

# The Horror On Two Forks Trail

## A Call Of Cthulhu Adventure

*A coach ride to San Francisco, what could go wrong? A scenario set in the American West of 1868-70.*

### **Foreword**

This scenario is well suited for all players (and characters) of Call of Cthulhu - no matter their experience, whether they are new and have no prior experience, or are old hands who can outstare a Shoggoth. No special skills or knowledge are required for its successful conclusion and no real time frame is set for the scenario, so events move according to the pace of the keeper, though things should ultimately move along regardless. That said, it should also be mentioned that this is not a scenario in the truest sense. There's nothing really to investigate; 90% of it will be adlibbed; made up; off-the-cuff. This scenario's roll is to fill out that night, or Sunday afternoon when no one really has anything to do, though it can easily fit in well with any ongoing campaign with a little modification. The scenario is intended to be set in the American West of 1868-70, or thereabouts, though names, dates and locations can be changed to suit the individual keeper.

### **Keeper Information & Player Introduction**

Perhaps players can be enticed onto this coach ride with a seemingly real mission to undertake in San Francisco, or maybe they have their own reasons for travelling there. Initially, some characters are introduced on the first leg of the journey - a cross-state coach ride, headed from Coulterville, to San Francisco California, with stop-offs at Patterson's Ridge and San Jose - San Jose being an overnight stopover. After 10 hours cooped up in a small cramped compartment, passengers will be glad of some R&R in San Jose. Patterson's Ridge is a 1.00 pm stopover for 45 minutes during which secondary characters and NPC are introduced before continuing with the second leg to San Jose.

### **The Crew**

- Red Jackson. Coach driver. Older guy - mid 40's. Seen a lot of action. Silent and calm. Always on the lookout for Injun raiders.
- Will Cronyn. Rides Shotgun. Mid twenties. Facial scar from left temple, across cheek, down through lips to tip of his pointy chin. Immature and brash. Lazy. Often found sleeping, much to Red's annoyance.

### **Passengers: Coulterville - Patterson's Ridge**

- Some players. Assorted riff-raff.
- Collette Bridges. Late 30s. Bookish. Prim and proper school marm. Strict. Spectacles on a chain, hair pulled back in to a tight bun. You know the type. Very vocal about the evilness of alcohol and will not tolerate its consumption in her presence. Dislikes smoking too.
- Artemus Penk II. Early forties. Texan Cattle rancher. Overbearing. Fat-headed, and arrogant. Boasts about having the largest longhorn ranch in Texas. Smokes very pungent cigars. Ignores Collette's pleas to extinguish them.
- Yuen Chan & Kim Tan. Both Chinese. Uncle and niece. Chan is small and wiry and sports a long well broomed beard. Mid 60s. Silent, polite, and inscrutable. He speak very little english. Kim Tan, mid 20s. Extremely gorgeous. Bashful, and giggly to anyone who makes eye contact, much to Uncle Chan's displeasure. Kim speaks no English.

## Passengers: Patterson's Ridge - San Jose

· Any other player.

· Clifton Westwood. Early thirties. Tough and strong exterior. Clifton appears to be the successful professional gambler type. He spends the time talking about strategy in card games, and how he lives it up as an expert cardsharp. He particularly delights in a tale in which he won \$12,850 with nothing more than a pair of fours from a rather nasty game, which ended up with him having to fight his way out against all odds. As well as being a gambler, this man is something more stimulating...

· Artemus Kinki. Another Artemus, but this one's a jovial, easy-going fat businessman. Mid-fifties. Smells of violets(!). Will engage anyone in conversation, what ever the topic. Sweats profusely. Concerned over possible Indian attack. Sells Barbed wire for a living.

The journey to San Jose is no more interesting than it had when it began for some characters. The sun beats down. The air is dry and dusty. A hot wind does nothing to aid the situation. Everyone has one of two options: snooze or stare lazily out at the bleak landscape. Young Will, our gallant co-driver is, as ever, catching some well deserved Zs, before being rudely woken by Red: "Injuns...". Startled, and bleary eyed, Will rubs the sleep from his eyes then grabs his rifle, then warns the passengers.

