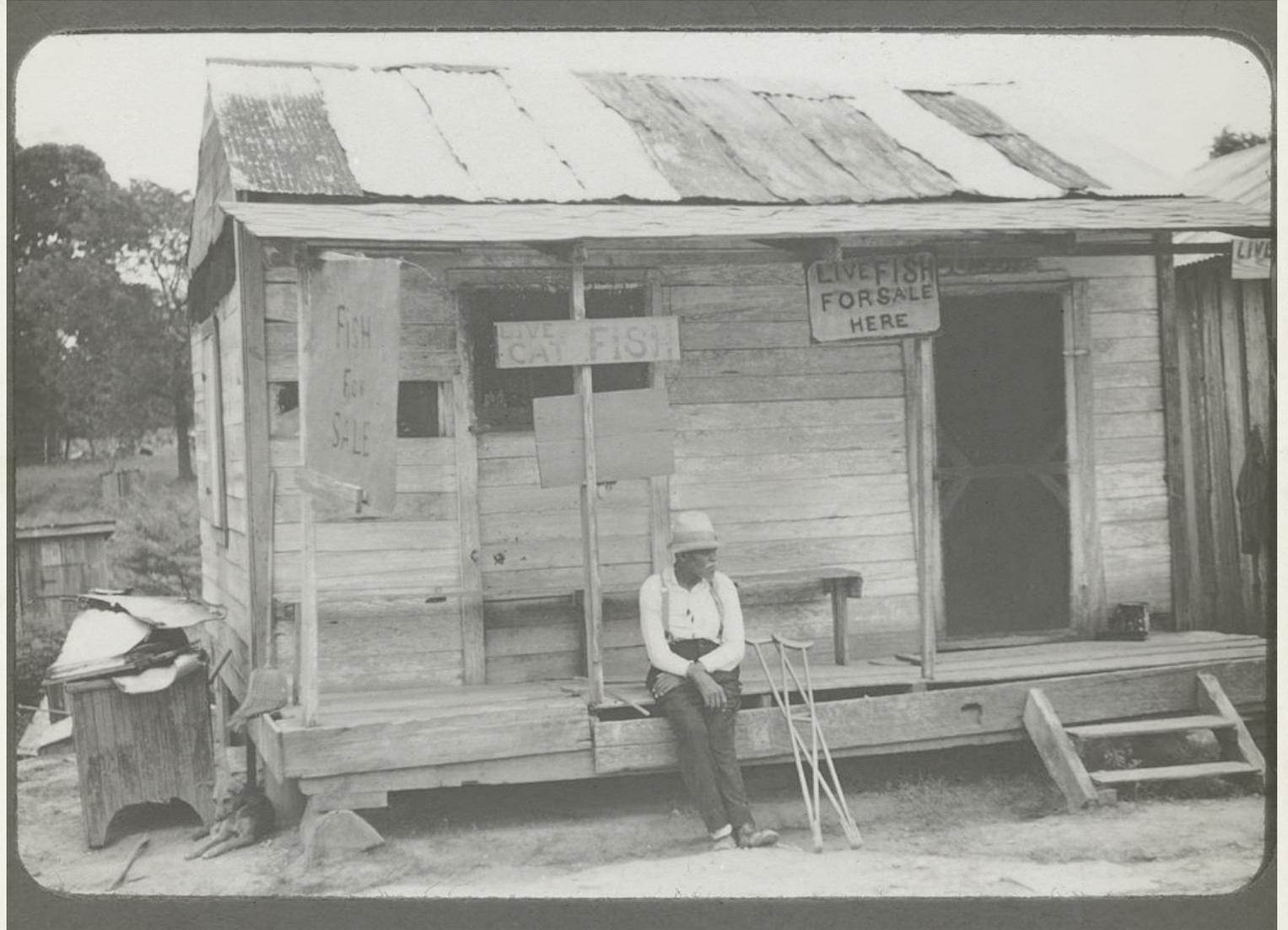


HELLHOUND

ON MY TRAIL



AN AGON HACK
BY NICK WEDIG



*I've got to keep movin',
blues fallin' down like hail,
[[...]]
And the day keeps on worrin' me,
there's a hellhound on my trail*
—“**Hellhound on my trail**”,
Robert Johnson, 1937

In 1929, the world ended. Some folks in Washington and Wall Street did something or other that meant no one could work no more. You don't rightly understand what it. All you know is that it meant the bank foreclosed on your family farm.

