

# Simon Of Vandenberg's Essential Goods

A Fringeworthy Pocket Stop Playbook

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Welcome to a Fringeworthy Pocket Stop Playbook! This playbook provides a setting in a sandbox mode, along with some adventure ideas and suggested abilities for the different NPCs that the players will encounter in this setting. This is systemless setting, but we'll give you enough information so that you can easily use it in your favorite game system.

Sandbox mode means that there is no set adventure, but a setting that the player characters can interact with. You as the GM can create your own adventures either by using the adventure seeds, plot hooks, and NPCs provided in this playbook, or create your own adventures based on the information we've provided in this book. Every major NPC will have plot hooks that can be used to also create adventures.

Also, because this is a sandbox, you'll find that not everything has been defined. This is so that you, the GM and the players, can fill in the blanks with things that you want to see and have adventures with.

**Note:** United Nations Earth is also known as Earth Prime. British Empire Earth refers to Victorian Earth, Victorian Prime, or, as the Brits call it, Earth Prime. There is some contention as to which world should be called Earth Prime.

## Setting

On the Alternate platform, in front of the #4 portal, is a sandwich board with a professionally painted sign with a picture of a bowl of soup, various essential travel items, and an image of a stylized vehicle parked next to a hookup. There is writing in an old German script that says "Simon's Essensjele Guod". There's an arrow at the bottom of the sign pointing at the portal.

When entering this world, visitors will be granted a Germanic language, similar to *Old Low German*, more similar to Frisian than to modern German.

The Pocket Stop is 64 kilometers long by approximately 56 kilometers wide, in a roughly ellipse shape and is 2,800 square kilometers in area. It appears to be a wide valley, with grassy hills dotted with several small copses of trees. Anyone who crests the sides of the valley will appear on the opposite side of the valley in a corresponding opposite location. A road runs from the Ring Station to the center of the valley. A sign post says, "This way to Simon's" in Old Low German.

Like many Pocket Stops, this one attracts items from other alternate worlds. About one new item appears ever 24 to 48 hours. The items are typically broken in some manner, though a few have arrived intact and operational.

A stream runs from a spring at the base of a rocky outcrop located five miles west from the Ring Station and winds its way down the valley and ends in a small lake near the center of the valley. A dye test proved that the water was not being recycled but drawn from and drained to unknown sources. The day/night cycle is 15 hours, with 8 hours of daylight and 7 hours of darkness.

Near the lake is the complex of buildings and ramparts that make up the domain of Simon of Vandenberg, a one-time Fringewalker, who settled down with his wife, Milava, and his four children. From here he runs his small Fringe mercantile empire, Simon's Essential Goods. His outpost has been here 19 years.

### Simon's Essential Goods

Simon's Essential Goods trades and sells all sorts of items, culled from several nearby alternates. Simon employs ten other people, two families, and they all live within the compound they built from scavenged materials that dot the Pocket Stop and the trees they harvested. It is surrounded by several tilled fields with a wide variety of crops being grown. To the side of the compound is a wide graveled area with posts with hookups for vehicles.

Once a week, Simon and Gustav, his eldest son, load up their horse drawn wagon with goods that they got from trades with other Fringeworthy and any new items sucked in by the Pocket Stop. They then visit one of several alternates on the platform and trade for more useful goods.

One of more unique items sucked in by the stop is Aldo. Aldo is not a person, it's a robot, powered by a tiny internal fusion reactor. As such, he can't leave the stop, but serves as Simon's shopkeeper and all-around gofer.

Besides trading for goods, Simon offers a small RV park for the traveling Fringeworthy to setup camp, dump their septic tanks, stretch their legs, and other things, and pay for their stay by charging up Simon's many batteries. Simon wants to start a bio-diesel plant, but it's cheaper to buy the fuel oil from the Mayans.

There is a small restaurant, but it serves a primarily vegetarian menu, with the occasional bit of rabbit stew, and the even rarer steak. Meat is very expensive, but a pot of corn and bean stew is always available for a small pittance or if you help out in the kitchen.

Simon has traded with Fringe Pirates, mainly at the end of his rifle and small 4-pound cannons. After his encounters with them, he now has a simple alarm system setup at the portal: A string across the front of the portal tied to a counterweight and wheel, attached to a rope that spins a wheel that hits a bell that can be easily heard at the compound. Aldo is always listening for that bell and will alert the rest that a visitor has arrived at the Pocket Stop.

## Trading

Simon and Milava are both shrewd traders, their skills honed by many years of dealing with the various travelers who have stopped by as well as the Mayan and Rattus traders on the Alts. They won't take money, and gold is only useful on one the alternate worlds they trade with.

They trade primarily for items that they can trade to other travelers or use for themselves. They highly value meat in several forms:

Most valued:

1. Canned meats
2. Dried meats (Jerky)
3. Dehydrated meats
4. Cured Meats
5. Fresh Meat

Average valued:

Besides meats, they'll trade for items that they can sell on the other alternate worlds on the Alternate platform:

- Electronics
- Vehicle parts
- Bolts of cloth
- Clothing
- Books in either Low German, Scratch Speak, or Mayan

They have most traveler sundries: toiletries, tools, shoes and boots, bike chains, tire repair kits (with instructions in four different languages), canned vegetables (please return the jars if you can), and most importantly, information on the 4 open portals on the platform. That information will cost you at least 4 cans of SPAM to get or the equivalent in other trade goods. They also will trade for items that have appeared in the valley.

## Adventure Seeds

### **The New Neighbors: First Contact with UNIDA**

If this is the player's IDE team first to contact with Simon and crew, they will be considered to be just another set of pirates, just better dressed and hopefully better behaved. Simon will be neutral towards them, but he will give them a fair deal, trading items with them, especially food. He will give them very good deals on any meat that they have on them, especially any tinned meat, as it keeps longer.

Subsequent contact with Simon and his group will be on friendlier terms. He'll want to cultivate a good trading relationship with the IDE teams and will try to get some high-tech goodies from them like refrigerators and solar panels.

UNIDA will want to use him as a go-between with the Fringe Pirates and other Fringeworthy that frequent his establishment. Convincing him to do that will require some very good trade goods. This would be a difficult task for the player characters as Simon is a master trader.

In truth, Simon is all for this deal, but only if the player characters would do a task for him: He would like to have sheep on his Pocket Stop. Sadly, there are no easily gotten sheep on any of the nearby alternate worlds. He thinks that there may be sheep on the prime world. Feel free to setup the prime world as you see fit. There might be sheep, and there may not be...

