



## All That Shimmers...

An Adventure by Dylan Craig

### Part 1 - A Rock and a Hard Place

**Setting:** This adventure is designed to be set in Colorado, with the initial action happening in Boulder and Denver and then moving into the Rockies near Aspen. It will most likely run over two sessions (6-8 hours), and involves about an equal mix of investigation (first half) and action (second half). Some of the combats are quite deadly; you may have to tailor them to suit your Posse.



**Setup:** A powerful group of Reckoner-inspired black magicians has been plotting for several years to bring one of their lords to earth in the flesh, using a newborn baby as the vehicle. The ritual they intend to perform, however, requires a very specific location; a cave deep in the Rockies whose walls are lined with pure silver, in which a permanent gate to the Hunting Grounds exists. This cave is spoken of as a place of evil in several Indian legends, but its location is never given. Despite the cultists' efforts to find its precise location over the years, they have never managed to narrow the area down further than a region fifty miles in radius... and as the ritual calls for for the birth to occur in the cave, scouring 7500 square miles of mountainside for a cave with a pregnant woman in tow has held up plans for the ritual until now.

Recently, one of the cultists (who works for a mining company in Denver), overheard his boss trying to buy rights to a silver-finding device that a local scientist had developed. The cultist investigated, and sure enough, the device seemed to be genuine. Hastily, they assembled their expedition, kidnapped two suitable pregnant women, and set out for Boulder. There, two of the cultists broke into the Doctor's house (killing one of his guard dogs in the process), and stole a working prototype of the device. From Boulder, the group moves hastily Southwest, towards the mountains near Aspen, where the gateway lies...

**Getting the Posse involved:** There are several 'hooks' that you can use to get the Posse involved.

- They could be in it for the money: Dr Purvis is offering a \$500 reward for the prompt return of his device.
- They could be motivated by Helgo Schmidt, the editor of the Boulder Herald, whose motivations are discussed below.

- They could be friends or associates of Boulder's town Marshall, who is set to have his reputation as a lawman dragged through the mud if this case isn't promptly solved.

Feel free to mix and match these motivations; it would work well to have the posse motivated by several of them.

## Boulder

There are several leads that the Posse can follow up in Boulder.

**Dr Purvis:** Can be found in his house, sunk into a deep depression. He will be in his study, staring morosely into the bottom of a glass of brandy, attended to by his Mexican valet, Inigo. A whining dog with a bandaged neck lies at his feet, and a thin and smoky coal fire hisses and sputters in the grate. He will initially be resistant to questioning; a Fair (5) Persuade roll is required to get him to play along; alternately, the only way to snap him back to the real world is to mention money; this will remind him of the potential revenue he has lost with the disappearance of his device, and he will spring to life. He has the following to say:

*"Only one device of real worth is missing, although the thief took several of my more portable designs as well as all the blueprints from my cabinet. The one that I'm most upset about, you see, is one that I haven't yet patented; if the thief, whoever he is, patents the method before I can build a replacement, then six years of work have all come to nothing. The device works on the principle of etheric resonance harmonies; put simply, when you dissolve a small sample of a substance in a special mix of vitriolic salts within the mechanism, the ether antennae pick up the strongest source of sympathetic resonances in the local environment - within, say, twenty to thirty miles - and orients a pointer towards it.*

*I've only managed to get the device to work in the case of one substance so far... silver. The missing device was calibrated to find large silver deposits, gentlemen, and now it has fallen into the hands of a criminal."*

He pauses to wipe his glasses. Continued questioning will reveal the following, but only if the Posse undertake to track down the thief for Dr Purvis.

- He will offer the aforementioned reward, and will ask any obviously scientific types in the Posse to swear "on their honor as a practitioner of Science" to return the device.
- The real secret to the machine is the acid mix; luckily, the mix is only good for about ten readings before it becomes inert; and once it is inert, the secret of its composition cannot be determined by chemical analysis.
- The thieves broke in while he was taking his evening walk. He has no regular time for this walk; he "takes some air" whenever his work for the evening is finished, usually for about twenty minutes at a time. He usually walks around the block, has a brandy at Far son's Tavern, and then returns home.
- He was longer than normal on his walk this time because he spilt someone's drink while walking to his table, and felt obliged to replace it. He doesn't remember who the person was, just that it was a tall man with a beard he hadn't seen in town before, who was sitting at the bar with two other men who were playing backgammon and who smelled

strongly of drink.

- Inigo was out at a friend's on the evening of the crime, playing poker. He has a cast-iron alibi, and has no motivation whatsoever that might make him a suspect.
- The thief killed one of his dogs and wounded the other; these wounds were inflicted with a stabbing weapon of some sort. Anyone examining either the wounded dog, or the dead one's carcass (which is buried in the back garden) and making a Medicine (General) roll of 7 or more, or a Cognition roll of 9, will reach the conclusion that these wounds were inflicted by a long straight knife, like a bayonet. Both dogs have deep wounds on the left side of their necks.
- Only one person other than the Doctor knew about the device; the manager of a mining outfit, Webb Mining, based in Denver. Dr Purvis had been negotiating with Julius Webb to buy the rights to the device, but had wanted to hold off the sale until he could make the device work for other substances than silver. The price tag was \$25 000. Dr Purvis has not been to Denver to keep Webb updated on progress for several weeks.
- The closest patent office is in Denver. It will take the Doctor approximately two months to draw up new blueprints and build a new prototype.
- The prototype is a large apparatus resembling a lawn barbecue with a TV antenna sticking out of it's lid. The whole thing weighs about sixty pounds.

**Helgo Schmidt:** The editor and star reporter of the Boulder Herald can be found in his office, working on a first draft of a scathing editorial slamming Marshall Kingsley for "deserting his sworn responsibility to serve the interests of the Cattle Barons". Schmidt's motivations are simple; there is a mayoral election coming up, and he strongly favours a certain candidate over the others. If he sets himself up as a concerned mouthpiece for the *vox populi* now, he will be able to align public support behind his candidate more strongly. Marshall Kingsley's decision to lead a large posse out on a week-long campaign to find a gang of rustlers operating in the area has been a contentious issue in the town, and it is this dissatisfaction that he is using as his stepping stone.

If the Posse mentions that they are thinking of tracking down the thief, he expresses a great deal of interest; in fact, the paper is willing to add an additional \$100 to the reward that Dr. Purvis is offering. Should the Posse accept this, Schmidt will, of course, set the situation up to make himself look good in tomorrow's paper: "**Incensed Scientist And Local Paper Accept Mantle of Justice! 'No faith in Kingsley', say sources**", and so on. The information he knows is as follows;

- His "confidential source" was Deputy Marshall Brevis, who overheard the Doctor cry out "The prototype! It's gone!" when they entered the workroom. He will only reveal this fact if he feels he can trust the Posse.
- Webb Mining is a broad-based mining company which runs several shafts in the area of the Rockies. One mine produces semi-precious gemstones, and the other two are silver mines. Schmidt has heard several rumours that one of these mines is running a little "dry". Julius Webb is a successful businessman who worked his way up from working as a shaft steward to owning his own mining company. He has a reputation as a cut-throat but scrupulously honest man.
- He doesn't actually know what the prototype does; Purvis hasn't told him. However, he will attempt to worm this out of the Posse with any means at his disposal.

The worst thing the Posse could do is let Schmidt in on any of their information or plans; if they do this he will shadow them all over the place, getting in the way and generally being a nuisance. He won't follow them outside the town limits, though; he's not **that** interested in the outcome of the case, except where his personal agendas can be served.

