

The Gongfarmer's Almanac



The 2020 Gongfarmer's Almanac:

A Dungeon Crawl Classics RPG Zine

Written, Illustrated, Edited and Produced by
the DCC RPG Communities



Dark Trails - Yee-haw! #1

VOLUME 11 OF SIXTEEN BOOKLETS

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CHEESE

GOING TO THE CROSSROADS

By David Baity

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“Going to the Crossroads” was originally intended to be included in the upcoming *Dark Trails RPG*. Unfortunately, page count is an issue and the powers that be decided to toss the mechanic to help cut back on word count and crunch. Feel free to use the mechanic as an optional way to help add some depth to your characters and an added element of fun!

“Going to the Crossroads” can be used with, or as a replacement for, the birth augur/lucky roll mechanic found within the pages of the *Dark Trails RPG*. The mechanic is based around characters wishing to get the jump on evil by taking on the Devil himself by way of a game of chance.

The Devil, Beelzebub, or Lucifer, whatever folks take to calling him, don’t make no matter. Old Scratch has taken a keen interest in the current events of the world, namely the big tentacled things trying to crash his party with the man upstairs. You see, Heaven’s original “bad boy” has an age-old score to settle with the “Bossman”, and anyone foolish enough to intervene in these plans will learn the error of their folly, by way of a one-way ticket to Hell aboard the Brimstone Express! Hell, there’s even room for Elder critters.

While the forces of Heaven seem content to be indirect when dealing with the tentacle-laden apocalypse looming on the horizon, using intermediaries to carry out their plans, Old Scratch prefers a more direct approach and isn’t above answering directly the call of a wayward soul wishing to gain an edge since being baptized in the weird waters of the supernatural.

At 1st-level, characters in the *Dark Trails RPG* realize the greater role they play in the ultimate struggle between good and evil. With new powers and abilities comes the realization of the unfathomable evils destined to cross them along the path fate has set out for them. To stack the odds in their favor, fledgling characters often choose to

travel to the crossroads at midnight for the opportunity to challenge Old Scratch to a game of chance.

Beating Old Scratch at his own game isn't easy, but means walking away a little luckier with a special favor granted by the Angel of Darkness. Losing means the character's fortunes just grew a tad shallower; they'll walk away with a curse to serve as a reminder that you never mess with the Devil.

Once characters reach 1st-level (whether after finishing a successful funnel adventure or starting as 1st-level adventurers), players may declare they wish to "go to the crossroads". Handle the encounter using the listed steps below.

GOING TO THE CROSSROADS

Each player may choose to enter their character into a round of cards with Old Scratch, played by the judge. Characters with a positive Luck modifier initially play for free while those with no modifier or a negative modifier must wager a permanent point of Luck to enter the game of chance.

Once every participating character has anted, the judge assumes the role of Old Scratch, who favors cards when gambling during the 1800's, blackjack being his game of choice. For purposes of "Going to the Crossroads", judges should use a standard 52-card deck of shuffled playing cards (Jokers removed) and allow one random participating player a cut of the deck before cards are dealt. Each participant except Old Scratch receives one card face up followed by a second card also dealt face-up. **Old Scratch only shows the first card dealt to him, while the second card is dealt face down.** Aces may be played as 11 or 1, while 10's or face cards count as 10. All other cards count at their face value.

If Old Scratch's revealed card is an Ace or 10, immediately peek at his face down card to determine if he has 21 total points with the 2 cards dealt (21 points is also known as "blackjack"), in which case immediately reveal the face down card to win the current round unless a character also has 21, in which case a tie, or "push", occurs and neither the characters nor Old Scratch wins. All wagered Luck is returned, and a second round begins.

Should Old Scratch not have 21/blackjack with his initial 2-card hand, the round begins with the player on Old Scratch's left and continuing clockwise. All characters, one at a time, then attempt to get as close to a perfect score of 21/blackjack as possible by way of taking additional cards, dealt one at a time (often stated as asking the dealer to "hit me") until a player either declares a stop to the draw (termed "staying") without going over a total sum of 21 or the sum total of the drawn cards exceeds 21 (termed "going bust"). Characters may take any number of cards until they either go bust or decide to stay with their current total.

Characters drawing a matching pair as their initial 2 card hand have the option of "splitting" their hand. At this stage of the game, characters with a positive Luck modifier no longer play for free and must wager an additional point of Luck to split the initial hand. Once split, the character plays each card as a separate hand using the same rules; the only exception is if the matching pair is a pair of Aces. Characters are prohibited from hitting their Aces after a split. Instead, each Ace receives no more than one additional card, similarly to what happens after doubling down (see below), except that the character is not required to wager an additional point of Luck when their Aces receive the single extra card after splitting.

Characters feeling lucky may "double down" by wagering an additional point of Luck against the risk of drawing only one additional card. Doubling down is often declared when the two face-up cards total 10 and the character has a hunch an Ace is about to drop, resulting in 21/blackjack.

Once all characters have finished making their hands or going bust, Old Scratch flips his face-down card. If the total of his cards is 17 or higher, he must stay and is not allowed to hit for any additional cards. If the total is 16 or lower, he must continue to draw cards (hit) until a total of 17 or greater is reached or he busts. Old Scratch may not choose to split his hand or double down.

Characters may split, or double down, on a hand but not both.

WINNING & LOSING

Any character beating Old Scratch's hand total without going bust gains a permanent Favor determined by taking the highest-ranking

card in their winning hand and then referencing table 1: Permanent Favors & Curses. This is in addition to any wagered Luck being returned.

Characters beating Old Scratch with a perfect score of 21/blackjack gain a permanent Favor determined by taking the highest-ranking card in their winning hand and then referencing table 1: Permanent Favors & Curses. This is in addition to earning double the total Luck wagered on the winning hand. A character's Luck ability cannot be raised above 18 in this fashion.

Characters losing to Old Scratch, whether by obtaining a lesser hand value or by going bust, lose all Luck wagered and acquire a permanent Curse determined by taking the highest-ranking card in the losing hand and referencing table 1: Permanent Favors & Curses.

Should Old Scratch win with a score of 21/blackjack, characters lose double the Luck wagered and acquire a permanent Curse determined by taking the highest-ranking card in the losing hand and referencing table 1: Permanent Favors & Curses. **Legend has it, Old Scratch keeps centuries of wagered Luck in a mason jar that he plans to use in the fated final confrontation with the "Bossman".**

Characters who split their cards follow the above rules for each hand, possibly ending up with a win/loss, or claiming a rare win/win, or a worst-case scenario being a loss/loss. Favors and Curses are cumulative in these instances.

Characters who choose to double down and beat Old Scratch win double the total Luck wagered in addition to acquiring a permanent Favor, determined by taking the highest-ranking card in their winning hand and then referencing table 1: Permanent Favors & Curses. A character's Luck ability cannot be raised above 18 in this fashion.

All ties between characters and Old Scratch go to the Prince of Darkness (ya' knew better than to gamble ta' start with, tin-horn!) unless the character finished with a total of 21/blackjack, in which case a tie is declared and the character's wagered Luck is returned.

PERMANENT FAVORS - CLUBS

- ♣ 2 **Roadrunner:** Your character's movement rate is increased by 10'.
- ♣ 3 **Strapping lad:** Your character gains +1d to all Fort saves.
- ♣ 4 **Lightning boy:** Your character gains +1d to all initiative checks.
- ♣ 5 **Steel trap:** Your character gains +1d to all fear-based saves and +2 Grit points.
- ♣ 6 **Cunning linguist:** Your character is a student of foreign languages, fluent in 1d3 languages in addition to any normal bonuses received for INT.
- ♣ 7 **Stubborn feller':** Your character is steadfast and rarely succumbs to the will of others. They gain +1d to all Will-based saves and opposed rolls.
- ♣ 8 **Corn-fed mule:** Your character possesses unnatural strength. They gain 1d3 points of Strength, up to a maximum of 18.
- ♣ 9 **Bloodhound:** Your character can track by scent by making a DC 10 Intelligence check modified up or down by the conditions of the hunt, as determined by the judge.
- ♣ 10 **Cat's grace:** Your character gains +1d to Ref saves when falling less than a 100'. They also take no damage when passing a save that would normally allow for half damage and only take half damage when the save is failed. Additionally, they suffer no broken bones on a roll of 6.
- ♣ J **Lucky charm:** Once per 24 hours your character may grant a reroll to an ally for any skill check, attack roll or damage roll.
- ♣ Q **Charmed life:** Your character always seems to walk out of a brawl with not so much as a bruise. They may reroll one failed saving throw in each combat, but must take the second roll, no matter the result.
- ♣ K **Tough as nails:** Your character has unusually thick skin. They gain a permanent +2 AC bonus and blunt weapons do -1d to damage rolls against them.
- ♣ A **Vanishing act:** Your character has Fae blood in their veins and once per day can become invisible and remain so until they perform a strenuous action (including attacking) or they sleep.

