

# BLACK POWDER BLACK MAGIC

VOLUME 1



COMPATIBLE WITH  
**DCC  
RPG**

A ZINE OF SIX-GUNS AND SORCERY

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# Black Powder, Black Magic

A zine of six-guns and sorcery

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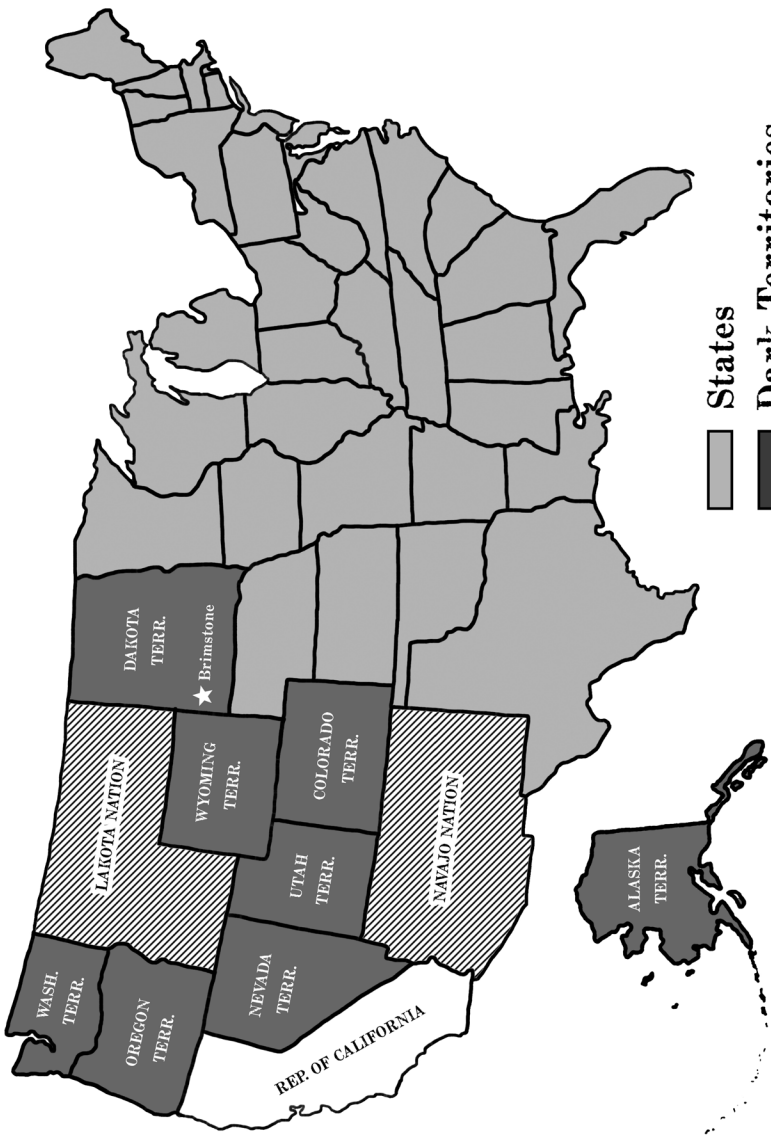
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1880

- States
- Dark Territories
- Native Nations



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# Introduction

You slap a tattered dollar onto the ticket counter. “Just one. Headin’ to Brimstone.”

The cashier scratches his stubble, gives you a once-over, and spits his chaw. “Brimstone, eh? Better have some skill of merit, friends in high places, or be damned lucky to make a name for yourself out there.” (See pg. 8, *Occupations*)

You give him a dismissive nod and glance down the track as passengers from all walks of life board the 3:10 train. Most are poor, neglected, desperate folk, cramming into the rear cars. Like you, they’re heading into the Dark Territories to build a new, and hopefully better, life. A few, those with more money than sense, board the luxury car at the front, which sits behind an ore tender and a massive, black-iron engine. A brass plaque adorns the steam box, and the name engraved there gives you pause: *The Devil’s Cauldron*.

Being the only one in line, the cashier strikes up a conversation. “So, what’s yer name?”

You turn back to address him and claim your ticket. “Never you mind.”

The cashier gives an understanding wink. “Ah. Well, whatever it is, once you get to Brimstone, won’t anybody know anyway. Everybody there gets a fresh start, so if your current name’s worn a bit thin, pick yourself another.” (See pg. 14, *Common Names of Brimstone*)

Staring down at the ticket, your thoughts drift to the circumstances that put you on this path (See pg. 13, *Motivations for Heading West*), and the tangible, ever-present reminder of your past. (See pg. 12, *Tokens of the Past*)

“That all?” asks the cashier.

“Any advice you can give me regarding Brimstone?”

The cashier smiles. “I was hoping you’d ask, but that’ll cost a few dollars more.”

You pocket the ticket and readjust your gear. Leaning on the counter, you

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give the man a cold, hard stare. “I’ll give you a nickel, and a promise not to come back there and beat you within an inch of your life.”

Visibly shaken, the cashier stammers, “Uh, well... um... alright. That’s an acceptable counter-offer.” He clears his throat and straightens his tie. “Two most important things. First, get yourself a gun. Don’t be picky. Any size or type will do the job.” (See pg. 16, *Rules for Firearms*)

“And second?”

“Don’t trust nobody.” The cashier then leans in and whispers, “Don’t trust nothing.”

You hold his gaze a moment, then toss him a nickel and start heading across the worn platform to the train. The counter window slams shut behind you, and the train whistle blows long and low, like a mournful wind across the moors. The conductor calls, “All aboard!” (See pg. 26, *The Devil’s Cauldron*)

You step into the hot, crowded car and claim the last seat. The advice given by the cashier was sound, if a bit mundane, but one thing bothered you: What did he mean by “trust nothing?”

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# Timeline of Events

- 1848 California Gold Rush begins
- 1855 California Gold Rush ends
- 1865 General Lee surrenders to General Grant at Appomattox Court House
- 1868 Soul Rending ritual complete by cabalists
- 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie
- 1868 Ulysses S. Grant is elected president
- 1872 Demon ore discovered in the Dakota Territory
- 1874 Brimstone is established
- 1876 Wild Bill Hickok is killed in Deadwood, South Dakota.
- 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn (Custer's Last Stand)
- 1877 The Southern Dakota Railroad begins construction
- 1878 The story "A Little Black Book" (*See pg. 38*)
- 1878 The Powder Drought begins
- 1879 General Sherman speaks to the graduating class of the Michigan Military Academy
- 1880 The Powder Drought ends
- 1880 The Southern Dakota Railroad finishes construction, connecting Brimstone to Rapid City

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# Starting at the Bottom

Everybody in Brimstone starts at the bottom, and that means 0 level for your character. The Dark Territories and the people in them are hard and unforgiving. Few of your characters will survive the trip, but those that do can choose a class in which to advance.

For now, roll randomly on the occupations table (*See pg. 8*), or choose an occupation that you find interesting. In the next volume of *Black Powder*, *Black Magic*, we'll share new classes commonly found in the Dark Territories.

