

**BROKEN EARTH**

# The Haunted Straits

A Tale from the Great Lakes

By Matthew J. Hanson



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# The Haunted Straits

## A Tale from the Great Lakes



In the wake of the Great War, a band of hardy survivors came together along the St. Mary's River between Lake Superior and Lake Huron. With national borders destroyed, Sault Ste. Marie, once divided between Michigan and Ontario, became a single city.

Like all communities they struggled with food, disease, bitter cold, and attacks from other survivors. The last problem they solved in an unconventional way. Among the survivors were a stage magician and a special effects supervisor in the Canadian film industry. They decided to keep raiders away through fear. Not fear of war, or fear of vengeance, but fear of the dead.

They drew on dozens of tricks, from tiny music players and projectors set up throughout the area, to eerie wind chimes, and hundreds of children's dolls that they hung throughout the forest. The net effect convinced everybody who came to the region that it was haunted. The survivors nicknamed themselves the Ghost People, a title that eventually became their primary identity.

The illusion was further enhanced when the second generation of Ghost People came of age, and many discovered they had telekinetic powers. Those really brave souls who made it past the strange lights and noises could not deny the presence of spirits when the rocks started to move on their own.

For decades the town passed down the techniques of the Ghost People, and the fear of spirits kept strangers away. They failed, however, to keep out Captain Blood Eye Jones. The pirate was determined to move into Lake Superior, and his crew was more scared of him than they were of the ghosts. To bypass the rapids, Blood Eye had his crew hoist the ships onto land, and then rolled them on logs until they were safely clear of the dangerous water. The process took weeks, and while the pirates were foraging, they discovered some of the Ghost People. Blood Eye approached them under a flag of truce and pretended to desire peace, but just before his ship departed, he and his pirate crew attacked one of the settlements and ransacked everything of value they could find.



Since the pirate attack, the more militant members of the Ghost People have gained influence. They argue for more than just scare tactics. They have set booby traps both on land and in the river, and even attacked people who wander too close.

## Life Today

The Ghost People live mostly in the ruins of Sault Ste. Marie, on both sides of the river. Keeping with their reputation as “ghosts,” they try to prevent their homes from showing signs of habitation on the outside, letting the exteriors decay, while still tending the interiors as best as they can.

The Ghost People almost all forage for food from the river and the nearby woods, however there are a few small greenhouses tucked within the ruins, and they developed an orchard that they hope looks like a natural copse of trees.

## Defenses in Detail

The Ghost People use many different tactics to frighten people. The most basic tools are the wind chimes and dolls that they hang from the trees and throughout the ruins. The dolls almost all come from before the War, though the chimes are a mix of pre-War metal chimes, and post-War chimes made of wood, scrap, or bone.

They also employ several more high-tech solutions. The most common are sound players that are rigged up to motion detectors powered by solar collectors (some of which still function). They are connected such that the motion sensors activate noises that are some ways away,

but still within earshot. When the heroes pass by a motion sensor, they might hear a child calling for its mommy fifty yards away, but when they reach the spot they will be far enough from the original motion sensor that the voice has stopped. The devices are all well hidden, so that the heroes must actively search for any electronics and suffer a -4 penalty to their Notice test to do so.

Though rarer, there are also several lights and even two projectors that are still in working condition, and that are set to activate in a similar way to how the noises do. A few of the dolls were the kind that moved or made noise on their own, and some of these also have motion sensors attached.

Lately the Ghost People have used an increasing number of booby traps. They tend to favor those that seem at least somewhat natural, or that could be the work of ghosts, such dead fall traps, or pitfalls. They have trapped the water as well, including stringing chains just below the water line.

## Entering the Haunted Straits

The first time that the characters enter the Haunted Straits, they encounter the dolls and hear voices calling for their mothers. Have the characters make a Spirit test. Those who fail suffer a -2 penalty to Trait tests as long as they remain in the Haunted Straits.

Every hour they spend in the area afterwards, they have a 50% chance of encountering a booby trap. Whichever character is on point can attempt a Notice test to spot the trap. Otherwise they encounter one of the following.



