

Handsome Ranch: Hardacre's Deeds

Part three of the Handsome Ranch adventure path.

Opening note: *Starting with this adventure we'll be switching over from the Serenity and/or BSG rules to Core Cortex rules. This shouldn't be a significant change and likely not even noticeable but in those instances where it does conflict with Serenity rules it should be easy to fix.*

Impact of events from preceding adventures:

Did Handsome try to hire gunmen from town to deal with horse rustlers on his land?

If so, then he's found out the hard way that Damien Marus has pretty much cornered the market on hired gunmen in the area. There just isn't anyone available in town and he returns to the ranch with no one. Mr. Handsome may not know for sure that it's Marus specifically that hired up all the gunmen in the area but it's clear there's none to be had, which is a bit troubling.

What happened to Rance Maynard?

Following the investigation of the assault on Handsome Ranch, Rance will have already been fingered for the attack and the horse rustling either by the captured raiders or Group Three (or both). Barring that, Mr. Handsome will have checked with his own contacts and come up with Maynard's name. Sheriff Daily will since have summoned him and he'll be in town with some of his men when the player characters arrive there to track down Mrs. Hardacre. In all likelihood he will already have been interviewed by the Sheriff and been exonerated (the Sheriff having been bribed by Marus). The arrival of the pc's convinces him to hang around a bit to deal with them rather than mosey on back to the Marus Ranch.

What happened to Group Three? Now loyal? Dead? Turned over to the law?

Whether or not Group Three came clean about their involvement or even whether they've fully repented and pledged undying devotion to Mr. Handsome and Handsome Ranch...they'll still be hauled into town with any surviving raiders and will now be cooling their heels in the local jail. They were horse rustling after all and that's far too serious a crime to be overlooked. The pc's should expect that Mr. Handsome's vouching for the kids (assuming he's doing so) will go a long way toward eliciting a light sentence from the local Magistrate. Possibly even guaranteeing the charges are dismissed, with the condition that they pay some form or recompense and restitution with Mr. Handsome (which he'd likely satisfy by simply continuing on with their work at the ranch.)

However, unbeknownst to most, the local Magistrate is in Marus' pocket. And even if they do make it to trial he'll surprise everyone by throwing the book at them and having them all hanged (despite the fact that horse rustling isn't usually a hanging offense on this moon!) But of

course, if everything goes as Marus plans, then they'll never make it to trial anyway, no more than any of the surviving raiders will.

Did Maia Lin get away to inform Rance Maynard or Damien Marus about Hardacre's deeds?

In all likelihood she did but if the pc's managed to stop her somehow she'll be cooling her heels in the local jail alongside the rest of Group Three. Being the resourceful sort (and an NPC featured in later adventures on this path) she'll manage to convince Maynard to spare her and take her on, and he'll have gotten her out. While this adventure assumes Mrs. Hardacre passed on the deeds to Damien Marus earlier, if Maia Lin managed to slip off then we should refit that. Main Lin then notifies Marus about the deeds and he then gets them from Mrs. Hardacre. This is simple GM-meanness and allows us to pin the blame on the player characters letting Main Lin get away. In the end, it doesn't really matter how Marus got his hands on the deeds. It's just another opportunity to get them emotionally invested in putting things right.

What about wounded ranch hands from the Battle for Handsome Ranch?

Anyone wounded badly enough to require extended medical care (rather than just a clean bandage and bed rest) will be at Doc Willy's. If they're that badly wounded they can be considered "out of pocket" for this adventure. Pc's will be free to visit or interact with them there but they otherwise won't play any part here.

Any pc's who were that badly wounded pose a problem and should either be allowed to refuse further medical attention and join the party or have their wounds simply "waved off" a bit by the GM. Having them fully healed would be odd though, so there's nothing wrong with leaving them a little banged up.

Grampy's journal.

Grampy's journal will still be in the possession of Mr. Handsome and won't be handy to back up any assertions the pc's make that Mrs. Hardacre holds deeds belonging to him. Mr. Handsome won't allow the journal out of his sight and certainly won't allow it to be taken into town and risk folks finding out about Grampy's infidelities.

Background:

At the time this adventure starts as little as two days or as much as one week have passed since the Battle of Handsome Ranch. This is entirely up to the GM but it should allow enough time to have passed for the local Sheriff to have visited the ranch, conducted some cursory interviews, documented everything and have everyone involved locked up in town awaiting trial. Concerning the deeds that Mrs. Hardacre supposedly possesses, Handsome wants to keep the matter as quiet as possible, not wanting to drag the family name through the mud. He will not have informed the Sheriff or anyone else, though the pc's and possibly some other ranch hands may now know about it. It certainly won't have "gotten around".

Mr. Handsome, having been impressed (hopefully) with the pc's reliability and resourcefulness so far, will tap them to deal with the matter. If they haven't been especially reliable and resourceful up to this point, then he will benevolently extend them this "last chance" to prove themselves by dealing with this matter. They will be instructed to ride out to town and make contact with Mrs. Hardacre, secure the deeds if possible or report back concerning any difficulty doing so. At the very least he expects them to open up a dialogue between he and she concerning the matter.

Other avenues can be pursued if that fails but above all Mr. Handsome expects the pc's to deal with matter discretely. If that proves impossible for some reason, he'd rather not cause any further harm to the family name. The pc's are instructed to simply return and report in such a case. He won't be happy about it but with no other recourse but to take legal action (contacting the local Sheriff, followed by filing a complaint with the Magistrate) he will do so. He will *not* be happy with pc's who take matters into their own hands and cause further trouble. Considering the embarrassment Grampy Handsome's "dealin's" with Mrs. Hardacre will bring in the first place he certainly won't want matters complicated any further by his ranch hands stirring up *more* controversy in town.

So what's the deal with Mrs. Hardacre and the deeds?

What isn't known by anyone but Mrs. Hardacre and old Grampy Handsome is

that Winifred had a son by the crotchety old coot. Atypically to how such matters normally play out, Winifred and Grampy settled the matter amiably and broke off their affair. Winifred raised her son alone, not telling him who his father was until many years later. In all that time she'd had little to nothing more to do with the old man. Grampy likewise had long since detached himself from the whole affair, set up a small (and secret) trust fund to ensure the boy's education and showed no interest in the boy or Winifred ever after. When her son grew up enough to run off and make his own way in the world, he did just that at the first opportunity. Fleeing his mother's overbearing and rather unhealthy attachment, he took advantage of the trust set up for him and attended a school on Persephone. When he returned to visit his mother he expected that she'd pass on from the tragic illness that had her bed ridden and thus seize his inheritance. She then confessed her involvement with Grampy Handsome, identified him as the man's father and handed over the deeds he'd left with her.

By that time the abandonment by Grampy Handsome (not an especially traumatic event, as she was never really all that attached to him) and by her only son (an extremely traumatic event, on the other hand) had driven poor Winifred Hardacre firmly around the bend. The house cats she'd begun adopting to fill her empty nest had multiplied to an unhealthy horde and her eccentric behavior had already made her the "town loony".

Naturally all this would leave him somewhat bitter toward the now-deceased Grampy Handsome (who'd had nothing to do with him nor shown any interest in him in all these years) and less than benevolently inclined toward Mr. Karl Handsome. He even went so far as to blame Mrs. Hardacre's deteriorated mental state on Grampy's abandonment and to distance himself from any responsibility in the matter, changed his name and moved halfway across the moon.

Still, this wouldn't spur the man on to seek any sort of revenge. Having been fairly well educated, having done well enough on his own and now possessing the deeds passed on from his mother, he was likewise free to shrug off the past. And he would have done so, had the deeds he now holds clearly identified him as the inheritor. Rather they were marked to pass down to

Handsome's eldest surviving son. And Karl Handsome is two years older than Damien Marus.