All 0-level characters start with the following:

- 1d4 hit points, modified by Stamina
- 5d12 dollars
- 0 XP
- A randomly determined occupation (*See pg. 8*)
- A randomly determined Token of the Past (*See pg. 12*)
- A randomly determined Motivation (*See pg. 13*)

Based on the occupation:

- Possession of one weapon, be it improvised or trained
- Possession of some trade goods
- A +0 modifier to attack rolls and all saving throws; note that 0-level characters use a crit die of 1d4 on crit table 1 of the core rulebook.

As the character earns experience points, his XP total advances. When his XP total reaches 10, he may choose a class.

Once you've determined the character's occupation, Token of the Past, and Motivation for Heading West, roll or choose a name from the tables on pages 14 and 15.

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# Occupations

1. Architect, metal square (1d2), blueprints for a saloon
2. Artilleryman, ramrod (1d6), 1 lb. gunpowder
3. Artist, large paintbrush (1d2), rare pigments
4. Auctioneer, gavel (1d2), unclaimed estate trinket worth 20 dollars
5. Baker, rolling pin (1d3), a long-lasting fruitcake
6. Banker, pen (1d2), roll of 25 silver dollars (1d3)
7. Barber, razor (1d3), a bar of shaving soap
8. Barkeep, billy club (1d4), a pewter tankard
9. Blacksmith, hammer (1d4), 5 lbs. pig iron
10. Boatman, gaff hook (1d5), gang plank
11. Book-keeper, letter opener (1d2), blank ledgers
12. Brewer, club (1d4), keg of ale
13. Bricklayer, trowel (1d4), a bag of dry mortar
14. Butcher, cleaver (1d4), a side of salted beef
15. Cabinet-maker, small hammer (1d3), a 8' plank of mahogany
16. Carpenter, hammer (1d5), a bag of nails
17. Carter, staff (1d6), a push cart
18. Cardsharp, pocket pistol (1d6), a deck of marked cards
19. Cavalryman, sabre (1d8), tin of chewing tobacco
20. Cavalryman, heavy pistol (1d10), a riding saddle
21. Cigar-maker, machete (1d6), a box of fine cigars
22. Clerk, letter opener (1d2), an order pad
23. Clergyman, brass candlestick (1d2), a bottle of red wine
24. Clock-maker, small hammer (1d2), gold hour-hand
25. Clothier, shears (1d2), set of fine clothes
26. Cooper, bung club (1d4), empty oak barrel (10 gal.)

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27. Coppersmith, small hammer (1d3), 5 copper cobs
  28. Cowpuncher, branding iron (1d6), 5 lbs. cured beef
  29. Dentist, scalpel (1d2), handful of silver fillings
  30. Distiller, copper pipe (1d3), a bottle of shine
  31. Draughtsman, steel triangle (1d2), plans for a new engine
  32. Drover, whip (1d2), a steer
  33. Druggist, big needle (1d2 + 1 dose sedative), a vial of morphine
  34. Editor, vicious red pen (1d3), a green visor
  35. Engraver, chisel (1d2), a blank bronze plaque
  36. Factory hand, wrench (1d3), a bag of rivets
  37. Farmer, scythe (1d6), a bale of hay
  38. Farmer, shovel (1d4), 1 lb. manure
  39. Farmer, rake (1d4), 1 lb. potatoes
  40. Farrier, hammer (1d6), lucky horseshoe
  41. Fisherman, knife (1d4), a large net
  42. Fireman, hand axe (1d6), a large bucket
  43. Gardener, shovel (1d5), a bag of flower seeds
  44. Grocer, club (1d4), a jar of pickled herring (red)
  45. Gunsmith, light pistol (1d6), fine tools
  46. Hatter, shears (1d2), a very fine Victorian hat
  47. Housekeeper, broom (1d2), sunday linens
  48. Hunter, civilian rifle (1d12), a compass
  49. Huckster, knife (1d4), leather briefcase
  50. Infantryman, bayonet (1d6), really good shoes
  51. Infantryman, civilian rifle (1d12), a mess kit
  52. Infantryman, knife (1d4), a sturdy backpack and bedroll
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53. Innkeeper, pocket pistol (1d6), incriminating ledger
  54. Jeweler, chisel (1d2), an eye loupe
  55. Judge, gavel (1d2), law degree
  56. Laborer, shovel (1d5), 50' rope
  57. Lawyer, pen (1d2), law degree
  58. Librarian, pen (1d2), a potentially useful reference book
  59. Livery-stable keeper, riding crop (1d2), saddle bags
  60. Locksmith, a huge lock (1d3), a lock pick set
  61. Lumberjack, axe (1d8), wool coat
  62. Merchant, knife (1d4), mystery parcel
  63. Midwife, broom (1d2), bottle of laudanum
  64. Miller, barrel stave (1d5), a bag of very fine flour
  65. Miner, pick (1d6), bag of gold dust (worth 1d24 gp)
  66. Musician, boot knife (1d2), banjo
  67. Paper-hanger, paper-hanging stick (1d4), pot of glue
  68. Peddler, pan (1d4), organ grinder
  69. Photographer, steel tripod (1d3), camera and film for 3 photos
  70. Physician, pocket pistol (1d6), a doctor's bag
  71. Pimp, pocket pistol (1d6), a silk vest
  72. Plumber, pipe wrench (1d4), 12" baby alligator
  73. Policeman, billy club (1d4), a whistle
  74. Politician, a pocket pistol (1d6), 2d12 dollars in a fine leather wallet
  75. Porter, a pocket knife (1d2), canvas backpack
  76. Potter, wheel (1d3), lump of clay
  77. Printer, shears (1d2), barrel of ink
  78. Prison guard, light pistol (1d6), handcuffs with key
  79. Professor, sword cane (1d6), a magnifying glass
  80. Quarryman, heavy hammer (1d6), 6 iron spikes
  81. Railroadman, iron pry bar (1d6), 6 iron spikes
  82. Saddler, awl (1d3), fine saddle
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83. Sawyer, saw (1d5), bag of sawdust
  84. Servant, brass candlestick (1d2), a letter of recommendation
  85. Shoemaker, awl (1d3), fine boots
  86. Silversmith, sword cane (1d5), an engraved silver flask
  87. Storekeeper, billy club (1d4), a basket of produce
  88. Student, cane (1d3), your favorite encyclopedia volume
  89. Surveyor, walking stick (1d4), compass
  90. Tailor, a pair of scissors (1d2), sewing kit
  91. Teacher, yard stick (1d2), fresh apple
  92. Teamster, horse whip (1d3), a bag of chew
  93. Telegraph operator, wire snips (1d3), telegraph machine and 50' wire
  94. Tinsmith, tin snips (1d3), a pot and a pan
  95. Trapper, a skinning knife (1d4), bear trap
  96. Undertaker, hammer (1d4), a bag of two dozen nails
  97. Veterinarian, big needle (1d2 + 1 dose sedative), horse tranquilizers
  98. Watch-maker, walking stick (1d3), a watch that keeps perfect time
  99. Weaver, a pair of scissors (1d2), 100' cotton string
  100. Wainwright, knife (1d4), buckboard

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# Tokens of the Past

*The items below represent physical links to the character's past, and can create the foundation of an interesting backstory. Roll or choose one.*

