



Night Train



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Deadlands™ Dime Novel™ #3

NIGHT TRAIN

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PROLOGUE

It's been less than a week since our last tale, *Independence Day*, in which Ronan Lynch served a short but eventful tour as a Dodge City peace officer and helped Texas Ranger Hank "One-Eye" Ketchum put an end to the abomination known as "the Butcher." Unfortunately, although Ronan's undead body is capable of healing nearly any wound, his right hand-severed by Ketchum in the battle with the Butcher-remains unattached. Ronan is now carrying it in his saddle bag, hoping that whatever keeps his undead flesh from rotting may somehow mend his severed flesh as well. If he can only learn how.

CHAPTER ONE

The front of Ronan's shirt exploded crimson as he was lifted clean out of his saddle. He landed hard, face first on the Kansas dirt. It took him a long, stunned moment to even realize he'd been shot.

He tried to roll over and reach for his own pistol, but failed miserably at both. The best he was able to manage was to half-lift himself up enough to inspect the wound. It was huge, most likely made by a rifle, and maybe even a buffalo rifle if the gaping hole in his chest was any indication. Ronan's strength left him. He fell back to the ground with a wet splat. His awareness slowly ebbed away as his eyes fought to close.

A moment or maybe an hour later, he was roused by rough handling jostling him about. He forced his eyes open and looked up at a scraggly excuse for a man who was pulling off his favorite boots.

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"Wh-what do you think you're doing?" Ronan coughed blood. "Why, mister, I'm robbin' you. Though, I reckon if'n I'd waited another minute, I'd just be lootin' the dead," said the wickedly grinning man tugging at his boots. He easily had the worst teeth Ronan had ever seen.

"Damned bushwacker. Don't even have the sand to face a man."

"Mighty brave talk for a dead man," the one with bad teeth replied as he leaned down to remove Ronan's pistol belt. Behind the man, propped against a rock, was a Sharp's Big Fifty.

"You don't know the half of it," Ronan growled. "The Devil always gets his due."

"Now you've got me right scart, Devil. Why don't you just put that on my account?"

"Sure thing," Ronan grinned unsettlingly. "Just tell me who to bill."

The man stared hard into Ronan's dead eyes. He didn't like what he saw there, but he wasn't about to back down against what he thought was a dying man. "That would be Abner Knaggs," he said proudly, with a slight quiver in his voice. "I'm sure you'll remember it, mister. It's the last name you'll hear."

With that, Knaggs pulled a Green River skinning knife from his belt, knelt behind Ronan, and drew it slowly across the undead gunslinger's throat.

Even a creature like Ronan, one of the Harrowed, could "die" for a while. He'd be back, of course. The only way to put him down for good was to destroy his brain-or exorcise the demon inside that kept his undead corpse walking around. Of course, Knaggs had no way of knowing that.

Ronan spared one last bloody grin for Knaggs before he collapsed. Then everything went black.

CHAPTER TWO

Ronan coughed deep and long, spitting clods of bitter sod out of his mouth. Painfully, he rolled over and gazed up at a starlit sky. He slowly pushed himself to a sitting position. Not for the first time in his unlife, he wondered why resurrection had to hurt so much.

Apparently the bushwacker had dragged him behind a horse for some distance. His clothing was in tatters, and the skin on his belly was in little better shape. His surroundings looked a little different. Last he could recall, he'd been riding along a flat to the east of a low ridge. Now he was laying near a small, rocky stream.

At least no scavengers had eaten out his soft parts.

A quick check revealed what he already suspected-the wounds in his chest and neck were already closed and healing.

His stomach—or perhaps the strange parasite he sometimes felt rumbling around inside his rotting innards—grumbled angrily. Healing such deep wounds took a lot out of a man. He needed meat. And soon.

Without a gun, or even a knife, he'd be hard pressed to bring down any game. Worse, there were plenty of things out here looking for food themselves. An unarmed man, even a dead one, would be easy prey. He had little choice but to hunt down a town.

The bushwacker had stripped him of everything save his shirt and pants. The scum would probably have taken those too if not for the dark blood stains that soaked the cloth. The worst of it was Knaggs had taken Ronan's horse and saddle bags—which meant he'd lost his gun hand. He wasn't sure there was any way to reattach the thing, but if his pale flesh could heal a hole made by a buffalo rifle, there was a possibility it might someday take back his hand as well.

Or so Ronan hoped. For now, he just fumed that Abner Knaggs had a piece of him. And it took truly lowdown scum to steal a man's hand.

A faraway scream split the night and interrupted Ronan's brooding. The second time it broke across the land, the gunslinger recognized it for what it really was, a train whistle. It sounded faintly from the west. He guessed it couldn't be more than five miles away, 10 at the most. With any luck, that meant there'd be a town nearby.

He started walking toward the whistle.

Ronan hadn't gone 10 yards when he stopped, searched the ground, and picked up a fist-sized rock. Better a poor weapon than none at all.

CHAPTER THREE

Around mid-morning, Ronan arrived at his destination. The town he'd hoped to find turned out to be a small train station with a telegraph office attached as an afterthought.

Behind the station stood a small shack, probably the station master's quarters. Off to one side of the shack, Ronan could see a small barn with a horse in a small corral and a couple of pigs penned behind it. He saw no one as he approached, but that didn't surprise him. Such stations often had only one or two people manning them. Their main purpose was to provide water for the trains' boilers. Few passengers ever disembarked at such remote places.

The place wasn't what he'd hoped for, but Ronan hoped he could get a meal from the station master. He headed down the gentle slope, taking care to make his approach obvious so as not to threaten whoever lived in the shack below.

A sign on the front of the station read "Welcome to Barlowe Station." Ronan stepped up on the porch and knocked on the front door. There was no response, so he tried the knob. Not surprisingly, it was unlocked, so he let himself in.

The interior was spartan. A few papers littered the lone desk, and a line map was posted on the otherwise bare wall to the left, but there was no sign of the station master. Ronan crossed the office to the back door and looked out. The shack stood silently.

"Hello," he called, waited a moment, and tried again. Still no response.

Ronan left the station and walked to the shack. He pounded on the door and called out once more. When no one replied, he turned the doorknob. Unlike the station, this door was locked. He circled the small building, looking in the windows as he went. He saw a bed and an iron cookstove in the front, but no station master.

Ronan walked on around, his suspicions growing. The back window was shattered, the glass entirely knocked out of the frame. The room beyond was obviously the bedroom. The mess inside kept him from calling out again. Instead, he crept silently through the window.

His feet crunched glass on the floor beneath. It had obviously been broken from the outside. The bed was unmade, and the blankets were thrown back as if in a hurry. An overturned night stand lay on its side nearby. On the floor, Ronan found an empty .36 Navy Colt. Scattered around it were six rounds and a couple empty shells. From the inside of the shack, he could see several pinpricks of light penetrating the room—bullet holes fired at chest level from the empty gun.

The gunslinger popped four spent shells out of the gun's cylinder and loaded the six bullets he'd found into it. Then he stuck the pistol in his waistband. Its weight comforted him somewhat.

Near the foot of the bed, he found a small pool of still-moist blood.

The station master was certainly dead. It might have been Indians, or maybe Knaggs and his pal had stopped here as well. But the blood, combined with the broken windows, convinced Ronan that he wouldn't be finding the station master anytime soon. At least not upright.

A little while later, Ronan, emerged from the front door of the building, wearing a clean set of clothes and not-quite-fitting boots. He hadn't found any more cartridges for the pistol, but his pockets were now full of \$250 in Confederate scrip. While Ronan normally wouldn't have anything to do with the Rebel government, he didn't see as how he had much of a choice. In this part of the shattered country, the scrip would spend find.

Ronan squinted in the midday sun as he surveyed the station and the area around it. The more he thought about it, the less sense it made. If Indians had done this, they'd have taken the animals and burned the place to the ground. If bandits were responsible, they'd have taken the money at the very least. Knaggs would likely have taken the pig for "company."

Ronan strode back to the station office. According to the map, the nearest town was Varney Flats, about 30 miles to the south. It was further than he could make by nightfall, but another night in the wild seemed somehow more appealing than spending it here.

It didn't take him long to find tack and get the horse saddled. The nag didn't care for him much, but then again, since his hanging, no horse had. His gaze crossed the pigpen as he climbed up on the reluctant mount. A gnawing in his stomach reminded him of the last thing he'd need before he left.

Ronan had six rounds. He hated to waste the bullet, but he had to eat. Besides, he reasoned, if he couldn't do the job with five rounds, he doubted the sixth would make much difference. He took aim at the head of one of the pigs.

Less than an hour later, Ronan headed out south, saddlebags full of bacon and stomach full of meat.

CHAPTER FOUR

The mid-afternoon sky erupted into a torrent of rain as Ronan rode into Varney Flats. The town wasn't much to look at—one main street and a couple of outlying houses. He figured there couldn't be more than a hundred people living in the town, all told. At the northern end of Varney Flats he saw a small clump of tents surrounded by piles of animal skins. Buffalo hides, he guessed.

Varney Flats did have the type of business Ronan was most interested in at the moment—a saloon. His undead flesh was starting to smell ripe after many hours in the morning sun, and he could use some pickling.

The gunslinger rode towards a place squatting behind a sign that read "The Palace Saloon." There he tied off the horse, which seemed quite relieved to be rid of him, and headed into the two-story building.

There were a number of people in the saloon, more so than might be expected for an afternoon. Most were probably just trying to ride out the storm, which had turned the day to an early twilight. Ronan found an open spot at the bar and took a seat on a well-worn stool.

"A bottle of your best," he said.

"Well, mister, we got Kentucky bourbon or Tennessee sourmash."

Ronan frowned at the choices. "Bourbon."

The man returned with a whiskey glass and an unlabeled bottle that Ronan could only guess was bourbon. At least the color was right. He filled the glass and drank it in one gulp. He savored the burning sensation as the liquid flowed down his throat. Whatever it was, it had alcohol in it.

He'd finished two more glasses and was pouring himself a much-deserved third when a familiar voice behind him said broadly, "You'd best slow down, mister. Drinkin' like that'll kill a man."

Ronan knew without turning who that voice belonged to. "Texas," he said, meeting the ranger's one-eyed gaze in the mirror to the rear of the bar, "I'm surprised I didn't smell you before now."

Hank Ketchum—or "One-Eye", the name he took almost roguish pleasure in—was wearing the same standard-issue Texas Ranger black duster he'd had when Ronan first met him, just about a week before. Ketchum removed his hat and set it on the bar to Ronan's left.

"I figured you'd have lit out for Roswell by now, Ranger."

"Well, I had to finish a little business hereabouts," Hank said. He reached across the bar, helped himself to an empty glass, and half-filled it from Ronan's bottle.

"You ain't figurin' on tryin' me again are you? I thought you were smarter than that, old man." Ronan took the bottle back and placed it on his right.

"Naw, you proved yer point on that one, Lynch. If I was comin' after you, I'd shoot you from a hilltop. When you weren't expectin' it."

Ronan turned to face him. Something in the tone of the ranger's voice hinted at more than his words said.

Ronan's right hand reached instinctively for his holster before his mind realized that he had neither holster nor hand. The Ranger noticed the movement and grinned slightly in a way that made Ronan want to tear his head off.

"Of course, if I were to do it, I'd blow yer head off instead of wastin' lead on the rest o' yer worthless hide." Ketchum said, turning his attention to his drink, but Ronan could tell the man was amused about something.

"I don't see what's so funny, One-Eye. And the mood I'm in, pretty soon you won't either."

"Whoa, simmer down, Lynch. I was just joshin' you." He lifted the glass of bourbon and drained it. "Good Gawd, man. What are you drinkin'? I've drunk sump water better than that."

"Maybe you should ask for the wine list. What is it you're gettin' at?"

"Well, let's take a walk. I think it'd be easier to show you than tell you."

CHAPTER FIVE

Ketchum led Lynch out of the saloon. The rain had stopped as quickly as it had begun, but it had left the street a muddy ruin in its wake. Ronan felt the water seep through his boots almost as soon as he stepped off the plank sidewalk.

The two slogged across the street toward a small frame building. Although it didn't bear a proper sign, Ronan guessed from the barred windows that this must be the town marshal's office. He stopped the ranger once they were standing right outside the office door.

"Before we go any further, you tell me what's goin' on. You might have stood my back in Dodge, but that don't make us pals."

"Now Lynch, you have no idea how much that hurts me. Here I was gonna ask you to marry my sister."

Ketchum waited patiently for Ronan's nervousness to pass. When the gunslinger finally turned his grim gaze away, the ranger continued. "You got nothin' to worry about from me. I found a friend of yers in here, and I just thought you'd like to give him a Yankee howdy."

Puzzled, Ronan followed Ketchum into the marshal's office. A rather unimposing man sat behind the desk. Their arrival startled him, and he looked nervously over the rims of his thick glasses. He dropped the small book he'd been intently studying when they walked in. It was a dime novel about Buffalo Bill Cody. Ronan snorted to himself.

"Sorry, Cap'n Ketchum. You surprised me." The peace officer hurriedly stood up and rounded the desk, apparently being led by his outthrust hand. After a moment, Ronan realized the young man was expecting to shake hands with him. With a wicked grin he stuck out his badly bandaged stump. This had exactly the effect he expected.

"Sorry, mister," came the quick apology. The man hesitantly started to hold out his left hand instead but then, fearing the result, decided instead to awkwardly adjust his spectacles.

"Deputy Parrish, this is Ronan Lynch. I believe you have something of his." The deputy looked blankly at Ketchum for a moment, and then slowly his eyes began to widen.

"You mean the... It belongs to him?" The man's face visibly became a shade whiter, and he momentarily froze.

"Well, are you gonna get it or just stand there waitin' for pigeons to roost?" Ketchum said, turning the man around by the shoulder and gently pushing him back toward the desk.

"You still haven't told me what's goin' on, old man, and I'm gettin' mighty bored." Ronan looked around the office for the first time since entering. He saw a barred door behind the desk,

presumably leading to the holding cells. Other than the desk and a few chairs, the only furniture was a locked rifle rack hanging beside the front door.

The deputy approached Ronan cautiously, holding a pair of saddlebags at arms length. Ronan immediately recognized them as his own. He took them from the deputy and turned to Ketchum.

"How'd you get these?"

"Took 'em off that feller in the back," the ranger said, carelessly motioning toward the barred door.

"Knaggs," Ronan growled. "I got a score to settle with that man."

"So does the State of New Mexico. Knaggs has got a lot more to answer for than pissin' you off. See, that snake is real fond of killin' homesteaders. Women, children—don't make no difference to him."

