

BROKEN EARTH

Hart Plaza

A Tale from the Great Lakes

By Jason Owen Black



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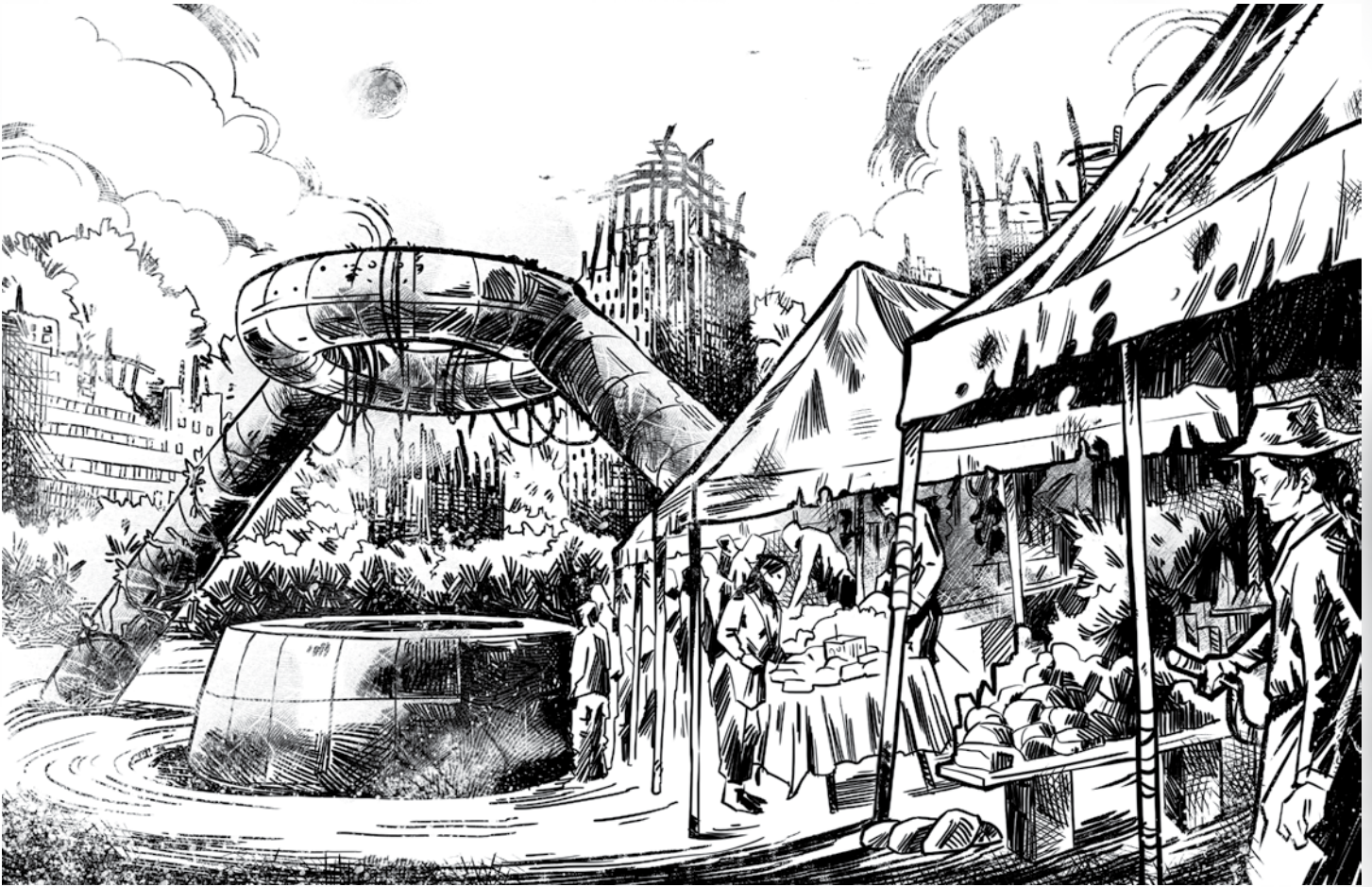
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Hart Plaza

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Hart Plaza

Obvious

Population: 987 (farmers, mechanics, scrappers, traders)

Salvage Value: 2

Buildings: Hydroelectric power station

Hart Plaza sits along the Detroit River, amid the ruins of that once great city. Once a large open space used to entertain vast crowds, in the years since the Great War it has been repurposed as one of the most important trading sites in the Great Lakes region. Home to almost a thousand people throughout the year, the population spikes at various points during the warm months, as people come from all over the region to buy, sell, and trade.

