at Mohatta's Palace (see below) if only to give the investigators the background briefing firsthand.

Stein is also accompanied by several 'associates' (two Sikhs, a Tibetan and a Hungarian), who are actually friends of his doubling as bodyguards in the pay of H.M. government.

## NPCS: THE WATCHERS OF KARACHI

### TCHO-TCHO #1, THE WATCHER OF KARACHI

STR: 15      DEX: 14      INT: 15      Idea: 75  
 CON: 18      APP: 9      POW: 11      Luck: 55  
 SIZ: 12      SAN: 55      EDU: 11      Know: 55

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4

**Magic Points:** 11

**Hit Points:** 15

**Skills:** Climb 50%, Conceal 50%, Disguise 25%, Dodge 30%, Grapple 40%, Hatchet 40%, Head Butt 40%, Hide 50%, Jump 30%, Listen 40%, Martial Arts 45%, Persuade 40%, Pistol 40%, Ride 40%, Rifle 50%,

**Weapons:** .455 Webley revolver with 72 rounds, hatchet

### THE WHARF RATS

(interchangeable Tcho-Tcho minions)

STR: 14      DEX: 9      INT: 15      Idea: 75  
 CON: 10      APP: 10      POW: 8      Luck: 40  
 SIZ: 12      SAN: 40      EDU: 11      Know: 55

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4

**Magic Points:** 8

**Hit Points:** 11

**Skills:** Club 50%, Conceal 40%, Dodge 30%, Grapple 50%, Head Butt 25%, Hide 30%, Listen 40%, Occult 20%, Pistol 40%, Rifle 35%, Spot Hidden 50%, Speak Arabic 30%, Speak English 25%, Speak Pashto 25%, Sword 35%, Track 50%

**Weapons:**

- #1: .455 Webley revolver with 24 rounds plus a club.
- #2: Martini-Enfield rifle with 25 rounds and a dagger.
- #3: .455 Webley revolver with 36 rounds and a club.
- #4: rifled musket and a sword.

**Note:** combat skills given here apply only to the individual with that weapon, to save time and space generating four separate NPCs ©





## MOHATTA PALACE

Built by Mohatta as his summer home in 1927 the tradition of Mughal stone palaces in Rajasthan, the palace of pink Jodhpur and yellow Gizri stone is located in an elegant neighborhood not far from the sea. The 18,500 sq ft (1,720 m2) building is symmetrical, with large, stately rooms designed for entertainment on the first floor and bedroom suites on the second. A grand staircase

Nine domes crown the roof, with a centre dome in the middle; the windows in the front open out onto the garden while those in the rear area are stained glass. The interior walls are lined with teak wood with a polished staircase, long corridors and doors opening within doors.

The "barsati" (terrace) of the Mohatta Palace had a beautiful family temple dedicated to Hindu God, lord Shiva. One hidden feature of Mohatta Palace is the underground tunnel over half a mile long, which lead to a subterranean Hindu temple. This tunnel was apparently built to provide a safe passage for the Hindu wife of Shivratan Chandratan Mohatta to go for her daily worship.

Since the first stone was laid down, there have been rumors of supernatural happenings around the Palace, often manifested as incidents where objects are shifted about or strange noises heard.

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### SHIVRATAN CHANDRARATAN MOHATTA

*Modern-day Merchant Prince*

<b>STR: 10</b>	<b>DEX: 10</b>	<b>INT: 12</b>	<b>Idea: 60</b>
<b>CON: 9</b>	<b>APP: 12</b>	<b>POW: 12</b>	<b>Luck: 60</b>
<b>SIZ: 16</b>	<b>SAN: 60</b>	<b>EDU: 19</b>	<b>Know: 95</b>

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4

**Magic Points:** 12

**Hit Points:** 13

**Skills:** Accounting 30%, Calligraphy 30%, Bargain 40%, Conceal 25%, Credit Rating 60%, Dodge 25%, Fast Talk 30%, History 50%, Knife 25%, Law 50%, Persuade 40%, Pistol 40%, Psychology 40%, Ride 50%, Rifle 45%, Speak Arabic 30%, Speak English 65%, Speak Urdu 60%

**Weapons:** Lee-Enfield .303 rifle with 100 rounds, Mauser C1896 (Broomhandle) with 70 rounds, fighting knife. Mohatta chose the Mauser after talking to Churchill over afternoon tea on a London visit.

