

*Wherein an overnight stay in Roswell, New Mexico devolves into paranoia...and death!*

## THE STORY SO FAR

A few nights ago, near the Spotswood Trading Post in Roswell, New Mexico, hired hand Fletcher Graham moseyed down to the well to draw a pail of water. A mysterious stranger confronted him on the way. Before ol' Fletch could say "Howdy" the man transformed into an unnatural, horned snake. And before Fletch could scream, it sank venomous fangs into his throat.

After consuming him and assuming his shape, it returned to the trading post. There it awaits an opportunity to kill someone else and hide in *their* form. In the meantime, though, the evil varmint decides to have some fun and scare up morsels of tasty Fear.

## THE SETUP

Run this suspenseful little tale when your pistoleros pass through Roswell. On this particular night, savage thunderstorms lash the region. Flash floods seem likely. Anybody with a lick of sense knows shelter is a must, and the nearest warm, dry place is the Spotswood Trading Post. Read this as your posse enters:

*The small, rancho-style trading post is lit by a few lanterns and the glow of a pot-bellied stove. The shelves and cracker barrel look reasonably well-stocked.*

*You pull up short when you lock eyes with the burly, bearded man crouched behind the counter. He's pointing a scattergun at you with trembling hands. Your eyes flick to the right, where a few other terrified men aim pistols in your direction. The bearded man says, "Howdy strangers. If'n you're friendly, you better speak up."*

Assuming the posse's more interested in shelter than bloodshed, success on a Persuasion roll calms the locals enough that they lower their firearms and invite newcomers inside.

### SPOTSWOOD TRADING POST

Fear Level: 3

Earle Spotswood (the man behind the counter) runs this trading post with his wife Courtney, teenage sons Earle Jr. and Eli, and four hired hands. The post consists of a single room with a counter along the back wall, a stock room in the back, and a loft above where the family sleeps. Secretly, Earle is a paid informer for the Texas Rangers. He files a report on just about everyone who passes through.

For the past few days, though, things have taken a turn for the weird. Hired hand Fletcher started telling ghost stories, and hair-raising tales of body-snatching beasts that lurk in the night. The horned serpent delights in using its guise to sow fear before it claims another victim. It also has a few unique talents!

- **Earle Spotswood:** Use the Townsfolk profile in the *Deadlands Marshal's Handbook*; add the Connections (Texas Rangers) Edge and Persuasion d8.
- **Courtney, Earle Jr., and Eli:** Use the Townsfolk profile in the *Deadlands Marshal's Handbook*. Courtney has Agility d8, Shooting d8, and the Quick Draw and Marksman Edges.
- **Hired Hands (3):** Use the Townsfolk profile in the *Deadlands Marshal's Handbook*.

☉ **"Fletcher Graham":** See Horned Serpent in the *Deadlands Marshal's Handbook*. This one's a wily old specimen, and a Wild Card. It has the *confusion* and *puppet* powers (activated with Spirit, with no visible Trappings), and 15 Power Points. The creature can remain in Fletcher Graham's form indefinitely unless it's discovered. And it's got a nasty sense of humor.



## FOX IN THE HENHOUSE

From the minute the creature arrived wearing Fletch Graham's appearance, it's been making non-stop chin music about specters, apparitions, and things that go bump in the night. The others find the stories terrifying but too compelling to ignore. Once the posse's all settled in, Fletch spins another yarn:

*"Here's one my ol' grandpa used to tell. There's a certain type of a critter – a terrible shadow of a thing – that stalks people like a bobcat after venison. 'Cept when it catches you, it doesn't just eat your flesh off your bones. It eats the bones too. And when it's finished it can look and act and sound just like you. That's how it gets close to your friends and eats them too."*

Posse members who succeed on a Notice roll catch Spotswood, his family, and the other hired hands throwing veiled, suspicious glances their way.

