

THE WHINY DOG

Sidestep I: Handsome Ranch adventure path

This sidestep session can occur anytime during Chapter One but it works best following Hardacre's Deeds. At that time the player characters will be hiding out on Handsome's lands in an old cabin deep in the woods.

Background: In Adventure VI (High Tide) the players will be dealing with a sadistic serial killer so we're going to drop a couple of clues concerning that here. One of the killer's victim lived on a small farm near Handsome's land and the young lady's faithful hound still haunts the homestead. Scrubs, the faithful (if somewhat emotionally scarred) hound is our main character here. Having witnessed the killer's assault and kidnapping of his mistress, he naturally attempted to come to her defense...but was hit with the fiendish killer's secret weapon. Hence, the development of his Traumatic Flashes and Phobia (Dark) complications. This is what keeps the poor mutt up all night howling.

Hook: From their first night at the old cabin Handsome has stashed them in, the players will be tormented by the howling of our faithful hound. Every night, from dusk to dawn he howls. The incessant braying comes from just far enough away that the sound is barely discernable but close enough that it keeps them awake all darned night. Eventually they'll feel compelled to investigate.

But since the players might *require* some reason to investigate, then we'll give them a few chores around the cabin in order to make the old abandoned hideout livable. And fatigue penalties from lack of sleep.

Handsome's chore list: Not being the sort to simply give his ranch hands a vacation merely on account of being wanted for murder, Handsome takes the opportunity to drop a list of chores on them. Since they'll be hiding out at

his old hunting cabin, he'll expect them to tidy the place up a little in while they're there.

Here's four days worth of chores to keep our players. They've got a week to finish up these chores before Handsome drops by for a critical inspection...er...that is, a friendly visit...just to check up on them.

Day 1: Clean up around the place.

The cabin's been empty for a long time. And whoever stay there last wasn't much of a housekeeper. Dust covers everything, refuse litters the floor, the chimney needs sweeping, etc. This is a full day's work but not strenuous.

Day 2: Chop firewood, stock pantry.

Handsome will have a cache of canned food dropped off in the woods nearby, enough for a whole week. All the players have to do today is fetch it and bring it in. And while there are a few scraps of firewood for the first night, they'll have to chop up enough for the rest of the week today. Another full day's work but easy enough.

Day 3: Repair roof.

Another full day's work. There are spare shingles available in the shed outside the cabin, as well as all the necessary tools. This will take all the characters working together all day to finish up. This definitely qualifies as strenuous activity.

Day 4: Clear the yard.

The yard in front of and around the cabin has grown wild. Clearing it is another hard day's work by all the characters as some thick brambles and bushes have intruded as well. More hard work.

From the morning of their arrival, start keeping track of each eight hour block of time, including the eight hour sleep period that first night. This is the total number of hours they'll be going without sleep. Once this reaches 24 (the morning of Day 2) they will begin picking up fatigue penalties and stun damage from lack of sleep (*see Cortex Rules, p. 98*).

Each night beginning with Day 2, we'll allow them to catch a 10-30 minute catnap despite the howling. Each player character rolls Willpower and subtracts from 8. This represents the equivalent number of hours of sleep gained.

For example: By nightfall on Day 2, Player A has gone 40 hours without sleep. That

night he rolls his Willpower and comes up with a 4. He gains four hours of "sleep" from nodding off. By morning he's been at the cabin for 48 hours. Subtracting the four hours he gained from that catnap his total hours of lost sleep is now 44, rather than 48.

Which sucks. So we'll expect the player characters to try to get around that by cutting corners on their chores during the day and taking turns napping while the dog *isn't* howling. This could make the difference since they get a Willpower + Discipline/Specialty roll worth of hours for each hour or two sleeping this way (*Cortex Rules, p. 98, Fatigued*).
Really smart characters may even take their Second Wind to get rid of incurred stun damage from fatigue as well.

In the end a resourceful bunch of players could get their chores done without botching and wrap up this session without ever checking out the dog. Even a botch or two (and the injuries resulting from them) is fine, really. Give them a couple of Plot Points for the session anyway.

If/when they do get around to hiking out toward the howling they'll find the farm easily enough. Scrubs will be right there in the yard but being rather wore out his own poor little self he won't bother them much for coming on his mistress's land.

If they try to step into the farmhouse though, that's another matter. Anyone attempting to do so comes under Scrubs' intimidating snarling. He won't attack unless threatened but anyone who foolishly ignores his warning will be snapped at a bit. Even in that case, it's just a more stern warning and he'll drop back after the first bite.

Furthermore, Scrubs hasn't gotten much sleep himself so his own fatigue will play a critical roll. He's toting a -2 Attribute penalty and 6 points of Stun damage from all those nights staying up howling. This will be quite evident just from looking at poor Scrubs. His red eyes and staggering manner make it clear that poor dog's plumb tuckered

out.

Placating Scrubs isn't all that hard to do. He's hurting for some affection these days as well as starving and just too tired to put up much of a fight. Once they're on his good side he'll allow the pc's to enter the house. He'll also latch on to them rather desperately and they'll find they've made a new friend despite themselves. He'll follow them around doggedly now (pardon the pun), even tracking them for miles if he must. Consider him a new NPC addition to the party from here on.

Scrubs

Agi d6 Str d8 Vit d6
Ale d8 Int d4 Wil d6
Init d8+d8; LP 18

Attacks: Bite (d4 B)

Traits: Duty d6, Enhanced Senses d6 (Hearing, Smell), Phobia (Dark) d4, Tough d8, Traumatic Flashes d4

Skills: Athletics d6/Run d8, Influence d4, Perception d6/Tracking d10, Unarmed Combat d6/Bite d8

Investigating the Farmhouse (*Hard Alertness + Perception/Investigation*)

Failure: Not a clue. No idea.

Success: A single female in her mid-twenties lived here. There are signs of a struggle in the house but no blood trails or other obvious indications of assault. There are no signs of forced, either.

Extraordinary Success: Tracks outside indicate the attacker followed the victim at a leisurely pace while she staggered and tripped over obstacles that should have been obvious. In the yard, burnt grass indicates a stun gun or similar device was used, missing and hitting the ground several yards away from the farmhouse. The front step is stained with a greenish gook.

A Hard Intelligence + Medicine/Toxicology, Science/Environmental or Science/Physical reveals the gook to be a common pesticide.