

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW



A QUICK, THE DEAD AND THE SPACES IN BETWEEN ADVENTURE OF THE

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The Good Book tells us that a decent man will give up his life protectin' the innocent from the evils of this world. Well, I consider myself a decent man, so I thank the Lord every day that I ain't never met no one who was innocent.

THE STORY SO FAR

This story began as two separate tales; the Saga of Blackwater, and the Legend of Joshua Payne. Where the two stories meet creates a tragic tale of treachery and unattainable redemption.

Just three years ago, in 1873, a small band of settlers, fleeing a war they wanted nothing more to do with, came upon a small valley in western Montana that was so isolated from the rest of the world that they were fairly certain that the war could rage on forever outside, and they would never be touched. For the most part, they were right.

Once everyone got their stakes planted, they began to set up a small farming and ranching community. That's when Gary Treadwell made his discovery. Gary rode out to check on his herd when he spied the water hole that would one day give the town its name. Three of his cows were lying on the ground around it, so he rode over to them to take a look. The fumes coming from the small pond nearly knocked him out.

Somehow, that pond was a naturally occurring spring of alcohol (well not really "naturally;" see The Waterin' Hole below). But not just that; some quality in the earth around it seeped into the liquid and gave it a taste like nothing else in the world. Cows being rather stupid, they had drunk themselves to death.

Being an enterprising soul, Gary quickly realized just how stinking rich this discovery could make him. By the time he rode back to his house that evening, he already had a design in mind for the label of "Blackwater Special Sippin' Whiskey." Realizing that he didn't have the capital to provide bottles, printing, shipping, and advertising by himself, he let his fellow townsfolk in on his discovery. Together, they agreed to split the profits from the sale of this unique resource and began formulating plans for exporting it.

That's when Hank Ballard showed up and things started to go sour. Ballard was on the run from some

difficulty up in Sioux territory, and he had stumbled onto Blackwater. At first, it seemed that he was going to fit in just fine. He and Gary Treadwell became friends, as well as Gustav Horstein, the new town's aged sheriff. Ballard even came up with the idea of turning Blackwater into a tourist attraction.

Just the same, however, Treadwell felt no need to reveal the location of the spring to his new friend, just in case. It was a good decision, as it turned out, because soon Ballard was angling for more and more control of the business. His insistence that his sons be placed in charge of security was equally suspicious. Only one shipment of Blackwater Special had gone out when the other partners opted to vote Ballard out.

Hank and his boys did not take kindly to this, but had little say in the matter, since Treadwell and Horstein backed up the dissolution of the partnership with buckshot.

Hank is a vindictive man to start with, but with the additional push given to him by the Blackwater Special (see below) he decided to pay his revenge on the town that had wronged him. He didn't want to just kill everybody, however, since he had no idea of where the spring was or who knew exactly where it was. So he settled into a system of caves in the nearby hills and sent his sons out to recruit an army of desperadoes for the siege. Ballard and his boys began a ruthlessly efficient program of harassment and sabotage, effectively cutting the town off from the outside world.

After a couple of months of this terrorism, the townsfolk finally managed to get a message out to the deadly and mysterious Joshua Payne.

The Hardest of Men

Joshua Payne was once just another soldier serving the Union. Of course, back then he went by a different name. The first combat he saw was at Antietam, when he turned tail and ran. He kept on running. Ditching his uniform and changing his name, he knew there was still one thing he couldn't get away from: his fear. He reasoned that the only way to put his fear (and his shame at deserting) behind him was to banish the reasons for that fear.

He was afraid of combat because he didn't want to die, and he was fairly certain he would, since he could-

BY LEE
GARVIN

...

ARTWORK
BY
STEVE
BRYANT

n't fight his way out of an onion skin. So he began to train himself in the lethal arts of the gunslinger, always focusing on anything that would keep him alive that much longer. When he thought he had advanced to the point where he shouldn't be afraid anymore, he embarked on a test. He went bounty hunting after a bandit who had run into the Sioux-controlled

Dakotas.

When he finally cornered his prey, he found the fear still there, and it paralyzed him. With his bounty high-tailing it away and a bullet in his leg, Payne felt his life seeping out into the snow and he felt more afraid than he had been in the face of the Confederate cannons.

It was not his fate to die in the Dakotas, however, because he was found by an aged shaman, Grey Hills Bear, who saved him and nursed him back to health. Over the next several months, Grey Hills Bear and Joshua became good friends and had many adventures together. And each time Joshua faced death, Grey Hills Bear would teach him how to deal with his fear a little more.

During the course of one of these adventures, Payne and Grey Hills Bear ran afoul of a particularly nasty gang of thugs in the employ of Hank Ballard. During a dispute over mining rights, the Ballards kidnapped Grey Hills Bear and held him hostage against Payne, ordering him to back off or the old man would be killed.

