

KILLER GLOWNS



HELL ON EARTH
John Goff



Deadlands™: Hell on Earth™ Dime Novel #3

Killer Clowns

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Chapter One:

Who's Laughin' Now?



"So, when Dempsey Wilton discovered there was no cure for his condition, he hired the top medical specialists and scientists in the world. He had all of them brought right out there to the islands." Teller had the posse spellbound with his version of the old urban legend.

"Rather than accept his inevitable fate, he tried to cheat death. Wilton had them cut his head from his body and freeze it. Then the grisly package was placed in a life-support system underneath one of the islands in the park. Needless to say, attendance began to drop off when word got around there was a disembodied head under Dempsey Islands! I bet it's still out there somewhere—alive but not alive in its cryogenic freezer—to this day."

"Jeez, mister," asked a young man sitting on the floor nearby, "you don't believe that, do you?"

"Well, it's not what I believe that matters," Teller answered. "It's what's a fact and what isn't that does. Anyway, it looks like the sun's about down. Time to get ready."

It might have been his military experience, or maybe it was just the way he carried himself, but a few days ago, he had somehow found himself in charge of a small posse of townsfolk chasing a bandit gang across southeastern Texas. The scavs had raided a small community to the north, taking some of the townsfolk hostage in the process. Teller had agreed to help hunt the gang down and rescue the captives. The raiders had taken almost everything of value in the village, but the people had been able to scrounge enough up to make an adequate offer of payment.

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A group of eight townsfolk had volunteered to go along as well. Many of these were hunters who'd been out of the village when the attack came.

The small community was a favorite trading spot for travelers, and a couple of other outsiders had thrown in with the group as well. The woman Brooks was one of those. The other was a standoffish fellow named Roth. That name sounded familiar to him, but so far, Teller hadn't been able to dredge anything out of his memory. Normally, he didn't like working with strangers, but according to the reports, there were nearly 20 gangers in the group. A few extra guns never hurt.

Brooks had tracked the bandits to an oceanfront building at the edge of an enormous parking lot. The building turned out to be a monorail terminal, the point of departure for Dempsey Islands, an old amusement park back in the days before the Big Bang. Built on a series of six or seven islands in the Gulf of Mexico, it had been the largest such construction in the world at one time. Now, like most of man's other creations, it sat empty.

The scout scoured the area around the terminal and found no sign of the raiders' trail. The only way they could have gone was across the bridge. Teller couldn't fault the wisdom of the raiders' choice—the island provided the perfect lair. It was likely to have shelter and maybe even residual power from its own generators. Better yet, it had only one approach—the posse would have to cross almost a half mile of exposed bridge with nowhere to hide except the waters of the Gulf.

Teller hoped the raiders had only just stumbled on the park and the heroes weren't advancing into a carefully prepared killing ground.

On his advice, the group had holed up in the terminal to await nightfall. The cover of darkness just might let them sneak across the bridge without becoming bullet magnets. He'd tried to pass the time and ease the men's nerves with a couple of stories and couldn't resist the last one about the former owner of the park. Unfortunately, his choice seemed to have backfired on him—most of the group seemed even edgier than before.

Teller moved over to where Brooks had taken up a position near where the rails left the building.

"How's it look?"

"Bad. I'm pretty sure if you'd asked me this morning what the worst route of approach I could have imagined was, I'd have described something damn near this monorail."

"I agree, but I don't see any other choice," Teller said. "I'm hoping if we move in tonight we can catch them while they're still tired from the trip. Maybe even before anything serious happens to the captives."

"Might I suggest we don't take the whole pack of yokels with us? We'll have enough trouble on our hands without having to

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play nursemaid to a bunch of nervous weekend warriors. We're just as likely to get shot by them as the bad guys."

"Fair enough," Teller answered. "I'll ask for volunteers. After that last story it doesn't seem like too many are going to be jumping at the chance to go out to the islands anyway."

When he asked for volunteers, they kicked at the ground and avoided his eyes. Like he'd suspected, most of the men in his makeshift posse had lost their sense of urgency. Teller had seen this all too often since the War. As long as there was no real risk, there were plenty of "heroes," but once the chips were down, most folks just rolled over and hoped someone else would carry the load.

Only one man stepped forward. Roth didn't say a word, he just picked up his battered duster and walked over to where Teller stood. At least he carried himself like he knew what he was about, Teller thought. As the man pulled on his duster, Teller noticed he had a well-worn, twin shoulder-holster rig holding a pair of 9mm automatic pistols.

"The rest of you wait here until we get back." To be honest with himself, Teller doubted half the band would even stay the night in the station. The two men walked back to where Brooks crouched by the doorway.

"Okay, I managed to talk the others out of going, Brooks," he halfheartedly joked. "It's just the three of us—assuming you're in." He hoped the woman was going. Over the past few days she'd proved herself to be one of the stealthiest scouts he'd ever seen. She'd served as a sniper during the Last War, and, although he hadn't asked which side, the NA M-42 sniper rifle she carried gave Teller a good idea what color her uniform had been.

"Wouldn't have it any other way," she sighed as she rose to her feet. "You boys think you can keep your feet on the rail out there?"

Chapter Two

The trestle proved to be easier to negotiate than Teller had first thought. It was nearly four feet wide, and, although a metal rail took up the middle foot and a half, there was still ample room for the three to walk single file. A good thing too, he added to himself, since God only knew what was swimming in the ocean water 15 feet below them.

There were a couple of tense moments during the crossing when they came to places where the concrete had fallen away, but they'd been able to scamper around them with little trouble. About 10 minutes into the trip, Brooks hissed back at the men to stop. She lowered herself to a crouch and slid carefully forward along the rail another 20 yards or so. After a few minutes, she moved back to where they waited.

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"I caught sight of a light ahead. Looks like they may have set camp—or at least a guard—on the first island. From the flicker, I'd guess it was a fire or torch. We should be safe to move up some more, but keep an eye out."

They continued forward, stopping every few minutes to let Brooks check the light ahead. As they got nearer, she could tell it was definitely a fire—probably set in a trash can inside the island's terminal. She caught occasional glimpses of people moving inside the building, but saw no sign of a guard on the trestle itself.

"It's possible they're not expecting company," Teller whispered when she returned with the news.

"We should be so lucky," she countered. "In a few more yards, we'll be over the island itself. Why don't we drop down to the shore and work around to the front? I'll not get a clear shot into the terminal from out here and, besides they won't be expecting trouble from that direction."

He agreed and she lead the way to a spot about 10 yards further up the trestle. It was still a good 10 to 15-foot drop to the ground, but not far enough to pose a serious danger. Teller went first. He lowered himself over the side and hung for a moment and then let himself fall as quietly as possible to the sandy beach below.

When he hit the "sand" of the beach, Teller was surprised to find it was solid and even echoed slightly under his impact. Luckily, the sound was lost in the sound of the ocean behind him. He bent down and felt the surface. It was some sort of fiberglass composite. He'd remembered Wilton had the islands built—he hadn't realized he'd actually *built* the islands.

His companions dropped to the island beside him. Brooks seemed as surprised as he had been by the "sand," but Roth remained inscrutable. He drew his pistol and motioned the group into the shadows of the terminal building. There, he outlined his plan in hushed tones.

"Roth and I will move up on either side of the main entrance. Brooks, you find a vantage point that gives you a good field of fire into the terminal. On my signal, we'll move into the building.

"You take care of any door guards, Roth. I'll move along the wall immediately inside and attempt to isolate and protect any hostages. Brooks, you're responsible for watching our backs and suppressing any hardcases we can't handle. Everybody comfortable with that?"

"No problems here, boss," Brooks answered. Roth simply nodded his head. The three split up—the scout moved off into the deeper darkness of the abandoned park and Roth circled behind the terminal to the opposite side. Teller carefully made his way up to the side of the building and stole a look around the corner.

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There, in front of the entrance to the terminal stood one of the raiders. The man seemed more interested in the amusement park than actually watching for any threat, so maybe their luck would hold out. He knew they'd need a good deal of exactly that if the three of them were going to take on the whole gang alone. Surprise might give them an advantage, but they'd have to move fast or the bandits would realize how few of them there really were.

Teller saw Roth peer around the far corner of the terminal. He hesitated before giving the signal to attack; he wanted to be sure Brooks had time to find a good sniping position. She was their ace-in-the-hole and he wanted to make sure she was ready to play when the time came.

Suddenly, the sound of gunfire erupted from somewhere in the darkened amusement park!

Chapter Three

Teller's first thought was that the bandits had discovered Brooks. If that was the case, they were all in a lot of trouble. Then more shots echoed through the night and he realized they were coming from too far away to be firing at the scout. Maybe the outlaws were just plinking at some of the old rides or attractions out on the island.

The bandit at the terminal entrance didn't seem to think his fellow gang members were fooling around, though. He yelled back into the terminal and drew his own pistol. Within seconds, the raiders were pouring out of the terminal like a swarm of angry bees. There was no way he and Roth were going to take them by surprise now!

He started to curse his luck and duck back behind the wall when he saw something that sent a chill through him. Roth walked out from the other side of the terminal as calmly as if going for an evening stroll. He didn't even have his pistols drawn. It took a couple of seconds for the gang members to see the man, but as soon as they did, all Hell broke loose.

Faster than Teller thought possible, Roth's hands swept under his duster and came out holding the twin 9mms. Both pistols cracked and Teller saw a pair of outlaws crumple to the ground—one clenching his gut and the other already dead from a bullet in his skull. The gunslinger never even missed a step as he continued walking straight toward the mass of raiders.

His own 10mm pistol already drawn, Teller stepped into the open. Taking a stable, two-handed grip, he double-tapped the bandit nearest his position. Both rounds caught the raider square in the chest, sending him stumbling backward. Teller immediately shifted his aim to another target. He knew they had to work fast. Once the bandits shook off their initial surprise,

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the two men were going to be in serious trouble. He hoped Brooks was in position by then—she would be their only hope at that point.

On the other side of the building, Roth continued his relentless march forward. He shot another bandit—first with his right-hand pistol, and then with his left when the man didn't drop. The second round did its job and the raider collapsed onto the concrete ramp. One of the other bandits recovered from his shock and turned his old hunting rifle on the gunslinger.

Roth caught sight of the rifleman from the corner of his eye and rolled to the ground as the rifle boomed. The bullet ricocheted off the terminal behind him and Roth let his momentum carry him through the shoulder roll. He ended in a kneeling position and fired both pistols into the man as he rose to his feet, walking forward again.

From the darkness came the distinctive crack of a .50 caliber rifle and a bandit fell lifeless to the ground. Good, Teller thought, they might just get out of this alive with Brooks providing cover fire. He dropped his second target with his pistol and darted forward. They'd been lucky so far—all but one of the bandits outside were down. The remaining outlaw realized this as well. He dropped his weapon and raised his hands in the air.

"I..." he began, but his words were cut off abruptly by a couple of pistol shots.

Two splotches of red appeared on his chest and the outlaw died staring at Teller with a look of surprise frozen on his face. Standing behind the man on the ramp was Roth. The gunslinger didn't look at Teller; he continued his slow walk toward the entrance, not even slowing as he fired his gun into each of the wounded bandits he passed.

"Wait—Roth!" Teller yelled as he sprinted toward the ramp himself. "Don't go barging in there—you'll endanger the captives!"

The man strode up the ramp, ignoring Teller's warning. When he reached the top, the gunslinger stopped. Teller could hear a voice yelling from the inside.

"Don't come another step closer, man! I'll kill her—I swear I will! Put your guns down. Now!" The bandit inside sounded panicked.

Teller clambered to the top of the ramp himself and saw their predicament had just gotten complicated. Inside, a bandit held a terrified woman in front of him, a gun to her head. There was no way to get a clear shot at the man, at least not from their angle.

"She's nothing to me," Roth answered in his low, steady voice. "Go ahead and kill her—it'll give me a clearer shot at you."

"No—wait!" The situation was careening out of control. Teller knew if he didn't talk fast, an innocent woman was going to die for it. "Look, put your gun down and we won't shoot. Okay?"

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"Speak for yourself, taleteller," the gunslinger said.

"That's it, man! I'm gonna do her!" The bandit cocked the hammer of his pistol. His hand shook as he pushed the weapon into the side of her head so hard it bent her neck to the side.

When the shot came, Teller was sure the woman had been killed. At least until she started screaming. The bandit lay sprawled behind her, his arms outstretched and a .50 caliber bullet hole in his forehead.

Chapter Four

"Don't you ever pull a stunt like that again!" Teller stood behind Roth as the man quickly stripped the ammunition from another dead outlaw's pistol. "Do you understand me, mister? If it hadn't been for Brooks, that woman would probably be dead now!"

"The job got done. Besides, I had him." The gunslinger stood up and faced Teller. Then, without another word, the man walked to the next body to begin his routine again.

"Any one of us could have been killed because of your stupidity! I could care less about your own worthless hide—you want to throw it away, go right ahead! Just don't take the rest of us with you!"

"Thanks for the permission." Roth stuck a couple of spare magazines in his pocket. "Are you finished? 'Cause I am. Half these were using 10mm—you use that, right? You may want to gather a few rounds yourself."

"I'm worried about you, Roth. I think you're on the edge and that puts all of us in danger," Teller kept the anger from his voice. "I have no idea what to expect from you—in fact, I don't even know your first name! How can I trust you, Roth?"

The man turned and stared into Teller's eyes. "My name is Gabriel." He didn't look away this time; he knew what was coming next.

"Gabriel Roth?" Teller was stunned. "I've heard of you—they say you did some real bad things to a town up in Kansas."

"Yeah, well, maybe you didn't hear the whole story."

"I heard you killed an entire town—50 men, women, and children—and burned it to the ground."

"Then again," Roth said as he stood up, "maybe you did hear the whole story."

Teller watched the man walk back into the terminal and found himself speechless for the first time in years.

* * *

"Well, how did it go?"

"Not good. How are they?" Teller nodded his head toward the three captives.

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"A little worse for wear, but they'll live. She said there are three others, two men and a woman. They escaped into the park a few hours ago. That's also where most of the gang is right now—looking for the escapees."

"So we're going to have to watch out for these three *and* wander all over this island looking for the rest. All the while dodging the other outlaws—that's just great."

"Doesn't exactly sound like a day in the park does it, boss?" Teller looked closely at the woman's face to see if she'd said that on purpose. He wasn't sure, but he thought the corners of her mouth twitched once or twice.

"Cute." He thought for a moment, then said, "They'll have to head back to shore alone."

"You sure this is a good idea, Teller?" Brooks stood in front of him, obviously displeased with his decision.

"Yes, as far as I can see, it's our only choice. We can't risk taking them with us—they'll slow us down, or worse yet, they might compromise us. When it comes time to fight, they're liable to get injured or even killed. Trust me, they'll be much safer this way."

"It's a long walk back over the trestle to shore," Brooks countered. "They might have trouble."

"If they stay with us, they *will* have trouble. Besides, the rest of the group—at least those that didn't run the minute we got out of sight—are still there."

"I'd still rather one of us went with them..."

"Brooks," Teller began, "I understand your worry, but we're already outnumbering four-to-one or worse. I can't spare you. If you want to go, that's your choice, but I won't give you my blessing."

"Nah, since you put it that way, I'll stay. What's the deal with Roth? You find anything out?" She nodded toward the gunslinger, who had returned to his position by the door.

"I was afraid he was unstable, but it's worse than that. His name is Gabriel Roth—you heard of him? Well, anyway, he's a bad man from the stories I've picked up."

"You can't deny he knows how to handle those pistols, though, boss. He might have his problems, but I'll guarantee they're nothing like those someone at the other end of his gun has."

"That's why I didn't send him back—we need him out here. But he's one more reason not to take those folks with us. I really don't know how far to trust him."

Brooks got the hostages together and explained what Teller had planned. The first woman, Mary Reiner, didn't appear worried about the trip across the thin trestle at all. In fact, the scout got the impression she was relieved to be leaving the island. Well, she could certainly understand that—amusement park or not, the place was starting to give her the willies too.

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They waited in the terminal until the former hostages had moved out of sight in the darkness—which wasn't that far. The night seemed extraordinarily dark; none of them could see more than a few dozen feet. Teller supposed he should be grateful, after all, the dark would be a bigger help to them than the raiders. Still, he couldn't shake a general feeling of uneasiness about moving into the shadowy park.

