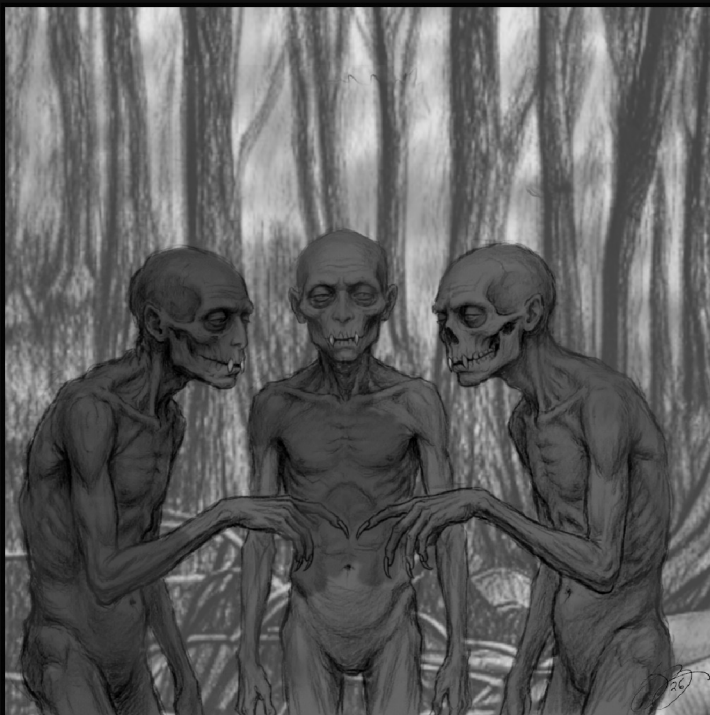




POSTCARD FROM THE DARK PEAK · #14

SOD'S LAW

A SOLO RPG SCENARIO · THE DARK PEAK · HELLSBOROUGH, S6

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A NOTE FROM PIP

You know what this one costs before you set out, which is the difference, and which is also the problem.

Every other job in this series, the price is something that happens to you on the way. This time the price is the job. You are carrying it in your inside pocket in a tin, and at the end of the murkneet you are going to tip it into the roots of an elder and say some words, and a bit of you is going to go with it and not come back. Nobody is going to trick you into it. You could stop at any point and nobody would so much as mention it, and that's worse, somehow, than being made.

The milting are owed ground. Not by you, exactly. By somebody you owed, who's gone now, and the debt came down to you with the rest of what they left. The milting don't want a field, and they don't want çhits. They want the ground from under where you sleep. A tin of it. Bedsod, they call it. Rented or owned makes no odds to them. They care who sleeps on it.

It sounds like nothing. A bit of dirt in a tin. I thought that too, right up until I had the board up and the spoon in my hand.

Two things, murker, and then go. The moor is peewhit ground and it is newshoot, so walk straight and don't stop. And when you get to the elder, the milting will talk to you. Let them. Just don't agree to anything. You brought a tin. You're giving them a tin.

-- Pip Rippon, *field notes, The Palm, Palm Street, Walkley*

YOUR CHARACTER

You are a crosslander, over the Causeway years back, sleeping in a rented room in Hellsborough and owning nothing much. Tonight you are paying a debt you didn't run up, to people who have never once been known to cancel one.

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

STAT	WHAT IT COVERS
GRIT	Strength, endurance, keeping your feet with a bird coming down at your head. Walking in a straight line when every part of you wants to stop.

STAT	WHAT IT COVERS
WIT	Perception, quickness, reading an animal. Knowing where your hands are.
MURK	Sensitivity to dark matter. What the milting are talking to. What you have left of yourself when they stop.

HP: 6. At 0 HP you go down on Rod Moor and the tin goes with you. If your **Murk** reaches 0, you stop hearing the milting as a lot of talk and start hearing them as sense. See **Outcome**.

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 or less	Failure. You don't do the thing. Your own bad luck decides what happens instead.

When a creature reaches you, roll **2d6 + Grit** to resist physical damage, or **2d6 + Murk** to resist what gets in through your ears. On a failure, take the damage.

ROD MOOR

Three zones. You start at **Hollow Meadows**, with the tin in your pocket. Getting the bedsod into the elder's roots and having it accepted is the whole of it. You move forward only. Roll on the **Encounter Table** each time you enter a new zone and each time the rules tell you to.