Grey Hills Bear had done a lot of good in his life; enough to make certain manitous annoyed with him. One of these decided to have some fun at his expense. It approached Payne in the body of one of the hired guns he had recently killed and made him an offer. The manitous assured Payne that no matter what happened, he would not be killed when Ballard's men shot at him.

Desperate to help his friend, yet still afraid of death, Payne agreed, hoping he would figure a way out of whatever payment the spirit required. The malevolent being placed its "gift" upon the young man and Payne raced off to his friend's rescue.

Ballard himself had already left for greener pastures, but had ordered his men to hold Payne off for a little while more while he made his escape, or to kill him if they could.

In the battle that ensued, Payne was hit by exactly twenty-eight bullets, enough to kill him many times over. But none of the shots even made a mark. Puzzled but thankful for this phenomenon, he waded through the henchmen. Leaving a trail of bodies in his wake, Payne finally found Grey Hills Bear in the cave where he had been held. The shaman was dead; killed by falling rocks from the roof of the cave. Payne didn't realize it, but the number of rocks that hit the shaman was 28.

With this Pyrrhic victory staining his soul, Payne left the Dakotas and began wandering the West, making his way as a gunfighter for hire. He never noticed that wherever he went, folks had a tendency to die in freak accidents. But some folks did.

Over the years, a sort of legend grew up around him, and he became known to the Sioux as The Man Who Can Have No Brother.

The Waterin' Hole

Now just what is all the fuss about in Blackwater anyhow? Well, no one in town, or

JOSHUA PAYNE

Joshua Payne is a tragic figure who could have been a hero if he had made a different choice in life. And he knows it. Despite his "gift," fear still rules his life, but not to the extent that shame does. He never drinks, claiming that he must remain steady at all times in case of trouble. The truth is that with the slightest bit of alcohol in him he gets the shakes something horrible and can't even bear to see his own shadow.

The picture the rest of the world sees is much different from the true man. He talks quietly, without ever needing to raise his voice. His face is almost always expressionless, although he does have a temper. When he's in combat, he is a ruthless machine, carefully taking aim for a full action and making called shots to the head, never once dodging or taking cover.

The past month and a half has brought a disturbing revelation to him, but he refuses to believe it as yet. The time he has spent in Blackwater is the most he has spent in one place in several years, and the accidents keep happening, and people keep dying. Part of his brain has figured out that about one person has died each time he would have been killed in a gunfight, but the rest of his brain won't admit it.

Payne is five feet eleven inches, is in his late thirties with prematurely grey hair and pale blue eyes that seem to see the deaths of anyone he's speaking to.

Profile

Corporeal: D:4d12, N:3d10, S:4d8, Q:4d12 (4d12+6), V:2d8

Shootin': Pistol 6d12, **Shootin':** Rifle 3d12, **Quickdraw** 4d12+6, **Fightin':** Brawlin' 4d10

Mental: C:3d6, K:2d10, M:3d12, Sm: 3d6, Sp: 4d10

Overawe 4d12+4, **Persuasion** 2d12, **Bluff** 5d6, **Guts** 2d10

Edges: The Voice (threatening), The Stare

Hindrances: Night Terrors

Gear: Two pearl-handled Peacemakers, fastdraw holsters

Special Abilities:

"Champion of the Innocent": Payne cannot be killed by any normal or magical means. Any time something would do damage to him, the same amount of damage is instead channelled to an "innocent" person within a five mile radius. This damage does not appear the same way as Payne's damage should have appeared; a bullet wound does not show up as a bullet wound, for instance. Instead, some bizarre accident occurs which does the same amount of damage. This will affect the same "innocent" until they are dead or they move out of range, at which point the effect moves on to the next person.

By the terms of the curse, the most innocent are those targeted first. Someone who has never done anything selfish or wrong in their lives is the first choice. Next down the line would be someone who is completely uninvolved in the issue being fought over. After that comes anyone not involved in the present battle. Finally, if the only people for five miles around are those involved in the battle, then the damage will be transferred to a random combatant other than Payne or the person who inflicted it. The only way out of the curse is to find an innocent person in the vicinity and "kill" them. The damage would be transferred as an "accident" and kill Payne instead.

Sometimes Dead is Better

even this side of the graveyard knows this, but about six years ago, a fella by the name of Thomas "Thirsty" Guthree was prospecting in these hills. He was not alone, but neither was he very popular. Thirsty Guthree had a reputation among the other prospectors for getting falling down drunk while working. This was amusing at first, then annoying, then dangerous, since he would occasionally knock over a mine's support beam, or light the fuse on the wrong stick of dynamite, or drop an ore bucket on somebody's head. He was run out of every prospecting town and camp in Montana.

Finally, Guthree decided he didn't need anybody else anyhow. He wandered for a few days until he came upon a valley where the surrounding hills were riddled with caves. Figuring he'd do a little prospecting there, he set up camp at one of the many watering holes in the valley.