Damien Marus being, of course, the name the man is going by these days.

Synopsis:

This adventure is comprised of four acts, each with two parts. By now the pc's should already be aware of Grampy Handsome's affair with Winifred Hardacre and the fact that Grampy left deeds he owned in her possession. If not then Mr. Karl Handsome informs them of this during the Opening Scene as well as tapping them to go to town, track down Mrs. Hardacre and try to get them back. (See the Background for notes on his specific instructions and preferences in that regard).

In Act I the player characters travel to town and try to locate Mrs. Hardacre. In the process they find out quickly that she's well known around town as "eccentric" at best and down right "off her nut" at worst. Her penchant for cats and the horrid condition of her home as a result of that being a favorite topic among the townsfolk. During the course of this the pc's have a chance to recruit two more ranch hands to replace the ones lost in the first two sessions. And thus inject another possibility to get into trouble, if the GM needs it.

In Act II the player characters catch up with Mrs. Hardacre and discover firsthand just how off her nuts she is. Though she's become little more than the "local loony" in recent years, they may have occasion to discover the town's loyalty to the woman who did quite a lot of good in her younger days (before she went off her nut). Once they've dealt with their encounter with Mrs. Hardacre and whatever fallout there may be, they'll have a run in with Rance Maynard and his goons to contend with.

If Maia Lin managed to escape the ranch and flee before the law nabbed her, they'll spot her in town at this time. Depending on how they react to that they might have a tense confrontation with Rance Maynard as well. If Maia was in custody at the local jail then Rance Maynard will have since secured her release and have her hanging around.

Either way the act wraps up with a violent

altercation with Maynard (or with a couple of loose cannons on Maynard's team who decide to settle accounts with the player characters on their own.)

In Act III the player characters have a troubling encounter with the local law who seem surprisingly less than inclined toward Mr. Handsome (and his ranch hands) all of a sudden. During the course of this incident they have opportunity to discover the Sheriff and possibly even the Magistrate are linked to Damien Marus somehow.

By now the player characters may already have discovered that the deeds are now in Winifred's son's possession, though they may still not know his identity. Most likely they're under the assumption that she still has them and have discovered dealing with her rationally may not be possible.

There are a number of different ways they can deal with this situation and the GM will have to be flexible here but the obvious solution (and, incidentally, the route Mr. Handsome clearly instructed them to take in such a case) is simply to return to the ranch and report. Anything else risks trouble, which Mr. Handsome will not take kindly to. But if your player characters are adventurous and try to get the deeds on their own there's really only one way to do so...raiding Mrs. Hardacre's cat-infested home.

If player characters should actually do as they're told and try to leave town, they have another opportunity to get on Mrs. Hardacre's good side and get what information out of her that they can when she gets into a little trouble herself.

In Act IV the player characters should have either raided Mrs. Hardacre's home and come up empty-handed (though probably now aware she had a son, who he is and that he has the deeds) or saved Mrs. Hardacre from a bit of unpleasantness and discovered all this straight from her. Unfortunately Rance Maynard hasn't been sitting on his hands all this time and has already disposed of all the witnesses sitting in Sheriff Daily's jail. And Sheriff Daily has gathered a small posse (all Maynard's men, of course) to bring in the murderers who he claims assaulted his jail...the player characters.

Getting out of the attempt to arrest them won't be easy, especially considering the Sheriff's posse is more interested in

planting them in the dirt than actually taking them into custody. Even if they manage it without bloodshed they'll now be wanted for the murders and aware a fair trial isn't to be had in these parts. Most likely we'll have our prerequisite bloody gunfight for this adventure, between the player characters and the Sheriff and his nefarious posse.

As the adventure ends the players will either be sitting in jail awaiting trial by a corrupt Magistrate, lying dead in the street or high-tailing it back to Handsome.

Opening Scene: Going to Town

As our adventure opens, Mr. Handsome has called Group Two (the player characters) in for a meeting to discuss the contents of the journal and the deeds it mentions. His first order of business is to stress to the team that the matter of Grampy Handsome's dalliance with Winifred Hardacre isn't something he wants to get around. He'll also instruct them to pass the word on to Group One and mentions that he's spoken with Jack Dingo and Mrs. Belford about it already. In all the excitement that's gone on about the ranch in the last week or two he's concerned everyone will be a little loose lipped and doesn't want family business to become town gossip. Though Grampy Handsome isn't an especially notable figure in local history, he was nevertheless known as a fair and reliable businessman. Karl Handsome naturally wants to preserve his family's reputation.

The second order of business are the deeds Grampy supposedly left in the care of Mrs. Hardacre. Mr. Handsome grumps a bit that so little is said of them in the journal, specifically why in the world those deeds were left with her in the first place and why she never contacted him about them when Grampy passed on. Having since run another check on Grampy's holdings over the cortex while he was in town, he still can't find any mention of them nor any stakes claimed or any legal filings concerning properties. So apparently, at least, Mrs. Hardacre never took any action concerning them. To that end Group Two is to go to town, find Mrs. Hardacre and speak with her concerning them.

Again, it is stressed that the first order of business is to be discrete. Not only for the Handsome family's sake but for Mrs. Hardacre's as well. Very likely she'll be embarrassed to have strangers nosing into her past and won't want tales getting around about town concerning her either. Any such thing will likely make an amiable agreement with her all the more difficult. The player characters are instructed to simply identify themselves as agents of the Handsome family, ask after the deeds and leave it at that. If she doesn't produce them immediately then try to come to some quiet agreement concerning them or at least return with as much information as they can. Mr. Handsome's last resort will of course be to seek legal recourse. Above all, don't make a fuss.

Finally Mr. Handsome reminds the player characters, almost as an afterthought, that the ranch is now short quite a few ranch hands (unless, of course, we actually managed to get through the second episode without losing a third or more of our ranch hands somehow). With the player characters away in town the entire work load now falls to Group One. The adults, Jack Dingo and house girls will all probably have to pitch in just to keep the place running in their absence. For that reason, should they have an opportunity to recruit new hands while in town they should do so and they should at least mention here and there that Handsome Ranch is looking to hire on. The matter of the deeds is the first order of business, regardless.

The players are to depart the next morning after breakfast, giving them time to gather whatever gear they want to take with them. This will also put them in town around mid-morning or noon at the latest (it's only a couple of hours ride from the ranch).

Note:

Mr. Handsome hasn't mentioned the name "Winifred Hardacre" to Mrs. Belford yet. Rather, he's simply referred to some woman in town Grampy had immoral dealings with in the past. If Mrs. Belford has had an opportunity to hear the name or if the player characters mention it in front of her, she will recognize it. In the course of her own dalliance with the local preacher she's heard the name mentioned and knows that "Winifred Hardacre" and the local "Crazy Cat Lady" are one and the

same. She'll be able to pass on this tidbit to Mr. Handsome and the player characters, making it much easier for them to locate her.

Guns in town:

The players characters should be aware of local expectations concerning arms and armament in town. While it's considered perfectly normal and quite appropriate to walk about with a sidearm holstered, carrying a rifle, shotgun or other long arm is extremely unusual and typically a sign that one is up to no good. Even a long arm slung over one shoulder is suspicious at best. Automatic weapons...well, just forget it.

