

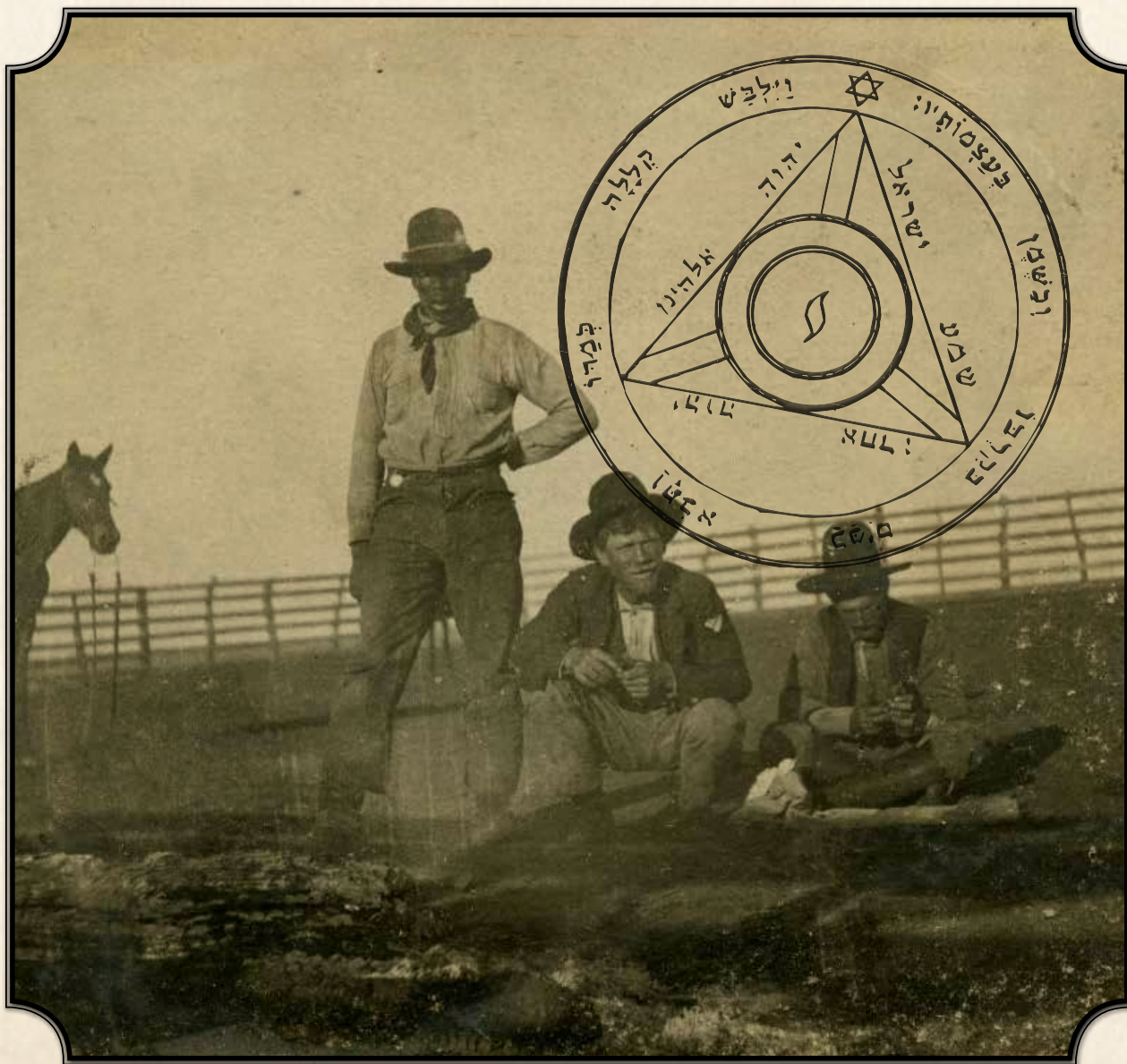
# THE DEVIL, JOHN MOULTON



*An Occult Western  
by Nick Wedig*







*"There are in the souls of wicked men those hellish principles reigning, that would presently kindle and flame out into hell fire, if it were not for God's restraints."*

*—John Edwards,  
"Sinners in the Hands  
of an Angry God"*

Somewhere out there is your quarry. The one that you've been hunting across the vast desert of the American West. The one who showed you how to bind a demon to your soul. John Moulton. Murderer, bank robber, outlaw and demon summoning warlock. The man they call **'The Devil John'**.

You've gathered together a posse. Each of your posse is also seeking the same sorcerous bandit that you are. Some of you are seeking vengeance. Some are seeking redemption. Some just want to collect the sizable bounty on Moulton's head. Each says that they want Devil John dead. Some of them might even be telling the truth.

So you're gonna ride with them, seeking out Moulton. Each town you ride into finds your quarry's henchmen and minions. They're losers and deadbeats who sold their souls for peanuts. But each one is going to bring you a little bit closer to the your final goal. Kill enough and you might find your way up to the man himself. Then, there will be a reckoning.

**THE DEVIL JOHN MOULTON** is a tabletop roleplaying game designed for one gamemaster and 2-5 player characters. You can run a game in a single sitting, but it is best suited to being a few sessions long, perhaps meeting 2 to 5 times for a few hours each time.



## CHARACTER CREATION

Character creation has several steps, each of which will be described in detail:

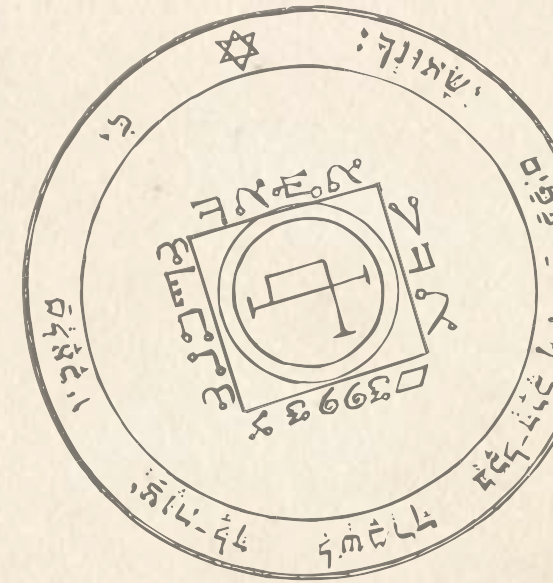
1. Everyone at the table decides how long a game you will play.
2. Draw the appropriate number of cards.
3. Choose one card and pass your hand to the left.
4. Repeat with the new hand you received, until you choose between the final two cards.
5. Discard the last remaining card.
6. Assemble a concept for your character and answer the questions on your cards.
7. Decide how many demonic miracles you wish and create them.
8. The rest of the table decides what sin is the price for your demonic miracles.
9. Determine the die sizes, scars and starting values for each of your four traits.
10. Invent a fact that you know about the Devil John Moulton
11. Answer the remaining questions on your character sheet
12. Help the table create the first town and begin playing!

