

# DEAD LANDS



**HELL ON EARTH**  
**Leftovers**



*Deadlands: Hell on Earth* Dime Novel #1

## Leftovers

**Fiction by:** Shane Lacy Hensley

**Adventure by:** John Hopler

**Additional Material,**

**Editing & Layout:** Matt Forbeck

**Cover Art:** Tom Fowler      **Logo:** Ron Spencer

**Interior Art:** Ashe Marler

**Cover Design:** Hal Mangold

**Maps:** Jeff Lahren



**Pinnacle Entertainment Group, Inc.**

P.O. Box 10908

Blacksburg, VA 24062-0908

[www.peginc.com](http://www.peginc.com) or [deadlands@aol.com](mailto:deadlands@aol.com)

(800) 214-5645 (orders only)

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***Deadlands: Hell on Earth*** created by Shane Lacy Hensley.





# Leftovers



## Chapter One

"I knew the monster was somewhere in the brush. I was down to three shots from my Beretta, so I had to make every bullet count.

"One of the deputies charged headlong into the bushes. I tried to warn him about the bloodvines, but it was too late—he got tangled up and dried out like a raisin before we could cut him loose.

"Me and the rest of the townsfolk were still staring in horror at the deputy's body when the creature bounded out of the thicket. The thing looked like a werewolf right out of the old fables, but its fur was matted with dried blood, and it was wrapped in coiling tendrils of bloodvine. The monster was living in the thicket, just as I'd guessed!

"The bloodwolf ripped apart three of the posse before anyone could blink. Some of the survivors eventually drew their guns and started firing, but more bullets hit the posse than they did the monster.

"They hadn't believed me when I told them this hideous thing couldn't be killed by lead. And the wooden weapons that worked just fine against regular bloodsuckers weren't going to be much good either.

"But I'd run across these sorts of creatures before, and I had this one's number cold. This apple hadn't fallen far from the hanging tree its father used to use as a scratching post. All it took was a little bit of silver in the right place. In this case, that meant getting it from right at the end of one of my special .45 bullets and straight into the center of his toothy noggin.

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"Luckily, I came prepared. I only had three bullets in the special clip I kept with me for just such purposes, but I slapped it into my pistol with a well-practiced move.

"I took aim and squeezed off a shot, but the monster was moving too fast. My first precious bullet flew off into the thicket behind it.

"My second bullet bounced off the thing's bony skull as it leapt for me. The silvery slug tore off one of the beast's ears, but that didn't even slow it down. The bloodwolf knocked me on my back with one powerful sweep of its massive arm and stood over me, ready to rip out my throat and chug down my steaming blood.

"But that gave the rest of the posse a clear shot at the thing. They couldn't kill it with their lead slugs, but even if they knew it, that didn't stop them from doing their damndest anyhow. The hail of gunfire knocked the beast further and further back until I could finally stand up and get clear.

"When everyone else finally ran out of ammo, the bloodwolf picked itself up and bounded after Sheriff Tate. The lawman fought valiantly, but the beast tore him to pieces in a matter of moments.

"I leveled my gun at the creature's head and screamed for it to stop, but it just looked back at me and laughed. Tate's blood gurgled from the beast's mouth as its eyes met mine.

"The bloodwolf tossed aside the sheriff like an empty beer can and launched himself at me again. This time, I waited until I could smell the creature's foul breath. I put my last bullet right between its blood-red eyes.

"The bloodwolf's snarl was cut short by my gun's report, and a large hole appeared in the center of the thing's forehead. It let out a short whimper before it dropped to the ground, dead again, and this time for good.

"And that, friends, was how we killed the Boise Horror."

\* \* \*

Teller looked out over the crowd. Every jaw in the saloon was slack. Though he had told a hundred tales to a thousand survivors across the wasteland that had been the American West, he never got tired of striking a crowd speechless. The tale of the Boise Horror, the most ferocious creature of the Reckoning he had crossed paths with to date, was a real nail-biter, and no one could tell it better than he.

Teller quietly turned his back on the crowd and smiled at the bartender. He could have ordered the local homebrew, which he understood wasn't too bad, but he saw something far more interesting on the wall behind the bar: a row of bottled Pepsi Colas.

"How much?" Teller asked quietly, pointing up at the coveted bottles.

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The bartender reached back, grabbed one of the sodas, handed it over to Teller, and slowly shook his head. The Pepsi was nearly priceless in these parts, but the bartender didn't hesitate a moment. He would make its price back and much more from the crowd the storyteller had gathered.

Teller made sure to look surprised and appreciative, though he had expected as much. He wiped the dust off the Pepsi and stared at the bottling date: March, 2081, the year of the Last War. Had it really been that long ago?

Teller looked in the mirror and rubbed the dark stubble on his chin. His blond hair was cut short, just like it had been in the army, but his dark blue eyes had changed dramatically since that time. Once he had been a Captain in the United States Veterinary Corps. A safe if not particularly easy job, one in which he had never expected to see combat. But in the final days of the Last War, every soldier had been called to do his duty.

"Want some grub, mister?" the bartender pushed a plate of warm food toward him.

Teller nodded, impressed by the slab of steak, white potatoes, and even beans piled on the old china. "That's more than grub, that's a feast, friend."

The bartender smiled and shrugged. "They're just leftovers. We have it pretty good here. Compared to most places."

Teller nodded and stuffed a forkful of rare steak down his gullet. It had been a long time since he had actually chewed and attempted to enjoy his meal.

"Leftovers," he thought. He often felt like a leftover himself. He should have died when the bombs fell. Everyone else at the base had. But he had been off in the desert riding the General's horse. That might have gotten him shot—it being wartime and all—but ironically, it was what saved his life when the base got hit.

A few minutes later, Teller mopped the plate clean with bread and jammed it in his mouth. The meal beat old military rations—milrats—and dried jerky all to Hell. And now it was time for the sweet finale.

Teller reached into his camouflage uniform and pulled out a Swiss army knife—a remarkably useful device since the end of the world—and popped open the bottle of Pepsi. He didn't care that it was hot—cold drinks were a luxury long forgotten here in Near Wichita. The bottle fizzed appreciatively, and Teller thought back to when a Pepsi only cost \$2 instead of a month's pay.

The soda was sweet and thick. Teller lived on nothing but water most days, but he was a soda junkie. If the crowds knew how many of his adventures started with him exploring the ruined cities for a few cans or bottles of the precious stuff, they'd likely run him out of town for a fool.

"Enjoy that, mister?"

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Teller turned on the rickety stool. He couldn't make out whoever was talking to him, because the stranger and two others stood smack in the sunlit doorway of the ruined McDonalds that now served as a saloon.

"Um, yeah?"

"Glad to hear it. We understand you're some kinda war hero. That right?"

Teller squinted in the light, still trying to see who was speaking to him. No luck yet, but he could tell there were multiple shapes in the doorway. His hand eased slowly down toward the Beretta on his hip. It wouldn't be the first time some local tough guy had taken offense at his tales, thinking Teller was bragging instead of trying to bring hope to a few desperate souls. "No, I'm no hero. Just a storyteller who happened to be in more wrong places at the wrong times than I care to think about."

"Hmm." The speaker stepped out of the doorway and into the darkness. In a few moments, Teller could make out an older man wearing leather chaps, jeans, and a thick denim shirt. Behind him moved two other men, both carrying automatics on their hips.

The speaker had peppered, full hair and a bushy, gray mustache, with scores of tight wrinkles on his sun-scorched face. Teller summed him up in an instant: He was a hard-working man and, in a community like Near Wichita, most likely a good one. The storyteller's hand eased away from his pistol.

"Is there something I can do for you?" Teller drained the last drop of Pepsi from his bottle. If there was going to be trouble, he was damn sure going to finish his precious soda first.

"Maybe. We got a problem with muties."

"What kind of problem?" Teller asked warily.

"They're stealing our cattle. We have guards, but somehow they always get past us."

The man stuck out his hand, and Teller shook it firmly. "My name's Hank Norton," the rancher continued. "These are my hired hands." Norton motioned at the men who had accompanied him into the saloon.

The pleasantries over, Norton got down to business. "This whole town depends on my beeves—what few I've got left. Especially since Old Man Holston's herd got wiped out a few months back.

"I don't wanna kill every mutant in the state—I know they ain't all flesh-eatin' monsters—but I gotta do something to protect my herd. Folks say you been tellin' stories about handling things like this before. If you can stop the muties from stealin' my beeves, I'll load you down with 25 pounds of the finest cuts of beef.

It was a generous offer. Few places could even get meat of any kind, let alone 25 pounds of fresh, uncontaminated, grade-A beef.

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Teller sighed. It was his lot in life: problem-solver for the world. Still, he was good at it, and he had actively sought such troubles since discovering certain secrets of the so-called "Wasted West."

"I can check it out. I've dealt with mutants before. Sometimes they listen to reason. Maybe I can even set up a salvage swap. They get all kinds of stuff in the cities, you know."

Teller paused for a second and then asked, "So what happened to that other herd you mentioned?"

Norton pushed his hat back and squinted at the storyteller. "We don't rightly know. C.J., Old Man Holston's son, claims the mutants at the mall did it, but no one believes that. I saw what was left of the herd, and nothing human could've done that.

"Many of the cattle had large hunks of flesh ripped off of them, and most of them had been torn nearly in two. We never found any trace of Holston or the rest of his family.

"Actually, C.J. survived. He claims to have been out boozing it up with his pals when it all happened.

"Either way, the Holston dining room was splattered with more blood than my slaughterhouse. All of Holston's ranch hands and hired guns were dead or missing too."

"Armed guards? Was Holston having trouble with someone?"

Norton chuckled, "Holston had trouble with the world. He was an ornery old cuss who thought everyone was out to steal his herd. He paid through the nose for those guards and made sure they took care of anyone who even looked sideways at one of his cattle. If you're thinking I was out to eliminate my competition, you're barking up the wrong tree, mister."

"Sorry. I've run into that type before. Seems the war brought out the best in some and the worst in others," responded Teller.

"I don't think the war had anything to do with it. Odell Holston was born mean. Whatever killed him did the world a favor. It's been kinda peaceful around here since then. We haven't had any sort of trouble until my cattle started disappearing."

The cattleman nodded and tipped his hat, then got up to leave. "I'll give you a week, friend. Then I'm gonna have to rile up the town and get 'em to help me wipe 'em out. I don't want that, but I got responsibilities here. Understand?"

"Yup." Teller watched the rancher lumber out the door. It was amazing that after 200 years and near total devastation, Westerners still acted like the cowboys of old. They may have replaced their Colt Walkers for Uzis, their Winchesters for M-16s, Indians for mutants, and their horses for salvaged motorcycles or hover bikes, but those things were only window dressing. Most everything else was still the same. For better or worse.

"Let me have one of those Pepsis for the road," Teller said as he dropped an entire box of .45 shells on the counter. He carried a 10mm anyway.

## Chapter Two

Teller walked out of Near Wichita and headed into the wastes. The town was actually a suburb far outside of Wichita—the actual city was still enveloped in a ghost-rock storm.

These days, many settlements often took on the name of the nearest bombed-out city. Some of the places with picky folks added “Near,” “Little,” or “New” to the title, but it was all the same in the end. Teller guessed it made folks feel like there was something left of the old world to keep a little piece of the name.

He could just make out the far-off city. It wasn't hard to see great distances in the flat lands of Kansas, even with the dust-laden sky. Bombed cities weren't hard to spot anyway, since the ghost-rock bombs' most-telling aftereffect was a screaming, churning, black storm that surrounded the blast site.

Wasatch Industries had first developed the new bombs. Teller had read about them during his years as an officer, and during his long walks across the wastes, he often tried to remember the things he had been taught about them.

As the storyteller recalled, the first generation of ghost-rock bombs were merely that: the superfuel known as ghost rock—discovered sometime in the 1860s—packed tightly into a metal shell and detonated just like any other powerful but nonradioactive high-explosive.

Later, Wasatch Industries, under the direction of the famous Dr. Darius Hellstromme, developed irradiated ghost rock to create atomic bombs. They had a lower yield than plutonium or uranium bombs, but they also spread less radiation, allowing a war's victor to occupy the devastated lands only a few decades later.

The storms they caused were an unexpected aftereffect, and as far as Teller knew, they had never occurred during testing. The one which now raged over Wichita would supposedly abate in a few decades, but Teller had his doubts.

The Last War ended in a rain of ghost-rock bombs on September 23, 2081. What no one had expected, at least no one that Teller knew, was that the Apocalypse would also bring about Judgment Day. Sometime after the bombs fell, the mysterious and long-rumored “Reckoners” actually made their first appearance on the planet, and it was one Hell of a premiere.

Over the years, many people in the know about such things had come up with dozens of theories about who the Reckoners might be. Despite all of that, no one was ready for them when they finally arrived.

They were none other than the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: War, Famine, Pestilence, and Death.



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A noise in the distance broke Teller's train of thought. He had on a good pair of sneakers, so he was making little noise himself. From a few hundred yards away came the distinct sounds of battle. Teller drew his 10mm Beretta and ran as quietly as possible toward the din, hoping that no one could possibly hear him over all the racket.

A cracked highway led to an old shell crater 50 yards across—likely made by traditional artillery when the USA and the CSA fought over “Bloody Kansas” once again in the Last War. Teller looked over the lip to see what all the ruckus was about.

A young woman dressed in tanned leather and carrying a spear was trying desperately to escape the lip of the crater. Behind her, a band of three men and one woman scrambled after her over broken concrete slabs and other debris.

In the background, a sixth figure screamed with pain, holding the bloody stump of a severed arm. Teller saw a hubcap, no doubt sharpened into a deadly frisbee, lying beside the howling man. All of the pursuers bore the disgusting purple boils, black splotches, and thin wisps of hair that marked them as mutants.

Teller stood up from his crouch and fired a single shot into the air. He had often found that one bullet fired as a warning could save him many more fired to kill. “Back away!” he barked in his old officer's command voice. The mutants halted in their tracks and sized up their foe.

“Who are you?” one of them growled like a junkyard dog being kept from a choice piece of meat.

“Name's Teller.”

The girl had also halted, but she now took the opportunity to crawl up out of the hole. “They're flesh-eaters!” she cried.

Teller grimaced. The word “mutant” was a loose term applied to anyone too diseased, crazed, or just plain ugly to live with more fortunate townfolk.

Teller had no problem with such people and in fact had a great deal of sympathy for them. But in some places, such outcasts had become the monsters they were supposed to be. They terrorized norms and turned to cannibalism and sometimes worse.

“That true?” he asked.

The lead mutant, a man in jeans and a scrap of an old T-shirt, shook his head in disgust. “No! She stole from us!”

Teller didn't enjoy playing judge and jury here, but right now, he had the gun, and that gave him the responsibility. “What'd she take?”

“Our whistle!”

He looked at them in disbelief. “You'd kill her over a whistle?”

“It is important to us! It warns of the Devourer!”

Teller got a sinking feeling in his gut. “Tell me about this Devourer,” he sighed.

## Chapter Three

"In the name of Hellstromme, Einstein, and Oppenheimer, amen."

Doomsayer Jon Grissom allowed his power to fade, and his brilliant-blue Chevy electric pickup died with a whine. The town of Near Wichita looked more prosperous than most. It was surrounded by a sturdy wall of crushed cars and old tires. The gates of the town were open, but the Doomsayer could make out at least three armed guards standing atop the wall. Grissom had stopped a safe distance from town, but the guards watched him suspiciously, ready to raise the alarm at the first sign of trouble.

Grissom stepped out of the pickup and wiped sweat from his brow. He was a burly black man in his mid-forties, and the power of his convictions blazed in his eyes. Like all the followers of the Cult of Doom, Grissom believed the human race was ready for the next evolutionary step. That step had been taken with the glorious Apocalypse. The mutants rising from the ashes of the old world were the proud forebears of the future. Unfortunately, the "Mutant King"—the prophet of this new movement—had betrayed his own holy cause by leading bloody attacks on norms instead of just letting nature take its own course.