### Important Information

Clifton Westwood is actually a Secret Service agent, and he boarded the coach after completing some business with the local, Chiricahua Apache tribe. He was sent by President Ulysses S. Grant to strike a deal with Indians, in which the US Government would purchase a tract of land which contained a rich seam of iron ore deposits. The deal fell through. The Indian Chief was adamant about not selling, saying only that, that precise area was a spiritual site to them and their ancient ancestors.

Undeterred, Westwood entered the local caves to dig out some samples, for later analysis, and there he found a temple of some kind. And in this temple sacred treasures abound. Some of it valuable looking. Gold and silver. Just sitting there. Doing nothing. Who would miss a few trinkets? Greed took over. Who could foresee that the totems he would take would be magical artefacts. And not just any hokey religious regalia that has some mystical importance attached to it. Oh no, these certain objects are used to imprison a Flying Polyp which the Indians keep entombed in the caves. Without them the Polyp is sure to escape and go on a rampage. Can you see the plot begin to take shape? Well, apparently the Indians did miss them and they want them back. Desperately. So here they come...

### Typical Indian

STR	CON	SIZ	INT	POW	DEX	MOVE	HITS
12	12	10	12	13	12	8	11

WEAPON	ATTK %	DAMAGE
Fist	50	1d3
Bow	65	1d8+1
Knife	60	1d4+2
Tomahawk		70 1d6+1
Rifle	35	1d10+3

Skills: Dodge 25%, Leap on to wagon 80%, Ride 99%, Throw 45%

Equipment: Bow, Arrows, Tomahawks, a few Rifles, knife

### Back to the action

By now the players are awake and alert. The horses are spurred on. Quicker. Quicker. Our passengers are jostled and bounced. Here the adventure gets simple. Survive the Indian attack, then head for safety. As the vehicle lurches forward dozens of horse mounded Indians hove into view, whooping wildly...

For purposes of this scene, the keeper has access to as many Indians as he/she needs. Keep them coming in waves, even if the players are able to cut them down like wheat before the scythe. Keep them coming

until they achieve their objective, which is to stop the coach so that they can retrieve a small strongbox from the baggage compartment. The passengers are of secondary concern and will be left completely alone if they simply stop and give up. Ha, fat chance!

Keep the pressure on, but hold back if the players get overwhelmed. Have fun with the action. Encircle the wagon. Describe desperate fist fights, with head-butting, gouging, etc.. Have Indians leap on board, have arrows thud into the carriage, as do tomahawks and the occasional wood-splintering bullet.

As the fight continues, all shots fired are reduced to HALF CHANCE, though observant characters might notice that Westwood is an extremely good shot with his pistol despite the penalty. Artemus, is unarmed and scared shitless. He hangs on for dear life, fighting desperately to hold back his womanly screams. Red takes an arrow to the shoulder and back, but continues, gritting his teeth. Will fires randomly and ineffectually. An Indian leaps onto the carriage, and a struggle ensues. Will is pushed off and lands badly breaking an ankle. Red pulls a handgun but is too slow and gets a tomahawk to the face, knocking him senseless, after which he drowns from his own blood.

With no one at the reins the horses plough on, hurtling forward. Out of control. Somebody should eventually realise that no one is driving. Those able to scramble their way to the reins must contend with attacks from the Indians as well as bringing the vehicle under control (DRIVE COACH or WAGON check). Red lies slumped over in his seat. Sadly the character is a tad too late, and just at that moment the coach jolts and bucks as a wheel disintegrates into kindling off a conveniently placed boulder. The vehicle crashes, skids, rolls over and is broken apart. The horses break free and gallop off, stranding everyone to their fate.