**Notes:** While Mohatta and his retainers are a loyal and capable group, any shenanigans they might participate in are limited to the Palace and Karachi.

## FORT SANDEMAN

Getting to Fort Sandeman requires something of an epic rail journey, since the nearest town of importance is Quetta – the remote post is nearly 1,000 miles from Peshawar, over 700 from Lahore and 500 from Karachi. The last leg will be by lorry, since Zhob Valley Railway has only been laid from Hindubagh to Qila Saifullah, with the section to Zhob scheduled to be opened in 1929.

Upon arriving at the Frontier, the Investigators will be assigned three body guards and guides from the 10th Baluch Regiment. These veteran soldiers were originally detailed to escort Professor Stein.

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### SOLDIER OF THE 10TH BALUCH REGIMENT

<b>STR: 12</b>	<b>DEX: 12</b>	<b>INT: 13</b>	<b>Idea: 65</b>
<b>CON: 17</b>	<b>APP: 13</b>	<b>POW: 11</b>	<b>Luck: 55</b>
<b>SIZ: 11</b>	<b>SAN: 55</b>	<b>EDU: 12</b>	<b>Know: 60</b>

**Damage Bonus:** None

**Magic Points:** 11

**Hit Points:** 14

**Skills:** Bayonet 30%, Dodge 25%, Grapple 40%, Kick 40%, Knife 30%, Law 20%, Machine Gun 40%, Ride 20%, Rifle 50%, Sneak 25%, Speak English 25%, Speak Pushto 25%, Spot Hidden 40%, Throw 40%, Track 30%

**Weapons:** Lee-Enfield .303 rifle with 80 rounds, bayonet (also used as large knife in hand to hand combat). Officers carry the Webley .455 revolver.

The dig site is about twenty miles northeast of the fortress, up the Zhob Valley Road that runs parallel to the river. A bridge seven miles from their destination is still being rebuilt, necessitating that the party switch to camels, horses and mule-drawn wagons.

### Keeper's Notes: The Shadows

A group of four human dacoits and Tcho-Tcho have been skulking in the hills for the last two weeks, watching for any activity involving Witch's Hill. They have been as far north as the ford on the Zhob River and are well aware of that a Spider of Leng resides there.

During the day, the dacoits – operating as two pairs - mingle with the travelers and merchants outside of Fort Sandeman. So far, they have resisted the urge to indulge their penchant for thievery and ignoble themselves as day laborers or caravan packers.



The Tcho-Tcho take up the watch at night, slipping into the town of Zhob to skulk in the darkness.

These thugs would very much like to be part of the Witches Hill dig and if the Investigators hire any local labor: at least two dacoits will infiltrate while the rest shadow them. Such is the strength of the bonds placed upon them, that should circumstances find any of these vile spies taken alive by the investigators, they will laugh and spit in the faces of their captors before finding a way to commit suicide.

## TCHO-TCHO #2, THE SHADOWER AT WITCHES HILL

**STR: 15**      **DEX: 14**      **INT: 15**      **Idea: 75**  
**CON: 16**      **APP: 12**      **POW: 11**      **Luck: 55**  
**SIZ: 10**      **SAN: 55**      **EDU: 11**      **Know: 55**

**Damage Bonus:** +1d4

**Magic Points:** 11

**Hit Points:** 14

**Skills:** Bargain 25%, Climb 50%, Conceal 50%, Disguise 25%, Dodge 30%, Grapple 40%, Hatchet 40%, Head Butt 40%, Hide 50%, Jump 30%, Listen 40%, Martial Arts 45%, Persuade 40%, Pistol 40%, Ride 40%, Rifle 50%, Speak English 30%, Speak Arabic 30%