Each player draws some cards from the deck. How many cards you draw determines how long the game will last. If you start with five cards, then the game will be pretty only one or two sessions long. If you start with a hand of nine cards, then the game will last for a longer amount of time. (These guidelines have to be very vague, as the campaign's length depends a bunch of the size of your group, playstyle, number of times the dice are invoked, etc.) Discuss with the group the length of game you want to play and decide collectively how many each player will draw. Each player should draw the same number of cards. I would recommend five as the minimum number and nine as the maximum. If you go outside those bounds, you're voiding the warranty. The game may still work, but I can't guarantee it.

### EXAMPLE

*Alice, Paul, Carole and Trent decide to play a game of "THE DEVIL JOHN MOULTON". Trent is the most familiar with the rules, so everyone agrees that he should GM. The group discusses briefly and decides that they want a short game. They only have a single evening to play in, and Carole has to work early tomorrow and Paul has to get back to watch his kids. So the group decides to start with five cards in their hands. Assuming an hour to go over rules, create characters and make the town, that still gives the gang enough time to play a single town before wrapping by 11:30.*

## THE NUMBER OF CARDS YOU DRAW DETERMINES THE LENGTH OF THE GAME





# YOU DRAFT CARDS TO DETERMINE YOUR CHARACTER

Each card has on it a potential piece of background, often a question to answer and mechanical effect of your character's abilities. You'll choose one card to be true about you, then pass the rest on to the left. Repeat until you have a hand of two cards, when you choose one and discard the other.

All your dice start as d4s. Cards will increase dice traits by one size. **D4->D6->D8->D10->D12.**<sup>1</sup> Some will let you remove a scar from a specific trait. Some have extra demonic miracles that you can choose for 'free' (without raising your endgame value). Generally, cards with 'Past Lives' help the Way of the Drifter, cards with past sins improve your Way of the Bastard, cards with Scruples improve your Way of the Soul and cards with Secrets improve your Way of the Gun.

Well, 'improve' is not exactly the right word here. The cards will increase your die size in a trait, which is both good and bad. A bigger die means that you can roll it more often, but that it will be less effective in conflicts. A smaller die will be really powerful, but you can only use it a few times before death looms close overhead.

## EXAMPLE

Alice draws five cards from the deck: The Background "A gambler who lost everything", the Scruple "I only fight fair", the Scruple "I can't back down from a challenge", the Act of Evil "While starving, I killed a person and ate their flesh" and the Demonic Miracles "The World-Breaker's Hand". She looks over these cards and really likes the looks of several of them. In the end, she takes "The World-Breaker's Hand" and passes on the other cards to Paul, who is sitting to her left. Alice then takes the four cards that Carole passed her, which include the background "A bounty hunter", a background "A freed slave seeking fortune", the Secret "I'm seeking to join Devil John's posse, not to kill him" and the Act of Evil "I stayed silent instead of protecting my lover from an angry mob". Once again, Alice has to choose between cards she likes very much and those she doesn't. Alice decides to play a former slave who used the World Breaker's Hand to free herself (or himself? she hasn't decided on gender yet). With this in mind, Alice rejects some of the cards from her next hand and chooses "I betrayed the only one who trusted me". Then, in the final hand, she gets "A former robber baron, now penniless" and "an innocent accused of murder". Obviously, one fits better with the other chosen cards, so Alice takes the latter one. Now Alice has an entire story for her character: Before the Civil War, Silence was a slave who was working a plantation when the slaveowners tried to frame Silence and her sister Obedience for their murderous act. While imprisoned, Silence made a pact with Devil John to break free of her bonds. Silence destroyed the chains that bound her, but the guard heard the noise and started firing. Silence chose to escape alive rather than take the time to free her sister from prison and risk her life in the process.

<sup>1</sup> You can't go above d12. If you go beyond d12, you spill over to another trait. Pick another die to take the excess bumps in die size.





Each Player character has already sold their soul to Devil John in exchange for an impossible infernal power. You must choose one demonic power to start with. (This is in addition to any demonic miracles you received during card draws.)

See the section below for the full rules on demonic miracles. What you need to do now is ask yourself: what strange, dark and twisted ability did you gain in your bargain with Devil John?

While you're at it, describe to us what disquieting form the demon you have bound your soul takes.

## EXAMPLE

*Based on her previous card draws, Silence already has the diabolical ability to destroy any object with a touch. But Alice still needs to come up with another demonic miracle of her own. She decides that Silence can sway the opinions of crowds of people. When she speaks, she can change the minds of large groups so long as a single soul is convinced. But she can't convince a lone individual any better than anyone else.*

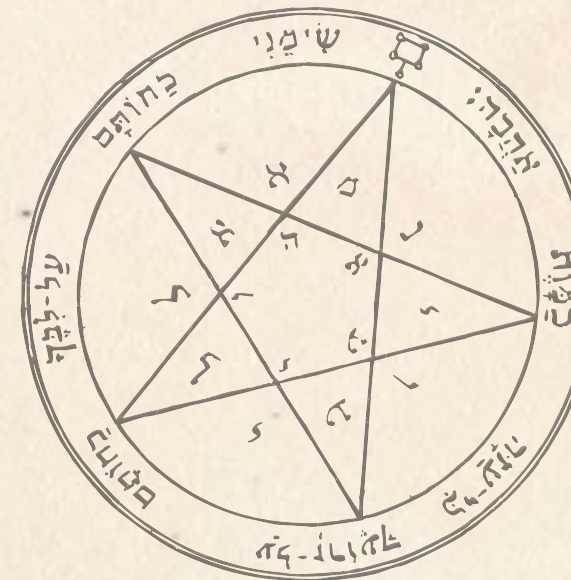
*Silence's demon takes the form of The Whisperin' Stranger, a gaunt silver haired man in decaying fancy clothes. When she speaks, he walks amongst the crowd, though only Silence can see him, and he whispers into the ears of random folks until the crowd becomes swayed.*

Once you know what your demonic abilities are, everybody else at the table brainstorms what the starting price is for that demonic miracle. Demons will perform their diabolical magic for your PC once for free, but after that they demand a payment in return. Demons want the PC to commit terrible sins, so the price they ask is a sin. This sin can be thematically tied to the demonic miracle or related to some other aspect of the character. But it doesn't have to be. Everyone at the table (except that PC's player) should come up with the best, juiciest, most interesting price they can imagine.