### **It's a Big Small World**

Because this Pocket Stop covers 2,800 square kilometers, no one at the compound has been able to thoroughly explore it. Simon wouldn't mind if the Team were to head on out and beat the borders of his domain and report back what they find. Realistically, it would take months to search every square meter of the Pocket Stop on foot or in a vehicle. However, if the Team has a remotely operated drone aircraft, they could do a basic survey in a week or so.

For various reasons, the remote-control range is greatly reduced to just 4 kilometers, so the Team will have to go into the field. Also, the drone cannot go above 2,000 meters in altitude otherwise it "goes through" the sky and comes back through upside down. Yes, there are clouds and a "sun" but they look to be projections rather than real objects.

The first couple of days of aerial surveying doesn't show much more than what you'd expect: fields and clumps of trees, and the occasional junked object. On the third day, the drone spots what looks like a cave.

The cave is nestled in a depression near the edge of the valley and appears to be artificial in appearance. That is, the opening is an upside-down U-shape. If the drone has infrared cameras, the cave is warmer than the ground outside it. The cave mouth is 3 meters tall and 2.5 meters wide.

Investigating the cave will result in a voice calling out "Doncha come enny closer! I gots ya covered!" The voice is wheezy and sounds like it's coming from multiple sources. It will be difficult to convince this person that the Team doesn't mean him any harm.

If they fail to convince the him, he'll shoot one of them with a shotgun loaded with rock salt. At best, it would be a minor wound and will hurt like hell. What happens after that is up to the team. The person will defend himself.

If they convince him, he'll step out. He's a Dimixi, from a nearby Dimixi alternate. He is Toka-Sho Mil'Koda. He discovered a portal on his world years ago and travelled the worlds of the nearby alternate platforms in secret. He's been living on this Pocket Stop for years, long before Simon and crew showed up. He tolerates Simon's presence, as it keeps the heat off of him. He only operates at night, and has a good view of the Ring Station, so he knows when Simon has left on one of his trading missions. He wasn't in the Pocket Stop when Simon arrived. He was on one of his operations. When he came home and found that he was now speaking Low German, that gave him a heads up and incentive to hide.

Inside his cave is a horde of items he's stolen from other worlds. He views them as "false worlds" so there is no sin in stealing from them. He has a small electric/steam vehicle. It uses fuel cells to travel on worlds and then switches to steam on the pathways. The steam comes from burning hydrogen. He has a secret pipe to draw water from the Pocket Stop's stream. This is his drinking water and his source of hydrogen. He has a "water splitter" a piece of Tehrmelern

biotech that converts water into oxygen and hydrogen. It just needs sunlight. It looks like a plant with wide leaves and blends in with the surrounding vegetation.

But now that he's found out, he'll have to deal with Simon. He views this Pocket Stop as his domain and will try to force Simon to pay for the privilege of living here. Of course, Simon will disagree. It will be up to the Team to act as the go between for the two parties.

**Note:** If the Team has at least one Dimixi, Toka-Sho will view him as some sort of bounty hunter and target him. He'll also speak his native language, an archaic form of Stejiel at the Player Character Dimixi. He will not be taken back for punishment. It turns out that he's a wanted Dimixi on his home world. He's a master thief and "con man". Getting this information in general will be very difficult for Dimixi and non-Dimixi alike.

### Alternate Platform

Of the 8 portals on this platform, only 4 are open. The other 4 will be up to you as the GM to generate when you see fit. If you don't pay the 4 cans of SPAM price for information on each of the alternate portals, you'll just get the basic information.

#### **Alt #2: Alternate Historical: Rattus Sapiens**

**Language Gift:** Entering this world will grant the team the language "People of the Great Western Forest Speak". When speaking it, the person's voice will be in a higher register and squeak a bit.

**Basic Information:** "Ja, it's a world with lots of rats. They are good rats and they are looking for good trade."

**More Information:** The warp for this world is in a forest glade with plenty of room for vehicles to drive around. In fact, there is a dirt road that leads from it, as well as a small collection of meter and half tall wooden buildings, with all the buildings off to the side of the warp.

This is the land of intelligent rats, Rattus Sapiens. They are about a meter tall, with the males wearing kilts, while the females wear loose trousers. The buildings are for the guards that keep watch for visitors. Normally, it's Simon and his son, Gustav, arriving with a load of scrap metal and other items in trade for cured venison and lumber.

The locals will assume that the team is just another bunch visitors that stop by to gape at them and use the magic picture boxes to take pictures of them. A mercenary lot, they will request some form of payment for those pictures. Either in Federation Trade Shillings (A rough translation) or in trade items. The nearby city of "Where the Sky Kisses the Earth" is a hodgepodge of local materials and recycled metal. Most Rattus soldiers wear metal helmets and carry firearms (.22 caliber comparable) made from reformed steel.

"Where the Sky Kisses the Earth" is the center of high technology on their world, mainly thanks to the scavenged junk that Simon brings them for trade. They still haven't figured out electronics, but there is a thriving vacuum tube technological industry, with Far Singing Boxes (shortwave radios) being the number one export from the city, along with a thriving lead acid battery industry to power them.

**GM Information:** *When asked about the presence of armed soldiers, the team will be told that there are the occasional raids from the sea by raiding Rattus. While “Where the Sky Kisses the Earth” is miles from the ocean, the city is on a major river, and sometimes the raiders will make their way up the river and raid as they go. If pressed, or the characters get a great success on their interaction with the Rattus they’re talking to, they will also talk about the raids from the warp by raiding humans, AKA Fringe Pirates.*

*Outside of “Where the Sky Kisses the Earth”, the average technology is around the 1900’s of United Nations Earth. Personal vehicles have not been created, only large passenger steam trains and sea vessels exist. No one has made any inroads on heavier than aircraft, only hot air balloons and gliders.*

In the lands surrounding “Where the Sky Kisses the Earth” are farms and ranchers. Farms are fairly traditional wheat, corn, legumes, and other vegetables. The ranchers... well, they ranch giant rabbits. These rabbits are not like the ones on United Nations Earth, they were domesticated 8,000 years ago and bred for meat. The average giant rabbit is 75 cm at the shoulder and weighs in between 65kg and 75kg. Ears are only 21cm long, but they all sport set of wickedly sharp buck teeth. In addition to the giant rabbits, chicken-like birds are raised as well for their meat and eggs.

