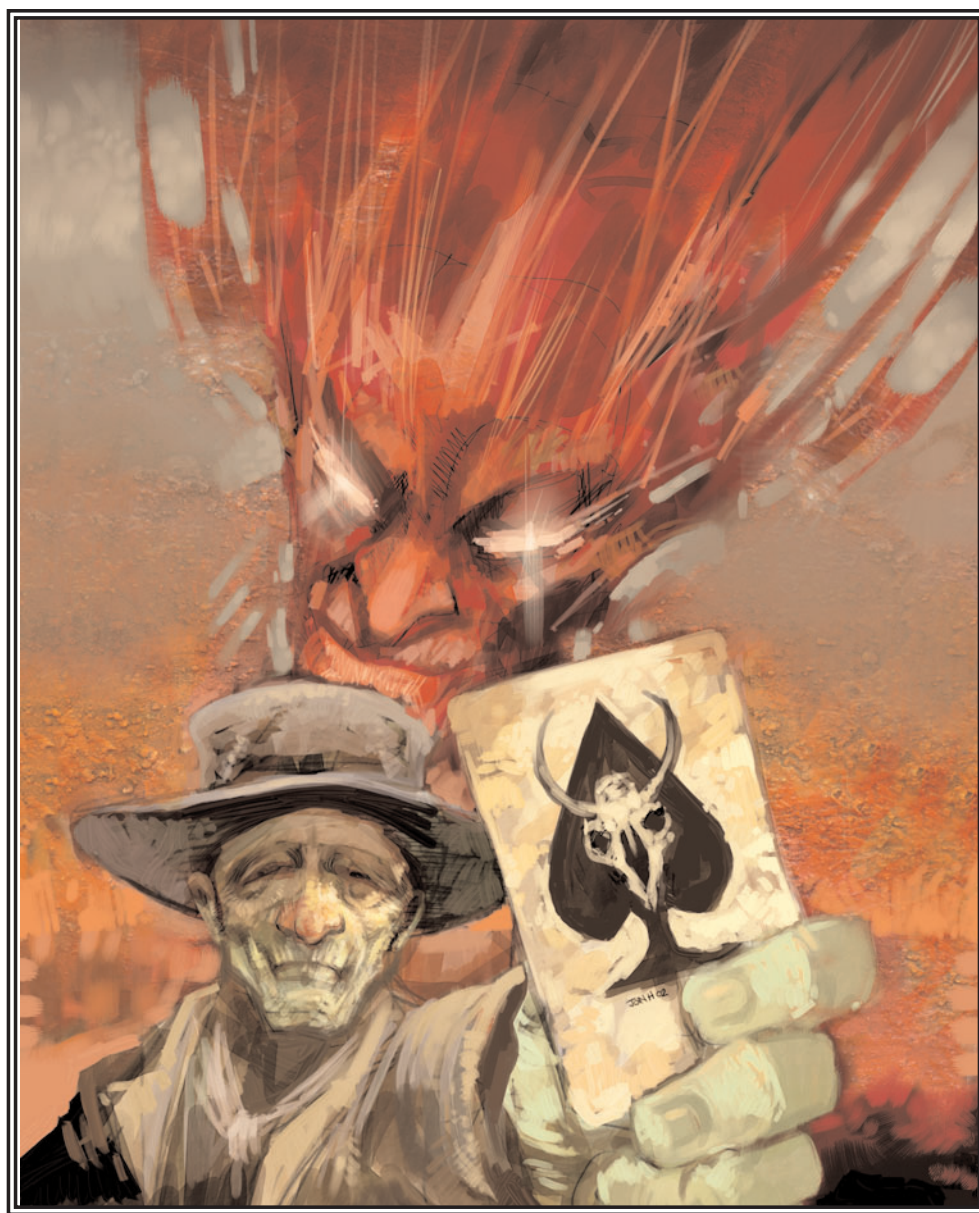


DUST DEVILS

A TRULY GRITTY OLD WEST ROLE-PLAYING GAME



BY MATT SNYDER



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 INTRODUCTION

*"There comes a time when you got
to shoot or give up the gun."*

DUST DEVILS is a role-playing game set in the dust-ridden Old West. Players portray gunslingers, gamblers, cowboys and outlaws who survive in a rugged land, and conquer their own Devils, the dark secrets that keep them from being honest decent folk.

Dust Devils asks, "Can a no-good son of a bitch make right with his ugly, evil past and be a man the God-fearin' people of the West respect and admire? Or, will the Devil get the best of him, and everyone discovers that he's a cheat, a liar or a no-good killer?"

Or, as we might say nowadays, "Can a person reform his dark past and become a hero, or will that past haunt his actions until death?"

Or, perhaps simpler, "What does it take to be a hero in a lawless place where it's hard to just stay alive?"

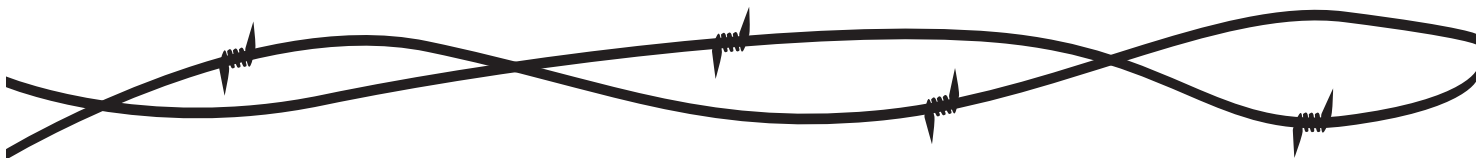
Or, simplest of all, "Can a person change?"

Dust Devils is a game in the tradition of films. *The Outlaw Josey Wales* and *Unforgiven* are two examples. In the former, Josey Wales—played by Clint Eastwood—is a real son of a bitch; yet he's a hero. He doesn't reform his killin' ways. He makes use of 'em right up to the end of the film, at which point we know Josey Wales may be one helluva gunfighter, but he ain't the outlaw he used to be.

Unforgiven is very much the inverse (in fact, the inverse of Westerns in general). William Munny—also played by Clint Eastwood—is an outlaw, and makes no bones that he was a no-good son of a bitch. In the movie, though, he's reformed. "I ain't like that no more," he says. Yet, he's terrible at reform. He can't farm, he can barely ride his old, sway-backed horse, and he can't shoot worth a damn. He finally snaps after they kill Ned, his best friend from the wilder days. He's no longer comical. He becomes a fearsome avenger. In the end, Munny's past comes up to haunt him again as he shoots down six men, including his rival L'il Bill. His legend lives on. He's a "known thief and murderer, a man of notoriously vicious and intemperate disposition." But is he really? That's the great issue in the movie, and it's just the kind of thing *Dust Devils* should facilitate for players.

Shoot or give up the gun. Which is it gonna be?

These movies exemplify *Dust Devils*' premise, which is the Devil mechanic (see **DEVIL**, page 4).



CHARACTERS

IN DUST DEVILS, players portray figures of the American West—the legendary gunslingers, outlaws, dance girls, gamblers, cowboys, and other folks most of us are familiar with through movies and television. Each player creates his or her own character (called a “player character”) using the rules on pages 4–8, while one player—called the “Dealer”—assumes the role of many “non-player characters” as he injects conflict among the other players.

Dust Devils characters have four attributes: Hand, Eye, Guts and Heart. Players divide 13 points among the four attributes for their character as they see fit. Attribute ratings cannot be higher than 5. The Dealer is free to create attributes for non-player characters as he sees fit.



- ♠ Hand represents physical action, i.e. anything a character does with his hands or body. Hand covers everything from the brawn needed to knock a fella into next week to the finesse required to rope an outlaw. Hand is associated with the playing card suit of Spades.
- ♦ Eye measures a character's senses and intellect. Eye might test a character's ability to sense a canyon ambush or challenge his knowledge of Apache traditions. Eye is associated with the suit of Diamonds.
- ♣ Guts reflects a character's vigor and health as well as his courage and cool. It take Guts to take on the whole Bolivian army, and it might take a lot of Guts to keep your shootin' hand steady with a .45 round in your thigh. Guts is associated with the suit of Clubs.
- ♥ Finally, Heart gauges a character's social competence as well as his heroic—or perhaps villainous—nature. Heart makes the ladies swoon, and it sure comes in handy when you're trying to convince the town to fight the railroad's thugs. Naturally, Heart is associated with the suit of Hearts.