1. A small, silver-framed mirror
2. A silver bullet
3. Another person's land grant
4. A wanted poster
5. A faded photograph
6. An antler-handled Bowie knife
7. Jewelry of Sioux origin
8. A human scalp
9. The ace of spades with a name written on it
10. A raven's skull
11. A bible with blank pages
12. A very expensive bowler hat
13. A Union sergeant's stripes
14. An embarrassing letter
15. A tin box of pills
16. A cattle brand
17. A Confederate flag
18. A death certificate
19. A music box
20. A ticket to the Ford Theater

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# Motivations For Heading West

*Fame and fortune are common goals, but characters will struggle, suffer, and sacrifice for much more personal reasons. Roll or choose one.*

1. To fulfill an obligation or debt
2. To find a missing relative
3. To avoid an obligation or debt
4. You seek to unravel the mysteries of the universe
5. To impress a love interest
6. You are wanted for horse theft
7. You are wanted for murder
8. You are wanted for arson
9. You are wanted for forgery
10. You are wanted for train robbery
11. A medium instructed you to fulfill your destiny
12. You seek revenge
13. You seek justice
14. You have crossed a gang
15. To cure what ails you
16. You lost a bet
17. You had a vision
18. You follow a ghost
19. A ghost follows you
20. To escape an abusive relationship (spouse, father, employer, etc.)

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# Common Names in Brimstone

*There's no official census in Brimstone, but these names are the most heard.*

## Women

- |               |               |               |               |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. Abigale    | 26. Esther    | 51. Josephine | 76. Nancy     |
| 2. Ada        | 27. Ethel     | 52. Judith    | 77. Natalie   |
| 3. Agnes      | 28. Ettie     | 53. Julia     | 78. Nellie    |
| 4. Almira     | 29. Eudora    | 54. Juliet    | 79. Nora      |
| 5. Alva       | 30. Eva       | 55. Katherine | 80. Patsy     |
| 6. Amelia     | 31. Fidelia   | 56. Laura     | 81. Permelia  |
| 7. Ann        | 32. Frances   | 57. Leah      | 82. Phoebe    |
| 8. Beatrice   | 33. Fanny     | 58. Lenora    | 83. Philomena |
| 9. Becky      | 34. Flora     | 59. Letitia   | 84. Polly     |
| 10. Bernice   | 35. Florence  | 60. Lilly     | 85. Rachel    |
| 11. Bess      | 36. Genevieve | 61. Lorena    | 86. Rebecca   |
| 12. Charity   | 37. Georgia   | 62. Lorraine  | 87. Rowena    |
| 13. Charlotte | 38. Gertrude  | 63. Lottie    | 88. Rosa      |
| 14. Chapawee  | 39. Gladys    | 64. Louise    | 89. Ruth      |
| 15. Chastity  | 40. Grace     | 65. Lucy      | 90. Samantha  |
| 16. Constance | 41. Hannah    | 66. Lydia     | 91. Sally     |
| 17. Cynthia   | 42. Hattie    | 67. Margaret  | 92. Sarah     |
| 18. Dorothy   | 43. Helen     | 68. Maria     | 93. Savannah  |
| 19. Edith     | 44. Helene    | 69. Martha    | 94. Selina    |
| 20. Edna      | 45. Henrietta | 70. Matilda   | 95. Stella    |
| 21. Ehawee    | 46. Hope      | 71. Maude     | 96. Victoria  |
| 22. Eleanor   | 47. Isabella  | 72. Mika      | 97. Virginia  |
| 23. Elizabeth | 48. Jane      | 73. Mildred   | 98. Wachiwi   |
| 24. Elvira    | 49. Jennie    | 74. Molly     | 99. Winnifred |
| 25. Emma      | 50. Jessamine | 75. Myrtle    | 100. Zylphia  |

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## Men

1.	Aaron	26.	Eldon	51.	James	76.	Ned
2.	Abraham	27.	Elijah	52.	Jasper	77.	Obediah
3.	Alejandro	28.	Enapay	53.	Jack	78.	Ogaleesha
4.	Alonzo	29.	Ezekiel	54.	Jefferson	79.	Orville
5.	Ambrose	30.	Ezra	55.	Jedediah	80.	Oscar
6.	Amos	31.	Francis	56.	Jesse	81.	Owen
7.	Archibald	32.	Franklin	57.	Joel	82.	Paul
8.	Asa	33.	Gabriel	58.	Jose	83.	Patrick
9.	Barnabas	34.	Garrett	59.	Josiah	84.	Reuben
10.	Benjamin	35.	Gideon	60.	Joshua	85.	Roderick
11.	Bennet	36.	Gilbert	61.	Lafayette	86.	Rufus
12.	Benedict	37.	Gus	62.	Lawrence	87.	Samuel
13.	Bernard	38.	Hank	63.	Lewis	88.	Seth
14.	Bertram	39.	Harland	64.	Luther	89.	Silas
15.	Buford	40.	Harold	65.	Louis	90.	Simon
16.	Byron	41.	Harvey	66.	Levi	91.	Tashunka
17.	Calvin	42.	Henry	67.	Lucas	92.	Thaddeus
18.	Carlos	43.	Hiram	68.	Luther	93.	Theodore
19.	Clarence	44.	Horace	69.	Marcellus	94.	Ulysses
20.	Clement	45.	Hotah	70.	Martin	95.	Uriah
21.	Clinton	46.	Hugh	71.	Meriwether	96.	Victor
22.	Cole	47.	Isaiah	72.	Miguel	97.	Walter
23.	Daniel	48.	Israel	73.	Mordecai	98.	Warren
24.	Edmund	49.	Isaac	74.	Morgan	99.	Wilfred
25.	Edwardo	50.	Jacob	75.	Nathaniel	100.	Zachariah

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# Rules for Firearms

The following list of firearms are an abstraction of the many and varied weapons available in the later half of the 19th century. The categories below represent generalizations of common weapons. The judge is encouraged to use these guidelines to create minor variations of these stock weapons. Changes could include larger or smaller capacity, accessories such as scopes or bipods, and superior (or inferior) quality.

**Damage:** The extreme lethality of firearms is simulated by exploding damage dice. If the maximum number is rolled on the damage die, the die is rolled again and the results added together. For normal games, this exploding die occurs only once per roll, but the judge could opt to increase the number of exploding dice to equal the level of the character, or even remove the limit for exceptionally brutal games.

**Range:** Range is listed as short/medium/long/extreme. Per the core rule-book, short range is resolved with no modifier, medium range confers a -2 to the attack, while long range is at -1 on the die chain. Shots at Extreme range are taken at a penalty of -2d on the attack roll and -2d damage, due to the lost velocity of the projectile.

**Mode:** Whether the weapon is single shot or semi-automatic. SS=single shot; only one bullet can be fired per round, usually before needing to reload the weapon. SA=Semi-Auto; the character can fire up to 3 shots in a round, however, the first is at -1d and each subsequent at an additional -1d. A warrior can use a special Mighty Deed, called Fanning, to modify these penalties.

**Capacity:** The total number of shots the weapon can fire before needing to be reloaded. A character typically can reload 4 bullets if taking no other action in a round. If a Reflex Save (DC 10) succeeds, the character can reload 4 bullets while moving his regular movement. If the check fails, the character drops 1d4 bullets and fumbles the reload.

