

POSTCARD FROM THE DARK PEAK · #6

THE BLUEBELL LINE

A SOLO RPG SCENARIO · BEELEY WOOD · HELLSBOROUGH, S6

DEMONSPAWN BOOKS AND GAMES

HELLSBOROUGH.COM

A NOTE FROM PIP

Van wants something from the mill ruins at Beeley Wood. He was, as usual, precise about what and vague about everything else.

There is a murkask in the main room of the derelict mill – waterproof, sealed, the kind of thing you'd trust to a gutterball colony if you needed it kept somewhere the nascenti wouldn't look. Van did not say who left it there. He did not say what's inside it. He said: this murkneet, before the exacid grubrun, go and get it.

The grubrun happens every few weeks. The exacids arrive, collect what the gutterball colony has recorded, and leave. If the murkask is there when they arrive, they'll take it with the rest. If you are there when they arrive, you'll have a different problem.

The bluebell line is at the wood's midpoint. A longleg holds it. This is normal. Don't make eye contact and don't take anything from the bluebell side – the longleg will not stop you walking through it but it will remember everything you take.

The gutterballs don't care who you are. They care what you think, and what you think about what you're thinking, and the gap between those two things, which is where the interesting data lives. Plan accordingly.

— Pip Rippon, *field notes, The Mason's Arms, Walkley Lane*

YOUR CHARACTER

You are a crosslander, recently arrived in Hellsborough from the off-world. You know very little. This is both dangerous and, occasionally, useful.

Distribute the numbers **3, 2, 1** between your three stats. Choose according to who you are.

STAT	WHAT IT COVERS
GRIT	Strength, endurance, physical force. Pushing things. Not dying.
WIT	Perception, intelligence, quickness. Spotting things. Not being surprised.
MURK	Sensitivity to dark matter. Luck. Resistance to things that feed on minds.

HP: 6. At 0 HP you are taken by the wood. The murkask is never recovered. Van does not discuss it again, which is its own kind of verdict.

TESTS

When you attempt something uncertain and the outcome matters, roll **2d6 + the relevant stat**.

ROLL	RESULT
10+	Success. You do the thing.
7-9	Success with cost. You do the thing, but something goes wrong, you take 1 damage, or the situation gets worse.
6-	Failure. Your own bad luck decides what happens instead.

When a creature attacks, roll **2d6 + Grit** to resist physical damage, or **2d6 + Murk** to resist mental damage. On a failure, take the creature's listed damage.

BEELEY WOOD

The mill ruins sit in three distinct zones. Move between them freely, but each time you enter a new zone, roll on the **Encounter Table**. Also roll when you make noise or fail a test.

THE DUN PATH

The river path, west of the wood. Murk at waist height. Gas lamp at the stile — it has been burning since before anyone can remember and nobody has ever seen it lit. The Dun is audible but not visible.



BEELEY WOOD

The bluebell line runs east to west through the wood centre. South of the line: bluebells, impeccable. North of the line: nothing. The longleg holds the line. The canopy here is dense.



THE MILL RUINS

Derelict stone buildings. Roofs gone. Flagstone floors. Drainage channels along the river wall. The Dun is below. The gutterball colony. The murkcask is here, in the main room.

To complete the scenario: Move to The Mill Ruins, retrieve the murkcask (Wit test), and return to The Dun Path — all before making **6 total Encounter rolls**. On roll 6, if you are not back on The Dun Path, the exacids have completed their grubrun and found you. Go to The Exacid Encounter.

ENCOUNTER TABLE

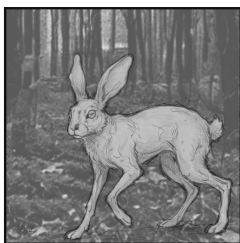
Roll 2d6 when you enter a new zone, when you make noise, or when you fail a test.

ROLL	ENCOUNTER
2	The exacids have arrived early. Go directly to The Exacid Encounter. The grubrun has begun.
3-4	A gutterball rolls toward you. Roll Murk 7+ to step aside without touching it. On a 7-9, you avoid it but its aperture orients on you — add +1 to your next Encounter roll in this zone. On a failure, the sphere makes contact. Add +1 to all further Encounter rolls in The Mill Ruins.
5-6	The longleg is watching. Roll Wit 7+ to freeze until it loses interest. On a 7-9, it lets you pass but follows one zone behind you. On a failure, it steps

ROLL	ENCOUNTER
	over the line — you cannot enter Beeley Wood this round; roll on this table again when you next attempt to enter.
7-8	The murk drops. Visibility collapses to arm's length. Roll Wit 7+ to keep your bearings. On a failure, you spend one round reorienting — roll on this table again before you can move.
9-10	Clear passage. Nothing moves. The gutterballs are facing the same direction they were when you arrived. Note it. It won't last.
11	Something on the mill floor. A cracked psycmask, still warm. Inside: a folded note written in semasiographic script you cannot read in this light. Take it if you want. It weighs nothing.
12	A gutterball near you opens its aperture fully and orients on something behind you. You turn. Nothing there. When you turn back, the aperture is now facing you. Lose 1 Murk.