Likewise body armor of any sort is a sure sign that you intend to cause some mayhem. (Mesh armor and similar gear can probably be worn under one's clothing without causing a fuss, though.) Any such thing is bound to cause a stir and the local law will be along in short order to find the player characters and "advise" them to stow the offensive gear. Any reluctance to do so will result in their being hauled off to jail for causing a disturbance and having the threatening gear confiscated until they leave town. If they really push the matter, the local law has no problem with actually charging them with disturbing the peace, holding them overnight and fining them pretty harshly.

What to do with any such gear they've unwisely brought along may seem a stumbling point but generally folks leave such things stowed on their horse. In such a case it's relatively secure. People don't typically rummage about in other folk's horse packs. Likewise it's consider appropriate to leave such things (assuming it's nothing illegal) at the local sheriff's office.

Bear in mind that all this assumes Sheriff Daily hasn't realized just who the player characters are. Once he does he'll be quite happy for any excuse to fine them, arrest them or otherwise make the local law a source of discomfort for them.

Act I, Scene I: "Oh, You Mean That Crazy

Cat Lady?"

Unless you have something interesting in mind for them in the meantime the player characters should get to town after just a couple hours of riding. They're free to check out the town if they like of course but once they start their search for Winifred Hardacre, they'll find she isn't especially easy to find, depending on who they talk to.

Asking about her of people on the street won't accomplish much. Most don't know the name, though everyone knows the Crazy Cat Lady. The local businessmen, those who've been at it a while, know the name and all the "old folks" in town do as well. Most of the younger business folk won't. Likewise anyone who works with the local church and especially the pastor knows her by name, as they make weekly visits and extend a widow's charity to Mrs. Hardacre.

Still, finding her shouldn't become a major quest. If the player characters ask after her while visiting or shopping at two or three different places of interest, it should only take an interview or two to identify her as "the crazy cat lady who lives in that old shack". If they head straight to the local bar or down to the church to ask specifically about Mrs. Hardacre and seem focused on finding her, you probably shouldn't drag the matter out.

When it comes to the town's view of the Crazy Cat Lady however, things can easily get rather sticky for the player characters. Unless they themselves grew up in town they won't have any insights into how the town feels about her. They get the impression right off, once the person they're looking for is identified as "the Crazy Cat Lady", that she's just the local loony. She won't seem to have much respect around town and will, by all appearances, be something of an embarrassment.

Any of the player characters who did grow up in town likewise won't know that the Crazy Cat Lady's name is Mrs. Hardacre. They will know all they need to about the Crazy Cat Lady, though.

However, Mrs. Hardacre wasn't always nutty. In her day (quite some years back)

she ran a respectable tailoring business, using generous loans from Grampy Handsome to get started. Once the relationship had broken off she carried on doing quite well for herself and became well esteemed around town, despite being a unwed mother of a bastard son. Always partial to the simple life and very charitable herself, she held onto most of her excess wealth (her son's education off-world having already been secured). She was then able to play a major role in most church charities, helped to reconstruct the local mill after a devastating fire and campaigned twice to get a particularly benevolent mayor reelected. She even pitched in to fund reopening the local ship's port, which proved quite a boost to local business and secured the town as a main port for the little moon.

In light of all this, while she may have deteriorated to the level of "town loony" since those glory days, the townsfolk still favor the old lady when it comes right down to it. This may not always be evident but in cases where they feel compelled to come to her defense, they certainly will and with a vengeance. Even the younger generation, who have no clue concerning her past, have picked up on this subtle attitude. While they are even more likely to ridicule the old lady in her absence, they're just as prone to dealing respectfully with her personally and to come to her defense if she's threatened. Even if they can't explain why they feel so protective.

In light of that, folks around town will be curious concerning what dealings the player characters have with Mrs. Hardacre. Though most won't feel comfortable coming right out and being nosy about it, if the pc's should actually mention anything in particular they'll be quick to ask questions about it. Should they in any way seem in danger of causing any trouble for the Crazy Cat Lady or so much as seeking some sort of confrontation, attitudes toward the player characters will quickly and surprisingly turn sour.

What's commonly known about Mrs. Hardacre:

If the player characters actually ask about the old lady, most folks in town don't really know all that much. The older folks all know about her past and the decent things she's done for the town (before she went kooky). Everyone else just knows she had

a bastard son who ran off and left her, and that she more or less went kooky after that. And, also, that she owns far, far too many cats.

This Act should primarily consist of the player characters doing whatever they wanted to do when they finally got to town. If they've shopping to do, want to surf to cortex or simply want to hit the local tavern (assuming they're old enough) let them at it. The matter of Mrs. Hardacre being identified as the Crazy Cat Lady and someone pointing out her house to them shouldn't take much to accomplish.

The Shopping List:

If the player characters haven't anything in particular to do in town other than track down Mrs. Hardacre, yet you *want* them to have more to do, I'd recommend a little shopping list. There's bound to be something that Handsome Ranch needs from town and with all the commotion of the last week or two there probably hasn't been an opportunity to get it, even with the hasty trips the adults have been making to town recently. Typically Jack Dingo makes a trip once or twice a month to fetch a whole truckload of assorted goods for the ranch so Mr. Handsome isn't likely to ask them to pick up ten bags of grain or some such.

You can bet that the ranch hands have heard the player characters are heading to town, though. In all likelihood a handful of them will catch up with the pc's while they're saddling up. Dime novels, toys and anything to while away the evenings are in high demand and every young ranch hand will want *something*. The house girls will definitely want some pretties from town as well and probably have a long list of spices and kitchen implements they can't get Mr. Handsome to authorize.

All in all there's an opportunity to give the players something else to do in town besides asking about Mrs. Hardacre. More importantly there's an opportunity for the GM to saddle them with a bundle of goods they have to haul around and be responsible for.

Act I, Scene II: Precious and Percy

While this Scene is presented on its own, it actually begins during Scene I. As soon as the player characters arrive in town and have their first interaction with someone (interviewing, shopping or even just asking for directions), begin asking them for Alertness/Perception checks. Each time the player characters move from one place to another, have another Alertness/Perception check. (Two of the local kids have spotted the player characters, recognized them as hands from Handsome Ranch and begun following them around.)

It shouldn't matter much if your players are especially bad at such checks since all members of the group should be rolling and they make another check every time they move from here to there. Odds are someone will spot the two waifs eventually. But if you're worried they won't succeed, even after multiple attempts, you can easily justify reducing the difficulty each time they have to make a new check.

You can decide to make the check a recurring opposed action against the kids' Cover skills but I prefer a simple check. Less dice being my personal preference in most cases.

Spotting the two kids following them around: (Hard Alertness + Perception)

Botch: These are not the droids you're looking. Move along, move along. (I'd skip it for now, given the players no further chance to spot Precious and Percy. Rather, I'd make sure they popped up at the most inopportune time, such as during a fight or while they're raiding Mrs. Hardacre's house.)

Failure: Rain clouds on the horizon. Suppose it's going to rain? We've been needing some rain around these parts so I sure hope so. Been a dry month. Wait, what was I looking for?

Success: You spot two young kids, a boy and a girl, following you around but keeping their distance. They've probably been watching you for some time now.

Extraordinary Success: You spot two young kids, a boy and a girl, following you around but keeping their distance. They're both pretty dirty and their clothes are ragged but they manage to blend in enough to make them hard to spot. They seem unusually interested in where you're going and what you're doing.

The two kids will continue to stalk the player characters, keeping an eye on them and following them around from a distance until they're spotted. If the player characters don't move to confront them right away, then they simply keep on following and watching them until they do. It just won't require any more Alertness/Perception checks to know they're there. They probably won't approach the player characters on their own until they're in danger of leaving town without them.

