

THE MALIGNITY

A 1920S SCENARIO BY STEPHEN E. WALL



THE MALIGNITY

by Stephen E. Wall

A Classic-Era Scenario of Survival, Madness, and Small Town Life set the foothills of Central California for the Call of Cthulhu Role-Playing Game, 7th Edition.



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
The Malignity.....	4
Setting	5
The Investigation	7
Persons of Interest	19
NPC & Monster Statistics	23
Epilogue	26
Appendix: Maps, Timeline, Handouts	27



Shops on Main Street, Springville California

INTRODUCTION

This is a scenario for 4 to 6 investigators and averages two 3-4 hours sessions of play to complete, or one long session of play. The nominal setting is Central California in the towns of Porterville, Springville, and the wilderness region of Mountain Home Grove, during the early Fall of 1925. The region can be changed. Any small town in North America with a region of forested mountains nearby will do. The Spanish Franciscan missionaries might be substituted with any other regional missionary movement (ex. Evangelical Lutherans, Jesuits, the Moravian Church). The scenario might also be updated to a modern logging town with a more contemporary missionary history (ex. Mormons, Evangelical Pentecostals).

SUMMARY

Mary Zalud (see Persons of Interest section), a lady of enviable wealth and societal station in her hometown of Porterville, California, has suffered three recent misfortunes. The deaths of her son-in-law and eldest son she can do nothing about, but she will not let the recent disappearance of her youngest son **James Zalud** (see Persons of Interest section), age 18, go unchallenged. James has run away to the Sierra Nevada foothills and she has asked the investigators to recover her wayward boy.

Recovering James will not be easy. While planning a trek to a cave reputed to contain an unspoiled deposit of gold, James ran afoul a cruel outlaw named **Charley Matthewson** (see Persons of Interest section). James owed Matthewson a debt, and proposed to share the promised gold with him as payment. Now Charley, his thuggish friends, and James have found the hidden treasure horde, but there is something alien and unspeakable lurking at the bottom of the cursed grotto that has a long history of tormenting people and animals of the region.

Investigators will need skill, tenacity, and more than a little luck to rescue Mary Zalud's son from madness and bury a horror that, left unchecked, will continue to feed and grow until it leaves behind ashen wasteland.

THE MALIGNITY

THE HORROR IN THE CAVE

It is an occult truth that in the world of Lovecraftian horror and the Cthulhu Mythos that any number of entities can visit the Earth accidentally or intentionally when the stars are right. Some come for conquest, some for learning, others for reasons beyond the comprehension of the feeble human mind, and yet there are others that want nothing more than to eat and grow. This is the case for the Malignity. Though possessed of alien intelligence and perceptions outside the scope of human biology and learning, its needs and wants are simple to understand: feed, grow, move, and feed again. It craves the substance of physical, animal life.

Perhaps there were species not unlike the reptiles, mammals, fish, and birds of our world on the planet were the Malignity first began its journey, and perhaps it consumed them all, leaving behind a dead world orbiting the Red Giant Menkar in the constellation Cetus as it fell through space when the stars were right. Perhaps there is a chain of dead worlds now that goes back millions or billions of years where the Malignity has arrived, fed, and left. It is certainly old, for it is a simple organism with the workings of a single organic animal cell, only writ large (the size of a Ford Model T) and much more alien. It appears as a great sphere of organic matter with a thick, spongy cell wall that absorbs impacts without breaking or tearing. The shape gives off a dull pulsing red luminescence that is barely visible in daylight but glows abundantly by darkness or night. It is surrounded by numerous black, segmented flagella that lap and wave gently, and can even work in concert to push its great bulk about on the ground or allow it to waft through space when it is time to move.

These flagella are not as crude and simple as those of an algae or slime mold cell. They are part of the Malignity, but can briefly detach and seek sustenance for the central body. These are the Feeding Tendrils. Though eyeless and noseless, they sense heat and organic, animal flesh better than any earth-born serpent, shark, or tiger. They do not possess intelligence, only the drive to find the nearest source of suitable food. Once food is found, they attach their single orifice, that is both mouth and cloaca, to that source, break it open by means of a large, drill like tongue covered in serrated spines, suck out all the nourishment from within the food source, and return to the Malignity. Reattaching to their parent organism, they vomit the contents of their meal into its red, roiling center where it nourishes the creature and its appendages together.

The Story of the Malignity

Twenty-five thousand years ago, the Malignity fell from the sky and landed on Earth. Those who witnessed it fall into what would later be called the Sierra Nevada Mountains created cave paintings of a dazzling meteor shower that clearly showed more than one of the glowing red globules was propelled toward the earth. Some might have landed in the deep ocean, while others struck regions beyond the North American continent. What was certain to the cave painters however was that the one that struck nearest them did not take long to awaken from the sleep induced by cosmic voyage. It crawled forth from the crater it made on its many worm-like legs, and slunk into a cliff-side grotto inside what Europeans would one day call Moses Mountain.

From its new burrow, leaking radiation that burned curious tribesmen who tried to follow it and poisoning others with a mental contact that broke their brains with hallucinations of burning destruction, the Malignity sent out its Feeders. Those who were struck by the Feeders were reduced to sacks of skin and bone. All else was sucked up and digested by the Feeders, providing nutrient rich meals for the Malignity. The Paleolithic tribesmen of what would one day be called Mountain Home Grove were not helpless though. At the heart of their culture was shamanic tradition of the Elder World handed down through dreams and across generations, and they begged the assistance of their silent, watchful guardian spirits. These alien creatures they had

known in the distant past could hop through time and space and into the bodies of their magicians, who welcomed the possession as it gave them god-like powers. The Great Race Yith, seeing that humankind was in jeopardy and needing the species to continue thriving for their own purposes, slew the Feeders and constructed a door of crystal and gold to entomb the Malignity and cut it off from any form of sustenance. In the dark, without nourishment, the Malignity grew still and entered the same death-like torpor it used to travel across the cosmic abyss.

Millennia later, when the ordeal of the Paleolithic Worshippers of the Old Ones was but a distant memory, a group of men representing the authority of the Roman Catholic Church would come and find a strange, secretive order of *Indio* Medicine Folk and their kin making sacrifices before the door of the Malignity's tomb in order to sustain the magic of the Great Race of Yith. Despite the fact their ancestors had painted the cave with thorough warnings against the Malignity, the priest in charge of the explorers would interpret the crystalline door as a blasphemous idol and order it destroyed with gunpowder. The breaking of the door would be heard for miles in every direction and the Malignity would awaken from twenty-five thousand years of sleep ever the more hungry and destructive. It would devour and slay all but a handful of *gentiles* and *neofites* who would escape and tell a degraded form of the story to warn their children. Eventually, men would learn of the painted cave with crystal and gold inside, and would come to seek wealth and find only the Malignity waiting to devour them.

SETTING

ENVIRONMENT AND ATMOSPHERE

The foothills of the San Joaquin Valley are often dry and dusty in the early Fall. The wild green grasses of Spring have faded to a yellow-brown in the Summer and rain at this time is still sparse. Despite the heat and dryness there is an abundance of vegetation: live oaks are plentiful in the lower foothills with conifers and Sequoia redwoods becoming more common at higher elevations. Small towns scattered around the region are collections of brick and wood false-front commercial structures, cabins, California bungalows, and converted farmhouses. The most elaborate buildings such as post offices, government buildings, hospitals, and manor houses incorporate a flair of Spanish architecture, with white stucco walls and sloping red-clay tiles being a main feature. The air and soil of the region are suitable for a variety of plant life, and wealthier people have taken to planting imported palm trees and other tropical plants to decorate their gardens and walkways. Fruit trees, walnut trees, grape vine trellises, and large succulents are also common decorations.

As this is intended to be a weird fiction/horror role-playing scenario, the Keeper is encouraged to play up qualities in the NPCs and their environment that might set them apart from people and things in the everyday world. Horror tropes that fit the folk of a weird fiction San Joaquin Valley and Sierra Nevada foothills play into the dryness and dustiness of the early fall weather. Describe tanned,

leathery faces, wrinkles that look like cracks or fissures in dry ground, white hair and beards that have gone yellow with lack of washing and sun exposure, and teeth that have gone yellow, brown, or even blackened with prolonged use of smoking and chewing tobacco.

Compared the erudite and cosmopolitan parlance of the San Francisco Bay or the swanky, fast-paced patter of Los Angeles County, the San Joaquin Valley and the nearby mountains have a dialect that comes off as very plain and rural. People will either be very plain spoken or affect a mild drawl in their language. The closer one travels to the mountains, the more one finds farmers and ranchers of this region who live by folk wisdom and have little to no formal education, only apprenticeships in the family trade(s). At times, a visitor to Springville in 1925 might feel she or he has stepped back into the 1880s, encountering pockets of the wild-west cowboys, sod busting homesteaders and pioneer mountain men of the last century.

Author's Note-The Tule River Indian

Reservation: Organized by U.S. Presidential order in 1873, the creation of the Tule River Indian Reservation forced members of the Yokut, Mono, Tübatulabal, Yowlumne, and Wukchumi tribes into an area of 550,000 acres in the foothills between Porterville and Springville. It is estimated that, prior to being forced onto the reservation, these tribes experienced population reductions of between 75% and 90% due to 250 years of Spanish military and missionary conquest, wars with other groups of white settlers, and the introduction of European diseases. While elders made efforts to maintain traditional practices and beliefs through recitations and oral traditions, the population of the Tule River Indian Reservation was compelled to adopt white education, customs, and economic practices to survive. Despite their best efforts to assimilate, the amalgamated Tule River Indians are regarded as second class citizens in the 1920s and they draw frequent negative attention from the Bureau of Indian Affairs regarding illegal alcohol distribution and from church organizations and the Ku Klux Klan, who regard their presence as a moral threat and a blight on traditional American society, especially after Native Americans are awarded citizenship by the Federal Government.

I have taken pains to separate the Paleolithic Elder World Cult and the Secretive Medicine Folk descended from them who are involved with the Malignity from the Native Americans of the Tule River Indian reservation in this scenario and I encourage Keepers who run this scenario to do so as well. I have not given the Natives of Snakebite Ridge a tribal name, as that would be lost to history following their subjugation by the Spanish—a standard practice for the missionaries of the time—and I do not wish to draw direct links between these fictional Native Americans connected to the strangeness of the Cthulhu Mythos and true-to-life Native American tribes with significant histories of real-world horror and oppression. I am of the opinion this adds to the fictional mystery surrounding the Malignity and pays necessary respect to the modern Tule River Indian Tribe by not co-opting the real and lived history of their ancestors.



Main Street, Porterville

Character Creation

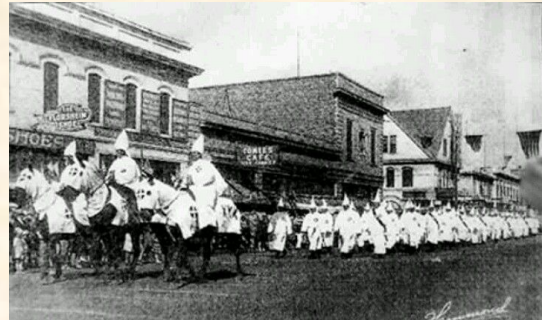
Despite what limited photographic evidence shows, Porterville and the surrounding towns in the Southern San Joaquin Valley were ethnically diverse in the 1920s. Numerous Mexican, Native American, and Chinese families lived alongside the more publically acknowledged families descended from white settlers. African Americans were not common in the region, but were also not absent. Settlers of all types migrated to the region in three waves: during the Gold Rush, at the start of the Civil War, and after the Civil War.

Mary Zalud is looking for competent professionals to search for her son. Bounty Hunters, Outdoorsmen/women, Farmhands, Ranch Hands, Big Game Hunters, Prospectors, and Lumberjacks are all likely people to turn to when wanting to track someone through the wilderness of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Private Investigators and Reporters might also come in handy as their skills allow them to gain information from locals. Finally, some of the investigators might be social acquaintances of Mary Zalud through her various community organizations. These could be Teachers, Artists, Scientists, Archaeologists, and Authors. Mrs. Zalud is also not unknown amongst handful of occultists and spiritualists in Porterville, as she finds comfort in communicating with her deceased son and son-in-law through séances and talking boards. Finally, for ease of negotiating the scenario's written evidence, one or more investigators should have Spanish as an "Own" or "Other" Language.

Porterville

The scenario commences here, in a growing town defined by agriculture and railway access. Porterville was founded in 1861 by Royal Porter Putnam and his wife Mary Jane Putnam (ne. Packard), who established a trading post called "Porter's Tule River House" at the Butterfield Stagecoach station in a remote region of the San Joaquin Valley to service the needs of farmers and ranchers. By giving away free lots, Porter attracted a population, and a hotel, bank, and railroad station followed in 1888. In the 1890s the first school and fire department were established. Restaurateur John Zalud moved his family and business to Porterville when the railroad came to town and, from his saloon profits, built the town's only French revival home with a mansard roof and dormer windows. Porterville became an incorporated town in 1902.

By 1925 Porterville is thriving center of agricultural commerce and clean, American living, its veneer of Christian civility solidified when the Volstead Act has put its numerous and notorious saloons out of business. The Porterville Recorder is the local newspaper of choice, the town boasts numerous social clubs such as the Free & Accepted Masons and the Order of the Eastern Palm Leaf, a Golf Course has recently been built, and car races and parades on Main Street are popular holiday events. The Monache Theatre, Bullard's Department Store, numerous small shops on Main Street, and the Municipal Ball Park, where Porterville's city baseball team plays, all offer picturesque experiences of Roaring Twenties Americana. Under the surface though there are social and economic struggles like one would find in any town or city of the day. The death of the saloon business has given birth to organized crime and the Ku Klux Klan has a major presence in Porterville during the decade, as white men grow angry about the presence of more and more Mexican families in the San Joaquin Valley and the naturalization of Native Americans by the Federal Government.



Ku Klux Klan Parade in Porterville

Springville

Investigators will find most of the clues related to James' disappearance in this sleepy, dusty foothill town at the base of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Called Daunt until 1911, town founder William Daunt opened the first store in the area in 1860. Largely regarded as a stopover for loggers traveling to work in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, Springville was established around a post office built in 1886. As of 1925 the town has a small school, Springville Union School, several stores for groceries, hardware, and animal feed, a pharmacy, and a Marshall's station manned by a single deputy. The town has become somewhat famous for its proximity to several "soda springs," natural springs where fresh water mixes with trapped gases to produce a carbonated output. The piles of bright orange mineral and algae deposits that built up around them easily identify the springs and they are a beloved feature of the region. Drinking and bathing in the water has long been a folk remedy and conventional science now seems to support this hypothesis. The town's largest construction undertaking, sponsored by funds from Tulare and King's counties in 1918, has been a Tuberculosis Sanitarium. The sanitarium has granted the town a certain amount of regional fame and also added a preponderance of doctors and medical staff to its population.



Main Street Springville



Birdseye View of Springville

Mountain Home Grove

Clues to James' disappearance will lead to this remote, backwoods region northwest of Springville, where investigators will have to travel on foot or by horse. Though it will eventually play host to ranchers and homesteaders, and even tourists seeking backwoods adventure in the future, Mountain Home Grove is wild country in 1925 comprising the forested region between and south of the twin peaks of Moses Mountain and Maggie Mountain, named for a surveyor and the woman for whom he pined, who were among the first settlers of this region. It has seen its share of loggers and prospectors in recent decades, but the interest has died off largely due to the popularity of the Camp Nelson Lodge and Soda Springs to the East.