**Cost:** The weapon cost in dollars (equivalent to gold pieces).

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<b>Firearm</b>	<b>Damage</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Cap.</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Pocket Pistol	1d6	5/10/15/30	SS	2	20
Light Pistol	1d8	30/60/90/180	SA	6	20
Heavy Pistol	1d10	30/60/90/180	SA	6	30
Shotgun*	1d14**	15/30/45/90	SS***	2	20
Carbine	1d10	50/100/150/300	SA	6	100
Rifle*	1d12	70/140/210/420	SA	8	150
Elephant Gun*	1d14**	100/200/300/600	SS	1	300
Gatling Gun*	1d10****	100/200/300/600	Special	50	1500
Cannon*	1d30	500/1K/1.5K/3K	SS	1	4000

\*Two-Handed Weapon: Characters using two-handed weapons roll 1d16 for their initiative.

\*\*Anyone taking a hit must make a Reflex save with a DC equal to the damage received or fall prone.

\*\*\*You can fire both barrels at a single target. Roll damage twice.

\*\*\*\*A Gatling Gun does 1d10 per round. See description for details.

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## Firearm Descriptions

**Pocket Pistol:** A pocket pistol is a small pistol designed to fit in the palm of a character's hand, and it's only useful at close range. The ubiquitous Deringer is an example of a pocket pistol. A character attempting to conceal a pocket pistol receives a bonus of +1d.

**Light Pistol:** Civilian pistols of smaller caliber. These affordable and commonplace weapons can be purchased in most towns.

**Heavy Pistol:** Heavy pistols are typically made for military or law enforcement use and pack a bigger punch than their civilian counterparts. Heavy pistols are sometimes called horse pistols because of their frequent use by cavalry forces.

**Shotgun:** The shotgun is the mainstay of most people making their living on the frontier. It fires cartridges filled with tiny lead balls and can cause devastating damage at close range.

**Carbine:** The carbine is a short rifle designed for use by horse soldiers or civilians who don't need to hit targets at long range. Older models have breech-loading and revolver designs, while newer models are lever-action. Although it is a two-handed weapon, its short barrel allows a wielder to roll the normal d20 for initiative.

**Rifle:** The apex of modern personal firearms, the longer-barrled rifle has greater range, ammunition capacity, and lethality.

**Elephant Gun:** The big game of the plains demands a big gun! The hunting rifle trades magazine capacity for accuracy and damage. A hunting rifle does not suffer a -2 to hit at medium range and only takes a -1d penalty to hit at extreme range. Damage at extreme range is still at -2d, however.

**Gatling Gun:** The Gatling gun is not a true machine gun to purists, but if you are on the wrong end of one when it's cranking, the finer points of ballistic semantics are the least of your worries. A Gatling gun can fire up to 10 bullets per round. Each target after the first suffers a -1d to hit, in addition to any other penalties. The Gatling is difficult to move, and typically it must be set on a carriage or tripod and needs at least two trained characters to operate. It takes 10 rounds to unlimber a Gatling and get it ready to fire.

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**Cannon:** Cannons are normally found in the hands of the army or exceptionally well equipped militia. It takes special training to fire a cannon and a crew of at least three. Reloading a cannon takes 10 rounds. Unlimbering and preparing for first use takes 20 rounds.

## **Firearms Manufacturers**

By 1877, demand for firearms greatly outpaced the supply, and available munitions ran dangerously low. Colt, Ithaca, Remington, and other established companies increased production of their standard guns and ammunition, but the nightmare logistics of shipping them to the Dark Territories usually meant huge delays. New manufacturers stepped in to fill the void.

In many cases these were small operations, often owned and operated by a single gunsmith. However, these lone wolf outfits produced high-quality, customized firearms with prices to match. Notable examples include W.W. Hammer, who produced an incredibly devastating shotgun nicknamed Thor's Hammer, and A.J. Knox, who produced exquisite revolvers.

Throughout 1878 and 1879, munitions in the Dark Territories were scarce. Folks started calling it the Powder Drought. Many carried empty revolvers and rifles. Things in the deep mines began to stir and the miners had inadequate means of self defense. Mine production slowed, and the boomtown mining economy began to implode.

Randolf Angerman, a scientist from Boston, founded the Anger Powderworks just outside of Brimstone in 1879. He won a claim to 200 acres in the Black Hills containing a sulfurous hot spring. When he surveyed the land he discovered a natural saltpeter cave, putting 2/3 of the ingredients for gunpowder in his hands. After a year of local powder production Brimstone boomed again, and Angerman became one of the wealthiest men in the Dark Territories.

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## New Mighty Deed of Arms: Fanning

Fanning the hammer of a pistol is an old gunfighter's trick. By holding down the trigger and quickly pulling the hammer of the weapon back with the heel of the off-hand, the revolver can fire in rapid succession. Typically, firing more than one shot per round from a semi-automatic weapon results in a cumulative -1d to hit per shot fired. With a successful Mighty Deed the warrior can reduce this penalty. See table below.

<b>Deed Die</b>	<b>Fanning Result</b>
3	Fire the first bullet at your normal attack die and each subsequent bullet at a -1d to hit, up to 3 shots.
4	Fire the first bullet at your normal attack die and each subsequent bullet at a -1d to hit, up to 4 shots.
5	Fire the first two bullets with your normal attack die and each subsequent bullet at a -1d to hit, up to 4 shots.
6	Fire the first three bullets at your normal attack die and each subsequent bullet at a -1d to hit, up to 5 shots.
7	Fire the first three bullets at your normal attack die and each subsequent bullet at a -1d to hit, up to 6 shots.
8	Fire the first four bullets at your normal attack die and each subsequent bullet at a -1d to hit, up to 6 shots.
9	Fire the first five bullets at your normal attack die and each subsequent bullet at a -1d to hit, up to 6 shots.
10+	Fire up to 6 bullets at your normal attack die.



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# Demon Ore and Hellstones

“War is Hell!”

William Tecumseh Sherman could not have known the uncanny accuracy of his statement to the graduating class of the Michigan Military Academy in 1879. A more accurate quote could have been “Hell is *at* war,” because it was, and had been for centuries. However, to truly put an end to a demon’s existence is a rare and difficult task.

Yes, they can be banished to another plane of existence for a hundred years and a day, but these creatures are eternal. Years, decades, centuries... time means nothing to them. Once their imprisonment has run its course, the hosts of Hell will return to fight again. That is, until a meddling group of human cabalists were tasked by their demonic patron to tip the scales of war in his favor.

In early 1868 the cabalists conducted a powerful ritual called The Soul Rending. This forever changed the nature of demonic warfare, for if they were slain on their home plane of existence, they would explode into metal fragments that scatter upward through the barrier to the plane of our mortal existence. This is commonly known as demon ore or Hellstone.

This demon ore has rare and mystical properties when mined and harnessed properly. Those skilled in dark arts, or willing to play trial and error with their very soul, can smelt and form the demon ore into incredible artifacts. The more powerful the demon was in life, generally the more powerful the qualities of their demon ore. There are nearly limitless possibilities to the individual demons and their resulting demon ore that can be uncovered.

Even such a powerful ritual as The Soul Rending cannot irrevocably end a demon’s potential mischief, however. In theory, it is possible to reforge more powerful demons if enough demon ore fragments are collected. Because of this theory, evil cults, secret societies and other mysterious factions, have taken interest in demon ore. The intrinsic value, nearly limitless mystical possibilities, and potential for incredible evil have made demon ore the

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most sought after substance in the world. Findings of even scant traces of demon ore have led to migrations that make the famous gold rush of 1848 - 1855 pale in comparison.