During all this we'll play up the "stalking" angle just a bit as we're hoping to lend a slightly menacing air here. The encounter is fine enough on its own and not intended to be challenging (we're just giving the player characters a chance to recruit a couple of replacements for the ranch.) But this is a nice opportunity to inject just a little drama. Let the players worry why these kids are following them around and spying on them. Mostly we'll let the players develop a little suspicion about this two kids during the rest of this adventure. Are they up to no good? Planning to set the player characters up for something? Are they working for Marus or Rance Maynard? Besides, they're sure to assume the two are pickpockets anyway (which isn't all that far from the truth in Percy's case.)

Making contact with the two kids isn't hard. They won't run away when the player characters come after them (they were hoping to be hired on at Handsome Ranch but are just too skittish to actually approach).

Once the players have made contact they still won't have the nerve to ask for a job outright and will probably be too busy trying to come up with acceptable answers about why they're following them around. Rather than claim they're looking for a job, they'll be tight-lipped about who they are and what they're up to. Not because they have anything to hide but because they're afraid of getting into trouble somehow. If *pressed* for answers they'll answer honestly. Once the point has been made and it's out in the open, the two kids will be pretty desperate for the job, even to the point of pleading. They're homeless and starving, after all.

Once the player characters actually take them on (assuming they do) the two will

want to accompany them around town. If the players don't simply have them along, they'll *offer* to come and act as guides. They'll claim insights into the local merchants, tips on what can be found cheapest at which store (or simply where something can be found). They'll do their best to convince the players to let them tag along, not wanting their golden opportunity to get off the streets just slip away. Most especially they'll know where the Crazy Cat Lady lives and where she can most likely be found at any given moment.

If they manage to join the group though, we'll make sure to let a few things happen that cast some doubt on them as the session progresses. One of them will need to slip off to perform some undefined errand at some point. They whisper to one another while glancing at the player characters every now and then. The kids give suspicious answers to questions concerning Damien Marus or Rance Maynard. Perhaps the kids happen to know a little *too* much about the bad guys. There are bound to be little opportunities here and there to let these two kids be a red herring. But they are in fact relatively innocent and really do simply need work pretty desperately.

On the other hand, each have complications of their own which could easily spring up to cause a bit of trouble. Make sure to keep an eye out for the perfect opportunity to get the player characters in trouble with Percy's Klepto and Precious' Klutz. This isn't necessary of course, just available as an opportunity should you feel the session needs a little excitement.

Precious and Percy's stats are included in the NPC section.

Act II, Scene I: Attack of the Crazy Cat Lady

Once the player characters have discovered that "the Crazy Cat Lady" is who they're looking for they'll run into her or spot her in the street soon after. Even if they get her address or directions to her

home we'll have them bump into her before they can get there.

First of all, let's make sure we present Mrs. Hardacre correctly. She is, after all, a Crazy Cat Lady. Her hair is bushy and tangled, not having been brushed or washed in...well, who knows how long? Here clothes are ratty and stained with who-knows-what. (And cat hair. Lots of cat hair.) She'll *look* crazy. And smell. She smells very, very bad. Maybe she even wears her underwear on the outside.

Interacting with Crazy Cat Lady should be an interesting experience for the players so let's make sure to set the stage here. Mrs. Hardacre is completely loony. This is a woman who clearly hasn't bathed in weeks (if not longer) and doesn't take care of herself at all. She has no personal boundaries when it comes to other people. She'll cough wetly in their direction, insist on pawing whomever she's talking to, casually reach into their pockets to see what's in there, answer with nonsense occasionally, ask inappropriate questions, etc.

Most of all she'll become combative and hysterical when confronted or challenged in any way. Whether the player characters accuse her of something (or if she merely *thinks* they have) or if they simple question her in an aggressive manner, she'll freak out at the drop of a hat. Having Crazy Cat Lady scream obscenities and wail on someone with her tote-bag is not an unusual occurrence around town.

If the player characters don't catch on quickly to the fact that Crazy Cat Lady requires careful handling, this will blow up into a embarrassing incident almost automatically. If, however, the players show any hint that they're trying to take into account the "crazy" aspect of Crazy Cat Lady, allow checks to maintain control of the situation.

Interacting with Crazy Cat Lady without setting her off: (Hard Willpower + Influence or Willpower + Knowledge/Psychology)

Botch: Crazy Cat Lady reacts very badly to something you said. Or didn't say. Or who knows what. Obscenities are screamed and the tote-bag starts a-wailin'.

Failure: Crazy Cat Lady doesn't freak out just yet but any mention, no matter how non-threatening, of any of her hot-button issues will set her right off.

Success: Crazy Cat Lady remains calm during your interaction but you'll still need Influence checks to get information out of her. Hey, she doesn't know you from Joe Blow.

Extraordinary Success: Crazy Cat Lady likes you. She wants to answer all your questions, be friendly to you and fill in all the blanks. This, however, makes her no less crazy. She just isn't likely to whack you in the head or scream "rape" during your conversation.

Naturally, as alluded to earlier, if Crazy Cat Lady *does* snap, begin screaming and wailing on player characters, any townsfolk in the immediate area will come running. And everyone will assume the player characters were mistreating poor old Crazy Cat Lady. Dealing with irate townsfolk while Crazy Cat Lady curses your bloodline and flails about your head with a tote bag then becomes the order of the day.

Want more crazy?

Besides being completely unstable *and* dangerous to deal with there's naturally yet another potential problem associated with Crazy Cat Lady. She might get along with one of the player characters a little *too* well.

If the players have been too successful in dealing with Crazy Cat Lady (finding out about the deeds, her son and everything else in one sitting)...*or* if a male character happens to score an Extraordinary Success anytime during the interview...*or* if the GM just plain feels like stickin' it to 'em for kicks...Crazy Cat Lady decides one of the more charming/handsome male player characters is her long lost son who's come home to her at last.

This can be all manner of fun and giggles. Crazy Cat Lady will talk to the player character as if he were ten or so years old, expect him to behave appropriately for that age ("straighten up, don't slouch" and waving off "grown up" questions, for example.) She'll also expect him to leave off with these suspicious out-of-towners immediately and come straight home...where he's to bath, eat supper and get straight to bed. He has school tomorrow.

Player characters can play on this in the attempt to get information out of Crazy Cat Lady but that would be pretty darn callous. Which is why we'll make things difficult for them if they do by having Mrs. Hardacre carry her delusion to extremes.

This a rather firm and decidedly desperate delusion she'll suddenly and inexplicably display. She won't take kindly to so much as the *suggestion* that this isn't her ten year old boy (even from the "boy" in question). Such a suggestion will go all the more toward convincing her to rescue her son from bad influence he's hanging around with.

Should anyone actually manage to *convince* her she'll either break down (literally down on the ground) crying or proceed with the obscenities and tote bag swinging.

Either way getting control of the situation in that case becomes decidedly more difficult (perhaps Heroic or even Incredible, if you don't simply rule it a lost cause).

In the end our encounter with the Crazy Cat Lady should reveal to the player characters that she had a son who's since run off, very probably that he has the deeds Grampy Handsome left her and possibly even that her son has changed his name to Damien Marus. She will present the fact that her son ran off in as positive a light as possible (suggesting he doing important work somewhere or some such). Grampy Handsome is clearly someone she hasn't much good to say about but his mention won't set her off. Damien Marus' name is one she doesn't approve of at all. She much prefers the name she gave him: Dolpho Levenstock Hardacre.

If the player characters can manage to avoid or control any Crazy Cat Lady incidents they should get all or most of this information with just a little effort.

Otherwise they'll have to leave town without it or raid her home to uncover it for themselves.