The few folk who live in this region, which supports a mixed forest of conifers teeming with wildlife, are true rustics who have chosen hermitage or are part of decadent, decayed family lines that have lived by subsistence for so long they know no other way. Some of these bloodlines include claims of Mexican and Native American inheritance. Those who dare to look will no doubt find strange folk-traditions that crudely mix European lore with half-forgotten and misunderstood Native American customs. Such traditions inevitably produce stories of Mountain Witches who can talk to or take the shapes of animals, can bless or poison gardens with secret signs, and can talk to the spirits and gods inside the mountains.

Snakebite Ridge

A forbidding region in the midst of rough wilderness, Snakebite Ridge hides a history of violence and supernatural peril, which James has stumbled upon in his search for a lost gold strike. For those that know the name, the little mountain bluff called Snakebite Ridge conjures of images of dread, degeneration, and repugnance. The stories of this place are so old they are not remembered in words but in feelings. Their narrative has been lost to time.

People will tell you about a friend-of-a-friend who went hunting near Snakebite Ridge and knew they stepped into place that felt wrong. No birds sang in the trees, their minds filled with unbidden dark thoughts, and they half-heard ghostly voices in the unnatural silence. Others will say it is a place of terrible sickness or that sleeping near the shadow of the bluff causes nightmares fit to be dreamed by the devil himself. Only someone truly mad would choose to dwell there for any length of time.

There is, of course, a good reason this little spot on the backside of Moses Mountain evokes such a reaction, but it is only a very, very unlucky few who have found out exactly why. The human history of the forested rise beneath the bluff goes back 25,000 years incorporating a Paleolithic Elder World Cult, the Secretive Medicine Folk that descended from them, Spanish soldiers and friars who enslaved the Native Mountain Worshipers in an effort to convert them, and prospectors who came to the bluff following legends of a cave full of riches.

THE INVESTIGATION

MARY ZALUD

While her husband has maintained a hard heart following the death of his eldest son, the disgrace and murder of his favorite son-in-law, and now his falling out with his youngest boy, Mary is not content to see her family fall apart and is willing to burn her resources and social standing to make sure James comes home. She will use her money and influence to put together posse of capable professionals. The Keeper should have players define their connection to Mrs. Zalud. Have they been specifically hired for their skills or do they know her from social circles such as her charity work, book club, or perhaps did they meet her at a séance where she was attempting to contact her dearly departed son Edward?

The only clue Mary has to offer is a pile of books James had purchased from an estate sale last year. He had been poring over them for hours at a time before he left home, and in an argument with his father, **John Zalud** (see Persons of Interest Section) she heard him declare, "I don't need your money, you old goat! There's money out there for the taking and I know where to find it!" The box of books is marked "Schofield" and it contains the geology and mineralogy texts of **Walter Schofield** (See Persons of Interest Section), plus several diaries that date back to his days as a prospector starting in 1844. Studying the diaries with a successful Hard **Library Use** roll will provide bonus dice on future Navigation checks in the Springville and Mountain Home Grove, and Snakebite Ridge regions. Of principal importance however, is the letter from **Dr. Peter**

Bequette (See Persons of Interest section) to Schofield (**Handout I**), detailing the strange cave his student mentioned and a collection of papers from the files of La Misión de Gabriel Archangel, that detail a failed expedition of monks and soldiers who went mad with lust for gold. (**Handout II**)

Based on the evidence provided, it should be clear that James plans to follow in the footsteps of Walter Schofield, and should lead the investigators to Springville (See Map in Appendix). Referred to as “Daunt” in the Bequette’s letter, a Hard **Knowledge** roll or regular **History** roll reveals the town’s name was changed when it was incorporated and it refers to the numerous soda springs for which the region has become locally famous. Failing this, the investigators could confirm the connection between Daunt and Springville through Portville’s City Hall land management and survey office or the town’s small public library.



Portrait of a Young John & Mary Zalud

THE SPRINGVILLE HOTEL

When James Zalud arrived in Springville he took lodgings at the Springville Hotel and borrowed his mother’s maiden name when he signed the guest registry, introducing himself as “Jimmy Herdlicka.” The hotelier, **Andrew Parker**, runs a moderately furnished establishment catering to tourists on their way up to the hot springs in the mountains. Mr. Parker still keeps the bar stocked, despite prohibition, pouring recently made liquor from bottles dated from before the United States went dry. His locally sourced moonshine is tough to swallow, but ultimately not harmful. The local Marshall’s deputy looks the other way, both out of loathing for the Volstead Act and because Mr. Parker allows him to top up his flask whenever he drops by for a visit.

Parker runs the hotel with his wife, **Sarah** who serves as the head of housekeeping with the couple’s two daughters, **Esther** (age 14) and **Roberta** (age 16), as her assistants. Andrew’s son, **Hollen** (age 13) carries luggage, chops wood, and maintains the grounds. Two elderly women, **Bessie Mae Graves** and **Eva Hubbs** assist Sarah

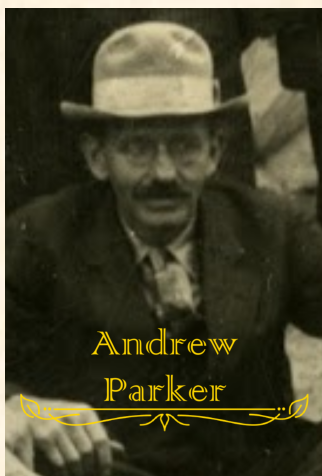
and her daughters in the kitchen on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday when guests are offered a supper in the main floor dining room. The hotel’s second floor has five guest rooms and men’s and ladies’ toilet facilities. Behind the hotel is a small barn Parker has converted into a bunkhouse suitable for men on hunting trips looking to “rough it.” Bunkhouse guests are offered a “cowboy breakfast” of beans, toast, and coffee, while main house guests are served an assortment of muffins, breakfast meats, local fruit, and scrambled eggs.

Mr. Parker knows three pieces of information about Jimmy Herdlicka’s (James Zalud’s) comings and goings. He is eager to share what he knows, as his erstwhile guest has not returned to the hotel for at least ten days and he owes Parker rent for keeping his belongings and damages for smashing up his room. Jimmy left the Springville Hotel more than a week ago after a group of callous looking men came to see him. He left with the men and Parker’s youngest daughter found the room empty and in a terrible state the following day. A chair was broken, the mirror was smashed, and there was blood on the floorboards and two teeth under the bed. Some of the young man’s belongings are still in the room, including a torn, blood-stained shirt and a calling card with the name **Dorothy Radeleff** on it, identifying her a librarian at Springville Union School. The floor of room is covered in sawdust, tracked in by the rough looking men who came to talk with Jimmy.

Prior to his meeting with the three men, Jimmy Herdlicka was a model hotel guest, if a bit obnoxious and inquisitive. He arrived on the back of an old motorcycle. The boy was known to harass the old timers at the Doughnut Shop at the far end of Main Street, looking to hear old ghost stories. There was also a rumor he made visits to the schoolhouse and people surmised he might have been sweet on the new librarian the town had hired. He visited her several times and she even came to the hotel looking for him after he disappeared.



Springville Hotel



THE DOUGHNUT SHOP

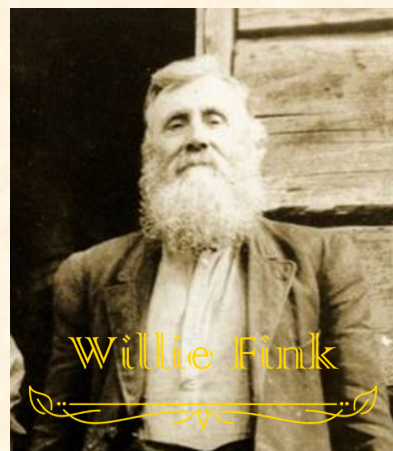
Willie Fink owns and runs the Springville Doughnut Shop. He is a beast of a man at 6'6" with a barrel chest and protruding gut. He has a thick, white beard and huge mane of white hair, both gone sour yellow due to constant exposure to doughnut grease and tobacco smoke in his little café. His working uniform is a stained undershirt and apron over brown trousers. Though he hides it well due to limited movement behind the counter/fryers, Willie has a wooden leg that was the result of an injury, which ended his logging career. Fortunately, Willie had other talents and the ingenuity to see vacancy in Springville for a simple café.

Willie is a widower and in 1918 Willie son **Bill Jr.** returned from the Great War. Though lauded as a hero, the boy was broken in body and mind. Few things gave him pleasure, but what never failed to draw his attention were doughnuts, a treat served to him and the lads in the trenches by Salvation Army volunteers. Willie learned how to make the treat, started serving them in the café in late 1919 and in 1923 he purchased a contraption by mail order from New York that would pop out doughnuts automatically and drop them in a fryer. It was an instant sensation among his mostly elderly clientele and Willie added "Doughnuts &" to his wooden sign that previously read "Hot Coffee."

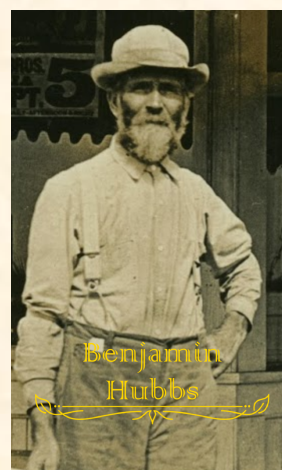
Every farmer, rancher, logger, and cowboy making their way into town stops by Willie's for a cup of coffee, a cake doughnut, and the quick perusal of the Porterville Recorder and other local newspapers in the parlor, a wood paneled dining room decorated with second-hand hunting trophies Willie purchased from farmers and ranchers. Though Willie thinks the stuffed deer, wild pig, and mountain lion heads add the ambiance, many are tattering and falling apart due to constant exposure to grease and smoke. The affect is one of rotting animal remains leering at the patrons as they consume their morning victuals and read the newspaper.

Willie knows **Isaiah Zimmerman** (see Persons of Interest section), who occasionally does chores for him in return for food and a little money. If the investigators can put together enough information on Jonah Zimmerman or have spoken to Dorothy Radeleff (See Springville Union School section) about Isaiah, they might be able to find his whereabouts through Willie and have the opportunity to

speak to him and see his strange wound from the night his father drove him off of Moses Mountain. Isaiah typically drops by the Doughnut Shop in the afternoon to ask Willie if he has trash to haul, windows to wash, or any other simple labor to perform.

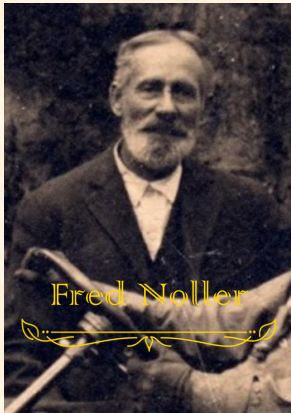


Benjamin Hubbs: The oldest man amongst the regulars at the Doughnut Shop, Benjamin's eyes are foamed over with cataracts, but he can still tell a story and remembers well when Walter Schofield and his friends got lost in the mountains. He was 17 at the time and working at the hardware store when Walter came in to outfit himself and two other local men for two weeks of exploration in Mountain Home Grove. "I 'member when Walt Schofield came into the hardware store lookin' for tools an' kit for ta find a cave up on the Snakebite Ridge, backside of Ol' Moses Mount'n. Mr. Miller, the owner ah' the store jus shook his head. 'Reckon them fellas ain't gonna fine nuttin' but trouble. Ain't no man goes up ta' Snakebite Ridge an come back whole,' he say, 'That place is cursed by Gawd! Been trod upon by anythin' and everythin' evil: dev'ls, spirits, witches, an dragons."

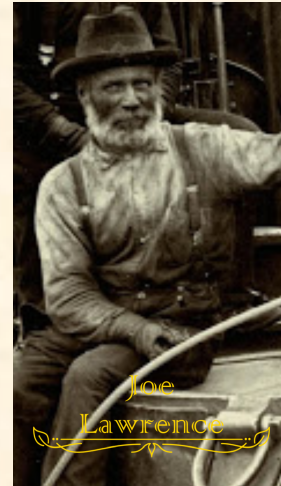


Fred Noller: One of two men playing match after match at a hand-carved checkerboard, Fred is in his sixties and has certainly heard tales of men that got lost in Mountain Home Grove: kidnapped by Mountain Witches, shot by outlaws

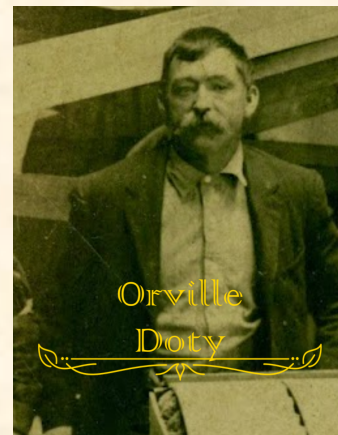
hiding in the woods, or scared to death by the ghosts of Natives, “Heck my granddad told me crazy ol’ Adam Zimmerman tried to build a general supply store up there using stones from a tumbledown church he found way up in the pines. Went blind starin’ at the sun an’ talkin’ ta hi’self.”



Joe Lawrence: A constant companion to Fred Noller at the checkerboard. Joe is a man of darker complexion than most in the Doughnut Shop. He will introduce himself, but remain silent until one of the investigators agrees to sit down at the checkerboard and play a game. He will complain that Fred Noller, “Ain’t changed his strategy in 10 years and I’m getting’ a might tired a winnin’.” The outcome of the game will be determined by an **Opposed Intelligence** roll. Joe’s **Intelligence** attribute of **70**. During the game, Joe will open up, remarking that he’s “half-Native on my mother’s side.” He will add, “I’m not the spiritual type, but I went to Sunday school and learned a few of the old stories from my mother and grandmother.” He knows of Snakebite Ridge as an evil place where, “Lots a folk died two-hun’ed years ago. They got sick, like the fever that come with a snakebite. Seein’ things, hearin’ voices. Bad way to die.” With regard to stories of Spanish Missionaries, **Padre Jimenez** (See Persons of Interest section), or a Lost Mission, he will remark that there were Spaniards all over in those days looking for gold, slaves, or anything else they could trade or sell. “They may not talk about it, but they was here, they taught my four-times great grand parents to speak and read Spanish and even write a little Latin: ‘Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam,’ for the Greater Glory of God.” (This phrase is inscribed on a helmet Jonah Zimmerman found near the mission ruins).



Orville Doty: Orville Doty is a wood and leather worker who is never seen without his hand-made pipe. He just turned seventy this year and used to trade with **Jonah Zimmerman** (See Persons of Interest section) for furs. He describes the man as odd, always looking at the back of Moses Mountain and talking to it like it was talking back to him. “Jonah’s a strange fellow. Married himself a woman from the Goodall clan that’s been living in those hills for generations. I hear tell their women are witches. That they can talk to animals an’ take on the shapes a’ hawks and mountain lions. And I heard if’n ya cross Belle Zimmerman she’ll suck your soul out your ear an’ put it in bottle. Heck, my wife used to tell the kids if’n they didn’t pipe down during Sunday service she was gonna put’em in a sack on the back porch and let Belle Zimmerman carry’em away.”



