

BROKEN EARTH

The Falls

A Tale from the Great Lakes

By Matthew J. Hanson



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The Falls

A Tale from the Great Lakes



Money is power? Knowledge is power? Maybe where you come from, but around here, power is power.

People have always admired Niagara Falls, from the indigenous people who settled there long before Europeans arrived, to the tourists who flocked there up until the Great War. It is a thing of beauty and power, and it was one of the first locations tapped for hydroelectric generators.

The twin cities of Niagara Falls, New York and Ontario were not hit directly in the Great War but were soon abandoned in the chaos that followed. They lay empty for decades, except for the occasional scrappers who searched them for ever-decreasing salvage. These scrappers spread rumors of drones left over from the Great War, further dissuading people from exploring the ruins.

Then Ma Parker and her associates arrived. She and her scrapper crew refurbished several buildings, repaired the hydroelectric generators, and got electricity flowing

to what was now a single city, known as the Falls, that straddles the Niagara River. The Falls thrives and is famous for the electric lights that brighten the sky at night. Travelers flock to its trading posts, gambling dens, saloons, and entertainment halls. Some claim the Falls is decadent and filled with immorality, but the people who live there see it as the best chance for humanity's survival.

Ma Parker reigns over the Falls. She controls many of the businesses directly, and controls the rest indirectly, because she controls the power. If somebody displeases her, they lose their electricity as a warning to either quickly make amends or get out of town. Those that ignore her warnings get a once in a lifetime chance to see the falls up close and personal.

Ma Parker's Secret

Ma Parker projects the image of a self-made woman who literally built her empire from a pile of scrap, but in truth, she had more than a little help, and not just from the people in her crew.

Ma Parker did not restart Niagara's electrical power stations; indeed they never stopped. Less than 20 miles from the power plants, but buried 1,000 feet underground, lies Phoenix Station Epsilon, one of the underground bunkers designed to withstand nuclear war. Most of these stations are powered by micro nuclear reactors, but Epsilon instead drew its power from Niagara Falls. To maintain the facilities, they deployed semi-autonomous drones that could repair themselves, as well as any other problems with the hydropower.

Most people of Broken Earth view any kind of drone as a remnant of the Great War and steer well clear of them, but Ma Parker, ever curious, wanted to learn more. Before long she deduced their purpose, and thus the existence of the Phoenix Station. She contacted them with an offer: she and her associates would help maintain the power plant in exchange for knowledge and the right to all the extra power that Epsilon didn't need. After they quibbled, she reminded them that life is hard up topside, and a lot of people would love to break into a cushy place like the Station Epsilon. Not Ma Parker of course, but it would be a shame if the secret got out and something happened.

So, Epsilon Station made a deal. They gave Ma Parker the information and expertise she requested to harness her share of the power, while they got the power they needed and the right to remain anonymous.