HOLLOW MEADOWS

The top of the Rivelin, where the last lamps give out and the road stops trying. Past here the hivemind thins to the odd biofeed advert, then nothing. You start here.



THE SCRAPES

Rod Moor. Flat as a lid, cotton grass and rush and old wall lines going nowhere, the murk sat on it at knee height. Peewhit ground. Nests in scrapes you could fit a boot in, and you can't see them, and you can't see the birds until they're on you.



THE HEARTH

A ruined farmstead in the middle of the moor, one gable end standing. Out of the old kitchen hearth grows an elder, bigger than elders get, smelling sweet and a bit off, like a cake forgotten in a drawer since Windstrom. A vixen has her den in its roots. A cabal of milting stands in a ring round it at ten paces, and will not come closer, and will not leave.

THE TIN

You are carrying one **tin of bedsod**: clinker, old dust and a century of dropped pins from under the boards beneath your bed.

Turning back. You can stop at any time. Tip the tin out on the moor, or take it home and put it back under the board. That ends the scenario. Nobody will stop you. See **Outcome**. This is always on the table, and the scenario will offer it to you more than once.

What it costs. The offering always costs Murk, and the cost is taken off your **Murk maximum when the scenario ends**, not during it. The offering itself cannot drop you to 0 Murk mid-scenario. The Talk can.

THE CLOCK

6 Encounter rolls to make the offering. The milting leave at murkriese, and an offering nobody is there to take is no offering.

- Entering **The Scrapes** is your first Encounter roll.
- Crossing The Scrapes takes **one more** Encounter roll after that. Any roll where you **stop** (to fight a peewhit, to go round, to get your breath) makes no ground, and you need another.
- Entering **The Hearth** is an Encounter roll.
- Getting past **the sly** to the roots costs **1 Encounter roll**, and some of her results cost another.
- **The Offering** roll itself is not an Encounter roll.
- If your **6th** roll is spent and you have not yet made The Offering, it is murkriese. The milting are gone. Treat it as **Failure**.

ENCOUNTER TABLE

Roll 2d6. **Low results are the dangerous ones.**

ROLL	ENCOUNTER
2	The flat rises. Every peewhit in earshot comes up at once. Resist three stoops in a row (see The Peewhit), then the grudge. At The Hearth, it's the milting instead: all seven heads come round at once and your next Talk roll is at -2 .
3-4	Pee-whit. The call, then the tuck of folded wings. Go to The Peewhit .
5-6	Your hand in a scrape. Anywhere on the moor, the ruin included. You go down on one knee and your palm lands on eggs: warm, warmer than eggs should be, ticking faintly like a watch in a coat. Roll Wit 7+ to lift your hand off without cracking one. On a failure one cracks, and The Peewhit comes for you at once, its stoop at -1 to resist.
7-8	The quiet. The last of the hivemind goes out of your head. Nothing arrives. It's the first time since you crossed that there's been nobody in there but you. Note it.
9-10	Clear ground. You move without incident. Note it down. It will not hold.
11	A marked stone. An old boundary stone, half sunk, cut with marks older than the wall it stands in. Milting marks, a claim from before anyone was counting. Roll Wit 7+ to read the shape of it. On a success you know the words they'll use: +1 to your first Talk roll .

ROLL	ENCOUNTER
12	A gap in it. The murk lifts off the flat for a stretch and the birds settle. This roll is not spent. The clock does not advance for it.

THE SCRAPES

Rod Moor is the only way to the elder and the whole of it is nests. Pip's field note holds: **keep walking in a straight line away from the nest**. The trouble is the straight line away from one nest runs into the next.

When a peewhit stoops at you in The Scrapes, choose before you roll to resist:

- **Keep walking.** Resist the stoop with **Grit 7+**. Whatever happens, you make ground this roll.
- **Stop and deal with it.** You may strike at it as it pulls out (see **The Peewhit**). You make **no ground** this roll, and a stopped walker is an argument that goes on longer; the grudge runs one roll longer.

After your roll to enter and **one more roll that makes ground**, you reach the wall of the farmstead. Entering **The Hearth** is an Encounter roll.

