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"Howdy" from 12 to Midnight

In case you are not familiar with us, 12 to Midnight is a Texas-based RPG publisher specializing in modern horror. You might not normally think "Texas" and "horror" go together, but we are pretty sure you will change your mind after spending some time in Pinebox.

That's Pinebox, Texas. It is a nice little rural community smack-dab in east Texas. There is a university nearby, a Pine forest called the Big Thicket, and a mess of beautiful wildflowers every Spring. Unfortunately, it is also the epicenter of a whole lot of bad mojo. We're talking dark magic, serial killers, haunted buildings—the whole ball of wax.

If you want to learn more about Pinebox, just visit our website at 12tomidnight.com. You can start using the free campaign setting on our site right now, then watch it continue to grow right here in the pages of *Modern Dispatch*. Of course, Pinebox is *our* setting but all the material in these pages can just as easily be dropped into *yours*.

If you have any ideas for future issues or want to comment on what you read here, please drop by the forums on our website.

Adventure Outlines

Big Thicket Adventures



The Big Thicket of East Texas is one of the last remaining jungle-like regions of North America. Its dense undergrowth is so thick in places that it cannot be penetrated without a sharp machete or hatchet. Every deer season, many hunters find themselves lost within its confines. In East Texas it is often said, "Stay within 20 feet of the road or you'll get lost—and you may never be found again!"

The Thicket is primarily made up of tall pines, ancient oaks, and a few beech trees. The understory is a tangle of vines, small bushes, and thorns. This forest is home to coyotes, black bears, many species of birds, and the legendary panther. Native American tribes, such as the Caddo, once made their homes deep in the Thicket. Though two hundred years ago the forest covered a majority of East Texas, today it only covers a few counties, including the southern reaches of Golan County.

In the 1800s, many bushwhackers, outlaws, and renegade Native Americans made the Thicket their home and sanctuary. During the 1920s, bootleggers hid their alcohol stills deep in the reaches of the Thicket along its natural creek beds. Today, murders are commonplace and human remains are found by hunters on a fairly regular basis, though these remains are generally half eaten by wild animals and rarely identifiable. Ancient Native American burial mounds, rotting cabins, and old barns are found deep within the forest, overgrown with the weeds and thorn bushes of a hundred years' growth.

Today, biking and hiking trails have been cut through many parts of the Big Thicket, which is now protected by both state and national governments. The fall and winter see many hunters enter its dark interior

seeking deer, ducks, squirrels, geese, turkeys, and wild razorback hogs. Several large camping areas are available for those who wish to keep the amenities of civilization close at hand, but others prefer to hike into the forest and create their own campground.

Many legends involving the Thicket persist even today: bigfoot and panther sightings, rumors of chupacabra attacks, reports of ghostly Spanish soldiers, fierce Native American spirits, and tales of buried Confederate Hope Gold. Some even say that pirates from Galveston ventured up the Sabine River to hide their loot in the deep woods. Other phenomena are also common, ranging from unexplained lights in the night sky to strange disappearances, bizarre and dangerous weather patterns, and the mysterious Flames of Kirby Smith. In the Pinebox Campaign all of these legends are true, and they make for great side treks or short adventures. Three such side treks are presented in this issue of *Modern Dispatch*: The Beasts of the Thicket, Little Lost Child, and Last Chance Gold.

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Beasts of the Thicket

This encounter can involve a bigfoot, panther, or chupacabra. These legendary creatures are masters of hiding and moving silently. They only attack humans if provoked. Choose one of these three creatures or select the beast randomly.

As you make your way deeper into the beautiful, dark Thicket, you suddenly notice a strange stillness. The forest has become eerily silent.

Have the heroes make *Spot* checks against the creature's *Hide* check in order to notice it a mere fifteen feet away, hidden in the underbrush, watching their every move. If they see the creature, what happens next depends on them. If the heroes choose to provoke the creature, it fights them. Fleeing is also an option, though the action of running away provokes the panther or chupacabra to attack.