Now a man who worked as hard as Thirsty deserves a little libation every now and then, and Guthree was a very deservin' soul one particular night. He got so drunk that he didn't even notice when he fell into the watering hole. As Thomas Guthree drowned, he cursed his life, he cursed his drinkin', and he cursed his fellow miners. But most of all, he cursed the world for not bein' just a little bit nicer to him. He wished everyone would know what it was like to be him; a greedy little man who couldn't get a handle on his liquor.

Well, normally, this pathetic and sad story would end here. But this is the Weird West, and since when do things end normally? One o' them pesky Manitou decided to make Guthree's last wish come true; after a fashion. Guthree's bloated corpse sank into the water and then got wedged into a crevice deep at the bottom. The Manitou changed the water into whiskey and placed a curse on it. Anyone who drank more than a full bottle of this stuff within a week needs to make a hard (9) Spirit check. If the check is failed, they pick up a Mild Hankerin' for this one type of whiskey. Worse, once a person has a Hankerin' for it, they get greedy about it; the victim will want to ensure that he always will have a supply of the whiskey.

Once a victim has come down with this malady, he cannot be cured unless the curse is lifted. The only way to lift the curse is to dive into the whiskey (not an easy thing to do), find Guthree's body (nicely pickled by now) and remove it, giving it a proper burial. If the body is removed, the waterin' hole turns back into water, but all of the curse victims still have a Hankerin'. The curse will never be entirely lifted until he is given a proper burial.

CHAPTER ONE: STAGE TO NOWHERE

The story opens with the posse heading for Butte, Montana for some reason. It doesn't really matter what that reason is, just so long as everyone is on the stage bearing them there. The posse may know each other or not, but a long stagecoach ride is an ideal place to make introductions.

The posse is on the road to Butte, riding in a

weathered stagecoach with an even more weathered driver. Allow them to make their introductions, get in arguments or bragging contests if they like, then hit them with the next event.

Read or paraphrase the following:

You hear a loud bang and then a dry crack that sounds like a small explosion. The rear of the stagecoach suddenly drops to the ground with a bone-crackin' crash. You're dragged for a short distance further before the harness for the team snaps, leaving you sitting in the wreckage. Everybody make a Vigor roll.

Anyone who fails to get a 5 or better on the Vigor roll takes 2d4 damage from the crash, to a random location. After folks've gathered their senses and clambered out of the stage, describe the scene to them.

You step out into the late afternoon sun and see the team of horses galloping away at full steam, like the devil himself was lashin' the whip. Wondering what became of the driver, you look at the seat he had





been occupyin'.
He ain't there, but it
doesn't take too long to spot him. He's lyin' on the
ground about a dozen or so yards back. A quick inspection
reveals that he musta landed head first on a rock; he's dead-
er than Lincoln.

If anyone inspects the wagon, they discover that
one of the wheels has been completely shattered.
There are no repair supplies on board the coach.

If anyone thinks to retrieve the horses, they'll have
a difficult time of it, since the sound of the wheel
exploding when it hit a rock has spooked them some-
thin' fierce. First they have to catch up to the horses
by making a Hard (9) Quickness roll to head the team
off at the next curve. Then, they need to make a Hard
(9) Animal Wranglin' roll to calm them down.
Another, less humane way to halt the team would be
to just shoot one of the horses, allowing its weight on
the harness to stop the other horses. They will still
need to be calmed down, but this time it would take an
Incredible (11) roll.

At this point, let the posse know that sundown is
just a few hours away and they are pretty sure they
heard wolves howling earlier. This should convince
them to seek shelter. No matter what direction they
travel, go on to the next Chapter.

Bounty

For surviving the chapter, toss one Bounty point
into the pool. If they managed to retrieve the horses,
add another point. If they stayed behind to bury the
driver, add another.

CHAPTER TWO: TWO BULLETS BEAT THREE KINGS

Read or paraphrase:

*As you reach the top of the next hill, you finally see a
sign of civilization; literally. There's a sign stickin' up outta
the ground on the side of the trail covered with dirt and
dust. It's planted so low to the ground that no one in a
stagecoach would have ever even noticed it. It says:
"Blackwater — 5 miles."*

If no one wants to take a side trip to Blackwater,
remind the posse that it is getting dark, and Butte is
still at least 75 miles away.

After they've travelled about a mile along the
twisting track to Blackwater, the posse encounters a
few of Hank Ballard's men. There are four of them,
arranged two to a side on either side of the road. They
will wait until the posse is between them and one of
them will step out to block them, shotgun held at his
hip. The other three will remain hidden, drawing a
bead with their rifles. One to the front and left of the
posse, the others to either side and behind them.