The sin the table chooses should in part be made with the campaign length in play. If you immediately leap up to murder and similar horrific crimes, then there isn't much further to go up the ladder. Starting too big will cause the sin spiral to escalate too quickly. On the flip side of that, if you are playing a one-shot game, then you should watch out for starting too small. The game could be over before the player is confronted with truly difficult choices. Ultimately, this matter is unique to each group of players; no one answer will be right for everyone. Try to gauge what grabs the other players interest and aim your suggestions squarely at what is interesting and unsettling for the players at your table.

## EXAMPLE

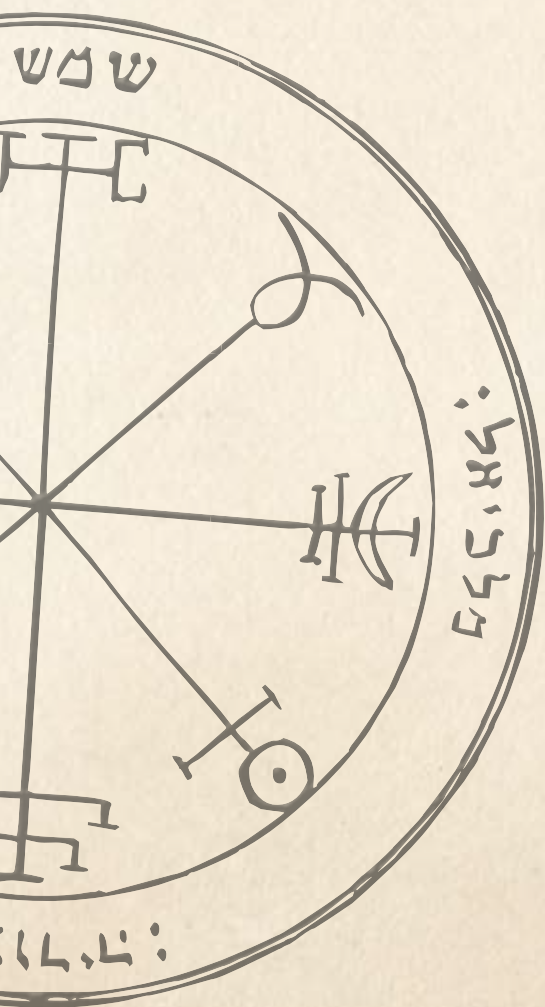
*The table all discuss what they would be an interesting sin for Silence to perform as a price. Paul suggests stealing something, but nobody likes the idea. Carole takes that idea and changes it, suggesting that Silence has to destroy something of value, without using her magical ability. Initially, Silence only has to destroy something minorly valuable, but if she uses the abilities repeatedly, then it will increase the value of the thing that must be destroyed.*



**YOU HAVE ALREADY SOLD  
YOUR SOUL FOR INFERNAL  
POWER**



# YOUR INFERNAL POWER COMES AT A PRICE



## BOOKKEEPING

All characters have four attributes: **THE WAY OF THE BASTARD**, **THE WAY OF THE DRIFTER**, **THE WAY OF THE GUN** and **THE WAY OF THE SOUL**. Each of these begins with a d4 die size, which can be increased by the cards you drafted during character creation. If a card says to increase your die size in an attribute, the attribute's die will increase from d4 to d6 to d8 to d10 to d12.

You also have a current value in each attribute. This value starts at the maximum for the attribute's die size. So if you have a d4 in an attribute, your value for that attribute starts at 4. If you have a d8, then your value starts at 8. As you play the game, this value will tend to go down. If an attribute's rating ever gets down too low, then your character will be killed off or otherwise eliminated from the game. (*Note that the size of die you're rolling will never change; it's completely separate from the attribute's current value.*)

Your character sheet has a few other details for you to fill in. Explain who your character is and how all the pieces of history you accrued during character creation fit together into a coherent whole. Answer why you need the assistance of the PC sitting next to you. Finally, make sure that you haven't left any important bits of your character sheet blank.

## EXAMPLE

*Alice chose two backgrounds, thereby increasing her Drifter die from d4 up to d8. She also chose one Act of Evil, so her Bastard die increases from d4 to d6. Her extra Demonic Miracle does not affect her die sizes at all. Silence's remaining attributes remain unchanged at d4.*

## THE MAN HIMSELF

Each player will also establish one fact that they know about Devil John. Take turns choosing and answering one question from following list. Once all the players have answered a question, the GM chooses one and answers it.

## QUESTIONS

- *What makes Devil John worse than your player characters?*
- *What ominous portents signify Devil John's approach?*
- *How can you identify when Devil John's corruption has spread to a town?*
- *What horrific misdeeds has Devil John performed which you were an accomplice to?*
- *Each person who makes a pact with Devil John carries what mark hidden somewhere on their bodies?*
- *Why can't you just find and kill the bastard?*
- *What is rumored to be Devil John's one weakness? Why is it difficult to exploit?*



## GAMEPLAY OVERVIEW

**THE PLAYERS HAVE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY OVER THEIR PLAYER CHARACTERS.**

Each player has a Player Character that they are the advocate for. You describe what your PC thinks and how they act. You have some limited ability to dictate other parts of the fiction, but the GM has primary authority over those things. The PC is primarily yours, though other players and the GM and the rules may impact your imagining of the character.

**THE GM HAS PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE TOWNS AND NPCs.**

The GM's duty is to make sure the setting and NPCs are described in a vivid manner so that the rest of the table can imagine them and the PCs can interact with them in an entertaining fashion.

**PCs RIDE FROM TOWN TO TOWN. THE PLAYERS AND GM COLLABORATE TO CREATE THE TOWN.** Each town has its own struggles and problems. The players and GM will collaborate to create the town from scratch. Then the PCs will enter the town and stir up trouble.

**YOU ROLL DICE TO DETERMINE HOW WELL YOU PERFORM AN ACTION.**

PCs get a pool of one to four dice to roll, which tie into their four attributes. NPCs and environmental dangers receive their own die pools according to different rules. After you roll, the lower the result is, the better you perform. The lowest roller decides the results of any conflicts between characters.

**EACH TIME DICE ARE ROLLED, THE PC INCHES CLOSER TOWARD THEIR DEMISE.**

Each attribute has a current rating. When you roll lower than the rating, the rating goes down by one. If your rating gets too low, then your character reaches the endgame and is eliminated from play.

**THE PCs TRY TO FIND THE MINION OF DEVIL JOHN, WHO SOLD THEIR SOUL TO MOULTON FOR SOME OCCULT POWER.**

Somebody in town has sold their soul to Devil John. The PCs have to find the one with the Faustian bargain and get some answers out of him or her.

