

Neo-rocs

(Struthio neocamelus nivenus)

Description: imagine an ostrich. Now imagine that ostrich as being the chick form of a larger, winged bird, capable of carrying off an elephant in its talons. Now scale **that** bird down to the point where it still can comfortably carry a Halfling wearing twice her weight in gear and tack. They are generally docile enough, even with non-Halflings; but neo-rocs thrive best under the care of Halflings, and the Halflings themselves believe that the best neo-roc riders and handlers are female.

Origins: The Universal Dominion -- that increasingly doomed magical empire that once loomed over post-apocalyptic America like a brooding dragon -- was never much for actual magical experimentation. There was no reason for the Dominion to be interested in research; the magical state of the art was sufficient to allow its archmages lives of power and luxury, and literally nobody else mattered. The only real development that still took place was invariably in a field that **amused**. Giant magical animals amused.

Hence, the neo-roc. Taking clues from the pre-Discovery sage Niven (whose works were simultaneously banned by, and popular with, the Dominion's magical aristocracy), genetic wizards took the Old African ostrich and cracked its genes open enough to transform it into something very much like the roc of legend. This project happened in stages, of course: it took fifteen generations of breeding before they could get a neo-roc that could even fly. It took another five generations to get one big enough to carry, say, a Halfling slave on its back.

It was at that point that Halfling slaves stole the entire breeding population and fled the Universal Dominion as swiftly as they could. The Dominion project was subsequently closed down, partially because the Dominion was increasingly feeling the need for competent wizards for the war effort, but mostly because the Halflings had also booby-trapped the entire breeding complex with primitive claymore mines. There wasn't much of a project **left** in the end, in other words.

Today, the majority of neo-rocs can be found in the Halfling exile colony of Newhome, found in what was once the Yucatan. There have been no real attempts to make the birds **bigger**, as they're already capable of carrying a Halfling rider, but decades of selective breeding has both

tamed and domesticated the species. Neo-rocs are an integral part of Newhome's defense, and a jealously guarded one at that; their flyers act as scouts, pathfinders, and relays.

Stats: Use the *Rukh* (***GURPS Fantasy***, page 50), but reduce ST to 25, remove Unaging and Berserk, and replace Wild Animal with Domestic Animal. SM: +1; Damage: 2d+2/5d-1.

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