Many Doomsayers, such as Grissom, revolted during something called the Schism. The purple robes draped from his massive frame were an open act of defiance against the green-robed Doomsayer loyalists.

Grissom dusted off his robes, hoped the locals realized the color meant he was one of the good guys, and walked into town. The first occupied building he passed was a shack pieced together with old pieces of tin siding and a few busted boards. On the wall just over the door was a red and yellow plastic sign that read "McDonalds." Just below that, painted onto the plastic, was the word "Saloon." Grissom smiled and stepped inside.

"Greetings, brothers," he said to the shocked patrons. Fortunately, there were few this early in the afternoon, and most were the lazy type. Later, when the more-rowdy locals came in for a drink, the sight of a Doomsayer might have caused trouble—purple robe or no.

"Whaddaya want?" the bartender growled.

Grissom dropped a fist-sized chunk of ghost rock on the counter, well worth a week's receipts. "I understand you're having trouble with the next generation."

"Huh?"

"Mutants."

"Oh. Yeah. They're stealin' old man Norton's beeves. That's the only livestock we got around here. Some army man went to take care of 'em, though."

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Grissom's brown eyes lit up and his brow creased with worry. Survivalists were never friendly to mutants. Even now the army man and his well-armed cronies were probably killing innocent men, women, and children. "You must tell me where these mutants live!"

The bartender looked around at the others in the bar and shrugged. "I dunno." It was a preposterous lie. Everyone knew where the nearest band of muties lived, and most folks avoided it like—well, like the nearest band of muties.

Jon Grissom placed his hands on the bar. They started to tremble, then glow a pale green. Soon the wood beneath them began to smoke!

"All right, all right! East of old Wichita. In an old mall. Now get outta here before we kick you out!"

Grissom smiled, gave a short blessing from the Litany of Doom to the poor norms, and headed out of town.

## Chapter Four

Teller kept the gun on the mutants while they patched up their friend's severed arm. From the amount of blood pooled about the injured man, Teller guessed it wasn't likely he'd make it through the night.

"You're pretty good with that frisbee," Teller said to the girl, who sat nearby watching. She had long, brown hair that was dry but full, and a survivor's eyes and lean figure. Her pouty lips and tanned but as-yet-unwrinkled skin claimed she was no older than 20, maybe even young enough to have forgotten what the world was like before the Apocalypse.

"Huh?" She cocked her head at him curiously.

"Frisbee. Hubcap." He finally pointed down at the sharp, metal disk where it had half-embedded itself into the ground. "Your weapon."

"Oh," she looked at him like he'd grown a second head. "No better than most of my people."

"Your people?"

The girl started to open her mouth and then closed it, saying nothing else.

"What's your name?" Teller asked.

"Too many questions," she snarled. "That's the trouble with you olders. Always asking. Never just accepting."

The girl stood up and grabbed her hubcap. The mutants tensed immediately, ready to pounce on her at any false move, but she merely shook the thick blood off the disk and hung it from a hook on her belt. Then she pulled a silver whistle from a pouch, threw it at the mutants' feet, and stalked off out of the crater.

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"Women." Teller said to the unappreciative mutants. They didn't laugh.

"All right, let's go." Teller showed the mutants how to improvise a stretcher, and they lifted their wounded comrade out of the crater.

"Let's get back to your home," he said, keeping his gun on them from behind as they grunted their way out of the crater, "and you can tell me about this 'Devourer.' Then maybe we can come up with a plan that'll keep you and the folks from Wichita from killing each other."

The group was walking past a ruined stone building when there was a sudden green flash and a deafening explosion. The mutants dropped their wounded friend and dove into the surrounding rubble. Teller was knocked flat by the concussion. When he finally regained his senses, he saw a purple-robed, dark-skinned man standing over him. A Doomsayer.

"Where are the rest of your killers?" Grissom demanded of the ex-vet.

Teller's fingers crept toward his Beretta, but the priest kicked it away. "I'll blast you into atoms!" he raged.

"Back off, nutcase!" Teller stammered as he regained his breath. "I'm not hurting your precious, freaking mutants! Just ask 'em!"

Grissom spared a quick glance at the frightened group cowering behind him. Obviously, they had not yet learned of their benefactors in the Church of Doom. He would have to educate them quickly.

"Fear not, brothers," he said to them. "I am Brother Jon Grissom, of the Church of Doom, your sworn protector and guardian as you bravely evolve our pitiful species."

"Give me a break," Teller mumbled as he sat up.

Grissom turned back on him with angry eyes. "I'll break you in half!"

Teller kicked forward between the giant's feet, saw Grissom step off-balance to avoid the kick, then quickly yanked his foot forward to sweep him down. The priest landed in a cloud of dust at Teller's feet, the wind knocked out of him. When the Doomsayer leaned back up, the former vet had his Beretta in hand and aimed directly at Grissom's chest.

"Look friend," Teller said, "I know what's going on here. I've met your kind before. You think I'm out here to wipe out the mutants, but I'm not. I'm keepin' a gun on 'em because I don't trust anybody: muties, norms, or Doomsayers—even the 'good' kind. But unless you stole that robe or just walked through a floating cloud of purple paint, you're a heretic, and I don't have any fight with you."

"It's true," one of the mutants said, stepping up on Teller's behalf. "He said he would help us fight the Devourer."

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Grissom's temper still raged, but he knew there must be some truth to the stranger's words, or the Doomsayer would already be suffering from a gaping chest wound. It was difficult for Grissom to swallow this notion. His temper had always been as volatile as a ghost-rock bomb, and it was hard for him to put it aside. That was one of the reasons he had sought the priesthood: to help him learn how to grapple with his anger and channel its energy in positive ways.

"What is this 'Devourer?'" he finally grimaced.

\* \* \*

The mutants lived in an old mall. They didn't much like being called "mutants," however, and preferred their "clan name," the Mall Rats. Teller smiled. Outcasts all over the Wasted West had adopted similar names rather than a "town" name of some sort. He supposed it made it easier to move on when things got too bad in one location.

The leader of the Mall Rats was a portly man with a short, gray beard and an ancient tattoo of a rat on his shoulder. His right arm was atrophied and boneless so that it waved around almost like a fleshy tentacle. Everyone simply called him "Jerry." Teller thought he looked like an old biker.

"We lived in another mall before moving here," Jerry said after introductions had been made. "That one was taken over by survivalists. We fought, but there were too many of them, and they had too many guns. Now we barely have any weapons left, and less ammo. It wasn't so bad for a while. We found some old bows in the stores here, then made some arrows. The game around the mall came back, and we created a small garden under the skylight in the food court.

"But then this creature came: the Devourer. Sometimes it lurks outside, among the old cars in the parking lot. If anyone comes back with food, it attacks them straight off. The monster goes after the food first, then kills anyone dumb enough to stay and fight it."

"That's why you've been stealing cattle?"

Jerry nodded. "Only it kills those, too, so we've started all this trouble for nothing. Every time we lead in a steer, it attacks. Walk in without any kind of food, and it leaves you alone."

"I hate to bring it up, but I have to ask. Did any of your people have anything to do with the slaughter out at the Holston place? There's a few in town who seem to think that you did."

A few long seconds ticked by before Jerry answered, and Teller began to wonder if he had just made a fatal faux pas. He glanced nervously in the direction of the door and fought the urge to rest his hand on the butt of his pistol.

"No, we had nothing to do with that massacre. But to be perfectly honest, I don't think anyone here shed a single tear when we heard about it. Holston was a greedy bastard who got

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just what he deserved. When we first moved here we bought some cattle from him, hoping to start our own herd. The price he charged us for them used up all of the best trade goods we had salvaged from the old mall.

"He insisted on payment in advance. Once we paid up, his cowhands showed up with our so-called 'cattle.' They were the sorriest looking cows I had ever seen. They were all skin and bones and obviously sick. One of them was so exhausted by the walk from Holston's place to here, it fell over dead on the spot. When we complained, the guards Holston had sent along pulled their guns and threatened to shoot us."

Teller looked around Jerry's home: an old Radio Shack full of unopened gadgets and gizmos. A person could make a fortune salvaging some of this stuff.

The ex-vet noticed a large box of several countertop displays of diet pills sitting in one corner. The lid had been torn off, and one of the bright yellow displays had been busted open.

"Forgive me for asking," Teller said, gesturing toward the stack of pills, then looking down at Jerry's substantial gut, "but if your people are starving, I wouldn't think you'd be needing a diet."

Jerry flushed red, and for a moment Teller thought he'd angered the man. Not a smart move, he thought, especially not when you're surrounded by a gang of this man's armed friends and you've got a mutant-loving Doomsayer looking over your shoulder to boot.

Then Teller noticed Jerry looking up at him kind of sheepishly, and the storyteller breathed an inward sigh of relief.

His color slowly returning to normal, Jerry explained. "The same blast of radiation that withered my arm also screwed up my metabolism. I'm not sure exactly what the problem is—finding a real doctor's kinda difficult these days, especially for a mutant—but the effect is that although I eat normal amounts of food—plenty of it, in fact—my body converts nearly everything I eat straight into fat.

"I tried cutting back what I eat. I damn near starved to death, but I didn't drop a single pound. Given our current situation, I feel pretty darn horrible about it, but there's really nothing I can do about it, short of taking myself out of the game.

"The only thing keeping me alive is those diet pills Toad brought back with him. They're the latest thing, or at least they were before the Big Boom. They've got enzymes in 'em that actually dissolve fat and remove it from your body. Without them, I'd balloon up as big as a house and die when my heart gave out.

"As you can see," the mutant leader said, pointing at his bulging gut, "I'm already overdue for a dose. I don't know what I'm gonna do once the stores around here run out of this stuff. Luckily, diet pills don't seem to be in big demand these days, so I should be all right for a while."

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Teller relaxed. He had been told many stories in the past 13 years, and he could hear both the pain and the truth in Jerry's words.

"What does the Devourer look like, my brother?" Grissom asked solemnly, getting back to the more immediate problem.

"It's big and fat, with dirty rolls of pink skin. It's got black eyes like a shark's, and a mouth full of jagged teeth. It's the teeth you gotta watch out for. It stuffs folks in there and chews 'em up."

"I assume you've tried shooting it?" Teller asked innocently.

"We have. A few of our best wasted several rounds on it, but the bullets just sank into its fat and did nothing."

Teller and Grissom frowned. These men had seen plenty of horrors in the Wasted West, both of the mutated and the purely supernatural variety, but this was a horror far beyond the few spectres or bloodwolves either had so far encountered.

"I know it sounds incredible," Jerry grumbled. "I thought my friends here were exaggerating myself until I heard about it enough times."

"That's why the whistle. To warn when it's coming?"

Jerry nodded.

Grissom suddenly turned and stalked out of the ruined storefront.

"Where are you going?" Teller asked.

"To slay the beast!"

"You idiot. They just said they didn't know how to kill it."

"No, they said bullets can't kill it. They haven't reckoned on the power of the atom!"

Teller stepped on the back of Grissom's robe. "Hold on, priest. I got a feeling this thing is more than just another monster."

Grissom yanked his robe free. "And?"

Teller sighed. "I think it's a 'servitor.' A direct servant of the Reckoners. In this case, Famine."

"How do you know of such things?"

"I'm a storyteller," Teller said, trying to keep the irritation from his voice. He didn't know Grissom all that well, and the man's temper put him on edge. He found himself pulling out his gun and checking its action, a habit he'd picked up over the past few years. You could never be too careful about your hardware. "Sometimes I listen to stories too."

Grissom ignored the gun and its implied threat. "So what does being a 'servitor' mean?"

"It means it's going to take more than anything you got up those purple sleeves of yours to bring it down. It'll have some kind of unique weakness. That's the only way."

"So what's the gun for?" Jerry grinned.

"It just makes me feel better," Teller answered. He brought the barrel to his lips, blew an imaginary wisp of smoke from its tip, then spun the piece smoothly into the holster on his hip.

### Chapter Five

Teller, Grissom, Jerry, and four other Mall Rats exited the ruined shopping center and headed back toward Near Wichita in the Doomsayer's Chevy. An hour later, thanks to directions from Jerry, they had reached Hank Norton's farm.

After a short conversation with Teller, Norton—who cast a lot of sidelong looks at the company the storyspinner had taken up with—agreed to give him one of his sickly beeves as bait for his plot.

As Teller climbed back into the cab of the truck, Norton called after him. "You really think this is gonna work?"

Teller flashed a wry smile his way. "You got anything better?" With that, he slammed shut the door, and Grissom turned his pickup back toward the Crossroads Mall.

"Here's the plan, folks," Teller began. "We're gonna strap a couple of grenades to Bessie here and lead her to the monster. I don't think it will kill the Devourer, but this way we'll know for sure. Doomsayer, you're welcome to try a few of your blasts on it as well. Just don't get it too mad. We don't want it chasing us, or we're dead."

"Thanks for your permission," Jon grumbled. He preferred being a leader, not a follower.

Jerry and his mutants grinned as Teller "booby-trapped" the steer. Teller hadn't had much call for demolitions training in his branch of the service—and certainly not for strapping them to the underbelly of a cow—but he'd picked up a few tricks over the past few years. That didn't make what he was having to do any easier.

"Sorry, Bessie," Teller patted the animal on its head. It was clear the animal wasn't going to live long anyway, most likely due to grazing in some toxic pond or ingesting irradiated grass. Still, Teller had been a vet, and he had much preferred healing animals than feeding them to some horror he couldn't even have imagined 15 years ago.

"Let's do it," he grimaced.

The group moved slowly toward the mall. Fortunately, they were able to avoid any ruined buildings or patches of forest that would have let the Devourer ambush them. They were in a wide clearing on an old ruined interchange when one of the mutants—a big-eared, blue-colored fellow—pointed to the east. "Here it comes!" he cried.

Teller drew up his binoculars and gazed eastward. Sure enough, a large, bloated, pink thing was waddling-rolling toward them. The way it moved made it look slow, but Teller watched with growing alarm as it quickly closed the distance. "What's behind it?" he asked suddenly.



## Leftovers

"They say it raises those it kills," Jerry whispered. The man's normally strong and confident voice had fallen hushed in amazement.

Teller dumped the binoculars in his pack and pointed to a row of buildings a few hundred yards off. "Leave the cow. We're getting out of here."

He didn't have to say it twice.

The Chevy had made half the distance to safety when Teller heard the cow wail in horror. Everyone looked back and saw the Devourer pick the thing up in its impossibly scrawny arms. Then its huge mouth grew even wider, and it gobbled the steer down in two shakes of its disgusting jowls.

Moments later, a tremendous boom sounded from inside the creature's gizzards. The Devourer staggered and landed on its back.

"Hah!" Grissom yelled triumphantly at Teller. "You were afraid of nothing!" He slammed on the brakes and jumped out of the Chevy's cab. "Let me finish this horror with the holy fury of the atom!"

Teller said nothing. He hoped he had been wrong, but he wasn't convinced the Devourer was dead just yet.

Grissom boldly walked forward, arms outstretched. Teller and the mutants watched in fascination as green energy started to whirl about his hands. "In the name of Oppenheimer and Hellstromme, in the fury of the atom, I send thee back to the Hell from whence you came!"

The energy suddenly streamed from the black man's huge hands and raced to the center of the horde. It impacted with a tremendous boom, creating a skull-shaped mushroom cloud centered on the Devourer. The fatty creature rippled and contorted, and the blast ripped through its minions like a tornado through a cornfield.

"Hah!" Grissom exclaimed, delighted by his success. Exhausted as he was by the strain of summoning the energy to power such a blast, he could not help but gloat.

He turned his head to scoff at the storyteller. "You see!" he exclaimed, pointing at the fallen creature. "The power of the atom conquers all!"

Teller just looked the Doomsayer squarely in the eyes, shook his head grimly, and pointed back over the big man's shoulder. "Great job on the little ones, radpriest, but you just pissed the big guy off."

Sure enough, Jon turned back to spy the horror lying some hundred yards distant. He felt his heart sink as the Devourer began to stir.