**Covered Pit:** The Ghost People dug a pit and then covered it with a layer of thin twigs and dead leaves that give way with just a little weight. The character in the lead must succeed at an Agility test at -2 or fall into the pit, taking 2d6+2 damage.

**Deadfall:** The character trips a line that topples a tree or drops a pile of rocks. This deals 3d6 damage in a Cone Template (tree) or a Medium Burst Template (rocks). A successful Agility test reduces the damage by half.

**Underwater Chain:** A sturdy chain stretches from bank to bank. It sits just below the surface of the water. The vehicle stops and takes 1d6 damage for every 5" of its current speed. Whoever was steering the ship must make a successful Boating test or the vessel capsizes. The characters must cut the chain (10 Toughness) or portage their ship to pass the chain.

If characters keep exploring, there is a 10% chance each day of encountering a Ghost Person foraging the hexes adjacent to Sault Ste. Marie, or a 40% chance of encountering somebody if the heroes are within the city.

The first time the heroes camp for the night in Sault Ste. Marie or any adjacent hex, a group of two poltergeists sneak close to the camp and try to scare the heroes.

## Navigating the Straits

Lake Superior has a water level about 23 feet (7 meters) higher than Lake Huron. This, and the underlying geology, causes a series of rapids in the St. Mary's River. A canoe can attempt to travel through the rapids with a Boating test at -2. Failure indicates that the boat suffers 3d6 damage. A critical failure means that the boat takes damage and also capsizes, tipping all its cargo, including the characters, into the river.

Large vessels automatically run aground on their way down the rapids, and no vehicle can go up them.

## Locks

To make it navigable, the American and Canadian governments constructed several locks that could raise and lower the water level within them so commercial ships could travel from one water level to another.

Of course the locks are no longer functional, and after decades of neglect and the constant flow of a river, some of the locks are damaged beyond repair, but others can be saved. The best bet is the remains of the Canadian Lock, which is still in decent condition and easier to repair because of its smaller size. While it could not accommodate the super freighters that once sailed the Great Lakes, it should be just fine for the heroes' needs.

Repairing the lock requires 20 Build and 20 weeks of labor, and requires somebody with technical knowledge to oversee the project (a hero with Knowledge [Mechanics], or the Engineer Community Edge). If the players' characters insist on repairing one of the larger locks, it takes 60 Build and 72 weeks.

Operating the lock is easier and faster if it is connected to a source of electricity (most likely a refurbished hydroelectric power station), however the essential function of opening the doors and opening and closing valves can be converted to manual power. The actual filling and emptying of the lock has always been done by gravity, the proper valves just need to be open or closed.

## Hydro Power

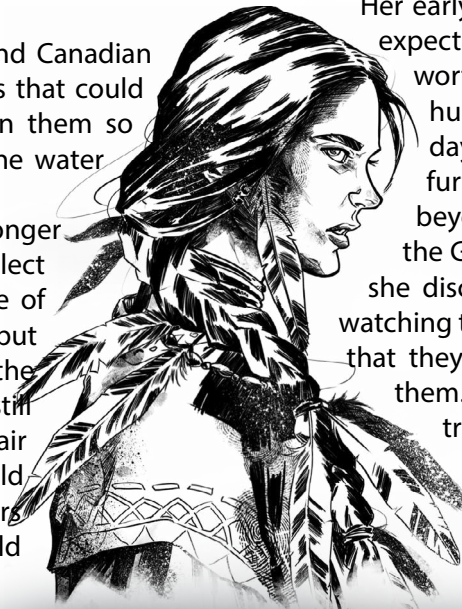
Before the War there were three different hydroelectric power stations along the St. Mary's River. Now they are all in various states of decay. The Francis H. Clergue Generating Station is in the best condition to be repaired (see *Broken Earth* page 42 for more on repairing ruined buildings); a single power station will provide far more electricity than the surrounding community needs.

## Important People

### Rebecca Nolan

Rebecca was born the child of two poltergeists, psionics who were responsible for scaring away the small number of explorers who ventured too close to the Ghost People's settlements. With such parents, the community had great hopes for Rebecca's psychic potential; hopes that were boosted when she started moving small objects with her mind at a young age. Alas these hopes never materialized. Despite her years of practice, Rebecca never developed more than the ability to move a few ounces, and worse the powers sometimes fail her altogether.

