

LIONS, & TIGERS, & BEARS...

...YOU SHOULD BE SO LUCKY.

Magic has returned to the world, and with it has come all manner of beasts. Genetic material, long dormant with the absence of magic, has been reactivated, transforming mundane animals into creatures once believed supernatural, even mythical. Juggernauts roam the plains, Firedrakes infest the woods, Leviathans swim in the oceans, and Devil Rats now hunt Man in the shattered Sprawl that he has created.

Paranormal Animals of North America is a Shadowrun field guide to the newly awakened creatures of the Sixth World. 80 of the most dangerous paranormal species are discussed in full detail. Included with each entry are illustrations, physical descriptions, feeding habits, magical abilities, range, and safety tips for runners.

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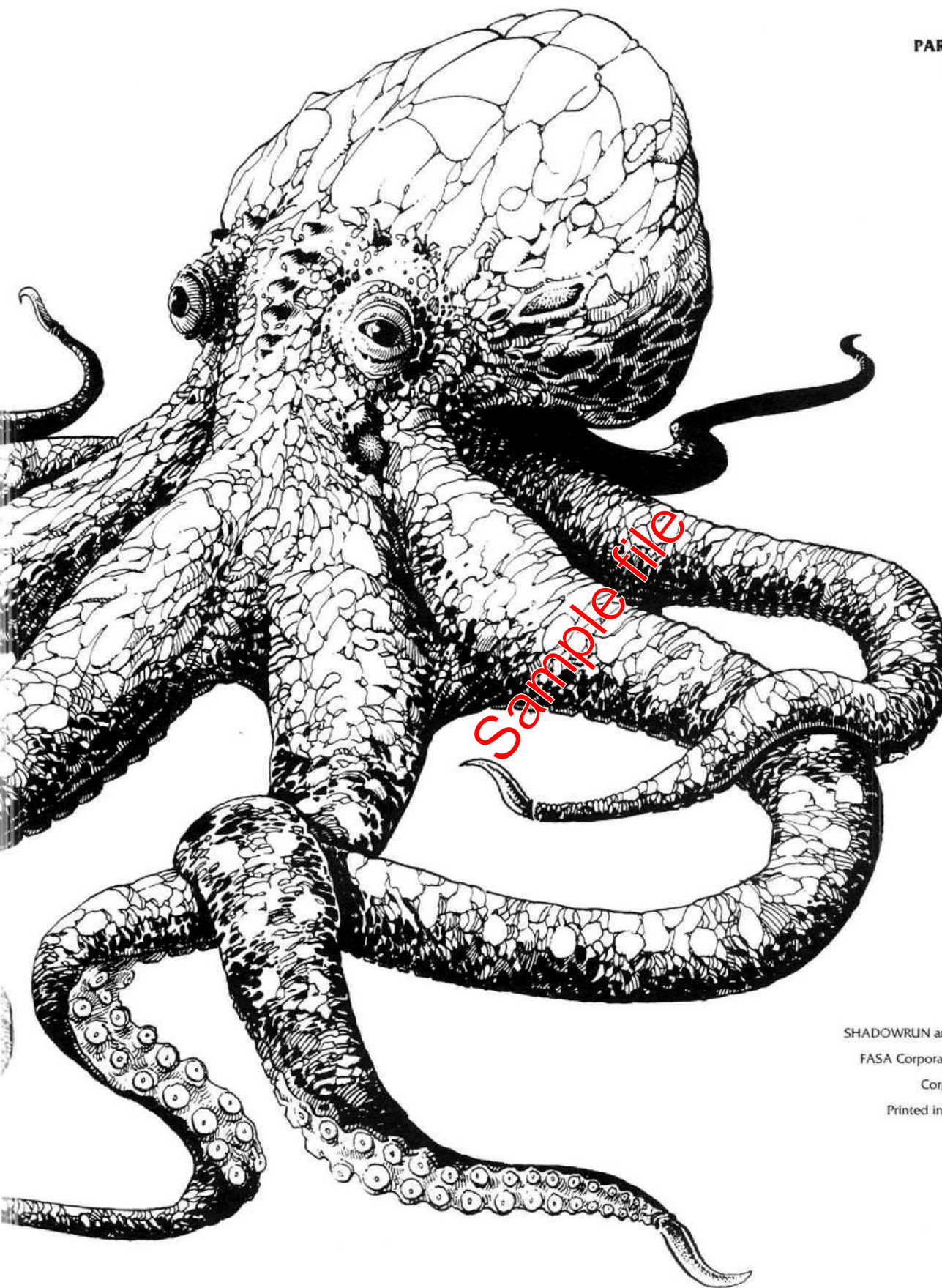
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STREET SMART

