



the last train to darksville

An Adventure for Master Characters

A rail caravan from Devil's Breach to Darksville has failed to show up for three days running, and no one in Devil's Breach can figure out why. It's up to the player characters to investigate what's keeping the trains from running on time as they ride what may well be the last train to Darksville.

"Last Train to Darksville" is an adventure designed for master characters. Lower-level characters had best not apply. I wrote this as the fulfillment of a stretch goal for The Shadow of the Demon Lord™ Kickstarter drive, and I've enjoyed every bit of it. Thanks to Rob for letting me fool around in his world—and for him tinkering around in mine as he handled much of the heavy lifting for my Shotguns & Sorcery™ roleplaying game.

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BACKGROUND

Devil's Breach is a dark little town on the edge of an empty land, somewhere on the continent of Rûl. The people there don't have much to offer the world other than the geographic location of their home, which makes it an excellent stopping point for travelers making their way to far-flung locations. Wagon trains used to stop at the town for supplies on their way in and out of the wastes, and the new railroad that goes through town follows the long tradition.

While the wagon train managed to slip through the wastes without drawing too much attention, the loud steam engines belching soot into the sky are another matter entirely and have recently roused a dragon from his slumber in the nearby badlands. The monster makes regular ventures from his lair to prey upon the iron machine, its precious cargo, and its ill-fated passengers.

So far, the dragon has taken out two trains along this desolate stretch of track. The Darksville Railway only has three trains in total. The third leaves from Devil's Breach tomorrow at dawn.

GETTING STARTED

The adventure's setting is intentionally vague to help you weave the story into your campaign. The ideal place to set it, however, is the stretch of rail between Sixton and Foundry. Darksville and Devil's Breach could be the unnamed towns shown on the Northern Reach map shown on page 166 of *Shadow of the Demon Lord*.

To become involved, the player characters need to find out about the Darksville Railway's plight. They could manage this by passing through Darksville, of course, but if they happen to be elsewhere, a railway agent, Johann Heevey, can track them down where they happen to be and hire them to guard the train caravan as it makes its next attempt to reach Darksville. If they agree to help, the agent offers them free passage to Devil's Breach.

In any case—whether the player characters start in Devil's Breach or elsewhere—the railway agent is happy to offer them a reward of 250 gold crowns to split among themselves — and another 250 if they return with the train intact.

Once in Devil's Breach, the player characters may wish to investigate what's happening. No one in Devil's Breach has any idea. The train used to run between Devil's Breach and Darksville like clockwork. The railway company has taken great pains to protect the train, and it makes no stops along the way.

CATCHING THE TRAIN

At dawn the day after the player characters arrive in Devil's Breach, the train embarks for Darksville. While the train is normally packed full of people, no one outside of the railway's employees is willing to ride the train today.

Each train car has a single guard (as a **veteran**) who also doubles as a braker. The engine carries two workers: Vilma Hersson, the engineer who drives the train and handles the mechanical ends of things, and Simon Kauss a magician to keep the engine rolling and handle all mystical matters. The only other person on the train, besides the player characters, is the railway agent, Johann Heevey.

There are six cars on the train. In order from front to back, they are:

- The engine, as the locomotive engine described in the *Demon Lord's Companion*
- Two passenger cars, each a Size 8 object with a 4 × 10 space, with seats for 32 passengers, windows on each side, and doors on either end
- Two freight cars, each a Size 8 object with a 4 × 10 space, cargo 20, and large doors on either side, and ladders leading up to the roof
- The caboose, a Size 6 object, with a 4 × 6 space, with a doors at either end, a ladder leading up to the roof, and several bunks for the workers and guards

The passenger cars are empty, but the freight cars are packed full of things being shipped to Darksville. One holds crates of dry goods, while the other is packed with cows and pigs, each at separate ends of the car. In the caboose are six exceptionally clean pigs kept in a makeshift pen. They appear ordinary except they closely watch anyone who enters the caboose (see **Pigs in the Parlor** for details).

The workers usually rest in the caboose in shifts during the long ride to Darksville, but they're all on high alert for this trip. They know they're likely riding off to their deaths, and none of them are all too pleased about it.



THE RAILWAY AGENT

Johann Heevey is a dark, slim man who's worked for the railroad his entire life. His great-uncle Wilver Heevey founded the Darksville Railway, and Johann went to work on it as soon as he was able to walk the aisles. Despite this, he hates his current job as a railway agent, mostly because he's lousy at doing anything other than working as a conductor. He just doesn't have the mental capacity to do more than that.