Read the following when the man steps out:

*"Whoa there! Just were do you folks think yer headed?"
The rough lookin' feller waves his shotgun at you and con-
tinues. "There's nothin' y'all need to worry about down
there: just a bunch o' uppitty sodbusters is all. Why don't
you just turn around and head back the way you came, and
there won't be no trouble."*

If the posse decides to follow the thug's advice, and
turn around, one of the crew, who has been spoiling for
a fight, will fire a shot at a random posse member any-
way. If they decide to fight, then go ahead and let
them fight. During the fight, one of the three men
who are firing from cover will make a break for it to
run back to Hank Ballard to report. Once he has
dropped below the rocks he was behind, the posse has
no chance of hitting him or even noticing that he has
gone until the fight is over.

After the fight, the party can question any prison-
ers, and they will get a small portion of the whole
story, since the thugs are not in on everything that has
been goin' on. No matter what, though, the prisoners
will not reveal the location of Ballard's hideout, or
even that he has one.

After a few more miles down the trail, they will
finally come into view of the town. It is a small col-
lection of buildings at the mouth of a large valley. In
the distance can be seen a few farms. At the end of the
trail into town is a small town square with a cannon
set in it pointing at the trail.

Sometimes Dead is Better

Let the posse decide how they want to enter the town. If they wish to come in ridin' hard and guns blazin', then this is gonna be a mighty short story, since Payne will just gun them down without blinkin'. If, on the other hand, they decide to be peaceable, Payne will meet them at the cannon and introduce himself. He'll welcome the posse to Blackwater, but will quickly admonish anyone who's packin' iron to keep their pistols in their holsters while they're in town, so's things don't get confused.

Any character who is able to make an Area Knowledge: Dakotas, Missouri, or Montana roll of 7 or better has heard of Joshua Payne and knows just how deadly he is supposed to be.

Payne will be polite, if a bit distant, and will point the posse to the Blackwater Grand Hotel (see below) if they are looking for a place to stay or rest.

Inside the hotel, Gary Treadwell will be extremely exited to have actual customers and will be a bit overzealous in showing the party excellent service. This wouldn't be such a bad thing, except that his entire staff consists of two people, including himself. Treadwell will answer nearly any questions put to him, and may even volunteer to tell the story of the town. The one bit of information he will not divulge is the location of the water hole.

Allow the posse some time to get comfortable; take a bath, check into their rooms, sample a bit of "Blackwater Special," etc. After they've relaxed some, they hear several gunshots from out in the street, then silence. A hard (9) roll of Cognition / Shootin' will reveal that five guns were involved: three Army Colts, two Peacemakers. An incredible (11) roll will tell the listener that one Peacemaker fired only four times, while the other guns each fired two or three times.

If anyone asks what's going on, Treadwell will simply shrug and say, "Sounds like ol' Joshua's bagged a few more Ballard boys."

If any character runs or looks outside, they will see Payne standing over the bodies of four dead men, calmly reloading his pistol.

Afterwards, the gunfighter will walk into the hotel bar and order a aspirila. If anyone offers to buy him something stronger, he will thank them politely but change the order to aspirila. If any poker games are going on, he will ask to join. If not, he will offer to start one.

If the posse takes Payne up on his offer, determine how the game goes according to the rules with one exception: divide all of Payne's rolls by half. Payne will quickly raise the stakes to thirty dollars; he is carrying five hundred forty dollars. A foolproof (3) Gamblin' roll is all that is required to realize that Payne wants to lose.

Bounty

Drop one Bounty point into the pool for surviving the ambush. Add another for not irking Joshua Payne. Award another if the posse learns the history of Blackwater and the Ballards.

CHAPTER THREE: BAD NEIGHBORS

This chapter takes place that night, after all the

HENRY "HANK" BALLARD

Even before he was ever called an "outlaw" in the Weird West, Hank Ballard was a criminal in New York City. He left just days ahead of a noose and decided to see what the wild frontier had to offer. And if it wasn't offered, he'd take it anyway.

With him came his sons; three acorns that didn't fall far from the tree at all.

Ballard has developed a system that has so far suited him just fine: steal a bankroll, hire a whole lot of guns, and then keep throwin' 'em at his victims until they give up or don't have anyone left to oppose him. After that, he usually bleeds whatever it is he wants dry, and then moves on to the next place, always avoiding anything that might resemble honest work.

Hank likes to delegate his activities, especially to his sons. It builds character.

Profile

Corporeal: D:2d6, N:2d6, S:2d6, Q:2d6, V:3d10

Shootin': Rifle 4d6, Shootin': Shotgun 3d6

Mental: C:4d8, K:2d6, M:2d6, Sm:2d6, Sp:2d6

Scrutinize 5d8, **Trackin'** 3d8, **Area Knowledge:** Hills Around Blackwater 3d6, **Leadership** 2d6

Edges: Belongings - level 3 (ready cash), Sense of Direction

Hindrances: Greedy

Gear: .45 Winchester '73, Double barreled shotgun, a whole bunch o' hired guns

NICK BALLARD

Nick is Hank Ballard's oldest boy at thirty-four years of age. He has never been married and has always been annoyed at that fact. It ain't that he's ugly; on the contrary, some women even find him attractive. The problem is that he's got all the charm and grace of a gut-shot mule. After two minutes in his company, women begin to think things like, "Now why was entering a convent a bad idea?" Nick is just plain mean, so people don't like him. Of course, he may be mean *because* no one likes him, but that's for someone else to decide.