"Nobody does that in my territory and gets away with it. Nobody."

"I wasn't plannin' on takin' him to dinner, Texas," Ronan snarled. "I figure my way will get the same place as yours—just a little faster."

"There's one big difference, Lynch. My way's the law. Yours ain't."

There was a long, dangerous silence as the two men stared at each other. Finally, Ronan's left hand settled on his belt, away from the gun tucked into his waistband. His gaze remained fixed on Ketchum's good eye, however. "I wouldn't make a habit of crossin' me, old man."

The ranger smiled widely. "Hadn't planned on it. I got me plenty of enemies already. I just wanted to give you back your good right hand. And maybe even show you how to get it in workin' order again. C'mon let me buy you another bottle of that sump water."

"Just a minute," Ronan said as he stalked back toward the jail cell. Knaggs was snoozing noisily on a cot, his wet snores escaping through his peeled-back lips.

Ronan squinted at him in disgust, then poked him through the bars with his toe. "Wake up, Knaggs. You've got a debt to settle."

The bushwacker choked back his last snore and sat up slowly, a surly look on his face. The his jaw dropped, and thick saliva dribbled down his unshaven chin. "Y-you're dead!" he stammered.

"That's right, Knaggs. I said you'd have to pay the Devil his due, and I'm here to collect." Ronan pulled open his shirt and showed Knaggs the bloody scab where he'd been shot.

Goggle-eyed, Knaggs said nothing as his heart threatened to leap out of his chest.

"Better start saving, Knaggs." Ronan grinned savagely. "Your account's overdrawn."

CHAPTER SIX

"Believe it or not, Lynch," Ketchum said as they entered the saloon, "I didn't walk you to the jail just so you could give Knaggs a heart attack. I got me a problem."

"Figures. And what would that be?"

Now that the crowd had cleared, the two men had no difficulty finding an open table. The only other patron was a solitary black man seated in the center of the room, cleaning a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. His brown wool suit and bowler clearly announced he was a tinnhorn traveler from somewhere back East.

The ranger caught the bartender's eye as they passed him. "If you got any whiskey back there, bring the bottle. And two glasses." They took seats on opposite sides of a table at the back of the room.

"Two hundred miles south, I'm the law with a capital L-A-W. But this ain't the Confederacy, it's the Disputed Territory, and I've only got as much authority around these parts as my gun and my reputation says. Most times that's enough and then some, but Knaggs may be a little too unpopular hereabouts for that to work."

"And just what do you need me for? More importantly, what's it payin'?"

"I need you to watch my back 'til I ride out tomorrow morning. I figure there'll be a lynch mob tonight, and you've seen the local police force."

Ronan grimaced at the thought of Parrish trying to stop a mob of angry citizens.

"What it's payin' you got over yer shoulder there," Ketchum continued, nodding towards Ronan's saddlebags.

"You want me to help protect a man that bushwacked me? Besides, there's nothing in these bags that wasn't rightly mine already." The bartender arrived, carrying a bottle of rye whiskey and two glasses. Ketchum paid the man and poured for both of them.

"That's the truth. But there's something in there I don't think you can replace. Least, without some help from someone who's knows what he's doing—someone who's dealt with your kind before."

Ronan opened one of the bags and examined the contents. As he expected, he found a change of clothes, his Peacemaker and holster, a box of cartridges, and some dried jerky. In the other, he found a cloth-wrapped bundle about seven inches long and four inches wide. Inside was his right hand, still intact. He looked up to see Ketchum carefully studying him.

"I reckon you don't know how to fix that little problem, or you already would have." Ketchum's voice was just above a whisper.

"I hope that ain't your idea of a joke, Texas, because I don't think it's funny." He pushed his chair back from the table and began to stand. "If it hadn't been for you, I'd still be whole, you bastard."

"And you'd still be the Butcher. Or did you forget that part?"

Ronan paused, and then sat back down. His anger still smoldered, but Ketchum spoke the truth. The Butcher had possessed him, and only the ranger's huge Bowie knife had saved Ronan—and no doubt countless others as well. And though Ronan wouldn't admit it to the world, the hero that had fought many long years for the Union still lurked somewhere inside him.

Nonetheless, Ketchum's control still galled him.

"So I have my hand back. I guess I'll just take care of it until I can settle down somewhere and mount it on a mantle piece. You still aren't offering me anything that's not mine."

Ketchum leaned forward and talked even softer. "When I learned Knaggs was in the jail, I told the deputy who I was. He was more than happy to turn Knaggs over to me."

"I found your hand in Knaggs' things. He told me where he'd got it. He was gonna make a necklace out of it." Ketchum stopped for a moment, trying to suppress a deep belly laugh in vain.

A look from Ronan stopped him cold, and he collected himself and started again. "I knew right away it was yours, and from what Knaggs told me about how he'd 'killed' you, I knew you weren't put down for good. Like I said before, I know a little 'bout your kind."

"Get to the point, Ketchum. You're boring a dead man to death."

"The dead are always surly. You get used to it."

"I was surly before—dyin' just aggravated me all to Hell."

Ketchum swallowed a shot of whiskey and nodded. "Anyway, as I was sayin', I know things about your kind. Things that I'm guessin' you don't know yerself."

Ronan remained silent as Ketchum paused to refill their glasses. Either the whiskey was of a higher quality than the bourbon, or neither man was paying too much attention to the flavor at the moment.

"You can heal just about anything, which, for obvious reasons, I'm guessin' you already know. And you're probably wonderin' why your hand hasn't. Some like you ain't hardly fazed by losin' a limb. They can grow it back given enough time. But with them folks, you cut off a hand, it starts rottin' away. Yours didn't. That means it's still a part of you—so to speak."

"How does knowin' that help me?" Ronan asked, downing his second glass in one shot. He poured himself another without even glancing at Ketchum's.

"Simple. Sew it back on."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Ronan coughed, almost choking on his drink. Ketchum leaned back in his chair and took a swallow of the whiskey.

"That's all?" Ronan asked, incredulously.

"That's all. It'll probably take some time, but eventually it'll be good as new. Won't even have a scar." Ketchum continued, "Of course, you probably don't want to just walk up to any ol' sawbones and ask him to sew your hand back on. Might raise some questions you don't want to answer. And you can't do it yourself—one-handed and all."

"So what do you suggest, old man?"

"I'll do it. I've got a room upstairs here. Won't take too long."

"You don't strike me as much of a seamstress, Texas."

"Fair enough, but it don't require no fancy stitchin'. Just enough to keep it attached until your body takes hold of it again. Believe me, I've done worse. Course it might sting a little," he grinned.

"As much as this?" Ronan met Ketchum's gaze and pulled down the bandanna around his neck just enough to allow the ranger to see the scar where Knaggs had opened his throat.

"No, I don't reckon it will."

"Then I can handle it."

* * *

An hour later, the two men came back down the stairs of the saloon. Ketchum had tightly bandaged Ronan's right hand after reattaching it. As unlikely as Ketchum's solution had seemed, Ronan knew that if someone told him a year ago that he'd dig himself out a grave after being hung by a fancy pistoleer from Back East, he'd have laughed in their face. The hand felt like a dead weight at the end of his right arm. He hoped the ranger was right and the healing process would begin soon.

During the time they'd been gone, business had begun to pick up again, but the saloon was still far from crowded. Ronan surveyed the patrons warily. "How long 'til you expect trouble?"

"Then I can count on you?"

"If I don't get to kill Knaggs, then it's damn sure no Kansas sodbusters do."

"I figure we got a few hours until everyone has enough time to fill up on liquid courage. Round about 10 o'clock or thereabouts. That gives us near four hours to kill. You much on poker?"

"Only when I'm winning."

"Well, let's play a few hands. If you'll pardon the expression," Ketchum laughed. "Maybe we can pull that tinhorn in." He nodded towards the center of the room where the black man in the wool suit still nursed his drink.

"Him? You're not planning on givin' the man a hard time are you, Texas. I can't abide that."

"Me? Nope. Color of a man's skin never meant anything to me. I've seen great men and women who were black. And whites I wouldn't scrape off the bottom o' my boots. Guess you had all of us south of the Mason-Dixon figured for crackers, didn't you Yankee?"

Ronan shrugged. "Then why'd you sign up for the war?"

"I had my reasons."

"What were they?"

"Personal." Ronan took the hint and let the subject drop.

Ketchum produced a well-worn pack of cards from a vest pocket and began shuffling. From the way he handled the cards, Ronan could tell the ranger was no beginner.

The two mosied over to the tinhorn and pulled out chairs.

"Wanna play some poker?" Ketchum asked amiably as he sat.

"Thank you, sir, but I must decline. I am unfamiliar with the both the rules and strategy of that particular game. Yesterday, some other gentlemen taught me how to play "21", or "Blackjack" in the vernacular. It was most interesting, but unfortunately that is the only game of the sort with which I am familiar. Of course, I am quite skilled at other permutations, such as bridge and cribbage."

"Don't worry about it, mister," Ronan said as he sat. "We'll play free for the first couple o' hands. Then you can bow out if you want."

"Well, if it would be no trouble," the man smiled, delighted at the unexpected opportunity. He stood and offered his hand. "Let me introduce myself. My name is Thaddeus Washington."

"Ronan Lynch." He extended his left hand almost without thought. If the other hand took long to heal, Ronan was beginning to think he might get used to being a lefty.

"Captain Hank Ketchum, of the Texas Rangers. Some folks call me One-Eye—for obvious reasons." Ketchum shook Washington's hand. Introductions over, Thaddeus resumed his seat.

"What brings you west, Mr. Washington?" Ketchum asked.

"Thaddeus, please. Mr. Washington is rather formal. I recently completed my doctorate in biology at Columbia University, and I decided it was time for a little field work, sir. You see, I am a scientist, and I believe that only so much can be learned from texts before one must experience the actual reality. I have come west for the purpose of studying unique and unusual manifestations of life."

"Come again?"

"What he's sayin', Texas, is that he's come west to look for monsters." Ronan translated.

"I do believe you have cut to the heart of the matter, Ronan. I do indeed intend to study 'monsters' as you have colorfully called them."

"Well, you've come to the right place. Hasn't he, Lynch?"

CHAPTER EIGHT

Three hours later, both Ronan and Ketchum were beginning to lose far more games than they were winning. Thaddeus seemed to have an incredible natural talent for the game and seldom bet much on the hands he did lose. "You know, Thaddeus," Ketchum said, "if I didn't know better, I'd say me and Lynch were being hornswoggled."

"Let me assure you that is not the case. I have simply noted that this game, much like blackjack, is based strongly on the mathematical likelihood of certain combinations of cards occurring in a given hand. Now, as three of the cards in each of your hands are visible as dealt, I can narrow down the possible combinations either of you could have by a process of simple deduction. Combine that with the knowledge of the cards I have 'in the hole,' I believe you called it, and with a simple statistical calculation, the odds of winning any hand can be roughly determined."

"You were wrong, Texas," Ronan said. "We are being conned. Did you do this well at blackjack, Thaddeus?"

"As a matter of fact, I did somewhat better. You see, as that game progresses, more and more of the deck becomes visible, and thus the possible variations become smaller. This—"

Ketchum held up a hand to stop him. "That's enough explainin'. You're takin' all the fun out of it. How them fellers take it yesterday?"

"One of them became quite upset. I honestly believe he considered shooting me."

"Well, that does it for me. I feel like I'm payin' you two to play," Ronan grimaced, putting his cards in the center of the table. "I'm out."

"Yeah, like they say, 'quit while you're behind.'" Ketchum threw his cards in as well. Then the ranger pulled out his pocketwatch and looked at the time. "I reckon we got about an hour at the most."

"An hour until what?" Thaddeus asked as he raked in his winnings.

"We got a feller over in the jail that some folks'll likely be tryin' to hold court on here in bit."

Thaddeus leaned forward and in a stage whisper asked, "You mean, a lynch mob?"

"Yup," Ketchum sighed.

"And the two of you plan to stop them?"

"Well, there's also the town deputy, for as long as he stands his ground. Which will be about 10 minutes before the trouble starts." Ketchum stood up and looked to Ronan. "We'd probably best head to the jail. They might show early."

Ronan stood and turned to Thaddeus. "It's been a pleasure, Thaddeus. Just wish I could say playing poker with you'd been the same."

Thaddeus stood as well. "Gentlemen, if I can be of any assistance, you may count on me."

"I appreciate the gesture, Thaddeus," Ketchum replied, "but you'd best leave this to us. It could get a little ugly."

"Captain, I can assure you, I am no babe in the woods. I hold degrees in several areas of scientific endeavor from the finest universities on this continent. The anatomy of strange beasts is not my only field of expertise."

"We'll try to keep that in mind," Ronan said.

CHAPTER NINE

The office was lit by a single oil lamp. Ketchum and Lynch had decided that Deputy Parrish was likely to be more of a hindrance than a help and had sent him home for the evening.

Ketchum now sat behind the desk and inspected a double-barrel shotgun he'd pulled from the rack by the door. Ronan put on his old boots. If Knaggs hung tonight, he'd be doing it in his socks.

The undead gunslinger walked over to the door and looked out its small, barred window. The streets were still as empty as the bottle they'd left behind in the saloon.

"How'd a lily-liver like Parrish ever get put in charge of this town?"

"Actually, they had themselves a right good sheriff until yesterday. He rode out to check on a farm in the evening and never came back."

"Bushwackers?"

"Nobody knows. Deputy Parrish says it's only about 10 miles or so down the Black River line to the farm. Even if the marshal had stayed until late, he'd have been back long before now. Figure I'll try to convince Parrish he needs to round up a posse and ride out there tomorrow."

"I'm thinkin' that may be a waste of time."

"Why's that?" Ketchum asked.

Ronan told him about Barlowe Station.

"This is startin' to sound familiar. We had somethin' similar happen late last year along the Dixie Rails line. Whole families disappeared. Started out near the Arizona border and moved east. By the end, they had a whole company of Rangers investigatin' it, but we never figured it out."

"I thought you Rangers always got your man."

"Naw, that's the Canadians. We're just meaner than Hell."

"Sounds like whoever's doing it is followin' the railroad. Shouldn't be too hard to find."

"You'd think. Least til you really start lookin' at the railroads. Each one has pretty much a single main line, but there's so many spurs goin' to and from the mains, it's gettin' like a spider's web in some places."

"So what do you plan to do, Texas?"