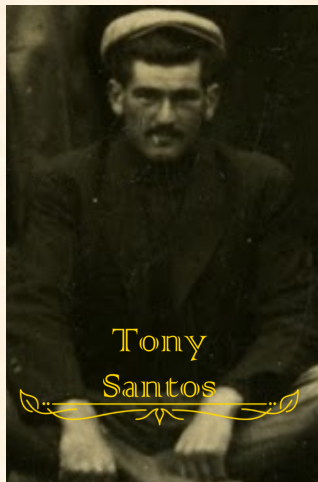
THE HARDWARE STORE

Mary and Tony Santos: A young Native couple who run the Springville Hardware store on behalf of its owners, who have now retired. Tony and Mary do not take the local legends and folklore seriously, though they have heard Snakebite Ridge on the backside of Moses Mountain is an unlucky place. Tony recalls Arlander Fry and Jimmy Herdlicka coming into the store to purchase supplies for what looked like a trek into the mountains, possibly for prospecting. Jimmy, one eye blackened and swollen shut,

solemnly paid for the supplies by selling his motorcycle, an AJS Model from the Great War. This was done at Arlander's insistence and with a certain amount of bullying and intimidation. Arlander cuffed the boy more than once, and warned him that he would tell "Charley" he was not following through with his part of the bargain.



Mary Santos



Tony Santos

SPRINGVILLE UNION SCHOOL

Dorothy Radeleff: A newly minted teacher with a degree from Occidental College in Los Angeles. She came back to her hometown of Springville with the intent to bring new ideas about education to the charming one-room schoolhouse traditions of the region. This did not work out as planned, and Dorothy was put charge of the school's simple library. She has taken this setback in stride though, and set up something more than a library of storybooks and practical lessons for young children. She's collected a wide variety of local history and encouraged donations from the private collections and personal libraries of the oldest Springville families. She is always eager to talk to educated people and was altogether swept off her feet by James Zalud. The young man's intelligence and intensity as well as his stories of a lost cave of gold enthralled her.

Dorothy has a variety of information she can share with investigators. She spoke at length with James Zalud, who introduced himself to her as "Jimmy Herdlicka." She can also provide background on the rumors of a mad Spanish priest who came to the foothills two hundred years ago lusting for gold, and some indigenous stories that elaborate on the fearful feelings of the old folks in town have toward Snakebite Ridge. She and "Jimmy" looked over some old prospecting and land management maps from the 1850s together for several hours across multiple days. A successful **Charm** or **Persuade** roll will convince Dorothy to share information regarding her meetings with "Jimmy."

"Jimmy heard that we had some old prospecting and land management maps in the town archive I started last year and asked me if I'd help him identify a place called Snakebite Ridge. It wasn't on any formal map, but we found it on some hand drawn maps by a former resident named Walter Schofield. They had it marked as an elevated slope on the northeast side of Moses Mountain. The mountain made it onto the official land management maps, but

Snakebite Ridge never did. It comes up in a handful of stories some of the old folks share from time to time—Native legends too." A **Psychology** roll will reveal that Dorothy is fond of "Jimmy" and enjoyed spending time with him. She will relate that she has asked after him at the Springville Hotel and indicate that he has been missing for ten days, or perhaps longer (see Appendix Timeline for details). She is concerned he might have run afoul a group of loggers in town, or tried to talk to **Isaiah Zimmerman** (see Persons of Interest Section).

If asked about anyone living in and around the northeast side of Moses Mountain, Dorothy will remark, "There are squatters, trappers, and other mountain folk living up in Mountain Home Grove. The houses are remote and there aren't any roads, just game trails. We sometimes canvas the area looking to enroll young children at the school, but its rare when the families will take an interest. The only person in town I can think of who's from there is Isaiah Zimmerman. He's something of a drifter, has a bad limp, and the story goes he had a falling out with his father when he was younger. Something about a hunting accident."

Dorothy is protective of the folklore and Native stories she has picked up while living and working in Springville and will not be eager to share them for fear of her and her kin coming off as superstitious hill folk or backwards country bumpkins. A Hard **Persuade** roll or a regular success with **History** or **Occult** will show enough genuine interest to let her tip her hand. If asked about a Padre Jimenez, Spanish priest with gold fever, or Spanish activity in the region prior to 1850 she will remark: "There are rumors that the Spanish made their way inland with a mind to convert the tribes that lived around here two hundred years ago, but no one has ever found a church or anything of the like in the valley or the hills. The story goes that the priest found a cave full of gold that the Mission Indians said was home to evil spirits. The priest and his men drove away the local tribal folk and then fell to fighting amongst themselves until they had all died by violence, starvation, and exposure. The Natives tell a similar story with a different ending: they say a spirit that lived in the mountains ate the priest and his soldiers, that they tried to take the gold and they violated old medicine, old magic, that keep spirit bound to the stones, and they paid the price for their greed with their lives."



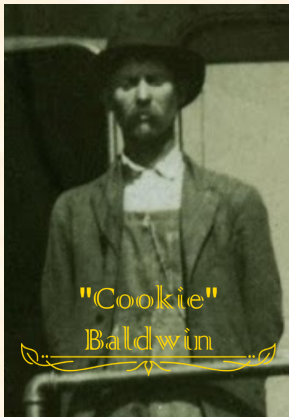
Dorothy Radeleff

CLARK COMPANY SAWMILL

The Clark Company Sawmill sits northwest of Springville at the intersection of Hickman Creek and Bear Creek. The sawmill employs roughly two-dozen workers on a regular basis, with extra laborers hired on for large orders and the busy months of the year. The sawmill sees lots of short-term workers, with injury and attrition for better work being common occurrences. Though they are loathed by their fellows, the sawmill laborers will not give up the name of **Charley Matthewson** or the names of his associates **Pedro Garza** and **Arlander Fly** (See Persons of Interest section) easily. This is partially out of a sense of loyalty, as they share in a brotherhood of hard labor, hard luck, and little reward and partly because Matthewson and his associates are notoriously vengeful.

If the investigators can get through to one of the more gossip-prone workers, perhaps **George "Cookie" Baldwin**, the mill's resident slinger of beans on toast, they can learn about Matthewson's recent plans. He's been bragging that some greenhorn in town owes him a lot of money over a poker game, and the psychotic thug and his buddies have been paying the young man frequent visits and beating him up. Before disappearing, the men joked about taking their new "friend" on a little adventure in the woods.

More salt-of-the-earth investigators might gain the trust of sawmill veterans like **Lester Lathrop** and **Sam Wells**, both experienced loggers, by taking part in after work competitions such as climbing, axe throwing, and wrestling. Loggers use these games to gamble and settle arguments in lieu of violence. The loggers frequent a "restaurant" called the Cow Cabin, which occupies a little strip of land between the Mt. Whitney Ditch and the Clarke Company Sawmill. While the tarpaper shack is nominally a café providing eggs, beans, and bacon to hungry loggers and cowboys, at night it comes alive, dispensing homemade liquor bought from local moonshiners and offering space for music, gambling, and competitions/fights. Regulars will remark on the card game where a young greenhorn named Jimmy played one too many hands against Charley Matthewson and ended up in the outlaw's debt. They will recall how the boy was fast and loose with his money, buying drinks for anyone who had a yarn to offer about prospecting, strange caves in Mountain Home Grove, and Indigenous lore.



TRACKING THE MATTHEWSON GANG

With proper information obtained from the sawmill workers and/or Tony and Mary Santos the investigators will know the Matthewson Gang was headed to Mountain Home Grove. Three **Tracking** Skill rolls will be required to follow the trail of the four men, identifying old tracks, broken twigs, trampled grass, and other signs of recent human passing. These can be made by the character with the best **Tracking** skill and other investigators can help. If the investigators cannot glean anything from the aforementioned sources, they can learn about the Snakebite Ridge and the haunted cave by talking with sources in town. The Doughnut Shop is the best option of local gossip and ghost stories and Dorothy Radleffe can be coaxed to provide the relative location of Snakebite Ridge. Without a lead from the mill workers on the intentions of the Matthewson gang, the investigators will need to make three rolls: **Navigate**, **Natural World**, and **Climb**. All investigators must make the latter roll where a designated "leader" can make the first two with assistance from other investigators. Consequences for failing these rolls is left to the Keeper, but animal encounters, running afoul Mountain Home Grove's isolationist homesteaders, and injury due to falling are all possibilities.

Traversing Mountain Home Grove

Investigators approaching Mountain Home Grove from the south and moving toward Snakebite Ridge on the far northeast side of Moses Mountain should be prepared for a difficult journey. There are no roads or cleared trails into the region. It is considered too rugged for farms and ranches and all but the most experienced hunters and trappers avoid the area around Moses Mountain and Maggie Mountain entirely. If the investigators arrive in Springville with vehicles rather than horses and pack mules, they can potentially procure the necessary animals from ranches and farms northwest of town.

Deer trails crisscross Mountain Home Grove, but can easily steer hikers and riders in the wrong direction, as they frequently change elevation and lead to dead ends. Following the North Fork of the Tule River is perhaps the smoothest passage and the river also makes a good landmark in the event one becomes lost, however Snakebite Ridge is at a remarkably higher elevation up the side of Moses Mountain from the river. If the investigators follow the river, they'll have to conclude their journey with a sudden ascent of a thousand feet to be level with their destination.

The handful of people living in the area are isolationists who survive outside of society all together. If they come into Springville at all, it is to barter what they have grown, killed, or skinned for supplies, and most prefer to avoid the town unless desperate for food or medical attention. They will not be friendly toward outsiders. Approaching the wrong cabin or shack in the woods can lead to an investigator being shot.

Animal Encounters

Farms and ranches sparsely populate the hills around Springville. Wild animals prowl through the spaces in between, and frequently stray onto fields and pastures.

Mountain lions and bears kill cows and pigs, while coyotes and bobcats steal chickens. Rattlesnakes are also a frequent and dangerous nuisance. Any of these animals can threaten investigators or make life on the trail challenging. The wilderness is also full of small irritants such as bats, scorpions, swarms of biting ants, and clouds of aggressive wasps. There are no planned encounters with animals as part the scenario, but such scenes can add serious tension, act as red herrings, offer comic relief, or serve as penalties for failed **Luck** rolls or **Tracking** and **Navigation** skill rolls.

Matthewson Gang Massacre

Huddled close to the cliffs at the south end of Snakebite Ridge (See Map in Appendix) is the campsite used by the Matthewson gang. It is a grim scene. The bodies of Charley Matthewson, Pedro Garza, and Arlander Fly have lain rotting in the sun for a week or more depending on the time it takes the investigators to arrive. All three are victims of the Feeding Tendrils. Careful examination with a successful **Medicine** skill roll reveals puncture marks where the Tendrils attacked them, liquefied their fat, muscles, and internal organs into a half-digested slurry, and then consumed all but skin and bones. Arlander Fry was attacked first, struck from behind while urinating just outside the firelight. Garza and Matthewson rose to face the adversary, but after Garza was viciously attacked Matthewson turned tail and ran into the woods, eventually striking a tree in the dark and then having the creature following him attach to his forehead as he lay sprawled, half-conscious in the dirt.

The bodies are utterly untouched by scavengers. Insects, worms, and the weather have all begun to break down the skin and bones left behind by the Feeding Tendrils (**Sanity** roll 1/1d4+1 for viewing the remains), but larger animals like coyotes, bears, and mountain lions can sense the lingering wrongness of what fed on these men and will not touch them. If the investigators have one or more dogs, they will bark angrily at the remains and howl and whine in protest if pulled close to them.

Going through their possessions, it is clear the group of thugs have been to the cave. Each has a couple nuggets of quartz crystal on his person, and those crystals have thin veins of gold embedded in them. The Matthewson Gang came up Moses Mountain with a variety of camping and digging supplies, as well as firearms. The Keeper is encouraged to let the investigators find a few things that might come in handy if their own supplies are limited or became lost during the trip into the backcountry. There is no sign of James Zalud, but a successful **Spot Hidden** roll results in evidence his personal effects have been divided up amongst Matthewson and his cohorts. These include a monogrammed handkerchief and engraved money clip with the initials "JJZ," and an army-issue compass engraved, "Find your own way James. —Edward."

The Matthewson gang left James for dead once they had found the cave in cliff-side. Beyond the blasted aperture where the crystal and gold door once stood, the group found a dark, foul smelling natural well of stone leading deeper into Moses Mountain. James, nervously wondering how deep it went, shown his light over the edge and Arlander Fly sadistically pushed the boy into the pit.

James fell fifteen feet down a steep incline, broke his wrist, a twisted an ankle. The three older men laughed as James sobbed and screamed, and then Matthewson emptied his revolver into the hole. The boy was silent after that and the other men assumed he was dead, though the truth is Matthewson was never a great shot and did not hit James once. They agreed they would come back with something the following day to cover the pit and conceal James and whatever else was rotting down there with him, and then collect the gold. That night, as they toasted their success, the Feeding Tendrils struck.

Weakness: During the course of the investigation it will become clear that the Feeding Tendrils are attracted to heat. Knowing this, either by figuring it out on their own, or with the aid of an **Idea** roll, the investigators can impact the actions of the Feeding Tendrils in two ways:

- Using flames to draw the creature's attention away from prey. One playtest group used dynamite to do this.
- Covering their skin in river mud will cause the investigators to be invisible to the Feeding Tendrils for 1 hour. A **Con** roll is required to avoid the effects of hypothermia should the investigators attempt this strategy more than once at night.

THE FEEDING TENDRILS

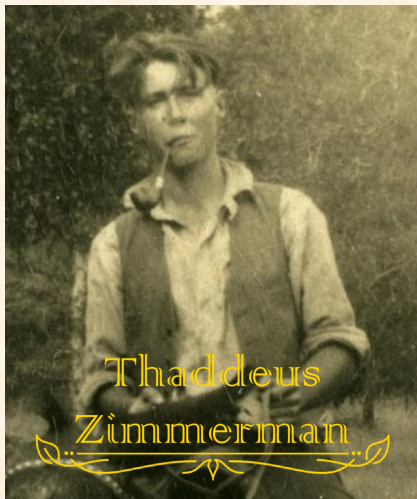
As night falls on Snakebite Ridge, the Feeding Tendrils crawl and out of the cliff-side cave in search of animal prey to feed the Malignity. They move through the tall grass, crawl up and down trees, and between boulders. They move similarly to serpents and yet more freely. The Earth's gravity has a limited influence on the Feeding Tendrils, and they appear to float across flat surfaces and effortlessly climb vertical obstacles. Investigators familiar with exotic animals might liken the creatures to large boa constrictors with the ridges and flexibility of earthworms. Like earthworms, they are sightless. They direct their predatory efforts with spear-shaped heads that contain simple, but powerful sensory organs that focus on heat.

The Feeding Tendrils are not capable of any emotional response. They are not vindictive hunters, they do not recognize threats, and they do not display camaraderie toward others of their kind. If they attack in a group, it is only because they are sensing the same heat source. Their directive is a simple one: seek out sustenance, gorge themselves on that sustenance, and return to reattach and feed the Malignity. A Feeding Tendril that takes in food will abandon its fellows and return to the Malignity by the quickest route possible. As they latch on and digest the insides of their victims, they leave behind sacks of flesh and bone in their wake. While the bulk of the wildlife in Snakebite Ridge has fled the region, investigators will periodically come across deflated animal carcasses that have been previous meals for the Feeding Tendrils.

Each night, unless they take some sort of precaution, 1d4 Feeding Tendrils will approach any group of

investigators. For example, if the investigators divide into two groups, each will be sniffed out by 1D4 Feeding Tendrils. Individual investigators wandering too far away from the group can expect to be overwhelmed by 1D4 feeding tendrils each. In addition to seeking food at nighttime, loud noises such as gunshots and shouting will bring 1D4 Feeding Tendrils to investigate. Investigators encountering any number of Feeding Tendrils must make a **Sanity** roll, failure results in **Sanity Loss 1/1D6**.