#### **Adventure Seeds:**

#1: The local industrialist, **Fox of the Windswept Meadow**, is interested in the solar panels and other power generation gear the team may have. He intimates that he could make it “worth their while” to provide him with panels in large quantity, or better yet, how to make them. In any case, he will send his minions to spy on and perhaps get their paws on some of the more portable solar chargers the team may have.

#2: The Mayor of “Where the Sky Kisses the Earth”, **Grizzly Bear of the Northern Redwood Forest**, is interested in acquiring upgraded firearms from UNIDA. The current crop is problematic as there is no consistency in the quality of metal that Simon delivers. Properly manufactured weapons would be greatly appreciated. Greatly. And unless the player characters can convince him otherwise, they will find themselves with their own personal honor guard of Sky Kissed soldiers. The presence of said soldiers will put a chill on any social encounter the characters may try to enter into.

#3: When Simon appeared, he confirmed the rumors of some sort of “hole in the air” that a few Rattus claimed to see. With his help, there are now 6 Rattus Fringe explorers working for the Mayor, Grizzly Bear. They are led by **Puma of the High Cliffs**, a charming young Rattus, who has a gift for languages. Trips to other alternates on the platform isn’t a problem, but they only made one foray to the Prime portal, which took two days one way. (It’s an above average difficulty to get them to talk about what they found.) Their main mission is to trade with the flat headed humans (Mayans). What they really want is a vehicle that they can use on the pathways to haul the loot they bring back. They love the idea of the horse drawn wagon, but horses are these giant, wild creatures that would stomp you into the ground as to look at you. Helping them build a steam powered vehicle would be a major task, since the local steam tech depends on large quantities of water for the boiler. While the players might know about recycling steam,

actually figuring out how to do it would require someone on the team have some sort of steam tech skill, perhaps the TAESS liaison on the team from British Empire Earth? This encounter with the Rattus Fringeworthy can happen on any of the alternate worlds, the Pocket Stop or even the Alternate Platform.

#### **Alt #4: Simon's Pocket Stop**

**Language Gift:** Entering this world will grant the team the Old Low German language.

#### **Alt #10: Tehrmelern Recreational World: Nature Preserve**

**Language Gift:** Entering this world will grant the team the language of the first team member to enter this alt. In case of a tie, have the characters roll a die to decide.

**Basic Information:** "It's a big open plain, with dragons. Also, the people there are weird, like pipe cleaners."

**More Information:** The portal is a ring station inside a Tehrmelern Visitor Center. The Ring Room is larger, 30 meters wide with a 15-meter-tall dome. The room and the entire Visitor Center is made from living wood. No straight lines anywhere, and windows are made from transparent organic material.

The Visitor Center laid out in a cross shape, with various rooms, with a ring of rooms surrounding the Ring Room. The entire complex covers 4,000 square meters and is surrounded by a living thorn fence.

The team will be greeted by a Quellor, who will speak in the gifted language. "Welcome to the Snarg-Tergle Nature Preserve. We are at your service and can answer any questions about the preserve." And they mean that last bit. They will only answer questions about the Nature Preserve and nothing else. "I'm sorry, I have no knowledge of that topic," will be the oft repeated refrain.

The "Dragons" that Simon mentioned are in fact Dinosaurs, mid-Cretaceous Era Dinosaurs. While there are no Tyrannosaurus Rexes present, there are other carnivorous dinosaurs, such as the Tyrannotitan and just as dangerous. Also, in the area, and competing with the Tyrannotitan are their descendants, the Giganotosaurus, much larger and a deadly hunter.

The plains are home to several sauropods, and if asked, the location of the Visitor Center is in the pampas region of Argentina.

If the team wants to tour the plains, the Qellor will provide them with a tour "vehicle". The vehicle is in fact a large animal the size of a bus, with multiple legs and a recognizable face. It's furry, fast, and looks for all the world like the Catbus from *My Neighbor Totoro*. It does have windows that are bullet proof, and it is nimble and can climb steep inclines.

In addition to the Catbus, are the Rescue Canines, some of which can be seen romping around in the protected yard. They are a meter and half at the shoulder, have wicked teeth, and act like puppies around the characters. They also talk and will want belly rubs. "I'm a good boy!" In addition, there are the "drones": Winged critters with biological cameras that fly out and survey the region around the Visitor Center.

**GM Information:** *This complex has an underground facility. Food animals live down here to feed the Qellor, as well as meat trees for the Catbuses and Rescue Canines. This is where the Mother Qellor lives, as well as the other mothers: The Catbus mother and the Rescue Canine mother. Also, in the Visitor Center is a fully stocked Tehrmelern Doc Box. The Doc Box can handle up to 12 people at one time. It can even revive a dead character as long as you get at least the head back within an hour. The Rescue Canines carry one Biobag per canine. The Biobag can put the victim into a form of medical stasis. This does not stabilize the victim, they just stop bleeding and/or dying. If a dead victim can be put into a Biobag within 15 minutes, there will be no issues with reviving them, even if you get the Biobag to the Doc Box a week later. Technically, all you need is the head, but that means 10 weeks of regrowing the victim's body. The regrown body will have Mediocre Strength and Dexterity. Lots of physical therapy to regain the victim's lost abilities.*

*In case the team gets in trouble and their Catbus is disabled or dead, the Qellor will dispatch Rescue Canines. These are to dogs as bicycles are to racing motor cycles. Incredibly fast, armed with wicked teeth that can cut through thin metal cable, they will seek out the team, protect them, and if at all possible, bring them back to the Visitor Center.*

*Both the Catbus and the Rescue Canine have limited intelligence and can only converse about things they are made for. Catbuses are tour guides, and Rescue Canines can only talk about defensive actions, emergency medical operations, and belly rubs.*

*The other secret is that the Visitor Center isn't the only facility on this world. There over a thousand other facilities both on land and in water, whose mission is to maintain the balance of nature and to assist and care for the animals of this world. This is just the main center, because it is directly connected to the Fringepaths.*

### **Adventure Seeds:**

#1: The Nickel Tour: If the team takes the Qellor up on an offer of a tour of the surrounding Nature Reserve, a Catbus is made available and it will take them out amongst the giant Sauropods and other smaller dinosaurs. The Catbus will deliver a narration of what's going outside the bus and answer any questions about the reserve or the dinos. It won't go more than 24km from the Visitor Center, for a reason. One that will soon be evident.