These attributes are a means for players to compare characters with their compadres, but more importantly, the attributes are the central mechanic in determining how characters perform when the bull leaves the shoot!

TRAITS

In addition to the four attributes above, all player characters have two figurative descriptors to highlight their most obvious qualities. In true Western style, these are written as similes. “Tough as nails” or “Dumb as a post” are two examples. When a character tries to overcome a conflict, he earns an extra card in the Deal if he overcomes it in a way that emphasizes one of his two descriptors.

Example: Dylan “Bang” McCreedy has the following traits “Strong as an ox” and “Crazier than popcorn on a hot stove.” Should McCreedy need to free himself from underneath his fallen horse, he’d get an extra card because using brute strength in this way matches his “Strong as an Ox” descriptor perfectly. Similarly, if ol’ Bang McCreedy decides to rob a bank with a lit stick of dynamite in each hand, he’d get a card for his obviously crazy action (and perhaps his last!).

KNACKS

Players also select several Knacks—skills or talents at which their characters are proficient. Knacks have a rating ranging from 1 to 4, with 1 being a novice and 4 being an expert. Players distribute 11 points among their selected Knacks ratings, but the total number of Knacks may not exceed the total of the character's Hand+Eye attributes or 6, whichever is higher.

Knacks can be any suitably narrow skill. For example, Thievin' is probably too broad, but Rustlin' (stealing cattle) is probably just fine.

Knacks are useful in conflicts by helping players improve their hands (see **THE DRAW**, page 10).

Example Knacks include: Ambushin', Dancin', Drinkin', Gamblin', Politickin', Shootin', Readin' 'n Writin', 'Rithmetic, Ropin', Safe Crackin', Trappin', Ridin', and so on. Players and the Dealer are welcome to create any number of Knacks well suited to their character concepts.



FINALLY, every character's got a Devil. It's that ugly side you don't want the preacher to know about. Devil is that element you're trying to fight, good or bad. It's that dark, personal history that you just can't shake no matter how far you ride, how much you drink or how many men you done killed.

The Devil can be a simple phrase, a one or two sentence description or paragraph that explains the character's troublesome past.

A good example of a Devil is something that stays with a character, no matter how often he tries to solve the problem. It could be that, “Drinkin' leads him to ruin, and he just can't seem to turn it down.” Or it



might be that he's a "Wanted man." Whether the character committed the original crime or not, the law's after him, and he's always looking over his shoulder and doing what it takes now to get by.

These two examples—*drinkin'* and being a *wanted man*—are a fair start for a Devil, but there needs to be a little more meat to the story. What's missing is *why* the character is a drinker or a wanted man. How did he find himself in that situation? How does that troublesome past keep affecting him currently?

For example, after tracking down an escaped slave, bounty hunter Zeke Munroe prefers to see the world from the inside of a whiskey bottle. This is important because it demonstrates Zeke's character. Zeke isn't about the drinking; he's about issues of freedom and captivity, and innocence and guilt. That is, Zeke's Devil reflects the important issues the player should explore with the character in game play. Whenever Zeke enters conflicts related to these issues—like capturing the wrong man, for example—his Devil affects the outcome of the conflict.

One way to create backstory details for a character's Devil is to narrate flashback scenes during play. The player needs only the basic framework for his character's Devil; he (and his fellow players) can create the details as he goes along. These in-character vignettes can reveal bit by bit what haunts a character, and what motivates him now.

A poor example of a Devil is something the player might be able to resolve neatly in one or two sessions of play. For example, it might be just too easy to say a character's Devil is "Get revenge on the sons-of-bitches that killed his wife." Should he do just that, he might just as well settle down and see what all this mail-order bride hubbub is all about.





Instead, the Devil should be something dark and disturbing—some poor choice the character made in his past that he now has to live with as it factors into every important decision in his life. In the “get revenge” example above, the Devil isn’t something troubling the character did. Rather, it’s something terrible that happened to him. While getting revenge might be entertaining for a short time, there isn’t really anything else to challenge the character.

With a little twist, however, this Devil could work. The player might expand that Devilish history, saying that the character is a federal marshal whose wife was killed by a band of outlaws. The character then has to walk the line between revenge and justice (as seen in the film *Hang ‘Em High*), and this struggle should affect every action he makes. His dilemma shouldn’t be limited just to the murdering outlaws; it applies to everyone he interacts with. Even if the outlaws are captured or killed, the Devil haunts him still.

THE DEVIL’S DUE

Each character’s Devil has a rating from 1 to 3 that the player can change from session to session. This rating indicates how much the Devil haunts the character. A rating of 1 means the Devil is subtle, a personal flaw kept mostly under control, and the character is able to go about his business for the most part. A rating of 2 indicates seething tension as the character’s past begins both to enliven and spoil day-to-day issues. Finally, a character with a Devil rating of 3 is a tempest of dramatic activity; the Devil infects nearly every decision he makes, resulting in spectacular success almost as often as it does terrible loss.

At the beginning of each session, the player decides what his character’s Devil rating will be. He might take into account the events of a previous session—a particularly devastating encounter with a figure from his criminal past in the previous session might encourage the player to set his Devil rating at 3 as things come back to haunt him. Conversely, someone playing a character for the first time may simply opt to set his new character’s Devil rating at 1 and let the Devil stew quietly until things build up in subsequent sessions.

It really is up to the player and how much he wants to “dance with the Devil” in play. Just keep in mind that the Devil is a forked-tongue snake—the rating can work for or against a player! The Devil may come into play as part of any given conflict. When it does, the Devil results in a modified number of cards for the Deal for that player.

For example, Zeke Munroe’s Devil is that he’s a “mean drunk,” and Zeke’s player has set the Devil rating at 2 for the current session. Zeke might lose two cards whenever he’s involved in conflict involving liquor—or just the temptation to drink it—comes along. Say he’s trying to impress Sally at the saloon. Thanks to the pint of whiskey Zeke just downed after losing \$50 at the roulette wheel, Sally’s not likely to go upstairs with a mean drunk like him, at least not without a couple dollars. The Dealer decides to deal two fewer cards in that conflict.

Conversely, our boy Zeke might earn a couple more cards in the Deal should he need to walk across the same saloon when a knock-down, drag-out fight breaks out. A little liquid courage never hurt the old Guts attribute.

THE GAME

IN DUST DEVILS, all players are expected to take part in narrating the game. This ain’t no one-man narrator game in which the “Game Master” has complete control. As characters move from place to place and scene to scene, everyone playing the game should take part in describing what’s going on, who’s involved and generally what the scene is like. Players should think about the following:

- ☞ First and foremost, players should consider how their characters (and even their fellow players’ characters) act, think and feel about the events of a scene. Most importantly, players should think about their character’s Devil and how that affects the decisions and action they take.
- ☞ Players should consider the five senses. The West is a lively place, filled with sights, sounds, smells and more. Players can bring these senses to life with colorful, vivid description when narrating the



game as other players do the same.

- ☞ Players can set the mood of a scene with their narrative contributions. With some thoughtful description, a player can set the scene for any number of moods—tension, irony, fear, melancholy and so on. For example, if a player senses tension that might erupt later into a brawl or gunfight, describe it as a “cold-staring, finger-twitching affair.”

Remember, players should feel free to create elements outside their character when helping describe a scene. This might be as simple as coloring details of the scenery and locale, or it might be as important as the introduction of other non-player characters without input from the Dealer.

THE DEALER'S ROLE

AS PLAYERS contribute to the creation of the shared narrative, the Dealer acts as a director, keeping all the parts of the multi-character story coherent. He adds details and narration of his own, and he edits, adapts or revises details offered by other players to keep things consistent and focused. The Dealer should guide the story, keeping players focused on their characters and the issues directly related to their characters' Devils. His job is more to react to the actions of player characters than it is to single-handedly guide the players through a narrative of his own crafting. The Dealer's role is not to toss prepared scenarios or linear plot lines at the characters to see if they can worm their way out and “solve” the situation.