The Falls Today

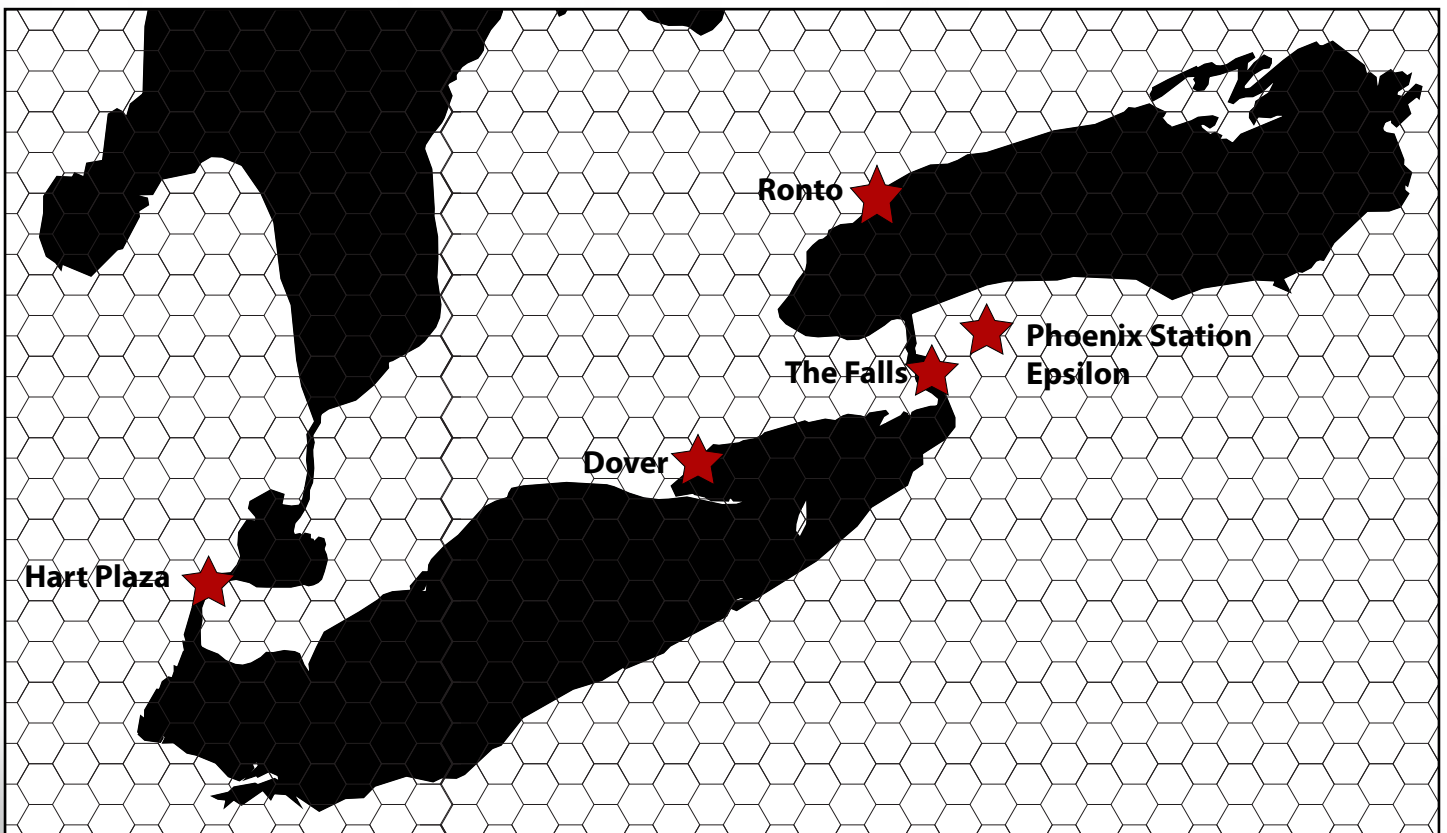
The Falls is one of the largest settlements in Broken Earth, and it is a commercial center for the people of the region.

Ma Parker

Ma Parker is an intelligent and shrewd woman. She was born into a crew of roaming scrappers and even as a little girl, loved to take apart pre-war devices she found to see how they worked. Her skill with scrap, along with her powerful charisma, saw her leading her band of scrappers by the time she was twenty. Shortly after that, she discovered the power generating stations at Niagara and single-handedly got them up and running again (so the story goes), and from there built one of the most powerful empires in present-day Broken Earth.

Now in her fifties, Ma Parker remains just as quick with machines as ever and has only gotten shrewder with age. She recognizes the power that she wields and is not afraid to use it. Despite several offers, Ma Parker has never married and has no family, though she insists that her crew and her city are all her children.

Ma Parker is below average height and has a stocky build. She keeps herself fit, though has put on a few pounds in her later years. She has dark tan skin and long black hair that she keeps in a long braid.



Ma Parker

Race: Human

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Common Knowledge d10, Fighting d4, Intimidation d8, Notice d8, Persuasion d8, Repair d10, Research d8, Science d10, Shooting d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7(2)

Gear: Revolver (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6+1, RoF 1, AP 1), survival knife (Str+d4), kevlar vest (+2), tablet computer, professional walkie-talkie

Hindrances: Curious, Overconfident, Vengeful (Minor)

Edges: Charismatic, Command, Hold the Line, Level Headed, McGyver, Rich

N23

Using knowledge she gained from Phoenix Station Epsilon, Ma Parker restored and reprogrammed an old maintenance drone she discovered in the ruins of Buffalo. As drones have become the stuff of legend in post-war Broken Earth, most people are in awe of N23, and Ma Parker uses the drone to impress her allies and intimidate her rivals. Despite the hype, the drone's combat capabilities are mediocre at best, but damaging N23 would anger Ma Parker, which would be far more lethal.