As the storm builds and rain pounds on the roof overhead, dripping through cracks into strategically placed mason jars and cans, things get weirder. The horned serpent uses its *confusion* and *puppet* powers to compel the other hired hands to make odd, cryptic statements or suddenly stumble around for no apparent reason.

When everyone's imagination is running good and wild, there's a slow, steady trio of knocks on the door.

## A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT

Spotswood insists it's a ghost. The knocking goes on until someone answers. In the rain stands a compact, wiry fellow in a black-and-red Chinese coat and red-tinted spectacles. He's soaked to the skin. He says,

*"The storm is growing worse. To make it here in time, I had to be...swift. May I shelter with you?"*

This is Californian martial artist Jack Swift, who's not merely touring the area near Roswell. In fact, Swift knows quite a lot about the Reckoning. He's been tracking the horned serpent for weeks in an attempt to halt its reign of terror.

 **Jack Swift:** See profile at right.

## RAISING THE STAKES

Swift makes small talk and warms himself by the stove. It's immediately apparent that the Spotswoods and their employees don't trust the newcomer one bit. Then Swift drops a bombshell:

*"I came here following a tall, dark man. One who waylays travelers and murders them in cold blood. Friends...someone here is not who he seems to be."*

The horned serpent makes a few attempts to influence Swift's mind with *confusion* and *puppet*. If it's successful, it makes the stranger appear clumsy or—the preferred approach—forces him to attack a nonplayer character or posse member outright.

For his part, Swift doesn't leap into action (or even speak up right away) when he feels an arcane influence attempting to mold his thoughts and actions. Swift wants to know who's the *thing* before he strikes.

Marshal, allow this scene to continue until it seems like everyone at the table has their own theory about who's who, and a plan to get to the bottom of it.

## HOW HIGH'S THE WATER, MAMA?

At the very height of paranoia, call for Notice rolls at -2. On a success, listeners perceive a thundering, rushing sound of water. It's far louder than the raindrops that hammer the roof. Anyone who looks out a window sees rushing torrents of water outside; the trading post looks like it's in a newly formed river. It's a flash flood! The martial artist quips,

*"That was a swift turn of events!"*

Soon water flows under the door and through the log walls. The stove is extinguished in a blast of steam and smoke. In minutes there's four feet of water in the room. The Spotswoods' wares bob on the dark surface like flotsam.

Now the creature fights to the death if it cannot escape. It dives underwater and resumes its true form, gaining a +5 bonus to Stealth rolls while submerged. In the confusion, it strikes out with its bite and mental influence to best effect. Due to the water the trading post interior is considered Difficult Ground, and the stove's smoke creates Dim Illumination (-1 to attack rolls). The thunderstorm lasts 1d6 hours.

## JACK SWIFT

Jack Swift wanders the West seeking challenges, longing to return to his love in Shan Fan. But her father is Cheu Meng, brutal warlord and Jack's former sensei.

**Attributes:** Agility d12, Smarts d6, Spirit d12, Strength d4, Vigor d8

**Skills:** Boating d6, Fighting d12, Guts d6, Knowledge (Occult) d4, Notice d6, Repair d6, Shooting d8, Survival d4, Swimming d6

**Cha:** 0; **Grit:** 5; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 6

**Hindrances:** Arrogant, Enemy (Minor, Cheu Meng), Quirk (Makes puns of his name)

**Edges:** Celestial Kung Fu (Drunken Style, Tan Tui), Chi Focus, Chi Mastery, Improved First Strike, Improved Frenzy, Martial Arts, Movement of the Serpent, New Power

**Powers:** Deflection d6, smite d6; **Power Points:** 20

**Gear:** 2x sai (Str+d4, Parry +1, +1 to Disarm attempts), LeMat pistol (Range 12/24/48, Damage 2d6, RoF 1, AP 1) and shotgun (Range 5/10/20, Damage 1-3d6, RoF 1), red-tinted spectacles, sandals.

*"Jack Swift" created by Louis Head.*