"Get us out of here, Jon," Teller said firmly, taking no glee in the Doomsayer's failure. He watched as the creature struggled to its feet. "Now!"

## Leftovers

"I-I can't." The adrenaline now drained from Grissom's face, all the horrors he'd seen over the past 13 years were etched clearly on his face. Despair filled his voice. "I've used the last of my energy. I cannot start the truck."

Teller rolled his eyes. "All right. Then let's move, people!" The former vet leapt from the pickup and led the others toward the nearby row of office buildings.

The Devourer ran after them, half-waddling, half-rolling on its disgusting, gelatinous flesh. As it ran, its gibbering mouth chortled and cackled, fortunately causing its fearful prey to run even faster.

"It's gaining on us!" Jerry grunted as he ran. The old, potbellied biker was steadily falling back from the rest of the group, his tentacle flapping behind him as his other arm pumped along as hard as it could.

"Damn!" Teller glared at Grissom and pointed to a closed metal door that was a rear entrance to the nearest building. "Get that door open!"

"I have enough power for that!" he said as he blasted it with a burst of irradiated energy. The others streamed in behind him.

"Upstairs," Teller said. "It's too big to climb stairs."

The group had one last look at the Devourer trundling after them before they ascended the three flights of stairs that took them to the top of the building.

## Chapter Six

Six hours later found the group sitting atop the building's roof in near-dusk.

"We can't sit here forever," Jerry said quietly to Teller. "How much longer you plan on staying up here?"

"I don't know. We haven't seen the thing since we got up here. That means it's probably waiting down there somewhere, starving us out. That's its nature. So unless you wanna challenge it to another footrace?"

Jerry shook his head. "No. But maybe I ought to. Give the rest of you a chance to slip away."

Teller gave the Mall Rat leader a smile of admiration. Mutant or no, he was a true leader. The ex-vet was determined to figure another way out of this situation though. He didn't want anyone sacrificing himself—not for him or anybody else.

"Servitors are invulnerable to most everything," Teller explained. "You gotta be real clever to destroy them for good. Most of them have a specific weakness. We just need to figure out what this one's weakness is. This critter's got a Hell of an appetite and some vicious claws. Maybe if..." Teller suddenly had an idea.

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"I've heard stories that say servitors were once people. People who did something that gave the Reckoners an opening to worm a way into their souls. These stories say that if you can figure out who the servitor was, you can often use that information to discover it's weakness.

"I think I may know who our fat friend down there is. Jerry, we've got to get back to town."

\* \* \*

Jon had rested enough to start the pickup again, but the only way he could get to the truck would be if someone else created a diversion. Jerry and the Mall Rats volunteered for that. As soon as the thing showed its ugly head, they'd pepper it with automatic fire—wasting the last of their priceless ammo—and hopefully draw its attention.

The Doomsayer carefully walked to the edge of the three-story building and looked out. No sign of the Devourer. Jon nodded at the others, then crawled out over the side, his only tether a rotting firehose held by Jerry and the mutants. Teller had already slipped inside the building and was waiting to jump out a second-story window on the other side, once the Chevy pulled up.

Grissom descended rapidly. He didn't care to be dangled slowly while the monster raked him with its vicious claws. The Doomsayer landed on his feet, slipped out of the firehose, and started running as hard as he could toward the pickup.

Nothing followed.

\* \* \*

Teller walked quietly down to the building's second floor. There was no sign of the creature. Finally he found a broken window just a few feet above a semi with a burned-out cab. He figured he could jump down from the window onto the trailer easily enough. From there, he was sure he could make it to the ground.

Before he could move, though, Teller heard the squealing of tires off in the distance. A tricked-out 4x4 sped into the mall's outer access road from the main highway.

Three young men stood in the back of the cab, looking out over the spotlights mounted up top. A man in a dirty, white cowboy hat sat alone in the driver's seat. He looked wide enough to need the room to himself.

One of the riders slugged back the last of a beer and tossed the empty bottle back over his shoulder. The green glass shattered against the worn asphalt. Another bottle followed out of the driver's window soon after.

Teller watched in utter amazement as the 4x4 screeched to a halt just past the truck, right where he had been hoping the Doomsayer would be to pick him up. What was taking Jon so damned long?

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"Hey there, mister mutie!" shouted one of the men in the back of the truck. The others seemed to think this was hilarious, and they dissolved into a bunch of belly laughs that shook the truck on its suspension.

Finally the driver managed to compose himself. Wiping tears of laughter from his eyes with a fat finger, he poured himself out of the jacked-up cab and slid to the ground. Relieved of his weight, the truck immediately stopped looking as lopsided as it had been.

"I'm not a—" Teller began.

The fat man drew his gun and fired off a loose shot in Teller's general direction. The taleteller shut up.

The fat man grinned, tucking a thumb behind a big, brass belt buckle that looked like it might break from the strain it was under. The initials C.J. gleamed brightly from the buckle.

"I don't really care who you are, mister, mutie or not. I don't care if you've got three nipples or twelve arms or your bald scalp's blue under that hat you're wearing." He took a moment to blow the smoke from the barrel of his gun. He grinned up at Teller for a drunken moment before continuing on.

"The fact is you're hanging out here in mutie-town, and in my book that makes you a mutie." This statement was greeted with cheers from the fat man's friends. He turned around to grin at them for a moment before he continued on.

"And the last chapter in my book says, 'The only good mutie is a dead mutie!'"

His friends roaring behind him, the man lifted his gun again and took aim in Teller's direction. The barrel weaved erratically, but Teller didn't trust the fool to not get off a lucky shot.

"Hold it right there, would you?" he shouted down at the drunks. The fat man seemed intrigued enough to let his gun's sights wander off to the side.

Teller breathed an inner sigh of relief and pressed on. "It doesn't matter who I am. The fact is your lives are all in terrible danger!"

That got a big guffaw from the fat man. His friends joined in, although not with the same gusto. "What the Hell kinda line o' bull are you tryin' to feed us, mister?"

"You've heard of the Devourer?" Teller asked. Recognition flashed on each of their faces. The fat man's smile nearly split his face in two, but the others shot each other furtive glances instead.

"Why sure!" the fat man shouted.

"Well he's right here!" Teller stated flatly, spreading his arms wide.

"I don't see him anywhere," the fat man said, looking under the truck and to his left and right. "Are you absolutely sure 'bout that?"

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The man's tone was driving Teller nuts. He half thought about letting the Devourer have these jackasses, but they were between him and his way out of here.

"Look," he said, letting his irritation show, "I don't really care if you believe me or not. I'm getting the Hell out of here, and I suggest you and your buddies do the same."

With that, Teller leapt out of the window and onto the top of the semi's trailer. His right leg went straight through the trailer's brittle roof like paper, but his left found a still-solid crossbrace, keeping him from falling through.

The yokels found his predicament absolutely hilarious. One of the men in the back of the truck actually spit beer out of his nose.

Teller was thinking about going for his gun and blowing the drunken idiots away when he realized that his right foot was caught in something spongy inside of the truck. He twisted his boot out of it slowly, regaining his footing.

Balancing on the support beam, Teller knelt down and looked into the fresh hole. Inside he saw a large mass of something pink and rubbery. For a moment he thought he'd landed on a truck full of fiberglass insulation. Then he realized what it was.

"Oh sh—"

Suddenly the sides of the trailer burst open, and rolls of pinkish fat squirted out from between the vertical support beams. Two lanky arms shot out from beneath the roof and grabbed for Teller. The storyteller felt the trailer's roof rise, and he went with it, riding it like a catapult up and over the creature's flailing arms. He landed hard behind the trailer, rolled with the impact, and came up running.

The Devourer stepped up to its full height, shredding the trailer. It turned and glanced after Teller before focusing its attention on the men in the 4x4. The three in the truck's bed were shaking like leaves on a tree.

The fat man up front just stood there grinning up at the Devourer like Santa had come early this year. Teller glanced back over his shoulder, and the sight stopped him in his tracks.

The Devourer looked down at the men in the truck, then to the fat man standing there in front of them, his gun dangling loosely in his hand. It pulled itself out of the remains of the trailer and stepped slowly up to the fat man.

The blubbery beast stopped dead in front of the fat man, towering over him. Its foul breath blasted off the man's battered hat, and his greasy hair fluttered in the wind.

Behind the fat man, his friends leapt into the cab of his 4x4 started it up, and peeled off in a cloud of exhaust and burning rubber.

The fat man just kept looking up at the Devourer, apparently transfixed by the thing's multiple eyes. "Nah, you're not gonna

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hurt me, now, are ya, big fella?" With a wide grin, he patted his bulging belly. "You wouldn't harm one of your own."

The Devourer reached down with its long, spindly arms and wrapped them almost tenderly around the fat man's shoulders. Then, with a swift move, it bent down and stuffed the fat man into its mouth and started chewing.

Teller had been watching the whole thing like it was some kind of TV show, detached and amazed by the whole event. The fat man's muffled screams snapped the tale-spinner out of it.

"Oh, dammit! No!" he yelled at the beast.

At Teller's shout, the Devourer returned its attention to him. It stuffed the fat man's legs into its bloody maw, smacked its lips, and trundled after the ex-vet.

Teller sprinted off at top speed across the tarmac, toward another office building in the mall's outer ring. He darted in and out between abandoned cars, but it was no use. The Devourer just rolled right on over the tops of them as if they weren't there.

One of the creature's huge claws reached out and almost had Teller by the straps of his backpack when gunfire resounded from the rooftop of the building behind it. It was Jerry and his Mall Rats, wasting their precious bullets on a monster they could not kill. Still, the barrage slowed the Devourer down a few steps and gave Teller another few moments of life.

"Duck!" came a booming voice from ahead. It was Grissom. Teller could see the Doomsayer standing off in the distance with his arms outstretched and green energy swirling about them. He was about to let loose the kind of blast that had destroyed the Devourer's minions. If Teller was caught in the explosion, he would almost certainly be killed as well.

He dove around a car and huddled behind the tall cement base of a nearby streetlight just as a streak of light raced by and slammed into the Devourer. Again the skull-shaped mushroom cloud accompanied a tremendous boom, cratering the ground, and shaking bricks loose from the closest buildings.

A nearby car slammed up against the lamppost, but the base held, and Teller was fine. When he looked up, he saw the hideous monster roll backward, tumble over its own fatty guts, and lay still.

Teller stood there stunned for a moment. Then a bullet splattered into the pavement next to him. He looked up and saw Jerry waving him on. Teller couldn't hear the mutant leader's shouts—his ears were still ringing from the Doomsayer's blast—but when he saw the monster begin to stir, he didn't need any more urging.

The ex-captain ran as fast as his feet would carry him, praying that he could reach Grissom and his truck in time. He couldn't believe what a sweet sound the Chevy's electric engine made as it whined to life.

## Chapter Seven

Norton and the other people of Near Wichita quickly confirmed Teller's suspicions. Not one of them had a single good thing to say about Odell Holston other than that he was dead, survived only by C.J. Holston, his worthless bully of a son.

"Wait a minute," Teller said to Norton. "Is he a big, fat bugger with a black 4x4?"

"That's him," Norton nodded.

Teller smiled grimly and let Norton continue.

Unfortunately, nothing the rancher or anyone else told Teller provided him with any clues as to the creature's weakness.

Odell Holston had become something of a hermit during the last few years of his life, and the townspeople were more than happy to not have to deal with him. If Teller was right, and Holston had become the Devourer, the storyteller was going to have to go to the Holston ranch to find the answers he needed.

The ex-soldier rejoined Grissom in the truck. As they drove toward Holston's spread, Teller recounted to the Doomsayer the stories the townsfolk had told him.

According to the people of Near Wichita, Holston had been completely ruthless when it came to his herd. He maintained a small army of hired gunmen to protect his ranch from would-be rustlers, and they had instructions to shoot anyone who strayed too close to the place.

When starving groups of refugees stopped at his ranch during the Last War to beg for food, Holston demanded payment up front in gold or trade goods. No goods, no food. If the refugees tried to force their way onto the ranch, the guards shot them.

A few of the townspeople said that Holston had even gone as far as taunting groups he believed had gold and were just holding out on him. He would set up a grill, cook steaks, and then sit down to a small feast right in front of them. He gave the scraps to his dogs.

Grissom gave out a low whistle when Teller finished. "If your theory about servitors once being human is right, I'd say he sounds like our boy. What do you hope to find at his ranch?"

"To be honest, I'm really not sure, but I'll know it when I see it."

"Let me get this straight. We're going to what could possibly be the home of a monster we can't kill, to look for some unknown object—in the dark, I might add—with the hope that this unknown thing just *might* be able to kill the beast."

"You got it."

"I don't want to hear any more remarks out of you about Doomsayers being crazy."

"Hey, no one forced—"

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The pair's conversation ended abruptly as the truck stopped at the edge of the Holston property. The vehicle's headlights revealed a high chainlink fence topped by a double coil of razorwire. A portion of the fence had been knocked down and trampled into the ground. The unmistakably large footprints of the Devourer could be clearly seen in the dirt.

"Oh boy."

\* \* \*

Teller and Grissom got out of the truck near the main house.

"Holston had a heck of a spread," observed Grissom as he looked over the enormous ranch-style structure.

"That he did," agreed Teller. "Hey, do me a favor this time. If we run into trouble, save enough of your glow juice to get the truck going."

The Doomsayer's glare went unnoticed in the rapidly gathering gloom.

The pair entered the house and began searching with the aid of Teller's flashlight. A few minutes later, the duo stopped at the entrance to the main dining room. It looked as if a small twister had touched down in the room. The tables were overturned, the chairs were smashed, and the floor was covered with a layer of broken glasses and plates. A charred and decaying side of beef hung on a spit in the enormous fireplace which took up most of the far wall.

As Teller's light played over the walls, he saw brown stains which he knew could only be one thing: dried blood. The sliding glass doors leading to the patio behind the house were shattered outward. "Looks like we've come to the right place," he muttered.

Teller and Grissom poked among the rubble for a few moments without finding the object of their quest. Despite all of the blood on the walls, they found no trace of any bodies.

The two searchers moved on into an enormous study just down the hall from the dining room. A large mahogany desk sat in front of the window at the far end, and a fat leather chair squatted behind that.

"Let's see what kind of records Holston kept," said Teller as he headed for the desk. He only made it half way across the room before a scratching noise caused him to stop in his tracks. He put out his arm to stop Grissom.

"What gives?"

"SHHH!"

The sound was coming from behind the desk. Teller drew his pistol and slowly advanced.

A woman in her late fifties erupted from her hiding place behind the desk. Teller brought his pistol and his flashlight up as one and pointed them at her face. Her right cheekbone had been smashed in, and the skin on that side of her face hung in tatters. Her lips pulled back in a feral snarl as the light hit her.



She lunged toward the storyteller, and his pistol boomed twice. The woman collapsed to the floor with a puckered hole in her forehead.

"God, I hate walkin' dead," said Teller, holstering his pistol.

"Yeah, well give me a little more warning next time. I could have saved you some ammo," responded Grissom.

Teller began rifling through the drawers of the desk looking for a clue.

"I guess that was his wife," said Grissom as he picked up a small, framed picture from the desk. The Doomsayer held it out for Teller to look at. The woman in the picture did resemble the one the vet had just shot. She stood next to a tall, thin man wearing a cowboy hat. The expression on his face could have soured fresh milk.

The rad priest plopped down into the wide, leather chair behind the desk and watched Teller continue his search.

"You know, as expensive as this chair looks, it's not very comfortable,"

Teller turned toward Grissom and shined his light in the Doomsayer's face. "I'm sorry, I'll be sure to request better accommodations next time."

Grissom threw up his arm to shield his eyes as he leaned back in the chair. To his surprise, the chair quickly became unbalanced, and the protector of the next generation found himself flat on his back. He scrambled to his feet, his hands glowing green with energy.

"Don't you ever do..." Grissom's angry exclamation trailed off as he noticed Teller wasn't paying him any attention. The vet was staring thoughtfully at the overturned chair.

"Take a look at that," he said, handing over the flashlight.

