

The Gongfarmer's Almanac



Volume #5, 2019

The 2019 Gongfarmer's Almanac: A Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG Zine

Written, Illustrated, Edited and Produced by the DCC RPG Communities



DARK TRAILS BONANZA! # ONE

VOLUME FIVE OF FOURTEEN BOOKLETS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Volume 1: DCC Survive the Funnel #1

The Gig at the Wizards Tower (Level 0)	5
--	---

Volume 2: DCC Survive the Funnel #2

12,000 to 0 (Level 0)	5
Cavern of the Cannibal Crone (Level 0)	20
The Void Corpse of Amann Uur (Level 0).	41

Volume 3: DCC Level Up

The Heist for the Royal Jewels II (Level 1)	5
Spoils of Temptation (Level 2)	19
Sun Smith's Forge (Level 3).	31

Volume 4: MCC Apocalypse Drop!

The Desert Gardens (Level 0)	5
Life Finds A Way (Level 0)	20
Haxors	29
Computer Programs in DCC RPG	31
Technological Mishaps	32
Malicious Code.	38
Exploit	44
Quarantine	48

Volume 5: Dark Trails Bonanza! #1

A Dark Trails Primer: Funnel Quickstart	5
Emergent Class Abilities for Dark Trails	14
Picnic Among the Pines on the Rocky Mountain	
Stage Line (Dark Trails Funnel, Level 0)	21
The Demon Hills (Dark Trails, Level 1-2).	34
Dark Trails Character Sheet	55

Volume 6: Dark Trails Bonanza! #2

Dark Trails Carousing	5
The Trickster (Coyote, Fox) (Patron).....	11
Mike Fink (Patron).....	16
Dark Trails Creatures (Monsters).....	21
Dark Trails Character Sheet	35

Volume 7: Third Party Special

The Handoff (Bronx Beasts Funnel, Level 0)	5
Wrath of a Dead God (TCC Funnel, Level 0)	20

Volume 8: DCC Patrons & Deities

The Great Ak	5
Aslan.....	12
Erhyta	16
Lady of Shadows	23
Baba Jędza	29
Midwinter's Maker	35
On the Altar of Neutrality	46

Volume 9: Monster Mash

Beastomatic	5
-------------------	---

Volume 10: Monsters & Artifacts

The Skin Thieves (Monsters)	5
The Digit Demon a.k.a. "Ladyfingers" (Monsters)	15
Gadgols (Monsters)	18
Fossil Anomalies (Monsters)	19
The Blood Stone	27
The Head of Aharise	31
Five Antediluvian Artefacts	38

Volume 11: Classes & NPCs

The Anti-Cleric (Character Class)	5
The Cambion (Character Class)	10
Children of the Wild (Character Class)	14
Godling (Character Class)	18
Fater (Character Class)	22
Hirelings!	27
Henchmen, Hirelings, Allies & Adversaries	35

Volume 12: You be the Judge #1 (Rules & Tables)

The Known Realms Hexcrawl Starter	5
Making an Effort	40
Legacy Points - XP for Players	41
Twist of Fate	44
Big Ol' List o' Gonzotronic Professions	46

Volume 13: You be the Judge #2 (Rules & Tables)

Are you entertained!	5
Prayer Burn, Blood Magic	8
Meanwhile - A Narrative Downtime Subsystem	23
Seek the Hag in the Woods	39
DCC Classless	49

Volume 14: 2019 Master 'Zine Index

DCC RPG Master 'Zine Index	5
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A DARK TRAILS PRIMER: FUNNEL QUICKSTART

By Keith Nelson

For further Dark Trails information and updates, please check the official Dark Trails RPG website at www.darktrailsrpg.com.

DARK TRAILS is a weird western game from author David Baity, based on the DCC RPG system. The world changed dramatically in the 1860's. On top of the US Civil War, a cabal of cultists, influenced by Nyarlathotep, used an ancient grimoire, the Necronomicon, to open a rift to awaken and attempt to call forth the Elder Gods. This was thwarted by a band of Texas Rangers, but not before a great release of dark, eldritch energies (the taint) and lesser supernatural entities into the world during what became known as the Seven Days of Night. The elder gods were awoken and made aware of their imprisonment, even if not released. The Necronomicon was not captured or destroyed, but its pages scattered to the winds, awaiting rebuilding and use by another twisted force in the future. A direct result of this release of the taint was an uprising of the hundreds of thousands of dead throughout the battlefields of the Civil War. This resulted in the cessation of the Civil War as both sides fought the revenants that still infest the South, and also in the activation of the ancient ley lines in the earth. The combination of the ley line power and the taint has produced a number of people manifesting strange and mystical powers and abilities. It's a new western frontier, with strange beings, fragments of elder gods, sorcery, weird science, and evil and danger around every corner. Welcome to the world of Dark Trails!

This primer is meant to present the basic rules and outlines of the system prior to running a funnel. Additionally, we present some basic methods of introducing the Dark Trails character class abilities during the course of the funnel.

Dice are used for attacks, damage, and threat resolution, just as in DCC. Card decks are used for a couple of very specific purposes during the game - to introduce a different random factor in gunfighting and in some spell/power usage, as detailed below. Finally, poker chips are used to represent “boons” and “hexes”, which ebb and flow over the course of the game and can be used as a benefit or as a detriment to players afflicted with them.

RANDOMIZATION

POKER DECK

Used for spell-like effects for the mountebank and the gambler, as well as in all gunfights, where it's termed the “gun deck”. Guns of the time were black powder, often cap and ball handloaded, so prone to potential misfires or unexpected events. The gun deck simulates this. Specifically, each player has a shuffled gun deck for their character (or, if playing in a funnel, one for multiple 0-levels), including both jokers. Immediately before rolling the die to determine the attack with a gun, the top card is flipped over from the deck. When used for gamblers or mountebanks, the card(s) are flipped to show the effects of their power. Each PC, unless they never use a gun (such as Luchadores or Mystic Monks) will need a poker deck. This is covered in further detail in the Combat section, below.

POKER CHIPS

These should be in two colors or markings - one to represent the “Hexes” and one to represent the “Boons”. These are used as follows:

HEXES

Hexes are gained by any roll of a 1 on the d20 (or a 20 on a Luck check). A hex represents the disfavor of Lady Calamity.

- ◆ Fumble die type is increased by +1 die step for each hex currently in hand
- ◆ Interactions with non-party members are at a -1 die step for each hex in hand

- ◆ Those characters with high numbers of hexes will find a black cloud of ill-favor following them around. They will be attacked more often, random malign events will be focused on them, stray dogs will snarl at them, small children throw horse apples at them, etc.

BOONS

Boons are gained by any roll of a 20 on the d20 (or a 1 on a Luck check). They may also be given for good roleplay or similar in-game actions. A boon represents the obvious favor of Lady Luck. They can be spent as follows (by handing them in to the judge):

- ◆ Remove hex chips on a 1:1 basis
- ◆ Add +1 die step to any roll (attack, save, damage, crit, etc.) per boon spent
- ◆ Reshuffle the gun deck (thus potentially avoiding a string of misfires)
- ◆ Spend two boons to allow a reroll of any die roll.

CREATING THE 0-LEVEL CHARACTER

- ◆ Characters are all human.
- ◆ Roll 3d6 in order, for stats (Strength, Agility, Stamina, Intelligence, Personality, Luck).
- ◆ Roll a d30 on the Birth Augur table, using either the version from the DCC core book or a Dark Trails specific one.
- ◆ Roll 2d20 on the occupation table to determine starting occupation
- ◆ Roll Hit points = 1d4+Stamina modifier
- ◆ Starting money = 2d4 dollars
- ◆ An additional stat, **Grit**, is derived from Personality+Stamina/2 (round down to nearest whole number).
- ◆ Armor Class = 10+Reflex Save (including Agility modifier)
- ◆ Modifiers to saves: +0 to Will, Fortitude, Reflex saves
- ◆ Starting Crit die: d6
- ◆ Starting Fumble die: d12

Abbreviated occupation and weapons lists are given below, but I would encourage anyone running this to make their own list as well. Anything appropriate to the mid-1800's would be fine.

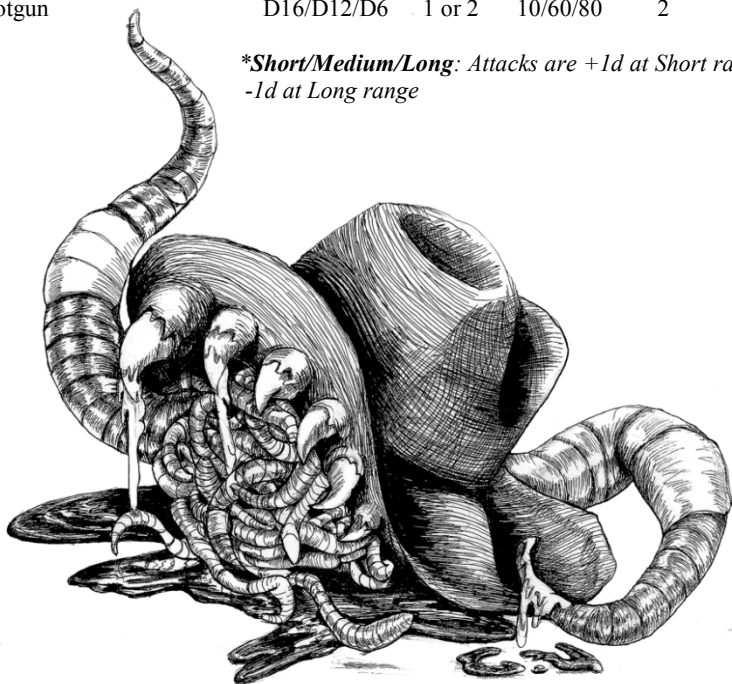
TABLE: OCCUPATION

2d20	Occupation	Weapon	Other possession
2	Author	Cane (d4)	Copies of self-published book (d6)
3	Barber	Knife	Shaving kit
4	Saloon keeper	Club	Bottle of quality whiskey
5	Lawman	Pistol	Manacles and badge
6	Butcher	Cleaver (d6)	Package of sausages
7	Carpenter	Hammer	Ruler and pound of nails
8	Teamster	Whip (d3)	Buffalo coat
9	Cook	Knife	Mess kit
10	Cowhand	Pistol	Lasso
11	Doctor/Dentist/ Veterinarian	Knife	Medical kit
12	Drunkard	Club	Bottle of cheap whiskey
13	Farrier	Hammer	Horse shoes
14	Gambler	Derringer	Dice and deck of cards
15	Tailor/Seamstress	Scissors (d3)	Sewing kit
16	Hanging Judge	Pistol	Hanging rope and law book
17	Farmer/Homesteader	Pitchfork	Mule
18	Clerk	Knife	Key ring, pen, and ink
19	Laundrer	Club	Wash tub
20	Librarian	Cane (d4)	Stack of books
21	Livery worker	Club	50' rope and sack of grain
22	Lumberjack	Axe (d8)	50' rope
23	Servant	Knife	Cleaning supplies
24	Prospector	Shovel (d6)	Gold pan
25	Mountain Man/ Trapper	Tomahawk (d6)	Beaver pelts (d3)
26	Outlaw	Pistol	\$50 Bounty on their head
27	Pioneer	Rifle	Beaver hat
28	Preacher	Club	Bible
29	Railroad Worker	Hammer (d4)	Railroad spikes (d4)
30	Rancher	Rifle	Cow
31	Remittance Man	Derringer	Carpet bag
32	Reporter	Knife	Journal and pen
33	Settler	Shotgun	Coil of barbed wire and wire cutters
34	Shop Keeper	Club	Feather duster
35	Entertainer	Knife	Fancy clothes and perfume
36	Salesman	Club	Carpet bag with samples
37	Ex-Soldier	Rifle	Rucksack
38	Teacher	Wooden ruler (d4)	Slate and chalk
39	Undertaker	Shovel (d6)	Embalming fluid
40	Wheelwright	Hammer (d4)	Wedges

TABLE: WEAPONS

	Damage	No. of shots	Range in feet (S/M/L)*	Reload time (rounds)
Clasp Knife	D3	-	-	-
Hunting knife	D4	-	-	-
Bowie knife	D6	-	5/10/15	-
Hatchet	D6	-	5/10/15	-
Walking stick/club	D4	-	-	-
War club	D6	-	-	-
Saber	D8	-	-	-
Bow and arrow	D8	1	30/60/90	n/a
Firearms – Pistols				
Derringer	D10	1	6/12/30	2
Small pistol (.22-.32 cal)	D6	5	6/15/50	3
Colt Navy (.36 cal)	D8	6	12/30/90	3
Colt Army (.44 cal)	D12	6	12/30/90	3
Firearms – Rifles/Shotguns				
Sharps rifle (.52 cal)	D14	1	50/100/480	1
Springfield musket (.58 cal)	D16	1	25/75/150	4
Spencer carbine (.56 cal)	D14	8	25/100/200	2
Shotgun	D16/D12/D6	1 or 2	10/60/80	2

**Short/Medium/Long: Attacks are +1d at Short range, -1d at Long range*



“Wormfood” by Carmin Vance

COMBAT

INITIATIVE

Initiative may be rolled for the whole group at once, modified for individual initiative modifiers. Responsibility for this can rotate from player to player throughout the game. Alternatively, each player can roll a single initiative for their pool of zero-level PCs, modified by the highest initiative bonus.