The pampas are full of many dinosaurs of all types, and more than in any book about dinosaurs. The team will see dozens of unknown species of dinosaurs at every turn. And the Catbus knows what people really want to see, and that's blood. And it finds a situation that's guaranteed to have a lot of it. A Tyrannotitan is stalking a juvenile sauropod of unknown species. The Catbus narrates, "The juvenile is twice the size of a buffalo or So'kao T'mat. It will provide more than enough food for this male Tyrannotitan."

The Catbus goes into Cheshire mode and blends into the tall grasses of the pampas, while giving the team a grand view of the Tyrannotitan stalking the small sauropod. Sadly, the Catbus doesn't notice the female mate of the Tyrannotitan, but she notices it.



The attack is swift and sure, the Catbus cannot react in time. The Tyrannotitan hits the Catbus and knocks it on its side. It flails its many legs in defense, but it's claws are short and meant for climbing, not fighting. If a character pulls a gun to fire at the dino, the Catbus will say, "Not through the windows. They are bullet proof. Shoot through the frame. It will be alright."

The other Tyrannotitan will attack from the other side and try to get at the team. The windows will stop it, for now. The team will have to hold off the two dinos for at least 10 minutes. The reason is that the Qellors have sent out the Rescue Canines. At 60kph, the Canines will reach the team in under 10 minutes. There will be two Canines per team member. Each of them will be carrying a biobag just in case.

It will take at least 5 minutes for the Tyrannotitans to rip a hole in either the roof or the floor of the Catbus. There will be blood. Everywhere. There is a small outcropping of rocks 10 meters away, that can provide minimal cover from the dinos. If the team makes a break for that, and the Catbus is still alive, it will try to distract the dinos. This will give the characters a +2 to go unnoticed by the feasting dinos. After the team makes it to the outcrop, the Catbus will die and the dinos will start ripping it apart, eating their fill.

If they are noticed, one of the Tyrannotitans will chase after them. Roll 1d6: An even roll, it's the female, odd the male. The dino is faster than they are, but only average in dexterity. "Kiting" the dino and leading it around will work as long as the fastest runners of the team do it and they have some way of getting the dino's attention. Shooting it will definitely do that. If it's the female chasing them, harming her will get the attention of the male and he will join in. If it's the male, the female will only come to his aid if the male receives a Serious wound.

When the Rescue Canines arrive, they will put themselves in between the team members and the dinos. They will attack to sedate the dinos with their special bite. It will take three successful attacks for the dinos to receive enough sedative to go to sleep. It will take three rounds for this to happen. More bites won't speed it up and could be fatal to the dinos.

Yes, sedate. This is a *nature preserve*, and the Canines will only kill if there is no other choice. These two Tyrannotitans are essential to the balance of nature. Once the dinos are not a threat, they will bag the wounded and dead, and return everyone to the Visitor Center. At least two of the Canines will remain until the dinos regain consciousness, defending them.

#2: The Sound of Thunder. The Qellor know that on occasion, someone will arrive at the Visitor Center looking to hunt and kill a dinosaur, preferably a major predator. To accommodate this desire, they keep track of older predators. One of which is Giganotosaurus #3298-B. 40 years old and nearing the end of her life, 3298-B is nearby and would make the best choice for a hunter. There are restrictions: The only trophy allowed is one or two teeth, 40 kilos of meat. The rest is left for the scavengers to have. No skulls are allowed to be taken.

How the hunt goes is really up to the player. If they want to hunt from the back of a Catbus, they can. If they want to go on foot and hunt 3298-B, they can, but they will have three Rescue Canines with them. If they want to strip down to a loincloth and go after the dino armed with nothing more than a Bowie Knife... let 'em. They might even do it. Feel free to add in other smaller nuisance dinosaurs, and perhaps 3298-B's children are nearby.

## **Alt #11: Alternate Historical: Mayan Empire**

**Language Gift:** Entering this world will grant the team the Yucatan Mayan language. However, it's very different from the United Nations version, with many European, African, and Incan loan words in it.

**Basic Information:** "They call themselves the Maya, and for people, they aren't too bad. Except for their flat heads."

**More Information:** The portal is in the Yucatan and isn't far from the major Mayan metropolis of Uxmal. The Ring Station is in a limestone cavern that's been cleared for travel. In addition, there are barracks and guards watching the ring station. The guards are dressed in padded armor laced with metal plates. The armor is covered with Mayan designs and are quite colorful.

**GM Information:** *The head guard is named **Gukumatz** and will challenge the team when they enter. He will interrogate them as to their purpose and how long they will be staying. He's expecting to be bribed and wants either weapons or gold. Firearms with plenty of ammunition is preferred. If he's satisfied with the answers or sufficiently bribed, he'll let them pass. Otherwise he will turn them away.*

*None of the guards are Fringeworthy. Those worthies live in Uxmal, and only venture out when the Godking orders them to.*

The exit from the cavern leads into a wide scrub covered plain. At night, the light from Uxmal is visible, and during the day, the smoke from thousands of cooking fires pinpoints its location 80km away with a brown smudge on the horizon. A cobblestone road runs from the cavern entrance.

If the team travels down the road to the city, they will pass by farms tended by people wearing colorful *huipils* and *caxipays*, the females wearing skirts and the males loose fitting trousers. They will be more interested in the team's vehicles than the team. (Non-human team members will illicit stares and curiosity.)