Grissom played the light over the chair. The bottom of the chair was a solid steel plate almost a half inch thick. One-inch-wide metal rods were welded to the plate and extended up into the arms and back of the chair.

"Who sat in that thing? Moby Dick?" asked Grissom.

"Exactly," responded Teller. He turned to the desk and grabbed the picture Grissom had shown him. "Everyone in town described Holston as thin and lanky, and this picture supports that. So why would someone like that need a chair like that? I think I know what we're looking for."

Teller began pulling drawers from the desk and spilling their contents on the floor.

"Care to enlighten me?" asked Grissom.

"No."

Teller's light flashed over a small, yellow box among the junk on the floor.

"Got it! Let's get out of here and back to the mall. We've got some shopping to do."

## Chapter Eight

"He saved your life!" the boy said.

"No, he saved the muties' lives! I would've slain them all if they'd messed with me." Tasha looked around the ramshackle house that was her tribe's home. There were 10 of them now, all 20 years old or less. They'd all been children when the bombs fell. Adults, the "olders," were responsible for what had happened, and Tasha and the others wanted nothing to do with them. The residents of Near Wichita called the tribe "savages." It was a name the youths had proudly adopted.

"Still, he might be able to save Cindy." Rex, the eldest of the group, pointed to a 14 year-old girl lying on a bed of hides and scavenged blankets. She had contracted radiation sickness—the glogs—and none of the savages knew how to save her.

Tasha looked around at the others. Their decision had been made. Tasha stood and planted the butt of her spear in front of her. "Okay, I'll find him. But don't expect any miracles. And if he causes me any problems, I'm sticking him."

\* \* \*

Grissom drove his pickup right up to the doors of the mall, and he and Teller ran inside. The mutants weren't too happy about the pair coming back without Jerry and the others, but Teller was the most persuasive bastard the Doomsayer had ever seen. A few minutes later found the two of them rummaging around in Jerry's home.

\* \* \*

Tasha stared at the ruined building. She had followed the tracks of Grissom's truck to the outskirts of the mall, but they vanished into the parking lot near this place. Several bodies lay in the rubble, twisted and broken as if they had fallen with the building as it collapsed. She recognized one of them, the leader of the mutants, an older named Jerry. Teller was not among them.

Tasha nosed around a bit more and caught Teller's tracks heading southwest before he got into a vehicle again. Just behind that, Tasha discovered another set of tracks, though it took her a while to recognize them as such. They looked like someone had rolled a huge sack of liquid over the earth. When she eventually deciphered the pattern, she realized they headed southwest for a short distance—no doubt chasing Teller's vehicle—but then suddenly veered southeast—straight toward her tribe.

\* \* \*

"You really think this will work?" Grissom grumbled as they each dragged heavy bags out of the mall.

"I have no idea. But it sure feels right."

"That's great." Grissom threw his bag into the back of the

## Leftovers

pickup, then tossed Teller's in as well. "And do you really think you're gonna get it to eat another cow?"

"No. It's smarter than that. We'll have to find something else."

"What do you suggest?"

"Leftovers."

"Huh?"

"See, this creature serves Famine, right? So it's trying to starve everyone to death. Remember, it only attacked the Mall Rats when they were bringing food back. When it caught them, it ate up all the food first, then attacked anyone unlucky enough to hang around trying to fight it."

Grissom climbed in the cab of his truck, spun his fuzzy dice for luck, and shook his head. "Where to?"

Teller climbed in the passenger seat. "Near Wichita. We gotta persuade the folks to make us dinner."

\* \* \*

Tasha couldn't believe her eyes. There was blood everywhere. There were no bodies, but she could only believe that her entire tribe was dead.

The monster had struck while she was away looking for the older. It was his fault. This monster had never bothered them before. Like all the adults that destroyed the world, he came and stirred something up. He couldn't leave well-enough alone, and now her entire tribe had paid for it.

Tasha dipped her spear's tip in her friends' blood, then headed north.

\* \* \*

"You again?" Hank Norton and his ranch hands were loaded for bear. They were ready to hunt.

"Those won't do you any good, Mr. Norton. The mutants are only stealing your cows 'cause there's something bigger out there keeping 'em from finding food."

Norton cocked his head inquisitively. "Whaddaya mean?"

"Some kinda monster. I think it's a servitor of Famine."

"A what?"

"Never mind. It's something big. Bigger than you can kill with those," Teller pointed to the ranchers' guns.

One of the ranch hands leaned forward "I tol' you I saw somethin' out there that night."

Hank ignored the man. It was obvious they had some notion there was more to this whole business than simple rustling. Unfortunately, Teller knew they probably knew little of the Reckoners and their minions, so to them it was just another horror of the Wasted West to be hunted down and killed. "Son, this here's a 12-gauge shotgun loaded with slugs. I ain't seen nothin' in all my 52 years that couldn't be brought down with it."

"You need to get out more," Grissom chimed in.

Teller shot the Doomsayer an angry look. Talking to people

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was a delicate skill, and the ex-vet didn't want help. "Now you have, Mr. Norton. We chucked three grenades down the thing's gullet and barely gave it heartburn. My friend here hit it with an explosion big enough to nuke a semi, and it still kept coming. Those pop guns won't do any more than attract its attention."

Hank squinted, sizing up the storyteller.

Teller saw the doubt in Hank's eyes and struck while the iron was hot. "We've got a plan, but we need a little more help. We need you and the other townfolk of Wichita to make a feast."

"What? I done gave you a steer! What are you doing? Feedin' the damn muties?"

"Look, Mr. Norton. There's a certain logic to killing things like this, but I can't really explain it to you. I think I know a way to finish it, but the only way to make it work is to draw it out and stuff it full of food. The two bits of jerky and one flat soda I've got in my pack won't do it."

Hank rubbed his chin. "You want us to pony up a couple hundred dollars worth of chow on a plan you don't even know will work?"

"That's right. Or you can go out and blow a couple hundred dollars worth of bullets on it just before it eats you instead."

"You just need some food cooked up?"

"No," Teller paused nervously. "There's more. We gotta invite the mutants over to eat with you. This thing is mostly after them right now, so we have to invite them over to insure it'll follow."

"You want us to cook up a bunch of food *and* share it with muties? Son, you've got to be plumb loco! Why, half the folks here'd just as soon shoot 'em as let 'em lick their plates."

"Then we'll be killing two birds with one stone. There's not much left of this world, and if people can't get together to fight the bad guys, we're all going to die. Now, I know you're one of the good guys. If you weren't, you wouldn't have asked me to fix things before the rest of the town started a war. So let's quit talking and get to cooking."

Grissom watched anxiously. He'd channeled too much radiation that day. If the ranchers turned ugly, he wouldn't be of much help in a fight.

Fortunately, Teller was damn persuasive. It wasn't so much what he said as how he said it. Grissom thought he'd make a damn fine Doomsayer.

Hank Norton raised his shotgun—and put it over his shoulder. "Slaughter a beeve, boys. Then head on into town and tell 'em to start cookin'. Company's comin'!"

\* \* \*

Teller got to the ruins an hour or so after Tasha had left. Both he and Grissom were heartbroken to see buzzards already pulling apart what was left of Jerry's mangled corpse.

"That's gonna make it hard to get the rest of the muties to the

## Leftovers

feast," Grissom sighed.

Teller nodded. He was deadly serious now. "Let's go shopping."

"Where's Jerry?" the mutie with the assault rifle asked.

"Jerry's dead."

Grissom didn't think it was such a hot idea to tell the mutants their leader was dead. He knew the mutant mentality better than Teller, and telling them he'd gotten their leader killed wasn't going to win him any points.

The mutants looked at each other with a mixture of loss and growing anger.

Teller had paused just long enough. "He gave his life trying to stop the Devourer. And maybe bring you and the people of Near Wichita together in the process."

"Norms?" a one-eyed mutie said. "We don't want nothin' to do with 'em." Another mutie, one with no mouth, nodded his head and clanged an old machete off the wall in anger and agreement.

Grissom stepped forward. It was his turn. "Fate and the power of the atom have blessed you, my friends. As it has blessed me." The giant pulled his robe down around his waist, revealing impossibly thick flesh. Spiny cords rippled beneath, making it look like coils of rope were lashed about his ribcage just under his ebony skin.

"The Cult of Doom says we are the chosen. Our founder, Silas Rasmussen, was corrupted by the very energy that gave him power. But before that, when he was as pure as weapons-grade uranium, he realized the unfortunate norms had failed to evolve to the next level. The rest of us, the so-called mutants, are the true inheritors of the future. We must not hate the norms, for they are doomed. We must pity them, and protect them, for they are our ancestors."

Teller cocked an eyebrow. He'd heard Doomsayers—both loyal and otherwise—talk before, and it never failed to amaze him just how looney they were. Still, the mutants here were beginning to calm down.

"Your leader, Jerry," Grissom continued, "realized this. Before he passed on, he told us that we must make peace with the norms of Wichita and defeat this Devourer, else we would all be doomed, and your precious legacy would not be passed on." It was a lie, but Jon knew Jerry would have understood.

Teller stepped up once again. "The norms have already agreed to help. They're preparing a feast in your honor—and to help draw out the Devourer. If everything goes well, you'll all get to fill your bellies before the thing shows up."

"And what are you going to do then?" the one-eyed mutant asked.

"Then we're gonna send it back to Hell," Grissom answered.

## Chapter Nine

Ten mutants rode in the back of Grissom's neon-blue pickup. Teller and the Doomsayer rode in the cab, and the rest of the Mall Rats, about 20 individuals, followed behind. The town of Wichita was walled, and before the gates had even been opened, the starving mutants could smell cooking beef, vegetables, and other homemade food they'd long forgotten existed.

A sentry on the wall signaled behind himself, and the gates drew open. Teller saw scores of townsfolk, some happy, most cautious, others terrified. He also noticed a few quiet individuals in distant windows, no doubt armed and ready to fire if the mutants caused any trouble. Those on the ground were gathered about several old picnic tables covered in plates piled high with delicious food.

"Hurry up, and get what you can, folks. That food's too valuable to waste. We'll let the monster have the leftovers. And remember, no dessert."

One woman—Teller knew her to be Jerry's widow—stepped forward. Hank Norton walked up to her calmly. "You in charge here?" she asked.

Hank nodded and studied the woman. She was in her mid-thirties and quite attractive, with a slim figure and raven hair. Her only mutation was that her skin was stained a brilliant red.

"I'm Lisa. We have a gift for you." She motioned, and several of the mutants brought forth a box of electronic parts. "They are odds and ends. Perhaps some of them will be useful for you."

Hank smiled and motioned for some of his ranch hands to pick up the box. "Thanks, ma'am. I understand your leader... Well, he didn't make it."

"He was my husband," Lisa nodded.

"I'm sorry," Hank replied and took off his hat. Then the rancher did the unexpected. He took Lisa's hand and led her over to the table himself. "Let me tell you about my wife. She died when the bombs hit."

Others, both mutants and norms, quickly fell in line behind them. They weren't holding hands and promising peace, but they weren't shooting at each other either.

Teller and Grissom shrugged at one another. At least this part of the plan had been far easier than they could have hoped for.

\* \* \*

Tasha watched from a distance. What were the olders celebrating? The fact that her tribe had been wiped out?

Her anguish seethed within her, clouding her reason. She would end their celebration with the one called Teller's blood—if she could just find a way in without being spotted.

\* \* \*

The crowd got a full 20 minutes of feasting before the lookout warned of the Devourer's approach. "It's coming!" he yelled.

Teller stood on the table and gazed through his binoculars. Behind the Devourer was another crowd of its horrid minions—the walking dead. This time they were spread out instead of clustering around their leader. The Devourer was smarter than it looked.

Teller's voice switched from its earnest pleading tone to one of command. "All right. Get the kids out the back way. Everyone else, take up your positions on the back walls. Don't think you're safe up there—it's already knocked down a building to get at somebody—but at least you'll be out of harm's way long enough to see if this works."

Jon Grissom stepped forward into the open gateway. "Come and get it, you big, fat piece of—" The big man saw a shadow move out of the corner of his eye. "Teller!" he screamed.

A hubcap came whizzing out of the now-abandoned guard tower above him. Teller dove for the ground just as the sharpened weapon struck the picnic table and embedded itself deep into the wood.

Grissom motioned to cast one of his deadly bolts up at the tower but Teller stopped him, "It's that girl, the savage! Don't kill her!"

Tasha stepped forward on the wall's walkway, evidently oblivious to the horror rolling toward her, only 50 yards distant. "You killed them all! You woke up a monster, and it *ate* them!" she screamed at Teller. The girl raised her long spear above her head and prepared to jump.

"No!" Teller screamed. "That thing was already—"

"Too late!" Grissom yelled as the Devourer smashed into the sides of the wide-open gateway, its fatty girth too wide for it to easily squeeze through.

The momentary delay saved Grissom, giving him time to backpedal and get behind the table with Teller. Tasha, unfortunately, fell off the wall and landed behind it, where the thing's minions—her former family—were waiting with hungry claws and teeth.

Grissom let loose his last bolt of irradiated energy. Teller pulled his last grenade from his pack and hurled it at the thing, then tipped the table over forward and pulled Grissom down behind it.

\* \* \*

Outside, Tasha screamed in horror. Her friends were clawing her to pieces, and she couldn't bring herself to fight back. Suddenly, a barrage of shots came from above her. It was Hank Norton and Lisa. Hank's shotgun tore the head off one of the walking dead, and Lisa's submachine-gun neatly stitched up another, though the creature kept coming.

# Leftovers

"You gotta shoot 'em in the head!" Hank yelled to his new friend. "I get these varmints out on the range all the time."

Tasha finally came to her senses and stabbed one of her old companions in the gut. As Hank had warned, the blow didn't kill it, and the thing began pulling itself up the shaft toward her, leering evilly.

"You're not my family," Tasha grunted. The back of her leather cuffs had sharpened ice-skating blades laced into them. She let loose with a furious backhand that sliced through the zombie's throat, and its head fell \* \* \*horribly behind it.

"It's coming!" Grissom yelled as he stood to his feet and retreated from the beast.

"Let it eat cake," Teller grunted as he stood his ground, daring the thing forward. As he suspected, the Devourer gobbled up all the food that had spilled from the overturned table—including a huge, near-priceless chocolate cake—before reaching for him as well.

Grissom grabbed the back of Teller's collar in his strong hands and yanked him backward. "You did it. Now it's time to flee, my friend."

"Work around the side. We gotta save that girl!" \* \* \*

Tasha's spear was a poor weapon against her ex-family. Hank and Lisa had put down four of the groping walking dead, but now Tasha's saviors had run out of ammo, and another half-dozen creatures were still ready to pounce on her.

Grissom and Teller ran out the open gate, shouting to Hank and Lisa to close it from above. Grissom stood, stunned with horror at the undead horde for a split-second, but Teller had dealt with their kind before. "Go for the head!" he shouted as he put a 10mm round into one's brainpan.

Tasha stabbed another in the eye, ignoring the trail of gray matter that followed her spear tip out as she withdrew it to attack again.

Grissom cursed himself for not carrying a gun, relying too much on the blessed energy which he'd already used up again. The gate slammed shut behind him, trapping the Devourer inside. A moment later, he heard the monster trying to break through. "Your plan isn't working!" he screamed as he threw his own brawn into supporting the gates.

"Give it time," Teller answered as he put down another of the zombies.

One huge, black-taloned claw burst through the wood and raked Grissom down his chest. Fortunately, the mutant's incredible, armored skin deflected the worst of the strike, though he could still feel blood from the superficial cuts run down his legs. "I can't hold it much—"



## Leftovers

Suddenly the gates burst wide and a shower of wooden splinters peppered the fighters. The Devourer's immense form spilled out of the hole and landed in accordion-like thumps on the blood-soaked ground. Its wild, black eyes focused on Teller, then on Tasha, and finally on Grissom. It reached down and grabbed the sprawled Doomsayer in its massive claw.

Teller put another bullet into the head of a zombie, then put his back against Tasha's. "You gotta trust me!" he said.