**Farson's Tavern:** It's almost impossible to speak to "Red" Farson, the owner and barman of Farson's, during peak hours (during lunch, and after seven at night), but at other times he's more than happy to put aside checking his beer mugs for chips and cracks, to talk.

- Dr Purvis comes in for a glass of peach brandy every night; it's about the only time he leaves his house. All his shopping and errands are done by Inigo.
- He remembers the three fellows who were sitting at the bar playing backgammon; they arrived three days ago, with two friends. Their room is paid up until the end of the week, although he hasn't seen them today. He can provide them with descriptions of Ivan Green, Christopher Sutcliffe, and Murray Barron (see Boot Hill). He will remember Murray most clearly (Murray spent the most time in the saloon); and thus his description will be the most detailed, which will allow the Posse to recognise him from a photograph in Webb's office. He also remembers Ivan Green (the tall, bearded man who distracted Dr Purvis on the eve of the robbery), as being a "heavy drinker".
- Not surprisingly, the cultists' room is empty. They are long gone.
- They didn't say where they were going, but there wasn't much tack on their horses; they couldn't have been going more than a day or two's ride from Boulder.

There aren't many other leads to follow up in Boulder; the cultists made sure that they weren't seen near the scene of the crime. Deputy Marshall Brevis is very little help indeed; a nervous 18-year old, he is beginning to feel like he has opted for a job too demanding for him. Schmidt's rabble-raising isn't helping either.

The reason the cultists seemed so short on supplies is that they have been operating out of a Conestoga wagon five miles out of town, in which their two pregnant captives were held under guard by Victor Rose, while his acolytes stole the silver finder. Within this wagon are all the supplies they need for their trip to Aspen, as well as most of their weapons and supplies. If the Posse speak to farmers (or truant schoolkids) on the road out of town (where the wagon was parked) to ask whether they have seen any passers-by headed out of town, they will discover that a wagon and a pair of oxen was parked there for three days, with one man hanging around it, but that it was gone on the morning following the robbery.

It's a 14-hour ride to Denver from Boulder. If the Posse really push it, they might make it in one day, but if a reasonable pace is followed, it will take two moderately hard days of riding to reach Denver. They know that the same route would take a wagon two, three, or even four days, depending on the load.

Of course, the cultists have headed West, not East; they are taking back routes to avoid any pursuers, and will not be spotted by the Posse. They have various charms which allow them to detect magical attempts to find them (either by spells or by shapeshifted shamans in eagle form, for instance); these attempts will be retaliated against if at all possible, using Victor's full

range of dark powers, and the information they return to the Posse will be garbled.

**Awards:** 1 bounty for questioning each of the following; Dr Purvis, "Red" Farson, and Helgo Schmidt. A white chip for asking the locals for information on who traveled along the roads. A red chip for racing to Denver to try and intercept the thief.

## Denver

The Posse should head towards Denver; even if they don't think that's where the criminals will be found, all their leads point in that direction. Less cynical parties should speed towards Denver with all haste; after all, there is always the chance that they might overtake the wagon on the road!

**Webb Mining:** A two-story building in the heart of Denver, the Webb Building holds the records and claims offices of the company (bottom floor), and the offices of the President and Vice-President as well as a board room (top floor). A guard with a shotgun and a dog is always on duty in the reception area (a certain quantity of silver is kept on the premises). Getting an appointment with Julius Webb is moderately difficult, as he spends a lot of time out of the office; however, it is usually possible to see him at some point on the same day as one requests a meeting. Mentioning Dr Purvis or his invention will draw a much speedier response!

Webb will meet them in his luxurious office, with the a wall full of framed photographs behind him. The photographs depict various important times in his life; his old shaft crew, his first paycheck, his wedding, the day he opened Webb Mining, and so on. Each one is labeled with a small caption - "Opening the Honeycomb Shaft, 1871", for instance.

Julius Webb is an imposing figure, with long gray hair and an impeccably tailored gray suit which accentuates his powerful build. He has the strong, calloused hands of an ex-miner, and he is fond of waving these in the air while he talks. If the Posse mention, or have mentioned, Dr Purvis or Boulder, he leaps to the conclusion that the characters are representatives of Dr Purvis', come to negotiate the final sale, and will greet them as such with some remark like "So, I see old Bart finally feels like gettin' rich!".

Of course, Webb knows nothing about the theft, and will react with genuine alarm at the news. One of his mines is running dry, and he is concerned that the loss of capital will slow down the pace of his company's growth. He has an alibi (of course), for the evening in question. He will corroborate Dr Purvis' version of their negotiations thus far, adding the following;

*"Well, while I'm upset at the theft, I made my fortune without the help of such a contraption and I'll make another fortune without one before I'm through. But Purvis is a good scientist, and if he ever does get his little toy to work on anything but silver, I'd sure like a piece of that action. I could make ten fortunes that way! I tell you what; if you can find it, and get it back to him, I'll add a hundred and fifty dollars to whatever he's paying you... for travelling expenses, let's say. How does that strike you?"*

At this point, ask the Posse to make Cognition rolls. The character with the highest total will notice a picture on the wall behind Webb, showing Webb with Murray Barron at the signing of

the purchase documents for his latest acquisition. Barron's features are clearly visible in the image, identifying him as the man in Farson's Tavern. The caption reads "Julius Webb and Murray Barron Purchasing the First Water-Cooled Drill Bits in Colorado". If this is brought to Webb's attention, he will scowl and say the following;

*"Hmph! I should take that one down, I suppose. That damned Barron turned on me in the end - little half-blind snake!"*

At this point, a little questioning will reveal the following;

- Murray Barron was an accountant and personal assistant to Mr Webb at Webb Mining.
- He absconded a week ago, taking the contents of the firm's petty-cash safe and several confidential survey maps of the area around Aspen with him.
- Webb has several detectives looking into the issue, focusing on rival mining firms in the Colorado area. He suspects that Barron has gone over to a competitor with the maps. These detectives have already been over Barron's residence with a fine-tooth comb, and found no clues.
- One detective, Lucas Tredhill, an ex-Pinkerton, has been dispatched to Aspen to look for Barron there.

This is all they stand to learn from Webb, but some more enquiries around Denver will reveal that Barron bought a Conestoga wagon, enough supplies for a month, and a pair of oxen from a local outfitter's ten days ago. Other news around town (Roll **Streetwise (7)**, or buy 20c worth of newspapers) includes;

- There are no leads yet in the murder of a local seamstress, Tessa Green, who was killed with an axe last week. Police are looking for her husband, Ivan, in connection with the crime. Green is described as tall and gangly, with a beard. The reports refer to him as a "drunkard" with a violent temper. (Ivan Green is one of the cultists. A picture is provided).
- A \$10 reward is offered to anyone who sees 17-year old Alice Winnicott, who is still missing after fleeing her home after a fight with her parents. She is rumoured to be "in a delicate condition". (This is one of the women that the cult has abducted. A picture is provided).
- There's a strike on at the Golden Sunset Gold Mine east of town, after several miners were killed by a malfunctioning lift. (Nothing to do with the adventure).