**GM Information:** *This world experienced an alternate history that parallels that of United Nations Earth and British Empire Earth. It diverged from their histories with a strong Mayan Empire arising in the 1390's C.E. The Mayans banded together into a major empire and from their strongholds, conquered the rest of Central America, Mexico and the Southern portions of the North American Continent, and the Northern portions of the South American Continent. The Great Incan Empire was the only challenger to their dominance.*

*When explorers from Europe arrived, they encountered a more unified and less superstitious native people. Despite their weapons, the Spanish Conquistadors were overwhelmed by the Mayans. Armed with the new weapons and taught how to make more of them by captured Spaniards, the Mayans set out and invaded Europe.*

*When the dust settled, most of Southern Europe lay under Mayan rule. England was a client state and North Africa the next prize. Over the next 600 years, wars were fought, until today, with the Mayans only holding the Americas unified with the Inca, and Eurasia and Africa a mishmash of small kingdoms.*

*This world's science and technology levels are at the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with steam power the latest thing.*

*Thanks to Simon, the Maya now know about the Fringes, and with his help, have found several Fringeworthy in their city. The Ajximbal Jelkabtak, the "Walkers of Alternate Worlds", are a diverse group, none of whom came from the priesthood or the noble families. There are five Walkers, three men and two women. The men are Itzamatul, Zipacna, and Ekchuah. The women are Colel and Meztli. Only Zipacna has any military experience, the rest were farmers, merchants, or servants. But now, with their ability to walk among the worlds, they are treated like nobility, answerable only to the Ajwal or Godking Ah-Muzencab. And one of their goals is to get their own Crystal Key.*

The City of Uxmal is designed differently from more western style cities. The center is home to the various temples to Mayan Gods. South of the temples is the residence of the city's *yajaw* a role akin to Lord Mayor of Uxmal. This worthy is Coyopa and has profited mightily from the trade goods Simon and other Fringeworthy have brought.

East of the Mayor's residence is the ceremonial ball court. Despite myths surrounding the Mayan ball game or *pitz*, the losing side never sacrificed. Well, professional ballplayers are never sacrificed. Four times a year, a ceremonial game is played, on one side the pro ballplayers, on the other side prisoners destined to be sacrificed. And the prisoners always lose.

There are other ballcourts in Uxmal, with less religious significance, and a thriving Pitz league exists in the Maya Empire. The ceremonial ballcourt, the Jawal Chanal Chak Bay Kanul, "Ballcourt of the Celestial Sky Serpent Chanal Chak Bay Kanul" is only used for ceremonial games or when the Uxmal Chan Kana (Sky Serpents) are in the playoffs.

Outside of the ceremonial center of the city, the rest of Uxmal is a mixture of residences, workshops, businesses, shops, eateries, and other urban buildings, including lodges and guesthouses. All built with the Mayan style. Many residences have shops out front or underneath, depending on the building. There are no apartments, per se, in Uxmal. You will see multistory buildings, but usually everyone in those are all part of the same family: grandparents, parents, children, cousins, and other relatives.

The Maya have currency, in the form of paper money. It goes under two different names, Kakaw Takin and Chachak Takin, or cacao money and copper money. It takes 200 kakaw takin to equal 1 chachak takin. Both forms of currency come in the following denominations: 1, 10, 20, 100, 200 and 1,000, and chachak takin continues with notes with similar values. 11 Kakaw Takin is about one US Dollar.

Lodges and guesthouses are the equivalent of inns and motels. The rooms are quite spartan, and you probably should fumigate the bedding. Most offer rooms for 4 to 8 people to sleep together and run 40 to 80 Kawkaw Takin a night. They have no problem with both sexes sharing the same room. Amenities include a room at the end of the hallway with a hole in the floor. Bring your own toilet paper. (There is a Maya version of toilet paper made from rice paper. 200 20cm by 20cm sheets for 13 Kawkaw Takin.)

Uxmal is a city meant for walking. What vehicles there are, are pulled by various beasts of burden: horses, oxen, buffalo, etc. There is a somewhat modern sewer system, consisting of clay pipes and cisterns, that eventually empty into large ponds that are allowed to dry out and then used as fertilizer for the fields. Needless to say, the drainage ponds are downwind of Uxmal. The city has a population of approximately 200,000, so it was stroke of luck for Simon to find five Fringeworthy here.

**GM Information:** *It would be, except the people of this Earth are Fringeworthy at the rate of 1 in 40,000-50,000. It's five times as easy to find Fringeworthy on this world. This is something that is not easily found out with just one visit.*

One thing the characters will note is the amount of smoking going on. Mayan k'ujtz or tobacco, is potent stuff. It's been known to induce hallucinations. The other is that the Maya are not above taking drugs of all sorts. Both k'ujtz and other potent potables are on sale everywhere. Any character who partakes, will have to make a willpower test to stay lucid, otherwise they are stoned out of their minds. The reason for all this drug use, mostly hallucinogens, is to have visions of their gods and the spirits around them. The Maya are very religious, and drugs just help them become closer to the spirit world.

#### **Adventure Seeds:**

#1: While the Maya won't mess with Simon, as he has proven to be a valuable resource and friend, they really do want their own Crystal Key to help them find more Walkers. If the team makes it known that they have a Crystal Key, Lord Mayor Coyopa will make a generous offer to them for its purchase. If they turn him down, then he will use *other means* to secure that key.

The other means will be in the form of thugs that will wait until one or two Player Characters are off by themselves. They will also break into the lodge or guesthouse where the team is staying and go through their goods. They will also try to break in to the team vehicle and steal it if possible. Noticing that someone is trying to steal their vehicle would be an Average difficulty against an Alertness or Notice skill. If they are sleeping when this happens, it becomes a Hard difficulty. They get a bonus if they have some sort of alarm on the vehicle. Let them decide how loud the alarm is and assign the bonus to hear and recognize that it's their alarm appropriately.

Confronting Lord Mayor Coyopa about these attempts will result in plausible deniability. "I am sorry if you've met with misfortune. To make amends, I will assign a troop of Jaguar Warriors to guard you and your vehicle(s) day and night." And he will, and the warriors will make any form of social interaction with the residents of the city nearly impossible. Trying to ditch them will take some doing, as they know the city better than the Player Characters. It would be a Hard difficulty to lose their "honor guard" for more than an hour or more.

Finally, if the team decides that they have had enough of Mayan hospitality and want to leave this world, they will have to sneak out in the middle of the night. If they leave during the day, they will find the entrance to the portal blocked by large stones a meter or more in size. They will be turned away because the portal is closed. A blatant lie.

Sneaking out in the dead of night will be a three-step challenge:

1. Starting their vehicle and leaving quietly. Challenging difficulty.

2. Making their way through Uxmal without alerting the guard. Hard difficulty.
3. Reaching the entrance to the limestone cave before any word from the town gets there before them. Respectable difficulty.

Once they make it to the chamber where the portal is, it's just a matter of driving through it. Dress it up with Jaguar warriors clinging to the side beating the vehicle as they go through the portal and silence. (Or there is one still beating on the vehicle, who then slowly stops hitting it as what has happened sinks in.)

#2: While wandering through the city, window shopping, the characters come across some young men in a basic ballcourt playing a game of pitz. The offer is made for them to join them in the game, for money. If the characters don't have cash on them, they'll take any item offered as payment. Offworld items always net a lot of *takin*.