While the Detroit area was a significant target during the Great War — the city always expected that to be the case — there were plenty of people who managed to survive. And as the metropolitan area dominated the region, many people came back to the ruins of the city

seeking scrap and shelter. It wasn't long before Hart Plaza became the center of trade in the area. Its position was key in this: it not only sits on the river, but is next to the towering ruins of a glass building called the Bright Towers that acts as a prominent landmark visible from quite far away. It was easy to find, easy to access, and had plenty of space for traders to spread out — in other words, a perfect place to build a community.

Since the rediscovery of Hart Plaza, it has grown into a thriving community, which the locals generally refer to simply as the Plaza. Best known as a center of trade, the Plaza is also a center of culture in the southeastern Great Lakes region. It has given birth to two different religions, which are slowly spreading to other communities, and is known to people who have been there for its cuisine and its music scene. Safe and stable, Hart Plaza has become a destination not only for traders but also for settlers, artists, and pilgrims.

Government

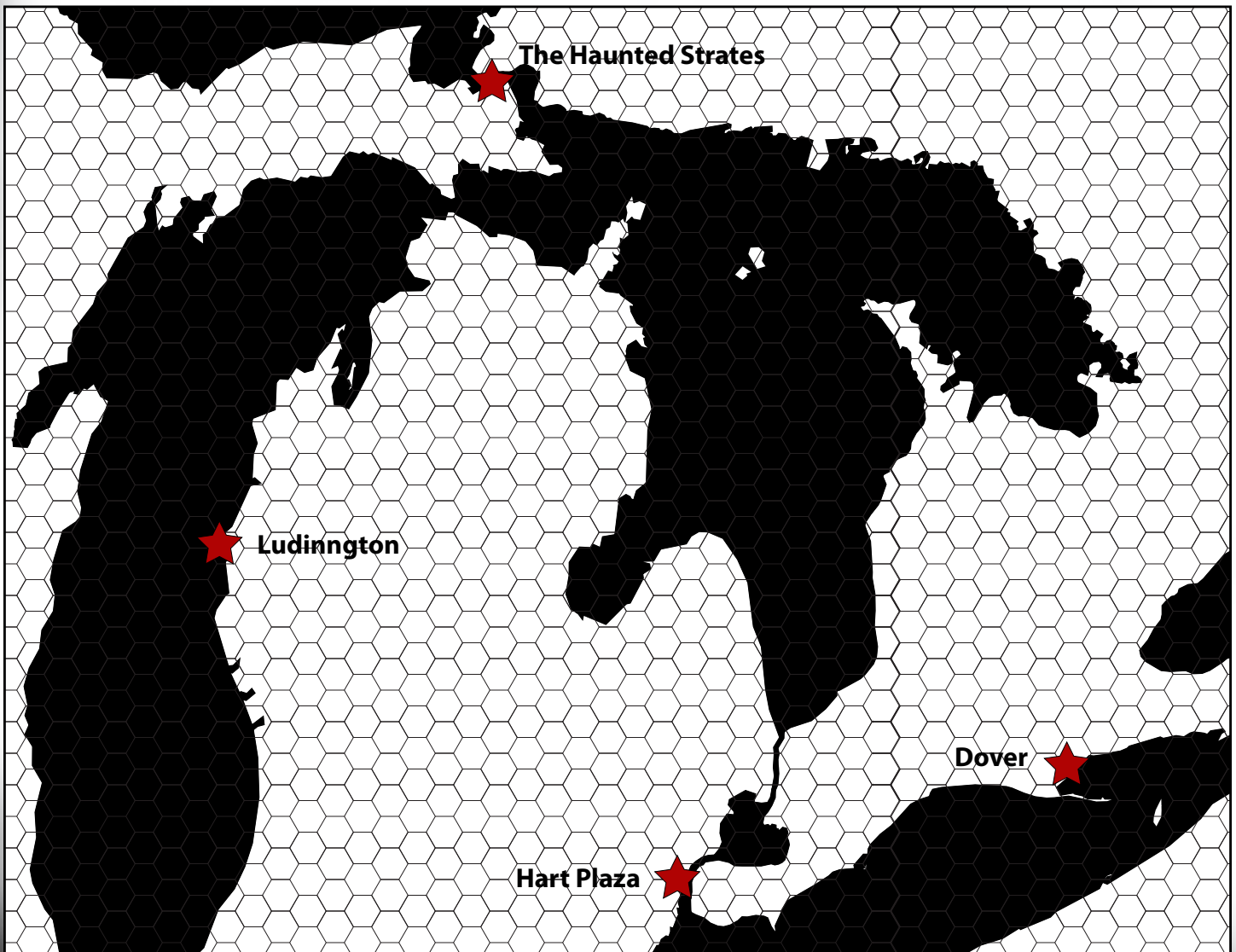
There is no official government in Hart Plaza, but that doesn't mean the place is lawless or devoid of order. There is a vibrant civil society to be found there. Just about everyone pitches in when they can to try and make life a little easier. By and large, citizens and visitors to Hart Plaza are left to their own devices, so long as they don't start trouble or mistreat their neighbors. In such cases most people can take care of themselves, and it is not unheard of for a thief or drunk to be thrown out of a business by the owner. Neighbors are quick to help each other out when food is short, a family member is sick, or somebody needs to watch the kids. In more serious cases they can rely upon adherents of the Temple of the Fist to deal with more dangerous troublemakers.