This is not to say the Dealer cannot create elements of a scene. He can and should do this at least as much as the other players do. The Dealer should create a host of non-player characters, including unique and special figures that act as important people in the life of the player characters. They might be a character's darlin', maybe his ma and pa, his archrivals, partner or some other crucial personalities.

In addition to creating important non-player characters, the Dealer's most important role is handling conflict. If players act through their characters as they should (that is, motivated by their Devils to both good and bad deeds), the Dealer will find himself handling conflicts often. Players will get themselves into trouble

WHAT IS A CONFLICT?

Just what in God's creation is a conflict? A conflict is any risky situation in which characters have something to lose while trying to meet their goals. They might risk all sorts of things about their character. When characters lose in the Deal, they might lose their temper, lose face in embarrassment, lose their nerve, or lose all common sense. Or just plain ol' lose some blood! All kinds of results are possible as character's deal with conflict.

But, remember that conflict need not be physical confrontation. Conflict could be a test of a character's Cheatin' Knack as he gambles. It could be social interaction like bartering for horses. Or, indeed, conflict could be out-and-out brawling and gunfighting.

All conflicts could result in Difficulty, which diminishes the losers' attributes when characters fail to win the Deal.

Conflict might be as simple and direct as a horse race across a dusty gulch, or as complex and subtle as negotiation for peace with Indian elders (this negotiation could occur over a series of individual conflicts and several Deals). Either way, the Deal determines the winners and losers of a single conflict, and each hand specifies how much Difficulty losers receive as well as which player will narrate how the conflict plays out.



with little or no nudging from the Dealer.

Still, the Dealer should introduce conflicts to stir the pot and keep things interesting. These conflicts could be any challenge for the characters ranging from subtle social provocations over a game of cards to a full-fledged gun battle in the town streets. Ideally, the Dealer should introduce conflicts as a challenging consequence of decisions made by the player characters. Similarly, the conflicts should provoke at least one character's Devil. Conflicts that do both work best of all!

For more advice on being the Dealer, see **RAW DEALER**, page 16.

THE DEAL

WHEN A CONFLICT erupts during play, all players declare what their characters' goals are in the immediate conflict. The Dealer then deals a number of playing cards (from a U.S. regulation poker deck, including the two Jokers) to each player involved. He also usually deals himself a hand because he controls either a non-player character or represents another challenge (see **FIVE CARD STUD** below). Success for the players hinges on beating the Dealer at his game. The highest Poker hand in a conflict is the "winner," and progressively better poker hands indicate increasingly extraordinary success. The winner succeeds at his declared goal, though exactly how he succeeds is up to the narrator (see **FASTEST TONGUE IN THE WEST**, page 11). Losers may or may not succeed in their goal; this is up to the narrator of the scene.

The number of cards dealt depends on the conflict. With the Dealer's approval, each player receives a number of cards in the deal equal to his two most relevant or most interesting attributes for the situation. Players should size up the conflict situation and determine which two attributes work best for their character, or perhaps which pair might make the scene most entertaining.

It's down right common for a single character to have three or even four relevant attributes for a given conflict. Players might easily imagine how Hand, Eye, and Guts apply in a gunfight, for example. However, only two are allowed for the Deal. The player must choose, and that decision might be based on a number of factors, including which attributes are highest, which might be temporarily lowered through Difficulty (see **DIFFICULTY**, page 12), or which pair gives his character the best swagger!

FIVE CARD STUD

For conflicts in which the Dealer does not control or involve an important non-player character (i.e. a non-player character with his or her own Devil), the Dealer typically deals himself a "Five Card Stud" hand. This means the Dealer gives himself five cards to challenge the players' various hands. The single five card stud hand may represent any game conflict—from a rampaging, driverless stagecoach to a pack of thugs in a bar room brawl. The dealer can not discard and redraw any cards from his Five Card Stud hand (though he may award a Chip to each player to do so; see **WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN**, page 13).

***Here's an example:** While running from a posse after making a big score on a train heist, "Black" Jack Kerrigan and Luke Johnson are trapped in a clever ambush. They have a choice in this challenge—face the posse hot on their trail or leave their horses and jump off a cliff into a raging stream below. Quite a conflict. The Dealer deals cards, giving himself five cards because none of the posse members is a significant character. Should the Dealer have the high hand, the narration might indicate the posse surrounds and captures Black Jack and Luke. Alternatively, the narrator might let Black Jack and Luke make their daring leap only to be injured in the fall. However, if one or more of the characters wins, the fugitive pair safely leap into the stream and swim to their next escapade.*

For relatively minor conflicts, the Dealer may simply deal himself a "Three Card Stud" hand. Minor conflicts are less difficult or have only slight consequences. Stakes should not be rewarded for such minor conflicts. The Dealer should consider whether such small conflicts are worth a Deal; it sometimes is better to simply resolve the conflict through colorful narration and move on.



Here's an example of a minor conflict: After escaping the posse, "Black" Jack Kerrigan, Luke Johnson and their newfound partner in crime, Dylan "Bang" McCreedy, query the regulars in a town saloon, trying to find out when the mine company payroll will arrive at the bank across the street. The Dealer decides getting folks to talk about the financially important event isn't difficult, but the locals might be suspicious of a bank robbery in the making (quite rightly!). So, he deals himself three cards. Should his meager hand win, the consequences are slight. The locals might be a bit suspicious or less friendly. But, if Black Jack, Luke and McCreedy overcome the Three Card Stud hand, they don't really deserve any greater reward than the information they coax from the saloon patrons.

On the other hand, for exceptionally hazardous conflicts, the dealer may take a "Seven Card Stud" hand, dealing himself seven cards with no option to discard and redraw (without awarding chips to each player). For overcoming such difficult conflicts, the Dealer should usually reward the players with Stakes of at least one Chip.

For example, if our trio of outlaws scouting out the bank in the previous example find out that the payroll arrived that same damn morning, which is why everyone's at the saloon drinking Kentucky joy juice before noon, they've got a dilemma. They need the money to post bail for their jailed partner Zeke Munroe back in Last Oak, so they decide to waltz across the street and nab the cash now! They don't have a plan, they have no idea who or what might be at the bank, and they don't have an escape route planned. This is going to be tough. The only thing in their favor, the Dealer notes to himself, is that no one of consequence guards the money. But, the new model locked vault, the teller with a loaded pepperbox, and the nearby sheriff's office is enough to warrant a seven-card hand for the dealer. It's also, the Dealer decides, enough of a mess to warrant two chips for the crazy bastards should they pull it off!



THE DRAW

PLAYERS can improve their characters' initially dealt hands with character Knacks. For each Deal, a player can discard up to a number of cards equal to one of his character's relevant Knack ratings. The player may choose to discard any number or combination of cards, so long as he does not exceed the limit dictated by his Knack rating. The Dealer then deals to the player an equal number of new cards from the deck. Characters without a relevant Knack for a given conflict may not draw additional cards, unless they spend chips (see **WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN**, page 13).

Players are welcome to use their characters' Knacks creatively during conflicts. For example, the Rustlin' Knack may not seem like much use during a shoot out, but Reggie Spencer might effectively knock down a stockyard fence and cause a stampede to save his skin from crack shot bounty hunters. The Dealer has authority to decide whether an unusual use of a Knack like this is permissible in a given Deal.

CALL

WHEN ALL PLAYERS and the Dealer settle their hands, the Dealer calls and everyone shows his hand. A player may have several cards in his hand (as many as 7 or 8 or more), but he can "lay" only up to five cards. Players ignore excess cards; only the five cards a character lays at Call count toward resolving a conflict. Players with fewer than five cards in their hand simply lay all the cards in their hand, all of which count toward resolving the conflict.

Note: Just as in Poker, without a pair or better in any player's hand, high card wins. Also, Jokers are as Wild Cards. See **POKER HANDS**, Page 24.

Players should consider carefully which five cards to lay. Players should seek to win the conflict, by choosing the best poker combination possible. Players should also consider the importance of earning narration rights with the high card (See **FASTEST TONGUE IN THE WEST**, page 11), which may or may not be part of their poker combination. In rare extraordinary hands—especially a Full House or any kind of Strait or Flush—the player should consider whether to include a high card or maintain the five-card combination.