Of course, this is a pro team practicing for an upcoming match. Fleecing the tourists is just an added bonus. This is a modified version of pitz, in that you cannot use your hands or feet, but elbows, knees, thighs, hips, and your head can be used to knock the 2kg rubber ball around the court and then through the stone hoop 4 meters off the ground. They are good sports and will offer protective gear for the Player Characters to use: Padded headgear, hip pads, thigh and knee pads, and elbow pads. Not that this will keep you from being injured. Every one of the pitz players are covered with bruises, some will abrasions that have been bandaged.

If the Player Characters plead ignorance of the rules, they will offer to show them how to play. "It's easy to learn!" with the unsaid "And years to master!" And they will honestly show them how to play. Each character will have to make an Average Intelligence difficulty test to see if they get the gist of how the game works. Any character with an Athletics or Acrobatic skill can use that instead to learn the game.

After familiarizing themselves, the pros will take them to town. The team will have to make five separate Challenge tests and win at least three of them to win the game. Each round, pick a player character and have them make the attempt to score. The other characters can help, those with an Athletics or Acrobatic skill can add half their skill bonus. All others can add +1 if their Dexterity or Strength is 0 or better. The Character making the attempt, rolls on their Dexterity or Strength, or if they have an Athletics or Acrobatic skill, on that skill at -1. The pros will roll against this character with a +8 (Expert Pitz Players, Good Dexterity or Strength). Players win when they tie or beat the GM's roll. On a 10 or better success, the pros will be at -2 the next round.

If they win, they'll get about 11 chachak takin. If they lose, well, they lose whatever they bet.

Make sure to roleplay through each round, with the players setting things up for the next shot, and the pros interfering or trying to steal the ball for their own shot. The game score may be 1-0, much like a good soccer game. If the team has non-humans, they will be accommodated, though a Dimixi or Bliznix might be asked to sit out as they are just too different.

## Dramatis Personae

Non-player characters are rated on a simple scale that's easily translatable to most gaming systems. Please refer to the EZ Rules section for an explanation of the rankings.

General skill classes will be listed for NPCs and species. These are not meant to be specific skills, but more along the line of suggested skill areas that the NPC could be knowledgeable in. For some characters, their skill area will have a rating, others will be unrated, and up to the GM to set. Not all skill areas will be listed for every NPC, just the major ones that they have.

### **Simon Egonssen of Vandenberg**

Middle aged Fringewalker that married and settled down in a nice Pocket Stop. He's from an alternate world where the Saxons succeeded in conquering most what is Germany, Poland, Austria, Netherlands, and Denmark. He was born in 1493 C.E. and worked as an apprentice to a merchant. He found a warp and went through it many years ago. After determining that possible riches lie on the other side, he kitted up, got a horse and wagon, a load of food and water and headed out. He's lost track of how many years he's been traveling, other than that he may be pushing 90 but looks 40. He met Milava on a Russian alt, and after discovering that she's Fringeworthy, wooed her and finally married her on her home world.

They travelled together for several years, making sure to use high tech worlds for the birth of their children. When Gustav, his eldest son, reached the age of 10, they looked for a place to settle and found their Pocket Stop.

Over the years Simon has become a shrewd trader and businessman. He also met a lot of fellow travelers over the years and realized that many of them needed a place to rest, kit up, and offload things that they have found. Thus, he created his trading post.

If the player characters ask him which way he had traveled on the Fringepaths, he'll indicate the direction the PCs came from. Sadly, anything he knows about those worlds is 19 years out of date.

#### **Attributes:**

Strength	Average	Intelligence	Fair
Constitution	Good	Wisdom	Good
Dexterity	Average	Charisma	Good

**Experience:** Journeyman

**Health:** Average

#### **Skills:**

Knowledge (Trader): Master

Knowledge (Area: Alternate Platform and Alts): Expert

Persuasion: Expert

Shooting: Very Skilled

**Equipment:**

Light Pistol: 9mm pistol with two extra magazines.

Medium Knife: a large knife.

He wears clothing that seems to come from different time periods, but still seems to appear like a man from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

He has a jacket that's the equivalent of Medium body armor, and he wears that when he travels outside the Pocket Stop.

**Milava Eleonora Baranov, Wife of Simon**

Milava Eleonora Baranov was just an ordinary Russian peasant near Smolensk in 1723 C.E., when a strange man appeared in her life. He was charming and told her stories of fantastic worlds that were beyond belief. When he put a small, white pyramid-like crystal into her hand, it flashed, and a thrill went up her arm. After that, he courted her and promised to show her the wonders of the universe. Finally, after he provided an ample dowry to her parents, he wedded her and together they travelled the Fringepaths.

She did see many wonders and sights. She also learned how to use a carbine and grenades. She was a crack shot and could take out opponents at a long range when she had to. All the while she was nursing her babies. All her children know what a rifle shot sounds like and what kick it has.

When they settled down in the Pocket Stop, she was the one that found a place to build their compound and coordinated the building of its defenses. She is the tactical genius of the family, and head farmer.

**Attributes:**

Strength	Fair	Intelligence	Average
Constitution	Fair	Wisdom	Average
Dexterity	Good	Charisma	Good

**Experience:** Journeyman

**Health:** Average

**Skills:**

Shooting: Master

Knowledge (Farming): Expert

Knowledge (Tactics): Expert

Persuasion: Very Skilled

**Equipment:**

Heavy Rifle: A .50 cal. sniper rifle with scope nicknamed "Миротворец" AKA "The Peacemaker" with ammunition.

Light Pistol: 9mm pistol, with ammunition.

When in combat mode, she wears high-tech, camouflaged body armor, ranked Heavy.

When not defending her family, she dresses herself in various styles that reflect a dozen different cultures. When working the fields, she opts for the more traditional dress of her home.

### **Gustav Simonson**

Born in a hospital operated by giant spider-like people called the Dimixi, Gustav spent his early years travelling the Fringepaths. He speaks many languages, as he has a talent for learning them. Taught by his father and mother from various books they had collected from different worlds, Gustav has had an eclectic education.

He appears to be 18 years old but is in fact 29. He's wooing a Mayan girl named Xoco on Alt 11 and hopes that letting her handle the family crystal will eventually make her Fringeworthy. His mother taught him how to shoot, and his father is teaching him how to be a good trader. So far, he's still learning.

