

A Dissertation on the City of Pittsburgh

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ATMOSPHERE

Capturing the atmosphere of Pittsburgh is not easy to do in writing; as with all American settlements, it is confounding and fast-paced, but has a unique character all its own. It is a city that really has to be experienced to understand, but I'll do my best. Pittsburgh is a "blue-collar," or working class, town through and through, although there are more white-collar jacket-and-tie businesses moving into the town all the time. It is also, if you'll excuse the turn of phrase, a rock and roll town, and anywhere one goes, he or she will hear rock music in the air, be it classic rock, the ever-popular 80's rock, or newer alternative and heavy metal music, or techno and industrial Goth sounds. Even the music scene in the city is active and prolific, if not well known as in cities like New York or Los Angeles. Bars host local bands of some sort, be it a regular show or an open stage, every night of the week except Sundays, and if a band isn't playing, you can be certain there will be a D.J. spinning out his tunes. In neighborhoods like the South Side and the Strip District (both discussed later on), one can feel the electricity in the air from the various clubs and bars beckoning people in to hear whatever band graces the stage that night. Some bars (a popular "alternative" type bar is Zythos) even have outdoor tables right on the sidewalks, where police tend to overlook the "no alcohol outdoors" laws on weekends, so long as drinks remain at said seating area.

There are really four divisions of people in Pittsburgh, and please understand that the best means to engender the proper image is to use stereotypes. There are those who fit in personality with different groups than they might

fit in looks. A person might dress in designer clothing but hang out with all Goths, for example, just because he likes the attitude of his friends, but the look of his clothes. We're talking about city atmosphere, here, not individual people, and for that reason we look at groups as a whole and not the members of each group.

The first division is the "upper crust," the white-collar workers who live in wealthier neighborhoods, mostly to the North, South, and East of the city such as Mt. Lebanon, Upper Saint Clair (South), Shadyside and Squirrel Hill (East) and Wexford (north). These are the people that live in \$300,000 to million dollar houses, and deduct their way out of taxes. This isn't to say that everyone who lives in these neighborhoods is wealthy, just that these are definitely the more costly areas to live. Think of the folks in these neighborhoods as the ones who don't worry if they forget to lock their doors at night, and are paralyzed with shock at the mention of a crime anywhere near their neighborhoods. Dwellings in these areas range from white picket fences to mansions, and everyone drives a brand spanking new SUV that they really don't ever use the four-wheel-drive on.

The second division of people is probably the most numerous in the city. These are the middle-class folk who work your regular day jobs and live either in apartments or ranch houses in the \$40 or \$50 K range. Folk in this class are the people in the city who work hard, play hard, and put family and friends before their job. Most of them are good people who just want to live out their lives in peace and be left alone. Every day after work for an hour or two the bars

are jam packed with this crowd, having a few cold ones to wash away the stresses of the day. Every other Thursday they lament about how all the cash is gone but tomorrow is payday. On weekends they run wild through the bar neighborhoods and in private parties. Most college students fall easily into this category, though for them it's more partying than work, and dorms instead of houses. A good deal of the college faring students in Pittsburgh do work their way through school, though, which contributes equally to the blue-collar party atmosphere of the town.

The third category of citizens in Pittsburgh is what could quite aptly be called "subculture," but who refer to themselves as "Goths," "Burnouts," "Freaks," "Punks," and a whole host of other names to describe their individual groups. These are the people who follow their own rules, who party sometimes with other substances besides the occasional beer, or who can party without substance at all, who live on the wilder side of life, and for many of whom art music is more than an evening's entertainment...it's a passion. They are the artists, the writers, the musicians, even the gamers of the area. They frequent dance clubs like Laga, the Lava Lounge, and cafes like the Beehive and Tuscany. They wear black t-shirts and combat boots. They smoke clove cigarettes. They're not necessarily chronically depressed, but they might get that bad rap. You get the idea. We'll talk more about this category in the "Ethnic Diversity" section to follow.

The final category consists of the destitute. These range from those welfare souls in low-rent districts, to the truly poor who sit on the street and reek because there's no reason to bathe. Destitute people come in all shapes, sizes, and forms, and there's not much of a stereotype to them; rather, there are a multitude that it's not necessary to bring up. Keep your eyes and ears open, though; that bum panhandling on the corner might see and hear things that you never will...