Her early failure to live up to the Ghost People's expectations pushed her harder to prove her worth in other ways. She became a skilled hunter and forager, sometimes spending days in the wild, venturing further and further from home. Before long, she traveled beyond the realms traditionally haunted by the Ghost People, and there, for the first time, she discovered other humans. She hid at first, watching them from afar. Eventually she concluded that they were not dangerous, and approached them. Things went well, the other travelers traded with her, and they shared stories of their journeys, including Rebecca's warning to them about the ghosts that haunt the straits area near what was once Sault Ste. Marie





Rebecca returned to her people and told them all she experienced. This caused a stir among the Ghost People. Some, including Rebecca, thought they should explore more and maybe even establish contact with other settlements. In the end the group favoring the status quo won out and the community remained isolated.

Rebecca continued to venture out on her own, and sometimes encountered other humans, though she made sure to warn them away from the Haunted Straits. As she got older, she journeyed less frequently and took more of a leadership role within the community. Eventually she settled down, married, and now has two young girls.

When the sailors led by Captain Jones arrived, Rebecca was among the ones who advocated peaceful talks, and this time her arguments won out. When the pirates looted the area and fled, she was devastated by the betrayal as much as by the destruction they reaped.

Since then, Rebecca has recanted on her own ways, and has taken charge of setting up booby traps throughout the woods. Despite her new-found resolve, she still harbors a tiny sliver of the explorer she used to be.

Rebecca is a woman in her mid-forties with copper skin and raven-black hair. She wears her hair in a single, long braid, from which she hangs feathers.

### Rebecca Nolan

**Race:** Human

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

**Skills:** Fighting d6, Knowledge (Battle), d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Survival d8, Swimming d6, Tracking d8

**Charisma:** —; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6(1)

**Hindrances:** Cautious, Vengeful (Minor)

**Edges:** Dodge, Woodsman

**Gear:** Bow (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6), Spear (Str+d6), Leather Armor (+1)

### Poe Bondar

Like all children among the Ghost People, Poe Bondar learned their ways of stealth and trickery at a young age. The trickery part fascinated him the most. He soon became the most promising apprentice to what the Ghost People call “zappers,” the people who maintain the delicate electronics that power some of the Ghost People’s scare tactics.

He learned much from his teachers, and sought out more information in the remains of Sault Ste. Marie. He dissected every mechanical or electronic device he could find, and made extensive technical drawings of them, trying and often succeeding to understand how

they worked. Having worked as a zapper for decades, he now leads the team and has taken on apprentices of his own.

Though Poe never sought the limelight, his position means that people respect his judgment and look to him for answers, even when it’s on a subject that he knows nothing about. He’s uncomfortable with this authority and would rather just focus on his technical work. The clearest example of this was when Captain Jones and his crew came through the area. Poe supported talking to the “sailors” (not knowing they were pirates), a decision he later regretted. When the pirates sacked his town, they killed his wife of thirty years, plunging him into a month of despair.

Poe has five grown children. His youngest daughter is an apprentice zapper, and it looked like she was going to carry on the family tradition, but things have been icy between father and child since the pirate attack.

Poe is a fair-skinned man in his mid-fifties. Both his hair and full beard are turning gray and he is starting to bald. He walks with a cane after a bad fall from a tree in which he was repairing a motion detector.

### Poe Bondar

**Race:** Human

**Attributes:** Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d4, Vigor d4

**Skills:** Boating d4, Knowledge (Electronics) d8+2, Knowledge (Mechanics) d8+2, Notice d8, Repair d10, Stealth d4, Swimming d4

**Charisma:** —; **Pace:** 4; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 4

**Hindrances:** Cautious, Lame

**Edges:** McGyver, Scholar (Mechanics, Electronics)

**Gear:** Staff (Str+d4), toolkit.

### Poltergeists

The poltergeists are those lucky and skilled enough to develop telekinetic powers. They are held in high regard among the Ghost People, and enjoy special privileges.