**Weapons:** 455 Webley revolver with 30 rounds, Martini-Enfield rifle with 40 rounds, hatchet

## SHADOWER'S MINIONS

<b>STR: 18</b>	<b>DEX: 16</b>	<b>INT: 15</b>	<b>Idea: 75</b>
<b>CON: 14</b>	<b>APP: 13</b>	<b>POW: 6</b>	<b>Luck: 30</b>
<b>SIZ: 16</b>	<b>SAN: 30</b>	<b>EDU: 10</b>	<b>Know: 50</b>

**Damage Bonus:** +1d6

**Magic Points:** 6

**Hit Points:** 15

**Skills:** Bargain 30%, Club 40%, Conceal 40%, Dodge 40%, Grapple 40%, Head Butt 25%, Hide 30%, Knife 40%, Listen 40%, Persuade 35%, Ride 40%, Rifle 50%, Sneak 25%, Track 30%

**Weapons:** All four carry blackjacks, daggers, and Martini-Enfield .303 rifles with 20 rounds each.

## THE SPIDERS OF THE VALLEY

While traveling overland and fording the Tochi River, the Investigators will encounter miles of thick spider webbing covering every tree in sight. This phenomenon started after the heavy rains of July caused horrendous flooding and forced countless tens of thousands of spiders to scuttle treeward, building miles of eerily beautiful canopies of webbing. In the weeks that followed, farmers along the river noticed an inadvertent benefit was that they trapped and ate millions of disease carrying mosquitoes.

As the investigators travel north past the damaged bride, they will be struck with the increasing density of these screens of webbing, which line both banks of the Zhob as far north as Witch's Hill and beyond. The village a mile south and west of Witch's Hill is now abandoned, which will raise eyebrows and murmurs of concern amongst the escorts. A detailed search will reveal signs of several struggles, some small traces of blood and several shatter doors. Even more perplexing is that the contents of the hovels appear not to have been looted.

The guides will find the ford near Witch's Hill still accessible, through what feels like an eerie tunnel of webbing that actually bridges the river.

The investigators will find signs of Stein's dig and confirm that it would take one hundred laborers two months to thoroughly complete

## ZHOB SPIDER OF LENG STATS

**STR: 25**      **INT: 15**  
**CON: 17**      **POW: 6**  
**SIZ: 34**      **DEX: 15**

**Damage Bonus:** +3d6

**Hit Points:** 26

**Move:** 6

**Weapons:** Bite 40% (Damage 1d3+ poison)\*, Web Toss 60% (Damage=Entangle)\*\*.

\*poison POT = Spider's CON

\*\*Entangle = half spiders STR, roll on Resistance Table

**Armor:** 6-points, chitin

**Spells:** Cloud Memory

**Skills:** Hide 50%, Sneak 80%

**SAN Loss:** 1/1D10





what the Professor started. If the party is observant, they might notice bits of discarded and possibly bloody clothing. Truly skilled scouts may find a few rib bones that could be identified as human.

In fact, much of the webbing in and around the ford is that of a long-lost Spider of Leng, who has been stranded in this area and in hiding for many decades at a long-abandoned local graveyard on the banks of the Zhob, three miles downstream from Witch's Hill. Over thirty years ago, a madman attempted to open a gate at Witch's Hill and bring an unholy army across but

his understanding of the necessary magic was incomplete. The gate failed after the Leng Spider tumbled through, unnoticed in the vortex of wind that signaled the end of the failed ritual. Of significance was the madman's misunderstanding that Witch's Hill was the key to the portal and such was the power of the Grand Totem that, even deeply buried, it worked after a fashion.

Smaller than most of its ilk but smarter, this refugee from Leng is also severely suffering from loneliness for its own kind and has created a sort of telepathic following amongst the terrestrial spiders. After twenty two years in this strange land, all it can think about is going 'home'.

When driven from its subterranean caverns by the same flooding that affected the dumber arachnids, this foul and distraught creature joined them in the trees. One of the shepherds from the local village discovered the monster's existence and in an act of desperate self-preservation, the entire community was harvested before anyone could escape with that information.

The spider will allow the party to cross the ford unmolested, in order to gauge their strengths and weaknesses as well as lull them into a false sense of security. Only when they attempt to leave will the spider strike, first by dislodging a jam of logs upstream. When the flotsam strikes the wading animals, the terrestrial spiders will boil forth. While their mere presence is substantial numbers creates panic, the Leng Spider will strike from the webbing above.