FIREARMS

The guns used during the Dark Trails time period were deadly and unreliable. These qualities are reflected in the rules for guns.

- ♦ Guns are deadly, as reflected in the positive aspects of the gun deck for PCs and the extended critical range of 19-20 for judges.
- ♦ Fumbles/Misfires occur when players draw Aces or Eights from the gun deck or when the judge rolls a 1 or a 2 when using firearms. A roll of 1 for a PC is just a miss (but garners a hex chip).
- ♦ The gun deck is used to reflect the unreliable nature of the often handloaded ammunition, powder, percussion caps, and the gun itself. It is generally only used for players and should be shuffled at the beginning of the game. Before each attack with a gun, the top card should be revealed.

POKER DECK

Used in all gunfights and referred to as the “gun deck”. Guns of the time were black powder and often cap and ball hand-loaded, so prone to potential misfires or unexpected events. The gun deck simulates this. Specifically, each player has a shuffled gun deck for their character (or, if playing in a funnel, one deck for multiple 0-levels), including both jokers. Immediately before rolling the die to determine an attack with a gun, the top card is flipped over from the deck. One card is flipped for each shot taken. If the flipped card is:

- ♦ Ace or an eight (Dead Man’s Hand), = gun misfires (equivalent to a fumble) and there is no shot. Immediately roll the appropriate fumble die modified by Luck.
- ♦ Joker = an automatic critical hit.

- ♦ Red Face cards = Jack +1 to hit and damage; Queens +2; and Kings +3.
- ♦ Black Face cards = Jack -1 to hit and damage; Queens -2; and Kings -3.
- ♦ All others have no effect and the shot is taken as normal (if a 1 is rolled, then it is treated as a miss and garners a hex chip, but does not result in a fumble).

FANNING THE HAMMER

Any single action pistol or lever action rifle can be used in this manner. This is an inaccurate way to fire multiple shots in one round. The first shot is made with a normal attack die, the second one step down the dice chain, the third another step down and so forth. A maximum of 6 shots can be taken using this method and the attacking character may stop at any time. A card is flipped from the gun deck for each shot.

COVER

Cover is extremely important in Dark Trails, as most characters have no armor and firearms are the common way of settling disputes. Thus cover works as follows (with modifiers applied to defenders AC):

- ♦ Character has at least half their body behind cover = +2 AC
- ♦ Character has entire body except head and shoulders behind cover = +4 AC
- ♦ Character completely behind cover except for head = +6 AC

FIRING INTO MELEE

Each missed ranged attack has a 50% chance of hitting an ally, in which case the player determines the ally at random (if multiple allies are present) and rolls to attack again. No additional draws from the gun deck are required. Matching or beating the new targets AC means they suffer the damage from the attack instead.

HORROR & MADNESS

GUT-CHECKS AND GRIT

Gut-checks represent an attempt to face the forces of sanity-bending darkness and master your rightful fears. Grit reflects a character's sanity over the course of an adventure. Failure of a gut-check leads to the loss of Grit, which can have long-lasting negative effects, often manifesting as psychoses and neuroses. A brief version of this mechanic is presented here, sufficient for a funnel game.

- ◆ Gut-checks = Will save at DC10 + the HD of the creature being faced.
- ◆ It is not necessary to continue to make Gut-checks each time you encounter similar creatures. The judge may simply rule that, having already mastered your fears, there is no need for subsequent Gut checks for the same situation. Alternatively, gut checks may be easier upon subsequent encounters.
- ◆ Making a Gut-check = Success, no effect on character.
- ◆ Critical success on a gut check = +1 to Grit (up to max) and +1d to attacks and spells versus this creature during this encounter
- ◆ Failing a Gut-check = loss of Grit equal to the HD of the creature. After losing Grit, the player rolls a 1d4 for each point of lost Grit on the Madness table, immediately applying those results.
- ◆ Critical failure (Roll a natural 1) on a Gut-check = loss of Grit equal to the HD of the creature, character suffers a -1d penalty to the next Gut-check, and rolls on the Madness table (1d4 per creature HD). Lastly, the creature senses the weakness in the character and gains a +1d bonus to all attack rolls for the duration of the encounter.
- ◆ If a character's Grit is reduced to zero over the course of an adventure, there is a permanent loss of one point of Grit and it resets to the new maximum value.

TABLE: MADNESS

Result	Effect
01-03	Hair stands on end, but push through fear with no ill effects.
04-05	Chills run down spine and freeze you in place. You miss next action.
06-08	You emit a shrill, piercing scream of horror. All stealth attempts fail. -1 die step penalty if you attack in the same round.
09-10	The shock and terror causes you to drop anything you're currently holding.
11-13	You're jolted by fear and use your next move to run as far away from the source as possible.
14-15	You momentarily black out from intense fear and fall to the ground, awakening the next round prone and having dropped anything held.
16-18	Fear overwhelms you, causing a loss of sphincter control. You suffer a -1 die step penalty to all social interactions until you clean yourself.
19-20	You drop to your knees and pray to a higher power to save you. You can only pray for 1 round.
21-23	All hope is lost, you drop into a fetal position and sob for d3 rounds. DC12 Will save to recover wits after first round.
24-26	Madness washes over you and you fling yourself into battle with the nearest living target. You are left with a minor compulsion (DC12 Will save or take -1 to all social interaction rolls and all action rolls in combat).
27-30	You are overcome with the certainty that this evil you face now will be your end, on this day or another. You are stunned for 1 round and develop a minor phobia (DC12 Will save or take a -1 die step penalty while in presence of object of phobia)
30-35	Major phobia – DC14 Will save or flee for 1 round/point the save was failed by. If save, can remain, but take a -2 die step penalty while in presence of object of phobia.
36-40	Major compulsion – DC15 Will save or take -2 die step penalty to all social interaction rolls and all action rolls in combat. If make the save, then only take -1 die step penalty.

EMERGENT CLASS ABILITIES FOR DARK TRAILS

By Keith Nelson
Illustrations by Joshua Barton

For further Dark Trails information and updates, please check the official Dark Trails RPG website at www.darktrailsrpg.com.

In the course of a typical 0-level funnel adventure, the basic aspects of Dark Trails and other DCC-based games are emphasized along with emergent character development, but rarely is there an opportunity to investigate or even showcase the features of the class system in the game. One way to introduce this into an adventure is to provide tangible items that trigger specific class abilities in 0-level characters. They don't need to continue on in these classes, but this gives players the chance to experience some basic parts of the class system. Optionally, the judge can either have the powers vanish upon the character taking on another class or allow them to retain the items/powers, adding to the individual flavor of each character. In the standard DCC game, this could be done through finding a magic weapon, holy relic, spell scroll, or similar item that would trigger some advantage or class-based abilities, as has been done in several funnels already in print. In Dark Trails, with a large number of classes to choose from, providing specific items that give small class-based powers to the 0-levels is an excellent way of showcasing aspects of the post-funnel game.

This article focuses on the Dark Trails RPG, but I would encourage Judges to use a similar system for any of the DCC-based systems, with the goal of exposing players to some of the potential in the post-funnel character system. Each item is matched to the Dark Trails class. Upon finding the item, the manifestation of its power may occur before claiming it or upon attempting to use it. A character that claims one of these items must then meet the criteria

given for success, including a d20 check to beat the listed DC, using the modifiers for the listed stat. If successful, they gain the effect noted for that item. I would suggest that only some of these items are introduced in any given funnel, and also that only one of any particular given type is introduced, to highlight the unique nature of these items.

CLASSES AND ASSOCIATED ITEMS TO FIND

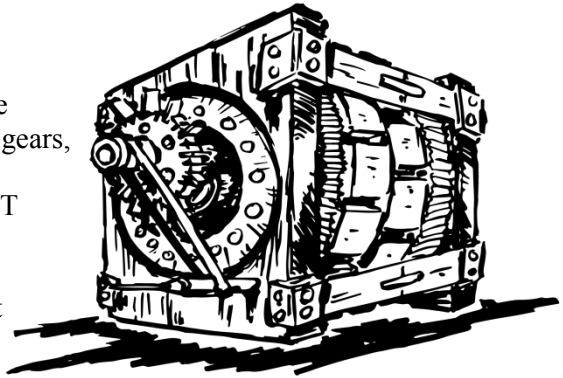
BEDLAMITE

Found Item: Strange contraption of brass, gears, and leather

Roll for Success: INT DC12

Manifestation: Attempt to figure out the use of the item results in a brain fever and frenzied repair of it.

Effect: Get ability to use one contraption at d16 (works as Enlarge spell).



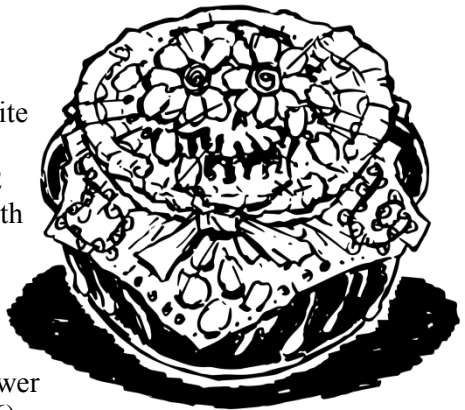
CALAVERA

Found Item: Pot of bone white face paint

Roll for Success: PER DC12

Manifestation: Paint face with paint, then spirits begin whispering to you as the paint seeps into your skin.

Effect: Spellburn stamina (2 pts) to get Face of Fear power (as with Scare spell – roll d16).



GAMBLER

Found Item: set of dice on table – pristine in middle of moldering ruin or in a cave or in an abandoned saloon

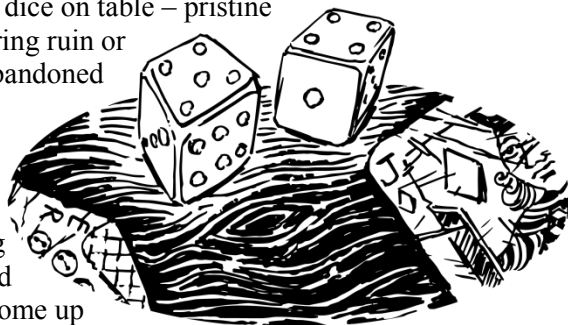
Roll for Success:

Luck check at -2

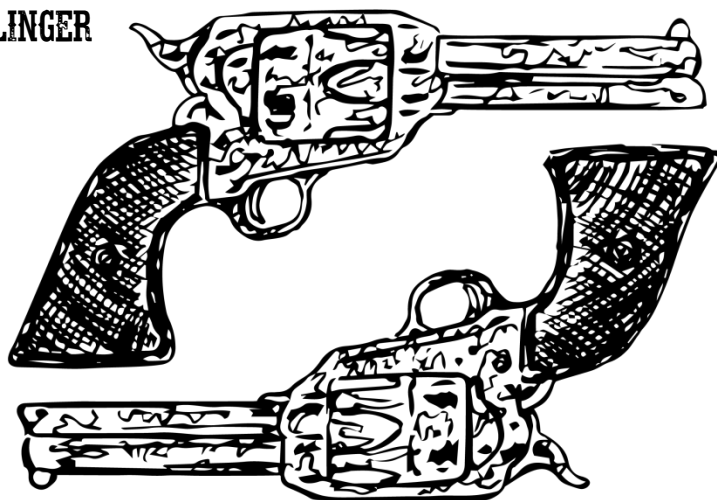
Manifestation:

The dice almost beg to be rolled. If rolled successfully, they come up snake-eyes, box cars, or sevens and disappear, leaving a set of cards behind in your hand and the knowledge of their use.

Effect: Gain limited Dead Man's Hand ability – Once per day can activate (spellburn 3pts) and draw 1d6 cards (black cards damaging and red cards healing for 2HP each or 4HP for face cards).



GUNSLINGER



Found Item: rusted, matched six-guns

Roll for Success: Lawful PER DC12

Manifestation: Guns call to the person picking them up, telling them to commit to the gun...Rust flakes away upon bonding

Effect: Get spirit link with those guns (get +1d3 - w/ those guns only).

