

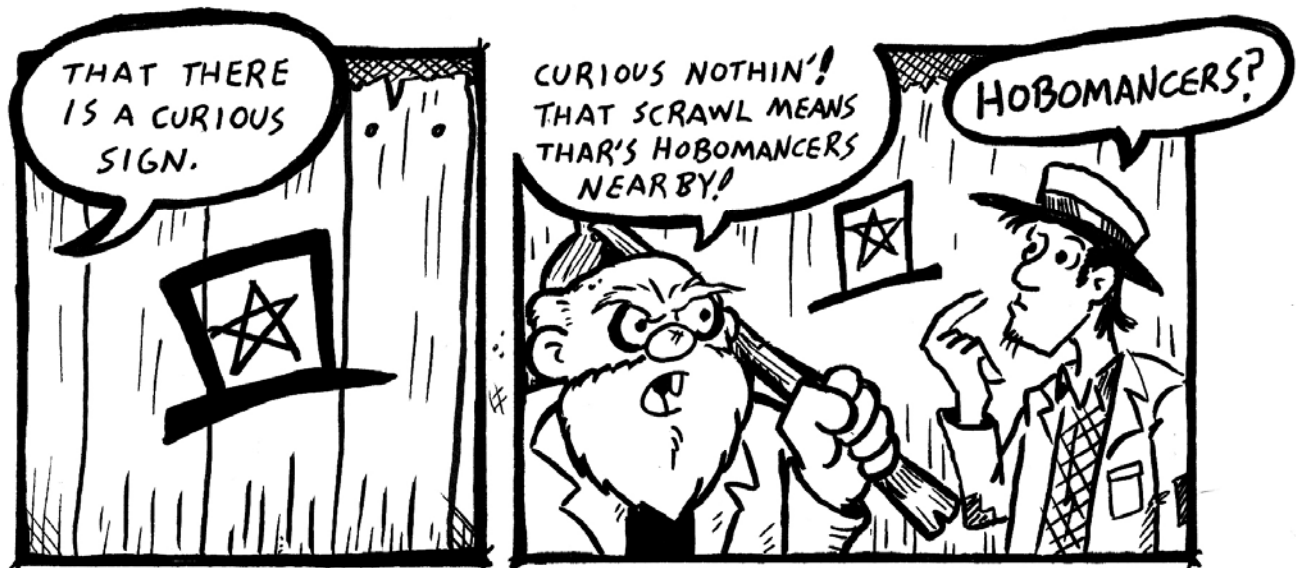
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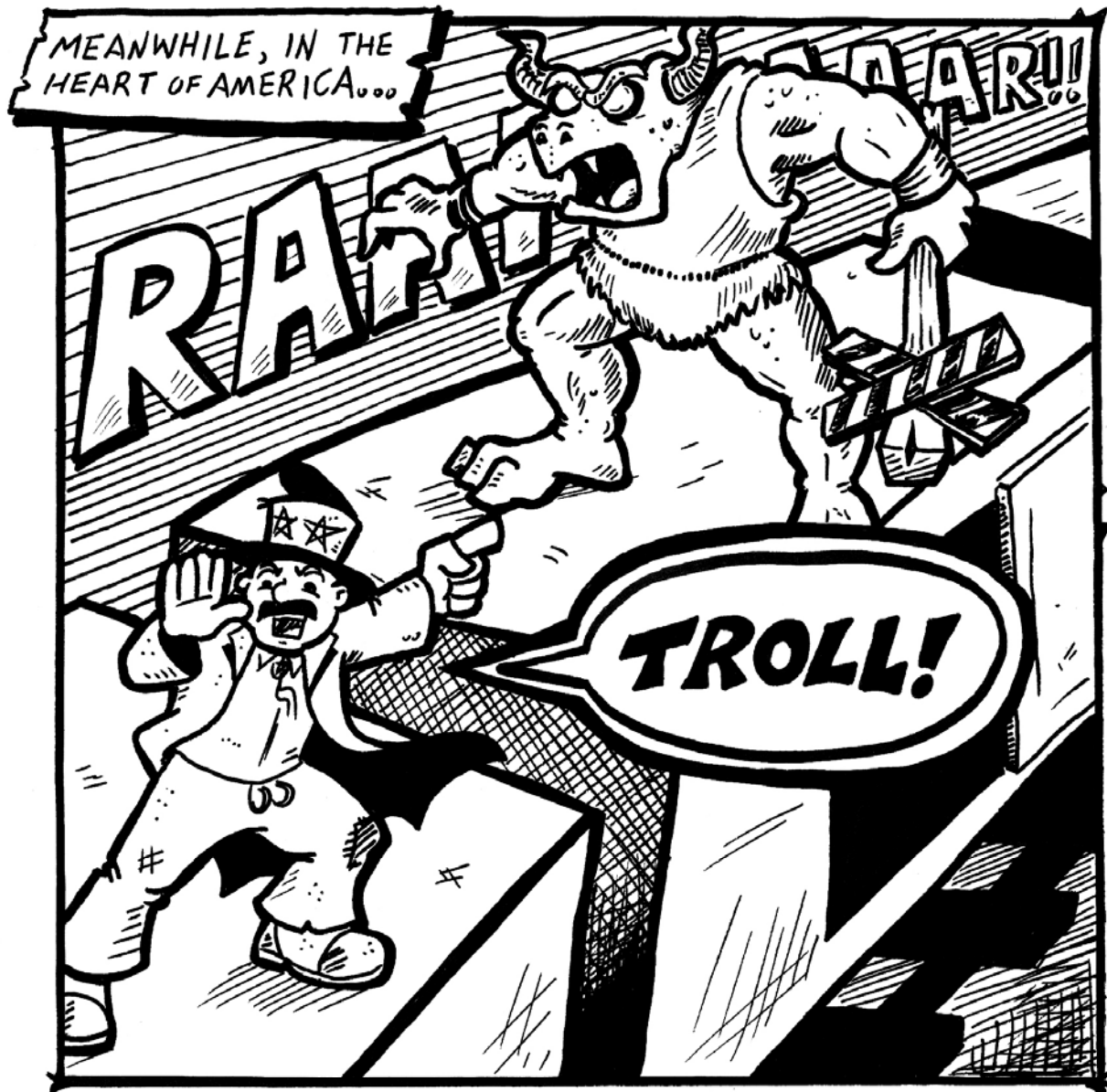


In the beginning was the song...



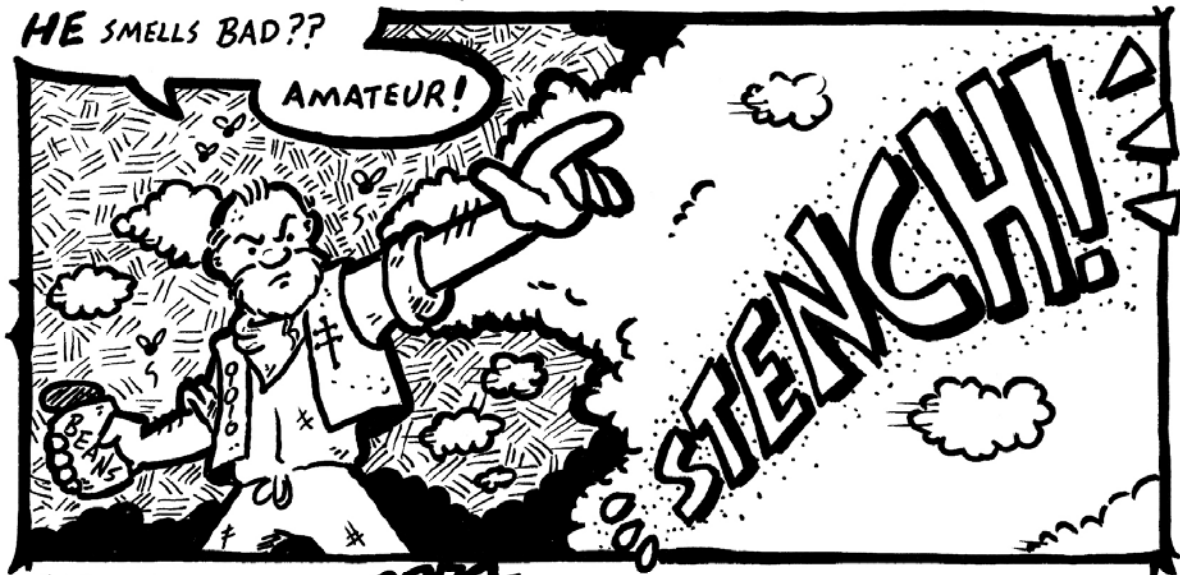
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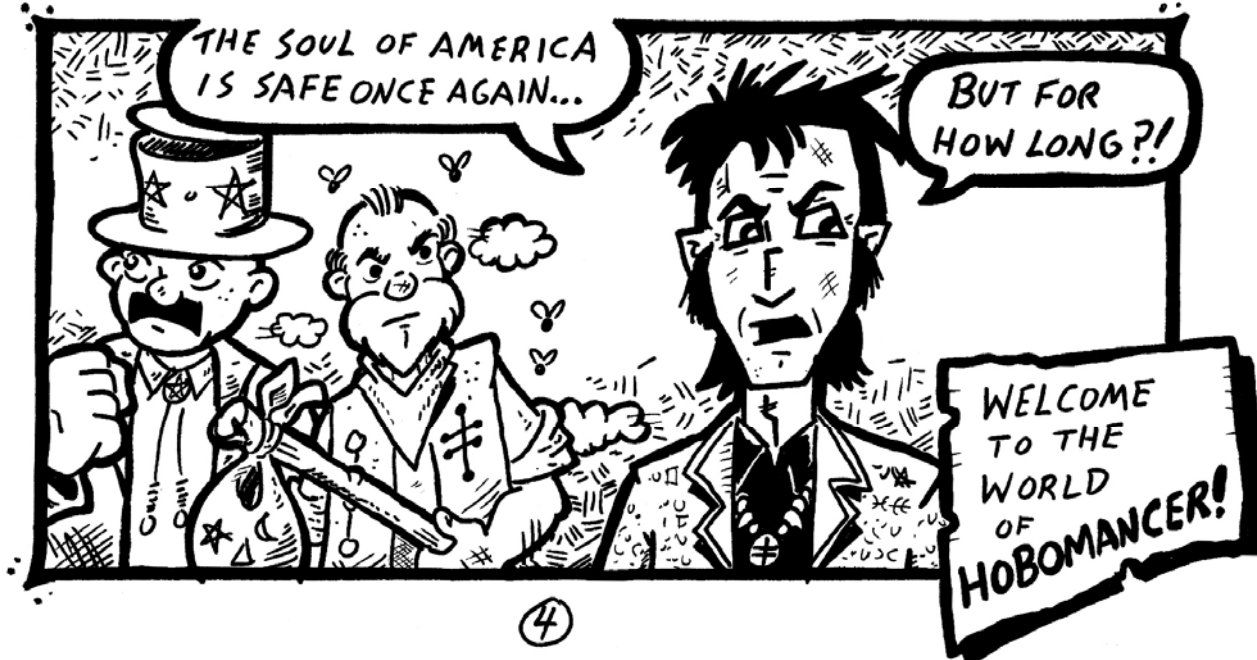




LET'S GO, STINKY PETE! A QUICK GLYPH WILL PROTECT US!







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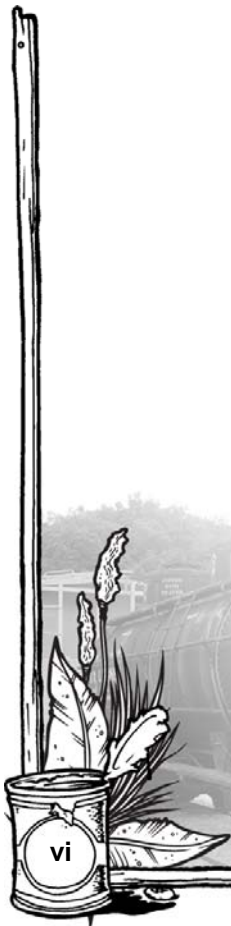
With Respectful Acknowledgment to the Works of

Jimmy Buffet, Neil Gaiman, John Hodgman, Ken Kesey, Grant Morrison, North Bank Fred, Tim Powers, and Manly Wade Wellman

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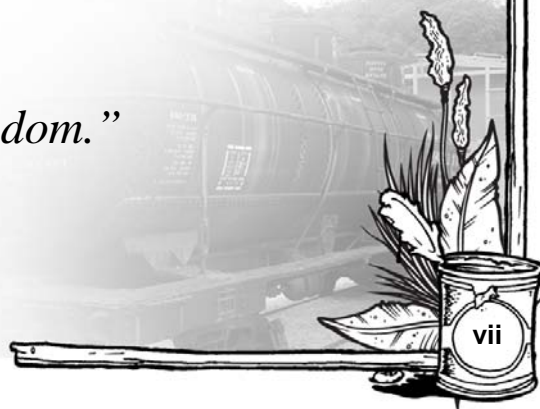
CONTENTS

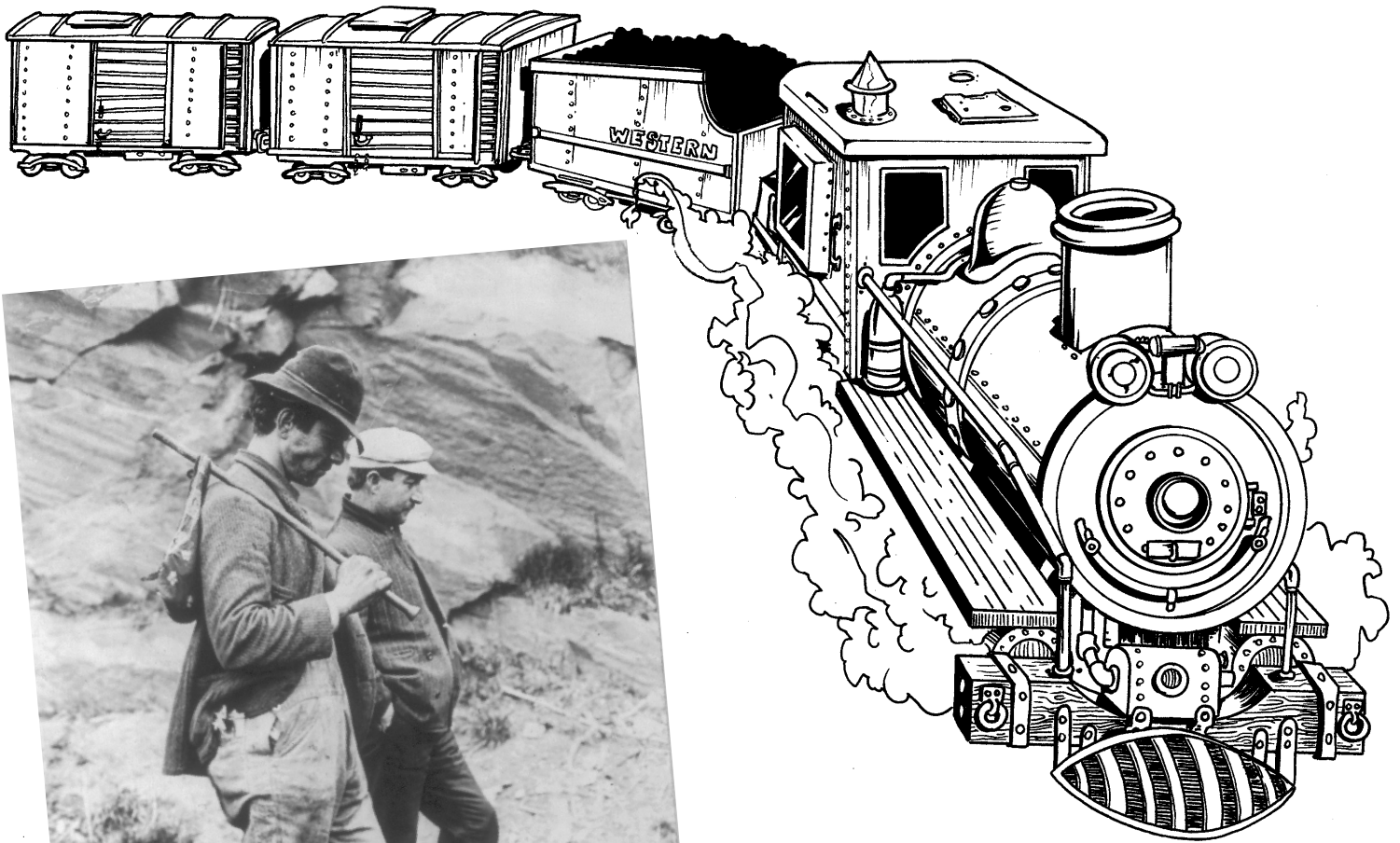


Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Songlines	3
Chapter 2: Hobomancers	7
Chapter 3: Hobo Life	15
Chapter 4: America in the 1930s	25
Chapter 5: Game Rules	33
Chapter 6: Hobo Magic	41
Chapter 7: Hobo Powers	47
Chapter 8: GMing <i>Hobomancer</i>	53
Chapter 9: Enemies	61
Chapter 10: Hobo of Hamlin (A Sample Adventure)	87
Appendices	
Appendix 1: Hobomancer Timeline	103
Appendix 2: Hobo Signs	107
Appendix 3: Hobo Lingo	109
Appendix 4: Random Hobo Names	115
Appendix 5: 1930s Wages & Prices	121
Appendix 6: Dumb Tables	123
Appendix 7: Sample Characters	131
Appendix 8: Ritual Magic Rules	135
Appendix 9: For Further Research	151
Afterword: Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?	153
Hobomancer Character Sheet	155

“It's freedom, son. It's all about freedom.”