Johann knows his family expects big things of him, and he's just as certain he's going to disappoint them. He sees this last train to Darksville as an opportunity for him to either redeem himself or die trying—and he's not sure which one he hopes for the most.

JOHANN HEEVEY

DIFFICULTY 1

Size 1 human

Perception 9 (-1)
Defense 10; **Health** 11
Strength 11 (+1), **Agility** 10 (+0), **Intellect** 9 (-1), **Will** 9 (-1)
Speed 10

ATTACK OPTIONS

Sword (melee) +1 (1d6 + 2)
Pistol (medium) +0 (2d6)

THE ENGINEER

Vilma Hersson knows trains better than anyone in the Darksville Railway's employ. She's been working on them since she was in her teens, and she's dedicated her life to making them run faster, better, and safer.

Vilma believes the two trains went missing due to operator error. Perhaps the tracks were torn up and the trains derailed. Or maybe the other engineers simply went too fast around one of the route's few curves. Either way, she's sure it's a normal—if horrible—problem and one she can solve, given the chance.

VILMA HERSSON

DIFFICULTY 10

Size 1 human

Perception 12 (+2)
Defense 11 (soft leather); **Health** 21
Strength 11 (+1), **Agility** 10 (+0), **Intellect** 12 (+2), **Will** 11 (+1)
Speed 10

ATTACK OPTIONS

Wrench (melee) +1 with 1 boon (2d6)

THE MAGICIAN

Unknown to Johann, the train's magician (as a cultist)—a smarmy man known as Simon Kauss—is part of a doomsday cult that worships creatures like the dragon.

Once Kauss figured out what happened to the first two trains—he believes them to have been destroyed by a monstrous dragon sent by the Demon Lord—he demanded to be allowed to help escort the third train on its journey to Darksville. He believes that the only way to appease the beast is to sacrifice three trains to it.

Kauss is a power-hungry madman, but he also cares about the people of Devil's Breach. He believes giving the trains to the dragon is the only way to ensure the town's safety. He also harbors some hope that if the dragon recognizes him as the one delivering the train to him that it will not only spare him, but also grant him greater magical power.

Fearing the group might upset his plans, he bargained with a devil to gain an incantation that would hide his fellow cultists. By bargaining away a piece of his soul, he gained access to a single casting of a spell that would transform six cultists into pigs. He slipped the transformed swine onto the train and intends to undo the magic to take out the player characters before the dragon attacks.

SIMON KAUSS

DIFFICULTY 25

Size 1 human

Perception 14 (+4)
Defense 10; **Health** 25; **Insanity** 12; **Corruption** 2
Strength 9 (-1), **Agility** 10 (+0), **Intellect** 14 (+4), **Will** 14 (+4)
Speed 10

ATTACK OPTIONS

Wrench (melee) +0 (1d6)

MAGIC

Power 3
Fire *control flame* (4), *flame missile* (4), *fire blast* (2), *flame ward* (2)
Magician *sense magic* (4)
Protection *magic lock* (4), *secure site* (4), *force field* (2), *protection from spells* (1)
Technomancy *jury rig* (4), *magic wrench* (4), *bolt thrower* (2), *mend* (1)