### Problems?

- The Posse could attempt to assault or kidnap Webb. This has been tried before, and Webb now has two bodyguards packing Gatling pistols with him at all times. One walks by his side dressed in a suit, and one walks ten paces behind them dressed casually and looking as inconspicuous as possible. Webb's bodyguards (use the Spy archetype, and add **Shootin':Automatics** of 4) will shoot to kill. Webb's house is similarly impregnable. Webb will not, of course, talk to any Posse that he encounters in this way; and they will soon find out that he is an incredibly bad enemy to have.
- The Posse might be too cagey around Webb to get any information out of him at all; in which case, one of the secretaries at the office, Margaret Ferguson, will follow them outside and tearfully "confess all" - she has mistaken them for more detectives being sent after Barron. She had been having an relationship with Barron, and he asked her to come along to Aspen with him for "something big", but she couldn't face deserting her

aged mother, who lives in Denver. A **Cognition (9)** roll will reveal that she is pregnant and beginning to show (6 months). In fact, Barron has planned to bring her along as one of the kidnapes, but lost his nerve at the last minute. Margaret wants the Posse to bring him back to her; in between sobs, she promises that she will stand by him, even if he loses his job. In fact, there's no reason why the Posse shouldn't meet Margaret anyway, whether they get Webb to talk or not; it might make an interesting roleplaying dilemma for any *Heroic* characters who might otherwise have no qualms blowing a hole in Barron's skull when they find him.

## On the Road Again

The Posse must once again head out in a hurry, this time in the direction of Aspen. It's a hundred hard miles southwest by horse (five or six days ride); alternately, Wasatch Rail operates a rail service from Denver to Salt Lake City, which runs 125 miles west through Glenwood Springs, from which it's only 50 miles southeast through the Sawatch Range to Aspen. The train leaves just before dawn on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, and takes 14 hours to reach Glenwood Springs.

**Awards:** 2 bounty for talking to Webb; 1 bounty for talking to the outfitter, and 1 for talking to Margaret Ferguson. A white chip for handling the meeting with Webb well; and another white chip for taking time to find out what else has been happening in Denver in the last two weeks.

## Part 2 - Aspen and Beyond

**Setting:** This is the follow-up adventure to Part 1 of "All That Shimmers". The action begins with the posse en route to Aspen to track down Murray Barron, his accomplices, and to retrieve a stolen silver-finding gizmo from them.

**Setup:** The cultists have reached Aspen ahead of the posse. After taking some readings using the silver finder on the way in, they manage to find the location of the cave. They then speak to a local trapper to find out about routes capable of taking a wagon's weight leading up to the area. They set off the next day, using the Scrye spell to "look behind them" in case of pursuit. Through this spell they find out about Tredhill's arrival. As the posse reaches its destination, the cultists have just finished casting a spell onto the trapper, compelling him to kill Tredhill and then himself.

## On the Trail

In order to keep the story fluid, the Marshal should create a diversion during this point. If the heroes are headed to Aspen by horse, how about an encounter with a wandering madman... just a fine ol' fellow who has wired the bridge he and the heroes are standing on and will pull the string leading to the ignition fuse and the two crates of sweaty gelignite if the posse doesn't promise to give a message to God when they see him - "*Tell him the Devil's comin' back t'earth soon... tell him I dreamed it last night. Dreamed 'bout you, too... that's why I wired the bridge like I did. Had to*



*make sure you'd stop to listen, see...*". The posse will have to be convincing in its promises to deliver the message! If the heroes are on the train to Glenwood Springs, a pickpocket loose on the train and a high-stakes bare-knuckles brawling contest in one of the freight cars ought to make a good diversion. There's no reason why you shouldn't turn the madman loose on them during the ride from Glenwood Springs to Aspen as well (two days along a narrow pass).

Shamen and Braves with the Occult Skill, or those characters with Area Knowledge: Rockies or Colorado may roll a Ornerly (7) check to recall any information about the area surrounding Aspen; there are several old, half-buried legends in various local tribes that refer to the area surrounding the slopes of Mount Maroon as a place of great beauty but also of bad luck.

## Aspen (Fear Level 0 - for now....)

Aspen is a young town, enjoying the effects of the silver boom. Ideally, the heroes should arrive at dusk; if they don't you may have to modify the time references that follow. The heroes have two potential routes by which to investigate the town; they could look up Lucas Tredhill, the private detective that Webb has sent to Aspen, or they could ask after Barron himself. Snooping around town yields the following results:

**Lucas Tredhill:** A few inquiries in the saloons (Streetwise roll of 5 or more) will turn up that a man fitting Tredhill's location has been seen around town recently. As far as those questioned know, he is staying at the Titania Rooming House.

**Barron and friends:** Well, plenty of people pass through Aspen this time of year... but a Streetwise roll of 7 or more, or a dollar's worth of beer and whiskey to refresh people's memory, will reveal that four fellows with a wagon came in a few days ago. One of them (Murray Baron) was seen talking to a certain one-armed trapper by the name of Roger Ryan down at the Dry Gullet Alehouse. The others rented a room at Flatley's Junction Hotel, and weren't seen around town much. One old coot by the name of Buster Flanagan swears blind there were more people in the wagon apart from the four fellows everyone saw, and that he saw a woman's face in there too. The woman, should the heroes ask, does not fit Alice Winnicott's description. Several people will also remember Tredhill, who has also been asking about Barron - they'll mention that he's staying at the Titania.

**Flatley's Junction Hotel:** The proprietor, an old black lady called Lillian Flatley, remembers the group, and can give descriptions matching those the posse already has. She is upset that they left such nasty gashes in her nice wooden floors, and is busy putting up a sign saying "*No Spurs to be Worn Inside*" as the posse arrives. The gashes, of course, were left by the silver finder's tripod legs. She will also confirm Old Man Flanagan's observation that at least one man stayed with the wagon all night, and took food there at night; she attributed it to them not wanting to pay for an extra room, as there were already four sharing the room she rented to them.

**The Dry Gullet Alehouse:** It takes the heroes about half an hour to get the barman's attention in this packed saloon; but, when they eventually do, he says he hasn't seen Ryan all night, but he does remember the man who came in to talk to him - it was one morning, when things weren't so busy. The man had a map, and it looked like Ryan was showing him routes into the mountains.

**The Titania Rooming House:** The Titania is run by George d'Ortraine, an eccentric Boston

artist who moved here to paint the Rockies. As the heroes arrive, a pair of grim-faced deputies (Smith and Timms) are busy carrying a blood-soaked sheet with a human body inside out towards the undertaker's. Standing nearby is Sheriff Michael Deens, Aspen's local lawman, who is taking notes as d'Ortraine stands by wringing his hands and asking how to get rid of all the blood. The body in the sheet is Lucas Tredhill; he has been shot in the gut, chest and head, and is very dead indeed. His left hand is clenched closed, with a scrap of paper visible peeking out of the end of his fist. . The body's arms spill out of the sheet as the deputies negotiate the steps. If the party can somehow get the paper out of the dead man's hand, the information on it is theirs; otherwise, they will just have to do things the hard way.

The scrap is a piece of a lined notebook, and bears the words "*Rog. Ryan - trapper (scruffy, one hand). Barron seen talking to, asked about routes - where to?*".

## Investigating the Scene of the Crime

**What really happened:** Acting under the influence of the cultists, Roger Ryan went up to Tredhill's room to kill him about an hour ago. Opening the door without knocking, he surprised Tredhill in the act of writing his journal. Tredhill, not realizing that Ryan was here to kill him, quickly crumpled the page he had been writing on in his left hand to hide it. He didn't want to spook a potential source of information, after all. That's when Ryan pulled his .36 Navy and started blasting. Tredhill took a slug in the leg before he could react; then, pulling a .45 derringer, he managed to draw a bead on Ryan just as Ryan's second and third shots took him in the gut and head. Tredhill's own gun blazed as he fell, and both slugs hit Ryan in the right shoulder, breaking it. Ryan's "orders" were to "Kill Tredhill, and then shoot yourself in the head". But, lacking a left hand and unable to lift his right arm past the hip to complete his orders, he just stood there dumbly as Deputy Smith, who had happened to be downstairs enjoying a whiskey in the Titania's small bar, burst into the room and tackled him. Ryan has been carted off to jail by the time the heroes arrive.