The two men spread out, one to each side of the street that led away from the terminal. Their footsteps seemed to echo with an unnatural sharpness off the darkened buildings to either side of the street. Teller had his pistol out, but close to his body, so it couldn't be snatched away easily by a sudden attack. Roth, on the other hand, had left his pistols holstered. Teller was supposed he should be grateful that at least he was considerate enough to move with some stealth.

Brooks kept a short distance back and covered them as they moved forward. She found herself looking over her shoulder every so often, almost expecting to see *something* creeping stealthily up from behind. The group covered almost half of the first section of street when the truly unexpected happened.

The park's lights flickered to life!

Chapter Five

All three heroes darted for cover. They found themselves standing on a cobblestone street in the middle of what appeared to be a small town. The buildings to either side were one to two stories tall and painted beige, with maroon shingles on the roof. Teller noted the structures were designed in old American Gothic style, like something out of an old Rockwell painting. However, the color scheme combined with rows of darkened windows made the row of stores and restaurants resemble a line of gigantic bloody skulls rather than a middle-American shopping district.

"Bandits?" asked Brooks in a low voice.

"Don't know. I guess it's possible," Teller answered. "We'd better find a place to hole up until we know what's going on here."

"Up ahead across the square there's a large building with a clock tower," Roth nodded down the street. "Looks like a church of some sort."

Teller could see the building from his position, but thought it was probably supposed to be a town hall. The first order of business was getting under cover, and the large building was a good a spot as any. Besides the tower might give Brooks a place to settle in with her rifle.

Leapfrogging from one doorway to the next, they quickly moved further up the street. When they reached the large square, they split and followed the ring of buildings around the open

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area. Teller and Brooks moved along the southern edge while Roth moved north. In the center of the square, Teller saw a large, sculpted, stone fountain. Off to the north he was fairly certain he heard the sound of a calliope—whoever had turned on the lights had gotten the rides running too. In the distance, he even thought he could hear the clanking roar of a roller coaster.

The rides could complicate matters for the searchers—the movement and noise would make it difficult to spot the bandits until they were on top of each other.

They reached the town hall with no further incidents, although Brooks seemed on edge when they stopped outside the building's double doors. Apparently, the town hall was actually a theater designed to look like an idealized town seat. A pair of show schedules flanked the doors, but the dates were over a decade old.

"Anybody see anything?" Teller asked as he scanned along the way they'd come.

"Nope," Brooks answered. Roth merely shook his head. Teller tried the doors and found them unlocked. He and Roth went through simultaneously, alternately sweeping right and left over the lobby. The large anteroom was bare, but doorways in the opposite wall led into the main theater. Stairs branched to the left and right, presumably leading to balcony seating. He pointed Roth to one of the downstairs doors and motioned Brooks toward the stairs.

Each of the men took a door and moved into the large audience chamber. Thick, red drapes hung along the walls, and other than a row of footlights on stage, soft, yellow seating lamps provided the only light. They began to quickly scan the rows, but the stage drew their attention almost immediately.

A man stood in the center of the stage, his head down, but his arms spread wide. He was dressed in a black tuxedo—something Teller hadn't seen since shortly after the first shots were fired in the Last War. On his head was a top hat just short of being ridiculously tall. The two moved cautiously down the side rows toward the figure. Teller saw Roth had drawn his pistols—something he'd not done since the fight at the terminal.

The man's head raised from his chest and a spotlight illuminated him from above, making strange shadows on his face. The storyteller thought he heard the sound of faint, muffled laughter coming from somewhere in the direction of the stage, but the man on stage didn't seem to be the source.

"Don't move!" Teller shouted, leveling his 10mm at the figure on the stage.

The man's head turned to face him, although the rest of his body stayed oddly still. He could tell the man was wearing some sort of makeup as well. The man's face broke into a parody of a grin and spoke a rhyme in a singsong falsetto voice:

"Welcome my friends to the Hell that never ends,

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"Come inside, it's time to die.

"We've been waiting for so long for a precious soul to rend,

"Come inside, it's time to die."

As soon as the speaker finished, his head slumped back to the chest. Then his skeleton seemed to lose its rigidity, and he poured, more than fell, to a heap on the stage. Roth rushed down the aisle and vaulted to the stage, somehow managing to keep a pistol on the figure at all times.

"This one's dead," he called to Teller.

"How? Can you tell?"

"Bear in mind I'm no doctor, but I'm guessing this three-inch whole in the back of his head might have something to do with it."

Teller scanned the theater and saw Brooks had reached the balcony. She gave him a nod indicating she had them covered and he climbed onto the stage as well. Roth was right, it didn't take a medical expert to see what had killed this man.

What the gunslinger hadn't mentioned was that the blood around the wound was already congealed—and there was none on the tuxedo itself. It looked like the man had been dead for some time and whoever had killed him had changed his clothes afterward. How the corpse had been able to recite bad poetry from beyond the grave, Teller had no idea, but he had seen stranger things—or at least as strange.

A moment later, he realized the faint laughter he'd heard before the dead man had spoken was gone.

He and Roth searched the area backstage while Brooks looked for a way to get into the clock tower. The only thing they found behind the curtain was a single, bloody handprint on a mirror in one of the dressing rooms. There was no sign of who—or what—was responsible for the dead man on the stage. They didn't even know whether he'd been an escaped captive or one of the bandits. Teller hoped for the latter—if that was the case, it meant one less bullet they'd have to spend later.

They met the scout back in the main auditorium.

"Any luck?"

"I got up into the tower," Brooks said, "but I don't think I'll be much use up there. There's a lot of ground clutter in the park—all those rides moving keep me from getting a clear view of almost anywhere. To the south, there's also a small, wooded area. With no commo, I'd lose track of you way too easy."

"Alright, you'll just have to find firing positions as we go."

Teller looked at his companions, "Any suggestions where we go from here?"

"North," Roth answered. "Someone's got those rides going over there."

"Actually, they're up all over the park," Brooks volunteered.

"There's even a roller coaster running on the other side of the island. And there's something else..."

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"What's that?" Teller prompted after she didn't continue.

"Well, I didn't get a good look—it darted behind a ride before I could be sure. You're going to think I'm crazy, but I think I saw a clown."

Chapter Six

As they walked through the northern section of the park—called the Octopus' Garden, according to a sign at the entrance—it was like stepping into an old traveling carnival. Hawkers' booths lined the area, filled with rigged games and unwinnable prizes. The rides were running their endless circles and, every now and then, Teller could almost swear he caught the scent of cotton candy or caramel apples.

The games had been waiting patiently for years for some poor sucker to give his luck a try, but no taunting voices called out from hucksters or con artists, daring them to try their luck—the booths were all long empty. After the first few booths, Teller decided he wouldn't want to claim any of them, even if they were free for the taking. Eyeless dolls lined the shelves of one booth. Another contained a mix of stuffed animals, all seeming to watch the group from their perches with an oddly predatory glare. But, most disturbing of all were the clown dolls that appeared in nearly every booth. Even if Brooks hadn't thought she'd seen one scurrying under cover like some brightly-colored cockroach, the small figures would have made him uneasy—he'd never liked clowns.

Calliope music filled the air, but it seemed *wrong*, somehow. Maybe it was played in a minor key, or just struck an occasional off-note, but it raised Teller's hackles. For all the color and sound, he felt menaced in a way he'd couldn't remember ever feeling. Almost like an insect being lured to a slow, painful death by the sweet smell of a Venus flytrap. Carnivals had that effect on him—he couldn't shake the feeling that all the glitter and light was just a thin veneer designed to draw unsuspecting victims to some unimaginable fate.

"There!" Brooks yelled suddenly. "I just saw one! It cartwheeled across that open space!" Both men whirled to look, but neither man saw anything.

"You sure, Brooks? It looks clear to me." Teller scanned the area. With the multicolored booths and moving rides, it would be nearly impossible to see someone dressed in clown garb—if they didn't want to be seen, that is.

"You know," he mused, "you'd think a place called the Octopus' Garden would have an Octopus ride in it, wouldn't you? But I don't see one anywhere--those things are pretty obvious. They look like huge spiders."

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"I'm a little more concerned with what is here, sneaking around right now, than with what *isn't*, Teller!"

"Shh..." Roth whispered. "Listen." Underneath the twisted caliope music, they could hear the faint but distinct sound of a man screaming.

* * *

All the other sounds in the park made it difficult to pinpoint the source. Eventually, they tracked the screams to a large, circus-tent-like structure near the northern edge of the Octopus' Garden. By the time they reached the large building, the man's voice had begun to falter.

A fancifully written sign over the opening said "The Octopus' Arcade" and was held by two of the arms of a purple, cartoon octopus. Like everything they'd seen, the octopus seemed sinister and threatening. Walking under the sign, Teller felt a twinge of fear that one of the creature's other arms might reach down to grab him. However, he knew it was nothing more than a sign and he was letting the park get to him.

They carefully entered the arcade and found themselves confronted with a maze of electronic games, most of which had long since shorted out. Enough remained operative, though, to raise a cacophony of noise even more confusing than the carnival midway. Teller motioned for the group to split up.

Brooks lifted an eyebrow and looked at him with concern, as if to ask if he was sure that was a good idea. Teller nodded—he wasn't thrilled about splitting up himself, but somewhere in here there was a man in mortal danger, judging from the sound of the raspy screams. If they didn't find him fast, they might just find his remains.

He took one of the center aisles and moved as quickly as he dared through the machines. Every so often, a burst of sound from one of the games startled him, causing him to take aim on the machine until he realized what had happened. Finally he reached the back row of games. Teller heard the screams clearly from his right. His pistol ready to fire, he spun into the open area.

"Nobody move!" Expecting to see one of the hostages being tortured by some of the bandits, he was totally unprepared for what actually awaited him.

A clown-thing stood in front of an old Whack-a-Mole game. The creature was man-sized and at a distance would have looked exactly like a circus performer. However, up close it was a walking nightmare.

The monster's skin was a cadaverous white and the upper layer of flesh appeared to be sloughing off in places. Its nose was a swollen red protuberance from the center of its face. While it was wearing makeup around its mouth, the thing's maw was much larger than a human's, reaching nearly from ear to ear and filled with dozens of pointed teeth. Dead black eyes sat

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under its distorted eyebrows, and a pinpoint of red shown in the center of each.

It was wearing brightly colored, silken clothing, but the striped pattern on its shirt was spattered with spots of dark red. In its hands—which were also a pasty white and ended in yellowed claws—the clown-thing held a bloody fire ax. Teller could hear the same crazed laughter coming from the monster he'd heard in the town hall.

The blood on its clothing and weapon came from the Whack-a-Mole game in front of it. Instead of small, animatronic moles, the creature was swatting at human heads. It had already hit five of its six targets—some a couple of times. The final head was the source of the screaming.

Even though his gun was drawn, the clown-thing so unnerved him that Teller couldn't fire. The clown stepped back from its "game" and turned toward him. It raised one hand and waggled its clawed fingers back and forth in a parody of a wave, then it took a slow and exaggerated step to its left. In the blink of an eye, the creature had disappeared into the labyrinth of game machines.

Teller squeezed off a shot after the monster, more to snap himself out of his trance than anything else. He heard his companions yell out from opposite sides of the arcade.

"I'm all right, but watch yourselves," he answered. "There's... something loose in here."

In spite of the man's pleas, Teller waited until the others arrived before he let him out of the game. Otherwise, the storyteller would have had to turn his back on the maze behind him. The thought of an ax-wielding clown-thing creeping up from behind as he worked on the box made his skin crawl.

"Believe me now? I told you!" said Brooks when Teller told them what had happened. She seemed almost pleased someone else had seen the clown.

"Uhm," said a voice from behind them. "*I really* appreciate you folks comin' along when you did—I really do. But when you've finished chattin', I'd appreciate it if you could find it in your hearts to GET ME OUT OF THIS BOX BEFORE THAT THING COMES BACK!"

Chapter Seven

It took a few minutes of effort to free the man, especially since Teller insisted one of them keep watch at all times. As they worked, it became obvious that while the others in the game were bandits, the survivor likely wasn't. The corpses were all wearing the same piecemeal armor as the goons in the station, whereas the other man was dressed in simple work clothing.

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The survivor had a number of nicks and cuts on his head—apparently the clown-thing had come close several times. Small rivulets of blood ran down the side of his face like sweat.

“Who are you and what are you doing on this island?” Teller was pretty sure the man was one of the escaped townsfolk, but with all that he’d seen since arriving at the park, he thought he’d best be sure.

“My name’s Tom Ernst. I’ll tell you, bein’ cramped up in that box sure can stiffen your limbs,” he added rubbing his arms and legs. “Them fellers was road bandits. They raided my village and dragged me and some others out here to this island.”

“We’re here to take you and the others home,” Teller said.

“We’ve already released the three in the terminal, now we’re tracking down those of you who made a break earlier. Do you know where the others are?”

“Me, Diane, and Fred—those are the other two what got away—split up when we got into the park,” Tom answered. “I think Diane was headin’ for the other side of the island, and Fred made a break for that forest to the north. I don’t know what happened to them, but that clown-thing caught me pretty quick.

He continued, “A few hours later, it rounded up these other fellows—they’re all bandit scum, good riddance—and stuck us in this box. If you folks hadn’t come along, I guess I’d a been joinin’ them bandits real soon.”

“What was that monster?” Teller asked.

“Mister, I got no idea—but I don’t relish the thought of runnin’ into it again.”

“Can’t say as I blame you. We’re going to round up your friends before we leave. Make your way back to the main entrance and follow the trestle back to the mainland. There’s a group of townsfolk there—you’ll be safe with them.”

“No offense, mister, but I’m not walkin’ around this place alone. I’ll stick with you folks if you don’t mind.”

“Teller,” Roth interrupted. “Counting these five and the eight we waxed back in the terminal, we’ve got maybe six scavs left out here—seven tops. And I think we can assume the thing in the auditorium was what was left of one of the raiders.”

“Makes sense,” Teller agreed, “But we’ve got these other clowns to worry about now.”

In spite of his better judgement, Teller eventually relented and allowed Ernst to stay. At least the man gave them another pair of eyes, even if he was a tactical liability.

After a brief discussion, the group decided to head north, into the small patch of woods on that side of the island. The woods were fairly close, and they had only a vague idea where the third escapee, Diane Felton, had hidden. If they could find Morton, he might be able to narrow the search area down a little for them.

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More importantly, it got them out of the bizarre carnival. Everyone agreed the twirling rides and multicolored buildings were a tactical nightmare. It was all too easy to be distracted by the motion and sound surrounding the area. However, Teller had no doubt his companions had another reason for wanting to get away from the Octopus' Garden as soon as possible.

No part of the carnival area was quite right—not the rides, not the games, nothing. The merry-go-round horses bared their teeth in a permanent carnivorous snarl instead of a playful whinny. Screams of tortured metal echoed from the ominous ferris wheel at random. Even the colors of the booths seemed putrid and fading.

The woods might be lonely, dark, and deep, but at least a maniacal clown wouldn't be able to hide among the trees like it could in the multicolored jungle of the Octopus' Garden.

Once or twice they caught a glimpse of a clown stalking them as they crossed the Anytown portion of the park, but never for long. It was as if the creatures wanted them to know they were being followed. Teller had to admit there was something very disturbing about being hunted by a monster in happy-face—particularly when it had large, sharp objects in hand.

Normally, he'd have been worried about being herded into a trap of some sort, but the things didn't seem to be trying to force them into any particular direction. Rather, he thought they might be waiting for a straggler to lag behind the group. Then, he was sure they'd pounce on the unlucky victim like a pack of kaleidoscopic jackals.

Sometimes he cursed his own imagination.

Chapter Eight

As they got closer, Teller started to question the wisdom of heading for the woods. Dark shadows ahead of them marked the beginning of the small, forested area on the island's northern edge. As they approached, Teller began to wonder if the place were really a better choice than the carnival.