In this sense, I suppose, Pittsburgh isn't much different than most other cities. We have the same general types of people, but I honestly believe that the *feel* of the city is singular. Pittsburghers (as they call themselves) truly and passionately love everything about their city. Now you will find "city patriots," and maybe even a great many of them, in any city, but it is

my experience that the passion for the hometown is far more powerful in Pittsburgh than in many other places. Radio stations play songs about how "We're from da Burgh," and even about certain neighborhoods in the city. People in Pittsburgh obsess about the local football team in the spring and summer, long after and long before the season is in effect. Cars painted in the city colors of black and gold are seen on the streets year round. Pittsburgh is, without a doubt, a football town, and all other sports come second. Even the Goths and "subculturists" tend to be closet, if not open, football fans. Exceptions exist, but are rare.

ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Many long-term visitors to Pittsburgh are quickly taken with the cultural diversity of the place and some have made it a personal quest to delve into the mysteries that always lie beneath the surface of so many different ethnic backgrounds living in one locale. For a time, Hollywood producers were very interested in the city for Not only is Pittsburgh a hotbed of ethnic diversity, but with six colleges and at least as many technical schools within the city proper and surrounding boroughs it is a hotbed of philosophical diversity as well, which means that there is an abundance of private and organized mystical study here. I would assume (and it certainly seems logical) that the presence of the Hellmouth at Point State Park lends itself to the attraction of mystics from all over the world, whether they realize it or not. Even dormant mystics, in my observation, are drawn to places of mystic power, and the Hellmouth certainly qualifies as that.

Where there is diversity on such a large scale, there is bound to be subculture. Pittsburgh has its share of this as well. The hip-hop subculture, while somewhat subdued compared to cities like Los Angeles or New York, is certainly a presence. Actual hip-hop clubs are few and far between, but perhaps the most notable place to find such enthusiasts of the genre is at the hip-hop nights hosted by a local club, Laga. This club, in fact, is a force to be reckoned with in the city and I will discuss it in more depth later in this treatise.

More numerous than the hip-hop culture, though far more subtle in its operation and manipulation of events, is the Goth culture. Goths are everywhere, and have been since the mid-90's when the genre enjoyed a serious

resurgence and moved from a garage sub-genre of music to a mainstream, full-fledged genre of its own. With the music came a slew of rebellious young people in a generation that had no identity of its own, aching for something to identify with. Goth was a siren song to these young men and women and before long body piercing, tattoos, and black became the commonplace order of the day. But for many of these kids, “the look” wasn’t enough. They wanted to rebel against mainstream sensibilities and values as well as aesthetics. Thus did many take to the call of paganism, and while most were “dabblers” with no real power, for whom the *image* of being pagan was enough, there were a select few with dormant magical and psychic abilities that exploded into brilliant light under the tutelage and guidance of books and mentors. Many have moved out of the rebellion that started them on their path, but have discovered in the Goth subculture something to truly fill a void that existed inside of them. I admire these “True Goths,” as I call them. They are a secretive and quiet lot; it is rare that a True Goth will spout off about his or her expertise in the mystic arts, as they understand that magic is not something to flaunt, but to be used as a tool to subtly manipulate events for the better. They also tend to know the rules as far as the streets go, which makes them incredibly valuable allies and informants, if not confidantes. Indeed, most every cabal and coven in the city has at least one Goth member, and more than a few are composed entirely of these black-clad enigmas.

Another sad fact of life in a region of ethnic diversity is organized crime and gang activity. In a place like Pittsburgh, however, these factors serve a useful purpose in the diversion of and battle against the Demons and Vampires. The mischief they cause is oft times more than sufficient to distract police from investigating the characters’ activities. Also, I am of the understanding that several crime families and gangs have specially trained enforcers to deal with the supernatural threat posed by the Hellmouth. This, if it is true, could paint such families as puppets or fronts for the Initiative, who would certainly view human criminals as preferable to the supernatural evils presented by Vampires and the Hellmouth. The real problem with organized crime is that while it may serve a purpose in its own way, it is inherently dangerous, and those who walk the streets alone at night have one more aspect of the shadows to fear. While more “traditional” criminal families

tend to let be those who do not affect their concerns or business, gangs are all-too-often thugs who brutalize and victimize the innocent as well as those involved in their own underworld activities.

Truly, the ethnic diversity of Pittsburgh is one of our greatest assets and worst dangers. Below is a list of several prominent ethnic neighborhoods.

Bloomfield – North of the city proper, Bloomfield is the “Little Italy” of Pittsburgh, dubbed so by its own residents. Great pasta there, and don’t forget to visit the Bloomfield Bridge Tavern for good music on the weekends. Just keep your true face hidden; the people here (so far as I know) are largely ignorant to the larger picture. It is also rumored that there is a large and very organized crime syndicate operating within this area; if there is, it seems to have been effective at keeping supernatural elements to a minimum; this is one of the less dangerous places in the city. By and large, Bloomfield is the area where a lot of hospitals and medical professionals (general practitioners and such) can be located. It really bridges Pittsburgh and Oakland with the Shadyside area.