THE HEARTH

You come round the gable end and there it is: the elder out of the hearth, the vixen square on her den in its roots, screaming, and the milting in a ring, shuffling and swapping places and talking in low voices all at once. When you arrive they stop. Seven heads come round. The light comes through their ears.

THE TALK

The milting talk. About the moor when it was sea, about this farm and who owned it and how they came by it, and then about your street, and your landlord, and how weak his claim on that building is, and how somebody who sleeps there might be well placed to sort that out, with a bit of help.

Roll **Murk 7+** to resist the Talk **after your Encounter roll to enter The Hearth**, and again **after each Encounter roll spent getting past the sly**.

ROLL	RESULT
10+	You hear it for what it is. Talk. No effect.
7-9	It gets in. Lose 1 Murk , or make a Concession . Your choice.
6 or less	You're nodding. Make a Concession and lose 1 Murk .

The sly helps. While the vixen is still on her den and barking (you haven't harmed her or driven her off), her scream keeps cutting through it like a slap. **+1 to every Talk roll.** And once, when you make a Concession, you may take it back: she screams right through the middle of it and you come to.

Concessions. A Concession is you agreeing to give them more than a tin. Write down what: your chits, your door, your street, the building. Each Concession adds **+1** to your **Offering** roll, because they're keener now, and costs **1 more Murk** off your maximum when the scenario ends, whatever the result. You may also offer up to **two** Concessions freely, before you roll The Offering. That's the trade. They'll accept almost anything if you give them more.

GETTING PAST THE SLY

She is stood on her den in the roots, and the roots are where the bedsod goes. You cannot make the offering from ten paces. Spend **1 Encounter roll** and choose. The roll comes off your six, but you don't roll on the Encounter Table for it:

- **Crawl, tin held low.** Knees, face turned away, the tin out in front at ground level so she can see it isn't a hand. Roll **Wit 7+**. **10+:** she screams at you from a foot away and then steps back onto the den and lets you by. **7-9:** she goes for your wrist and gets the cuff and some of the arm. **1 damage**, then she steps back. **6 or less:** she won't have it. **1 damage**, and you're back at ten paces. Spend another roll and choose again.
- **Stand still and let her look.** Roll **Murk 7+**. **10+:** she decides you're nothing to do with her ground, and goes back to screaming at the milting. You're past. **7-9:** you're past, but it took a while. Make an extra **Talk roll**. **6 or less:** she doesn't settle. Spend another roll and choose again.
- **Drive her off.** Roll **Grit 7+**. **10+:** she bolts into the den. **7-9:** she bolts, and bites on the way: **1 damage**. **6 or less:** she stands and fights. Go to **The Sly**. Either way she stops barking: you lose her **+1** on the Talk, and your **Offering** is at **-1**. You took ground at the elder by force, and the milting noticed.
- If you **kill her**, your Offering is at **-2**, and the kits in the den go quiet in a way you'll remember.

OBJECTIVE

You're at the roots. Open the tin. Pour the bedsod in, clinker and dust and pins. Say the words, which are nothing special, more or less what you'd say handing over the keys.

This is the last place to turn back. If you're going to, do it now, before you roll.

Roll **Murk 7+**, adding **+1 per Concession** and any penalties from the sly.

ROLL	RESULT
10+	Accepted. The milting stop milling. The old one nods, once, and they go off into the murk like people leaving a meeting that's gone on too long. Success.
7-9	Accepted, but it takes more than you brought. Something goes out of you that you'd not agreed to. Partial.
6 or less	They look at the tin, and at you, and don't nod. Something goes out of you anyway. Failure.

However it lands, something goes. Going downstairs in the dark and there's one less step than you counted. That, inside.

THE CREATURES

THE PEEWHIT



A lapwing, crest swept back, dark on top and pale underneath. The rising, wheeling call that off-worlders find charming.

On the wrist of each wing, a hooked spur like a rose thorn that the field guides don't mention, because the field guides are about a different bird. It doesn't screech from a safe height. It comes down.

STAT BLOCK

HP 2 **Damage** 1 (wing-spur rake, physical) **Type** Hungry

The stoop: you hear the call, then the tuck of folded wings. Roll **Grit 7+** to get an arm over your head. On a failure, take **1 damage**.

The grudge: once a peewhit has stooped at you, it follows. Before each of your **next two** Encounter rolls, it stoops again. Stopping to deal with it makes the grudge run **one roll longer**.

