



1
LEVEL

4-5
HOURS

3-6
PLAYERS

From Boot Hill

An Adventure for Tephra: the Steampunk RPG



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Getting Started

Overview

Towns occasionally go dark on the frontier. Tech fails them, bandits strike them, and sometimes they just dry up when everyone decides they don't want to hang out in the middle of nowhere any longer. Most investigations turn up a perfectly normal explanation. The investigators fix the problem if there's a problem to be fixed (broken tracks, bandit that needs killin', etc) or report back that the place is gone and everyone moves on with their lives. Most of the time ghost towns just aren't worth investigating any further.

This is not one of those cases. Once the players get there and start investigating, they find a literal ghost town — almost everyone (with one notable exception) is dead, buried in the largest Boot Hill cemetery any of the characters have ever seen. A single survivor is found — a crazed doctor held up in the Sheriff's Office who opens fire the moment they peek their heads in.

As they continue their investigations, they find references to a stranger coming into town, a patient zero of a terrifying disease that killed everyone. When it comes to try and leave, however, they discover that their vehicle has been sabotaged, and a new part will need to be jury-rigged. Before they can make it to the machine shop, however, they discover where the residents of New Hensley went: the corpses in Boot Hill start to rise, hungry for the flesh of the living.

They'll fend off a siege of zombies in the machine shop while their ride is repaired, and just when they're about to leave, they'll be caught by mysterious men and women in black. A clean-up crew that kills the zombies, burns the town, and tries their damndest to kill the party before they can make good their escape.

They'll be left with a lot of questions by the time this night is over.

But at least they'll have survived.



Hundreds of tiny towns and settlements dot the western frontier of Evangless. Some go west looking for a new life, freedom to reinvent themselves. Some look for freedom from the law, escaping past misdeeds. Most want freedom of opportunity, a chance to make something of themselves that the overcrowded cities won't allow.

It's well known that freedom comes at a price, and on the edge of civilization, that price is safety. Airships may dot the skies these days, but when Wild Mace's gang is laying siege to your town, help is still an awful long time in coming.

It doesn't help that the majority of people deep in civilized Evangless are disinclined to spend much money to help the settlers. They're so far away. And really, the poor dears put themselves there, didn't they?

Rumor mill has it that one small mining town in particular, New Hensley, hasn't sent word back in almost a week. Normally this wouldn't catch anyone of note's attention, but the Trust was expecting a shipment of Graviton Spheres that never showed up. When the Trust doesn't get what they're expecting, they can raise enough of a fuss to get a response.

Adventure Hooks

Just like there's any number of parties, there's any number of reasons your party might get caught up in the events of New Hensley. Maybe you've got a bunch of heroes trying to save the day, but then again, maybe you don't. Use the following as prompts and jumping off points to get your heroes out in the middle of nowhere.

The Cavalry

The Cavalry always rides over the hills in the nick of time in the movies. In this case, you rode over the hill far too late. Hired by the Trust or even as official representatives of the Evangless government, your party is sent there under the authority of a higher power to find out exactly what the hell is going on in New Hensley. Normally this sort of mission would call for a more full response, but honestly, it's just the frontier settlers. No reason to waste money on that.

Concerned Family

Whether as a member of the LaVrey detective agency or a smaller independent operation, you've been hired by a wealthy woman (Lady Quinn Delacoix) concerned for her favorite nephew (Jeffery), who wanted to prove himself on the frontier. The rich patron couldn't care less what happened to the town, but will move heaven and earth to get the nephew back in one piece. If you end up using this option, Jeffery is a safety manager for the Parasol Mining Corporation and should be one of the half-dead walkers the party fights at the Machine Shops.

A Wanted Man

It's a common story on the frontier. Two drunk men get into a fight. One runs into the night, one leaves in a pine box, and the survivor gets a price put on his head. You've tracked the man (one Terrance Meriwether) to New Hensley. You've got to have the man to get the money, but the wanted poster doesn't specify alive or undead.

Corporate Espionage

There's a rumor spreading among the major companies, conglomerates, and industrial baronies: the Parasol Mining Conglomerate may have found the biggest revolution in transportation technology since Graviton Spheres. And in New Hensley of all places. Now, for the moment, this is just a rumor, but if certain wealthy interested parties hired outside agents to investigate those rumors, well, there'd be no harm in that, wouldn't there?



The Long Ride There

Whatever the reason the party is heading to New Hensley, start with them in transit to the town. Although horses are traditional, the party will be riding on a hired Clanker. Not only will this be a vital part of the plot when it breaks down later, it helps to convey the stark contrast of the rural life of the West with the fantastical technology possible to build back East.

All Western settlements are remote, but New Hensley in particular is in the middle of absolutely nowhere. The characters should notice just how empty and sparse the area surrounding it is. The only thing to see for miles for all but the most technologically advanced and hawk-eyed of characters is a giant mountain plateau — called the Spire — shooting up out of the land in the distance. This mountain, and the Graviton Sphere deposits therein, are what brought people out here in the first place.

The driver of the vehicle is a member in good standing of the West's vaunted Clanker Express — hired to provide dedicated transportation to the party so they could concentrate on their work — and she's possibly the most genuinely, aggressively friendly person the party has ever met.



The large clanker stomps heavily across the empty desert, belching steam and smoke. Each footfall a loud thud, yet somehow, you feel nothing in the transportation up top. Modern gyroscopics at their best. You take another look out around you -- grasslands and scrub as far as the eye can see. About two hours ago, one of you thought you saw a herd of massive animals in the distance, but since then you can't even tell if there's anything living around.

Really, at this point, you can only see two things worth lookin' at:

1. The half-finished railroad track behind you, machines and men hard at work at bringing the Empire to the outskirts of society.
2. The tall Spire ahead of you: a flat-topped plateau stretching into the sky, the shadows of the buildings of New Hensley clustered around it. They say a settlement needs two things to be considered a real town: a Trust branch and a post office. New Hensley has both, and when the train gets there, it's going to be so much more.

The Clanker Express driver, a gnome with wild hair and a grin that could split a jack o' lantern, name of Jenny, turns back to you.

