

Northern Lights

An After the Bomb Adventure
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Introduction

This adventure can be run while the characters are exploring the northern parts of the North American continent, in the Great Lakes region. The party should include someone who can negotiate. Read the following:

“ You ve been travelling through hilly, forested domains for many days now with barely a few outposts of industrious beavers working in mills and some backwoods pig and cowtowns to ease the monotony. You ve stopped for drinks at many a small pub and over toasts of the local moonshine you ve heard tall tales of a modern human city that still survives and is at the peak of its glory. The further north you went the more the locals insisted that such a place exists, and they all pointed you in one direction: Buffalotown. You were always skeptical of such claims, since many of them were traps laid by bandits for naïve merchants and travellers, but you ve finally arrived in Buffalotown, and you re stunned.

Looking down from a hilly spot you can see Buffalotown quite clearly perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking a vast lake and river. The town itself looks fairly normal, with salvaged construction and belching smokestacks from crude smithies and machine shops. Various mutant animals, mainly rodents, crows, beavers and deer, trudge through the mud to make a living. But it s not Buffalotown that stuns you; it s the gleaming, clean metropolis that sits directly opposite on the far bank of the river. This must be the fabled human city of Anthrotopia, the only city to survive unscathed through the Great Death! To top it off, a glowing field of energy surrounds the city and you can see some sort of encampment farther into the distance. A slender but solid-looking bridge connects the human paradise with the grungy mutant animal town on your side, though you don t see any traffic on it. Giant glowing insects flit with pallets of cargo to the north, and numerous clouds of black birds gyre over a large island to the northwest.”

Locations

Buffalotown – big sprawling town of rodents, beavers, deer, ravens
Anthrotopia – big city of humans who trade with Buffalotown
Wolf Barbarians at the gates – massed army besieging Anthrotopia
Squawk Island – home of the raven nestgrounds
Glowbug Drome – airport for shipping supplies south to New Kennel
Old Town – radioactive ruins of old Buffalo, NY (uninhabited).

People

Rodin Silvertail – mayor of Buffalotown, Clan Silvertail [rat]
Roger Blackwind – General of Crows & Ravens in Buffalotown [raven]
Catulus the Younger – chief ambassador to Anthrotopia [cat]
Fred Anderson – Anthrotopia ambassador to Buffalotown, minister in Fort Erie [human]
Alita Prime – android chief scientist of Anthrotopia, keeps the holodome working [android]
Ragnar Furson – wolf barbarian Warlord [wolf]
Grom Skinhide – wolf barbarian Death Commando, strike team on the bridge [wolverine]



The Big Buffalo

Buffalotown is a hive of activity and is actually quite prosperous considering its location in the far north. The Council of mutant animals, under the leadership of the Rat Clan Silvertail, has made a trade pact with the human city that has benefitted both parties. The humans regularly trot out large machines like tractors, trucks and bulldozers in exchange for food, lumber, metal ores and other raw materials. Squawk Island to the north serves as a nesting ground for thousands of ravens, crows, pigeons and other birds who are allied but not subservient to Buffalotown. Though a formidable aerial force, the Islanders tend to squabble among themselves and seldom present a united front, and have no ambitions for ground conquest. This stands in direct contrast to the Wolf Barbarians who have just recently invaded the Niagara region and wish to conquer both Anthrotopia and Buffalotown. The only thing stopping them is the massive energy dome that surrounds Anthrotopia (or Fort Erie, as the humans still call it) and encloses the Friendship Bridge, the only route which crosses the Erie River.

The Wolf Barbarians of the Ironteeth Horde, under the murderous leadership of Warlord Furson, have laid waste most of the region west of the canal but were stymied by the energy dome. Their first assault

disintegrated most of their strike force when they tried to go through it and they are still cowed by this technological marvel. Their attempt to cross the river on boats was a disaster and was easily repulsed by the forces of Buffalotown, lead by the skilled but cautious General Blackwind. The situation is a draw, but the wolf barbarians are daily gaining in number and may eventually overwhelm both cities. Already refugees who arrived before the invasion are heading out of Buffalotown and morale is not very good. The Wolfers are plotting to build insulated tanks to attack Anthrotopia and gliders to send a force to capture the Glowbug Drome. If they succeed both cities would fall easily.