LUCHADOR



Found Item: Luchador mask

Roll for Success: Lawful PER DC12

Manifestation: Mask speaks to the owner, tells them to put it on and it will grant them great power

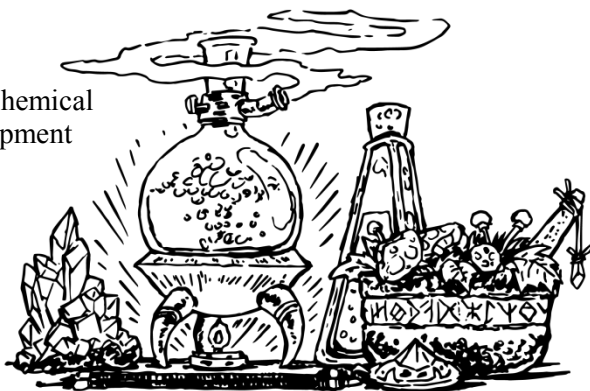
Effect: Burn personality temporarily (2 pts) to get devil mask (+2 att/dmg vs. chaotic or unnatural adversaries) or mask armor (+2 AC).

MOUNTEBANK

Found Item: Alchemical reagents and equipment

Roll for Success:
INT DC12

Manifestation:
Attempt to understand it results in breakthrough knowledge.



Effect: Spellburn STA (1 pt) to make one potion of either healing (1d4) or exploding (1d6 – 5' rad).

MYSTIC MONK

Found Item: strange scroll/cave paintings/tablets with figures of unarmed fighting men

Roll for Success: PER DC12

Manifestation: With a flash of mystical insight, you visualize how to call on your inner reserves

Effect: Spellburn Personality (1pt) - Gain iron coat ability – add 1d3 to AC for 3 rounds.



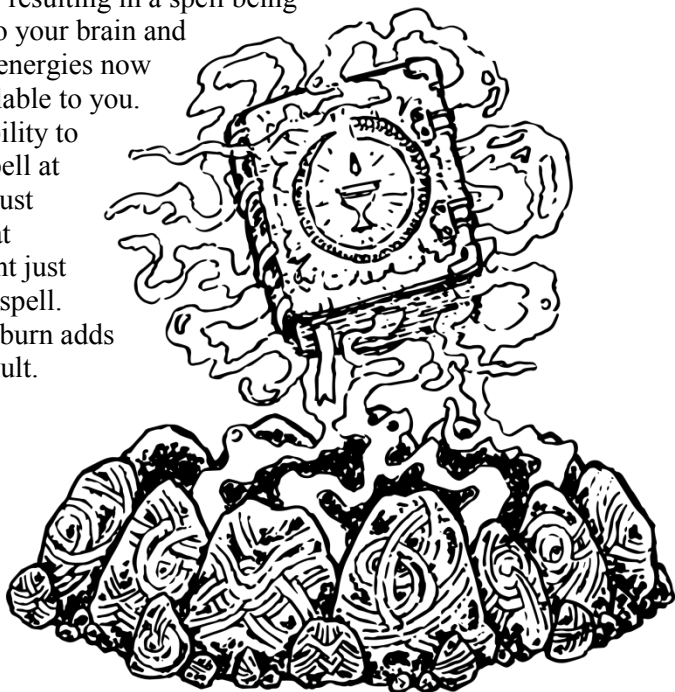
OCCULTIST

Found Item: Carved runes. An occult book. Sorcerous materials.

Roll for success: INT DC12

Manifestation: Attempts to read and understand the writings are successful, resulting in a spell being burned into your brain and the occult energies now being available to you.

Effect: Ability to cast one spell at d16, but must spellburn at least 1 point just to cast the spell. Extra spellburn adds to spell result.



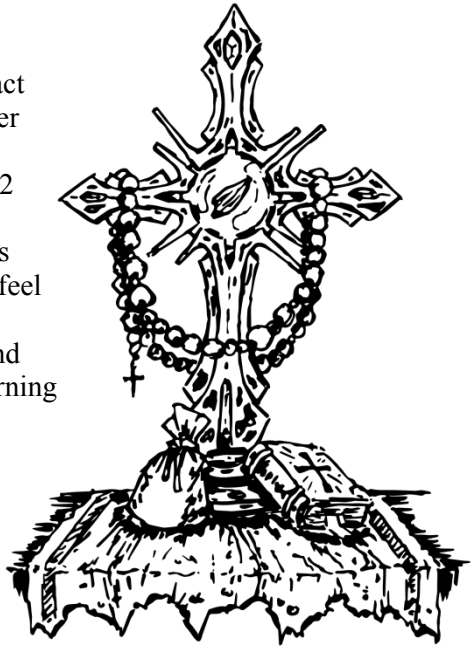
REVELATOR

Found Item: religious artifact (gris-gris, prayer book, prayer beads, cross, etc.)

Roll for Success: PER DC12

Manifestation: The holy spirit enters you as you focus on the holy artifact and you feel a flush of power.

Effect: Gain healing (d16 and DC12 for 1d4 healing) or turning (d16) ability.



SIN-EATER

Found Item: ancient coin (Charon's obol) and a raven feather

Roll for Success: PER DC12

Manifestation: attempt to read the inscription on the coin, reveals secrets to summoning Stygian Ravens

Effect: Spellburn stamina (1pt) to call Stygian Ravens for defensive bonus – Flock of half-visible ravens appear and cloak PC – give +2 to AC. Lasts 3 rounds.



TOMMY-KNOCKER



Found Item: first player that has all 0-level PCs die

Roll for Success: None

Manifestation: You come back from the dead, but you're not exactly alive...

Effect: Get Dark Inheritance – filled with strength from undeath, you gain +1d3 to melee attacks & damage.

PICNIC AMONG THE PINES ON THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN STAGE LINE

A Dark Trails Introductory Funnel

By Keith Nelson

Illustration by Joshua Barton

For further Dark Trails information and updates, please check the official Dark Trails RPG website at www.darktrailsrpg.com.

PLAYER INTRODUCTION

The stage doesn't travel in the winter through the mountains, so folks in the small town of Finley's Crossing don't get much news or commerce from the west until the spring thaw each year. However, it's been a few weeks since the thaw and the west-bound stage went through over a week ago with no returning coach. While some of you may be a bunch of shiftless layabouts, or "underemployed gentlemen and ladies of leisure", you're at least capable of riding out to check on the missing coach at the behest of the town's sheriff, who's dealing with a very pregnant wife and first baby jitters. The rest are anticipating the arrival of relatives, trade goods, mail order brides, etc. on the coach. So, on a fine spring day, with the snow well-melted and the sun shining, you set out to find the missing stage. It's a bit of a picnic atmosphere.

Judge's Note: Players can turn back at any time. Those doing so will incur 3 random encounters for each day of travel, one of which will be the wendigo attempting to herd them towards the mesa or to ambush a straggler to carry off. If they arrive back in town, they will forever live with the shame of their cowardice.

This shame is heightened after the stage agents appear several weeks later with tales of a place of slaughter near a mesa about 2 days ride from here. They're hard-bitten men and women, carrying their weapons like they were a part of them, but they all look a bit shaken. The leader, a tall man with a face like leather, wearing a black eyepatch, says "Looks like the passengers from that stagecoach and a couple of homesteaders were all taken there up there to that mesa. They were skinned and gutted while still alive. There was some evil green stone altar there as well, that had their bodies draped over it and the blood soaked into it. Can't get it out of our heads. Worst was the little girl. Couldn't have been more than a week or two ago. There was something up there, left a 15 foot-wide trail of destruction through them pines, headed down towards the flats. We tracked it a bit, but it petered out on some hard-rock."

DAY ONE

1 – Random Day Encounters: Ride out 1 day up into the mountains. Roll twice on random encounter table.

2 – Stagecoach: Find stagecoach tipped over on its side near end of first day of travel. Horses and passengers gone. Signs of blood on the trail where the horses were, and drag marks and footprints lead off into the pines to the north of the road. If the coach is searched, find a random selection of items in the baggage (roll Luck checks once per searching PC to find useful items, otherwise random toiletries and clothing are found). It will begin getting dark in about an hour.

3 – Skeletal Bear and Horse Carcasses: If the PCs elect to try and follow the tracks into the woods, they can do so (DC6 to succeed) but the tracks will scatter after about a mile, or half hour of tracking (DC8 to continue to follow). After another mile, a scatter of skinned

horse meat, innards, defleshed bones, and blood spoor may be found (being “fed on” by a skeletal bear - the bear will depart after 20 minutes if unmolested and the characters are quiet, but remember to roll Gut Checks) after which the tracks still can be followed, but are fainter, leading in the direction of a tall mesa in the distance.

4 – Random Night Encounters: If they elect to continue to press on at night, they run the risk of losing the trail and will have 2 random encounters. The second of these being with a wendigo that uses a Scare spell (DC15 Will save to resist, otherwise flee for 2d6 minutes in direction away from the source of the spell) to drive them towards the mesa, but does not directly attack at this time. If they camp, there will be one random encounter.

DAY TWO

5 – Faint Tracks: Morning breaks after a miserable night. If they elect to press on towards the mesa in the distance, they can follow faint tracks and signs that there were people still in the group (a scrap of cloth from clothing, a dropped tobacco pouch, a clear ladies shoe print, etc.).

6 – Derelict Cabin: Mid-morning, the PCs come across a derelict cabin, with the door broken in. If investigating the interior, they find two rooms, with broken bunk beds and a mangled skeleton, still with some flesh on the bones, in the corner. A small animal, like a large rat with disturbingly human appearing features, scurries away as they approach, disappearing through a hole in the rough floor boards. Another defleshed skeleton lies outside the door, skull crushed. A child’s doll is flung to one side. The walls are defaced with scratches and painted abstract figures, featuring large spirals and ringed circles. The paint appears to have been done in blood. A DC12 Intelligence check will show that it’s only 3-4 days old.

- ◆ A cursory search of the interior will find a slightly rusted wood ax; gold mining equipment (including a shovel and pick); a jug of whiskey; an old, but working, rifle-musket (with 1-3 rounds worth of useable powder and ball); and one of the special items from the emergent class abilities table.

- ◆ A deeper search (Luck check at -2 or stating that they are searching the chimney or floorboards) will uncover a small pouch of gold nuggets with an obsidian and gold-chased statuette of an obese, squatting frog-like humanoid. Engraved script on the statue is in no language you recognize, though the curling yet angular letters are unsettling to all. Along with this is a map of the mesa, cryptic notations surrounding a series of apparent cave openings. “El Dorado?” is written in a scrawl on the bottom of the map.
- ◆ Faint older tracks of some large biped and drag marks may be found (DC13 tracking check) leading in the direction of the mesa.

AT THE MESA

7 – Mesa and Ground Level Cave: If the group does continue towards the mesa, they can either follow the drag marks, which peter out in a shale slide at the foot of the mesa, or the map. Both lead to an overhang of the mesa where numerous carved cave entrances fill the cliff side. There are small foot and hand-holds carved in the rock face (DC5 Agility or Strength check to reach the first row of caves (~20’ up), DC10 for the second (~40’ up) and DC 15 for the third rank (~70’ up). Otherwise, a quick search of the area turns up a cut lodgepole pine with rough steps carved into it that can be used as a ladder to get from level to level with no climb check. Ledges go between the caves on each level. There is one cave entrance accessible from the ground.

Ground level cave: This entrance leads into a large round, domed cave with no exits. Carved into the floor is an immense spiral. 17 small niches are carved in the walls. Small bits of trash litter the floor, including pages torn from an old journal.

Journal: The gist is that the writer, Friar Herrera, was part of an expedition to find the lost city of gold.

- ◆ They were beset by savages, but found this complex.
- ◆ Many gold treasures were found, but they met with resistance from “the darkness”.
- ◆ Men went mad, turned on one another, were poisoned by “the gold itself”.

- ◆ A great treasure exists here, accompanied by great evil.
- ◆ The apparent final entry speaks of a great throbbing hum filling the air and foul images of blood, a winged darkness, and a soulless, but intelligent, void that scours the brain...

Niches: These hold the following:

- ◆ One item from the Emergent Class Abilities Item Table.
- ◆ Small cache of gold in rotting leather bag.
- ◆ Small obsidian blade and 3 circular jade ornaments (lip plugs/ear plugs) – A character using the blade to pierce their face and insert a plug loses 1HP but gains 30' vision in the dark and the notice of *Tepeyollotl*, the Aztec god of jaguars, darkened caves, and earthquakes.
- ◆ Rusted helmet of conquistador vintage.
- ◆ Crude oil lamp, with oil dried in it.
- ◆ A rusty, but serviceable, Spanish military rapier (d8).
- ◆ Simple silver cross, tarnished with age.
- ◆ The other 10 niches are empty.

8 – First and Second Level of the Caves: The caves here are rough habitations, devoid of much save simple paintings on the walls. There is a trend leading from representations of crude animals and people into abstract spirals, whorls, and banded circles, like crude bullseyes. DC15 Intelligence check to realize that some of these seem to depict constellations. Occasional pottery shards are found, but nothing else.

