

who needs lawyers?



AN ADVENTURE FOR THE WEIRD WEST

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*All service ranks the same with God –
With God, whose puppets, best and worst,
Are we: there is no last nor first.*
– Pippa Passes, Robert Browning

Matson Creek, Wyoming – The town of Matson Creek is peaceful tonight. The miners are at their mines, the homesteaders are in their homes, and the robbers are... well if I knew that, I'd be a robber, wouldn't I? All over town, the only sound to be heard after dark is door bolts sliding.

It wasn't always this way. This rough little miner's town had more than its share of problems keeping the peace. If the miners weren't drunk and ornery, the thieves were. If neither group was causing trouble, it was because the Union Army was in town drinking the leftovers. There was a time not so long ago when a night didn't go by without somebody in town taking a short look up a long barrel, if the knife didn't get 'em first. The best business in town was the Undertaker's.

Well, all that's changed. Law and Order have come to Matson Creek, whether the town likes the idea or not. The miners are quiet. The robbers don't come to Matson Creek anymore. Even the soldiers mind their manners when they come to town. All this would be fine, if the Undertaker's business weren't booming.

Sheriff Carl McClinton was always a nice fellow, the townsfolk say. Everybody liked him when he ran for Sheriff a couple of years back. He was quiet, unassuming, easily lost in a crowd... just the sort of man you want keeping the peace if you're in the mood for some raucous entertainment. He kept mostly to himself and kept a tidy jailhouse. He even arrested folks occasionally. Said it wasn't all that hard. They were mostly passed out by the time he got to them.

After a few months of this, the *law-abiding* folk of Matson Creek started to look for shelter elsewhere...

That's when the grey men rode into town. Everyone assumed Sheriff McClinton had called them, because they rode right to his office. No one has heard any of them called by name. All the townspeople know is each of them sport bright, shiny new Deputy's stars on their shirt. Ever since Sheriff McClinton has changed from a quiet sort to a man

with a mission. There would be order. All of a sudden, the jail was full to bursting with lawbreakers of all stripes. Drunkards shared space with thieves. Killers got hunted down and brought to trial.

Now one would think that criminals would vamoose with the Law taking such an active interest in things. Well, apparently that isn't true around Matson Creek. Seems somebody's got themselves a *mad on* for the Sheriff, and they're taking it out on the townsfolk. It wasn't a week after the arrests started that the Wyatts, a family of settlers come recently to these parts, were found shot full of holes at their farm. Nobody was spared. Not even the four year old boy, Josiah. There was a fresh round of arrests after that. Some of the lawbreakers even made it to the jail...

Somehow most of them kept finding their way to the Undertaker's hands.

There is order in Matson Creek these days. The streets are quiet at night. Nobody breaks the law if they can help it, and the ones that do leave town... fast. That's why they get blown into messy chunks, mostly. They try to escape. All in all, folks say it's quite a difference from the old days. When the Sheriff walks by, they smile and tell him what a good job he's doing. Sure, the smiles are a little forced sometimes, but who's to know? Yessir, there's order in Matson Creek now.

Nobody ever spits on a sidewalk, though.

marshal's information

Who Needs Lawyers? is an adventure intended for a starting *Deadlands* posse of anywhere from three to six players. Feel free to adjust the number of Grey Men to fit your posse. Some skill with a firearm is recommended for at least one character. Then again, in the *Weird West*, some skill with a firearm is recommended for just about everybody...

the man behind the mayhem

Sheriff Carl McClinton got into office because he was a nice guy. The law abiding folks of Matson Creek liked him, and the rest just didn't vote. Truthfully, if enforcing the law was a question of being polite and neighborly, then Carl would have been one hell of a lawman. Problem is, you

Carl was only too glad to accept. In fact, he couldn't deputize the strangers fast enough. Funny how damnation seems like your best option sometimes.

the reform of matson creek

With his new deputies backing him up, Carl felt more up to the challenge of keeping Matson Creek orderly. Most times, the deputies didn't do anything more than look impressive when Carl made his arrests. When they did make a move, it was fast, bloody, and final. It only took a couple of bodies to bring the thieves and miners into line. They stopped sassing their sheriff. Now they paid him respectful attention. It was safer that way.