Now you're penniless, wandering the country. You're seeking a new home, food, jobs, anything to get by. But the farmlands have turned into a desolate dust bowl. Every town you come to is haunted. And there is a malevolent force chasing you for unknown reasons. There's evil out there in America, rotting the country to the core, and it is after your soul.

“**Hellhound on My Trail**” is a hack of **Agon** by John Harper and Sean Nittner. In this game, you transpose the epic tales of ancient myth onto the lives of down on their luck drifters during the Great Depression. One core theme of the game is keeping the game ambiguously magical: folks might talk about ghosts, hoodoo and strange powers, but it is left unresolved if these things are really magical or merely superstition and metaphor.

You will need the base game of **Agon** to make any sense of this document.

INSPIRATIONS

Oh Brother, Where Art Thou (dir. the Coen Brothers), *Carnivàle* (TV series 2003), *Lovecraft Country* (TV series 2020), *The Ballad of Black Tom* by Victor Lavelle, *The Circus of Dr. Lao* by Charles Finney, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, *The Twilight Zone* (TV series 1959), etc.

A WORD ON SAFETY

History is full of terrible stuff, including all sorts of racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, violence, injustice, and suffering. Your player characters are likely to be the sort of people on the wrong end of those sorts of problems. Sometimes it is good to tell stories about these real world evils, to imagine heroes fighting back against them. That story has value. But sometimes you want to imagine a world where you don't have to deal with those evils. That has value, too. The key thing is to know which kind of story you and your fellow players want to tell. When you begin a game of *Hellhound On My Trail*, talk with your fellow players about what content you are each comfortable with in play. If anyone has reservations on some sort of content, then you simply never have that appear in play. If you are playing an ongoing campaign, checking in briefly at the start of each session to see how everyone is feeling. You are always allowed to change your mind, to ask that you don't deal with a sensitive topic this evening. You don't have to give any explanation if you don't want to. The point of a game is to entertain its players, so if anything will hurt your enjoyment, then you should cut it from the game.

For similar reasons, every group should use emotional safety tools that work for them. These are techniques like the X-Card by John Stavropoulos or Script Change by Beau Sheldon that you can layer on top of existing games to give people tools for dealing with difficult topics. Find one that works for you and your group, and use it as part of play, in case new problems arise while you are playing. You never know when your story will accidentally stumble into a topic that is a pain point for someone else at the table, so you use these tools to help mitigate harm and deal with difficult topics.

This game isn't an excuse for you to be or to pretend to be racist, sexist, homophobic, etc. If you're going to be a shitty person, find another game to play.

DRIFTERS

Instead of ancient Greek heroes, you play drifters. You could be anyone who finds themselves uprooted and wandering during the Depression, for any reason.

Drifters can't settle down. At least, you can't. There is something shadowy and evil coming for you. If you remain more than a few days in any town, then the it will find you. You aren't sure exactly what would happen then, but it ain't going to be good. So you keep wandering town to town as you learn more and more about the thing chasing you. Then when you've finally found a place to call home, you can finally choose to face this threat that is after you.

NICKNAME

Instead of an Epithet, you have a nickname. Nicknames imply some essential part of your character. "King" might imply authority and grandeur, "Rabbit" might imply that you are jumpy and a fast runner.

FORMER LIFE

Instead of a Lineage, you have a Former Life. You didn't choose to wander the country. Your Former Life represents who you were before you became a drifter. Maybe you were a newspaper reporter whose paper went under, or an heiress who lost her fortune. Choose a domain that your former life makes you good at.