**BETWEEN TOWNS, YOU HAVE AN INTERLUDE.**

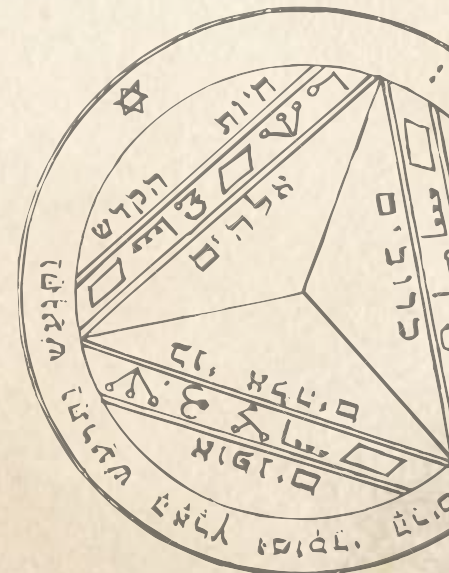
We assume that the PCs travel for a while, entering small towns with not much of interest in them. You can work side jobs and receive medical care and try to seek new information on Devil John.

**EVENTUALLY, YOU DIE A HORRIBLE DEATH.**

If your rating in an attribute gets too low, then your character dies, or becomes a demon, or wanders off into the desert never to be seen again.

**OR YOU FIND DEVIL JOHN AND HAVE A RECKONING.**

If Devil John's die gets too low, then the PCs can find and confront him.





## PCS HAVE FOUR ATTRIBUTES

These are the dice that you roll. You never get any dice beyond these four to roll. Typically, you'll roll one or two of the dice. You may sometimes be able to roll three dice or even four in particularly odd circumstances. Each of these dice works as a timer that leads you closer to a predefined endgame. Every time you roll that die, your PC inches slightly closer to the endgame for that trait. So if you're a Bastard all the time, pretty soon you'll be joining the ranks of the infernal choir. One thing to consider when creating your character and choosing what dice to roll is what ending your character is pointed toward.

The cards you drafted during character creation determine what size die you roll for each trait. Each attribute starts with a d4 and one scar. Cards that you receive might remove the scar or they might increase the die size, from d4 to d6 to d8 to d10 to d12.

### EXAMPLE

*Alice chose two backgrounds, thereby increasing her Drifter die from d4 up to d8. She also chose one Act of Evil, so her Bastard die increases from d4 to d6. Her extra Demonic Miracle does not affect her die sizes at all. Silence's remaining attributes remain unchanged at d4.*

## THE WAY OF THE GUN

ENDGAME: GUNNED DOWN LIKE A DOG

Roll The Way of the Gun When you wish to harm, kill or frighten someone. Roll it also if you use violence or brutality to achieve another goal.

You don't have to use an actual gun to roll The Way of the Gun. But it helps. All you really need is a willingness to do harm to others to get your way.

### EXAMPLE

*Silence has decided that she is tired of the town sheriff getting in her way. She waits in ambush for him to come riding into town. When she draws on the sheriff and fires, Silence's player Alice rolls the d4 that Silence has for the Way of the Gun, getting a 2. This beats the surprised sheriff's result of 5, so she is able to kill the lawman without trouble.*

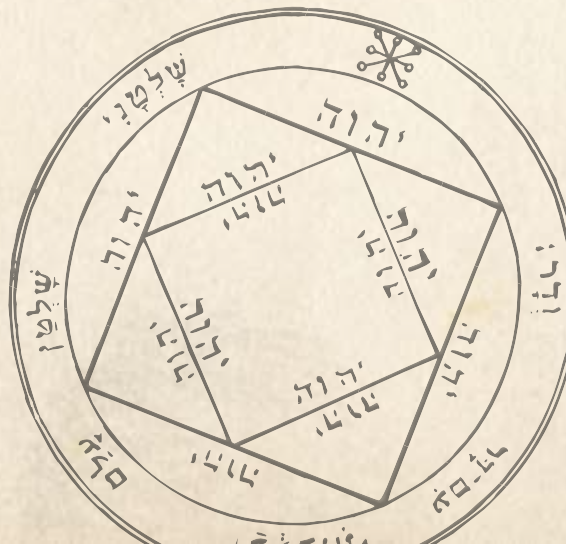
## THE WAY OF THE BASTARD

ENDGAME: BECOMES CORRUPTED AND TURNS INTO A DEMON

Roll the Way of the Bastard when you use deception and villainy to get what you want. Like if you wish to frame an innocent for murder, lead your enemies into an ambush, cheat at poker, or escape from the fort's jail cell. The Way of the Bastard is all about being a no good dirty rotten asshole to others.

### EXAMPLE

*Silence is trying to creep into among the tents of a shanty-town, sneaking up on the warlock that she's hunting. Because she's trying to be sneaky and nefarious, Alice asks if she can roll her Bastard die. Trent shrugs and says "Sure, it applies if you want it." Alice takes her d6 and also a d8 for The Way of the Drifter because she's moving around camp. She rolls both and gets a 3 and a 5, which isn't great but is probably good enough.*



**EACH ATTRIBUTE IS A  
WAY OF INTERACTING  
WITH THE WORLD...**



## THE WAY OF THE SOUL

ENDGAME: YOU SACRIFICE YOUR LIFE TO SAVE ANOTHER.

Governs attempts at peaceful resolution and open, honest communication. The Way of Soul is about finding a smarter way out of tense situations. Roll the Way of Soul when you use honesty and integrity to get what you want.

### EXAMPLE

*Paul's PC Thin Jim chose to take a vow never to tell a lie. While causing trouble in town, Jim begins interrogating a local drunk who Jim thinks knows more than he is telling. Jim gets really intense and tells the drunkard "Listen, if you ain't telling us everythin' we need to know, then I'm gonna tie you hands to my saddle, ride out into the middle of the desert and leave you there to die." Because Jim has sworn to honesty, everyone at the table knows that he really means it. The GM, Trent, looks at Paul and asks "Are you trying to roll The Way of the Soul and The Way of the Bastard at the same time?" Paul just reaches for the two dice whose sizes match his Soul and Bastard dice, respectively.*

## THE WAY OF THE DRIFTER

ENDGAME: YOU LOSE ALL CONNECTION TO THIS WORLD. AT THE END OF THIS TOWN, YOU RIDE OFF INTO THE DESERT WASTES, NEVER TO BE SEEN AGAIN.

Roll 'The Way of the Drifter' when you use physical motion to get what you want or when you act alone. This die is all about physical action and motion. Riding horses, climbing the side of a speeding train car, rustling cattle and swimming through raging waters while bullets whizz past your head. That sort of thing.

### EXAMPLE

*Silence has discovered that the railway engineer has been murdering union leaders and sacrificing them to an insane train god cult, thereby bringing the trains to life. When the locomotive tries to run her down, Alice grabs for her Drifter die. Attempting to jump out of the train's way is about acting alone and physical motion, so the Way of the Drifter will determine her success or failure.*



...AND EACH IS A WAY  
THAT YOUR LIFE CAN END



## DEMONIC MIRACLES

You all start with a demon attached to your soul. Each demon has one impossible task that they can perform. This task is determined when you first bind them to your soul. The demonic miracle can be anything at all, as long as it is fairly simple and concrete. When in doubt, try to make the abilities slightly creepy or tinged with a malevolent aura in some way. Don't be afraid to choose a single powerful ability. The demons are only too happy to give you enough rope to hang yourself with. You sold your soul for a single unique superpower: What was it?