Underneath a wood-carved sign proclaiming "Welcome to the Enchanted Wood," a small path led deeper into the forest. The path was lit occasionally by gently swinging lanterns, and, although the lights were designed to resemble old kerosene lamps, a soft yellow electric bulb glowed within each. The small pools of light they created were widely spaced along the trail, leaving large swaths of shadow across the path.

Long, scraggly tree limbs stretched over the trail, making the path seem like a tunnel. The weak lanterns swayed in the light breeze, causing shadows to rush out toward the group and dart

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back into the woods. They could no longer hear the calliope music from the Octopus' Garden, but the wind rustled the leaves above them, creating a soft whispering that blurred every other noise around them.

"Is it just me, or does anyone else hear something wandering around out there?" Brooks asked.

"I do!" volunteered Ernst. "Sounds like something big walkin' around."

"Shh!" Teller whispered. "If there is something out there, talking about it is just going to let it know where we are."

They soon found the Enchanted Woods were laced with enough trails to confuse a well-trained lab rat. After they passed the third intersection, it was clear they'd have to come up with a plan for exploring the forest.

"We could leave a trail of bread crumbs," Brooks joked halfheartedly.

"Yeah and we all know how that story ends, don't we?" Roth answered.

"We'll take a right at every intersection," Teller said. "Then, even if we don't find Morton, at least we won't get lost as well."

After a few more crossroads and a cul-de-sac or two, the group entered a small meadow. In the center of the clearing, there rested a box or package of some sort. A number of pathways lead out of the open area, but the meadow was otherwise empty. Still, they'd learned not to trust anything on the island.

"I'll check it out," Roth said and without waiting for a response, he strode into the clearing.

"Damn! Brooks, cover him—Ernst get down."

Roth reached the object in the meadow and knelt beside it. He holstered one of his pistols and picked something up from within. He looked at it briefly, dropped it back into the box, and then picked the whole thing up by a pair of handles that had been folded out of sight.

As he walked back toward them, Brooks looked up from her scope and said, "It's a picnic basket."

Roth dropped the basket on the ground at Teller's feet and shrugged his shoulders. The storyteller bent over and pulled a bread roll out of the basket; it was stale and molded.

"You know," Teller began, "this reminds me of the story about..."

He was interrupted as a piece of cloth was carried by the wind into the middle of the group. He caught it before it blew away and held it up. Large, jagged rents had been torn into it, but it was still plainly a small, red cape.

"...Little Red Riding Hood," he finished.

"All the better to eat you with," added Roth.

* * *

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Nearly 20 minutes after discovering the picnic basket, the path brought the small band to a shed nestled against the trees. The shack, made of planks, appeared haphazardly thrown together, but it had weathered over a decade on the island. Teller presumed it was merely a prop, constructed to resemble a ramshackle hut. A single door was the only way into the shack.

Teller and Roth walked cautiously to the shed while Brooks kept her rifle aimed at the door. Ernst stood behind the sniper, fighting the urge to cower. At Teller's signal, Roth kicked the door open and dropped to a knee in the opening. From his left, Teller scanned the opposite of the interior, giving the scout a clear shot into the doorway.

"Got one down in here," Roth yelled. "Otherwise, clear!"

Teller motioned Brooks and Ernst to the hut and went in himself. The body on the floor was very much alive, but tied and gagged. The storyspinner pulled the gag down and turned to Ernst.

"That's Fred!" he exclaimed. Teller sat the man up and began loosening his bonds.

"Boy, are you folks a sight for sore eyes," the man said. "I didn't know what was going to come through that door, but I didn't expect anything good—somethin' big's been snufflin' around the outside of this hut since nightfall. I tried to hide in these woods after I got loose, but these circus midget-lookin' things got a' hold of me and tied me up."

Brooks looked nervously over her shoulder at the surrounding woods. "I'm going to stay out here and make sure nothing gets the drop on us, Teller."

"Good idea, but don't get too comfortable—we're not staying long," Teller turned back Morton. "You have any idea where Felton may have gone? We're here to take you folks home."

"She took off straight across the island, but I'm not sure where to exactly. There's a roller coaster just west of here, she might have headed toward it."

Just then, an ear-piercing howl erupted from the darkened woods nearby. Teller jumped to his feet and headed for the open door.

"Hey, boss!" Brooks yelled, "We've got something big inbound!" She started to say more, but her words were cut short by her own terrified scream. Both Teller and Roth rushed out into the clearing to see what had so frightened the sniper.

Standing a mere 10 feet from the house stood a wolflike monstrosity that Teller at first took to be a bloodwolf, but then he realized it was far too large. Covered in coarse, black fur, the thing stood nearly nine feet tall on doglike hind legs, and its long, vulpine ears probably added another six inches. A thick, viscous drool poured from between its vicious fangs, and it rhythmically clenched and unclenched its long claw-like hands as it stalked toward Brooks.

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The monster glanced toward the two men, and Teller saw its eyes carried the same red inner glow he'd noticed on the clown-thing. When the creature turned away, Brooks—who, up until then, had been staring in horror at the abomination—regained her composure. She started to bring her rifle to her shoulder, but the movement caught the monster's attention.

The creature looked back at the scout, and to Teller it seemed to almost smile and shake its head in a reproving manner. He half-expected to hear a “tch, tch” come from its horrid mouth. Brooks hesitated and the monster's body tensed and appeared to momentarily swell.

Suddenly, it thrust its body forward and let out a blast of air directly at Brooks. Taken completely off-guard by the wolf-thing's action, the gust caused her to stumble backward and lose her balance. She landed hard on her back and her rifle skittered out of her grasp.

Roth recovered from the shock before Teller and fired both pistols into the thing. He might as well have been pitching pebbles at the monstrosity—all he succeeded in doing was drawing its attention. The creature began to walk toward the gunslinger, slowly and deliberately placing one massive foot in front of the other. Roth continued to fire at the abomination, but to no effect.

The monster reached Roth and lowered its head until it was nearly eye to eye with the man. A huge glob of drool slipped out of its mouth and stretched to the ground. The gunslinger stopped shooting with his left hand and brought his right pistol to shoulder level and continued to fire with it out of sheer defiance. Teller saw the thing draw back one of its claws—if it hit, it would probably tear the man in two.

He launched himself at Roth and the two men went sprawling onto the ground as the thing attacked. Teller felt his jacket snag and rip as the claw narrowly missed his back. The impact with the ground stunned Roth and he laid face down, gasping for breath. Teller rolled over onto his back to see the monster looming over him.

Its mouth was less than a foot away and he felt the spatter of drool fall on his chest. He tried to bring his pistol up, but the creature pinned his arm to the ground with a vice-like grip.

“Here, piggy-piggy. Here, piggy-piggy,” the thing taunted in a deep, rumbling growl. Teller turned his head away as the thing slowly brought its maw toward him. He had no desire to watch his own mauling.

A loud crack sounded from off to the left and he instinctively rolled away from the monster. A heavy thump behind him told Teller his instincts had been right. He pushed himself to his feet and looked at the body of the fallen monster.

“Sorry I took so long,” Brooks apologized from her spot on the ground a dozen feet away.

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Teller started to respond, but noticed the monster's chest was beginning to swell to ridiculous proportions.

"Take cover!" he yelled running for the shelter of the tree line. "I think it's going to..." There was a loud thud and a wave of pressure knocked him to the ground. All around him, bits of burned hair and warm liquid showered down. After his ears stopped ringing, he stood up and walked back to the others.

"Everyone okay?" he asked, brushing himself off.

"I caught a piece of debris in my leg," Brooks said.

Teller took a look at the wound. It was light, but he figured it might slow her down a little. Still, as long as she didn't have to carry any weight or do any climbing, he thought she would be able to keep up. Roth, like Teller, had managed to avoid any serious injury from the explosion.

"Any idea what that was?" Roth asked. The normally calm and collected gunman was a little unsettled by a creature that was nearly invulnerable to his weapons.

"Since wolves don't normally explode—not even werewolves—I'm thinking we might be dealing with some sort of automatons," Teller told the group. "I noticed the same sort of odd light in this thing's eyes as I did in the clown's. I'm betting what we're looking at here is what happens when animatronics go bad."

"So what do we do?"

"We find Felton and get the Hell out of here, ASAP. And I'm pretty sure the place to start looking is the roller coaster."

"What makes you think that?" Roth said.

"I've been hearing that thing clatter and roar all night, haven't you? Well, it just went dead quiet a couple of minutes ago."

Chapter Nine

The shack proved to be near the opposite edge of the woods and they were able to find their way out quickly. The trail they were following brought them out near the base of the immense coaster. Looking up at the colossal structure, he was glad he'd thought to gather up the rope Morton had been tied up with—he had a feeling they were going to need it.

Built of tubular steel construction, the ride rose over twenty stories at its highest point and contained three vertical loops. The coaster was painted black with red and orange highlights, giving it the appearance of a still burning fire. From their position, they were unable to make out any unusual details—the web of girders and rails prevented even Brooks' sniper scope from penetrating too far into the tangle.

With Teller now in the lead, they made their way around the side of the thrill ride to the boarding area at the front. Once they rounded the end of the coaster, Teller saw one of the cars was sitting at the top of the main hill with the front seat dangling over a 200-foot-plus fall.

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"Brooks, take a look up there." The storyteller pointed to the halted ride.

"I think we just found our lady, Teller. There's a woman in there—she looks like she's chained to the safety bars." Brooks lowered the rifle from her shoulder. "I don't think it's necessary to add she doesn't look too happy."

"It's almost too obvious to be a trap," Teller said, "but we can't leave until we get her down. These things had a maintenance walk along the tracks. We should be able find a way onto it from the boarding area."

The passenger boarding station rested on the southern side of the coaster on the edge of a small lake that separated it from the Octopus' Garden. At the bottom of the ramp leading up to the coaster, there was a sign with a small, evil-looking devil holding a measuring stick. A word bubble said: "You must be at least this tall to ride the Screamin' Demon. Please secure all loose items before boarding. This ride is not recommended for pregnant mothers, people with high blood pressure or heart conditions." The last half of the sentence had been scratched partially out and replaced by "anyone still living."

Nylon belts stretched from pylon to pylon creating a narrow and meandering course for the hordes of customers that once waited hours for a few minutes' excitement. While Teller and the others could have simply stepped over the guides, Brooks' injury prevented her from doing so. Instead, Roth produced a serrated belt knife and proceeded to cut a path through the flimsy labyrinth for her.

The waiting area itself was decorated like some cartoonist's vision of Hell. Flames adorned the walls of the platform and the support columns had been covered in fiberglass modeled to look like rock pylons. Oily-black demonic statues with long, serpentine tails and wielding pitchforks sat on spires near the entrance. After all they'd experienced, Teller kept a close eye on the guardians as they passed near them.

Red-tinted, fluorescent bulbs lit the station. The lights flickered constantly, making the painted flames dance on the walls. Screams and wails emanated from hidden loudspeakers in the walls and rafters, completing the illusion of a trip to the Underworld.

When they reached the boarding platform, they saw one of the cars was sitting at the gate. It looked like an old, rusted mine cart on the bottom, but the seats were demons with vile grins on their faces. Their clawed hands clasped together to form the safety bars for the passengers.

"Oh, that's just lovely," Brooks said. "Who came up with this little bit of Hell?"

"At one time," Teller responded, "I believe it was the most popular roller coaster around. The atmosphere added to the thrill for some folks, I guess."

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"You're in no shape to go climbing around on this thing," he continued. "Why don't you have Ernst and Morton help you find a good firing position. I'll head up there and get the woman loose."

"I'm going, too," Roth added. Teller gave him a doubtful look, but Roth patted his pistols and added, "These are pretty much useless down here if you get into trouble up there."

"Fine," Teller said. "But you carry the rope." He tossed the gunslinger the short coil just a little harder than necessary.

* * *

Teller and Roth found the maintenance walkway entrance near the boarding station. The catwalk itself was narrow—barely a foot wide—and only occasionally had a safety rail alongside it. At the base of the first hill, the catwalk became a set of precarious, wire-frame stairs. Teller wasn't exactly thrilled about climbing the cramped steps nearly 20 stories up the coaster, but there was no other way to reach Felton at the top.

"They were all cannibals," the gunslinger said about halfway up the climb.

"Excuse me?"

"That town in Kansas," Roth continued. "Everyone in it was a cannibal—if that makes a difference to you. They lured in solitary travelers and small caravans. I guess they thought it was easier than raising their own food."

Teller had never heard that part of the story and he doubted many others had either. "How'd you know?"

"They tried to use me as an appetizer. I took issue with that."

"So you killed them, every single person..."

"Rot has to be cut out, Teller—whether it's part of the body or society. it doesn't get better—it festers and spreads." The storyteller had no ready answer to Roth's remark, so he changed the subject.

"Why haven't you told anyone what really happened?"

"Probably because I am a bad person," Roth answered after a while. "I've done some things I'm not proud of—things nobody will ever know about. So, in a way, it's only justice that people hold me accountable for one of the few good things I've done. Besides, it keeps most people from getting too friendly."

"You really don't strike me as the 'sensitive and vulnerable' type, Roth."

"I'm not, but people have a habit of dying around me—whether I like 'em or not. I tried putting up my guns once...that didn't work. So I just decided to stop liking people. Makes life easier."

"And death, too. Right?" Teller intended the remark as sarcasm, but the gunslinger didn't take it that way.

"And death too."

"So why are you here?" he asked. "Why come along to rescue a bunch of people you've never met?"

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"I didn't come to rescue them, Teller. I came to kill the people that kidnapped them. That's what I'm good at, so that's what I do."

Roth's last comment pretty much ended Teller's desire to talk to the man. They reached the top of the main hill, and without any conversation to distract him, Teller felt a slight rush of vertigo. He got a firm grip on the railing, which seemed too frail to serve as a safety device, and focused on the car just around the curve ahead.

Molded fiberglass painted to resemble flames lined the outside of the curve as they neared the drop. As fragile as the molding seemed, it did block a little of the yawning space around them and helped steady his nerves.

"Felton!" he called out as they neared the car. A weak, breathless "help me" was the only reply he got from the woman. When they got closer, he could tell she was nearly paralyzed with fear.

"We're here to get you home," he said. "But first we're going to have to get you off this ride."

"Oh, thank God" she sobbed. "I hate heights." Looking at the gaping drop in front of her, Teller silently agreed with her.

Chapter Ten

With the help of Ernst and Morton, Brooks was able to climb up on top of the boarding station. The roof was relatively flat, and the site gave her an excellent view of most of the roller coaster. The only part she wasn't able to target easily was the portion of the coaster that passed directly overhead.

Her leg was aching terribly—far more than she expected. She began to wonder if perhaps a piece of shrapnel wasn't still stuck in the wound. Of course, it could just be she was getting old—it had been nearly two decades since she'd been a green recruit back in Basic Training, after all. Still, she spent a large part of the time Teller and Roth were climbing the coaster shifting positions trying to find a comfortable one.

She finally managed to get her leg situated so it didn't feel like someone was prodding her with a hot needle. By then, the men were approaching the stopped car. She chuckled softly to herself as she looked through the scope—Teller did not appear to be enjoying himself on the tiny walkway.

Brooks pulled her eye away to scan the area and a flash of color on the side of the coaster caught her eye. She brought the scope back up to get a better look and saw one of the clown things scaling the side of the coaster like a huge, brightly-hued spider. Quickly she panned about the structural supports beneath the track and picked out two more of the monsters. However, the network of cross-beams combined with the things' movement made it impossible to get a clear shot.

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She knew she had to take some action—the clowns were only a few feet from the tracks! Once again, she cursed the fact they had no tactical radio communications. That left her only one option.

She drew aim carefully and squeezed the first of the rifle's two triggers. When she was sure of her target, she pressed the second and fired at the top of the coaster.

* * *

The bullet ricocheting off the walkway between them immediately caught the attention of both men. Teller looked around for the source and saw Brooks gesturing frantically from the top of the boarding station.

"Teller," Roth said from behind him. "You'd better hurry. We've got a problem."

He turned around and saw the gunslinger tying off one end of the rope he'd given him to the base of the safety rail. As he watched, a chalky white hand with long, yellowed claws gripped the top of the rail. First one of the clown-things pulled itself up to the walkway, then a second. Felton's sharp intake of breath warned him of the third rising on the other side of the car.