If the heroes choose to remain calm and still, the creature eventually turns and makes its way deeper into the forest. It may be tracked, by someone with the *Track* feat, to its lair. The creature's home is a dry creek bed with five-foot-high banks on either side.

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The panther makes its home in an ancient oak tree overlooking the creek bed, while the chupacabra lives within the tree's hollow trunk. The bigfoot creature has created a bed of flora in the creek bed. If the lair is discovered, the creature fights or flees, depending on

the actions of the heroes. If the creature survives an attack, it hunts the heroes until they escape the bounds of the forest.

Panther

Medium-size Animal

Hit Dice: 3d8+3, hp 17

Massive Damage Threshold: 12

Initiative: +2

Speed: 40 ft.

Defense: 15, touch 12, flat-footed 13 (+2 DEX, +3 natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/+3

Attack: +3 melee (1d4, claw)

Full Attack: +3 melee (1d4, 2 claws), +0 melee (1d6, bite)

Fighting Space/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Qualities: pounce, improved grab, rake 1d4, low-light vision, weapon finesse (claws)

Saves: Fort +3, Ref +5, Will +1

Action Points: 0

Reputation: +0

Allegiances: none

Abilities: STR 11, DEX 15, CON 12, INT 2, WIS 10, CHA 6

Skills: Balance +8, Hide +8 (+16 in tall grass or undergrowth), Listen +2, Move Silently +8, Spot +2, Swim +11

Feats: none

Possessions: none

Challenge Rating: 2

Advancement: 4-8 HD (medium), 9-12 HD (large)

Panthers have the following traits:

Pounce (Ex): If a panther leaps upon a foe during the first round of combat, it can make a full attack, even if it has already taken a move action.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the panther must hit with a claw or bite attack. If it gets a hold, it can rake (see below).

Low-Light Vision (Ex): Panthers have low-light vision.

Rake (Ex): A panther that succeeds in making an improved grab can make two rake attacks (+3 melee) with its hind legs for 1d4 points of damage each. The panther can also rake if it pounces on an opponent.

Weapon Finesse (Claws) (Ex): The panther may use its *Dexterity* modifier instead of its *Strength* modifier on attack rolls.

Skill Bonuses: Panthers receive a +4 species bonus on *Balance*, *Hide*, and *Move Silently* checks. In areas of tall grass or heavy undergrowth, their *Hide* bonus improves to +8.

The legendary black panther of East Texas is an elusive hunter that haunts the deepest recesses of the Big Thicket. Some believe these are a type of jaguar or cougar, but little evidence has ever been collected. Many tales are told of a bone-chilling scream that sounds like a woman or a small child. In reality, it is the call of this large cat.

Lesser Chupacabra

Small Aberration

Hit Dice: 2d8, hp 10

Massive Damage Threshold: 10

Initiative: +3

Speed: 20 ft., fly 40 ft. (poor), jump 20 ft.

Defense: 16, touch 14, flat-footed 13 (+3 DEX, +1 size, +2 natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +1/-5

Attack: +0 melee (1d4-2, 2 claws), or +1 melee (1d6-2, bite), or +0 melee (1d6-2, kick)

Full Attack: +0 melee (1d4-2, 2 claws), +1 melee (1d6-2, bite)

Fighting Space/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Qualities: darkvision 60 ft., musk, chameleon skin, vampiric bite, weapon finesse (bite)

Saves: Fort +0, Ref +3, Will +2

Action Points: 0

Reputation: +0

Allegiances: none

Abilities: STR 7, DEX 16, CON 10, INT 2, WIS 10, CHA 1

Skills: Hide +10 (+2 in thicket), Move Silently +5, Listen +4, Spot +4

Feats: none

Possessions: none

Challenge Rating: 2

Advancement: 2-3 HD (small), 4 HD (greater chupacabra, see below)

Greater Chupacabra

Medium Aberration

Hit Dice: 4d8, hp 20

Massive Damage Threshold: 10

Initiative: +3

Speed: 30 ft., fly 50 ft. (poor), jump 30 ft.