—Anonymous





*“One evening as the sun went down
And the jungle fires were burning,
Down the track came a hobo hiking,
And he said, ‘Boys, I’m not turning
I’m headed for a land that’s far away
Besides the crystal fountains
So come with me, we’ll go and see
The Big Rock Candy Mountains’”*

--Harry McClintock, “In the Big Rock Candy Mountains”



INTRODUCTION

I met the old man somewhere outside of Cincinnati, near Clifton. I was riding the rails in those days, and looking for work wherever I could get it, but somehow I couldn't bear to be called "hobo." I was a hard-working individual who'd had some bad breaks. Once I found the right opportunity, I thought, things would turn around. Never mind that the whole country was in the middle of a depression and opportunity was a distant memory—I was young and didn't know any better.

I had started a fire and was warming my hands when the old man came staggering near. He was a hobo, all right, in a worn suit and battered hat. One hand held the bindle stick that leaned on his shoulder, while the other hand was pressed against his stomach. As he got closer I could make out the bits of food in his bushy, unkempt beard.

Before I could tell him to buzz off, I got a better look at the hand on his gut. It was caked with dried blood, as was his shirt. I was no model of Christian charity, in those days, but I had enough of a decent raising not to send an old man off to die in the cold. "Have a seat, old timer," I said.

He nodded his thanks, and sat next to me. He looked worn out. We sat in silence for a few minutes, before he finally spoke. "They call me Sidetrack Stevens. You got any booze?"

"Not much," I said, handing him my bottle.

He took a long swig. "That hits the spot," he said. "I appreciate your kindness, son." I waited for him to pass the bottle back my way. It soon became clear he had no intention of doing so.

"What happened to you?" I asked. "Get in a fight?"

"Something like that," he said. He held the bottle up to his nose and sniffed it, then peered down into it. He looked like he was staring at something impossibly far away. Just as I started to get uncomfortable he turned to me and said, "Lemme tell you a secret."

I couldn't imagine any secret this old hobo could tell me that would possibly be worth knowing, but he clearly didn't have long, so I decided to humor him. "I'm all ears," I said.

Sidetrack Stevens looked me square in the eye and, like a prophet in the days of old, intoned, "There are worlds beyond this world."

"Oh?" I waited for the punch line, but his expression was serious, like he really had just told me a big damn secret. "Other worlds, huh?"

"Yup." He took another swig, then continued, "Sometimes those other worlds come a-knockin', and most of the time they ain't too friendly."

Something about his manner disturbed me, made me want to lighten the mood. "C'mon, old-timer . . . I've been all over this country. If there were folks from another world running around, I'm sure I would have seen one or two by now."

He shook his head. "We've kept 'em in check so far. We hold the line, son, and we stand strong. But it's a hard fight, and it takes a toll on a man. I'm almost finished."

"Maybe we could find you a doctor," I said, knowing that we couldn't.

He waved his hand. "No, no. This here?" He nodded his head toward the gut wound. "This won't kill me. I still got some time left. Not much, but enough to take on an apprentice, maybe." He gave me a hopeful look.

I raised an eyebrow at that. "Are you talking about me? You don't even know my name."

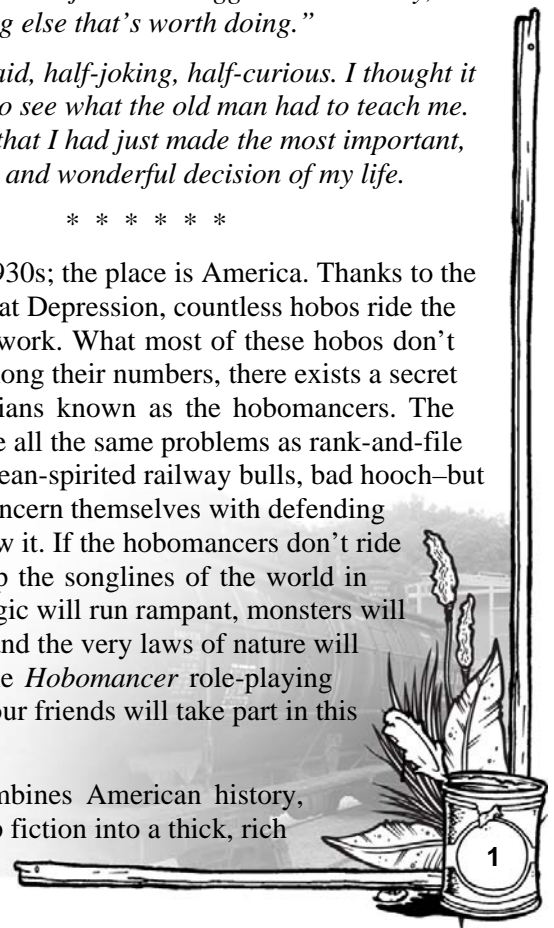
"I don't give a damn about your old name. If you join up with me, you'll start a new life, be a new man. What do you say? How'd you like to join the struggle? It ain't easy, but neither is anything else that's worth doing."

"Sure thing," I said, half-joking, half-curious. I thought it would be a hoot to see what the old man had to teach me. Little did I know that I had just made the most important, magical, terrible, and wonderful decision of my life.

* * * * *

The time is the 1930s; the place is America. Thanks to the effects of the Great Depression, countless hobos ride the rails looking for work. What most of these hobos don't realize is that, among their numbers, there exists a secret society of magicians known as the hobomancers. The hobomancers face all the same problems as rank-and-file hobos—hunger, mean-spirited railway bulls, bad hooch—but they must also concern themselves with defending reality as we know it. If the hobomancers don't ride the rails and keep the songlines of the world in balance, dark magic will run rampant, monsters will ravage the land, and the very laws of nature will collapse. With the *Hobomancer* role-playing game, you and your friends will take part in this epic struggle.

Hobomancer combines American history, folklore, and pulp fiction into a thick, rich



HOBOMANCER

Mulligan stew of adventure. Your *Hobomancer* game will be exciting, dark, funny, and sometimes even sad. It is a game with a wide range of possible tones and storylines, where a character can steal a pie from a window sill in one scene and do magical battle with a creature from beyond in the next. And while the default setting is America in the 1930s, during the Golden Age of the Hobo, you can set your *Hobomancer* game any time from the 1890s to the present day.

To play *Hobomancer*, you will need a Gamemaster (GM) and some players. Players take the part of hobomancers; the GM takes the part of everyone else. *Hobomancer* uses QAGS, the Quick Ass Game System, for its mechanics, so you will need either the *QAGS Second Edition* (Q2E) Core Rulebook or the free Qik Start rules (see sidebar for more information on QAGS), twenty-sided dice, and candy.

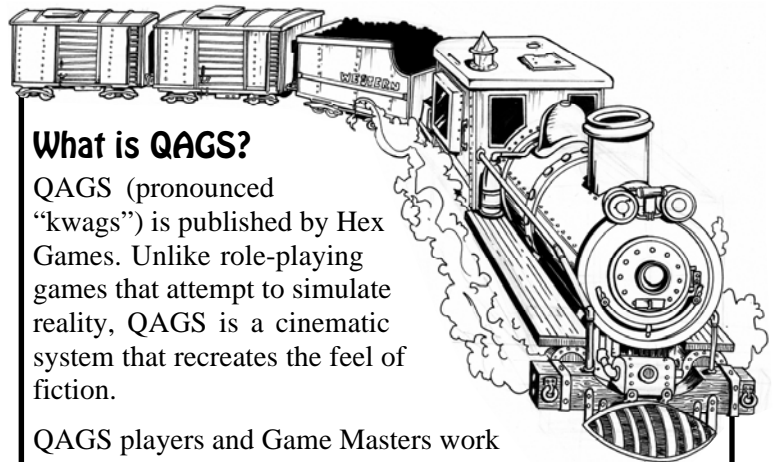
What's In This Book

This book contains everything you need to know about hobomancers in order to play the game. We recommend reading each chapter in order, but those with a rebellious streak may want to skip around.

Chapter 1: The Songlines explains the history and workings of the songlines, which are not only the source of the hobomancers' magic, but also the underpinnings of reality itself. **Chapter 2: Hobomancers** explains who the hobomancers are, what they believe, and how they function on a day-to-day basis. It also describes hobo magic, including otherworldly Powers and Spirits.

If you don't know the difference between a hobo jungle and a hobohemia, **Chapter 3: Hobo Life** will teach you the basics, including the history of hobos, daily hobo life, and hobo superstitions. **Chapter 4: America in the 1930s** continues your historical education, giving you a general overview of the default time period for the game, including information on popular arts and entertainment, crime and law enforcement, the Great Depression, and the New Deal.

Chapter 5: Game Rules gives QAGS rules for regular hobo activities, such as jumping trains, and guidelines for character creation, including new Words. **Chapter**



What is QAGS?

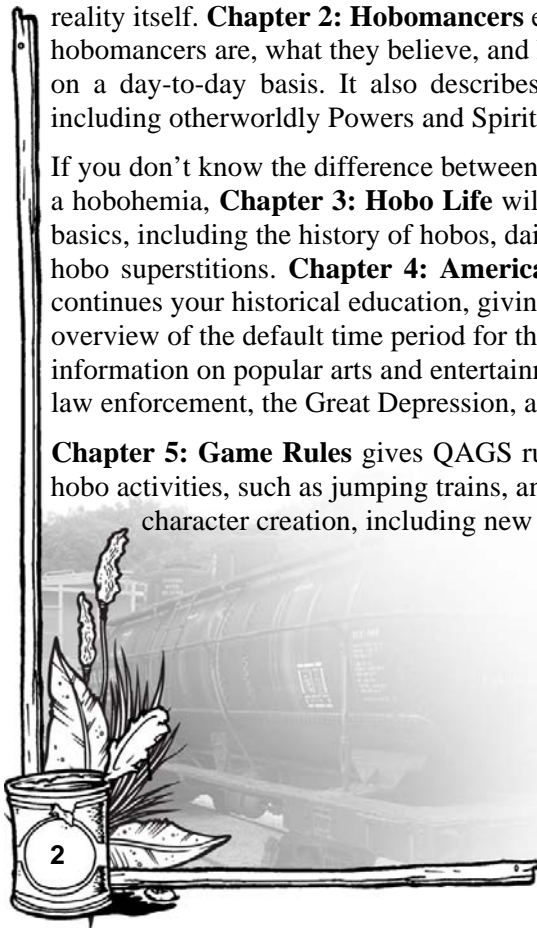
QAGS (pronounced "kwags") is published by Hex Games. Unlike role-playing games that attempt to simulate reality, QAGS is a cinematic system that recreates the feel of fiction.

QAGS players and Game Masters work together to create entertaining stories, using the innovative candy-based mechanic called Yum Yums. You can purchase *QAGS Second Edition*, and other fine Hex products, at www.hexgames.com, or you can download the free Qik Start Rules.

6: Hobo Magic explains just how hobomancy works in game, except for Hobo Powers, which are covered in **Chapter 7: Hobo Powers**.

The final three chapters are for GMs only. **Chapter 8: GMing Hobomancer** explains how the GM can plan the tone, themes, and plot of her game, with an adventure formula to get her started. **Chapter 9: Enemies** lists both mundane and supernatural opponents GMs can use to trouble the PCs. GMs don't have to start planning their adventures immediately, though, since they can begin with the sample adventure in **Chapter 10: Hobo of Hamlin**.

Finally, the appendices are filled with useful information. **The Hobomancer Timeline** gives more historical context, featuring important railroad history as well as key events of the 1930s. **Hobo Signs** and **Hobo Lingo** give you tools to spice up your game with real-life hobo culture, while the **Random Hobo Name Generator** offers up over ten million possible hobo names. When PCs want to cast elaborate spells, refer to the **Ritual Magic Rules**, which can also be used with other games. In addition there are **Dumb Tables**, **Sample Characters**, and a list of materials **For Further Research**.



CHAPTER 1

THE SONGLINES

We were crammed into the back of a boxcar, Sidetrack Stevens and me, and I was eager to get some shut-eye. Just as I was about to nod off, he elbowed me in the ribs.

"You hear it, kid?" he whispered.

"Hear what?" I grumbled. Even when you've had practice, falling asleep on a boxcar's not the easiest thing in the world. When someone interrupts, you can't help but resent it.

"Listen," he said. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath. As he sat there, listening, he broke into a big smile.

That just annoyed me more. "Yeah, I hear it," I said. "We're on a damn train, and it makes a lot of damn noise."

I had barely gotten the words out when Stevens, moving faster than I ever expected, whacked me on the head with his bindle stick.

"Ow!" I said, rubbing my head and glaring at him. I didn't know it, but that was just the first of many headaches he'd give me in the weeks to come. "What was that for?"

"This is serious business," he said, "and we ain't got time for jokes. Yeah, the train makes noise. You hear that with your ears. Behind that noise, though, there's a Song . . . the most beautiful song there is. When you listen close, you can hear it—not with your ears, but deep down in your soul."

* * * * *

The Bible says that in the beginning was the Word, and that's close to the truth, but hobomancers know that in the beginning was the Song.

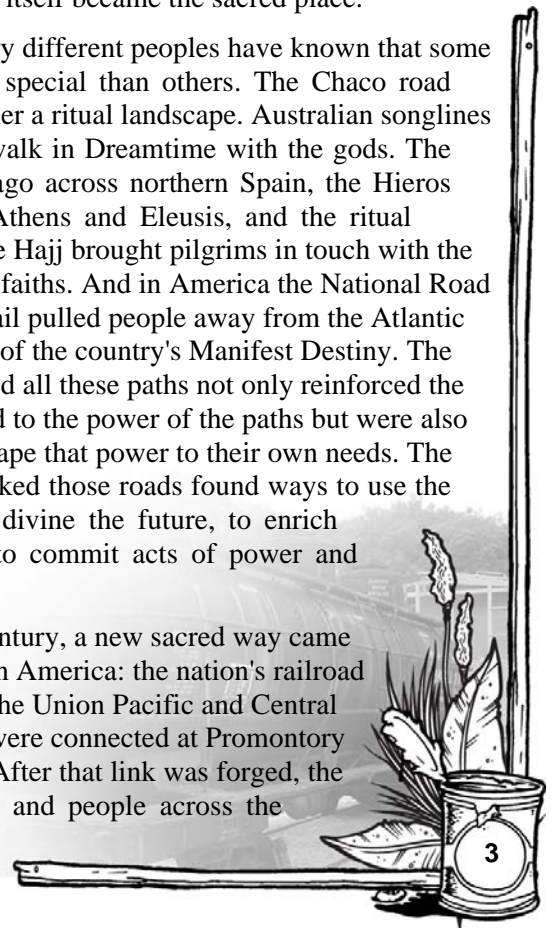
Since the Great Creation, the mysterious and little-understood inception of the omniverse uncounted eons prior to the beginning of this universe, certain beings have been attuned to the vibrations of matter and energy. They recognize these vibrations as sounds, or, more precisely, as music. These beings are compelled to add to the sounds of the omniverse, reinforcing the places where the music has grown weak, or where there is dissonance, or where the music is in danger of unraveling. In essence, through these beings the omniverse is able to repair itself, expand creation by making something previously unseen or unheard, or literally change reality through the power of the Song.