9 – Third Level of the Caves: These are similar to the first and second level, although with many caves having collections of bones within them, some human and some animal, as if the remains of those who once lived here. All are old and dry.

Eventually you find one cave that leads back into the darkness. This one has signs of recent disturbance of the dust and smears of blood along the entrance. Trodden into the dust of this cave are small gold nuggets (2d6 x \$5 worth) and a torn leather bag rests in one corner. Some fresh pine branches, oozing sap, are piled to one side.

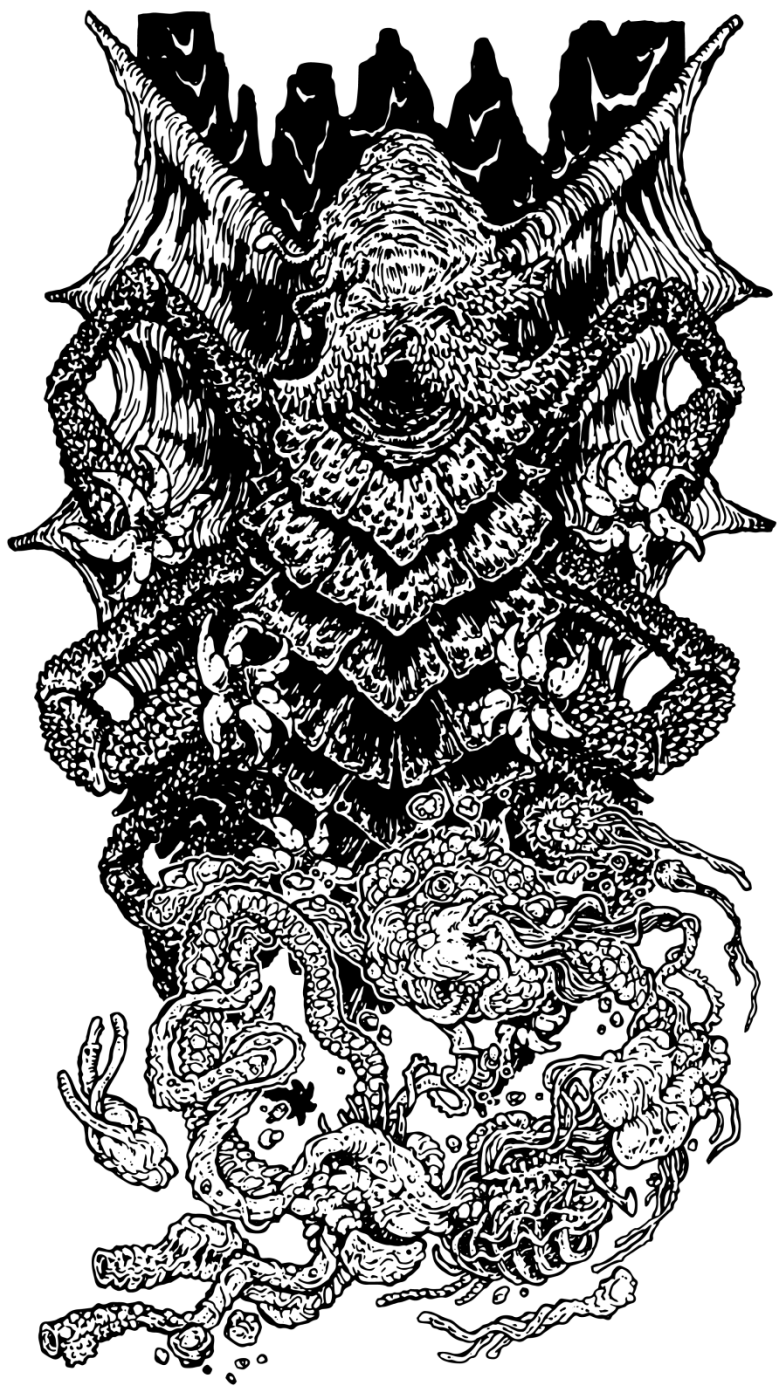
IN THE CAVE

10 – Mi-Go Cavern: If they follow the cave back into the darkness, it twists and turns, narrowing and expanding, for several hundred yards, at least. It does seem to be carved out so that at most, PCs must move in a hunched over posture and go single-file, but never narrows further. The darkness is intense, seeming to drain your light source. The PCs smell a distinct odor of decay and greasy metal. As they round a final turn, the cavern opens out before them into a 50'x100' space with a 50' domed ceiling. A low humming sound becomes noticeable. There is also a faint greenish-blue witchlight glow to veins of quartz in the walls that dimly illuminates the cavern. The cavern contains:

- ◆ A group of 10-15 unclothed people staring as if in a trance at a pulsating, humming, spiral of the darkest black and inky blues and purples. It hangs in midair unsupported.
- ◆ Staked out skins of animals and people along the ground and walls.
- ◆ Discarded piles of clothing, offal, and belongings.
- ◆ A large greenish stone altar at the far end of the cavern, on which is a child's eviscerated body.
- ◆ A hole in the ceiling over the altar, through which shines a pallid light.
- ◆ A man-sized, leathery-winged lobster-like creature with a fleshy pink head covered with antennae and 5 pairs of legs (a Mi-Go) standing near the altar smoothing body parts together into a strange construct like a small wagon of bone and skin and organs. Make a Gut-check with a +4 modifier. It squeals in an almost ultrasonic wail as you draw its attention (1 round after entering the cavern). It will actively defend itself if directly threatened, and then only to get away.

Mi-Go (1): Init +3; Atk psychic blast +4 ranged (1HP + Stun); AC 13; HD 4d8; hp 16; MV 20' or 50' flying; Act 1d20; SP Psychic blast – stun for 1d6 rounds unless opposed Will save made at DC = Mi-Go roll; SV Fort -1, Ref +2, Will +7; AL N.

11 – Mi-Go Construct: There is one round after the Mi-Go wails for everyone to act. The Mi-Go will immediately begin to frantically



mold the construct. If it has three uninterrupted rounds to act, it will engage the construct and ride it through the hole in the ceiling, escaping to the stars. If it is attacked and damaged, it will fly away (although one wing is tattered and seemingly barely functional), leaving the construct behind and escaping through the hole.

12 – Crippled Wendigo: On the second round, the crippled wendigo emerges and attacks the party. This wendigo is small (8-9' tall), with one side scorched and blackened, as if by fire, with the leg and arm twisted and crippled. It wears a battered breastplate and has a collar of twisted glowing strands of pulsing, slick muscle tissue around its neck. It has been trapped underground and starved for a very long time, thus its powers are notably diminished. The Mi-Go has enslaved it and sends it forth to capture subjects for testing. It will flee 2 rounds after the Mi-Go, squeezing into a narrow crack in the rocks.

Wendigo (1): Init +2; Atk claw +3 melee (d6); AC 16; HD 4d8; hp 22; MV 40'; Act 1d20 claws or 1d20 spell; SP Spells – Terror (a wave of fear emanates from the wendigo, forcing an opposed Will save from all within 20' or they run away for 1 round), Stolen Breath (the wendigo inhales and all opponents within 10' lose 1d4 Stamina points while the Wendigo regains 2d4 hit points). Hide at +6. Damage resistant (-5 damage from weapons or non-fire spells). Fire damage is as normal. Regenerates 3 HP/round; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +6; AL C.

13 – Greenstone Altar: If one of the PCs touches the altar, the humming mounts to a fever pitch, and the greenstone altar vibrates violently. The ground seems to liquefy under it and it is drawn back into the earth, with the cavern walls cracking and shaking down around you. Everyone must roll reflex checks at DC5 every 2 minutes to avoid being hit by debris for 1d3 damage. The DC goes up by 1 for every 2 minutes spent in the cavern after that time. It will take 10 minutes to escape the danger zone of cave-in.

14 – Entranced Masses: The group of people gazing at the spiral can be freed by removing their gaze from the spiral, which leaves them dazed for several minutes. They docilely move with you when you shift them. A DC5 Will save must be made to avoid looking at it unless explicitly stated that the PC(s) are avoiding doing so.

Those who state they look directly at it must make a DC15 Will save or be ensnared. In this group are several of the stagecoach passengers and a small girl of 8-10 years of age. She remains silent, mutely staring at the altar, clutching a small doll to her. When none of the PCs are looking, she moves over and touches the altar, triggering the events described above.

Those choosing to spend time searching the chamber may make a luck check to find one of the following at no risk prior to the altar being triggered. Further searching will result in reflex checks at DC10, DC15, and DC20 to avoid falling debris as the altar is triggered, either by one of the PCs or outside forces.

TABLE: WHAT TREASURES MIGHT THE MI-GO CAVERN CONTAIN?

2d20	Item
2	Loaded double-barrel shotgun (1d16/1d10/1d6 damage)
3	Obsidian-bladed war club (<i>macahuitl</i>) (1d8+1 damage, drops 1 die step on a fumble)
4	Small clay pot full of gold nuggets (worth \$100)
5	Jade statue of an amorphous creature, covered in eyes and mouths, in the act of swallowing multiple smaller stylized humans (\$50-\$300)
6	Strange discarded construct of leather and weird lightweight dull grey metals. For bedlamite has 1 st level spell effect if pass a DC14 Int check.
7	Glass globe filled with gently glowing rocks. Take 2 points of Stamina damage/day if spend more than 15 minutes within 5' of it.
8	Halberd leaning against the wall (1d10) by the skeleton of a man in armor (breastplate, helmet, and tall leather boots).
9	Pile of old cloth and clothing. DC10 Fort save to avoid being contaminated by spores of yellowish mold within the deeper layers.
10	Heap of semi-stripped, reeking bones. Some human, some animal, some seemingly caught between those states.

- 11 Pot of sticky dark fluid. Burns fiercely if lit (1d6 damage per round for 2 rounds). Burns differently if swallowed (1d4 damage).
- 12 Pile of skulls formed into a crude altar. A pristine steel cross-hilted sword (1d8+1 damage) with a silver pommel rests on top of it, together with a stone carving of a jaguar-headed man. Blood paints the skulls.
- 13 Stretched and cured skin of a human. A strange map of numerous separate points has been drawn on it. (Star map – DC20 to determine it points to a place well past Neptune)
- 14 Flintlock rifle – loaded, but luck check to see if powder still good (1d12)
- 15 Leather bag of gold in chunks of quartz (\$150 worth, but weighs 50lb)
- 16 Colt Army pistol in holster (4 shots remain in gun)
- 17 Carpetbag containing 4 bottles of patent medicine, a fine checked suit, a gentleman's toilet kit, and a small pistol (1d6, 4 shots).
- 18 Seam of gold in the cavern walls. Chunks of quartz laden with gold can be pried out by hand. (\$2d10 per minute)
- 19 Tablets of beaten gold, carved with runes. Details a summoning or binding spell for occultists who can decipher them (DC20 Intelligence check, modified by access to library and time spent (up to +5)).
- 20 Strange pistol-shaped piece of worked bone and chitin. Firing stud on one surface. -2 to attack. d6 shots of 2d10 heat damage. Overheats on final shot, exploding for d6 damage (DC10 reflex save to avoid)

After you return to town, things are never quite the same for you. You've seen the elephant and fought the things that lurk in the shadows of this world. Those that you rescued are all affected as well, some disappearing in drink or laudanum; one walking out into the prairies, never to return; some losing themselves in violence or madness. Even the strange girl disappears one night, snatched out of her bed in the home of the people that took her in. Their bodies are crushed and torn, as if by a bear or other wild animal. Her doll is left in a corner of the room, seemingly thrown aside. Strange symbols, like those seen in the derelict cabin you saw among the pines, are painted on the walls in blood.

TABLE: RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

d10 Encounter

1 A rustling in the bushes and trees draws your attention and you spend 10 minutes hunting down the very active local chipmunk community.

2 **Hoop Snakes (2d3):** Init +4; Atk rolling +1 melee (1d4) followed by +6 sting (1d3+ poison); AC 16; HD 1d8; hp 6; MV 30' or 120' (rolling); Act 1d20; SP Poison DC15 Fort save or begin swelling up, taking 1d3 Stamina damage each round for 1d6 rounds. Once stamina reaches zero, then the affected individual will explode, scattering entrails and gobbets of flesh in a 5' radius, expiring in the process. If they survive that, then Stamina returns upon resting at 1 point/day; SV Fort +0, Ref +5, Will +0; AL N.

Appearing in groups of up to 6, this long (up to 12') slender snake can roll itself into a hoop to go faster and bear down on its prey, moving at speeds up to that of a speeding locomotive (60 mph). The hoop snake can't be outrun short of finding an obstacle that it can't roll over or through, making it unroll to go around the obstacle. The venomous sting of the hoop snake uncoils as it strikes its prey, injecting the stunned prey with a potent venom that causes intense swelling before death, usually due to rupture of the prey. This allows the snake, despite its size, to ingest prey of all sizes.