The Strip District – Situated just outside the city to the northeast, the Strip is during the day like an old-fashioned open-air market on Penn Avenue. Shops full of fresh produce, meat, fish, and other amenities are lined up and down both sides of the street, and on weekends during the day it’s rather crowded. The sounds of rock music, both classic and new, fill the air and the mingled smells of ethnic cuisine seem to permeate everything. Parallel, on Smallman Street, are a host of clubs, bars, and specialty shops. A lot of Asians live in and around the Strip, and they’re pretty territorial after the sun goes down, at least off of the main roads: Penn Avenue and Smallman Street. Probably best for them. Still, I’ve seen some strange things go on in the shadows of that neighborhood and there have been sightings of some odd, greenish lights in the sky late at night. As far as the “scene” goes for the human singles crowd, this is the place to be, though, on weekends, and even certain weeknights. On Smallman and Penn (the two “safe” streets) there are clubs and bars 2 or 3 to the block. Needless to say, proximity to the Hellmouth engenders a high degree of vampiric and demonic activity here. I understand that some of the clubs (particularly Area 51, Pluto’s,

and Valhalla) have special arrangements made for some of the more unsavory elements of the city if one knows who to talk to, what to say, and what face to put on.

Deushtown – on the North Side of the city, known (not surprisingly) also by the moniker “German Town,” this area houses many of the Germanic residents of the city. Lots of urchins in this area – it spawns a lot of the gang activity in the city. My suspicions are that it is also a feeding ground for Vampires. The North Side of Pittsburgh also houses the Penn Brewery and the Andy Warhol Museum. The museum in and of itself is a must-visit for newcomers, especially those seeking funding for their factions, for many of the city’s wealthier subcultural figures frequent the place and are always willing to sink their cash into a “worthwhile” cause. And we all know the types of things Andy Warhol found worthwhile. Artists, witches, and wizards looking for financial backers fit in very well here. Another area of the North Side that should be noted is that neighborhood known collectively as the *Mexican War Streets*. This area gains its name from the fact that all the streets are indeed named after famous figures, events, and locations from the Mexican War. This area is one of the rougher areas of the city to live and travel in, and again, a lot of vampire activity here.

Hill District – Pittsburgh’s population is approximately 27% African-American, and many reside in the Hill District, Homestead, and Homewood, and there is a great deal of ethnic pride in the heritage represented here. Sadly, the average per capita income in these areas are perhaps the lowest in the entire city and the general dissatisfaction with the state of affairs spawns perhaps more gang and criminal activity than anywhere else in the city. Several local gangs call the Hill their turf and woe betide the man, woman, or demon who treads on these streets without their permission. The Hill separates the city proper from its eastern borough, Oakland. It should also be noted that there is more living in the Hill than just innocents and gangs. My own studies indicate a widespread vampire presence, and indeed many of the gangs in the Hill seem more concerned with and prepared for hunting undead than with battling each other or engaging in openly criminal activity.

South Side – not so much an ethnic neighborhood as a hotbed of subculture, the

South Side by and large is the party area of the mid-to-late 20’s and thirty something crowd in the city. Rivals the Strip District in the number of bars, but has no dance clubs to speak of and generally attracts a different sort of crowd; the “singles scene” isn’t as dominant on the South Side as in the Strip, or at least, is a bit more reserved. The bars in this area get crowded to bursting on weekends, but you don’t find the loud dance music or “meat market” atmosphere here. The South Side is far more catered towards those young adults who like to just spend time with friends, have a few drinks, and maybe see a live local band play. The South Side also houses a number of cafés and bistros, as well as the recently reopened Rex Theater. Once an arthouse movie theater, and one of only four surviving big single screen theaters in the city, the Rex now boasts that its doors are open to “any kind of show” and hosts bands, improvisational comedy and acting troupes, dance club-style DJ’s, and the like. It has become a popular hangout for local young adults recently, and its popularity appears to be growing. If you are looking to make contact with the Goth subculture, there are two places worth checking out on the South Side: the Lava Lounge and the Beehive coffee house. The same people own both establishments (one a bar, the other a café), and rumor has it that both also have special back rooms (again, if you know who to talk to and what to say). Oddly enough, vampiric activity tends to stay fairly low-key here, probably due to the crowds that are omnipresent.

