

SPYIN'

This sidestep session can occur anytime during Chapter Two but probably works best before or after Episode IV: Framed. As long as they are hiding out in the cabin on Handsome's land, it works just fine anywhere.

Background:

In the intervening time since the last session Handsome has reported no significant progress on clearing them of murder charges. He's surprised at the difficulty he's having getting anyone to look into the matter and that Marus seems to have gathered so much influence without anyone gossiping about it. He already doubts he can make the charges go away and has begun to doubt even being able to assure them a fair trial.

Any follow up on the investigation of Scrubs' owner reveals whatever information was already available to the player characters at the scene. In addition to this several other women have disappeared in the area over the last few months, prompting the governor's own investigator to begin looking into the matter. Nothing further on that score yet, beyond the fact that Scrubs' owner is still missing.

Hook:

As the player characters are busy doing whatever they do to while away the hours at the hideout, one of the ranch hands (Benny Simples) rides up out of the blue. He informs them that he spotted some of Marus' men heading towards Jenkins' farm a couple of hours ago. When he informed Mr. Handsome he was told to ride hard out to them and tell them to check it out.

Mr. Handsome relays orders not to cause any trouble on Jenkins' land, since he enjoys friendly relations with the farmer and can't afford any new enemies. They are simply to head over there, watch to be sure no harm comes to Jenkins and then leave off. If

they can find out what Marus' men are up to without any undue fuss, all the better.

Jenkins' Farm:

The Jenkins Farm is only a couple of hours ride from the cabin so getting there won't be any trouble for the player characters. Once there though they'll eventually have to contend with Jenkins' dog, Mulligan.

Mulligan:

Mulligan isn't the kind of dog to stay on the porch and nap. He'd much rather range the farm all day, chase squirrels and dig at anything that smells interesting. Jenkins has long since learned to ignore Mulligan when he sets about barking and raising a fuss on the farm somewhere though. If he keeps at it a good long while he might check on the matter, if he isn't doing anything else at the moment. Otherwise the dog is largely ignored. The player characters won't know this of course. And when Mulligan stumbles across them and starts "raisin' Cain" they'll likely fear someone will be coming soon to investigate. How they handle the encounter is up to them entirely. Mulligan will take a good long time before he gets bored barking at the trespassers and wanders off but he won't attack unless threatened himself. Even then he will likely run yelping back to the farmhouse with his tail between his legs as soon as the trespassers appear aggressive. Jenkins meanwhile won't come looking for them himself unless Mulligan does come running and yelping or if he hears something other than Mulligan just pitching another of his fits (such as gunshots, etc.)

If the players have brought Scrubs along...well, they probably aren't playing very smart bringing a dog on a spy mission. Still, in this instance it works out great. Scrubs bounds toward Mulligan looking to play and Mulligan, being flighty to begin with, immediately forgets all about the trespassers to play with his new

friend. Scrubs will keep Mulligan quite busy (and vice versa) pretty much for the rest of the session.

There's a small chance Jenkins might decide to go investigate the sounds of two dogs barking it up around the place but he'll just as likely shrug it off as some neighbor's dog wandering by.

Marus' Men:

Marus has sent a group of his honchos around the farms and homesteads surrounding Handsome lands in the attempt to put off his neighbors. They've been busy all day rudely interrogating everyone concerning Handsome and blatantly threatening anyone who seems well disposed towards him. The overall theme is simply, *"Stay out of the trouble with Marus and Handsome or you'll find your own self in trouble."*

So far it's working grandly, with nearly all of Handsome's neighbors deciding they want nothing to do with either side until the whole thing blows over. Unbeknownst to Handsome (at least yet) two of his nearby friends have had their barns set on fire to illustrate the point. Since the local Sheriff is in Marus' pocket and the men never specifically identified themselves as associates of Marus (or even identified themselves at all), he'll shrug off the complaints, "forget" to file a report and leave it at that. Nothing will come of it.

Unless the player character drag their feet or are otherwise seriously delayed, they should arrive in time to witness Marus' men on horseback talking to farmer Jenkins on his front porch. If they manage to get close enough to overhear or have some gadgetry allowing them to eavesdrop from a safe distance, they'll hear the men threatening Jenkins not to get involved in the matter between Marus and Handsome.

Since Jenkins isn't the sort to put up with strangers tell him what he can and can't do, he doesn't take the advice well and argues with the men. He then fetches his double barrel shotgun from inside the house to run them off.