3 **Giant Rattlesnake (1):** Init +4; Atk +4 bite melee (1d3 + poison); AC 15; HD 4d8; hp 20; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP Poison - DC15 Fort save or be paralyzed with pain and take 1d3/round for 1d6 rounds; SV Fort +3, Ref +4, Will +0; AL N.

This 25' long rattlesnake seems capable of swallowing a man whole. It hunts at night and will come to the campsite in search of food. The infrared-sensing pits on its head will allow it to target the most active PC. In the day, it will be found on the trail, either sunning itself or coiled up in a defensive posture, if the PCs are making a lot of noise.

- 4 **Rattle-wolves (1-3):** Init +3; Atk wolf bite +4 melee (1d6) and snake strike +2 melee (1 + poison); AC 14; HD 3d8; HP 18; MV 40'; Act 1d20 wolf bite and 2d14 rattlesnake strikes. SP Poison - DC15 Fort save or take additional 1d2/round for 1d4 rounds; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +1; AL C.

These strange versions of wolves stand 4' tall at the shoulder, with two timber rattler bodies emerging from the shoulders. They work in concert to attack the group, trying to cut out one individual and focus their attacks on them.

- 5 Crazy old prospector – Has 1d4 rumors of 1) strange bands of men wandering through these parts, dressed in weird shiny clothes; 2) Indians shunning these parts, due to legends of spirits that catch you and remake you into monsters; 3) lost city of gold somewhere nearby, but he'll stick to panning for it; 4) the critters grow big around here.

- 6 **Zombie Conquistadors (2d4):** Init +0; Atk hands +2 melee (1d6) or weapon +1 melee (1d8); AC 10 (15 if armored); HD 2d8; hp 10; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP Release fungal spores when hit (DC12 Fort save if within 5' or develop lung disease (DC16 Fort Save each week or lose 1 STA each week until cured)); SV Fort: +3, Ref: +0, Will: +3; AL C.

These appear to be normal men, albeit raggedly dressed, until they approach within 30', at which point their sunken, yellowed eyes, desiccated flesh covered in fine yellow-brown mold, and lurching walk tell a different tale. They have an impressive turn of speed once they near their prey, running in jagged fits and starts to either tear at it with hands and teeth or hack at it with rusted swords and halberds. Some (25%) wear rusted, but serviceable, cuirasses of ancient Spanish design. When shot or struck by weapons, a cloud of yellow dust rises up, filling a 5' space around them with choking fungus spores.

- 7 **Skeletal Bear (1):** Init +1; Atk bite +4 melee (1d6) and claw +4 melee (1d4) or vampiric intestines +1 melee (1 + 1d3/subsequent round. DC12 strength check to pull intestines off of self or other person); AC 14; HD 4d8; hp 30; MV 25'; Act 2d20 or 4d14 (intestine); SP Mushrooms

(2d4) growing on the bear can be ingested to heal d4 hit points or 1 ability score point; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +4; AL C.

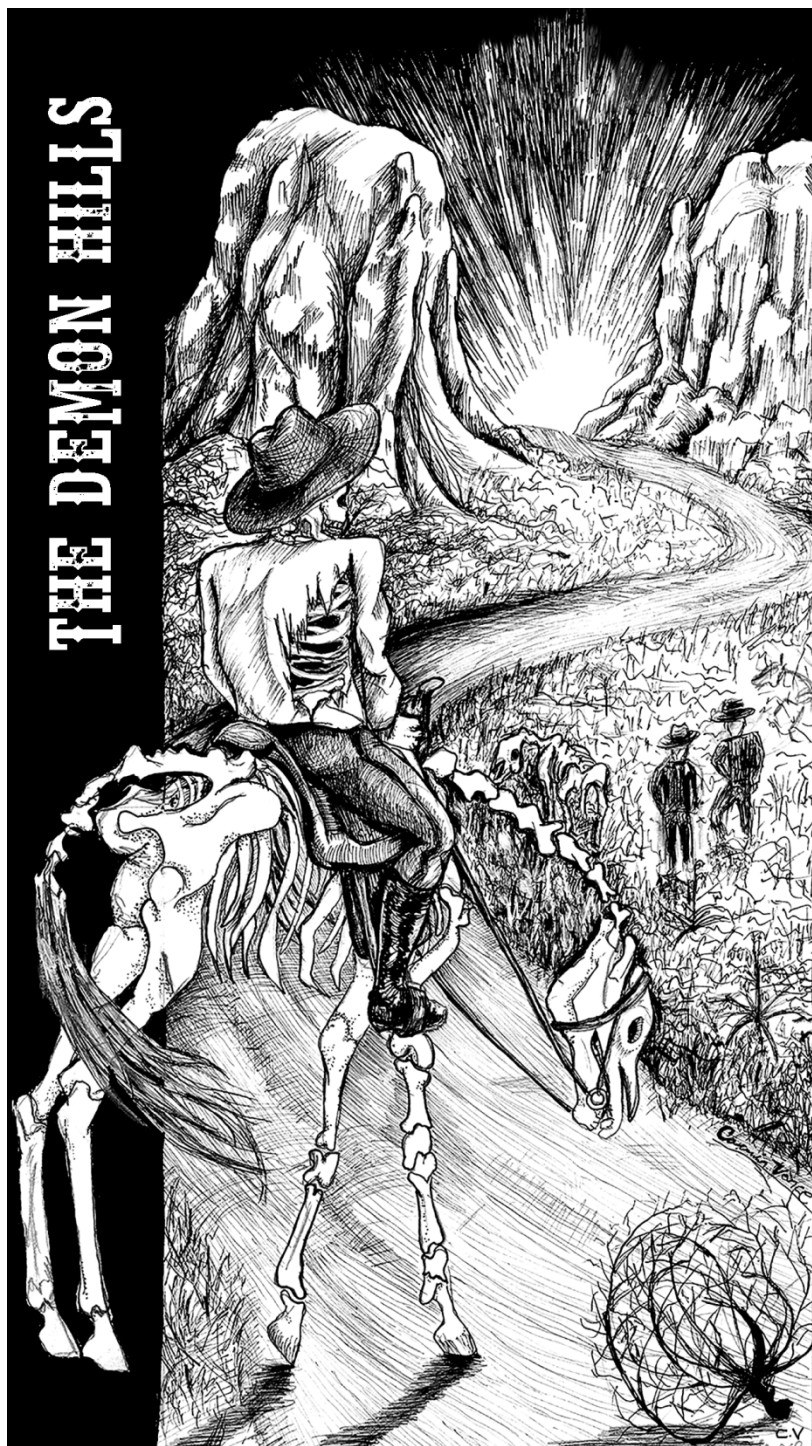
This ambulatory bear skeleton has tattered skin stretched tight over its frame and bloated intestines visible through rents in the skin. While it may attack with claws and bite, it can also extend 4 of the toothed sections of intestine as a lamprey like attack to targets within 10'. The skin has a moist look to it and is patchily covered with fungi and mold, with small red to yellowish mushrooms predominating.

- 8 **Young Santer (1):** Init +5; Atk tail bash +2 melee (1d4); AC 14; HD 3d8; hp 18; MV 70'; Act 1d20; SP DC12 Reflex check or take an additional 1d8 heat damage from the red hot penultimate tail ball; SV Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +1; AL N.

Long bodied and long-limbed, this varmint, while still a youngling, is at least 6' long, with a relatively slender body covered in long reddish fur. The head is large, rounded and bald, displaying a cunning intelligence in the domed forehead. The tail is at least as long as the body, with 8 iron-hard knots in it, the second-to-last of which radiates intense heat. It attacks using the tail as a flail to strike and knockout prey prior to devouring it. The long limbs move at an alarming rate, propelling the santer with great agility over the ground or through the trees at a tremendous pace.

- 9 Small group of elk. Yep, normal elk. Nope, not dark elk. They appear suddenly and the male bugling scares the crap out of some of you.
- 10 Deadfall – While making your way along the trail, a gust of wind comes up and a tree drops a large limb on your group. Everyone make a luck check to avoid being hit for 1d4 damage. A max of 3 PCs will be hit.

THE DEMON HILLS



THE DEMON HILLS

**A Dark Trails, Black Powder, Black Magic, or Other DCC-
powered Western Adventure Mini-Campaign Setting
for 4-6 Characters of Level 1-2**

By Eric Betts

Cover Art and Illustrations by Carmin Vance

Cartography by Shyloh Wideman

The Demon Hills is an ode to all of the crazy, low-budget, odd plotting, high energy “Spaghetti Westerns” of the 1960s that fire my imagination to this day.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The characters are wranglers, cowboys, weirdos and drifters who’ve been hired by a crooked saloon owner to rescue his daughter from kidnapping banditos. The party soon find themselves tangled in the intrigues of the town of Sour Creek and the mystery of the Verdan (Demon) Hills. The adventure takes place somewhere in the Southwestern United States in the 1870s.

Design: I’ve never been fond of linear adventures, as players are gifted with the ability to derail a Judge’s best laid plans. Also, the best westerns are ones driven as much by the hero’s choices as by the villainous plot. So, while the adventure begins with a rescue mission and a betrayal, the path after that is open. The adventure is organized into **Encounters** and, to provide some structure, an encounter flowchart is included for Judges to reference. While there is a ‘main’ plot (Otomis Crowe and the demon ore), the residents of Sour Creek have plenty of additional material to last several adventuring sessions.

KEY NPCs

Otomis Crowe: A demon possessed New Orleans occultist/gambler, currently seeking control of the demon ore in the Verdan Hills area. He plans to have human slaves mine the ore and use it to further enhance his own supernatural powers in our world. Tall, dark-haired, with a thin mustache, he is always dressed in a fine dark frock coat.

Otomis' Gunfighters: Bret and Bart. Dark haired, sharp-featured, deadly gunslingers that exude a palpable sense of menace, they are loyal lieutenants to Otomis Crowe. They each wear tied down, paired, bone handled Army Colts and obviously know how to use them. If they know he is a demon, they don't care.

"The Bushwhackers": A Troop, 15th Missouri Cavalry Regiment (Confederate States of America) – time trapped confederate cavalymen enslaved to Otomis Crowe. The Otomis ran into these renegades in early 1865. The demon-possessed wizard promised to get them away from pursuing Union cavalry. Left unsaid was that the escape would turn the troopers into undead spirits beholden to Otomis. There are a total of sixteen undead soldiers and undead horses. A character with a background in the Union Army will know of the "Bushwhackers" as a particularly cruel and murderous band that just "disappeared" towards the end of the war.

The Bushwhackers 'could' be a great source of information on Crowe, they know his background (as a wizard, not as a demon) and if encountered in a non-combat way, will share both what they know about Crowe, and how they are Cursed to do his bidding (even telepathically). The Bushwhackers would love to split with Crowe, but unless someone can break their Curse (DC 25) and return their mortality, they are trapped as undead. If the Curse can be broken, surviving men and horses will return to mortal and be extremely grateful to those that broke the Curse (and willing to get revenge on Crowe).

The Bandits: Normal Mexican outlaws raiding over the border and looking for a wild time and quick buck at the gringos' expense.

Taggart Reide: Crooked owner and operator of the Deluxe Saloon in Sour Creek. He's a slippery weasel with thinning red hair and a paunch in a loud checked suit. He thinks he is Otomis Crowe's partner in taking over the town. He loves his daughter Tilly, but loves himself and money more. He has no clue that there is anything supernatural going on.

Tilly Reide: Taggart's beautiful fiery haired daughter. She's always ready to love, fight or get into trouble (basically...a player character). She is also likely to fall for the nearest heroic player character in the party. Also known for getting kidnapped by the villain of the moment.

"Mrs. Colonel" Mae Tucker: Hard as nails, white haired widow of a Union Colonel, she is the only land-owner around with the guts to stand up to Otomis Crowe. Has her own crew of cowboys.

Mae's Crew: Cowboys working "Mrs. Colonel" Mae Tucker's range. They are loyal and tough, but only human.

Little Johnny Cotton: Pugnacious 11 year old orphan boy, known for attaching himself to tough looking player characters and getting kidnapped by villains.

Townfolk: Sour Creek is home to approximately 70 people, other than those named. Businesses include Gordon's Hardware and Dry Goods Store (complete with firearms for sale), Parker's Livery (for horses), the Alma Feed Store, Smith's Blacksmithy, Otomis Crowe's Sour Creek Bank, the Deluxe Saloon (with 8 guest rooms for rent), Ho's Chinese Laundry, the Sour Creek (non-denominational) Church and Community Hall (no priest), Paul Smith's Saw-bones and Barber (he's not an actual doctor), Frank Hammer's Funeral Parlor (more like a fancy hearse), Casey's Stagecoach Stop (with four small guest rooms), the Sheriff Office/Jail (currently vacant) and any other small business the Judge may need.