PERMANENT FAVORS - HEARTS

- ♥ 2 **Enhanced vision:** Your character has twice the normal range of vision and gains a +2 bonus to all spot checks.
- ♥ 3 **Double jointed:** Your character is capable of bending and contorting in such a way that they can free themselves from normal restraints in addition to squeezing into tight spaces half

their size.

- ♥ 4 **Crack shot:** Your character is a natural with firearms of any type. They gain a +2-attack modifier with guns of all types.
- ♥ 5 **Ambidextrous:** Your character can use either hand for physical tasks and suffers no penalties for using two 1H weapons of equal size when two-weapon fighting.
- ♥ 6 **Educated:** Your character is highly intellectual and considered educated at the university level. They gain +1d to all Intelligence-based rolls (including spellcasting).
- ♥ 7 **A real looker:** Your character is extremely good looking. They gain +1d to all rolls related to non-magical charms (wooing a lady, trying to get free drinks at the saloon, etc.) and courtship which can often be used to the character's advantage.
- ♥ 8 **Quick healer:** Your character heals at twice the normal rate and all healing (magical or not) gains a +1d to rolls determining restored hit points.
- ♥ 9 **Goosebumps:** Your character gains +1d to spot and other related rolls, including surprise, detecting hidden passages, traps, etc.
- ♥ 10 **Animal savant:** Non-angered or trained animals treat your character favorably. Any rolls related to befriending animals are made with +1d and even attacking animals will choose another target if one is available.
- ♥ J **Lie detector:** Your character can tell when someone is lying directly to their face if they concentrate on the liar's "tells".
- ♥ Q **Dead kin:** Un-dead creatures will always choose a target other than your character during combat unless they strike them. Additionally, zombies will completely ignore your character as if they are one of their own.
- ♥ K **Seeing red:** Your character may enter a rage that allows the benefit of an additional attack per round and all attacks are made with a +2 bonus. Additionally, their AC drops by 2 while raging and they must make a DC 12 Will save to try and stop the rage. Failure means they continue to attack remaining enemies until vanquished and then they turn on any allies. A Will save is allowed each round.
- ♥ A **Floater:** Your character can levitate once every 24 hours. Levitation lasts 1 turn and the character can float up or down 20' per round, after which the character will float down harmlessly at the same rate.

PERMANENT FAVORS - SPADES

- ♠ 2 **Amped-up hearing:** Your character's hearing is amplified, allowing the ability to hear even a whisper in a crowded room. They also gain +1d to rolls made to avoid surprise.
- ♠ 3 **Photographic memory:** Your character can recall any piece of information with perfect clarity. Spells using verbal components gain a +2 casting bonus from their talent.
- ♠ 4 **Wired:** Your character has a sixth sense that makes them impossible to be caught by surprise while conscious.
- ♠ 5 **Shadow sight:** Your character can see in pitch black non-magical darkness.
- ♠ 6 **Fire born:** Your character takes half damage from heat/fire attacks, as there was a devil at play somewhere down the line!
- ♠ 7 **Blessed be:** Your character gains a +1d to all saving throws versus creatures walking the Path of the Damned.
- ♠ 8 **Sprightly:** Your character gains 1d3 points of Agility, up to a maximum of 18.
- ♠ 9 **Copycat:** Your character can mimic any sound or voice they hear with perfection. Targets attempting to see through the ploy must make a DC 15 Will save (may be modified by the judge based on current conditions.)
- ♠ 10 **Charmed life:** Your character is capable of making friends and changing minds. Your character gains +1d to any NPC interaction rolls, while contested Personality rolls made by the target of their charms are made at a -1d.
- ♠ J **Lie sniffer:** Your character can tell if someone is telling the truth by spoken word.
- ♠ Q **Shape shifter:** Your character can shapeshift into an animal linked to them in the spirit world. Items they wear shift with them as they gain the physical stats of the animal. Your character retains a form of limited speech while in animal form in addition to their full mental abilities. Roll 1d10: 1) coyote; 2) bobcat; 3) crow; 4) rattlesnake; 5) wolf; 6) hawk; 7) badger; 8) jack rabbit; 9) armadillo; 10) desert owl.
- ♠ K **Tickle-whispers:** Your character can communicate telepathically with those whom they could normally hold a conversation. Range is 1 mile per level and line of sight is not required if the recipient is known.
- ♠ A **Ulthar's chosen:** Your character can communicate telepathically with any feline within line of sight, who also considers them a friend. Small favors may be asked, but usually come with a price, and felines are to be cherished and protected.

PERMANENT FAVORS - DIAMONDS

- ◆ 2 **Heightened reflexes:** Your character gains +1d to all Ref save and related Agility ability checks.
- ◆ 3 **Internal compass:** Your character always stays on track and never becomes lost; whether underground or out at sea, they can always find their way home, or to a destination they have previously visited.
- ◆ 4 **Big brother:** Your character has a very influential ally on their side that they can call on for help, or information. The player and judge should work on the type of contact and services they can offer.
- ◆ 5 **Tough as nails:** Your character gains double their Stamina modifier in hit points at every level. Your character always gains at least 1 hit point, despite any negative modifiers.
- ◆ 6 **Friendly spirit:** Your character has a spirit watching out for their well-being and they may reroll one failed save every 24 hours. Your character may also spend a point of permanent Luck to reroll any number of saves on a 1:1 basis.
- ◆ 7 **Old Yeller:** Your character has an animal companion with whom they share an empathic bond. Your character can teach the animal two basic tricks per level and it will faithfully defend them until the end. Roll 1d8: 1) monkey; 2) horse; 3) hawk; 4) dog; 5) cat; 6) wolf; 7) badger; 8) crow.
- ◆ 8 **Shiver shrugs:** Your character takes half damage from all cold related attacks and suffers no ability penalties from remaining in cold environments.
- ◆ 9 **Cat's eyes:** Your character has superior night vision at normal line of sight if they have at least a candle strength source of light.
- ◆ 10 **Snake bane:** Your character is immune to all non-magical poisons and takes half damage from magical ones.
- ◆ J **Arcane diffuser:** Your character is resistant to magic. Your character gains a 20% magic resistance which is further increased by 10% with each new level (100% maximum). Spells, magical recipes and miracles (even beneficial ones) simply have no effect on them.
- ◆ Q **Fit as a fiddle:** Your character is immune to all disease, including magical ones. Additionally, they may opt to reroll any hit point roll at each new level but must keep the result of the second roll regardless if it's lower than the original.
- ◆ K **Fire starter:** Your character can manipulate inanimate objects causing them to catch fire while concentrating. Range is line of sight and objects suffer 1d6 damage on the first round (see rules for fires in the *Dark Trails RPG* for more info).

- ♦ A **Spirit walker:** Your character can step physically into the spirit world. A reflective surface must be gazed upon to attempt the ability and a DC 13 Will save (modified up or down by the judge) must be passed to side step across the veil. See the Dark Trails RPG for additional rules on side stepping.

PERMANENT FAVORS - JOKER

- Joker **Lady Luck's chosen:** The patron of good luck constantly allows her mojo to flow through your character's corporeal mortal body. Your character gains +2 points to your total Luck ability (maximum of 18) and regenerates spent Luck points at a rate of 2 points per day.

PERMANENT CURSES - CLUBS

- ♣ 2 **Milky:** Your character suffers from albinism. Vision is half normal range and your skin burns easily in direct sunlight making it hard to perform physical actions while under the light of day (-1d).
- ♣ 3 **Club foot:** You gain a lame foot and suffer a -5' penalty to movement in addition to a -2 penalty to Ref saves.
- ♣ 4 **Snake bait:** Your character is vulnerable to the venom of serpents. Saves are made at -1d and effects and damage for failed saves are doubled.
- ♣ 5 **Slithering whisperm:** Your character is terrified of snakes of all types. The presence of a snake(s) within 10' of your character forces a DC 15 Will save, with failure resulting in immediately fleeing away from the area for 1d8 rounds. If they are unable to flee, they suffer a -1d to attack rolls while in the presence of the snake(s).
- ♣ 6 **Eye grabber:** Your character has a large birthmark, tattoo, or possibly a large mole. NPCs are often distracted and do not retain what your character is trying to discuss.
- ♣ 7 **Animal spook:** Your character suffers -1d to all interactions with animals, including horsemanship skill rolls. Domestic animals will avoid the character and attack if cornered.
- ♣ 8 **Speak up:** Your character must be looking at a subject they wish to speak with to understand any conversation; reading lips helps. They're not completely deaf and loud noises will alert them 60% of the time.
- ♣ 9 **Two slices short a loaf:** Your character is known for their dull wit and slow decision-making. Subtract 1d3 from Intelligence. Additionally, they suffer -1d to initiative checks and other rolls involving quick decision making.