"I don't got time to chase down every single mystery west of the Mississippi. First thing I plan to do is get this skunk to his appointment with the hangman in Topeka. Then I'm headin' to a certain place in New Mexico with that little toy I picked up in Dodge." Ketchum patted his breast pocket, where Ronan assumed he still had the Butcher's scalpel. "After that...well, we'll see."

Ronan turned back to the window. While they'd been talking, a fair-sized crowd had gathered in front of the Palace. Most were armed with rifles, and some carried torches. A large man in the front had a coil of rope in his hands. At one end hung an all too familiar sight: a hangman's noose. Ronan frowned at the noose and rubbed his scarred neck. No matter how long he'd been on this side of the grave, he'd never forget his death. Beneath the scar Knaggs had given him, he still bore a rope-burn scar, a reminder that he'd been on the other side of the veil for a while.

As one, the crowd began walking toward the jail.

"Here they come, Texas."

CHAPTER TEN

Ronan and Ketchum strode out onto the porch as the rabble arrived. There were easily 15 men and women in the mob.

Ronan had left his holster inside. He felt surprisingly comfortable drawing with his left hand, but it wasn't something he wanted to chance just yet. Instead, he had his Peacemaker stuck in the waistband of his trousers. Ketchum carried the double-barrel in addition to his own hogleg.

"Step aside! We've come to see justice served on that murderer!" said the man with the rope.

"You people go on home. There will be no hanging tonight." Ketchum spoke in a loud voice, deeper than usual. Ronan suddenly knew why the Texas Rangers' favorite saying was "One riot, one Ranger."

Another man stepped forward. "Kansas ain't part of the Confederacy. You're out of your jurisdiction, Ranger!"

Ketchum thumbed the hammers back on his shotgun. "Mister, right now I'd be more worried about the range of my Greeners if I were you."

The first man turned to the crowd and yelled, "He's only got two barrels. At this range he'll only be able to get two of us."

"Nope," Ketchum growled, "I reckon I'll only get one of you real good. Now all you fellers got to decide is who's the corpse and who's the pallbearers."

Ronan surveyed the mob. Ketchum might have cowed a few of them, but no amount of talk would make up for 10-to-1 odds. As good as the two men were, if it came to gunfire, they would lose. He inched his hand toward his pistol. A sudden move on his part would likely touch off the shooting.

"Pardon me," called a voice from behind the crowd. "I think it best if everyone were to do as the ranger requested and return home for the evening. It would be unfortunate if anything untoward were to happen."

A few in the crowd turned immediately, and their exclamations drew the attention of everyone else. Even Ronan and Ketchum craned to see what was going on. Standing in the street, holding an oddly shaped, four-barreled rifle was Thaddeus Washington.

"Perhaps some of you are wondering exactly what sort of firearm I have in my hands. It is a shoulder-fired, spring-driven, self-loading, automatic rifle. In layman's terms: a Gatling rifle. However, I feel in instances such as this one, actions speak louder than words."

Thaddeus pointed the rifle at the street in front of the mob and squeezed the trigger. The barrels whirled and fire spat from each one in turn, sending a bullet into the ground. Dirt sprayed up into the faces of those at the front. Thaddeus continued as the dust settled, "Now, I would like to reassure all present that a single magazine for this weapon holds 30 rounds. Subtracting the rounds I just expended for that exhibition, I am left with more than enough bullets to provide each of you with your own personal souvenir of the evening's festivities."

The crowd stood open-mouthed, staring at Thaddeus.

Ketchum had handled enough mobs to know the iron was hot. "Get on home now before we lose our tempers!" he boomed. Almost as one, the mob dispersed into the night.

Ronan stepped off the sidewalk. "Good work, tinhorn. I guess you do know about something besides critters."

Ketchum joined them. "I'll second that. That's a mighty fine shootin' iron you got there."

"Yes, yes it is," Thaddeus smiled, looking over the weapon. "It's a pity I can't hit a thing with it."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Ronan bolted up from the bed as the sound of a far-off train groaned in the distance. He was in a room above the Palace. It was still dark out, so he guessed he couldn't have been asleep long before the nightmares had begun.

Most nights he dreamed of that fateful Virginia battlefield, where half his unit had been burnt to a cinder by Hunley's Devils. The Confederates had been equipped with flamethrowers as part of Jeff Davis' attack on Washington back in '69.

Other nights were filled with images of his death at the hands of Edgar DuChamp and Cynthia Carstairs. Night after night, he watched the bullet from DuChamp's Buntline tear through him. Then he remembered the long, dark night spent in the basement, bleeding slowly to death. Finally, DuChamp and Carstairs, a dark sorceress who had sold her soul to the Devil long ago, had hung him from the gate of their ranch.

Ronan still didn't understand how he'd come back from the dead. He knew only that there was some sort of evil spirit inside him that kept his bones moving. That same spirit, he suspected, tormented him in his dreams, amplifying his nightmares to the point of pain.

A second Hellish whistle broke Ronan's train of thought. He threw his legs off the bed and began to get dressed. There'd be no more sleep for him tonight, he was sure of that.

It was awful late for a train anyway. And that particular whistle would give the dead nightmares. It seemed to him he'd heard it before. Then it struck him.

It was the same whistle he'd heard the night before last outside of Barlowe.

He hurriedly finished dressing and left his room. He headed for the town jail.

Ketchum had stayed at the jail after the crowd cleared out, figuring if a few of the braver vigilantes came back, he'd be waiting. Ronan had wandered off to the Palace and got himself a bed.

The door to the jail was locked when he arrived, so Ronan pounded on it heavily. A moment later, a shutter at eye level opened and Ketchum glared at him through the bars. "I considered just shootin' through the door and goin' back to sleep," he grated.

"Open up," said the gunslinger. "I think we've got trouble coming."

Ronan heard the bolt slide back, and the door opened. "Remember I told you I heard a train the night before I got to Barlowe," he said, entering the office. "Well, I just heard it again, and I think it's comin' this way."

Ketchum didn't answer, he just walked to the desk and opened a drawer. He pulled a set of keys from inside and tossed them to Ronan. "They're to the rack by the door. Help yerself."

"I don't think I'll have much use for a long gun," he said, showing Ketchum his still-limp gun hand.

"Point taken," Ketchum agreed. "Why don't you head over to the station, and I'll go get that tinhorn and his fancy rifle. We'll meet you there."

"He probably couldn't hit the dark at night with that gun."

"No, but it sure does make a whole lot of racket when he fires it. And sometimes that's enough."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Ketchum knocked on Thaddeus' door for the third time, and still there was no answer. He took a step back and kicked the door just above the knob. With a loud crack, the frame splintered and the door swung open. Ketchum strode into the room.

Thaddeus, finally aroused by the noise of the broken lock, quickly sat up in the bed. "Captain Ketchum," he shrilled. "To what do I owe this dubious pleasure?"

"Get up, Professor. We've got trouble. There's a train-load o' it coming. We don't know what's ridin' those rails tonight, but it's caused all sorts o' Hell before."

"I see," he said. "What we are looking at is an unknown, potentially dangerous quantity which may travel by means of locomotive. If you will bear with me for just a moment, I'd like to assemble a few pieces of equipment that may prove advantageous." He opened the top of an enormous trunk resting at the foot of his bed. Inside, Ketchum could see numerous strange devices and contraptions. Thaddeus pulled out a couple and turned back to Ketchum.

"What is the current level of cloud cover?"

Ketchum gave him a blank look.

"I am trying to ascertain what the ambient light is tonight in order to determine the appropriateness of vision enhancement equipment."

"Oh," Ketchum said, still not fully understanding. He took a stab and said, "The moon's gone down?"

"Thank you." Thaddeus pulled out another odd-looking gadget. By this time, they could hear the rhythmic vibration of the approaching train.

Finally, the scientist had gathered all his gear, and the two men hurriedly made their way down the stairs and across the barroom. On the boardwalk outside the saloon, Thaddeus stopped and began strapping one of his devices over his head. The gizmo resembled a pair of reversed binoculars that had been attached to a harness.

"What the devil is that?" Ketchum asked.

"This is a mechanism of my own design. By melding ghost rock with a form of quartz, I was able to fabricate a material that was particularly sensitive to heat emanations. I have found it is slightly more effective than simple light-amplification devices, as it functions in total darkness, detecting, for instance, the internal heat of homeothermic creatures."

Ketchum decided to stop asking the man even simple questions and started in the direction of the station at a jog. Thaddeus followed behind him, his gear jostling and bouncing about as he ran.

"You'll have to secure that brass band yer carryin'," Ketchum said, stopping momentarily at the corner of the marshal's office. "We'd be lucky to sneak up on an unconscious rock with all the racket yer makin'."

"Yes, I see your point, Captain. I shall endeavor to proceed with more stealth." They'd not gone five yards before Ketchum once again stopped and turned to Thaddeus.

"Look, I'll go ahead and find Lynch. You give me about a minute and then follow. Slowly. Okay?"

"Certainly. Thus unencumbered, you will be able to move not only more quickly but also more covertly."

After a moment's consideration, Ketchum decided that constituted a "yes" and trotted off toward the station.

* * *

The train station sat near the western end of Varney Flats. The building was a one-room office with a platform which contained a covered bench. Neither the platform or the office offered any sort of cover, and Ronan didn't like the idea of standing out in the open to greet whatever might be on the train. His memories of his recent nightmare were still remarkably vivid, and he found them unsettling. Looking about, he saw the nearest likely looking structure was a barn about 20 yards off.

Ronan peered down the tracks and saw the train's solitary and dim light approaching like a great eye. He trotted to the barn and stepped into the shadows near the large double doors to watch its arrival.

Within minutes, the train pulled into the station, the screech of its brakes piercing his ears. They hissed as thick steam rolled out from the undercarriage.

The engine panted, its breath coming in clouds from the smokestack. Ronan thought the train itself looked like a casualty of war. Its sides were flaking paint and dented. It was an old coal-burning locomotive, with only three cars other than the engine and coal hopper. Two of them appeared to be passenger carriers, although the gunslinger noted with a shudder that all the windows were boarded.

Behind those was a single freight car, its loading door closed. The cowcatcher was broken in several places and badly rusted, resembling nothing so much as the fangs of some ancient predator. With a groan, it stopped, the couplings between cars clanking in sequence as each car butted into the one before it.

Time seemed to skip a beat. The train sat silently beside the platform as if calculating its next move. No sound came from the locomotive save for the steady thrum of the engine.

Slowly, the passenger car door closest to Ronan's hiding position opened, revealing nothing but darkness. Out clambered a solitary figure, which darted suddenly to the covered bench.

There it paused in the shadow, intently studying the station office. It tilted its head back like a nervous rat searching the air for a scent. After a moment, apparently satisfied that it was alone, the figure scurried further across the platform to the office itself. It crept stealthily to the door and tried the knob. Finding the door locked, the figure peered cautiously into the window beside the door. Then it paused for a moment before turning around and signaling the train.

Ronan had a very bad feeling.

* * *

Ketchum heard the tram's whistle and realized the locomotive had beaten him to the station. Not wanting to rush blindly into an unknown predicament, he slowed his pace to a hefty Texas gait. Just in case, he loosened his pistol in its holster. He left the shotgun's hammers uncocked. Otherwise, a misstep in the dark could have spelled disaster.

Finally, clearing the single row of businesses on Varney Flats' only street, he saw the station not twenty yards away. The train sat at the platform, steam from the brakes curling along the ground like tendrils of sentient fog. He couldn't see Ronan anywhere, although he doubted the gunfighter would be careless enough to wait in plain sight. Ketchum knelt in the dirt and hugged the corner of the building, watching the train.

He thought he caught sight of a furtive movement on the platform. Peering closer, he saw the shadow of a man's head through one of the station windows. It appeared to be looking into the building from the outside. He pushed his hat back on his head slightly and rubbed the day-old stubble around his chin.

Then, behind him, he heard a soft metallic click just as the train's whistle let out an angry shriek.

* * *

The other doors to the passenger cars burst open, and the loading door on the freight car slid noisily back. Dark shapes scurried from the train helter-skelter, scuttling like roaches toward the shadows of the town buildings. Ronan guessed as many as 30 had been disgorged, but they scattered quickly before he could actually count.

The main part of town was on the opposite side of the station from Ronan's position, and the majority had bolted in that direction. A few, however, were headed in his direction, and one in particular seemed to have its sights set on the barn. From where Ronan stood, none had appeared armed, but a holster would've been hard to see in the darkness.

Ronan retreated back further into the gloom. A shot would surely draw unwanted attention to his location, so he looked hurriedly about the stalls for a quieter weapon. He found a

number of them—pitchforks, an ax, even a pick—but none that were suitable for use by a one-handed man. This was really getting old.

Ronan sighed and drew his pistol, holding it butt forward. The Peacemaker felt awkward in his hand. Wyatt Earp might prefer to use a pistol this way, but Ronan had always been of the opinion that a gun was made for shooting, not clubbing.

A noise outside the building told him the stranger had arrived. The undead gunslinger carefully inched forward until his back was to the wall beside the door. He slowly raised the pistol in anticipation.

The footsteps stopped at the threshold. He heard an odd sniffing sound, then silence. A tense moment dragged by before Ronan heard the footsteps once again, this time receding.

Ronan waited until he could no longer hear the footsteps, then lowered his pistol. Gradually, he edged to the door, paused to listen one last time, then poked his head around the corner.

Less than three feet away, staring straight into his eyes, was one of the things from the train.

He'd been suckered.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Ketchum thumbed the hammers back on the shotgun as he spun around. Standing behind him in the middle of the sidewalk was Thaddeus Washington. Ketchum scowled at him and carefully lowered the hammers back down.

Looking back to the train, he saw a number of dark shapes loping across the ground toward the town. Hank turned to Thaddeus and motioned back the way they'd come. Thaddeus hesitated, looking over the ranger's shoulder then wheeled and ran. When they reached the opposite end of the building, Ketchum caught Thaddeus by the arm and pulled him down around the corner.

"Might I inquire as to why we retreated?" Thaddeus whispered.

"Well, them 30 or so fellows chargin' us was good enough reason," Ketchum said, leading them around the building's front.

"Pardon me for being obtuse, Captain, but to which men were you referring? I saw no one."

Ketchum looked back at the scientist as they reached the next corner. "Did you forget to turn your fancy goggles on? They were runnin' toward us faster than Bluebellies run from a fight." Ketchum crouched and looked around the corner. "There's a couple on this side, but not near as many. You distract 'em with that fancy rifle of yours, and I reckon I can handle 'em."

He rounded the corner quickly rising as he moved, Thaddeus following close behind. They'd not yet left the building's shadow when a shot rang out from the other side of the station.