One important thing for everyone to know: Demon abilities always bypass the dice. They simply happen or they don't.

The demon will happily perform their service for you, once. After that, you have to pay the price.

### EXAMPLE

*Silence sold her soul for the ability to destroy any object with a touch. When she is cornered by the town's corrupt sheriff, he brandishes a gun in her face. Silence's player, Alice, describes reaching out slowly, deliberately and touching the tip of her finger on the lawman's pistol. It decays into a rusted hunk of useless metal, as if it had been left in desert for a century or more. Alice doesn't have to roll a die to do this, but Silence now has to repay her demonic associate before she can do that trick again.*

When you create a demon, everybody else at the table decides an immoral act that is the demon's price. They'll only provide their dark miracle after you perform that action. When you do, the table as a whole except you brainstorms something even worse to be the next price. So the price for action keeps getting higher and higher as you go. The new price should generally be thematically related to the earlier sin, but it doesn't have to be if the table finds a really juicy misdeed that relates to the PC in some other way.

Write on an index card the powers the demon grants you. On the other side, write the starting price. When you have the power available (as you do to start) then have power side up. When you use the power, flip the card over to the price option. When you pay the price, then you cross out the old price, write in the new one and flip the card back over.

### EXAMPLE

*Alice knows that Silence can destroy objects with a touch and sway the minds of crowds. So she writes "The World Breaker's Hand" and "Mob Mentality" on an index card. She flips it over, and writes down 'destroy something of value' as her price. When she destroys the sheriff's gun, she flips the card from miracle side to price side. Later on, Silence sets fire to a farmer's barn, because he had been antagonizing the PCs. Alice then crosses out 'destroy something of value' and asks the rest of the table to create an even worse sin. The other players discuss and decide that Silence has to destroy something valuable to an innocent or somebody that meant no harm to Silence or her allies. Alice notes this down, then flips the card back to the miracle side.*

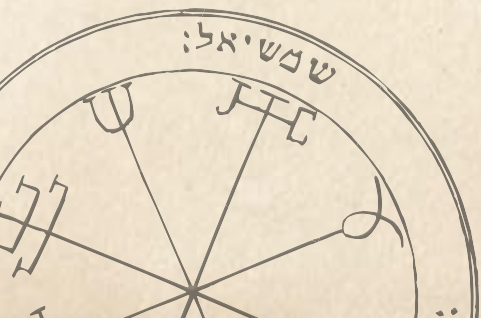
What happens if your price is invalidated before you pay it? Like if you had the demon ask you to "murder your loving wife" and some worthless bandit did so before you did. Then the group should brainstorm up a new, worse cost just as they would if you had paid the price, but you don't get the powers renewed. So if you don't do the terrible deed, then you'll just have to do something even worse.

### EXAMPLE

*Paul's character Thin Jim has died and come back several times. So after a few iterations, the table comes up with "kill the one you love most" for the current price for his demonic miracles. Of course, the town they're in turns out to be Thin Jim's old hometown, and his old lover is still in town. In fact, Jim's lover is Mayor Theophilus Armstrong, whom the other PCs have been scrapping with. Jim himself tries to keep them from harming his former lover, but Silence gets angry and drowns him in a horse trough. So now the one that Thin Jim most loved is dead, and the players have to come up with a different, harsher sin for Thin Jim to commit.*

*Everybody discusses, and they decide that he has to trap a whole crowd of people inside a burning building. Paul gets no particular benefit from this; all that happened was the price that he paid got notched up again with nothing in return for him.*

## DEMONIC MIRACLES NEVER ROLL THE DICE





## ROLLING THE DICE

To know how well you perform an action, roll one or more of your four dice. If any die rolls lower than its current rating, decrease that rating by one. (*If the roll is equal to or higher than your current rating, it stays the same.*)

Your lowest die shows how well you do. Higher results are worse, lower ones are better. On a 6 or higher, you barely succeed. On a 1, you do brilliantly.

### EXAMPLE

*Silence is attempting to appease an ancient spirit by making a blood sacrifice to it. Silence has to slice open a live rooster and bathe in its blood as part of the appeasement ritual, so Alice asks if she can roll her d4 for The Way of the Gun as well as her d4 for The Way of the Soul. Trent the GM says that's cool, so Alice rolls 2d4. Her current value for Soul is 4, since she hasn't used the ability yet, and her Way of the Gun is 3. Alice rolls and gets a pair of 3s, which is a mediocre result. It's also below her current rating in Soul, so Alice increments the way of the Soul down from 4 to 3. Her Gun rating is the same as her roll, so Gun stays where it is. Alice then describes how she tries to calm the spirits with offerings of whiskey and a slaughtered rooster and promises of a quick exit from town. Trent describes her mixed result: the spirits are convinced to wait for a short time, but they are still unhappy with the PCs being in town.*

## REROLLING

If you are unhappy with your roll's result, you may reroll your dice as many times as you like. Each time you roll, though, you check the die against the trait's current rating and decrease it if the die is lower. You can modify your description with the reroll and roll different collections of dice, so long as it is narratively justified.

### EXAMPLE

*Alice is glad that the spirits aren't about to kill her, but she really wants the spirits to help Silence with another matter. Alice takes up her dice but chooses to only reroll the Soul die, getting a 1. Once again, this is below her rating of 3, so she increments it down to 2.*

## COOPERATING

To work together: everyone who is cooperating rolls their dice. The lowest die, rolled by anyone, determines the outcome. Each participant can roll several different kinds of dice, based on what sorts of methods they are using.

### EXAMPLE

*Silence and Thin Jim are interrogating a shopkeeper. Silence has a knife to the man's throat. Thin Jim calmly tries to reason with the man, offering to reward him if he gives tells the PCs what they want to hear. Alice takes a d6 for the Way of the Bastard and a d4 for the Way of the Gun because she's using villainy and violence to achieve her goals. Paul grabs his die for the Way of the Soul. The GM grabs 2d6 for the shopkeeper. All the dice are rolled, and the lowest result is Silence with a 1 in her Way of the Gun. Alice decreases her rating in that attribute. Her way of the Bastard rolled a 6, so she doesn't decrease that any. Paul's 2 is also lower than his current 4 in The Way of the Soul, so he decreases that from 4 to 3.*

**IF ANY DIE RESULT IS  
BELOW YOUR CURRENT  
VALUE YOU DECREASE  
YOUR CURRENT VALUE**





## COMPETING

If you are opposed by an outside force (like a thunderstorm or a crooked sheriff), then you might fail in your goal. Everyone who is competing rolls their dice. The GM rolls for NPCs and outside forces that may be opposing a PC, and players roll for their own PCs. The lowest die, rolled by anyone, determines the outcome. If it's a tie, it may be that the PCs get what they want with a cost, complication or compromise. Or it may be that no one gets what they want. If you beat an NPC, then you can decide their fate (kill them, let them live, possibly change their ability or desire depending on what you're doing.)