The Glowbug Drome is a primitive airport that is host to hundreds of giant beetles and dragonflies that are used as cargo carriers by the industrious rodents of Clan Flying Fur. These are the most diminutive of mice and rats who control the bugs through telepathy and ride them to destinations as far south as Cardania. Most of the giant bugs are not fireflies, but the glowing types are used at night as runway lights and positional markers on the trade routes, hence the name. There are currently only 28 cargo bugs at the hangar, along with 15 Deer Troopers to protect them.

The Offer

After the characters arrive in Buffalotown, when they've had some time to acclimatize themselves to the local scenery, read the following:

“You've barely been in Buffalotown for a day when you're approached by a stern-looking deer military officer accompanied by two rat troopers. „This is for you. 100 bucks if you just come and talk to our mayor. We need soldiers like you, he says, „and we're willing to pay a lot of money. If the players take him up on his offer, they are escorted to a three-story building clad in steel plates and surrounded by barbed wire. A sign identifies it as Buffalotown Head Office. Inside you are greeted by a noble-looking rat with silver fur wearing mayoral robes and sporting a stylish hunting cap. Beside him you are also introduced to General Blackwind, a gruff and strangely-silent raven with penetrating eyes and a constant frown on his beak.

Mayor Rodin begins his speech thusly: “Noble travellers, we have seen the arms you bear and the strength in your sinews, and we wish to welcome you to our prosperous little town, one that is at this very moment resisting the forces of darkness and savagery. The Wolf Barbarians are besieging us and our allies, the most excellent nation of Anthrotopia, and we are seeking mercenaries and true friends to stem this tide of insanity. We know that your bravery is legend– “ He's suddenly cut off by General Blackwind, who interrupts by saying “Let's cut the bull. We need experienced soldiers for a dangerous mission across the bridge to attack the wolfers. You look the type. We're paying 10,000 bucks to anyone who meets the requirements and goes. And if you can get the Anthros to cooperate, so much the better.”. “Err, yes, that's quite succinct,” says the now-deflated mayor.

The mayor is willing to provide medical facilities and ammunition for anyone attempting the commando mission, but nothing is paid until the mission is accomplished. Buffalotown has money but most other resources have gone into the militia already. From this point on the story has many options for the players. They could attempt an assassination mission against Warlord Furson, a difficult enterprise at best as the barbarian is surrounded by hundreds of berserk followers almost all the time (the hunting pack elite sleeps in one big pile in the main hall of the race track). Only high explosives would take them all out at once. General Blackwind is willing to provide a diversionary military strike using his aerial forces, mainly ravens and crows dropping grenades and a few bombs on the wolves, but only during the night because the barbarians are good shots during the day.

The Embassy

If the players hesitate to take on the military suicide mission, the alternative presents itself on the second day, in the form of Ambassador Catulus the Younger. The ambassador is a fop and proud of it. Dressed in a black-and-white tuxedo with an elaborate gold Rolex watch (which he displays ostentatiously to

everyone) he is the image of a snob, but is really quite helpful as long as the characters are not all country hicks. He gets along best with scientists and other learned individuals. As an intellectual cat and connoisseur of pre-Death literature he loves to quote Shakespeare and Ralph Walrus Emerson. He offers the party a chance to “meet the Anthros”, as he puts it, so that perhaps they can convince the humans to do something where he has failed. During the initial attack of the barbarians Buffalotown asked Anthrotopia for troops and war machines but were politely rebuffed, for unknown reasons. No human forces have struck out against the barbarians at their gate despite Anthrotopia’s large army regularly drilling inside the complex. Ambassador Catulus wants the players to find out why Anthrotopia isn’t helping, only using its energy dome in a purely defensive manner. He arranges a meeting with the humans on the Friendship Bridge the next day.

A Bridge Too Far

Read the following:

“ You arrive at the Friendship Bridge at the appointed time to meet the human representatives of Anthrotopia, or as Ambassador Catulus corrects you, the Fort Erie Republic. The vast energy dome shimmers in front of you and stare at the marvels of the human city for a few minutes. Green parks outline a clean, white series of domes which form a futuristic-looking complex. Purebred humans wander on the moving sidewalks on their way to work, seemingly unconcerned by the tents and howls of the wolf barbarians just outside the perimeter of their perfect little paradise. Energy cannons rotate slowly on mounted defensive points, but none ever fire into the Horde.