When things come up that require a more serious approach, or requires the attention of most of the community, Hart Plaza holds a debate. Any adult citizen can call for a debate, and if a child or trusted visitor wants to do so they can convince a citizen to call for one on their behalf. Whoever calls for the debate is responsible for scheduling it and letting people know about it. They

usually give the community a few days to spread the word. Unless the weather is too cold, debates are held in the pre-war amphitheater on the northwest side of the Plaza. A debate can be held for any number of people, but at least half the population has to be there in order to vote on something.

Debates are organized chaos. A few heralds are chosen to move around the crowd, keeping track of who wants to speak and making sure that people don't yell over each other too much. Anyone can speak, including children and visitors, but only adult citizens can vote, or call for a vote. Whoever calls for a vote must get support from at least a third of the people present to move on to a vote, after which a proposal must get a simple majority in order to be passed. Then it gets added to the community's charter.

"Real" debates where a vote can be held aren't all that common, partly because getting half the population together can be a hard sell, but also because most citizens settle things between themselves, or go to one of the community's venerated elders, affectionately called "ballers," for arbitration.



Ballers

Respected elders around Broken Earth are known by many names. In the Plaza, they're referred to as ballers, a pre-war term referring to someone who has made it big, or proven themselves by surviving long enough to earn the respect of their neighbors. Ballers in Hart Plaza earn their title by being the best at what they do; they're respected for their skills, their wisdom, or their tenacity. Just because Hart Plaza is well established doesn't mean that life there is easy, and living long enough to grow old can earn one baller status by default.

One cannot claim baller status; it has to be earned. While someone like Marta Rivers (see page 6) can refer to herself as a baller, it's only because enough other people in the community have been doing so for years. If she had just claimed it on her own, nobody would respect her for it. One can strive to be a baller, but public opinion has to confer that status, and public opinion can take it away too.

Culture

Trade is a big part of day-to-day life in the Plaza, but the people there do more than just buy and sell. Hart Plaza is a vibrant place, and visitors have often noted that the people there try not to let the difficulties of life get them down. Culture in the Plaza takes two principle forms: food and music.

Food, both cooking and eating it, is an important part of Plaza culture. The kitchen is often the center of family life in the Plaza (when it isn't the shop or stall) and inviting someone over for lunch or dinner is considered a compliment. Not showing up to such a meal (without a very good reason) is considered a snub, and has been known to ruin friendships and end engagements. The best cooks in the Plaza, whether they run restaurants or not, are respected and sought for their advice.