DOMAINS

There are four domains, but they are different than in default *Agon*.

	The Left Hand	<i>Creativity and Trickery</i>
	The Right Hand	<i>Blood and Brute Force</i>
	The Head	<i>Intellect and Knowledge</i>
	The Heart	<i>Soul and Intuition</i>

THE BLUES

Instead of Divine Favor, you have blues songs or folk songs that resonate in your soul. Each drifter places begins with 2 marks in their favorite song, and they distribute 3 marks between the other songs below (or pick another period appropriate song and work with your group to decide its meaning).

HAINTS

Instead of divine wrath, you have Haints, ghosts of the past that come back to haunt you. Like everything else supernatural in the game, these are ambiguous if they are actual ghosts or if they are just regrets and painful memories. Haints are tied to one specific drifter, but work the same as Divine Wrath.

BONDS

Create one bond with another character. If you knew these characters before taking to the road, record another bond with another character. If you just met up with them while already a drifter, you mark one more blues song.

GLORY

Glory still stays the same (but maybe means something different in a different context). Pathos is renamed Despair, but acts the same. Fate remains the same in name and function.

LEGENDARY VIRTUES

Don't worry about it. When your story is through, just narrate your end based on your deeds.





HARM

Work the same, but rename:

Dangerous: Mark Despair when you suffer against a Dangerous threat.

Deadly: Mark Despair when you enter a contest against a Deadly threat.

Scary: Spend a blues song if you suffer against a Scary threat.

Terrifying: Spend a blues song when you enter a contest against a Terrifying threat.

BETWEEN TOWNS

Between towns, you spend some time singing songs, telling tales and getting to know your traveling companions.

Perform Fellowship step as normal.

Instead of the Sacrifice step, you tell ghost stories about why you fear the evil that is chasing you. Everyone rolls Heart, the Strife player rolls 2d6 and takes the highest die. drifters earn Glory as usual. The best's story is also true, and they gain an Advantage die for details from that story when they finally face the evil.

If all drifters suffer, then the Strife player tells them a tale, the most terrible tale they can think of about the evil. That fear gives the evil power. The strife player gives a Haint to the drifter that rolled lowest.

After the stories, you sing some blues songs. Each drifter marks 2 blues songs.

Determine leadership as normal.

There is no Vault of Heaven to mark your travels. The drifters keep wandering until they decide to finally face the evil that is after them. When you decide to face the evil, the Strife player creates a final "town" to represent the confrontation with the evil as it has been revealed. In the final town, the Strife player can abandon ambiguity and make things explicitly supernatural... or explicitly mundane.

After each town, the Strife player adds a Haint to one drifter, representing the worst thing any of the drifters did in the last town.

TOWNS

Instead of islands, you wander from town to town. Each town is still a self contained adventure, as in regular Agon. In every town, there is something strange going on. The Strife player's job is to present the town and the troubles, but do it in a way that is ambiguously magical in nature. Maybe the Widow Cranston claims she can spin straw into gold. She might be telling the truth, or she might be a con artist of some sort.

One way to do this is to take stories from mythology and literalize them. Find a way to take the themes of a mythical epic and make them into down to earth tales of penniless wanderers. (*Oh Brother Where Art Thou?* is all about this.) So maybe a mighty king with a massive army is the small town mayor and his posse of thuggish friends. Maybe Orpheus isn't a demigod who can sing so well the rocks weep, but an old blues guitar master seeking his lost love in the worst places imaginable. A mythical monster could be a ferocious wild animal or a dangerous criminal in the run from the law. Supernatural effects could instead be superstition or happen offscreen and be uncertain in nature.

For inspiration, you could take any story from Greek myth, obviously. But you could also pull from other myths, folktales and fairy tales, or even from the islands made for regular Agon game play.

For use with the **PARAGON** system,
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