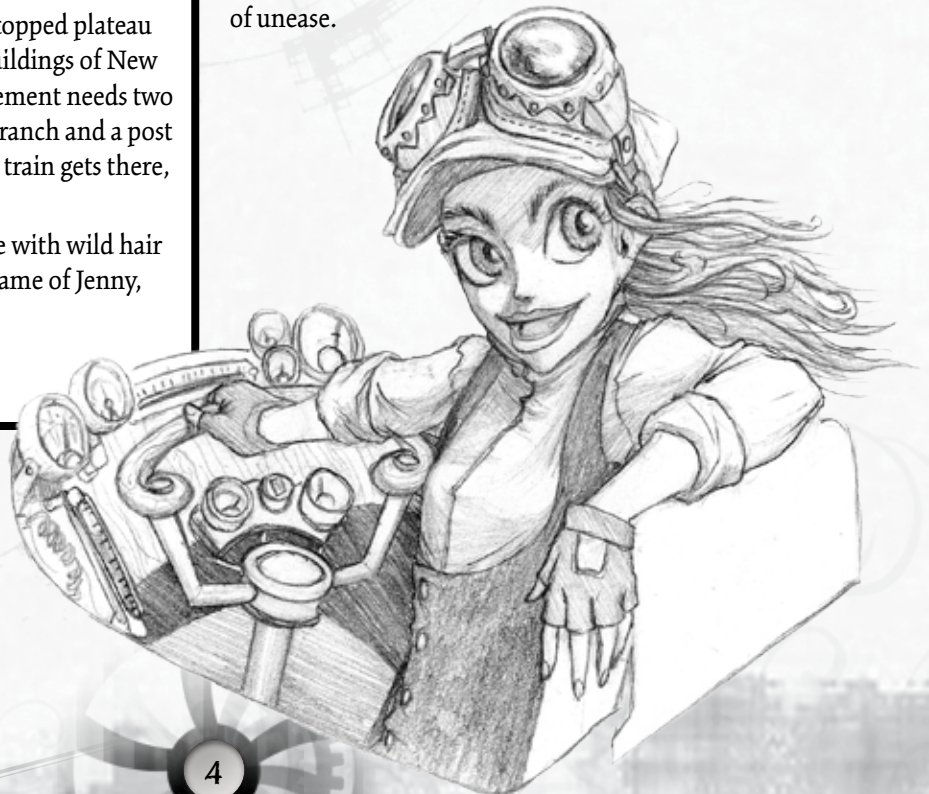
"So where y'all from?" she asks.

If the players keep talking with the driver, she'll happily regale them with the history of the town, and of herself. She knows that the place was a major mining operation years ago that dried up with the mine. After someone figured out that the Graviton Spheres they found were actually useful, the Parasol Mining Conglomerate bought up the land and opened the mine up for business.

She's most interested in her passengers' adventures. Especially if they're from other countries and cultures -- the farther away, the more interested she is.

If they don't, she'll try to tease information out about them. No matter what the characters do, though, she'll never lose her cheery disposition, at best offering "Well someone's a grump!"

If the players are interested, keep the conversation going until it starts to flag and proceed to the arrival at the town. If you can, try to interrupt mid-sentence to drive home the sense of unease.



The Driver:

Jenny Hundoo of the Clanker Express

AP: 3 PAR: >1

Gnome

HP: 30 | Wnds: 12 | Pri: +0 | Spd: 15 ft (land)

Brute	Cunning	Dexterity	Spirit	Sciences
+0	+4	+6	+3	+7

Guard

Pilot's Duster - light organic armor

Eva: +4 Def: +0

Soak: 2 | 4 | 6 | 8

Actions

Emergency Flash-bang

Jenny carries a supply of emergency flash-bang grenades on her belt. Designed to be thrown at the feet of the user, they produce a bright flash and a loud noise, disorienting attackers long enough for her to get away. Those within melee range of her must make a Tier 3 Brute resist or be Disoriented for 3 turns.

2 AP

A lot of people who don't understand gnomes very well mistake Jenny as metal deranged. After all, she's a far sight from her native woods. However, a quick inspection of her designs reveals only the bare minimum of metal required. Truth of the matter is that Jenny is just struck with an intense wanderlust. She wanted to see the world, all of it, and this was the way to do it. She's been just about everywhere and wants to talk about it, constantly, to whoever will listen.

She's been in a scrape or two and knows how to get herself out of danger, but she isn't a fighter and would rather get out of trouble's way rather than attack. If and when danger shows its face, she won't pick up arms but will instead activate a defensive "flash-bang" grenade to disorient her enemy and put some distance or a heavy table between her and her enemies, while still focusing on whatever needs to be done.

Claire (Jenny's Clanker)

Jenny's clanker (affectionately named "Claire" after Jenny's mother-in-law) is a tank-sized cargo hauler capable of carrying large supplies and even a few passengers up on top deck. Made entirely of a specially treated hardwood that's got the strength and flexibility of steel, it's a large platform on top of a cargo hold suspended between six massive wooden legs. Much faster than it would seem, it's a marvel of Gnomish engineering.

Jenny swears at it a lot when it breaks. Hence naming it after her mother-in-law.

Narrator's Note

Players are an annoyingly inventive lot — always coming up with solutions you never see coming (lightning into pools of water, causing a cave-in, running away from problems, etc). This is fun when it happens in fights, but can be tricky with mysteries, where pacing is controlled by how much information they do and do not have. Too little, they get frustrated. Too much and the plot's over. Throw the advanced science of Tephra into the mix and things get even more problematic.

We've detailed the things characters can find in the major locations with detective work and science, but rest assured, they will surprise you with something we couldn't possibly think of. When they do, remember the key rule of improv: "Never say no. Say yes and..." Don't be afraid to call a ten minute break if they drop something really surprising on you ("You want to do WHAT with a Graviton Sphere?") and figure out what to do.

Our tables are not etched in stone, and we won't track you down and kick in the doors if you have to adjust information accordingly to your group (we've tried this in the past, but the logistics are beyond our current budget). We've detailed exactly what happened at the end of this adventure under "The Truth," but the key points the characters should have when the dead start walking are:

- ✦ The town was left spotless, meaning that someone has actively been tidying up and burying people.
- ✦ Things started REALLY going to hell about a week ago when a disease started spreading like wildfire.
- ✦ Not long before that, a drifter named "Manco" showed up looking for mining work
- ✦ The Parasol Mining Conglomerate was up to something out here. Something they wouldn't want let out into the world.