The investigators and the local wildlife—what remains of it—are at risk for attack. The Zimmerman family and James Zalud have absorbed the psychic emanations of the Malignity, marking them as “not food” to the Feeding Tendrils. The Zimmermans, thanks to Belle Zimmerman’s folk magic, have resisted falling under the thrall of the Malignity, but James Zalud embraces it as his god and considers himself its prophet.



THE ZIMMERMAN HOMESTEAD

Jonah Zimmerman (See Persons of Interest section) and his family live in an old and rough looking one-story log cabin decorated with witch bottles, feather charms, and other trappings of folk magic in the shadow of Snakebite Ridge. A path of flat stones meanders up to their front door, avoiding haphazard clumps of tilled earth where the family grows most of its own food. The Zimmerman family consists of Jonah, his wife Belle, and their teenage son Thaddeus. Thaddeus, “Tad,” looks nothing like his parents, though they refer to him as their “youngest.” Belle Zimmerman has periodically taken in orphaned children, like Isaiah whom the investigators may have sought out in Springville, during her career as a rural midwife.

Thaddeus is a dull-witted lad of sixteen who enjoys reckless activities. Should the investigators arrive in Snakebite Ridge during the early morning hours, Thaddeus will surprise them by dynamiting fish in the pond near the south end of the Ridge. The Keeper of Arcane Lore should play up the startling disruption as the explosion echoes across the mountains, and follow it with the disturbing image of a crude mountain lad playfully throwing dynamite into a body of water and laughing moronically as fish are blown into the sky.

Jonah Zimmerman, Aloof Mountain Man, or Mad Cultist?: As written, Jonah Zimmerman is a man with a vague understanding of the Malignity and its intensions after years of exposure to its subtle psychic presence, tempered by his wife’s folk magic wards. Keepers are encouraged to dial up or dial down these qualities as they see fit. It is possible Jonah welcomes the presence of outsiders in Snakebite Ridge because they will inevitably feed the creature in the cave and the creature will, in turn, leave his home and family in peace. At the same time, the Malignity might have a deeper hold on Jonah and he might take a more active role in sacrificing the investigators to it. He might even be working in concert with James Zalud, the most recent and zealous convert to the Malignity’s weird little cult. Alternatively, Jonah could join the investigators in their hunt, eager to see the alien being done away with once and for all. Jonah is intended to provide information to the investigators that will get them pointed in the direction of the Malignity, but his motivations beyond that can be as pernicious or benign as the Keeper likes.

Thaddeus will run home and tell his father about any strangers he meets in the woods and Jonah Zimmerman will walk out calmly, though armed with a hunting rifle, and cautiously greet the investigators asking their business. Mountain folk do not like strangers, but they are not rude and they realize most parties traveling in the wilderness are hunting and therefore armed. Provided the investigators did not act threatening toward Thaddeus and are not openly threatening to Jonah, this will be a good opportunity to ask him questions about Snakebite Ridge, the elusive cave full of gold, and the Matthewson Gang/James Zalud.

If the investigators show deference, Zimmerman will invite them to his home. Over coffee, Jonah will remark that, “Surein’ there’s weird an frightin’in’ things hereabouts. T’ain’t a cursed wood or cave like people say though, just things most men av’ ne’r seen, nor will they ev’r see. Jus’ like a bar’ (bear) or mount’n lion they is. You leav’m alone and show’m no fear and they’ll do tha’ same ta’ you. Ma woman Belle’s got the cunnin’ an she knows the signs and the secret words ta’ say. I wouldn’a go up ta’ that cave if n I were ye. But if n yer fixin’ ta go I can show ya the quickest way up the mount’n.” Jonah will follow up his warning by offering some evidence of another group of men who attempted to enter the Cave: Walter Schofield and his party of prospectors. Jonah’s late grandfather Adam managed to recover Walter’s diary from the prospectors’ campsite following the deaths of the three men. It is in poor condition and largely worn away with time, but the last entry is preserved. **(Handout III)**

If they stay until dark, the investigators will be able to speak to Belle Zimmerman as she comes home from attending a birth. She will advise them against approaching the cave until they have learned what they will face within it. She will point them to the young growth of forest on the north end of the Ridge and to the old prospectors’ camp near the trailhead Jonah suggests for approaching the cliff. If asked for protections, she will offer to pray with the investigators and bless them (as per the “Bless” Folk Magic

spell in *The Grand Grimoire of Cthulhu Mythos Magic*), providing a bonus die to Dodge for 24 hours).

Having lived in Snakebite Ridge for decades, the Zimmerman family has suffered constant psychic exposure to the Malignity. It has sent them dreams and visions that have worn away at their sanity. Only Belle Zimmerman's folk magic has halted the creature from transforming them into deranged, babbling slaves to its alien influence. However, the Zimmermans have not escaped the psychic impact of the Malignity entirely. They will periodically catch themselves staring at the cliffside cave, mumbling alien words and phrases to themselves, and even talking to Moses Mountain. While this makes them odd and uncomfortable to be around, it also provides the benefit of being marked as "not food" by the Malignity and therefore invisible to the Feeding Tendrils.

Belle Zimmerman's witch bottles and feather charms make the family cabin the safest place in Snakebite Ridge. If the investigators spend the night, they will perhaps see the Feeding Tendrils lurking in the woods beyond the edge of the property, but they will not approach. If the investigators are being pursued though, the folk charms will not be enough to turn back the Feeding Tendrils. However, even the safest place in Snakebite Ridge is not without risks. Spending the night with the Zimmermans is an unsettling experience all its own. At the Keeper's discretion, any of the following incidents can take place in the Zimmerman's cabin overnight:

- An investigator wakes up to find Jonah Zimmerman in his long johns standing over her/him with a hatchet in hand, his eyes rolled back to show only the whites as he mutters, "They come forth to feed upon the blood and sinews of Earth-life. They bring these offerings to their master so that their master may rise!" Jonah will not attack, and any sharp physical or auditory shock will wake him from his semi-dreaming state. He will apologize and mutter evasively that, "Belle says I walks in ma' sleep sometimes."
- Belle Zimmerman, sitting in a rocking chair by the hearth watching the embers die, will sing softly to herself, "Jesus loves me—this I know, For the Bible tells me so; Little ones to him belong, —*nilgh'ri gotha hrü ron; fhalmaoth ilyaa un shogg-ah; Iä. Iä Azathoth...*" and so on. If questioned, she'll smile sleepily and nod, then head to bed without a word.
- In the middle of the night Thaddeus, who sleeps on a cot in the attic, will mutter in his sleep, then whimper pleadingly, and finally he will sit bolt upright and let loose a blood curdling scream saying, "It will rise when the stars are right! It will rise and burn the world to ash in its fiery wake!" He will then collapse back onto his bed and sleep as though he never woke. Neither of his parents will stir in their bed while this is taking place.

THE MISSION RUINS

The investigators might locate the ruins of La Misión de San Ebon in the newer growth forest on the north side of Snakebite Ridge by accident, but a more likely scenario is that Jonah or Belle Zimmerman will mention the tumbled

down stone buildings to investigators when they question them about the region. Like the cave, Zimmerman and his family tend to avoid the ruins, as they make them uneasy and Belle, being the cunning type of woman she is, feels the old stone foundations are full of ghosts. Zimmerman has one trophy he collected from the ruins among his possessions, a steel Spanish-style soldier's helmet with a Latin motto: "Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam" eloquently engraved across the rim. Though tarnished, the craftsmanship is exquisite. A regular success on a **History** or **Archaeology** skill roll will identify the piece as belonging to the Spanish missionary period of the late 1700s. A Hard success will add it is likely the work of the Free Company of Catalan and an Extreme success will identify the maker's mark as coming from Cusco, Peru.

Zimmerman Family Folk Magic:

*Belle Zimmerman never attended school. Her education consisted of the Bible, the Old Farmer's Almanac, and the family cookbook. Her folk magic was handed down from her mother and grandmother and consists of a equal parts Christian prayers in English and Latin, rural English traditions James Frazier would call "sympathetic magic," and a Native American shamanistic perspective on time, space, and relationships between people, animals, and landforms. Belle Zimmerman might be a "cunning woman," a "Mountain Witch," or just a very capable home-taunt midwife and veterinarian. The truth of the matter is left to the individual Keeper. Belle is written by default to provide one helpful folk magic spell to the investigators, which she will perform with the aid of a homemade herbal oil, a Native American rhythm tapped out by her foot and sung under her breath, and the sign of the cross on each investigator's forehead. Nominally, this Blessing provides a bonus die to **Dodge** skill rolls for 24 hours. It is meant to provide the investigators with a fighting chance against the overwhelming odds of the Malignity and its Feeding Tendrils. If the keeper wishes to change the spell to suit their gameplay style, they are most welcome to do so.*

The mission buildings, a 30ft x 60ft single-story dormitory and a 40ft x 60ft Spanish-style Roman Catholic-style chapel, are covered in newer growth forest compared to the rest of Snakebite Ridge. The trees are perhaps only one-hundred-and-fifty years old. Successful **Spot Hidden** rolls and **Archaeology** rolls will find a host of loosely buried remains and artifacts. Bones of domesticated animals (cows, horses, and sheep) are easily unearthed. There are also a few scattered human remains as well, including a skull with a puncture wound very similar to that received by Charley Matthewson. The remains of candlesticks, tools, and even some rusty weapons from the Spanish colonial period can also be found.

A Hard **Spot Hidden** or Regular **Archaeology** roll will reveal the door to the cellar/dungeon beneath the dormitory hall under a carpet of moss and dry pine needles. The underground chamber is sparsely furnished, but there is one corpse lying on the floor. The remains are desiccated,

but it clearly wears the brittle vestiges of a brown friar's robe. The poor fellow appears to have died while kneeling in prayer. Amidst the remains of a chair or stool nearby is a Latin Bible, once very ornate but now fallen to pieces. A single piece of stiff, well-persevered paper sits folded beneath a small wrought-iron candleholder, the candle in which has sat unlit for almost a century and a half. Carefully unfolding the paper, the investigators will be able to read the last words of **Friar Miguel Elesio Durán** (See Persons of Interest section). (**Handout IV**)

At some point, preferably after Friar Durán's note is found, the investigators will hear muttering coming from the chapel. James Zalud has arrived after his daily wander through the woods to pray to his new god. He has decorated the floor of the chapel in honor of the creature he met in the cave, using charcoal to create a large black circle in the middle of the floor with black tendrils radiating outward from it, including some that appear detached. He has tried to write words on the floor as well:

*Nghrii goka Azathoth kn'aog lloig ebunma
Ch'nnkn'a nafl ooboshu ph'kn'a y'hah
Tharanak h'gofnn ngshagg ep sgn'wahl
Iä throd Nyarlathotep ep mnahn'uaaah*

All these are phrases that circle endlessly and meaninglessly through James Zalud's mind and he occasionally mutters them under his breath. There is no potent magical secret here, just the inane chatter of a broken mind trying to make sense of something abominable. Keepers can feel free to alter the words to their purpose, perhaps filling in the names of other mythos deities familiar to the characters if this scenario is part of an ongoing campaign. In any event, seeing the haunting display requires a **Sanity** roll (**0/1D3**).

The Boy with the Broken Mind

James Zalud (a.k.a. Jimmy Herdlicka) avoided the doom of his thuggish associates in the Matthewson Gang, but was stricken with a terrible fate of his own. Climbing up the cliff-side at Charley Matthewson's command, he entered the cave that houses the Malignity, taking note of the numerous rock paintings and realizing he was entering a sacred place. While the rest of the gang dug about for gold, James was cast into a pit at the back of the grotto by the sadistic Arlander Fly, shot at by Charley Matthewson, and left for dead at the bottom of the deep well, where he crawled toward a dim red light and encountered the Malignity. The creature not only burned James' flesh with the terrible ambient radiation emitted from its spongy carapace, but also entered, dominated, and ultimately broke his mind.

Entirely given over to madness and covered in weeping, peeling blisters from numerous second degree burns, James wanders Snakebite Ridge muttering to himself, overwhelmed by the visions the Malignity has thrust upon him. He chatters meaninglessly about horrors from space and blind idiot gods in the black gulfs of far-flung galaxies. He is set in the notion that the Malignity is his god, his great red god, and he is the prophet who will bring the world its terrible revelation: that humankind is little more than food for cosmic horrors. His physical injuries and strange vocalizations require a **Sanity** roll (**0/1D3**) to endure with anything other than loathing and

deep emotional discomfort. He will cry out to the Feeding Tendrils when he encounters the investigators, urging them to come to his aid—which they will if the Keeper desires. The Feeding Tendrils no longer sense James as a food source. He has too much of the Malignity in him, and the being from the stars is not a cannibalistic creature.

Investigators will likely take one of two courses with James when they encounter him in person, they will try to reason with him or they will attempt to physically overpower and subdue him. An appeal through social skills and reminders of his mother or perhaps Dorothy Radcliff's concern for his safety will give him brief pause, "My mother sent you? My mother!? I've forgot all about her. Why can't I remember her face? It feels like a lifetime since we've spoken. I..." He will trail off as the madness of the Malignity reasserts itself, "No, no! That doesn't matter now! It never mattered! Only the hunger of my red god matters. When it has had its fill and the stars are right he will leap into the heavens live a triumphant angel of judgment. It will blacken the earth and scorch the sky! Only the chosen few will be spared its wrath and be carried with it into the stars!"

As the Keeper, you are encouraged to play up James' insanity in whatever way suits the investigators approach. If they try to talk to him, he will rant and rave and prophesy doom. The investigators might even gain some Cthulhu Mythos (1-2% with a successful Intelligence roll) from his babbling. Alternatively, if the investigators move to capture James, he will flee and call down the Feeding Tendrils crying, "Come horrors! Black cherubim! Devour the blasphemers!" He will lead athletic investigators on a merry chase through the woods and eventually the Feeding Tendrils will emerge of their own accord, as a pack of sweaty, panting human beings will draw their attention.

LOCATING THE CAVE

Once they have arrived in Snakebite Ridge the investigators will need to seek out the cave where James likely went in search of gold (See Map in Appendix). It is easy enough to find by daylight, a successful **Spot Hidden** roll will locate the aperture amongst the rocks of the steep mountain slope. As for reaching the cave, that is more difficult. There is a trail up cliff, but it is extremely difficult to pick out. A Hard **Tracking** roll will reveal the route most recently used by the Matthewson Gang, it requires a Hard **Climb** roll. Failure requires a **Luck** roll to avoid falling a short distance at an odd angle (1D4 Damage). Once one person completes the Hard **Climb** roll, they can give assistance to others, adding a bonus die to each attempt.

A Hard **Natural World** or **Navigate** skill roll reveals an older and more certain path used by Walter Schofield and his fellow prospectors and the Native American shamans who looked after the cave prior to the coming the Spanish Missionaries. This requires two regular **Climb** skill rolls. Failure does not result in damage, however pushing either roll requires a **Luck** roll upon failure and failing the **Luck** roll results in minor injury (1D4 Damage). Note: after one or both paths mentioned above have been traversed, they are easier to navigate, and additional rolls are only necessary under duress, such as when being pursued up or down the cliff-side, holding lit dynamite while climbing up or down, or similar stressful circumstances.

Meeting and talking with Jonah Zimmerman prior to attempting to climb using either path will add a bonus die to any **Climb** roll. Jonah keeps his distance from the Cave, but he has been up to it on a couple of occasions and can forewarn investigators against loose gravel, dead ends, and other hazards. Climbing equipment can also be employed if the investigators brought it with them. This will reduce the Matthewson Gang's route to a single regular **Climb** roll and eliminate the need for rolls altogether using the prospector's route.