OPENING

Opening: The party has been hired by Taggart Reide, the owner of the Deluxe Saloon and self-proclaimed prominent businessman in Sour Creek. His daughter has been recently kidnapped by bandits from across the border. He wants the party to go to the bandit camp and bring his daughter Tilly back unharmed. Do this, and he'll pay the PCs \$100 in gold. {Hard negotiation will get him up to \$150, which is fine with Taggart, he has no intention to pay anyway} He will be able to direct the PC's to Encounter 1.

Taggart is a weasel and junior partner to Otomis Crowe, the town banker. He does love his rambunctious daughter, but he loves gold too. He's told the bandits that he'll pay for Tilly's return, just like he's told the characters, but has no intention of paying either. He has his own men, but if asked, he'll confide they're not as good at this work as the PCs. He's not above stroking the PC's ego with references to their adventures and obvious prowess.

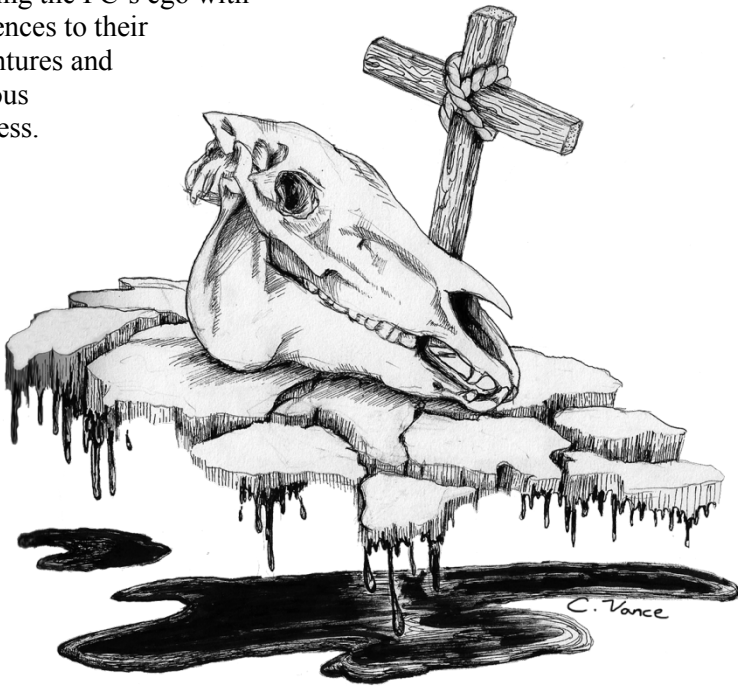
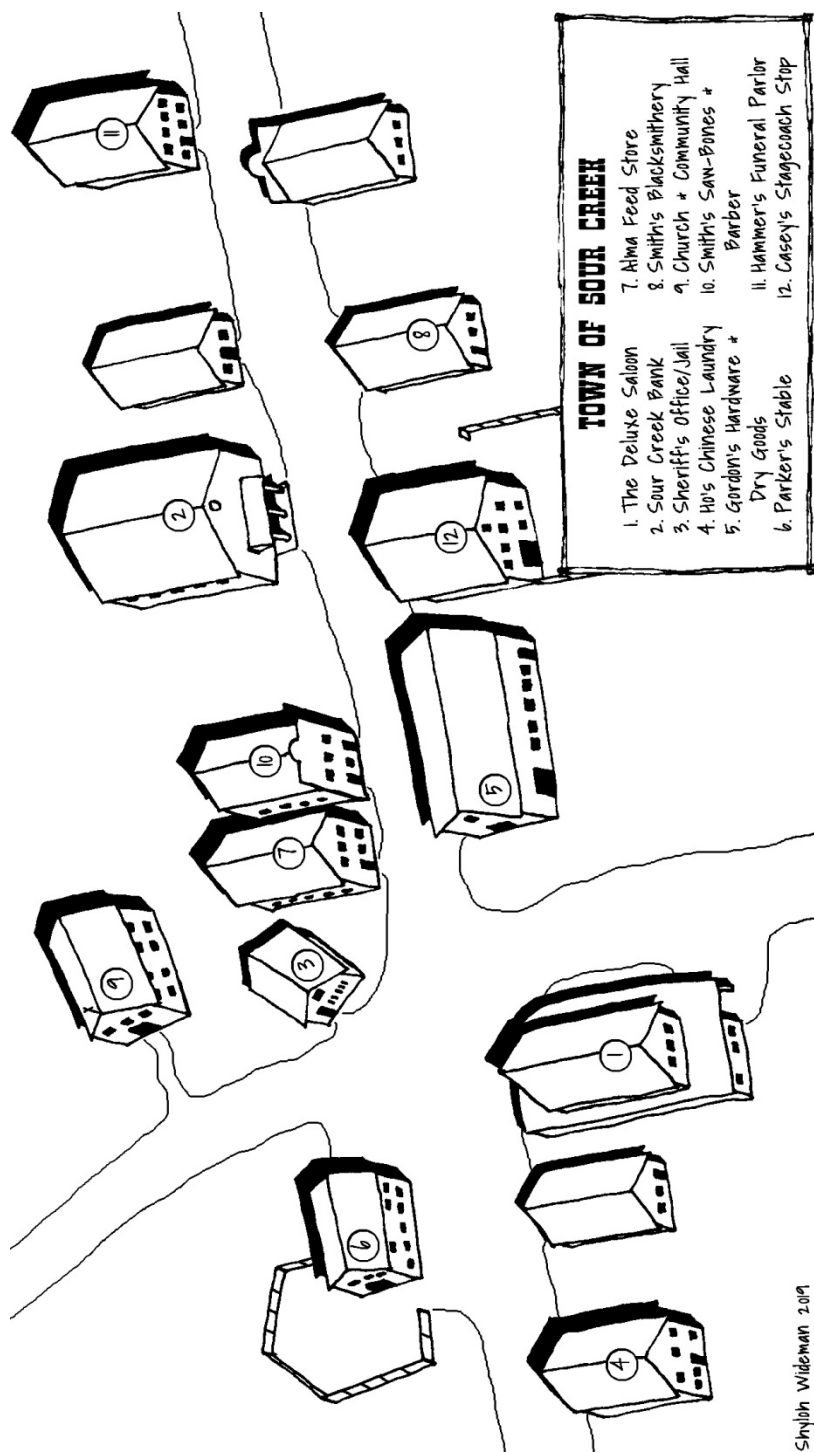


Illustration by Carmin Vance



TO THE RESCUE

Encounter 1 – Bandit Camp: The bandits have set up a temporary camp in the Verdan Hills. They have a circle of six wagons, with one in the middle. Their horses are in a temporary sagebrush corral off to one side and they have guards posted (see **The Bandit Camp** map), but most are sitting around a campfire drinking tequila and getting excited about molesting poor Tilly (in the center wagon).

Mexican Bandits w/pistol (7) Init +0, light pistol +1 missile (1d8); AC 11; HD 1d8; hp 5; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref+1, Will +0; AL N.

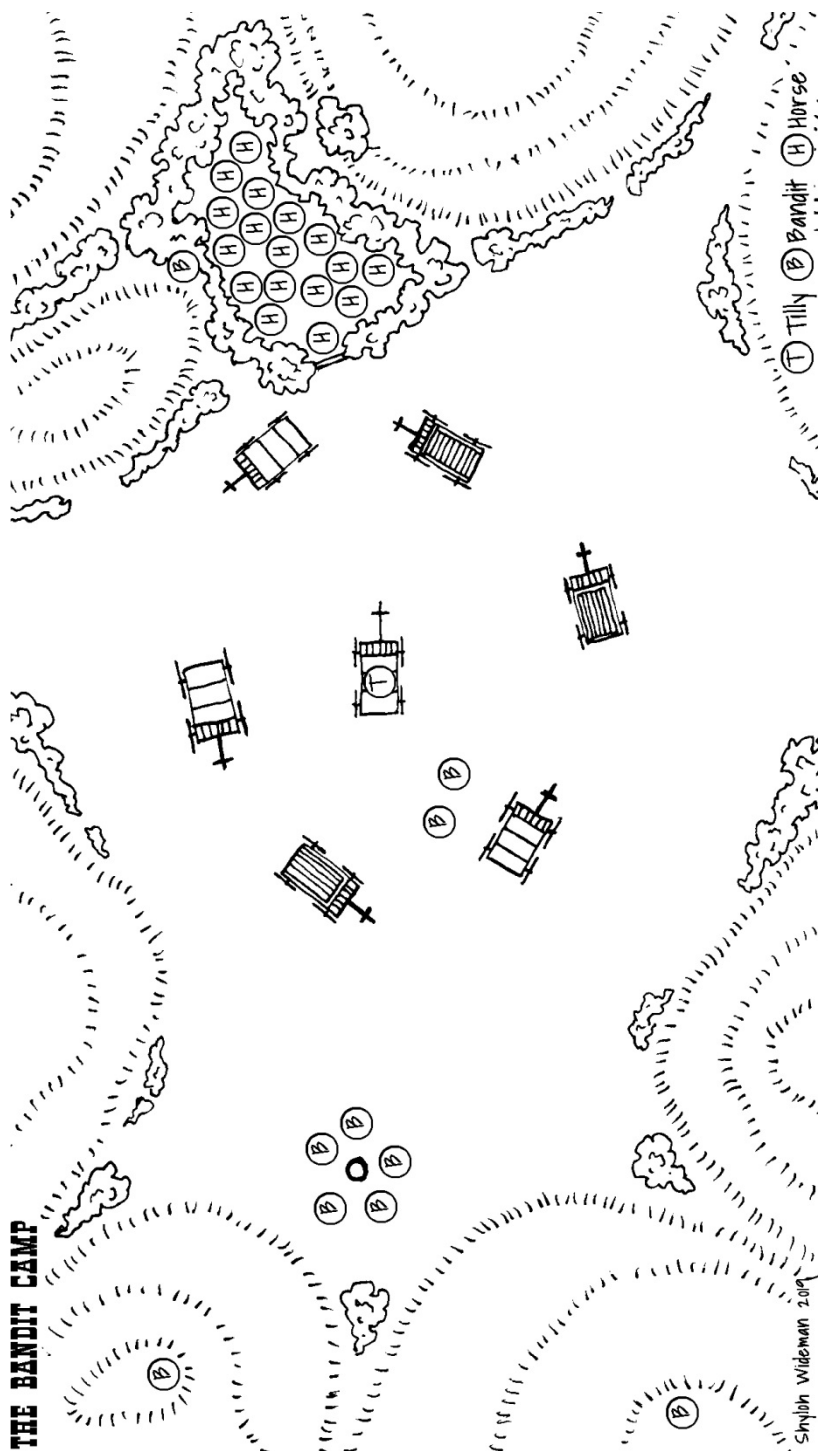
Mexican Bandits w/rifle (on guard in hills and corral) (3) Init +1 (roll 1d16 due to 2 handed weapon), rifle +2 missile (1d12); AC 11; HD 1d8; hp 5; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref+2, Will +0; AL N.

Tilly Reide (1) Init +2, +1 missile (will pick up a weapon); AC 11; HD 1d8; hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref+1, Will +1; AL L.

IMPORTANT: At some point before attacking the bandits (like sneaking around to get the drop on them), in the middle of the fight, or after rescuing Tilly and riding off, the characters will see a strange green glow off to the west. If asking Tilly or another towns person about it, they will be told that it is caused by an odd ore only found in the Verdan Hills area. Touching it is supposed to bring bad luck, and everyone has a tale of misfortune occurring to folks who have done so (i.e. going broke, miscarriages, sudden death, etc).

Tilly is in the center wagon and may be able to get loose to “help” the PCs if the fight gets close to her. Tilly is a beautiful redhead that is all attitude. She will “fall” for the PC that helps her out in the fight, or that rescues her (or in pure DCC method – roll a dice for it). The PC will become Tilly’s love interest for better or worse (she’s hard to get rid of).

THE BANDIT CAMP



AMBUSH AT THE DELUXE SALOON

Encounter 2 – The Deluxe Saloon: After disposing of the bandits and getting (someone) stuck with Tilly, the characters will return for their payoff to Taggart's saloon in Sour Creek (see **The Town of Sour Creek** map), imaginatively named the Deluxe Saloon (see **The Deluxe Saloon** map). Taggart will be exuberant upon the PC's return, leaping up to congratulate them, shaking their hands and calling for beer.

As the beer arrives, Taggart will step to the side and embrace his daughter. Suspicious players may make a DC 12 Intelligence check to realize that they are being surrounded by Taggart's men. If the PCs confront Taggart on what is happening, he'll call them suckers and rubes, and try to grab his daughter and run. EXCEPT, Tilly will fight with her father about being pulled away and the two will be stuck in place.