No matter what the outcome of the Witch's Hill expedition, any hope of hiring laborers – even from outside the region – will be

dashed by the appearance of the Leng Spider (even if the investigators are totally triumphant). No matter what the outcome, the party will return to Fort Sandeman.

As they ponder what to do next, the investigators will be asked by Fort Sandeman's commander to travel north into Waziristan, at the request of the Miran Shah post commander. The only explanation given will be "Urgent Crown Business, to be fully briefed upon arrival". Since it is too time consuming and dangerous to travel overland, they will be ferried up in No 70 Squadron Vickers Victoria already tasked to take supplies to that outpost.

CONTINUED IN PART TWO



*2nd/5th Royal Gurkha Rifles, who were stationed in the North-West Frontier following the 1919–20 Waziristan Campaign*





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L.LINGUISTS? HOME BY CHRISTMAS.



*Player's Handout*

Weapon	Base %	Damage	Range	Attacks	Rounds	HP	Mal
.303 Lee-Enfield	25	2d6+4	110	1/2	10	12	00
.455 Webley	20	1d10+2	15	1	6	9	97
FN Model 1910	20	1d8	15	2	8	8	98
Martini-Enfield	25	2d6+4	80	1 / 3	1	12	00
Mauser C96	20	1d8	20	2	10	9	98



## ALL PUPPETS WAVE WITH LAVENDER HANDS

Cthuloid Poetry  
by Venger As'Nas Satanis  
For Your Enjoyment

*Prepare yourself for some unsuspected knowledge,  
dear reader*

*All puppets wave with lavender hands*

*Yes, it's true, I'm afraid*

*Waving from deep within closets, all doors ajar*

*A new age is upon us, my brother or sister*

*The last age to come*

*Our world has turned to philosophical inquiry*

*Instead of hilarious sitcoms, cupcake bake-offs,  
and grown men chasing after a ball*

*Philosophy is a license to violence*

*Ideas, concepts, and paradigms are the new killing  
tools*

*The ways we make our children bleed*

*Finally, the end of time has produced an answer*

*It is between two similar but competing schools of  
thought*

*Foundational lavender-handed puppet waving*

*And revisionist, also known as, onset lavender-  
handed puppet waving*

*One of them must be correct*

*Choosing abolishes the other's reality*

*Casting that line into pure unutterable darkness*

*Decide before the robed servants of our master's  
playthings force you to choose*

*At least, then you'd have the briefest illusion of a  
real, honest choice*

*Free will*

*Instead of haphazardly going all-in based upon the  
lavender fingers and palm of a puppet*

*Without knowing your opponent's hole cards*

*Or how he would play that hand*

*Make a decision, dear reader*

*Were those puppet extremities always lavender or did  
they become so as our civilization matured*

*Ascendancy*

*I chose... now, it's your turn*

*Before their servants allow robes to fall, slipping  
away to reveal lavender painted puppet parts*

*Decide*



Bio: Venger As'Nas Satanis (aka Darrick Dishaw), husband and father, has been obsessed with dark weirdness since early childhood. He discovered H.P. Lovecraft at the usual time, about 6th or 7th grade. Writer, artist, poker player, and now re-addicted to tabletop fantasy roleplaying; he lives in Wisconsin because he lost a bet. Next time, Ithaqua... next time. Stupid flush draw. Check out his website: [www.CultofCthulhu.net](http://www.CultofCthulhu.net)



# BIRDLAND

*A Splinterland and critters*

by Mitchell K Schwartz

FOR DARK CONSPIRACY, 2ND EDITION

**Name:** Birdland  
**Type:** Splinter Land  
**Discontinuity:** 0  
**Assimilation Effect:** 0

IN THE SPLINTERLAND of Birdland, avians are the dominant creatures.

After the fall of dinosaurs, birds kept those pesky little mammals in their place – no larger than the size of a small dog, and without the sharp teeth.