- ♣ 10 **Portly:** The character is unusually obese and must eat double the amount of food of someone with normal stature. Portly characters find their movement reduced by 5' and squeezing in tight places is impossible.
- ♣ J **Addict:** Your character has a strong addiction to substances that get them drunk or high. Any saloon, opium den or related den of iniquity forces the character to pass a DC 13 Will save to resist going in for a "taste" or a chance to "chase the dragon". Characters succumbing must attempt to get as drunk or high as possible, suffering any game related effects.
- ♣ Q **Stumblebum:** Your character's reflexes are horrible during times of combat and they suffer a -2 AC penalty in addition to a -2 penalty to Ref saves.
- ♣ K **Toothy twin:** Your character has developed a large tumor resembling a distorted version of their face. Hair, eyes, and teeth are all prominent features. The tumor has an infantile intelligence and must be "loved" by big brother or sister for one hour each day. The tumor may also make disturbing noises during moments when silence is paramount. Judges should roll percentage dice and a result of 20% or less means a burp, moan or disturbing laugh has filled the air.
- ♣ A **Elder's chosen:** Your character often hears whispers from those who have awakened from centuries of slumber. The things they say are maddening as the damnation of man is imminent. Your character loses twice the amount of Grit normally lost for failed Grit checks and they must make a DC 13 Will save at the beginning of each new gaming session. Failure results in the character gaining a temporary minor disorder which is in place for the session. Should the character already have a minor disorder, it is temporarily upgraded to a major disorder for the session.

PERMANENT CURSES - HEARTS

- ♥ 2 **Stuttering:** Your character must make a DC 15 Will save to communicate effectively during stressful situations. Failure means they cannot express themselves in a coherent fashion.
- ♥ 3 **Warts:** Your character is covered with unsightly warts. They're considered unattractive and suffer -1d to all NPC interaction rolls. Drinks usually cost more, and businesses may refuse to serve them in hopes they go away.
- ♥ 4 **Beaked devils:** Your character suffers from ornithophobia and must make a DC 12 Will save to focus on any action while in the presence of any bird. Failure results in -1d to all die rolls while the bird(s) is present.

- ♥ 5 **Free bleeder:** Your character suffers from hemophilia and continues to suffer 1 point of bleed damage each round when hurt until first aid or magical healing can be administered.
- ♥ 6 **Sticky fingers:** Your character has a compulsion to steal and must pass a DC 13 Will save to resist attempting to steal an item that has caught their eye.
- ♥ 7 **Sandman:** Your character often falls asleep during inopportune times. If you roll a natural 1 on any initiative or skill check, they doze off for 1d4 rounds, or until roused.
- ♥ 8 **Poorly educated:** Your character loses 1d3 Intelligence, has no education and can neither read nor write.
- ♥ 9 **Glass jaw:** Your character is not able to withstand damage most would shrug off. They must make a DC 12 Fortitude save when an amount of damage from a single source equal to or greater than half their current Stamina ability is suffered . Failure results in being knocked unconscious for 1d4 rounds.
- ♥ 10 **Firestarter:** Your character must pass a DC 13 Will save to avoid setting a structure on fire if conditions allow for one to be started where they won't be held responsible.
- ♥ J **Truth sayer:** Your character is incapable of telling a lie, even under threat of death for themselves and allies.
- ♥ Q **Modern giant:** Your character is 7' +1d12" tall. They gain 3 points of Strength (not to exceed a maximum of 18), but also suffer -10' to movement, -3 to AC, and -1d to initiative checks due to severe arthritis.
- ♥ K **Gill kin:** Your character has a sliver of deep one nesting in their blood and the awakening of forgotten gods has triggered a "change". With each new level starting at 1st-level, they gain a minor fish-related mutation (judge's discretion).
- ♥ A **Gremlins:** Technology tends to malfunction in your character's hands. Your character has -1d when using any modern technologies (guns, steam engines, telegraph machines, etc). If your character rolls a natural 1 while using any such devices, the device becomes broken beyond repair.

PERMANENT CURSES - SPADES

- ♠ 2 **Lil feller':** Your character's height is reduced to 5' - 2d6" and their base movement is permanently decreased by -10' (minimum 5').
- ♠ 3 **Potty mouth:** Your character often blurts out curse words as an uncontrollable reaction to stress. They must pass a DC 13 Will save to refrain from blurting out an obscenity during inopportune times or stressful encounters.
- ♠ 4 **Ex-orderly:** Your character has an all-consuming fear of

- doctors stemming from early (primitive) medical practices. Your character must pass a DC 13 Will save to allow standard medical treatment to be administered to them without a fight.
- ♠ 5 **Missing eye:** Your character only has one functioning eye. Ranged attacks and Ref saves are at -1d.
 - ♠ 6 **Wheezer:** Your character must pass a DC 13 Fort save after any encounter where they exert themselves. Failure means the character must stop and rest for 1 turn or pass out for 1d3 hours.
 - ♠ 7 **Fiery fate:** Your character suffers massive third degree burns. The burns cover most of their body causing a -1d penalty to all rolls where appearance is a factor. The flames vanish as quickly as they appear.
 - ♠ 8 **Firebug:** Your character is fascinated by the creatures that dance in open flames and must pass a DC 13 Will save to avoid standing motionless to watch any burning flame, even during times of combat. Failure results in standing perfectly still until the save can be passed; a new save may be made each round.
 - ♠ 9 **Stiff legged:** The Devil takes your character's leg just under the knee and leaves them with a wooden peg or similar prosthetic in its place. Movement is reduced by -5' (minimum 5') and all Ref saves are made at -1d.
 - ♠ 10 **Mute:** Your character is incapable of speech and communicates by reading lips and jotting down notes as sign language (though known by them, it is rarely learned by folks on the frontier.)
 - ♠ J **Chronic liar:** Your character can't resist telling tall tales and friends often can't tell what's coming from their mouth is the truth. To avoid lying during crucial moments, they must make a DC 13 Will save. Failure results in a doozy of a lie!
 - ♠ Q **Bullet fetcher:** Your character has a chrono-demon stalking them for some unknown offense. The creature will randomly show up during moments of combat where firearms are being used. Should any character using a gun deck flip the Ace of spades, the demon manifests and catches the bullet, redirecting it towards your character with an automatic critical hit. The demon rolls a d12 on the critical hit chart with misfires and adds +1d to any additional roll on the critical hit table result when your character is the target (e.g., damage, ability loss, etc..)
 - ♠ K **Devil's rest:** Your character finds it hard to get a good night's rest and often keeps the rest of your group up while camping on the trail. Each night they must pass a DC 13 Will save to avoid waking up in cold sweats and screaming at the top of their lungs. A failure results in each character in the posse (including

the character) losing any healing benefits from resting, and your character also suffers -1d to all actions for the day.

- ♠ A **Predator's prey:** Your character constantly gives off the same pheromone animals exude when close to death. Your character's presence in any group in the wild means double the chance of wandering encounters by creatures with bestial intelligence. Your character will also be attacked at the first opportunity by any domesticated carnivore given the proper opportunity to strike with advantage (turn their back on a dog, having their picture made with a tamed wolf, etc.)

PERMANENT CURSES - DIAMONDS

- ♦ 2 **Stumbles:** Your character constantly trips over and stumbles into things. If there is a chance to fall into something fragile and valuable, immediately make a DC 10 Ref save to avoid disaster. Your character also suffers a -2 penalty to all Ref saves.
- ♦ 3 **Thin skinned:** Pick heat or cold as a sensitivity. Your character always takes full damage from attacks based on the chosen temperature extreme.
- ♦ 4 **Roach magnet:** Your character suffers from katsaridaphobia (fear of cockroaches) and becomes terrified while within 30' of one. At any point should they find themselves within range of the detestable insect, they must pass a DC 15 Will save or flee directly away from the source. On a success, your character still suffers a -1d to attack rolls while the cockroaches are present.
- ♦ 5 **Gimped gripper:** Your character loses the use of one hand meaning all but the most basic tasks are impossible.
- ♦ 6 **Blackout:** Your character often forgets important memories. Should they be called upon to remember some important detail, they must pass a DC 13 Intelligence check to recall the bit of information.
- ♦ 7 **Silver mine blues:** Your character has blue skin (argyria) as a result of long-term exposure to silver while working the mines. All NPC interaction rolls are made at -1d and they are often made fun of.
- ♦ 8 **Crook back:** Your character has a severely crooked spine and suffers -10' to movement along with a -1d to Ref saves from an awkward gait.
- ♦ 9 **Imaginary friend:** Your character has two distinct personalities that switch during moments of stress unless they pass a DC 13 Will save. Each personality only remembers what it was present for and one personality must be opposite in Path alignment (if possible).