In addition, gauge the amount of investigation on your players. If they're having fun poking into every corner, let them. If they look bored, probably best to move things along.

New Hensley



The clanker pushes past a rock formation and the town comes into town. The driver stops off mid-sentence as you round the bend, and you quickly see why.

There's absolutely no one there. A long dusty main street—a Saloon, a Machine Shop, a Sheriff's Office, and the Trust branch line the main drag, houses and miners' camps spreading out on each side and further back towards the Spire itself. A burnt-out building sits next to the Sheriff's office—black ash and ruins.

A large graveyard, known out in the frontier as a "Boot Hill" sits on the outskirts of town. Hundreds of grave markers, if not more, bake under the sun.

The street is empty. From what you can see, the buildings are empty. The town is silent, except for the buzz of a single machine outside a mine entrance.

The streets of the town are too narrow for the larger cargo-bearing Clanker, so the players must get out to explore. If they want to hitch a ride to the mine, Jenny will shake her head, citing that they only have enough fuel to get back to safety. Jenny herself hangs back when the party heads to explore -- keeping the Clanker ready to go at any moment.

The town itself has a few major landmarks and a couple dozen private residences, including: the Mine, the Sheriff's Office, the Saloon, the Trust, the Machine Shop, and Boot Hill. We've detailed the major landmarks that your players might investigate, but don't insist, or even expect, them to visit them all. The idea is to provide clues as to what happened and build an eerie, lonely atmosphere, not make certain they find every single clue.

Assisting Another

You can attempt to help somebody with an action. Helping costs just as much to perform as the act of doing it. One person will need to be the primary roller, the person who is primarily doing it. Any person helping will add a bonus to their roll based on their own tier result. Unfortunately, a tier 1 assist will result in a penalty being added to the primary roller as you got in their way.

1	-4 to the result
2	+2 to the result
3	+6 to the result
4	+12 to the result

The Machine Shop

"Machine Shop" here is a broad term indicating a handy-shop that fixes pretty much every piece of machinery the town needed — from a bent horseshoe to the mind-numbingly complex machinery that powered the mining operation. Whoever was in charge here kept the place meticulously clean and neat — down to chalk outlines for every tool on a peg-board. Scientifically inclined characters can use this space to build, repair, and study any mechanical devices they find. If they choose to craft items here, any augments that they make will be 1 marque higher than what they can craft with their current skill in any of the sciences.

Scientific Inquiry: On a successful Understanding (science), characters can discover the following:

The Machine Shop kept a detailed ledger of all their repair work, which tracks orders up until a week ago before suddenly stopping. In addition, there's a mention of Bioflux repair work for both Dr. Ashley Donnae and "Parasol Special Projects"

Tier 2 The characters find a fully functioning Spendo-Brand Lawn Deformer (pg. 86, Tephra players guide) in a back room.

Tier 3 The characters find the last order for Dr. Donnae in a storeroom—an extra cartridge for his Bioflux gun.

Tier 4 The characters find Dr. Donnae's design notes—and with it, instructions on how to overcharge it, destroying all half-dead in a hundred yard radius and completely wrecking the gun beyond repair.

Dr. Donnae's Anti-Death Neutralizing Wand

Dr. Donnae's Anti-Death Neutralizing Wand looks like he put it together with whatever scraps he could find in his office and the Machine Shop. Mostly because he did. It's a long, black wand with a trigger midway meant to be held with two hand like a rifle. Tubes connect exposed parts and pulse with black liquid when fired. A gauge set into the wand reveals the number of charges left: 3 out of 7. Consider it a heavy firearm with an accuracy of + 1

Firing the wand uses the same roll as any Firearm (Accuracy vs. Evade). When fired, black liquid pumps through the hose and a white arcing light shoots out the gun. Against the Half-Dead, the gun kills them with a single successful shot regardless of tier. Against the Reapers, it inflicts the Paralyzed condition for a single round unless the Reaper succeeds on a Brute roll equivalent to the player's Accuracy roll. Ex: A Tier 3 or higher Brute roll against a Tier 3 accuracy roll.

Against the living, the toxic nature of the Liquid Black powering the gun takes a dispersed effect, forcing an immediate spirit resist roll against Tier 2 fear.

The Trust

The Trust branch is one of the most respectable looking establishments in the mining town and was designed to look like a branch back East in miniature. Unlike the other buildings, which were built as needed and don't look like they'll last very long, the Trust is hewn from granite, brick, and stone, with a modern vault to match. The tables, desks, lanterns and portraits of of royalty and bank presidents all say that this is a place for men and women in waistcoats and bowler hats, not sunburnt desperadoes in dusters.

As a side effect of the modern construction, the Trust

branch also served as the storage unit for the Graviton Spheres before they were picked up and shipped back East. The Vault is almost impenetrable save by exceptionally powerful explosives (marque IV).

Good Ol' Fashioned Detective Work: On a successful Intel-Gathering roll (cunning), characters can discover the following:

Tier 1 The vault, till, and Graviton Sphere depository are all untouched—no robbery here. Whatever happened, no one's taken advantage of robbing the bank. That being said, they can take 30 princes from the tills. If they want to. The Graviton Spheres are all stocked behind the Vault's thick walls—short of powerful explosives or the key (nowhere to be found) they're not getting out.

Tier 2 Parasol Mining's ledger doesn't match the room in the vault—there's an entry marked "Project Black" but you can't find anything that matches it among their Graviton Spheres depository.

Tier 3 Buried deep in the ledger you find a description of Project Black—a large metal container, cold to the touch, filled with a viscous black liquid.

Tier 4 The characters find a Parasol Special Projects log-book deep in their Graviton Sphere vault. It's currently encoded, but can be broken later. You know, when they aren't in the middle of nowhere and surrounded by death.

The Saloon

Known simply as "Pete's," the saloon also doubled as the town hotel and meeting house of note. A long curved bar on one end with a mirror behind it, a stage on the other, rooms up top, and a variety of tables, gambling and otherwise, in between. This is the only place that looks like there's been a fight — chairs are smashed, tables are overturned, and the mirror behind the bar is shattered.

A door swings open on the second floor landing -- "Pete and Shooter's" written above it. As you step in, your nose wrinkles -- there's an awful stench coming from a door behind the bar.