## EXAMPLE

*The local sheriff has decided that he has had enough with the PCs just riding into town and causing a heap of problems. He and a posse have told the PCs to go, but they're staying put. The sheriff goes to draw his firearm, and Trent as GM calls for a conflict. He grabs 3d6 for the posse. Alice takes her d4 for Silence's Way of the Gun and a d8 for the way of the Drifter, as Silence is going to run for cover and try to lose the posse. Paul grabs a d8 for Thin Jim's Way of the Gun and a d4 for the way of the Bastard, as Thin Jim already laid a trap for the lawmen. He left a bundle of dynamite hidden underneath a nearby horsetrough, and he pushes the detonator to hopefully take out a few in the blast. Paul rolls his d8 and d4, Alice rolls her d4, Trent rolls 3d6 the NPCs. The NPCs have the lowest die with a 2, but Paul has to increment both his attributes down from their results of 3 and 5, respectively. Alice's d4 also rolled a 3, enough to decrease her value from 4 to 3. She decides to let it go, as her d4 can't be rolled too many more times before she kicks it. Paul decides to reroll both his dice, and winds up with a 1 and a 2, incrementing both down but winning the conflict. Paul describes how the explosion maims most of the posse and scares away the rest.*



**THE LOWEST ROLLER  
DECIDES THE CONFLICT**



## TAKING A BEATING

If you lose a conflict, the winner may decide that you have been injured. When you're injured, your endgame value for all traits goes up by one until the end of the town. That means that instead of dying or wandering off into the sunset or whatever when an attribute's value gets down to one, you would instead reach that ending when the attribute is a 2. Getting hurt makes it more likely that you'll reach the end of the trail.

Multiple injuries can raise it multiple times, until an endgame is triggered. So if you get shot, then stabbed, you have an endgame value of 3. Having an endgame value of 3 is dangerous when you only have a d4 in one or more attributes. And another injury would put you over to death or denouement even without ever rolling that attribute.

Between towns, you can remove your injuries, but you'll gain a Scar. See the section on Scars, below, for the full details on those.

## EXAMPLE

*If, instead, Paul had decided to stand on his 3 and let the sheriff and posse win the conflict, then Trent would have narrated the NPCs victory in his role as GM. The posse might have shot them both in non-fatal manners like the arm or leg, then dragged them off kicking and screaming to the town jail. Until Silence heals up between towns, she'd have an endgame value of 1 in all attributes. Which is a problem for her, as she just rolled her Way of the Gun down to a 3. Using that attribute again might be her demise.*







## ENDGAME

When your rating in a trait gets too low, your character will die or be retired, one way or the other. Whenever you have an attribute rating equal to or less than your endgame rating, then your character is going to be eliminated from the picture. Typically, this will be the result of rolling the die and decreasing your rating in an attribute below the current endgame value for that attribute. But you could also trigger endgame by taking an injury, or even by gaining a Scar.

By default, you reach the endgame for an attribute when your rating in that attribute is 1. If you have taken a beating at some point, then you add your current number of injuries to your endgame value. So if you have two injuries from two lost fights, then you'll reach the end of the road if any attribute is 3 or below. Scars also add to your endgame value, but only for the specific attribute they're applied to. If you have a Scar in the Way of the Gun as well as those two injuries, then you'd reach endgame if you ever get to 4 or below in the Way of the Gun.

Regardless of how it happens, your PC is now leaving the story. The exact ending your character reached depends on the attribute that triggered your endgame. Read the short description of how you're taken out, and then tell the rest of the table how it plays out given the current situation for your antihero.

## EXAMPLE

*Silence has been bruised and battered, so her endgame value for all attributes is 2. She's currently sitting with a 3 in her Way of the Gun. Alice tries to avoid violence as long as possible, but eventually she gets cornered by a horde of angry zombies. With no way out, she knows that Silence will be injured if she doesn't resist, and she'll die if she rolls successfully. Alice decides to go down fighting and rolls her Way of the Gun. She gets a 2, beating the zombies but incrementing her attribute to match her endgame value. Alice describes Silence firing bullet after bullet into the undead horde, then clubbing several to death with her rifle butt. Silence manages to defeat the last of the zombies, but in doing so they manage to rip her gut open, intestines spilling everywhere. She begins to crawl back to town, but a mysterious stranger appears from the desert haze: Devil John himself. John leans down, slowly, carefully and sticks a pistol barrel up to her head. He whispers something only Silence will ever hear, then he executes her.*

**WHEN YOU REACH YOUR  
ENDGAME VALUE YOUR  
CHARACTER LEAVES  
THE STORY**



## CATCHING UP TO YOUR QUARRY

This game is made to be an episodic story, where each session has the PCs dealing with a single town, and the collection of towns feeding into a larger storyline. You start with the posse going from town to town, hunting down Devil John's henchmen and goons. In each town, the Devil John has granted demonic power to somebody, and the PCs aim to find that someone. The PCs arrive and stir up trouble, seeking to find the person who has been granted impossible powers. Once that person is found, the PCs try to get answers out of them about Devil John one way or another.

As you get closer to capturing Devil John, his influence grows stronger. Devil John has a big d20 if you're playing a series of sessions, or a d12 if you're only playing a single game. His **WAY OF THE DEMONIC OVERLORD** that starts at the maximum for that die. When you are directly dealing with his minions or evidence of his unholy power (or eventually, with the demon man himself), the GM adds the die to any NPC or environmental die pools. You have to beat his result if you wish to succeed (along with any other dice rolled by antagonists). If his roll is equal to or greater than his current value, he uses the current value. If he rolls lower than the current value, he uses the lower roll and decreases his current Demonic Overlord rating by 1. So as you get closer to the final villain, his power grows stronger.

The Devil John gains Scars on his Way of the Demonic Overlord as the PCs discover more about him. Devil John's endgame rating starts at one, and his Scars add to that endgame value. Once his rating equals or is lower than his endgame value, the PCs have succeeded in locating him. The next town they ride into will be where they finally find Devil John. There, they don't have to find the sorcerer who sold their soul to Devil John. They just have to find the man himself and take him out. In direct conflict, Devil John always rolls 3d4 plus his Way of the Demonic Overlord die. If you can find him and beat him, then you'll have succeeded in your morally ambiguous quest.