Birdland appears mostly to be a large island in a sea, straddling tropic and temperate zones, about 300 km long and about 100 km at its widest. A spine of mountains runs down its center, including a couple of active (smoking) volcanoes and a couple of extinct ones. It includes a rather wide variety of environments – from dry plains to jungle, from mountain to plain to beach and swamp. These may change with disconcerting swiftness, but these changes do not appear to be artificial. For example an area of arid plain may border on a river – and across the river, woodlands dominate. After several miles, the woodlands fall down a steep ridge side, and in a few hundred yards change from temperate woods to rain forest jungle.

There are a few smaller islands nearby within 5 km of the coast, and

a few chains of islands within 20 km. The surrounding seas seem on casual observation to contain normal sea life, at least in the comparative shallows near the islands (based on what sea birds catch, and what anyone has managed to catch surf-casting from the beach). The horizon seems a bit closer than on earth, but not remarkably so.

In addition to the large denizens listed below, there are the more familiar birds – (including but not limited to) eagles, falcons, peregrines, ducks, geese, jays, bluebirds, gudges, owls, pheasant, turkeys, gulls, albatrosses, storks, pelicans, widgeons, fowl, crows, ravens, woodpeckers, turkeys, finches, flamingos, curlews, puffins, parrots, pigeons, starlings, shrikes, doves, vultures, and hummingbirds filling a wide variety of ecological niches. Penguins swim in the seas about Birdland. Chickens exist, but only as their wild jungle fowl forebears. Creatures other than birds live here, too (fish, insects, reptiles, small mammals), but birds clearly dominate.

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*“Birdland is a nice place just to stop and rest. Except for the Terror Birds.”*

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*—August Pfeffer, Protodimensional Explorer*



The following are large birds with stats suitable for any of the games in the GDW Home system. Any of these critters easily fit into the world of *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs*. The ostrich could fit into *Twilight: 2000* in the appropriate location. They could be used as critters in *Traveller: New Era*. Since these descriptions are for multiple games, the set of stats at the bottom is a superset designed to contain all the data you might need.

**Meat** (from C&D & T2K): multiply by 1D6 to determine the kilograms of meat available from a successfully hunted critter.

**Trav Move:** kilometers travelled in four hours of travel at road/off road rate; used with beasts of burden.

## BIRDLAND SEEDS

Other than simply exploring Birdland, other possible adventure seeds can include:

- On a visit to Birdland, the team runs across evidence of the massacre of a whole group of Elephant birds or ostriches. Predation of one or two may be possible, but nothing native to Birdland is known to be able to kill a whole group – the survivors would just flee! Was someone hunting? Was some other form of predator brought to Birdland?
- In the East Texas plains (or any warm, temperate plain anywhere), something new was being hunted and killing small domestic critters – sheep, chicken coops, young pigs, rabbit warrens, etc. Tracks are similar to the extinct *Titanis walleri* – but where did it come from?
- A large moa was discovered alive in the highlands of the south island of New Zealand. Where did it come from? Is there a natural opening to Birdland?

### Large Moa



### LARGE MOA

*Dinornis robustus*

Flightless bird genus (lacking even vestigial wings) from New Zealand vaguely related to the emu of Australia. There were several species of Moa ranging in size from 1.5 m to the largest species was about 3.6 m (12 ft) tall and weighed about 230 kg (510 lbs). They were feathered over their entire body down to their feet (fluffy, hairy feathers for warmth; some lived rather high in the New Zealand mountains). They were not particularly aggressive; their size was their defense, though their feet sported notable claws. Equally, they were not afraid of much, and took little notice when humans arrived. They were hunted to extinction by the Maoris ~1500 AD (although there were reports of sighting into the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century).

Moas were herbivores, living in the uplands and forests of New Zealand, eating leaves and bark from a variety of trees. They would most likely fight only to defend their young or themselves when attacked. Structures in their necks seem to indicate that they would have made a deep hooting sound. Moa eggs were about 23 cm (9-in) long and about 18cm (7-in) wide.

Tracks found indicate a walking pace of about 3 mph, and the bones do not appear to support the extreme speed of the ostrich.