Act II, Scene II: Maia Lin Bolts Again

Once their encounter with the Crazy Cat Lady is concluded (hopefully with at least

some information and without being arrested) the player characters are free to finish up shopping or sight-seeing, or head on back to the ranch. But before they do...

The player characters now spot Maia Lin coming down the street. And Maia, being the paranoid sort to begin with, bolts like a spooked colt the second she spots them right back. An opposed Alertness + Perception check here would not be a good idea. We *want* Maia to spot the player character at the same time they spot her. Because we want them to chase her.

Assuming they do they won't have any problem catching her because she'll come to a stop once she's rejoined Maynard and his men. If this encounter occurs anywhere near a bar or saloon, then that's where Maynard is hanging around and where Maia will dash to. Otherwise there's no reason Maynard and his group of thugs aren't just carousing down the street a block or two away.

There's also no reason you can't make a nice Chase Scene out of this, though. If the player character manage to catch Maia Lin then you can simply have Maynard walk up while they're wrastlin'. And a Chase Scene is always exciting, yeah?

Once in proximity to Maynard and his gang the player characters should notice him easily enough. You can have them make some sort of Knowledge check to recognize him if you like but it's not a far stretch for them to know the faces of the more famous (or infamous) ranch honchos in the area. They should know who Rance Maynard is right off.

Bear in mind the reasons Maynard and his gang are in town. First, to settle the minor matter of being investigated for horse rustling (the Sheriff and Magistrate are on Marus' payroll, after all, so this practically a formality). Second, to take out the witnesses to his complicity in that incident (the raiders and the ranch hands sitting in the jail). At this time he hasn't quite gotten around to killing anyone just yet but he was heading out to take care of that in just a moment.

Once presented with the player characters he recognizes the opportunity to let them take the fall for the murders, though. He'll immediately change his plans to knuckling

the Sheriff under, killing the witnesses and then pressing the Sheriff to issue warrants against the player characters for the killings.

Maia Lin:

If Maia was never arrested then she's here with Maynard trying her best to worm her way into Marus' organization. If she was arrested then Maynard has managed to secure her release after she offered to help him (and we can say he's already knuckled the Sheriff to conclude the investigation). Maynard has no intention of actually recruiting Maia (she's already gotten on his nerves) and still considers her one of Handsome's crew. He's stringing her along, looking for a chance to use her. Until the player characters show up, he was toying with the idea of framing *her* for the murders.

Nevertheless, she'll turn on the player characters without any reservation in her bid to get in Maynard's good graces. But once the whole situation falls apart for her it will only reinforce her paranoia and she'll be strictly solo after this adventure.

Before Maynard can get to his nefarious plans, he'll take a moment to intimidate Handsome's ranch hands and generally torment them a bit. Considering he's on his way to commit multiple counts of murder at the Sheriff's office he doesn't really want to draw any significant attention to himself. So he definitely won't want a gunfight or bar brawl to break out in the street.

On the other hand he wasn't present during the assault on Handsome Ranch so he, like the raiders before, assumes the player characters are just a bunch of stupid orphans. It will never occur to him that coming down on them might force them to lash out.

If the player characters cop an attitude with Maynard or his men, they won't even consider backing down from a bunch of young punks. If they draw weapons or start a fight then Maynard's men will be eager to draw blood but Maynard himself will realize his blunder and try to quell the mess before the law is forced to come and intervene.

If the players insist on raising a little hell then so be it. It will be up to the GM to make sure Maynard survives to cause them trouble later in the campaign. It will also

give Maynard and the Sheriff a nice opening to have the player characters thrown in jail. If that happens this session might easily turn into an exercise of the "Credibility and the Courtroom Trial" rules. (Cortex Core Rules, p. 113)

Settlin' Scores:

If the players manage to bump into Maynard and *not* get into a violent altercation of some kind, there's always the option (and I encourage this one) that a couple of Maynard's more hard headed goons break off and stalk them a ways afterward. Then, once clear of Maynard and the others, they decide to teach these young punks a lesson on their own. The opportunity to beat the snot out of a couple of Maynard's hired thugs being the player's reward for handling the encounter with Maynard so well, naturally. This encounter then should be a standard brawl, with the thugs choosing not to draw iron (unless the player characters do). If they've avoided violence so far here we'll respect that and keep it to fisticuffs.

Act III, Scene I: You Got 'till Sundown...

Unless the player characters have given the local law an excuse to toss them in jail then the Sheriff is only interested in putting some pressure on them and running them out of town. Essentially, Sheriff Daily is showing his solidarity with Marus and the generous kickbacks he doles out.

If the players have given him good reason to arrest them then, again, they better figure some way out of their troubles. He will, at this time, not really want to hassle or processing them and whatnot. He'd rather they just be properly intimidated and skip town. Should they give him good cause though, he won't really have a problem with tossing them in the jail and Maynard will certainly be quite pleased with that decision as well.

Regardless, soon after their confrontation with Maynard (say, within the half hour) Sheriff Daily shows up with a couple of deputized men (two of Maynard's gunmen

on loan). He'll immediately start making life uncomfortable for the player characters. He'll ask pointed questions, imply some complicity on their parts with the trouble at Handsome Ranch recently, go through their belongs looking for contraband, etc.

In the end, once he's made the point that he's hard on their case, he'll flat out warn them to get out of town. If the player character don't look as if they're ready to sprint directly to the town limits on foot, he'll give them a solid deadline of sundown to be gone...or else.

Here our player characters have the opportunity to pick up the inference that Sheriff Daily and the local magistrate are on Marus' payroll. If they quibble in the slightest way then Sheriff Daily will warn them that Damien Marus is considered a true benefactor by the town leadership and that he's done a lot to secure the continued prosperity of this town. He's sure the local magistrate agrees and wouldn't want any ill-advised implications of criminal wrongdoing tarnishing the good name of such a fine businessman.

The hint should be fairly clear here but if the player characters are oblivious enough to miss it, then they can always find out the hard way that everyone in power locally is on Marus' side.

By now the player characters should have picked up at least some basic background information concerning the location of the land deeds and possibly even Mrs. Hardacre's relation to Damien Marus. Considering their instructions from Mr. Handsome and the fact that everyone with the authority to make their life extremely uncomfortable does not approve of their presence, they've every reason to skeedaddle right on out of town.

Here the players should be prepared to head off in one of two directions. Either the player characters still believe the deeds are in Mrs. Hardacre's possession and have decided to snatch them or they're intent on leaving town with whatever information they might have about them.

If they intend to snatch the deeds, the only way they can do so is to invade the Crazy Cat Lady's home. The deeds won't be there but they'll have a chance to find out where they actually are.

If they intend to leave town and report

whatever they do know to Mr. Handsome, then we'll be throwing a small stumbling block in the road. Just to slow them up enough for Sheriff Daily to catch up with them again.

Act III, Scene II: Option 1: Raiding a Cathouse. Not What I Had in Mind...

If your players fulfill your deepest, darkest and most sadistic dreams and decide to raid Mrs. Hardacre's shack...well, good for you. Seriously. This is just going to be so much fun.

Mrs. Hardacre is known as the Crazy Cat Lady for good reason after all. She's crazy. And she owns far, far too many cats. The little four-room shack which she's been reduced to squatting in is filled to the brim with all manner of junk and refuse collected over the years and this has turned it into a veritable gauntlet of feline terror. Barring taking a crowbar to one of the boarded up, dirt-encrusted windows and breaking in (or out) that way, there's really only one entrance to the shack. And more to the point, only one exit. The good news is that the front door isn't locked. Or maybe that's the bad news.

