



The Witching Hour

An adventure by Matthew DeForrest.



Background

Samhain: The festival marking the end of the Old Celtic year, celebrated on the evening of 31 October and into the following day. During this time, the Otherworld of the Sidhe (the fairy folk of Ireland) and the dead and evil spirits are reported to be able to cross into this world at will....

In 1798, smallpox came to an Indian village on a minor tributary of the Missouri River in what eventually became known as Nebraska.

Quickly, most of the village became infected. Soon, the dead outnumbered the living. Eventually, the handful of survivors, scared both physically and mentally from their ordeal, were forced to turn their village into a graveyard. They then left and were taken in by the Dakota. Their tribe's name disappeared from history. The graveyard, ravaged by the forces of nature, disappeared and was forgotten, although local tribes carry a residual memory of the event, considering this bend of the stream a haunted place.

In mid-May, the Brosnan family moved near the site of the old village and built a homestead. Tomás had first seen the land as a member of a Union Blue scouting party. After his stint with Union Blue was up, he purchased the land and moved his family west from Chicago. When they raised their house, Declan O'Neil, Brosnan's father-in-law, wanted to leave a sacrifice of fresh milk to appease the local spirits, as would have been done in his native Donegal, Ireland. Brosnan refused, desiring nothing more than to leave behind the memories of what he called "the dark superstitions of the Old World for the reality of the New." O'Neil, who has exchanged stories with shamen traveling between the Souix Nation and the Coyote Confederation, learned of the Little People of the American Indian traditions and has become afraid that, on Samhain (Halloween night), they will exact some kind of revenge for not having been appeased. He has been vocal in his protests of late, asking that some milk and fresh bread be left for the Little People before some evil befalls the family and has made his daughter, Brigit, and his two grandchildren, Mary and Abraham fearful as well. In order for his children to learn that there is no such thing as fairies, Brosnan has forbidden any gifts to be left for anyone—little or big. In doing so, he has unwittingly sown the seeds for his family's destruction by allowing the creation of an abomination..

The transformation of the village into a graveyard created the need for a Massau'u Kachina spirit to oversee this one-way portal into the Hunting Grounds. Some spirits of the dead Indians lingered near this portal prior to their moving on towards their final destination. The fear felt by O'Neil, however, has attracted the attention of several Manatou. Several Manatou have bound

themselves to the Indian spirits in order to cross into the mortal realm on one of the one day of the year these spirits may cross over into the mortal realm. They intend to use any mortal they can capture to being the Massau'u into the mortal realm long enough to kill anyone in the area and, thus, raising the fear level. They intend to do this for as many years as it takes to create a Deadland.

Currently, the Fear level, caused by the haunted reputation this area has among the local tribes and the fear felt by O'Neil, and his daughter and grandchildren, is 2.

The Major Players

Tomás Brosnan

Tomás (pronounced TO-mahs) Brosnan served with the Irish Brigade and had earned a reputation for bravery in the face of extreme danger. All the bravery in the world could not have helped him when, at the battle of Fredricksburg, his Brigade was ordered to participate in the doomed attack on the stone wall at the foot of Marye's Heights. He lost his left leg below the knee that day. While the horror of that day has in no way broken his spirit, it has led to an idiosyncrasy—he quietly whistles "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" whenever he works. On some nights, Brigit has heard him faintly singing one verse of the song:

*Where are the legs that used to run? Haroo, haroo.
Where are the legs that used to run? Haroo, haroo.
Where are the legs that used to run
When you went of to carry a gun,
Indeed, your dancin' days are done,
Johnny, I hardly knew ye....*

Once discharged, he returned to his family in Chicago, working in the rail yards until the beginning of the Great Rail Wars. As a veteran, he was exactly the type of man Chamberlain wanted for his rail company. Brosnan was hired as a guard and saw occasional service as a cavalry scout. It was on one of these rare scouting rides that he saw the land he later bought. He has heard tales of the strange occurrences that have happened since the Reckoning from other men in Union Blue and believes strange things are occurring. His refusal to allow his father-in-law to sacrifice to the Sidhe is due to his belief that such an act may attract the attention of some of the strange beings lurking in the Weird West.