Though the drone is not sapient, Ma Parker programmed it with basic language capabilities, and because it amuses her, she has programmed much of its dialogue based on pre-war movies she recovered, including lines like, "I'm sorry Dave, I'm afraid I can't do that," "Would you like to play a game?" and "Hasta la vista, baby."

Maintenance Drone

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Notice d8, Repair d8, Science d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 6

Special Abilities

- **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken; ignores 1 point of Wound penalties; does not breathe or suffer from disease or poison.
- **Fearless:** Drones are immune to Fear and Intimidation but may be smart enough to react to Fear-causing situations appropriately.
- **Internal Tools:** Maintenance Drones have a wide array of built-in tools and do not need external tools for most tasks.

Ma Parker's Crew

Ma Parker's crew has grown from the dozen members of her original scrapper gang, to over a hundred. The crew is not simply those who work for Ma Parker, after all, everybody in the Falls works for her one way or another, instead it is a prestigious class of elites who run the town. To join her crew, people have to earn Ma Parker's trust by proving their competence and loyalty. In the early days she vetted everybody personally, but as her crew and her empire has grown, she now relies on established members of her crew to bring in new blood, but she always insists on meeting them personally to welcome them into the family.

The crew attracts a range of personalities and skill sets, and Ma Parker assigns them the most important jobs in the Falls, such as maintaining the power plants, patrolling the streets, and keeping track of the money, making the crew the de facto government in the Falls.



Law and Order

Just as they run the rest of the Falls, Ma Parker's crew enforces the law, and the only law is whatever Ma says, goes. Ma frowns on activities that disrupt her city, including theft, murder, vandalism, and assault, thus her crew try to prevent these crimes when possible, and punishes the perpetrators when not.

When crew enforcers witness a crime, when there's a confession, or when there's overwhelming evidence, members of the crew dole out punishment on the spot. When circumstances are less clear, the case goes before one of Ma Parker's handpicked magistrates, or—if the accused is a member of the crew—to Ma Parker herself.

Just as there are no set laws, there are also no set punishments, but there are some common ones. Confiscating property is the most common response for minor infractions, such as participating in a bar brawl, while large crimes result in exile or execution, and the most popular form of execution is sending the perpetrator over the waterfalls.

Chips

Like most of Broken Earth, Ma Parker's crew initially operated on a barter economy, trading their scrap for food. Then one of Ma's lieutenants named Shades Hamilton opened a casino and changed everything.

Low-stakes gambling of goods is common throughout Broken Earth, but it is challenging on a larger scale. After all, everybody at the table needs to agree on the value of items for stakes to be equal. Shades paired his casino with a pawn shop that traded goods for salvaged pre-war casino chips. If the player came back a winner, they got back whatever they came with and could trade their excess chips for more from the store, but if they lost, the casino claimed their goods to sell to somebody else.

Before long the people near the Falls started to accept chips as payment from Ma Parker's crew with the promise that they could trade them in at the casino store, and then started trading them with each other.

Now that Shades has introduced this casino chip economy, he monitors it closely. He has a stash of pre-war chips that he introduces slowly into the system as the community grows, and he is always on the lookout for counterfeit chips, and gives counterfeiterers a one way trip over the falls.

Important Locations

The Falls is a bustling city and heroes can find plenty of shops, food, and entertainment, but a few of the most prominent locations are described below.

The Plants

Ma Parker and her crew operate three refurbished power generating stations: two on the formerly Canadian side of the Niagara River, and one on the US side. Ma's crew guards the power generating stations day and night, and they only allow other members of the crew to enter. Her engineers are all extremely loyal and tight-lipped about the internal workings of the plants, but outside experts figure that any one of the stations could generate more than enough power to supply all of the Falls and surrounding territory, leading them to speculate that Ma Parker has long-term plans for massive expansion.

Ma's Tower

When she first settled in the Falls, Ma Parker and her crew lived in the remains of an office building that once supported the power stations. As they started reconnecting locations to the electrical grid, Ma wanted a new home, one that was both more comfortable and also demonstrated her power and the potential of pre-war technology.