Ronan guessed that at one point the thing in front of him had been human. But not anymore.

Its skin was whitish-pink, and its head was completely bald. Its nose turned up at the end like a bat's, and from its mouth sprouted two long teeth. The thing's eyes were dead black, and in the center of each burned a tiny red spark. With a hissing roar, the creature jumped at him, fangs bared and clawed hands out-thrust.

A lesser man would have hesitated confronted with such an abomination. In fact, less than a year ago, Ronan himself might have been taken aback. But clawing his way out of his own grave had hardened the former officer.

He brought the butt of the pistol up in a vicious uppercut. He caught the brute squarely on the chin and snapped its head back sharply. This seemed to have little effect, however, and the creature's momentum carried it on into him.

Ronan staggered back under the impact and, catching his foot on a rough spot, went down with the thing on top of him. He wedged his right arm against the creature's chest and pushed with his forearm. Its strength was enormous. He couldn't even budge the thing.

It lowered its head to his right shoulder and Ronan felt a sharp pain as it bit deeply. The gunslinger thrashed wildly, trying to dislodge the fiend, but to no avail. Then, suddenly, it released its hold and dragged itself away from him. He quickly rolled in the opposite direction.

Rising to his feet, he saw the thing was curled up on the ground. It was choking, trying to clear something from its throat. He checked his shoulder and saw the bite mark the creature had left. It was a deep puncture, and he could see a little of his viscous, dark blood pooling in it.

"Get a mouth full of something you didn't care for, did you?" Ronan said, walking toward the prone form. "Well, you're about to get a belly full of something you'll like even less." He cocked his Peacemaker and took aim, disgust for the moment overriding subtlety.

The sound of the shot echoed through the dark. In moments, there would likely be more of them swarming the barn, but at least this bastard was dead.

Ronan scanned the darkness intently for more, unaware that the creature he'd just gut-shot was slowly rising to its feet.

Ketchum knew from the report that the shot had most likely come from a pistol, and he was betting that the pistol was a Colt Peacemaker held by Ronan Lynch. "That damn Yankee's tryin' to steal all the glory," he muttered.

The shot had also drawn the attention of the figures nearest the ranger. Several turned toward the sound but then continued on in their original direction. Ketchum paused, looking for an opportunity to cross the open ground unobserved.

Soon, the way was clear. He moved toward the station, then hugged the shadows along the back of the building. He could hear muffled clanking as Thaddeus trotted behind him.

"Captain, I still haven't seen anyone besides you," he said between breaths. The weight of his gadgets was taking its toll.

"Then I'd take them goggles back to who—" Ketchum's comment was cut off as a figure crashed out of a window in front of him.

He leveled his shotgun, but the thing batted the gun out of his hands as quick as a striking rattlesnake. Then it grabbed his duster and slammed him into the building wall, pinning him. Long teeth descended toward his leathery, sunburned throat.

The teeth stopped when they clinked against the barrel of the ranger's six-gun.

"Damn! Yer ugly enough to peel the hide off a gila monster," Hank said as he pulled the trigger. The monster stumbled backwards, dropping hard to the ground.

"What happened? What's going on?" asked Thaddeus.

"You mean to tell me you didn't see that? Tinhorn, you got to open your eyes!"

"I saw you get slammed against the wall, and then a bright flash as you fired your revolver. What are you shooting at?"

Ketchum reached out and yanked the goggles off the scientist's head and pointed at the creature on the ground, not three feet away. "That!"

The thing was beginning to sit up. Ketchum fanned three more bullets into its chest, and it slumped back to the ground.

The men walked forward to the body. Thaddeus bent over it, closely examining the face. "Fascinating," he said. "From the distinctive front teeth and pale complexion, combined with the bipedal form, I would suspect that this creature is a form of *nosferatu*. A vampire, if you will."

"Avampire?"

"Yes. Although its overall morphology is somewhat different from the concept of the traditional, or Carpathian, form, I believe it is, nonetheless, a vampire." Thaddeus, continuing, stepped back from the body. "And if such is the case, Captain, I would also suspect that your shots did it no permanent damage. It is, in all likelihood, only momentarily stunned."

"Well, then, Professor, how do you kill a 'noseferret'?" Ketchum asked then spit on the thing.

"Nosferatu? That is difficult to say, as myths about such creatures abound in nearly every culture. However, exposure to sunlight is shared by most such legends as fatal to vampires."

"That don't help too much right now. We've got about another hour and a half until sunup." Ketchum kept the pistol trained on the vampire as he retrieved his shotgun. Miraculously, it had not discharged when he dropped it.

"Well, another fairly commonly held belief is that decapitation will also kill a vampire."

"That, I can do." He put his foot on the creature's chest, just below the neck.

With a hiss, the vampire awoke just as Ketchum placed the shotgun's barrels against its throat. It bared its fangs and started to lunge upward at him.

"Too late," he spat as he pulled both triggers.

* * *

The soft crunch of a footstep on straw warned Ronan something was behind him. He ducked and turned into his attacker, catching it with his shoulder just above its waist. Legs pistoning, he pushed the creature backward into the barn.

Inside, he drove it hard against the corner of a stall. It struck the post with a satisfying thud, but the impact barely fazed the thing. It brought both its fists down on Ronan's back and drove the gunslinger to his knees.

As Ronan struggled to recover, the monster grabbed him by the throat and pulled him to his feet. With its other claw, it dealt him a tremendous backhanded blow, snapping his head to the right. Ronan put his pistol against the creature's gut and fired.

The vampire flinched, but little else. It hefted him over its head and threw him into the stall, smashing the wooden dividing wall.

Momentarily stunned, Ronan could do nothing but try to crawl away from the monster. A claw clamped around his boot, and he found himself being dragged backward. His pistol had slipped from his grasp when he struck the wall, and now he groped for anything he might use as a weapon.

His hand closed on a piece of splintered planking.

Keeping the wood close to his side, he rolled over to face the thing. As he turned, the vampire pounced. Ronan thrust the wood into the creature's chest, and its own momentum impaled it. It dropped heavily on him, thick black blood gushing from the gory wound.

Ronan scrambled from under the wailing creature and backed off, looking for a way to make use of the moment's respite. By the time he had recovered his pistol, the creature had stopped moving.

He prodded it with his boot gingerly. Nothing. Two A5 caliber bullets had barely slowed it down, but a piece of wood had killed it. Ronan backed toward the stall door but bumped into something, and whirled about to face it.

He was eyeball to eyeball with another one.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A burst of staccato gunfire sounded to Ronan's left, and the vampire was literally knocked off its feet.

"I hit it! Mr. Lynch, are you all right?" came a familiar voice from outside the barn.

"A little worse for wear, but still moving," Ronan stepped out of the stall to find Thaddeus and Ketchum entering the barn. "By the way, those things take a lot of killing, so watch yourself."

"We know," said Ketchum, grabbing the ax from the wall and stalking toward the creature Thaddeus had shot. "You got to take their heads."

With one stroke of the ax, he did just that

"Or expose them to the sun's rays." Thaddeus had wandered into the stall and was examining the other vampire.

"I had wondered about this. A number of Eastern European cultures hold that a vampire may be immobilized by driving a stake through its heart. Mr. Lynch you seemed to have proven that particular hypothesis," Thaddeus said. "I would wager, however, that if we were to remove the stake the creature would rapidly regain its motivity."

"That's a bet I'll not be takin' if you don't mind." Ketchum, finished with the first vampire, moved into the stall.

"Okay, so what's going on here?" Ronan asked, looking at the ranger.

"If you'll excuse me, Captain, I believe that I may be able to provide an answer to that question. Vampires, according to myth, regularly require a sizable quantity of blood to exist. In a large Eastern city, a fair-sized colony could exist or even possibly thrive. However, the West has a low population density, consisting primarily of small towns and homesteads. Such a society is ill-suited to supporting such a creature. However, technology has provided an answer to the vampire's problem." Thaddeus gestured toward the train. "The locomotive not only provides rapid transportation, it also serves as protection against the sun's rays."

"So what you're sayin' is these things are usin' the railroad like a giant chow line?" Ronan asked.

"In a word, yes."

The train whistle blasted again.

From town now came the occasional sounds of gunshots. The nosferatu were raiding the homes, and at least a few citizens were managing to fight back.

Within moments, vampires began scampering from the shadows of the town toward the train. Many appeared to be carrying bundles over their shoulders. Occasionally, one of the bundles struggled with its captor.

"Those things are takin' people with 'em!" Ketchum said.

"I would postulate that the freight car serves as a private larder in which they stock victims for later meals." Thaddeus responded almost clinically. As if to agree with him, the creatures dumped the bodies in the rear train car.

The locomotive began building steam for its departure. "What are you gonna do, Texas?" Ronan asked. "Think you've got time to chase this one?"

"You know Lynch, there's one thing I really hate: smart-mouthed Yankees. You in?"

"I don't have any plans for the next couple of hours. Besides, someone's got to be there to pull your bacon out of the fire."

"Let's saddle up, then. We'll have to ride hard to catch that train." The two men began jogging toward the stables as the train pulled out of the station.

"Gentlemen, may I suggest we take my wagon?" Thaddeus called out from behind.

"No offense, Thaddeus, but it'll be hard enough catchin' it on horseback. We'll never do it on a buckboard."

"You haven't seen my wagon."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Washington's wagon was parked behind stables out back of the Palace. It was blanketed by a heavy tarp, and the three men hurried to uncover it. As the vehicle was unveiled, Ronan realized the scientist was right. He'd heard of steam wagons before, but he'd never seen one like this.

Washington felt the need to explain his invention as he climbed aboard and started priming the boiler. "As you gentlemen can see, the wheels are similar to a regular wagon's, but are actually on spring-mounted metal axles. The rear axle is connected to the boiler here at the rear. This is the real source of its power." Washington held up a chunk of black rock that looked something like coal. The scientist didn't need to explain that it was actually a hunk of ghost rock, the fantastic substance that put lesser fuels to shame.

Thaddeus climbed into the small space between the seat and the engine. "It will take just a moment for the boiler temperature to reach its operating range," he said adjusting a set of dials. A deep rumble came from inside the engine. "Gentlemen, if you'd care to mount the conveyance, we shall be departing shortly."

"Not that I doubt your ability, Perfesser, but is this thing safe?"

"Certainly. Now, if you please? The boiler is nearing operational temperature."

Ronan climbed aboard, not wanting to miss a chance to nettle Ketchum. "What are you waitin' on, Texas? We've got a train to catch."

Reluctantly, as if approaching a date with the hangman, Ketchum climbed around to the small cargo space behind the seat. Abruptly, the wagon lurched forward. Hank lost his balance and tumbled ungracefully onto the floorboards.

"My apologies. She's a tad bit uncooperative until she's had a little time to run, Captain." The wagon quickly gained speed as it rolled toward the railroad. In a sheath beside Thaddeus, Ronan saw what appeared to be a rifle with a long hose attached.

"What's that, a flamethrower?" he asked, barely disguising his disgust.

"That is another item of my own devising—a steam-powered harpoon rifle." Ronan could detect a note of pride in the man's voice.

"What's it for? Last time I checked, there weren't any whales in Kansas."

"Obviously. However, there are Mojave rattlers in Utah, which aren't all that different from whales, as I understand it."

"You shoot one with that little spear, and it'll be usin' it to pick its teeth after it eats you," came Ketchum's voice from behind. He'd regained his feet and was steadying himself with a hand on the seat's back.

"Oh, I don't intend for the harpoon to kill the beast. You noticed the small anchors on the front of the wagon? Each harpoon is attached to an anchor. Once the beast is speared, the drag of the anchor should serve to tire it until it can be slain at leisure. It's basically the same principle one would use to hunt whales, so on that count, you're correct, Ronan."

The wagon had built up considerable speed, moving across the Kansas prairie faster than a galloping horse. Ronan now understood the purpose of the springs underneath. Even with their aid, the wagon jumped and bounced violently. Ketchum was forced to take a knee to avoid being thrown from the vehicle. Although the stars provided a small amount of light, the tracks were barely visible beside the hurtling wagon. He looked over at the scientist who was staring intently into the darkness.

"How do you see?" Ronan yelled above the wind.

"Not very well."

Ronan grinned as he heard Ketchum curse from behind.

* * *

The sky behind them was beginning to show the first traces of dawn when Ronan saw the dark silhouette of the train ahead. "Ketchum," he called over his shoulder, "get ready. We're coming up on the train."

"Pull us up alongside the coal car, Perfesser. That's the best place to board," Ketchum yelled.

Thaddeus pushed on a lever beside him, and the wagon jumped forward. In no time, they were even with the coal tender.

"One word of caution, gentlemen. Be careful of any victims you find aboard the train," Thaddeus shouted. "Another aspect of the vampire mythology suggests that anyone who is slain by the bite of a vampire becomes one as well."

"These things just get better and better," Ronan muttered.

Ketchum passed his shotgun to Ronan and leapt to the car. Ronan then tossed the gun across to the ranger and jumped over himself. Once they were aboard, Thaddeus drifted away from the train, keeping a parallel course.

"I'll take the engine, Lynch. You secure the freight car."

"You think it's such a good idea to split up, Ranger?"

"If we don't, they're liable to kill the people just for spite-and somebody's got to stop the train." For once, Ronan found he agreed with Ketchum. He nodded and headed toward the back of the train. Ketchum watched him for a moment and then began to move carefully forward across the loose coal.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Ronan reached the end of the coal tender. Ahead of him was the first passenger car. Carefully balancing on the coupling, he reached to the ladder beside the door. Climbing the ladder with one good hand proved easier than he had hoped, and he soon pulled himself onto the top of the car.

Gaining the center of the car, he began to walk toward the rear of the train. Although the train swayed gently as it moved along the track, he easily kept his balance.

Soon he reached the end of the first car. A three-foot gap separated him from the next roof. He gauged the distance and figured he could easily clear it from a standing jump, but hesitated. Looking down, he saw the ground rushing under the train. Ronan backed up a few paces and ran toward the gap.

He easily cleared the space and landed heavily on the other side. After a moment, he regained his balance and began walking along the crest of the second car. In less than a minute, he stood opposite the freight car. Once again, he took a running start and leapt across the gap.

Midway through the jump, Ronan felt something vise-like clamp around his right ankle and pull him down.

* * *

Ketchum crept across the coal, his shotgun leveled before him. He could see a faint glow from the engineer's compartment.