TELLTALE SIGNS

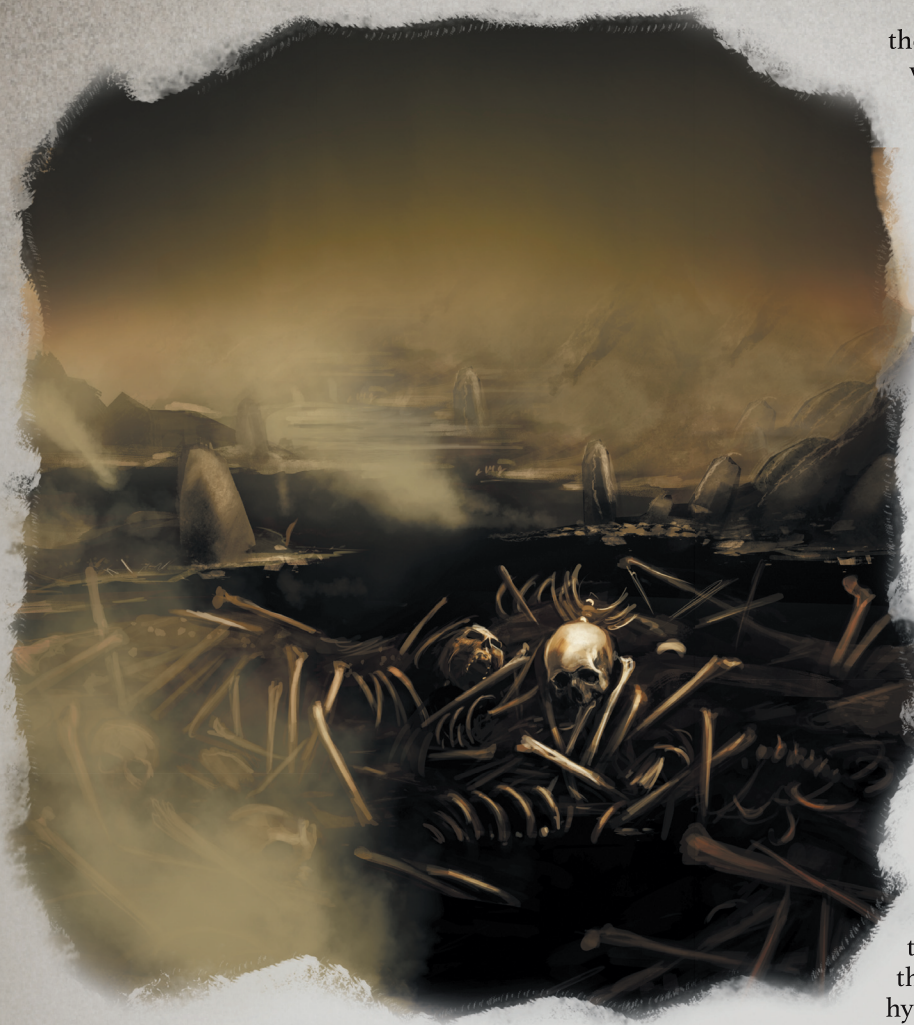
After setting out, the train passes through a blighted, seemingly empty landscape. Johann comments on how quiet it seems. "Often you can spot wild animals roaming the lands out there, with even an occasional monster or two. Today, though? Nothing."

The reason for the emptiness becomes clear the longer the characters travel. The countryside bears patches of burnt forests, the burned and mostly devoured bones of large creatures, and a few tendrils of smoke rise in the distance. No one on the train has any idea what these signs portend.

FIND THE FIRST TRAIN

After four hours, Vilma sounds the whistle, and the train slows to a halt. On the north side of the tracks, train cars lie scattered across the landscape as if flung there by a gigantic child.

Investigation reveals the engine and three passenger cars still stuck together. They are all blackened on the top, as if someone on the roof had set them on fire. They're smashed on whatever side they rest on, as if they were dropped from a great height. Everyone inside them—dozens of people in each car—is dead, killed by the impact.



The freight cars are all missing. The connector to the last passenger car was sheared off, leaving only a gaping hole in the back of the car. If there was a caboose—which Johann confirms should have been there—it's missing as well.

The discovery shakes most of the crew, and they all want to turn back. Johann insists they move forward, however. Vilma grows concerned, but she continues to try to puzzle out a rational explanation for the disaster. Simon enthusiastically agrees with Johann and exhorts them all to press on.

Allow the players to make the decision here. If they accede to Johann's wishes to press on, the rest of the crew has no choice but to comply. If they refuse to continue on, Johann cannot stand against them. Simon, however, refuses to go back, even if ordered to. He quietly gives in if he must, but the first chance he gets, he subdues Vilma and sets the train to charge forward into the wastes.

The train, of course, was attacked by the dragon, who ripped it from its tracks. Once it had the train in the air, the beast shook it until the front part separated from

the rest. It then flapped off toward its lair with the freight—and the workers in the caboose—which it disposed of at its leisure.

If the player characters wonder aloud about the second missing train, Johann reveals it would have been coming from the opposite direction, returning from Darksville. The one they found was the first train that disappeared, and it left from Devil's Breach.

PIGS IN THE PARLOR

Not long after the group comes upon the wreckage of the first train, the magician makes for the freight car holding the enchanted swine under the auspices of going to bed down in the caboose. There he hopes to reverse the magic so the cultists can ambush the characters just as the dragon attacks. If not prevented, he crawls up one of the ladders and drops in through a hatch in the roof. There, he speaks the phrase he learned from the devils and watches as the swine return to their human forms. Unfortunately, the devil's magic left these cultists with a nary curse, turning them into **6 skinchangers** stuck in a weird hybrid form, part human and part pig.

They don't respond to Simon's orders and, in fact, turn against him. The characters might hear his screams and come to his aid. If not, Simon flees the car and heads to the characters, shouting about how there are monsters on the train. In desperation, and if pressured by the characters, Simon babbles all he knows about the dragon in order to save his life. He's hard to understand, as the skinchangers are intent in wreaking havoc and pursue him with no regard for their own lives.