It was cold in the woods. Rain drizzled through the trees, and the gusting wind cut like a razor. As the full moon showed briefly through a gap in the clouds, Harley's cybereyes immediately adapted to the changing light levels. He saw his surroundings with a clarity that an unaugmented human couldn't know even at brightest noon. The trees stood in serried rows, cleared of their lower limbs and the underbrush that would normally surround them. That was a bad sign, but Harley had no time to worry about that now. He was more interested in the fence that his enhanced vision picked up surrounding the MTC compound a few hundred meters away. That fence was probably charged with enough juice to fry a juggernaut, but Harley wasn't going to worry about that either. Not yet.

It was the dark figures moving inside the fence that concerned him, and he gave them his total attention. At the same time, his peripheral vision assured him of the presence of his back-up, two street samurai. Calvin and Hobbes they called themselves, an obvious joke that nobody ever got. Harley hadn't hired them for their sense of humor, however, but because they were a good team, a pair of street brothers—related by decision rather than blood.

Indeed, Calvin and Hobbes synchronized their actions in uncanny fashion, as though one mind inhabited the two armored and boosted bodies. They almost never spoke to one another, their communication being limited to grunts, gestures, or glances. Harley didn't know how they did it, and he didn't really care. All that mattered was that it worked. The two street samurai were chipped so high they were almost vibrating. And that was the kind of back-up he needed tonight.

Tonight's run was a good one, the high-risk, high-pay kind that Harley liked best. There was something in the MTC depot that he wanted: data he could use personally as well as sell for a healthy profit. But he had gotten his first surprise after trying to make it a simple snatch-and-grab through the Matrix. He hadn't been able to get into the depot via the Matrix because it wasn't on the Matrix. The barbarism of a completely isolated, stand-alone computer system had stunned Harley.

Physical intrusion would be the only way in. But then came the second surprise.

Security surrounding the depot was mega. For starters, the depot was smack in the middle of a 500-meter zero zone. Zero incursion, zero survival. If you were outside, you didn't get in. Or if somehow you did manage to penetrate, you were buried there. Thanks to some techniques Harley'd bought from his friend Blacknight, however, he and his little team had gotten this far. But it had been tight. Then came the juiced-up fence. And now something else. Something new. Biologicals, and not just the normal guard dog.

Piasma. Bear-like and Awakened, with all the potential power and danger that implied. Harley unslung his cyberdeck and slipped the fiber-optic lead into the ceramic-lipped datajack in his temple. Calvin was beside him almost before Harley saw the man move.

"What's up?" the samurai breathed.

"Last check with Paterson's," Harley whispered as his fingers danced an intricate pattern across the keys. "Maybe somebody's got something new on those bear-things. Watch me while I'm gone." His eyes rolled upward as he slipped into the technorealism of the Matrix. (Remote linkups like this were part of Harley's edge over the other deckers competing for big contracts. His satellite uplink had set him back almost a million, but it had paid for itself in less than a year. And if it paid with this run, he'd be able to afford even more techno-toys.) He was out again quickly, extracting the jack and coiling the lead.

"Well?" It was Hobbes this time. For a big man, he moved quickly, with an almost preternatural silence.

"Nothing new," Harley told them. "Shadowtalk confirms these things are piasma. Straight Gain still thinks the squealers are going to do the job." He patted one of the small, grenade-like objects hanging from his bandolier.

His face split in a ragged street grin. "You guys up for it?"

The samurai didn't even have to exchange glances for that one.

"Then let's do it," Harley said.

Without a backward glance, he and his small command moved out into the night.