For example, the sharp-witted "Black" Jack Kerrigan has managed to get himself and all his comrades in an ugly shootout. After the Dealer dealt him 3♥, 3♣, 7♦, 7♣, 9♦, Q♦ in the initial Deal, he used his character's Shootin' Knack to draw back an additional two cards. He discarded the 9♦ and Q♦, and redrew the 3♦ and K♠. Now Black Jack has a Full House! But, if he lays the full house for this conflict, he likely won't have high card for control of narration, which might be important for helping out his buddies. He's got to choose between laying the Full House or laying Two Pair (still a good hand) and having that K♠ for a good shot at high card.

SHUFFLING

ONCE A CONFLICT has been resolved, play resumes. Sometimes, however, conflict begets conflicts. This happens most often in a fight as characters keep risking it all to be the last man standing. When the Dealer calls, everyone resolves his goals and any Difficulty inflicted, the narrator describes the outcome, and the conflict is over. Should players or the Dealer wish to continue the conflict, the Dealer shuffles the deck and deals a fresh hand to continue the conflict. Technically, any subsequent hands are new conflicts (and the narrator should consider this), but the type of conflict may be precisely the same as the first (like a shootout, for example). As an optional rule, the Dealer may allow the "winner" (or "winners") of the previous conflict to receive an extra card in the deal for conflicts that follow immediately in this way.



KNOW WHEN TO FOLD 'EM

WHEN A CONFLICT just looks too damn tough, players can Fold and remove their character from the situation. A player must declare Fold before the Dealer Calls. Doing so likely means the issue will remain unresolved, and the situation will rear its ugly head again in the future. Folding requires a player to spend a Chip or the Dealer to award Chips to each player (see **WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN**, page 13).

FASTEST TONGUE IN THE WEST

IT WOULDN'T BE the Old West without some tall tales to spice things up. In every conflict situation (i.e. Every Deal), narration of the event falls on the single player with the highest single card laid at Call. This means only cards that are part of the five cards players lay down count toward determining high card. Ignore all other cards.

In many cases, the player with the highest winning hand will lay the high card. However, even the lowest ranking hand can yield the high card—the A♠, for example.

The “winner” of a hand succeeds in his declared goal, and the narrator describes just how his goal is fulfilled. The “loser” of a conflict may or may not have succeeded in his goal. It is the narrator’s choice to determine this.

The narrator should take into account not only who “wins” and “loses” the conflict, but also how they won or lost. This should color his description. Extraordinary hands—like a Full House (Three of a Kind coupled with Two of a Kind)—indicate dramatic and exceptional events, while winning a hand with just a single high card indicates a relatively mundane or routine success for the character.

Being the narrator has distinct advantages. The player who narrates gets exclusive rights to describe resolution of the single conflict at hand. While his authority is shorter lived than a Texas tornado, the player can really stir things up at critical moments. Often, the player will narrate that future conflicts and scenes play right into his hands. This tremendous power is flexible, too. The player might, for example, decree that even losing hands deliver Difficulty to winner (see **DIFFICULTY**, page 12).

STAKES

AT IMPORTANT dramatic moments, the Dealer may declare Stakes for a crucial conflict. This is the reward players can earn should their character win the important challenge. The Dealer offers rewards as Chips; players are encouraged to use actual poker chips to represent these. The Dealer generally sets Stakes at one Chip, but he may offer two or three Chips for especially important moments in game play.

The Dealer should offer Stakes for any conflict situation that he thinks will be a dramatic turning point in the game. For example, if the players finally get into a shootout with the notorious outlaw they chased from St. Louis to Santa Fe, the Dealer should offer Stakes. Such dramatic moments may also be more spontaneous. For example, a player could show a love interest in a heretofore unimportant dancehall girl. Though the Dealer didn't expect it, he should react accordingly and offer Stakes when the character tries to sweet talk his newfound darling into following him to California. The Dealer also should expand the dancer's background and create a suitable Devil for her. He may not introduce her troubled life until a later game session, but she'll be well defined for future conflicts.

Also, the Dealer should offer Stakes any time a character deals with his Devil in a substantive way. For example, a character whose devil is “massacred an Indian village” could earn stakes when he deals with that history positively—perhaps by successfully befriending an Apache scout, even though the Heart-based challenge would be difficult due to fewer cards drawn as a result of his Devil.



DIFFICULTY

CHARACTERS who lose conflicts lose attribute points. Simple as that. Conflicts are dangerous that way. They have a way of whittling a poor soul down until the only thing he's got left is to make a deal with the Devil.

When a character loses a conflict, he subtracts a number of attribute points equal to the number of cards in the Poker combination that beat him. The player subtracts the points as desired from the attributes related to the suits played in the winning Poker combination.

***An example:** “Lucky” Luke Johnson isn’t living up to his name. A rival gunslinger shoots at him in a conflict, playing three of a kind in the hand to do it: 5♥, 5♣, and 5♦. Therefore, Luke loses three points from his Heart (Hearts suit), Guts (Clubs suit) and/or Eye (Diamonds suit). Luke’s player subtracts the three points of damage as he sees fit. He can subtract 3 from a single attribute, or subtract 1 point from all three attributes if he chooses.*

When Jokers constitute part of a hand, subtract damage only from the suits played in other cards. In the example hand above, if the 5♦ had instead been a Joker, Luke would have lost 3 points from his Heart (Hearts suit) and/or Guts (Clubs suit) in any combination.

It’s important to remember that while a character loses attributes, the Difficulty inflicted may or may not be actual physical harm. It’s up to the describing character to explain the injury or reason for attribute loss.

***For example,** if Luke’s player decided to subtract one point from each attribute “hit” in the example above, the narrator of that scene might say the gunslinger’s wild shot grazed Luke’s forehead. The blood trickling into his eyes explains him losing a point of Eye. Getting shot at makes him reluctant to fight on, which explains the loss of Guts, and the ugly, though not down right pernicious, wound makes him a gruesome sight to everyone, hence the loss of Heart. He may look a bit worse for the wear, but maybe Luke is lucky after all—the wound could be a lot worse.*

Alternatively, the same hand could be described a bit more comically: The narrating player says the gunslinger’s wild shot knocks down a chandelier that falls on poor Luke’s head. The loss of a point in his three attributes is a reflection of his being a bit dazed by the event (loss of Eye and Guts), not to mention more than a little embarrassed (loss of Heart).

RECOVERY

Characters recover all damage to attributes at the end of each game session. The Dealer may rule that damage carries over into the next session if he thinks events are unfinished or so closely tied that characters have little chance for rest and recovery.

Characters reduced to zero in any single attribute do not recover Difficulty in that attribute. See **THE ROAD TO HELL**, page 14.

Characters may recover lost attribute points during the course of a session. This requires the successful use of Knacks in a conflict to heal, console or otherwise aid the poor cuss, and the treatment must fit the description of the damage. See the table below to determine the difficulty of the recovery.



**Attribute points
recovered**

Dealer’s Hand

1-2

3 Card Stud hand

3-4

5 Card Stud hand

5+

7 Card Stud hand





For example, after a shoot-out, the narrator described Dylan McCreedy's Difficulty as actual physical injury. To recover, he'll need the help of Doc Samuelson, who could use his Doctorin' Knack to stitch McCreedy up. However, if the narration described the damage as an embarrassing encounter resulting in a loss of Heart and Guts for McCreedy, then the solution for recovery may be a little lovin' from "Red" Sally (and her Entertainin' Knack) upstairs in the Red Roof Saloon, or maybe just a shot or two of whiskey downstairs (using McCreedy's own Drinkin' Knack) to get back to his old self!

WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN

IN THE COURSE of the game, players will win stakes presented after challenging conflicts. The Dealer may opt to give players a small number of chips to begin play. Players can use the tokens to various effects to improve their character's abilities, assume narration of a conflict and improve their chances of getting a decent hand in a Deal. Players may spend earned Chips for the following:

- ☞ **Improve Attributes**—Players can spend Chips to increase their characters' attributes. Improving an attribute costs a number of Chips equal to twice the new rating. Individual attributes cannot be higher than 5.
- ☞ **Improve or earn additional Knacks**—Increasing a Knack costs a number of Chips equal to the new Knack rating. Knacks may be increased only one point at a time. Purchasing a new Knack at Novice level (1) costs two Chips. Characters may have a maximum number of Knacks equal to their Hand + Eye attributes or 6, whichever is higher.
- ☞ **Assume Narration of a Hand**—By spending one Chip, a player can assume the narration of one hand, pre-empting narration by the player with the high card as described in the rules above. Should another player or players attempt to spend a Chip to assume narration, the players may bid for narrative control of the scene. The player who spends the most Chips narrates. Note, however, that the player with high card may bid in this process; the player with high card need only meet the highest Chip bid to regain narrative control of the scene.