Good Ol' Fashioned Detective Work: On a successful Intel-Gathering roll (cunning), characters can discover the following:

Tier 1

This was no bar brawl, the walls are littered with bullet holes, scorch marks, and other evidence of weapons. Characters with appropriate specialties can also determine that aside from conventional guns, someone was also firing more advanced Bioflux gun from the stage.

Tier 2

Shoved beneath a upturned faro table, characters find a beat-up but still perfectly serviceable Bioflux gun that looks like it was cobbled together with spare parts. Though it's obvious HOW to use, what it does is a mystery until the characters speak with Dr. Ashley Donnae.

Tier 3

Pete kept his safe behind a painting depicting the closing days of the Hurricane wars (Pete was a veteran of said wars who cashed in his chips and sought fortune out west). Inside, they can find Pete's old gear — a sidearm (broken, but with a marque II Auto Reload augment that can be attached on a medium firearm at the Machine Shops).

Tier 4

The characters find Manco's room -- it looks like someone left in a hurry. They do, however, find a something with his real name: Terrance Meriwether.

Pete and Shooter's Room

Pete and Shooter had the second-best room in the house (the best was for the best guests, of course). It was neat, well-maintained, and full of love. Love letters from the courtship are framed on the walls, as are ledgers for both the bar and Shooter's business. Miners can get awfully lonely so far away from home.

Next to the Ledger they find Shooter's diary, where she kept the town's secrets. Most of them are fairly useless as far as investigations go (but feel free to make up any salacious blackmail material you want. Pete's was also the town brothel, after all). There are a few specific references: A drifter named Manco rolls into town two weeks before today looking for mining work. Manco takes ill a week and a day before today, which is followed by everyone else in the town getting increasingly sick. Three days before today, the journal ends with a note of a town meeting being scheduled.

The Kitchen

The kitchen behind the bar is just as beat-up and a mess as the man room outside. Food stores have been left out to rot, and the place reeks of disease, maggots crawling over the meat. The intense stench will make the players retch and lose 5 maximum HP until they can take a long rest. They can prevent this by making a tier 2 brute resist.

Houses

A quick search of any of the residences will reveal that they're more or less identical (Parasol didn't see the point of shelling out the money for personalized residences) and all empty and untouched. Everything is neatly put away, but any food (meat, fruit, vegetables, etc) has long since rotted.

Burnt out Husk: Doctor's Office

Should the characters seek out the Doctor's office or investigate the burnt-out husk next to the saloon, they quickly determine that they're one and the same. The sign for "Dr. Ashley J. Donnae's Health and Well-Being" still swings in front of the husk, untouched.

They can smell the accelerant and fuel used to burn the place down as they poke through the ashes, but there's not much to find but burnt-out equipment and pictures of Dr. Donnae's family back East. Someone was VERY thorough.

Know of the Land

With a successful spirit roll, the adventurers can learn the following:

Tier 1

This food has been cooking in the heat for at least four days, and was laid out for a large feast. By all rights, scavenging animals should have moved in by this point to have taken the food. The fact that they haven't means something is keeping them away.

Tier 2

Something **had** been eating the meat before it rotted, but never finished it, something that doesn't look like an animal the adventurers have ever seen.

Tier 3

Those bite marks? They're human.

Tier 4

There's a rumor they've heard. A very old rumor about half-dead corpses eating the flesh of the living. What's worse, though, is that these half-dead corpses can be controlled by an intelligent corpse.

Boot Hill

Boot Hill is separated from the town by a low stone wall with a tall wooden gate, "Dearly Departed" etched into gate's crossbar. The graveyard is massive for a town this size. Early graves date back a century, but the most recent was buried a week ago. After that, the graves stop bothering to put up dates -- they're all simply cairn markers. Piles of stone to say someone's buried here, but nothing to say who.

As they leave, something approaches them: wolves circling around. Sickly looking things, with pustules and weeping sores all over their matted fur. They growl and charge.

Wolf Pack - Secret Encounter

The infected wolves aren't half-dead, they're just hungry, sick, and dying. Normally, wolves wouldn't attack people -- too dangerous. But these wolves tried eating half-dead and it's rotting them from the inside. No matter how much they eat, it's not enough, and they're pushed to desperation somewhere in their animal brains.

They'll attack whoever they perceive as weakest (gnomes in particular) en masse, hoping to bring them down and run. The moment anyone fires a gun or makes any kind of similarly loud noise or flash, though, they'll scatter.

Conclusion

The characters should walk away from Boot Hill feeling that whatever took this town is catching and could be dangerous to the outside world. Look what it did to those wolves.



Wolves (5)

AP: 3 PAR: 1

Medium Animals

HP: 10 | Wnds: 8 | Pri: +0 | Spd: 40 ft (land)

Brute +2	Cunning +6	Dexterity +1	Spirit +0	Sciences +0
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Guard

Hide - organic armor

Eva: +0 Def: +0

Soak: 2 | 4 | 6 | 8

Note: Wolves have two additional called shot locations for their legs, but have no arms or hands.

Actions

Bite - natural weapon

Acc: +1 Stk: +3

Damage: 6 | 12 | 18 | 24

2 AP

Note: The wolf gets a +1 to strike for each other wolf within 25 feet. The wolf can begin a new move, attack, and then complete the move.

Howl

1 AP

The wolf gives a +4 bonus to strike to the next attack roll made by any allies within 25 feet.

The Mine



The mine was the heart of the town hundreds of years ago, and now that the world knows the secret of Graviton Spheres, it's the heart again. Production had only just started to crank into high gear, but there's signs of construction all over the place—next to all the elaborate, steam-powered mining equipment there's half-built buildings, scaffolding for the construction of rails and half-dug tunnels into the Spire.

A generator hums quietly next to the mine, left on and never turned off, powering lights and other equipment inside. Above it is a large, happy sign: "Parasol Mining Conglomerate" with a friendly-looking pair of miners sharing a blue-and-white parasol. Right next to it is a small company office. And next to that—

The dark entrance to the mine itself.

The mining company office is overturned and torched. The only thing left to find among the ashes is a Personnel log. If the characters know to look for Manco, he's listed as working on "Special Projects, level 7."