Tasha made to pull away and leave the older's back to the last of the horde, but something in his voice made her hesitate. She did not trust him, but neither would she betray him as the olders had done the entire human race. She knew she was doomed, but she vowed the zombie in front of her wouldn't taste of her flesh, so she put it down with one lethal stab through its mouth. Neither would the next, which she skewered through the eye.

Teller fired over and over into the monster's eyes, trying to hurt it bad enough to make it drop the flailing Doomsayer. It was no use. The thing was enraged, just like the wild, Amazonian fighting-machine Teller heard screaming and cursing behind him.

The monster stuffed Jon in its mouth and bit down hard on his torso. Anyone else would have been snapped in half, but the mutant's tough hide kept him alive. One more snap of those inhuman jaws, though, and Grissom was doomed.

One of the zombies had worked its way around Tasha. Teller spun off her back and put his last bullet in its brain. He gasped in amazement to see Tasha covered in gore, her spear dripping with the brains of her former family, all of which lay dead—again—at her feet.

Then the savage pushed Teller aside and hurled herself at the Devourer, using her spear like a pole vault. She landed on its fatty chest and started slashing with her razor-sharp cuffs. It rolled backward, teetering on its bleeding mounds of flesh, and the Doomsayer rolled out of its jagged maw.

"It didn't work," Teller breathed to the dying eyes of Jon Grissom. "I got us all killed."

The monster's corpulent head snapped forward and caught one of Tasha's flailing arms between its gnarled teeth. In a flash, the savage's arm was amputated and sliding down the horror's gullet.

Tasha didn't miss a beat. She continued to flail with a berserker's fury. She knew she was doomed, and she planned on taking this unholy horror to Hell with her.

Teller and Grissom watched helplessly as Tasha continued to thrash. Oddly, she was sinking ever lower, almost as if the obese horror were melting beneath her one-armed savagery.

"It-it's working!" Teller screamed. He grabbed a pipe dropped by one of the zombies and went to work on the Devourer's gory teeth, trying his best to keep it from catching Tasha again before

## Leftovers

the poison cake he had fed the monster did its work. He and the girl bashed, slashed, and smashed until every last bit of muscle was spent. Tasha passed out first, falling backwards as the stump of her tawny arm continued to gush precious blood. Teller staggered over the dissolving corpse until he too could no longer hold on to consciousness.

As he fell into the pile of oozing flesh and blood, he hoped someone would tell his story some day.

## Epilogue

Teller awoke to see a blood-red, western sky stretched out before him. Beside him, also conscious but unmoving, was the young savage, Tasha. They were laying in the bed of the Doomsayer's garish pickup. He could see the top of Grissom's bald, black pate as the Doomsayer knelt before the tailgate.

"You're awake!" the giant said as he stood from his mysterious task.

Teller looked at the man's torso, a question in his eyes.

"That? Just a scratch, friend. Especially when one has the power of the atom itself at his command. You'll notice our young friend there is also well, though I'm afraid this poor priest was not yet skilled enough to save her arm."

Tasha looked down at the bandaged stump and nodded in grim appreciation.

"How'd you do it, older?" she asked of Teller, ignoring her wound. "How'd you kill it?"

Teller sat up. He could smell something cooking just over the truck's side. "With something we 'olders' used to buy lots of. They're not so useful anymore. At least not until today."

"What's that?" she moaned.

"Diet pills. Thousands of 'em. In the cake. I found a box of them out at Holston's place. They were what he used to control his weight when he first started down the slippery slope to becoming a servitor. He had some of those newfangled ones they came out with right before the war, the ones with fat-eating enzymes. You could pop a few pills at night, get up in the morning, have yourself a constitutional, and suddenly be 20 pounds lighter. As fat as the Devourer was, I had a feeling that many pills would eat it alive."

Grissom grinned at Tasha. "He's a smart one—or damn lucky! Either way, it worked, and you're both alive."

"And hungry as Hell. What are you cookin' down there?"

Grissom leaned down and handed each of his patients a plate. "Leftovers," he smiled.

Teller took the plate and smiled back. "Let's eat and get back to the saloon. I have a story to tell."

# Leftovers



Marshal: 34



# Leftovers

## The Adventure



In this foray into the Wasted West, the heroes fight one of the Reckoner's powerful servitors and learn the true health risks of a recklessly high-fat diet. And it's a lot worse than a possible heart attack!

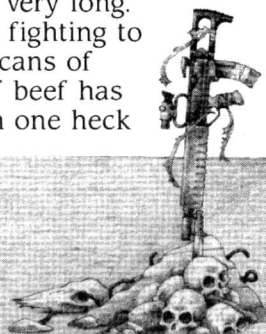
### The Story So Far

The people of Near Wichita have a problem with mutants. In the Wasted West, a mutie problem normally ends in one of three ways: with a lot of dead mutants, a lot of dead norms, or both. No matter how it turns out, the only ones who benefit from the struggle between the irradiated and "regular" folks are the buzzards and radrats.

The norms of Near Wichita aren't a bunch of mutie-hating bigots. In fact, they're usually downright reasonable and tolerant. As far as irradiated folks go, the townsfolk have been willing to live and let live up to now. But then the mutants living in the Crossroads Mall began to steal cattle from the town's ranchers.

Food—especially something as tempting and valuable as fresh beef—being scarce these days, the townspeople aren't going to put up with this kind of behavior for very long. When folks are fighting to the death over cans of Spam, a side of beef has got to be worth one heck of a firefight.

**Marshal: 35**



## The Devourer

What the people of Near Wichita don't know is that the mutants have resorted to cattle rustling out of sheer desperation because they are being slowly starved to death by a hideous creature of the Reckoning they have dubbed "the Devourer." They gave it this name for the simple reason that any food it comes across it stuffs straight down its massive mouth.

In the Wasted West, food is more valuable than gold, and a creature that cuts down on its supply is a real threat to any community. At least you can shoot at the Black Hats.

The local band of mutants, a tight-knit, family-style band of folks, live in the nearby Crossroads Mall. Given their surroundings, they like to call themselves the Mall Rats. Most folks in Near Wichita might not get the joke—they think its got to do with the main source of meat in the mall—but the mutants still think it fits them just fine.

The Mall Rats supplement the meager amount of food they are able to grow in the mall's food court and occasional cement planters with canned goods scrounged from nearby ruins and whatever game they can manage to shoot. These extra sources of food have been entirely cut off since the appearance of the Devourer. Anyone attempting to enter the mall carrying food of any kind is mercilessly attacked, and the food is immediately stolen and then stuffed down the critter's gullet.

The Mall Rats stole cattle from Near Wichita in a vain attempt to get some food into their hideaway, but like everything else, the beeves they rustled ended up in the Devourer's tremendous gut. Unless something can be done about the Mall Rats' voracious neighbor it's only a matter of time until they are dead either at the hands of the people of Near Wichita or from hunger.



## The Setup

All that's necessary to get your posse involved in this tale is to have the heroes end up in Near Wichita. They could simply be passing through the area on their way to somewhere else, or they may have come to town because they've heard it's possible to get a fresh steak there. Even in a rural state like Kansas, real beef is a rarity after the arrival of the Reckoners, one that can draw folks in from miles around.

Once in town, the heroes are approached by Hank Norton. He asks the group to go talk to the Mall Rats on behalf of the town. Anti-mutie sentiment is running high, and he doesn't trust anyone living in Near Wichita to have a civil conversation with the mutants—including himself.

Doomsayers that hear of the plight of the mutants should certainly find themselves rushing to help. Junkers may be tempted by the prospect of untouched troves of gear.

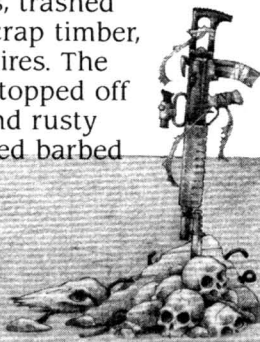
Templars may decide to hang out in town for a while to determine if the people of Near Wichita are worth saving. With one or two notable exceptions, these Kansans are good people, and any Templar with a heart should be willing to take up their cause.

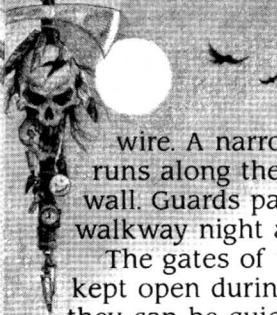


## Chapter One: Near Wichita

Near Wichita is a small town of about 80 people, located in the suburbs near, well, Wichita, Kansas—or at least where Wichita used to be. There's not much left there since the bombs fell.

The place is surrounded by a ramshackle wall constructed of cinderblocks, trashed automobiles, scrap timber, and discarded tires. The whole thing is topped off with snarled and rusty bits of scavenged barbed





wire. A narrow walkway runs along the inside of the wall. Guards patrol along the walkway night and day.

The gates of the town are kept open during the day, but they can be quickly closed in case of an emergency. Outsiders are free to enter the town, but the guards at the gate make it clear that unruly behavior won't be tolerated.

## The Jayhawk Saloon

The tourist trade has been kind of off since the Last War, so unless the heroes have business in town, the only place of interest is the Jayhawk Saloon. This place, housed in the remains of an old McDonalds, is the local watering hole for many of the ranchers who live outside of town. It also caters to those who are just passing through on their way elsewhere.

The food is good, if a bit pricey (increase all food prices listed in *Hell on Earth* by 50%). The bar serves home-brewed, rotgut whiskey for 50¢ a shot, and good prewar Kentucky Bourbon for \$5 a shot. There is also a small shelf of warm soft drinks on display behind the bar. These prized beverages go for \$60 a pop. If the heroes like, they can even get some stale pretzels to go with their drinks at \$1 a bowl.

Most people don't come to the Jayhawk for drinks though. The owner, Burt Shupe, cooks a steak that melts in your mouth, slides down your gullet, and makes you feel so warm and happy you can almost forget the events of the past 13 years for a moment. These culinary masterpieces sell for \$30 each.

If the heroes seem like adventurous types or spin tales of their accomplishments (much like Teller in the story), Hank Norton approaches them directly. Feel free to skip on down to **Ambassador to the Mutants** on page 40. If the heroes need a little push to get themselves involved, we've got something for that as well.

## Stop, Thief!

Once the heroes have had a chance to get a drink or order a meal, a little excitement breaks out. It starts with a shout of, "Stop, thief!" from the kitchen, and it spills out into the main room as a young man dressed in ragged clothes and a hooded cape vaults the counter and heads for the door, a bloody sack of fresh beef in his right hand.

If one of the heroes attempts to stop the would-be steaknapper, it requires an opposed *fightin': brawlin'* roll. If the conscientious citizen attempting to put an end to this carnivorous crime spree

# Leftovers

gets a raise or better over the reckless robber, she has managed to tackle the fleeing beef thief.

If the heroes fail to act or are unsuccessful in preventing the thief's escape, his flight from justice is cut short by a well-placed leg that sends him sprawling. The leg belongs to C.J. Holston, the town bully (see page 41 for this clod's profile). He's a big, beefy man wearing a cowboy hat and boots and an enormous, brass belt buckle bearing his initials.

Regardless of how the thief is stopped, C.J. gets up and rips the hood back from the boy's head to reveal Toad Miller, one of the Mall Rats. The boy is in his early teens, but he looks like he belongs six feet under. His face is a pale white, and it has more wrinkles in it than a rotted prune.

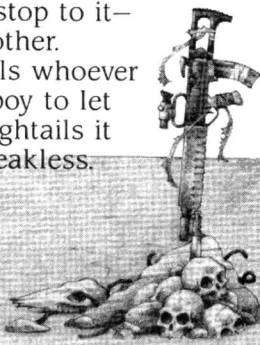
C.J. hollers, "Mutie scum! It's time you got fitted for a coffin." He pulls a pistol from his belt and points it at the terrified youth's head. C.J.'s hand wavers for a second, and his thumb slowly cocks back the hammer on the small hand-cannon he's got shoved in the kid's face.

Now is the time for any heroic types to show their true colors. If the heroes don't intervene, Hank Norton walks up behind C.J. and knocks his arm up and away just as the gun goes off. Norton follows



this up with a right hook that knocks C.J. flat. The bully picks himself and his gun up off the floor and leaves the saloon muttering threats under his breath. You can be sure he'll be back.

Unless someone has a firm grip on him, Toad sneaks out the door in the confusion. If Toad doesn't manage to escape, Norton tells him to let his people know that if they don't stop stealing his cattle, he's going to put a stop to it— one way or another. Norton then tells whoever is holding the boy to let him go. Toad hightails it out of there, steakless.





# Leftovers

## Ambassador to the Mutants

If the heroes intervened to save Toad, Norton approaches them and asks for their help. He explains about the recent cattle thefts and the anti-mutant feelings it has stirred up. He doesn't understand why the Mall Rats have suddenly started stealing from the town. He'd like the posse to pay a visit to the mutants, find out what's going on, and put a stop to it if possible. He'd go himself, but he's afraid that if he's not here to keep hotheads like C.J. under control, something bad might happen.

If the posse didn't get involved, Norton strikes up a conversation with them and tries to get a feel for their views on mutants. Unless they come off as the kill-'em-all-let-God-sort-'em-out types, he asks for their help as above.

Regardless of the manner in which Norton recruits the heroes, he offers them each 10 pounds of fresh beef in exchange for their assistance. He warns them that if they don't succeed, he has no other choice than to put together a posse and clean out the mall.

If the heroes inquire about C.J., Norton explains that his parents and all of their ranch hands were killed about two months ago. Nobody seems clear on who or what killed them. No one knows how they

were killed either, because there wasn't much left of them to examine—just a lot of blood and a few scattered body parts.

Although there is no evidence linking the mutants to the killings, C.J. blames them because of a bad business deal they had with his father. At least this is what he tells the public.

## "Toad" Miller

Toad's mother was pregnant with him when Wichita was hit by a ghost-rock bomb. He was born with a corpse-like complexion and without vocal cords. Most norms were repulsed by his hideous appearance, and his mother eventually fled town to keep her son safe from anti-mutant bigots.