Although the Song of the omniverse permeates every part of the cosmos, its power is not uniform. The omniverse is made up of an ever-changing pattern of magical energy created by the ebb and flow of the Song. On a cosmic scale, beings and forces beyond the scope of human comprehension manipulate the pattern to create reality itself. On a more local level, the pattern changes according to the movements and deeds of individuals and civilizations and, more importantly, the songs and stories that those actions create.

Beings who can hear the Song are compelled to travel to places where it is most powerful. Once there they add to the music they hear, strengthening and renewing the Song. On Earth, these locations are often recognized as sacred, and temples, shrines, and even whole religions have sprung up around them. In the Old World of Europe, these tended to be discrete places—a wooded grotto, a temple to Apollo, or a particular stretch of seashore. In other instances the journey was literally more important than the destination, and the path, trail, or road itself became the sacred place.

Throughout history different peoples have known that some roads were more special than others. The Chaco road system tied together a ritual landscape. Australian songlines let modern men walk in Dreamtime with the gods. The Camino de Santiago across northern Spain, the Hieros Hodos between Athens and Eleusis, and the ritual ambulations of the Hajj brought pilgrims in touch with the holy ones of their faiths. And in America the National Road and California Trail pulled people away from the Atlantic Coast to be a part of the country's Manifest Destiny. The people who walked all these paths not only reinforced the sanctity and added to the power of the paths but were also able to use and shape that power to their own needs. The shamans who walked those roads found ways to use the Song to heal, to divine the future, to enrich themselves, and to commit acts of power and control.

In the late 19th century, a new sacred way came into prominence in America: the nation's railroad system. In 1869, the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads were connected at Promontory Summit in Utah. After that link was forged, the passage of goods and people across the



HOBOMANCER

continent imbued the rails with part of the magic—the vital essence—of the burgeoning nation, and soon they were resonating to the energy of the American people. The Songlines—the vibrations of the omniversal Song itself—found the railroad the same way a river finds the fastest path to the sea.

The 1870s saw the beginning of an economic depression that would encompass the United States and Europe. Many people (mostly, but not entirely, men) took to the 50,000 to 60,000 miles of railways looking for work or just a better situation. By the 1890s these men were known as hobos, and they became icons in American culture. At first they were looked on with concern and were the scapegoats of choice whenever a crime was committed. By 1930 the railroads had 240,000 miles of track laid and, since another economic depression had the country by its lapels, people could more easily relate to the hobo way of life, but hobos still suffered regular mistreatment, especially in areas with a shortage of jobs and an overabundance of outsiders looking for work or charity.

Not everybody rode the rails looking for material gain. Some, lured originally by the call of freedom, felt the power in the rails themselves. They could touch it, draw it out, and use it to keep the magic flowing and the country strong. These men were the first hobomancers.

Corrupt Songlines

Although the Song shapes reality and is the source of all magic, it is also shaped by the actions of beings throughout the cosmos, especially acts of magic. Some actions are harmonious with the Song and add to its strength. Other actions are discordant and twist or corrupt the nature of the Song. On the microcosmic level that most humans experience, this means that the deeds and actions that occur along a songline can lend it a certain character or emotional resonance. Where the resonances are especially strong—for example, sites where acts of greatness or great evil have taken place—even people who are not especially attuned to the Song can “feel” the power of the songlines.

Where actions disharmonious with the Song, such as black magic or acts of great cruelty, have occurred, the site or songline can become corrupted. The evil resonance of corrupted songlines affects everyone who travels or lives along them,

causing bad luck and amplifying negative emotions. Corrupt songlines can also affect magic, dampening the positive power of the Song and thereby making harmonious magic unpredictable and black magic more powerful.

It should be noted that tragedy, sadness, and other negative emotions do not necessarily result in corrupted songlines.

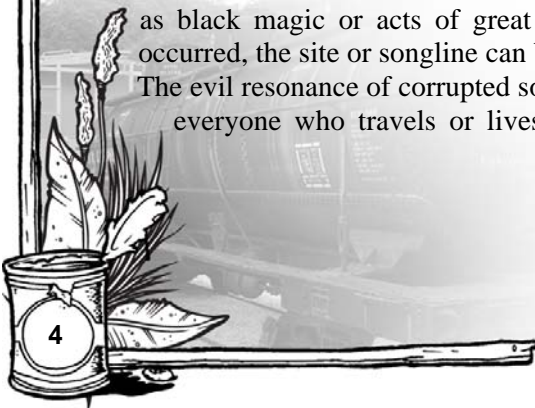
SORCERY

In numerous places throughout this book, we make reference to sorcery, also called black, dark, or forbidden magic. For hobomancers, dark magic is any spell that violates the basic principles of the hobo code—for example, mind control magic or spells cast to satisfy greed for material wealth. Magic that violates an individual hobomancer’s Vow to the Kind Lady is not generally considered sorcery unless it does so in a particularly malicious or cruel way.

While other wizards don’t understand the songlines in the same way as hobomancers do, most traditions have their own concepts of forbidden magic, and these dark rituals can also corrupt the songlines even though the taboos and prohibitions of different forms of magic vary considerably. It might be useful to think of each tradition as having its own unique “song” that harmonizes with the cosmic Song in its own way, so magic that’s discordant in one tradition’s song may be perfectly harmonious with another’s.

Since most magical traditions developed as ways to protect the community or tribe and help it prosper, there are very few traditions that are inherently sorcerous. While some magical practices may seem brutal and primitive to modern man, they fulfill ritual (and sometimes practical) needs within the context of the culture that produced them. Therefore, these actions, no matter how distasteful, rarely have a corrupting effect on the songlines when practiced properly.

While magical traditions are not inherently sorcerous, some creatures and people who use magic are so corrupt and evil that every spell they cast is considered dark magic. Demonic magic, for example, always has a corrupting effect on the songlines. Humans who give themselves over to dark magic are known as sorcerers and are discussed in detail in **Chapter 9**.



THE SONGLINES

Trials and tribulations can actually strengthen the songlines, just as a hint of sadness can make a song more hauntingly beautiful. Corruption of the songlines and the creation of corrupted songlines only occur where acts of great cruelty, inhumanity, or black magic have taken place (for example, along the Trail of Tears) or where lesser evil has persisted for a very long period of time (the home of a long-lived evil sorcerer, for example). Very corrupt sites often reflect their corruption visibly through twisted and stunted trees, foul weather, and vicious and deformed animal life.

Songlines, Magic, and So-and-Sos

While magic is somewhat stronger along the songlines, it is especially strong where multiple songlines are close together or intersect one another. Novice hobomancers often envision the songlines in two dimensions, stretching across the surface of the earth just like the tracks of a train. In order to truly understand the magic of the songlines, however, it's important to understand that songlines exist in all dimensions. That's why sacred sites can exist in places that aren't connected to the sacred paths of earth. In these cases, the songlines that intersect to give the place its power

exist on levels of reality that most humans can't even comprehend, much less travel.

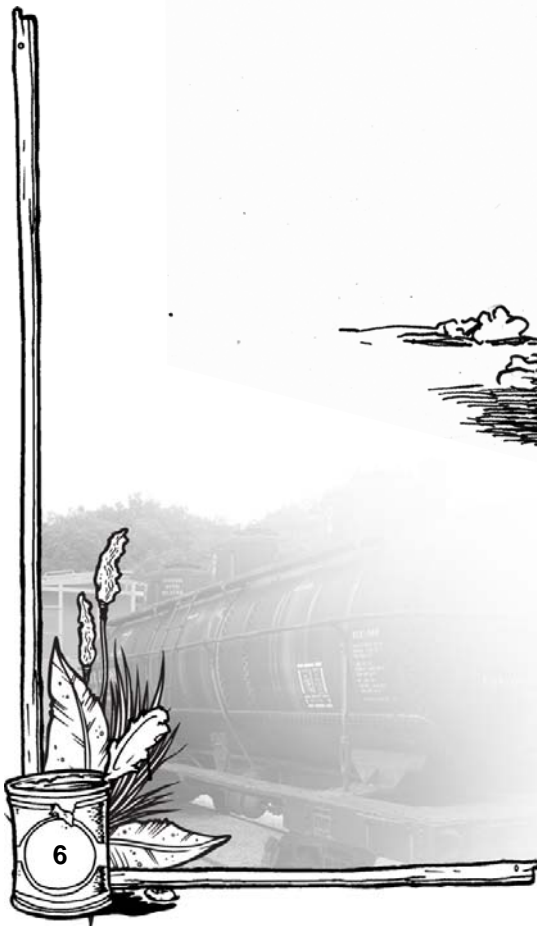
Whenever a wizard casts a spell, even if he doesn't realize it, he's reaching out along the songlines into other dimensions, essentially making the impossible happen by drawing energy from worlds where the desired result is commonplace. Harmonious magic, when cast correctly, closes these connections to other realities, while incorrectly performed rituals and black magic often leave them open. In addition, creatures in other realities can leave paths to our world open with their own magical activities. Where these unbroken magical connections exist, portals or rifts between realities may open naturally or be activated accidentally through unintentional ritual actions (such as spilling blood on the ground or playing a specific note on a musical instrument). While there are stories of men wandering through these portals and into other lands, such as the fairy realm, the hobomancer's primary concern is that monsters from other realities (called "so-and-sos" by hobomancers) will wander into our world.





"There had been hoboes in the United States since there had been trains and liquor, which is to say, always."

*--John Hodgman, *The Areas of My Expertise**



CHAPTER 2

HOBOMANCERS



“Jesus was a hobomancer,” the Right Reverend Appalachia Phil Buckets said, wagging his finger at me. “Didn’t you know that, son?”

“Can’t say I did,” I replied. The three of us were somewhere outside of Kansas City; we couldn’t agree on where, exactly. We had been walking for a day and a half with no sign of a train track. I would have been perfectly content to find work and linger for awhile, but Sidetrack Stevens insisted that we had to keep moving. He said we had to reach the west coast before the next full moon and I, as always, had nothing better to do than go along with his demands. Actually, even though I hated to admit it, the old man had taught me plenty, and introduced me to some remarkable individuals.

“Picture him now,” the Right Reverend Appalachia Phil Buckets continued, “walking back and forth with his friends along the songlines of Galilee with nothing but the clothes on his back, helping people, fighting demons, and telling stories. Sure he never rode no train, but I don’t think we should hold that against him.”

“It ain’t Sunday,” Sidetrack Stevens said, “so you can stop preaching, Phil.” The two of them bickered so much that I couldn’t understand why they would ever want to travel together, yet they had been inseparable since we left Indianapolis.

The Right Reverend Appalachia Phil Buckets replied, “I ask again, Sidetrack, that you address me by my full name and title. It is a simple enough courtesy. And furthermore, I’ve engaged in no preaching here, just free and open conversation. How else is the boy supposed to learn? You barely tell him anything.”

“I tell him enough,” Stevens said.

“Have you told him about the Kind Lady?”

“Who’s the Kind Lady?” I asked.

The Right Reverend Appalachia Phil Buckets laughed uproariously.

Sidetrack Stevens shook his head. “Don’t rush him.” He looked at me and said, “You want to know who the Kind Lady is? Don’t worry, kid, you’ll be meeting her soon enough.”

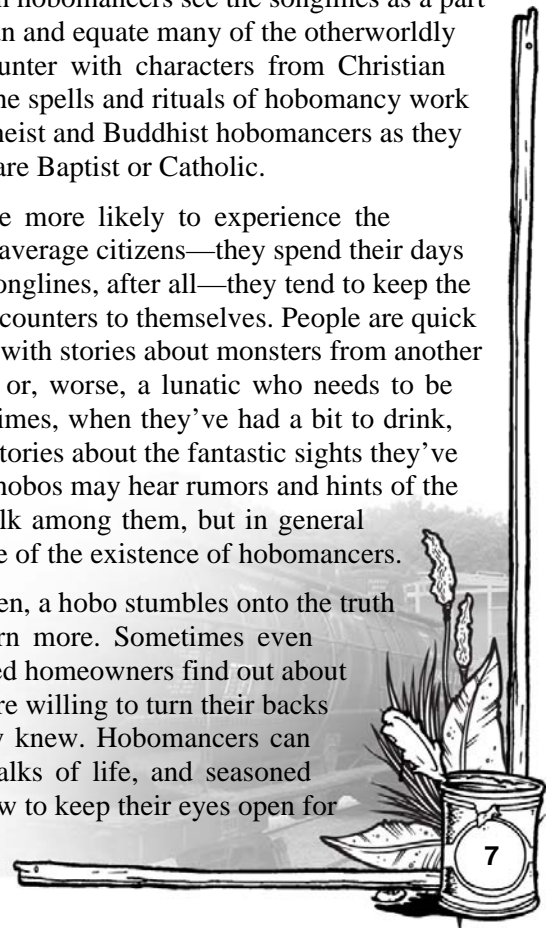
* * * * *

As hobos rode the rails, some of them became attuned to the rhythms of the songlines and eventually began to draw upon the power of the Song to benefit themselves and others. They also discovered that the songlines could be corrupted, often by beings from other realities, and that all manner of strange and fearsome creatures were drawn to the power of the rails. As more and more hobos learned to harness the power of the songlines, they formed a loose brotherhood to pass on what they had learned and protect the rails and those who rode them from supernatural threats. The members of this secret society called themselves the hobomancers and the magical tradition that they founded was called hobomancy.

Hobomancy is an occult tradition, not a religion. Most hobomancers, like most Americans of the era, are at least nominally Christian, but the teachings and practices of hobomancy itself have remained mostly secular. Religious hobomancers often understand the songlines and the entities that they deal with through the lens of their own faith (for example, Christian hobomancers see the songlines as a part of God’s great plan and equate many of the otherworldly beings they encounter with characters from Christian mythology), but the spells and rituals of hobomancy work just as well for atheist and Buddhist hobomancers as they do for those who are Baptist or Catholic.

Though hobos are more likely to experience the supernatural than average citizens—they spend their days riding along the songlines, after all—they tend to keep the details of these encounters to themselves. People are quick to dismiss a hobo with stories about monsters from another world as a drunk or, worse, a lunatic who needs to be locked up. Sometimes, when they’ve had a bit to drink, hobos will share stories about the fantastic sights they’ve seen. In this way hobos may hear rumors and hints of the sorcerers who walk among them, but in general hobos are unaware of the existence of hobomancers.

Every now and then, a hobo stumbles onto the truth and wants to learn more. Sometimes even gainfully employed homeowners find out about hobomancy and are willing to turn their backs on the world they knew. Hobomancers can come from all walks of life, and seasoned hobomancers know to keep their eyes open for



potential new recruits. This can be tricky, because there are no clear and obvious signs that someone would make a good hobomancer. Magic is like playing the piano—while some people are born with a natural aptitude, and can pick it up quickly, with enough training and practice anyone can learn how to do it. Aptitude is generally less important than personality and strength of character. Sometimes hobomancers recruit people they think have potential, and sometimes people beg hobomancers to teach them. In either case, the prospective hobomancer must go through an initiation.