"Get her loose," Roth said in his too-calm voice. "I'll handle these clowns."

He'd had no luck unlocking the safety bar from his side of the car, so Teller hopped into the seat behind Felton to reach the opposite latch. Almost as soon as his feet hit the floor of the ride, he felt something break loose beneath the car and it began to roll down the 200-foot drop!

* * *

The clowns presented a much better target silhouetted on the walkway than they had scaling the coaster. The dot of her laser targeting device appeared on the first monster's forehead and Brooks slowly squeezed the first trigger. She felt the satisfying click as the device set the firing pin.

As she prepared to send the clown-thing a .50 caliber greeting card, searing agony burned up her leg and she was dragged backward. The pain caused her to involuntarily squeeze the second trigger sending the round harmlessly off into the night. Looking over her shoulder, she saw another of the monsters had crept up on her while she was focused on the coaster.

The creature was a shorter, plumper version of the ones she'd seen earlier, but no less menacing. It had sunk one of its claws into the wound in her leg and was twisting it around. Worse yet, it was doing this from five feet away—the thing's snakelike arm was unnaturally long. Brooks couldn't even kick the monster away!

Biting her lip to focus, she rolled over, knocking the thing's hand loose with her other foot. She didn't have the time for an

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aimed shot, so she pulled the rifle up to her hip and fired a round at the monster's center of mass. The half-inch wide bullet caught the clown square in the chest and knocked it onto its backside. Not one to miss an opportunity, she squeezed off a second round into the thing and it fell back onto the roof.

Seconds later, its body began to bubble and hiss—in moments, all that was left was a swirling puddle of colors.

She took a deep breath and shook her head to clear the pain. Placing the rifle butt beside her as a brace, she pushed herself back to her stomach. And found herself face to face with another of the abominations that had scaled the other side of the roof!

Before she could react, it grabbed her by the hair and yanked her off the roof.

* * *

"Well," Roth said as the car rolled over the edge, "that makes things a whole lot simpler."

He dropped the rest of the coil of rope beside him and stood up to meet the things as they walked toward him. The monsters moved forward with a grotesquely loose-limbed walk—almost as if they had no support in their legs whatsoever.

Drawing both his pistols, he put two rounds into the first monster. The impact slowed the creature a bit, but didn't stop it. If these were a type of automaton like Teller thought, Roth doubted he'd stop the things with gut shots. Instead, he holstered his guns and charged the nearest one.

The monster made no attempt to defend itself. Instead it spread its arms wide—really wide. Roth figured the creature's limbs were at least five feet long! He grabbed the clown's billowing shirt and launched himself out over the rail. The maneuver caught the thing off-guard and it was dragged with him.

As Roth fell, he hoped the knots he'd tied on the rope under his duster would hold—not that he was worried about dying, only missing a chance to take a few more of the monsters with him. As luck would have it, the rope did stay tied and he was snapped to a stop about twenty feet below the rail. He released his hold on the clown, but the thing's long arms caught a grip on his waist and pulled itself back up to him.

"Surprise," he said. Roth pulled his pistols back out and planted a barrel into each of the monster's eyes. "I'll bet these work much better here," he added as he pulled the triggers. The clown's head snapped back and he felt its grip weaken and then slip.

A tug on the rope turned his attention back to the track. A second clown had climbed out over the flame molding to reach for the rope. It was beginning to saw through Roth's lifeline with one of its claws.

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"I didn't forget about you either," the gunslinger said as he raised his pistols to fire. Squeezing off four rounds in rapid succession, he missed the thing with every bullet. Even the grinning monstrosity perched above him seemed surprised. Roth smiled up at the clown and aimed one last shot. As he pulled the trigger, the abomination realized he'd never been firing at it. The final bullet sheered the last of the fiberglass molding from its attachment and the clown went pinwheeling down the side of the coaster.

* * *

"Hold on!" Teller shouted and then realized he was the only one not strapped in. He grabbed the back of the seat with both hands. Felton began to scream in a high-pitched wail not unlike the sound of fingernails on a slate blackboard. As the car picked up speed, he felt his stomach—and the rest of his body—beginning to rise from the car.

He scrambled to find a safe position for himself. Teller was pretty sure he was okay for the next few seconds, but he remembered somewhere along the coaster's track there were three vertical loops. He had no desire to be thrown out in the middle of one. As he fought to secure himself behind Felton, he noticed they weren't alone—the third clown had gotten into the car behind his!

The thing was clambering over the seats and almost on top of him. Teller pulled his pistol and fired a shot at the monster. The bullet hit the clown, but had little effect. He'd hoped he was wrong about the things being a form of automaton, but evidently he hadn't been. In spite of the gun's ineffectiveness, he decided to keep shooting—it beat just standing there waiting to be killed.

It stretched its arms across the opening toward him and Teller leaned against the seat backs behind him. Its hideous fingers fell just inches shy of his throat. Abruptly, the monster stopped its attack and reached behind it to grab the safety bars in its own car. Teller suspected a trick, but then remembered—the loops!

Quickly, he turned and wrapped his arms around the bar on the unoccupied front seat and just in time. The car began an impossibly steep ascent and then passed through the vertical. At the beginning of the loop, the centrifugal force held him in the car, but as it neared the top, the car had lost enough speed for him to begin to slide out. Then the car was through the loop and on the downhill slope.

Teller used the momentum from the loop to pull himself into the front seat. Felton was screaming hysterically in a hoarse voice, but he did his best to ignore the woman. By the time he was situated and again facing the rear of the coaster, the clown-thing had climbed into the back of his own car. He fired another round at the monster just to keep it honest and braced himself for the next loop.

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As the car roared down the opposite side of the second loop, Teller realized there was only one loop left in the ride. After that, he'd better have some plan for dealing with the creature.

The monster's serpentine arms slithered over the back of the seat to secure a grip on Teller's safety bars. While the pistol didn't seem to actually damage the monster seriously, Teller took some satisfaction in knowing it didn't want to get shot any more than necessary. However, he was sure as soon as the final loop was finished, the clown-thing would be on him as soon as it could drag itself over the seat, pistol or no.

He risked a peek over the front of the car before it hit the last loop. There, at the bottom of the down slope, he saw something that gave him an idea. Teller reversed his position in the seat, so that his shoulders rested on the lip of the leg space and his feet were wedged against the upper part of the safety bar. That put his legs dangerously close to the clown's claws, but he'd have to risk it—and hope he could keep himself in the car through the top part of the loop.

The car rattled through the loop and slowed again at the top. In his contorted position, Teller felt himself begin to pitch forward into the void. Then, a hand grabbed his arm and held him in place through the rest of the inversion. Felton wrenched her eyes away from the track in front of them just long enough to say, "You're not leaving me here alone, mister."

He smiled and began to reassure her, but was interrupted by the monster in the back. The car hadn't even completed the loop and the thing was already scrambling over the back seat.

Teller waited until the clown's entire body was over the seat back. Taking his pistol in a two-handed grip, he brought it up and fired at the safety latch on the side of the seat. Luck was with him and the first bullet snapped the metal retainer off. He kicked up with his legs, bouncing the monster up off the back of the seat.

Just as the creature reared up, the car entered the tunnel at the base of the loop he'd seen moments before. The clown's head smacked into the center of a sign saying "Please keep hands and arms inside the ride." Teller watched the monster bounce along the trailing cars before collapsing in a motionless heap at the mouth of the tunnel.

* * *

A few seconds later the car ratcheted to a halt inside the boarding station. Teller climbed out from his awkward position and saw Morton and Ernst standing on the platform. Ernst was holding Brooks' rifle, but the scope was hanging uselessly to one side.

"What happened?" he asked as he helped Felton out of the car.

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"Two of them clown-things jumped Brooks," Morton answered. "She got one of them, but the other one got the drop on her and tossed her off the roof. It must a' forgot about us, 'cause while it was goin' to finish her off, Tommy here blew it's head clean off! I'll tell you, he hit it so hard, it just turned to a puddle of goo!"

"What about Brooks?" His eyes darted around the platform, but he didn't see the woman anywhere. "Is she alive?"

"Yeah," Ernst said, "but she's in pretty bad shape. I think she broke a couple a' bones when she fell. We didn't move her—she's over there behind those bushes."

He rushed to where the scout lay beside the boarding platform. The men were right—her arm was broken, and probably her collarbone too. She'd taken a nasty blow to the head as well and was unconscious. He immediately set the men to finding materials to build a stretcher and splint.

By the time he was able to get the worst of her wounds bound up and a crude stretcher thrown together, Roth had returned.

"Ernst!" Teller called. "You and Morton are going to have to carry the stretcher. It's going to be a little tricky on the monorail, but if we take it slow, I'm pretty sure we can do it. Roth, I'll take the front—you cover our backtrail."

The men lifted Brooks with a grunt and the group started down the slope from the boarding platform.

"You know," Teller said as they started along a lakeside path, "I do wonder what caused all this. I mean, nobody built things like those clowns back before the war and Throckmorton isn't exactly in the export business."

"I think I might have an answer to that, Teller," Roth called from the rear. The strained edge to his voice made the storyteller turn around. The gunslinger was looking at the surface of the lake as a large, spider-like thing dragged itself up from the depths.

"And I think I've got an idea where the Octopus ride went, too," he added.

Chapter Eleven

The gigantic contraption walked in a bizarre, almost rolling, fashion onto the shore toward them. It was definitely the Octopus—completely rebuilt to function as some enormous robot, but Teller could still see the main components of the ride in its structure. Teller thought he glimpsed a tiny bubble of plastic or glass on the top of the Octopus, but with all the thing's legs and its jerky movement, he wasn't certain.

"I'm sorry you weren't completely satisfied here at Magic Island," an older, cultured voice boomed from a set of

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loudspeakers. "I'd offer you free passes to some of my other attractions, however, I see you've already decided to depart."

"Ernst, Morton—get Brooks out of here!" Teller ordered. "Felton, you take cover, too!"

"So, in the interests of good relations," the thing continued as it skittered up the pathway toward them, "I'll be attending to your entertainment personally!" The ground shook with the impact of each of its eight legs.

"I really doubt pistols are going to do much good, Teller," Roth said, drawing both anyway.

"So do I, but I've got a sneaking suspicion I know what that thing's weakness is," he looked around hurriedly. "Can you keep it occupied for a minute?" Without waiting for an answer, he ran off after the two stretcher-bearers.

The gunslinger ran to the side and fired a couple of shots to draw the robot's attention. The eight-legged abomination quickly rotated in place and charged him. Roth dived to the side, barely avoiding one of the thing's huge legs and rolled to his feet. He fired another round into the monster's body and dodged again, but he was sure he wouldn't be able to keep this dance up long—the gigantic robot moved nearly twice as fast as he could run.

Teller caught up with Brooks and the men and grabbed her rifle. He saw the badly damaged scope and knew the weapon was useless for a long-range shot. That put a crimp in his plan, but the big gun was probably their only chance. Sprinting back down the hill, he realized what he would have to do.

A leg crashed in front of the gunslinger, and he was forced to dart back, underneath the huge machine. The sound of strained servos warned him just in time and he rolled quickly out from under the Octopus as its main body dropped to the ground to crush him. He scampered away on all fours, not even able to get back to his feet.

Seeing the black monstrosity try to grind Roth into the pathway gave Teller the idea he needed to put his plan into action. Not wanting to risk a shot to get the thing's attention—he had no idea how many were left in the magazine—he yelled as he ran toward the Octopus. The robot heard him, and, probably recognizing the rifle in his hand as a greater threat, left the gunslinger on the ground to deal with Teller.

Following Roth's lead, Teller rolled under the main body and hesitated just long enough to let the thing make an attempt to crush him. The legs tensed and the huge central body rushed down at him. He struggled to drag himself out from underneath, but his foot slipped causing him to sprawl facedown on the path.

As he waited for the sudden sharp tang of impact, he heard a pistol shot, followed by two others in rapid succession. The ground shook as the body hit the ground beside him, but

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somehow the robot missed him. Looking up, he saw Roth had managed to shoot one of the hydraulic lines and disable the leg closest to Teller. It had left him just enough room to avoid being ground to a pulp.

The crippled leg also slowed the monster's recovery. Teller grabbed the side of the thing's body and pulled himself onto it as it rose back to its normal position. There, in the middle of the Octopus, a plexiglass case was mounted on a rotating platform. In the case, still horribly aware, was the severed head of an older, gray-haired man. It spun to face him and its expression was one of shock and outrage.

"I'm sorry, but visitors are not allowed here!" it raged. "I must ask you to leave or I'll have to call security!"

"Mr. Wilton," Teller said as he raised the rifle barrel to the side of the case, "my friends and I would like a refund." He pulled the trigger, sending a .50 caliber bullet into the case.

As the spidery robot collapsed, the lights across the island began to flicker and go out. The calliope music from the Octopus' Garden faded away and the rides slowed to a stop. All across the island, the amusement park was dying with its creator.

Epilogue

"Roth," Teller said as the group entered the Anytown Square. Morning was just beginning to break and they'd not seen a single clown creature stalking them as they crossed the island.

"I owed you one," the gunslinger answered.

"I figure Wilton's mind had been badly twisted—either during the freezing process or after he was resurrected. Magic Island stopped being an amusement park and became a terror park," Teller said. Somehow, this place fed off the fear generated by 'visitors.' It's probably been a while since anyone had been here."

"Morton, Ernst, and Felton were already pretty worked up when they got here," Teller continued, "so they were his primary audience. I think the bandits were used up priming the works."

"Hey," interrupted Brooks' feeble voice from the stretcher, "anyone remember where we parked?"

* * *

On the other side of the island, a solitary figure approached the fallen Octopus with an odd, loose-limbed walk. It reached into the wreckage with its dead, white hands and pulled out the shattered plexiglass case containing the remains of Dempsey Wilton. Cradling the object to its chest with one arm, the thing ambled back to the shadows under the roller coaster.

Soon, the faint sound of crazed, mechanical tittering broke the silence in the deserted park.

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The Adventure



So, Marshal, is your posse tired of fighting Black Hats, stomping zombies, and otherwise saving the world? If so, maybe it's time for you to send your heroes for a little vacation to the Dempsey Islands!

This adventure might be a little much for a starting posse. Dempsey Islands is a *Deadland*—that's right, a *Deadland*. Heroes without a few points of Grit under their belt will have a hard time scraping through.

The Story So Far

Back before the Last War, Dempsey Islands was the most popular amusement park in the CSA. Its creator and owner, Dempsey Wilton, was one of

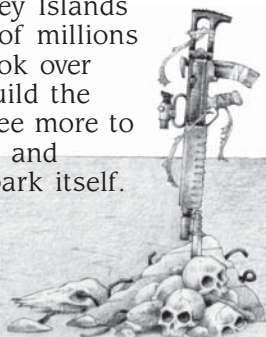
the most well-known entertainment moguls in not only the CSA, but most of the world.

Wilton earned his fortune from designing and licensing cute and lovable characters for computer games and films, and even before opening his island theme park, Wilton's name was a household word across the globe.

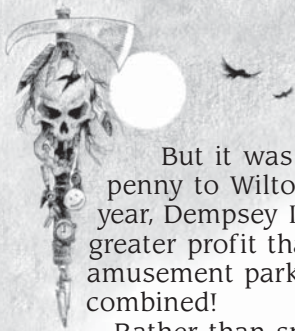
Dempsey Islands

Built on a series of man-made islands just off the Texas coast in the Gulf of Mexico, Dempsey Islands cost hundreds of millions of dollars. It took over two years to build the islands and three more to design, develop and construct the park itself.

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But it was worth every penny to Wilton. In its first year, Dempsey Islands made a greater profit than all other amusement parks in the CSA combined!

Rather than spend the money frivolously, Wilton reinvested it into Dempsey Islands. He made constant improvements to the park, its rides, and attractions. He even hired Hellstromme Industries to design and produce a special line of entertainment robots based loosely on that company's own automatons.

To Cheat the Reaper

Unfortunately, all his money and fame couldn't save Wilton from the ravages of a rare and incurable wasting disease. By early 2071, even advanced life support techniques were losing their efficiency and his doctor gave him less than a month to live. Wilton took a drastic step and, rather than await his appointment with the Grim Reaper, he searched for a way to postpone it indefinitely.