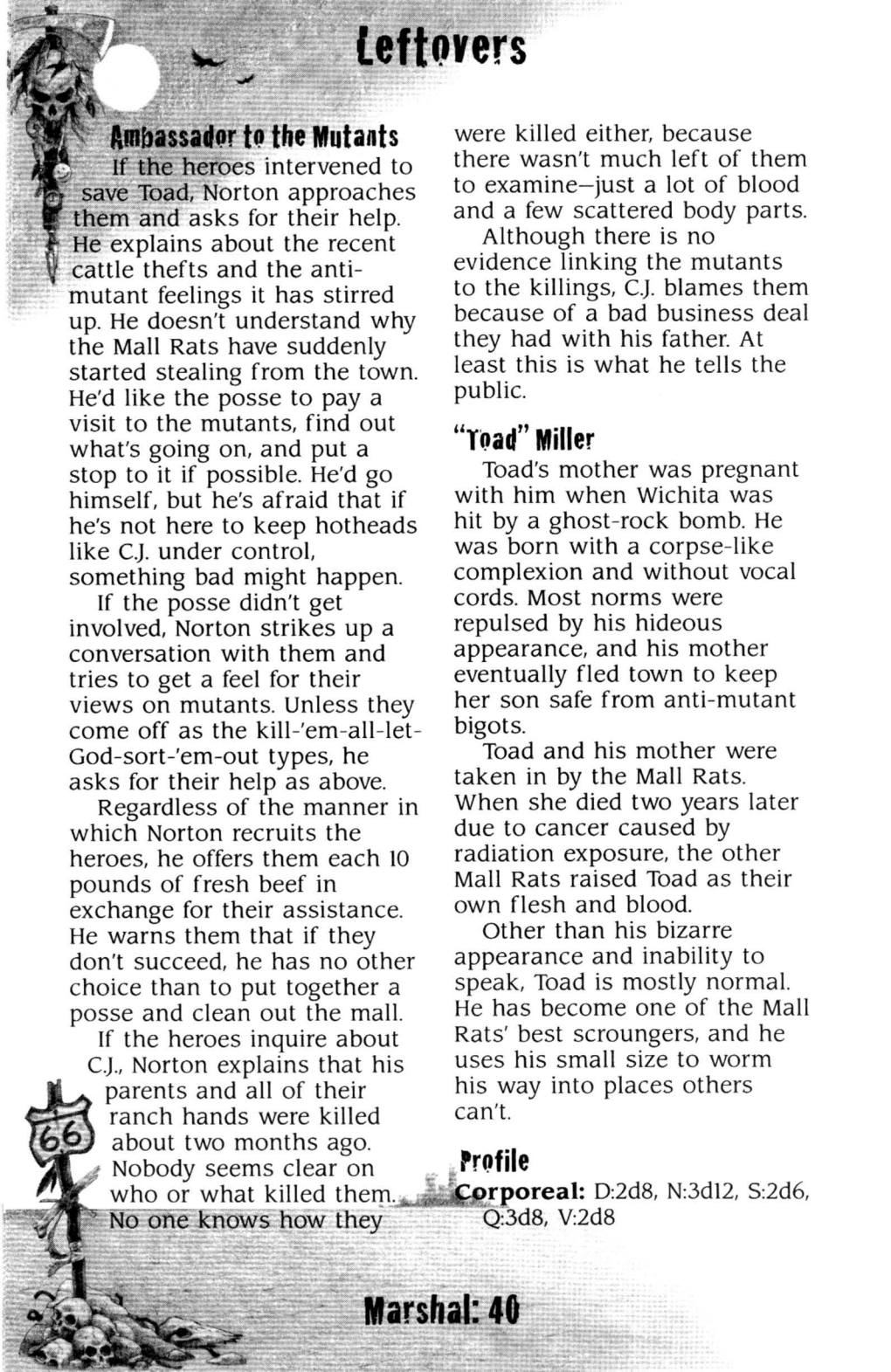
Toad and his mother were taken in by the Mall Rats. When she died two years later due to cancer caused by radiation exposure, the other Mall Rats raised Toad as their own flesh and blood.

Other than his bizarre appearance and inability to speak, Toad is mostly normal. He has become one of the Mall Rats' best scroungers, and he uses his small size to worm his way into places others can't.

## Profile

**Corporeal:** D:2d8, N:3d12, S:2d6, Q:3d8, V:2d8

**Marshal: 40**



# Leftovers

Dodge 3d12, fightin': brawlin', knife 4d12, lockpickin' 3d8, shootin': pistol, 3d8, sneak 4d12, swimmin' 2d6, throwin': balanced, unbalanced 3d8

**Mental:** C:3d6, K:2d6, M:2d6, Sm:3d10, Sp:2d8

Area knowledge: Wichita area 3d6, guts 3d8, scroungin' 6d10, scrutinize 2d6, search 3d6, survival 4d10

**Edges:** Keen

**Hindrances:** Kid, mute, ugly as sin

**Gear:** Large knife and a backpack.

## C.J. Holston

C.J. (it stands for Clyde Joshua, but don't call him that) is the town bully. He picks on those who can't fight back, since he's really a coward.

C.J. blames the mutants publicly for his parents' deaths, but only to hide his terrible secret: the Devourer is actually his father! Check out **Chapter Five: Kill the Beast!**

### Profile

**Corporeal:** D:2d6, N:3d6, S:4d10, Q:2d8, V:2d12

Dodge 3d6, drivin' 3d6, fightin': brawlin', knife 3d6, ridin' 4d6, shootin': pistol, assault rifle 4d6, speed load: pistol 3d6

**Mental:** C:3d6, K:2d6, M:3d8, Sm:3d6, Sp:2d6

Area knowledge: Near Wichita 3d6, guts 2d6, overawe 4d8, scroungin' 3d6, scrutinize 2d6, search 3d6, survival 3d6



**Edges:** Brawny

**Hindrances:** Yeller

**Gear:** SA officer's sidearm, two loaded magazines, and a large knife.

## Bounty

**Accepting the Job:** 1 white chip.

**Saving Toad:** 1 red chip.

**Enemy:** If the heroes stopped C.J. from shooting Toad, they have just picked up an enemy. For the rest of the heroes' stay in Near Wichita, the younger Holston goes out of his way to harass the heroes and thwart their plans.

## Chapter Two: Cry Havoc

If the heroes are willing to take up the gauntlet that the people of Near Wichita have cast before them, Hank Norton gives the heroes directions to the Crossroads Mall and wishes them luck.

The people of Near Wichita don't have anything to offer the heroes to help them out in their mission other than a small bit of good will. None of them are interested in giving out any kind of weaponry for fear that they're going to need it in the impending battle with the Mall Rats.

Some of the greedier ones might be willing to sell or trade certain materials away, though, for the right price. It's up to the heroes to negotiate the best price for whatever they need and can find. For weaponry and ammunition most folks are asking double the normal cost due to the "mutie threat."

Claims that the heroes are trying to put an end to that threat are usually met with more than a small amount of skepticism, but a kindly soul might be willing to cut them a bit of a break, pricewise, but even that's going to take some talking on the heroes' part.

Eventually, the heroes should find themselves leaving the protective walls of Near Wichita. Before the posse can reach the Crossroads Mall, the sound of gunfire cracks off in the distance. If the heroes investigate, they come across a small, country convenience store under siege by a pack of dogs o' War.

### Quik-E-Death

The store is defended by a desperate group of mutants. Their limited supply of ammo is running low and without help it's only a matter of time before the dogs overrun the place.

The store is being defended by three Mall Rats and Toad. The muties have only enough ammo to fire their weapons for three more combat rounds.

There are six dogs o' War. They are trying to force their way in through the shattered plate-glass windows at the front of the store. They ignore the posse members and concentrate on their prey in the store until the heroes attack them.

If the heroes stop to look around before charging in, have them make opposed *search* rolls against the alpha's *sneak*. Anyone who gets a raise or better against the head wolf spots it hiding in the edge of the woods behind the store.

# Leftovers

While running the combat try to ensure that Toad survives. If the heroes helped him out earlier, their kindness should make it easier for them to gain the mutants' trust, just on Toad's say-so.

## Mall Rats

The mutants in the convenience store are a scavenging party out looking for medicine for their leader, Jerry. They got trapped in the Quik-E-Mart by the dogs o' War. Use the following profile for each of the muties, except Toad. See page 40 for all about him.

### Profile

**Corporeal:** D:2d6, N:3d6, S:2d8, Q:3d8, V:3d8

Dodge 3d6, drivin' 3d6, fightin': brawlin', knife 4d6, shootin': pistol, SMG 4d6, speed load: pistol, SMG 3d6

**Mental:** C:3d6, K:2d6, M:3d8, Sm:3d6, Sp:2d8

Area knowledge: Near Wichita 3d6, guts 2d6, scroungin' 5d6, search 4d6, survival 4d6

**Gear:** One has an SA officer's sidearm, and the other two have Hellfire SMGs. All of them carry a large knife.

## Dogs o' War

Following the Reckoning, War stomped across Kansas and the High Plains, battling

the Sioux and scattered bands of soldiers and other heroes. In War's wake followed a pack of baying, bloodthirsty hounds that came to be known as the "dogs o' War."

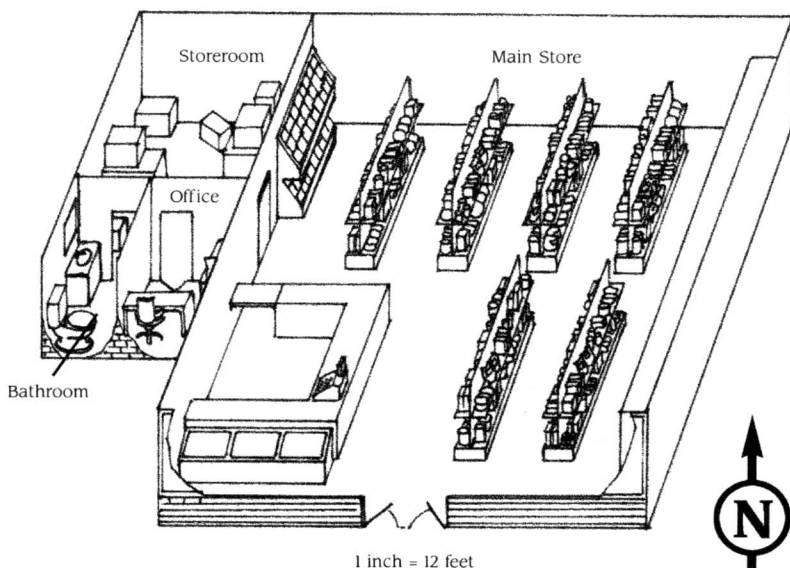
These beasts were raised from the dead by War to hound those souls who somehow escaped his ravages. Several packs were left behind to continue chasing lone travelers and cull the weak. Today, they are most common to the High Plains where War once roamed.

The dogs o' War have a very simple and deadly form of attack. When they spy



# Leftovers

## The Quik-E-Mart



potential prey (anything that moves), the "alpha" (the pack's leader) gives off a mournful wail that unnerves all but the strongest souls (make a *guts* roll against an Onerous (7) TN). Then the rest of the pack bolts after their prey at a rush, not stopping until they or their victims are finished.

While this happens, the alpha watches from a respectful distance. If his pack is destroyed, he leaves and forms another over the next 1d6 days. The alpha and its new pack have no

special hatred for their old foes. In fact, if the group has no new "blood" in it and is spotted again, the pack ignores them and even runs away if attacked. Once someone new joins the posse, however, all bets are off, and the pack charges in again.

### Profile (Dog o' War)

**Corporeal:** D:1d4, N:3d8, S:3d6,  
Q:2d8, V:4d8  
**Fightin':** brawl'in' 3d8  
**Mental:** C: 1d6, K:2d6, M:2d6,  
Sm:2d6, Sp:2d6  
**Trackin'** 6d6

**Marshal: 44**



# Leftovers

**Pace:** 15

**Size:** 4

**Wind:** NA

**Terror:** 5

**Special Abilities:**

**Damage:** Claw (STR), bite (STR+1d4)

**Fearless**

**Undead**

**Profile (Alpha)**

**Corporeal:** D:1d4, N:3d12, S:3d8, Q:4d10, V:4d10

Fightin': brawlin' 6d12, sneak 2d12

**Mental:** C: 1d6, K:2d6, M:2d6, Sm:2d6, Sp:2d6

Guts 4d6, overawe 2d6, trackin' 6d6

**Pace:** 15

**Size:** 4

**Wind:** NA

**Terror:** 7

**Special Abilities:**

**Damage:** Claw (STR), bite (STR+1d4)

**Fearless**

**Undead**

**Coup:** The character never has to make *guts* checks while engaged in battle.

## Aftermath

Once the dogs o' War have been dispatched, the survivors in the store emerge to greet their rescuers. If Toad survived, he tells the other Mall Rats (through the rudimentary sign language he's developed) about how the heroes helped him in Near Wichita. This helps to

alleviate some of the usual suspicion the mutants have for norms. Of course, if the posse didn't do anything to help Toad, he mentions this also. The other mutants are a lot less friendly if this is actually the case.

If the posse mentions the subject of the cattle thefts to the mutants, they look at each other sheepishly. One of them eventually pipes up and tells the heroes that they were forced to steal the cattle because of the Devourer. The creature has attacked anyone entering the mall with food—even live cattle, so that didn't even work. The mutants have been forced to get by on what they can grow under the skylight in the food court.

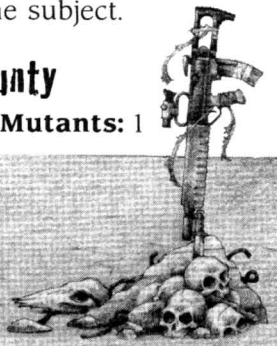
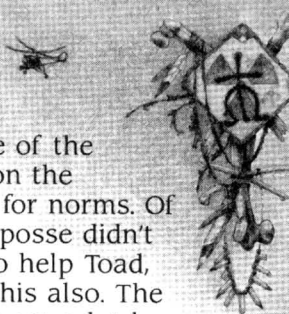
As long as the heroes don't say anything to torque them off, the grateful mutants offer to take them to the mall and introduce the posse to their leader, Jerry.

Anyone making a Fair (5) *Cognition* roll notices that one of the mutants' backpacks is packed to bursting with boxes of Lipidase diet pills. If asked about it, they say the pills are for Jerry. They refuse to say any more on the subject.

## Bounty

**Rescuing the Mutants:** 1 red chip.

**Marshal:** 45



## Chapter Three: The Ambush

The heroes have one more trial to get through before they reach the mall.

The mutants like to stay clear of the main roads while they travel. Not even considering the general anti-mutant sentiments many people have these days, the mutants know that the folks in Near Wichita have the Mall Rats at the top of their dance card. The heroes' newfound friends lead them on a circuitous route to the mall that cuts through a wooded lot. It's obvious to the heroes that the mutants come this way often, because there is a well-worn path between the trees.

Although the Mall Rats have gotten along well with the people of Near Wichita until now, the same can't be said of their relations with the Wasted Youths, a tribe of savage teenagers who live nearby. The savages have a chip on their collective shoulder the size of a log, and they are desperately looking for someone to knock it off.

They blame everyone and anyone (except themselves, of course) for the current state of the world. Their answer to this is to pick fights with all of these

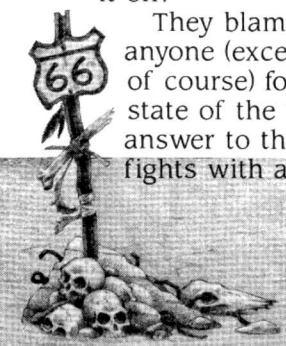
horrible people and make sure they suffer for what they've done. (Even if the Youths knew what irony was, it would be lost on them.)

The savages have also been having trouble with the Devourer. They have less of a food reserve than the Mall Rats and have decided that it's time to rectify that situation. The first step is to attack the mutants' foraging parties.

The Wasted Youths have set an ambush along the trail leading to the mall. The savages are well-concealed. Spotting the ambush before it begins requires a successful *Cognition* roll against an Incredible (II) TN. Those who spot the ambush are not surprised. Those who don't, are.

There are 10 savages concealed in the trees, five to each side of the path. Three on each side are actually up in the branches of the trees. When the ambush starts, they swing down on ropes and try to skewer their enemies on their spears. The other two on each side of the road have stacks of razor-sharp hubcaps to hurl at the group.

The savages swinging down from the trees add an extra +2 damage dice if they hit their targets. If a swinging savage misses, make a Fair (5) *Nimbleness* roll for him. If he succeeds, he has managed to



# Leftovers

swing across the path to a tree on the other side. He can make a swing attack again on his next action. If the roll is failed, the savage's attack slowed him down, and he has to drop down to the path.

If the Wasted Youths lose more than half their number, they break and run. They are after food, so if they are able to put down a character with a backpack, the savage who did the deed snags the hero's pack and runs off with it.

If any of the Wasted Youths are captured, they claim they attacked the mutants because they are hoarding food at the mall. The Mall Rats, of course, deny this.



## The Wasted Youths

All of the savages are armed with makeshift weapons made from scavenged metal. Their spears are broomhandles with knives duct-taped to them. Their machetes are lawnmower blades with duct tape wrapped around one end to make a handle. They have been sharpened to a razor's edge.

### Profile

**Corporeal:** D:2d6, N:3d8, S:3d8, Q:2d8, V:2d8

Dodge 3d8, fightin': brawlin', knife, machete, spear 4d8, throwin': balanced 4d6

**Mental:** C:3d8, K:2d6, M:3d8, Sm:3d6, Sp:2d8

**Area knowledge:** Near Wichita 3d6, guts 2d8, scroungin' 5d6, search 4d6, survival 4d6

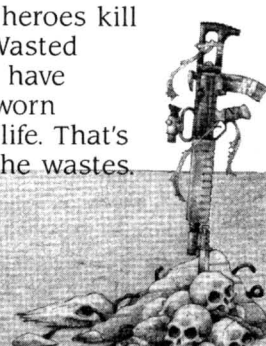
**Gear (in Trees):** Spear, and a boiled leather shirt.