If the characters go inside the mine itself, they'll find an elevator is operated by a brass switch with settings for 1-6, each taking them to a different level. When they look closer, they realize that there used to be a setting below six, but it's been buffed away. If they pull the switch down PAST 6, it will take them all the way down to level 7.

On levels 2-6 they'll find most everything as it should be—lights line the mining tunnels providing ample illumination. Graviton Spheres are embedded into the rock at the far ends of the tunnels, and the whole thing is set up on a system of rails to cart the spheres back up. They can also pick up pick-axes and other mining equipment, all usable as Heavy Weapons.

Level 7 is a different story.

Level 7

Secret Encounter



As you step out of Level 7, it's like you've stepped into something out of a particularly terrifying fire-and-brimstone sermon. A massive cave, hollowed out around a deep pool surrounded by a chain-link fence. A large pipe sticks through a hole in the fence and into the pool before shooting off up into the ceiling.

When you get closer, you realize that the pool isn't filled with water. It's filled with a black, viscous liquid. And despite being underground with no wind and no tremors you can feel?

It's moving.

Upon stepping out of the elevator, the players must immediately make a Spirit resist roll against Tier 3 fear. This place is terrifying and objectively wrong. Players should feel like someone is watching them at all times, occasionally glimpsing screaming faces in the pool, and hearing the whispers of their dead friends and relatives.

Narrator's Note

It's a delicate business, running a scary scene. Your players can always distance themselves knowing that they're not really in any danger. They're sitting comfortably in a room with their friends, a warm pizza, and some dice. Some people don't want to be scared, and that's okay. It's a conversation you should have with your players beforehand.

There are two tricks to making scenes scary: the first is description. Don't just say a place is terrifying, show how a place is terrifying. Use every sense at your disposal: what do the characters feel, what do they smell? What doesn't jibe with their sense of what should be down here?

The second is to make it personal. At a certain point, most scary things stop being nightmares and start being tropes. In this case, take advantage of your characters' histories and stories. In this place, they're going to hear the dead talking to them, remember their worst fears and sins. Be specific as to who those people are, and what sins they brought down below with them.

Is there someone dead in their lives they feel responsible for? Is there a sin they brought down? It's all here. In the black. It doesn't have a personality, it simply is. Think the Overlook Hotel in the *Shining*.

You can even personalize the effects within race: gnomes might instinctively know that this place is unnatural beyond their understanding, while farishtaa might start having impossible flashbacks from when they were elves. Elves might have a affinity and fascination with the stuff mixed in with their repulsion, while satyrs start having race memories of experimentation.

If you're feeling industrious, talk to each player beforehand and make them pick a death-related memory that still haunts them. Whether it's a man they killed, someone they let die, or a dead-man they still secretly fear at night, find out what their weaknesses. If they ask why, just say "You'll see," and smile. Players hate that.

This encounter is unique in that there's no fighting or chance to lose any hit points. Just a chance to walk out shaken and afraid of what Parasol might be doing.

If they can control themselves enough to stay on Level 7, there's a table with vials filled with the black liquid labeled "LIQUID BLACK" that they can take with them.

Conclusion

Your characters, if they have access to explosives, may decide to blow the place up—always an acceptable option. Either way, they should walk away knowing that Parasol is up to something secret and wrong. Potentially even unholy depending on their religious beliefs.

The Sheriff's Office

The law in town was also the town jail — three cells in the back, a pair of desks up front. The gun case is smashed open and while the smaller arms are taken, there's a full range of ammunition available (including sniper and high-damage cartridges). The door is barricaded when the characters get there, but fairly easy to get through.

In the back, before the characters even have a chance to look around, someone yells out "They eat their minds and their souls, but leave their meat for the filth!" before opening fire.

Dr. Ashley J. Donnae

Dr. Ashley J. Donnae was the town's doctor and is the only survivor of New Hensley. Though a compassionate doctor, the satyr was an escaped slave and tended to rely on alcohol far too

much when things got really bad in the town. He was already jumpy and paranoid before the dead rose and everything went to hell. Watching the people he loved eat his other loved ones was too much for him to handle.

That being said, he's fortified his position pretty well (heavy cover) and took the repeater rifle (which counts as a Heavy Firearm) from the gun case. He's convinced that anything that moves is one of the walking dead after him, and no power on Tephra will convince him otherwise. However, he's not looking for a fight either: knocking out his hit points or successfully disarming and trapping him will make him fall to his knees immediately, expecting to die.

After subduing the Doctor, the players will find it difficult to get any sense out of him, as he still believes they're walking corpses. There are a few clues to be discerned from his ramblings, though:

✦ He frequently refers to what swept the town as "A disease, a pathogen with no known vector."

✦ He's deathly afraid of a person he calls "Manco"

His fear of Manco doesn't come close to his fear of the mine, however. He calls it "the place where it incubated for millennia, waiting for us to dig it up and spread it." If any attempt is made to bring him into the mine, Donnae will do anything, quite literally anything, to keep from having to go in it.

✦ If you feel that the players have done an exceptionally good job of talking the satyr down, he'll reveal the specifics of what happened:



"We knew there was a problem. We held a town meeting at Pete's. People were angry. People wanted answers. I should have had the answers. But I was stupid. STUPID. I didn't have the answers until Manco walked in. He had our friends with them. Our family. They were dead. They were hungry. They didn't care about our bullets. Fire burned them. Didn't burn him. My gun burnt him, though. He knocked my gun out of my hands. He ran. I ran. But my gun burnt him."

✦ If the players try to leave him, he'll beg them to take him with them. He may not be entirely convinced that they're real, but he desperately doesn't want to be left alone.



Dr. Donnae

AP: 4 PAR: 1

Satyr

HP: 55 | Wnds: 12 | Pri: +2 | Spd: 35 ft (land)

If somebody that he is engaged with moves away, he can reflexively follow them for 1 AP. He matches their speed (with a difference of up to 20 feet).

Brute	Cunning	Dexterity	Spirit	Sciences
+5	+0	+3	+0	+12

Guard

Patchwork Leathers - light organic armor

Eva: +0 Def: +1

Soak: 2 | 4 | 6 | 8

Note: For every 10 damage Dr. Donnae takes, he can choose one target within 25 feet and cause them to suffer Tier 1 Fear (-2 on resist rolls, -4 on resist rolls against him). Targets can resist with a Tier 2 Spirit.