In the short time remaining to him, only one option was available—cryogenics. Wilton had his head frozen and preserved in the hopes one day medical science would find a way to transplant his head to another body.

During his last days, the effects of the cancer and his own fear of impending

death clouded his thoughts. Wilton became paranoid for his safety after undergoing the freezing process. He insisted his head was to be kept in a vault under Dempsey Islands and monitored by the park's advanced main computer. He even had small nuclear reactors built under the island to provide his life support with its own power supply.

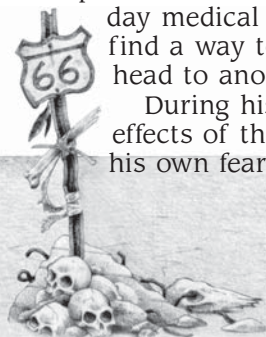
While Wilton's last request was never announced, some rumors slipped out to the general public. Within a few years the "frozen head under Dempsey Islands" was a common urban legend. Partially as a result of that disturbing mental image, the park's attendance began to fall off and, by 2080, it was barely able to break even.

The onset of the Last War a year later sounded the death knell for Dempsey Islands. Even before the first ghost-rock bomb fell, the amusement park was deserted.

Empty or not, the reactors kept the park alive—dormant, but alive.

Resurrection

When the bombs ripped reality, a powerful manitou awakened Wilton's head from its frozen sleep. Awakened probably isn't the right word—dragged kicking and screaming back from the dead is probably a better choice. Not only did



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the creature possess the severed head, but what remained of Wilton's personality was driven insane by the experience.

Using its connection to the main computer, the undead head was able to take control of the park. Once it had control, the abomination began to make a few changes to the way things were run.

The demon must have had a twisted sense of humor, because it dedicated itself to turning the famous amusement park into a Deadland.

Dempsey Islands Today

The manitou has been quite successful in its quest. Even when it isn't in control, Wilton continues its work. His after-death experiences have seriously muddled his thought processes and he has confused fear and terror for happiness and joy. He believes the park was deserted because people didn't find it exciting anymore.

Wilton has some ideas on how to make it more "exciting." One of the first changes he made was to modify his entertainment robots. The automatons are now terrifying caricatures roaming the islands to "amuse" any visitors.

Wilton has found few people are willing to visit his altered park, and those who are don't usually last through the entire experience. He began recruiting

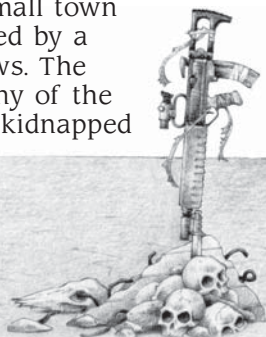


"test subjects" from local towns with his automatons. It didn't take long for him to deplete the tiny communities and once again leave himself without a target audience.

That's all about to change.

The Setup

While traveling through southeastern Texas, the posse is approached by a group of survivors. The band is all that remains of a small town recently attacked by a group of outlaws. The gang killed many of the townsfolk and kidnapped six others.



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The leader, a middle-aged man named Alec Michaels, tells the posse:

"We know the bandits are more than we can handle—we've already learned that the hard way. However, the people they took from us are wives, husbands, mothers, and children; they'll be sold into slavery, killed, or worse. I'm not a real religious man anymore, who is? But you folks seem like a godsend to me right now."

He informs the posse there were about 20 or so bandits in the gang, mostly armed with civilian rifles and pistols. They had a small cargo truck they

were riding when they left, but it didn't look in too good of a shape—Michaels doubts it had many miles left in it.

The townsfolk have put together a small pile of goods as payment for the posse. There's not much, but Michael's offers it as up-front payment. In the pile of junk, the posse finds 17 ounces of ghost rock, a pair of small batteries, a pair of binoculars, a big knife, a motorcycle helmet, 20 9mm rounds, two 12-gauge shotgun shells, a can of soda, and a Ruger Redhawk revolver (empty).

If the posse accepts, Michaels points them toward the southeast—the direction the bandits went when they left.

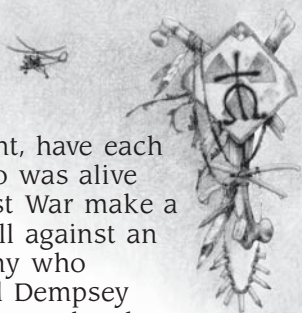
A Note to the Marshal

We've only detailed a portion of Dempsey Islands in this dime novel—trust us, there's a whole lot more to it than what you see here. For this initial foray into the park, we've limited the posse's access to a single island. We are planning another, much longer, trip to Dempsey Island in the future.

However, you may find your heroes want to further explore the park. If that's the case, feel free to detail more attractions as you see fit. We've hinted at some of the other attractions in Chapter One.



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Chapter One: We're Going to Magic Island!

After tracking the band for a few days, the posse finds the outlaws' vehicle—an old, worn-out truck—abandoned by the side of the road about midday. A Fair (5) *tinkerin'* roll tells any hero examining it that the truck's engine has seen its last mile. Poor maintenance and years of abuse finally killed the old workhorse.

Any hero searching the truck finds a wide assortment of trash and junk, but nothing of any use. A Fair (5) *trackin'* roll turns up the bandits' trail leading to the south. A raise on that roll tells the waster there are between 20 and 25 people in the group. Once located, it's a simple task to follow the outlaw trail.

End of the Line

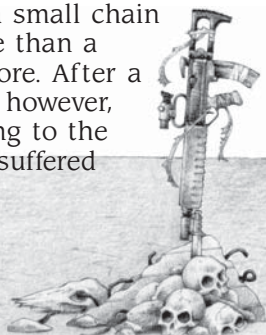
After following them for a few hours, the tracks lead into a gargantuan, asphalt parking lot on the edge of the Gulf Coast. A sign outside the lot says "Welcome to Dempsey Islands, Where Dreams Come True!" Someone has taken a can of spray paint and replaced "Dreams" with a scrawled "Nightmares."

At this point, have each character who was alive before the Last War make a *Knowledge* roll against an Fair (5) TN. Any who succeed recall Dempsey Islands was a popular theme park until just before the War. The waster with the highest roll even remembers the old "Dempsey Wilton's frozen head" story.

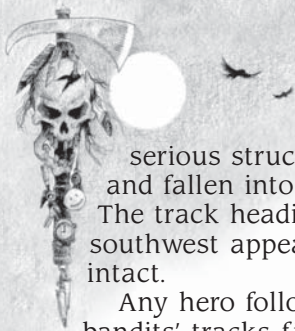
The parking lot itself is virtually empty—only a small number of cars still sit in it. Those few are all badly rusted from over a decade of salty, sea air. Wind has blown sand up from the nearby beach to cover most of the remaining autos in miniature dunes. Searching these vehicles reveals nothing.

A row of empty, vandalized ticket booths sit on the ocean side of the parking lot. Rusted and jammed turnstiles fill the spaces between each booth. Behind the booths is a modern, but long abandoned, monorail terminal. The building is quite large, more than 30 yards in length.

A slender, concrete monorail track leads out of each end of the terminal and across the Gulf. The tracks' destination appears to be a small chain of islands more than a half-mile offshore. After a short distance, however, the track leading to the southeast has suffered



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serious structural damage and fallen into the water. The track heading to the southwest appears to be intact.

Any hero following the bandits' tracks finds they meander about the parking lot, but eventually lead into the terminal.

The Terminal

A wide ramp leads from the ticket booths to the terminal entrance—there are no doors to the terminal. A quick search reveals the building is empty of any life—bandit or otherwise.

The monorail runs along the back (south) wall of the building and a large loading platform dominates the area. The remains of overturned food-vending carts and trash cans litter the floor. Posters decorate the walls proclaiming a variety of Dempsey Islands attractions—Pirates of the Maze, Faraway Mountain, A Cozy World, and the Octopus' Garden.

An information kiosk sits near the middle of the terminal platform. Any waster searching the booth finds a badly water-damaged map of the attractions at Dempsey Islands on a successful *search* roll against a Fair (5) TN. Only the section on the first island in the series—Magic

Island—is readable. (At this point, feel free to give the players a copy of the map of the island.)

After the heroes have looked around the terminal for a little while, they determine the bandits must have crossed the monorail trestle. No tracks lead out of the building, either through the main entrance or any other exit.

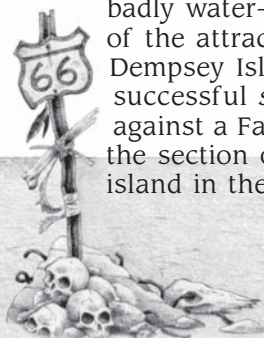
The Security Station

A small security monitoring station sits above the platform. The door leading to it is locked, but can be broken open by a Hard (9) *Strength* roll or 14 points of damage to the lock.

The security office has a number of video screens and phones, but all are long dead. Using a power like *powerup* provides access to cameras in the terminal itself, but no others. The security cameras show the posse nothing surprising.

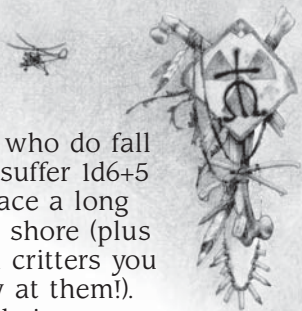
The Monorail

The monorail trestle is about four feet wide, with a two-foot wide metal track in the center. It runs completely through the terminal and is separated from the loading platform by a plexiglass wall. A number of boarding stations allowed passengers to enter the monorail cars, and most of these now stand closed.



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One of the stations is open, and an Onerous (7) *search* roll tells any waster examining it the doors have been pried open fairly recently. This is how the bandits left the terminal. If a hero climbs onto the trestle itself, he finds tracks in windblown sand on a Hard (9) *trackin'* roll.

The trestle exits both ends of the building, but the track to the southeast has crumbled in disrepair. The only route the bandits could have taken is the southwestern trestle.

Watch Your Step!

The monorail trestle runs about 15' to 20' above the waters of the Gulf. It's fairly wide, so most of the time the posse has no trouble negotiating it. However, there are some sections where it has suffered structural damage and the going is a little tougher.

Magic Island lies about a half mile offshore. This took mere moments when the monorail was running, but it takes the heroes the better part of a half-hour to walk—longer if they wait until nightfall.

Have the wasters make a Fair (5) *Nimbleness* roll twice as they cross the bridge. Any who fail the roll get a brief scare as a section of concrete breaks loose under them, but only those who go bust on the roll actually drop into the

water. Heroes who do fall into the Gulf suffer 1d6+5 damage and face a long swim back to shore (plus any nasty sea critters you want to throw at them!).

It's pretty obvious anyone crossing the trestle is going to be very visible to anyone watching the monorail bridge. Should the heroes cross during the daytime, they must make *sneak* rolls against an Onerous (7) TN or be spotted by one of the bandits. There's no cover on the bridge and the outlaws plink at them from cover.

If they wait until dark, the heroes are only spotted if one of them goes bust on the *sneak* roll. If all the wasters make their rolls, they can creep right up to the Magic Island Terminal.

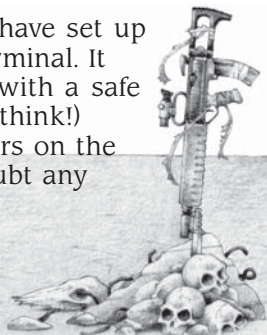
Next Stop—Magic Island!

The Magic Island Terminal is similar to the other terminal back on the mainland. A plexiglass partition separates most of the track from the boarding platform, but a number of doorways are pried open here.

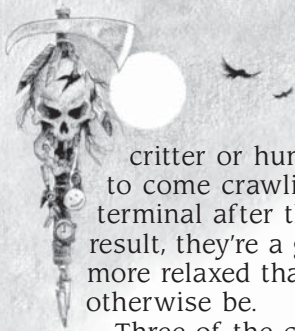
The Bandits

The bandits have set up camp in the terminal. It provides them with a safe haven (so they think!) from the dangers on the shore. They doubt any

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critter or human is likely to come crawling out to the terminal after them. As a result, they're a good deal more relaxed than they would otherwise be.

Three of the captives took advantage of this a few hours ago and made an escape. A number of the outlaws are combing the island when the party approaches, trying to find the escapees.

There are eight outlaws in the terminal. Half of them are armed with police pistols and the others carry hunting rifles. Unless some of the heroes blew the *sneak* roll, the bandits are caught off-guard and are surprised for the first round of combat.

There are also three hostages—one child and two women—in the room, so area affect powers, explosives, and automatic fire are probably a very bad idea! The plexiglass wall provides Armor 1 to any target on the opposite side of it.

Bandits

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

Fightin': brawlin' 3d6, shootin' pistol, rifle 3d8, sneak 3d8

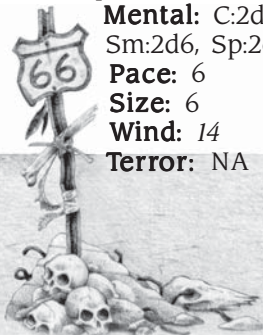
Mental: C:2d6, K2d6, M:2d6, Sm:2d6, Sp:2d6

Pace: 6

Size: 6

Wind: 14

Terror: NA



Gear: Either a police pistol (9mm) or hunting rifle (.30-06), 9 rounds of ammunition, big knife, and 1 lb. of jerky.

Where Is Everybody?

After the bandits are beaten, the hostages talk to the posse. Once the heroes convince the captives they're a rescue party, one of them introduces herself as Mary Reiner.

She tells the heroes about the escaped hostages. She also tells the heroes that, so far, none of the captives have been seriously injured—although some have been mistreated badly. Apparently, the bandits intended to sell them as slaves and wanted to keep them in fairly good shape.

Mary volunteers to take the other two captives and head back to the mainland. They can wait for the posse there without the threat of being recaptured or killed in a fight.

Into the Park

While the heroes talk to Mary, they occasionally hear the sound of gunfire from deep in the park. After a few moments, it ends and the island is once again quiet.

If they haven't already found a map of the island, there's a large one conveniently posted on a wall in the terminal. Smaller copies are available at the information kiosk in the center of the platform.

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Now it's time to separate the heroes from the posers. Once they've had time to hear Mary's story and her offer, there are only two choices—give up on the rest of the captives and leave, or head into the park.

For true heroes, there's really only one choice.

Bounty

Posse agrees to hunt

bandits: 1 white chip.

Posse defeats bandits in

Magic Island Terminal: 1 white chip.

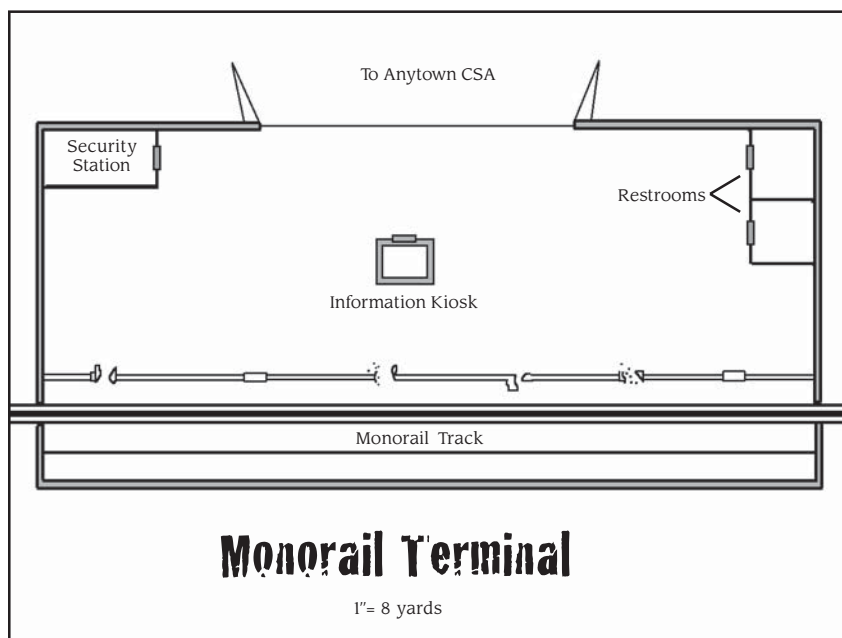
No captives are killed in the

firefight: 1 red chip.