Initiation

A hobomancer must live outside the mundane world. The first step for someone wishing to become a hobomancer, then, is to leave his old life behind. Those who are not already hobos often choose to fake their own deaths, though some simply walk away.

The initiate must give up all his physical possessions, no matter how grand or how meager, except for the clothes on his back and the shoes on his feet. Rich men who want to become hobomancers—and while these are rare, there have been a few—must give away their fortunes. Hobos who possess little must still give away beloved pocketknives, harmonicas, and pocket watches.

After he has given away his possessions, the initiate must board a train and, within 30 days, travel from coast to coast, with stops along the way. An experienced hobomancer accompanies the initiate and serves as his mentor. Over the course of the month, the mentor teaches the initiate to listen to the songlines and to cast simple spells. He also gives the initiate problems to solve and challenges to overcome. Depending on the teacher, these challenges can range from the thought-provoking to the life-threatening.

After the initiate has completed his journey, his mentor takes him to an isolated spot where they meet with a circle of hobomancers (at least seven) at midnight. They gather around a fire and perform a funeral for the man the initiate once was. The mentor gives a short eulogy, people are invited to speak about the deceased, and prayers may be said. Once the funeral is concluded, the initiate chooses a new name. The name is traditionally one he has earned during the course of his journey. The hobomancers greet him by his new hobo name. From this point on, it is forbidden to refer to him by his old name.

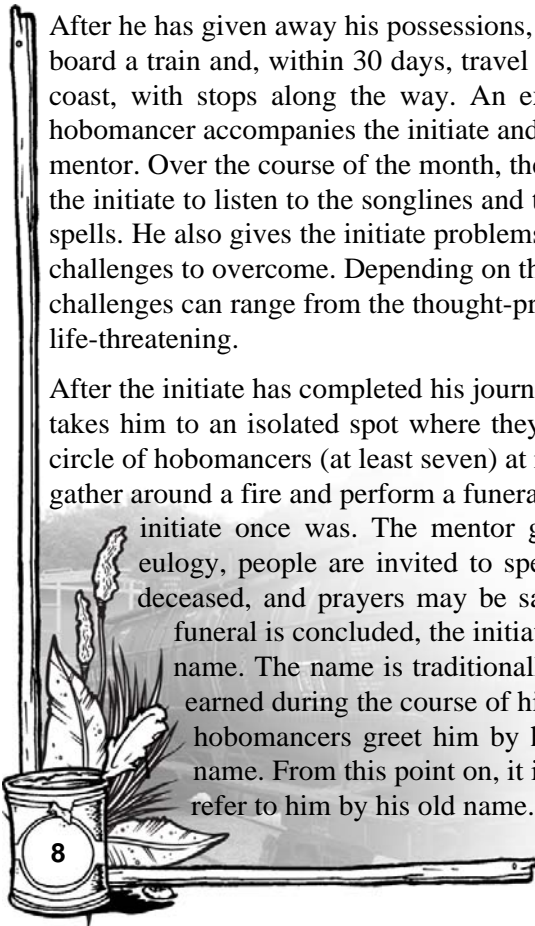
That night, when the initiate falls asleep, he dreams of a shadowy woman hobomancers call the Kind Lady. She talks with him, welcomes him to his new life, and makes him a deal. He may or may not remember the specifics of this conversation in the morning, but either way, when he wakes up he is a full-fledged hobomancer. Crusty old hobomancers may still refer to him as “rookie,” “fresh meat,” and other derogatory nicknames, but when the chips are down, they will recognize him as one of their own.

Beliefs and Goals

Hobomancers cast off the strictures of society to embrace personal freedom. The old story goes that, when the initiate asked a seasoned hobomancer to tell him the most important truth, the crusty old hobomancer answered, “It’s about freedom, son.” Most hobomancers see themselves as lucky to be liberated from the everyday world of meaningless work, able to travel and live life on their own terms. At the same time, for the songlines to stay healthy, the trains must continue to run. Extreme order leads to a regimented society with severe limits on personal freedom, but extreme freedom leads to anarchy, which leads to the breakdown of the songlines and eventually the world. Hobomancers strive to find a balance between order and freedom, respecting the ebb and flow of everyday society even as they stand apart from it.

As you might expect, the hobomancer’s relationship with the law is complex. A hobo breaks the law every time he jumps a train, but the average hobomancer is not an anarchist out to topple the government (most hobomancers wish the president well and many are downright patriotic) or a rebel who breaks laws just for the thrill of it. A hobomancer breaks laws when necessary, as determined by his moral code. No two hobomancers have exactly the same moral code, though most of them espouse some variation of “do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” and most of them attempt to follow the hobo code (see **Chapter 3**). Generally speaking, hobomancers believe in self-reliance, individualism, an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay, compassion, and generosity.

All hobomancers are dedicated to the well-being of the songlines. They have taken it upon themselves to keep the songlines flowing, fight invaders from other worlds, and prevent the Unbecoming. While the specifics are unclear, “Unbecoming” refers to the day that the songlines break down, the Song of creation comes to a halt, and the world ceases to be.





Seasoned hobomancers often say that the best they can hope for is to maintain the status quo and prevent things from getting too much worse. Hobomancers often come across as cynical, at least until they've had a few drinks. But, even though they would never admit it openly, most hobomancers dream of a better tomorrow. They dream of a world where humanity lives in tune with the songlines, where human needs are more important than corporate bottom lines, where every individual can find a meaningful role to play in society doing work he loves.

Daily Lives

The daily life of a hobomancer is mostly identical to the daily life of a regular hobo. The hobomancer must figure out where his next meal is coming from, dodge the railway bulls, get onto or off of trains, look for work where it is available, and find pleasant ways to fill his leisure time. Nights are often spent gathered around fires, singing and telling stories.

The hobomancer has an added component to his life, however. He rides the rails not just so he can look for work, but to ensure the smooth functioning of reality as we know it. Hobomancers keep their eyes and ears open for corruption of or rifts in the songlines. They protect regular hobos, fight monsters, and cast spells to heal the songlines. They help the sick and needy. They practice spellcasting. At times, they even band together to undertake special missions for the High Council.

Organizational Structure

Hobomancers are, at best, loosely organized. While some have impressive titles, like "Cincinnati McGee, Hobomancer First Class," or "Railway Rhonda, Queen of the Southwest Line," these are self-awarded. Some hobomancers band together and form groups, while others strike out on their own. The only authority widely recognized by hobomancers is the High Council.

The High Council is not an elected body. No one knows who is on the High Council, how they got there, or whether they are even human. Anyone who might know the truth has kept that information to himself. What all hobomancers can agree on is that the High Council exists, and it's usually a good idea to do what they say.

Occasionally the High Council gives a hobomancer, or a group of hobomancers, an assignment. This assignment usually has to do with an imminent threat to the songlines. Since the High Council is mysterious, they do not give instructions directly, but send them through intermediaries.

The High Council's most common method of communication is through hobo nickels.

Hobo nickels pass through many hands, but a nickel from the High Council will inevitably end up in the hands of a hobomancer. When a hobomancer receives such a nickel, he feels a slight itching in his palm. Experienced hobomancers recognize this as a signal that they have a message awaiting them. When a hobomancer holds the hobo nickel up to his eye and speaks the pseudo-Latin phrase inscribed on one side of the nickel, the face on the coin animates and recites a recorded message. Once the message is relayed, the magic of the coin fades. Not all hobo nickels come from the High Council, but those that do speak with a tone of authority that all hobomancers instinctively recognize.

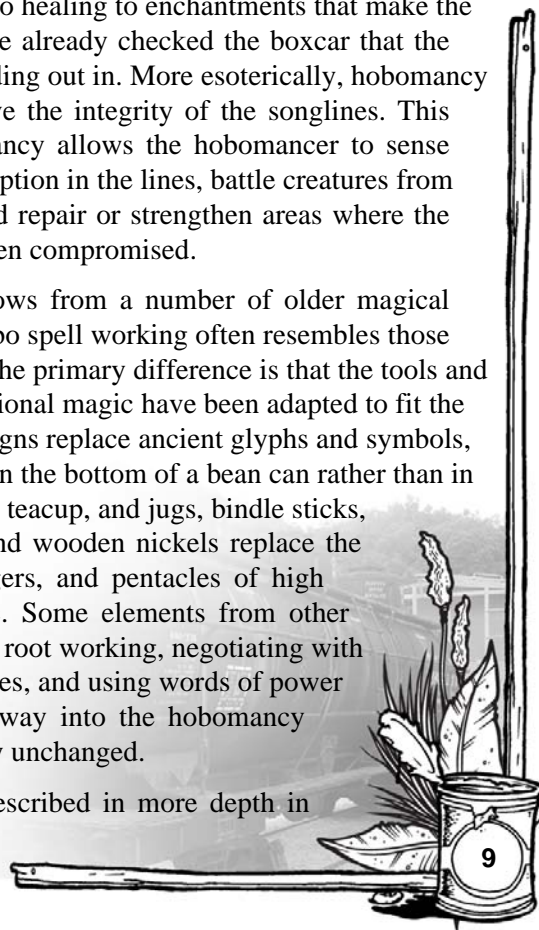
Hobomancers are free to ignore assignments from the High Council but they almost never do.

Hobo Magic

Many of the rituals and practices of hobomancy serve the very practical goal of helping the hobomancer to survive life on the rails. This aspect of the tradition is very broad, and each practitioner adapts hobo lore to his own particular needs and abilities, but it can include everything from protection magic to healing to enchantments that make the bulls think they've already checked the boxcar that the hobomancer is hiding out in. More esoterically, hobomancy is used to preserve the integrity of the songlines. This aspect of hobomancy allows the hobomancer to sense weakness or corruption in the lines, battle creatures from other realities, and repair or strengthen areas where the songlines have been compromised.

Hobomancy borrows from a number of older magical traditions, and hobo spell working often resembles those forms of magic. The primary difference is that the tools and trappings of traditional magic have been adapted to fit the hobo life. Hobo signs replace ancient glyphs and symbols, fortunes are read in the bottom of a bean can rather than in the leaves left in a teacup, and jugs, bundle sticks, railroad spikes, and wooden nickels replace the cups, staffs, daggers, and pentacles of high ceremonial magic. Some elements from other traditions, such as root working, negotiating with supernatural entities, and using words of power have made their way into the hobomancy tradition relatively unchanged.

Hobo magic is described in more depth in **Chapter 6**.



When Hobomancers Stop Being Hobomancers

Sometimes, a hobomancer loses his connection to the songlines. This usually happens when the hobomancer rejects hobo values or repeatedly fails to fulfill his duties as a hobomancer or keep his Vow to the Kind Lady. Sometimes the hobomancer makes a deliberate choice to abandon the hobo life—for example, he may decide to settle down and raise a family, or personal greed may cause him to lose sight of the hobo values in favor of pursuing “the good life.” In other cases, the hobomancer loses his way unintentionally because of mental trauma, depression, or drug and alcohol addiction. Former hobomancers fall into three broad categories.

Citizen Hobomancers

Citizen hobomancers are hobomancers who for some reason (usually family commitments, old age, or injury) no longer ride the rails. They still live according to the hobo ways as much as possible and those who have upheld their Vows to the Kind Lady typically retain the use of their Hobo Powers. Citizen hobomancers can be good sources of information and while they don’t have much—like regular hobos, citizen hobomancers avoid getting tied down to regular jobs as much as possible—they’ll share what little they have with their former colleagues.

The Lost

The lost are hobomancers who have lost all their gumption. Sometimes this happens because of mental trauma brought on by the otherworldly horrors that hobomancers encounter on a regular basis. In other cases, the lost fall victim to more human pitfalls like drug or alcohol addiction. Whatever the cause, the lost withdraw into their minds or vices. While some of the lost are still able to fend for themselves, they are far too damaged to worry about much other than simple survival. A few become complete basket cases who can’t even take care of themselves.

Fallen Hobomancers

Fallen hobomancers are turncoats who, in addition to turning their backs on their duties and beliefs, have decided to use their knowledge of hobomancy and the songlines to further their own pursuit of power, material wealth, or personal gain. While most sorcerers unknowingly corrupt the songlines with their evil magic, fallen hobomancers are fully aware

of the effect their magic has on the cosmos and a few actively work to bring about the Unbecoming.

Powers and Spirits

While most of the creatures from beyond this reality that hobos must contend with—demons, monsters, and less easily-classified so-and-sos—are of a decidedly unfriendly nature, there are some supernatural entities that can be called upon for assistance—anything from friendly ghosts to fairies to demons whose current schemes happen to coincide with the aims of the hobomancer. These, however, tend to be allies of circumstance. The two categories that hobomancers regularly find themselves petitioning for assistance are Powers and Spirits.

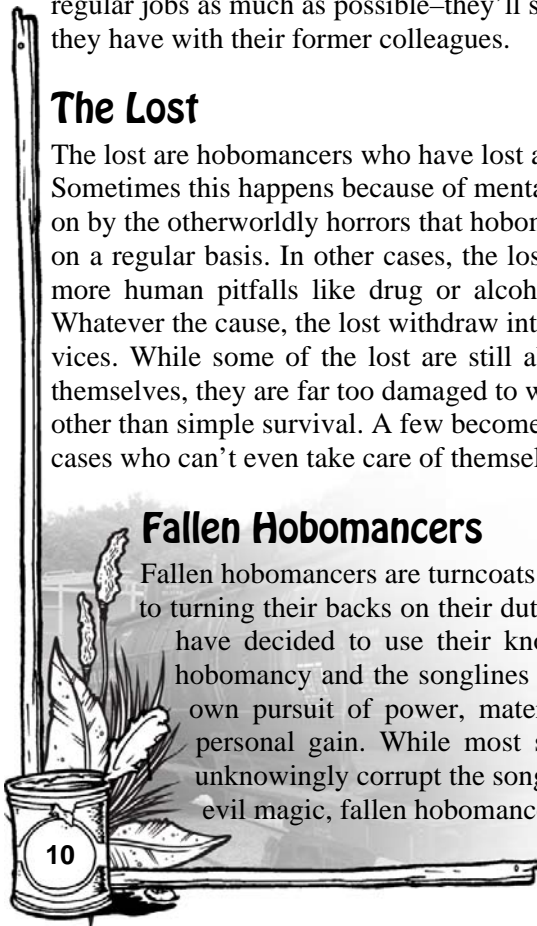
Powers

As mentioned above, hobomancers come from a variety of religious backgrounds, and many of them are monotheistic. While these hobomancers would be quick to deny that the Powers are gods, they would have to admit that they are at the very least “godlike.” The Powers are cosmic beings who exist on a higher level of reality. No one knows where the Powers come from or how far their reach extends, but it is clear that they move on an omniversal stage.

While each Power has a specific sphere of influence, it would be a mistake to think of them as anthropomorphic representations of abstract concepts. The Powers are not figures created by humans to help them understand the natural world; they are bigger than humanity, and older than the Earth. Instead of human beliefs influencing the Powers, it seems more likely that human life itself is just a shadow of the great dramas enacted by the Powers.

Unlike Spirits (discussed below), each Power is a discrete entity with its own personality, agenda, and goals. Their agendas and goals are beyond the scope of human understanding, but their personalities can be discerned by the hobomancers who interact with them. For whatever reasons, the Powers will, from time to time, manifest on Earth.

A hobomancer can request an audience with a Power and even make a deal with one. Powers, even the malicious ones, will not break a deal—a verbal contract with a Power is eternally binding—but they cannot always be trusted to take a hobomancer’s best interests to heart. Calling on a Power should never be done lightly. Hobomancers must keep their eyes open and remember that even the most seemingly benevolent Power has an agenda that extends across space and time. They are playing their own game, on a board we cannot see, with rules we cannot understand.





The best known Powers are described below.