Before the Great War, there were a number of lawns scattered around Hart Plaza, which have been turned into farms. These farms are operated by families that sell their produce, which include things like corn, wheat, peas, lentils, various beans, and tomatoes. Many households maintain small gardens to supplement what they can get at market. Wild blackberry bushes can be found growing in pretty much every spare patch of dirt in the area. Mushrooms tend to grow under these same bushes, and both are pretty much fair game to anyone.

For meat, many people get fish from the river, while a few families raise broods of "street chickens." Street chickens are, in fact, a breed of mutant pigeons that grow to about five or six times their normal size. Street chickens can fly, and are known for being pretty mean in the wild, but are also lazy and grow complacent quite easily, so broods aren't hard to start. Their meat is darker and

greasier than chicken, and while common in the Plaza, many visitors find it to be something of a delicacy.

Whether at home or a restaurant, fish or street chicken, the people of Hart Plaza like their food spicy. Everything is spicy, and while people who grow up there are used to it, sometimes it takes visitors or migrants a while to get used to those spices. Peppers of various kinds form the basis of this aspect of local cuisine, and all of them are bought from Metro Ahmed, a farmer who years ago cornered the market on peppers, selling them cheap but making sure that nobody else had access to seeds.

The only thing the people of Hart Plaza love as much as food is music. Music is everywhere in the community, whether people are making it themselves or listening to it through one of the many old audio players found in the ruins of Detroit or beyond. Since the Plaza has its own small generator, pre-war audio players have found a new life in the community. Not everybody has access to such a device of course, but those who do like to share, and it's pretty common that somebody will bring one to a party or with them when they go out for a meal. But everyone else can, and does, sing, rap, or play one instrument or another, regardless of how good they sound. Parties, especially weddings, tend to feature people making music together, and there are a number of people in the community who make a living doing just that.

While many communities might see entertaining as a waste of time, the people of the Plaza have a lot of respect for musicians who can make a living doing what they love. It is rare to find somebody who subsists solely on their musical ability, but the community is home to several of them. The current king of the Plaza scene is the mysterious b34t_b0x, a dark-skinned wandering synth who styles himself as a sort of hip-hop monk. b34t_b0x spends most of his time in the ruins of Detroit looking for old audio devices and music while writing rhymes, showing up in the community every couple of months for a few weeks at a time to trade, perform, and collaborate. Where there is music there is usually dancing, and the Plaza is no exception. Dancing is a very popular pastime, with many a workday ending with a large meal, plenty of dancing, and music throughout.

The Bazaar

The main draw of Hart Plaza is, of course, the bazaar. The bazaar is an open-air marketplace built around an old fountain in the center of the Plaza. It consists of both permanent shops built with debris from the city, as well as more temporary stalls, usually built alongside or between the shops. The shops mostly belong to the more successful merchants from the Plaza, who operate all year and more often than not live within their shops. The stalls are usually operated by smaller merchants, some of them outsiders and most of them unable to maintain their

business through the harsh Detroit winters. The best spaces for stalls are alongside shops, which are rented from the people that own the permanent structures.

One of the most unique features of the bazaar is the area called Downstairs, which is under the bazaar itself and home to restrooms with relatively reliable plumbing. The restrooms are open to everyone. There are also some storage areas and small kitchens down there, making Downstairs the place where most residents go to eat. All of the kitchen space is shared by a few locals that maintain restaurants down there. The other areas have largely been given over to space for hosting, performing, or holding debates during the cold months and are considered public spaces.

Below is a list of some of the most prominent shops and restaurants in the Plaza and some details on what products or services they provide, as well as who owns them.

Airport's: Airport Gonzalez used to be a scrapper, combing the ruins of Detroit looking for things she could fix and sell. She got quite good at it and made some valuable connections, but that was before she lost her left leg below the knee. In the intervening five years she has stopped hunting for scrap and put her energy into fixing or inventing things. She has a sturdy one-room building in the bazaar that serves as her bedroom, store, and workshop (the distinctions between which are blurry). It is the best place to find rare technological items in the community. Airport earned baller status for providing tech for the community, and not only surviving the ghost cat attack that took her leg, but also making her own prosthesis (rumored to contain a gun).