Striking back: if you stop, roll **Wit 8+** to catch it as it pulls out. A hit deals **1 damage**; two kill it and end its grudge. Another peewhit will have seen.

Killing one: the flat takes it personally. Your next Encounter roll is at **-1**.

THE SLY

A vixen. Red fox, slytail, slyfluff; long in the leg, hackles up, stood square on her den in the roots of the elder.

Two pairs of pinprick eyes in the dark behind her. Her bark is a scream that would have half a street out of bed. She has been barking at the milting for hours, and a bark that goes on from one spot past when any fox would have moved on means something's cornered, and it hasn't decided which way round.



STAT BLOCK

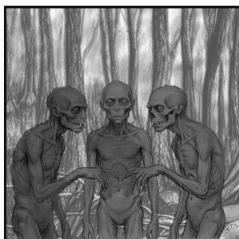
HP 4 **Damage** 1 (bite, physical) **Type** Warden

The den: she will not leave it for anything. She doesn't want your tin and she doesn't want you. She wants her ground.

Her scream is on your side: while she is unharmed and barking, **+1 to every Talk roll**, and once you may take back a Concession as she screams through it.

If it comes to a fight: she bites each round (resist **Grit 7+** or take 1 damage). **Grit 7+** to hit her for 1 damage, 2 on a 10+. At **2 HP or less** she bolts into the den and the fight ends. If you keep going after that, you are digging a fox out of an elder in front of seven milting, and your Offering is at **-2**.

THE MILTING



Small, old, older than the idea of old. Skin so thin over the nose and ears that the light comes through. Teeth like grains of rice.

Fingernails that remember being talons. They guard the Hinge and keep a calendar nobody else is allowed to read. They are frightened of elders and drawn to them, both at once. Up close they smell of old paper and wet slate, and of something the hivemind has no file for. "It's milting, murker. We've 'ad this ground afore. We'll 'ave it again."

STAT BLOCK

HP 8 **Damage 1 to Murk** (the Talk, mental) **Type** Listener

You do not fight the milting. Lift a hand to one and they stop talking, all seven. They turn and go. The offering is refused and the debt is still owed, and now they know what you're like. Treat it as **Failure**, and lose **1 extra Murk** off your maximum.

The Talk: see **The Hearth**. They don't take. They talk, and it comes in like the murk does, slowly and then all at once.

The elder: they won't come within ten paces of it while you're making the offering. It's the only reason you get to do this on your own terms.

They'll take more: every Concession you make, they'll collect. Not tonight. They're patient. They've been patient since before the murk.

HOW TO PLAY

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

STEP 1 -- MAKE YOUR CHARACTER

Assign **3, 2, 1**. For this example: **Grit 2 · Wit 1 · Murk 3 · HP 6**. A lodger in Neepsend paying off a dead aunt's debt, steady on the Talk and clumsy with animals.

STEP 2 -- THE GOAL

Hollow Meadows → The Scrapes (two rolls to cross) → The Hearth → past the sly → pour the bedsod and roll **Murk**. All before your **6th Encounter roll**, or the milting are gone at murkrise.

STEP 3 -- ENTER THE SCRAPES

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

"Your hand in a scrape. Roll Wit 7+ to lift your hand off without cracking one."

2d6 + Wit (1). You roll **4+3 = 7, +1 = 8**.

8

7-9: no egg cracks, but one rocks, and the call starts overhead. A peewhit stoops (not at -1, since nothing broke).

You choose **Keep walking**. Resist with Grit (2): **3+3 = 6, +2 = 8**.

8

7-9: your arm's up in time, but the spur opens the back of your hand. 1 damage. HP 5. You still make ground. The grudge starts: it stoops before your next two rolls.

ENCOUNTER ROLLS USED: 1 OF 6 · HP 5 · MURK 3

STEP 4 -- CROSS THE SCRAPES

The grudge stoops first. Keep walking, Grit: **5+4 = 9, +2 = 11**.

11

10+: arm over your head, spur rakes your sleeve, nothing else.

Now the Encounter roll: **4+4 = 8**.

"The quiet. The last of the hivemind goes out of your head. Nothing arrives."

That roll made ground. You're at the farmstead wall.