Actions

Bowie Knife - light metal melee weapon

2 AP Acc: +3 Stk: +2
Damage: 6 | 12 | 18 | 24

Repeater Rifle - heavy metal firearm

1 AP Acc: +1 Range: 200 ft.
Damage: 6 | 12 | 18 | 24

Narrator's Note

Not every narrator is going to have a flair for or comfort with heavy role playing, especially someone like the good doctor who may be irreparably damaged by what he's seen. If you feel comfortable we encourage you giving it a try. If not, it's enough to simply state the key facts listed above as being among his ramblings.

It's also worth noting that Dr. Donnae isn't a villain, and mental illness and trauma is not something to be taken lightly. He's simply a man who was so frightened by what he saw that he can't leave it any longer.

Conclusion

Now that the players have someone who may, with help, be able to actually provide answers to what happened, the next step is to figure out what to do with him. There's a pair of Mindcuffs (Pg. 86 in the Tephra Player's Guide) in the Sheriff's desk that will help, but the most sensible place to put him is the Clanker for now and see if Jenny can do anything.

GP

Sundown

Whether the characters investigate everything or decide they've had enough and want to go for help, the sun is finally setting when they return to the vehicle.



The sun dips slowly below the horizon as you trudge back to the edge of town. As you get back to the Clanker, you quickly realize something is wrong – you don't recall Jenny lying there motionless when you left.

The characters quickly determine that Jenny isn't dead, only unconscious. She'll recover in a moment with a sprained right leg. When she wakes up, she explains that someone snuck behind her and knocked her out. Her description is vague (she only got a brief look at him). A man with a slouched hat and a patterned serape.

If she was holding out to Dr. Donnae for them, though, he only emerges from hiding when the characters approach. He's agitated again, but when talked down will identify the man who attacked Jenny as "Manco. But not Manco. Manco's corpse with him in it."

The party, with or without Jenny's help, determine that the Clanker is currently inoperative – someone took a part from the engine core, and without it, they aren't going anywhere. Their only option is to jury-rig a replacement, and that's only happening at the Machine Shop.

It's at this point someone should spot something coming towards them from Boot Hill.



The last rays of the sun fall over the horizon, and you start to pull out lanterns and lights for the trip to the machine shop. One of you looks up and, in the last dim twilight sees something moving in Boot Hill.

Sees a lot of things moving. Figures bursting up from the ground, dragging themselves onto the sand, and shambling towards you. Your stomach turns, and the hair on your neck stands on end. The shared part of every race on Tephra that remembers being hunted is screaming at you right now.

You know what happened to everyone here. Everyone died. And now the dead are walking.

"Stone," you hear Jenny say. "They're headed to the Machine Shop's. I can't fix the damn engine surrounded by them, we have to get there before they do. RUN!"

At this point the characters will have to make a mad dash towards the machine-shop. The dead won't make it to them in time to force a fight, but they'll be closing in just as they reach the edge, forcing them to close the door just as they lunge for it.



The Siege



Jenny rushes to the table and pulls busted parts from the junk boxes. “Keep ‘em off me for a second!” You can smell the rot and hear the groans outside. The beating of fists against the walls—all too thin walls you realize at the moment.

There’s a crash, you turn, and see a dead ayodin burst in, dressed in his Sunday best, followed by a shambling elf, her dress torn and tattered. You hear door rattle behind you and see a dozen hands pushing through—it isn’t going to last for long.

If the adventurers brought Dr. Donnae with them:

Dr. Donnae huddles in a corner, whimpering. “They’re here.”

The encounter at the Machine Shop runs a bit differently than most encounters. Rather than a set number of enemies that must be killed, the characters have to hold off the walking dead until the engine is fixed so they can beat a quick escape. By herself, Jenny will take 4 rounds to fix the engine. If someone helps her, it’ll take 3. If someone with any skill points in Engineering helps her, it’ll take 2.

Dr. Donnae is largely useless in this fight — if freed and given a weapon, he will fight back against the half-dead walkers, but will just as quickly turn on the players or even the engineers fixing the engine.

The Half-Dead Walkers

The walking corpses are Half-Dead Walkers, functionally mindless animate corpses with only one thing on their minds: eating living flesh. They’re incapable of higher thought or tactical planning. Any attempts to affect them mentally or emotionally flat out fail without a resist roll of any kind. They’re simply too mindless for it to work.

They have no mind for strategy or higher thought. They simply seek out and attack the closest living being to them unless attacked, at which point they turn on the threat. Any and all automatons are ignored entirely.

No matter what the race, Half-Dead walker stats remain the same. Becoming a corpses seems to have a democratizing effect.

The half-dead walkers aren’t strong, but they are relentless and effectively limitless in numbers. For priority

purposes, treat the Half-dead as all having the same turn. Only two burst initially, but three more will follow at the end of every Half-Dead turn.

Half-Dead Walkers AP: 3 PAR: 1

Undead of many races

HP: 15 | Pri: +0 | Spd: 35 ft (land)

If a half-dead walker kills somebody, they gain 1 AP on their next turn.

Brute	Cunning	Dexterity	Spirit	Sciences
+8	+2	+2	-	-

Guard

Dead Hardened Flesh - organic armor

Eva: +0 Def: +3

Soak: 1 | 2 | 3 | 4

Note: Strictly speaking, the Half-Dead aren’t using any of those muscles or nerves. Called shots are meaningless to them, no matter how accurate. On the plus side, exhaust their hit points and they fall down, finally truly dead.

Actions

Claws

Acc: +2 Stk: +3

1 AP Damage: 4 | 8 | 12 | 16

Note: The Half-Dead can spend an additional 1 AP to bypass poor or light cover.

Bite

Acc: +2 Stk: +5

2 AP Damage: 5 | 10 | 15 | 20

Poison: The bite deals an additional 6 damage if the target fails to make a Tier 2 Brute resist.

Part of what makes the undead so scary is that they aren’t malevolent. They’re us, normal people turned into ravenous monsters. Be sure to play that up: every walker that bursts in isn’t just a faceless mook to be killed, but a former person. Describe what they looked like, the clothes they died in. Some suggestions:

- ★ Pete, the Saloon owner: built like a fireplug, with a crisp white shirt and suspenders
- ★ Shooter, Pete’s wife: wide shouldered, tall, and prone to wearing pants
- ★ Mine operators
- ★ Machine Shop workers
- ★ Miner’s wives and husbands, who followed them out west looking for money to settle down with

- Jeffrey Delacoix, mine manager in waistcoat and pocket watch, he's the intended target of the Concerned Family hook.