THE CREATURES

LONGLEG



Hare. Wrong legs. Amber eyes with horizontal pupils. It holds the line.

The longleg does not want you to fight it. It wants you to understand that you are in a place with rules, and that the rules predate you by some considerable margin. It is patient about this once. Less so the second time.

STAT BLOCK

HP 3 **Damage 2** (physical — the hind legs are longer than they look) **Type** Warden

Territory hold: The longleg will not attack unless you cross the bluebell line while taking something from the south side, or fail your Wit test in Beeley Wood twice in the same crossing. First failure: warning, it advances one step. Second failure: it attacks.

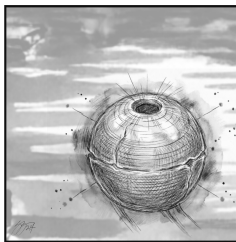
Won't follow into the ruins: The longleg's authority ends at the wood edge. Get past it once and you're clear on the return.

Eye contact: If you make eye contact (player's choice, or automatic on a Wit failure in Beeley Wood), you cannot choose your route — the longleg herds you directly to The Mill Ruins. No stops, no backtracking. It does not follow you in.

GUTTERBALL

Sphere. Head-sized. Wet stone surface. Aperture somewhere on the outside, always oriented at the most interesting thing in the room.

It does not hurt you in a way you would recognise as hurting. It records you. Whether that matters depends on how long you've been in the ruins and how much of your internal monologue you consider private.



STAT BLOCK

HP 4 **Damage 1** to Murk (not HP — it does not touch your body) **Type** Listener

Passive recording: After 2 rounds in The Mill Ruins, roll Murk 7+. On a failure, lose 1 Murk permanently. This roll happens every subsequent round in the ruins.

Cannot be damaged by Grit: Physical attacks pass through the surface. To disrupt a gutterball, roll Murk 10+. On a success, its aperture closes for the rest of this encounter.

Colony awareness: If any gutterball is disturbed — touched, knocked over, targeted with an attack — all apertures in the room orient on you simultaneously. Roll on the Encounter Table immediately.

THE EXACIDS



Two of them. Bipedal crab form. Dense shell. Lateral claw. Not here for you. Present company notwithstanding.

They arrived for the grubrun. Finding a crosslander in the ruins during a grubrun is not something the exacids have a protocol for, exactly. What they have is a claw and a directive to secure anything anomalous, and you are currently the most anomalous thing in the building.

STAT BLOCK

HP 7 each **Damage** 2 (crushing, physical) **Type** Lurker

Hard shell: Grit attacks deal 1 less damage (minimum 1). Wit-based manoeuvres — feinting, climbing past, using the drainage channels as cover — deal normal damage.

They work as a pair: When you engage one, the other flanks. Unless you roll Wit 7+ before the fight begins, take 1 additional damage each round from the second exacid.

Not here for you: Before fighting, you may roll Wit 10+ to convince them you are maintenance staff. On a success, they process your psycmask and move on. On a 7–9, they let you leave but log your identifier — expect a follow-up later. On a failure, they engage.

THE EXACID ENCOUNTER

Run this sequence when you roll a 2 on the Encounter Table, or when you fail to exit before roll 6.

STEP 1 — ASSESS

Before they see you clearly, roll Wit 7+. On a 10+: you have a moment — choose to bluff (Step 2), hide in the drainage channels (Grit 7+; on success, wait them out at the cost of 1 Encounter roll; on failure, go to Step 2), or run (Step 3). On a 7–9: no time, go to Step 2. On a 6 or less: they've already seen you — go directly to combat in Step 3.

STEP 2 — BLUFF

Roll Wit 10+ to convince them you are maintenance staff. On a 10+: they process your psycmask and leave — grubrun proceeds; retrieve the murkask once they're gone (costs 1 Encounter roll). On a 7–9: they let you leave but log your identifier — you cannot retrieve the murkask this run. On a 6 or less: they engage. Go to Step 3.

STEP 3 – COMBAT OR FLIGHT

Roll Wit 7+ before the first round. On a failure, the second exacid flanks – you take 1 additional damage per round.

Each round: attack with Grit (1 less damage due to hard shell, minimum 1) or a Wit manoeuvre (normal damage). They attack: roll Grit to resist; on a failure, take 2 damage (plus 1 if flanked).

To flee: Roll Grit or Wit 7+. On a 10+, you exit The Mill Ruins cleanly. On a 7–9, you make it out but take 2 damage. On a 6 or less, you cannot flee this round. The exacids do not pursue past the wood edge.

OBJECTIVE

The murkcask is in the main room of The Mill Ruins, against the north wall, half-buried under flagstone rubble. Roll **Wit 7+** to retrieve it.

ROLL	RESULT
10+	You have it. Sealed and dry. Something in the room stirs but does not roll toward you. Move immediately.
7-9	You have it, but you knock a flagstone loose reaching for it. The sound carries. Roll on the Encounter Table immediately.
6-	You find the rubble but not the murkcask — it has shifted. Roll on the Encounter Table immediately. On your next attempt, add +2 to the Wit test.

HOW TO PLAY

| A complete example. Follow this once and you'll have it.