He is, however, a loyal son, and will do whatever his father tells him. Especially if he gets to shoot people. He just loves shootin' people.

Profile

Corporeal: D:3d10, N:2d8, S:2d6, Q:2d12, V:2d10

Shootin': Pistol 4d10, Shootin': Rifle 3d10, Fannin' 2d10, Quickdraw 3d12

Mental: C:2d6, K:2d6, M:1d4, Sm:1d8, Sp:4d6

Edges: Two Fisted, Tough as Nails

Hindrances: Greedy, Mean as a Rattler

Gear: two matched cherry-wood handled Colt .45 single action revolvers

gamblin', drinkin', and whatever are done with.

Hearing that a group of strangers came into town, Hank Ballard assumes that they are there to lend aid to Payne. Since Payne has killed twenty-six hired guns all by his lonesome, Ballard decides he can do without help. He dispatches a bunch of hands to sneak into the hotel and murder all of the strangers in their sleep to put an end to it for once and for all.

Give each posse member plus Payne one gunman, and start by checking for surprise. The thugs will all start at the same time; each of them will spend their

CODY BALLARD

The second oldest of the Ballard Boys, Cody left the fold for a number of years during which he got married. This has caused a bit of friction between him and Nick, since Nick can't figure out how a plug-ugly cuss like Cody was able to land a woman when he can't get one to talk to him. Cody takes a not-too-secret pleasure in his ability to vex his older brother, and is determined to become a better killer as well, just to irk him a little further.

Cody will not pass up any opportunity to show off that he is smarter or deadlier than Nick, but he tries to do so with a bit more style.

Profile

Corporeal: D:2d12, N:3d6, S:4d4, Q:2d8, V:3d6

Shootin': Pistol 3d12, Fightin': Knife 4d6

Mental: C:2d6, K:2d6, M:3d8, Sm:2d6, Sp:2d6

Persuasion 3d8, Trackin' 2d6

Hindrances: Ugly as Sin

Gear: Peacemaker, Winchester '73

SAM BALLARD

Sam is the youngest Ballard at twenty-two. Of all three, he is probably the only one who could possibly be turned against his father. Sam doesn't like his brothers very much, but is willing to do almost anything to please Hank.

He has been having second thoughts lately, though, and if persuaded successfully (with at least two raises), he will help the heroes against his father. His conditions for this assistance, however, will be that no harm comes to Hank Ballard. The rest of the family and their thugs can go hang for all he cares.

Profile

Corporeal: D:3d10, N:2d8, S:2d6, Q:3d8, V:2d10

Shootin': Pistol 4d10, Quickdraw 3d8, Fightin': Brawlin' 3d8

Mental: C:3d6, K:2d6, M:3d8, Sm:4d10, Sp:4d6

Edges: Two Fisted

Hindrances: Loyal (to Hank)

Gear: Two Peacemakers

first action opening the door to a room, and their second closing it. If a door has been locked, the first action is spent checking it, the second breaking it down (locked door — difficulty 5, blocked door — difficulty 7). Any character inside will wake up immediately. Once shooting starts, everyone wakes up unless they have the Heavy Sleeper Hindrance, in which case they don't wake up until shooting begins in the same room.

Run this combat quickly and confusedly; no one should know what's going on. Roll dice and draw cards for Payne as well as the ambushers. The thugs will attempt to kill the posse, then git. Payne will most likely deal with his assailant quickly and lethally and then go to assist the nearest party member who is under attack.

Bounty

Add one bounty point to the pool if the party survives this ambush. Add another if they manage to capture one or more of the thugs alive.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANOTHER GRAVE TO FILL

The next morning, the characters and everyone else in the town will hear a man out in the street calling, "Clara! Clara!" The man is Ezra Pinney, and the woman he's looking for is his wife. He hasn't seen her since the night before, and he's powerful worried.

Most of the townsfolk will be too busy shoring up their defenses to help with the search, but the players can easily lend a hand here. A fair (5) Trackin' roll will enable them to discover tracks leading from the Pinney's outhouse into the hills around Blackwater. If followed, these tracks will lead onto Gary Treadwell's land and eventually to a shed. Inside the shed, they find a pool that reeks of alcohol. Here, Clara will be discovered face down in the spring, drowned.

A hard (9) Trackin' roll (or the appropriate hex) will reveal that Clara was simply wandering about when she stumbled across the shed. Curious, she stepped inside to take a look at it. The fumes made her dizzy, and she staggered back, slipped, and fell into the pool, hitting her head on a rock. If anyone asks, she appears to have died the evening before (around the same time as Payne's gunfight).