Defense: 15, touch 13, flat-footed 12 (+3 DEX, +2 natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +3/-3

Attack: +2 melee (1d4, 2 claws), or +3 melee (1d6, bite), or +2 melee (1d6, kick)

Full Attack: +2 melee (1d4, 2 claws), +3 melee (1d6 bite)

Fighting Space/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Qualities: darkvision 60 ft., musk, chameleon skin, vampiric bite, weapon finesse (bite)

Saves: Fort +0, Ref +3, Will +4

Action Points: 0

Reputation: +0

Allegiances: none

Abilities: STR 10, DEX 16, CON 10, INT 2, WIS 10, CHA 1

Skills: Hide +15 (+2 in thicket), Move Silently +10, Listen +8, Spot +8

Feats: none

Possessions: none

Challenge Rating: 2

Advancement: none

Chupacabras have the following traits:

Darkvision (Ex): Can see in total darkness out to 60 feet.

Musk (Ex): The creature may exude a powerful musk three times a day, which forces every creature within a 20 foot radius to pass a Fortitude save (DC 12). If this save is failed, the victim is paralyzed in a sleep-like state for three rounds.

Chameleon Skin (Ex): The chupacabra's skin can change color and texture to adapt to its surroundings. This provides a natural bonus of +5 to the creature's *Hide* skill.

Vampiric Bite (Su): Upon a successful grapple, the chupacabra's fangs allow the creature to bite and suck the blood from its victim. This is done at 1d4 points of Constitution damage per round. Victims who lose more than half their Constitution must pass a Fortitude save (DC 12) or lose consciousness, unless they receive a transfusion of blood within the next ten minutes of game time. Victims who lose all their Constitution

points die. The chupacabra gains one temporary hit point for each point of Constitution it drains, and the hit points last for one 24-hour period. The temporary bonus is limited to a maximum of 10 points above its normal hit point level. Chupacabras may heal damage through their vampiric bite. Damage healed in this way is permanent and without limit.

The chupacabra is a savage and stealthy carnivore. It has the face of a wolf, but with gray or scaly facial skin. Course body hair and skin provides chameleon-like camouflage, with a row of quills that runs down the length of the beast's back. The creature has bat-like wings, powerful kangaroo-like legs, and two short forearms ending in three-fingered claws. Two sharp fangs extend several inches from the creature's snout. Its eyes are reported to be black, orange, or red.

These twisted creatures range throughout the Caribbean, Central and South America, and the southern United States. They generally prey on small fowl and animals, such as chickens, geese, ducks, goats, dogs, and cats. Greater chupacabras have been known to attack cattle and, occasionally, human beings. Chupacabras are masterful predators and are very difficult to track, hunt, or kill. Typically they attack at night and leave the bodies of their prey ravaged and bloodless. Investigators claim that the creature gives off a hissing noise and secretes a natural musk that lulls prey into a sleep-like paralysis. It then attacks the victim with two straw-like fangs, which allow the beast to suck the blood from its prey.

Many South Americans blame US scientists for creating these aberrations and loosing them upon an unsuspecting and unbelieving world. Many have reported that American soldiers come to claim any chupacabra carcass harvested by hunters. These bodies are secreted away in hidden bases deep in the Amazon jungle. Officially, the US government disavows any knowledge of these creatures.

Bigfoot

Medium-size Humanoid

Hit Dice: 3d8+3, hp 16

Massive Damage Threshold: 18

Initiative: +3

Speed: 30 ft.

Defense: 17, touch 13, flat-footed 14 (+3 DEX, +4 natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +2/+5

Attack: +6 melee (1d3+4, slam or 1d6+3, club)

Full Attack: +6 melee (1d3+4, slam or 1d6+3, club)

Fighting Space/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Qualities: dense fur, improved grab, low-light vision, scent

Saves: Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +1

Action Points: 0

Reputation: +0

Allegiances: none

Abilities: STR 17, DEX 16, CON 18, INT 10, WIS 10, CHA 6

Skills: Climb +5, Hide +8, Listen +2, Move Silently +5, Spot +3, Survival +6, Swim +3

Feats: Stealthy, Simple Weapons Proficiency

Possessions: none, may use a natural club

Challenge Rating: 2

Advancement: by character class

Bigfoots have the following traits:

Dense Fur (Ex): The animal's fur is so thick that it provides a natural +4 Defense.