Assuming narrative control by spending a Chip (plus any required to win bidding) also allows the player to restore one point of any Difficulty his character suffered in the conflict (see **DIFFICULTY**, page 12). If a player suffers Difficulty that reduces an attribute to 0, then spending the Chip restores his attribute to a rating of 1, regardless of how much Difficulty he suffered (attributes can not go lower than zero).

For example, A Zeke Munroe has a Guts rating of only 2 after experiencing Difficulty in a prior conflict. In this latest harrowing conflict, he's hit with another round of Difficulty. This time, the hand that beat him is a potent Flush of Clubs, which delivers five points of Difficulty to his Guts attribute. However, Zeke's player needs to spend only one Chip (plus any required to win bidding) to restore Zeke's Guts attribute rating back to 1. The Player does not and cannot spend multiple Chips to get his attribute rating restored to 1. Players may restore only 1 point of Difficulty per conflict in this way.

- ☞ **Receive an Extra Card**—Players can receive one extra card in the Deal by spending one Chip. Players may draw only one extra card per hand.
- ☞ **Draw an Additional Card**—Players may draw back one additional card in the Draw. This is in addition to any drawn cards for the character's Knacks. Players may draw back only one additional card per hand.
- ☞ **Fold**—The player may spend one chip to Fold, thereby removing his character from the risks and the rewards of a given conflict. Characters who fold receive no Stakes from the Dealer after a given conflict, even if their Devil came into play before they folded. If all player characters Fold, then the conflict remains unresolved, and the Dealer—or even the players themselves—may re-introduce the issue at a later time.



Dealers must *award* chips to do the following:

- ☞ **Receive an Extra Card**—The Dealer may award one chip to each player and receive one extra card in the Deal.
- ☞ **Draw an Additional Card**—The Dealer may award one chip to discard a card and redraw a new one from the deck in a hand.
- ☞ **Fold**—The Dealer may award one chip to each player present in a conflict to Fold. Just as when Players fold, the conflict ceases without resolution. Character participants, including those run by the Dealer, are immune to Difficulty once the dealer folds, and Players receive no extra awards, even if their Devil came into play before the Dealer folds. The Dealer should only fold in conflicts involving important non-player characters.



⚔ THE ROAD TO HELL ⚔

“We all got it comin’, kid.”

WHEN A CHARACTER reaches zero in any single attribute, his time of reckoning has come, whether he’s ready or not! Now, reaching zero may indeed mean the character will be dead and gone. However, the character’s actual fate is up to the player. He may die, retire, go mad, settle down, move on or otherwise end his struggling days.

Here’s how it works. When a character reaches zero in any single attribute after a conflict, he’s on his last leg. The player continues to play normally. He may continue to narrate as play progresses as other players can, and he may take part in conflicts that do not involve the zero-rated attribute. However, should the character take part in any conflict requiring the use of that attribute, it will be his last.

In place of the zero-rated attribute, the player uses his Devil rating to determine how many cards he receives in the Deal. He still adds the other relevant attribute to this total. (If the character has two relevant attributes that are both reduced to zero, then he receives a number of cards equal to double his current Devil rating.) The player may also discard and re-draw a number of cards equal to his Devil rating. This is



in addition to any relevant cards re-drawn using Knacks.

In addition, the player automatically receives rights to narrate the conflict. If two or more characters enter a conflict with zero-rated attributes, the controlling players must bid for control of the scene using any remaining Chips. Other players, including the Dealer, may not bid in this case.

Players and the Dealer should be keenly aware of the importance of this crucial moment. The player should make every attempt to enter such a final conflict in a way that involves his Devil. Players may wish to Fold or otherwise skirt conflicts while they have a zero-rated attribute in order to reach a meaningful final conflict.

The player should carefully consider the results his character's last stand. For example, if the Devil rating draws a winning hand (i.e., if the character wins the conflict), it could indicate that the Devil has finally taken hold of the character. Only his desperate effort to fall back on the support of Devil allows the character to win out. Conversely, a character might use his Devil as a terrible means to a heroic end. He passes on, among much infamy and derision, as a Devilish soul, all while earning the safety or redemption of others.

This is really a chance to go out in style and steal the show as narrator. Players should make every effort to make their characters' last conflicts memorable and dramatic.

HOW THE WEST IS DONE

PLAYING DUST DEVILS is a different experience than playing many other role-playing games. One crucial difference is recognizing who is in control of the game. In many role-playing games, the game master is in control; he controls the narration, the conflicts and rewards for success. *Dust Devils* takes a different trail. In this game, the Dealer has nowhere near that level of authority. In times of conflict, the game rules explicitly pass the control of narrating a scene from player to player (including the Dealer) through the high card mechanic.

Outside these tense moments of conflict, the players still maintain a lot of control over how the game proceeds. As a player, you shouldn't sit in the saddle, waiting for the Dealer to present some kind of "plot line" or "adventure" or some other ripfire reason to interact with non-player characters and get your character into whole messes of trouble. Instead, you should jump right into action, with your character's Devil as a guide. Rather than wait around for trouble from the Dealer, you should be raising hell yourself. Let the Dealer react to you, rather than the other way around! With your partners doing the same based on their own Devil-ish backgrounds, your game sessions will be wilder than a turpentine cat.

This is not to say the Dealer won't inject some conflict. He's going to bring some by-god hellfire your way, sure enough. But, by and large, he'll introduce conflict and developments directly related to your characters and their Devils. The conflicts and struggles of game player should be *for* your characters and *about* your characters. You should not be a bystander to action and intrigue generated by the Dealer. If the Dealer does introduce seemingly unrelated conflicts, don't let him get away with it. Get involved. Stick your nose where it belongs—in the game.

RAISE HELL OR DIE TRYIN'

That leads us to another crucial difference between many other games and *Dust Devils*. Typically, other games encourage players to survive and improve their resources and abilities. Beat the monster, outwit or outfight the clan elders, get the treasure, save the girl and so on, but make sure to live on and fight another day.

Dust Devils doesn't give a spit whether your character lives or dies. The only thing that matters is whether the Devil gets his due, whether your character has what it takes to decide then act to save his soul. Shoot or give up the gun. The rest just doesn't matter.

What that means is that there's precious little point to playing it safe. We all know it ain't smart to get into a showdown with no-good dirty outlaws. It'll get you dead quick. But this game isn't about safety, it's about redemption. If your character's got a good damn reason to get into a showdown with some no-good cowboys, then he should go in guns blazing.

Of course, there's no better time to do this than when your character's on his last leg. The game rules pro-



vide ample opportunity for players with zero-rated attributes to go out memorably. Your job as a player is to recognize that, and live up to your character's good or bad name.

RAW DEALER

PLAYERS aren't the only ones who have a different role in playing *Dust Devils*. The Dealer is faced with a sometimes uncertain task tugging on the reins of many narratives created by all the players. Being the Dealer in this game is unlike the game master's role that is so familiar in many role-playing games. Such games often follow a fairly predictable sequence in which players encounter a problem presented by the game master, investigate the problem, and solve the issue in some climactic scene, usually a battle.

Dust Devils doesn't work well under that model. The Dealer has to be quick on the draw and react to the players. Don't waste time creating scenarios or complex plots. Don't create plots at all. That's really everyone's job during play; the players and the Dealer will craft engrossing plots as the game unfolds.

WANTED!

Instead, the Dealer should create a handful or more of non-player characters that are linked in some way to the player characters. This connection could be a close relationship, like family or romantic involvement, or it could be some other motivational conflict. Either way, important non-player characters should have to potential to affect or trigger a player character's Devil. The Dealer should avoid creating characters that are just plain interesting, and instead think about how the non-player characters relate to the player characters.