- ◆ 10 **Gambling itch:** Your character must pass a DC 13 Will save to avoid gambling should the opportunity present itself. Gambling sessions typically last 8+1d16 hours, or until the money runs out.
- ◆ J **Arcane mark:** Your character's soul is particularly vulnerable to arcane energies. Your character makes all magic related saving throws at a -2 penalty in addition to taking 1d6 cold and fire damage as ghostly blue flames briefly engulf them after they are targeted by a spell, magical recipe or miracle.
- ◆ Q **Sickly:** Sickness constantly plagues your character as they are cursed with an insufficient immune system. Saving throws made against poison and disease are made at a -1d. Additionally, damage and in-game effects are doubled in intensity.
- ◆ K **Devil's matchstick:** Your character is often followed by an infernal creature obsessed with casting the world in a hellish landscape. The creature has found a way to possess them at inopportune times and cause them to start fires. Judges should secretly roll a 1d20 at the beginning of each session to determine if the creature appears. Any odd number results in the creature manifesting and attempting to possess the character by way of an opposed Will save (the creature gains +2 on the opposed roll). If the creature loses it will leave the character alone for the rest of the session. Should it win, the character is forced into a trance as the creature gains full control of them long enough to start a fire.
- ◆ A **Spook magnet:** Your character's body emits a low frequency vibration that causes nearby spirits pain, much like being stung by bees. Spirits will either flee or attack the character and refuse to communicate with classes known for their abilities to interact with the restless dead. Spirits attacking you successfully gain +1d on all damage rolls as a result of the rage the character instills within them.

PERMANENT CURSES - JOKER

- Joker **Lady Calamity's whipping boy:** Your character is marked by the patron of bad luck! Your character loses 2 points from their Luck ability (minimum 1) and anytime a party member is randomly targeted by an attack, your character is selected. Additionally, any Luck checks are made at +1d (remember lower is better on a Luck check!)



CORNSTALK

BOOGEYMAN

*A level 1 **Dark
Trails** scenario*

**By Ian Zebarah
Shears**

**Illustrations
by Brad McDevitt**

INTRODUCTION

In the little town of Cornflower, all is not as it should be. It's May and the corn is ripe. All the fields are worked daily and the windmill never stops churning, noon, or night. Players are stranded in this town and must put a stop to an ancient ritual if they don't want to be this year's sacrifices.

JUDGE'S BACKGROUND

A small town in Germany made a pact with a feldgeister, a mercurial field spirit. He will protect the town and ensure a bountiful harvest as human sacrifices are offered each Beltaine. The townsfolk of Cornflower are their descendants. The now active ley lines have given the feldgeister corporeal form and great power. Now, the ritual is about to begin again with fresh, unwitting sacrifices.

After arriving in Cornflower, players have limited time to piece together what is going on, formulate a plan and hope to stop the spirit before a mob of villagers comes to collect them for the festivities. It is ultimately up to the judge to set the time limit and react to player decisions. This scenario is not recommended for the beginning judge as it requires a lot of spontaneous decision making after everything has been introduced and after players wake up in town the morning after they arrive. The scenario is presented in this way to encourage an open playstyle your players may find refreshing.

PLAYER START

On your way west, you hired on as guards to aid a traveling salesman. Soon, you'll be stopping in Cornflower, and finally be able to sleep in a real bed. There's talk of a spring celebration that will be going on during your stay as well! You gather around the campfire, it seems Ol' Eli has a story to tell...

Eli is a rough and tough older man. His clothes have many stains and patches, he keeps his head shaven, and he is missing several teeth. He's seated on the ground stirring a large, pewter pot full of baked beans. "The folk in the next town are quite the superstitious lot. Be sure to mind yer manners, or the cornstalk boogeyman he'll come and take ye 'way." He chuckles loudly, a throaty wheeze of a

sound. “Mark my words, if ya cause any trouble, you won’t be wakin’ up in the next mornin’. Corn grows all year long out there and sometimes, I can swear the leaves move on their own.” He chuckles again and a sinister sort of smile crosses his worn features. It’s unsettling on this dark, still night. He spoons out each person’s meal and disappears into his stagecoach, the sound of iron bolting the door shut echoing across the empty plain.

MORNING

The night passes quietly and by 8am, the party will enter Cornflower. They will now only have 3 days and 2 nights (more or less time depending on the judge’s whims) to find out what is going on before their blood nourishes the soil. All townsfolk are either members of the cult, or accept them. What will follow next will be descriptions of the town, its people, and places of interest; followed by a rough timeline of events and creature attacks. The final section will have stats for creatures and NPCs.

ENTERING TOWN

You round a hill and come upon the southern entrance to what you assume is Cornflower. To your left is an immense cornfield with a large house dominating part of it. Behind that is a windmill, the sound of its blades creaking as they churn can be heard clearly some distance away. On the right side of the main road are the buildings common in a frontier town: an inn, a stable, a mercantile, a saloon and a rundown Spanish mission. You hear children playing and singing down a small path to the left.

CORNFIELD

Corn grows thickly without much room to walk through unless you push the stalks aside. The stalks are vivid green and the ears are all healthy gold. You can hear workers clearing further in the field, but you’ll have to walk through the field as you can’t find any path leading into the field, or to town.

For each 10 minutes spent wandering the field, PCs have a 1 in 4 chance of being accosted by four stalklings, intelligent corn stalks given horrific sentience by the boogeyman. On the first day, players will get the eerie feeling that the corn is watching them and swaying

in their direction. A single PC might get swatted, or bit, but the creatures are mostly sizing up their prey at this point.

At night, they will openly hunt. The sound of rustling roots will be unmistakable. They will openly attack at this point and will ambush anyone snooping in the dark. The boogeyman will teleport into any space with corn and observe the combat, figuring out who is the easiest to pick off. Seeing a stalking requires a DC 10 grit check.

Stalking (4): Init+3; Atk slashing roots +4 melee (1d4+1 damage, DC 10 Ref save to avoid tripping) or kernel spit +5 missile (1d2 damage and roll 1d5 for number of missiles); AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 12; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP plant traits; SV Fort +0, Ref -1, Will +3; Path: POD.

Plant traits: Immune to mind effects, -1d for bludgeoning weapons and piercing weapons, damage from gunfire rounded down to 1 plus any modifiers from the gun deck and high ability scores.

THE CLEARING

A small footpath winds through the field to a large round clearing. A series of maypoles lines the far side of the clearing. They are draped in gaily colored ribbons that have cornflowers sewn in. A group of the town's children are playing with the ribbons, spinning them around the maypoles.

There is one maypole for each character. The children will be here every day, braiding more cornflowers and running the ribbons around each pole. This should tip off sharp players, or anyone that has seen The Wicker Man. On the final day, the poles will be wrapped in the ribbons and flowers, ready for the characters to be staked to them.

THE INN

The only hostelry in town is run by Jebidiah and his wife, Clarice. It's a large, single story building with every room being along the perimeter walls. A few rooms on the north side have a scenic view of the stable yard, whereas the rest of the rooms overlook the eastern cornfield. rooms cost 50c a night and each room has a single twin bed, a desk, an oil lamp, a washbasin, a filthy pewter spittoon,

and a stained brass bedpan. Meals are simple affairs: corn meal grits for breakfast, cornbread biscuits and slaw in the afternoon, and chicken and dumplings for dinner. Meals cost a dollar a day. Jebidiah acts as a simple man. Doesn't say much and is never seen without his apron. His wife, Clarice, never stops talking and is the town gossip. They serve as spies and informants to the alderman and inform him of everything they learn about the PCs.

The attached stable currently is housing the 4 horses of the Dewlap gang, the local outlaws. It will be full with the horses from the merchant's carts. A pitchfork, buckets, and flat shovels can be found inside.

MERCANTILE

The only store in town is run by a man named Mitch. He is a recent transplant and prefers to wear an old, green suit every day. He is a taciturn and irritable sort. He will report anything the PCs purchase to the alderman. He will sell basic goods to PCs at 1.5 book cost and he will claim to be out of stock of any firearms, or weapons. PCs will need to break in if they need to expand their armory, or pick up some dynamite. The store is open from sunrise to about 4pm. Mitch will lock up, go by the saloon for drinks and a poker game, then to the inn for a meal before returning to his room in the back of the shop.

SALOON

The only waterin' hole in town is run by Gracy. She is a portly, matronly sort of woman. She is tolerant of the types of folks that frequent bars and sells a decent array of drinks. However, folks who act like degenerates have a habit of "getting lost". Especially folks wonderin' if she's some sort of madame. Several different kinds of dart boards line the walls and a game of poker or blackjack can be joined late into the night.

Here is where the local outlaw gang, "The Dewlaps" can be found.

THE DEWLAP GANG

Unlike most gangs, these boys are looking for a good time and can be valuable allies if they can be convinced something bad is going to happen to them soon.

Tortoise is the leader. He is a large, burly senior wearing black leathers. He is a tough sort of man, but he keeps his boys in line and is amicable to folks buyin' them drinks. He keeps a shotgun on his person at all times and frequently spits. He was in the next town, Mudcrick, during the seven days of night and he took that as a warning to start leading a better life. His posse defended the town against the living dead and other horrors and each of them bear the scars. After a few drinks, Tortoise will tell the folks that the sheriff of Mudcrick sent his gang to find the Texas Rangers and notify them of something wrong going on in Cornflower; when they returned to Mudcrick, the town was destroyed and corn stalks grew everywhere, not a soul could be found. The gang has been holed up in Cornflower trying to gather intel, but just can't get anywhere with the locals hounding them.