Tomás is what is commonly referred to as Black Irish: black hair, blue eyes, and rosy cheeks. While only a year older than his wife (27 and 26, respectively), he looks ten years her senior.

Profile

Corporeal: D2d12; N4d10; S2d10; Q3d8; V2d8

Shootin': Automatics 2, Rifle 4, Speed-Load: Rifle 2, Climbin' 1; Dodge 2,

Fightin': Brawlin' 2, Horse Ridin' 1, Sneak 1

Mental: C4d6; K1d6; M3d6; Sm2d6; Sp3d8

Artillery 1, Search 2, Trackin' 2, Area Knowledge: Chicago 3, Union Blue

Lines 1, Languages: English 2, Irish 1, Leadership 2, Survival 2, Streetwise 2, Guts 4

Edges: Brave, Luck of the Irish, Nerves of Steel, Sand (2), Tough as Nails (3)

Hindrances: Lame (3), Loco (1), Obligation: Family (5)

Gear: .44 Army Pistol, Winchester 73, wooden leg

Brigit Brosnan

Brigit (pronounced as is Bridget) is currently torn between her love for and devotion to her husband and the love respect she feels for her father. She is a fair shot and her husband has taught her how to use both his pistol and rifle.

Brigit has dark red hair and fair skin.

Profile

Corporeal: D3d6; N4d6; S2d8; Q3d8; V2d8

Shootin': Rifle 2, Dodge 2, Fightin': Brawlin' 1, Sneak 3

Mental: C3d10; K2d8; M3d12; Sm4d10; Sp3d8

Scrutinize 3, Search 2, Area Knowledge: Chicago 3, Languages: English 2, Irish 2, Persuasion 3, Ridicule 3, Streetwise 2, Tale Tellin' 2, Guts 2

Edges: Brave, Luck of the Irish, Purty

Hindrances: Obligation: Family (5)

Gear: Winchester 73

Declan O'Neil

Declan is a seanchaí (pronounced SHAWN-a-see), a traditional Irish storyteller from a lesser line of the O'Neil clan. He is intimately familiar with Irish folklore and is a believer in the power of the sidhe (pronounced shee) and familiar with various folk remedies.

Profile

Corporeal: D2d6; N3d6; S1d8; Q1d8; V3d6

Shootin': Rifle 1, Dodge 2, Fightin': Brawlin' 3, Club 3, Sneak 3

Mental: C2d10; K3d8; M2d10; Sm3d8; Sp3d10

Scrutinize 3, Search 2, Academia: Irish Folklore 5, Occult 3, Area Knowledge: Chicago 2, Donegal 4, Languages: English 1, Irish 5, Medicine: Folk 1, Persuasion 4, Ridicule 5, Tale Tellin' 4, Bluff 4, Streetwise 2, Dowsing 3 (see below), Guts 2

Edges: Brave, Luck of the Irish, "The Voice" (all types) 5

Hindrances: Intolerance, English, Oath: seanchaí (5) Superstitious

Knack: Bastich

Gear: Shillelagh (pronounced Shil-LEY-lee)

New Aptitude

Dowsing (Spirit): This aptitude allows an individual to search for an object or type of thing (most commonly water) by focusing on the item sought and attempting to locate it using a dowsing wand (a forked stick is most common). It is possible to dowse "off site" by using a map and to dowse for answers to yes/no questions. If a dowser is doing so, the Marshal must determine how reliable the map is and then uses that number as a modifier in the attempt to locate the thing being dowsed for. A Marshal must be very careful in the use of this aptitude as it could potentially unbalance a game. Keep in mind that the dowser must remain focused and, if distracted, may produce inaccurate results.

Suggestions on how to Involve the Posse

If the posse is traveling from one location to another, have them see the house and remind them that sleeping indoors is more comfortable than sleeping outside. If one of the posse is a Union veteran or former employee of Union Blue, have them visit their old war buddy. (Note: Tomás, while a loyal Union supporter, has great respect for the Confederacy and, so long as his family is not threatened, will accept a Southerner into his home, explaining "If you had been there, to share the nameless feeling of the war, you would know why we two can share a table.")