After a few minutes two humans arrive on an electric cart and stand on the other side of the energy barrier. The barrier flickers for a second and a doorway appears in its energy fabric, allowing the cart to continue driving onto the bridge towards you. Two tall humans get out and move to greet you. Both are wearing spotless white and red spandex uniforms which make your clothing look like those of tramps.

“Greetings, Friend Animals, we welcome you in the name of the Republic of- “ the first man begins to say, when suddenly his friendly expression turns to startlement as half a score of white wolves leap from under the bridge into the midst of your party!

The wolves are a special commando strike force under Death Commando Grom who have been tasked with penetrating the energy dome. The wolves quickly noticed that the only time the energy dome opens is for trade exchanges with Buffalotown, but those are usually heavily guarded by both sides. The only place this happens is on the bridge. However, they also noticed that ambassadorial visits are usually not guarded, so they sent a small force to infiltrate the rafters of the bridge, bide their time until a delegation presents itself, then force their way into Anthrotopia to disable the energy field if they can, or simply capture humans and intelligence as a secondary objective.

Grom will first direct his troops to neutralize anyone with firearms, then charge through the opening in the energy barrier as quickly as possible. His team consists of 4 wolf commandos, 2 wolverine heavy weapons specialists and 1 badger demolitions expert. The soldiers have camouflaged themselves in white to blend with the colour of the bridge. These are probably the most skilled Wolf Barbarian opponents the PCs will face, the disciplined elite of Furson’s forces, so make this battle dangerous, with the possibility of friends or foes falling off the bridge, humans running screaming, Catulus being taken hostage, etc. The wolves have 6 melee rounds before Anthrotopia realizes what is happening and closes the energy barrier. After 10 rounds approximately 15 raven and deer militia from Buffalotown will arrive to assist the party. If the primary and secondary objectives fail, the badger commando has been secretly instructed to blow the bridge with plastic explosives, probably killing everyone on it as it plunges into 100 feet into the rushing waters. This would be a disaster for Anthrotopia and would initiate plans for the complete evacuation of the humans (see Entanglements, below).

The Secret

If the characters repel the commando team, the humans are extremely grateful. While raven and deer militiamen secure the bridge from further attack, the humans invite Catulus and his party into Anthrotopia for negotiations, and medical attention if necessary. State-of-art medical robots quickly heal any wounded characters. The party is invited to speak to Alita Prime, Chief Scientist and leader of Anthrotopia. Read the following:

“After passing through vast halls full of robotic machinery and other astounding technology you enter the Control Room, a beautiful but antiseptic room full of magical computer displays, glowing lights, strange announcements and even stranger humans. You see bald-headed technicians operating terminals and controls for factories and gun sentries. Seated on a podium in the middle of this marvel is Alita Prime, Chief Scientist of Anthrotopia. A pale, short, black-haired beauty (every human here seems eerily beautiful, except for the human ambassador, Fred Anderson), she rises from her chair to greet you. No smile passes her lips as she says to you „All of Anthrotopia is immensely grateful for your help today. You have proven the bonds of trust that exist between us and Buffalotown. Make yourselves at home and know that our gratitude shall extend to making your every wish come true.”

The humans are all friendly, but evasive. If asked why Anthrotopia is not fighting the wolf barbarians, Alita Prime will claim that all hands are needed to maintain the operation of the city, and that, besides, the energy barrier is sufficient to keep the enemy at bay indefinitely. Catulus will quietly prod the party to investigate further. If the players are crafty and enterprising they may eventually discover the terrible secret of Anthrotopia: the city is almost entirely an illusion, or more specifically, a complex physico-holographic construct run by the Artificial Intelligence known as A-1, which communicates to the outside world via the android body of Alita Prime. In fact, the entire population of real humans in Anthrotopia is a mere 20! Everything else is a sophisticated hologram that feels physical (thanks to telesensory electroinduction) and is cleverly programmed to imitate real humans. The real humans, Fred Anderson among them, are terrified of the outside world and don't know what to do about the wolf barbarians. They were hoping the wolvers would exhaust themselves fighting Buffalotown, but their plans have been thrown out of whack by the degradation of the energy dome. Much of the infrastructure is also fake, but there is a core complex full of computers and warehouses full of trucks and other machinery that keeps the humans supplied and comfortable.