In the United States, the places where demon ore has been discovered were overrun with lawlessness almost immediately. In response, the U.S. government quarantined all areas where demon ore was found and named them Dark Territories. To enter a Dark Territory to mine for demon ore, or to conduct any business at all, requires authorization from the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Special licenses called Dark Permits are issued in a haphazard manner along territorial borders. Poor management, corruption, graft, and carelessness, have led to an unruly and unmanageable program of licensing. A healthy black market in legitimate and forged licenses exists around every Dark Territory. Policing of the zones themselves is left to the commanders of the local frontier outpost and sometimes state or territory militia.

Of course, most people do not realize the origin of demon ore, although the name has caught on in all circles due to the hazards of working with the stuff. Most people think demon ore is merely a previously undiscovered metal, unearthed by newfangled mining techniques. Regular folks with no knowledge or protection against the forces of evil have made their way into Dark Territories hoping to “strike it rich.” Predatory merchants, unscrupulous businessmen, and all manner of snake-oil salesmen have followed in their wake.

Some of the names and properties of the more commonly found demon ore and Hellstones have been categorized, and reliable methods have been invented to harness their power. New types of ore and ways to expand upon the properties of the smelted metal are being discovered daily, and the judge should feel encouraged to introduce them whenever needed.

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## Low Grade Ore and Stone

### Feather Rock

This gray, pock-marked rock is very light-weight. It contrasts in texture and color with the sedimentary stones of the streams and rivers in which it is found. It is primarily used as a fuel substitute, since it burns twice as hot as coal. It's currently valued at 150% gold standard. The metal originates from the corpses of Type I demons.

### Frog Eyes

Frog Eyes are consistently found in swamps, bogs, and marshland. These green-striped, spherical deposits are the remains of Type II demons. They are easily found at night, as they are luminescent. They are commonly used in magic that improves a person's fortitude, willpower, and reflexes. Frog eyes are worth twice their weight in gold.

### Moonstone

Prospectors who've made some coin harvesting feather rock and frog eyes typically move on to mining near the surface for moonstone, a translucent blue mineral. Strangely, canines can locate moonstone through scent, and bloodhounds are becoming a common sight in Brimstone. It is believed that moonstone is derived from Type III demons. It is used in protective magic and will command prices at 3 times the gold standard.

## High Grade Ore and Stone

### Queen's Teeth

The white, sharp formations of queen's teeth are found in caverns deep beneath Brimstone. They break easily, but are useful to those practicing the dark arts. It is a required component for making indigo steel, and many tout its effectiveness in salves, potions, and other alchemical concoctions. It sells for 3 times the gold standard, and originates from Type IV demons.

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## **Indigo Steel**

This purple metal is highly conductive, malleable, heavy, and willingly accepts any spell cast upon it, whereas common steel tends to reject enchantments. Making indigo steel requires the addition of powdered queen's teeth for it to be worked into useful objects, such as pistols, ammunition, and knives. Jewelry is sometimes crafted from indigo steel, but the metal is toxic. Prolonged exposure to skin will cause debilitating effects and deformities. It is currently valued at 5 times the gold standard. The ore originates from Type V demons.

## **Demon Hide**

The most resilient and toughest metal is demon hide, and believed to originate from Type VI demons. It is quite rare, and found only in the deepest and most dangerous of mines. The red ore is dense, heavy, and difficult to harvest. It requires the burning of feather rock to create a temperature high enough to forge it, but the end result is a metal that will resist all manner of mundane punishment, and can cut through even the strongest of ordinary steel. It's worth at least 6 times its weight in gold. To date, there has only been one discovery of demon hide around Brimstone, and the ore was quickly sold to undisclosed buyers.

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# The Devil's Cauldron

Since the emergence of demon ore across the country, prospectors have discovered a high concentration of the minerals in the Black Hills of the Dakota Territory. The great thinkers of the day speculate why this location has an abundance of these minerals, but none of them agree on a single theory. Some believe that the greatest battle in the war for Hell was fought deep under the Black Hills, while others have long believed the badlands of the Dakota Territory hold special significance to infernal powers.

Whatever the case, thousands of prospectors flock to Brimstone every month to seek their fortune. Most never return. All the normal dangers of a boom town in a lawless territory (indian attacks, robbery, claim-jumping, starvation, and disease) coupled with the volatile supernatural threats found around and within Hellstone mines make survival far from a foregone conclusion. Those that do return, however, do so wealthy and powerful, albeit it almost universally changed in some way.

This adventure is, quite literally, a railroad! Each of the characters heads west aboard *The Devil's Cauldron* for various reasons (See pg. 13, *Motivations for Heading West*). Everyone knows the journey is fraught with danger and hardship. The Dakota Territory is a lawless place; outlaws are drawn to the riches of the boom towns, the badlands are cold and remote, and recently the Sioux have taken to the warpath in large numbers to fight the incursion of miners and settlers into their land.

## The Devil's Cauldron

The train consists of the engine, a coal car, a first-class passenger car, a dining car, a steerage passenger car, 2 freight cars, a flatbed car, an armored car, and the caboos. Throughout the adventure, fighting from within the train will provide a +4 bonus to armor class. Hiding completely (taking no combat actions) grants a +8 AC bonus. Characters whose zero level occu-

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pation grants them a piece of large equipment (such as a buckboard), will have paid to transport the item on the flatbed car. Those who have livestock will have the animals stowed in one of the freight cars.

The armored car has the logo of the Southern Dakota Railroad painted on the side, thick metal shutters over the windows, and a locked metal door. Railroad men are loading weapons into the car. If asked, they may tell the character inquiring that quite a few groups of Sioux are on the warpath, and attacks are occurring all over the Dakota Territory. In truth, they are there to protect the railroad payroll safe that will be travelling in the armored car.

In addition to the characters, there are several railroad personnel and other notable passengers aboard the train:

- Edgar, the engineer (engine)
- Rufus, the fireman (engine and coal car)
- Ezra, the conductor (passenger cars)
- Pere Warri, a Carribean man (passenger car)
- Brigadier Bellows, an English army officer (first-class passenger car)
- The Great Santini, a magician (passenger car)
- Gideon, the backup engineer (caboose)
- James Jasper, a Pinkerton detective (armored car)
- 4 railroad guards, (armored car)

## 1. All Aboard

Give the characters a chance to do some snooping around The Devil's Cauldron before the train leaves the station (*See pg.4, Introduction, for inspiration*).

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Below are some things they may learn or encounter:

- Brigadier Bellows has a very loud verbal altercation with Pere Warri during the boarding of the train. Apparently the Brigadier objects to having to share the same train with “an islander, and a dirty French one to boot!” Pere Warri will meekly move to another passenger car to avoid the Brigadier.
- A tall skinny man boards the train with a large steamer trunk emblazoned with the words, The Great Santini.

The following encounters can really take place in any order the judge wishes, except that encounter 7: Warri’s Revenge should probably come last. Be sure to keep track of all of the characters that die during the adventure. Unless other steps are taken all of the bodies will be put into a Freight car by the personnel of The Devil’s Cauldron, and they may make an appearance at the end of the funnel.