He moved closer and saw a figure standing there in the dim light. He brought the shotgun to his shoulder, drew aim on it, and gently squeezed both triggers. As he did, the train hit a rough spot, and the coal beneath Ketchum's feet shifted. His shots went high, spattering pellets into the roof of the locomotive.

The figure turned almost sluggishly toward him and began to climb out of the cab onto the coal. Clumsily backpedaling, Ketchum broke open the shotgun and dug into his pocket for more shells.

The thing had mounted the coal pile and was trudging toward him. Hurriedly, Ketchum jammed the shells into the gun and snapped it shut.

The creature was almost on him. It was no vampire.

Ketchum had fought more than his fair share of walking dead. It was part of the job that came with being the Confederacy's secret army against the supernatural. This thing's decaying flesh indicated it long since shuffled off this mortal coil, but it had come crawling back in its own unique way. It had a vacancy to its eyes Ketchum had never encountered in the undead, and its mouth was sewn shut by a heavy, dark thread.

Ketchum's attempts to identify the creature were cut short as it raised an arm over its head to strike him. The ranger brought his shotgun up to block the thing's attack. The force of the blow shattered the weapon's stock, and Ketchum felt his feet shift on the coal. He tossed the useless weapon aside and backed further along the surface of the coal.

The zombie followed him slowly.

Ketchum drew his pistol and fired twice into the monster's chest. He might as well have been throwing rocks at it. "You never know til you try," he muttered to himself, then drew a bead right between the monster's dead eyes.

"Enough of this," he said and fired. The thing's head rocked back. Ketchum could see the hole the bullet had left in its forehead, but it hadn't missed a step. "Now that just could be trouble."

Ketchum took another step back and felt his boot strike the end of the coal bin. Behind him, he saw the blur of the ground rushing beneath the train. Ketchum felt the coal shift under his feet again as the train hit another rough spot. Turning back to the advancing creature, he fired twice more. This time, however, his aim was much lower.

The zombie's knees exploded with the impact of the bullets, and it crashed forward into the coal. Ketchum side-stepped its outflung arms and darted as quickly as he dared toward the locomotive's cab.

* * *

Ronan's upper body whipped onto the roof of the freight car as his leg was dragged downward. The grip on his ankle relaxed, and he fell into the space between the cars. He groped wildly for a handhold as he dropped toward the ground rushing below, but found none. Suddenly, he was struck in the chest, hard. Ronan felt a few of his ribs give way, but his fall had stopped.

He had landed on the coupling between the passenger and freight cars.

Striving to maintain his precarious balance, he rolled his back against the freight car. Climbing onto the coupling from the passenger car was a vampire. Behind it, he could see an open doorway framing several more pale, rat-like faces.

Ronan pulled himself to a sitting position straddling the coupling and drew his Peacemaker, realizing it was a temporary measure at best. Either way, there were more of them than he had bullets, and reloading quickly wasn't a one-handed gunslinger's strong point.

The vampire reached the center of the coupling.

Ronan fired once at the monster, striking it solid in the gut. The shot slowed it momentarily. That was all he had hoped for.

Ronan jammed the pistol into his waistband and lunged forward. As he struggled to release the coupling, sharp, ripping pains across his shoulders told him the vampire had recovered sooner than he'd hoped. He felt his shirt and flesh being torn to tatters by the thing's claws.

Then he felt the coupling release. Gradually, the freight car began to fall away from the train. The vampire crouched atop the center of the coupling lost its balance and pitched forward into the widening gap. It lashed out a claw and caught the edge of the freight car's coupling.

"Not hardly," Ronan said as he drew his Peacemaker again and took aim at the creature's hand. It only took two shots. The car barely moved as it ran over the thing's blood-bloated body.

* * *

Ketchum reached the cab and quickly looked about. The compartment was empty save for the locomotive's controls. It took a moment of trial and error to determine which lever was the throttle and which the brake. The ranger was preparing to haul back on the brake lever when he noticed a movement out of the corner of his eye. Behind him, a number of grinning vampires were creeping forward across the coal pile.

The battle-hardened Ranger drew his revolver and fired at the lead monster. The bullet caught it square in the chest, and the thing was staggered by the impact. When he pulled the trigger a second time, the hammer fell on an empty chamber.

He quickly holstered the pistol and drew his gleaming Bowie knife. He flipped it deftly in his hand and prepared to throw. He wasn't sure the knife would work as a stake, but it sure as Hell wouldn't hurt to try.

He drew back to throw at the closest creature, but stopped. At best he'd get one, and the rest would be on him like flies on a corpse. He flipped the knife again, this time catching it by the handle.

Grabbing the throttle, he opened it fully and stuck the point of the knife behind the lever. Straining, he twisted the handle and broke the point in the mechanism, jamming the throttle open. The train began to accelerate. With any luck, it would soon build enough speed to derail itself.

He turned back to face the advancing vampires with his broken blade. One of the fiends hissed at him from the edge of the adjacent coal car.

"All right, you blood-sucking bastard, let's dance."

The vampire tensed to spring. Ketchum braced himself. Then, the point of a spear appeared out of the center of the monster's stomach. The thing stared at the shaft protruding from its belly for a moment, then gripped it with both hands and began to push it out.

Ketchum looked past the creature to see Thaddeus lowering the harpoon gun. The scientist had missed the thing's heart, but it was a good try.

The scientist saluted, then reached to a lever beside the steering wheel and pulled it toward him. An anchor dropped from the front of the wagon, and the rope on the harpoon quivered. Suddenly, it pulled taught, and the creature was jerked backward off the train. Ketchum saw it careen off the corner of the passenger car, explode like a blood sausage, and cartwheel into twilight.

The wagon accelerated, pulling alongside the cab.

"Jump!" yelled Thaddeus, motioning now toward the front of the train. A quick glance revealed the train was rapidly approaching a dry wash. Although there was a trestle across the wide gully, the steam wagon would not be able to cross it. If he stayed on the train, he'd be on his own and armed with only a broken knife.

Ketchum looked back and saw three more vampires scampering across the coal. In the distance, he could see Ronan and the detached freight car rolling to a stop. There was nothing to keep him here now.

"To Hell with it and the rest o' you," he spat at the hissing nosferatu. The ranger drew a deep breath, then took two quick steps and launched himself at the steam wagon. He landed heavily, half in the wagon, with his boots scraping the Kansas soil. Thaddeus veered sharply away from the train.

* * *

The freight car coasted to a stop. Ronan dropped painfully from the coupling and walked toward the car's sliding side door. He jammed his pistol in his belt, popped open the cylinder, and carefully reloaded it with his good hand. The sun was cresting the horizon behind the train as he opened the door. Nothing happened, so the grim gunfighter pulled himself up into the car.

A vampire launched itself at him from out of the shadows. Ronan pulled his pistol, but the thing snatched his wrist and twisted his hand away. It grabbed his face with its other claw and bore him to the floor at the edge of the door.

The back of Ronan's head struck the hard wood, and he felt the pistol slip from his grasp. The vampire released his arm but kept its hold on his head, smashing it again and again into the floor. The force of the impact dizzied him. Ronan knew that if his brain was crushed, even he might not survive. He fumbled desperately about for the pistol. Then his fingers brushed the edge of the sliding door.

The creature jerked his head up again. As it brought it back down, Ronan kicked up with both legs, catching the vampire on its bony butt. The kick launched the fiend forward and over Ronan's head. He twisted and threw his weight to the right while pulling on the door. The door rolled closed and caught the vampire on its bald head. The blow stunned the monster, and it slumped in the opening. Ronan rolled to his feet. Once more he leaned against the door and pushed with all his might.

This time the door closed almost completely, separating the vampire from its head.

In the dim light seeping through the cracked door, Ronan looked about the car. All around lay the bodies of the vampires' captives. An occasional groan of pain let him know at least some were alive. He guessed the vampires preferred their blood warm.

He retrieved his pistol and carefully made his way to where the vampire had been lurking. There he found a limp form lying face down on the floor. A vicious neck wound told him this fellow hadn't been so lucky. He kneeled and rolled the body over.

"Knaggs," he said to himself. The man's face was pale and lifeless. Ronan rose and picked his way back to the freight door. As he reached it, the sound of a boots scuffling across wood caused him to turn.

Stalking across the floor behind him came the bushwacker. Knagg's eyes now flickered with red embers, and his mouth hung open, exposing his unnaturally long teeth. His upper body wove hypnotically like a snake readying for a strike.

Ronan gripped the edge of the sliding door and flung it back along its track. Dawn flooded the car. The thing that had been Knaggs dropped smoking to the floor, screaming as it went.

Outside the car, Ronan heard Washington's steam wagon approach. Both the inventor and Ketchum looked battered but alive.

By the time Ronan turned back to Knaggs, his corpse was nothing more than a charred ruin. Ronan prodded it with the toe of his boot and grinned as it crumbled to ash.

"Consider that a down payment on what you owe me, Knaggs. I'll come for the rest when I see you in Hell."



NIGHT TRAIN

THE ADVENTURE

Welcome back, partner! Those vampires give new meaning to the term "taking a dirt nap," don't they? Here's a what we call an A-1 prime opportunity for your heroes to tackle those two-legged leeches themselves, so tell 'em to strap on their six-shooters and load their scatterguns—this one's gonna get bloody!

THE STORY SO FAR

Before the white man ever set foot on the American continent, Indian tribes in what is now southern New Mexico were plagued by a group of primitive nosferatu—what Europeans like to call vampires.

For years, these creatures virtually ruled the night in the American Southwest. After the things had decimated his tribe, a clever Navaho brave swore vengeance.

He did not know how to kill the things, but he knew they shunned the daylight and hid from it within a dark cave. The brave waited until the sun shone brightly, then ventured into their labyrinthine lair.

There he found scores of the hideous fiends sleeping in shallow graves in the earthen floor. The brave swiftly summoned his warband and they collapsed the cave, sealing the nosferatu within for centuries.

Time passed, history became myth, and myth was in turn forgotten.

THE
NOSFERATU RETURN

In late December, 1875, a band of outlaws hiding from the law in western New Mexico stumbled upon the old cave. The bandits holed up inside for a few days before they discovered the sealed tunnel at the back of their makeshift hideout.

The bandits, visions of lost Indian gold in their heads, tunneled through the debris. The vampires, starved by centuries of imprisonment, were on the outlaws before they even realized the danger.

Most of the outlaws were killed before their guns cleared leather. A few were able to put up a fight, but in the end only one—Tom "Redeye" Dawson—escaped the ruins.

BAYOU
VERMILLION'S PLAN

A month later, Dawson's wild tale reached the ears of Baron Simone LaCroix—owner of the notorious Bayou Vermillion railroad.

LaCroix had been using zombies in his work crews for years. The possibilities offered by this new form of bloodsucking undead caught his imagination. Perhaps he had even found a solution to the Apache raiding parties

stalling his advance in Arizona. He had Dawson—now publicly known as a crazed drunkard—summoned for an interview.

LaCroix immediately outfitted an expedition—led by a reluctant, but well-paid Dawson—to capture the foul monsters.

The expedition found the creatures still nesting in the ruins. Fear of being caught in the surrounding desert at daybreak had trapped the vampires in their den.

This same weakness made them useless to LaCroix. The nosferatu were incapable of hunting Apache raiders because sunlight proved almost instantly fatal to them. The monsters were too ravenous to trust to a simple work crew either. LaCroix soon decided he couldn't use the creatures to speed his own construction.

Then an evil thought occurred to LaCroix: he would release the vampires along his opponents' railroads. The creatures would devastate the lines of communication and possibly even the population centers. The resulting chaos would wreak havoc on the other rail barons' westward advance.

THE NIGHT TRAIN

Baron LaCroix rushed to have a special train prepared. The locomotive is powered by

the newest ghost-rock steam engine, but it's been disguised to look like an older coal burning locomotive to keep suspicions to a minimum.

The Night Train is outfitted with an adjustable carriage to allow it to traverse the various gauges the other railroads use. Special "sleeper" cars protect the monsters during the daylight hours, and a freight car serves as a grisly larder of human flesh.

Finally, since no mortal man would crew such a train, a zombie was created to serve as engineer. For his first engineer, LaCroix selected the now-useless Dawson—much to Redeye's dismay.

The Disputed Territories are currently crisscrossed with hundreds of railroad tracks. The fighting between Black River and Union Blue alone has spawned dozens of spurs leading from one railroad to the other. Just over a week ago, the Night Train entered Kansas on the Black River line.

The Night Train uses this web to prey on small isolated stations, homesteads, and even small towns. The vampires' numbers are slowly growing, and they may soon begin to hunger for even larger towns.

The Night Train preyed on Barlowe Station last night. It's next target is Varney Flats, and that's where our heroes just happen to wander next.

THE SETUP

There are two ways to bring the posse into Varney Flats. The first is to run the scenario as a single continuous adventure, beginning with the heroes arriving at Barlowe Station and then continuing on to Varney Flats from there.

The other option takes a little longer, but builds tension and makes for a creepier showdown in the end. Instead of running the scenario as a single adventure, intersperse several encounters similar to Barlowe Station throughout your campaign. Let the heroes



encounter a few small settlements or waystations where everyone's missing. The only clues are some old bloodstains leading to the railroad tracks, and even those likely require Hard (9) *trackin'* rolls. Eventually, of course, the posse comes across Barlowe Station, and this adventure begins.

Regardless of the option chosen, the posse reaches Barlowe Station just before twilight. They can be passengers on another train stopping momentarily at the station, or they can be riding horses across the plains.

CHAPTER ONE: BARLOWE STATION

Barlowe Station is just that: a rail station and really nothing more. It serves primarily to replenish the water supplies on locomotives. Few if any passengers ever get off at Barlowe, and even fewer board there.

The facilities are limited to a small office and a water tower, and the station was staffed by a single person.

Last night, LaCroix's Night Train stopped here. The vampires poured out of the cars and over the small station before the station master even had time to finish dressing. He did manage to fight back,

though, emptying his revolver into the monsters as they climbed through his bedroom window. Unfortunately, the bullets had no lasting effect on the creatures, and he was soon killed. After feeding on his fresh corpse, the vampires dumped his drained body in the outhouse.

Other trains have passed the station during the day, but the posse is the first to stop at Barlowe since the attack.

THE SCENE OF THE ONE

When the posse arrives at the station, they find it empty of human life. Close inspection reveals that it has not been long abandoned.

This scene is all about searching for clues around the station. To help you keep track of everything that can be found, look under the Clues sections below. At the end of each clue are listed the Aptitudes needed to find something, followed by the TN, all in parentheses.