Blind Pig: Occupying a couple of the old storerooms under the bazaar, Blind Pig is the Plaza's only inn, providing ample sleeping quarters for visitors who don't have a lot of money, don't know any locals who might put them up, or won't be staying for long. For the modest fee of 2 tp per night, a guest gets a well-maintained bed and a lockable trunk to store their goods. For an extra 1 tp per night guests can get breakfast too. Blind Pig is run by Prosperity Rails, an elderly woman with dark skin and white hair, who handles the business end of things and cooks meals for guests. She also employs several younger residents who take orders, clean, tend bar, or eject rowdy guests. Blind Pig also functions as a club of sorts, and people go there to enjoy the night-life the Plaza has to offer, with music and dancing almost nightly. It's also one of two places that serves alcohol, which makes it especially

popular for gatherings. Prosperity is one of the original ballers, and is widely respected for her wisdom and grandmotherly nature.

Cantina de le Cueva: Marta Rivers is the undisputed queen of Plaza cuisine, and every day around noon or so she makes her way from her home outside the bazaar to her restaurant next door to Blind Pig, where she spends most of the day cooking. Her children and grandchildren handle the money and the customers, which is a huge help as the Cantina de le Cueva is almost always busy. Marta and Prosperity have been friends since they were growing up in the Plaza, and the two know pretty much everyone and everything there is to know in or about the community. A long-time

baller, Marta's status comes from her famed cooking skills, and her deadly accuracy with a wooden spoon, with which she will hit rowdies.

Dugout: This small stand covered in baseball memorabilia is owned by Frank Comer, who grew up in the ruins of Detroit and moved to Hart Plaza about a decade ago. Since then he's established himself as a sausage maker and, more importantly, the creator of a Plaza delicacy: the sloppy taco. Frank starts with a grilled sausage, lays it in a narrow, fluffy tortilla, and then piles it with chili and diced onions. It is commonly served with beer. Sloppy tacos are a favorite because you can take them with you, and they're great for watching a debate or concert. It's an easy dish, and while anyone could make it, nobody does it like Frank. He's also obsessed with the pre-war game of baseball, and is desperate for any information about the game or paraphernalia he can find.

Plaza Pepper Distribution Co.: While Metro Ahmed is an important figure in town, having figured out the secrets to growing the peppers necessary to make the spicy food Plaza dwellers love so much, it is his son Tabil Ahmed who has leveraged that agricultural genius for profit. Running the business out of the greenhouse that doubles as the family home, Tabil deals directly with the owners of the restaurants and shops in town, and sometimes sells in bulk to traders. He doesn't sell direct to consumers, but Ahmed family products can be purchased from several food vendors in the bazaar. While Metro is a baller, respected for his skills as a farmer, Tabil has not earned that status yet, and many see him as a pretentious pest.



Speaker Box: The Plaza moves to the beat, and nobody knows salvaged audio players and media, recording gear, or instruments like Prosperity's granddaughter DJ Fleek. DJ Fleek (she refuses to go by her given name, Aretha) is something of an acolyte of b43t_b0x, and is obsessed with music. She often collaborates with her mentor, and helps to repair the devices and media he brings to the community. Her shop is also the place for musicians (would-be or otherwise) to hang out, trade tips, collaborate, or spit game. She also organizes a lot of the performances in the community. DJ Fleek wants to be a baller, and is convinced that continuing to follow in the footsteps of her baller mentor b43t_b0x will get her there.

Buying and Selling

Customers can find almost anything in the bazaar if they come at the right time of year. Instead of listing all the things that can be purchased in Hart Plaza, when a character wants to find a specific item of uncommon or rare value use the rules for Buying Rare Items in *Broken Earth* page 31, but grant a bonus to the Streetwise test based on the season. The chance that a given item will be available for purchase varies from season to season, depending on how many additional merchants are visiting the community, or how many hard-to-find items are left over from traders who have come through.

Season	Bonus
Winter	+0
Spring	+1
Summer	+2
Fall	+1

New Items

The following items are not unique to Hart Plaza, but are especially popular there.