## 2. A Train Robbery

The Levi/Dillon gang has received word of the payroll shipment on board The Devil’s Cauldron from a cousin that works for the railroad. Just 4 hours into the Dakota Territory, the gang will board the train by leaping from running horses while it is on a uphill grade. Characters who pass an Intelligence check (DC 14) may notice the gang before they board the train and will have a round to act.

Three gang members will board each passenger car, while 4 will take over the engine and bring the train to a stop. Edgar the engineer will resist the outlaws that board the engine and will be shot dead for his efforts. The remaining 8 men of the gang will surround the armored car and try to gain access.

The gang members in the passenger cars will demand that all passengers surrender their weapons, jewelry and cash. Anyone who wishes to conceal a valuable from the bandits may do so by making an Agility check (DC 5) for each object kept from the outlaws. Failure means one of the gang members spotted the deception and will move to beat the passenger until the item is relinquished.

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The gang members who go for the armored car will first demand the occupants surrender and open the door. The occupants will refuse and start shooting out of the armored windows. Finally, the gang will attempt to dynamite the door off the hinges, and shoot the stunned railroad guards inside (although James Jasper will survive). They will also capture Gideon from the caboose, as they wrongly believe he can open the safe, and will take him along to their camp for interrogation. All of this will take about 10 rounds of combat, after which the remaining gang will ride off on their horses to their canyon camp to slow-roast Gideon over a fire.

**Gang Member (18):** Init +0; Atk knife +0 melee (1d4) or light pistol +1 missile (1d8); AC 11; HD 1d8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +1, Will -1; AL C.

Each gang member is armed with a knife, light pistol, and 20 rounds of ammunition. The gang members that surround the armored car also each have a civilian rifle (1d12) with 20 rounds of ammunition and 1 stick of dynamite each.

For surviving the train robbery (even sitting and doing nothing) the characters should earn 2 experience points. Sometimes discretion is the better part of valor. If the characters somehow manage to foil the robbery of the payroll safe, award 4 or 5 experience points. This should be very hard to do, given the gangs' numbers and the short time available to fight.

### 3. After the Dust Settles

If the Levi/Dillon gang manages to escape with the payroll safe, James Jasper will attempt to assemble a posse to go after them. While this may not seem like a great idea at first, Rufus will let everyone know that since Edgar has been killed, the train ain't going nowhere unless Gideon can be rescued, since he is the back-up engineer. The train will have to wait for a replacement engineer from Chicago, which could take days.

If any of the characters has the railroadman occupation, he may act as the replacement engineer if he succeeds at an Intelligence check (DC 10). Characters with other mechanically inclined occupations (architect, clock-maker,

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draughtsman, gunsmith, locksmith, telegraph operator, watch-maker) may try to learn the operation of the steam engine with the same Intelligence check with a 1 die penalty on the dice chain. Eventually, a replacement engineer will arrive, but not until the train is attacked twice by Sioux braves.

**Sioux Braves (12):** Init +1; Atk war club +1 melee (1d6) or bow +1 missile (1d6); AC 12; HD 1d8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +0; AL N.

Each brave is mounted on a pony. Two of them will have a civilian rifle (1d12) with 20 rounds of ammunition. There is a 50% chance that any brave within melee range of a train passenger will not attack, but instead attempt to count coup, that is to simply touch the passenger and ride away. The target of a successful coup counting loses 1 point of Luck. This loss is cumulative. The lost luck will return at the end of the adventure or at the judge's discretion. The Sioux braves will usually retreat if half of their number are killed or incapacitated.

If any characters volunteer to help James Jasper, he will offer them the choice of a light pistol or shotgun with 10 rounds of ammunition from the small arsenal in the armored car. The outlaws can easily be tracked back to their hideout in a nearby box canyon. Inside the canyon, the remaining gang members are preparing to roast Gideon until he tells them the combination to the safe. He is loudly protesting his ignorance of such knowledge, but to no avail. There is one gang member standing guard atop a small pile of rocks near the entrance to the canyon, but he is pre-occupied with the imminent roasting. He has a 50% chance to notice an approach to the canyon, and no chance if that approach is stealthy, which will require an Agility check (DC 10) for all those sneaking. Characters with the appropriate occupations (cavalryman, hunter, infantryman, policeman, servant, trapper, etc.) may receive a +2 to the roll.

Rescuing Gideon is worth 2 experience points.

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## 4. Water Stop at Sisseton

The Devil's Cauldron must make a scheduled stop to resupply at a little railroad outpost called Sisseton. The outpost consists of a water tower, a wooden house with no door that stores coal, and a stone blockhouse for the two railroad employees (Jed and Rutledge) who man the station.

Unfortunately, there has been an unseasonal drought, and the water tower can't meet the demands of the engine. Jed and Rutledge have been carrying buckets back and forth from a creek in nearby Sica Hollow, but the going is slow. If the railroad men have to do it themselves, it will take nearly 2 days, and the train will be attacked by Sioux war parties twice.

**Sioux Braves (12):** Init +1; Atk war club +1 melee (1d6) or bow +1 missile (1d6); AC 12; HD 1d8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +0; AL N.

If the characters volunteer to help, and each take 2 buckets, the tank could be sufficiently filled in one trip. Sica Hollow is a rough patch of terrain that juts up from the otherwise featureless prairie about 2 miles to the north. If the characters volunteer to help, the trip to Sica Hollow is uneventful and pleasant. The Hollow itself is dark, cool, and eerie. Occasionally, footfalls and other sounds can be heard just around the next bend or behind a tree, but no sign of any creature can be found.

Sioux will not enter Sica Hollow. If any characters inquire about this, they may make an Intelligence check (DC 15) to recall that Sica Hollow is the location of several Sioux myths and legends, and is generally considered an unlucky place.

Once at the creek the characters are confronted by a robust prospector with a bushy red beard and a tattered old cap. He is leading a ragged mule with an overladen pack saddle with one hand, and holding a very large shotgun in his other. He demands to know why the characters are stealing his water.

He prefers not to fight, but if anyone attacks him he will unload both barrels of his shotgun on the most aggressive character. He will only miss on





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a fumble. If the offending character dies, and there is no more aggression, Rodger will get back to playing cards. If there is further aggression, he will not hesitate to defend himself.

Rodger Hertog is actually a patron level entity known as The Red Duke. He is immune to normal weapons, and any time a character would normally hit him with one, something strange happens to get in the way (the mule turns suddenly and the bullet deflects off the iron pan on the pack saddle, the knife gets stuck in Roger's shirtsleeve, etc.).

If the character injured by Rodger's shotgun blast somehow survives, that character is thereafter forever immune to normal bullets. Something incongruous will always happen (as with Rodger above) to save them from harm. Magical bullets (or normal bullets fired from magical firearms) can harm the charmed character, as well as all other melee and normal projectile weapons.

Rodger will let the characters take his water if they will play some cards with him. He claims he is lonely, living out here in the wilderness all by himself.

The ante for each hand is 1 penny (cp). Any and all characters may play. The judge can actually play hands of cards (5 card draw is recommended) or simply have every character involved make a d20 roll modified by both Intelligence and Luck. The highest roll wins. Rod has a +6 to his check.