Narrator's Note: Be cautious about making any of the half-dead walkers kids. While it's a standard and effective horror trope, it may not be for every group. Everyone has their own limits, and you should respect that. Don't be afraid to broach the subject openly before or during game—communication is key.

Once the engine is fixed, stop sending walkers in and wait for the party to wipe out whatever's left.

Conclusion

They've got a fixed engine, now they just need to get out of here. If the characters take a moment to catch their breath and look around, they might find that there's something in between them and freedom.

If they just decide to run, though, they're going to find out that they have a problem on their hands.

The Conspiracy

Whether the players rushed out or took the lay of the land before exiting the building, they see the following:



You feel a blast of heat on your face and quickly realize why — the town's on fire, along with the dead folks. Men and women of all races in black hats and black dusters buttoned up to the collar swarm the inferno. To a man, they have reflective black goggles on, the fire from the burning buildings reflecting in the mirrored lenses. Most have firearms and mundane weapons, picking off stray half-dead walkers.

A shot rings out and a young girl, couldn't be more than 18, goes down. Others have large, backpack mounted flamethrowers, and they're setting everything to light. Others, seemingly unarmed, are wheeling Graviton Spheres out of the Trust, while a woman with a clipboard counts them off.

In the flickering firelight, you can see a patch on the shoulder of each duster — the symbol of the Parasol Mining Conglomerate.

Blam!

A shot rings out. Smoke rises from a black-handled revolver in the hands of a tall farishtaa, dressed the same as every other company man there, save for a black balaclava covering his mouth. Three company men stand in front of him, one with half his head missing.

The dead man slumps to the ground. The Man in the Balaclava, with almost mechanical grace, holsters his gun. He looks at his men's shocked expressions.

"You said he might be infected."

A woman in heavy black leathers and a burn scar on her face steps forward and sets the body ablaze with a hand-held flame caster.

If the adventurers left the building:

The man in the balaclava looks up at you and takes a step forward, hand on his gun. "Survivors? How are you still alive?"

Whether the heroes try to talk, lie, or just pull leather and open fire, the result is the same: the mining company clean-up crew will try to kill the players and any other people with them.



There's nothing the characters can offer, say, or do that will change their minds: these men and women are here to cover up the truth and are profoundly disinterested in leaving survivors.

If he spots them, the Man in the Balaclava will try lying at first, explaining that he's there to help save company employees and find the truth of what happened. He'll particularly try to get the characters to come out and be surrounded by his killers to make a quick job of it. If that doesn't work (and it shouldn't, he all but has "Man in Black" written on his hat in big red letters):



The Man in the Balaclava sighs. "Worth a shot." He turns to the heavily armored woman. "Please kill them, Jeanine." He walks off into the shadows. Jeanine pulls the Flame Caster and a jet of flame ignites, the bright white teeth of her manic grin visible in the dancing light.

The two thugs draw dangerous-looking repeater rifles.

Yeah. This ain't good.

One Option: Sneakin' out the Back

Your characters might decide to skip the fight entirely and try to sneak out the back: a perfectly good option when dealing with faceless company goons looking to shorten your life-span. If that is the case, use the sneaking rules found on page 125 of the Tephra Player's Guide against the Man in the Balaclava's cunning (+8). Repeat this twice, and don't be afraid to really draw out the Man's roll to ratchet up the tension. If they fail the first roll, proceed with the encounter as usual. If they fail the second, proceed with the encounter as before, but they're 50 yards from the Clanker. If they make it almost the way there, but fail the third, they're close enough to the Clanker that they can climb on it with an Action Point.

The Man in the Balaclava

The Man in the Balaclava has no name. Or at least he doesn't have one he'll bother to explain to the characters—not information they need to know. While everyone else on the clean up crew is your standard-issue Conglomerate thug, trained in strike-breaking and destruction, the Man in the Balaclava is a methodical, cold-blooded killer. He's the man they send when a union leader needs to be silenced, when things can't go wrong. Whatever personality he had when he was an elf, he came out

of the process as twisted on the inside as he had been on the outside. He's utterly loyal to the company and will do anything for them, but also doesn't see himself as expendable.

He has people to be expendable for him.

Company Men (2) AP: 3 PAR: 1

Human

HP: 30 | Wnds: 12 | Pri: +4 | Spd: 20 ft (land)

Brute +3	Cunning +2	Dexterity +4	Spirit +1	Sciences +0
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Guard

Company Duster - light organic armor

Eva: -1 Def: +0

Soak: 2 | 4 | 6 | 8

Actions

Rifle - heavy metal firearm

2 AP Acc: +1 Range: 200 ft.
Damage: 6 | 12 | 18 | 24

Knife - light metal melee weapon

2 AP Acc: +2 Stk: +5
Damage: 4 | 8 | 12 | 16

Jeanine

Jeanine is, in many ways, the Man in the Balaclava's polar opposite. He's cold and calculating, an alien enigma. She's passionate, manic, and you can see everything about her in the insane grin on her face. The Man's loyalty to the company is for favors unknown. Jeanine hangs out with him because he lets her burn things.

Jeanine will use fire strategically, looking to blind and cut the characters off from each other so the riflemen can pick them off one by one. She does enjoy hurting people, though, and will take the chance to terrify and torture one player in particular (chosen at random) if she thinks she can get away with it.

Narrator's Note

Your characters might be inspired to try and run away. After all, they're probably still bleeding from the half-dead siege and are massively outgunned by the Parasol goons.

Good. We encourage that. It's not impossible to beat back Jeanine and her goons, but make sure to make it clear to your players that running is an option. A lot of players might consider every fight to be won or lost, but life doesn't always

Jeanine

AP: 4 PAR: 1

Human

HP: 59 | Wnds: 12 | Pri: +2 | Spd: 20 ft (land)

Brute +4	Cunning +6	Dexterity +5	Spirit +1	Sciences +0
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Guard

Fireproof Duster - medium organic armor

Eva: -2 Def: +4

Soak: 3 | 6 | 9 | 12

Note: Grants immunity to the Burning Status Effect

Actions

Flame Caster - medium metal casster

Acc: +1 Range: adjacent

2 AP
Fire Damage: 5 | 10 | 15 | 20

Causes Tier 2 Burning upon a successful hit.