The Devil

The Devil may or may not have any association with the Satan mentioned in the Bible; the point is heatedly debated amongst Christian hobomancers. He is clearly different from the Satan that Dante or Milton describes, however, and much more similar to the deal-making trickster of folklore. There are many folktales about mortals outsmarting the Devil. Though some these stories are based on historical fact—it is well-documented that the Devil lost a wager and gave a solid gold fiddle to a young man in Georgia in 1927—it seems likely that the Devil himself has encouraged the spread of these tales in order to make mortals overconfident. While a few men and women throughout history have benefited from their interactions with the Devil, they are exceptions to the rule. Deals with the Devil inevitably backfire and end in tragedy. Hobomancers know to give the Devil a wide berth, and only in extreme circumstances will they even begin to consider making a deal with him. The Devil generally appears as a gracefully aging middle-aged man wearing an expensive suit. He is friendly, charismatic, and eager to negotiate.

The Drifter

Unlike most other Powers, the Drifter cannot be summoned. Instead, as his name implies, he travels around the world. He heals illnesses and injuries, aids communities, and helps out against demons. Some hobomancers insist that the Drifter is none other than Jesus Christ returned to the world, while others claim he's John the Baptist, or the Wandering Jew, or the Beloved Disciple. Still others dismiss all such theories as nonsense; the Drifter is just another Power with a hidden agenda. The Drifter usually appears as a young black man wearing well-worn denim and flannel clothes with sturdy work shoes. His smiling face is clouded by some secret sadness.

The Farmer's Daughter

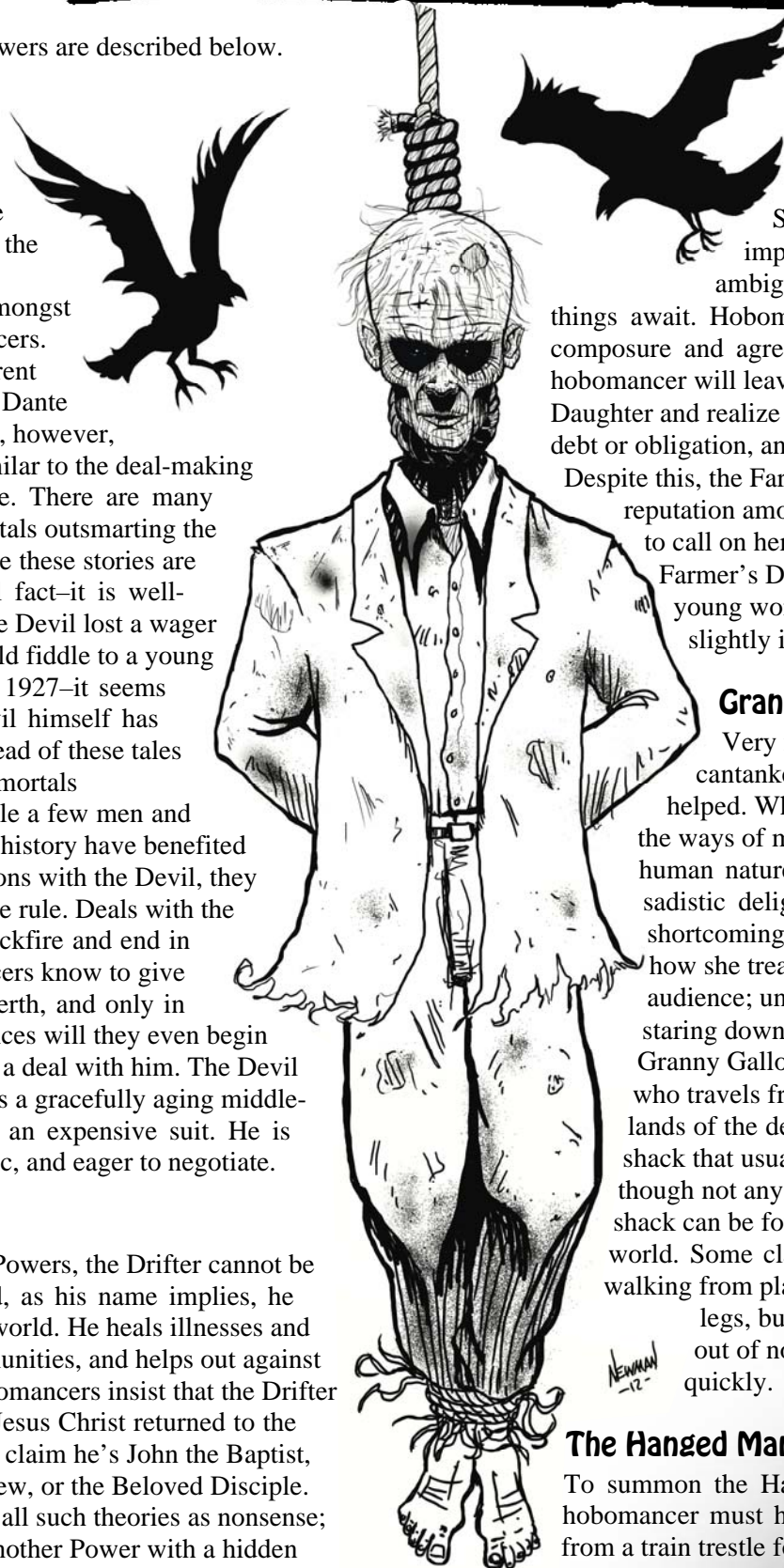
At first, hobomancers enjoy dealing with the Farmer's Daughter. She laughs at your jokes and winks suggestively. She doesn't so much promise as imply, through alluring glances and ambiguous comments, that great things await. Hobomancers tend to lose their composure and agree to anything. Usually a hobomancer will leave a meeting with the Farmer's Daughter and realize that he has taken on a heavy debt or obligation, and received nothing in return. Despite this, the Farmer's Daughter has a glowing reputation among hobomancers, and they tend to call on her more than they should. The Farmer's Daughter appears as a beautiful young woman, dressed in a casual and slightly immodest fashion.

Granny Gallows

Very few hobomancers seek out this cantankerous old hag if it can be helped. While she is very wise, skilled in the ways of magic, and a keen observer of human nature, she also seems to take a sadistic delight in pointing out the shortcomings of her visitors. And that's how she treats those to whom she grants an audience; unwanted visitors find themselves staring down the barrel of Granny's shotgun. Granny Gallows is a powerful Haint Caller who travels freely between this world and the lands of the dead. She lives in a run-down shack that usually appears near a graveyard, though not any particular graveyard; Granny's shack can be found literally anywhere in the world. Some claim to have seen the shack walking from place to place on giant chicken legs, but others say it simply appears out of nowhere and disappears just as quickly.

The Hanged Man

To summon the Hanged Man, a hobomancer must hang upside down from a train trestle for a day and a night. Eventually the Hanged Man will appear, dangling by his neck, his hands tied behind his back, his head glowing with a dull



yellow light. The Hanged Man does not appear to be either happy or sad. He will not speak unless spoken to, and will answer one question. The answer he gives is always accurate, and usually heartbreaking.

The Keeper of the Song

While all Powers operate on a scale beyond human comprehension, the Keeper of the Song is even more detached than most. The Keeper is charged with maintaining the entire Song of existence. Even the worst rifts in the Earth's Songlines are insignificant next to the kinds of problems the Keeper handles. While hobomancers are technically on the same side as the Keeper, they operate on such a small scale that he doesn't even recognize them as allies or agents. Hobomancers only deal with the Keeper through intermediaries, and so have no idea what he or she looks like.

The Kind Lady

They say every hobomancer meets the Kind Lady at least twice. On the night a hobomancer completes his initiation and takes on his new name, the Kind Lady appears in his dreams and welcomes him to his new life. And then, when a hobomancer lies dying, the Kind Lady appears to soothe his pain and comfort him in his last minutes. Hobomancers can also call on the Kind Lady in between initiation and death, though many are hesitant to do so. It's not that The Kind Lady is unfair in her dealings—she's kind, after all—but that she expects so much in return. The Kind Lady is like a mother who wants to make sure her children better themselves. When a hobomancer asks a boon, she will require that he give up smoking, or undertake a special task, or learn a valuable lesson. Hobomancers often leave a meeting with the Kind Lady feeling guilty. The Kind Lady appears as a shadowy woman in a dark dress.

The King of Rain

The water cycle is crucial to all life on Earth which means, to the King of Rain's mind, that he is the rightful ruler over every living thing. That would make him insufferable, except that the King of Rain's mind frequently wanders, giving him the appearance of senility. In general, he seems much more interested in weather than in people; he will tell long, rambling stories that revolve around minute changes in rainfall patterns over the course of a century. Though few hobomancers enjoy these conversations, they are often stuck in the rain, giving them reason to strike deals with the King. The King of Rain appears as a tall, thin, bearded man with blue skin.

The Lord of Steam

A Power who has greatly grown in visibility and influence in recent years, the Lord of Steam claims the railroads as part of his domain. As such, hobomancers deal with him more frequently than with other Powers. The Lord of Steam is boisterous and jocular, and generally well-disposed toward humans, but is quick to anger. Hobomancers who meet the Lord of Steam are wise to treat him with the respect and deference he believes he is due. The Lord of Steam manifests as a chugging, whirring giant made out of boilers, steel plating, rubber hoses, and the debris of a thousand mechanical devices.

The Pandemonium Queen

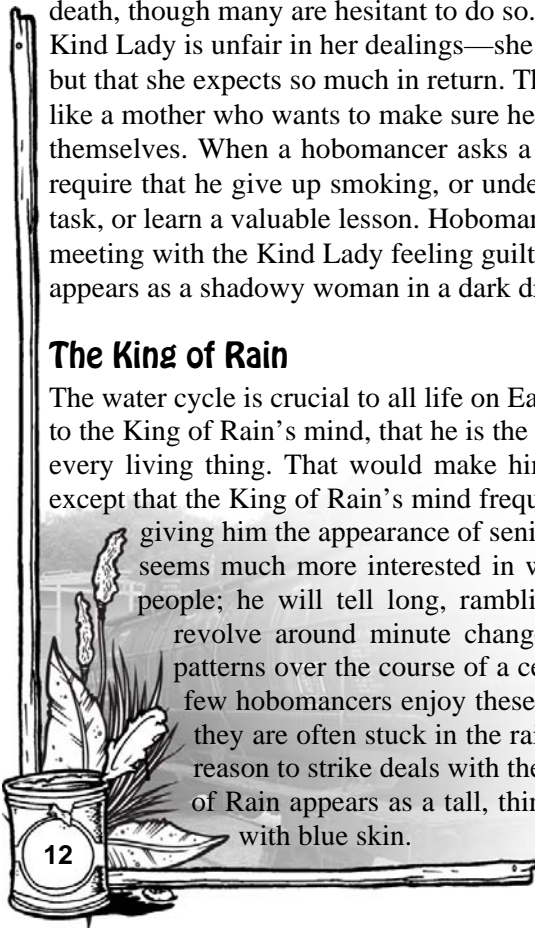
Whenever the Pandemonium Queen visits she brings about change, sometimes subtle but usually sudden and explosive. Wherever she goes—and she enjoys travel, so she goes to many different worlds—the Pandemonium Queen is always attended by her court, a group of well-dressed creatures of all different shapes and sizes. The court filters out the riff-raff, making sure only the truly worthy receive an audience with their Queen. Those hobomancers who are allowed to speak to the Pandemonium Queen usually get drunk first. This is a necessary precaution; no sane man can talk to the Pandemonium Queen for long without losing his mind. Alcohol does not completely safeguard against this effect, but it forestalls it. The Pandemonium Queen speaks in riddles and nonsense and, sometimes, powerful truths. The Pandemonium Queen manifests as a pulsating pillar of twisting, rippling blobs of color and smoke. It is wise not to look at her too closely.

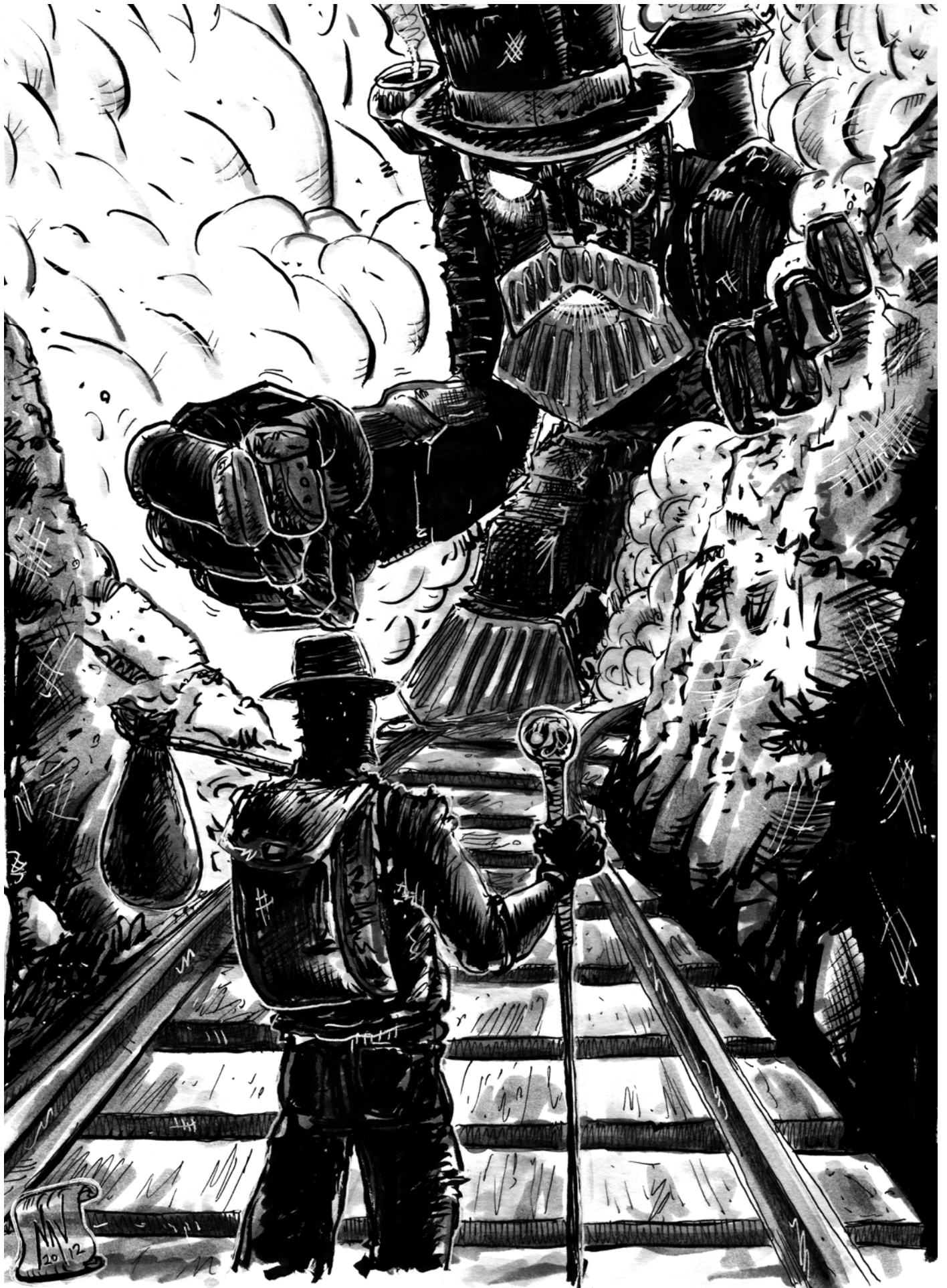
The Teller of Tales

The Teller of Tales knows every story, even those that haven't happened yet. He can usually be found sitting at a campfire spinning yarns for whoever passes by. Sometimes a hobomancer in search of valuable information seeks the Teller out and, for the right price, the Teller of Tales tells him a story. It is never the story that the hobomancer wants, but it is inevitably the story that he needs to hear. The Teller of Tales appears as a heavyset bald man, covered in ornate tattoos.