#### **Attributes:**

Strength	Average	Intelligence	Average
Constitution	Fair	Wisdom	Average
Dexterity	Average	Charisma	Fair

**Experience:** Apprentice

**Health:** Average

#### **Skills:**

Shooting: Very Skilled

Knowledge (Trader): Skilled

Knowledge (Farming): Skilled

Persuasion: Trainee

#### **Special Abilities:**

Linguistic Savant: +4 when trying to learn a new language.

#### **Equipment:**

Medium Rifle: His mother's old carbine, .30 cal. with ammunition.

Wears his father's hand-me down ballistic vest, Medium armor, when he goes on trading missions with his father.

When not trading trips or working the fields, he wears the latest in Mayan fashion around the shop and compound.

### **Aldo The Mechanical Man**

#### **Toka-Sho Mil'Koda**

Toka-Sho is from a Dimixi alternate several platforms away. He found the warp by accident and made use of it to further his criminal activities. It was these criminal activities that drove him



from his homeworld. He fled, leaving behind evidence of his extra-dimensional activities behind him.

Somewhere on his journeys on the pathways he found a cache of Tehrmelern artifacts. Where, he won't say. (He really doesn't remember but won't admit it. It's just "that away" and he doesn't know how far.)

He found this Pocket Stop 24 years ago and set up shop. He frequents other alts and steals what he can. The Mayans and the Rattus keep an eye on him, but they think he's just a Fringewalker that frequents the area.

He is incredibly worried that his past will catch up to him and that he would be brought back to his world for justice. So, he's grown paranoid and secretive over the years, is willing to fight anyone who tries to bring him home. (It's up to the GM to determine if he is still a criminal back home. Toka-Sho may be lauded as the discoverer of the Fringes or despised for keeping it a secret as long as he did.)

**Attributes:**

Strength	Fair	Intelligence	Fair
Constitution	Fair	Wisdom	Average
Dexterity	Great	Charisma	Good

**Experience:** Seasoned

**Health:** Average

**Skills:**

Burglary: Master

Intimidation: Expert

Knowledge (Trader): Expert

Shooting: Very Skilled

**Special Abilities:**

Web spinning: Can weave a silk cord up to 80 meters long by 2mm in diameter, before having to rest and eat. The cord is 10 times stronger than steel of the same size.

**Gear:**

Medium Shotgun: A Dimixi made double-barrel shotgun. Has self-loads of lead pellets, large birdshot in size, and rock salt. The rock salt loads are short ranged.

A Steam/fuel cell scooter: It needs a source of hydrogen, but on one tank, it has a range of 200km before refueling. It uses pressurized hydrogen tanks made from composite material. The tanks are lined with Tehrmelern plastic and can hold pressure for years. He has three spare tanks that can extend his range by another 600km. On the paths, the scooter uses the steam produced by burning hydrogen to run a small, high pressure turbine. This allows the scooter to move at around 15kph while on the pathways. When on the fuel cell, top speed is 60kph. He has a small trailer that can hold up to 100kg of stuff.

Tehrmelern Watersplitter: A plant with large, broad leaves that can split water into oxygen and hydrogen, producing about a tank's worth of gas every three days.

An array of homespun clothing, nothing fancy, as his weaving skills are rudimentary.

### **Gukumatz**

### **Fox of the Windswept Meadow**

### **Grizzly Bear of the Northern Redwood Forest**

### **Puma of the High Cliffs**

### **Rattus Minions of Grizzly Bear**

Sly and always ready with a quick explanation, the minions of Grizzly Bear are expert spies. They will use every method to get what they want, social, stealth, and if need be, violence. They can be both charming as well as threatening.

#### **Attributes:**

Strength	Mediocre	Intelligence	Fair
Constitution	Average	Wisdom	Average
Dexterity	Good	Charisma	Good

**Experience:** Experienced

**Health:** Average

#### **Skills:**

Persuasion, Intimidation, Notice, Burglary, Research, Sneaking, Shooting, Fighting, Climbing

#### **Equipment:**

A fine kilt, vest with many pockets for casual encounters.

Light Blade: A short knife 10cm long

Light Pistol: A one-shot .12 caliber pistol

Notebook, pencil, various small bags. Normally carries around 40 Trade Schilling, about \$60 equivalent.

When on an operation, they have gray stealth suit for nighttime operations (+2 Sneaking), a large caliber multi-shot pistol, Light Pistol, .22 caliber, 4 rounds, climbing gear (+2 Climbing), burglary tools (+2 Burglary), pry bar, and short lengths of rope, suitable for binding wrists and ankles together.

### **Rattus Soldier**

Loyal and brave, the average Rattus Soldier of Where the Sky Kisses the Earth do their job very well. They act as both as a police force as well as protectors of the city from all foes, rattus or otherwise.

**Attributes:**

Strength	Average	Intelligence	Average
Constitution	Fair	Wisdom	Average
Dexterity	Good	Charisma	Average

**Skills:**

Shooting, Fighting, Knowledge (Tactics), Notice, Intimidation, Persuasion, First Aid

**Equipment:**

A military kilt lined with wooden slats in the pleats (Light armor) male or female soldiers, armored vest (Light armor), metal helm (Medium armor).

Medium Rifle: Armed with a 6 round .22 caliber carbine, optional bayonet mount.

Light Blade: Bayonet 16cm in length.

When on patrol in the city, they carry a first aid kit (+2 First Aid), manacles, a truncheon 30cm long (Light club), and pocket change of about 3 Trade Schillings (\$4.50)

Rucksack when in the field, they will have a bedroll, cooking gear, rations for 3 days, water skins, entrenching tool, half a tent with one tent pole and ropes. A great cloak for inclement weather.

**Rescue Canine**

Rescue Canines are genetically modified wolves. They are 1.5 meters tall at the shoulder with bodies 2.5 meters long. They were created to provide protection and rescue service for visitors to Tehrmelern nature reserves. Around people, they are playful, friendly, and act like big puppies. When in rescue mode, they are vicious defenders and their bite can sever thin steel cables. Capable of running at 60kph but can only do so for a total of 20 minutes before exhausting themselves. Their back is concave and large enough to hold a full size Tehrmelern. Humans find it roomy. Special flaps of skin act as straps to hold the person in place.

Technically, not sentient, but really smart animals. They can venture onto the Fringepaths, if someone physically escorts them through the portal.