Chapter Two: Anytown, CSA

The first section of Magic Island the wasters enter is Anytown, CSA. This section is an idealized version of Main Street in a mythical small town in the Confederacy. Quaint shops and restaurants line the cobblestone street and a large town hall sits across an enormous town square.

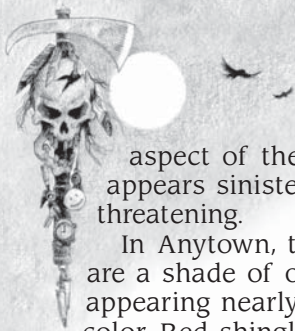
There's one catch—the entire island, Anytown included, is a Deadland! Not only does the posse suffer -6 to all *guts* checks, but every



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aspect of the island appears sinister and threatening.

In Anytown, the buildings are a shade of off-white appearing nearly bone-like in color. Red shingles cover the roofs, but the paint has begun to run in streaks down the sides of the walls, giving the buildings the look of bloody skulls lining the streets.

If it's dark, the heroes won't be able to make out any details right away. But don't worry—they'll soon see a lot more than they want to!

Start the Show!

Wilton's servants have been chasing the bandits and their escaped captives since before the posse attacked. The firing the posse heard earlier was some bandits trying to hold off the abominations. Most of the bandits are dead, but Wilton has taken the townsfolk alive—live customers are so much easier to scare!

When the posse arrived on the island, Wilton couldn't believe his luck. Almost a year without a single soul to torment, and, now, he has two groups in one night! He has decided to keep the townsfolk for a while to "play with," but he wants to charge up the park with a strong burst of terror from the heroes—before he kills them, of course.

Once the posse has reached the midpoint of the group of buildings before the town square, the lights of the park flicker to life. The heroes can hear the sound of twisted and off-key calliope music in the distance.

Exploring Anytown

Wilton has had a decade of experience terrorizing victims, so he's content to take his time at first. He doesn't throw his servants at the heroes right away—instead, he lets them wander about Anytown for a while so their own imaginations have the chance to get the wasters good and nervous.

Locations of special interest are described below.

The Camera Shop

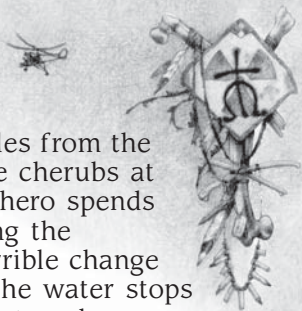
A small camera shop rests at the northeastern corner of the town square. A hero making a Fair (5) *search* roll turns up a couple of apparently functional, instant cameras. A picture taken with the camera develops within moments, but there's a catch—anyone who has a picture taken by one of the cameras appears dead!

Although, the manner of death differs from person to person, no matter how many times a person has his picture taken, the manner of death is always the same for him—even



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if he has it taken with the other camera. The death depicted is always violent and brutal.

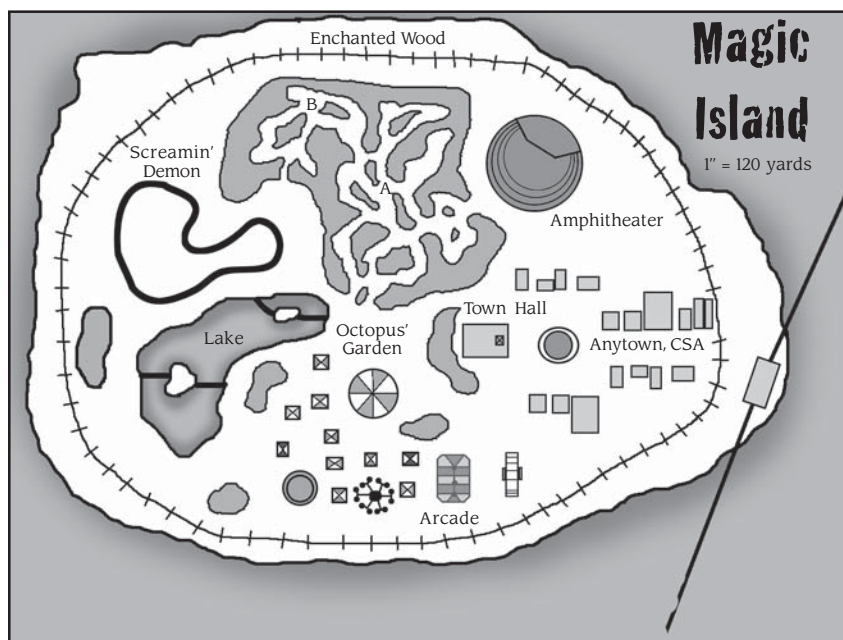
Viewing a picture his own corpse causes a waster to make a Fair (5) *guts* check.

The Fountain

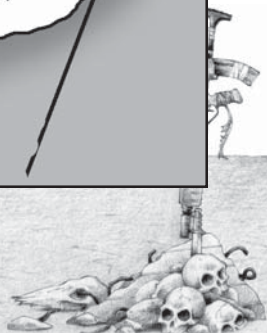
In the center of the town square, there is a large, 10' tall, stone fountain. The fountain is sculpted in the form of a band of singing cherubs. However, the effect of the Deadland has distorted the cherubs' mouths from joyous smiles into horrified screams. Even their eyes seem to reflect terrible pain and torture.

Water gurgles from the mouths of the cherubs at first, but if a hero spends time examining the fountain, a terrible change takes place. The water stops after a moment, and a sputtering cough comes from inside the fountain. Then, a glob of some viscous, red substance splatters from the mouth of one of the cherubs. A flow of thick, crimson liquid begins to pour from the statues' mouth.

Witnessing this repulsive scene requires a Foolproof (3) *guts* check, but even that easy roll is tough with the high Fear Level in the park!



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Park Security

Near the monorail terminal is a building marked "Security." A smaller sign underneath lists services provided: Lost & Found, Lost Children, and Security. Each section has its own room in the building.

Lost & Found contains a number of trivial items—keys, an empty wallet or two, a comb, etc.—and a single, severed hand. The hand is still warm and the blood on it is fresh! There is no clue as to whom it once belonged—one of the bandits, but the posse doesn't know this.

Lost Children is completely empty—except for a small, white ball that is just rolling to a stop when the heroes enter.

The Security office itself is empty and no amount of effort can bring its monitors on line—Wilton long ago had their connections severed. Even *powerup* or similar abilities are useless.

Restaurants

There are a few cafes and fast food restaurants along the street. Regardless of which ones the heroes explore, the odor of mold and stale foodstuffs is strong inside. Due to the Deadland, the odor of decay is stronger, in fact, than is normal for an area as long abandoned as Magic Island.

Any hero scrounging through a restaurant finds nothing of value except a few pots and pans. On an Onerous (7) *search* or *scroungin'* roll, a waster finds a cutting board covered in red stains with extremely deep gashes cut into it.

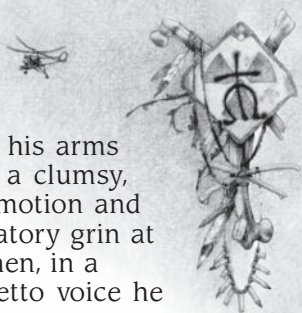
A hero who makes an Onerous (7) *Cognition* roll while searching any of the restaurants notices a complete absence of cutlery. Knife racks are empty, cutlery drawers are conspicuously missing knives, etc. Any posse member who thinks to look for fire axes finds they have been removed as well—even from other areas of Magic Island!

Souvenir Shops

A variety of souvenir shops line the street of Anytown. Very little of value remains on the shelves—Wilton had his servants remove anything the least bit cheery long ago. What was left has been turned into a tribute to horror.

Headless dolls neatly line the shelves of one store. Another contains stuffed animals in predatory poses that seem to stare at any waster who enters the store. Clown dolls in a third have leering faces and oddly long and sharp teeth. Worse yet, the display in each store changes subtly between every visit—this takes a Fair (5) *Cognition* roll to notice, though.

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The Station

An antiquated train station sits near the monorail terminal in Anytown. The building has an antiquated look to it, as do most of the structures in this area of the park. There is no train at the station—it's stopped for good on the other side of the island.

If the posse follows the tracks, they find the train sitting behind the Enchanted Glen. The passenger cars are all badly weathered and rust covers the ride. At one time, the locomotive resembled a happy little "engine that could," but it has been distorted into a twisted and sneering monstrosity.

Town Hall

The hall itself is actually a large and richly decorated theater. Thick, red, velvet curtains cover the walls and a balcony overlooks the main hall. The interior is dimly lit by foot lamps on the stage and a few small seating lamps (a -4 *shootin'* modifier).

When the heroes enter town hall, they get their first taste of one of Magic Island's real attractions. On stage a single figure stands—one of the bandits, but dressed in an elaborate tuxedo. His head is bowed as they enter, but as the posse comes further into the hall, it raises.

He extends his arms outward with a clumsy, almost jerky motion and smiles a predatory grin at the heroes. Then, in a warbling, falsetto voice he says:

"Welcome, my friends to the Hell that never ends,

"Come inside, it's time to die.

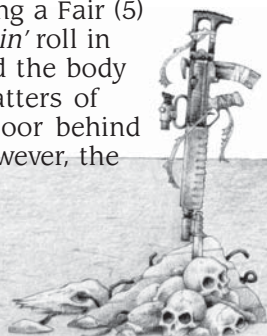
"We've been waiting for some time for your precious souls to rend,

"Come inside, it's time to die."


Physical attacks have little effect on the body; it merely pauses in its delivery until the posse stops its attack. After he finishes his short rhyme (or if the posse climbs onto the stage before he's done), the figure collapses in a heap on the stage.

Any waster examining the body finds the bandit is dead—and likely has been for some time; the body is cool to the touch. Closer examination reveals a large hole in the back of his head, nearly three inches across. One of Wilton's clowns was using the body as a type of ventriloquist's dummy, but slips out the back of the theatre after delivering its message.

A hero making a Fair (5) *search* or *trackin'* roll in the area around the body finds a few spatters of blood on the floor behind the curtain. However, the



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trail doesn't lead any further than a few feet from the curtain. If the waster gets a raise on the roll, she notices a white smudge on the curtain about head level (from the clown's "makeup") but nothing else.

Backstage

Unless the posse finds a way to raise the curtains, the area backstage is pitch black. If they have a way to light the stage, they find ropes tied into nooses hanging from a narrow catwalk overhead. Sandbags used to counterweight curtains and scenery dangle far above, but seem unusually lumpy—

hinting that more than sand is being used to fill them. Pieces of painted scenery resemble some nightmarish forest filled with looming trees and far too many trap doors dot the floor of the stage.

A small corridor to the right leads to a prop room, as well as a few dressing rooms. The prop room is filled with old, rotting clothing. The dressing rooms are empty, but the mirror in the last one has a single bloody handprint in the center.

Once the posse reaches this point—or as soon as they move out of the Anytown section of the park, whichever comes first—Wilton lowers a section of the monorail trestle into the Gulf. Escape from the island is virtually impossible.

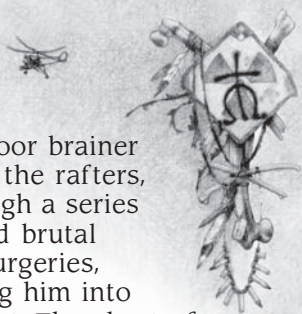
The Magic Island Amphitheater

During its heyday, this small amphitheater was a favorite stop for many musical groups, either on their way up or down the pop charts. At best, it could seat 2,000 fans, but the park's popularity almost guaranteed a full house every night.

Now, it feels more like an overgrown crater forgotten in some ancient forest. Rotting netting stretches over the stage and the front half of the seating area. At one time,



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lights or flowers were hung from the nets to brighten the amphitheater—all that remains are dangling ropes and electrical cables.

Have any hero looking toward the main stage make a Fair (5) *Cognition* roll. On a success, he sees a figure in the shadows hung in the ropes and netting. The captive feebly waves at the posse, but seems too weak to call for help.

The Puppet Show

The figure is actually an undead marionette controlled by cables dangling from the area directly above the stage. The puppet tries to lure the posse onto the stage where they can be attacked. Wires from above drop and attack any waster on the stage, attempting to snare and pull him up into rafters.

Any hero on the stage is subject to a 4d8 *fightin'* attack at the beginning of each round by puppet strings. If the attack succeeds with at least one raise, the target is caught and pulled up into the rafters. This takes a total of two rounds—including the round the hero is tangled by the wires. The only way to free the character is to sever the wire, which requires a called shot at -4. It only takes 5 points of damage, but the damage must come from a single attack—cumulative damage does nothing.

Once the poor brainer is pulled into the rafters, he's run through a series of vicious and brutal mechanical surgeries, rapidly turning him into another puppet. The short of it is he's dead, plain and simple. The entire process is incredibly fast—in five rounds, the new puppet drops onto the stage to fight his former comrades.

The Puppet

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

Fightin': brawlin' 4d6

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

Pace: 6

Size: 6

Wind: NA

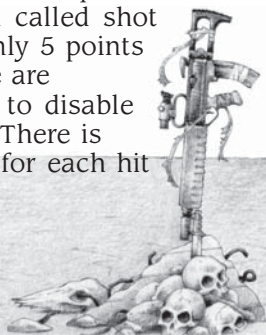
Terror: 7

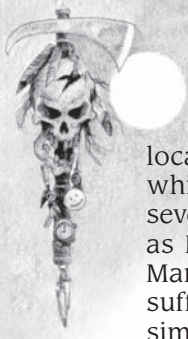
Special Abilities:

Claws: Badly rusted razor blades have been imbedded into the puppet's fingers. STR+1d4 damage.

Invulnerability: This abomination is unaffected by most physical damage. Only severing the "puppet strings" by which Wilton controls them can kill the puppets. This requires a successful called shot (-4), but only 5 points of damage are necessary to disable the cable. There is one cable for each hit

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location and any location which has its cable severed is useless—treat it as Maimed. At the Marshal's discretion, sufficient damage may simply destroy a hit location as well.

Mobility: Due to the cables connected to its limbs, the puppet is capable of bounding to any point on the stage on each of its actions, regardless of the distance.

Description: The puppet is actually the animated body of one of the bandits. The corpse has been dressed in a different set of clothes (taken from a previous victim) and a grotesque coat of stage makeup has been applied to it—giving its face an inhuman pallor, but very rosy cheeks.

Somebody's Watchin' Me!

As soon as the heroes have encountered either the ventriloquist or the puppet, Wilton's clowns (detailed in the next chapter) begin to shadow the wasters.

The clowns stay out of direct line of sight, but they do allow a hero to catch sight of them from time to time. However, they avoid any confrontation with the posse at this time—at the first sign of an attack, the

clowns trundle off into an alley, duck around a corner, or drop down into a service tunnel.

Be sure to play up the creepy movement and activities of the clowns—remember the clowns have very flexible limbs! A hero may see one slowly cartwheel across an otherwise empty street, or just walk into the shadows with an exaggerated, rolling gait. A clown's face peers around a corner of a building—nearly 11 feet or more in the air. Every now and then the posse catches the faint sound of a clown's laughing box echoing through the empty park.

Wilton wants the heroes on edge at this point. He lets the wasters catch a glimpse of his twisted clowns, but, as yet, he won't let the posse get too close to them. After all, the heroes' imaginations should do most of his job for him at this point!

Wilton can simply sit back and savor the posse's fear until he decides to end the night's festivities.

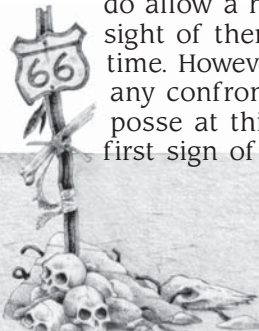
Bounty

Exploring Anytown fully: 1 white chip.

Posse defeats puppet: 1 white chip.

Posse searches park for other captives: 1 red chip.