THE STATION

A sign marked "Barlowe" swings from a post outside this single-story, unpainted building. A wooden platform surrounds the building, and two wooden benches sit on the side toward the rails.

Barlowe Station is a two-room affair. The front room holds the station master's desk, a wood stove, and a large map on the wall. A pair of spectacles still lie upon the desk.

The second room is a storeroom and has little of interest. Neither room appears to have been looted or even searched.

CLUES

Station Master's Desk:

Logs were maintained up until yesterday evening. The last train to arrive was a Black River express to Denver. (Foolproof (3) *search*)

Station Master's Desk:

The ink in the inkwell is still wet. It would normally dry out after three or four days. Obviously, the murder here took place within that time period. (Fair (5) *Knowledge*)

Map: A map on the wall shows the next town on the route is Varney Flats. Scores of spurs run off Black River's main lines in this area. (Foolproof (3) *search*)

OUTSIDE THE STATION

There are a few things to be found outside the station, as shown on the map on the following page. In addition to that, numerous tracks can be



found in the dirt around the station if the posse hasn't already walked over them, stomping them out of existence.

CLUES

Outside: Several human tracks outside the station lead from and back to the tracks. An exact count of the number of people who made the imprints is impossible, but the total is above 10 individuals. On a raise, the tracker can tell that some of the prints were shod. Others were barefoot. With two raises, the character notices the unshod feet have extremely long toenails—maybe claws! (Fair (5) *Trackin'*)

THE BARN

The unpainted, one-story barn contains two horse stalls and room for feed. The pen to the outside has a feed trough to the east and a gate beside the barn door.

One tired mare stomps nervously inside, and a couple of pigs remain in the pen. There are remnants of food in the pig pen.

CLUES

Happy Pigs: The animals were fed yesterday. (Fair (5) *Animal wranglin', medicine: veterinary, or trade:farmer*)

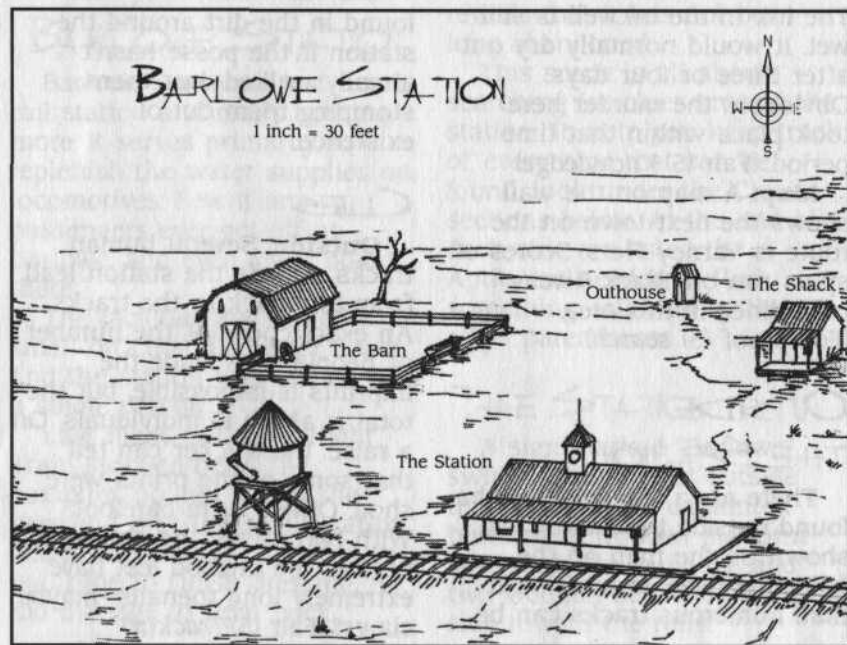
STATION

MASTER'S SHACK

A small porch leads to the front door of this unpainted but well-cared-for shack. There's a small vegetable garden the northeast, trampled by scores of footprints.

The shack is locked. Deep grooves (claw marks) in the wood remain where the nosferatu tried to fight their way in (they wound up going through the window instead).

The front room of the shack served as the kitchen, dining room, and living room. This area is undisturbed.



The rear room-where the station master was sleeping when the Night Train rolled in-is in shambles. The solitary window is broken in, and light streams through several bullet holes beneath the window.

CLUES

Bed and Floor: The bedsheets are thrown back, and a night stand beneath the window is overturned. In the center of the floor lies a Colt Navy .36 revolver. Scattered around it are six .36 rounds. Beside the pistol are two expended shells. If a character examines the Colt, he finds four expended rounds in the chambers. Three bullet holes can be seen under the window. The rest are unaccounted for. (Foolproof(3)*search*)

Blood on the Floor: Also on the floor near the pistol is a small puddle of blood. The blood is no more than a day old. A raise reveals something has lapped at the blood after it was spilled. Further searching uncovers no further blood in the room, not even on the broken glass. (Foolproof (3) *Medicine or trackin'*)

Overturned Nightstand: \$250 dollars in Confederate scrip. (Fair (5)*Search*)

Outside the Window: A set of recent and deep footprints lead from the rear window to the outhouse. (Fair (5) *Trackin'*)

THE OUTHOUSE

A fellow's got to do what a fellow's got to do. And the station master did it here.

The Outhouse: A character examining the seating in the outhouse finds the boards are loose. The stench from beneath smells of more than just waste. The distinct smell of death lurks down there. (Fair (5) *Search*)

Down the Hole: Any hero stalwart enough to climb into the hole finds the body of the station master beneath the filth. No *search* roll is required, but the Marshal should make the hero make an Onerous (7) *Vigor* roll or lose 1d8 Wind due to the stench. This loss goes away at the rate of one per hour.

The Body: On the corpse are a number of enormous rat-like bites. A raise on the roll tells that the true cause of death was blood loss. In fact, the corpse is nearly withered. (Onerous (7) *Medicine*)

MOVING ON

Eventually the heroes find all the evidence they care to and move on. If the characters are riding a train, the conductor stops at the next town, Varney Flats, to report the incident. The train won't arrive there until early the next morning.

If the posse is mounted, a quick investigation of the station map shows the nearest population center on their route is Varney Flats. It's about a half day's ride from their location. If they don't seem particularly interested in following the mysterious train, have them wander into Varney Flats out of chance or for whatever other reason suits your campaign.

BOUNTY POINTS

Action

Points

Learn the crime occurred yesterday	1
Discover the station master fought back unsuccessfully	1
Learn the attackers came from and left by a train	1
Examine the station master's body and determine the cause of death	1

CHAPTER TWO: VARNEY FLATS

Varney Flats, KS—Fear Level 2. Seldom do visitors bother to stop in Varney Flats, so the posse draws quite a bit of attention. The townspeople aren't suspicious, just curious as to why anyone would stop in their little piece of Hell.

Founded two years ago, Varney Flats is little more than

a water stop for locomotives traveling westward. Most respectable folk have long since moved on. Recently it's gained a small boost from buffalo hunters.

The hunters use the town as a base for launching their hunting raids into the Coyote Confederation's lands. This practice is frowned on by North, South, and Indian governments alike, but the revenue from the hunters is too great for the community to put a stop to it.

Here are some of the places the party may explore in town

BARBER/DENTIST

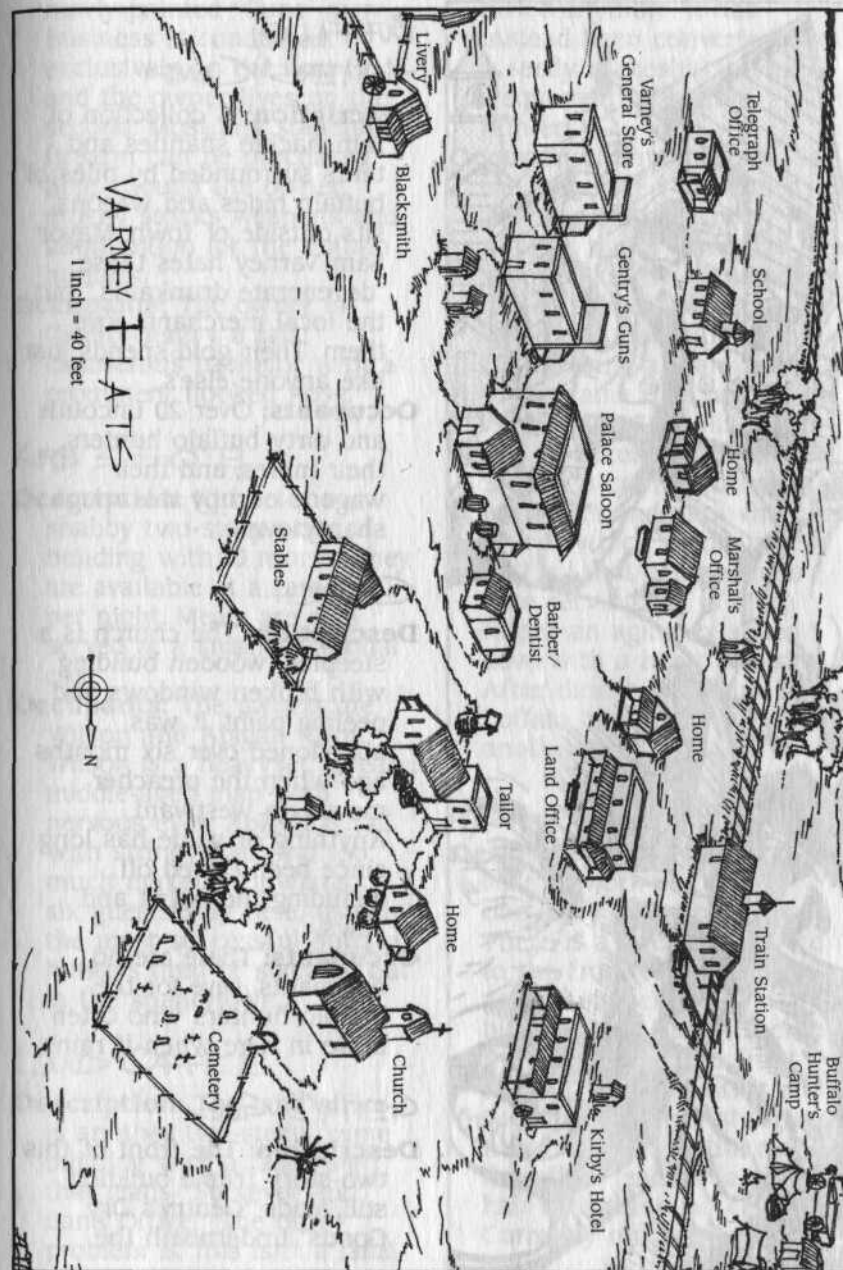
Description: This is a small wood-frame building with an office in front and living quarters to the rear.

Occupants: The owner is Joanne Webb. She's a middle aged, dour woman who has even removed a bullet or arrow from a patient on occasion.

BLACKSMITH AND LIVERY

Description: The smithy has an open-front, wood building attached to a corral and barn. A wagon sits to the east of the barn.

Occupants: The blacksmith is Silas Fletcher, a large, well-muscled black man with a strong handshake and a friendly and open demeanor.





BUFFALO HUNTERS' CAMP

Description: A collection of ramshackle shanties and tents surrounded by piles of buffalo hides and wagons sits outside of town. Mayor Sam Varney hates these "degenerate drunkards," but the local merchants love them. Their gold spends just like anyone else's.

Occupants: Over 20 uncouth and dirty buffalo hunters, their mules, and their wagons occupy this rough shantytown.

CHURCH

Description: The church is a steepled, wooden building with broken windows and peeling paint. It was abandoned over six months ago when the preacher moved on westward. Anything of value has long since been carted off, including the pulpit and pews.

Occupants: There are no occupants, save for the buffalo hunters who often move in here when it rains.

GENTRY'S GUNS

Description: The front of this two-story frame building still reads "Gentry's Dry Goods" underneath the

newly painted "Guns" sign. Business is conducted exclusively on the first floor, and the owner lives on the second. Most any standard firearm can be purchased here, though the owner mostly stocks weapons and ammunition for the buffalo hunters.

Occupants: The owner is Cicero Gentry, a tall, cadaverous bachelor with a prominent hooked nose.

KIRBY'S HOTEL

Description: Kirby's is a shabby two-story wood building with 10 rooms. They are available at a rate of \$1 per night. Meals are also served at a small additional cost.

Occupants: The owners are Wilson and Abigail Kirby. Wilson is a heavyset, sweaty, middle-aged man with nervous eyes. Abigail is tall with stringy hair and too much makeup. Upwards of six guests stay here, usually the most successful buffalo hunters tired of sleeping out in the shantytown.

LAND OFFICE

Description: The land office is another two-story frame building with a faded sign that reads "Surveyor and Land Office." The only problem is, this isn't a land

office anymore. It has instead been converted into a seedy makeshift saloon frequented by buffalo hunters.

Occupants: James Marcus is the owner and bartender. Any lawmen or bounty hunters might recognize him with a Hard (9) *Knowledge* roll as a one-time gambler wanted in Dakota Territory for shooting a man during a poker game. The bounty on his head is \$100. His lackey and bouncer is Fred Stokes. Stokes is competent with both fists and gun when not drunk (which unfortunately isn't all that often). Their lone serving girl is Mary Roper, an aging ex-soiled dove with a heart of stone. After dinner, there are 2d6 buffalo hunters in here and another 1d4 locals.

MARSHAL'S OFFICE

Description: McBride and Parrish work out of this one-story stone building. There is a one-room office to the front which contains a desk, two chairs, and a bunk to one side. A rack on the wall beside the front door holds three rifles and two double-barrel shotguns. A barred door to the rear of the office leads to a short hall with three jail cells. Currently only one of the

cells is occupied, the one holding the killer Abner Knaggs.

Occupants: Deputy Parrish and Abner Knaggs.

PALACE SALOON AND HOTEL

Description: The Palace is a tall, three-story frame building, and it was the first saloon to be built in Varney Flats. Its former elegance is still evident, but fading fast. Upstairs, 12 rooms are available at \$2 per night. Meals area available at lunch and dinner for an extra \$1.

Occupants: Eloise Brahms is a Southern belle whose family lost its fortune early in the war. She seldom makes an appearance in her saloon, preferring to let Jake Harding run the place. Harding serves as the gruff bartender. No one but Eloise knows it, but Jake was once a gunslinger, and he's still handy with a gun. There are also 2d4 customers after dinner, and 1d6 overnight guests.

TAILOR

Description: Stacks of buffalo hides sit on this one-story frame building's porch. Few articles are still for sale here anymore—it's become a trading post for the buffalo hunters.