Improved Grab (Ex): To use this ability, the bigfoot must hit with a slam attack. If it gets a hold, it can squeeze for 1d4+4 damage.

Low-Light Vision (Ex): Bigfoots have low-light vision.

Scent (Ex): Bigfoots are able to detect approaching enemies, sniff out hidden foes, and track by sense of smell.

East Texas has many legends regarding these great ape-like creatures. Some believe they are a missing link in the evolution of man. Others believe they are aliens who have come to earth as observers or as advance scouts for an invasion. Whatever they are, reports of them can be found around the world. Proof of the bigfoots' existence would set much of the scientific community abuzz and bring great fame to whoever provided conclusive evidence. However, there are those in secret organizations, including the US government, who want to keep knowledge of these mysterious beings from the public.

Little Lost Child

In this scenario, the heroes search for a little lost boy named Ray Williams. He wandered away from his father's camp and became lost in the Thicket. While the child wandered lost, a rabid werewolf abducted him. This poor creature is suffering from advanced dementia and has lost much of his humanity. Once the party successfully tracks the creature, he attacks them. The werewolf has not harmed the boy, but the boy is terrified and in shock.

The search has lasted for several hours and has drawn you ever deeper into the Thicket. You were excited by your discovery of the boy's left tennis shoe, but that find came more than thirty minutes ago and you fear you may have lost the trail.

Have the heroes make *Listen* checks (DC 12). Success allows them to hear the distant whimpering of the child. Ray sits next to a large pine tree, his head in his hands, crying from fright. The creature is hidden 20 feet away in the underbrush. He may be noticed if a character succeeds at a *Spot* check (DC 20). If he is not seen, he gets a surprise round to attack the heroes. Being rabid, he attacks until killed. In his fevered mind, the child is his cub and he intends to protect him. Anyone attempting to save the child may become his target. The werewolf does not attack anyone who carries the boy for fear of hurting his "cub," but tracks the heroes back to camp and attacks at the first opportunity.

Werewolves

Lycanthropy is a quasi-genetic disease with both dominant and regressive traits. This inherited affliction leads to painful transformations from the human shape into a hulking creature resembling a shambling, upright wolf. These shifts in form are triggered by intense emotions, and people with this disease tend to have great difficulty controlling such emotions. These changes can last anywhere from minutes to hours, or even (rarely) days. While the sufferer is in creature form, only a slight vestige of the human intellect remains. Typically such creatures only remember their most basic identity and the identity of very close loved ones.

While transformed, the werewolf's saliva contains a viral agent with traces of the lycanthropic disease. This virus is transferred to a victim's bloodstream through any open wound. Assuming the victim survives the lycanthrope's attack, this disease slowly alters his genetic code. This process usually takes several weeks, during which the victim may display symptoms similar to a bad case of the flu.

On nights of the full moon, the virus fully activates, transforming the victim into a pale imitation of his attacker. This "wolf-man" is a man-sized wolf creature with much more human characteristics. Typically, new wolf-men retain more of their intellect and are able to control their actions to a degree.

However, these transformations are much more painful than those of lycanthropes and the disease itself is degenerative. That is, the virus constantly attacks the victim's genetic code and replaces it with modified code. These changes to the body chemistry and brain lead to a gradual descent into paranoia, delusion, and eventually outright madness. This descent usually takes between six months and a year, depending on the initial health of the victim.

See the [Werewolf template in the Modern System Reference Document](#) for info on curing the bite of a lycanthrope.