Oakland – Like the South Side, this is not so much an ethnic neighborhood as a subcultural one; Oakland, situated to the east of the city proper, houses the University of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Mellon University, and Carlow College. Also in Oakland is the Carnegie Museum and Library, a tourist attraction for a long time, which boasts one of the largest collection of dinosaur skeletons in the Eastern U.S. Life in Oakland is fairly typical of any college town these days, I would assume. Places of note in Oakland include the Upstage – where during their “Ceremony” nights, members of the Goth culture are present in abundance. A good place to make contacts, but beware: Vampires often hide among the masses, not so noticeable among the pale makeup and dark clothing of the Goths. Indeed, the Upstage is a place where many human and undead movers and shakers in the city’s underground gather in abundance.

Another club of note, directly above the Upstage, is Club Laga. On Thursdays and Saturdays Laga hosts "Hip Hop night," which tends to bring a less savory element out. At one point arrests were common, but as of late the police have been a bit more lax in their patrolling of the city (a bit of sarcasm: one can't help but wonder why that is). Another curiosity in Oakland is the abandoned King's Court Theater, which once housed the Pollinator, a bar and club featuring live bands. The same people who operate the Beehive and Lava Lounge on the South Side owned the place, but it closed down suddenly and somewhat mysteriously in April of 2001. It has remained vacant ever since, and there are whisperings of cult activity in the bowels of the place.

The North and South Hills: These areas are largely suburban, complete with well-trimmed yards and fences. Places like Fox Chapel, Mount Lebanon, and Wexford, where at one point in time people didn't go out of their way to lock their doors at night. Of course, these days, everyone locks their doors...and there are lower-rent districts in the South Hills. Areas such as Arlington, Allentown, and Belzhoover are "low rent" districts and tend to be rabid feeding grounds for the vampires.

THE HELLMOUTH

One of the reasons why Pittsburgh has the problems it does. Each of the four rivers in Pittsburgh (the Monongahela, the Allegheny, the Ohio, and the underground river that feeds the fountain at Point State Park) has a dragon line (a line of magickal energy) following its course, which means practically the entire city sits on one of these trails. Mystic energy and psychic phenomena are in abundance as a result, and there are whispers, rumors, and accounts of creatures more terrifying than even the most evil vampire.

Needless to say, such an abundance of mystic energy is a veritable treasure trove for both the vampires and those opposing them. Worse, the four rivers meet at Point State Park, which means a center of mystical convergence of incredible power. This center of mystical convergence is the barely-sealed opening to countless hell dimensions, and some form of evil is always looking to blast the cork out of the bottle and let all the genies escape. I feel as though I should say more about the Hellmouth itself, but really, what can one say about a Hellmouth? It is, after all, much like other Hellmouths in the world. Instead, I shall endeavour to paint the history of the place where the Hellmouth is located.



HISTORY OF THE POINT

The Hellmouth, as I have said, is at the point where the four rivers merge. This point (called Point State Park) is a public park, as well as a historical landmark, and it has seen its share of war and bloodshed over the centuries. The park is built on the site of Fort William Pitt, a literal fort dating all the way back to the French and Indian War. In the mid-1700's the Ohio River was a waterway of great strategic importance, connecting present-day French Canada with the Eastern part of what is now North America. Trade vessels between French colonies in the north and settlements in the south constantly traveled back and forth along the Ohio, Allegheny, and Monongahela rivers, and the French needed a stable military port along this route. At the time there existed a small British encampment named Fort Prince George at the juncture of the rivers, right where the French needed an outpost. In 1754, an army of French and Native Americans overwhelmed Fort Prince George, which was in fact still under construction, and drove the British out. The tiny fort was burned almost to the ground in the battle, and the construction of the massive Fort Duquesne began. Through numerous bloody battles and attempts to reclaim the fort for the British, Duquesne held out for four more years. In 1758, General John Forbes led an army of 6,000 troops to finally drive the French out of Duquesne once and for all. This time, the majority of the fort stood intact, and the location was re-named Pittsborough, after the Prime minister of England, William Pitt.

The fort became one of the largest English strongholds in North America, and was never again besieged by French forces, though Native Americans did repeatedly lay siege to the settlement until the Battle of Bushy Run, in 1763. The fort and the walled settlement within remained a garrison town until around 1790, when the city (now called "Pittsburgh") finally began to develop in its own right. The frontier had begun expanding, and Pittsburgh became a sort of gateway to the western part of the continent. As the French knew early on, the three rivers that the city is known for were a necessary and extensively used means of travel throughout the area, connecting the west with the east and the north with the south, and Pittsburgh saw its share of visitors, from George Washington to Daniel Boone to Jim Bowie. Evidence shows that the Hellmouth at the point first leapt into active status sometime during the battle in which

Duquesne was conquered for the British. These days, due to the massive amounts of psychic energy in the area, ghostly images of battles long past can sometimes be seen at the point, and silent visions of soldiers walking translucent ramparts, firing weapons at ancient native warriors, fighting, bleeding, and dying, can be disconcerting at best. These images have been relegated to the local ghost story repertoire that all cities seem to possess.