**AS YOU GET CLOSER  
TO DEVIL JOHN HIS  
INFLUENCE GROWS  
STRONGER**







## EACH TOWN IS A CLUE TO FINDING DEVIL JOHN AND A JUDGMENT ON THE PCs

### TOWNS

When the PCs come to a new town or settlement, these questions have to be answered. The GM first chooses one question to read aloud and answer. Then the players each take turns choosing, reading and answering a question. Then the GM gets one more question. (Sometimes one answer makes the others more clear. That's okay.)

- *How do the people here make their living?*
- *How does Devil John's corrupting influence touch this town?*
- *What dark secret does this town hide?*
- *How is the existing order here unjust or harmful to its citizens?*
- *How does the injustice or dark secret turn the townsfolk against and harm one another?*
- *How will the situation in town get worse if the PCs do nothing?*
- *Who in this town can offer the PCs something that they want?*
- *Who in this town has a demand that the PCs cannot ignore?*
- *How are the innocents entangled with the corrupt in this town?*
- *Which PC is already involved in this town's problems? How is the PC tied to the town?*
- *How does a PC's past come back to haunt them in this town?*

While everyone is answering these questions, write down any NPCs people mention. Ask follow-up questions about things and tie them together. Ask for names and descriptions of the NPCs. Make notes on things. If it is obvious right away, note an NPC's abilities, scars or desires. If it isn't immediately obvious, watch during the NPC's first scene for signs and fill in the blanks as soon as you can. An NPC's desire should be filled in first if at all possible, so that the NPC has a reason to interact with the PCs.

### LEAVING TOWN

At the end of each town, you the player make a moral judgment about your PC's actions in the town. If you were an awful person doing bad things, then roll your Bastard die. If you were trying to do the right thing overall, then roll your Soul die. (Rarely, you might decide that your character didn't do anything particularly morally notable. In that case, roll your Drifter die.) The player who rolled lowest can author an additional fact about Devil John that they learn along the road. Maybe tell us a little story about the bastard's exploits out there somewhere.

If the PCs found the sorcerer and learned something about Devil John in the town, then you add a Scar to Devil John's Way of the Demonic Overlord. The player who rolled lowest decides exactly what form the Scar takes. What chink in Moulton's armor might give the PCs some hope of defeating the immortal bastard? If the PCs left town without getting answers out of the local warlock, then all you learn are rumors that may or may not be true.

### EXAMPLE

*Thin Jim wasn't concerned with doing the right thing in town, and Paul thinks his PC was a right awful person. He rolls a d8 for his Way of the Bastard, getting a 4. Alice doesn't roll, because Silence died in town. Carol gets a 5 on her Soul die, so Paul gets to narrate some details about Devil John. They found the one who bargained with Devil John, so Paul can describe how Devil John can only be killed by the Philadelphia Derringer that felled President Lincoln, which has now been inscribed with occult sigils and bound with demonic power of its own. Devil John hid this weapon away somewhere, though none know where.*



# SCARS

Between stories, you may be able to rest up some, but your injuries never go away entirely. After the PCs leave one town, there is an 'offscreen' interlude where the PCs perform minor tasks, travel from place to place and generally make their way in the world. During this time, you have the option to reset one mechanical aspect of your character. In doing so, though, you gain a Scar to one of your four attributes.

A Scar makes it more likely that you will reach the endgame in a particular attribute. When you gain a scar, tell the rest of the table what your Scar is and note it on your character sheet. Mechanically, a Scar increases the endgame value for that attribute. By default, you reach your tragic end when your rating in an attribute reaches 1. But if you have a Scar, then you reach endgame at 2. If you have two Scars, you reach endgame at 3, and so forth. As you gain too many Scars in a trait, it becomes more likely all the time that your character will die in unfortunate circumstances. Narratively, Scars explain why you are impaired in a acting a specific way. For *The Way of the Gun* and *the Way of the Drifter*, physical scars work just fine. you can describe how your character lost an eye, or has a bad knee that still acts up. For *The Way of the Soul*, you should describe aspects of your character that make people not trust you. Ominous facial scars are a classic, but I'm sure you can think of many other traits that make you seem more slimy villain than honest stranger. For almost any attribute, you could invent a mental Scar, such as a phobia or some sort of post-traumatic stress disorder. For *the Way of the Bastard*, these might be moral qualms or regrets about your past misdeeds.

## GAINING SCARS

When acting between towns, you can decide on one of several side jobs you wish to perform. For each, you receive the benefit described, add a Scar as listed and then tell the rest of the table the answer to the question listed.

**IF YOU VISIT THE SAWBONES,** you can remove all your injuries. Gain a Scar in an attribute of your choice. *What disturbing 19th century medical procedure do you have to undergo?*

**IF YOU'VE BEEN TRYING TO SETTLE IN AS A REGULAR PEACEFUL RANCHER OR TOWNSFOLK,** you can reset *The Way of the Soul* to its maximum. Gain a Scar in *The Way of the Bastard*. *How did your criminal past ruin your attempt at a peaceful life?*

**IF YOU'VE BEEN AVOIDING HUMAN CONTACT**, you can reset the Way of the Drifter. Gain a Scar in the Way of the Drifter or the Way of the Gun.

*How did you survive alone in the desert?*

**IF YOU HAVE BEEN LIVING AS A LOW LIFE CRIMINAL AND SCOUNDREL** you can reset the Way of the Bastard. Gain a scar in the Way of the Soul. *How did the last crime go wrong?*

**IF YOU COMMITTED ANY OFF SCREEN VIOLENCE**  
then you can reset Gun. Gain a Scar in the  
Way of the Gun or the Way of the Drifter. *Who  
still wants revenge for your violent acts?*

**IF YOU INSTEAD HUNT FOR THE DEVIL JOHN,** then you don't gain a Scar. Devil John rolls his Way of the Demonic Overlord. If the result is lower than his current rating, then Devil John gains a new Scar in the Way of the Demonic Overlord. Tell the table one fact that you learned about Devil John and how it will help you take out Moulton once and for all. *How did learning that fact get you into more trouble than you were already?*

### EXAMPLE

*Thin Jim barely makes it out of town, having taken an injury (raising his endgame value to 2) and having rolled several attributes. His Way of the Gun sits at 3 on a d4, and his Way of the Bastard is a 4 on a d8. Paul thinks for a bit about what he wants for Thin Jim, then decides to heal his injury and take a scar on The Way of the Bastard. He can still use the Bastard die once or twice in the next town, then hopefully take another scar to reset the Bastard up to 8. Paul tells everyone how Thin Jim genuinely regrets the loss of his companion Silence, and he doesn't want to see any additional folks die in his quest for vengeance. Nonetheless, this pang of his conscience doesn't stop him hunting Devil John. He just hates himself a bit more for doing so. Paul writes "Self-Hatred" as a scar for his Way of the Bastard.*

YOU CAN REST BETWEEN  
TOWNS BUT YOUR SCARS  
WILL NEVER FULLY HEAL





## EVERY NPC WANTS SOMETHING FROM THE PCs

### NPCs

When fighting an NPC or group of NPCs, they roll two dice. The NPCs start with a 2d12. Ask yourself these questions and decrease the die size by 1 for each Yes answer:

- *Do the NPCs have an advantage in this situation? (This includes outnumbering the PCs.)*
- *Are the NPCs risking something of value? (including their life)*
- *Are the NPCs using occult power to get their goals?*
- *Are they working to increase the injustice in this town?*

If a PC is attempting something that falls in their particular skill, then they roll one additional die.