The party should leave Ezra to mourn and return to the town. Once there, or if they never left, Joshua Payne will approach them. If the posse handled themselves well during the previous night's ambush, he will ask them to help him in raising Ballard's siege. He will give the posse three hundred dollars to help him take care of the rest of Ballard's crew, and they can collect any bounty offered on them as well. His only condition is that Hank Ballard be left to him, as, "Him an' me; we've got history." He won't explain anything more, except to say that Ballard once killed someone very close to him.

If any of the posse agrees, he will ask if any of them have a plan, since strategy ain't his strongest suit. He will listen to anything they offer (and agree to it if it sounds reasonable). It would be impossible to recount all of the possible plans your players may come up with, so use your best judgement. If a plan seems just too foolish, feel free to have Payne veto it. If the plan calls for a peaceful solution to the problem, he will also refuse, stating that Ballard, "owes a lot of people some dirt-time."

Below are two possibilities the posse may try:

Searching the Countryside

The character's may reason that the best way to smoke out Ballard is to discover where he is hiding. This will involve traipsing around in the hills and prairie around the town. Ballard has patrols skulking about in the hills nearby, to prevent any of the townsfolk from getting out. Anyone searching the hills will encounter one of them. Each patrol consists of four men, who will shoot without warning if they spot the characters: taking cover and trying to catch them in a crossfire.

If the posse survives the patrols, they then have to find the hideout. This is a lot tougher than it sounds, since the area is riddled with caves and the rocky ter-

Sometimes Dead is Better

rain makes tracking nearly impossible. If a posse member is going to track, have them make four Incredible (11) trackin' rolls. If any one of them miss, they lose the trail.

Infiltrating the Ballards

If the posse was able to take any prisoners during the ambush, they may hit upon the idea of letting him escape and following him back to the hideout, or of convincing him that they want to join up with the gang. This last part will be much more convincing if only one or two people want to join up. Even a brainless thug can smell a rat when a half-dozen people he had been shootin' at the night before suddenly decide to join his side.

The marshal should weigh whatever story the players give and make the appropriate rolls (probably Scrutinize, Persuasion, and Bluff).

If the prisoner decides the posse are telling the truth, he will lead them on a very precise trail through the hills and over two creeks until he reaches a group of hidden caves about five miles away.

If the posse is merely following him, they should make Sneakin' rolls against the bandit's Scrutinize. Also, have the posse make periodic Trackin' checks against a DN of 7, even if the thug is in plain sight. If they fail, roll to see if a slither shows up as above.

Once the caves have been reached, the party may wish to stake them out, simply rush them and attack, or the "mole" may try to learn about the setup.

Bounty

Put one point into the pool if the posse found Clara. Put another in if they agree to help Payne. And finally, add one if they managed to infiltrate Ballard's gang or track the bandit back to the caves.

CHAPTER FIVE: BALLARDTOWN

Most of this chapter will involve characters in Blackwater, but the beginning only concerns posse members who have joined up with Ballard. If an infiltrator has managed to join up with the gang, this would be the best time for her to try something. Go ahead and give her a bit of roleplaying time in order to take advantage of her position.

The next morning, Hank Ballard calls for a meeting of the rest of his thugs. He announces that he is getting tired of the situation in Blackwater, and he has finally hit upon a way to solve it. He orders Nick to go into town with a dozen men and kill everybody there. The player character is included in this mob, as a bit of a loyalty test.

What Hank doesn't tell the mob is that they are a diversion from the real plan. He has figured out that it's Treadwell's land that has the spring on it, and has dispatched Cody to the town to kidnap him during the confusion.

Fade out on the PC with the gang as they saddle up and cut to the rest of the posse.

The town is in for a rough time of it, since the only people who are willing and able to hold a gun are Payne and the posse members. The mob will simply ride into town and begin shootin' anything that moves



(and a few things that don't).

This will be the players' first chance to notice a possible way to hurt Payne. Most of the mob will be aiming for Payne and anyone else who is defending the town, but Nick will go out of his way to shoot unarmed people. The first target he goes after is Jake Spivey's adopted son, Standing Fish. No matter how much damage is done by the shot, nothing happens to the boy. At the same time, however, the balcony that Payne is standing on falls and he takes the same amount of damage that the boy would have.

Whatever happens, however, try to make sure that Payne survives this chapter. One way to make sure of this would be for him to start shooting Nick. Even Nick isn't mean enough to keep plugging away at an innocent boy while he's being fired on by a dead shot like Payne.

If an infiltrator is with the mob, she'd better hope that her posse knows her plan; otherwise, she may get shot as well. If she starts shootin' the thugs herself,

BOOT HILL

Note: the word "strength," appearing next to a damage die type, indicates that the roll is a strength roll and only the highest rolling die should be taken.