The fort itself, of course, is long gone; however, visitors can (or could, at one point) walk the outline of the fort by means of a trench in the ground that traces the length of the original foundation. Also still in existence is Bouquet's Blockhouse, the oldest building in Pittsburgh and the only remaining original piece of the fort. Three defensive earthworks from the fort have been recreated on their original sites, and one of these houses the Fort Pitt Museum, a treasure trove of historical information about the city. Vampires stalk the Point late at night, and with the notable exception of holidays such as Independence Day, when the Americans celebrate their noteworthy uprising against the Empire, and various festivals throughout the spring and summer months, it is not advisable to enter the park after sunset.

THE VAMPIRE THREAT

As with anywhere, things in Pittsburgh get far more complicated than history and magic energy. The undead plague this city as they do few other cities I have visited, studied, or even heard about. No one knows how or why this city is such a magnet and breeding ground for the undead, but if our figures are correct, there could very soon be enough of the monsters in existence here for a Master to make its presence known. Should this happen, I fear that the city will truly feel the opening of the gates of Hell. With a Master vampire taking up residence here, there may be little to nothing of the city left.

It seems as of late more and more vampires have been flocking to the city, and many neighborhoods have become almost rabid feeding grounds for the fiends. Rumors circulate that somehow the mayor of the city has fallen under the thrall of a Master Vampire or demonic force of some sort. If this is true, it is an unprecedented and frightening turn of events, for our intelligence points to the possibility of an apocalyptic battle on the horizon. However, if it has happened, this Master has not shown his or

her face. I cannot speculate upon the truth of this rumor, except to say that in rumor there usually lies at least some small grain of truth, some spark that set the rumor mill in motion. Do we have a Master Vampire in control of Pittsburgh? I can't say for certain, but if the shadows at work in the city are any indication, I would say that it is possible. If we do, then may all the gods of light help us, for our troubles have increased tenfold.

CITY MAPS AND PLANS

Maps of the city, as well as tourist-style brochures, are readily available on the Internet, for those who would wish to join the battle for the Point.

MAGIC AND CULTS IN PITTSBURGH

As hinted in the earlier "Ethnic Diversity" section, there are indeed several powerful cults operating in Pittsburgh. There are literally *dozens* of covens and cabals located in warehouses, abandoned buildings, and wooded areas throughout and surrounding the city. Some of the covens and cabals are registered as practicing witches and wizards; most are not. Still, Watchers Council maintains a subtle presence in Pittsburgh and certainly keeps an eye on those cabals it becomes aware of who are not registered.

On a practical note, any and all mages practicing magic or psychic powers in the city proper (downtown area) gain a +2 to all Sorcery tasks. Any effects of failed magick are *doubled* while in the city limits. The lines of mystical energy that surround the city, as well as the one that cuts directly through the center (the underground aquifer, or mysterious "fourth river,") form almost a solid sheet of magick energy. Open mystic and psychic conflict in Pittsburgh is likely to be grandiose and deadly; for this reason most major players turn to other methods of problem solving out of the necessity of keeping a low profile. It also means that cults are constantly scheming to perform their next apocalyptic ritual. There's a heck of a lot more to worry about in Pittsburgh than the vampires and demons. In a game revolving entirely around

light and dark, and the shadowy places between, the shadow wars between cults in a place like Pittsburgh certainly serve to make for an interesting setting.

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RESOURCES

If the Council desires more information on Pittsburgh, there are an abundance of wonderful websites online to provide information both historical and current about the city itself. A few of these are listed below.

Fort Pitt Museum History Page:

<http://www.fortpittmuseum.com/History.html>

Pittsburgh.com:

<http://www.pittsburgh.com/>

A Pittsburgh 20th Century Timeline (from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette™ online):

<http://www.post-gazette.com/newslinks/timeline1900.asp>

Digital City Pittsburgh:

<http://www.digitalcity.com/pittsburgh/>

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Website:

<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/>

An Overview of Pittsburgh History:

<http://zeeb.library.cmu.edu/SAA-PghHostCmte/articles/PittsburghHistory.html>

Pittsburgh Ethnic History:

<http://www.nauticom.net/www/maduro/ethnic.htm>

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Website:

<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/>

The Homestead and Pullman Strikes:

<http://iberia.vassar.edu/1896/strikes.html>

Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy:

<http://www.pittsburghparks.org/>