**Sheriff Deens' View of Events:** Deens will talk freely to any bona-fide lawman who inquires about the details, and possibly to a journalist, but anyone else will have to make a fairly good case for why he should reveal "confidential legal proceedin's". The letter from Webb will help, as will any reference to the speed with which the guilty party was apprehended (Deens, like many small-town lawmen, is fairly susceptible to subtly delivered praise!). He can tell the posse the following:

- Roger Ryan has been apprehended for the crime.
- Ryan is not know to have a violent temper; in fact, he's quite well liked around town and known to be particularly friendly to strangers passing through and settlers coming into the region.
- Ryan will have to wait in jail until a town meeting can be convened; in the absence of a judge, his fate will be decided by majority vote. He's likely to hang, as Deputy Smith distinctly heard three shots from Ryan's black-powder .36 before the derringer fired. This indicates that Tredhill was unarmed when the shooting started, which makes it murder.
- If the heroes wants to know more, they are free to talk to Ryan; the town doctor is just finishing up with his arm, and he seems to have broken out of the stupor.

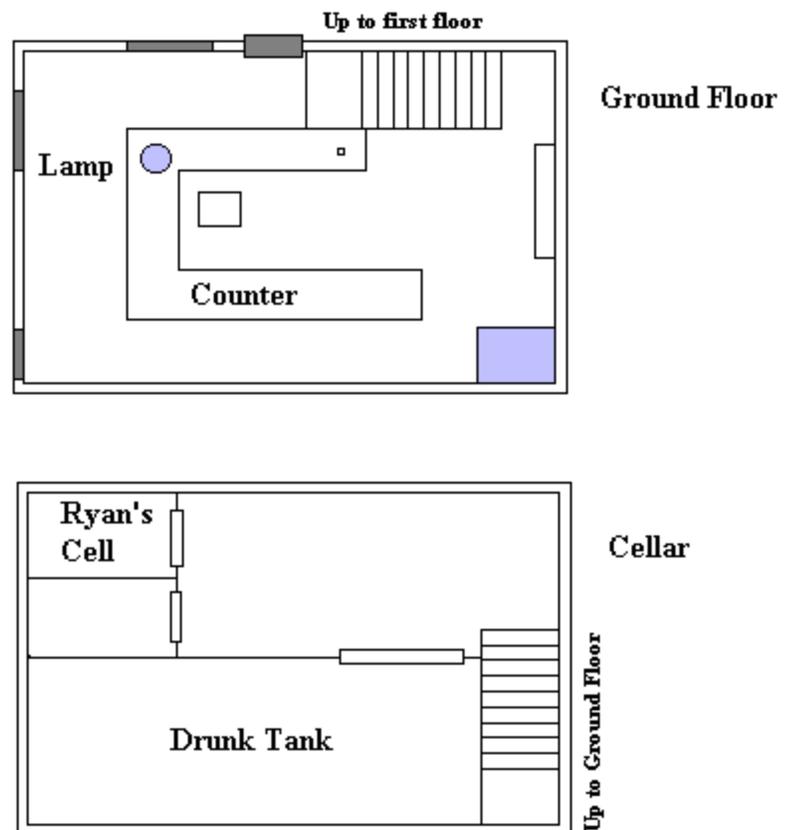
## Aspen Town Jail

The Aspen Jail is currently more of a drunk-tank than a serious hoosegow; the jail itself is located in the cellar of the Sheriff's house, the bottom floor of which serves as his office.

The Sheriff will stick around the crime scene for now, as he wants to finish interviewing d'Ortraine. Deputy Smith is given the keys to the jail and the task of taking them to see Ryan.

Deputy Smith is 25, tall and heroic-looking, with light brown hair and a bright red neckerchief. He is very chatty as he guides the posse towards the jail; it's not often that he gets to catch a 'bad guy', and even less often that he gets to brag to interested strangers about it.

Upon reaching the jail, he hands them the keys and directs them to the trapdoor; he still has to complete the arrest papers for Ryan, and inventory Tredhill's belongings. The office is lit only by a large kerosene lamp, burning on the counter, so the heroes are liable to jump a yard when a huge black cat with bright blue eyes struts out from behind a desk to rub against the characters' legs! This is Deen's cat Leo, and despite his sinister appearance, there is nothing malevolent about him. Smith will give the posse another lantern for their trip down to the cellar.



## The Lockup

Aspen's lockup is a converted root cellar; trailing roots hang from the roof and the floor is moist and bears a few mushrooms and toadstools. The walls are rough stone streaked with moss and mold, and the place smells like old whiskey gone sour and unwashed prospectors. Sitting in a huddled heap in one corner is Ryan; his right arm is in a sling, and he is muttering to himself.

## Roger Ryan

As they will have heard from other sources before now, Ryan is missing most of his left arm, an old injury from Ryan's stint as a Confederate Ranger eight years ago. He is currently in a dazed and slightly concussed state. A Persuasion (9) roll is required to snap him out of it; each member of the posse can only try once. When one succeeds (or everyone has tried and failed), he begins to ramble on as follows:

*"Voices in my head... the devil, the devil was in my head... he told me to kill Tredhill... never*

*met him before... met him the other day, new in town... a wagon? How big? Heavy load? Well, that's tricky... there's a couple of trails you could try... but watch out for those Henderson boys... steal you blind... blind... I never saw him before... up the mountain? Prospecting, huh? Well, I guess it's your business. Don't mind me asking... guess I'm the Aspen welcomin' committee... welcome to Aspen... welcome... welcome... wel-"*

Ryan is utterly unresponsive. Just as they are despairing about ever getting information from him, a big drop of dark red blood splashes onto his upturned face, seemingly from the thin air above them! The West is about to get Weird - and mean...

## Devil Dawgs

By now, the cultists have realized that their plan to cover their tracks and take out their pursuers has failed, so they've fallen back to Plan B. Victor, using his dark arts, has located a grave site up on the mountain, animated its contents (six long-dead dogs), and sent them back into town to kill the posse, Ryan, and any others who stand in their way.

The Loping Dead's stats can be found in the Boot Hill section. The carcasses animated to produce the dogs are almost a year old, and are held together purely by the powers of dark sorcery - most of the dogs lack leg joints, or have incomplete spines. Their blackened and ancient bones are partially covered by decayed and desiccated scraps of flesh and hide, except for the skulls, which are bare of flesh and wreathed in a malevolent green glow.

The dogs have entered town stealthily - one reason why it's better for this scene to occur at night - and have entered the jail in search of their victims. On route, they killed the cat (the source of the blood that seeped through the floorboards into the cellar), and knocked over a kerosene lamp... The floor above them is beginning to crackle with flame as the dogs pad around, sniffing and pawing at the trapdoor. The click-click of their bony paws will be audible above the low hiss and crackle of the flame on a Cognition roll of 9 or more.

The ring of keys Smith gave them also holds the key to Ryan's cell, but he is incapable of concerted action and will only shuffle along unless led.

Tactically speaking, the posse has twelve rounds (one minute) until the floor is mostly ablaze. The fire doesn't affect the dogs except to blacken and char their bones. At this point, townsfolk will begin to arrive, drawn by the smoke and flames. Deputy Smith (who left to fetch Tredhill's luggage) will rush in, intent on saving the day, only to be chased out again by two of the snapping, smoldering horrors. Five minutes will then pass, while Smith runs off to fetch the Sheriff and the townsfolk draw back to a safe distance after Smith's screaming exit. Once a minute has passed, the floor will fall in, spelling almost certain death for anyone still in the cellar. All this assumes that the posse didn't do the gritty thing and bust out of that trapdoor, guns blazing, before that.