**Gear (on Ground):** Six sharpened hubcaps, a machete, and a boiled leather shirt.

## Bounty

**Surviving the Ambush:** 1 white chip.

**Enemy:** If the heroes kill any of the Wasted Youths, they have picked up sworn enemies for life. That's the way of the wastes.





## Chapter Four: The Mall

The heroes should eventually arrive at their destination: the Crossroads Mall. It's an average-sized suburban mall laid out in a "T" shape with the food court at the center of the "T." All of the entrances other than the main one at the bottom of the "T" have been blocked off with stacks of disabled vehicles pushed up against the doors. There are two muties on guard at the main entrance and two others patrolling the roof.



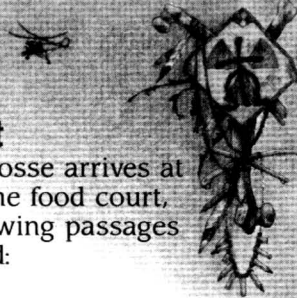
Before the heroes enter the parking lot of the mall, the mutants they're with (assuming they've actually made friends with any of them) advise them to leave any food they are carrying behind. They warn that trying to take food into the mall may attract the Devourer.

If any of the heroes ignores this warning, the mutants refuse to accompany him into the parking lot. They know what this thing is capable of, and they're not going to challenge it.

If any hero tries to enter the mall with anything more than a single serving of food, the beast appears and attacks her and anyone with her. The creature loses interest in the heroes if they drop the food. See **The Devourer** on page 54 for all the gory details (and gory they are!).

The heroes catch some sour looks from the guards at the door, but a few quick signals from Toad gets the group inside without a hassle.

The interior of the mall shows signs of having been well-looted before the Mall Rats took up residence. Many of the glass storefronts have been smashed, and the shelves of most of the stores are completely bare. The mutants have tidied up some, but their home still has a decidedly post-nuke look to it.



## The Man in Charge

The heroes are taken to the lower level of the mall's food court, right at the cross-section of the "T." Along the way, they pass a number of mutants of all shapes, sizes, and colors engaged in various housekeeping duties: washing clothes, cooking, cleaning weapons, etc.

The heroes get a mixed reaction from the mutants they walk by. Some gasp in surprise when they see the strangers, others glare at them openly, and some don't even bother to look up from what they're doing.

If the posse has seen the diet pills the mutants scavenged from the Quik-E-Mart and been told by the savages that the mutants are hoarding food, the group may be a little suspicious. After all, the mutants claim that they're stealing cattle because they're starving.

If the heroes ask about how Mall Rats look, tell them that most of the mutants they see are lean, bordering on thin, and a few look dangerously underfed. These people are not well-fed. If the heroes check out any of the cooking pots, they see the same thing in each: a thin, watery vegetable soup that's obviously been stretched as thinly as it can possibly go.

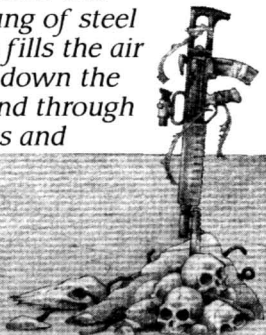
## The Food Court

Once the posse arrives at the edge of the food court, read the following passages to them aloud:

*As you near the mall's food court, you can feel the moisture in the air increase slightly, and a deep, earthy smell with a slight hint of decay and possibly fertilizer fills your nostrils.*

*The cement floor of the food court has been broken up and removed piece by piece to expose the earth underneath. A large garden has been planted here beneath the food court's shattered skylight. There are small patches of various vegetables growing in tidy rows, along with all sorts of grains ranging from soybeans to corn to wheat.*

*A group of mutants are diligently chipping away at the floor on the far side of the plaza with wedges and sledgehammers. The constant clang of steel on concrete fills the air and echoes down the long halls and through empty shops and restaurants.*



# Leftovers



The laboring muties are led by an older man in his early fifties. He has a long, gray beard, and his left forearm is covered with intricately patterned, intertwined tattoos. His right arm is atrophied and hangs bonelessly at his side like a fleshy tentacle.

In sharp contrast to the skinny people around him, this man has a tremendous gut spilling over his belt. The fabric of his black T-shirt looks stretched dangerously close to the breaking point.

As you approach, he turns his attention to your group and heads in your direction. He does not seem happy, but that feeling doesn't seem to be directed personally at you.

The heroes' escorts (whoever they may be) introduces this man to the posse as their leader Jerry. The mutants quickly fill Jerry in on what has happened and the role the posse played in events.

If the heroes lent the mutants a hand, Jerry welcomes the heroes and suggests they go somewhere else where they can talk without having to shout at each other over the din. He's happy to see the heroes. These days, the Mall Rats need all the friends they can find.

If the heroes haven't helped the mutants at all or have simply bypassed the earlier encounters, Jerry's a bit more standoffish, but after some consideration (and perhaps a bit of a side argument with one of the escorts) he figures he doesn't have much to lose at this point by trusting the heroes.

The heavysset mutant leads the posse up a nonworking escalator to his quarters in the remains of a Radio Shack. Piles of unopened electronic gizmos litter the floor.

# Leftovers

## Another Offer

Once the heroes get to the reason for their visit, Jerry explains:

*"We're slowly starving to death here. We can raise a few crops in the food court, but not enough to feed everyone. By the way, if you need to use the facilities while you're here, we'd appreciate you doing it in the garden. We need the fertilizer."*

*"I've got some people working on expanding our planting area, but I'm afraid it won't do much good. The edges of the court don't get enough sunlight, and by the time anything has grown large enough to harvest, it will probably be too late. At least it keeps everyone busy and gives them some hope."*


*"My friends say they have already told you about the Devourer. Everything they say is true. Whenever anyone tries to enter the mall with food, the beast attacks, devours the food, and kills anyone foolish enough to fight it. Our weapons seem to have had no effect on it."*

*"The thing is hideous. It's big and fat with dirty rolls of pink skin. It's got black eyes like a shark, and a mouth full of ragged teeth. During one of its first attacks it stuffed Melissa into its mouth whole and barely stopped to chew."*

*"It seems to be able to raise those it kills from the dead. The last time it attacked, it was followed by folks it had killed in earlier battles. We could only put them down by shooting them in the head."*



# Leftovers



*"We didn't want to steal cattle from the town, but we've had bad experiences dealing with the people in Near Wichita. We bought some cattle from C.J. Holston's father when we first moved here. He overcharged us and then gave us sick cattle that died within a week. When we complained, he threatened to shoot us.*

*"If you can help us get rid of this beast," he says gesturing to the electronics strewn around the room, "we can make it worth your while."*

If the posse is interested, he offers them each \$150 in electronic components or clothing (the only tradeable commodities left in the mall). The heroes can try to haggle. Make a contested roll between the posse spokesman's persuasion and Jerry's Smarts. Each raise the haggler gets on his roll nets the heroes an additional \$50 each.

If the posse's demands are too outrageous, Jerry gets angry and points outside to the rest of the mall. "There are over 30 people living here. Ten of them are under the age of 12. If somebody doesn't do something, they

are all going to die a slow, painful death. We don't have the resources to move everyone out of here, and we don't have any where to go. Even if we did, there's no guarantee that thing might not devour us all along the way."

## **In the Land of the Skinny, the Fat Man is King**

If the posse brings up his weight or the diet pills, Jerry explains:

*"The same blast of radiation that withered my arm also screwed up my metabolism. I'm not sure exactly what the problem is—finding a real doctor's kinda difficult these days—but the effect is that although I eat normal amounts of food, my body converts nearly everything I eat to fat. I tried cutting back what I eat and damn near starved myself to death, but I didn't drop a single pound.*

*"The only thing keeping me alive is those diet pills Toad brought back with him. They're the latest thing, or at least they were before the Big Boom. The pills have enzymes in 'em that actually dissolve fat and remove*

# Leftovers

*it from your body. Without them, I'd balloon up as big as a house and die when my heart finally gave out.*

*"As you can see, I'm already overdue for a dose. I don't know what I'm gonna do once the stores around here run out of them. Luckily, diet pills don't seem to be in big demand these days."*

Jerry's telling the truth. Despite any suspicions the posse might have, there is no connection between him and the monster, and there is nothing going on behind the scenes at the mall. The Mall Rats are just trying to make the best of a very bad situation.

## Something Wicked This Way Comes

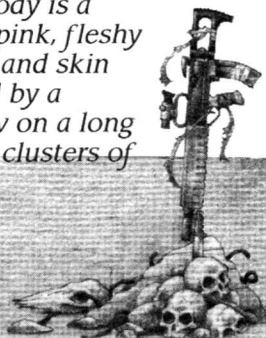
Just as the heroes conclude their business with Jerry, a shrill whistle sounds outside. The mutants' leader looks up in shock and shouts, "That's the alarm!" He grabs an assault rifle hanging from a peg near his makeshift bed and runs out the door.

Once Jerry and the posse reach the front entrance of the mall, the following sight greets their eyes:




*As you near the front entrance of the mall, you see the two guards you passed earlier blazing away with their rifles at an unseen foe.*

*Once you reach the door, it's obvious what they're shooting at: an enormous mound of flesh on two legs. The beast in the mall's parking lot towers nearly 12 feet tall. The creature's body is a disgusting, pink, fleshy mass of fat and skin rolls topped by a gaping maw on a long neck. It has clusters of*



# Leftovers



*small, black, lifeless eyes on the top of its head. Its long lanky arms end in wickedly sharp, black claws, and smaller, barbed claws dangle from its sides on short tentacles.*

*Two Mall Rats are running for their lives before this monstrosity. One has a freshly cut deer haunch over his shoulder. Despite its enormous girth, the Devourer is not only keeping up with the pair, but gaining on them with its long, impossibly spindly legs.*

*The two mutants weave through some derelict cars in a vain attempt to slow the beast. It simply brushes a small compact car out of its way with a nonchalant backhand and continues its pursuit.*

*The mutant carrying the venison stumbles and falls.*

Before the heroes can act they must make an Incredible (11) guts roll.

The Devourer moves to attack the fallen Mall Rat with the deer haunch. Once the mutant has been disabled, the beast spends an action to wolf him and

the deer haunch down. It then goes after the other Mall Rat and anyone who attacks it. It leaves once it has cleared the parking lot of attackers.

Once the creature departs, Jerry says, "Now you know what we're up against. I hope you can help us."

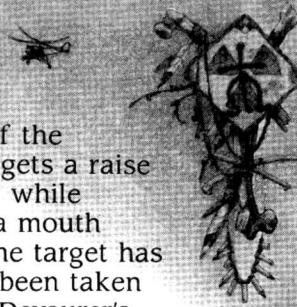
## The Devourer

The Devourer can't be killed by normal means, and it's unlikely the heroes are in a position to destroy the creature in their first encounter with it. The main purpose of this first attack is to let the heroes see the beast and learn how powerful it is before they go charging off half-cocked. The servitor tears things up outside the mall, and then once it has devoured all the food, it loses interest and wanders off.

The Devourer is immune to all forms of attack (including magic). However, just because it can't be hurt by a particular weapon, doesn't mean the creature doesn't *feel* it. Whenever a hero hits with an attack, roll damage normally and then have the creature make a stun check based on the number of wounds the attack should have caused.

For all the details on the nature of the Devourer and how the heroes can kill it, check out **Chapter 5: Kill the Beast.**

# Leftovers



## Profile

**Corporeal:** D:2d6, N:3d8,  
S:4d12+8, Q:2d8, V:4d10

Fightin': brawlin' 5d8

**Mental:** C:2d6, K:2d6, M:2d10,  
Sm:2d4, Sp:3d12

Trackin' 6d6, overawe 4d10

**Pace:** 15

**Size:** 12

**Wind:** NA

**Terror:** 11

## Special Abilities:

**Creator:** The Devourer can make walkin' dead of up to 10 of its victims.

**Damage:** Claws (STR+2d12), barbed claws (STR+2d6), bite (STR+2d20)

## Fearless

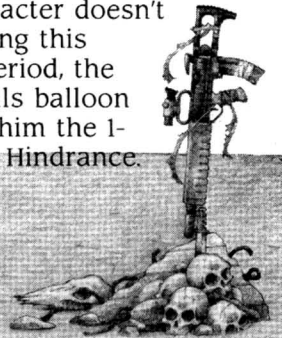
**Grapple:** The creature can use its barbed claws to attack anyone who moves within three feet of it. If it gets a raise or better on its attack roll, it has hit with multiple claws and grappled its target tightly to its belly. Each action, a grappled hero may make an opposed *Strength* roll to break free from the Devourer's grasp. While, grappled, the beast can automatically hit the victim with its mouth attack on each action.

**Immunity:** The Devourer cannot actually be hurt by anything but its weakness (which is described below). It can be knocked about by other things, but never truly harmed.

**Swallow:** If the creature gets a raise or better while making a mouth attack, the target has actually been taken into the Devourer's mouth. On the creature's next action, roll a contest of *Strength*. If it wins, the hapless victim has been swallowed whole. He takes 2d8 damage to each body location each round from the creature's digestive juices. A partially swallowed hero may break free on his own action if he wins a contest of *Strength*.

**Weakness:** Diet pills.

**Coup:** Anyone who absorbs some of the Devourer's essence gains the ability to go without food for extended periods of time. An individual can go without food without suffering any ill effects for a number of days equal to his Wind. At the end of this period, however, the person must eat double the amount of food he normally consumes for as many days as he fasted. Failure to do so causes 2d6 damage each day the character doesn't overeat. During this overeating period, the hero's fat cells balloon up and give him the 1-point *big 'un* Hindrance.





## Insult to Injury

Not long after the Devourer has lost interest in the mall's inhabitants and wandered off (preferably just after, while people are still bandaging wounds and counting their ammo), C.J. Holston and some of his drinking buddies show up at the mall.

C.J. and his friends are in his 4x4 pickup truck. They arrive with a screech of tires, a few shots in the air, and the shattering of tossed liquor bottles. C.J. parks his truck directly in front of the mall's main entrance.

It takes a few seconds for C.J. to stumble out of his truck (he's been imbibing heavily). Once he does, he begins yelling at the mall (his rant is accompanied by a chorus of "Yeah!" from his buddies in the back of the truck):

*"Hey, muties!*

*"I just came by to warn you that I better not see your damn, roach-eatin' hides anywhere near town. If I do, I'll fill you so fulla lead, I'll use your carcasses as a pencil.*

*"Any mutie that comes near town or one of our herds is gonna be shot on sight. You hear me, freaks? SHOT ON SIGHT! There's some*

*mutie-lovers in town that don't want trouble, but I ain't one of 'em.*

*"I dare you to come to town! My boots are gettin' kind of worn, and I hear freak-hide makes good shoes.*

Jerry and the other Mall Rats aren't going to take this lying down (or in any other position for that matter), especially after having just lost some friends to the Devourer. He and a few other mutants storm outside and confront C.J. The bully's buddies (there are four of them) hop out of the truck to help him, and a lot of yelling and shoving ensues.

If the heroes don't immediately get involved, give them only a few moments to think about their course of action. Things quickly come to a boil, and one of the mutants throws a punch and knocks one of C.J.'s pals flat. The drunken cowpoke wipes the blood from his lip and reaches for his pistol. Unless someone stops him, he takes aim at the mutant who punched him, and he shoots him dead. After a second of stunned silence, everyone goes for their guns, and all Hell breaks loose.

The mutants have an advantage in this fight. It took a lot of liquid courage to give C.J. the spine to drive out to the mall. He and his friends'

# Leftovers

eyeballs are fairly awash in whiskey. Apply a -4 modifier to all of their rolls.