Thus, she selected the remains of the Skylon Tower, an old observation tower that also once held a revolving restaurant. Ma Parker not only restored power, refurbished the elevators, and restarted the rotating floor, she also completely renovated the interior, turning the lower, rotating level into offices for her and her most trusted subordinates and turning the entire upper floor into her personal living quarters.

Ma Parker enjoys gazing from the observation deck at her city and the waterfalls that make it unique. Before the war, the observation areas were covered with protective rails, but Ma Parker has removed these in places, exposing it to the open air, and from time to time those who displease her "accidentally" fall from the tower.

Falls Casino

Before the war the twin towns of Niagara Falls, Ontario and New York boasted several casinos; now there is only one: The Falls Casino. Located near Ma's Tower it is easy to spot by the giant glowing "Casino" sign that clings to the side of the building.

The Falls Casino features dozens of gambling tables with several games, including pre-war favorites like poker, blackjack, and roulette, as well as several post-war games. One of these new favorites is rat race, in which trainers race rats through mazes, and spectators bet on which rat completes the maze first.

In addition to gambling, the Falls Casino offers food, drink, and entertainment, plus some services not typically associated with a pre-war casino, like a combination pawn shop and general store and the closest thing that the Falls has to a bank.

Because it is the heart of commerce in the Falls, heavily armed guards from Ma's crew maintain tight security.

Red's Tavern

Red's Tavern is probably the largest business that's not under the direct control of Ma's crew (of course they still control it indirectly through the electrical grid).

People in the Falls and the surrounding territory recommend Red's for the quality of its food and drink, especially the wine and hard ciders made from the fruit of nearby farms. It focuses on the basics, without any of the glitz and glam that places like the Falls Casino offer. While most of its business is food and drink, Red's also has a few beds on the upper floors for travelers.

Red, the owner, earned his nickname on account of his flaming red hair, and he's been called that for so long many people don't realize that's not his birth name (it's Scott Jensen). He was born in the area to a farming family who brewed their own cider, and Red transitioned from selling it in the market to selling out his tavern. He is a gregarious man who tries to stay out of local conflicts.

Nearby Area

Because of its economic, political, and literal power, the Falls extends its influence over the surrounding territory.

The Farms

Before the war, much of the area near Niagara Falls was prime farmland. Many farms survived the initial missile attacks only to be destroyed in the chaos and fallout that followed, but those that survived the first few years came out strong, and their descendants continue to farm the land today.

After Ma Parker electrified the Falls, she started running power to these farms. Initially the price was low, just a small portion of their farm crops. As time went on, Ma and her crew sold more and more electric devices to the farmers, making them more and more dependent on her power, just as she has slowly increased the price of the power, hoarding more food and wealth for herself.

A small group of farmers figured out what Ma Parker and her crew were doing long ago and want no part of it. Their ancestors survived without electricity just fine, and they can too.

David Miller: The self-appointed leader of the “off the grid” farmers is a man named David Miller. David believes not only that people should do without electricity, but that each farm should be completely self-reliant, growing a mix of crops and raising a small number of animals like goats and chickens. David doesn’t just see this a practical matter, he views it as his holy mission. He believes that God sent the Great War to punish humanity for its excesses, and that Ma Parker has been seduced by the devil. David frequently preaches in farm homes around the area, and gains more followers every week, but not all those who resist Ma Parker subscribe to David’s religious ideology, and some worry that soon they will have to oppose both Ma Parker’s crew and David Miller’s congregation.

David Miller is a fair skinned man in his late 40s. He has light brown hair and a bushy beard that he is exceptionally proud of.

Ruins of Buffalo

About 20 miles upstream from the Falls, lie the ruins of Buffalo, New York. For decades after the Great War, Buffalo was a prime source of scrap for the surrounding

area. Ma Parker regularly raided it in her youth, and her crew continued to pick it clean for decades.

The ruined city has always attracted travelers and vagabonds looking for shelter, and a small number of people made the city their home, collecting scrap and living off the plants and animals that reclaimed the ruins.

Recently a band of raiders has taken over the ruins, led by a man named JT. They started by ambushing outsiders who came through the ruins, but as time went on they became bolder, venturing out of the ruins to attack nearby farms. They demand food and other goods and threaten to destroy the farms and everyone on them. So far, only one farm has tried to defy them. After the raiders burned the farmhouse and hung the corpses of the farm family from nearby trees, everybody else has given JT’s raiders what they want.

