

Perilous parcels! The farmstead where an atrocity occurred is not what it seems.

THE STORY SO FAR

The Strauss farmstead was a completely mundane, if isolated, plot of land. Brandon Strauss raised his family there after he settled once the war was over. The land was good to the former Confederate and provided a stable, comfortable life for his family.

Lady Luck followed ol' Brandon to the nearby town of Manti each time he went gambling. He'd come home with his pockets stuffed to the seams with cash or pricey booze. His continued forays into town eventually drew some unwanted attention. Kerry Travers, a man known for being a mean cuss, didn't take kindly to losing all of his money to Brandon.

Travers was feeling whiskey-brave one night and followed Brandon home to his fields where his family had gathered to greet him. Something tugged at Travers as he skulked. Something wicked whispered to him. *Why should Strauss have all the luck?*

With smoking revolver, Kerry put them all down in the very cornfield on which Brandon had worked so hard. Kerry's paranoia overwhelmed him, and once the deed was done he decided to cover his tracks by setting fire to the entire farmstead. He was certain no one had witnessed the act; however, some *thing* had. The family's scarecrow watched as Kerry killed the Strausses and the field it guarded was engulfed in flames.

The dark presence that urged Kerry onward staked its claim on the Strauss Farmstead. It mingled with the blessed luck that had graced the family until their tragic demise, and became something altogether new as it imbued the scarecrow with its essence. The newly empowered scarecrow survived the roaring inferno and made the charring heat its own.

To Kerry's surprise, no one in town reacted to the seeming destruction of the Strauss farmstead. His paranoia grew until he eventually returned to the farm, only to find the land unscathed. The gentle silence

of the farm filled him with dread and he could not shake the feeling of something watching him. He fled, and now finds comfort only in the bottom of a bottle.

THE SETUP

The Strauss farmstead rests in the heart of Deseret. The posse has been hired – by Smith & Robards or an independent inventor – to deliver a clockwork demoler to Manti. Moving such a behemoth has proven tedious at best. The posse passes through the farm just before nightfall. Though candlelight fills the home on the property, no one can be found within. The scorncrow emerges if the posse settles in for the night.



In Manti, the townspeople are concerned that they haven't received any goods from the Strauss farm recently, but no one has been able to find Brandon or his family. Additionally, there have been several disappearances and some regular merchants have yet to arrive in town. Characters who ask questions about the family might learn about Strauss's streak of good luck while gambling and about those who resented him for it. Anyone investigating the disappearances learns that most of the missing were last seen heading in the direction of the Strauss farmstead.

Kerry Travers is little more than a drunk now. While sober Kerry is incredibly tight-lipped, drunken Kerry rambles about fire and the demon that he "brought to the ranch." He doesn't give any more information unless suitably intimidated or presented with the burnt shell casings from the farm.

- **Kerry Travers:** Use the Townsfolk profile in the *Deadlands Marshal's Handbook*, but add the Habit (Major – Alcohol) Hindrance.
- **Townsfolk (8):** See the *Deadlands Marshal's Handbook*.

THE STRAUSS FARMSTEAD

Fear Level: 3

The farm is plain upon first inspection. Consisting of a farmhouse, barn, stable, outhouse, and a large plot of luscious, green cornstalks, it's easy to let one's guard down.

A cursory investigation of the buildings reveals nothing sinister beyond the fact that the entire farm smells faintly of smoke—though none can be seen. Anyone who touches the walls of any of the buildings realizes that though they look perfectly normal they feel like charred husks.

Deeper investigation reveals the casings of several cartridges out in the field. Most odd is that they appear to have been partially melted and burned, though the ground around shows no sign of fire.

Additionally, a discolored mound of earth is located within the cornfield. A small, crudely made cross pierces the soil. Shamans, blessed, and even Harrowed know that this is unhallowed ground. The charred remains of the Strausses can be found in the grave.

The danger of the farm is mostly self-contained. If the heroes wish to bring an end to the madness they must either find and dig up the bodies of the Strauss family and give them a proper funeral, or they must bring Kerry Travers to the farm and either kill him or allow the scorncrow to end his life.

There is a third option for posses that refuse to let Travers die. The scorncrow can be destroyed while it attempts to kill Travers. Its smoldering remains must then be *sanctified* with holy water before it reforms.



SCORNCROW

The scorncrow is a burning nightmare clad in flannel and a straw hat. Unlike the "common" animate scarecrow, a scorncrow is not truly a servant of the Reckoners nor is it cruel for cruelty's sake. It is an agent of vengeance, cursed to be unable to hunt down those who have done wrong. The creature takes its burning frustration out on anything within reach, and takes special relish in slaying those with deep bloodlust.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4, Spirit d12, Strength d8, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d12+1, Notice d8

Pace: 10; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 8

Special Abilities:

- **Blessed & Damned:** The scorncrow gains a +2 bonus to Fighting and damage rolls against characters who have the Bloodthirsty Hindrance. It gains a +1 bonus against any character who has killed a person. The scorncrow will not attack any characters with the Code of Honor, Pacifist, or Young Hindrance unless it is attacked first.
- **Burning Claws:** Str+d4.
- **Burning Hay:** As an action, the scorncrow can create a smokescreen in a Large Burst Template centered on itself. The smokescreen completely conceals the scorncrow as if it was in pitch darkness, though it can see normally while within the smokescreen.
- **Construct:** +2 to recover from being Shaken. No additional damage from called shots (except to the head). Never suffers wound modifiers. Does not suffer from disease or poison.
- **Coup (Burning Hay):** A Harrowed who counts coup on the scorncrow can use its Burning Hay ability once per session.
- **Daybreak:** The scorncrow cannot move while the sun is up. Effects that imitate sunlight do not affect the scorncrow in this way.
- **Invulnerability:** If the scorecrow is destroyed through any means other than its Weakness, it returns to life the following eve.
- **Landlocked:** The scorncrow cannot leave the Strauss farmstead of its own volition.
- **Weakness (Appease or Condemn):** The scorncrow can be destroyed in any of three ways. To appease it, a posse must give the family a proper burial. The alternative is to condemn Kerry Travers to death, or to slay the scorncrow while it attempts to kill Travers and *sanctify* its remains with holy water. When any of these conditions are met the scorncrow is permanently destroyed.