As the posse approaches the homestead, they will have to ford the stream 100 feet below the house. As they cross, have them make an Incredible (11) Search. If they succeed, they notice that there are very old bones on the side of the ford nearest the homestead.

Events

Chapter 1

The Brosnans serve dinner an hour before sunset. The children are excited at the prospect of hearing some of the old, heroic stories of Ireland (As a seanchaí, Declan has been forbidden from telling these stories except between Samhain (Halloween) and May 1st.). Declan keeps telling them that they will have to wait until sunset. Use dinner as a time for the party to get to know the family and to develop some sort of attachment to them. The Brosnans are friendly, hospitable people who go out of their way to make guests feel welcome.

Just before sunset, the children become irrepressible and start agitating for a story. Tomás teases his father-in-law by asking if there are now lawyers among the gentry (the name by which the sidhe are referred to in English—they do not like the term fairy) who would punish them for starting early to satisfy a child's request. Declan ignores him but moves to the fireplace and begins to light his pipe. He asks the characters if they have ever heard the stories of ancient Ireland and begins to draw his audience in. If they have not, he says, "Well, then, I should begin with the Book of Invasions—the story of how Ireland came to be populated and by whom it was settled and when."

Before he can begin his tale, however, an eerie wail is heard outside. Upon hearing it, Declan whispers softly but audibly "Banshee..." Have everyone make a *Guts* check against a TN of 9. If they fail, however, have the maximum effect on the Scart chart be the Heebie-Jeebies (This is supposed to frighten the posse not paralyze them for the rest of the adventure.). Tomás mutters "Impossible" and strides towards the door, throwing it open.

A fog has settled in over the stream. In it, a figure may be seen, glowing faintly. She is doing something in the water. On an Onerous (7) *Search* roll, posse members can make out that she is washing a bloody Union jacket in the water. A wisp of fog obscures her from the party as she begins to wail again. As the fog passes, and drifts downstream, the posse can see that she has vanished — even as her faint cry echoes in the air.

Tomás then turns to Declan and says, "I guess you were right after all, O'Neil." Declan replies "I wish I weren't."

Chapter 2

The posse can now ask any questions they may have of the family. While the posse asks questions, Tomás begins to arm himself and make the house more defensible. Should the party ask about the Banshee (from ban sidhe—fairy woman), Declan will explain that, as an O'Neil, he is of noble blood and that each noble family of Ireland has a spirit which will wail, predicting the death of one of his household. Brigit will pipe in, reminding him to explain the significance of the Washer at the Ford, if he is finished polishing off his noble name. He will then go on to tell that the washer always washes out the armor of a hero before him when he goes into a conflict which will bring about his death. Tomás, refusing to be fatalistic, says if Fredricksburg taught him anything, it was that life always has a fighting chance (and then

mutters that it was hardly a lesson worth losing a leg for). If they take time to examine the area of the stream where the banshee appeared, they will see the bones on an Easy (5) *Search* roll.

Brigit also suggests making Jack O'Lanterns—which are supposed to frighten away evil spirits—out of turnips. These children and she can make enough to cover half of the windows and the back door. If the posse helps, they can make enough to cover all the entrances and exits. If a posse member thinks to put one in front of the fireplace, award him an extra chip (excluding Black chips) drawn randomly from the pot.

Chapter 3

The posse has until midnight to prepare. At midnight, the Manatou and their spirit friends come out to play. Their goal is to take Tomás into the Hunting Grounds, where the Massau'u will possess him. The reason for the possession is that the building of the house has meant the ford—at which the village had been located—has come into constant use, desecrating the burial ground. In vengeance, the Massau'u will attempt to kill all in the vicinity who used the ford. While it would prefer Tomás, it will willingly use anyone brought in by the Shades. If successful, the fear level will be raised one point (not to mention that the posse will be dead). The number of shades is equal to the number of posse members plus 4.

The first indication the party will have, assuming they are watching to ford, is a return of the mist accompanied by a clammy breeze. Soon, wails of pain and terror mingle with the fog. Next, the dim outlines of a circle of teepees surrounding a cold, whitish fire. Shadowy figures are seen moving in and out of the teepees. Then they gather and chant a war song which died with their tribe and they move on the house.