Audio Player: These come in a variety of forms, from tape decks to CD players to MP3 players, and allow characters to listen to music. The price for such a device is 400 trade and they are considered uncommon devices. The size and format is irrelevant, and they all require electricity, but can be charged at the power plant (for 10 trade).

Spices: These are either small packets of spices or bottles of hot sauce that can be used to flavor dishes. They come in a variety of flavors and heat, and vary depending on who sells them. A single packet can flavor enough food to feed 20 people for 10 trade.

Religion

While many people in Broken Earth have little in the way of religion, the denizens of Hart Plaza have two homegrown religions to choose from, and those resources have proven to be some of the most valuable in the community's history.

The Church of the Spirit and the Temple of the Fist have different views on the world, but both are devoted to serving their community. Often referred to simply as the Church or the Temple, both have ample followers in the Plaza, though the Church has a slightly larger following. The chief tenet of the Church of the Spirit is that the spirit of humanity (or simians, freaks, or synths) is unquenchable so long as people work together. To that end, the Church promotes peace and cooperation between all sapient beings, with the most devout among them taking vows of poverty and non-violence. Of course, these most devout followers are pretty few and far between, and most believers are more than willing to make a profit in the bazaar and to take up arms to defend the Plaza.

The Church itself is outside of Hart Plaza proper, and is built around a pre-war statue of a man sitting in a meditative position. The statue once held objects in his hands, as if balancing them, but those pieces are long missing. Devotees of the Church maintain a garden and some beds there, so they can feed travelers or themselves, and tend to the sick or wounded. In the Plaza itself, followers of the Church maintain the restrooms, keeping them clean and in working order, which does wonders for the community's health. They also maintain the small hydroelectric generator built along the edge of the river.

The current minister of the Church is Winsor Coates, a young baller man with dark skin and short dreadlocks. Winsor was born in the Plaza and spends most of his energy seeing to the health of his flock and the larger community, and creating useful medicines that he either stores for church use or trades for goods or services needed by his flock. He is married to a self-styled "hydrological engineer" named Carlos Fermi who runs the generators that provide electricity to the community.

The Temple of the Fist is also centered around a pre-war statue, and also outside of Hart Plaza proper, but this is about where the two religions' similarities end. Built around a statue of a giant fist, once suspended, but now laying on the ground, the Temple is run more like a barracks, providing Spartan living conditions for the devout or to adherents or potential converts looking to train in the martial arts. Founded earlier than the Church, the Temple's primary tenant is that perfection can only be achieved through combat. They are neither marauders nor bullies though, and followers of the Temple place an emphasis

on training their bodies to be weapons with which to defend themselves, their loved ones, and their community. Historically, adherents of the Temple have patrolled the Plaza and its immediate surroundings, held monthly drills to train community members in self-defense, and hosted annual martial arts tournaments during the summer.

These things are still true, but in recent years the Temple has had less to do as the ruins of Detroit are better explored and less dangerous. As such, the current sifu of the temple, Stone Lighthair, has started offering the Temple's space as a training ground, and allows adherents to rent out their services as bodyguards to people traveling the ruins. Some older adherents feel that selling their physical prowess is degrading. Stone decreed that she would change her mind if any other member could defeat her in one-on-one combat, and to date nobody has challenged her. That's about the time she earned her baller status.

The Church of the Spirit and the Temple of the Fist do not see eye-to-eye on many things, and they often end up on opposite sides of debates or disagreements. Some see the faithful of the Church as unrealistic in their ideals, while others view adherents of the Temple as too stubborn, so both faiths have it in their best interest to work together, and both groups honestly want what is best for the community of Hart Plaza. The daily experience of religion for most in Hart Plaza is to simply do right by their neighbors and try to get by, and most seek out a baller for advice before they turn to religion.

Old Detroit

The city of Detroit, and its surrounding metropolitan area, was huge before the Great War, and while it is almost all ruins, those ruins stretch for many, many miles. On foot, it would take days, at least, before anyone could escape from the urban or suburban sprawl. Even before the apocalypse the streets were a bewildering mess, and the Great War made them even harder to navigate.