If any of the townsfolk are killed in this fight, getting assistance from anyone in the town is going to be difficult. Many of the people in town have been willing to let the Mall Rats live in peace, but their opinions change rapidly if they find out that some of their own were killed by the mutants. The fact that C.J. and his crew provoked the fight doesn't mean much to them.

The best the posse can hope for in this scene is to cool things off, bundle C.J. back in his truck, and hope he drives into a wall on the way home. If the heroes do manage to calm things down, they learn from C.J. that his trip out here was sparked by the fact that someone stole another one of the town's cattle.

Jerry and the other mutants deny having anything to do with the latest theft.



**Mental:** C:3d6, K:2d6, M:3d6, Sm:2d6, Sp:2d6

**Area knowledge:** Near Wichita 3d6, guts 2d6, scroungin' 3d6, search 2d6, survival 3d6

**Gear:** Police pistol or pump shotgun and 2d6 rounds for the weapon.

## Townies

These stats can be used for both C.J.'s pals and any other Near Wichitans.

### Profile

**Corporeal:** D:2d6, N:3d6, S:2d6, Q:3d6, V:3d6

Dodge 3d6, drivin': 2d6, fightin': brawlin', 3d6, shootin': pistol, rifle, shotgun 4d6

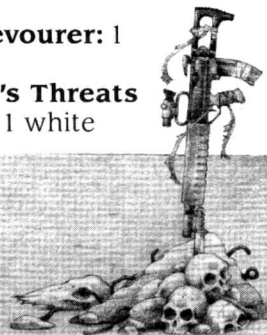
## Bounty

**Agreeing to Help the Mall Rats:** 1 red chip.

**Fighting the Devourer:** 1 blue chip.

**Killing the Devourer:** 1 blue chip.

**Resolving C.J.'s Threats Peacefully:** 1 white chip.



## Chapter Five: Kill the Beast!

After the excitement at the mall, there is only one thing left for the posse to do: kill the Devourer.

Of course, it's never that simple.

The creature is busy after it leaves the mall. It's getting impatient with the whole situation, and it decides it may need some helpers to starve out the mutants. To this end, it heads directly to the home of the Wasted Youths. Up until now, the Devourer has left the youths alone, but now that he's got a use for them, their doom is sealed.

The old, ramshackle house the young savages live in provides little protection against the Devourer's enormous bulk and sword-sharp claws. It only takes a few minutes for the beast to kill the entire group (whoever's left after the battle with the heroes) and make them into its own posse of walkin' dead.

The next time the posse encounters the creature, it's accompanied by 10 walkin' dead. For these poor souls, just use the stats for the Wasted Youths listed in Chapter Three (page 47), but give them each the *undead* power.

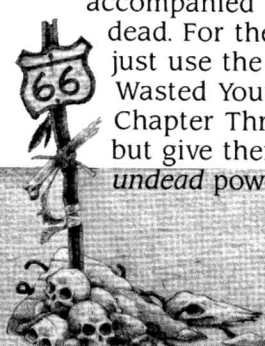
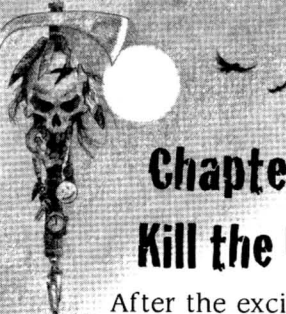
## The Devourer

The Devourer is a servitor of Famine. Servitors are creatures made by the Reckoners to keep the remaining population of the Wasted West suitably terrified while they stomp around elsewhere. Each of these creatures is unique and incredibly powerful.

As with every abomination the Reckoners create, making a servitor is easier if there is some seed for them to work with. Most servitors were once ordinary people whose actions brought them into a Reckoner's sphere of influence. Servitors of Famine may have hoarded food or burnt crops, a servitor of Pestilence may have knowingly sold infected blankets to someone, and so on.

One horrible act is usually not enough to transform someone into a servitor (although a particularly heinous act might occasionally do so), but a constant pattern of behavior like this almost always damns a person to becoming a powerful tool of the Reckoners. For more on how this works, be sure to check out *Wasted West, the Deadlands: Hell on Earth* worldbook.

This power comes with a price. Even the Reckoners don't have unlimited resources (although the current level of



fear in the world has given them quite a lot to work with), so the arcane processes used to create the servitors cannot make them completely invulnerable.

Specifically, the servitors of each Reckoner are vulnerable to things opposed to that Reckoner's sphere of influence. Food-related items are the Achilles' heel of Famine servitors, servitors of Pestilence are vulnerable to medicine, etc.

Each servitor's exact vulnerability differs and is as unique as the creature itself. Examining the history of the person who became the servitor can often provide clues to the creature's weakness.

Any hero with *academia: occult* at level 4 or higher has heard of servitors and knows that they have specific weaknesses. Heroes with lower levels in this aptitude know this information if they succeed at a Hard (9) roll.

## Origins

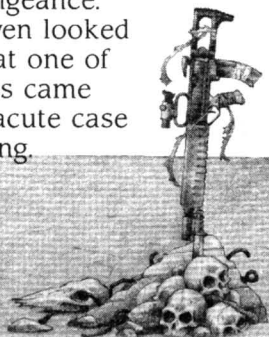
The Devourer was none other than C.J.'s dear old dad, Odell Holston. Even before he became a pawn of the Reckoners, Odell was an unpleasant, bigoted, stingy old cuss.

Odell started his ranch before the Last War and worked hard to build it up



from nothing. He did that by paying his cowhands peanuts and firing them if they complained. Although he went through a lot of cowpokes, his cattle business thrived.

When the Last War started, Odell took on some hired guns to protect his place. He hated to part with the money the gunslingers demanded, but he hated the idea of losing any of his precious cattle even more. Odell's gunmen protected the herd with a vengeance. Anyone who even looked over the fence at one of Holston's beeves came down with an acute case of lead poisoning.



# Leftovers



Both during the war and after, Odell sold beef to refugees in the areas—at a significant markup. Groups which had no money or valuables to trade for dinner went hungry. No matter how horrible their plight, Odell had no mercy in his heart for them—and certainly not in his stomach.

Meanwhile Odell ate beef, beef, and more beef. He had steak with his eggs, a roast beef sandwich for lunch, and prime rib for dinner. This didn't do much for his waistline, and he quickly swelled up larger than a Thanksgiving Day balloon.

Eventually, Odell's doctor told him that he needed to lose weight or he would die. Rather than stop eating, Odell started taking handfuls of Lipidase, a revolutionary diet pill that actually burned fat.

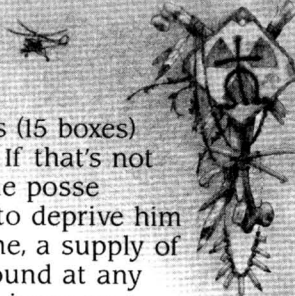
The pills worked so well, Odell was fit and trim in no time. Rather than starting to eat sensibly, the rancher began eating even more. While the rest of the world fought over table scraps, Odell kept to a strict "see" food diet—if he saw it, he ate it.

During this time, Odell began to gradually change, growing larger despite the number of pills he took. His appearance slowly transformed until he had the look of a bloated corpse. He eventually refused to leave the ranch house or let anyone other than his immediate family see him.

The event which finally damned him for eternity was selling the sick cattle to the Mall Rats. He knew the mutants were depending on them for food, but he wanted to make sure they were unable to start their own herd and reduce their dependency on him and the other ranchers.

The night the last cow Odell sold the mutants died, he transformed into the Devourer. The former rancher rampaged across his spread, killing his family and his workers and devouring his beloved herd.

# Leftovers



Odell's miserliness and greed are well known to his neighbors. Before the war, he often threatened to sue them over fairly trivial matters. If the heroes ask around in Near Wichita, no one has a single good thing to say about the man.

## Like Father, Like Son

The only thing on the Holston ranch which wasn't killed was C.J. He was spared because the Reckoners see in him the seed needed to create yet another servitor. He just needs to ripen some.

For his part, C.J. hasn't told anyone what he saw that night. He always feared his father's temper, and never more so than now. He is afraid that if he tells anyone what he saw, his father will rip him to shreds like he did everyone else.

## One Step to a Slimmer Figure

Odell's gluttonous nature and his use of the diet pills to hide his eating habits from the world has left the Devourer vulnerable to them. The heroes are going to need a large supply of the pills if they hope to kill the thing.

As long as the posse is still on good terms with the mutants, Jerry volunteers his

supply of pills (15 boxes) for the cause. If that's not the case or the posse doesn't want to deprive him of his medicine, a supply of pills can be found at any nearby convenience or grocery store with an Easy (3) *scroungin'* roll. A successful roll comes up with 1d6 boxes of pills, plus 1 for each raise.

Each box has 20 pills in it. In order to kill the Devourer, it's necessary to get 100 pills down its throat. Lesser doses hurt the thing (1d6 damage for every 10 pills), but it has to swallow 100 or more pills to receive a guaranteed-lethal dose of the fat-dissolving enzymes.

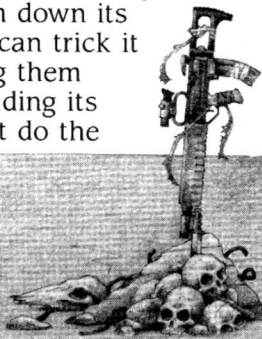
Due to the Devourer's supernatural origins, it cannot spend chips to stop damage caused by its weakness. Once the beast has swallowed 100 or more pills, it dies within 1d6 rounds.

## Open Wide

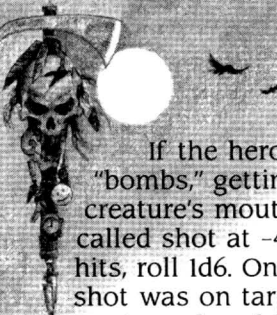
Believe it or not, the Devourer isn't going to allow the heroes to simply pour the pills down its throat.

There are two ways the heroes can get a lethal dose of pills into the creature: They can throw them down its throat, or they can trick it into swallowing them voluntarily. (Holding its nose shut won't do the trick.)

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# Leftovers



If the heroes make pill "bombs," getting one into the creature's mouth requires a called shot at -4. If the shot hits, roll 1d6. On 1 or 2, the shot was on target, but the creature closed its mouth. If the thing swallows some pills which hurt it, but don't kill it, it becomes more cautious and keeps its cake hole closed on a roll of 4 or less.

The posse can always attract the Devourer's attention by attempting to enter the mall with food. If the heroes do this, the creature appears and attacks those carrying the food.

Its first priority is to eat the group's food. It quickly wolf's down any food it gets its hands on. If it swallows food containing less than a lethal dose of the diet pills, allow the creature to make an Onerous (7) *Smarts* roll each time it grabs another poisoned food item. If it makes the roll, it detects the pills and throws the food away.

The group can also try hosting a feast like that in the "Leftovers" story. The sight of that much food spread out for people to eat drives the servitor of Famine into an

absolute frenzy. It charges in and starts eating. Once it swallows any diet pills, it must make an Incredible (11) *Smarts* roll to avoid eating other tainted foods.

## Achilles' Heel

That's all well and good, but how do the heroes figure out what the Devourer's weakness is?

It's possible that someone in the posse may make the connection between the pills and the creature's enormous waistline, but if that doesn't happen, we've provided a few clues to get the heroes moving in the right direction. Sprinkle these liberally throughout your game until you get the desired results.

## The Holston Ranch

The Devourer isn't hard to track. Between its enormous footprints, the small trees it snaps as it trundles along, and the occasional dead animal it leaves in its wake, following the creature requires only a Foolproof (3) *trackin'* roll. Blind tin horns could follow this thing home.

The creature's trail leads to the ruins of the Holston ranch. C.J. moved into town following his father's transformation, and no one other than the Devourer has been to the ranch since.

From the outside, the ranch resembles a military installation more than it does a cattle farm. It is surrounded by a 10-foot-tall chainlink fence topped by a double coil of

# Leftovers

razorwire. Small, one-man watchtowers appear every 300 yards along the fence's perimeter. Portions of the fence have been trampled down by the Devourer.

Assume the ranch is deserted when the posse arrives. The servitor is busy "recruiting" the Wasted Youths into its small army of undead.

## The Ranch House

The ranch house is a mess. Odell and his family had just sat down to dinner when his final transformation occurred.

The main dining room where the Devourer began its rampage is a bloody abattoir of overturned tables, broken chairs, and smashed plates. The large, sliding glass doors leading to the rear patio have been smashed outward where the beast exited the building.

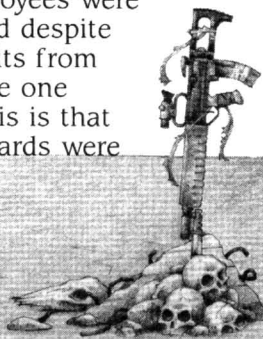
The only other room which holds something of interest to the posse is Odell's study. If the heroes poke around in here, have them make *search* rolls. A Fair (5) roll discovers a wastepaper basket filled with empty boxes of Lipidase.

Anyone getting an Onerous (7) total or better notices that the leather chair behind the enormous mahogany desk has been specially reinforced with metal plates to handle extra weight. Odell had the changes made during the slow part of his transformation.



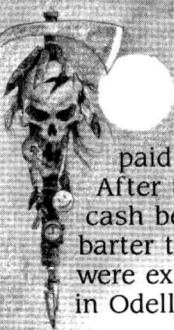
A roll of 9 or above discovers a wall safe behind some books on the bookcase. (None of the books look like they've ever been opened, much less actually read. The Holston's weren't known for their way with the English language.) A Hard (9) *lockpickin'* roll is needed to get the safe open. Inside are the ranch's books.

It's obvious to anyone who looks through the books that the ranch employees were badly underpaid despite enormous profits from cattle sales. The one exception to this is that the security guards were





# Leftovers



paid astronomical sums. After the war ended and cash became useless, the barter trades made for cattle were extremely one-sided—all in Odell's favor.

## The Bunkhouse

The bunkhouse has been flattened. Anyone examining the wreckage notices the crushed corpses of a number of the ranch's cowhands among the rubble. They are all long dead.

## The Barn

The ranch's main barn stands wide open. It is filled to the rafters with a wide assortment of rusty junk and disabled farm vehicles.

Odell's store of items which were bartered for cattle were kept here. After the family was massacred, C.J. managed to work up enough nerve to return to the ranch and clean out the most valuable stuff, but that hardly means he managed to get everything.

If the heroes want to poke around in the barn, have them make Onerous (7) *scroungin'* rolls. Each success and raise on a roll nets the lucky character \$50 worth of tradeable goods.

Junkers can scrounge for both mechanical and structural components here. The TN to find components is Fair (5).

## The North Forty

The ranch's fields are littered with the carcasses of slaughtered cattle. They have all died violently at the claws of the Devourer.

The wounds on the dead cows were obviously made by something with a set of large, sharp claws, which most heroes should be able to identify right away. All of the dead cattle have been at least partially eaten.

## He Disagreed With

### Something That Ate Him

If the posse is having a hard time figuring out how to kill the Devourer, you can give them a hint by having the creature get its claws into Jerry. There are enough of the fat-eating enzymes in his blood to hurt the beast if it eats him.

Have the Devourer spit the mutant's leader out a round or two after he's been swallowed and have the servitor run away, howling in pain. From having seen the creature eat the posse should realize that Jerry is the only thing it's ever spit out.

## Bounty

**Defeating the Devourer:** 1 blue chip.

**Investigating the Ranch:** 1 white chip.



**Marshal: 64**



# Where's the Beef?



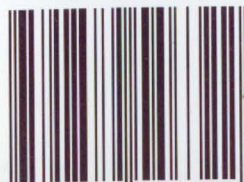
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That's the question a lot of folks around Near Wichita have been asking themselves lately. Seems that a band of mutants have been rustling their cattle—and even taken to stealing it straight out of the local saloon! But after so many years of relative peace, why are the mutants stooping to thievery now?

When a hero named Teller comes to town, he quickly becomes entangled in the whole mess. He soon finds himself doing his best to make peace between the townies and the mutants, but first he's got to figure out who's set these people against each other—and why.

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