The Energy Dome

The energy dome itself is powered by a large battery array from before the Big Death. Normally it would recharge itself indefinitely via its connection to ancient turbines still operational beneath Niagara Falls (to the north), but the constant attacks of the barbarians have drained it to such an extent that it is no longer capable of disintegrating most intruders. This is something that the wolves have not figured out yet, but they will eventually. The initial wolf attack killed hundreds of their forces, but if Warlord Furson were to command all his 5000 troops to surge across the barrier it would now only kill a few dozen, leaving the rest barely singed. Needless to say, the humans are desperate not to let this secret get out, even to their Buffalotown allies. What they need is a potent energy source to replenish the field.

Side Note: The power of the energy barrier is calculated as follows: At full power it can do up to 50,000 hit points of damage at any given moment, then recharges at a rate of 1 point per minute. If this limit is exceeded the field collapse for d20 minutes. Power levels are now at a maximum of 5,000 hit points, and dropping at a rate of 60 points per hour because of battery depletion. The field looks fully charged at all times regardless of its actual state, thanks to A-1's holography.

Rescue Anthrotopia

The players can achieve their objectives in several ways here. They could reveal the secret to the Buffalotown Council. This would show how vulnerable Buffalotown really is, because Anthrotopia is a

hollow shell and would be quickly overrun. Negotiations for more power to Anthrotopia could salvage the situation, but the humans would have to accept the collapse of their illusion and the arrival of mutant animals to connect them to the Buffalotown power grid. An alternative would be to use the glowbug fleet to ferry fuel (gasoline, fuel cells, or something else) directly to Anthrotopia. Another plan would be to convince the humans to evacuate to Buffalotown, then wire Anthrotopia to blow when the wolves invade. This would have the unfortunate side effect of destroying a lot of useful hardware and A-1, as the AI is bulky and cannot be moved without destroying it. The players will have to be enterprising to solve this dangerous problem before the wolves attack in force, which will only be a day or two away.

Complications

This diversion can be added if the GM feels there is a lull in the action or if the players grow complacent. The wolves, tired of attacking the energy dome, have decided to make a sneak attack on the Glowbug Aerodrome. First, a diversionary attack by the barbarians will begin towards Squawk Island. At the same time an amphibious force of ferret, water rat and beaver barbarians will cross the south side of the lake into Old Buffalo, through the irradiated craters and towards the aerodrome. They have been promised all the trade goods there as loot. Once they capture the airport, which should be easy given that most of Buffalotown's forces will probably engage the enemy at Squawk Island, their plan is to take the merchants hostage and fly all the giant bugs to the wolf encampment. The bugs could then be used by the wolves as air cavalry to transport their main forces straight into Buffalotown. The players will have to stop the sneak attack either at Old Buffalo in the ruins or in a desperate rush at the aerodrome before the bugs fly off.

Entanglements

The humans of Anthrotopia have no contact with the Empire of Humanity, and would probably be fairly revolted by the genocidal policies of that state. However, if no solution to the weakness of the illusionary city emerges A-1 may decide to contact the Empire to evacuate the humans. The safety of her charges negates all other considerations. If the Empire becomes involved, air strikes on ALL mutant animal locations may occur within 12 hours. A strike force of 150 dog troopers, 40 Type 1 armour human soldiers and 4 type 2xd soldiers will arrive within 2 days, just in time to temporarily halt the advance of the wolf barbarians, destroy much of Buffalotown, and capture the Anthrotopia complex and spirit its inhabitants back to Technoville.

Aftermath

Whether Anthrotopia is rescued or not, the gig is probably up for the humans who have been fooling the outside world for so long. Either they fully integrate into Buffalotown and form a united city-state on both sides of the river or Anthrotopia is destroyed by the barbarians and civilization retreats to the Buffalotown side of the river. Further story ideas could include the establishment of a trade route or embassy with Cardania, or perhaps the pursuit of the defeated wolf barbarians back to their hideout in Arroo Bay (near Algonkin).