

El Camino del Diablo

The call

Directive from A Cell: Multiple illegal immigrants were found murdered in the U.S. Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge under mysterious circumstances. Investigate at once. Cover-up if necessary.

Keeper's notes

This scenario is an investigation of a mass murder that involves an ancient Mayan artifact. It takes place in the desert during the summer of 2003. The Mexico/U.S. Border has become a very busy place since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Between 2002 and 2004, massive efforts were undertaken to "strengthen" the border. With increased border protection, monitoring, and fence construction, there was a massive reduction in the areas and opportunities where illegal crossings were possible. The remotest of areas have become hotbeds of illegal activity.

El Camino Del Diablo is a historic road, dating back to before European colonization of the Americas. It takes its name from the many bodies and unmarked graves that are found along the most dangerous section, a 130-mile stretch from Sonoyta, Sonora to what is now Yuma, Arizona. It connects the two cities through hostile terrain. Between these two cities, in this harsh and unforgiving desert, are wildlife refuges. Cabeza Prieta on the U.S. side and El Pinacate on the Mexican side. The last thirty miles to Yuma is perhaps the worst, containing few sources of water in an area that is known to reach temperatures of 120F.

Various refugees spend their life-savings to risk the inhospitable desert and be led across by specialists called "coyotes" who are likely to abandon them at the first sign of danger. Also, this area has become a preferred location for drug-smuggling and drug deals. The location is crisscrossed with improvised roads littered with burned-out, abandoned vehicles. If you add to that a strong military and border patrol presence as well as park rangers and U.S. army engineers surveying, and replacing the border fence, it all seems like a very busy area with the potential for human as well as natural conflict.

To represent the amount of activity now in the area, in game play, always let the players know that there is something visible, but just out of shouting distance, be it a moving car, or an abandoned wreck, plumes of smoke on the horizon, strobing flashlights at night, or something far more sinister dipping behind the rise of a hill.

On site

U.S. Park Ranger Gustafson meets the agents at the entrance to the park. He's a DG friendly. There are many agencies already at the site including representatives from U.S Border Patrol; the DEA; the FBI; local law enforcement agencies; The National Park Service; etc. The players can quickly gain control and authority over the confusion by flashing their badges and intoning the newly formed Department of Homeland Security. The investigators will see many bodies, in varying states of decay, lined-up facing a makeshift stone altar. All appear to be of modern victims but some appear to have been killed mere moments before while others are hours old, days old, weeks, months, it continues to the oldest remains which are just dust. They all appear to be bound and gagged, arranged in a line. Where cause of death can be determined, all appear to of died from loss of blood by severed jugular vein from a single knife stroke. If blood tests are performed, they will find evidence of an unknown chemical substance (Liao) as well as cocaine. None have any identification on them although all appear

to be Central and South American refugees based on their clothing and ethnicities. An abandoned truck is nearby as well as a cardboard box of packing material. On a successful Spot Hidden of the box, an agent will discover gold-colored flakes, from the artifact.

What really happened

A smuggler known as "Jirón" attempted to bring a Mayan artifact across the border. Unbeknownst to him, this artifact is unique. It houses a shard of a Lord of Tindalos. It is not enough for the Lord to manifest, but it is enough to cause temporal anomalies and for Hounds of Tindalos to be drawn to. Back in the time of the Maya, priests managed to dispel a Lord of Tindalos by forcing a shard into this statue made from meteoric metal. The statue is gold-hued, heavy, and represents an oddly angular man, sitting cross-legged. Housed inside a temple in southern Mexico, it was effectively shielded from the Hounds' view. Now, the Hounds want the shard released and will attempt to force anyone with the statue to complete the ritual.

After crossing the border, Jirón lost the mental battle for control and began preparations for a ritual. He seized the opportunity to begin the Releasing Ritual (see Supplementary Material) after coming upon a group of refugees waiting out the heat of the day under a stand of mesquite trees. He and his men tied them up at gunpoint.

Jirón is not alone, shortly before the ritual was to take place, he was approached by another group in the desert, three drug smugglers from Tiger Transit (Dara "Danny" Pheoung and Phongsakorn Chucharoenwanitchakuul, Tcho-Tcho pg. 143 see Supplementary Material), awaiting the arrival of a package from South America. They recognized the magic contained within the statue. They helped begin the ritual forcing the victims to ingest Reverb (DG:C pg.147) and then sacrificing them before a makeshift stone altar upon which the artifact rested. Before completion, Jirón was interrupted by a team of border patrol. They fled, on foot, into the desert, Strangely, the Border Patrol was unable to pursue, finding no tracks.

Having begun the ritual, only to have it fail, Jirón is now completely mad. The only thing he will utter is: "Los perros me quiere repetir el ritual", or some variation thereof. Now, Jirón and the Tcho-Tcho are heading towards the only reliable water source in the area, the Tinajas Altas (Spanish, "High Tanks"). In the past, men have been found dead, their fingers worn raw from climbing the rock between the nine tanks, looking for one which still contained water. More often than not, the men die just yards from salvation.

As the men head towards the rocky crags, they also get closer to exposed rocks possessing sharp angles from which a Hound of Tindalos might manifest. The Tcho-Tcho will sacrifice Jirón's men to the Hounds to keep the Hounds at bay. They want to escape, keeping the idol for themselves.

Lab results

(time for tests are indicated in parentheses after each entry)

FINGERPRINTING:

Prints in the truck are of Dara "Danny" Pheoung and Phongsakorn Chucharoenwanitchakuul, known members of a drug cartel (5 days): both have records for minor drug related infractions throughout the country. The sheet for Phoeng includes a detailed entry by a junior agent suggesting a link to Tiger Transit. The agent disappeared in 2001.

A few victims are identifiable by fingerprints if the agents gain access to Latin American countries' databases (success on both Spanish and Persuade Roll, 10 Days).

DNA:

Inconclusive, the truck will show genetic markers for individuals of Asian descent; the site, markers for Hispanic and Latino (10-30 Days, depending on backlog [Party Luck Roll]).

CHEMICAL:

Illegal drugs are present at the site in trace elements as well as in the blood of the better preserved victims. Drug dogs are unwilling to stay at the site and useless. The metal flakes are identifiable as polished remains of an ancient metal process known as depletion gilding.

PALYNOLOGICAL:

Pollen from the box's packing material indicates tropical jungles of Central America (5 days).

ENTOMOLOGY:

Any insect activity at the site would be recent (1st to 2nd instar), dating to the last few days, despite the age of the remains (5 days).

FORENSIC ANTHROPOLOGY:

Analysis of the remains will agree with previously stated information. The oldest human remains present will appear to be several thousand years but fossilization will not have taken place (5 days).

On hounds and horror

These beasts do not willingly exist in our dimension. This world, to protect its existence, constantly attempts to reject their presence. In this scenario, their primary goal is not the destruction of everyone, but rather the release of the shard through the completion of the ritual. The Hounds will quickly kill anyone who seeks to prevent this from occurring. However, the Hounds will attempt to herd anyone in possession of the artifact back to the site where the ritual was begun so it can be completed and the shard can be released, rather than kill them.

Completion

Contact with the idol will have certain effects (see Supplementary Material) including knowledge of how to complete the ritual. The players must return the artifact to the altar, and complete the ritual to successfully release the shard. Once released, the Hounds should depart and the temporal anomalies will cease. No negative effects are incurred through the completion of the ritual.

Cast of Characters/Potential Encounters (not necessarily physically violent):

Border Patrol

U.S. Army Corp of Engineers

Native Americans

Drug Runners (Tcho-Tcho and Mundane)

Coyotes

Latin American Refugees