Rabies

Should the rabies-infected creature bite a hero, that character must make an immediate Fortitude save (DC 12). If the save is unsuccessful, the rabies virus infects him, though the hero may not know of the infection until symptoms occur. In 1d10 days, the hero suffers muscle spasms and seizures, followed by a high fever—1d3 days later, the sight of water or any type of drink causes the throat muscles to spasm. This is followed by a period of 1d10 days of delirium, followed by death. If caught before the onset of symptoms, the rabies virus may be treated effectively with medication and a successful Fortitude save (DC 10). Once delirium sets in, the Fortitude save to survive is DC 20. The hero

may react violently, in an almost feral manner, towards anyone he contacts during this time.

The were-wolf in this adventure is in the delirium stage, but retains sufficient humanity to know that killing a child would be wrong. At least for now.

Werewolf in Hybrid Form

Medium size Humanoid

Hit Dice: 5d8+15 plus 2d8+6 (Human Strong Hero 5), hp 52

Massive Damage Threshold: 17

Initiative: +4

Speed: 50 ft.

Defense: 17, touch 13, flat-footed 15 (+2 DEX, +3 class)

Base Attack/Grapple: +9/+9

Attack: +9 melee (1d6+7, bite)

Full Attack: +9 melee (1d6+7, bite)

Fighting Space/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Qualities: alternate form, curse of lycanthropy, trip, scent, damage reduction 15/silver, wolf empathy, darkvision 60 ft

Saves: Fort +9, Ref +8, Will +2

Action Points: 0

Reputation: +0

Allegiances: none

Abilities: STR 18, DEX 18, CON 17, INT 12, WIS 12, CHA 8

Skills: Climb +10, Handle Animal +3, Hide +5, Jump +8, Knowledge (current events) +5, Knowledge (popular culture) +5, Knowledge (streetwise) +5, Listen +6, Move Silently +6, Profession +5, Read/Write Spanish, Speak Spanish, Spot +5, Swim +10, Survival +5 (when tracking by scent)

Feats: Athletic, Cleave, Heroic Surge, Iron Will, Power Attack, Simple Weapon Proficiency, Weapon Finesse (bite)

Possessions: none

Challenge Rating: 7

Advancement: by class

Last Chance Gold

For generations, treasure hunters have sought a fortune that was reportedly hidden deep with in the Thicket in May of 1865. Rumors say it is stored in three great artillery crates that have come to be known as the "Hope Gold" chests of the Confederacy.

Heroes who spend a day or longer in *Research* can uncover the following:

DC	Result
DC 20:	Research at the East Texas University Library uncovers the name <i>Mercury Smith</i> in connection with the hiding of the gold.
DC 23:	Research of the county records shows that Mercury Smith owned forty acres of land just southeast of Highway 96 on the southern Golan County line. A survey shows that the forest covers Smith's farmstead, with only the remains of a barn and a brick fireplace still standing. The property also contains five large Native American burial mounds and is known for excellent hunting during deer season.
25+:	The heroes uncover a book of military records entitled <i>Men of Golan County</i> . This book reveals that Smith was a sergeant in Company A of the First Texas Infantry Division. It also reveals that he never surrendered or took the Oath of Allegiance to the United States. The record indicates that he died one year after the war during a yellow fever epidemic.

Most treasure hunters never realized that the name Mercury Smith belonged to this Civil War sergeant. They thought it referred to a local gunsmith who was reputed to use mercury in making rifle cartridges. The heroes are on the right path to discovering the gold.

The old Smith Homeplace is now in the National Forest, so access is easy to gain. It is, however, illegal to dig into the burial mounds.

A *Search* check (DC 20) of the old farmstead reveals a hollowed brick in the old fireplace. Within the brick is a beaded cord of leather. There are five beads, and all but one is red. The middle bead is black, and has a small X scratched on it.

Looking at a map, the heroes can see that the five burial mounds run almost in a line from the old homestead, west towards Six Mile Bridge. The brush is extremely heavy, requiring machetes to clear a path to the burial mounds. The “treasure” is buried in the third mound to the west. If characters dig in the third mound, read the following:

As you dig into the earth, you quickly clear away the brush and grasses from over a hundred years of growth. Once you have broken through the natural coverings, the earthen mound gives way quickly and you soon spot the edge of a cracked piece of pottery. A wind blows from the west; its gusts shake the forest's leaves, which rustle in a cacophony of sound.