THE DRAGON ATTACKS

The dragon has found taking the previous two trains to be simple. So simple, it decides to toy with the latest noisy contraption chugging across its lands. First, it swoops close to the train, causing the whole thing to rock on the rails. An hour later, it swoops down again to snatch one guard screaming off into the night. Finally, an hour after that, the dragon snatches the caboose, taking a section of the rails and another guard with it.

An hour after that, the dragon attacks.

ELDER DRAGON

DIFFICULTY 750

Size 8 horrifying monster

Perception 19 (+9); truesight

Defense 23; **Health** 160

Strength 17 (+7), **Agility** 13 (+3), **Intellect** 14 (+4), **Will** 16 (+6)

Speed 16; flier (swoop)

Immune damage from fire; charmed, dazed, frightened, sleep, stunned

Spell Defense A dragon takes half damage from spells and makes any challenge roll to resist a spell with 1 boon. A creature attacking the dragon with a spell makes the attack roll with 1 bane.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Claws (melee) +7 with 3 boons (2d6)

Teeth (melee) +7 with 3 boons (3d6 plus 1d6 from fire)

SPECIAL ATTACKS

Flurry of Attacks The dragon attacks twice with its claws and once with its bite.

Spew Fire The dragon sprays flames in a 10-yard-long cone from a point it can reach. Everything in the area takes 8d6 + 10 damage and flammable objects catch fire. Each creature in the area must make an Agility challenge roll with 2 banes. A creature takes half damage on a success, or also catches fire on a failure. After using Spew Fire, the dragon must wait 1 round before it can use it again.

END OF THE ROUND

Epic Recovery The dragon removes one affliction from itself.

Epic Adversary Roll 1d3 +1 to determine how many actions the dragon can use during the next round. It can use these actions during any turn and can do so before its enemies act. Each time it would use an action, it can move up to its Speed before or after the action.

The dragon comes at the train from the darkness in the east, to the front of the line, where it blasts the train with fire from one end to the other in the hopes of slowing down the train or even stopping it, which will make snatching the freight cars that much easier.

Unless the player characters order a halt, though, Vilma increases the train's speed, pushing it to its limits in the hopes of outrunning the creature. That may be a doomed effort, but it's the only plan she has.

Simon, on the other hand, wants to slow down the train to make it easier for the dragon to snatch it. He attacks Vilma and they fight for control of the engine. If Simon defeats Vilma, he depowers the train's engines and then climbs atop the engine car to shout out his obeisance to the dragon.

Either way, the dragon is fast enough to keep up with the train at full speed, and it blasts it with fire again. On its third pass, it snatches at the freight car closest to the passenger cars, and uses an action to haul it into the sky. It takes the dragon two actions to accomplish this.

Once the dragon grabs hold of the freight car, it hauls the entire train into the sky. Even for such a mighty beast, this is a challenging feat. If the player characters can disrupt its efforts, the dragon drops the freight car, but there's only a 3-in-6 chance for the train to remain on its tracks. Otherwise, it derails and crashes. Everything in the car when it lands takes 6d6 damage from being thrown about. A success on a Strength challenge roll halves the damage.

If the dragon manages to get the train into the sky, it carries it about a 50 yards into the air and then shakes the freight car like a vicious terrier with a filthy rat until the front part of the train separates and crashes to the earth, at which point all occupants take 12d6 damage. A success on a Strength challenge roll with 1 bane halves the damage.

If the player characters manage to seriously harm the dragon, it turns its attention to them. The dragon is not used to experiencing pain, and it moves quickly to make it stop. While this might keep it from tearing the train from the tracks for a time, they face the dragon's full fury.

Once Simon deals with Vilma, he tries to hamstring the player characters at opportunity. If they turn against him, he screams to the dragon for help. The creature, of course, does not care one whit for him, and it is all too happy to immolate him in the same fire it blasts at the player characters.

AFTERMATH

If the player characters manage to defeat the dragon, Johann is all too happy to pay them their fee the moment they return with him to Devil's Breach. He doesn't care if the train was destroyed or not. The fact they triumphed over the beast and saved the railroad is enough for him.

If Johann didn't survive the battle with the dragon, his family can be convinced to pay the reward when they see some kind of proof that the dragon has been defeated.

The people of Devil's Breach are thrilled with the player characters, too. Their money is no good at local inns for the next week. They receive the same kind of reception should they ever make it to Darksville as well.

Ambitious player characters may realize a dead dragon means there's an empty dragon's lair somewhere out there. If they can find it before anyone else, they should be able to loot it at will. Nothing's ever that easy, of course, but that's a topic for another adventure.