Once the player characters step into this shocking pit of feline filth they'll be immediately overwhelmed by the violent assault on every good and noble human sensibility that it contains. Running through the shack lies one single meandering path through all the junk, itself threatened by the collapse of towering piles of old books, clothing, furnishings, boxes and other assorted refuse on either side. The windows are boarded up and crusted with old dirt, making the entire house quite dark. The air is filled with the near palpable odor of unwashed old lady and mangy housecat, thick enough to cut with a knife. The hundred or so aforementioned mangy cats have, over the years, managed to urinate, defecate, musk, shed fur and vomit

hairballs on every horizontal surface in the place. And most of the vertical surfaces as well. A lot of the odd angles, too. And all throughout this hellish, dimly lit, utterly offensive obstacle course from hell there's *movement*...just beyond one's sight, somewhere in the shadows...

Mrs. Hardacre's house is laid out simply, being nothing more than a shack as previously mentioned. With four equivalent rooms all connected to one another (but the door between the "entrance" and Winifred's bedroom blocked with furniture and trash) the player characters will have to navigate around through all four. The rooms themselves aren't all that large (roughly 10' x 10') but the meandering path and all the trash make it slow going.

Movement through Mrs. Hardacre's shack should be an exercise in progressively escalating horror. Certainly if they're actually trying to search the place. The cats will most especially be our spook factor.

Be sure to play up the horrid conditions of the place as the player characters carefully pick their way through looking for clues. A couple of Get Out Of Harm's Way rolls (or the simple Agility check given below) to avoid a tumbling avalanche of cat poop-encrusted trash should set them on edge nicely. Anyone with Medicine, Science or even a decent Knowledge skill should have a chance to recall details concerning Toxoplasmosis from Mr. Handsome's biology classes (*see Appendix I*).

Moving through each room without bringing a pile of blunt objects down on your head: (Average Agility + Athletics)

Botch: Oh, wow. You didn't just botch did you? *Here?* In *this* place? Good luck washing *that* out of your favorite jacket. And your hair...oh, my. You may just have to shave your head.

Failure: Take a point or two of stun damage from that box full of empty jars falling on your head. You clumsy ox.

Success: Whew! That was close. And was that a pile of "Cat's Meow: Cat Lover Quarterly" magazines that nearly fell over on you?

Most of all however there's the cats. They'll be on hand from the moment the player characters step into the shack. Shadowy

figures, hissing and skittering about in the darkness all around them.

The cats start off with ten or so that they can easily be detected nearby. Then perhaps it's twenty or thirty instead as the players begin to move through the shack stirring them up. Then it seems it's more like fifty once they've breached the second room, eyes shining in the dark like targeting lasers. Always the cats are there in the surrounding darkness, seemingly growing in number the farther the player characters move into the shack. Following and meowing. Snarling and hissing. Their numbers continue to swell as the players fall deeper into the trap, until it effects ease of movement along the already dangerous path. Cats get underfoot, get in the way of physical actions. Opening doors, searching refuse, reading books, looking through drawers...all bring the players in contact with jumpy and very disagreeable felines who don't appreciate being handled in a familiar fashion.

The gradually escalating noise from all the feline fiends surrounding them eventually brings a small Difficulty modifier to any actions requiring concentration or, for that matter, any attempt to communicate without raising one's voice.

And once their numbers are high enough some of the cats are bound to get bold enough to attack the intruders every once in a while. Springing forward to cause a minor hit (doesn't matter if it does damage or not), then springing away to disappear into the shadows again.

And if the foolhardy heroes should pursue or retaliate...all the cats freak out and hell descends in hand buckets. Wild and furious bags of mangy fur descend upon their heads to scratch and shriek. High piles of hard edged refuse fall atop the hapless interlopers. The horrid shrieking of a thousand not-so-very-domesticated predators cuts through the blackness like a jagged blade.

Now none of this need cause an real harm, of course. Unless you're just one of those mean old GM's who just likes the idea of a horde of cats uncharacteristically attacking en masse. But come on. Let's be a *little* realistic. Still, it should rattle their cages just a bit.

Which becomes important because, if Mrs. Hardacre is home during all this (even if

sleeping), it quickly becomes obvious moving through the house stealthily is completely impossible after just a short while. She *will* wake up. And she *will* come to investigate. And, if we've laid the scene well, the player characters will likely overreact while trying to get back *out* of that nightmare before she can catch them. Or overreact when she actually does catch them.

Otherwise, if the player characters were smart enough to reconnoiter and invade the home while she was away (and have the fortitude to persevere through the terrifying cat gauntlet) they'll eventually reach Winifred's bedroom. There a thorough search will reveal her journals (by which she inspired Grampy Handsome's own abortive journals), saturated in cat filth though they may be. Given the opportunity to peruse those at their leisure, the player characters should find out everything they need to know about the identity of Mrs. Hardacre's bastard son and the fate of the land deeds Grampy Handsome left with her. Then of course they have to go back out again. By that same treacherous path through the junk and muck. Past the same horde of demon cats.

Act III, Scene II: Option 2: Cat Scratch Fever

If the player characters decide *not* to go after the deeds or otherwise chose not to play cat burglar (pardon the weak pun) at Mrs. Hardacre's Crazy Cat Shack we still have to slow them down just a bit. We have to buy time for Sheriff Daily to return to the jail, oversee the massacre of the prisoners there by Maynard and receive unconditional instructions from Marus to pin the blame on the players for the murders. And promptly gather a posse of thugs to go shoot them dead in the street.

Now if they have indeed managed to shrug off all our subtle prodding in the direction of Hardacre's house and the really interesting scene we were so looking forward to there...well, we're not going to get upset. No, we're not the kind of GM that gets irritated when our players hare

*off and chose their own destiny, are we? No, no. We're fair and kind-heartedened to our players. Only interested in showing them a fun time.
Not going to stop us from being really heavy handed now though, is it? Well, goodness, why would it? We're going to drop the Crazy Cat Lady right at their feet to slow them down.*

Mrs. Hardacre, it seems, has long since developed Toxoplasmosis from years of utterly failing to look to the hygiene of a wild horde of filthy cats. And this parasitic infection has finally reached such an advanced stage of acuity that it's dropped her delirious and near-dead right in the middle of the road on the way out of town. (What? I said we were going to be heavy handed.)
Naturally, when the player characters take the Sheriff's warning to heart and start high-tailing it out of town they stumble right across the old lady lying directly in their path.

*Now, there's always the chance that your players are the sort that would walk right on past an old lady lying in the street. That's certainly a possibility. But if you're saddled with that cold hearted a band of player characters I'd suggest just shrugging off all pretense, let Sheriff Daily and his posse magically appear with automatic rifles and mow the player characters down like grass. Let your players whip up some newer, less hard ass characters already.
I mean, sheesh.*

The player characters should at least stop and check on the poor lady. Even this momentarily pause should be enough to allow you to stretch reality so that Sheriff can catch up with them again.
Once they do stop to help then any character with Medicine skill should have a chance to diagnose her advanced case of Toxoplasmosis and know that she requires immediate medical attention.

Diagnosing Toxoplasmosis: (Hard Alertness + Medicine /Diagnosis)

*I've made the difficulty for the diagnosis Hard here rather than Formidable on the assumption that the character in question is well aware of Mrs. Hardacre's horde of cats and filthy living conditions.
Toxoplasmosis might then be in mind*

already. Otherwise, go ahead with a Formidable difficulty.

Failing that diagnosis, the character treating Mrs. Hardacre should at least be able to recognize a fever high enough to pose an immediate risk:

Diagnosing deadly fever: (Average Alertness + Medicine /Diagnosis)

A quick bit of first aid should then be in order as well, at least to stabilize her enough to get to Doc Willy safely.