- JUMP rolls are required to leap out with nothing more than minor damage, otherwise 1d6 damage is taken.
- Staying inside and bracing themselves, characters require a LUCK roll to avoid 1d6 damage.
- Anyone free-standing or in a fight must make a LUCK roll. Failing the roll results in the unfortunate taking 1d12 crash damage. Success limits this to 1d6 damage. An impale results in no damage.

### **The Indians come in again...**

With ammunition hopefully getting low, and Indians converging in all around our heroes should withdraw, scrounge what cover they can find and pray that their death will be swift. The Indians watch the players closely. No attempt to communicate is made, and any questions asked are ignored. Others move in to search the wreckage. The limp body of Westwood is retrieved and scalped. The box is likewise found, before they leave en-masse - whooping triumphantly.

### **Shantak**

If the fight seems too easy for the players, have a Shantak swoop out from the sky and join the fray. Use it like a giant Ray Harryhausen special effect. It swoops ominously, moving in close then away. For added effect it could grapple somebody (players and horses included) in its mighty claws, before flying away. Is this excessive? Is it gratuitous? Is it a flagrant misuse of keeper impulse? Does there have to be a reason for it being there? Only you can decide.

### **The Aftermath**

The players find themselves to be the sole survivors, unless otherwise killed. Those without war or combat experience lose 1/1d6 sanity for the harrowing experience. After taking note of their situation, they find themselves in the middle of nowhere. A barren landscape of rocks and brushwood. The desert looks pretty unappealing. Distant hills being the only feature, apart from wreckage strewn all over, and of course dead Indians. This next scene starts to stoke player apprehension with desolation, isolation, the need to survive, the demand for food, water, shelter, rest, and medical attention. (Without proper first aid

or medical supplies players only regain 1 hp on a successful skill use - 2 hp if the roll is impaled. Medicine does nothing.)

Searching for useable equipment, before heading in a direction, the players find:

- Red Jackson: Colt .45 revolver, gun belt with 60 rounds of ammunition. Pocket flask of Whisky.
- Will Cronyn: .52 Spencer Carbine Rifle, 73 rounds of ammunition, Colt .45 revolver, 100 rounds. Bowie Knife.
- Artemus Kinki: Case containing barbed wire samples. Assorted paperwork pertaining to sales made. Most recent edition of Cavalier - a magazine containing pictures of women in provocative poses. Patterson Ridge News-sheet.
- Clinton Westwood: Colt .45, 33 Rounds. Pack of cards. Identification identifying him as a Special Agent of the United States Secret Service, (Department of the Treasury) based in Washington DC. A large leather wallet contains an unsigned land purchase agreement between the US Government and the Chiricahua Apache tribe.

A total of \$75 and 1d100 cents can be scavenged as can a watch on a fob. Assorted baggage contains nothing to interest the players. Light snacks may be found. Water consists of one canteen full (unless players have their own limited stock, which can be reduced further by a well aimed missed shot.), certainly not enough to benefit the party. Other stuff consists of a few bows and arrows, tomahawks and a few rifles that the fallen Indians had.

### **Heading Out**

Would you credit it? The blasted Indians rounded up all the loose horses and took 'em away. Inconsiderate bastards. The characters will have to hoof it if they want to get anywhere. The question begs: Where are they? Even if someone does the maths and calculates a relative speed and time equals distance travelled equation, they'll be no closer to safety. Patterson's Ridge may be 25 miles east... San Jose 25 miles west. Oh... the choice.

The sun beats down relentlessly. More so than before it seems. The characters are fatigued, hot, sweaty and thirsty. A hot wind whips up. Striking out in whatever direction they choose, they head out to meet the full desert harshness. Vultures circle overhead. A cheery omen indeed.

The 25 mile trek is hard, and dehydration is a problem, and with it comes the inability to think straight. Dazed and confused, the players are bound to wander off course. Eventually, when they skirt around the low hills, they see in a distant valley an Indian camp... and a little further beyond - a river which reinforces calm and relief. The river, with its thirst quenching and life preserving properties is a mirage and serves only to draw the needy players closer. Realising the river is a sad illusion results in 1/1d4 Sanity loss.