Keep track of all characters who win a hand. If a player wishes to cheat, he may make an Agility check (DC 15). If he succeeds, he may roll his gambling check at +1d. If he rolls below a 5, someone has caught him trying to cheat. If characters play at least one hand of cards, Rod will give them his blessing to gather as much water as they wish from 'his' creek.

On the return trip, any PC who won a hand of cards will find a playing card in one of their pockets, or inside their hat. The card is a cracked and faded King of Diamonds. The king depicted is ghoulish and unnerving. Those characters that receive a card will know that they can cast *patron bond* and *invoke patron* for The Red Duke should they choose the wizard class. If one of these characters chooses the wizard class and casts *patron bond*, the checkered pattern on the back of the card will rearrange itself for that character's eyes only and reveal the knowledge to cast 3 spells of 1st

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level.

Suggested Awards:

- 2 XP for getting the water back to the train.
- 1 XP to any character who wins a hand of cards.
- 1 XP for surviving each attack by Sioux war parties.

## 5. Sioux Ambush

After resupplying and leaving Sisseton, The Devil's Cauldron must stop in the middle of the night for the train crew to 'bend the iron', which is to operate a switch in the tracks to take them on an alternate route. The original route is under repair because a Sioux war party destroyed a bridge. That same Sioux war party has observed the required stop and now lies in wait for The Devil's Cauldron to become vulnerable.

The braves have dug spider holes on both sides of the train tracks. When the locomotive comes to a stop, they will stealthily emerge to attack the train.

If the characters have announced that they are setting a watch or declared that they are not sleeping, the alert character(s) may make an Intelligence check (DC 8) to notice movement on the platform outside the passenger car just before the attack. Otherwise, the braves will likely kill one or two characters in their sleep before someone is alerted. Once the battle commences, all sleeping passengers must pass a Willpower save (DC 5) to rouse and join the fight.

**Sioux Braves (12):** Init +1; Atk war club +1 melee (1d6) or bow +1 missile (1d6); AC 12; HD 1d8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +1, Ref +1, Will +0; AL N.

Suggested Award:

- 2 XP for surviving the Sioux attack.
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## 6. The Great Santini

To alleviate the boredom of the monotonous train ride, The Great Santini takes it upon himself to perform a magic show for the passengers in steerage. Unfortunately, The Great Santini is a terrible magician. His act is poorly rehearsed, and many of his tricks don't work as planned (the rabbit is in his coat pocket, not his hat, he can't get the metal rings back apart, etc.). Also, he is clearly wearing clothes intended for another man. The cape is too short, the pants too baggy, and the shirt sleeves leave too much wrist bare for a good magician.

Santini's real identity is Rafael Volducci, a grocery clerk from New York. He recently inherited his estranged father's magical props and is trying to follow in his footsteps. The original Great Santini delved into more than minor sleight-of-hand, and has left some truly dangerous magic in his old trunk. As Rafael continues to bomb, he will eventually go to a trick from the trunk that is actually a summoning ritual. He will don a turban with a large ostrich feather in it, and will produce a wand from the trunk. He will open a book and begin reciting in an unknown language (Aramaic on the off chance any characters speak it). As the text is read, it fades from the pages, so there is no chance to repeat the ritual at a later time.

Any characters who received a playing card from The Red Duke will hear a low ringing in their ears. If they pass a Personality check (DC 10), they also get the feeling of great evil emanating from Rafael. If any characters want to interrupt the summoning ritual, they must beat Rafael's initiative to do so. If they do interrupt the ritual, Rafael will be irate, but take no hostile action. If they do not, Rafael will successfully, and unfortunately, summon a minor demon.

**The Great Santini:** Init +0; Atk knife +0 melee (1d4); AC 10; HD 1d4; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +0, Ref +, Will -1; AL N.

**Minor Demon:** Init +1; Atk +2 melee (bite) 1d6; AC 12; HD 2d8; MV 40'; Act 1d24; SA Stench (Will DC 8), SV Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +4; AL C.

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The demon is a 4' tall frog-like creature with small rams horns and small bat wings. It has a large and surprisingly human-like mouth filled with three rows of small sharp teeth. Seeing no binding circle and an inept magician standing before it, the demon will grin from ear to ear and promptly begin tearing limbs from passengers. The demon also carries the stench of his foul plane of existence, and anyone who wishes to take action against it must first succeed at a Willpower save (DC 8) or retch.

Suggested Awards:

- 1 XP if Santini is stopped before summoning the demon. Also, add 1 Luck to any characters that acted to stop him.
- If the demon is summoned, award 2 XP to any survivors.

## 7. Warri's Revenge

Pere Warri only claims to speak French, although he can understand many languages. He is actually a vodou priest from Haiti. If the body count mounts sufficiently on the train (which it almost certainly will), he will devise a plan to raise the dead as zombi to claim revenge on the belligerent and racist Brigadier Bellows.

He is traveling to Brimstone to join a powerful necromancer from the Far East and learn new rituals of evil. The judge should keep track of each person killed during the adventure and where their bodies are kept. If the characters do not make other arrangements, the railroad personnel will keep all of the bodies in a freight car.

Observant characters making an Intelligence check (DC 20) may notice Pere Warri smiling slightly after each encounter in which someone is killed. The smile will grow larger with each death. If 10 or more people (player characters and non-player characters) die during the adventure, Pere Warri will sneak away to the freight car about an hour before arrival in Brimstone. He will time his disappearance just when The Devil's Cauldron rounds a bend and the final destination of the train is in sight.

Unless a player specifically states that he is watching Pere Warri at this

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time, they will have little chance to notice his movement in all of the excitement. Once there, he will enact a hasty zombi ritual on the deceased. This will take him 4 turns and be completed just 2 turns before arrival in Brimstone. If Pere Warri is not stopped, his zombi will wait until The Devil's Cauldron is making its final approach to the Brimstone rail station. Pere Warri will direct them to find and kill Brigadier Bellows, and any other characters whom Warri believes insulted him during the journey.



The zombi will burst out of the freight car and make their way towards the front of the train. The characters will have to decide if they fight the zombi, hide under a seat, or perhaps leap from the slowing train. This requires a Fortitude save (DC 8) or take 1d6 damage.

The train will slow down enough to exit without the chance for damage in 6 combat rounds, so the characters could also try to buy some time. Each zombi must make a Reflex save (DC 5) to navigate the gap between rail

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cars (or the judge can just remove  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the zombi for each car they must traverse). The zombi will attack until the Brigadier and any other characters designated by Pere Warri are dead, at which time they will wander away in a random direction.

Pere Warri will attempt to slip away during the commotion when the train has slowed sufficiently. Characters may make an Intelligence check (DC 13) to notice.

**Brigadier Bellows:** Init +2; Atk sabre +3 melee (1d6+1) or heavy pistol +3 missile (1d10); AC 13; HD 3d8; MV 30'; Act 1d20; SV Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +3; AL N.

**Pere Warri:** Init +1; Atk cane +2 melee (1d6) or harmful spell (2d8); AC 14; HD 5d4; MV 30'; Act 1d20+1d14; SP curse of blindness per core rulebook; SV Fort +1, Ref +3, Will +5; AL C.

**Zombi:** Init -4; Atk punch +3 melee (1d4); AC 9; HD 1d6; MV 20', Act 1d20, SP un-dead; SV Fort +4, Ref -3, Will +2; AL C.