In the intervening years, some commonly used paths have emerged, allowing inland traders to have access to Hart Plaza comparable to those moving by water. Many come in caravans, built from old pre-war vehicles drawn by animal or human power (and some via ingenious use of pre-war bicycles). These caravans often hire mercenaries or adherents of the Temple of the Fist to keep them safe

and guide them through the "wilds" of old Detroit. They bring food, scrap, and other valuable goods, as well as information and stories about the larger world.

The ruins of the old metropolis are home to dangerous creatures, gangs of raiders, and numerous lost but potentially valuable sites. Legends tell of a community of simians living in the old Detroit Zoo, which keeps a menagerie of exotic animals as guardians and companions. Traders from the "suburbs" tell impossible tales of parts of the state that barely changed following the Great War, where people live in their own large houses and trees grow on every corner. The people of Hart Plaza don't have to go all that far to find danger or mystery though, for despite how well-known the immediate streets of Detroit may be, there are still a few local sites that can provide some interesting adventures.



The Tunnel

Just northeast of Hart Plaza lies the entrance to the Tunnel. The Tunnel used to connect Detroit to Windsor by going underneath the river, but it was damaged in the Great War and fell into disrepair afterward. Rumor has it that one can still pass through it in order to reach the other side of the river, but nobody does that, and everyone just assumes it's safer to cross the river itself.

The Tunnel is rumored to be home to any number of dangerous creatures, raiders, and local urban legends like the Nain Rouge. The area just inside the entrance is a destination for Plaza youths looking to prove themselves by going into the tunnel and spending the night there, despite numerous stories of kids doing exactly that and never returning. (Prosperity says those stories are fake, but Marta swears it has happened.) Kids growing up in Hart Plaza are warned away from the Tunnel with ghost stories and the like, which most people ignore, but sometimes locals hear weird sounds coming from down there, especially at night.

The Bright Towers

Past the Tunnel, the Bright Towers stretch into the sky above Hart Plaza and the rest of Detroit. There are five towers, or what remain of them, that were once all part of a single building along the river. They earned their name because the pre-war buildings were covered in glass.

Much of the original glass remains, and reflects light well, making them an excellent landmark for people navigating through Detroit or along the river.

Unlike the old municipal buildings above the Tunnel, the Bright Towers have neither been picked clean nor well explored, and they are certifiably dangerous. The Towers are home to a variety of creatures, which can sometimes be seen coming and going from the building itself, and raiders and hatters have both been known to live there. Though the various denizens of the Bright Towers only rarely come out to threaten the Plaza, it has happened, and in recent memory, so normal people just avoid the place.

Adventure Hooks

Nain Rouge

An urban legend in Detroit that goes back many centuries, Nain Rouge (the red dwarf) is supposed to be a small humanoid, alternately described as a child with bad teeth and fur boots or even a small, red-skinned devil. He is said to presage disaster, and is rumored to spend time in the Tunnel. Recently, a local (probably not a baller) thinks they saw Nain Rouge, and has become fearful that something awful will happen to them. They think that, if the Nain Rouge can be killed or driven away, that trouble won't happen, and have hired the PCs to do exactly that. In reality, what they saw was a rusted lynx-class drone (*Broken Earth*, p. 153) that periodically comes out of the Tunnel on patrols. That in itself is dangerous though, and there may be more such drones down there.

Wedding Feast

The youngest of Marta's daughters, Consuelo, is getting married soon, and Marta wants to prepare something truly especial for the wedding dinner. She's heard some travelers talking about a small herd of dreek that they saw on Belle Isle, a few miles northeast of the Plaza, and she's looking for someone to go and hunt one for her. She's willing to pay well because she knows that the island itself is home to a variety of dangerous plants, animals, and even some river pirates.

Mapping the Towers

Stone Lighthair has grown weary of having to worry about the dangers posed by the Bright Towers, and after some inter-faith consulting with Winsor Coates, she is offering a reward to anyone who will go in and do reconnaissance there. She's looking for someone to explore the Towers systematically, floor by floor (to the extent that this is possible). She is aware of the dangers and isn't asking any one group to explore the entire location or to have it all explored quickly. She knows that this could be a project which outlives her.