The cave itself made up four sections: a rock shelter, a tunnel, a circular well, and the Malignity's grotto. The curving wall at the back of the rock shelter is covered in well-preserved petroglyphs; originally drawn thousands of years ago and maintained by the tribal shamans living near the cave until the arrival of the Spanish. The floor of the entrance is littered with traces of animal bones and the charcoal of burnt offerings from the sacrifices of bygone centuries as well as fist-sized hunks of quartz crystal containing thin striations of gold. In the midst of this panoply of tribal images and remains of ritual offerings, a wide fissure surrounded by old black powder burns opens to the interior of Moses Mountain. A tunnel leading thirty feet into the rock stops at a natural, vaguely circular well six feet in diameter. It is in this tunnel that one first smells the overpowering sour scent of the Malignity. A **Climb** roll is required to navigate the fifteen foot drop and into the grotto belonging to the Malignity. Falling down the well requires a **Luck** roll to avoid serious injury on the rocks below (1D6 Damage). The grotto's ceiling is irregular, but averages fifteen feet in height.

The Malignity floats just off the ground at the back of the grotto, with Feeding Tendrils embedded in its spongy body and snaking lazily about it. The alien sphere gives off an angry red glow, dimly lighting the cavern. The eye-watering sour smell of the creature saturates the chamber and the constant heat and radiation it emits has left the rock surrounding it blackened and glass-like.

Yithian Fragments: *The petroglyphs in the Snakebite Ridge cave are described to clearly indicate a point of contact between the unnamed Paleolithic tribe of the region and the Great Race of Yith twenty thousand years ago. This is not central to the story at hand, but it provides a reason for the barrier that held the Malignity in check for ages and, perhaps more importantly, a foothold for additional scenarios should the Keeper wish to consider a campaign in 1920s California. At the same time, the images provided are vague enough that the Keeper could use them as models for other Mythos creatures with technology advanced enough to appear magical such as the Mi-go or the Elder Things. The intent is tie the Malignity into the wider Cthulhu Mythos to whatever end the Keeper desires. Viewing the petroglyphs might trigger an encounter with the Great Race of Yith or the human cult that assists their time traveling scholars at a later date. Alternatively, they might spur surviving investigators to spend some time researching collections at the Doe Library of the University of California in Berkeley or the Los Angeles Public Library where they can locate copies of the Pnakotic Manuscripts or the Eltdown Shards in the special collections.*

The Cave Paintings

After the Malignity was sealed away, the Paleolithic tribe that was hunted by it painted the story of its coming, its attacks, and its binding by the Great Race on the walls of the cliff-side cave. (**Handout V**) The tribes of Native Americans that followed treated the cave as a holy place, and maintained the paintings of their ancient ancestors, adding to the tableau, as their artistry grew more vivid. A competent scholar or group of scholars with knowledge of **Astronomy**, **Archaeology**, **Anthropology**, and the **Occult** can read the full story of the coming and binding of the Malignity in graphic detail. Several amateurs with the knowledge between them might also be able to piece it together.

The Keeper is encouraged to withhold or provide information based on the following skill checks when one or more investigators visit the cave. A successful **Science (Astronomy)** skill roll will reveal the depictions of stars on the cave's ceiling, and the story of how the creature traveled from Menkar in the constellation of Cetus to the Earth, crashing into the ground as a bolide. A success in **Archaeology** will show how black serpents (The Feeding Tendrils) came down from the mountain to feed upon the ancient human and animal populations. A further success in **Anthropology** will detail how spirits were summoned to bind the creature and the black serpents in the cave—a successful **Cthulhu Mythos** roll will reveal the Great Race of Yith shifted in time to possess the bodies of shamans for this task. Finally, a Hard **Occult** roll will transfer the tale from Paleolithic and Native American myth into a more tangible story akin to science fiction. An hour of studying the pictographs will cause a loss of 1D3 **Sanity** in exchange for 2% in **Cthulhu Mythos**.

Confronting the Malignity

Once the investigators understand what lurks inside the foul-smelling grotto they will have three likely options: run away with James (if he is still alive), find some way to entomb the horror, or face the horror and destroy it. The first option is likely if the investigators have already been significantly injured or deaths have occurred when they encountered the Feeding Tendrils.

If they choose to entomb the creature again they will not have the convenience of the Great Race's magic. Instead, a more practical approach is needed. Encountering Jonah Zimmerman's son dynamiting fish in the pond should indicate that the mountain man and his family have some dynamite handy. Collapsing the outer cave requires at least 200 points of dynamite damage, or roughly 10 sticks of dynamite. This will cause a terrific explosion that will be heard in Springville and beyond and will likely alert the local Marshall's office. Anyone participating in setting the dynamite will need to pass a Hard **Dodge** roll to avoid debris. Failure results in 1D6 damage from falling rocks and necessitates a **Luck** Roll to avoid 1D6 falling Damage, a successful Hard **Climb** roll can be used to negate the Damage if the **Luck** roll fails.

Author's Note-What if They Set it All on Fire?:

Graf Moltke the Elder is famous for saying, "No plan survives contact with the enemy." Most experienced Keepers of Arcane Lore would say the same is true when it comes to scenarios and groups of player characters. There are never enough contingency plans to handle all player stratagems, but the one I always try to plan for is the inevitable attempt made by a player to burn everything to the ground and walk away. Should this be the strategy your players settle on for in dealing with the Malignity, the Feeding Tendrils, and Snakebite Ridge, I would allow them an attempt and even some success but make sure you use it as an opportunity to demonstrate 1) fire does not harm the Feeding Tendrils or the Malignity directly and 2) fire attracts the Feeding Tendrils, but not as much as warm bodies. Finally, keep in mind that even if a fire starts on Snakebite Ridge all is not lost. Dry grass is common in the foothills and flat lands of Central California, but in the mountains the ground consists of hard-packed topsoil, tough bushes, and pine needles. The latter smoke when set alight but do not produce flames for long. Moreover, this scenario takes place just after the typical fire season in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Rainfall is irregular but it does happen. If your regular group of players contains pyromaniacal personalities, feel free to describe Snakebite Ridge as a damp place that has experienced recent rainfall and describe constant cloud cover that produces drizzling showers from time to time. This will not impact the setting and it may save your game from burning down around you.

It should be noted that placing dynamite in the cave will draw the attention of 1D4 Feeding Tendrils. This happens even if the dynamite is placed and the investigators intend to use wire and a plunger to set off the charge at a distance and avoid the risk of close-proximity detonation. Note: Jonah Zimmerman does have the necessary dynamite sticks on hand, but he does not have a cable and plunger as he and his family use individual sticks to dynamite ponds and collect stunned fish.

Should the investigators elect to take on the Malignity directly, refer to its combat statistics below. The festering, spherical alien sponge floats just off the ground at the back of its grotto, allowing the Feeding Tendrils to pass into it and deposit the digested matter they have collected while hunting. Even though it does not move, the creature will be very difficult to kill given its radiation and mental attacks. On top of that, a direct assault will cause 1D4 Feeding Tendrils to detach and protect the Malignity they serve. Large-scale **Sanity** loss (1/1D10 per failed **Sanity** roll) and investigator death are very likely in the event the players go after the Malignity directly. Survivors will be wracked with hallucinations and dreams of the Malignity gorging itself on human and animal life before ripping free of the Earth's gravity with the aid of a powerful radioactive conflagration that will leave miles upon miles of devastation in its wake.

In all cases, James Zalud, unless he is restrained in some fashion, will provide an obstacle to dealing with the

Malignity. He has been overwhelmed by its mental assault and now considers it to be a god he serves fanatically. He will sell his life to prevent the investigators from entombing it or destroying it. Even if bound, have the players make a **Party Luck** roll for James to escape and interfere. His madness is such he will gladly break his teeth chewing through bonds, rouse himself from unconsciousness, or attempt to assault the Zimmermans if left in their care.

REWARDS

Apply the following **Sanity** awards and penalties to the surviving investigators depending on the outcome of the scenario.

- Rescuing James Zalud and bringing him home +1D6 **Sanity**.
- If James dies -1D4 **Sanity**.
- If James is left for dead in Snakebite Ridge -1D6+1 **Sanity**.
- Escaping Snakebite Ridge without entombing or defeating the Malignity -1D4 **Sanity**.
- Entombing or Defeating the Malignity +1D6 **Sanity**.
- Killing any number of Feeding Tendrils +1D2 **Sanity**.

Blood, Madness, and Conflagration.

The Price of Failure:

If the investigators fail to deal with James Zalud and the Malignity the consequences could be dire for Springville, Porterville, and numerous other small towns in the region. Should James be left to his own devices he will slowly transition from worshipping the Malignity to actively attempting to feed it, becoming a mad mountain sorcerer, guiding the Feeding Tendrils first to the homes of mountain folk surrounding Snakebite Ridge and eventually to the farms northwest of Springville. Livestock and people will become new victims of the Feeding Tendrils and James may succeed in kidnapping and bringing more vulnerable people into the presence of Malignity, creating cult of psychically damaged followers. When the stars do eventually come right and the Malignity can free itself from the bonds of the Earth it will lift off in a radioactive firestorm that will leave the region a wasteland, spreading radioactive material into the water table and having profound consequences for Central California and beyond. Anyone having a psychic encounter with the Malignity will experience visions of this radioactive inferno, an action that the Malignity has taken at many times on different worlds during its aeons of travel through the blackness of space.

PERSONS OF INTEREST

JOHN ZALUD

A prominent business owner and restaurateur in Porterville, CA, John Zalud came to the city in 1888. Though an important figure in the business community, his reputation has suffered from social scandal in recent years. His son-in-law was murdered by a mistress, and his eldest son Edward died in 1921 on a hunting trip that is rumored to be a cover story for bootlegging. Rumors also circulate that John Zalud has links to organized crime and is continuing to operate saloons in Portville in violation of the Volstead Act. In order to shake the cloud of suspicion, John has been sinking large amounts of funds into buying land and planting citrus groves.

He had hoped to pass the management of these ventures on to his one living son, James. However, James has little interest in business affairs and has been troubled since the deaths of his brother and brother-in-law, with whom he was close. He has recently taken the radical step of disinheriting himself and disavowing his father, running away from home into the mountains. John is of the mind that the boy is mad and is considering hiring Pinkerton Detectives to recover him.

MARY ZALUD (NE. HERDLICKA)

The wife of John Zalud is a major figure in Porterville elite society. She leads several significant charities, is a member of exclusive social clubs, and regularly entertains local politicians and business moguls and their families in her home. In recent years, misfortunes in her family have led her to turn to spiritualism for solace and she has amassed a significant personal library on the subject. Despite her fixation on the spiritual realm, her strong, dignified personality and ability influence people has made her a power behind her husband's throne.

Unlike her husband, she has a great deal of sympathy and pity for her young son James. She is convinced the deaths of his brother and brother-in-law broke the boy. Since Edward's death in 1921, James has not shown any interest in study or business, only in dreaming and adventure. She is convinced he is protecting himself by wanting to be a hero and treasure hunter and is certain that, given enough time, he will see the error of his ways and come back to the family like the Bible's Prodigal Son. Mary is certain that John's plan to send Pinkerton agents after the boy will drive him further away, and has therefore organized a more local searching party from among contacts with charity and spiritualist groups in town. Perhaps other dreamers can bring her dreamer home where she can keep him safe and help him reconcile with his father.

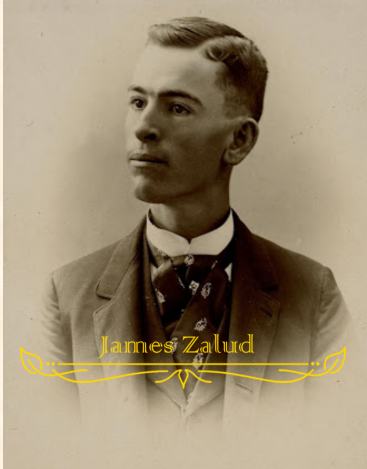
Historical Note: Unlike John, Mary, William Brooks (their son-in-law) and Edward Zalud (their son), James Zalud is a fictional character created for the purposes of this scenario. James, like the other characters in this tale, is part of an effort to tell a story, anchored to the reality of the history of Porterville, California and the surrounding towns. I am grateful for the efforts of the Porterville Museum and Historical Society, organizations that have made the unique and real stories of Zalud family available to the public in print and on the Internet. Any inventions of mine surrounding the history of the family are for entertainment purposes only.

JAMES ZALUD

(A.K.A. "Jimmy Herdlicka")

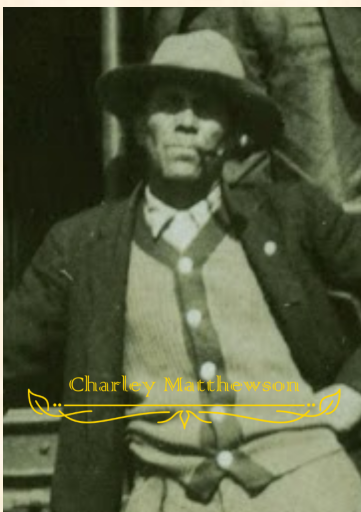
John Zalud's estranged son. He's borrowed his mother's maiden name in place of his father's more famous one and set out on his own following an argument with his father about working for the family business. James has always been something of a dreamer, longing for good, honest adventure rather than his father's shady business dealings. His collections of pulp magazines and dime novels attest to his fondness for stories of buried treasure and lost gold mines. Recently, James has been looking for the real thing and he hit upon one genuine rumor of a lost vein of gold in a letter from Dr. Peter Bequette of Santa Clara to Walter Schofield of Daunt (recently renamed and incorporated as Springville). He obtained this letter along with some of Mr. Scholfield's field journals while treasure hunting at an estate sale. The letter was supported by some Spanish-language documents James located in the archives of the church of San Gabriel Arcángel while visiting Los Angeles on a beach vacation with his older sisters. The documents tell of missionaries and soldiers who went mad with gold fever during a failed effort to convert the Native the Tule River region.

James made his way to Springville and, with his savings, settled into the Springville Hotel where he quickly began to pester anyone who would listen about Schofield, lost Spanish Missions, and rumors of caves containing gold. He had some success with the old men at the Doughnut Shop and Dorothy Radeleff, the young school librarian, but then ran afoul Charley Matthewson and his toadies at the Cow Cabin. James only wanted to drink, play cards, and swap stories like the heroes in his dime novel collection back home, but Charley Matthewson did not play for peanuts and he certainly did not play fair. By the end of the night, James owed the man \$300, which was more than what he had managed to save before running away from home. He was forced to save himself from vicious beatings and attempts to collect the debt by bringing Matthewson and his friends in on his plan to find gold on Snakebite Ridge.



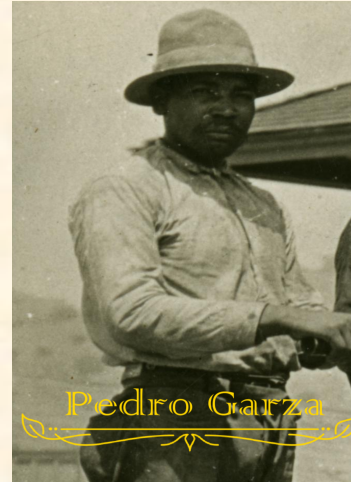
CHARLEY MATTHEWSON

A career criminal with a series of warrants out for his arrest in Missouri, Colorado, and Arizona, he survives by intimidating unintelligent, thuggish men into being his followers and sycophants. The most recent incarnation of the "Matthewson Gang" consisted of Pedro Garza and Arlander Fly. When he found out the greenhorn Jimmy Herdlicka was actually the son of businessman John Zalud, he hatched a scheme to take the lad for all he was worth. A night of drinking and card games at the Cow Cabin, a rough little saloon near the sawmill where Matthewson had been working, ended with Jimmy owing more money to Charley than he could pay. Charley attempted to shake the James down at the Springville Hotel, but after finding out the boy disinherited himself he became enraged and was prepared to beat the young man to death. Jimmy only saved himself by revealing his knowledge of a cave full of gold in Mountain Home Grove. Ever the opportunist, Charley sent Jimmy and Arlander Fly into town to buy supplies for a rushed expedition in search of Snakebite Ridge and the boy's mysterious cave.