Occupant: Dick Hotchner is the proprietor. He's a widower in his late 40s who's latched onto the hide trade to make a living.

TELEGRAPH OFFICE

Description: This small, two-room frame building serves as both Varney Flat's telegraph and post office. The operator sleeps in the back room.

Occupant: Clarence Johnson is a bachelor in his late twenties. He keeps abreast of happenings in the world and may have a recent copy of the *Tombstone Epitaph* on hand.

TRAIN STATION

Description: A one-room office building, water tower, and a covered bench make up the town's station.

Occupant: The station master is George Drew, an older gentleman with Southern leanings. He often sleeps at his desk—day or night.

VARNEY'S MERCANTILE

Description: This two-story wood building is the best-kept in town. Inside is a good selection of goods, although the prices are inflated.

Occupant: The owner is Mayor Sam Varney.

NOTABLE LOCALS

Here are some folks you might want to know about.

DEPUTY PARRISH

Deputy Nathan Parrish is a small bookish man, ill-suited to the profession of Western lawman. He immerses himself daily in dime novels and fantasizes about the exploits of Buffalo Bill and the like. Unfortunately, he lacks either the skill or courage to live up to his heroes. Until yesterday, Deputy Parrish could hide behind Marshal McBride. Now that McBride has disappeared, Parrish has found himself the only law in Varney Flats. With Knaggs in his custody, he knows trouble is just around the corner.

PROFILE

Corporeal: D:2d6, N:2d6, S:1d6, Q:3d6, V:2d4

Dodge 4d6, ridin': horse 3d6, shootin': shotgun 3d6

Mental: C:2d8, K:2d10, M:2d4, Sm:3d8, Sp:1d6

Academia: history 1d10, Area Knowledge: county 2d10, Science: general 1d10

Edges: Lawman (now suddenly at Level 3)

Hindrances: Scrawny, yeller (but he tries real hard!)

Gear: Double barrel shotgun, box of 25 shells, dime novel

ABNER KNAGGS

Parrish's sole prisoner is the murderer named Abner Knaggs. The outlaw has long, unwashed hair, a scraggly beard containing the remnants of (hopefully) last night's stew, and five teeth.

Personality-wise, he is a despicable, back-stabbing killer whose only claim to humanity is his parentage—and even that's in doubt. He's slithered across southern Kansas leaving a trail of dead sodbusters, pioneers, women, children, dogs, and just anything else he could run down, shoot, stab, or club to death. The reward on Knaggs head at the time of his capture was \$100-alive.

Two days ago, Marshal McBride tracked Knaggs from the site of a bushwacking. Knaggs, knowing a fair fight when he saw one, quickly surrendered, hoping for a chance to escape later. Now that McBride has disappeared, Knaggs plans to overpower Parrish the first chance he gets and make a run for it.

If the posse gives Abner half a chance to escape, he takes it. While they guard him, he taunts them constantly and generally makes them wish they could join the lynch mob. Use Abner to try your posse's patience and show them how hard it is to be a law dog sometimes.

PROFILE

Corporeal: D:2d8, N:3d8, S:1d8, Q:3d8, V:2d10
Fightin': brawlin' 4d8, shootin': rifle 4d8, sneak 5d8
Mental: C:2d10, K:1d6, M:1d6, Sm:1d8, Sp:1d6
Bluff 2d8, language: Comanche 2d6, ridicule 2d8, survival: plains 4d8, trackin' 3d10
Edges: Keen
Hindrances: Mean as a Rattler, Outlaw (4), Ugly as Sin
Gear: Sharps .50, .44 Army revolver, Bowie knife, deck of marked cards. (All of these are impounded at the jail.)

MAYOR VARNEY

A wealthy entrepreneur, Sam Varney had come out West hoping to found the next Dodge City, linking the cattle trade to the expanding rail systems. He planned to use the town's success as a stepping stone to a profitable career in politics.

Unfortunately, he placed his town between Dodge City and Abilene. On top of that, Varney Flats is almost due north of the Coyote Confederation—not the most favorable route for cattle drives. His venture made it almost four months before becoming a virtual ghost town. His fortune dwindled with the town's until the arrival of the buffalo hunters.

Varney does not approve of the illegal raids of the buffalo hunters, but he can't ignore the much-needed money they are bringing to town. Knaggs' capture is Varney's chance to show that, even though the buffalo hunters are camped outside town, the citizens won't tolerate any sort of rough behavior. Hanging Knaggs, especially before the circuit judge comes, should set the rest of the "scum" straight.

A tall man in his early forties, Varney's black hair is beginning to gray at the temples. His confident manner, combined with a quick temper, make him an imposing figure. Varney still struggles to maintain the facade of a rich and affluent businessman, despite his current situation.

PROFILE

Corporeal: D:2d6, N:2d6, S:2d6, Q:3d6, V:2d8
Fightin': brawlin' 2d6, shootin': pistol 3d6
Mental: C:2d4, K:1d8, M:4d8, Sm:2d6, Sp:1d10
Bluff 3d6, overawe 4d8, persuasion 3d8, professional: politics 3d8, ridicule 3d6
Edges: Voice (Soothing and Threatening)
Hindrances: High Falutin', Yearnin' (to be a powerful politician)
Gear: Colt Peacemaker, fancy cane.

PARRISH'S PLEA

After the the heroes have been in town for an hour or so, Deputy Parrish approaches them. He's been watching the group since shortly after their arrival, but he's been waiting for an appropriate moment to corner them.

The deputy approaches cautiously, hoping to get the heroes to speak with him privately. If they hear him out, Parrish talks in hushed tones and frequently looks over his shoulder to see if anyone is listening.

Read the following when you're ready to let Parrish spill the beans.

H-Howdy, friends. You look like the, um, adventurous sort, and I was wondering if I could interest you in a little work.

I got a little bit of a problem. There's this murderer in jail, a buffalo hunter named Abner Knaggs. Killed some settlers. He's going to swing when the circuit judge gets here in a few days, but I'm afraid the



townsfolk might not want to wait for the judge, if you know what I mean.

You see, Mayor Varney hates the buffalo hunters. He thinks they'll keep us from gaining, well, "respectability." Knaggs was a buffalo hunter, and a murderer at that. So he wants to see him hanged.

Marshal McBride would've kept Varney in line, but he went out to check on some other families where Knaggs did his business and has been missing since yesterday.

Parrish wants the heroes to help him guard Knaggs tonight. He's willing to temporarily deputize all of them if need be, and he's ready to pay too,

Parrish even offers to split Knaggs' \$100 reward amongst the heroes for one night's work. (Since Marshal McBride captured Knaggs in pursuit of his normal duties, he and Parrish are ineligible for the money anyway.)

Assuming the posse agrees, Parrish takes them to the jail and swears them in.

BOUNTY POINTS

Action	Points
Learn about McBride's disappearance	1
Accept the deputy's offer	3

CHAPTER THREE: DOWN ON THE FARM

Should the posse decide to ride out to look for Marshal McBride, Parrish asks them not to go. Parrish fears Varney may try something while they are gone. If they insist, he tells them to ride east for a mile and then follow the railroad tracks for another 10 miles or so to the next farm.

The house, built like many on the Great Plains, is made primarily of stacked squares of dirt. There are two windows in the house, but they are without glass panes, only shutters. A small corral, currently empty, stands to the side. The door to the building stands open, swaying slowly back and forth when the wind blows.

The sodhouse is entirely uninhabited. Along one wall sits a straw-tick bed and a dresser. Inside the dresser is clothing for a man and a woman. In the center of the room is a table with four chairs. Two of the chairs are overturned. Two cups rest on the table, both half-full with cold coffee.

If any hero decides to examine the windows, she sees the windows' shutters were battered open from the outside in.

CLUES

The Shotgun: A double-barrel shotgun, broken open for loading, lies under the table. Two expended shotgun shells sit under the bed. (Foolproof (3) Search)

More Tracks: Outside of the sod house there are tracks like those at Barlowe station and tracks from a single horse. (Fair (5) Trackin')

McBride's Gun: On the ground outside the house is a Colt Peacemaker. Engraved on the handle is "To Marshal Seth McBride from the Grateful People of Varney Flats. 1874." Three rounds have been fired from it. (Onerous (7) Search)

CHAPTER FOUR: LYNCH MOB

Around 7 PM a whole pot of trouble starts brewing in Varney Flats. Sam Varney calls a meeting of the more influential townsfolk in the Palace. He intends to stir up the mob, then lead them to the jail to lynch Knaggs.

Unless stopped, Varney convinces a majority of those present that his way is the best solution. He knows Parrish will hide from any fight, and he convinces the group that the new group of deputies will fold if faced with superior numbers.

LIQUOR' UP

As persuasive as the mayor is, a number of the attendees won't be up to killing a man in cold blood.

Cannily, Varney suggested the "concerned citizens" meet at the Palace. There he intends to get the less certain members of the group some "liquid courage."

Any posse member in the Palace between the hours of 8 PM and 10 PM will note the arrival of the group. There are 12 people in the mob, and all are armed in some fashion. In addition, Varney is carrying a sack.

Varney buys drinks for the group and continues his argument for a lynching. As the evening progresses, a few more join the crowd. If the posse is in attendance and speaks out against him, he tries his best to associate them with the buffalo hunters to turn the crowd against them.

Heroes in the Palace at this time should make a Fair (5) Cognition roll. Apply any hearing modifiers such as *keen*, *big ears*, or *bad ears*. Those who are successful overhear snatches of conversation such as "make a stand," "such lawlessness is a problem best solved by the community," or "without McBride, there's little evidence- he could go free."

Should a hero confront the group, Varney denies any accusations initially, insisting the hero misunderstood. If pressed, he explains they were simply discussing the potential outcome of Knagg's trial. The townsfolk lower their voices, but they continue their plans once they're left alone.

By 10 PM, Varney has fueled the mob's anger to the point of action. Those who may have been unsure earlier now have their judgment clouded by alcohol. With a loud and final, "I think we're all in agreement here. Let's go see the deputy!" Varney stands up and pulls a noose from his sack.

CONFRONTATION

Just after 10 PM, any heroes at the jail, near the Palace, or in sight of the street see a group of 15 people emerge from the Palace and cross the street to the jail. Parrish can't manage to speak over the mob, so the posse is going to have to take charge.

If no one meets the mob, Varney calls out "We've come for that 'murderin' scum! Send him out!" If a hero confronts the group, Varney says, "Step aside, we've come to see justice served!"

As long as Varney leads the mob, it goes through with the lynching. They only want Knaggs, but tempers are so

high at this point that anyone who stands in the way puts himself in danger. Should the situation result in gunfire, the heroes may be in trouble. They are likely greatly outnumbered. Even if they win, they may end up killing or wounding a fair portion of so-called "respectable" townsfolk.

The posse's best chance is Wyatt Earp's way: to defeat the mob's leader. To do so, they need to beat Varney in a test of wills. *Bluff, overawe, persuasion, or even ridicule* can be used here.

Varney gets a +1 for every 3 people his group outnumbers the posse by. The marshal should feel free to add other bonuses or penalties as the situation warrants.

If a hero gets a *broken* result, Varney backs down. If the posse is *broken*, the mob storms the jail.

If it comes to violence, the mob fights for four rounds or until a third of their number are wounded or killed. At that time, they lose their steam and scatter.

BOUNTY POINTS

Action Points

Find out the mob's intent before the confrontation	1
Face down the mob without any bloodshed	3

CHAPTER FIVE: MIDNIGHT SNACK

Pickings have been slim for the vampires since arriving in the Disputed Territory. Last night, they were only able to find the station master at Barlowe, Marshal McBride, and the family the marshal was visiting. There are currently 30 vampires riding the train, and they're hungry as Hell.

The next stop on the Black River line is Varney Flats.

WHISTLE STOP

Around 1 AM, all heroes still awake should make Fair (7) *Cognition* tests, applying all modifiers for hearing. Those asleep need to make Incredible (11) *Cognition* tests. Modifiers for *light sleeper* or *heavy sleeper* apply as normal. Those who succeed hear what sounds like a far-off scream. When it sounds again a few minutes later, the heroes realize it is an eerie train whistle, quickly moving closer.

The train reaches Varney Flats in less than 10 minutes. The heroes may do what they like before it arrives. Anyone watching the tracks sees the train come to a halt at the station. It appears old and weatherbeaten from a distance. Behind the locomotive and coal tender are three other cars. The



first two in line are windowless "sleeper" cars and the last is a freight car.

The train sits for a moment, the locomotive softly huffing. Then a whistle splits the night air. The train carries its own Fear Level with it. When the whistle blows, the Fear Level of Varney Flats rockets up to 4.

Immediately after the shadows grow a bit darker and the night air chills, doors at both ends of the sleeper cars burst open. Thirty frenzied, starving vampires pour out of the train and into town, looking for blood.

THE RAID

Any hero in the open when the vampires emerge is immediately attacked by one of the monsters. The others disperse among the town buildings and into the buffalo camp. As a rule of thumb, two vampires enter any given building.

The monsters have rarely been defeated, and so they are fairly chaotic during the attack. They do not aid each other if any resistance is met. Only if an attempt is made to prevent them from returning to the train is a coordinated effort made.

Because of the size of the town, only a few of the creatures actually stop to feed. Most seek to grab a victim or

two and carry them back to the freight car which serves as their larder of the living. During the attack, some of the creatures pull out the bars on Knaggs' cell and drag him to the train.

Any particularly brave cowpoke can board the train unmolested and explore (see the next chapter for a full description). During the raid, the train is essentially unguarded, save for the locomotive. Should the hero approach the locomotive, the engineer sounds the whistle and then attacks. The whistle brings the vampires running back to the train.

The entire attack on the town lasts less than 10 minutes, at which time the engineer sounds the whistle. All creatures still hunting at that time stop and quickly scuttle back to the train with one townsfolk for every two nosferatu. Any hero that's unfortunate enough to still be on the train at that time is in big trouble!

AFTERMATH

By the time the nosferatu retreat to the train, the angry and frightened surviving townsfolk have begun to put up a fight. Gunshots can be heard around the town, and the big Sharps rifles boom out in the buffalo hunters' camp.

After the train rolls out, the remaining townspeople gather in the street. Deputy Parrish and Sam Varney are among them, both quite shaken. Parrish tells the heroes that Knaggs has been captured (if they didn't know). He offers them the full reward for him—\$100 in gold eagles—if they bring him back alive. Varney also offers a bounty of \$20 a head for every one of his citizens they bring back alive.