Rendering first aid to the Crazy Cat Lady: (Average Alertness + Medicine /First Aid)

The difficulty is Average here because there really isn't much they can do about her symptoms and they're reduced to merely minimizing other risks. Unless they possess a MedAcad Doctor's Bag and the high-tech meds therein, of course. If they do, then go with a Hard difficult but establish that her life has been saved by their skillful medical attention if/when they succeed. This actually works out for the better since the MedAcad Doctor's Bag drops a nice -2 to -4 step bonus to the roll anyway. With inferior but otherwise successful treatment, she's merely stable enough to get to Doc Willy without further risk.

Doc Willy is available at all hours and two or more player characters shouldn't have much trouble getting a ninety pound old woman to him. All in all, this simply hands the GM two opportunities to catch the player characters up with the action so far.

First, in her delirium she'll believe one of the player characters is her long lost son and begin blathering on to him in the manner one would expect of a very crazy and very ill old lady. Any information the players have managed to miss so far concerning Damien Marus' relation to her (and to Mr. Handsome) and the fact that he now possesses the deeds can then be handed to them on a silver platter.
Second, it gives Sheriff Daily enough time to dash after them and catch them in the street, preferable right after they've dealt with Mrs. Hardacre and she's out of harm's way.

Although, to be honest, she doesn't play any further part in this campaign so, if

you're really are that hard hearted, she could very well end up in the line of fire here. All the more reason for Damien Marus to have it out for the player characters in the end, should she become a casualty in the coming fight. That's pretty mean but it's doable if you want a hard edge to your campaign.

Act IV, Scene I: Shootout at Sunset

Having dealt either with the invasion of Mrs. Hardacre's home or having found her lying delirious in the street (or both, for that matter) the player characters are finally free to high-tail it out of town...except, of course, that Sheriff Daily has now caught up to them looking to pin the murders at his jail on them.

Along comes Daily and his band of thugs. It's sundown, after all (or near enough, as far as Daily is concerned). This is probably the only real combat we'll have this session and since we're wrapping up the session anyway, we can go all out. Getting shot up a good bit won't be utterly tragic since the player characters will have the coming between-adventures stretch to heal up a bit. I recommend granting Sheriff Daily a number of men in the posse equal to the number of players in the group (*counting* Sheriff Daily). You can even throw in one or two more thugs, if you really want, assuming the player characters have a very healthy pool of Plot Points to play with (and they just might by now).

This battle is relatively straight forward. No especially thoughtful tactics on Daily or the thugs' part, at least at first. Yet again, the player characters probably haven't made an intimidating name for themselves yet and are still considered just another bunch of young punks. Orphan ranch hands shouldn't be hard to gun down in the street, right?

As such Sheriff Daily will most likely call them out right in the middle of the road, ostensibly placing them under arrest. His intent will be to take them into custody if that seems easy enough to do (should they surrender or some such). Otherwise he has no problem simply shooting them down

where they stand, since he intends to hand them over to the Maynard's men anyway for that very purpose.

The thugs accompanying him however are quite intent on simply shooting them, especially after the embarrassing defeat the player characters probably handed their brothers in the assault on Handsome Ranch. Even if the players surrender they'll find some reason to open up on them. Sheriff Daily will be a bit irritated at that but will join right in once the first shots are fired.

Once the player characters start tossing around Plot Points Sheriff Daily's tactics will change. The thugs in his posse may be dumb enough to stand in the street and get shot (or not, as you like) but he'll certainly dive for cover once he realizes these youngsters are a threat.

When his posse starts getting cut down (and especially if the player characters manage to shoot *all* of them) he'll look out for his own skin. He'll dart into a nearby business or home, shoot from the windows, run upstairs and toss furniture down on them and generally be a bit of a hassle to put down if the players don't kill him *first* in the fight.

Given the opportunity to negotiate with the player characters he'll be sure to point out all the trouble implicit with gunning down a law man. And if his posse is dead or fled, he'll accept letting them go (for now) in exchange for his own life.

Should the player characters manage to kill Sheriff Daily then that may well make matters all the more difficult for them later. They'll be wanted men all over the moon, with the law in every other town and village having an eye out for them.

It's up to the GM whether there's an actual bulletin put out on them over the cortex. Even if it is, Alliance Feds don't generally pay much attention to criminal matters out on the rim. Unless they drop right into the lap of Federal officers it simply won't matter.

If Daily gets away he'll keep it a local matter (not wanting to draw the attention of other, less corrupt law officers). In that case they should be able to move about the moon without attracting the interest of law enforcement. Daily will certainly be on the lookout for another shot at them (with

a larger, more disciplined posse) should they be foolish enough to come back to *this* town. And once he's got that posse he'll certainly come looking for them at Handsome Ranch.

On the other hand, if the fight goes badly for the players (and it very well could) then getting out of town might again become their immediate goal. In such a case it's in our interests to let them do that. If they're dead the campaign is largely over, naturally. Likewise if they're caught, considering the local Magistrate will be inclined to toss them in prison for life or, more likely, hang 'em.

Feel free to fudge the dice a bit if they high-tail it and help them escape. But still, they shouldn't get away without being shot up a good bit first. If half the player characters aren't at least limping and bleeding all over the place, they got away too easy.

Act IV, Scene II: Wrap up

A few points that should have been covered by the end of the adventure here. The player characters don't necessarily have to know all this by the end of the session, though. There's nothing here they can't pick up on later if they've been especially bad at information gathering so far, so there's no real need to push the point.

1. Damien Marus is the bastard son of Grampy Handsome and Mrs. Winifred Hardacre, having changed his name many years ago.
2. The deeds Grampy Handsome left with Mrs. Hardacre were probably an oversight, not being worth much at the time. Grampy may simply have not wanted to deal with the bother of fetching them from his pregnant ex-mistress and just written them off as a loss.
3. The land deeds are to several mid-sized plots of land on another moon (which moon in particular is, as is the case with *this* moon, entirely up to the GM). They are to pass on to Grampy Handsome's eldest male heir. In this case, Karl Handsome.
4. The deeds are now in Damien Marus'

possession, having been handed off to him by Mrs. Hardacre over a year ago.

5. Damien Marus has not yet established himself legally as Grampy Handsome's son and thus hasn't any legal right to the deeds. However, this can easily be rectified with a simple blood test. Karl Handsome would still be the eldest son and thus the heir to the deeds, though.
6. Sheriff Daily and very probably the local Magistrate are on Damien Marus' payroll, who it seems has extended his illicit political influence quite a bit in the last year. In addition to giving Marus a way out of even the worst legal trouble it also allows him to wield the local law against Mr. Handsome to some degree. It may also make it much easier for Marus to challenge Karl Handsome for his inheritance in court, though oddly Marus doesn't seem to be pursuing that avenue.

When all is said and done the player characters should have had an opportunity to visit town, have an interesting encounter or two and come into conflict with the local law.

All the raiders from the Battle of Handsome Ranch should be dead, as well as Group Three (with the exception of Maia Lin, most likely) and the player characters should be wanted for their murders. These obviously trumped up charges won't hold up in any *other* court and most especially won't stand under the scrutiny of Federal investigators but getting that kind of attention paid to a small town, rim-world legal matter is extremely unlikely. The best the player characters will be able to hope for, unless they're able to swing more weight than most Greenhorn/Novice level characters, is to lay low and hide while their benefactor, Mr. Handsome, deals with it.