Ballard Boys (40 total)

Attack:

Pistol 2d6/3d6

Rifle 2d6/4d8

Brawlin' 2d6/2d6(strength)

Defense:

Brawlin' 2

Hits: 30

Hank Ballard

Attack:

Rifle 4d6/4d8

Shotgun 3d6/4d6

Defense:

Hits: 30

Nick Ballard

Attack:

Pistol 4d10/3d6

Rifle 3d10/4d8

Defense:

Hits: 32

Cody Ballard

Attack:

Pistol 3d12/3d6

Knife 4d6/1d4+4d4(strength)

Defense:

Knife 4

Hits: 30

Sam Ballard

Attack:

Pistol 4d10/3d6

Brawlin' 3d8/2d6(strength)

Defense:

Brawlin' 3

Hits: 30

Joshua Payne

Attack:

Pistol 6d12/3d6

Rifle 3d12/4d8

Brawlin' 4d10/4d8(strength)

Defense:

Brawlin' 4

"Champion of the Innocent" (see description)

Hits: 30

well, all suspicion will be lifted, but she'll suddenly have a whole lot o' guns pointed at her.

During all of the mayhem of the fight, Cody Ballard has snuck around to the back of the hotel. Only a character who decides to check out the back will be able to witness this. If he isn't spotted, Cody will grab Gary Treadwell at gunpoint and usher him out the back way during the gunfight. Give anyone in or near the hotel a Cognition roll with a TN of 11 to notice what's going on. If he is successful in abducting Treadwell, Cody will then tie him to a horse and head back to the cave.

After all the smoke has cleared, give the posse time to assess the situation. They should realize that the attack was a diversion, and that Treadwell is gone (unless someone saved him). If Nick was killed or captured, he may be searched. In one of his pockets is a crude handwritten map (Nick has a very poor memory). This is a map to Ballard's hideout.

Bounty

Put one point in the pool if the party repelled the attack. Add another if they rescued Treadwell, and another if they found the map.

CHAPTER SIX: THE MAN WHO CAN HAVE NO BROTHER

Now Payne shows his colors. If the party shows him the map, he recognizes the landmarks on them. This is his chance for revenge, and he doesn't want anyone else getting to Ballard before him. Also, the collapsing balcony was the final wake-up call he needed to realize what his curse was doing. He is afraid that if the posse sees him face down Ballard's guns, they may figure it out.

Pretending to be helpful, he tells the posse that the map refers to a set of landmarks and some caves to the west about five miles. This is, of course, wrong; the real caves are almost due north. Make a contested roll of Payne's Bluff versus a party member's Scrutinize to

determine if they see through the ruse, but give Payne a bonus of +2 since he has been straightforward with them until now.

If the party falls for it, then they will probably go off to face Ballard's mob. As soon as they are out of sight, Payne hightails it out to the real caves for a final showdown. After a while of traveling to the west, a Foolproof (3) Cognition check will reveal that the landmarks in this area do not conform to the map.

If the party decides to return to town, they'll hear the sounds of distant gunfire. As they enter town, they will see the horrible evidence of Payne's actions. Three townsfolk are dead. One is lying under the wheels of a cart; another looks like he simply fell out of a window; and the last is a woman who fell through a rotten board on the sidewalk, snagged her bonnet on a nail on a nearby beam, and strangled to death.

An Academia: Occult roll of 7 or better will be all that's necessary to piece together what is going on, provided the posse has gathered all of the information available. It is very likely that the heroes will now rush out to the sound of the fighting.

When they reach the caves, Ballard's dead will be piling up in front of the cave mouth, while Payne is simply standing there taking careful aim at each one and firing. The posse may simply help him kill the rest of Ballard's mob, or they may try to take down Payne.

If they decide to help, he will grudgingly accept and together, they will almost assuredly triumph.

After the dust of the battle subsides, and the posse and Payne head back to town, Payne will get very quiet. If the heroes confronts him with their knowledge of the curse, he realizes that they can't let him continue. And that means they may have a way of killing him. And he is still afraid to die. Claiming that he has some things to think over, he will fall back to the rear and begin backshooting the party.

Another Academia: Occult roll of 7 will reveal that the only way to take down Payne is to shoot an innocent. Hopefully, they saved Standing Fish during the assault. If not, they will have to find someone else. Either way, the posse will need to run back to town and shoot someone, all the while, Payne will be shooting at them.

Any damage that an innocent target takes is transferred to Payne in the form of bizarre accidents. Some examples include: a tree falls on him, a snake bites him, he falls and hits his head on a rock, his horse rears and throws him, etc.

Bounty

The posse gets one point for wiping out the Ballard gang, one point for realizing that Payne tricked them, and a point for killing Payne. In addition, everyone involved in the fight against Payne gets to draw a Fate chip.

AFTERMATH AND REWARD

This section is just a few notes on what should happen after this adventure.