#### Ghost People Poltergeist

**Race:** Human

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

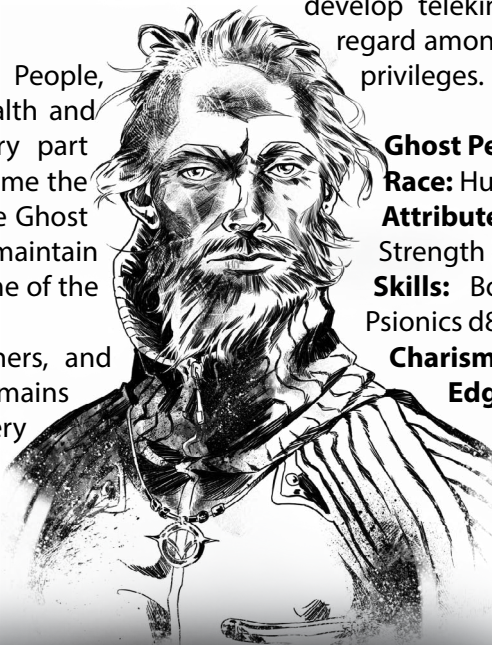
**Skills:** Boating d6, Fighting d6, Notice d6, Psionics d8, Stealth d8, Survival d4, Swimming d4

**Charisma:** —; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

**Edges:** Arcane Background (Psionics), Extra Power, Power Points, Teek (*Broken Earth* page 17).

**Gear:** Axe (Str+d6), personal goods

**Powers:** 15 Power Points, *bolt, deflection, entangle, telekinesis.*



## Ghost People

Most Ghost People focus on the foraging skills they need to survive. They have statistics similar to Axe Tribe members in *Broken Earth* (without the Illiterate Hindrance), but the statistics are reprinted here for convenience.

### Ghost People

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

**Skills:** Boating d6, Fighting d4, Knowledge (Nature) d6, Notice d6+2, Shooting d6, Survival d6, Swimming d6, Tracking d6

**Charisma:** —, **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

**Edges:** Alertness

**Gear:** Bow (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6), Axe (Str+d6), personal goods

### Plot Points

Characters beginning in the area near Wright Town can get involved with the Haunted Straits through the Northeast Passage adventure plot point, which may then lead to negotiations or war.

### The Northeast Passage

**Where:** Begins in Wright Town

**When:** After Pirate Troubles (*Broken Earth* page 109)

The Wright family has heard of Geneva and Scrap City and want to open up a permanent trade route with the cities on Lake Michigan. From the pre-War maps they've salvaged, they know that the sea beyond Wright Town eventually connects to Lake Michigan. Boat trade should be easy, at least once they've dealt with the Haunted Straits.

The problem of course, is that everybody knows the straits are haunted. It says so right there in the name. Nobody from Wright Town has ever stayed long enough to really investigate the area. If they had they would have discovered that the larger problem is the rapids.

Wright Town offers 5,000 Trade worth of company credit to anybody who can make their way to Scrap City or Geneva and back, and that can demonstrate that travel through the Haunted Straits is commercially viable. Given the heroes' effectiveness at stopping the pirate attacks, Jed Wright seeks them out personally, confident they are the right people for the job.

If the heroes enable Wright Town to move into the area, the company establishes a small trading outpost. Their initial plan to deal with the rapids is to unload cargo on one end, then ship it by land to the other end, but they hope to eventually repair one of the pre-War locks that once made shipping much more practical.

## Negotiating with the Ghost People

**Where:** The Haunted Straits

**When:** Any time

The Ghost People never liked outsiders, and after suffering at the hands of Captain Blood Eye and his crew, they like them even less. Characters who seek a peaceful resolution with the Ghost People face several hurdles.

Characters who stay in the area haunted by the Ghost People will eventually be discovered. When the Ghost People detect invaders, they usually dispatch a team of two to five poltergeists to scare the group away. They approach at night, and try to remain hidden while they telekinetically manipulate objects in the heroes' camp, encouraging them to move on. If the characters look for somebody moving the objects, they can make a Notice roll opposed by the poltergeists' group Stealth test. Because they use cover and hide in darkness, the poltergeists have a +4 bonus to their Stealth roll. If the heroes confront the poltergeists, they try to flee, but if unable they fight back.