Spirits

While the Powers exist independently of humanity, Spirits are created by human hopes, dreams, and beliefs. They are ideas that have taken on lives of their own. Over time, if enough people believe in an idea, that idea resonates within the collective unconscious and becomes a force that can



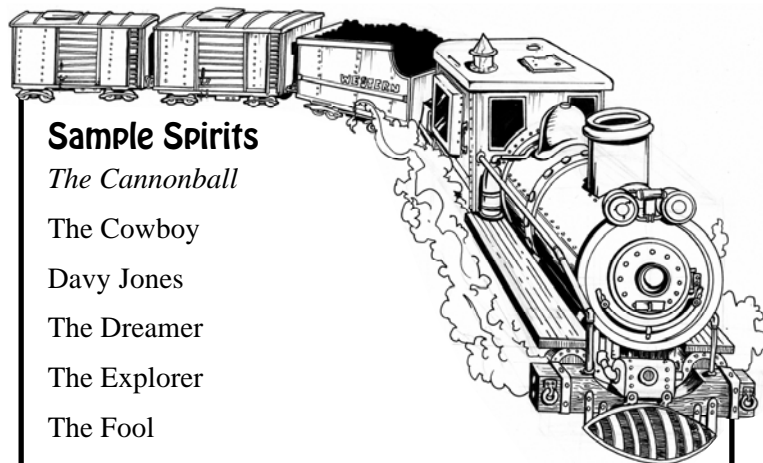


HOBOMANCER

affect the physical world. Whether or not there was ever a real steel-drivin' man named John Henry, for instance, doesn't matter; so many people have heard, and been inspired by, the story of John Henry that the Steel Driver has become a powerful Spirit. Spirits exist outside of physical reality and do not take action on their own. Hobomancers must call on Spirits to aid them.

A hobomancer who has never held a gun before in his life can call on the Cowboy if he needs to make a difficult shot. A hobomancer who needs to make good time on an urgent journey can call on the Messenger. Generally a Spirit will only aid a hobomancer for a short period of time. Some hobomancers specialize in channeling Spirits, however, and can make greater use of the advantages that Spirits confer. These abilities are described in more detail in **Chapter 7: Hobo Powers**.

Although Spirits are ultimately just very powerful ideas, they often become closely associated with real or legendary people, creatures from other realities, and even Powers who embody the archetype. For magical purposes, such characters are interchangeable with the more generic Spirit they represent. For example, a hobomancer may call upon Paul Revere instead of the Messenger, Pecos Bill could stand in for the Cowboy, and a hobo who needed to invoke the Martyr may choose instead to call upon Jesus Christ or perhaps even the Hanged Man.



Sample Spirits

The Cannonball

The Cowboy

Davy Jones

The Dreamer

The Explorer

The Fool

The Funeral Train

The General

The Good Dog

The Green Man

The Grim Reaper

The Healer

The Hunter

The Inventor

Jack Frost

The Lawman

The Lover

The Martyr

The Messenger

Old Man River

The Patriot

The Peacemaker

Queen Mab

The Sage

The Scoundrel

The Shepherd

The Steel Driver

The Trickster

The Warrior

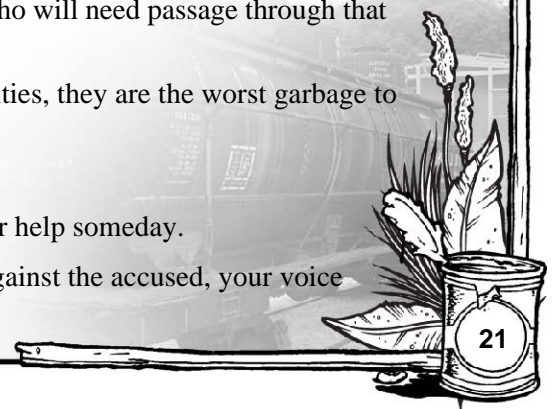


Bits & Pieces from later chapters....

HOBO ETHICAL CODE

During the 1889 National Hobo Convention (held in St. Louis, Missouri), the Tourist Union #63 voted to adopt an official ethical code for its members. The code consisted of the following 16 points:

1. Decide your own life, don't let another person run or rule you.
2. When in town, always respect the local law and officials, and try to be a gentleman at all times.
3. Don't take advantage of someone who is in a vulnerable situation, locals or other hobos.
4. Always try to find work, even if temporary, and always seek out jobs nobody wants. By doing so you not only help a business along, but ensure employment should you return to that town again.
5. When no employment is available, make your own work by using your added talents at crafts.
6. Do not allow yourself to become a stupid drunk and set a bad example for locals' treatment of other hobos.
7. When jungling in town, respect handouts, do not wear them out, another hobo will be coming along who will need them as bad, if not worse than you.
8. Always respect nature, do not leave garbage where you are jungling.
9. If in a community jungle, always pitch in and help.
10. Try to stay clean, and boil up (take a bath) wherever possible.
11. When traveling, ride your train respectfully, take no personal chances, cause no problems with the operating crew or host railroad, act like an extra crew member.
12. Do not cause problems in a train yard, another hobo will be coming along who will need passage through that yard.
13. Do not allow other hobos to molest children, expose all molesters to authorities, they are the worst garbage to infest any society.
14. Help all runaway children, and try to induce them to return home.
15. Help your fellow hobos whenever and wherever needed, you may need their help someday.
16. If present at a hobo court and you have testimony, give it. Whether for or against the accused, your voice counts!



AMERICA IN THE 1930S

Music of the 1930s

- Roy Acuff, "Wabash Cannonball" (1936)
- Fred Astaire, "Night and Day" (1932)
- Gene Autry, "Back In The Saddle Again" (1939)
- Cab Calloway, "Minnie The Moocher" (1931)
- The Carter Family, "Can The Circle Be Unbroken (Bye and Bye)" (1935)
- Count Basie Orchestra, "One O'Clock Jump" (1937)
- Bing Crosby, "Pennies From Heaven" (1936)
- Duke Ellington, "Mood Indigo" (1930)
- Ella Fitzgerald, "A Tisket A Tasket" (1938)
- Judy Garland, "Over The Rainbow" (1939)
- Benny Goodman, "Sing Sing Sing" (1937)
- Billie Holiday, "Strange Fruit" (1939)
- Bob Hope & Shirley Ross, "Thanks For The Memory" (1938)
- Robert Johnson, "Cross Road Blues" (1936)
- Leadbelly, "Goodnight Irene" (1934)
- Glenn Miller, "In The Mood" (1939)
- Cole Porter, "You're The Top" (1934)
- Harry Richman, "Puttin' On The Ritz" (1930)
- Jimmie Rodgers, "Blue Yodel No. 9 (Standin' On The Corner)" (1930)
- The Sons of the Pioneers, "Tumbling Tumbleweeds" (1934)
- Art Tatum, "Tea For Two" (1933)
- Shirley Temple, "On The Good Ship Lollipop" (1934)
- Rudy Vallee, "Brother Can You Spare A Dime" (1933)
- Ethel Waters, "Stormy Weather" (1933)
- Big Joe Williams, "Baby Please Don't Go" (1935)

Films of the 1930s

- *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938)
- *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1939)
- *Animal Crackers* (1930)
- *Bringing Up Baby* (1938)
- *Cleopatra* (1934)
- *Destry Rides Again* (1939)
- *Dracula* (1931)
- *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931)
- *A Farewell To Arms* (1932)
- *Frankenstein* (1931)
- *Freaks* (1932)
- *Gone With The Wind* (1939)
- *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (1939)
- *Hell's Angels* (1930)
- *Horse Feathers* (1932)
- *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1939)
- *I'm No Angel* (1933)
- *The Invisible Man* (1933)
- *Jesse James* (1939)
- *Kid Galahad* (1937)
- *King Kong* (1933)
- *Modern Times* (1936)
- *Mr. Smith Goes To Washington* (1939)
- *The Mummy* (1932)
- *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935)
- *Of Mice and Men* (1939)
- *Reefer Madness* (1936)
- *Romeo and Juliet* (1936)
- *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937)
- *Stagecoach* (1939)
- *Tarzan The Ape Man* (1932)
- *The Thin Man* (1934)
- *Werewolf of London* (1935)
- *White Zombie* (1932)
- *The Wizard of Oz* (1939)



HOBOMANCER

Sample Hobomancer Words

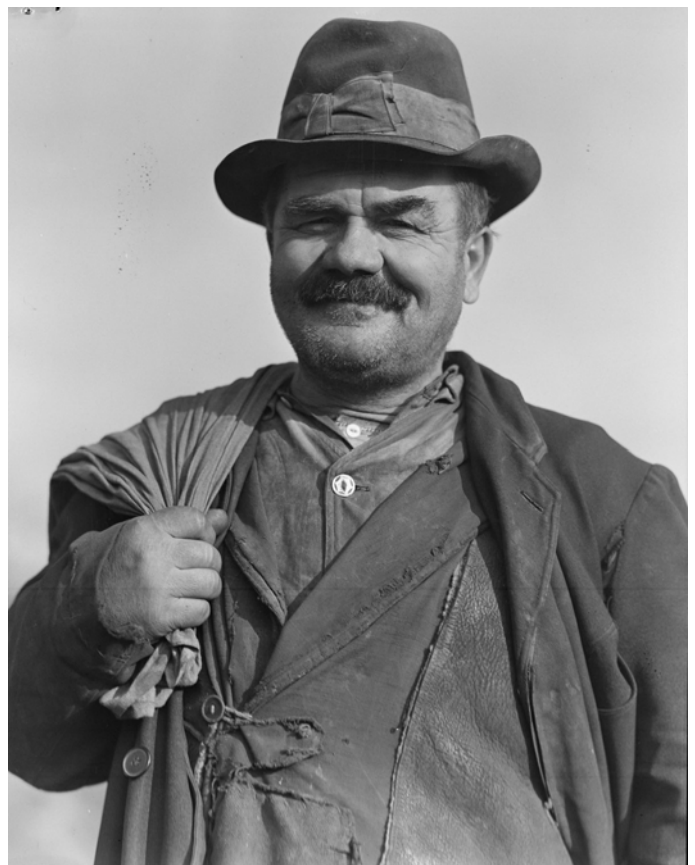
Gimmicks: Animal Empathy, Citizen of the World, Classical Education, Escape Artist, Fast Healer, Folksy Wisdom, Gift of Gab, God Loves Fools and Drunks, Good Instincts, I've Seen Worse, King of the Road, Ladies' Man, Lead Belly, Lifetime of Experience, Lightning Reflexes, Loyal Dog, Lucky, Master of Disguise, Mr. Fix-It, Pack Rat, Quick Healer, Remittance Man, Sixth Sense, Spirit Guide, Smooth Talker, Strong As An Ox, Trustworthy Face, Weird Luck

Weaknesses: Alcoholic, Amputee, Bull Magnet, Chronic Illness, Compulsive Gambler, Cursed, Dames, Demonic Debt, Drug Addiction, Getting Old, Glass Jaw, Gullible, Hellhounds On My Trail, Haunted, Just Plain Mean, Limpy, Monster Magnet, Oathbreaker, One-Eye, Phobia, Punching Bag, The Shakes, Shell Shocked, Touched in the Head, Ugly as Sin, Victim of the Past, Wanted Man, Weird Luck, Weirdness Magnet

Old Lives: Always A Hobo, Architect, Barber, Barkeep, Bellhop, Blacksmith, Bootlegger, Boxer, Brakeman, Bricklayer, Butcher, Carny, Carpenter, Chef, Coal Miner, Courier, Dentist, Dock Worker, Draftsman, Electrician, Elevator Operator, Farmhand, Fireman, Fisherman, Furniture Maker, Gandy Dancer, Gifter, Grocer, Handyman, Ice Man, Janitor, Lawyer, Lumberjack, Machinist, Mailman, Meat Packer, Mechanic, Milkman, Miller, Railroad Worker, Riverboat Pilot, Oil Worker, Plumber, Politician, Porter, Preacher, Sharecropper, Soda Jerk, Shoe Maker, Soldier, Steel Worker, Stock Broker, Teacher, Textile Worker, Traveling Salesman, Typesetter, Undertaker, Vaudevillian

Skills: Agriculture, Alchemy, Banjo, Baseball, Biscuit Spearing, Brawling, Breaking & Entering, Card Tricks, Carpentry, Conspiracy Theory, Cooking, Decking, Falconry, Fast Talk, Fishing, First Aid, Folklore, Foraging, Gambling, Good with Tools, Gossip, Hard Drinker, Harmonica, History, Hobo Lore, Housedog, Hunting, Inventor, Jackrolling, Jailhouse Lawyer, Keen Hearing, Knife Throwing, Latin, Limericks, Lint Knitting, Literature, Mining, Mooching, Nickel Making, Philosophy, Pocket Picking, Poker, Railroad Trivia, Religion, Scrounging, Singing, Sob Stories, Stealth, Stew Builder, Strong Swimmer, Tinkering, Train Hopping, Train Schedule, Trapeze Artist, War Vet, Wobbly, Wrestling

WWPHITM? Curtis Armstrong, Adam Baldwin, Raymond J. Barry, Kathy Bates, Ned Beatty, Jim Beaver, Danny Bonaduce, Charles Bronson, Clancy Brown, W. Earl Brown, Steve Buscemi, Dayton Callie, George Carlin, Helena Bonham Carter, George Clooney, Gary Cole, Clifton Collins Jr., Jonathan Coulton, Daniel Day-Lewis, Tim DeKay, Brad Dourif, Robert Downey Jr., Clea DuVall, Robert Duvall, Clint Eastwood, Jack Elam, Jamie Foxx, Morgan Freeman, M.C. Gainey, Zach Galifianakis, Walton Goggins, Gene Hackman, Woody Harrelson, Rutger Hauer, John Hawkes, Lance Henriksen, Damon Herriman, Don Imus, Samuel L. Jackson, Val Kilmer, Johnny Knoxville, Elias Koteas, Jennifer Lawrence, Jason Lee, Geoffrey Lewis, Juliette Lewis, Delroy Lindo, Paula Malcomson, Ian McShane, Christopher Meloni, Joe Morton, Charlie Murphy, Tim Blake Nelson, Willie Nelson, Mojo Nixon, Nick Nolte, Ed O'Neill, Bill Paxton, Ron Pearlman, Jerry Reed, John C. Reilly, Leon Rippy, Tim Robbins, Stephen Root, Axl Rose, Katey Sagal, William Sanderson, Tony Shalhoub, Tom Sizemore, Will Smith, Nick Stahl, Donald Sutherland, Patrick Swayze, Tony Todd, John Turturro, Karl Urban, Jim Varney, Tom Waits, Dr. Cornel West, Eli Wallach, Robin Weigert, Robin Williams, Steve Zahn



Train Whisperer

When a train first rolls off the line, it's just a machine, but as it travels along the songline, it develops its own personality and story, and some claim that well-traveled trains even have something like a soul. The train whisperer can learn a lot about a train by simply listening to its song and watching it roll along the rails. He can also affect the operation of a train through sheer force of will.

Sample Uses of Power:

- Determine basic information about the train, its cargo, and its crew.
- Get a rough idea of where the train has been. For example, its last stop or whether it's recently encountered corrupt songlines, rough track, or bad weather.
- Command the train. For example, the train whisperer can convince the train to run hot in order to guarantee that it will stop at the next water tank, or nudge the train into moving faster or slower than the conductor intends. In order to use this ability, the character must be on board the train.

Vow: Any.



Other Suggested Hobo Powers

Astral Traveler, Berserker, Charmer, Coinsmith, Daredevil, Dowser, Dream Weaver, Firestarter, Healer, Human Dynamo, Luck Changer, Mentalist, Oracle, Plant Whisperer, Rain Maker, Seer, Shadow Caster, Shapeshifter, Tattooed Man, Telekinetic

* * * * *

The night I met the Kind Lady for the first time, I started walking a new path. I've walked that path for years, and I'm walking it still.