If the party does not kill Joshua Payne or Hank Ballard, feel free to use one or both of them as a recurring character (perhaps the posse could become

Sometimes Dead is Better

embroiled in their personal feud again).

If the heroes manage to save most of the townsfolk, Blackwater will soon become a hub of activity. The posse that saved the town will be local celebrities, and will be given a lifetime supply of Blackwater Special. Of course, there is that nasty problem with the curse...

If the posse somehow figures out how to lift the curse from the waterin' hole, Blackwater will be a ghost town within two months.

APPENDIX: PLACES TO GO IN BLACKWATER

The Blackwater Grand Hotel

Description: A very fancy hotel with a saloon, a full kitchen, and twelve rooms, Gary Treadwell was planing on this hotel being the showplace of Blackwater. He had planned on building the town into a tourist destination for after the war, using the spring as the main attraction. Rooms are \$3 / night.

Occupants: Gary Treadwell (proprietor, see "The Story So Far"), May (saloon gal, and only waitress).

Treadwell knows: Payne is the best investment the town's made since this whole mess started. He'll gladly tell anyone who asks everything he knows with the exception of the pool's location. As part of his contract with the town, Payne gets free room and board, and an unlimited tab at the bar. The only thing he ever drinks is saspirila.

May knows: She hasn't been paid since Payne got to town, but figures that it's better than getting killed. She figured she'd earn a little of Payne's money one night and crept into his room. He was drenched in sweat and when she tried to wake him up he almost blew her head off. After she stopped screaming, he asked her what the hell she was doing in his room. When she told him, he glared at her and threw a handful of greenbacks at her and told her to never speak to him again.

Secrets: Treadwell is one of the only people in town who knows where the spring is.

Blackwater Special: This potent whiskey is the source of all the trouble in town. An incredible \$1 a shot, Treadwell limits customers to four shots a day. The first time a character takes a swig, no matter how experienced a drinker he is, make an Onerous (7) Vigor check. If he fails, he goes out like a light for 5-10 minutes; in addition, see the rules under The Waterin' Hole. The whiskey has an amazing flavor.

Spivey's General Store

Description: A jumbled but friendly-looking place, the store is running low on sugar and coffee, and is completely out of ammunition and guns. The only newspapers in the store are a two-week-old copy of the *Dodge City Clarion*, and a month-old *Tombstone Epitaph*.

Occupants: Jake Spivey (proprietor), Standing Fish (Spivey's ten year old adopted Indian son).

Sheriff's Office

Description: A sturdy building with a jail cell big enough for three miscreants. A ladder to the roof

affords a pretty good sniping position for nearly the entire town.

Occupants: Sheriff Gustav Horstein, Deputy Arnie Gladstone

Horstein knows: Where the pool is. He doesn't like the idea of a hired gun, but he knows he could never stand up to Ballard's gang.

First Bank of Blackwater

Description: A rather sorry looking place, it doesn't look like it does much business.

Occupants: Reinhold Heinz (bank manager).

Heinz knows: If someone doesn't lift the siege on this town soon, he's going to be bankrupt. Currently, there are only two thousand dollars left in the bank, and most of that is earmarked as Payne's salary.

Blackwater Church

Description: A pleasant looking church, it still has a smell of newness about it.

Occupants: None; the preacher was killed three weeks ago when he fell down the well. The church is now used for town meetings only.

Smithy & Livery Stable

Description: A passable smithy & livery, this is probably where the party's horses would be kept.

Occupants: Sam (smith and groom).

Hawthorne Boarding House

Description: A large, stately looking house, this is where most of the unattached people in town live.

Occupants: Mrs. Hawthorne (widow and owner of the house), Sheriff Horstein (when he's off duty), Gertrude Jacobs (a pretty young lady from back east), four or five other townsfolk.

Mrs. Hawthorne knows: The good lord surely has been gettin' lonely lately; what with him takin' all of those good folks up to be with Him. Back about a month ago, there was the Gilman's boy; one o' their herd fell over on 'im; then there was Nancy Poole, the poor dear, under this very roof, just up an died of a heart attack, an' her only forty years old; and of course there was that preacher man, Ezekiel Johnson, fell down the well. It's been a hard time in Blackwater even without Hank Ballard an' his houligans.

Waterin' Hole

Description: This is the spring of alcohol that gives the town its name. It is hidden inside a large shed. The fumes from the pool are nearly overpowering. Any characters standing next to the pool should make a Fair (5) Vigor roll or pass out.

Occupants: None (except for Thirsty Guthree).

Ballard's Hideout

Description: A series of caves a short distance from town, there are several chambers that have been sealed off with hides for privacy. It would be very easy to defend, since there is only one way to get in.

Occupants: Hank Ballard, Nick Ballard, Cody Ballard, Sam Ballard (see *sidebars*), 40 "Ballard Boys" (minus any that have been killed). ☹

'THE GOOD
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