**Attributes:**

Strength	Good	Intelligence	Average
Constitution	Good	Wisdom	Average
Dexterity	Great	Charisma	Average

**Skills:**

Unarmed combat: Expert

Tactics: Very Skilled

Notice: Very Skilled

Alertness: Very Skilled

**Special Attributes:**

Bite: 1d6+3 can cut thin steel cable

Hide: Light

Size: Large

Speed: 10kph normal, 60kph sprint for 20 minutes.

**Catbus**

No one knows why the Tehrmelern created the Catbus. Turning a domesticated cat into a bus sized creature with interior seating for 20 people seems more like a whim than a practicality. Still, the Catbus is fast, agile, and friendly. The Catbus can hit speeds of 90kph for 5 minutes at a time.

The Catbus is 7 meters long, 3 meters tall, and 3 meters wide. Has swivel “headlights” and can see in the dark. It has mouths inside that act as speakers. Talks with a “cat” voice. Lots of meowrrs. It’s “windows” are made of transparent Tehrmelern organic plastic and are bulletproof up to 15 points of damage. They are held in place by strong muscle “frames” and can be easily changed out or even popped out in case of emergency.

Its fur is capable of changing colors and allow the Catbus to camouflage itself.

Technically, not sentient, but really smart animals. They can venture onto the Fringepaths, if someone physically escorts them through the portal.

**Attributes:**

Strength	Great	Intelligence	Average
Constitution	Good	Wisdom	Average
Dexterity	Great	Charisma	Average

**Skills:**

Notice: Very Skilled

Alertness: Very Skilled

**Special Attributes:**

Night vision

Chameleon Fur: -4 Notice

Hide: Light

Windows: Heavy -7

Speed: 20kph, 90kph sprint 5 minutes

### **Giganotosaurus**

Giganotosaurus is one of the largest carnivorous theropod dinosaurs. Between 12m to 13m long and 4m tall at the hip, it has a head between 1.5m and 1.8m in length. It weighs half again as much as a Tyrannosaurus Rex. With a massive jaw and wicked claws on its feet, it is as fast any human moving at a jog.

#### **Attributes:**

Strength	Superb	Intelligence	Poor
Constitution	Good	Wisdom	Fair
Dexterity	Mediocre	Charisma	Average

**Hit Points: 38**

<b>Wound Level</b>	<b>Damage taken</b>
Healthy	Under 9 HP
Minor Wound	10-19 HP
Serious Wound	20-28 HP
Critical Wound	29-37 HP
Dying	38+ HP

#### **Skills:**

Biting: Expert

Intimidation: Master

Hunt: Expert

Stealth: Very Skilled

#### **Animal Attributes:**

Scaly hide: Light

Bite: Large

Size: Gigantic

### **Tyrannotitan**

The ancestor to the Giganotosaurus, the Tyrannotitan is a formidable predator. 3.5m tall at the hip, and between 11.4m to 12.3m long. Can move faster than a running human, and along with a wicked bite, it has long claws on its forelimbs that it also uses to attack its prey with. Known to

hunt in packs of two to three individuals. The few Tyrannotitans near the Visitor Center represent the last of their species.

**Attributes:**

Strength	Great	Intelligence	Poor
Constitution	Good	Wisdom	Fair
Dexterity	Average	Charisma	Average

**Hit Points:** 36

Wound Level	Damage taken
Healthy	Under 9 HP
Minor Wound	10-18 HP
Serious Wound	19-27 HP
Critical Wound	28-35 HP
Dying	36+ HP

**Skills:**

Biting: Expert

Intimidation: Master

Hunt: Master

Stealth: Very Skilled

**Animal Attributes:**

Scaly hide: Light

Bite: Large

Claw: Medium

Size: Large

[New Fringe Cultures:](#)

Rattus, AKA Rattus Sapiens

**Biology**

Size		Lifespan	
85cm – 105cm		60	
Sex	Gestation	Survival	Births

2	166 days	90%	2-6	
Sleep Cycle			Voice	
14w 10s			Any	
Smell	Vision	Taste	Touch	Hearin g
Abov e	Average	Average	Average	High

### Home World

Location	Designation	Temperature
TBD,2	Earth Mother	-20°C – 45°C

### Society

Allegiance (Morality)	Attitude
High	Ambitiou s

### Languages

People of the Great Western Forest Speak (99%) Trade Speak (34%) The Language of Eastern Plains (12%)

### Personality & Views

UNIDA	King of far lands
IDE Teams	Scouts for King
Family	Bigger the better
Work	To make a better life
Play	Whenever we can
Wealth	Can have really big family
Justice	Required
Honor	For our Family
Humanity	Big Doofuses with too much stuff
Politics	Play for leaders
Red Tape	Boring
Combat	When sneaking doesn't work
The	Untapped riches

Fringes	
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**Available Skills**

Most crafting skills, Stealth, Trade, Agriculture

**Good Traits**

Careful and notice everything

**Bad Traits**

Always underfoot, gnawing on chewsticks, always on the lookout for a new mark.

**Usual Quote**

“But it wasn’t nailed down!”

**Naming**

Typically, some animal name and a region, Puma of the High Cliffs, Otter of the Green Stream, Starling of West Forest. (Note, this is only typical of the Rattus near the portal. Rattus elsewhere have different naming conventions.)

**Description**

Rattus Sapiens, otherwise known as Rattus, are large, friendly, sapient rodents that form large family groups. A typical family will consist of 8 to 12 Rattus. They mature in about 12 years and then go out and seek their fortune. They cover the world and form small, but fiercely protected kingdoms or federations. The city of Where the Sky Kisses the Earth is part of the Westward Lands Federation of People. The city is located in Northern Oregon, approximately at the fork of the Columbia and Willamette Rivers. The Westward Federation occupies the states of California, Oregon, Washington, as well as the southern portion of British Columbia and northern Baja California. To the west is the Kingdom of the High Desert Plateau, corresponding to the central western American states, centered on the Great Salt Lake (Same name as on United Nations Earth).

They have the same percentage chance of being Fringeworthy as most humans.

They are approximately at 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century level of technology, with “Where the Sky Kisses the Earth” the center of the highest tech, roughly early 20<sup>th</sup> in level and capability.

**Species Attributes**

Strength	Poor	Intelligence	Average
Constitution	Average	Wisdom	Average
Dexterity	Good	Charisma	Average