Just as player characters have a Devil, so too should some of the Dealer's most important non-player characters. Often, these bedeviled souls will act as antagonists, villains, or rivals to the player characters. However, allies and love interests with Devils make game play more interesting as the player characters and non-player characters alike seek to reckon with Old Scratch. By giving a non-player character a Devil, the Dealer creates for himself a motivation for that character to act.

The Devil mechanics for non-player characters operates just as it does for player characters. The Dealer should set a Devil rating (though he may do this from the hip during play as players introduce or elevate important characters through narration). This rating affects the Deal in relevant conflicts just as it does for players. Non-player characters may, therefore, receive more or fewer cards as part of the Deal.

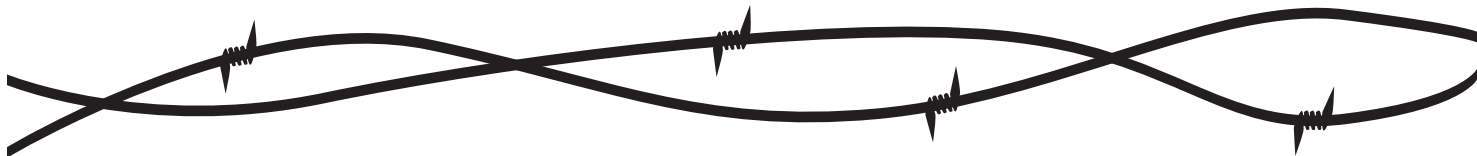
Note that when the Dealer may be controlling a number of characters or hazards that affect a single conflict, he may deal himself more than one hand. It often works best to hold a single "stud" hand for a conflict involving multiple hazards. Simply think of all the factors as one complex conflict, rather than several separate elements. However, when important non-player characters are involved (i.e. those with Devils), the Dealer should Deal separate hands for their role in the conflict.

Here are a few guidelines that will greatly help a Dealer direct a game session of *Dust Devils*.

HOWDY, STRANGER

First of all, the Dealer should make every effort to weave player characters' problems together. This doesn't mean that the player characters have to be together in every scene. In fact, whole sessions can work well without the player characters ever meeting! Don't force players to keep the group together. The Dealer may encourage them to stretch their legs a bit, expanding the scope of the narrative as the characters interact with non-player characters in divergent scenes.

So, the Dealer's job is to keep those sometimes ambling characters connected in some way. If a player character has a run-in with a crooked snake oil salesman, for example, then the Dealer might want another player character to bump in to the crook behind the general store stuffing his carpet bag full of cash. When the players realize the Dealer ties experiences together like this, they'll become much more interested in what's going on all the time. These strands of common interest will hog-tie the whole darn group together!



ROPE 'EM IN

Secondly, the Dealer must keep players focused on the crucial issues as they relate to the Devils. This is best done by manipulating the actions of influential non-player characters.

There are many common Western issues for characters to explore: bravery, independence, vengeance, land ownership, the law to name a few. All of these are well suited to *Dust Devils* play. All can easily be boiled down to a crucial decision: shoot or give up the gun? Characters should ultimately struggle with whether violence is a good or a bad thing in different situations. It may be easy to pull out your .44 and settle the matter, but is it right? Player characters should walk the murky border between law and morality. It's the Dealer's role to emphasize this struggle in play.

STRING 'EM UP

Once the Dealer's got the players focused on the issues at hand, it's time to hang 'em high. Here again, the Dealer's best tool for introducing such complications is through important non-player characters. Don't just think about how a non-player character can make it more difficult for a player character to achieve his goal. Think about how a non-player character can complicate the matter with ethical challenges.

Complications, whether introduced by non-player characters or otherwise, shouldn't be scenarios with an obvious or "canned" solution. Rather, they should be dilemmas handled in any number of ways by the players. Present a problem, not a puzzle to be worked out by the players. The problem should be an issue with many interpretations and many solutions (or sometimes no solutions at all!).

For a sample of how a Dealer might prepare a game session, see **THE HANGED MAN**, page 18.

CUT 'EM LOOSE

Remember that the Dealer should let go of the reins a bit and let the players drive the game. With all the right fixin's in place, the Dealer can cut the players loose and let them steal the show. His job is to respond to the players, and guide them along to the final deal.

One thing to keep in mind, however, is pacing. If players seem to be drifting or aren't focused on the issues in a particular scene, it's time to move on. The Dealer should help the players recognize when this happens and cut to another meaningful scene straight away.

HELL COMES TO TOWN

All of these Dealer techniques and advice are meant to do one thing—help the Dealer recognize and resolve the ultimate moment of redemption. Like the players, who must not “play it safe” in an effort to reckon with the Devil, the Dealer must keep in mind that *Dust Devils* is about one thing: Force the players to that Come-to-Jesus moment when they must decide to shoot, or give up the gun. Always keep that in mind, and be aware of those crucial moments when your players must decide between redemption and damnation—how they deal with the Devil is what this game is all about.



THE HANGED MAN

THE HANGED MAN is a sample scenario to be used as an introductory session or simply as a guideline for Dealers crafting their own *Dust Devils* games. This scenario takes place in Last Oak, Kansas, a fictional town along the Santa Fe Trail in early 1870s. Players may substitute their own characters in place of those provided here, but the Dealer should make sure the players have similar relationships with other characters and events in this scenario.

Last Oak, Kansas, is a waypoint along the Santa Fe Trail. Cowboys and all manner of travelers pass through the town on their way to and from the American Southwest. The dusty prairie town has had a hell of a lot of trouble lately with a rash of shootings as raucous cowboys and wild gunslingers converge on the town looking for an easy dollar.

But nothing compares to the most recent commotion.

The town had a public lynching led by Mayor Merrill Randolph and sheriff “Long” Tom Meredith. Just outside the Red Roof Saloon, they strung up a man they believed to be “Gentleman” Jim Harris, a gunfighter and known murderer.

But, the lynching covered up something far less noble than justice. The man they hanged had a short-lived love affair with Clara Hardin, Merrill Randolph’s own sister-in-law, whose husband died last year in some peculiar circumstances. Clara had hoped she could convince the hanged man, whom she too believed to be Gentleman Jim, to shoot dead her brother-in-law Merrill. Merrill has stolen Clara’s inheritance and taken advantage of her numerous times since taking her under his roof to “care and provide for the poor widow of his dead brother.”

Clara’s love affair with the well-dressed stranger, which was the gossip of the town, enraged Merrill, and he set in motion a plan to rid himself of her lover. He urged his long-time friend, the heavy-handed Sheriff

Tom Meredith to organize a posse to hunt down “Gentleman” Jim. They captured the well-dressed fellow, along with some other unknown outlaw, and hung him up on the gallows after an impromptu trial with a jeering public as jury.

Now, Merrill Randolph has rid himself of Clara’s lover and no one suspects his real motive.

There’s only one problem. The hanged man was not “Gentleman” Jim. Fact is, no one seems to know just who the hell he was.

And “Gentleman” Jim Harris just rode into town.

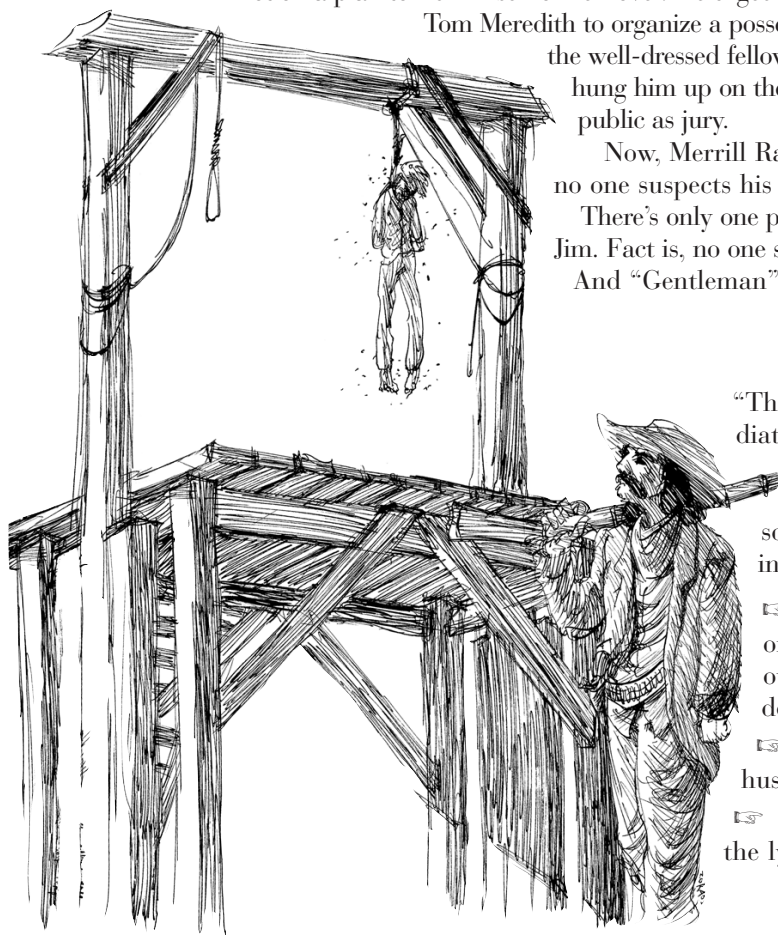
RUNNING THE SCENARIO

“The Hanged Man” situation is ripe with immediate conflict. The key is getting the player characters involved in the trouble in Last Oak. Several issues are left intentionally unresolved in this scenario so players may narrate in play the actuality of events. These include:

☞ The identity of the hanged man. No one really knows who the mayor and his over-eager sheriff did hang, or what he was doing in Last Oak.

☞ The circumstances of Clara Hardin’s husband’s death.

☞ Sheriff “Long” Tom Meredith’s role in the lynching of the hanged man.





If play starts to stall, the Dealer might highlight these unresolved issues as a means to keep players on track. This should be done, of course, through the non-player characters. For example, Clara Hardin might approach the real Gentleman Jim to help her get revenge, or maybe just to get her out of town.

PLAYER CHARACTERS

Players of this scenario can use any of the following four player characters. Anywhere from two to four of the characters can be used, depending on group size. In all cases, one player should run the character “Gentleman” Jim Harris.

Each of these four characters should have a pivotal role in the way “The Hanged Man” develops. Introduce the characters to the following startling revelations, or invent other means to strongly link the characters to the scenario.

- ☞ **“Gentleman” Jim Harris:** “Gentleman” Jim Harris rides into Last Oak to a gruesome sight—a hanged man dangles from the gallows surrounded by flies and a horrendous smell. Around the dead man’s neck hangs a crude sign that reads “Gunfighters beware.” Any inquiry with the townsfolk identifies the hanged man as “that murderin’ Gentleman Jim!”
- ☞ **Zeke Munroe:** Zeke Munroe managed to get himself enough drinkin’ money to last a while after helping “Long” Tom Meredith bring in Gentleman Jim and his partner. Trouble is, they got the wrong guy.
- ☞ **“Lucky” Luke Johnson:** Luke Johnson’s had better luck. While out on the trail, he came across a well-dressed stranger and offered some grub and hot coffee from his campfire. After a couple hours of shooting the breeze, Luke found himself at the barrel of Zeke Johnson’s shotgun. Zeke and the posse soon carted him off to the Last Oak jail. Lord knows why, but they strung up the stranger dead, and Luke’s worried he’s next.
- ☞ **“Black” Jack Kerrigan:** After hearing that Gentleman Jim was in nearby Last Oak, “Black” Jack Kerrigan decided to see about hitting up the gunfighter for a friendly game of cards. Black Jack knows Jim is a wealthy man from out east, or at least he was before they strung him up. His money must be somewhere, like maybe the town jail ...

“GENTLEMAN” JIM HARRIS, WANTED GUNFIGHTER

There was a time—before the War of the States—when Jim Harris considered himself a gentleman. Time was, his woman and his business partner were all a man needed to be happy and successful. But when he found out whom his wife was happier with, he joined the Union army as an officer. That didn’t last long either; his unit was killed to a man at Antietam.

Now, “Gentleman” Jim sees himself as anything but gentlemanly. Since the war’s end, he’s taken the lives of more than a half a dozen men with his mismatched six-guns. He’s a ruthless killer, or so folks say. Is it murder if a man is good at saving his own skin?

Devil (3): “Gentleman” Jim is a wanted man. His reputation as a cold-blooded killer follows him like a disease. While it has its advantages in getting what he wants, being a fugitive means he can’t settle down to enjoy a good life of money, fine clothes, and finer companions.

HAND: 4

EYE: 4

GUTS: 3

HEART: 2

TRAITS:

☞ Richer than Croesus

☞ Cool as a cucumber.

KNACKS:

Shootin’ 4

Drinkin’ 1

Bargainin’ 2

Philanderin’ 2

Gamblin’ 2

CHIPS: 3

ZEKE MUNROE, GUILT-RIDDEN BOUNTY HUNTER

Ezekiel Munroe has worked his whole life as a bounty hunter. In his early days before the War of the States, he caught up with a 16-year-old slave woman who’d managed to make it across the Ohio River, even



though she was almost ready to deliver her baby. He helped turn her in, and got all of \$5 for his effort. The girl got a damn sight worse than that.

Now, Zeke's much older, but he's not much wiser. He's still tracking down crooks and thugs for a bounty. The frontier provides him an ample supply of bounties to pursue ... and ghosts of the pasts to escape. Fortunately, it also provides an ample supply of whiskey.

Devil (2): Zeke is a mean drunk. He can hardly keep himself away from a bottle of whiskey, because it's the only thing that numbs the memory of that woman and her unborn baby those years ago in Ohio. Zeke's Devil comes into play in important conflicts involving liquor.

HAND: 5

EYE: 3

GUTS: 3

HEART: 2

TRAITS:

☞ Strong as an ox.

☞ Meaner than a new sheared sheep.

KNACKS:

Shootin' 2

Wrestlin' 2

Trackin' 3

Ridin' 1

Drinkin' 3

CHIPS: 3

"BLACK" JACK KERRIGAN, CROOKED GAMBLER

Jack Kerrigan is a gambler whose infamous "luck" is anything but. He's a damn cheat, through and through. When he was younger, he was as talented as any gambler on the Mississippi or New Orleans. But, in a game against a crooked Creole, Black Jack lost everything he had and a finger from his left hand to boot! Black Jack lost all faith in his skill as a gambler, but couldn't bring himself to quit the game. He learned a lesson that day. Cheat or lose.

Devil (2): Black Jack is a damn cheat. When presented with the opportunity to beat the odds with a little underhandedness, he'll do it. One of these days, Black Jack's so-called luck may run out, and he'll have to decide whether to cheat fate once and for all or just cut loose and let the cards fall where they may. God knows he's due.

HAND: 3

EYE: 4

GUTS: 2

HEART: 4

TRAITS:

☞ Sly as a fox.

☞ Sharp as a rattler's tooth.

KNACKS:

Gamblin' 4

Lyin' 3

Shootin' 2

Snoopin' 2

CHIPS: 4

"LUCKY" LUKE JOHNSON, LONESOME COWPOKE

Since the long, cold winter of '66, Luke Johnson's been alone. That year his wife and two daughters died of pneumonia on their Kansas prairie farm, and he blames himself for letting them die. Now, he wanders the Santa Fe trail hopping from job to job ... and from heist to heist to get by.

Devil (2): In a word, Luke Johnson's Devil is isolation. He's a nice enough cowpoke; he just doesn't trust himself to help others or to get close to others. He'd just as soon help himself. After years of doing things his own way, Luke doesn't trust much anybody else, either!

HAND: 3

EYE: 3

GUTS: 4

HEART: 3

TRAITS:

☞ Reckless as a blind bear

☞ Friendlier than a pet coon.

KNACKS:

Shootin' 2

Ridin' 3

Drinkin' 3

Ropin' 2

Lock Pickin' 1

CHIPS: 6



IMPORTANT NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Here are the three major players involved in “The Hanged Man” situation. The Dealer is free to modify or add to these non-player character statistics.

CLARA HARDIN

Clara Hardin hasn’t known happiness since her husband died. Her brother-in-law, Merrill Randolph, put a roof over her head and kept her fed and provided for. But he had his own ideas about what Clara was to supply in return. Now, part of her feels like she deserved what she got; the other part of her would just as soon see Merrill so full of lead he couldn’t walk uphill.

Devil (3): Clara’s Devil is original sin. Since her husband passed on, she’s found the only way to get what she really needs is to be with a man, whether she likes it or not.