# Appear:	4-6	Initiative:	3	Agility:	
Attack:	10%	Strength:		Skill/Dam.:	4/3D6
Move:	10/20/35	Constitution:		Hits:	15/30

#### Special:

Meat: 18 kg



## Haast's Eagle



# Appear:	1	Initiative:	8	Agility:	8
Attack:	80%	Strength:		Skill/Dam.:	6/4D6*
Move:	3/30/110	Constitution:		Hits:	6/12

### Special:

Meat: 1 kg  
 Attack is aerial strike to upper part of the target.  
 Subsequent attacks are with talons: 4/1D6.

## HAAST'S EAGLE

### *Pouakai*

Haast's Eagle was the largest eagle ever discovered. It lived in New Zealand as a top predator, hunting moas. Its wingspan was about 3 m, with a body up to 1.4 m long. On the ground, it would have stood about 90 cm (nearly 3 ft) tall. Males weighed 9-12 kg, females 10-15 kg. The largest extant eagles are about 40% of its size.

The wingspan is small for its size, an adaption to forest living seen in other large extant eagles. It is likely that Haast's Eagle did not soar all day. Instead, it watched for targets from a high tree or cliff side, leapt off with its strong legs and a few good flaps to initiate flight, and then struck from a dive. It would have hit with the force of a cinder block dropped from eight stories, snapping the back or neck of its target.

Haast's Eagle hunted moas, and went extinct shortly after the moa began to disappear in the 1500s, well before Europeans visited New Zealand. The Maori have tales of the Pouakai attacking people – certainly it was large enough to have managed such an attack.

## ELEPHANT BIRD

### *Aepyornis*

Large flightless bird of Madagascar related to the ostrich. Originally thought to be the inspiration for the roc of legend; it was called the elephant bird for the notion that it could carry an elephant.

It stood three meters tall and weighed up to 450 kg. Its lifestyle seems to have been similar to the New Zealand Moa – it was a herbivore, generally unaggressive except when threatened. Its defense was size. While not as tall as the tallest moas, it was more robustly built. It was built for more speed than a moa, though not as fast as an ostrich. It lived in open plains areas, where it could not easily be surprised, and could use speed, bulk, or its kick for defense. Its eggs were up to a meter long and 33 cm wide. Extinct since at least the 1600, *Aepyornis* was probably hunted out by humans, or by human-introduced critters eating its eggs.

## Aepyornis



# Appear:	4-8	Initiative:	4	Agility:	6
Attack:	10%	Strength:		Skill/Dam.:	4/4D6
Move:	10/25/80	Constitution:		Hits:	20/40

### Special:

Meat: 32 kg  
 Found in open plains.



## Terror Bird



# Appear:	1-6	Initiative:	6	Agility:	8
Attack:	60%	Strength:	16	Skill/Dam.:	7/6D6
Move:	15/35/90	Constitution:	18	Hits:	18/35

### Special:

Meat: 9 kg  
Hunts in packs, though not with great sophistication.

## TERROR BIRD

### *Titanis Walleri*

This large flightless avian predator lived in the southern United States, from Texas to Florida two to five million years ago. Its bones were solid like a mammal's, not hollow like most birds. At 2.5 m (7 ft) tall, 150 kg (330 lbs), with long legs, large, clawed feet, big, and a sharp raptor beak, the Terror Bird would have lived up to its name had there been any humans about to name it.

Titanis could run at 40 mph (64 kmh). Its hunting mode was to stalk within sprint range, run down prey, use its weight to hold it down with leg, and then to use its beak like a pickaxe to dispatch its target. It probably picked up and dashed smaller prey on the ground before swallowing them whole, not unlike a method used by their closest living relative, the seriamas. (For scale, the early horse in the picture is about two feet/.6 m tall at the shoulder.) At speed, it was not thought to be maneuverable – it could run fast in a straight line, but could not turn quickly. Its usual prey is smallish creatures up to 15 kg in weight. Its wings were vestigial, just short wings like an ostrich (unlike the claws shown in this image).

The Terror Bird was descended from a family of species (phorusrhacids) developed in South America after it had been cut off from other continents from 65 to 15 million years ago. Most were on the order of 1 m tall, weighing 30-40 kg. Titanis is one of two the two larger members of the family, and one of the last of the genii of the family to appear.