Viper is a slender, cunning man. He keeps a kerchief over his face and dark tinted spectacles over his eyes. He is the gang's scout and carries a .22 rifle slung over his shoulder. He is the 2nd in command.

Toad is short, squat and mostly jowl. He is more interested in what's on his plate than what's going on. He carries a pair of revolvers despite not being a great shot.

Jackrabbit is the newest member. Skittish and nervous, he is always on the lookout for trouble. He plays a mean game of cards and is a decent shot with his rifle.

The gang exists in town for multiple purposes. They can serve as foils to the PCs, possible allies and sources of info, and lastly, as fodder for the cult. Each morning, starting with Tortoise, a gang member will be found dead with corn growing through their body in their room. Without Tortoise to keep the boys in line, they will get dangerous and become the sort of gang Tortoise was trying to prevent.

ALDERMAN'S HOUSE

The folk take their German heritage very seriously and still insist on calling their leader "Alderman". Leroy Schwarzfeldt is the village leader. He is a tall, balding man with silver hair, a stern expression and is an expert justice dealer. He is a worshipper of Aylith and

through his devotion, has been granted mastery over the feldgeister. Woe to anyone in the town when Leroy is slain, because no one else can control the spirit, or keep it bound to Cornflower.

Hidden in plain sight is a journal detailing cult activities and the ritual to keep the feldgeister bound to the town. Stealing or destroying the book will not stop the ritual as Leroy has it memorized and its absence will tip off the Alderman to speed up preparations.

Leroy: Init+3; Atk shotgun +6 missile (1d14); AC 14; HD 2d6+4; hp 10; Act 1d20; SP spells: *charm person*, *chill touch*, *instant corn**, *nine lives*, *ricochet*; SV Fort+2, Ref +3, Will+5; Path: PoD.

*as *instant cactus*, but with corn.

SPANISH MISSION

This mission has stood at this location for nearly 200 years. It was built from local woods and sandstone. A decaying cemetery churchyard is on its left. The headstones are in varying states of decay and the words on them are now illegible.

After dark, the spirits of the dead wander the cemetery. They stare at PCs with empty spectral sockets but make no attempt to communicate. The signs of violent deaths are obvious on all the spirits bound to the cemetery. They follow people closely if they cross the rotting fence. They will become angry and place a curse on anyone bringing further destruction to the church or cemetery. Appendix C in the core DCC RPG rules has a series of example curses.

The massive timber beam door on the right side has been rigged to fall by the townspeople. A DC 12 Ref save is required to dodge the falling door in time. It is the only modification the cultists have been able to manage as the church is still consecrated and protected by the vengeful dead.

Inside the mission, the baptismal font is dry, but any pure water placed inside the vestibule will become holy water within the hour if blessed by someone with priestly knowledge. The stone pews at one time were beautifully carved, but now lie in varying states of ruin.

Underneath the great stone altar is a stairwell leading down to the catacombs. There is an ancient dart trap that will fire once someone steps onto the stone landing. The poison's efficacy has decreased to age, but it is still deadly to greenhorn adventurers.

Dart Trap: +6 to atk; 1 dmg; DC 8 Fort save or 1d4 STA damage as the victim writhes in gastric agony.

From the landing, wooden stairs descend 30' and lead to an ancient catacomb that has gone undiscovered until now. A step 10' from the bottom has wood rot and will collapse when the character with the most hex tokens, or the worst luck steps on it, dropping them below for 1d6 damage.

Burial niches line the exterior wall and the stone aisles on either side. Many people of medieval Spanish origin and few of them Native Americans. In a random niche is a scroll written in medieval Spanish. It is a retelling of the "Corn Mother myth" detailed below. It takes 1d3 hours of sifting through dry bones and disintegrating artifacts. Various gold effects and coins can be found worth up to 300 dollars if sold to the right buyer. They could also be donated to an active church for other rewards. 1d4 Spanish weapons can be recovered in empty niches. They are in serviceable condition.

CORN MOTHER MYTH

"...The great corn mother begged her husband, "please kill me! My body can feed the people." Her husband initially refused out of love for his wife, but after taking a journey to speak with The Great Spirit, he cut her throat and dragged her body across the field and planted her bones. They buried her other remains separately. From her bones grew tassled plants with sweet, kerneled fruit. From the body, a broad, leafy plant, that when smoked could clear the mind."

The myth serves to give PCs a clue about the true nature of the village. Of course, Aylith has corrupted the story, requiring the blood of unwilling humans to bind the feldgeister to the land to serve her desires.

After the scroll is discovered, the corpse will animate and speak with a dry, hoarse whisper. She speaks medieval Spanish. Current speakers will need to pass a DC 10 INT check to be able to fully

comprehend her. She understands English, but only speaks in Spanish. She will tell them that the followers of Aylith corrupted the town, killing anyone who wouldn't join. The remaining priest laid the dead to rest here, but the blasphemous acts committed yearly have made it impossible for the dead to move on. The feldgeister also makes their time difficult. The spirits located in the catacombs are able to wander the village and fields, but the feldgeister can destroy them, being a spirit himself. However, he prefers to capture spirits, like he does children, forcing them to work on his field in Alfheim. If players are able to communicate, and earn the dead's trust and swear to burn the field and farms inside it to ash, they will give someone a small, bone whistle. Blowing on it will summon 1d5 ghosts at night to aid the party. Players can also get the clue to burn down the cornfield from the windmill, but it is heavily guarded by the feldgeister and his allies.

WINDMILL

A tall decrepit windmill stands in the middle of the western corn field. It never stops turning, noon or night. Nobody is ever seen entering or leaving either.

FLOOR ONE

Dominating the center of the main room is a massive contraption. Four sentient and mobile cornstalks are the central mechanism in concert. A staircase going up is on the left, and to the right, stairs lead down into the cellar. Upon noticing you, the monsters immediately turn around and begin to growl loudly.

The four stalklings are responsible for the constant churning of the windmill. Once they notice the group, they will emit a bone splitting shriek and then begin spitting seeds at range until the players choose to close the distance. Seeing a stalkling requires a DC 10 Grit check.

Stalkling (4): Init +3; Atk slashing roots +4 melee (1d4+1 damage; DC 10 Ref to avoid tripping) or kernel spit +5 missile (1d2 damage roll and roll 1d5 for number of missiles); AC 12; HD 2d8; hp 12; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP plant traits; SV Fort +0, Ref -1, Will +3; Path: POD.

Plant traits: Immune to mind effects, -1d for bludgeoning weapons and piercing weapons, damage from gunfire rounded down to 1 plus any modifiers from the gun deck and high ability scores.

Hanging out in the stairway leading up is a flying head. A blasphemous un-dead human head that flies thanks to a pair of giant, grotesque mosquito wings. Viscera continually drips from its open neck. This creature is the result of someone obsessing over mosquitoes at the point of death. Seeing this abomination calls for a DC 12 Grit check as it is particularly gruesome.



Flying Head (1): Init +4; Atk bite +5 melee (1d4+2 plus bleed); AC 14; HD 3d12; hp 18; MV fly 50'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead traits, bleed; SV Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +0; Path: POD.

Bleed: Anyone bit by the flying head will automatically lose 1 hit point per time bitten until first aid has been administered.

The flying head will wait in the shadows and swoop down on the PC with the most skin visible. If the fight lasts more than 2 rounds, one of the stalkings on the next floor will send a large gear rolling down the stairs. A DC 14 Reflex save is required to avoid 1d8 damage and anyone failing their save must also make a DC 10 Agility check or fall down the stairs incurring an additional 1d6 damage.

FLOOR TWO

The second level is an open floor plan. In the center of the room is a shaft that controls the windmill. Scattered around it are various rusted cogs, spokes, machine arms, levers, and other spare parts.

It counts as difficult terrain for characters attempting to navigate this mess. There are three more stalkings in this room. One watches out the window, another is watching the shaft, and the last one is sorting through the wreckage looking for a spare bundle of twine to tie off the corn meal sacks in the basement. If alerted, they hide in the wreckage and attempt to trip anyone passing through to the stairs.

After the stalkings have been dealt with, the players are free to search through the heap of junk. Anyone can pull out a lever that can be used as a club. A bedlamite should be able to craft a more complex weapon or tool in an hour. Players searching for something interesting can find a small metal tool box within 10 minutes of sorting. It has: a claw hammer, a wrench, a canister of machine oil, and a box of nails. About 3 dollars worth of change is scattered in various coinage. It can be found while searching the pile for nothing in particular.

FLOOR THREE

The first thing you notice when you reach the top of the stairs is the large window overlooking the main cornfield. Upon entering the

room, you can see that it has been converted into a cozy study. Several bookshelves line the walls and a pair of leather chairs sit on either side of a square table with an oil lamp on top of it. Sitting in the chair facing the stairs is a little old man. He wears outdated European clothes and you could swear his beard is actually corn fibres. His beady iron colored eyes stare at you and he gets up at your arrival. His height is a mere 3'.