The Canal

Before the Great War, the Welland Canal connected Lake Ontario and Lake Erie, as Niagara Falls made the natural waterways unnavigable. After the war the locks in the river stood abandoned for decades, and anybody hoping to move cargo between lakes was forced to portage it at the Falls. Less than a year ago, an expedition from nearby Ronto (see below) set up a camp at the northern end of the canal and seems to be restoring the first lock.

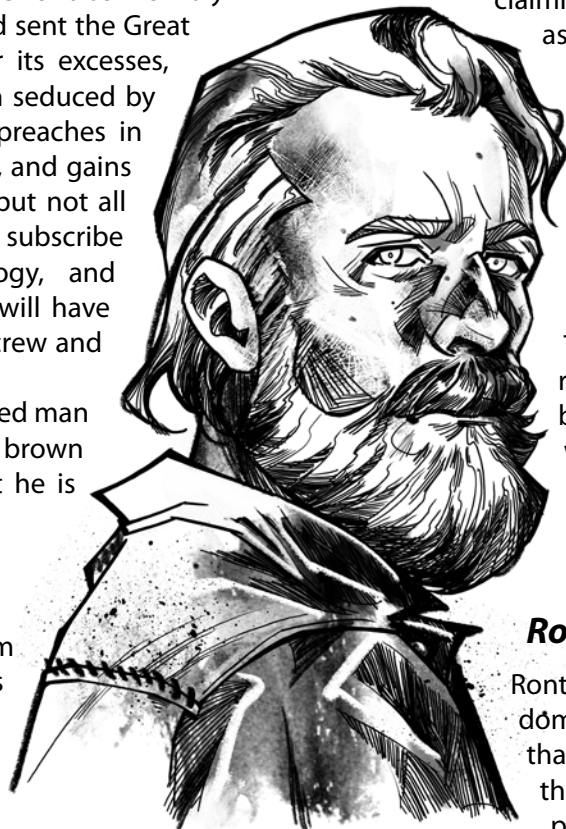
In response Ma Parker dispatched teams to take control of a cluster of three canal locks due west of the Falls. Their primary purpose is to prevent Ronto from claiming the entire canal, but Ma Parker figures as long as the teams are there, they might as well start fixing the locks. While travel between lakes is currently rare, Ma Parker is forward thinking, and believes that one day her crew might be able to profit from charging vessels to use the locks.

Diplomatic Relations

The Falls is not the only power in the region, and they know it. The two locations below, Ronto and Phoenix Station Epsilon will be detailed in future *Tales from the Great Lakes*, but the information below provides a brief overview and describes the Falls’ relationship with them.

Ronto

Ronto, built in the ruins of Toronto is a city dominated by freaks who vehemently believe that the needs of the community come before those of any individual. As the next most powerful settlement in the region, Ma Parker



views Ronto as the biggest threat to the Falls. Worse, their collectivist philosophy stands in direct contrast to Ma's top down leadership and policy of rewarding those most loyal to her.

Ma Parker knows the Falls is not strong enough to challenge Ronto militarily, but she looks for other ways to undermine the city, and the two exist in a kind of cold war. Despite that, most of the common folk in the Falls care little about Ronto and know it only as a boogeyman they hear about from Ma's crew.

Phoenix Station Epsilon

Almost nobody in the Falls beyond Ma Parker even knows that Phoenix Station Epsilon exists, yet it impacts all their lives. Ma Parker continues to ensure that power flows to the station, and in return it provides technical knowledge, and—when pressed—even some of their technological devices.

The leaders of Station Epsilon go along with Ma Parker's plans fearing that she will cut off their electricity, leaving them in the dark a quarter mile below ground. Some citizens, especially the younger generations, are tired of feeling beholden to Ma Parker and her crew. They want to travel to the surface, seek out other allies, and forge a better deal.

Savage Tales

Canal Recon and Sabotage

Ma Parker wants to move against the expedition from Ronto at the northern edge of the Welland Canal, but is not ready to spark a full-on war with Ronto, and she knows the freaks from Ronto will easily identify members of her crew.

Thus, she wants to recruit outsiders, like the heroes, to learn more about the Ronto expedition and do anything they can to "discourage a continued presence." She offers them 500 Trade worth of chips just for an accurate report, with the promise of more for better results.