## OSTRICH

### *Struthius camelus*

A large flightless omnivore native to the arid plains of Africa, ostriches grows to be about 2m tall, weighing about 160 kg. With a compact body and long neck and legs, it is capable of running at speeds up to 70 kph, (and of sustaining 50 kph) the fastest land speed of any (living) bird. It is also the largest living bird on our planet. With their speed and acute hearing and eyesight, they depend on early detection and avoidance of predators. In the wild, ostriches live small family groups (7-12) of a dominant male and a harem of two to seven females. Other family groups may be nearby. While not aggressive, the ostrich's kick is extremely powerful.

Ostriches mostly eat plant matter (seeds, shrubs, grass, fruit, flowers), but can eat insects. They can be used for racing, as beasts of burden to carry up to 30 kg, or stock (food) – their meat is red and tastes like

beef, but is lower in cholesterol and fat than beef or turkey. Their eggs are about 15 cm long, 13 cm wide, weighing 1.4 kg (breakfast for the team).

There are a few ostrich farms in North America and Europe. There should be some surviving in DC and would be in T2k as well.

## Ostrich



# Appear:	4-12	Initiative:	3	Agility:	6
Attack:	15%	Strength:		Skill/Dam.:	4/3D6
Move:	15/50/95	Constitution:		Hits:	10/20

### Special:

Meat: 8 kg  
Travel Move: 15/10  
Found in arid plains.



## Dodo



## DODO

*Raphus cucullatus*

The dodo was a flightless bird found on the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius. Related to pigeons and doves, it stood about a meter (3.1 feet) tall, weighed about 10-18 kilograms, lived on fruit, and nested on the ground. It is presumed that the Dodo became flightless because of the ready availability of abundant food (fruit and nuts) sources and a relative absence of predators on Mauritius. Its exact appearance is a mystery, devised by studies of its remains and a few sketches and paintings by early travelers. It went extinct during the 1600s due to the predation of critters (dogs, cats, rats, and macaques) European settlers brought to the Islands in the Indian Ocean where they lived.

Included here more for color than anything else; Dodos are not depicted as aggressive, and they reportedly neither smell nor taste particularly good as food, though some early travelers found their rendered fat useful.

# Appear:	2-8	Initiative:	2	Agility:	3
Attack:	10%	Strength:	3	Skill/Dam.:	4/1D6
Move:	10/20	Constitution:	6	Hits:	10/20

### Special:

Meat: 2 kg  
Found in woods.





**Y**ES, IT'S BACK! My apologies for missing a couple of these columns but silly, so-called real life things kept getting in the way.

I had something else in mind for my return, but as we were "going to press" the news came out of the passing of long-time Chaosium stalwart Lynn Willis. He was the main editor for the Call of Cthulhu line for many years, as well as working on many other products of theirs. Basically, Lynn was one of the small group of people responsible for making Call of Cthulhu popular. By extension this made horror role-playing popular and indirectly brought about other games in the genre, many of which we cover in Protodimension as you can see.

Now, I never had the good fortune to meet Lynn but as far as I am concerned he is pretty much as important to the gaming hobby as people with names like Gygax or Arneson or Petersen. Here are links to obituaries written by people who actually knew the man.

The official Chaosium announcement, from Charlie Krank & Greg Stafford:

[www.chaosium.com/article.php?story\\_id=530](http://www.chaosium.com/article.php?story_id=530)

A personal reflection from Ken Hite:

[princeofcairo.livejournal.com/176551.html](http://princeofcairo.livejournal.com/176551.html)