This is the room set aside for Ol' Cornstalk to use and live in. He speaks English with a heavy German accent. He will pretend to be a mere recluse and occultist to explain the presence of the creatures. After putting the group at ease, he will say something like this immediately after an ordinary remark: "And now that you have found my lair, I am going to make you tot (dead)."

The feldgeister will use this fight to size up the party. He hopes to wound or kill one of their number and will look out the window and teleport into the field once his hp has been lowered to half or less.

Feldgeister (1): Init + 5; Atk sickle claws +6 melee (1d6+3 crit on 18+); or thrown shillelagh +7 missile (1d6+3); AC 15; HD 6d6+4; hp 18; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP landgeist, corn growth, summon stalkling, teleport, kidnap; SV Fort +3, Ref +7, Will +10; Path: POD.

Landgeist: Ol' Cornstalk is bound to the land. In this case, the cornfields of the town. As long as the fields are undamaged, he will return with the dawn. If Leroy has been killed, he will no longer be under his control and will run free, able to go to other towns and sow chaos there.

Corn Growth: As an action the spirit can make a fully grown cornstalk erupt from any visible space.

Summon Stalkling: As an action, the spirit can make a visible cornstalk turn into a stalkling. It acts in the next round.

Teleport: Ol' Cornstalk can teleport to any space with a cornstalk in it as a move action.

Kidnap: The spirit will attempt to wrestle a target into submission. He will begin by making an attack on the target. To avoid this, the

victim must make a Reflex save to slither out of grasp. The DC is equal to the feldgeister's attack roll. On the next round, the target gets one final chance to escape. If they fail, the spirit will take the victim to his eternal field in Alfheim to work as a slave. The feldgeister will return in one hour.

The cornstalk boogeyman has many strange and potent powers. If the party can fend him off, they have an excellent opportunity to learn about defeating him here. The library has many volumes in it that are pertinent. One is a slim, faded leather journal. It has an entry written by Leroy in 1865, shortly after the seven days of night:

"I had a dream last night. A woman made from dried corn leaves emerged from the field as I was working the fields. She came to me and introduced herself as Aylith and that if I listened to her, our town would never go hungry. How could I refuse? She taught me a ritual to summon one of her servants and how to keep him under my control and how to keep him nourished. I bound the spirit to the cornfields and each year, boiling blood must be spilt on the soil. As long as the fields are free of flame, we shall prosper."

The ritual Leroy used is not in the volume, but the ritual to undo the binding in case of unforeseen events is included. It takes one hour of uninterrupted prayer to Aylith and bones no younger than 200 years must be ground down, burned, and then scattered in the field. (The bones can be found in the mission and the dead will eagerly allow this if asked.) Aylith is a messenger of Shub-Niggurath, the elder god. Leroy is unaware of who or what she is. The obvious solution for survival is sure to be a welcome one for pyromaniac players. It will take an hour to burn the dry fields down, but during that time the villagers and the feldgeister will come at them with everything they have. A coordinated burning is the best way. In this case, lighting each corner of the field simultaneously.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Day 1.

- Party rolls into town. NPCs will take measure of them.
- Noon. Eli announces that the wagon wheels have splintered and a new shipment isn't coming for 4 days.

- Late PM. Stalklings will attack the Dewlaps in the bar and any PCs present.

Day 2.

- Tortoise is found dead unless rescued. A corn stalk is growing through his ruined face and the wagons have been destroyed.
- Corn festival begins. It's an exciting county fair.
- Ol' Cornstalk and 1d4 Stalklings ambush the party in their rooms to gauge their strength.

Day 3.

- With bellies full of corn, the ritual can begin. Townsfolk absent and everyone is out plowing a new field. They are uncommunicative as they are under a spell from Leroy. He is shored up in his home, deep in meditation and communicating with Aylith.
- That night, an angry mob drags PCs out to sacrifice them on the maypoles. An excellent time for a shootout and siege. The feldgeister will harass the group on the inside and try to maneuver characters towards windows from which the mob will grab any characters within reach.
- If players end up on the stake, they will have only one chance to break free and escape, the scenario will end in failure if the ritual is completed. The feldgeister will grow in power and be able to move freely, converting more towns to the worship of Aylith.

ALTERNATE EVENTS

After the windmill has been explored, or if the characters act out of line, the events on the timeline will speed up. NPCs will become hostile, and the events of Day 3 will happen that night if action is not taken immediately. The final event can happen anytime. Leroy just loves observing tradition.

If players choose to flee, which is a distinct possibility, they will find that the next town, Mudcrick is 20 miles out from cornflower. It is a ghost town where corn stalks grow in every available inch. Leroy, the feldgeister, and 4 stalklings will attack the party to keep the secrets of Cornflower from getting out. Ol' Cornstalk will not be

able to return to Earth if slain here and the party will be free to flee to another locale.

Angry mob: Init -1; Atk grap +5 (1d5 damage plus grapple), or assorted guns +2 missile (1d6, roll 1d4 for number of shots fired); AC 10; HD 12d4; hp 24; ACT 2d20; SV Fort +3, Ref -4, Will +2; Path: POD.

CONCLUSION

For defeating the cult and banishing the feldgeister, each surviving character receives 1 point of permanent luck (cannot increase past 18). The townsfolk will snap out of a spell, having no idea what they have been doing. They will eventually settle into a normal, routine life. If the players choose to flee, their only reward is their lives for the act of yellow bellied cowardice.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



UNCLE SILAS

By Ian Zebarah Shears

Illustrations by Benjamin Marra

Cartography by Matt Robertson

This short level 1 **DCC RPG** scenario can be a horror one-shot played on a rainy evening or inserted into an ongoing Shudder Mountains campaign. It can also be used for **Dark Trails** after altering the setting, Silas' background and the nature of the shrine in the forest. The characters enter the dense forest at the base of the mountains expecting a simple search and rescue, but they encounter something more than bargained for when meeting Uncle Silas, a crazed cannibal cursed by the King of Elfland for vile behavior. PCs need to be quick to outwit him, or look for help in an unassuming woodsman that knows how to navigate off the trails.