Approaching the Lock: The force from Ronto is easy to find if the heroes travel along the coast of Lake Ontario, but getting close is another matter. The Ronto expedition expects interference from the Falls and sends out regular patrols. Heroes must either sneak their way past them with a Stealth check or convince the patrols they are allies with a Persuasion check. Alternatively, the heroes can fight a patrol, but this almost certainly makes them unwelcome in the camp.

Ronto Guards (1 per PC): See below

Freaks in the Falls

Because the rival city of Ronto is populated primarily by freaks, most people in the Falls associate all freaks with that city. This means that within the city they are treated with suspicion and often scapegoated for problems they had nothing to do with.

Ronto Guards

Race: Freak

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Boating d6, Common Knowledge d6, Fighting d8, Notice d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Survival d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Hindrances: Loyal, Freakish (Racial)

Edges: Radiation Resistance (Racial)

Gear: Short sword (Str+d6), hunting rifle (Range 24/48/96, Damage 2d8, RoF 1, AP 2), leather armor (+1).

Exploring the Encampment: Ronto is indeed trying to get the northernmost lock functioning again, and has roughly two hundred people there working on the operation either directly or in support positions.

If characters talk their way in, the patrol escorts them to the leader of the operation, a woman named Beatrice Blackberry. Here the heroes must make another Persuasion check, this time with a -2 penalty, to convince Beatrice that they are harmless. Alternatively, they can reveal their mission and offer to turn against Ma Parker, but doing so requires a Persuasion check with a -4 penalty. If the heroes succeed they can stay in the outer part of the camp but are not allowed close to the lock. If the heroes fail they are either politely escorted away, or—if they resist—violently thrown out.

If characters sneaked past the guards, they can make another Stealth roll, now with a -2 penalty. If they succeed, the heroes can infiltrate the actual camp. If they fail, they alert the camp, and have the option to surrender (and see Beatrice as above), flee, or fight (see below).

Causing Trouble: Provided the heroes get close enough to the encampment to see what is going on and get a rough read on numbers, they can report to Ma Parker and receive their 500 Trade. If they want more money, they have several options (and creative players will likely come up with others).

Sabotage the Lock: Even if the heroes are allowed in the camp, the lock is off limits. Characters might sneak in with a Stealth roll at -4 or they might fight their way past an equal number of guards, but the latter alerts the rest of the camp. Reinforcements arrive in 1d6 minutes if the heroes fought quietly or 1d6 rounds if the heroes were loud.

Should the heroes get near the lock, they can either sabotage it with brute force, such as using explosives to destroy some of the gate hinges or control mechanisms, or they can be more subtle, such as messing up some of the controls. The second method requires a Repair or Science check, but if successful the expedition from Ronto won't realize the problem until long after the heroes leave.

Supply Lines: While the expedition does some hunting and gathering, it is far from self-sufficient. Every few days, boats from Ronto arrive filled with food and whatever other supplies the settlement needs.

Heroes with their own boats could easily intercept a supply ship en route. Characters should first make a Boating check without penalty or a Perception check with a -2 penalty to locate the boat. Then run the encounter as a standard chase (see the core rulebook).

Ronto Guards: One per PC, see page 9

After losing the first shipment, Ronto sends two next time, each with twice as many guards. If the heroes also sink those, Ronto sends three ships on the next shipment and begins hunting the "pirates" responsible.

The expedition can weather one lost shipment with little problem, but if they lose two or more they must divert labor from the lock to hunting and gathering food, and if they lose five or more, they temporarily abandon the site until Ronto eliminates the pirate threat.

Fighting the Camp: While not everybody in the camp is trained for combat, about half are, meaning the heroes need to fight the equivalent of one hundred Ronto guards to wipe out the expedition through violence, unlikely for even the most battle-hardened characters. If the heroes are able to recruit a significant military force, they might run an invasion as a mass battle (see the core rulebook). In such a case the forces from Ronto would have a slight terrain advantage (+1).

Collecting the Reward: Ma Parker always rewards those who help her. As promised, if the heroes collected useful information, she gives them 500 Trade worth of chips, and will give them far more if they slowed down the operation. Exactly how much depends on their actions. They might get 1,000 if they set back work a few days, or up to 50,000 if they completely destroyed the expedition.