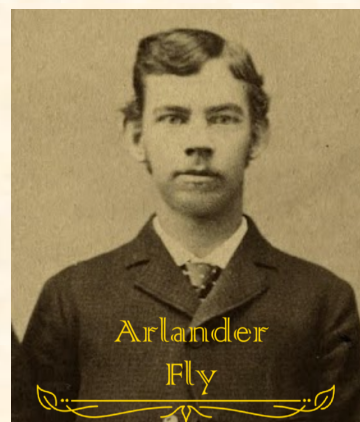
PEDRO GARZA

Matthewson's strong-arm support and bodyguard. Pedro is short, but well muscled. He often got into fights with other sawmill workers due to his stature, his poor command of English, and being one of only a handful of Mexican men working for the Clarke Sawmill Company. Matthewson, who could speak Spanish and appreciated Garza's raw strength and ill temper, established himself as the younger man's mentor in thuggish pursuits. He supported Garza's grudges, encouraged him to pick fights, and manipulated him into doing violence on his behalf.



ARLANDER FLY

Gaunt, chinless, and fish-eyed. Taunts of ugliness and inbreeding dogged Arlander all his life. He became Charley Matthewson's sycophant due to the protection the beastly outlaw provided. Charley also encouraged Arlander's sadistic streak. Sawmill workers remark that Arlander had a penchant for kicking dogs and abusing and killing small animals. More than one man on the Clarke Sawmill crew remarks on how Arlander once laughed hysterically at a rabbit he had caught in a wire snare.



JONAH ZIMMERMAN

The gossip residents of Springville will remark that Jonah Zimmerman is a crazy old trapper who has a habit of talking to the mountains, particularly Moses Mountain, in the shadow of which he has made his home. His grandfather failed in a venture to establish an outfitter and supply store in Mountain Home Grove competing with John Nelson, who founded the more prosperous Camp Nelson. Nelson was a shrewder businessman and attracted tourists as well as loggers to his nascent settlement and the Zimmermans lost their savings and went into obscurity. Jonah spends his days trapping, fishing, and maintaining a large subsistence garden.

He married a woman named Belle Goodall, from the only other noteworthy family to settle in Mountain Home Grove. Rumors persist the two families are thoroughly inbred after three generations and while Jonah Zimmerman talks to mountains, his wife is a witch in league with the devil, and his children are prattling idiots of animal intelligence. Like a lot of small town gossip, the rumors contain a kernel of truth but also a number of exaggerations and lies.

Jonah Zimmerman has lived in the shadow of the Malignity for so long it has tainted his mind. He hears its babbling voice in his dreams and in the still morning mists of Snakebite Ridge. Despite, the damage the entity has done to him, he is still a capable hunter, tracker, and subsistence farmer. He has uncovered a handful of clues to the Malignity's mystery and knows more about the strange world of Snakebite Ridge than anyone. If strangers are polite and deferent, he is more than willing to share what he knows.



BELLE ZIMMERMAN

Rumor has it that if you trace Belle Zimmerman's Goodall family line back two hundred years you will find Native Americans who were enslaved by Spanish missionaries. These *neofites* knew secrets of the land and the stars that gave them mystic knowledge of planting, healing, and signs of protection. Unruly Springville children who won't eat their supper or make rude noises in church are told they will be tied in a sack in left out on the back porch for Belle Zimmerman to collect at night.

Belle Zimmerman is rarely seen, but she is regarded as a woman of genuine mystical cunning, asked to bless crops, heal sick animals, and act as midwife in difficult pregnancies. In reality she, like many mountain witches and folk magicians, is a person of practiced intuition, who views time and distance differently than most people. Her speech and actions might appear full of prognostications and foresight, but these statements and actions are supported by networks of signs from the natural world and a remarkable amount of local knowledge about the inhabitants—both people and animals—of Mountain Home Grove.



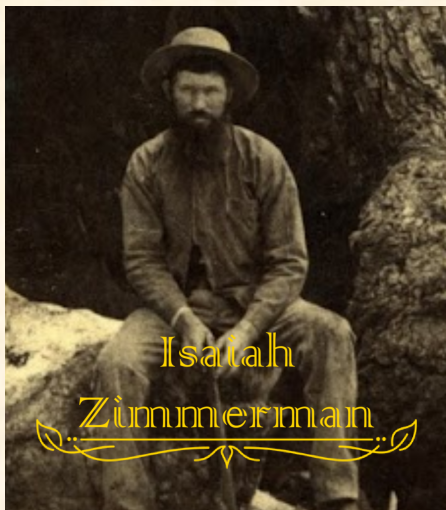
ISAIAH ZIMMERMAN

A man of forty with an unkempt, dirty blonde hair and beard. Despite a pronounced limp he is always seen wandering, never resting in one place for too long. The regulars at the Springville Doughnut Shop say he supports himself doing odd jobs such as skinning, tanning, fence maintenance, and pest control of gophers and snakes. He is known to be the son of Jonah and Belle Zimmerman, who live on the backside of Moses Mountain, but he will not unreservedly talk about his parents, his home, or why he left. When plied with bootleg liquor however, he becomes more talkative. His stories are piecemeal, full of indistinct mutterings and baleful glares in the direction of Mountain Home Grove. He will remark that he left after a hunting trip with his father when he came upon something evil. "It were a black serpent like n'other I ever seen. Long as a horse an' thick like a man's thigh. It got 'hold a' me and I screamed, but my paw jus' walked away. He said I wadn't his no more, and when it burned me with its tongue an' stard'ed to drink my insides I prayed fer death. I guess my paw had second thoughts 'cause he come back an' shot the thing in the head. Then he told me to git gone! He said the thing had a taste fer me an' it wouldn' never leave me be 'less I lef' the mount'n." As if expecting to be called a liar, Isaiah will roll up his pant leg as proof, revealing his right leg is missing a huge section of muscle on the calf and thigh. A successful Medicine check will note a curious, perfectly circular wound

that still faintly weeps as though it has never quite healed. **Sanity** roll (0/1) for seeing Isaiah's unnatural wound.

Should the investigators ply Isaiah with alcohol, get his story, and mention they will be visiting Snakebite Ridge themselves Isaiah will turn from sorrowful to violent in an instant. His eyes will widen with shock and fear he will lunge toward the investigator that mentioned the travel plans. He will attempt to strangle the investigator while crying out as tears stream down his cheeks, "No! No! Better the die here! Die now! Die a Christian death than face those things! They's in my head, every night! Slitherin' and sniffin' about lookin' fer food fer they mama! Don't go! Die here! Die a good honest death! Please!"

If more than one investigator is talking to Isaiah, they should be able to subdue him. He is strong, but he is drunk, and if he becomes aware he is outnumbered he will hobble off toward the nearest wooded area. Isaiah's presence in the scenario can persist as long as the Keeper likes. The investigators might hear Isaiah sobbing and lamenting nearby as they explore Springville and head toward Mountain Home Grove. Alternatively, Isaiah may make a more serious attempt to kill one or more the investigators, creeping into the Springville Hotel or wherever they elect to sleep, and attempting to slay an investigator in her/his bed with a shovel, axe handle, or whatever tool he has on hand. If utilized in this fashion, it is important to portray him as a tragic figure, blubbing, with tears in his eyes, doing what he must to protect the investigators from a fate worse than death.



DR. PETER BEQUETTE

Born in 1823 and died in 1901, Peter Bequette was one of the first professors at University of the Pacific. He came west to San Francisco after receiving his doctorate in geology from Harvard in 1849. He went on to establish the School of Natural Sciences at University of the Pacific when it was founded in 1851. Ten years on he had made the acquaintance of Walter Schofield and several other prospectors who arrived in California during the Gold Rush of 1844. These prospectors sent Dr. Bequette rocks, crystals, and fossils that would form the foundation of the University of the Pacific Natural Science and History Collection.

Bequette kept in touch with the prospectors and, in the case of Walter Schofield, sent him some details regarding an odd family heirloom a student of Native decent presented to him one day.

WALTER SCHOFIELD

Born in 1808 in Chicago, Illinois, Schofield was the son of a cattle rancher who took to learning about geology as a hobby and eventually earned a degree from the University of Pennsylvania. Academia was not for him however, as Schofield longed for adventure as was lured to California by the Gold Rush of 1844. After his search for gold proved fruitless he became a consultant for ranchers, farmers, logging companies, and the early government of the State of California. Among his many professional acquaintances was Dr. Peter Bequette of the University of the Pacific.

In return for rock, crystal, and fossil samples from his own collection of "treasures" Dr. Bequette related a tale of a student in one of his classes with Native ancestry who's great-great grandfather had a curious piece of quartz crystal laced with gold—not an uncommon formation—from a cave near the town of Daunt where Schofield made his home. Catching one last case of gold fever, Walter Schofield and two friends went to prospect on the backside of Moses Mountain in 1862. The three men were never heard from again.

Historical Note: While certain facts about the history of Spanish Missions of Alta California are used to lend verisimilitude in this scenario, I feel it is important to establish that references to La Misión de San Ebon, named for Saint Ebonitus of 12th century Spain, are entirely fictional. No mission was ever established in the part of California now defined as Tulare and Kings County. Plenty of real information on life in the Spanish Missions is available in print and online. I also want to thank my sister, JoAnna Wall, a historian of the California Mission period, for information concerning historical references to Native Americans of the time. The Spanish words *gentiles*, *neofites*, and *Indios* are not used with the intent to slander or defame the Native Americans of the Mission period. These were real idioms employed by Spanish missionaries at the time. For more information, I highly recommend James Sandos' work [Converting California](#).

PADRE FRANCISCO JIMENEZ

In 1788, Padre Francisco Jimenez, then a teacher of *neofities* (Native converts to Catholicism) and their children at La Misión de Gabriel Arcángel, claimed to receive a vision from an angel of God that told him to take up a holy crusade, and found a mission of his own across the swamps of the Tule River country in the heart of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. There, he would convert the most fearsome and blasphemous *Indio gentiles*, who had eluded God's church for nearly twenty years. Padre Jimenez's mission effort, which gained approval from the Church and the Spanish

Crown in 1791, was an unmitigated disaster and an embarrassment.

Twelve friars of the Franciscan Order under the leadership of Padre Jimenez, fourteen Soldiers of the Free Company of Volunteers of Catalonia under the authority of Don Gabriel de Sancha, and thirty Native American *neofites* went into the Southern Sierra Nevada Mountains and never returned. The handful of dispatches received by the Catholic Church talked of great success in establishing a chapel and dormitory, the destruction of a *gentile* idol by black powder, and terrible death striking the missionaries, soldiers, *neofites*, and captured *gentiles*. The descriptions of what attacked these people were so mad, rambling, and incoherent that the Church elders chose to bury the reports and treat the whole misadventure as though it never existed, less the Spanish Crown or the Pope chose to withdraw funding from the mission project. What written records and rumors still exist talk of the expedition breaking down and going mad over the discovery of gold.

FRIAR MIGUEL ELISEO DURÁN

When this young friar, born in Cusco, Peru in 1770, sealed himself in the dungeon below La Misión de San Ebon he believed he was the last living soul of those who traveled across the Tule River and into the mountains to found the mission under the leadership of Padre Jimenez. He had watched the Padre die raving, suffering terrible visions and begging God to forgive his sin of pride. Friar Miguel buried the priest in the graveyard that had filled up so suddenly, and then went to wait for the devils in the forest and death to find him. While waiting he wrote a brief account of the failure of the mission and its perceived supernatural source: a foul-smelling cave in the cliffs above the little bluff on the backside of Moses Mountain that, more than a century later, would be called Snakebite Ridge.

NPC & MONSTER STATISTICS

JAMES ZALUD (A.K.A. JIMMY HERDLICKA)

STR 45	CON 50	SIZ 50	DEX 70	INT 70
APP 10*	POW 40	EDU 70	SAN 0	HP 10
DB: 0	Build: 0	Move: 8	MP: 8	Luck: N/A

*James' appearance is normally 70, but his skin has been severely damaged by exposure to the Malignity.

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl	40% (20/8), damage 1D3+DB
Shovel (Brawl)	40% (20/8), damage 1D8+DB

Armor: none.

Skills: Climb 45%, Cthulhu Mythos 12%, Escape Artist 45%, History 45%, Intimidate 30%, Navigate 40%, Science (Geology) 35%, Stealth 45%

JONAH ZIMMERMAN

STR 60	CON 60	SIZ 70	DEX 40	INT 50
APP 35	POW 35	EDU 50	SAN 28	HP 13
DB: 1D4	Build: +1	Move: 4	MP: 7	Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl	50% (20/10), damage 1D3+DB
Hatchet (Axe)	30% (15/6), 1D6+1+DB
20-gauge Shotgun	40%(20/8), 2D6/1D6/1D3, 10/20/50

Armor: none.

Skills: Climb 45%, Cthulhu Mythos 10%, Escape Artist 45%, History 45%, Intimidate 30%, Navigate 40%, Science (Geology) 35%, Stealth 45%, Survival (Forest) 45%

BELLE ZIMMERMAN (NE. GOODALL)

STR 60	CON 60	SIZ 40	DEX 40	INT 60
APP 40	POW 65	EDU 65	SAN 39	HP 10
DB: 0	Build: 0	Move: 4	MP: 10	Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl	30% (15/6), damage 1D3+DB
Carving Knife (Brawl)	30% (15/6), 1D4+2+DB

Armor: none.

Skills: Climb 40%, Cthulhu Mythos 10%, First Aid 40%, Intimidate 40%, Listen 60%, Medicine 35%, Natural World 65%, Navigate 50%, Occult 35%, Track 40%, Spot Hidden 60%, Survival (Forest) 40%

THADDEUS "TAD" ZIMMERMAN

STR 65	CON 50	SIZ 60	DEX 50	INT 40
APP 30	POW 50	EDU 50	SAN 41	HP 10
DB: 0	Build: 0	Move: 8	MP: 10	Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl	40% (20/8), damage 1D3+DB
Knife (Brawl)	40%, 1D+2+DB
Throw (Dynamite)	50% (25/10), 4D10/3 yards

Armor: none.

Skills: Climb 35%, Intimidate 30%, Listen 40%, Natural World 40%, Navigate 30%, Throw 50%, Track 30%, Spot Hidden 30%, Survival (Forest) 25%

ISAIAH ZIMMERMAN

STR 60 CON 45 SIZ 70 DEX 20 INT 40
APP 30 POW 50 EDU 50 SAN 19 HP 10
DB: 1D4 Build: 1 Move: 3 MP: 10 Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl 45% (22/9), damage 1D3+DB
Shovel 45% (22/9), damage 1D8+DB

Armor: none.

Skills: Climb 30%, Cthulhu Mythos 5%, Intimidate 25%,
Listen 30%, Natural World 30%, Navigate 30%, Track 20%,
Spot Hidden 25%, Stealth 40%, Survival (Forest) 20%

CLARK COMPANY SAWMILL EMPLOYEES

(“Cookie” Baldwin, Lester Lathrop, Sam Wells, others as needed.)