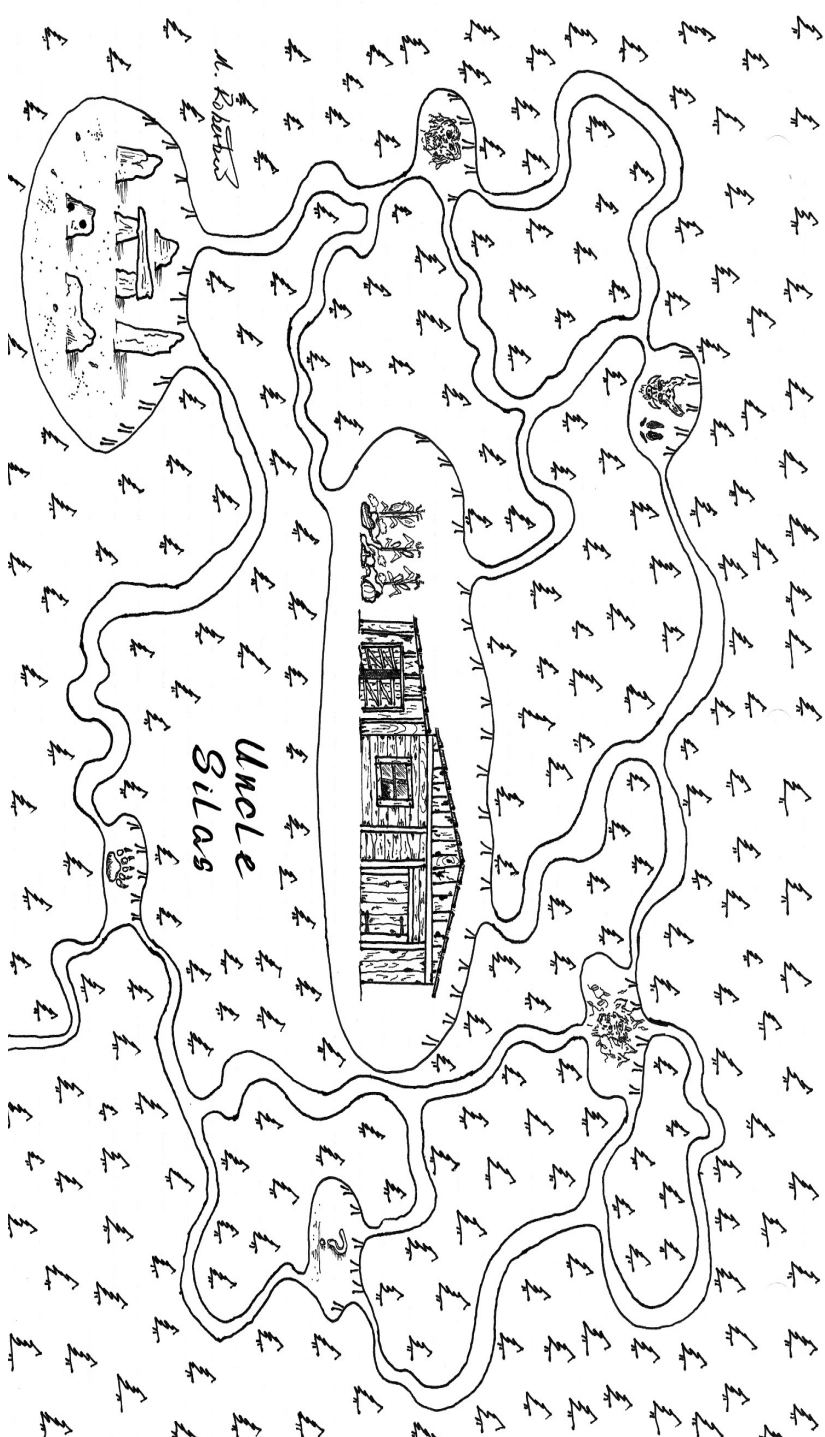
THE TALE

“Young folks enterin’ the woods ‘round here have a habit of never turnin’ back up. Papa used to tell of a poor farmer with no growin’ skills that went wanderin’ and lookin’ for food after his lands went fallow. Lackin’ woodcraft, he went mad with hunger. Now his ghost roams the trails, takin’ folks and cooking ‘em up for dinner. I’d not stray too far out there. If I were you, them kids are as good as gone.”

BACKGROUND

A few days past, in whatever hollow or village the PCs are staying at, some children went out gathering morels in the forests located around the mountains' base. The characters overhear this while in downtime as well as the tale of Ol' Uncle Silas. But there is more to Uncle Silas than just a tall tale of cannibalism.

Decades past, Silas was a simple farmer of some sort, not particularly good at it, but not horrible either. (The judge may roll on the 0-level background table to determine which kind, if desired.) At some point, a famine struck the region and many people were going hungry, several ended up dying. Daring to be a hero, Silas entered the woods surrounding the mountains. He quickly became lost and lost his mind as well as his soul. The woods changed him. He soon began to prey on travelers, kidnapping them and taking them to his shack surrounded by constant mist deep in the forest. One evening, he chose the wrong wanderers, a party of elves on their way to another wood. The moment he struck down the last of them, the dying wizard whispered a curse on the madman.



Uncle
Silas

M. Roberts

“As you have chosen hunger over decency, So ye shall be changed. A beast ye shall be, your hunger never sated, and by the will of the King of Elfland, the forest shall be forever thy enemy.”

Silas has since become a bogey to the country folk and haunts the forest as some sort of un-dead thing. He can only be laid to rest by primitive hunting traps and weapons favored by simple wood-folk, or weapons used to bring down game: axes, bows, spears, and firearms used for hunting. He can also be harmed by the forest itself. The exact nature of these weaknesses are ultimately up to the judge to tweak and make the scenario easier or more difficult as desired. Below is a rumor table to help seed information about how to defeat Silas. All rumors are true, but the information is disparate enough to sow some confusion amongst the party.

RUMORS IN TOWN

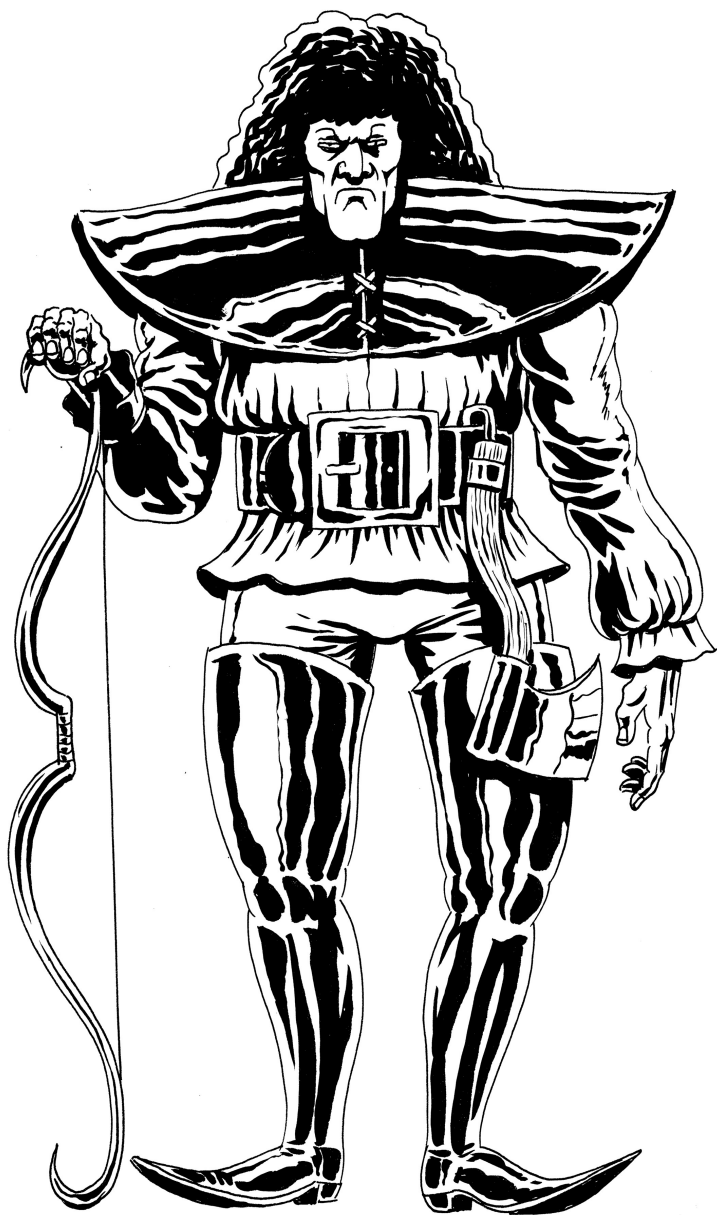
- The ghost is said to show fear when he sees snares.
- A hunter said Silas only bleeds when shot with arrows.
- Many folks go missing after searching the deep woods for morels.
- All sorts of hants and bogeys can be found in the forest.
- A merchant coming up from the next hollow swears spears put the fear in Silas.
- It is easy to get lost after the mist rolls in.

JEREMIAH

Jeremiah is a simple woodcutter and hunter of game who lives in a humble cabin just on the edge of town. He is a pleasant sort of man and mostly keeps to himself. If the characters engage him and bring up the situation, he will be willing to help them for a reasonable price, not necessarily gold, but a task of equal work will suffice. He is a 1st level adventurer of a class the judge feels would be useful to the party. If you make use of the *CRAWL!* zine, the ranger class would be most suitable. He can be hired by the PCs to help navigate the woods, and ultimately bring down Uncle Silas.

He is knowledgeable about setting pits, snares, animal traps, and other ways of taking game. He can instruct the PCs in woodcraft if the judge would rather not use him as a henchman, or if the judge plans on having him killed to increase tension and show to the

players how deadly a combatant Silas is. If players are struggling for hints on defeating the ghost, Silas will be visibly terrified of Jeremiah's bow and snare cords he wears on his belt.



INTO THE WOODS

Characters entering the woods have two choices. They may trailblaze through the forest or take the deer trail that winds through the ancient, misty wood. If the first option is chosen, the players encounter nothing, except dense, pine trees that grow unnaturally close together and a thick ground cover of brown needles that is several feet deep. In the wild part of the woods, they may encounter an ancient shrine dedicated to the spirits of the forest and its guardian, Necklavee, a kith with a sour demeanor and overall disdain for humanity. (More on this encounter below.)

The foot trail is a meandering shortcut to the next hollow. It is a footpath kept worn by the feet of wanderers and woodsmen alike. It's a grueling trail that goes uphill and follows the Tadpole River closely. It's a murky, slow-moving river with many cast-off branches breaking through the foamy water. About two miles down the path in a swampy section of the woods, it is split by a barely noticeable deer trail, only visible as a line of grey dirt that snakes through the underbrush. It is a long way down this path that the first encounter is located, a giant, wounded bear crashes through the woods into the PCs located in the center of the marching order!

"As you get used to navigating the deer trail, you suddenly hear a loud crashing sound as a massive, rabid brown bear slams into you!"

Make an attack roll for the bear with a D24 for its roll against characters in the range of its claws and teeth.

Rabid bear (1): Init +0; Atk bite +8 melee (1d8+2) or claw +6 melee (1d6); AC 14; HD 5d8; hp 32; MV 20' or climb 10'; Act 2d20; SP rabies; SV Fort +6, Ref -1, Will +8; AL N.

Rabies: Anyone bit by the rabid bear must make a DC 14 Fort save to avoid taking 1d2 Intelligence and Personality damage each day. Someone suffering from this disease must make 3 consecutive daily saves to rid themselves of the infection. Any damage done by the illness is cured at 1 point each day after the character has been rid of the infection or through supernatural/divine intervention. Any higher power that gives this aid will require compensation, of course. Anyone who dies from this illness rises as a zombie with

this ability the following night. This particular zombie breed is faster and a little stronger than the one presented in the core book.