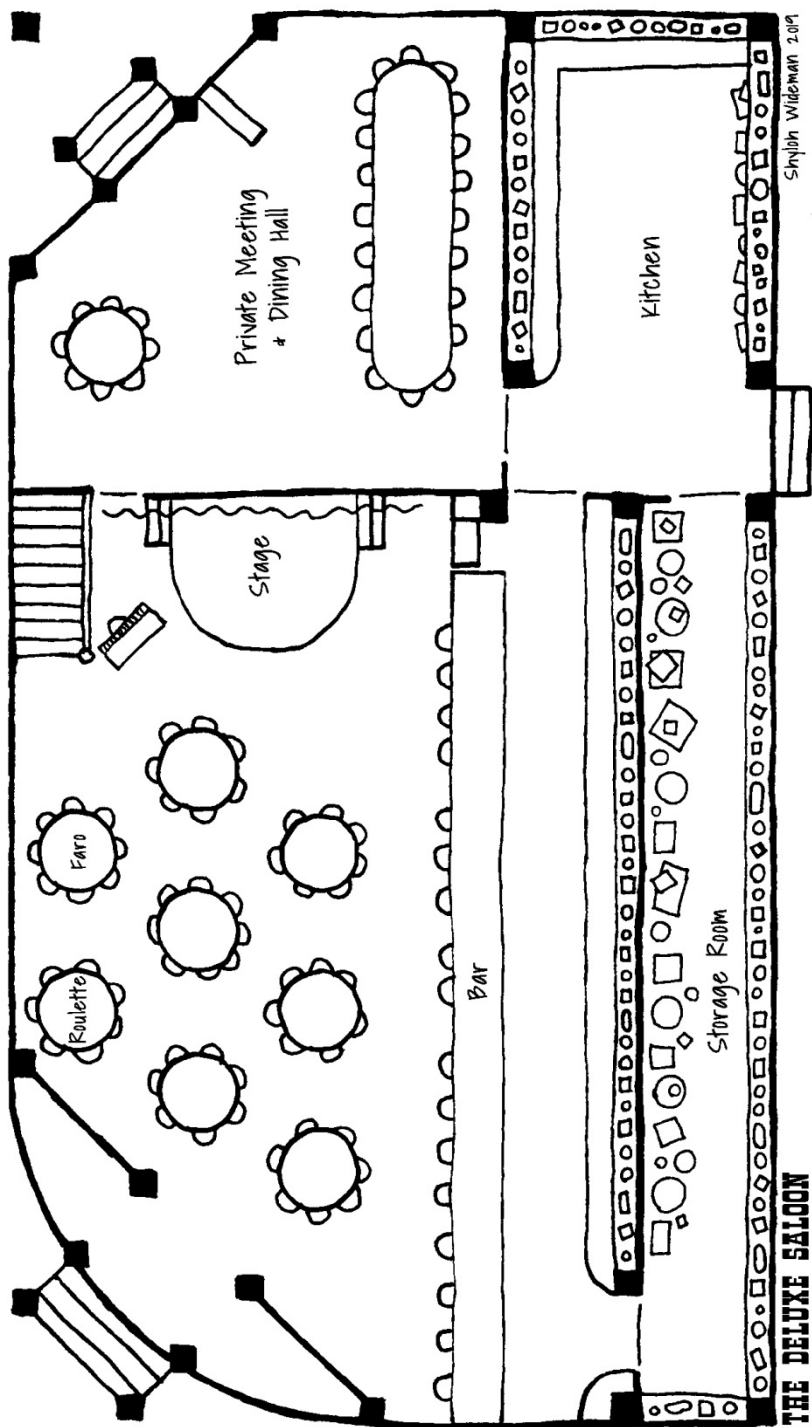
If the PC's do not fight back: Taggart's men will pull iron, order them to drop their weapons, then beat and rob the PCs, throwing them out of town and telling them never to return.

If the PC's do fight back: Taggart's Men (6-8 depending on the strength of the party) will start shooting. Tilly's shouting at her father distracts his goons, so there is no surprise (normal Initiative).

Taggart's Goons (6-8 depending on size of the party, at least 1 per PC): Init +0, light pistol +1 missile (1d8); AC 11; HD 1d8; hp: 5; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref+1, Will -1; AL N.

Taggart Reide (1) Init +2, light pistol +1 missile (1d8); AC 11; HD 1d8; hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref+1, Will +1; AL N.

When the PC's get the upper hand, Taggart will beg them not to kill him, whimpering uncontrollably, even hiding behind his daughter's skirts! If the PCs look serious about hurting him, he will offer up to double the agreed reward, paid now. Pressed, he'll even offer up Tilly (she'll NOT be happy about that). If the PC's still want him dead, a tall, well-dressed, dark haired man appears from the back of



the saloon, flanked by two fancy dressed gunfighters. He introduces himself as Otomis Crowe, the town mayor and owner of the bank.

Otomis will try to defuse the situation. He will suggest that Taggart, unarmed, is not worth murder charges. He will also insist that Taggart pay double the reward and chastise Taggart for trying to cheat “these fine people” If a PC is interested, and have certainly shown themselves as capable (of killing) Otomis will suggest the most gunslinger/fighter type character would make a handy Town Sheriff, and perhaps his/her friends would be willing to serve as deputies?

Judge’s Note: The encounter can go one of two obvious ways. Either the PC’s refuse to listen and persist in attacking Taggart, in which case Encounter 3 (and possibly 4) will be triggered. Or, they will allow themselves to be talked down by Otomis, at which time they will be recruited into his sphere of influence as Sheriff and deputies. This avoids Encounters 3 and 4 for the moment, but allows Otomis to continue with his plans and even recruits the PCs (knowingly or unknowingly) into his schemes.

Encounters 3 and 4 are optional, or dependent on player character actions.

Encounter 3 – No Deals With The Devil! If the PCs do not allow Otomis to defuse the situation and risk a shoot-out with Otomis and his gunfighters, the banker will slip away (almost as if by magic) and leave his two gunfighters to deal with the PCs. Brett and Bart are better than the other gunmen in Sour Creek and the Judge is encouraged to describe the fine gear both have, as well as their quiet menace.

Crowe’s Gunslingers (Brett and Bart) Init +3, heavy pistols (2) +2 missile (1d10); AC 13; HD 2d8; hp 11; MV 30’; Act 2d20; SV Fort +2, Ref+2, Will +1; AL N.

Losing his gunfighters will anger Otomis and may lead the Judge to implement Encounter 4 – Otomis Loses His Patience.

Encounter 4 – Otomis Loses His Patience: Depending upon the character's success and their threat to Otomis Crowe and his plans, the demon may lose his patience and summon the **Bushwhackers** to help him eliminate the characters (and the townspeople). It is not the optimal result in Otomis' mind as it will likely cause the destruction of the Bushwhackers, or the townsfolk. Without the Bushwhackers he'll need to get his own hands dirty. Without the townsfolk, he'll need to find some other humans to mine the Demon Rock for him. BUT...these things happen, and it is far better than letting his "host body" be destroyed.

In this event, Otomis will summon the Bushwhackers, who will appear on zombie horses at the edge of town the next round. Otomis will make for his bank office, where he will teleport to the caverns under the Verdan Hills, leaving things to "play out" in town.

The Bushwhackers will then ride through town, killing everyone they can find and lighting the buildings on fire. Five will have pistols in one hand and use the torches in their off-hand to light up the wooden buildings, while the other ten just shoot anyone they can see.

Bushwhackers (15) The Bushwhackers are trapped in a special kind of unlife, having agreed to Otomis Crowe's curse. As a result, they are neither dead or undead but something in between, and symbiotically linked to their mounts. Most of the time, they exist in an incorporeal limbo, but when summoned by their master (Crowe) they take on the physical form of rotting zombies in tattered confederate uniforms, atop rotting horses with eyes of fire.

The Bushwhackers have no special protection from attacks and if killed, the Bushwhacker and mount will fade away in an echoing scream. They do not come back.

Init +2; heavy pistols (2) +2 missile (1d10); AC 13; HD 2d8; hp 10; Dismounted MV 30'/Mounted 60'; Act 2d20; SV Fort +2, Ref+2, Will +1; AL N.

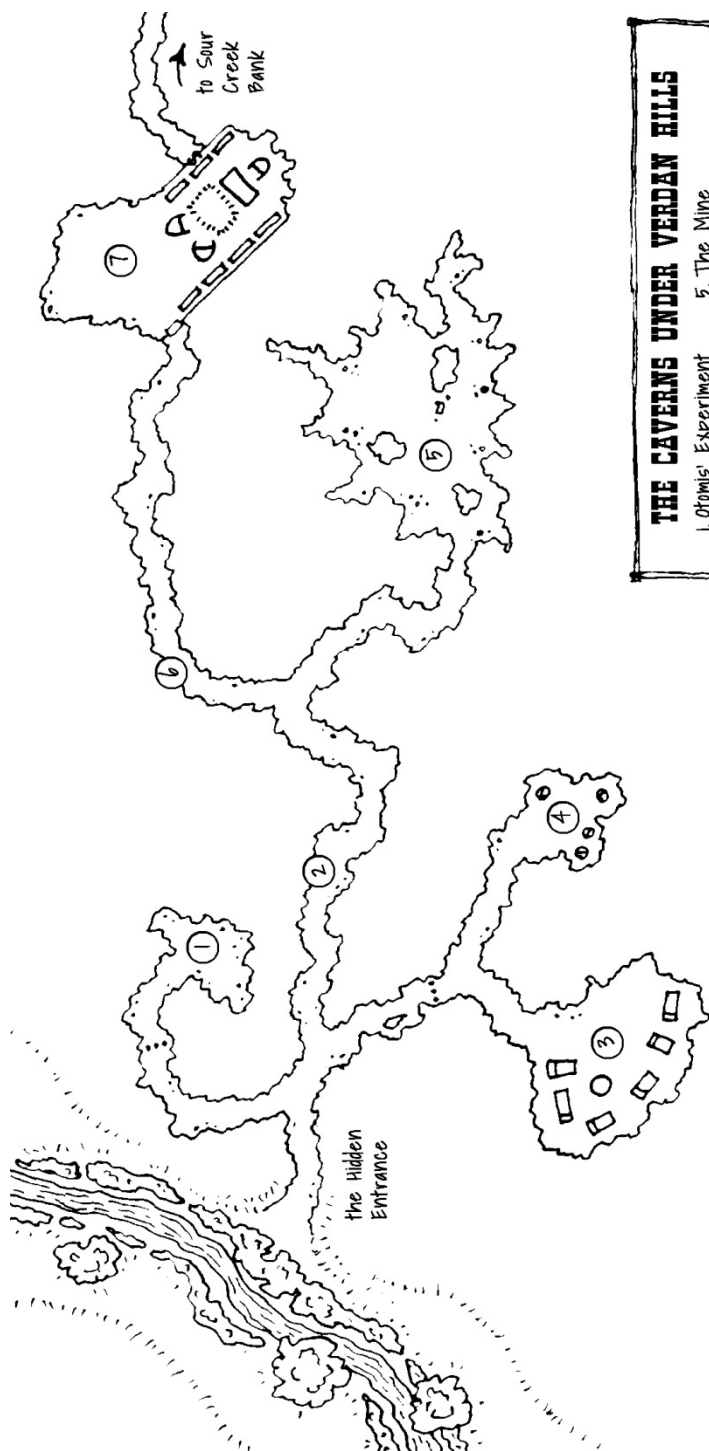
THERE'S (GREEN) GOLD IN THEM HILLS!

Encounter 5 – The Caverns Under Verdan Hills: Sooner or later the characters will investigate the greenish glow that can sometimes be seen from the Verdan Hills. The area is a sweet grass covered region of low hills that are fed from the same Sour Creek that gives the town its name. In the right light, the hills give off a sickly green glow that can be seen for miles around. Up close the glow distorts vision and can make characters feel ill {Fort Save vs DC14 or -1 to all Agility skills, to include shooting until leaving the area}. If characters search the area for an hour or more, there is a 1 in 6 chance of finding the entrance to the caverns, a 2 in 6 chance for a character with a tracking background (examples: Army Scout, Indian Brave, Frontiersman). The cave entrance is hidden at a bend in the Sour Creek, behind a clump of wild bushes and sawgrass. There are no tracks around it, as the Bushwhackers wipe away those made by captives, and they do not make any themselves (they go incorporeal before approaching the cave for just this reason.

Judges's Note: Judges will need to adjust based on the sequence of encounters. For example, if a showdown occurs with the Bushwhackers in town and all of the zombies are slain, then there will not be any Bushwhackers in **Area 5-5** but the poor wretches will still be chained there. Likewise, if the party comes to the caverns first and kills the Bushwhackers in **Area 5-5**, there will only be 12 Bushwhackers left to attack the town.