HAND: 2

EYE: 3

GUTS: 2

HEART: 4

KNACKS:

Teachin’ 2

Seducin’ 3

Mendin’ 2

TRAITS:

☞ Pretty as a little red wagon.

☞ Quiet as a mouse.

MERRILL RANDOLPH

Merrill Randolph is a two-faced bastard. To the town of Last Oak, he’s an affable man who keeps things pretty much status quo. But to the few who know his uglier side, like Clara Hardin, he’s a devious son of a bitch who connives to get what he wants. What he wants most lately is Clara Hardin, and he’ll continue to abuse her if it’s the only way he can get her. But he’ll also do what he can to win her heart, even if it means stringing up an innocent man.

Devil (3): Merrill’s Devil is the incessant need to control others. Merrill manipulates others to get what he wants. More often than not, that means convincing his old friend “Long” Tom Meredith to do his dirty work.

HAND: 3

EYE: 3

GUTS: 2

HEART: 4

KNACKS:

Politickin’ 3

Sweet Talkin’ 2

Drinkin’ 1

Gamblin’ 2

TRAITS:

☞ Proud as a peacock.

☞ Crooked as a snake.

“LONG” TOM MEREDITH

“Long” Tom Meredith is an imposing figure of a man who keeps the peace in Last Oak through force and fear. He and Merrill Randolph are long-time friends, and Merrill has a lot of influence on the tough old sheriff. So much so that Long Tom might make a fella disappear, or even string a fella up to die without so much as a trial. Long Tom’s more interested in keeping Last Oak the way Merrill wants it than he is in upholding the law.

Devil (2): Long Tom is a bully. He enforces the law with a heavy hand, but he only really knows how to handle those who fear him. If folks would stand and put up a fight, he’s lose half his thunder quicker than he could draw.

HAND: 3

EYE: 2

GUTS: 4

HEART: 2

KNACKS:

Interrogatin’ 2

Shootin’ 3

Fightin’ 3

Ridin’ 2

Trackin’ 1

TRAITS:

☞ Tough as nails.

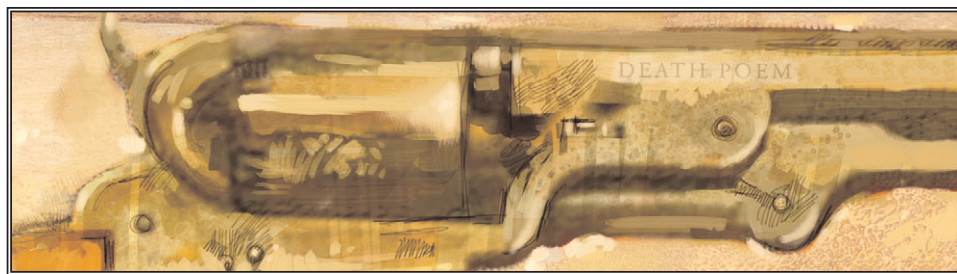
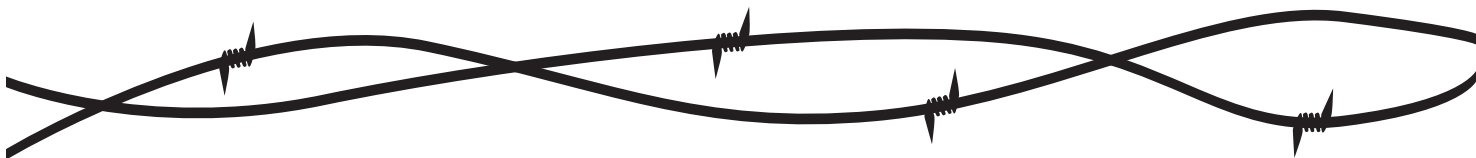
☞ Cruel as spite.



OTHER NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS

Of course, the Dealer is welcome to introduce more characters. Some other possibilities might include any number of deputies, town doctor “Doc” Samuelson, General Store owner Delmer Barnes, and “Red” Sally, Red Roof Saloon’s most “experienced” lady. Remember that the players might also introduce a number of non-player characters of varying relevance to the narrative during game play.



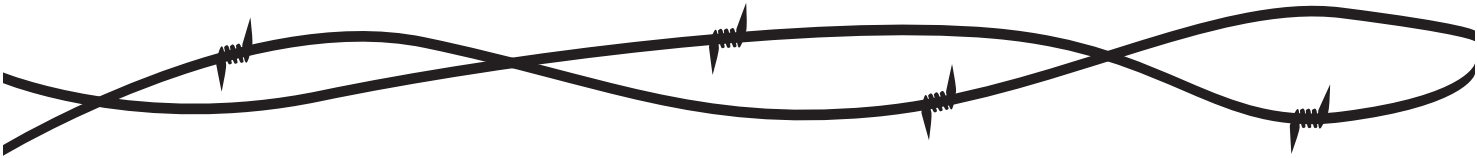


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a lot of inspiration for *Dust Devils* and thanks to a whole gang of compadres, including:

- ☞ Greg Stolze, for his design of the *Godlike* mechanics. *Dust Devils* card mechanics sprang out of thoughts about his clever, multi-axis dice mechanics for that game.
- ☞ Ron Edwards, for his brilliant game, *Sorcerer*, which influenced the crucial Devil mechanic for this game. Ron also offered up an immensely useful and thorough critique of the *Dust Devils* playtest version, and his comments there shaped this edition greatly.
- ☞ All the folks at the Forge (www.indie-rpgs.com) and RPG.net who shared their thoughts and opinions. I really appreciate all those who took time to download the playtest version of *Dust Devils* and especially those who offered their comments and suggestions.
- ☞ Michael S. Miller and Adam Jury, for their careful editing that just goes to show how good their Eye attributes really are, and how much my Guts gets in the way.
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- ☞ My wife, Canada, for her patience, editing, and eager ear. Couldn't have done it without you, babe!

—Matt Snyder



POKER HANDS

1. **ROYAL FLUSH**—The five highest cards in sequence and all of the same suit. For example, 10♦, J♦, Q♦, K♦, and A♦.
 2. **STRAIGHT FLUSH**—Five cards of the same suit in sequence. For example: 5♣, 6♣, 7♣, 8♣, and 9♣. Ace can be counted as low—i.e. A♣, 2♣, 3♣, 4♣ and 5♣— but in this case the high card will be the 5♣, not the A♣.
 3. **FOUR OF A KIND**—Four cards with identical face values. For example, Q♣, Q♦, Q♥, Q♠.
 4. **FULL HOUSE**—Three cards of one rank and two cards of a different rank. For example, J♣, J♥, J♠ and 9♦, 9♥. When comparing two or more Full Houses in a hand, compare the rank of the three matched cards. Highest of these wins.
 5. **FLUSH**—Five cards all of the same suit in any order. For example, 3♠, 6♠, 7♠, 10♠ and Q♠.
 6. **STRAIGHT**—Five cards of mixed suits in sequence. For example, 6♣, 7♦, 8♦, 9♥, 10♠.
 7. **THREE OF A KIND**—Three cards with equal rank. For example, A♣, A♥, A♠.
 8. **TWO PAIR**—Two cards of equal rank coupled another set of two cards of equal rank (but different than the first). For example, A♣, A♦, 8♥, 8♠. When comparing two or more Two Pair in a hand, the hand with the highest ranking pair wins.
 9. **PAIR**—Two cards with equal rank. For example, 5♦, 5♥.
 10. **HIGH CARD**—A hand with none of the above combinations. When comparing such hands, the hand with the highest single card wins.
- ☞ **COMPARING SUITS**—Suits rank in the following order from lowest to highest: Clubs, Diamonds, Hearts, Spades.
- ☞ **WILD CARDS**—Jokers serve as Wild Cards, and count as any card necessary to complete any of the above combinations.

DUST-DEVILS

CHARACTER SHEET

DETAILS

Name: _____
Vocation: _____
Description: _____

ATTRIBUTES

Hand ☐ Eye ☐
Guts ☐ Heart ☐

TRAITS



DEVIL:

RATING:

1 2 3



CHIPS

Current total: _____
Chips earned: _____
Chips spent: _____

Knack

KNACKS

Rating

BACK STORY

WANTED!