It wasn't long before Sidetrack Stevens left me. I had thought the old man was exaggerating his poor health, but it turned out he was right—he wasn't long for this world, after all. He died just two weeks after my initiation. His healing powers could only postpone the inevitable for so long and, after who-knows-how-many years of heavy drinking, his liver finally gave out. But he lived long enough to train his successor, and I like to think that when the Kind Lady came to see him the final time, he felt satisfied with what he had done. I lost my mentor but I kept learning, improving my craft, doing my part for this great nation of ours.

Now, years later, a lot of folks say that hobomancers aren't much longer for this world. They say the railroads will shut down, that men will no longer ride the rails. They say we're bound for extinction. I don't believe that. And even if I did, what does it matter? All I can do is keep on doing what I'm doing, continuing the journey that Sidetrack Stevens started me on, all those years ago. Like he once told me, "It ain't the best life, but it surely ain't the worst."



GMINING HOBOMANCER

Why Hobos?

Once you tell your gaming group that you want to run a game about magical hobos, they may ask you why. Once you think about it, though, the more reasonable question is “Why not hobos?”

Throughout history there have been spies and assassins. In 15th century feudal Japan the nobles recruited some peasants to go spy on the other side and kill their enemies in sneaky ways. Over time these assassins received the name “ninja.” Similarly, there have been people robbing other people on ships as long as there have been ships. In the 16th century, though, some men on ships robbed some other men on ships in the Caribbean, and created our modern image of pirates.

Historically speaking, there’s nothing about ninjas or pirates that differentiate them from thousands of other murderers in cultures around the world. But in both cases, a legend grew, and pirates and ninjas became fixtures in popular culture. Why? What makes these two archetypes so popular? If it was just the fact that they killed people, then you would see a lot more Aztec priest or World War I infantryman Halloween costumes. No, it must be the way they dressed. People like ninjas because they wear cool looking masks; people like pirates because they wear funny hats and scarves.

Once the strong visual image gets lodged in our collective consciousness, a random historical figure can take on a deeper meaning. Cowboys, who were simply men who herded cattle, could come to stand for an entire way of life. The secret appeal of the cowboy, like the pirate, is that he lives outside of society, and lives life on his own terms.

Considered this way, it’s clear that hobos are at least as interesting as pirates and ninjas. Hobos wear broken top hats and fingerless gloves. Instead of pirate ships, they ride trains; instead of swords, they carry bindles. They live outside the law, roaming the land, living life on their own terms. What could be more quintessentially American?

The hobo was once a common fixture in American pop culture. As trains have declined in importance in American life and the Great Depression has receded from popular memory, the hobo’s prominence has faded. Such a powerful archetype will not simply disappear, however, and as our

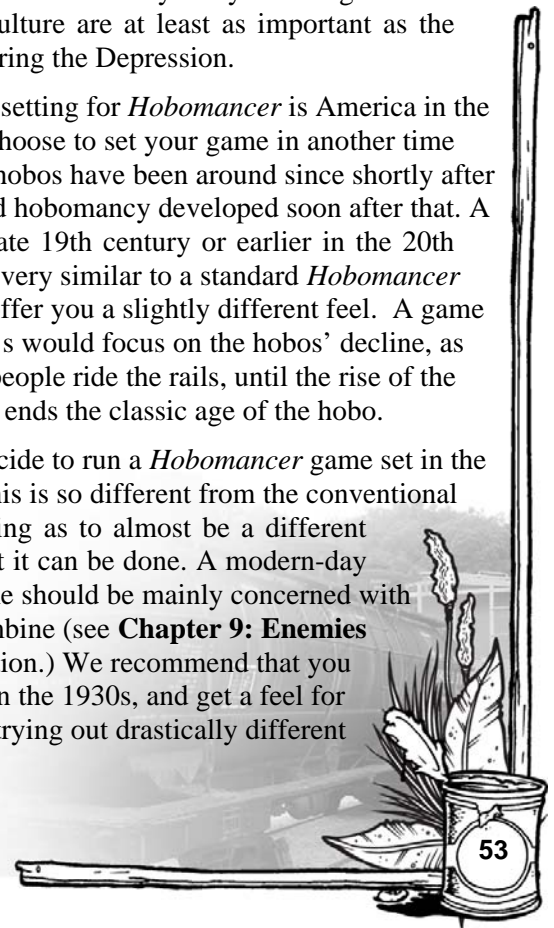
consumerist culture becomes increasingly toxic the thought of hopping a train and taking off for parts unknown becomes more appealing. Now it is no longer a realistic option but a romantic image of a lost time. As the real hobos of history fade from the public consciousness, we predict the archetypal image of the hobo will make a dramatic return, taking his rightful place alongside the ninja, the pirate, the knight, the cowboy, and the hardboiled private detective.

Setting

As you plan your *Hobomancer* game, you will want to do some historical research. This is an excellent idea, and can give you plenty of material for *Hobomancer* adventures. Interesting historical tidbits can spark story ideas and can help you add flavor to your game. Be careful, though, not to let historical facts limit you. *Hobomancer* is not about a strictly accurate depiction of 1930s America so much as it is about the mythical America of yesteryear. Images of the hobo from pop culture are at least as important as the realities of life during the Depression.

While the default setting for *Hobomancer* is America in the 1930s, you may choose to set your game in another time period. After all, hobos have been around since shortly after the Civil War, and hobomancy developed soon after that. A game set in the late 19th century or earlier in the 20th century would be very similar to a standard *Hobomancer* game but would offer you a slightly different feel. A game set after the 1930’s would focus on the hobos’ decline, as fewer and fewer people ride the rails, until the rise of the diesel locomotive ends the classic age of the hobo.

You may even decide to run a *Hobomancer* game set in the modern world. This is so different from the conventional *Hobomancer* setting as to almost be a different game entirely, but it can be done. A modern-day *Hobomancer* game should be mainly concerned with opposing the Combine (see **Chapter 9: Enemies** for more information.) We recommend that you start out playing in the 1930s, and get a feel for the game, before trying out drastically different settings.



The Combine

Hobomancers have always been vigilant about guarding our world from creatures that sneak in through cracks in reality. Most of these threats are large and clearly dangerous creatures. The greatest threat that the hobomancers have ever faced, though, is one that they did not even notice at first. In the beginning they were scarcely more substantial than air and practically invisible—you could see them out of the corner of your eye, sometimes, in the right light, but you wouldn't know what you were looking at. At some point in the early 20th century they began creeping through rifts in the songlines and infiltrating our world.

When hobomancers first discovered these creatures, they called them “dream-snatchers.” The dream-snatchers are emotional parasites who feed on despair. They infiltrate a community and do their best to break down people's hopes and dreams, giving rise to the despair that powers them. While they are wispy, ghostlike creatures who can barely affect the physical world, dream-snatchers can whisper in human ears, making promises of great power to those who advance their agenda. Hobomancers have had numerous run-ins with dream-snatchers and have, so far, been successful in freeing several communities from their influence.

Hobomancers think of the dream-snatchers as just another breed of so-and-so, a problem that pops up every now and then and which can be taken care of with a little hard work. They would be horrified if they realized the truth. The dream-snatchers are not isolated creatures that just happened through rifts into our world; they are a carefully coordinated invasion force.

The closest English translation of their name for themselves, which refers to both the species as a whole and the ruling body that governs them, is “the Combine.” The Combine has had its eye on Earth for a long time, and is now enacting plans that are centuries in the making.

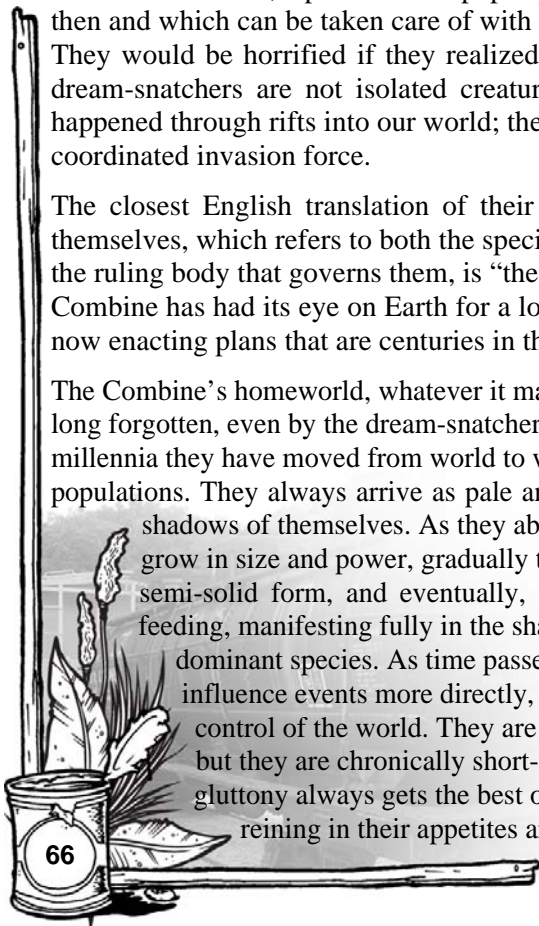
The Combine's homeworld, whatever it may have been, is long forgotten, even by the dream-snatchers themselves. For millennia they have moved from world to world, feeding off populations. They always arrive as pale and insubstantial shadows of themselves. As they absorb despair, they grow in size and power, gradually taking on a hazy, semi-solid form, and eventually, after years of feeding, manifesting fully in the shape of the world's dominant species. As time passes they are able to influence events more directly, eventually taking control of the world. They are masterful planners but they are chronically short-sighted, and their gluttony always gets the best of them. Instead of reining in their appetites and preserving their

food supply indefinitely, they gorge themselves until the world is used up, and then they move on. Even the dream-snatchers themselves have no idea how many times they have repeated this cycle. Now, the world the Combine has inhabited for centuries is on the verge of collapse, and they are in the process of making Earth their new home.

Dream-snatchers are not like vampires or succubi. They have no interest in feeding off individual humans. To sustain their species, they need massive, sustained, large-scale despair. The early Combine members who crossed over to Earth began the process by subtly influencing events. Now they are engaged in their long-term project: to engineer a society that systemically produces despair.

To achieve their goal, the Combine must overcome several serious obstacles. First, America has a strong defense against despair; the culture of the nation is based on a dream of hope, equality, and prosperity for all. Second, America in the 1930s is on the verge of entering World War II. War produces despair, but not in a way conducive to the Combine's plans—if humanity is wiped out, they will have no one to feed on. The Combine's goal, then, is to create a mostly peaceful America that is ravaged by doubt and anxiety. Once their grip on America is secure, the Combine can begin exporting the culture of despair they have created to the rest of the world.

The key to the Combine's plan is to focus less on introducing serious problems—humans have a history of overcoming obstacles—and more on undermining the foundations that allow people to cope with problems. If, in the past, people could be happy in the midst of poverty, they must now be constantly made aware of how poor they are. Advertising will create an endless sense of longing in rich and poor alike. This longing will replace people's sense of community, as the Combine's plan will discourage citizens from joining a bowling league or going to church and, instead, encourage them to stay home and watch television. They will lessen the sense of authenticity Americans feel in their daily lives, disconnecting them from a sense of meaningful work or culture. Main Streets will die, as business shifts to the shopping centers outside of town; national corporate chains will replace local businesses; real food will be replaced with mass-produced, pre-packaged food-based products, which will be served in franchised fast food restaurants. All of this will disconnect Americans from the hopes and dreams that once gave them comfort, and open the floodgates of despair. By carefully coordinating the actions of their human pawns, the dream-snatchers believe they can transform America into a homogeneous nation of consumers by the end of the 20th century.



HOBOMANCER

Hodag

The hodag is a fearsome beast found in the north-central parts of the United States. This massive creature, twice the size of a bull, has a hideous, frog-like face with the horns of a bull and the tusks of an elephant. Its broad saurian back is covered in spines, and it stomps around on four thick legs with razor-sharp claws. It is occasionally mistaken for a giant armadillo.

Hodags enjoy preying on livestock and may be responsible for several instances of cattle mutilation in and around the Great Lakes area. The monster prefers to make its lair in caves, and more than one has chosen to nest inside a railroad tunnel.

Body: 20

Brain: 5

Nerve: 14

HP: 35

YY: 3

Job: Monster (13)

Gimmick: Massive (12)

Weakness: Ponderous (12)

Skills: Burrowing +3, Tail Swipe +2

Notes:

Its impressive array of horns, tusks, and spikes allows the hodag to attack with a Damage Bonus of +5. Its thick skin and bony spikes give it an Armor Rating of 5.

Massive

Hodags are mighty creatures possessing great strength. When trying to accomplish a feat of strength beyond human ability it may roll this Gimmick. While performing purely mundane physical tasks, the hodag may use this Gimmick as a Second Chance roll.

Ponderous

Hodags move slowly and are somewhat clumsy. The hodag must roll this Weakness before trying any task that requires speed or grace. If the Weakness takes effect, the monster crashes to the ground.

Mostly-Dead

Reanimating corpses is a favorite pastime of sorcerers, demons, and other forces of evil. Through either magic, science, or a combination of both, these cadavers are granted a perverted parody of life. Sorcerers usually use “mostly-deads” (as hobomancers call them) as bodyguards, and more than one unscrupulous industrialist has used them as a source of cheap labor. While not as smart or strong as brutes, the mindless mostly-deads are more cooperative and less likely to get drunk on the job.

Mostly-deads do not crave human flesh or brains, but will gladly go after it if ordered to do so by their master.

Body: 15

Brain: 3

Nerve: 0

HP: 15

YY: 0

Job: Mindless Slave (13)

Gimmick: Too Dumb to Die (12)

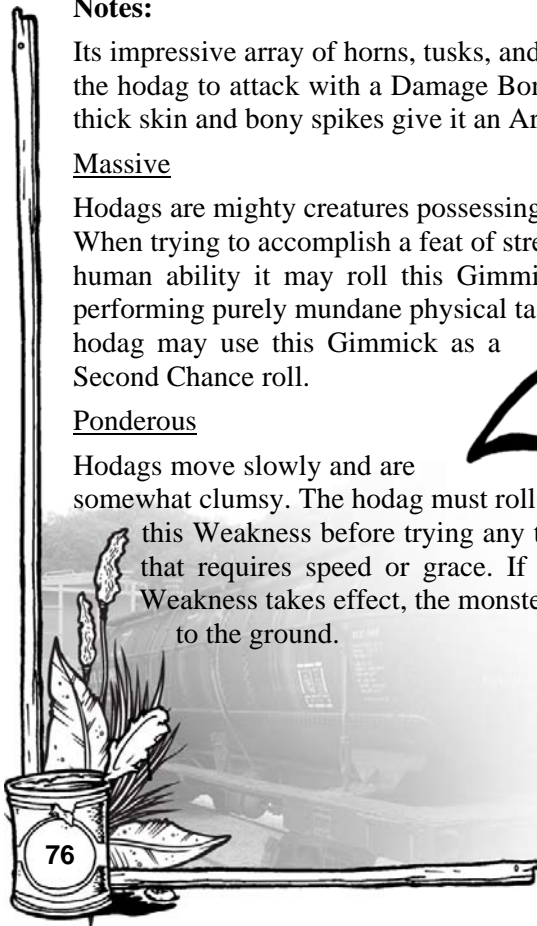
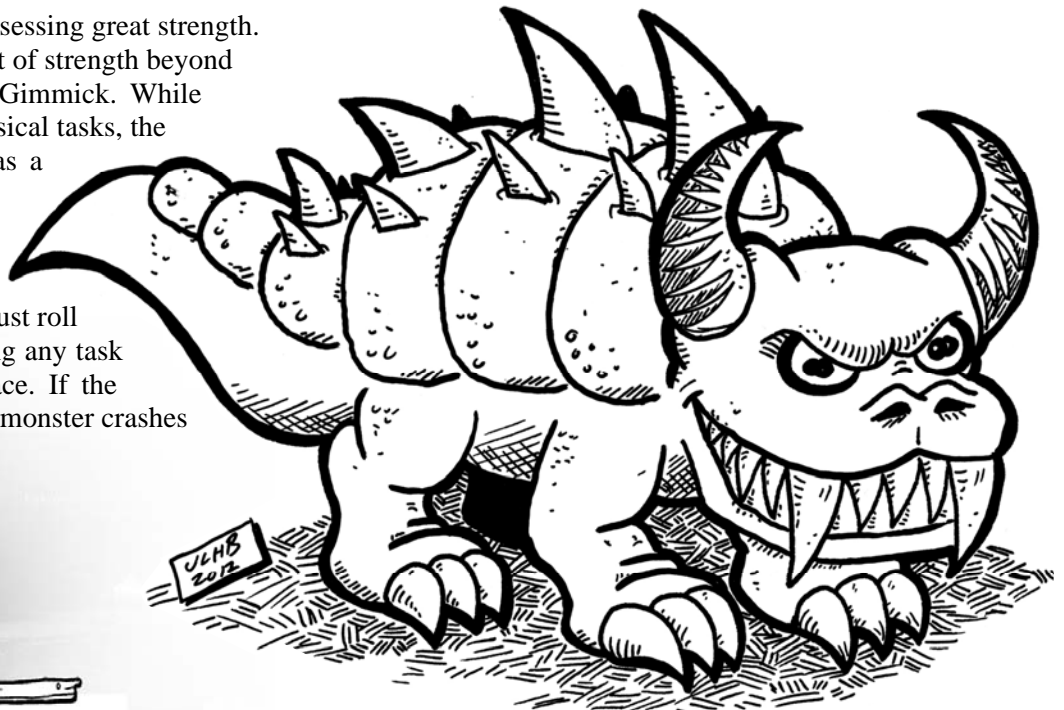
Weakness: Clumsy (12)

Skills: None

Notes:

Too Dumb to Die

If the mostly-dead is reduced to 0 HP, make a Gimmick roll. If the roll succeeds, the mostly-dead regains a number of HP equal to the roll and loses 1 point from its Gimmick Number.