### EXAMPLE

*Sheriff Oleander wants the PCs run out of town on a rail. The sheriff is good at leading Bullying others, so when he starts trying to scare the PCs out of town he'll get three dice. His posse and the entire town backs him up, so he had an advantage, and he is risking his life telling notorious murderers to leave. He isn't using occult power or explicitly increasing injustice in town, so the sheriff's die decreases from d12 to d8. He takes 3d8 and rolls them against whatever the PCs have to offer.*

Environmental dangers always roll 3d6, I think. Snakes, avalanches, desert thirst, whatever.

All NPCs also have a thing they want from the PCs. Define this as they are created. Some NPCs may want money or magical power or assistance getting rid of criminal thugs or maybe just to be left alone.

NPC information is made up on the spot during town creation, and is public information to the players. You want them to know that the sheriff's daughter is a crack shot, so they can avoid getting in a gunfight with her. Or that the town banker is an alcoholic, so that they can leverage that failing to get what they want. The only secret you as GM should be keeping is who sold their soul to Devil John, and what magical ability they got for it.

### EXAMPLE

*The local town shopkeeper knows Thin Jim from a prior business deal they had that went sour. All he wants from the PCs is to see Thin Jim (and by extension the rest of the PCs) suffer. He makes that abundantly clear the first time anyone speaks to him. The town drunk wants the PCs to clear out the ghosts that have been haunting the town, though he has little to offer them in exchange.*

Don't let the NPCs be reasonable people. They don't take No for an answer. They each want something and won't back down until they lose a conflict. If the PCs want to convince someone of something, they have to roll some dice to do so. ('Say No until the dice are rolled' so to speak.)



## THE SNAKE IN THE GARDEN

One of the townsfolk has sold their soul to Devil John, in exchange for some amount of power. Don't decide right away who sold their soul to Devil John. Start running the town, letting the PCs stir up trouble and wreak havoc and disrupt the existing immoral order of the town. Believe me, they will, one way or another. About halfway through the session, you should take an intermission. Spend a few minutes to use the restroom, grab a snack and ask the players if they are enjoying themselves. During the intermission, you should secretly pick one NPC (or maybe more in some towns) who made the devil's bargain. Choose the one NPC who is A) still alive and B) most interesting to be a warlock. The most interesting NPC may be really obviously the warlock, or it might be the one everyone least expects. Maybe it is a character that has barely appeared so far, or the guy who has consistently taken center stage. Each town and game is different. The key thing is for you to pay attention to your players reactions and feedback so far and pick a character who will be dramatic and compelling to be the final antagonist for this episode.

Retrofit their desires to explain why they were willing to make a pact with Devil John and what they got out of the deal. Maybe they were lying about bits of what they said before. Maybe the bargain didn't work like they thought it would and Devil John screwed them over. Many of Devil John's bargains don't work out as the bargainer hoped, meaning that a warlock might still be dirt poor and wanting a better life, even after they made the bargain.

Once you've decided who made the deal, you can start play again. Don't try to hide any more who the warlock is. Let the players discover the sorcerer's secret and confront him or her. That's the big climax of the town that you're shooting for, in the typical town of this game anyway. (You can always break from the formula if the game is getting stale, but you'd probably be better off wrapping up the campaign and playing something else at that point.)

### EXAMPLE

*The PCs spend the first half of the session stomping around Deadwater Gulch, harassing the sheriff and the local shopkeeper. The PCs are also interested in the widow Elizabeth, whose son had taken ill with a fever but been miraculously healed shortly before the town's water supply fouled up. During the intermission, a player offhandedly says that the widow is probably the warlock, having bargained with Moulton to save her child. I decide that they have that mixed up: the kid himself made the deal, to heal his illness and return his dead father to him. When the PCs barge in the widow's house and start interrogating her, she denies everything. She spoke to this shadowy man, but she rejected his diabolical pact. But while she denies this, the kid gets scared and summons up the ghost of his dead father to get rid of the PCs. Now they know who made the deal, but they have a murderous and psychotic poltergeist to deal with before they can get any answers out of the kid.*

**SOMEONE IN TOWN HAS  
SOLD THEIR SOUL TO  
DEVIL JOHN**





## OTHER GM STUFF

I'm just presenting these as bullet-points, when the discussion on how to properly GM this game could take up a bunch more pages. (*I need to playtest a ton more before I can give you really good GMing advice.*)

-ASK QUESTIONS WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE A GOOD ANSWER!

-TAKE OUTLINES THE PLAYERS GIVE AND FILL IN DETAILS.

-DON'T BE AFRAID TO SPILL THE SETTING'S SECRETS. TOWNS ARE DISPOSABLE, AND IT IS HOW THE PCs DISPOSE OF THE TOWNS THAT MAKES THEM INTERESTING.

-KNOW THAT THE PLAYERS WILL STEAM ROLL OVER YOUR POOR TOWN. TRY TO SHOW THEM THE HORRIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS.

-IF A PC WANTS THEIR ABILITY TO APPLY, THEN YOU SHOULD LET THEM. THEY'RE JUST ACCELERATING THEIR OWN DEMISE BY USING THE ABILITY MORE QUICKLY.





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Game design, writing and layout by Nick Wedig.

*(The core mechanic is drawn from CTHULHU DARK by Graham Walmsley, though this drifts pretty far.)*

PLAYTESTERS: Nathan Cawley, Kate Davoli, Dan Hall, Vryce Hough, and Amber Wedig.

All images are public domain, either 19th century western outlaw photos or demonic sigils from **THE KEY OF SOLOMON**.

This is still a rough first edition. There are a large number of cool additional things I want to add to this some day. I have many more rules that I want to playtest, a bit of commentary on the historical John Moulton, a treatise on why the game's mechanics work like they do, weird optional rules and lists of names. Those all have to wait for another day. Heck, I probably should go back through the text and rewrite most of it to make it easier to understand. For now, if you have any feedback, comments or questions about the game, you can contact me at [nickwedig@yahoo.com](mailto:nickwedig@yahoo.com).