Suggested Awards:

- Award 2 XP for surviving the Zombi attack.
- Brigadier Bellows will offer to sponsor any character who actively defends him for entry to Main Street in Brimstone. He will also pay the \$10 fee (*more on this in BP, BM Vol.2*).

## Further Adventures

- If found later, Pere Warri may be persuaded to introduce interested characters to his Patron, Baron Samedi!
- If all, or most, of the characters die during the funnel, they can still be animated as psuedo-zombi by Warri, forced to do his nefarious bidding until a way can be found to escape his domination.
- Brigadier Bellows is actually an agent of The Illuminati, a secret organization that knows the true origin of demon ore and seeks to

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acquire it. He is always looking for brave and resourceful agents, and if he can't find any, he might just hire the characters.

- Any character that assisted the Pinkerton agents might find work with the agency, or the agents could be a source of information.



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# A Little Black Book

“Hornswoggled.”

Lemmy tossed the weathered little book back into the lockbox. “A book. We held up a Pinkerton stagecoach for a goddamned book.”

The stagecoach creaked as a short, stocky woman jumped out. “Killed two guards and a driver too,” Jane stated. She leaned against the rear wheel, struck a match, and lit a robusto. “Gotta be worth something to somebody though. Ain’t no other reason to guard it so.”

Lemmy slammed the stagecoach door and spit. “Ain’t nobody gonna buy a book without words. That’s like... buying a bottle of whiskey without the whiskey.”

Jane sighed. “You got a weird way of puttin’ things, Lem. But this whole setup just don’t make no sense. Pinkertons? Mr. Leveque didn’t say nothing about Pinkertons. We sure as Hell don’t need to be on their list.”

The last remnants of the sun fled behind the mountain, and crickets, frogs, and all the other animals of the night began to sing their songs. The sky was clear, and an autumn breeze rustled the curling leaves in the trees.

Jane shivered “Do something constructive Lem. Get a fire started, and I’ll give this book a look-see.”

Lemmy spit again, fixed his derby hat, and went to work on a fire. Lemmy was good at two things: Killing people and making fires.

“This was your idea, Jane. If you weren’t my sister, I’d stuff you in that lockbox and toss you in a creek,” Lemmy joked as he stacked some dead tree limbs together. “How about you rip out some of those pages for kindlin’? Make my job easier.”

Jane didn’t hear him though. She was puzzled and intrigued by the book. She fanned the pages and fanned them again. Sure enough, every page was blank. But it looked as though the book had seen a hundred rough hands over a hundred rough years. The binding was cracked. Some pages were

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dog-eared. A red silk marker dangled out the bottom like a dead snake's tongue. Worthless.

Jane walked over to the newborn fire. Lemmy was rolling a log over for a seat.

"Momma was right about you Lemmy."

"What's that Jane," Lemmy asked, expecting an all-too-common smart-ass remark.

"Yer an unlucky sonofabitch. Good thing she had me first."

"Well, if you hadn't hit all the branches of the ugly tree on the way down, she might not have tried again."

Jane smiled and threw her stubby cigar at him. "You ain't gonna win too many pageants either, but yer pretty enough. And, as much as I hate to admit it, yer right about the book. It don't amount to jack diddly squat." She tossed the book in the fire and went to get her pack from her horse. When she returned, Lemmy was greasing a frying pan and whistling a tune.

"On the bright side," Jane said as she laid out her bedroll, "We got four horses we can sell. Plenty of prospectors between here and..."

Jane noticed the book in the fire. It was unharmed. Still as rough and ready as when she'd tossed it in there. She stared, disbelieving, then rubbed her eyes and stared some more.

"I'll be goddamned," she said.

"Watch yer goddamned mouth," Lemmy replied.

"Lemmy. The book."

Jane pointed at the fire. Lemmy's jaw dropped.

"I'll be double-damned," Lemmy said. "What do you reckon, Jane?"

Jane shrugged. "Fish it out Lemmy. Let's have another look."

Lemmy used the frying pan to push the book out of the fire. He blew

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some ashes from its cover, and with trepidation, put his hand on the book.

“It’s cold,” he said.

Jane walked over and snatched the book off the ground. They sat next to each other by the fire, cross-legged and anxious, like they were kids about to hear some ghost stories for the first time. They looked at each other and grinned. Jane peeled the cover back, and words scrawled across the pages, as if written by an unseen hand.

Jane snapped the book shut.

“What? What’s wrong, Jane?”

“Lemuel, this ain’t natural.” Jane hadn’t called him by his birth name since she’d shot and killed their father many years ago. But she hadn’t been scared since then.

Lemmy rubbed his hands together. “No shit. We got ourselves a genuine magic book. Not some two-bit, side-of-road, rabbit-from-a-hat magic book, but the real deal.”

Jane didn’t speak. She let the book slip down between her knees and looked up into the starry sky. That was the same sky she gazed into as a child, wishing for a better life.

Lemmy slapped her on the back. “Come on, Jane. This here gotta be worth a king’s ransom. Or a case o’ moonshine. Or some new boots. Yeah, I could use some new boots. Maybe a box of those nasty robustos you chew on. Jane?”

“Alright, alright. Quit yer yappin’,” Jane said, reopening the book. The pages were full of words, all penned in the same ink, by the same hand.

Peering over, Lemmy scratched his scruffy neck. “You make any sense of it?”

“Not this first part,” Jane said, “but look here. A bunch o’ names. Henry Carville. Ada Winthrop.”

Lemmy chimed-in, “Martha Belleview. Perry Hancock. Maybe it’s a list of people who owe money.”

Jane shook her head. “It don’t say how much they owe.”

“What about one o’ them censers?”

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“You mean census? Nah. No mention of where they live. There’s some dates in here though. Goes back way before we was born.”

“What about those funny words. They’re on each page,” Lemmy inquired.

Jane flipped some pages back and forth, verifying Lemmy’s statement. Jane was surprised he’d put that together himself. Two phrases, one at the top of each page, and one at the bottom.

She read the top phrase aloud. “Alurinum... procuri... sindus.”

The campfire swelled with intensity. Lemmy leaned back from the heat. Tendrils of blue and purple fire snaked into the night sky. Glowing embers swirled about them as if they were caught in the tender embrace of a lazy tornado. The trees groaned, protesting their inability to escape. Lemmy got to his feet, drew his revolver and pulled back the hammer.

“Jane. I’m havin’ second thoughts,” he said. “Let’s put it back in the box.”

Jane latched onto the book, her fingernails embedded in the leather cover. Her lips trembled. Tears and sweat rolled down her face. Unable to resist, she looked to the second phrase.

“Thulna... uthka,” she said in a whisper, hoping those words would float away with the rising embers of the campfire.

Their clothes began to smoke, and their skin began to bubble and peel. The campfire exploded. The wind carried Jane’s scream for miles, and it echoed in the cabins of homesteaders long after her ashes had settled in the woods. Lemmy’s boots, now empty and blackened, smoked like a pair of leather chimneys. His derby hung in a nearby tree. His revolver lay in the dirt next to the open book.

New writing scrawled across an empty page.

September 14, 1878

Jane Johnston.

Lemuel Johnston.

A gentle breeze shut the book, and the woods went dark.

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