Parrish reminds the posse that if the train gets too much of a lead they'll never catch it. Then he swallows deeply, and says, "I'm goin' with you." He cannot be dissuaded.

BOUNTY POINTS

Action	Points
Surviving the raid	2
Each vampire killed	1
Posse accepts the offer	3

CHAPTER SIX. TO CATCH A TRAIN

Assuming the party accepts the town's offer, Parrish tells them the tracks curve to the north about four miles out of town. If they leave immediately and cut across the prairie, they may be able to catch it.

Riding a galloping horse through the dark can be dangerous. Have each posse member make an Onerous (7) *horse ridin'* roll. Those who fail

lose 1d4 Wind from the rough ride. Should a hero botch the roll, he is thrown and takes 1d6+5 falling damage.

About 15 minutes after departing Varney Flats, the party crosses a rise and sees the Black River line below them. Less than a quarter mile away is the Night Train.

ALL ABOARD!

Boarding a moving train is no easy task, even for heroes. The train is moving at close to 30 miles an hour, so it is impossible to board by running alongside.

Jumping from horseback is likely the only way the heroes can get aboard. If they want to jump into the freight car, opening the door from a running horse requires an Onerous (7) *Strength* roll.

Once the hero's ready to jump, she must make an Onerous (7) *horse ridin'* (or perhaps *driving*, if on a steam wagon or similar device) roll to get close enough to the train. Then, she must make a Hard (9) *Nimbleness* check to catch a handhold. Those who fail take 2d6+5 damage. On a botch, the hero is trampled by his horse for the above damage, plus a *Strength* roll made by the horse (add all the damage together). A character with *bad luck* falls under the train wheels and is killed.



RUNNING THE ROOFTOPS

Once aboard the train, the heroes' problems have just begun. Walking along the top of the cars requires a Foolproof (3) *Nimbleness* roll. Failure indicates a loss of balance (and a lost action if in rounds). A botch results in a fall for 3d6+15 damage, unless the hero immediately makes a Hard (9) *Deftness* check and is able to hang onto the side.

To jump from car to car, the character must make a Fair (5) *Nimbleness* roll. Here, failure indicates a missed jump and a

Fair (5) *Deftness* roll must be made to avoid a fall for 3d6+15. A botch has the same result, although the fall drops the hapless hero between the cars for 2d6+10 damage and another 5d20 damage as he's hit by the train. Apply each wound received this way to a random hit location.

While the heroes are moving about the train or attempting to stop it, the vampires have a chance of noticing them. Each time a posse member makes a movement roll, make one Hard (9) *Cognition* roll for all the vampires in the car. If it succeeds, the monsters are aware of the posse's presence.

STOP THE TRAIN

There are a number of ways to stop the train, although most are fairly difficult. The list below is by no means exhaustive, but use it as guide in running the posse's assault.

SEIZING THE ENGINE

The posse can attempt to seize the engine and shut down the boiler. If so, they have to face the zombie engineer. Upon seeing the posse (a Fair (5) *Cognition* roll), the zombie tries to pull the whistle, alerting the vampires to the attack. If the zombie succeeds, the posse faces the zombie to the front and the vampires to the back.

UNCOUPLING THE CARS

The heroes can also attempt to uncouple cars from the locomotive. This requires an Incredible (11) *Strength* roll while the train is moving.

Any vampires in cars to either side of the released coupling notice it on a Hard (9) *Cognition* roll. Roll this once for each car. If the posse releases only the freight car, they have only the few vampires inside to face.

Should they release the entire train at the coal tender, the heroes risk notice by the zombie. It sees them on an Onerous (7) *Cognition* and then sounds the whistle. Even so, the zombie eventually notices the rest of the train is missing and returns with the locomotive. Also, the sleeper cars are still filled with 30 or so vampires wondering why the train stopped.

GET TO FIGHTIN'!

The posse can attempt to destroy all the monsters in a fight. If so, Parrish does his best to dissuade them.

Within the confines of the cars, the vampires fight like cornered rats and swarm the posse. Even if the heroes wait until daylight to attack, the cars protect the monsters from direct sunlight, although all their rolls are at -2.

Another possible solution might be to dynamite the train. It takes three sticks to completely destroy a single car-and unless it is daylight, the posse still faces a passel of irate vampires.

Dynamiting the locomotive causes a tremendous explosion equal to 10 sticks of dynamite as the ghost-rock engine detonates.

THE NIGHT TRAIN

The train has the overall appearance of being a dilapidated wreck, a cultivated decoration.

LOCOMOTIVE

The locomotive is a huge, iron behemoth. Its black iron seems somehow darker than the night, and its jagged cow catcher resembles the blood tipped fangs of some enormous monster. Ghost-rock vapor streams from its stack, wailing in agony as it pushes the iron monster forward.

Inside, the locomotive's engineer is "Redeye" Dawson, now a zombie created by LaCroix's necromancers. A pocketwatch in his shirt pocket is engraved with his name. Any Southern lawman or gunslinger who makes a Hard (9) *Knowledge* roll recognizes the name as that of an outlaw last seen in New Mexico several months ago.

SLEEPER CARS

The sleeper cars resemble great, black coffins. The image is not far from the truth.

Doors at each end of the cars let into a smaller room with other interior doors. The smell of death and decay inside is overwhelming. Often, the vampires bring "food" to the sleepers to eat, and over time the car has become quite foul.

Along the walls are sleeping berths covered by heavy canvas tarps. There are 24 berths in each car. They're stacked two high, with 12 on each wall. Not all the berths are currently occupied.



If the party boards a sleeping car during the chase, only 13 vampires are in each car—the others are in the freight car feasting on a townspeople per turn.

FREIGHT CAR

The nosferatu store their victims inside the freight car. Those too seriously wounded to escape are simply dropped on the floor in a heap. Others are hung from hooks imbedded deep through their backs and up under their collar bones.

Like the sleeping cars, this one stinks of death. Knaggs and most likely 14 other townspeople are the only humans currently in the car.

If guns are fired at any vampires feeding inside the freight car, don't forget the rules about accidentally hitting innocent bystanders.

After defeating the vampires, the heroes have earned only a brief respite. Knaggs, somehow chosen to join their ranks, has been bitten and rises as a brand-new nosferatu. Since it is dark, the party may not have noticed Knaggs' transformation yet. Use this to let him get in close and cause some real trouble with your heroes!

The other townsfolk are all alive, ranging from seriously wounded to merely battered around. Those that have been fed upon should heal soon.

THE AFTERMATH

If the posse did not stop the train, it continues on Black River's main line. Eventually, it crosses onto the Union Blue and heads back east.

If the party tackles the train, Deputy Parrish, assuming he survives, presents the posse with the reward whether or not they win. Varney also pays as promised.

The characters are welcome to remain in Varney Flats for as long as they please, free of charge. Varney doesn't want word of the incident getting out, however, as it would ruin the town's chances forever. If word does get out, a team of Pinkertons shows up within a few days to make everyone shut up. If they fail, Baron LaCroix sends his own agents to keep his failed maneuvers secret.

The train is a dangerous encounter. If the heroes aren't careful, as well as skilled, they will wind up a late-night snack. Therefore, if the posse stopped or at least thwarted the Night Train, each hero receives a point of Grit.

BOUNTY POINTS

Action	Points
Identify Dawson	1
Destroy the train	2
Every two townsfolk rescued	1

NEW ABOMINATIONS

NOSFERATU

Looking rather like the unholy offspring of a near-sighted, bald ferret and a wingless, albino bat, nosferatu are unpleasant to behold, to say the least. Their eyes are solid black, with a small spark of red glowing at the center. Coarse, brown claws tip their fingers and toes. Protruding from the mouth are two overgrown, chisel-like incisors, resembling those of a six-foot-long rat.

Nosferatu can speak, though after a time, most become so feral they don't have much to say.

Any person slain by a nosferatu's bite rises as a new vampire in 1d6 hours. Just being killed by a vampire is not enough—it must be the bite which does it. Nosferatu generally kill their victims prior to feasting to prevent them from rising.

A single vampire kills a person a week on average for food. Mining towns are prime territories for them, as they can hide in the shafts during the day while preying on the large transient population at night. Otherwise, only the larger cities are likely to hold any sizable population of these bloodsuckers.

PROFILE

Corporeal: D:2d6, N:3d10,
S:3d12+2, Q:4d12, V:2d10
Dodge 2d10, climbin' 4d10,
fightin': brawlin' 4d10, sneak
5d10

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

Overawe 4d8

Size: 6

Terror: 9

Special Abilities:

Claws: STR + 1d4

Bite: STR. Once a vampire has successfully bitten a victim it holds on and does STR damage each round. The only way to break free is to win an opposed test of *Strength*. The good news is that once the nosferatu's bitten someone, it has to use its hands to hold the hapless victim and can't attack with its claws any longer.

Immunity: Nosferatu are tough critters. They are immune to most forms of attack. It is possible to immobilize one by severing its spinal column. Complete decapitation is the only wound which can kill a vampire. Exposure to sunlight is also fatal to these undead. A stake through the heart can paralyze one for as long as the stake remains in place. Attempting to stake a vampire in melee requires a

called (or very lucky) shot to the gizzards. A vampire can be momentarily stunned by physical attacks. A *protection* miracle protects against a vampire normally.

ZOMBIE

Zombies are often mistaken for walkin' dead or even the Harrowed, and understandably so. All are (mostly) human in appearance and wear the stench of the grave.

However, although they are a form of undead, zombies differ greatly from the more familiar walkin' dead in several ways.

Zombies are slower and stronger than walkin' dead or the Harrowed, and they are not free-willed like Harrowed or walkin' dead. That's why their mouths are sewn shut as they are brought to unlife.

Zombies are not inhabited by manitous. Instead, zombies are created by hougans (voodoo priests) and are totally under their creator's control.

PROFILE

Corporeal: D:1d4, N:1d6,
S:4d12+2, Q:1d6, V:4d12+2

Fightin': brawlin' 4d6

Mental: C:1d4, K:1d4, M:1d4,
Sm:1d4, Sp:1d4

Size: 6

Terror: 9

Special Abilities:

Immunity: Unlike Harrowed, wounds to the head do not

kill a zombie. Instead, each piece keeps on functioning to the best of its ability until it is completely destroyed (usually by fire). Zombies do not heal on their own, but certain necromancers know how to rejoin their rotting parts. Another way to destroy a zombie is to fill its mouth with salt and sew it back shut. Some legends tell that turning a zombie toward the sea-if there happens to be an actual sea in sight-also destroys these decaying automatons.

BOOT HILL

DEPUTY PARRISH

Attack:

Shotgun 3d6(+4d6)/2d6(+4d6)

Defense:

Dodge 3

Hits: 30

NOSFERATU

Attack:

Claw 4d10/3d12+2 + 1d4

Bite 4d10/3d12+2

Defense:

Brawlin' 4

Dodge 2

Size: 6

Terror: 9

Special Abilities: See the description on the previous pages for all the (really) gory details.



TOWNSFOLK

Attack:

Fist 2d6/2d6

Gun 2d6/3d6

Defense:

Brawlin' 1

Hits: 30

ZOMBIE

Attack:

Fist 4d6/4d12+2

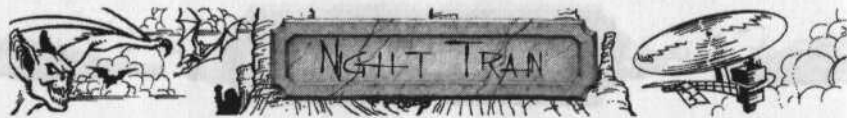
Defense:

Brawlin' 4

Size: 6

Terror: 9

Special Abilities: See the description on the previous page and this page for the dirt on zombies.



NIGHT TRAIN

THE GREAT RAIL WARS™ SCENARIO



Just like in the story and the adventure you just had the pleasure of thumbing through, the Night Train has arrived in Varney Flats, a town on the Black River main line. Only a small band of Heroes can stop them from overrunning the town.

One player (if possible) should take on the role of the Nosferatu. The rest of the players take on a single Hero each, then take control of any Posses they manage to rouse (see below).

This tale can also be played with all the players working together against the Nosferatu. If so, treat the vampires as rogues. They go after the closest troop, and don't gang up if they have a choice. Check the rules for rogues in *The Great Rail Wars™ Rulebook*.

Setup: Use the map of Varney Flats found earlier in this book. Treat the graveyard as a Strange Locale. The Night Train's locomotive is at the station, pointing north. The train comprises the locomotive (6" long), coal tender (3"), two sleeping cars (6"), and a freight car (6").

Deployment: There are at least four Heroes, but no more than six. Each player gets a single Hero, or you can divide them evenly. You can roll the Heroes randomly, use the Archetypes in *The Great Rail Wars*, or convert them from the roleplaying game as desired.

The Heroes begin in front of the jail where they've been guarding Knaggs. On each turn, posses of ravenous Nosferatu may pour out of the Night Train (see the next page).





NOSFERATU APPEAR

Turn	Posses of Nosferatu
1	3
2	2
3	2
4+	0

SPECIAL RULES

Each Hero can attempt to activate other units at various locations as noted on the Additional Units Table below. To do so, the Hero must enter the building before the people within are killed by the Nosferatu and then spend a whole action making a *Smarts* roll. The TN of the roll depends entirely on the location. No more than the Posses listed on the table below can be roused in any location.

Troops raised are placed around the Hero immediately, but they don't get any cards until the following turn unless a Hero attaches himself to them. Then the Posse can act on any subsequent cards the Hero has as usual.



Bonus: None. However, if a Nosferatu manages to get into a building in which there is no Hero (and from which the people have yet to be roused), the bloodsucker can make an Easy (4) *Fightin'* roll. If it succeeds, the Nosferatu kills everyone inside and racks up 10 points for its player.

ADDITIONAL UNITS

Location	TN	Unit
Palace Saloon	4	One posse of Gunmen
Land Office	8	One posse of Gunmen (in the converted saloon)
Kirby's Hotel	8	One Mad Scientist (use the Archetype in <i>The Great Rail Wars Rulebook</i>)
Buffalo Camp	4	Up to two posses of Buffalo Hunters (1 per <i>Smarts</i> roll)





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...because it just might be blowing for you!

At least that's what it seems like to Ronan Lynch when he hears the Night Train blowing its terrifying tune in the dark Kansas night. He'd been trying to get the Hell out of Dodge when he was bushwacked, and that long, low scream was the first thing he heard after coming back from the dead—again. Try as he might, this one-handed gun-slinger can't seem to escape his destiny to meet with the Night Train and its blood-soaked freight.



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