Perimeter Burn

Jenine can cause a perimeter burn, setting a 15 ft stretch of ground on fire that much be leapt over (requiring a Tier 2 Dexterity roll) or run around to avoid being caught on fire for Tier 2 Burning. She'll try to use this technique to catch the adventurers in a circle of flame, leaving them easy-pickin's for the riflemen.

2 AP

Blinding Shot

With a quick blast, Jeanine can shoot fire with the intent of temporarily blinding her enemies with its blazing light. Adventurers have to make a Tier 2 Brute resist or gain the Poor Vision status effect.

1 AP

work that way. Some fights don't end by reducing an enemy's HP to zero. Some enemies just can't be beat for now.

For the purposes of escape, assume the Clanker is 200 feet from the characters and once reached, can be mounted with an action point.

Shooting from the Clanker gives +2 to all firearms and bow shots due to having the higher ground as well as medium cover. If all the characters make it up, they can install the engine and make a hasty retreat without having to defeat the soldiers.

Conclusion



"Here we go!" Jenny shouts as she pulls a lever and the Clanker lurches into gear, speeding away from the inferno that used to be New Hensley. Men in black dusters give chase on horseback. One of them levels a very big gun...

"Oh no you don't, hang on!" Jenny flips a switch, and the Clanker darts to the left and you fall back as it hits speeds you were not aware it could—a beam of hot light barely missing the vehicle. You pull out into the night, away from the hell that you found.

If the players left Dr. Donnae in the Clanker when the zombies attacked, they'll find him dead, killed by the Clean-Up crew.

Aftermath

Depending on whether or not the characters saved Dr. Donnae and recovered a vial of Liquid Black, the following outcomes occur:

Dr. Donnae Saved and Liquid Black Recovered



As you sit in the Clanker in silence, trying to process what you've seen, Dr. Donnae stirs. You glance over at him and you realize that at some point, he got the vial of Liquid Black. He sits up, and for a moment you see the man he must have been. "I know what this is," he says. "This is what was in Manco. I used it to make my gun." He look at you. "I can teach you to make more." He takes off his glasses and rubs his eyes. "We're going to need them. Manco said he was headed East. He's catching the next train to Bailey. Parasol's HQ."

The characters gain the following story:

DONNAE'S DISCIPLE

You have studied at the feet of the great Dr. Ashley Donnae and he has taught you how to craft anti-death rounds. This ammunition gains 2 damage class when used against anything that has been corrupted by dead essence and can be used in any firearm.



Liquid Black Recovered



Dr. Donnae's dead body lies slumped against the railing, a bullet hole in his forehead and two in his chest. The black liquid swirls in the test tube you saved it in—what is this stuff? Why did they want it so bad? Jenny is quiet for a long moment. "You know I just realized something," she says. "Parasol's HQ is this way. East. In Bailey."

With access to the right labs, the characters can synthesize more charges for Donnae's Bioflux zapper, but won't be able to make more anti-death rounds without Donnae's help.

Dr. Donnae Saved



Dr. Donnae shivers in the darkness, drawing his threadbare coat around him. "He's going East," he mutters. "Manco has a train to catch to Bailey."

Dr. Donnae is, unfortunately, far too gone to help manufacture more without serious mental help. He does provide the clue of where the Stranger is going, though: Bailey. The largest city in the west of the country and the HQ of the Parasol Mining Conglomerate.

Regardless...

No matter which outcome they get, or if they don't save Dr. Donnae or the vial of Liquid Black, the following happens:



Jenny throws the Clanker into autopilot and turns to all of you. "I've been all over the world and I've never seen anything like this. Without you guys, I'd be a dead woman. Here, take your money back. Far as I'm concerned it's never any good with me."

Jenny refunds the characters' money: 20 Princes each. Everyone also gains the following story:

FRIEND OF THE CLANKER EXPRESS



You saved Jenny, and that's no mean favor to her and her friends. Characters can hitch rides with her friends in the Clanker Express for free if they're going the right way. Jenny will, if she's around and not on a job, take them most anywhere without charge.

If the characters were forced to fight the Man in the Balaclava's goons, they also gain the following story:

CORPORATE BOUNTY



You've got a price on your head, but it's from no government or law. A company wants your head, and they're willing to pay big to get it. They won't advertise as broadly but killers in the right circles will recognize your face and your names.

The Truth

What happened in New Hensley?

The Parasol Mining Conglomerate was content to mine the Spire for gravity spheres until a miner struck the black liquid deep down in the mine. He was infected by it when he found it and needed to be put down immediately. The company hushed it up and brought some of it back for testing. Whatever they found excited them enough they started expanding the operation and put people in to start extracting the stuff at a high rate.

Manco appeared in the town as a drifter looking for mining work. Most people assumed he kept his name a secret because of some incident in his past or another (common enough on the frontier). Since he had no family to speak of, Parasol put him to work on the Liquid Black project. One day he was found unconscious and rushed to the doctor. The doctor extracted enough of a sample to start to fabricate his weapon, but Manco started rising at night and preying on the townspeople, leaving a growing number of dead walkers in his wake. It was a few short days ago, when the Doctor called everyone to try and solve the problem, that he burst in with a small army of the dead and finished off everyone in the town.

It was the Manco that knocked out Jenny and took the Clanker part (he needed it for his own transport). He's also the man who burnt the Doctor's office—he didn't want anyone making any more anti-death rounds. He left the Doctor alive because he didn't believe Dr. Donnae was a threat any longer. And possibly because there was still something human left in him.

Once Parasol realized something was wrong, they moved the clean-up crew in to burn the town to the ground to contain the spread of the disease as well as hide their involvement. Tragic fires happen all the time. They didn't realize that Manco was long gone, and may not have cared even if they did know. Whatever they found out about the Liquid Black, they're willing to do almost anything to keep it a secret from everyone else.

What happened to Manco? Where is he going? Why did he take the time to bury everyone? What is the Liquid Black and why is the Man in the Balaclava so willing to kill for it? Those are questions that will have to wait for another adventure, dear Narrator.