### **The Camp**

As the players summon the energy and pick up the pace they notice, on a successful SPOT HIDDEN check that there is something wrong with the encampment. No signs of life. No horses. No children running or playing. Nobody comes out to meet them. Tepees stand crooked or are blown completely over.

Closer inspection confirms it. There is no life at all. Just bodies strewn all around. It seems that the Union Army swept through with a vengeance. But no, the carnage is much, much worse. Several hundred twisted, broken bodies. Wind blasted and desiccated; and in near all cases the flesh has been stripped exposing bone. Horses included. Sanity loss for this grizzly scene is 1d3/1d6. What could have caused it?

Well, sadly, the Indians were a little late in returning with their artefacts; and as they hurriedly conducted

their Polyp-entombing ceremony, complete with spur-on-the-moment sacrifices thrown in for good measure, the Polyp broke free and killed everyone present. The vengeful entity continued its spree outside... and somewhere, out there, there's a Flying Polyp. Anybody with Mythos knowledge may recognise the work of the Polyp here.

The Chiricahua'n Tribe has had the Polyp entombed for as long as can be told. They treat it as a living god. Degenerate as it may be, that is the only reason why they haven't tried to kill it. It doesn't matter that it is evil and would kill every living thing should it ever get out. They venerate it as much as they despise it.

Picking through the remains, the players find the usual assortment of Indian materiel, and enough food and water to satisfy their immediate need which gives an automatic morale boost by way of 1d4 sanity gain. Also, while searching the camp, a lucky character may find in what appears to be the Chief's tepee a telescope. Using it to get some kind of bearing the player, on a SPOT HIDDEN check sees, at one mile distant carved stone idols at the base of some hills. Closer inspection would require a trip out to them. The idols and caves can also be discovered if the players head towards the high ground so that they get a better panoramic view of where they are...

The dozen conical stone idols stand a full ten feet high and ten feet wide at the base. They seem to be clustered around a cave mouth opening. Upon their surfaces each bears deep etchings, and those of a fanciful nature might describe them to resemble three long tentacles, two of which terminate in enormous claws or nippers. At the end of the third are four trumpet-like appendages. Embedded in a ring atop the cones are yellow eye-like swellings. (Those with Mythos knowledge might identify these totems as crude representations of the Great Race of Yith.) Also, inscribed upon each of their surfaces are symbols and wards of protection and purification, but on each statue one sigil seems to be more prominent and stands out from the rest for whatever reason - a pentagon with an eye at its centre. A lesser known variant of the Elder sign. A few more dead Indians complete the scene.

Exploring the caves requires a light source. Essentially the mines are nondescript. Gravel crunches underfoot. A GEOLOGICAL check allows characters to see that the place has a rich seam of Iron Ore running through it. As the exploration draws to an end, the players emerge into a large cavern that appears to have been sculpted into a temple of some kind. It also seems that something large has exploded out from behind one of the walls - leaving an enormous cavity. But that is of secondary concern when faced with more death. Twelve bodies of a likes seen before; stripped of flesh and broken. Looking around players discover on an IDEA roll that there are two kinds of death here. One is carnage, the other is ritualistic sacrifice and the bloodied dagger held in the Chief's hand attests to that, as does the slit throat of a warrior. The box which was taken from the coach is found here - open and empty, its contents somewhere lost in the chamber.

Indian totems such as drums, flutes and whistles, and other religious garb and artefacts abound - some of which are inlaid with gold and silver. Greedy players can load up here, and whatever their worth is left to the individual keeper.

### **What Now**

Whenever it is convenient, have the Polyp ascend from behind a rocky outcropping, with an accompanying gust of wind. It rises higher into the air, apparently unaware of the players, before streaking off, at speed in a random direction. Remember Sanity loss, for those who see it. Generous keepers may allow LUCK rolls here. Who knows, maybe everyone has their backs turned at that particular moment. Obviously the characters can't stay here for ever, so they'll probably load up with as much as they can carry before continuing on their weary march. They might stay over night however.