STEP 1 — MAKE YOUR CHARACTER

| Assign **3, 2, 1** to your stats. For this example: **Grit 1 · Wit 3 · Murk 2 · HP 6**. You are quick and perceptive, but not built for a fight.

STEP 2 — THE GOAL

| Dun Path → Beeley Wood → Mill Ruins → retrieve the murkcask → Beeley Wood → Dun Path. Do it in **6 Encounter rolls or fewer**. Every zone move triggers a roll.

STEP 3 — MOVE TO BEELEY WOOD

| Roll 2d6. You roll **3+5 = 8**. Look up 7-8 on the Encounter Table.

| "The murk drops. Visibility collapses to arm's length. Roll Wit 7+ to keep your bearings."

| Roll 2d6 + Wit (3). You roll **2+4 = 6, +3 = 9**.

9

Success. You keep your bearings. The murk thickens but you find the bluebell line.

ENCOUNTER ROLLS USED: 1 OF 6

STEP 4 – MOVE TO THE MILL RUINS

Roll 2d6. You roll $1+4 = 5$. Look up 5-6.

"The longleg is watching. Roll Wit 7+ to freeze until it loses interest."

Roll 2d6 + Wit (3). You roll $3+3 = 6$, $+3 = 9$.

9

Success with cost. It lets you pass – but it follows one zone behind you. Note it.

You cross the bluebell line and reach the ruins. The longleg is now in Beeley Wood. It will not follow you in.

ENCOUNTER ROLLS USED: 2 OF 6

HOW TO PLAY CONTINUED

STEP 5 – RETRIEVE THE MURKCASK

You are in The Mill Ruins. Gutterballs are distributed across the floor. Their apertures are facing the door you came through. That's you.

After 2 rounds, you must roll Murk 7+ or lose 1 Murk permanently. You're moving quickly – roll the retrieval now.

Roll 2d6 + Wit (3). You roll $4+2 = 6$, $+3 = 9$.

9

Success with cost. You have the murkask – but you knock a flagstone loose. The sound carries. Roll on the Encounter Table immediately.

Roll 2d6. You roll $3+6 = 9$. Look up 9–10.

"Clear passage. Nothing moves. The gutterballs are facing the same direction they were when you arrived. Note it. It won't last."

Lucky. The apertures haven't shifted. Move immediately.

ENCOUNTER ROLLS USED: 3 OF 6

STEP 6 – RETURN THROUGH BEELEY WOOD

The longleg is in Beeley Wood. Its authority ends at the wood edge – it can't follow you into the ruins, but it's waiting on the other side.

Roll 2d6 on entering Beeley Wood. You roll $5+4 = 9$. Look up 9–10.

"Clear passage. Nothing moves."

The longleg watches from the bluebell line as you pass north toward the Dun Path. You do not make eye contact.

ENCOUNTER ROLLS USED: 4 OF 6

STEP 7 – REACH THE DUN PATH

Roll 2d6 on entering The Dun Path. You roll $2+5 = 7$. Look up 7–8.

"The murk drops. Visibility collapses to arm's length. Roll Wit 7+ to keep your bearings."

Roll 2d6 + Wit (3). You roll $4+6 = 10$, $+3 = 13$.

Success. You find the gas lamp at the stile. You're out. The murkcask is in your hand.

ENCOUNTER ROLLS USED: 5 OF 6 — SCENARIO COMPLETE

You deliver it at murkrise. Van opens it at the kitchen table, reads what's inside, closes it again. He says: aye. Then he makes tea. In Van's scale of acknowledgement, this is approximately a standing ovation.

FIVE THINGS TO REMEMBER

- 1 Every zone move triggers an Encounter roll. So does noise and test failure.
- 2 The longleg herds — it won't attack unless you take something from the bluebell side or fail Wit twice in one crossing.
- 3 Gutterballs drain Murk, not HP. At 0 Murk, you walk out with the murkcask but no memory of how it got there.
- 4 The exacids aren't here for you — a successful Wit 10+ bluff ends the encounter without a fight.
- 5 You have 6 Encounter rolls total. Three zones in, three zones out — spend them carefully.

OUTCOME

If you return to The Dun Path with the murkcask before 6 Encounter rolls:

You deliver it at murkrise. Van opens it at the kitchen table, reads what's inside, and closes it again. He does not tell you what it says. He says: aye. Then he makes tea, which in Van's scale of acknowledgement is approximately equivalent to a standing ovation.

The longleg was still at the bluebell line when you left the wood. You did not look back. You are developing a sense for which things it is better not to confirm.

If you reach 0 HP:

You are found by the exacids. They log you as an anomaly and file your identifier with the DPDC. You wake on the mill floor three hours later with a headache and no murkcask. Van says nothing. The silence is its own kind of verdict.

If you reach 0 Murk:

The gutterballs have what they need. You walk out of the mill ruins feeling clear-headed, which is not how you usually feel in The Dark Peak. The murkcask is in your hand. You are not sure how it got there. You deliver it to Van. He looks at you for longer than usual before taking it.

He does not ask what happened in the ruins. He already knows. He always does.

hellsborough.com

Written by Bull Stuart, hellsborough.com · Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International