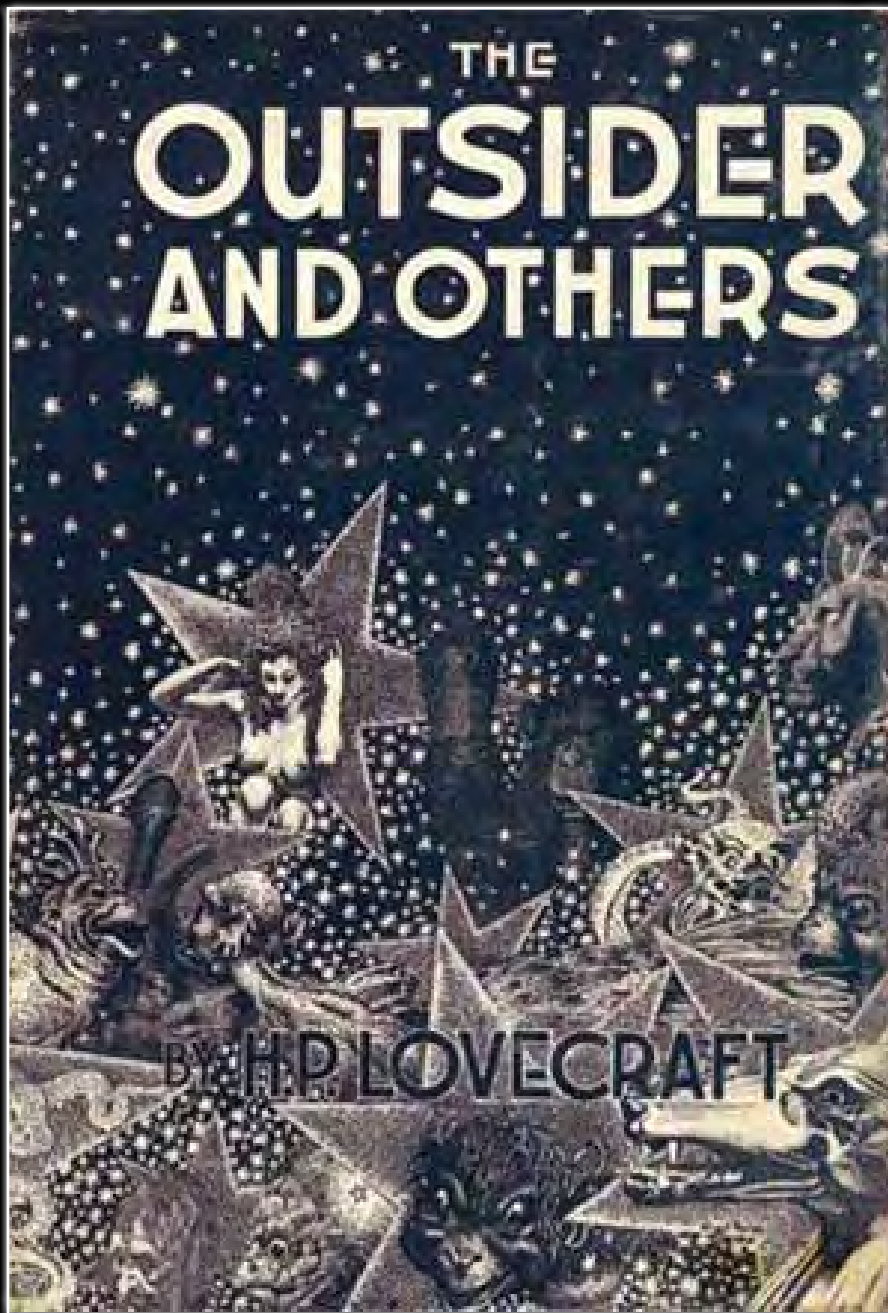
Forum announcement from Paul Maclean of yog-sothoth.com:

[www.yog-sothoth.com/content/1141-Lynn-Willis-Passes-Away](http://www.yog-sothoth.com/content/1141-Lynn-Willis-Passes-Away)

For myself, I just want to offer my genuine thanks to Mr Willis and all the work he did for us as gamers.







First book published by Arkham House in 1939



<i>Born</i>	February 24, 1909 Sauk City, Wisconsin
<i>Died</i>	July 4, 1971 Sauk City, Wisconsin
<i>Pen name</i>	Stephen Grendon
<i>Occupation</i>	Novelist, short story writer
<i>Genres</i>	Horror, thriller, detective and mystery
<i>Influences</i>	Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, H. L. Mencken, Samuel Johnson, Alexandre Dumas, Edgar Allan Poe, Walter Scott, and Henry David Thoreau

*Founded Arkham House in 1939. Derleth invented the term "Cthulhu Mythos" to describe the fictional universe described in the series of stories shared by Lovecraft and other writers in his circle.*