If the heroes dig deeper, describe the clouds of a thunderstorm rolling in from the west. Eventually, the occasional boom of thunder resounds in the distance, with bright flashes of lightning. If the heroes have ghost-hunting equipment, such as video recording devices, or if they take photographs, they see a heavy, white ectoplasm settling over the area. Nothing further happens (except for an intense downpour of rain) unless the heroes speak one of the following words: gold, Mercury, Confederacy, or Confederate. If they do so, the mound suddenly shakes and dirt falls away as the body of Mercury Smith rises from the earth, intent on protecting his treasure. If none of the key words are spoken, they eventually unearth the body of the old confederate. If disturbed, he rises and fights to protect his treasure. If the mummy is defeated, the heroes recover three chests from just beneath where he

arose. Each chest contains two bars of impure gold and several bags of Confederate money. The gold is mixed with other metals, lowering its value considerably. The treasure cannot legally be sold, as it was found on National Park lands in a protected Native American burial mound. (Possession of the treasure is punishable by up to two years in jail and a fine of up to \$10,000).

Dedicated Revenant

Medium-sized undead

Hit Dice: 6d12, hp 28

Massive Damage Threshold: –

Initiative: -1

Speed: 20 ft.

Defense: 17, touch 9, flat-footed 17 (-1 DEX, +8 natural)

Base Attack/Grapple: +2/+5

Attack: +6 melee (1d4+4, claw), or by weapon type +5 (1d6+3, saber)

Full Attack: +6 melee (1d4+4, 2 claws), or by weapon type +5 (1d6+3, saber)

Fighting Space/Reach: 5 ft. by 5 ft./5 ft.

Special Qualities: undead, despair, fire vulnerability, resistant to blows, damage reduction 3/silver, earth sleep

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +7

Action Points: 0

Reputation: +0

Allegiances: none

Abilities: STR 17, DEX 8, CON -, INT 9, WIS 14, CHA 6

Skills: Climb +8, Hide +8, Listen +11, Move Silently +8, Spot +11

Feats: Alertness, Archaic Weapons Proficiency, Toughness

Possessions: none

Challenge Rating: 3

Advancement: 4-7 HD (medium-size), 8-14 HD (large), or by character class.

Dedicated Revenants have the following traits:

Undead (Su): As an undead creature, the Dedicated Revenant has no Constitution score. Its darkvision has a range of 60 feet. It is not affected by poison, sleep, paralysis, stunning, disease, necromantic effects, or mind-affecting effects, nor is it subject to critical hits, nonlethal damage, ability damage, ability drain, energy drain, the effects of massive damage, or any effect requiring a Fortitude save. It may only heal by earth sleep (see below).

Despair (Su): At the mere sight of the revenant, the viewer must make a Will save (DC 15) or be paralyzed with fear for 1d4 rounds. Whether or not the save is successful, that individual cannot be affected again by that revenant's despair ability for one day.

Fire Vulnerability (Ex): A revenant takes double damage from fire attacks unless a save for half damage is allowed. A successful save halves the damage, and a failure doubles it.

Resistant to Blows (Ex): Physical attacks deal only half damage to revenants. Apply this effect before damage reduction.

Damage Reduction 5/silver (Su): Only damage of over five points injures a revenant, though silver (or magic) weapons affect it normally.

Earth Sleep (Su): The revenant may enter the earth once per day to sleep. On its movement, it may enter the earth and may take its full movement down into the earth at no extra movement cost. If disturbed, it may awaken normally. It may heal any damage taken at the rate of one hp per day of sleep. The revenant may endure for centuries in such a state.

Dedicated revenants are a type of mummy created when some great devotion in life cannot be let go, even in death. It is a curse and a form of hellish punishment that the revenant must endure for eternity, or until destroyed.

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