

Columbia, Maryland: City of Secrets

Part Five: Life inside the Sigil

In this lens, Columbia, Maryland was created by the most interesting kind of adepts: the ones that don't know that they're adepts, or that they just created a permanent and physical magical artifact in the form of an actual Sigil -- or, in fact, that magic exists at all. In fact, it was precisely due to this mystical blindness that the Columbia Sigil exists at all. Any sensible occultist would have blanched at the thought of everything that could have gone wrong... and what a failure would have done to the people who oversaw drawing that Sigil. Basically, it would not have been pretty.

But the Sigil exists, and it has a remarkable effect on the immediate landscape. First off, and most importantly: it fogs any psychic 'signature' found within it. If somebody's trying to find someone else using esoteric means, merely being within the boundaries of Columbia will handily jam the signal in both directions. Second, the Sigil provides the magical equivalent of microclimates: depending on the actual address, magic of one type or another will have a particular flavor to it. This is helpful for supernatural entities trying to, say, finish their lifespans in something approaching peace. Finally: it's remarkably easy for a

ghost to materialize within the Sigil. It's remarkably easier for a ghost that usually materializes *outside* of the Sigil to travel to the Sigil, too. Columbia gets regular spectral visitors from as far out as Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. And those are the *nicer* ones.

Psychic Jamming

It's hard to tell how many supernatural creatures actually live in Columbia, given that the jamming effects everybody's ability to esoterically search the area. But there's enough of them there that, theoretically, every mundane inhabitant of Columbia would know or live near at least one supernatural one. Some of those supernatural entities might have entire neighborhoods or housing complexes to live in.

It's more likely, though, that most of the unnatural inhabitants of the city at least partially keep to themselves. The jamming, again, works both ways: which is a problem for would-be predators who count on their ability to esoterically detect threats or general danger. More than one vampire has been staked in Columbia because he could no longer 'smell' a vampire hunter's aura from three miles away. Under the circumstances, many of the more

monstrous types might prefer to commute out of Columbia for work, or meals.

Special Neighborhoods

Columbia's naming conventions were... strange. The developers deliberately created street names that had precisely nothing to do with the original landscape, while at the same time drawing from the existing regional cultural matrix; from the point of view of somebody who specializes in name-magic, this is six-sevenths of the way to the creation of an actual spell. Only it turned out to be seven-sixths of the way: fortunately, nothing was vaporized in the process. Theoretically. One of the problems with name-magic is that a botched spell can take away both a word, and the *concept* behind that word.

Again, theoretically. It's hard to check.

At any rate, Columbia's street names have power. Live on Broken Lute Way? Spells involving music are easier to cast. The kitchens at Oven Bird Green can be used as the focus for some impressive culinary magic. Anybody who casts a transformation spell in Satinwood Drive (which used to be Satan Wood Drive) will discover that the effect is permanent. And so on. Naturally, supernatural entities

that find a particular neighborhood magically congenial will tend to move there. And tell their friends, which leads to more supernatural entities moving there, and so forth...

Ghost Central

And then there's the ghosts. Columbia pulls them in from all over the state; it's easier to materialize inside the Sigil than pretty much anywhere else. Unfortunately, these are not often very *friendly* ghosts. The Maryland ghost 'scene' revolves around Baltimore on one pole and the antebellum plantation system on the other; and the Undead inhabitants of either are not particularly well-disposed towards the living. It's a measure of how fraught the situation is that the Civil War battlefield sites of Antietam and Gettysburg are usually considered to be downright benign in comparison; certainly their ghosts are measurably better-behaved.

Fortunately, **most** ghosts cannot affect **most** mortals directly. But they can cause problems for supernatural creatures, or those touched by the supernatural; and in Columbia they are both touchier, and livelier, than usual. And there's no way to get rid of them, as long as the Sigil remains up and running...

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