## Fightin'

Refer to the map of the Sheriff's office. Depending on how long it took them to get out of the cellar (the drop of blood marks the beginning of round one), the floor will be in various stages of inferno; refer to the table below for the effects of the blaze.

Round number	Effects on Combatants
1-3	Roll Nimbleness (3) each round, or lose 1d4 Wind from burns.
4-6	Roll Nimbleness (5) each round as above, plus lose 1 Wind/round from smoke and heat.
7-9	Roll Nimbleness (7) each round as above, plus lose 2 Wind per round
10-12	Effects as above, but also make Vigor (5) roll each round or lose highest action card
13 or higher	Effects as above, except lose 2 highest action cards if Vigor (7) is failed.

The ground floor windows are all barred, so the posse either has to fight its way out the front door, or up onto the first floor where it can escape out one of the windows. Note that the counter shown on the map is not a solid bar - it's more like an angular table, so there is ample space for the dogs to attack from underneath it.

The dogs all attack silently, except for one, which utters a strange, high-pitched yelp-howl every few seconds. This piercing noise cuts through the noise of battle like a knife, all the more unnerving because the creature making it is obviously as hollow as an old canteen.

## Survivin'

Should the posse fight its way out of this battle, it makes it out just as the floor collapses into the cellar, blowing all the ground-floor windows out in a blast of flame and smoke.

A crowd of townfolk are gathered outside, either carrying buckets or, if Deputy Smith made his unfortunate discovery, brandishing firearms. An unearthly silence hangs over the street, broken only by the crackle of flames. Aspen is now treated as having a Fear Level of 1. A single child's voice is audible - "Daddy, Daddy, was Nibbles in that house? I heard him bark..." The speaker is a little girl of about four in her night-dress, who is tugging at her white-faced father's sleeve.

How the characters explain what happened is up to them (perhaps the best time for some Tale Tellin' - bear in mind that only Deputy Smith actually saw the dogs - the rest of the townfolk have that slight unease associated with a brush with evil, but no real knowledge of the events that took place), but some fast talking might be required. Should they question the white-faced man (his very insistent child will keep making it clear to all present that she "heard her doggy in there, and isn't he supposed to be in Heaven?"), they will discover the following story from the man:

*"I'm a farmer, see... las' year about this time, m'dawg started actin real weird... howlin' all night, had this real funny look in his eyes. Some m'neighbours started losin' some chickens, 'n some sheep... we found out some of the farm dawgs had upped and gone wild, 'n my dawg was one of 'em... so me 'n James, m'neighbour, rounded em up and took 'em up onto the mountain in James' old wagon... we shot 'em dead, just tied 'em to a tree and blasted all hell out of 'em with our shotguns. Dawg go wild like that, can't keep 'im on the farm no more... next thing, I'da lost a cow, or Ruthie here mighta gotten hurt. I can show ya where we took 'em, come dawn..."*

Looks like the posse have its lead into the mountains after all. If anyone asks about "the Hendersons", Sheriff Deens will be able to tell the posse that they are a pair of brothers who

make a living off robbing prospectors and settlers up in the mountains. Born and raised in the area, they haven't done anything serious enough to necessitate Deens riding out after them with a posse - but he'll warn the heroes to look out for them anyway, there's a \$250 bounty on the pair alive (\$200 on Jess, who is a deserter as well as an outlaw, and \$50 on Bill).

**Awards:** 1 white chip for gathering information about Barron and Tredhill, 1 white chip for visiting each of the the Flatley Junction Hotel and the Dry Gullet Alehouse, 1 white chip for talking to the farmer about his dog, and 1 white chip for finding out about the Hendersons. A red chip for convincing Sheriff Deens to spill the beans, and a red chip for retrieving the scrap of paper from Tredhill's hand.

## The Mountain Trail (Fear Level 2)

In the morning, the farmer (whose name is David Slight), will take them about five miles out of town, to the beginning of a wide but rocky trail up onto the slopes above them. "This is the trail they went up," he says. The place they buried the dogs is about five miles further up the trail. He won't go any further, not even for money - he says he needs to get home and look after his family.

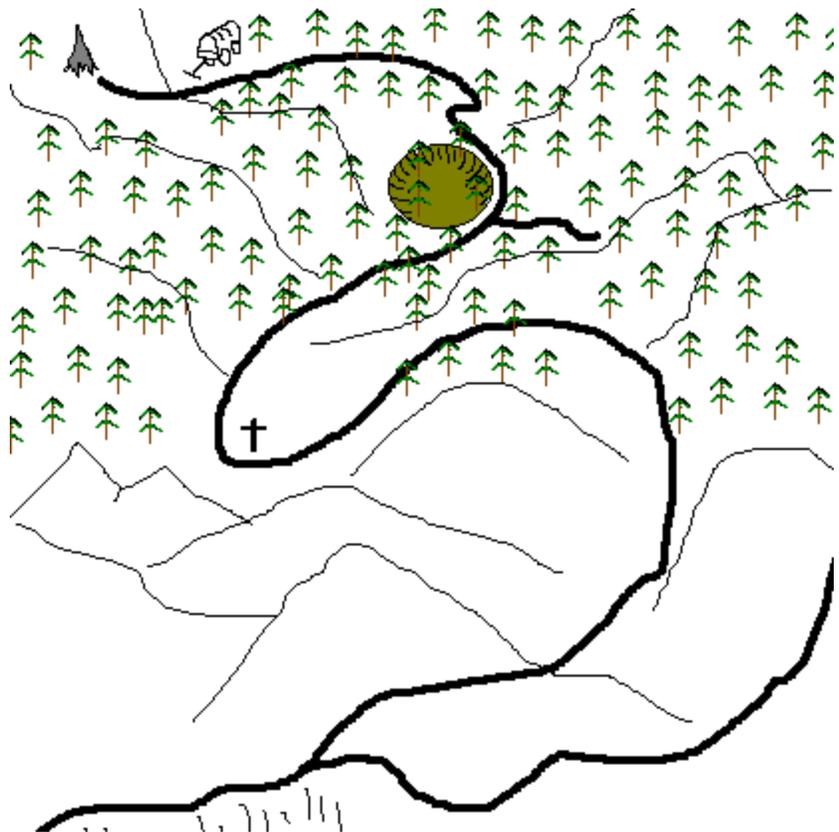
A Tracking (7) roll will reveal that five men on horseback, and a wagon drawn by two oxen, passed up this trail within the last week. The trail heads up about two miles before it is lost from view, and Slight will tell them that it becomes heavily forested beyond the place he buried the dogs.

As the posse start up the trail, a rifle shot rings out from somewhere deeper into the mountains.

As the diagram to the right shows, Slight's information is correct as far as locations go. The grave site has been recently dug up, and there are the bootprints of four men in the fresh earth around the hole. There are also five acid-smelling puddles of black wax spaced evenly around the grave; these formed the five points of the summoning pentagram used by Victor Rose to cast his Zombie spell.

It will take until noon to reach the junction. There, a Tracking (5) roll will reveal that the wagon turned left; the right-hand path peters out after a mile or so. The tracks are less than a day old.

The ambush site is one favored by the Hendersons (see below);



travelers are forced into a narrow track with a cliff on one side and a drop on the other. Normally, the Hendersons just fire a warning shot and hold guns on their victims, but this time they will be out for blood (see below).

## Ambush

The Hendersons attempted to hold the cultists up this morning, but found themselves on the wrong end of Victor Rose's Stun spell and were soon disarmed at gunpoint. Rather than kill them, the cultists handed them \$100 each, and told them to wait on this trail and kill anyone who passes. The brothers, terrified, agreed; and when the cultists told them they'd be watched in case they tried to skip out on their part of the deal, their loyalty was assured.