Either way, several hours later, they see in the distance a several hundred man strong military detachment of some kind heading their way - wagon bound and on horse back. Flagging them down and explaining their predicament Major General Thomas G. Copeland listens with a sympathetic ear.

While arrangements are made for their safe escort on to wherever they players wan to go, our friend Mr.

Polyp drops in to say hello. Soon all eyes are on it. Sanity checks for all. Men gaze open mouthed. Disbelieving. Stunned at the huge monstrosity. No one moves. Horses whinny and panic and try to flee. Set the scene then have the Polyp strafe the column for good effect. A strong wind buffets the wagons, blowing some of them over. General Copeland blinks then stirs from his momentary inaction and barks orders to: "Shoot it, Shoot it". The players may be at this stage already, and those soldiers who are able to follow their example open fire too. Other soldiers are just too far gone and will sit, drool & gibber, or run screaming into the desert. WAAAAAHHH!

Rifle and pistol fire are volleyed as fast as one can reload, however, due to the wind all ranged combat is conducted at -25. Since there are NPCs firing also, the Polyp takes an additional 1d4-1 damage per round. This way it can be killed even if the players are totally ineffectual. There are dozens of weapons to pick up and enough ammunition to eventually kill the wee beastie, but for the time being our players must do with what they have... then whenever it is appropriate blow the canvas off a wagon to reveal a Gatling Gun, complete with crank handle and boxes of ammunition.... For some reason it's not being used. Any takers? Sadly, there is no dynamite or barrels of gunpowder to be found.

The urge to use the Polyp to full effect is too great, so to avoid a quick end it is advised to use its special attacks sparingly. Or, direct them away from the players for the first few rounds to give 'em a chance. Decimate soldiers and horses by the bucket load describing how their flesh is stripped in horrifying agony. Sanity loss to see this (1/1d6).

As the Polyp is reduced to half hits it will no longer be able to keep aloft and will fall from the sky to continue its attack up close and personal. It pulls itself along with great effort, gouging a trench thirty feet wide and one foot deep. Thick ropy tentacles whip back and forth smashing wagons and whatever else that cannot get out their way. At quarter hits the Polyp attempts to flee to safety itself... try as it might it cannot lift off, so it drags itself away at speed 8 - quite easy to pursue and hunt down

Killing the Polyp will be a joyous occasion indeed, and well worth the 1d20 sanity reward. Quite soon after it has been slain, it begins to melt into a nauseating glutinous, mulchy goo. It bubbles and fizzes. Best not touch it. You know, just to be safe.

Once all is done, the survivors pack up what they can muster and go home.

## Flying Polyp

STR	CON	SIZ	INT	POW	DEX	MOVE	HITS
50	25	50	14	16	13	8 / 12	38

WEAPON	ATTK %	DAMAGE		Damage Bonus: +5d6
Tentacle		85	1d10	
Wind Blast		70	Special	

Armour: The Polyp takes minimum damage from all weapons, then another 4 points is subtracted.

Spells: None, unless the keeper is truly evil. Are you?

Sanity: 1d3/1d20

**Wind Blast Attack:** This attack has a base range of 20 yards, doing damage equal to its damage bonus. The range can be increased but it loses 1d6 damage per multiple of 20. Thus, the blast at 100 yards range would do 1d6 damage. Victims of this attack have their flesh stripped from their bones at worst, to a rather bad case of dehydration and wind burn. All victims are also blown back a number of yards equal to the hit points they lose. **Fixing Attack:** In this mode, the attack has a range of 1000 yards without diminishing. It's use is to slow a fleeing target, which the Polyp has deemed a suitable snack. This time the wind has a peculiar sucking effect, which slows the target considerably. All targets must roll their STR versus half the Polyp's POW. If the Target wins, he/she can act as normal. Failure means the victim is stuck and cannot move away that round.