Hiding at Handsome Ranch with these charges hanging over their head will be a bad idea. If the player characters don't recognize this then Karl Handsome certainly will. He'll immediately set them up in an old abandoned cabin on his land, pretend they've run off and generally cover for them while he tries to deal with the matter through his own contacts. He will be surprised to find just how far Damien Marus' has extended his influence as well when his own political contacts around the moon are unable or unwilling to

help (but all that comes up later in the campaign).

Non-Player Characters

The stats given here are in accordance with the Cortex Core rules but should be easy to adapt to Serenity RPG or Battletstar Galactica, if you are using either of those rule sets. There's very little difference, really.

Also, I've never bothered trying to balance out the stats I give my NPC's and just give them whatever I think they should have. Don't expect the numbers to add up all that much but by all means feel free to hack and slash them to taste.

Winifred Hardacre

Crazy Cat Lady

Agl d6 Str d6 Vit d4
Ale d6 Int d10 Wil
d10
Init d6+d6
LP 18

Winifred's tote bag of doom (d2 B)
(all those cans of cat food in there...)

Traits: Absent Minded d4, Higher Education d6, Light Sleeper d4, Tough d8, Traumatic Flashes d4, Unstable d10

Animals d6, Artistry d6/Poetry d8/Writing d8, Athletics d4, Craft d6/Tailoring d10, Discipline d4, Guns d4, Influence d6/Persuasion d8/Politics d8, Knowledge d6/Culture d8/Folklore d8, Perception d4, Science d6/Life Sciences d8, Survival d4

Sheriff Daily

Corrupt local lawman

Agl d8 Str d8 Vit d8
Ale d8 Int d6 Wil d10
Init d8+d8
LP 18

Medium Pistol
Shotgun (optional)

Traits: Brawler d2, Contacts (Criminal) d4, Greedy d6, Hooked (Alcohol) d4, Prejudice (Foreigners/Off-worlders) d4

Athletics d6/Dodge d8/Running d8, Animals d6/Riding d8, Covert d6, Discipline d6/Intimidate d8, Guns d6/Handguns

d10/Shotguns d8, Influence d6/Persuasion d8, Knowledge d6/Law d8/Townfolk d10, Medicine d4, Melee Combat d6/Clubs d10, Perception d6/Investigation d8, Survival d6/Local Wilderness d8, Unarmed Combat d6/Brawling d8

Rance Maynard

Damien Marus' head honcho

Agl d8 Str d8 Vit d8
Ale d6 Int d6 Wil d6
Init d8+d6
LP 16

Knife
Heavy Pistol

Traits: Brawler d2, Contacts d4, Criminal Past d6, Steady Calm d4, Rank and Privilege d4, Reputation (Criminals) d4, Signature Item (Pearl-handle revolver) d8, Tough d4

Athletics d4, Covert d6/Streetwise d10, Discipline d6/Leadership d8, Animals d6/Riding d10, Guns d6/Pistols d8, Influence d6/Intimidate d8, Melee Weapons d6, Perception d4, Unarmed Combat d6

Maynard's thugs / Daily's posse

Minions/Mooks

Agl d6 Str d8 Vit d8
Ale d6 Int d6 Wil d6
Init d6+d6
LP 16

Knife
Medium Pistol

Traits: Brawler d4, Convict d6, Hideout d6, Rebellious d4, Smartass d4

Athletics d6/Dodge d8, Covert d6/Sabotage d8/Stealth d8/Streetwise d8, Animals d6, Guns d6/Pistol d8/Rifle d8, Influence d6/Intimidate d8, Melee Weapons d6/Club d8/Knife d8, Perception d6, Survival d4, Unarmed Combat d6/Brawling d8

Doc Willy

Sawbones

Agl d8 Str d6 Vit d6
Ale d8 Int d8 Wil d6

Init d8+d8
LP 12

Traits: Contrarian d4, Good Natured d4

Animals d4, Discipline d6/Morale d8,
Influence d6, Guns d6/Pistols d8, Medicine
d6/Diagnosis d10/General Practice
d10/Internal Medicine d10/Surgery
d8/Veterinary Medicine d8, Perception d6,
Tech d4, Unarmed Combat d4

Precious Morganstein

Orphan

Agl d6	Str d4	Vit d6
Ale d8	Int d6	Wil d8

Init d6+d8
LP 14

Traits: Faith d4, Klutz d4

Animals d6/Animal Care d8/Riding d8,
Artistry d6/Cooking d8, Athletics d6,
Covert d4, Craft d6/Sewing d8, Guns d4,
Influence d6, Knowledge d6/Religion d8,
Melee Weapons d2, Perception d4, Survival
d4

Percy Morganstein

Orphan

Agl d6	Str d6	Vit d6
Ale d10	Int d6	Wil d6

Init d6+d10
LP 12

Traits: In Plain Sight d6, Klepto d6

Animals d6/Animal Care d8/Animal
Training d8/Riding d8, Athletics d6/Dodge
d8/Running d8, Covert d6/Pickpocketing
d8, Craft d6, Guns d4, Influence d4,
Knowledge d6/Folklore d8, Melee Weapons
d4, Perception d6, Ranged Weapons d2,
Survival d4

Maia Lin

Paranoid Animal Wrangler/Shooter

Agl d10	Str d6	Vit d8
Ale d6	Int d6	Wil d4

Init d10+d6
LP 10

Medium Pistol
Rifle

Traits: Paranoid D4, Natural Athlete D4

Animals d6 (Animal Care d8, Animal
Training d8, Riding d8), Athletics d6
(Dodge d8), Craft d2, Discipline d2,
Knowledge d2, Survival d4, Guns d6
(Pistols d8, Rifles d10), Pilot d2, Perception
d6, Drive d4, Tech d4, Unarmed combat d4

Appendix I: AODC Fact Sheet: Toxoplasmosis

Toxoplasmosis is a parasitic disease caused by the protozoan *Toxoplasma gondii*. The parasite infects most genera of warm-blooded animals, including humans, but the primary host is the felid (cat) family. Animals are infected by eating infected meat, by ingestion of faeces of a cat that has itself recently been infected, or by transmission from mother to fetus. Cats have been shown as a major reservoir of this infection.

Up to one third of total human population is estimated to carry a *Toxoplasma* infection, primarily on the worlds of the outer rim, where hygiene is underemphasized. The Alliance Office of Disease Control notes that overall seroprevalence as determined with specimens collected by the Annual Health and Wellbeing Critical Survey (AHWCS) was found to average 10.2% over the last five years, with seroprevalence among women of childbearing age (15 to 44 years) of 11.3%.

During the first few weeks, the infection typically causes a mild flu-like illness or no illness. After the first few weeks of infection have passed, the parasite rarely causes any symptoms in otherwise healthy adults. However, people with a weakened immune system may become seriously ill, and it can occasionally be fatal. The parasite can cause encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) and neurologic diseases and can affect the heart, liver, and eyes (chorioretinitis).

Acute toxoplasmosis

During acute toxoplasmosis, symptoms are often influenza-like: swollen lymph nodes, or muscle aches and pains that last for a month or more. Rarely, a patient with a fully functioning immune system may develop eye damage from toxoplasmosis. Young children and immunocompromised patients, those taking certain types of chemotherapy, or those who have recently received a donor, blastomere or artificial organ transplant, may develop severe toxoplasmosis. This can cause damage to

the brain or the eyes. Only a small percentage of infected newborn babies have serious eye or brain damage at birth.

Latent toxoplasmosis

Most patients who become infected with *Toxoplasma gondii* and develop toxoplasmosis do not know it. In most immunocompetent patients, the infection enters a latent phase, during which only bradyzoites are present, forming cysts in nervous and muscle tissue. Most infants who are infected while in the womb have no symptoms at birth but may develop symptoms later in life.