Jess Henderson is prone in the jumble of rocks facing the posse as they head down the path. Having once been a raider in the Union army, Jess knows how to set an ambush; his first shot will be a called shot to the head of the rear most horse (if the posse are riding); this will block the path out of the ambush. His second shot will be aimed at the front-most party member, and from then, in order of preference, people with long arms who seem intent on returning fire, and people trying to escape the kill zone. For his first shot, Jesse will be at a bonus of +8 due to aim, and the rifle rest he is using.

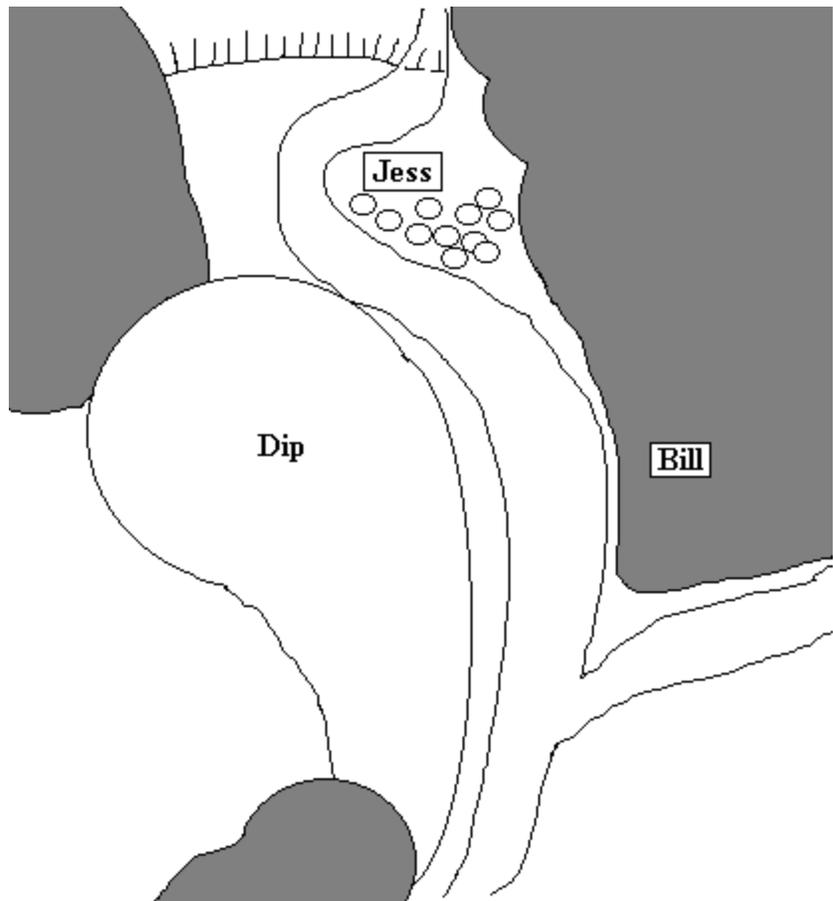
Bill Henderson, the less experienced of the brothers, is crouched on the top of the cliff with his scattergun. His orders are to wait until he hears people on the path below returning fire, and then to pop up and give anyone he sees both barrels. He'll keep doing this until Jess tells him to stop.

Bill will fight to the death, or until he is knocked out; Jess, on the other hand, has a yeller streak and will crawl backwards into a ravine and try to make his escape as soon as he takes a heavy wound.

See Boot Hill for the Hendersons' statistics.

**Living through the ambush:** There are a couple of ways the heroes might make it out of this one;

- If they have a scout out front, this unfortunate person will spring the trap before the rest



of the posse arrives.

- Alternately, they could just shoot it out with the Hendersons; this will be tricky, because the Hendersons most definitely have the drop on them.
- Of course, even though it's a ten-yard drop into gravel and scrub on their right, a character who makes the dive will be able to work their way, under cover, to a position where they can draw a bead on Jess.
- Finally, the jumble of loose rock Jess has chosen to hide in is part of a precariously balanced overhang; dynamite attacks or high-velocity firearm attacks (such as rifle shots) specifically aimed at the overhang have a 1% chance, per point of damage, of collapsing it. Should this happen, Jess will be pinned and helpless, his rifle knocked from his grasp. It will take a Scrutinize (7) roll or a Trade: Mining (5) roll to notice this detail.

When the firing dies down, the posse can take stock of the situation. If any of the Hendersons are still alive, they will gladly tell the posse all they know. Additionally, a Tracking (3) roll will reveal that a wagon passed this way, less than a full day ago.

## Body and Wagon

In a clearing ahead of them, the heroes see a Consetoga wagon, two oxen dozing in the shade, five horses grazing the stubbly mountain grass, and a jumbled pile of clothing. They also see, sprawled face-down in the gravel, the body of a young woman. This is Alice Winnicott, who broke free of her captors and made a run for it when she was led out of the wagon. With their goal so close, and having brought another woman along for just this eventuality, the cultists elected not to chase her - instead, they just gunned her down.

- Alice has been shot in the thigh (pistol) and back (shotgun). She was seven months pregnant. Her terrified and tear-streaked face requires a Guts roll against a Terror value of 5 from anyone examining the body. Her hands are tied behind her back, and from the state of her wrists, have been for over a week.
- The jumble of clothing comprises the traveling clothes of six adult men (the cultists changed into their robes before entering the cave).
- The wagon has a few day's provisions left in it, but otherwise nothing of interest.

Tracking the footprints of the six men reveals that they left the clearing, leading a barefoot woman, and headed up a steep mountain pass. A few yards up the path stands Dr Purvis' device! It's steaming gently, and its pointer arrow is spinning aimlessly - the cultists have exhausted its charge, and the device is now useless.

## Turn back or go ahead?

Well, the posse have retrieved the device; they could turn back now and no-one would be the wiser. However, any Heroic or Law Man characters who choose this option lose their highest chip and a point of Grit; they are deliberately turning their back on the chance to bust some evil-doers, and inside there will always be a small voice telling them so. If the posse give up now, give them a red chip for fighting their way past the Hendersons, a red chip for shooting the overhang, and a white chip if they outflanked Jess by diving off the cliff.

## Into the Earth (Fear Level 4)

Five hundred yards or so along the trail is a jagged cave mouth. The cultists' footprints are clearly visible in the powdery guano on the floor, as is a half-submerged and decayed skeleton. The walls of the cave are blackened by the smoke of ancient fires; barely visible under the soot are ritualistic carvings, left here by the ancient inhabitants of this region. The carvings are too crumbled to make out any detail, but something about their appearance is disturbing.

The fissure leads deep into the mountain. At its widest points, it is ten yards wide; in other areas, it narrows to a mere two or three feet. The floor shows signs of having been crudely smoothed down, and every ten yards or so, a hole has been carved in the wall to hold a torch or rush-light. Beetles and cockroaches scuttle underfoot, and the occasional moth flutters above.