Since Marus' men are under strict orders not to actually kill anyone or commit any other felonies, they back off with dire warnings that Jenkins "done bit off more'n he could chaw". They leave...but set fire to his barn on the way out.

If Marus men (or Jenkins for that matter) happen to spot the player characters during this time, make sure one or two of the men recognize them from town. If they've been involved violently with any of Marus' men before now and those men are still alive, then it's good bet they're with this group now. Either way you play it, if it's possible for the men to recognize the player characters they should do so now. Killing them now becomes their focus and they'll attempt it, even though Jenkins will immediately start firing on them when they do (consequently aiding them in the fight and probably forcing them to defend him as well).

Otherwise they simply set fire to Jenkins barn, ride off hard while Jenkins fires a couple of rounds of buckshot after them and are gone.

How many men are in the group of honchos is up to the GM but since this is likely the only violent encounter in this session, you can be somewhat generous. Bear in mind the players probably haven't anything more than the starting 6 Plot Points to throw around though. Use the "Maynard's thugs/Daily's posse" stats from Hardacre's Deeds for these guys, since they're the same bunch.

Farmer Jenkins

Agi d6, Str d8, Vit d6, Ale d6, Int d4, Wil d6; LP 14; Initiative d6+d6.

Traits: Tough d4, Anger Issues d4

Skills: Animals d6, Athletics d4, Guns d6/Shotgun d8, Survival d6

Lovelorn Louie (optional):

For a little bit more excitement (if you like) we can insert an NPC here with some prerequisite troubles for the players to get involved in.

Young Louie Derango fell in love with Jenkins' daughter six months ago at a barn raisin' near his home. He's been sneaking out to visit her at night ever since while Jenkins sleeps (Jenkins hasn't let the poor girl out of his sight since she hit puberty). He's already had two very terrifying encounters with Jenkins over this, the last time being threatened with getting shot if he's caught on his land again. Since Louie believes Jenkins will indeed shoot him if he's caught (and he would) he's cut back on the nightly visits and taken to being much more stealthy about it. Still, he hasn't seen his sweetheart Jenny Lee in *days*. He's absolutely *pining*.

The distraction of dealing with Marus' men provides the opportunity Louie's been looking for and he takes advantage of it to sneak around to Jenny Lee's window (or the barn, depending on where you put her). While the player characters are spyin' out the goings on between Jenkins and Marus' honchos, they have the opportunity to spot poor Lovelorn Louie skulking around out of sight. If they confront Louie on the sly they won't have any trouble getting his story out of him. He's been camping out nearby off and on for weeks, seizing every opportunity to sneak in and visit with Jenny Lee. (If the player characters seem able to help him in any way in that regard, he'll leap at the chance.) If they let Louie's quick visit go undisturbed they can spy him chatting it up with Jenny Lee for a while, offer her a poem he wrote for her and steal a clumsy kiss before stumbling off in dizzily back to his little camp in the woods nearby.

Should the trouble between Jenkins and Marus' men go down after we've injected Lovelorn Louie into the mix, we'll be sure to have Jenny Lee hiding out in the barn when it's set on fire. Louie then has the chance to save his beloved from a dreadful end and score

major points with her overprotective pop. And the player characters might have some further excitement trying to keep Jenkins from shooting to poor boy before he figures out he just saved his daughter's life.

Shootout with Marus' Men:

If the player characters are spotted while spying on the meeting between Jenkins and Marus' honchos, then they'll be inclined to start shooting at them right away and Jenkins will likely be shooting at the troublemaker's in turn for starting a gunfight on his land. If they chose not to intervene they can still pop up and help with putting out the fire in the barn once they've gone, though they'd better have a good explanation for trespassing.

Otherwise Marus' men leave Jenkins farm having set fire to the barn and head straight for the cabin where the player characters have been hiding out.

Maia Lin ran into Allison Buford in town several days ago but swore her to secrecy, promising not to tell anyone she was around. In the process Allison, being not especially bright, let slip that the player characters were hiding out in the old cabin. Never realizing her blunder it hasn't occurred to her to mention this to anyone at the ranch. She swore not to tell, after all. Maia Lin promptly sold the information to Maynard to finance her move out of town and away from all the trouble. The band of men thus have in their possession, should the player character's get a chance to search them, a note with directions to the cabin. If anyone is able to identify the handwriting, it's Maia Lin's.

If the men get clear of the Jenkins farm unaware that the player characters are there, they hit the cabin and find it empty. They'll still be there when the player characters return and end up having to be rooted out of their hideout. If your players fortified the cabin like mine did, this can be pretty ironic. In a bad way.