ENCOUNTER ROLLS USED: 2 OF 6 · HP 5 · MURK 3

HOW TO PLAY CONTINUED

STEP 5 -- ENTER THE HEARTH

The grudge's second stoop. Grit: $1+3 = 4$, $+2 = 6$.

6

Failure: the spur takes you across the scalp. 1 damage. HP 4. The grudge is spent.

Encounter roll: $5+5 = 10$. "Clear ground." Round the gable end. Seven heads come round. Now the **Talk**: Murk (3), +1 while the vixen barks. $2+3 = 5$, $+4 = 9$.

9

7-9: it gets in. You choose to lose 1 Murk rather than make a Concession. Murk 2.

ENCOUNTER ROLLS USED: 3 OF 6 · HP 4 · MURK 2

STEP 6 -- PAST THE SLY

Spend a roll (no Encounter Table). Wit is only 1, so you **Stand still and let her look**: Murk (2), $4+2 = 6$, $+2 = 8$.

8

7-9: you're past, but it took a while. Make an extra Talk roll.

Talk after the sly roll: $3+4 = 7$, $+3 = 10$. Clean. Then the extra Talk: $1+2 = 3$, $+3 = 6$.

6

You're nodding. A Concession (the building) and lose 1 Murk. Murk 1. But the vixen screams through it: you take the Concession back. Once only.

ENCOUNTER ROLLS USED: 4 OF 6 · HP 4 · MURK 1

STEP 7 -- THE OFFERING

Murk 1 is thin. You offer one Concession freely, your çhits, for +1. Roll: $4+3 = 7$, +1 **Murk**, +1 **Concession** = 9.

9

7-9: Partial. Accepted at greater cost. Choose Murk max -2 or HP max -2. You take HP max -2. The Concession costs 1 more Murk max on top.

RESULT

The milting go off into the murk and the vixen stops barking. You walk home at murkrise with 4 HP, a tin with nothing in it, and a Murk maximum one lower than when you set out. The debt's paid. Your çhits are theirs. You sleep in the chair.

FIVE THINGS TO REMEMBER

- 1 Keep walking in The Scrapes.** Stopping makes no ground and makes the grudge last a roll longer.
- 2 A peewhit that stoops once stoops again** before each of your next two Encounter rolls.
- 3 Leave the vixen alone.** Her bark is +1 on every Talk roll, and once she'll scream a Concession back out of you.
- 4 Concessions buy +1 on the Offering,** and each one costs 1 Murk off your maximum whatever happens.
- 5 The offering always costs Murk.** You can turn back right up until you roll it.

OUTCOME

Success -- the offering accepted (10+):

The milting go off into the murk and the vixen stops barking for the first time in hours. The quiet comes down over the ruin like a lid on a pan. **Your Murk maximum drops by 1.** The floor under your bed is theirs now, and you sleep on it by their leave. Some murkneets you sleep in the chair.

Partial -- accepted at greater cost (7-9):

More goes than you brought. **Choose: your Murk maximum drops by 2, or your HP maximum drops by 2.** The debt is paid. You don't feel paid up. You feel measured, the way a tailor measures you, except nobody's making you anything.

Failure -- rejected (6 or less, murkrise, or a hand raised to a milting):

They don't nod, or they're gone, and you're stood at the elder with an empty tin. **Your Murk maximum drops by 1 anyway.** The debt is still owed, and next time they won't ask for a tin.

Concessions: each costs 1 more Murk off your maximum, and they'll collect every one. Some Besd'y, after the landlord's been, there'll be a second knock.

If you turn back: the tin goes back under the board. You lose nothing tonight. The milting know your street, and your landlord's name. Nobody knows when they collect.

If you reach 0 HP: you go down on Rod Moor with blood in your eyes and a peewhit coming round again. The tin is found near you at murkrise, or it isn't.

If you reach 0 Murk: you stop hearing it as talk. It makes sense: the deeds, the landlord, the street. You say yes to all of it. You still live there, by leave. They don't come round. They don't need to.

The milting, the peewhit and the sly, the world of Hellsborough, the Bestiary of The Dark Peak, and every Postcard Adventure:

hellsborough.com

Postcard from The Dark Peak 14: Sod's Law. Published by Demonspawn Books and Games, Sheffield S6, South Yorkshire.

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