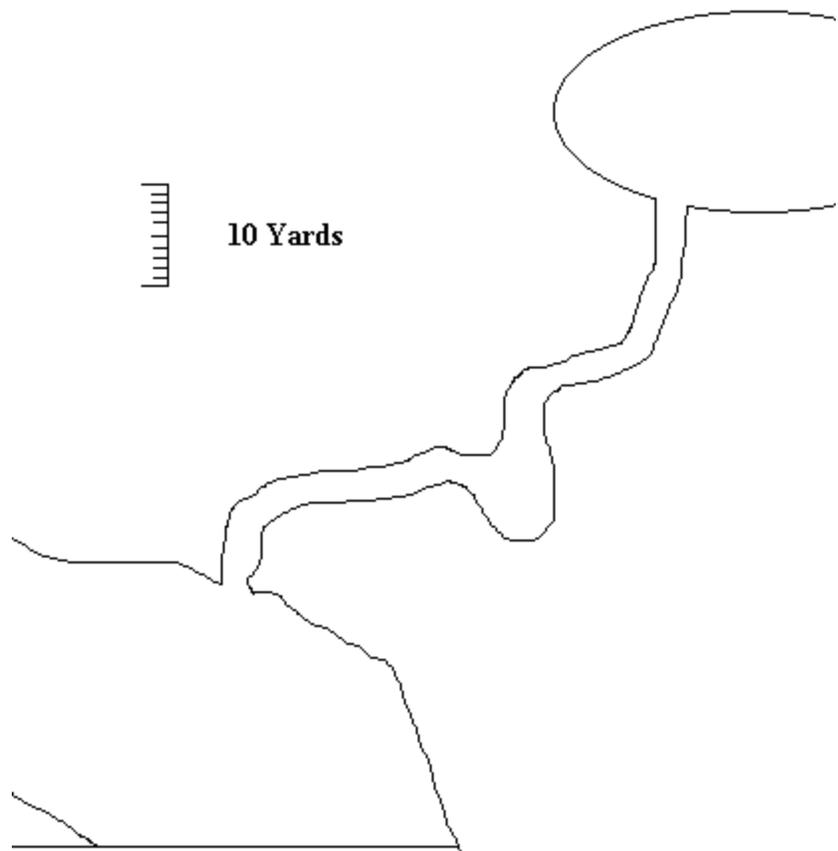
The tunnel twists and winds treacherously through the darkness. Eventually, the posse reaches a natural cavern with a sinkhole in the floor. The smooth stone surrounding the sinkhole is carved with ancient designs, these ones in better shape than their counterparts in the cave. The carvings depict human figures bowing in worship to a round object (the hole), and placing animals and smaller human figures inside it (sacrifices which were carried down the pit to be offered up to the Gate below). Coils of mossy, rotten bark rope are piled high around the room.

A thick log has been placed across the hole, and a heavy rope with knots tied every yard is attached to it, disappearing down the hole into the darkness. If the posse shine lights down the pit, they will see that the tunnel goes down about ten yards, and then begins to slope, finally being lost from sight.

The sinkhole's walls are unnaturally smooth, and have a soapy, greasy feel to them. As the posse descend down the pit, they will notice the walls beginning to sparkle; by the end of the sinkhole, the walls gleam like metal.

As can be seen from the simplified cross-section provided alongside, there are several sheer drops within the sinkhole's length. At these points, a Climbing (3) roll is required to safely pass through the section. Someone in the posse will also have to make a Guts check

against a Terror value of 3 when a beetle falls down the shaft behind them and lands in their collar, if they fail they involuntarily let go of the rope in panic!



**What's happening at the bottom of the sinkhole:** The ritual is already in full swing, and the sound of chanting and the frightened cries of a woman will start becoming audible as the posse reaches the halfway point. The woman is begging to be let go in Spanish; the chanting is in a mix of ancient Hebrew and Latin. The "Gate" is a monolith of pure silver, three meters high and a meter across. Its surface is bright and somehow fluid, and those looking directly at it must make a Guts roll against a Terror value of 3. The walls of the cavern are similarly bright, although they do not have the disturbing appearance of the Gate.

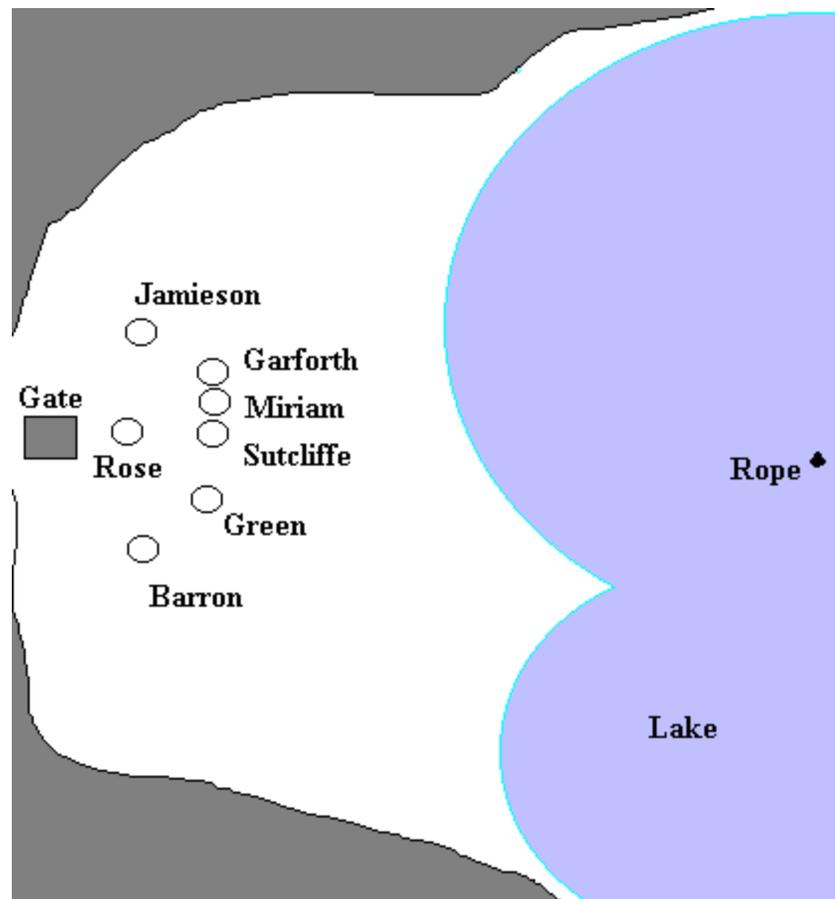
Refer to the tactical map alongside; Victor Rose is standing in front of the Gate chanting and holding a staff in one hand and a medallion in the other. All the cultists are wearing white robes with gold trim; they are standing in a half-circle between Rose and the posse, their attention fixed on the Gate, which is beginning to swirl and bulge, seeming to lose its shape and sway slightly. Two of the cultists support a weeping woman (the second sacrifice, a soiled dove named Miriam) between them. The five cultists standing in the half-circle are carrying their weapons.

The posse is stuck with the dilemma of whether to climb stealthily down the rope, and bringing its numbers to bear on the cultists, or opening fire while holding on the rope.

Firing at Rose (or, indeed, any of the cultists) from the rope will be tricky; firstly, the firer is at a -3 for having such an unsteady position, plus he or she will only have one hand free for shooting. Rose is also over 50 yards away (and the closest cultist over 30 yards away), and has both the Dark Protection (2) and Cloak of Evil (3) spells in effect. Sneaking down requires an opposed Sneak roll versus a random cultist's Cognition trait.

The cultists will, of course, turn and engage the posse at the first sign of trouble, leaving Barron to drag the screaming woman towards Rose and the Gate. The cultists' stats can be found in Boot Hill. Barron will shield the woman with his own body if the posse begins shooting at her.

Rose needs five more rounds to complete the spell he is casting; start counting from when the heroes first act or when the first posse member is noticed by the cultists. During those rounds, the Fear Level of the Silver Cavern is a steady 5. Once he completes the spell, however, two



things happen; first the Fear Level hikes up to 6; secondly something reaches for the woman from inside the Gate, the silver surface of the Gate stretching like rubber as the Reckoners reach out to claim their victim. At this point, Rose and Barron are free to join in the defense of the Gate.