Carl drank it up. It felt good to be in charge. People looked up to him now.

Before long, Carl was seeing things differently than he ever had before. There were lawbreakers everywhere. Some crossed the street without looking. Some used profane language in public. Some got drunk on Sunday. It was a direct challenge to his authority. The townsfolk were testing his resolve. He knew it was true. His new deputies told him so. He'd show them all. The new Carl McClinton was up to the task.

That's when the arrests began. At first, they were reasonable. If a man goes and hits another man, he ought to spend a night in jail cooling off. Everybody agreed on that. Cussing though, ain't generally a shooting offense.

That's when the Wyatts tried to leave town. At first, Carl was more than happy to let them go. Who needed them anyway? His town was peaceful again. That was all that mattered wasn't it?

The Grey Men had a different view. Who but a lawbreaker would want to leave a peaceful town like his? If the Wyatts wanted out, they must have something to hide, something they didn't want the Sheriff to see. It was a direct challenge to his authority. They had to be stopped.

That pretty much wrapped it up for Carl. The nice unassuming fellow that won a popularity contest for the office of Sheriff was gone, replaced by a puppet of the Grey Men.

The Law has come to Matson Creek. Justice has taken a vacation.

gettin' there ain't nothin'

There are any number of ways to get the posse into Matson Creek. If the heroes are law abiding types, they can be sent in by a Circuit Judge responding to rumors of the unpleasantness. What with the War and the Reckoning going on and all, he's a little strapped for Marshals and deputies just now. Good thing he's a judge. He can just make his own. In this case, the party would have some legal jurisdiction in the shape of a little tin star. Sheriff McClinton won't like that one little bit. That would be – you guessed it! – a direct challenge to his authority.

Maybe somebody's got relatives in Matson Creek. It is a pretty successful mining town at the moment. People used to come to it for miles around. For that matter, maybe the party has heard about opportunities to be had in town.

Maybe... just maybe... they happen to stop there because it's a good place to rest before going into the Rockies. Or is that too much of a stretch?



occasionally have to get rude at people when they break the law, and that just wasn't in Carl's nature. He'd ask people nicely to mind their manners and stroll back to his office, and the real mayhem would get under way. When Carl got back to the scene... well, let's just say his services were usually sort of a moot point by then.

When you got right down to it, Carl knew what the problem was. He just couldn't see any way around it other than giving up his badge. That was something he just didn't want to do. Call it pride. Call it civic responsibility. Call it plumb stupid, if you want. It just wasn't an option to Carl.

That's when the **Grey Riders** showed up. They marched into Carl's office one dusty spring morning and said four words.

"We're here to help."

the posse vs. the law

Any character with eyes should notice there is something odd about Matson Creek. The town is at Fear level 1. Everybody watches the posse carefully, as though sizing the heroes up for some sort of competition. Nobody will talk to them other than to do business. Even then, the townsfolk will be distant and frightened. The way things are these days, they're probably lawbreakers, and it isn't worth your life to be friendly to lawbreakers anymore.

It isn't going to take long for the posse to run afoul of Sheriff McClinton. He prowls the town like a rabid panther these days. No offense is too small to attract his attention. Being from out of town is suspicious enough. If one of the heroes breaks a law, any law, Sheriff McClinton will try to arrest them. He'll be alone the first time the posse encounters him. He's not feeling the need for too much moral support these days, so he leaves the Grey Men behind to guard the prisoners. [Strangely enough, this is when most of the "escape attempts" happen.]

sheriff carl mcclinton

Corporeal

D: 4d8 N: 1d12

S: 4d6 Q: 2d8

V: 4d6

Shootin'/Pistol 3d8, Speed Load 2d8, Dodge 4d12, Fightin'/Brawlin' 2d12, Horse Ridin' 1d12, Quick Draw 2d8