At the end of this process, the Fear Level will have gone up to 3.

Shades

Corporeal: D2d6; N2d8; S2d8; Q2d10; V2d10
 Dodge 2, Fightin': Brawlin' 4, Tomahawk 3, Sneak 3
Mental: C2d10; K2d8; M1d8; Sm1d8; Sp2d8
 Overawe 5d6, Diseased Touch 4d8
Size: 6
Terror: 9

Special Abilities

Semi-Corporeal: Shades take half-damage from all physical attacks, unless the weapon has been Blessed or is in some other way spiritually enhanced. Likewise, their own attacks with weapons—they are armed with tomahawks and/or stone clubs (50% chance of either) do half damage (but see below). Another eerie ability this allows is for them to become unidimensional—allowing them to slip through cracks (such as those between a door and its frame. (To pass the Jack-O'Lanterns, it is an onerous test against their Spirit. They will try to come down the chimney. The posse's first alert to this possibility will be Mary Brosnan's scream as she sees one forming on the hearth.) Seeing this occur is, of course, cause for a *Guts* check.



Diseased Touch: While their touch does not cause its victim to contract smallpox, it does, while physical contact is maintained, cause their victim to feel the effects of smallpox. The Shade must first make a called shot using their Brawling to touch an uncovered area of skin. Next, the Shade makes an opposed roll using Disease Touch against its victim's Vigor or Spirit (the victim may choose which). If the Shade succeeds, its victim loses 1d8 Wind. All skills are halved for the duration of the effect. Each round, there is another contested roll to see if the penalty is maintained. Attempts to break physical contact is requires either a Dodge or appropriate Fightin' roll (e.g., a Martial Arts block or tripping of the Shade).

Coup: The Harrowed has become a conscious carrier of smallpox and may alternately cause or cure smallpox by touch by spending a white chip, up to 5 may be infected or cured by spending a red chip and up to 10 by spending a blue chip. Entire communities may be infected or cured by spending a Legend chip. Giving someone smallpox earns a black chip and raises the local fear level by one per level of chip used (1, 2, 3, or 4). The reverse is also true (assuming the fear level has been raised by the presence of smallpox).

Appearance: These shades appear as translucent Indians, dark gray in color. Their eyes glow in a leprous shade of white. While their legs don't move as they drift across the landscape, their arms and upper bodies do move regularly. Their feet, although there, are indistinct in form.

The Masau'u is, of course, the Fearmonger. It cannot enter the mundane world on its own and needs to have a host brought to just before the ford—where the fabric between worlds is the weakest. This spot is identifiable by the pale white, ghostly fire which burns there from midnight to dawn.

Profile

Corporeal: The corporeal traits are taken from the individual possessed.

Mental: c:3d10, K:4d8, M4d8, Sm:3d8, Sp3d10

Guts 6d10, overawe 4d8, scrutinize 4d10, search 2d10

Size: 4

Terror: (Post-possession) 11

Coup: +2 to resist possession by a Masau'u in the future.

The Massau'u's Appeasement pool is equal to a Spirit roll conducted immediately before possession. If this pool is used up, the possession ends immediately. It knows all war and ghost medicine favors. Remember that this spirit is cunning and dangerous.

Solutions

While there are a number of ways the posse can survive the night, there is only one final solution—to deal with the graveyard. Only then will the Fear Level permanently drop. Even if they survive the night and defeat the Shades, the Massau'u will repair the Shades over the next 12 months and return next Halloween. If so, make sure that the party is back again for the next year—Declan or Brigit will receive a warning of the coming danger on May Day and search for the posse, asking them to return and help.

The solution may be done by closing the ford to all traffic (which the Massau'u will see and approve from the other side) or by the intervention of a Blessed or Shamanic figure directing

the spirits to their final rest. The latter may be found in the relatively close Souix Nation. The search may be an adventure in itself.

Bounty

Give the posse one random chip for every two shades defeated, a white chip for finding the bones near the ford, a red chip for saving the family, and a blue chip for defeating the Massau'u.