STR 60 CON 55 SIZ 65 DEX 40 INT 50
APP 35 POW 35 EDU 50 SAN 30 HP 12
DB: 1D4 Build: 1 Move: 7 MP: 7 Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl 40% (20/8), damage 1D3+DB
Wood Axe 35% (17/7), damage 1D8+2+DB

Armor: none.

Skills: Art (Cook or Carpentry) 25%, Climb 30%, Dodge 25%, Intimidate 20%, Listen 25%, Natural World 25%,
Navigate 25%, Spot Hidden 25%, Ride 30%, Survival (Forest) 15%, Track 20%

SPRINGVILLE LOCALS

(Doughnut Shop Patrons, Hotel Guests, Farmers/Ranchers, etc.)

STR 50 CON 50 SIZ 55 DEX 40 INT 55
APP 40 POW 35 EDU 55 SAN 35 HP 10
DB: 0 Build: 1 Move: 7 MP: 7 Luck: N/A

Attacks per round: 1

Brawl 40% (20/8), damage 1D3+DB

Armor: none.

Skills: Art (Carpentry or Cook) 30%, Charm or Persuade 20%, Climb 30%, Dodge 25%, Driver or Ride 20%, Listen 25%, Natural World 25%, Navigate 25%, Spot Hidden 25%

THE FEEDING TENDRILS, Voracious Alien Flagella

STR 110 CON 65 SIZ 70 DEX 65 INT N/A
APP N/A POW 50 EDU N/N SAN N/A HP 14
DB: 1D6 Build: +2 Move: 8 MP: 10 Luck: N/A
Attacks per Round: 2

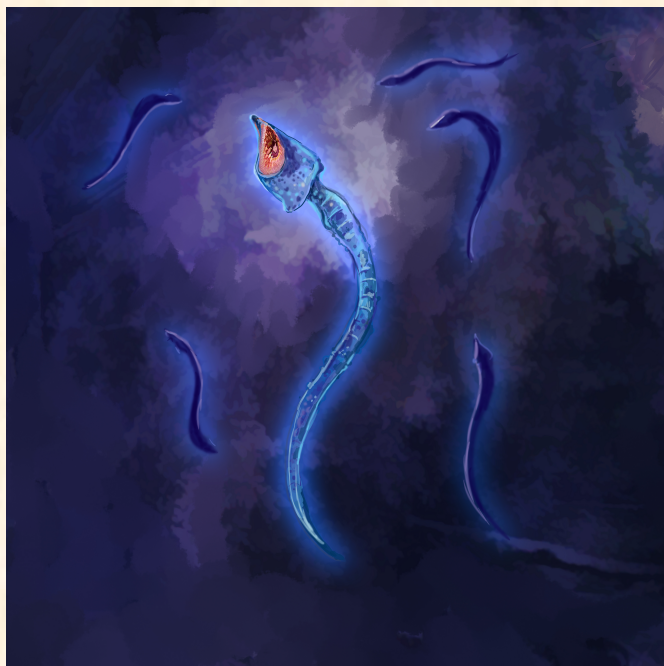
Fighting Attacks: Bite, Drain

Drain: A Feeding Tendril that successfully bites a victim uses its orifice to drill a silver dollar-sized hole in the victim and begins to drain and digest their muscles, nerves, and internal organs. This draining attack debilitates the victim, causing loss of 3d10 STR per round the Feeding Tendril is attached. A victim may use an opposed Strength roll to break free of the Tendril. Death usually means the Feeding Tendril has managed to digest a vital organ. Survivors of Feeding Tendril attacks who have been fed on often come away hideously deformed, missing large clumps of muscle tissue.

Fighting 40%, strike and bite 1D6+dmg bonus
Drain (mnvr) 3d10 STR per round (single victim),
Feeding Tendrils do not stop draining
until the victim is dead or they have been
forcibly removed.

Armor: 2-point rigid flesh. Immune to flame and heat damage, but the concussive force of an explosion will harm them normally.

Skills: Stealth 80%
Sanity Loss: 1/1d6



The Feeding Tendrils

THE MALIGNITY, Festering Alien Tumor

STR 120 CON 180 SIZ 220 DEX 10 INT 60
APP N/A POW 70 EDU N/N SAN N/A HP 40
DB: 3D6 Build: +4 Move: 1 MP: 14 Luck: N/A
Attacks per Round 1d6 + Radiation Sickness

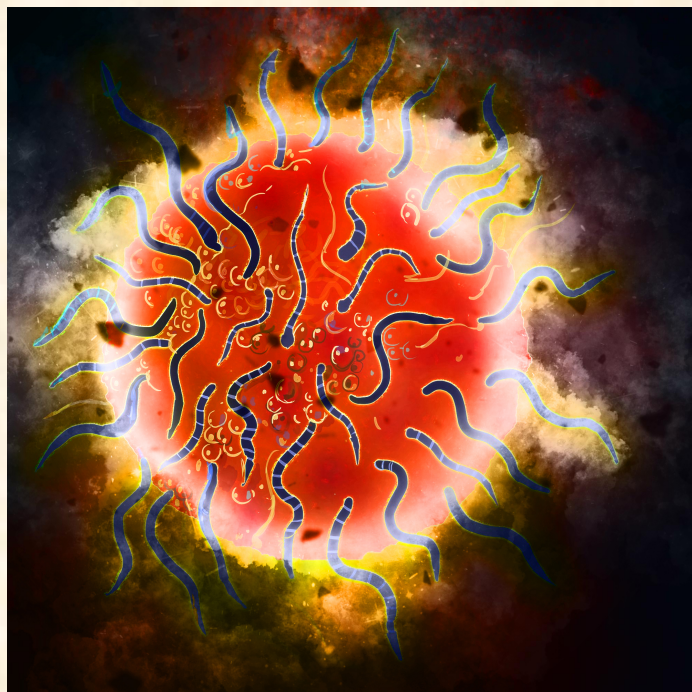
Radiation Sickness: A burning sensation triggers an Opposed STR roll, failure causes 1D10 STR damage to anyone in the grotto with The Malignity, and not wearing lead or other metal shielding. Strength is slowly sapped away.

Hallucinations: A psychic/mental attack where the alien tumor attempts to interact with the minds of thinking creatures. Opposed POW roll, failure means drains 1d6 Magic Points per round. The Malignity can attack 1D6 victims per round. Victims experience hideous hallucinations of death by fire and radiation as their minds break under the strain of psychic assault.

Defending Tendrils: While the above examples are features of being in the Malignity's presence, any assault on the Malignity will cause 1D6 Feeder Tendrils to come to its aid. These tendrils will be attached and will only be able to whip and constrict. One attack per round per tendril, tendril does 2D6 damage.

Fighting 40%, strike 2D6 damage

Armor-10 Points, spongy plastic membrane. It is immune to flames and heat, though the concussive force of an explosion will harm it normally.
Sanity: 1/1D10



The Malignity

EPILOGUE

FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS

Scenario seeds for continued Call of Cthulhu investigations in Springville, Porterville, and Southern Sierra Nevada Mountains.

- **Zalud Family Tragedy:** Mary Zalud's still living and competent children, Pearle and Emma, come to the investigators pleading for assistance with their mother. Whatever the outcome of The Malignity scenario, Mary is driven further along the track of spiritualism and occult study and has taken up with a strange little man from San Francisco named Dr. Leng, who practices mesmerism other occult therapies and has driven the rest of the family out of the Zalud house in Porterville with his strange, heady incenses and foul smelling medicines. Try as they might, Mary Zalud's daughters cannot force Dr. Leng from their mother's employ. She spends long days and nights in a death-like slumber and when she wakes she talks of her son Ed (and perhaps her son James as well) as if he is alive and well, living in a foreign land. Is this Dr. Leng merely a charlatan using the trappings of the Cthulhu Mythos to offer false hope? Is he a descendent of the abominable Tcho-Tcho people practicing dark rituals thinly veiled as medicine to ensnare a wealthy old woman? Or perhaps, if James is alive, is his interest is not in Mary at all, but the howling lunatic boy she keeps in the attic room, covered in stained bandages and muttering foul prophecies to any who will listen?
- **Bigfoot:** Just inside the borders of the Tule River Indian reservation stands an immense boulder decorated with petroglyphs in pigments of black, red, and white. The images show three enormous figures the locals call *Mayak Datat* or the Hairy Men. One day, these creatures will be tied to legends of Bigfoot, but for now their story belong to Native American folklore. Locals tell a wide range of stories about these creatures. In some legends they are psychopomps, their presence in the wooded shadows signaling death and misfortune. In other tales they demonstrate the ferocity of woodland predators coupled with the cunning and intelligence of men. The *Mayak Datat* prey upon

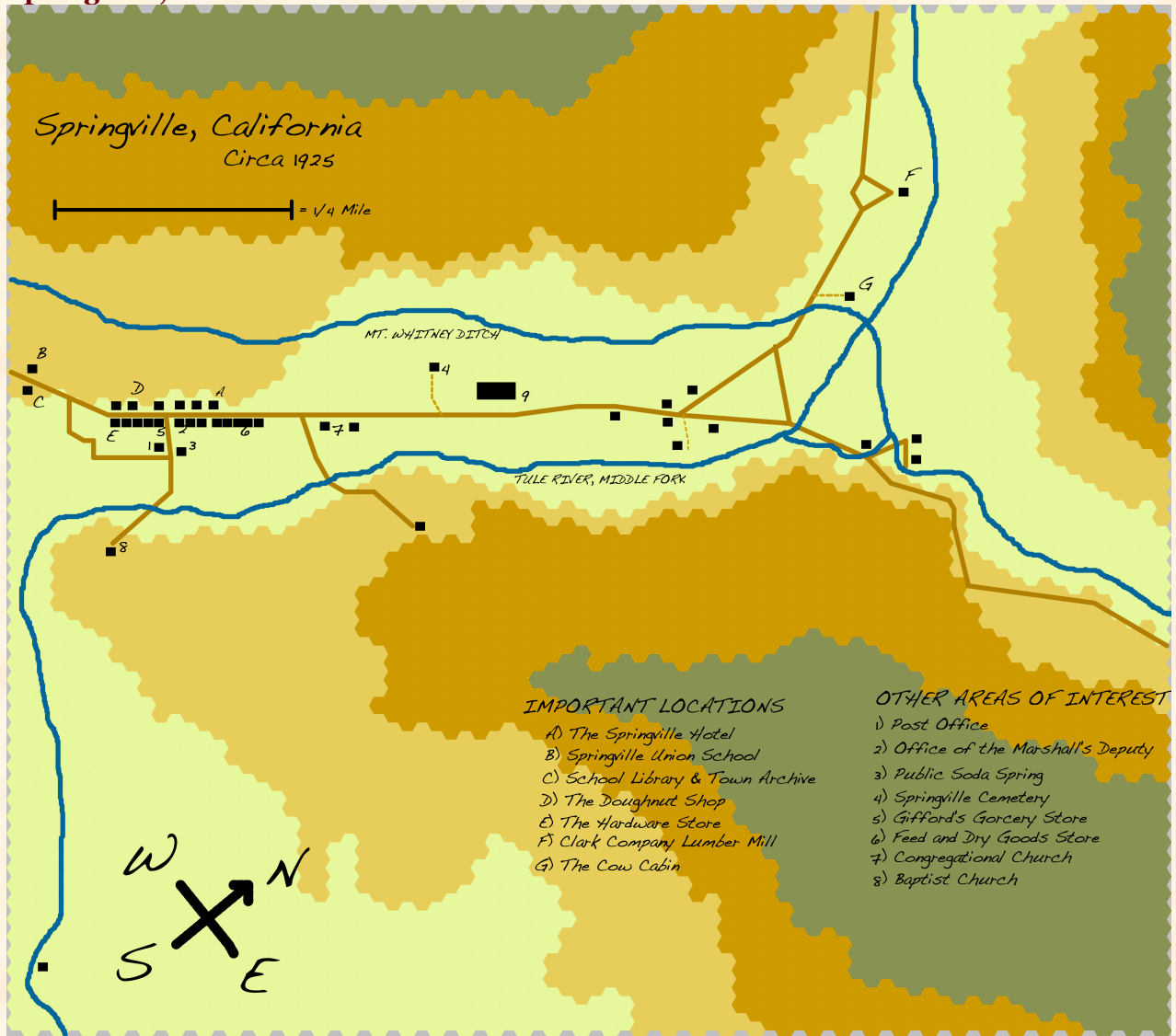
lone travelers and lost children. And yet, there are some who suggest these legends do not tell the tale properly at all, and the images on the Painted Rock represent a benign family of three forest giants. What version of the story will the investigators believe when children from the reservation and nearby farms start going missing.

- **Secret Places:** The Sierra Mountains are a wild and rugged terrain utterly separate from civilized society. A person can buy or rent a plot of land and live with out contacting a fellow human being for months at a time. Landscape artists are drawn to such places, as they offer unencumbered vistas and remote tableaux of tranquil splendor and dark insight. What might an artist meet in such places? Ghosts of men long forgotten? Or perhaps places where alien voyagers have landed or left something weird behind that defies the laws of physics? One such artist has mailed several strange, surreal, and haunting landscapes to a relative or mentor. That benefactor has bid the investigators to check on the artist. What will they find in an abandoned mountain cabin the artist called home for a year? Evidence of suicide? Abduction? Or perhaps a waiting doorway to some unfathomed realm? Use the Clarke Ashton Smith stories "Genus Loci" and "The Secret of the Cairn" for inspiration.
- **The Ornerly Dead:** Bill Wood was widely regarded as the most bitter and spiteful man in Springville. After a life of dead-end prospecting, lackluster farming, and hunting mountain lions for paltry bounties, Bill died poor, grim, and alone. No friends or family could be found to sit with his body the night he passed on, as was tradition, so kindly Dr. Hudson offered to do so. Now Dr. Hudson lies on the floor of Bill Wood's rotting farmhouse, dead of a terrible fright that cemented his face in a rictus of horror, and Bill's body is nowhere to be found. Is there a logical explanation for this? Or has ornerly old Bill's fiery specter raised up his body to walk once more, so full of spite for the living it will slay any good and gentle person it encounters? Use Robert E. Howard's "The Fearsome Touch of Death" for inspiration.