Mental

C: 3d6 K: 3d6

M: 2d8 Sm: 4d6

Sp: 1d6

Search 3d6, Trackin' 2d6, Area Knowledge/Matson Creek 4d6, Overawe 2d8

Wind: 12

There really isn't much left of Carl McClinton these days. The quiet, unassuming fellow who was elected Sheriff just isn't here any more. What remains is an obsessed shell, who's only real joy in life comes from arresting people and throwing them in jail. You can see it in his eyes. They're flat, dull orbs taking up space in his head. They peer sharply and shift constantly in hopes of catching someone doing something... anything... wrong, but there's no life in them. Once they spot a crime, they take on a look of unholy glee. Carl's whole face just lights up in a frightening mask of animation. His breath comes in quick, ragged gasps, as though he's trying to hold something back. Then the words come grating out. "You... are under... arrest!" From then on, he's a typical lawman doing his job. Brisk, confident and ready for anything, you'd almost take him for a normal Sheriff if you couldn't see his eyes; and if he wasn't arresting you for spitting on the boardwalk.

Carl may be obsessed, but he isn't suicidal. If outnumbered by an obviously hostile group, he'll back away. If the arrestee fights back and starts to win, say by dishing out three Wounds or taking out two thirds of his Wind he'll break and run for it. He can't enforce the law if he's dead, and enforcing the law is all he lives for these days. The townsfolk won't help him. They won't help the posse, either.

If the character goes quietly, he's in for a rough time. See, he's already had his trial. It took place the moment Sheriff

McClinton saw the *criminal act*. So far as Carl McClinton is concerned, the character is already convicted and just waiting for sentence to be carried out. Meals are served once a day, water twice. If you don't wake up when slop's on, you don't eat that day.

So far as the Grey Men are concerned, the hero is a corpse waiting to happen. They'll take their time about it. It's more fun that way. Whenever the Sheriff isn't looking, the Grey Men celebrate by using their Soul Eating power on the prisoners. They'll go after each one in turn until they have drained each to half his Wind. They start with the long timers first. That way the new additions get to see what they're in for. Anybody who puts up a serious fight or resists the attempt gets killed "trying to escape."

the grey men

Corporeal

D: 3d10 N: 4d12

S: 3d8 Q: 2d10

V: 1d12

Shootin'/Pistol 4d10, Fannin' 4d10, Fightin'/Brawlin' 3d12, Horse Ridin' 3d12, Fast Draw 2d10, Sneak 3d12, Lockpickin' 3d10

Mental

C: 4d6 K: 4d6

M: 1d10 Sm: 3d6

Sp: 4d10

Search 2d6, Scrutinize 2d6, Overawe 4d10

Terror: 7

Special Abilities

Harrowed. The Grey Men take damage as though they were Harrowed.

Soul Eater. The Level 3 Harrowed Power of the same name; the Grey Men may use the stolen Wind to heal the Sheriff as well, though they can't Bolster him, as they do themselves. All of them must spend the necessary Wind in order to form the bond needed to make the exchange. They must all be touching each other and the Sheriff.

The Offer. If the Grey Men aren't presently twisting a lawman's soul, (say if Carl were to get killed, for example.) the Grey Men can make the same offer to any other peace officer they meet. This is handled by an opposed Spirit test. They must make the offer as soon as they first meet their chosen victim, and can make it once a day after that. If she ever wins a test against the Grey Men, she knows them for what they are. The Grey Men will try to kill her at that point. If she loses, but the Abominations do not score any raises, she doesn't accept, but doesn't run them out, either. The victim is at a cumulative -1 to his roll for every raise the Grey Men score, to a total -6 penalty. If they ever get four raises on one roll, or the resistance roll goes bust, the deal is accepted. Once the deal is accepted, the victim can only be saved by outside intervention. When the first Grey Man is destroyed, the victim gets a new resistance roll at no penalty. The roll is at +2 for each Grey Man destroyed. If the last is destroyed, the roll is against the manitou that first struck the bargain. Draw a random card for the Spirit trait of the manitou. If the victim gets a raise, he's free. Success buys him another roll. If the spirit wins, a new Grey Man leaves town to start the whole cycle somewhere else.