For five more rounds, the gate bulges and roars. The thrashing form of the woman is dimly visible within the gate, which now appears more like shiny, greasy smoke than liquid silver. During this combat, attacks can be directed at the Gate: it is considered to have 100 Quick Hits, and an Armour Value of 1 against physical attacks. Holy Water and symbols of faith burn it like acid; these do damage equal to the wielder's Faith roll (or, halved Spirit roll if he or she does not possess Faith), each round that they are in contact with the Gate. The Gate actually sprays black "blood" when wounded; writhing grubs with agonized human faces can be seen in the blood, thrashing and dying as they enter our world.

The Gate can't "fight back" until ten round have passed; if they kill it before then, you may skip straight to the finale. If not, it attacks just like a Desert Thing until destroyed or the posse are all incapacitated. Don't forget that it draws an extra card each round as a result of the Fear Level. The Living Gate has a Terror Value of 7.

### Problems?

- Your posse died: Damn, Marshall, I told you to tailor these combats to your party! Well, you're just going to have to bite the bullet. If it's any consolation, those killed in this chamber automatically return as Harrowed, but with the Manitou having full Dominion.
- The sacrifice died: Well, Rose still has one trick to play; a unique Black Magic Spell called My Life For Yours. To learn this spell, a black magician must know over ten levels of dark favors; it requires a Faith roll as usual, and Rose's version involves slashing open the victim's chest, then his own, and actually ripping out his own still-beating heart and pressing it into the victim's chest! The victim is instantly cured of all damage, but the caster is irrevocably dead. As can be seen, this spell requires 4 actions to perform; if Rose takes a Wound during these actions, the spell fails.

## Grand Finale

As the heroes strike the final blow, a massive concussion rings out, blowing them all back from the Gate. With an ear-splitting crash, fissures begin to open all over the cavern, and lava begins to gush out. The cavern is filled with black steam as the lake begins to boil. Over all the chaos can be heard the screaming of an angry child, coming from the Gate. It is clear that if the heroes stay in the cavern, they will roast. Hope they left the rope up into the sinkhole intact! Otherwise, you could have a rockfall provide a nice slope up which they can scramble up to the sinkhole. Make the players not what order they are leaving the cave in.

Barron, if he is still alive, will sprint towards the exit along with the posse; any other cultists are swallowed by the fissures. As they flee, the Gate is buried in a wave of lava, and the child's voice is cut off. The exit is only large enough for one hombre to go through per round and they must make a fair (5) nimbleness check to do it, if they fail they can try again next round. There is a catch though, once the first hero has tried to get out of the exit the rest of the posse are feeling the effects of all that hot lava. Each round they stay in the cave, have the heroes who are waiting their turn to get out make a onerous (7) Vigor check to resist the heat. If they fail they lose the difference in Wind. When a hero runs out of Wind, he or she drops from the rope

like a stunned bug and plunges into the lava, unless someone can manage to snag them and haul them out. Don't worry about having them make climbing rolls on the way back up; it just wouldn't be dramatic.

As they sprint out of the cave mouth, the cave collapses behind them, burying the site under tons of rubble.

## Epilogue

Awards: Apply the awards given above; in addition, give a red chip for facing the cultists, a blue chip for destroying the Gate before it animated, or a blue and a red chip for destroying it while it was fighting back; a red chip for using holy symbols or materials against the gate, and a white chip for killing Rose. Additionally, if they manage to bring Barron back alive, to stand trial, award the player who bagged him a blue chip.

Don't forget the point of Grit for facing, and defeating, the cult and the Gate.

As a point of interest; history shows that in 1894, the Smuggler Mine near Aspen yielded a chunk of silver weighing over a ton...

## THE END?

### The Lopin' Dead

**Corporeal:** D:2d10, N:2d10, S:1d10, Q:3d10, V:2d8. Dodge 3d10, Brawlin' 4d10, Sneak 3d10

**Mental:** C:2d10, K:1d4, M:1d4, Sm:1d6, Sp:2d6. Overawe 5d4, Search 3d10

**Size:** 4

**Terror:** 7

**Special Abilities:** Bite: Str+1d6, Undead: Can only be harmed as if they were Harrowed. Immune to fire.

### Jess Henderson

**Corporeal:** D:2d8, N:4d8, S:1d12, Q:4d10, V:2d8. Dodge 3d8, Brawlin' 4d8, Sneak 3d8, Shootin':Rifle 5d8, Shootin' Pistol:3d8, Sneak:4d8

**Mental:** C:2d10, K:1d8, M:1d6, Sm:3d6, Sp:1d6. Overawe 5d6, Search 4d10

**Hits:** 40

**Description:** Short, with long brown hair and a scarred face.

**Gear:** Colt Patterson Model 1836 Rifle, spare loaded cylinder for same, Colt Dragoon, Bowie Knife, Travel Gear, Mule.

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## Bill Henderson

**Corporeal:** D:1d8, N:3d8, S:1d12, Q:3d10, V:1d8. Dodge 2d8, Brawlin' 3d8, Sneak 2d8, Shootin':Shotgun 3d8, Shootin' Pistol:2d8, Fannin' 3d8. Sneak:3d8

**Mental:** C:1d10, K:2d8, M:2d6, Sm:1d6, Sp:1d6. Overawe 2d6, Search 2d10

**Hits: 30**

**Description:** Short, with a shaved head and a squint.

**Gear:** 12-gauge scattergun, Pair of Colt Navies, Hatchet, Travel Gear, Mule.

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## The Cultists (Barron, Green, Jamieson, Garforth, and Sutcliffe)

**Corporeal:** D:3d6, N:2d6, S:3d6 (Green has 4d12), Q:3d6, V:2d10. Dodge 3d6, Brawlin' 3d6, Fightin':(weapons): 3d6, Sneak 4d6, Shootin:(weapons):3d6, Sneak:3d8

**Mental:** C:2d6, K:2d4 (Barron has 2d10), M:2d6, Sm:2d6, Sp:3d6. Persuasion 4d6, Search 2d6, Faith 3d6

**Hits: 30 each**

Gear	Description
<b>Barron:</b> Spencer Carbine, 15 rounds, Bowie Knife	Short, oiled hair, glasses with one lens blacked out.
<b>Green:</b> 12g Shotgun, 10 rounds, wood axe, Colt .44 Army	Hulking, gaunt, with dark beard.
<b>Jamieson:</b> Winchester '73, 2 Hunting knives	Skinny, manic, with green eyes and short brown hair.
<b>Garforth:</b> DA Army Pistol, Bayonet	Extremely fat, with ragged and dog-bitten wooden left arm.
<b>Sutcliffe:</b> SA Peacemaker	Long white beard, turban, toothless and obviously mad.

**Black Magic:** Barron Knows the Cloak of Evil spell to Level two.

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## Victor Rose, leader of the Cult

**Corporeal:** D:3d6, N:3d8, S:2d6, Q:3d8, V:1d6. Dodge 2d8, Brawlin' 3d8, Fightin':Knife 3d8, Sneak 2d8, Shootin:Pistol 3d8, Sneak:3d8

**Mental:** C:3d8, K:2d10, M:3d10, Sm:4d8, Sp:3d12. Overawe 3d10, Leadership 2d10, Guts 5d12, Faith 4d12

**Wind: 18**

**Description:** Tall and wiry, with a cultured and soothing voice. Blue eyes. Balding..

**Black Magic:** Cloak of Evil 3, Dark Protection 2, Stun 2, Animal Mastery 3, Scry 3, My Life for Yours 1.

**Gear:** Rupertus Pepperbox, Sacrificial Knife, Sacred Staff (He has the Level Headed ability while holding the staff - but it only works for him).