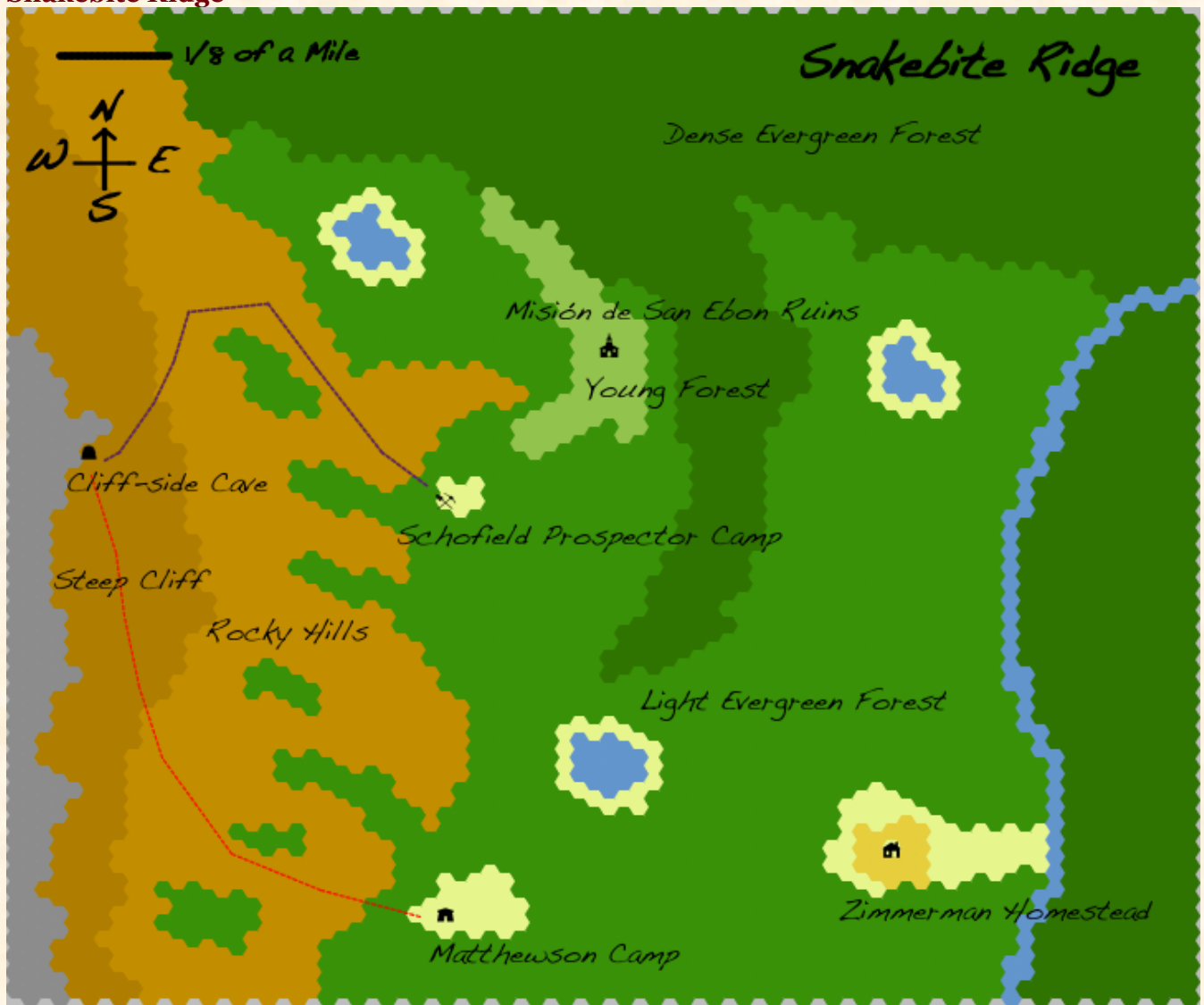
APPENDIX: MAPS, TIMELINE, HANDOUTS

MAPS

Springville, California



Snakebite Ridge



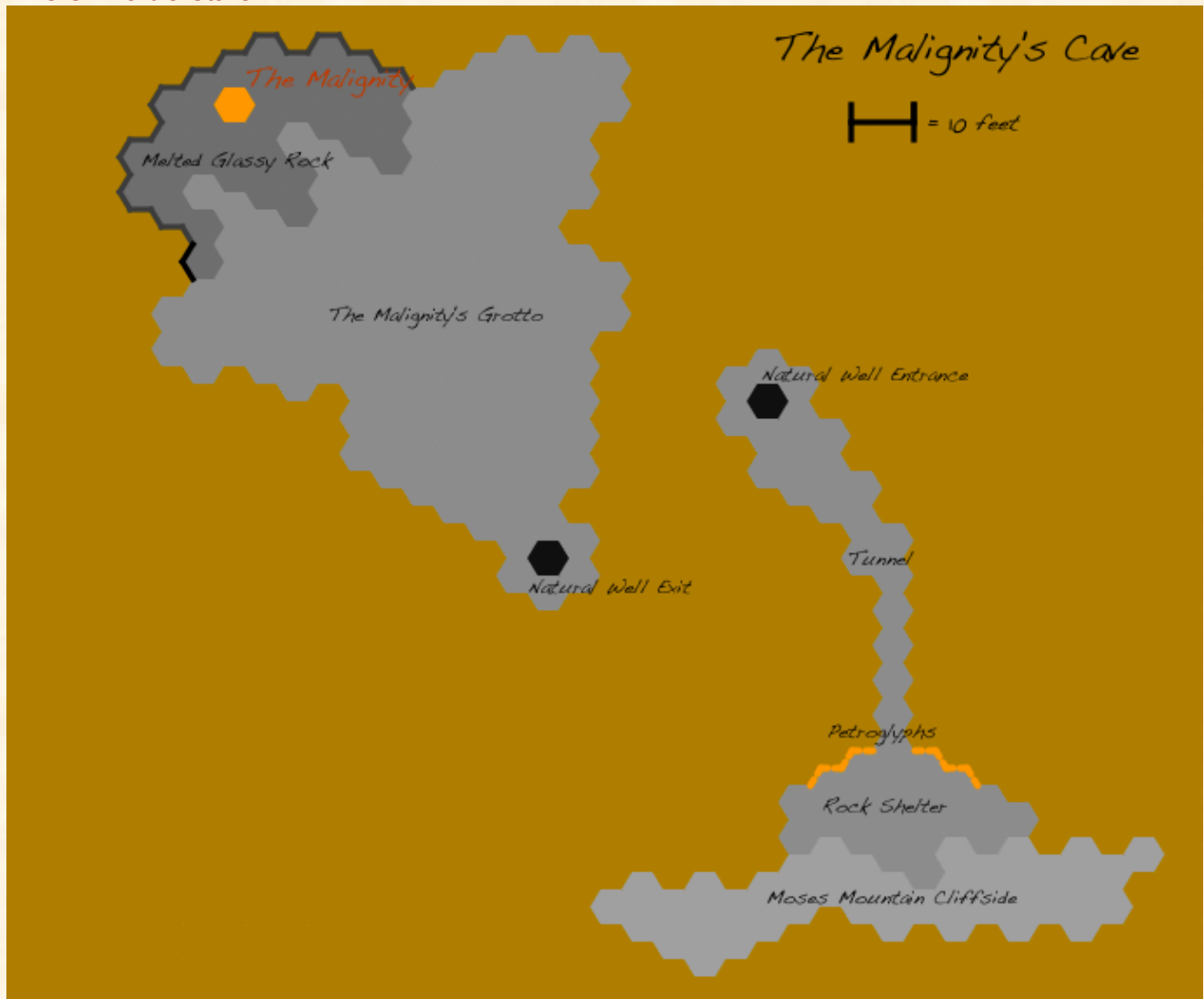
Map of the Kaweah Region (Springville, Moses Mountain)

<https://catalog.data.gov/dataset/usgs-1-125000-scale-quadrangle-for-kaweah-ca-1937>

Porterville Region Survey Map, 1926

<https://digitized.library.fresnostate.edu/digital/collection/topomap/id/832>

The Cliffside Cave



TIMELINE OF EVENTS PRIOR TO SCENARIO START

Day 1: James Zalud, going by the name “Jimmy Herdlicka” travels to Springville, rents a room at the Springville Hotel.

Day 2: James visits the Doughnut Shop and pesters the old timers for stories of Walter Schofield and learns he disappeared in a place the locals call “Snakebite Ridge.” They tell him a handful of ghost stories and refer him to Isaiah Zimmerman.

Day 3: James visits the local schoolhouse which also holds the town’s small library, run by Miss Dorothy Radeleff. He’s looking for maps and other survey documents.

Day 4: James tries to get some local loggers and sawmill workers to tell him anything they might know about Mountain Home Grove and Snakebite Ridge. He drinks with the timber cutters and eventually gets involved in a card game, where Charley Matthewson sees an easy mark and takes him for all he’s worth.

Day 5: James locates Isaiah Zimmerman and is rebuffed.

Day 6-9: While James visits Dorothy Radeleff and the Doughnut Shop patrons to gain more information and formulate a plan, Charley Matthewson harasses the boy about paying what he owes.

Day 10: Charley calls in James’ debt, and when everything he owns isn’t enough, Charley and his toadies Pedro and Arlander begin to beat James. In the midst of pummeling him, James tells Charley about the cave full of gold.

Day 11: Charley, Pedro, and Arlander cut work and Arlander is sent into town to sell James’ motorcycle (an AJS model from the Great War) and use the proceeds to buy mining supplies and rent a pair of pack mules.

Day 12-14: Charley, Pedro, Arlander, and James trek through Mountain Home Grove searching for Snakebite Ridge.

Day 15: The four men locate Snakebite Ridge and the cave. They find gold, and Arlander pushes James down a sour smelling natural well at the back of the cave, leaving him for dead. James encounters the Malignity. Later that night, Charley, Pedro, and Arlander are killed by the Feeding Tendrils.

Day 16-20: James emerges from the cave and wanders the woods beneath Snakebite Ridge, overwhelmed by the psychic influence. He builds a crude shrine to his “angry, red god” in the chapel of a long abandoned Spanish mission. He avoids the Zimmermans as he wallows in his madness.

Day 21: Mary Zalud asks the investigators to find her son.

HANDOUTS

I. Letter from Dr. Peter Bequette to Walter Schofield

May 1862

My Dear Mr. Schofield,

It was so good of you to send me those rock and sediment samples I asked for last year, and the trilobite fossils were particularly intriguing. They make for most excellent teaching tools. I think I've finally hit upon a way to repay you for your kindness. One of my students is of mixed heritage and traces his lineage back to the tribes of the San Joaquin region. The other day he showed me the most interesting specimen collected by his great-great grandfather, a Mission Indian. It is a curious piece of quartz the size of a plum, covered in delicate striations of gold. It is remarkable! What's more, the boy tells me the strangest story about how his ancestor collected the piece from a supposed haunted cave up northwest of your village of Daunt.

Curious, I did a little reading in some of the Old Spanish records we have in the archive and found a story about a mad priest named Jimenez who wanted to found a mission right in the same area. The recounting tells of how his expedition tore itself apart after they discovered gold in a nearby cave. I have attached a typescript of the document mentioning the matter for your convenience. Perhaps there's one vein left untapped in California after all! You should get your pick and your pan out of storage and have a look.

Sincerely,

Dr. Peter Bequette

University of Pacific, Department of Natural Sciences
Santa Clara, California

II. Letter from Abbott José Bernard Sánchez to his Secretary

Typed by Dr. Bequette, Letter is in 18th Century Spanish (Hard Spanish Roll to Read)

Avril 1794

Brother Garcia,

Regarding the fate of Padre Jimenez, I want to stress that there will be no more loose talk among the brethren of him, his men, or “La Misión de San Ebon.” Rumors and ghost stories are sinful and they do nothing but give the Devil power over the minds of men with too much imagination. You will formally report Padre Jimenez and his men to Governor de Borcia as deserters and that will be the end of it. Let the soldiers searching for criminals and heretics find them if they are able.

I always harbored concerns that Padre Jimenez was a liar or half mad with his talk of angels whispering to him like some conquistador riding with Cortés! He and his followers are not the first men we have lost amongst the Tule Swamps, abandoning their holy service to follow the Devil to El Dorado. So be it! The King and the Pope know all too well what the lure of gold does to the men they send to New Spain.

So no more talk of “Mad Padre Jimenez” and his cave of serpents and gold. Hand out labor and punishments if necessary to keep the brethren and the neophytes compliant in this matter. We have said all that needs to be said, and were we to say any more we might risk the support of the Crown and the Holy See.

May the Lord God Forgive us,

A.J.B.S.

III. Journal of Walter Schofield (Final Entry)

July 1862

Brought Merrill Jasper and Floyd Dobbs from the old days up to Snakebite Ridge and found the cave. The professor did not steer us wrong! The color is here! Wrapped around quartz crystal just like he said in the letter. Formation is odd, like a large crystal was shattered and then left in the cave. Color is real enough though.

Cave is an odd place, like a tomb. Bones everywhere, human and animal. Didn't the tribes around these parts cremate their dead? Strange pictures on the walls too. Some look like they're damaged by smoke or gun powder. Black snakes coming down and going back up to a red sun, feeding on people in between. Couple of spirit guards drawn near the mouth of the lower chamber. Look like men made of mushrooms. Will take photos for the professor, see what he thinks.

Smell from deep in the cave overpowering. Gonna gather what we can and then head deeper into the cave tomorrow. Smells nasty in there, like a soda spring gone foul. Floyd thought he saw a sorta red glow at the back of the cave. Some kind of fluorite? Maybe there's more to mine here than just gold. Either way, we're gonna be living well when we get back to Daunt, no question.

IV. Final Statement of Friar Miguel Elesio Durán

Written in 18th Century Spanish (Hard Spanish Roll to Read)

Decembre 1793

I am Friar Miguel Elesio Durán, servant of the Lord God and His Holy Order of Saint Francis, and let this be a record of my final words. It has been six long days and nights since I sealed myself in the dungeon below La Misión de San Ebon. I could do little else to keep the horrors that lurk in the woods from reaching me. The gentiles and neophytes ran off long ago, and the soldiers of the Free Company were no match for the monstrous things that crept through the forest at night. They were here to protect us from the gentile blasphemers, not from the imps of Satan.

I confess I had much fear when Padre Jimenez ordered the false idol of crystal and gold the gentiles worshipped destroyed with black powder. I shuddered when the cracking of the great crystal slab echoed across the mountain valley and my heart was frozen with fear when I asked my neophyte valet why the old gentile Medicine Men seemed to wail and weep in fear rather than curse in outrage over the destruction of their idol. Of their weeping and protestations he said, "They say it was not an idol to be worshipped but a door to a tomb, and it is wrong to open the door to a tomb. For sometimes, the dead things inside are not dead, but only sleeping."

Father Jimenez dismissed it all as gentile superstition and heresy, even as the mission bell tolled in the valley for the first time and old Brother Alberto screamed, saying he saw a black serpent in rafters of the tower. These evil creatures would become a common sight, as would the remains of their victims. So many soldiers, brother friars, and Indians killed in such an abominable way. Not bitten or strangled as by the serpents as I have known growing up in Cusco, but far worse. These men, women, and children were drained until they were lifeless sacks of skin and bone. There was nothing left inside them.

Even those who escaped their clutches did not live long. Poor Padre Jimenez lived out his last days in fearful agony, suffering from horrid dreams after one of the serpents struck his skull. I waited with him until he died, and offered him last rites such that I could provide. He seemed grateful, but also afraid and full of regret. He said God had punished all of us for his pride and that the angel who led him to found La Misión de San Ebon had abandoned him.

I buried the Padre and then locked myself in the dungeon. I feel safer here as the damp stones and wet earth conceal me from the prowling demons. The last of the soldiers went with all the black powder they could carry to seal the cave, but that was three days ago. I know not to light a fire, as the things seem drawn to the heat and they all but ignore the touch of flame. My food and water have run out, and at night I hear rasping and slithering of the fiends outside, as though they can feel or smell me somewhere nearby!

I do not want to die!

Lord Jesus, Mother Mary, where are you in my hour of need?

V. Cliffside Cave Petroglyphs

Petroglyphs in the rock shelter portion of the cliffside cave, surrounding the entrance to the tunnel.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stephen E. Wall has a Ph.D. in Folklore from Memorial University of Newfoundland and a Master's degree in Anthropology from California State University Northridge. He has privately enjoyed writing and running tabletop RPG campaigns and scenarios for his friends for twenty-nine years. He spent his childhood in Springville, California, learning the history and folklore of the town and the surrounding region from his great-aunt and other relatives. He currently resides in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. He can be contacted at swallfolklore@gmail.com.