Marshal: 50



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Chapter Three: The Octopus' Garden

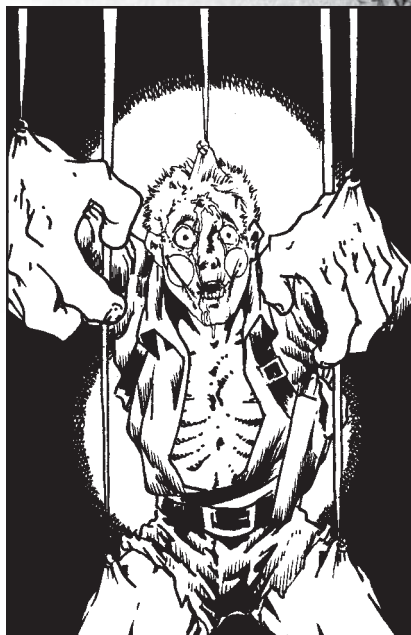
This section of the park occupies most of the island. It includes a standard midway complete with hawkers booths and carnival rides, a forested path called The Enchanted Wood, and the main attraction on Magic Island, the Screamin' Demon rollercoaster.

The calliope music originates from a large merry-go-round near the northern edge of the midway. Like most other rides on Magic Island, it appears to be operating—although there are no riders. The occasional clank and rumble from the western end of the Island tells the posse the Screamin' Demon is also in working order.

Wandering the Midway

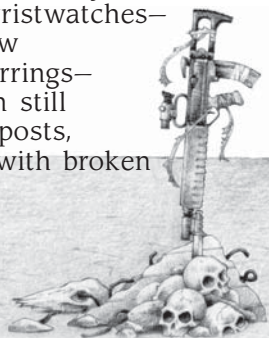
This portion of the Octopus' Garden resembles a carnival fairway. A variety of booths containing (rigged) games of skill lie helter-skelter around the area. Smaller, children-sized rides are interspersed between the games.

As the posse probably expects by now, the booths and rides aren't amusing or cute—rather they're sinister and threatening. The artwork on the rides depicts evil




clowns and other cartoon figures stalking terrified people across bleak, twisted storybook landscapes.

The games of chance are no better. Stuffed animals are crucified on dart boards or airgun targets. The prize selection varies from rows of eyeless dolls to personal belongings obviously taken from victims. If any of the wasters is greedy enough to loot these booths, they find a number of wristwatches—all broken, a few mismatched earrings—some with skin still caught on the posts, pocket knives with broken



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(and bloody) blades, and other sundry, but useless, items.

Litter and torn cloth blows through the open spaces between rides and booths. If a hero snatches one of the pieces of paper caught on the wind, she finds "You're all dead!!" or a similar message scrawled on it in crayon. The pieces of cloth appear to be the remnants of shredded clothing.

The clowns continue to stalk the posse along the midway. As before, they only allow the wasters to catch the briefest glimpse before scurrying back to the shadows.

The faint sounds of maniacal laughter can still be heard coming from all around the posse as it wanders through the midway.

Should the heroes become separated, the clowns become bolder. A solitary waster finds the evil-looking things actually trying to sneak up on him! However, as before, once spotted, they quickly retreat, dodging behind rides or rolling under tents.

Individual areas of note are detailed below.

The Arcade

As the posse nears this large, circus-tent shaped building, the heroes hear the sounds of gunfire, screams, and roars. A Fair (5) *Cognition* roll tells the wasters the racket is actually sound effects from old video games. However, if a hero gets a raise on the roll, he realizes there is a live human voice along with the electronic ones.

Inside the arcade, bright, visual effects and sudden, loud bursts of sound effects from the games assault the posse's senses. The games are arranged in a complex pattern that forms a virtual maze inside the arcade.

Next to the door is an odd machine with an animatronic gypsy inside. The machine offers to tell a fortune—no coin needed, just push the flashing



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"Start" button. The fortune varies from hero to hero, but each one promises a long and painful death.

Whack-A-Man

Far back in the arcade, the posse can hear panicked calls for help. Following the sounds, the heroes find a disturbing sight. Standing in front of a blood stained Whack-a-Mole game is one of Wilton's killer clowns (see description in the next chapter) holding a gore-covered fire ax.

Six heads stick up from the game—five of them have already lost to the clown, as evidenced by fatal wounds. The sixth screams in terror as the clown swats at it with the ax. At the first sign of the posse, the clown scampers off into the maze of games and disappears, the sound of crazed giggling and tittering trailing behind it.

If the posse manages to force a fight with the clown, use the profile in the next chapter. However, the monster attempts to escape the fight at the first opportunity.

Tom Ernst

The man trapped in the game whimpers for a moment then, realizing he's safe, thanks the posse enthusiastically. The man is Tom Ernst and he's one of the escaped captives. He tells the posse:

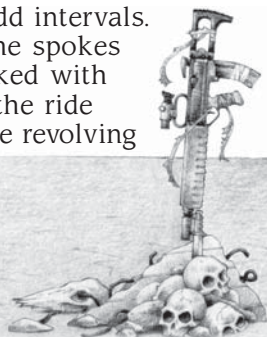
"Me, Diane and Fred—those are the other two what got away—split up when we got into the park. I think Diane was headin' for the other side of the island, and Fred made a break for that forest to the north.

I don't know what happened to them, but that clown-thing caught me pretty quick. A few hours later, it rounded up these other fellows—they're all bandit scum, good riddance—and stuck us in this box. If you folks hadn't come along, I guess I'd be joinin' them bandits soon."

Tom doesn't know what happened to the other bandits, nor anything about the clowns except they give him the "willies." He's afraid to be left alone in the park at this point and wants to stay with the posse. Unfortunately, he's of no use in a fight.

The Ferris Wheel

The ferris wheel has nothing overtly wrong with it, yet a sense of ominous, impending evil pervades the giant ride. Perhaps it's the relentless turning of the gargantuan device, or the tortured shriek of metal under tremendous pressure that echoes from the wheel at odd intervals. The paint on the spokes has been streaked with black, making the ride resemble a huge revolving spider's web.



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The Giant Swing

The Giant Swing is a large cylindrical tower with a number of chain swings hanging off its top. The tower turns slowly and centrifugal force causes the swings to fly out in a circle around it. However, the clowns have replaced most of the swings with large hooks from which they've hung a number of bodies—some recently dead, some not so recent.

A Terror check against a Fair (5) TN is optional—but remember the Fear level. Even the easiest checks are difficult now!

The Merry-Go-Round

The twisted, off-key calliope music echoing through the park comes from jagged brass pipes in the center of this ride. The Merry-Go-Round is ringed with black, red, and brown horse statues. All the animals' eyes are rolled back in their heads, not unlike a shark's just after its taken a bite. Their heads are arched back or thrust forward in a snakelike fashion. The teeth are bared and the horses seem to dare a waster to step in front of their mouths.

The ride itself has numerous concealed sharp edges. Any hero on the ride must make a Fair (5) *Nimbleness* roll each round to avoid being nicked by a

protrusion. The waster suffers 1 Wind for each point by which she missed the TN. For example, if she rolled a 3, she would lose 2 Wind.

The Octopus

The only thing creepy about the Octopus ride is that it's missing—all eight arms of it! The concrete pad where the ride once rested is now empty. Only a few loose nuts and bolts litter the otherwise bare cement.

Although the heroes don't yet know it, Wilton is using the ride as an enormous robotic body to move his head around the park (see **The Head Man, Chapter 4**). All that remains at this site is the loading ramp and gate, a turnstile, and a sign featuring a cartoon character holding a ruler four feet off the ground. A word bubble next to the sign says, "You must be *this* tall to ride the Octopus."

Enchanted Wood

This area resembles a deep, dark forest. A labyrinth of false dirt trails crisscross the Wood. The section's theme during the early days of Magic Island was children's fairy tales—particularly the grimmer ones, if you know what we mean.

Now, the Enchanted Wood is closer to a child's nightmare than a bedtime story. Unlike

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most of the park, the paths are poorly lit. Flickering lights hang from the trees far enough apart to allow plenty of shadows to cover the trails. Even the trees themselves seem to stretch long, clawed branches toward the heroes as they walk among them.

A light breeze rustles the leaves and branches, making it difficult to pinpoint sounds off in the darkness. And once the posse starts exploring the Glen, there are plenty of sounds! Branches crack under some unseen creature's feet, heavy running footsteps echo from the shadowy wood, faint breathing, and even an occasional husky growl waft through the trees.

The Picnic Basket

At the site marked A, a wicker picnic basket rests in the middle of a small meadow. The basket is open and its contents—bread rolls and cookies—are spilled on the ground.

If a hero inspects the food, she finds it's stale and moldy. However, while she is looking at it, a small piece of red cloth caught by the breeze comes tumbling from the woods. Examination reveals the cloth is actually a child-sized cloak, complete with hood. The cloak is shredded and torn—almost as if some large creature had ripped it apart.

The House of Sticks

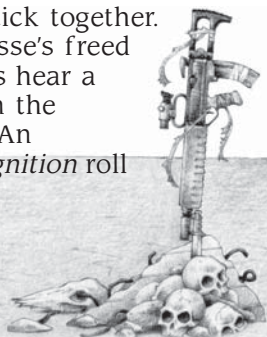
At the location marked B, the posse discovers a quaint hut built from wood planks. On an Onerous (7) *Cognition* roll, the heroes detect a faint whimper from within. A look inside finds a man, tightly bound by rope lying on the floor. His mouth is gagged, but if freed, he introduces himself as Fred Morton. If Tom's with the posse, he can identify him as well.

Fred is one of the escaped captives and tells the posse:

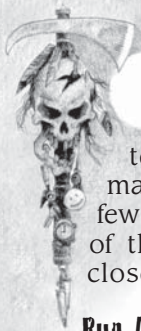
"I tried to hide in these woods after I got loose, but these circus midget-lookin' things got a' hold of me and tied me up. I'm right happy to see you folks—somethin' big's been snufflin' around the outside of this hut since nightfall."

He knows Tom headed off toward the midway and Diane ran straight across the island, but he has no idea where they ended up. He's not seen any signs of the bandits hunting him, but he did hear some gunfire and screams just about sundown. Fred, like Tom, is no use in a fight and, if Tom is with the posse at this time, the two men stick together.

After the posse's freed Fred, the heroes hear a loud howl from the woods nearby. An Onerous (7) *Cognition* roll



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tells a waster whatever made the howl is within a few dozen yards of the back of the hut—and coming closer!

Run Away!

If the posse makes a break for it, the heroes hear some large, panting animal pursuing them through the woods. As long as they head straight out of the woods, the creature never catches up. If they don't, the monster bursts out of the tree line and attacks!

You may want to have the hero leading the mad dash make a Fair (5) *Smarts* roll to find her way out of the Wood.

If she fails, the posse gets lost in the twisting pathways. Needless to say, the big bad wolf attacks the posse if this happens.

I'll Huff and I'll Puff...

On the other hand, if the heroes are inclined to stay in the hut, things get much, much worse.

First, they hear the sound of some large creature snuffling around the base of the hut—particularly at the door and windows—however, due to the darkness, the heroes never get a good look at the monster. Next, a determined scratching begins at the door. From the sound of it, the creature is gouging furrows several inches deep in the wood!

Finally, a deep, growling voice whispers from the other side of the door:

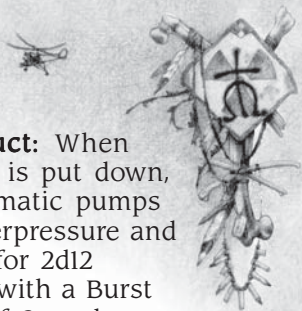
"Little pigs, little pigs, let me in or I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll tear your hearts out..."

Unless the posse opens the door to the beast at this time, the wolf-thing begins to buffet the house with blasts from its air pumps. Normally, this wouldn't be enough to bring down the wooden hut, but the wolf presses a hidden button in the ground outside causing the house to collapse.

Anyone inside the falling structure must make an Onerous (7) *Nimbleness* or *dodge* roll to avoid being hit



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by falling debris. Those who fail suffer 1 Wind for each point by which they missed the TN. Going bust on the roll deals 2d6 damage to a random hit location.

The Big, Bad Wolf

Corporeal: D:2d6, N:2d8, Q:3d8, S:4d10, V:2d12

Dodge 3d8, fightin': brawlin' 5d8, sneak 4d8,

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

Area knowledge (Magic Island) 5d6, search 4d8, trackin' 4d10

Pace: 8 (12 on all fours)

Size: 8

Wind: NA

Terror: 9

Special Abilities:

Armor: 2

Bad Breath: The wolf-thing is capable of blowing a tremendous gust of air from pneumatic pumps in its chest cavity. The air blast extends 10' out in a cone-shaped area five feet wide at the end. Any creature caught in the blast must roll a contest of *Strength* against the wolf to avoid being knocked down and suffering 1d6 Wind. This costs the creature an action.

Claws and Bite: STR+2d6. It can make two such attacks on each of its actions.

Fearless

Self-destruct: When the wolf is put down, its pneumatic pumps build overpressure and explode for 2d12 damage with a Burst Radius of 3 yards.

Undead

Description: The big, bad wolf is a highly-modified form of Wilton's clown automatons. It's much larger, standing nearly 9' tall on long, bent, dog-like hind legs and covered in coarse, black fur. The creature has enormous, exaggerated fangs and claws, and, like the other automatons, its black eyes glow with a Hellish, inner red light. A thick, viscous, lubricating fluid constantly drips from its jaws, giving the impression the creature is drooling. It can release a concentrated burst of air from its chest pumps—generating an ear-splitting howl. The automaton is also capable of low, growling speech.

Bounty

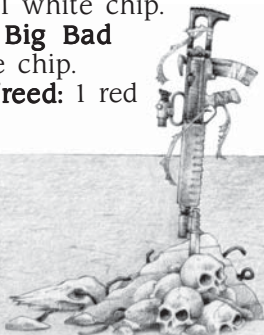
Exploring the Octopus' Garden fully: 1 white chip.

Exploring the Enchanted Wood fully: 1 white chip.

Posse defeats Big Bad Wolf: 1 white chip.

Each captive freed: 1 red chip.

Marshal: 57





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Chapter Three: The Screamin' Demon

The western side of the island is dominated by the Screamin' Demon. The huge, multiple-loop rollercoaster towers more than 230' above the ground, with its highest vertical drop topping 20 stories. At one time, it was the largest coaster of its kind in North America.

The Screamin' Demon looms over the entire island like the stripped bones of some colossal snake. Earlier, the posse heard the rattle and clank of cars along the tracks. Now, however, the coaster has grown strangely quiet.

A hero making a Fair (5) *Cognition* roll hears the faint sounds of distant, terrified screams. A second *Cognition* roll, this time versus an Onerous (7) TN, pinpoints a car stopped atop the main hill on the coaster. There appears to be a single person in the car. After a moment, either Tom or Fred (if they're with the posse)

recognizes the voice as belonging to the last escapee.

The captive, Diane Felton, has a terrible fear of heights. The clowns have

chained her to a car and have been toying with her all night. Now they've stopped the coaster atop the 20-story drop and left her dangling over the edge.

Guess who has to rescue her?

The Coaster

Just getting to the car is itself a heroic task. The easiest way is to climb onto the tracks at the boarding station and walk up the access catwalk.

The Boarding Station

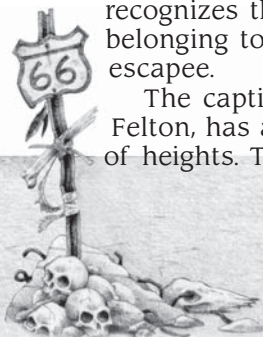
If the posse decides on the safer—and smarter—route, they pass through the boarding station. A miniature maze of rails fills two smaller waiting area shelters before the wasters even get to the boarding area.

A sign at the bottom of the waiting area states:

"Please secure all loose items before boarding. The Screamin' Demon is not recommended for pregnant mothers, people with high blood pressure or heart conditions."

The last half of the second sentence has been replaced by a scrawled *"anyone still living!"*

The entire area is decorated to appear like a cute cartoon version of Hell. However, the effect of the Deadland makes it appear far too real.



Killer Clowns

Statues of black demons with pitchforks and long serpentine tails perch atop spires of rocks and menace the heroes as they pass beneath. The boarding station is lit by a badly flickering set of red-tinted, fluorescent lights, giving the appearance of flames dancing on the walls. Hidden loudspeakers in the walls broadcast tortured screams and wails just loud enough to set the heroes nerves on edge.