Defending the Farms

Farmers south of the Falls need help. If the heroes are passing through the farmland, the plea might come as they stop at one of the farmhouses, or a young woman named Mary might approach the heroes as they relax at one of the fine establishments in the Falls.

Mary (or a similar NPC), pleads her case. The farms in her area have been harassed by JT's band of raiders based in Buffalo. They demand more and more food, and now are telling Mary and her neighbors that they want half of

their upcoming harvests. If the farmers give in, they won't have enough food to survive the winter, but they are in no position to resist. Thus, Mary is looking for heroes who can save her people. She hopes they'll do it out of the goodness of their heart, and does not have much to offer, but if pressed she says the community could give them 200 Trade worth of food.

Mary is the eldest daughter of David Miller (see page 7), and the heroes ask around town, most people in the Falls consider her and her friends to be backwater yokels who are scared of technology. A Common Knowledge check also reveals that while Mary has asked (and been refused by) several combat capable groups, she noticeably avoided asking Ma Parker's crew for help, despite the fact that they are the most powerful force in the region.

Some Friendly Advice: If the heroes meet Mary in a public location and seem willing to help, later a woman named Skelli King, a mid-level member of Ma's crew, approaches and "offers them some advice." She says Mary and her people are part of some nut-job cult, and that raiders are bad news. If the heroes value their safety and their reputation, they had best stay away.

Dealing with the Raiders: If the heroes agree to defend against the raiders, Mary (or a similar NPC) brings them to their farming village south of the Falls. Observant heroes who make a Notice or Science check, see the farms being threatened are all "off the grid." They have no electrical hookups, even though many farms a similar distance from the Falls do. If the heroes bring it up, the farmers say they prefer it that way. Inquisitive heroes can make a Persuasion check to learn the information described in David Miller's entry (page 7). If the heroes investigate the nearby powered farms, they learn that none of the farms on the grid are under the raider's ultimatum, despite the fact that some of them are closer to the raider's territory.

The heroes have two main choices to confront the raiders: to wait for the raiders to return or to take the fight to them. If they wait, they have about 10 days to prepare. They can use this time to set up traps, build fortifications, train farmers, or anything else the players think of.

If the heroes seek out the raiders, they must travel to the ruins of Buffalo. The farmers don't know exactly where the raiders came from, just that it was from the south, but the high amount of scrap the raiders carried suggest they at least visit some sort of ruins often. If the heroes search Buffalo, they can make an unmodified Survival check or a Perception check with a -2 penalty. If they succeed, they locate the raiders' hideout and can surprise them, study them, or pick them off in small groups. If the heroes fail their check, they waste a day searching. If they search hexes blindly they can attempt a similar check, but only find the raiders if they are in the ruins of Buffalo.

However the heroes go about it, the raiders represent a sizable force to deal with.

JT: Wild card raider with d10 in Shooting, see below

Raiders: Four per PC., see below

Raider

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Riding d8, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Survival d6,

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8(1)

Hindrances: Bloodthirsty, Mean, Wanted (Minor)

Edges: Brawny, No Mercy, Steady Hands

Gear: Bow (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6), battle axe (Str+d8), dagger (Str+d4), leather armor (+1), 20 arrows, quiver, horse, saddle.

Truth Behind the Raids: If the heroes capture any of the raiders, they can make Intimidation or Persuasion checks opposed by the raider's Spirit. If the heroes succeed, the raiders confess they targeted these farms because

they knew they were off the grid. They thought the lack of power made them weaker, and that nobody in the Falls would care what happened to them.

If the heroes capture JT, they can make a similar check with a -2 penalty to learn the whole truth, which only JT knows. Ma Parker's crew approached him and suggested that they target the off-grid farms and threw in a pile of chips to encourage him. Searching the raiders' headquarters in Buffalo discovers 1,000 Trade worth of chips from the Falls, but Ma Parker and her crew claim that the raiders stole the chips and JT is lying.

Ma Parker's crew had hoped that the raiders would either wipe out the farms or force the famers to accept the crew's help. Either way it would eliminate some of the only resistance in the area.

Now What: Even if the heroes defeat the raiders, it only delays Ma Parker's plans to eliminate the farmers who defy her. She will target farms again soon enough, and because the heroes sided against Ma Parker, the characters may find themselves unwelcome in the Falls.