**Poltergeists (One plus one per two PCs):** See page 6

Captured poltergeists do their best to keep their secrets, and heroes who attempt to use Persuasion or Intimidation on the poltergeists suffer a -2 penalty.

If the heroes continue to explore the area and have not already encountered people living in Sault Ste. Marie, the Ghost People send out a band of fighters to drive the heroes away. They too approach the heroes under the cover of darkness. They warn the heroes that they "have angered the ghosts that haunt these lands," and the party must leave the area or die. Heroes who try to talk their way out of the situation suffer a -2 penalty to rolls to do so. If the characters refuse to back down, and don't talk their way through the conflict, the Ghost People attack.

**Wild Card Poltergeist:** See page 6.

**Ghost People (One per PC):** See page 7.

Heroes who actively search for people in the area might find the Ghost People before the Ghost People find the group. If they search the ruins of Sault Ste. Marie and pass a Notice or Tracking test, they find either a home occupied by a group of 1d6 Ghost People, or find a group of 1d4 Ghost People traveling about their daily business. These Ghost People most likely try to flee from outsiders, but will fight if cornered. Talking to the Ghost People suffers a -2 penalty to rolls as described above.

**Ghost People (1d6 or 1d4):** See page 7.



If the heroes successfully talk to the any of the Ghost People, they are eventually brought before Rebecca Nolan for questioning. She demands to know who they are and what their intentions are. She is initially skeptical and distrusts the heroes, but if they succeed at a Persuasion test with a –2 penalty they can convince her that their intentions are honest (they negate the penalty if they can demonstrate that they killed or captured Captain Blood Eye). If the characters fail, she imprisons them indefinitely.

If Rebecca can be mollified, she allows the group to present their case before other prominent leaders in the community. Run this as a Social Conflict (see the Savage Worlds core rulebook). Though several members of the group argue against the heroes, for purposes of rules, use Rebecca's Persuasion skill to argue the opposing side. Characters suffer a –2 penalty to their Persuasion test for this conflict, but if they can demonstrate that they killed or captured Captain Blood Eye, they negate this penalty.

After you determine who won the challenge and by how much, consult the table below. If the heroes net 1–4 successes, the Ghost People ask for material compensation for their help. There are two values separated by a slash. The first value is for a relatively minor request, like letting

them (and only them) pass through their land. The second value is for larger requests, like allowing the Wright Trading Company to conduct trade through the area.

### War with the Haunted People

**Where:** Sault Ste. Marrie

**When:** Any time

If the heroes want to control the locks on the St. Mary's River, and cannot—or choose not to— negotiate with the Ghost People, their only option is to take the area by force. The Ghost People of course resist. They employ guerrilla tactics rather than meeting an opposing force on an open field, but you can still use the Mass Battle rules found in the core rulebook to run the conflict. Each round of the battle in this case represents three days of fighting.

In such a battle, all able-bodied Ghost People join the fight, fielding an "army" of 150 people. Because they know the land so well and have booby trapped the surrounding area, they have a major terrain advantage.

If the Ghost People lose half or more of their fighters, they decide to cut their losses and leave the area as if making an orderly retreat.

| Different in Successes | Result  |
|------------------------|---|
| 5 against the PCs      | The Ghost People decide to execute the heroes.  |
| 3–4 against the PCs    | The Ghost People imprison the heroes.   |
| 1–2 against the PCs    | The Ghost People allow the PCs to leave, but warn them never to return.   |
| Tie                    | The Ghost People say they need time to discuss the issue. They allow the PCs to leave and ask them to return in one moon cycle. Repeat the Social Conflict, but the PCs have only a –1 penalty. |
| 1–2 for the PCs        | The Ghost People agree to help the PCs if provided 1,000/20,000 worth of Trade, at least half of that in firearms.  |
| 3–4 for the PCs        | The Ghost People agree to help the PCs if provided 500/10,000 worth of Trade.   |
| 5+ for the PCs         | The Ghost People agree to help the PCs with no compensation.  |





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