A car sits in the station when the heroes arrive. It resembles a mine car on the bottom, with evilly grinning demons serving as the seat backs. The safety bars are sculpted in the shape of the monsters' clawed hands. The bars are in the upright position as if awaiting a new load of customers.

Any hero foolish enough to get into the car is immediately locked into the seat by the safety bars. Getting out requires an Incredible (II) *Strength* roll. Otherwise, the brainer is trapped in the car until the clowns decide to pay him a visit!

Climbing the Catwalk

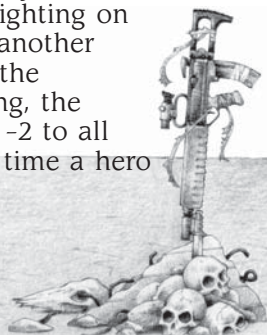
The service catwalk runs along the entire track of the coaster. Most of the time, it's a foot-wide wire platform, but, at each of the three loops, it becomes a ladder through the



vertical portion. There is a small safety rail on one side of the walkway, but the side next to the track is completely open.

Walking on the catwalk is no problem in and of itself. Heroes with phobias dealing with heights do have issues with the catwalk and suffer the modifier for their phobia to every action they take while on it.

Attempting any sort of hand-to-hand fighting on the catwalk is another matter. Due to the restricted footing, the heroes suffer a -2 to all rolls. Also, any time a hero





Killer Clowns

goes bust on a *fightin'* or *dodge* roll, she must immediately make a Fair (5) *Nimbleness* check or take a dive over the side. The damage taken for this fall depends on where the poor waster is at the time of takeoff.

Human Flies

More adventurous wasters may try to climb straight up the side of the coaster. Getting to the top without winding up a pancake requires three successful *climbin'* rolls against an Onerous (7) TN. Failure doesn't mean the hero falls, merely that she is temporarily stuck.

Going bust, on the other hand, is a Bad Thing—she plummets to the ground. Falling heroes take 5d6+25 if they go bust on the first roll, 10d6+50 on the second, and a whopping 15d6+75 on the third! See the falling rules in the *Hell on Earth* rulebook.

I'm NOT Going Up There!

Regardless of the route the heroes take, neither Tom nor Fred is willing to climb the coaster. No amount of talk or threats can convince them to scale the Screamin' Demon.

To them, it represents certain death!

The posse is now faced with a difficult choice—either leave the captive(s) alone or split the group.

Leaving the men behind runs the risk that they'll be captured again or worse; splitting the posse weakens the heroes in case of attack.

Send in the Clowns

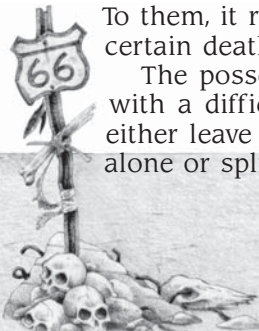
Wilton has no intention of letting his "captive" audience escape. When it becomes obvious the heroes are going to free Diane, several clowns are dispatched to stop them.

Two clowns, plus one for each member of the posse, are sent to attack the wasters. If the party is split, one of the extra clowns goes with each group.

The clowns use tunnels and ground cover to sneak up on any posse members not on the coaster itself. The automatons get a +4 bonus to their *sneak* rolls as they approach the heroes.

Those attacking the group on the coaster simply climb the sides—their extendable limbs make it a simple and speedy task. Since walking a narrow catwalk over 20 stories above the ground is likely to occupy most wasters' thoughts completely, the clowns get a +6 bonus to creep up on the heroes.

Once the clowns get within range, they attack. They try to coordinate their attacks if the posse is split into two groups to maximize the effects of surprise on the heroes.



Killer Clowns

Killer Clowns

Corporeal: D:2d6, N:2d8, Q:3d8,
S:4d10, V:2d12

Climbin' 3d8, dodge 4d8,
fightin': brawlin', axe, knife
4d8, sneak 3d8

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

Area knowledge (Magic Island)
5d6, ridicule 4d6, search 4d8

Pace: 10

Size: 6

Wind: NA

Terror: 7

Special Abilities:

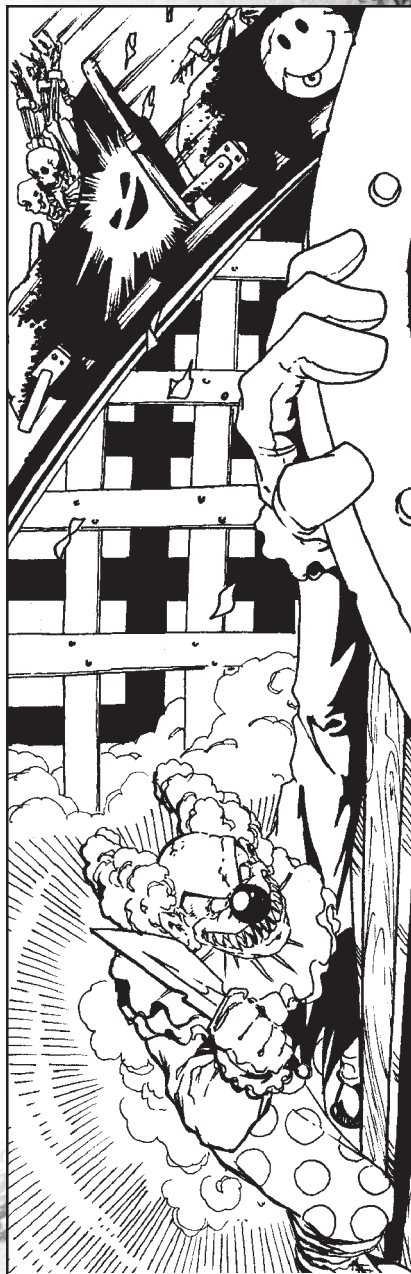
Armor: 2

Claws: A clown's claw
attack does STR +1d4—but
they use weapons
whenever possible.

Extendable Limbs: The
clowns' limbs are actually
powerful electromagnetic
cables constructed to
function as springs. This
allows them to retract
their arms and legs to a
minimum length of 2' and
extend them to a
maximum length of 8'. As
a result, the clowns get a
bonus of 2 to their Pace
and a +2 on all *fightin'*
and *climbin'* rolls. Clowns
can make fighting attacks
on heroes up to 8' away.

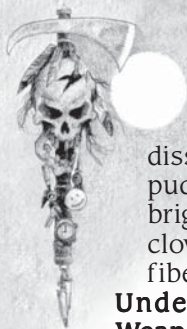
Fearless

Self-destruct: Unlike the
standard automatons,
killer clowns don't
explode when put down.
Instead, internal acid
reservoirs open and



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Killer Clowns



dissolve the body into a puddle of swirling, brightly-colored goo (the clowns are constructed of fiberglass composites).

Undead

Weapons: The clowns are armed with axes, cleavers, etc.—that's where all the sharp objects went! As long as they're armed, the clowns do STR+2d8 damage.

Description: Each clown is individual—there are short ones, tall ones, fat ones, clowns with orange hair, big noses...you name it. All have had their looks altered to appear more horrific than amusing. Smiles are now leers, teeth are pointed and sharp, eyes small and predatory, and hands end in enormous claws. The colors of the creatures' makeup are putrid variations of bright and cheery hues.

The flexibility of their arms and legs allows them to move in a disturbingly loose-limbed fashion, somewhere between flowing and stumbling. Some clowns may keep their arms stretched to abnormal lengths or walk on extended legs like stilts.

All clowns have a "laughing-box" that produces anything from a sinister titter to a maniacal cackle to crazed howling.

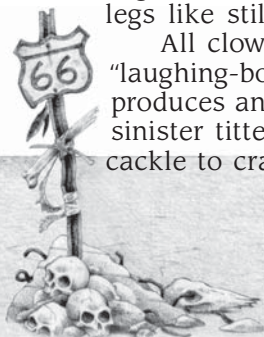
All Aboard!

As if battling demonic clowns with axes 20 stories above the ground weren't bad enough, Wilton has another surprise for the heroes. As soon as one of the wasters climbs aboard the car to free Diane, he starts the ride again! At least one of the clowns latches onto the car as well. The hero faces a hurtling race over the rails with a grease-painted devil hot on her trail!

Hell Ride

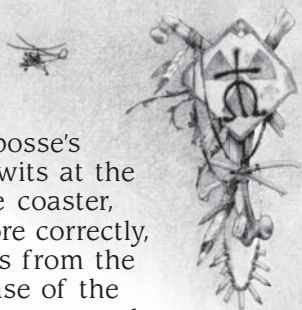
The safety bars are locked in the down position, so the hero has no way to secure herself in the car. Each round in which she does anything besides hang on for dear life, she must make a Fair (5) *Nimbleness* roll. Failure on this roll indicates she's hurled from the car for a minimum falling damage of 10d6+50—more if the situation warrants! Going bust on a *fightin'* roll has the same result.

Even if she makes the roll, all other actions are at a -4 while on the speeding coaster. The bright side is the clown is also at -4 to its rolls, although it doesn't have to worry about falling out—serpentine limbs do have advantages. However, if the clown goes bust on its *fightin'* roll it does fly out of the car to a near certain and messy death.



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Killer Clowns



By the way, any waster with a serious death wish can hitch a ride on the next set of cars which arrive 10 rounds after the first depart the top of the hill.

The Loops

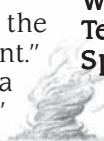
Three rounds into the ride, the car hits the first of three loops. During this round, the hero can do nothing but hold on for dear life. Centrifugal force helps some, but the ride's velocity slows enough at the apex for a rider to fall out.

Any unsecured rider must make a Fair (5) *Strength* roll on this round or drop out of the car when it reaches the top of the loop, suffering 10d6+15 falling damage. Unless the character has some way of securing himself to the ride prior to the loop, no other action can be taken.

There are two more loops on the coaster—one at five rounds into the ride and again at seven rounds. The ride ends nine rounds after beginning its plummet down the main hill.

The Head Man

If the posse defeats the clowns and survives the Screamin' Demon, Wilton decides to step in and give the group his "personal treatment." After all, it won't do to let a few "unsatisfied customers" leave the island!



While the posse's gathering its wits at the bottom of the coaster, Wilton—or more correctly, his head—rises from the lake at the base of the Screamin' Demon atop the remains of the Octopus ride. He immediately charges the posse, using *ridicule* on the least injured hero as he closes the distance.

All bets are off now—Wilton attacks to kill. He had hoped to keep a few visitors alive for a while, but rather than let a few "unsatisfied customers" escape Magic Island, he'd rather kill them. After all, he has a hard-earned reputation to protect!

Dempsey Wilton

Corporeal: D:2d6, N:3d6, Q:3d8,
S:4d12+12, V:4d12+8

Fightin': brawlin' 4d6

Mental: C:3d8, K:2d10, M:4d8,
Sm:2d12, Sp:3d10

Area knowledge (Dempsey Islands) 8d10, professional: computer programming 6d10, ridicule 4d12, science: electronics, engineering, robotics 7d10

Pace: 14 (this thing has *long* legs!)

Size: 15 (main body)

Wind: —

Terror: 11

Special Abilities:

Armor: 4 overall, 2
around head
(plexiglass case).



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Killer Clowns

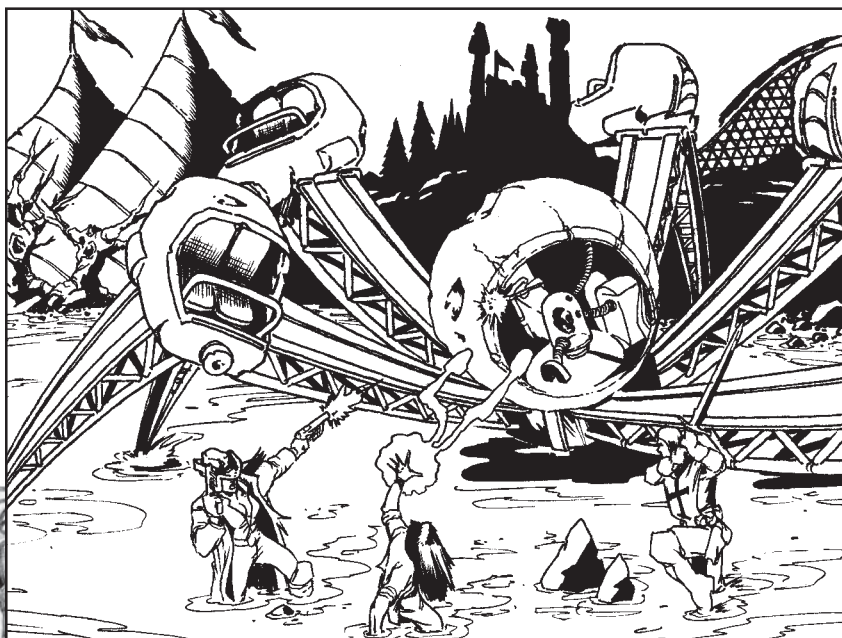
Bite and Stomp: Wilton can make one bite and two stomp attacks each action. Due to the ride's size, each must be directed at a different target. The bite does STR+2d10 and each stomp does STR.

Invulnerability: The octopus body can be damaged and even destroyed, but this has no real effect on Wilton's head. The head itself must be destroyed to kill Wilton. The head takes wounds based on a normal Size 6 human body.

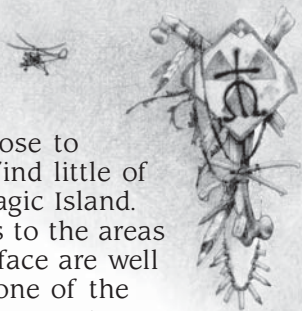
Mental Strength: Thanks to the connection to Magic Island's computer, the presence of the manitou, and his own insanity, Wilton gets a +5 to any *Spirit* roll to resist a mental attack.

Undead

Description: Wilton has had his head mounted on the missing Octopus ride from the Octopus' Garden. He's added a set of pneumatic compressors to function as a gripping tool—or a set of mechanical jaws, in a pinch. His severed head sits in a thick plexiglass case atop the black, eight-limbed



Killer Clowns



chassis and it's mounted on a rotating base allowing him full 360° vision.

Attempts to shoot the head are at -10 from the ground due to restricted visibility. Any hero brave enough to climb the monstrosity and fire on the head is only at -4.

Coup: The character gains a +2 to all *ridicule* rolls and can use that Aptitude to resist any Contest of Wills (*overawe, persuasion, or ridicule*). However, she also develops a maniacal twitter or cackle that sets normal folks' teeth on edge and gives her a -2 to all *persuasion* rolls.

Goin' Home

When Wilton is killed, the power on the island abruptly shuts off. All rides stop and the park is plunged into darkness if it's still night. The clowns and other automated creatures retreat under the island—although the posse is likely to assume they've shut down as well.

A short while after defeating Wilton, the posse notices the section of the monorail trestle that "fell" is repaired. They're free to wander the island or depart as they see fit. The former captives are quite ready to leave as soon as humanly possible.

If they choose to remain, they find little of interest on Magic Island. The entrances to the areas under the surface are well hidden and none of the clowns or other creatures can be found anywhere on the island. The weapons and other gear on the bandits are still around if the posse didn't already scavenge them--the clowns have little use for the items.

Unless the posse has a boat or some other way to cross the open water, they can't reach the other islands. The monorail bridge falls into the Gulf a short distance from the Magic Island terminal.

Once the heroes leave Magic Island, returning is much more difficult. The monorail bridge mysteriously collapses again, leaving no easy route back to the park.

The heroes did soundly trounce Wilton and are entitled to all the rewards due them for defeating a fearmonger—coup, Grit, and possibly even a Legend Chip—but something still lurks under the Dempsey Islands!

Bounty

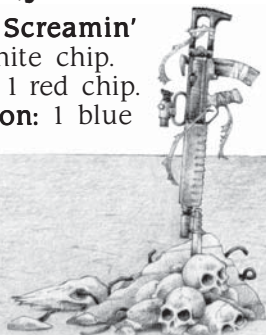
Climbing the Screamin'

Demon: 1 white chip.

Freeing Diane: 1 red chip.

Defeating Wilton: 1 blue chip.

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