HOBOMANCER



stop



kind lady



nothing here



this is the place



will give
to get rid of you



police are alert



work for food



don't give up



police are inattentive



good place for handout



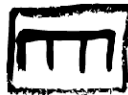
dog



don't go this way



tell a sad story



vicious dog here



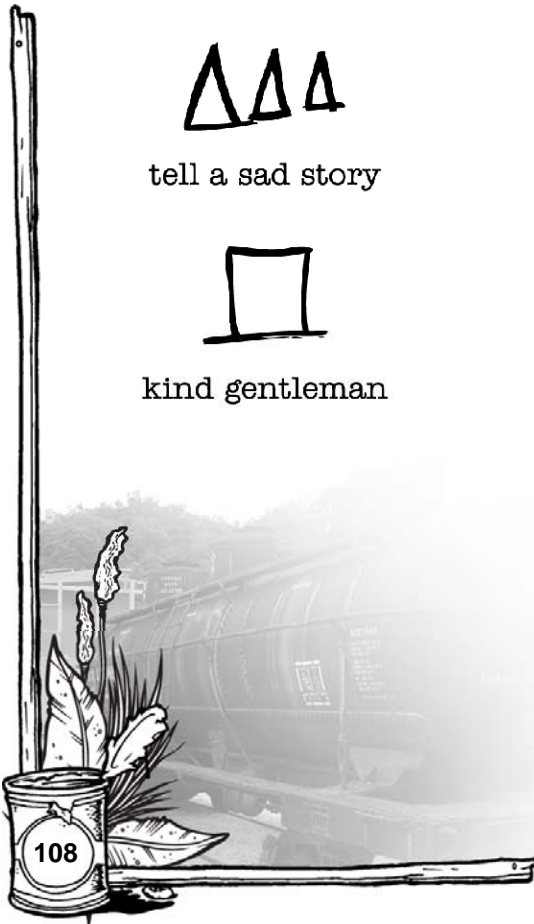
go this way



kind gentleman



barking dog



APPENDIX 3

HOBO LINGO

Accommodation: Local freight train.

Accommodation Car: Caboose.

Airedale: A loner.

Alkee Stiff: A drunk.

Anchor: A pick.

Angel Food: A sermon.

Angelina: A young and inexperienced hobo.

Ashcat: Fireman.

Avatar: The living embodiment of a Spirit.

Bad Mojo: Corruption caused by committing evil acts or using black magic.

Bad Order: A disabled car or engine.

Bad Road: A line that's especially unfriendly to hobos.

Banjo: (1) A short-handled shovel; (2) A frying pan.

Barber: To talk (usually too much).

Barnacle: Someone who holds the same job for a year or more.

Barrel House: A dive; usually a saloon, brothel, or flophouse.

Battleship: A high-sided coal car.

Beachcomber: A hobo who hangs around coastal areas or ports.

Beastmaster: A hobo who can communicate with animals.

Beefer: (1) A whiner; (2) An informant.

Benny: An overcoat.

The Big Burgh: New York City.

The Big House: Prison.

The Big Rock Candy Mountain: Hobo paradise.

Bindle: A bedroll, sack, or other bundle of luggage.

Bindle Stick: A walking stick used to carry a bindle.

Bindle Stiff: A hobo who carries a bindle.

Birdcage: A brakeman or signalman's lantern.

The Biscuits Hang High: Food or handouts are scarce.

Bitch: A lamp made out of a tin can.

Black Blizzard: A dust storm.

Black Snake: A train full of coal cars.

Blinds: A spot on the train where a hobo can ride without being seen. Usually the space between the engine and the baggage car.

Blinky: A blind hobo.

Blowed-in-the-Glass: Trustworthy.

The Blues: Existential angst.

Bo: Hobo.

Boette: A female hobo.

Boil Up: To wash clothes by boiling them to get rid of bugs and lice. More generally, to clean oneself up.

Bone Orchard: A graveyard.

Bone Polisher: A mean dog.

Boodle: Loot.

Book of Rules: Fictional book containing all the rules enforced by railroad employees.

Boomer: A part-time railroad worker.

Brakeman: Train crewman in charge of operating the air brake as well as of adding and removing cars and throwing switches outside the rail yard.

Brewmaster: A hobo alchemist.

Buck: A Catholic priest good for a dollar.

Bug Slinger: Brakeman or switchman.

Bull: A railroad security officer.

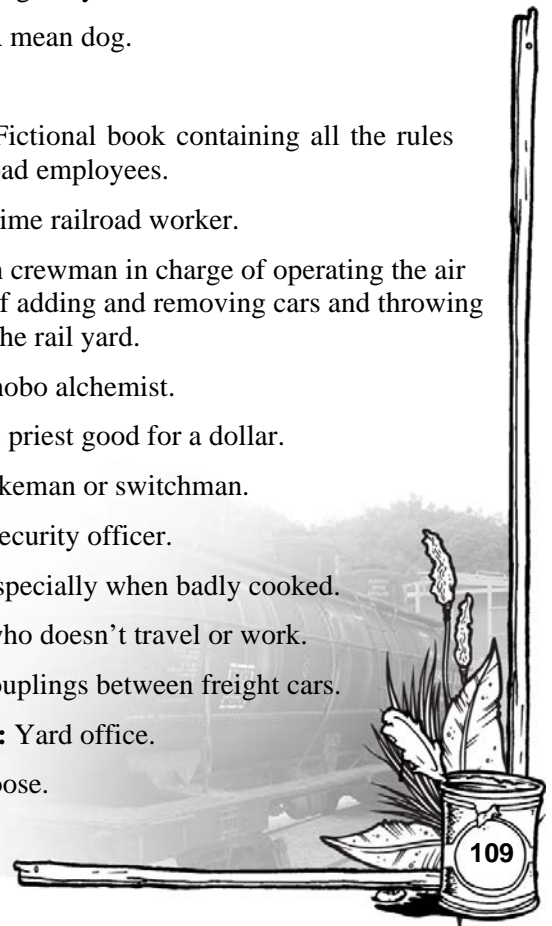
Bullets: Beans, especially when badly cooked.

Bum: A person who doesn't travel or work.

Bumpers: The couplings between freight cars.

Buzzard's Roost: Yard office.

Cabin Car: Caboose.



APPENDIX 6

DUMB TABLES

Train Events

- 1 Cow on the rails ahead
- 2 Train derails
- 3 Switch fails, another train headed this way
- 4 Cars detach from the train
- 5 Boiler begins to leak
- 6 Train stops
- 7 Sharp curve
- 8 Train enters a long tunnel
- 9 A bull shows up
- 10 Mail crane or overhanging branch
- 11 Bridge crossing
- 12 Train pulls into station
- 13 Rough tracks
- 14 It begins to storm
- 15 Train speeds out of control/brakes fail
- 16 Car tips over and is being drug along
- 17 Stalled train on rails ahead
- 18 Train robbery
- 19 Bridge out ahead
- 20 A monster attacks

Rail Yard Encounters

- 1 Someone or something completely unexpected
- 2 Trainmaster
- 3 Signalman
- 4 Conductor
- 5 A fight
- 6 Hobo
- 7 Brakeman
- 8 Mechanic
- 9 An unattended lunch
- 10 Switchman
- 11 Bull
- 12 Loader
- 13 Fireman
- 14 Flagman
- 15 A crime in progress
- 16 Engineer
- 17 Gandy dancer
- 18 Yardmaster
- 19 Suspicious activity
- 20 A monster

Local Places to Spend The Night

- 1 Shelter provided by fellow travelers (carnies, circus folk, gypsies, tent revival, etc.)
- 2 Private residence
- 3-4 A cave, tunnel, mine, etc.
- 5-6 Abandoned building
- 7-8 Storage building (barn, shed, warehouse, etc.)
- 9-12 Hobo jungle
- 13-14 Mission, church, or other place that regularly provides shelter for the homeless
- 15-16 Flophouse or cheap hotel
- 17-18 Under a bridge, in an abandoned car, etc.
- 19 A vacation cabin, hunting lodge, etc.
- 20 Jail

Attitude Towards Hobos

- 1-3 Hostile
- 4-7 Suspicious
- 8-13 Neutral
- 14-17 Civil
- 18-20 Friendly



SAMPLE CHARACTERS

Sidetrack Stevens

Body: 12

Brain: 13

Nerve: 16

HP: 12

YY: 0

Job: Hobomancer (16)

Hobo Power: Healer

Gimmick: I've Seen Worse (13)

Weakness: Chronic Illness (12)

Old Life: Barber +0

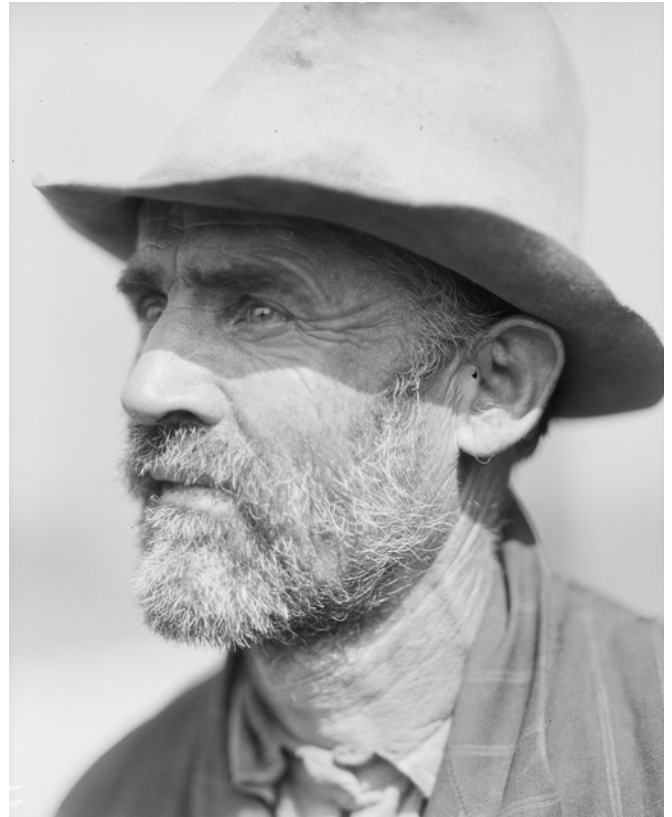
Vow: Never turn your back on the sick or suffering.

Skills: Mentoring +4, Hard Drinking +3, Knife Fighting +2, Train Hopping +1

WWPHITM?: Willie Nelson

Tagline: "It ain't the best life, but it surely ain't the worst."

Dumb Fact: Knows that he will die before the year is up.



Stinky Pete Yablonowitz

Body: 13

Brain: 13

Nerve: 16

HP: 14

YY: 3

Job: Hobomancer (15)

Hobo Power: Stinkomancer

Gimmick: Strong-Willed (13)

Weakness: Short-Tempered (13)

Old Life: Teacher +1

Vow: Never, ever bathe.

Skills: Breaking & Entering +3, Tarot +3, Squirrely +3, The Complete Works of Shakespeare +2

WWPHITM?: George Carlin

Tagline: "We gonna do this or what?"

Dumb Fact: Chews gum constantly.

Twin Cities Zelda

Body: 13

Brain: 14

Nerve: 15

HP: 13

YY: 2

Job: Hobomancer (14)

Hobo Power: Beastmaster

Gimmick: Weather Sense (14)

Weakness: Clumsy (14)

Old Life: Farmwife +1

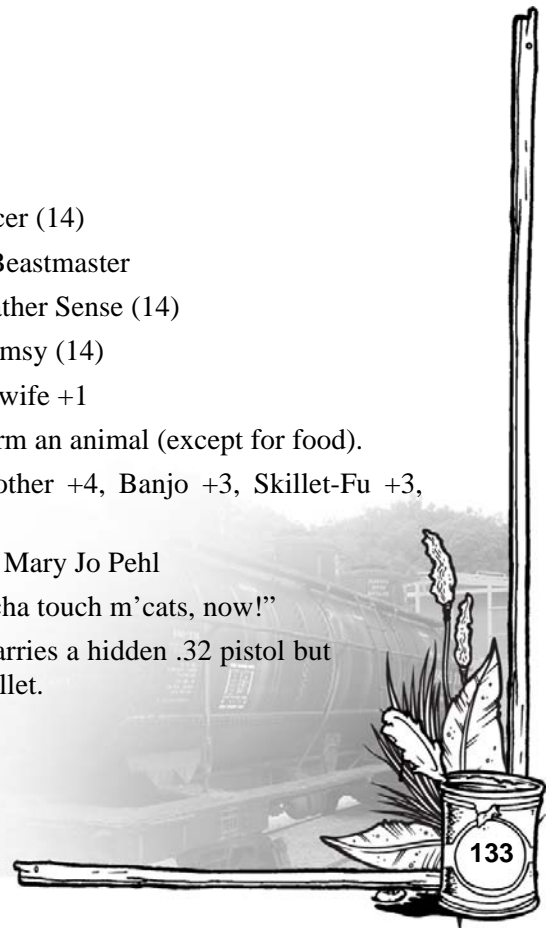
Vow: Never harm an animal (except for food).

Skills: Den Mother +4, Banjo +3, Skillet-Fu +3, Persuasion +2

WWPHITM?: Mary Jo Pehl

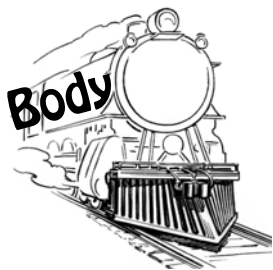
Tagline: "Doncha touch m'cats, now!"

Dumb Fact: Carries a hidden .32 pistol but only has one bullet.

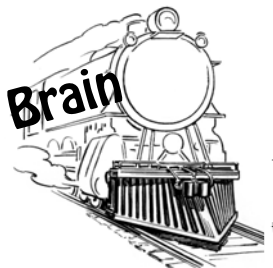




Hobo Name:



Body



Brain



Nerve

JOB:

Skills

HOBO POWER:

GIMMICK:

WEAKNESS:

OLD LIFE:

WWPHITM?

TAG LINE:

DUMB FACT:



The Blues



Bad Mojo



Ride the rails. Have more fun!



Health Points



Yum Yums

Notes:

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