Area 5-1 – Otomis' Experiment: *Passage down this cavern is blocked by iron bars set into the stone and a padlocked door.*

The padlock can be picked on a DC12, or forced with a DC18 strength check. Beyond is an experiment that Otomis conducted on some captured townspeople that died, a raise dead spell, and demon ore. The result is an **Insane Mass** of mouths, arms, legs and distorted faces that slimes its way toward any meat in a futile effort to satisfy an insatiable hunger. While the Insane Mass only moves at 10', every character seeing it must pass a DC14 Will check or freeze in terror.



THE CAVERNS UNDER VERDAN HILLS

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Otomis' Experiment | 5. The Mine |
| 2. Pit Trap | 6. Trip Wire Trap |
| 3. Slave Quarters | 7. Otomis' Office |
| 4. Slave Prison | |

Insane Mass (1): Init +1 bite +3 (1d4); claw +2 (1d4) AC 11; HD 4d8; hp 20; MV 10'; Act 2d20; SV Fort +3, Ref -2, Will n/a; AL C.

Area 5-2 – Pit Trap: At this position is a 15' deep pit hidden by a thin carpet of reeds covered in dirt. At the bottom of the pit are wooden stakes. When using light in the caverns, detecting the pit is a DC14 Intelligence check. If the party is specifically looking for traps, being careful, etc. there is an extra +2 bonus to detect the pit. If the party is travelling in the dark, the DC is 16.

If not detected, the lead character will fall into the pit. A DC16 Reflex save means the character has grabbed the edge of the pit. Without the save, the character takes 3d8 damage from the fall and stakes.

Areas 5-3 & 5-4 – Slave Quarters and Privy: *Passage down this cavern is blocked by iron bars set into the stone and a padlocked door.*

Moving down this cavern passage, the characters encounter a barred door as in **Area 5-1** above. The padlock can be picked on a DC12, or forced with a DC18 strength check. Beyond the door the cavern forks; to the right is an area with ragged bedrolls and a fire pit (**Area 5-3**). To the right is a crude privy (**Area 5-4**). A DC12 Intelligence check allows the characters to determine that between that between 4 and 6 people have been living here in wretched conditions.

Area 5-5 – The Mine: Turning down this passage, the character will hear the sound of digging, and the crack of a whip. As they get closer to the open area, they will see the glow of lantern light. In this area, they see five bedraggled humans digging at the green glowing walls of the cavern with crude tools (broken shovels, wooden sticks and trowels) while guarded by what looks like three Confederate soldiers! This despite the War Between the States ending almost a decade ago!

The three Confederate soldiers are Bushwhackers. If this is the first encounter with the Bushwhackers, the characters will each need to pass a DC8 Willpower check or be unable to act in the first round due to the horror of seeing rotting zombies!



“Demon Ore” by Carmin Vance

The **Bushwackers (3)** have no special protection from attacks and if killed, the Bushwacker will fade away in an echoing scream. They do not come back.

Init +2; Atk melee +1 whip (1d4), heavy pistols (2) +2 missile (1d10); AC 13; HD 2d8; hp 10; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SV Fort +2, Ref+2, Will +1; AL N.

The five ‘miners’ have been abducted and forced to mine by the zombie confederates. They are shackled together around the ankles (broken with a DC14 Strength check, or picked with a DC14 Agility

check). The miners are either ne'er-do-wells from town or travelers. They each have only a 1 in 6 chance of knowing a **Rumor** (from the table below). They do not know of anything beyond this mine area and their wretched quarters (**Area 5-3 and 5-4**).

Area 5-6 – Trip Wire Trap: Located here is a very thin trip wire. Detecting it requires a successful DC16 Detect Traps or Intelligence check. If successful, the wire is easily avoided. If not, it is tripped and all characters must make a DC15 Reflex save or take 2d4 damage. Characters must then roll a d2. On a **1** the character is trapped on the Office (**Area 5-7**) side of the cave in, a **2** indicates the other side (with the known exit). The passage is completely blocked and will take 1d4 hours to clear. (The characters on the **Area 5-7** side could still escape through the bank tunnel...if they could find it.)

Area 5-7 – Otomis Crowe's Office: At the end of this passage, the characters come to a fine oaken door set into the raw stone! The finely made door is at complete odds with the rough-cut caverns...very out of place. Trying the door, the characters will find it unlocked.

The door opens to a finely appointed office complete with Asian rug, large oak captain's desk, bookshelves and padded leather chairs.

Unless Otomis has fled here due to actions of the PCs, this office is unoccupied. The desk and bookshelves contain some interesting ledgers and occult books, but unless it suites the Judge's game, there are no grimoires or significant loot, although a skilled PC may decipher the ledgers to uncover some of Crowe's less savory hidden financial transactions.

If PCs search the bookcase, a DC12 Intelligence check will discover a concealed door. The secret door opens to a corridor some 5 miles long that empties into a hidden basement under the Sour Creek Bank. A ladder leads up to Otomis Crowe's office in the second floor. {This could be used by unscrupulous PCs to get into and out of the bank after business hours, for robbery or to set up an ambush for Crowe}

ADDITIONAL ENCOUNTERS / SIDEQUESTS

Encounter 6 – Support Your Local Sheriff: Otomis is completely serious about the characters becoming the law in Sour Creek. He will invite the party's "leaders" to his office on the upper floor of the bank. Meanwhile, the rest of the party can explore town, perhaps meeting with other townspeople. Obviously, any outlaw characters will be excluded as Sheriff or deputies, but Otomis explains he is willing to help them seek "an honest way of life" so long as no further crimes (like robbing his bank!) occur in the town. The Sheriff's pay is a dollar a day and deputies make 50 cents. There is a small Sheriff's office – a one room brick building split 50/50 with two desks, chairs and a two bunk jail.

Otomis will attempt to endear himself to the characters, playing up how civilization is coming to the West and that many of the surrounding ranchers are rustlers or worse...thieves! In fact, most have been foreclosed on by Otomis and are unwilling to peacefully vacate the premises. Each eviction also pays up to a \$100 bounty for the officers of the law doing the eviction.

Encounter 7 – Leave Me Alone Kid! Little Johnny Cotton, a pugnacious 11 year old orphan boy will attach himself to the toughest looking member of the party. A classic of the western genre was the annoying (but loveable!) brat that would bother the gunfighter and almost certainly get captured by villains while trying to "help". If the "tough guy" player plays along, he/she gets an additional 1d3 Luck and 1d4 Rumors from the little scamp. But should they dump or allow harm to come to Little Johnny, the penalty is loss of 2d6 permanent points of Luck and a permanent loss of 2 points in Personality. {Whether these come back from 'avenging' Little Johnny is up to the Judge}

Little Johnny Cotton (1): Init +1; slingshot +3 missile (1d4); AC 11; HD 1d8; hp 8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref+1, Will +1; AL C.

Encounter 8 – Over My Dead Body! The law enforcement PCs are charged with evicting sweet old "Mrs. Colonel" Mae Tucker, a white haired, hard as nails widow of a Union Colonel that is the

only land-owner around with the guts to stand up to Otomis Crowe. She will invite the PCs in to chat, and will be happy to fill them in on her suspicions of “Mr. Crowe” – that he is likely a wanted man, that he has falsified most of the deeds and mortgages he’s been using to support his land claims, as well as a likely murderer of anyone who stands in his way or whom he does not like. If the PCs are willing to talk, she will show her deeds and other paperwork that proves that she owns the ranch and that Crowe has claim to only minor debts – which she could and has tried to pay. She also knows 1d6 Rumors.

If the PCs do not wish to talk, and are fully supportive of Crowe (it happens), Mae has her own crew of cowboys. They will come to her aid as needed.

If the PCs murder the old woman outright, it definitely calls for a 1d6 permanent loss of Luck.

“Mrs. Colonel” Mae Tucker (1): Init +0 (initiative dice is 1d16 for using a 2 handed weapon (double barrel shotgun), double barrel shotgun +2 missile (2d14 damage – both barrels) 2 rounds to reload; AC 10; HD 1d8; hp 7; MV 20’; Act 1d20; SV Fort -1, Ref+0, Will +4; AL L.

Tucker’s Cowboys (6-8 depending on Judge’s discretion): Init +0, light pistol +1 missile (1d8); AC 11; HD 1d8; hp 5; MV 30’; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref+1, Will +0; AL L.

Encounter 9 - Them Dern Noble Boys! An optional encounter for the “law enforcement” characters if the Judge wants a longer game. The good old Noble boys are a pack of four inbred moonshiners who have lately been experimenting with adding some of the weird green glowing stuff they found in Demon Hills to their moonshine. As a result, all four are now demon-powered and quite insane. They will ride into town on their stallions and kill, drink blood, eat flesh or any other kind of homicidally insane depravity that the Judge dreams up.

The Noble Boys (Roscoe, Bo, Cletus, and Luke): Init +2, heavy pistol +2 missile (1d10); AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 11; MV 30’; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref+2, Will +0; AL C.

RUMORS

Rumors are acquired at Judge's discretion through interaction with townsfolk.

1. *It's odd, but I hasn't seen ole Bill around lately. He's always be a layabout bum, but when he runs out of cash, he's a decent laborman...when sober. I can't believe he left town. Thar's a few others that's gone missing in the last few months. Mostly the kind that won't be missed, ya know?* (True – the Bushwhackers have been kidnapping people that Otomis believes will not be missed as forced labor mining demon ore.)

2. *The mayor is sure busy buyin' up or drivin' out the ranchers around here. Don't make no sense either...you can tell with a look he ain't no herdsman hisself, an' there ain't no other use for that land. Prospectors never found nothin' of value in those hills.* (True - Otomis Crowe is busy buying up land or running the rightful owners off of land surrounding the Verdian Hills. Once the region is cleared out, he will start a full fledged secret mining operation to extract the demon ore.)

3. *I swear I seen 'em! Ghosts of the Confed'racy, rising again in the sunset! 'n I wasn't drinkin' that much either!* (True – this references the Bushwhackers)

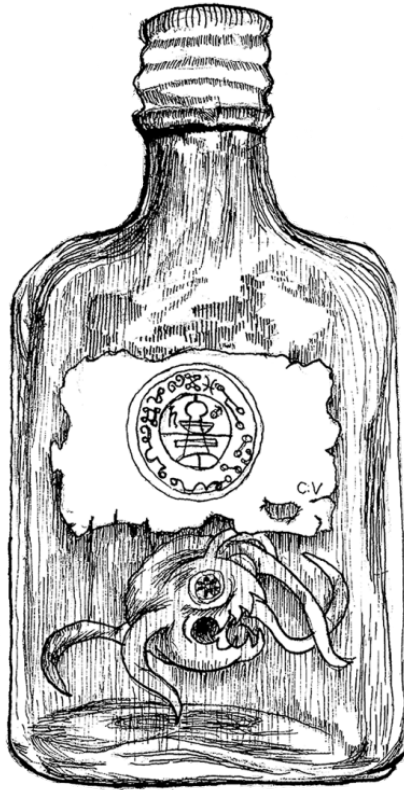
4. *Old Wen Ho Chan the laundryman is one ah them chy-nee boxers...don't mess with him! He looks old but can do backflips!* (False, but...Wen Ho is a refugee from the Ever Victorious Army and the Taiping Rebellion, but the only martial art he knows is with a rifle, which he is VERY good with)

5. *Best watch yer back. Them Indians are sneakin' outta ther' village an' into town. Ther' kidnapping good townsfolk fer eatin'!* (False)

6. *Taggart's the one pullin' the Mayor Crowe's strings! Reide is the real power in this town! That's why everyone's always kidnappin' his daughter!* (False)

7. *I've seen dancing glowing lights out on the prairie on nights of the full moon! Angels or spirits, ah don't know which! (False...he was... probably drunk? Or aliens?)*

8. *Them dern Noble boys are the REAL danger ta this town! They live out in the Western Woods mixing up white lightning...and drinkin' it! Ther' gonna tear through this place and kill everyone some day! (True)*



“Solomon’s Seal Whiskey” by Carmin Vance

DARK TRAILS CHARACTER SHEET

NAME	CLASS	XP	LEVEL
LUCKY SIGN	OCCUPATION	ALIGNMENT	SPEED

HP		ABILITY	MODIFIER	REFLEX
	STR			
	AGI			
AC	STA			FORTITUDE
	PER			
	LUCK			
GRIT	INT			WILL

SIGNATURE WEAPONS

WEAPON	DMG	SHOTS	RANGE	COMBAT
				INITIATIVE:
				MELEE BONUS:
				RANGED BONUS:
				CRIT DIE:
				FUMBLE DIE:
■■■■■ AMMO ■■■■■■				SPECIAL ■■■■

SPECIAL ABILITIES & SPELLS	GOODS & SUNDRIES
	ARCANE VAULT
	VALUABLES & DINERO
	STABLE

GFA TWENTY-NINETEEN

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