Rabid zombie: Init +0; Atk bite +4 melee (1d4+1); AC 10; HD 3d6; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SP un-dead, rabies; SV Fort +4, Ref +0, Will +2; AL C.

Anyone examining the corpse of the bear will find bloody, infected bite marks made by a human.



Every hour the PCs spend wandering this trail, roll a D4:

1. Uncle Silas as a “helpful citizen”
2. The altar of the woods
3. Giant boar
4. 1d6 witchfire rotters (skeletal remains that flicker with spectral, green flame.)

Giant boar (1): Init +3; Atk tusk +6 melee (1d8) or trample +6 melee (2d6); AC 12; HD 4d8; hp 24; MV 40’; Act 1d20; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will -1; AL N.

Witchfire rotters (1d6): Init: +0; Atk claw +2; melee (1d3); AC 9; HD 2d6; hp 7; MV 40’; Act 2d20; SP un-dead, witchfire; flicker; SV Fort +0, Ref+1, Will +0, AL C.

Witchfire: The moment a witchfire rotter is taken down to 0 HP it explodes dealing 1d6 damage in a 5’ radius. A DC 8 Ref save is required to avoid being lit on fire.

Flicker: After the last turn has been taken, a witchfire rotter may teleport to any open space.



THE ALTAR

“Nestled deep in the woods is an old, neolithic stone altar. Engraved upon it is a serpentine dragon with fifty pairs of draconic legs, like a centipede. Its multifaceted eyes watch your every move. It lies curled up in a cave deep under the forest. A pair of beeswax candles are placed on either side of the slate table as are offerings

of holly berries, lined wrapped packets of elven pine candies and bones from various animals.”

Concealed by a glamour, Nucklavee watches the characters enter the clearing. If they damage or deface the mural, he will place a curse on them and disappear if they damage or deface the mural. Should a character take an offering, he will chide them and ask for something of equal value to replace the stolen item. The judge may either roll on the table below or use one of the curses from appendix C in the DCC RPG rulebook. The severity of curses varies on the table and are fey in nature.

RANDOM CURSES

1. The afflicted always counts as being “opposed” on the Lay on Hands table.
2. The afflicted is now a hoarder.
3. The curse bearer is at -2D on the dice chain due to unpredictable fits of incompetence.
4. The poor fool now has ophidiophobia, the fear of snakes. The sight of the creature on the mural fills them with dread and loathing.
5. Unbeknownst to the player, their dominant hand has switched. How this manifests and how it affects the player is up to the whims of the judge.
6. When the cursed becomes stressed, they begin to pluck out their hair. This permanently lowers their Personality by 1 point per week until the curse has been lifted. It does not heal naturally. A DC 10 Will save will need to be made if the player wants to do anything besides pull out hair during a stress-inducing encounter.
7. Each night the pack of the afflicted rearranges itself. It takes one turn to find a specific item during combat.

If they give an offering or pray, showing some kind of reverence, he will appear to them and ask them what their business is. If they mention that they are after the missing children and hope to bring down the cannibal, he will give them the *vine snare pendant*. This pendant is a small brass sculpture of intertwined vines and thorny growth. It is palm-sized and a loop of string is tied onto it to wear around one’s neck.

Vine snare pendant: Once a day, the user can command the forest to snare a target. The affected target must make a DC 14 Ref save to avoid being pulled to the ground and made helpless. When used on Uncle Silas, he will fail the save automatically. Furthermore, it will strip him of his abilities, allowing him to be slain by any method permanently.



The dragon depicted is Gorthrax, an ancient linnorm who is a guardian to the natural world. Nuckelavee knows that he will be stirring soon, planning to wipe out humanity for its sins against the natural world. The dragon is indifferent to dwarves, tolerates halflings and is friendly towards elves and fey. Placating the dragon is beyond the scope of this short scenario, but will be featured in a later one.



THE CABIN

“The trail comes to an end at the top of a hill deep in the woods. The trees have all been poorly cut down. Jagged stumps jut from the ground like diseased, broken teeth. The remains of a rotting vegetable patch are located next to a large, ramshackle hut, off to the right of that is an old storage shed. The ever-present mist has thickened, obscuring the rest of the nearby environment.”

Once this locale has been entered, the characters are stuck in the forest. It goes on and on and paths bend and take them back to this clearing. If players wish to return to the altar, the leader must pass a luck check. They can truly escape by slaying Uncle Silas, or by ending up on his next plate. At the time of arrival, he is stoking the

fire in his cast-iron woodburner and welcomes the party inviting them “to dinner”. He will have one or more people dig in the garden for potatoes in an effort to split the group. All the spuds are: green, greasy, and covered in roots. He will sit them down at his table and disappear into his woodshed and take a long time.

If someone goes to check on him, he is sharpening an axe surrounded by six children stuffed into cages. They are all alive, but

very scared. They begin crying for help upon seeing a stranger. Silas snarls and swings his axe at the snoop checking on him.

If nobody goes to check on him, he will carve up one of the children and begin cooking them on the stove. If anyone eats this taboo food, they will suffer the same affliction as Silas. After Silas has been slain in this instance, the mist does not clear and the player must surrender their character to the judge.

“Inside the shed are six rusted cages stacked on top of each other. A blood-spattered beheading block lies in the center. Several weapons and tools hang from chains. They are covered in blood rust and are held together with gristle and vines. Several bloody husks of rotting meat hang from hooks in the back, dripping juices and maggots onto the offal covered floor.”

Many of the tools are usable but of poor quality. Pushing aside the hanging meat reveals a trunk roughly made from tree branches. It is trapped. A DC 10 perception check reveals that a rusty sawblade is rigged to spit out (attack +5 for 1d6 damage.) Inside the chest is a nice, tricorne hat worth 5sp, 1d3 gp, and 2 ancient brass coins that may be of interest to a historian, or collector.

Uncle Silas: Init +3; Atk axe +5 melee (1d8+6); or bite +3 melee (1d3 rabies); AC 14; HD 3d12; hp 24; MV 30'; Act 2d20; SP undead, rabies, can appear behind fleeing enemies; regenerates if dropped to 0 by conventional means; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will -1; AL C.

Rabies: Anyone bit by Uncle Silas must make a DC 14 Fort save to avoid taking 1d2 Intelligence and Personality damage each day. Someone suffering from this disease must make 3 consecutive daily

saves to rid themselves of the infection. Any damage done by the illness is cured at 1 point each day after the character has been rid of the infection or through supernatural/divine intervention. Any higher power that gives this aid will require compensation, of course. Anyone who dies from this illness rises as a zombie with this ability the following night.

He can only be laid to rest by primitive hunting traps and weapons favored by simple wood-folk, or weapons used to bring down game: axes, bows, spears, and firearms used for hunting. He can also be harmed by the forest itself. If the pendant is used, he will be bound to the ground and able to be killed like any other creature.

Uncle Silas is a vicious, and devious combatant. For example, he will stand behind the cages or hold his axe over a child's head if they approach him inside the shed. He swings his axe at the weakest targets first and attempts to bite the warriors, hoping they eventually succumb to his disease. If Jeremiah is with the party, Silas will strike him down in a single blow at the earliest opportunity. This will hopefully illustrate that players need to use tactics if they confront him head-on. Like famous slasher monsters, he can teleport right behind PCs if someone isn't walking backward and he will always appear to be at the edge of sight. He will sing off-key about how he is going to drink brains through a straw and the other graphic methods he plans on eating the characters. If he is killed by any methods other than described previously, he will resurrect the next dawn, trapping the PCs in the forest overnight.

CONCLUSION

Defeating Uncle Silas and rescuing all children earns each PC a point of Luck and the favor of the King of Elfland. How he repays this debt should be mysterious and whimsical. Depending on how the party treats with Nuckleavee, he will pose a dangerous foe, or he will have work for them in a future adventure.

The village mayor will give the group a handwoven basket. Inside are fresh rolls, some morels, and signed vouchers that allow each player an item from the blacksmith worth up to 50gp, or for an amenity from the town's priest if one is available. This reward is only available if all the children are safe and can vouch for the cannibal's demise.



Mara

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

DARK TRAILS CHARACTER SHEET

NAME	CLASS	XP	LEVEL
LUCKY SIGN	OCCUPATION	ALIGNMENT	SPEED

HP		ABILITY	MODIFIER	REFLEX
	STR			
	AGI			
AC	STA			FORTITUDE
	PER			
	LUCK			
GRIT	INT			WILL

SIGNATURE

WEAPONS

WEAPON	DMG	SHOTS	RANGE	COMBAT
				INITIATIVE:
				MELEE BONUS:
				RANGED BONUS:
				CRIT DIE:
				FUMBLE DIE:
■■■■■ AMMO ■■■■■■				SPECIAL ■■■■

SPECIAL ABILITIES & SPELLS	GOODS & SUNDRIES
	ARCANE VAULT
	VALUABLES & DINERO
	STABLE

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