At night, it's a whole different jailbreak. The Grey Men aren't at the jail. They're out stalking the edge of town, picking tomorrow night's victims. Instead there are two other deputies. These guys were hired by the old Carl McClinton. They'll only put up a token fight if attacked overtly, then try to flee, or bargain their way clear.

This is the one time anybody in town will be at all helpful. Nobody wants to get into the action, but anything the posse needs will suddenly become available if it's known they're going to try to break the jail. Can you say dynamite?

reg'lar deputies

Corporeal

D: 2d8 all others: 2d6
Shootin'/Rifle 2d8,

Shootin' Pistol 3d8

Mental

M: 1d8 all others: 2d6
Persuasion 3d8

Weaknesses

The Grey Men take damage normally from a Judge's weapon. If passed sentence upon, even informally, by a legally recognized jurist they are bound to carry the sentence out. So if you can get a Judge to sentence them to be hung until they are dead, the noose will destroy them.

Each of the Grey Men was once a lawman just like Sheriff McClinton. For whatever reason they were ineffective at keeping the peace. After a particularly ugly incident, the first of them (it doesn't really matter what his name was or where he was from) prayed to the *Almighty* for help. What he got instead was a manitou. The spirit made a pact with the sheriff in his dreams. When the poor sod accepted, he signed his own soul's death warrant. Over time, he underwent the same changes Carl McClinton is going through now. In the end, he burned down the "lawless town" he came from. Then he walked into the desert and looked for others in need of his "help."

jailbreak!

If a character gets arrested, the posse is probably going to want to break him out of jail. If the posse tries to take the jail by day, they will have to deal with all three of the Grey Men. The Abominations will hold the jail as long as possible. They will steal the rest of the prisoners' Wind to heal themselves. If they kill the last prisoner, not only is the jailbreak a moot point, but the Grey Men will flee. The prisoners, of course, will scream for the posse to leave.

the showdown

No matter what, by this time the Grey Men are going to take a direct hand in things. Their first move will be to try to take the posse out at night. This will be a straight up assassination attempt (there's no pretense of arrest). The Grey Men will try to hide their identities with heavy clothing and masks, sneak into the characters' rooms, and blow holes in them while they sleep. Carl will not be there. Any hitches in that plan will cause the abominations to flee first to the countryside, then when they're sure they aren't being followed, back to the jail.

The next day, Carl and the Grey Men go on a rampage. Carl is almost through his initiation. There is only one more thing he needs to do to lose his soul completely. Matson Creek must burn. The Abominations and Carl will try to take the posse out first, as the most serious threat to their plans. They'll try to kill them separately if possible. Otherwise, there's going to be a gunfight in the burning town of Matson Creek, Wyoming.

about the author

C.A. Johnson has been a Creative Writing major at Roger Williams University in Bristol, RI for far too long now; so long in fact that he has entered into an indentured servitude arrangement to pay the bills. He spends his off hours playing with his young son and chasing his wife.

the bounty

Part one: Welcome to town. If the players don't commit any crimes, give them two Bounty Points. Anyone who does something illegal (and remember, kiddies, obstruction of justice is illegal) but doesn't go to jail gets one Bounty Point. Anybody that winds up in jail gets nothing but a beating.

Part two: Welcome to Jail. If the players figure out that the Grey Men are behind the whole thing, give them one bounty point. Give them one if they break the jail, two if they do it without killing anybody (except the Grey Men, of course. They get extra for that.)

Part three: Welcome to Hell. Each Grey Man corpse is worth one Bounty Point. If they are brought to trial, make it two. If Carl can be saved, that's worth another. If they can save the town from serious harm, give them one Bounty Point for heroism.



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