

Background

The town of Cactus Gulch was originally desolate land, fit only for cacti and Indians. One year, Jeremiah Gulch, a crazy old prospector following a hunch that was equal parts intuition and sunstroke discovered silver in the area. Almost overnight, the town of Cactus Gulch was born. The primary industry in those days was separating miners from their silver, in ways legal and illegal, moral and immoral. The town had no mayor, no marshal, nothing that would interfere with business as usual. Outlaws used Cactus Gulch as a place to lay low when hiding from the law, or just to spend the proceeds from their latest robberies. The hills surrounding Cactus Gulch boasted an outlaw hideout in every box canyon.

Then, the silver mines played-out.

Again almost overnight, the town was deserted by most of the inhabitants. There were a score or so who had nowhere else to go, and nothing better to do, than to stay and try to make a respectable town out of Cactus Gulch. The going was hard in those days, when the stage stopped only once a month and supplies were scarce, and reasons to settle in Cactus Gulch scarcer. The town elected a town council, and a mayor, and a marshal, all the trappings of civilization. Eventually they sunk a well that tapped into a deep reservoir, providing enough water to irrigate nearby farmlands. In time, more underground water sources were found and utilized, giving Cactus Gulch a future.

The town's second boom started when the railroad came through Cactus Gulch. Many of the more respectable of the entertainment industries moved back into town, catering to travelers stopping on their way farther west. The town played on its status as an old mining town, even playing up the local legend of the lost Gulliver mine, containing the only untapped vein of silver in the area. According to the legend, the entrance to the mine is within the town, but so cleverly hidden that it has never been found. Luckily for all would be treasure hunters, old man Gulliver is supposed to have made a map showing the location of the entrance, and then for some inexplicable reason tore the map into four pieces. One of the pieces is on display in the Dry Mine saloon, making the saloon the first stop for treasure hunters. The second stop is usually the general store, which offers treasure hunters a special package containing everything needed to search for the lost Gulliver mine. The town's assay office has become a local museum, selling land deeds to tourists and offering educational lectures on the town's history.

The town's prosperity has not been without a price. Ten years ago, the local bank was robbed. The marshal at the time, Max Cooper, was a ruthless bastard who had kept the peace in town in his own way for years. When he saw that the outlaws were mounting their horses for a quick getaway, rather than run off to form a posse for a hot and dusty chase in the desert, Cooper shot the horses and then chased the outlaws down through town. Nobody is exactly certain what happened during that chase, only that neither the outlaws nor Cooper returned. Some speculated that Cooper was in league with the outlaws, but most laugh at that theory...without, however, offering a better one.

Since then, the town has gone through a series of marshals, culminating in the current marshal, Dwight Hagen. Townspeople agree that Hagen is the best marshal of the bunch, not only keeping the peace but also supporting the community and the local church in many ways.

Other local legends include the ghosts of the town. These ghosts are supposed to come out at night and walk around town. Some locals think the ghosts are those of Marshal Cooper and the outlaws, reliving their final chase through town. Others claim to have heard Indian war whoops from the ghosts, while yet others claim they're the ghosts of soldiers who strayed too far during the Civil War.

The town has much cause for celebration, though, and does so every year at the Founder's Day celebration. This year the celebration will be held, as in past years, at the town square, around

that first deep well. The Dry Mine saloon opens onto the town square, and will be providing drinks and refreshments at a reduced price. Everyone is welcome to join, and many visitors come both east and west for the celebration.

GM Information

This is a scenario where interaction between PCs is as important as interaction between PCs and NPCs. If your players are used to banding together against a common enemy, they'll have that opportunity, but it's much more entertaining if they're also looking out for themselves first of all. The scenario is pulp-western, complete with Hollywood western accents.

The basic setup is that PCs can be either locals or visitors, in Cactus Gulch at the time of the Founder's Day celebration. The entire town turns out into the main square, although usually the visitors outnumber the townspeople. The town council and the mayor are in evidence, as is the marshal.

When I ran this, the PCs were the marshal, the owner of the saloon, the owner of the assay office/museum, a local newspaperwoman, and a gunslinger drifting through town.

I started things out allowing the PCs to wander the square, doing what they wanted to do for a bit. This was a good time to introduce Stillwater, along with Mayor Jenkins and Reginald Forsythe. Forsythe would be talking to the Mayor, acting as if he were looking to invest in the town, or perhaps buy land.

The main adventure hook is the arrival of Calhoun's gang to town. Calhoun is an aging outlaw looking for one last big score to provide for his retirement. His gang are a bunch of no-good thugs with fewer brains than guns. The gang rounds up the citizens in the square, threatening some if necessary to get the marshal to cooperate. The majority of the tourists and citizens are herded into the general store, with the PCs and miscellaneous others herded into the saloon.

Calhoun is here because he has located a piece of the map to the Lost Gulliver mine, and has reason to think the other pieces are in town. He's right: Stillwater has one, Forsythe has another, and one of the PCs has the fourth (the one on display in the saloon is a fake, designed to draw business). Calhoun is not interested in anything but locating the mine, which he believes contains the loot from the bank robbery a decade ago (one of the outlaws escaped, mortally wounded, and got far enough to blurt a garbled version of the story to an old prospector... eventually, the story made its way to Calhoun, who has spent several years looking for the map pieces).

In Calhoun's mind, this is practically a legal operation. After all, he's not robbing the bank, just recovering (and keeping) loot that was long ago written off as lost. So he's not going to kill people unless events get seriously out of control...he'll rely on intimidation and threats.

Okay, so the PCs are mostly in the saloon with Calhoun and some of his gang, and other townspeople (including all the NPCs described below). What next? Getting all the PCs involved is important at this stage...in our game, the owner of the assay office wanted, quite reasonably, to hide out in her museum. So Stillwater went over and left his piece of the map in her safe to keep it from the outlaws. This sparked a nice conflict between the PCs when she and another PC tried to corner the market on the map pieces for themselves.

If you run games anything like I do, at this point events will flow from your player's actions. Let it flow, and don't be too concerned with making anything specific happen. Play to western clichés, and have fun with it.

A bit of geography: the saloon is on the northwest corner of the town square, the assay office/museum on the southwest, the general store on the southeast, and the courthouse on the northeast.

The Mine

The mine entrance is in the basement of the saloon. Behind casks and crates, there can be found a foot high granite slab apparently embedded in the brick wall. One of the bricks near the bottom of the slab is false, and hides a lever that releases a hidden door just above the slab. The door leads into the mine.

The mine itself is uninteresting, except for the trail of dead outlaws that lines it every hundred yards or so, the entrance to the Indian burial chambers, and the eerie wailing that echoes through the tunnels.

Each outlaw skeleton has an old pistol and extra ammunition, and most have wanted posters of themselves. The type of outlaw who feels the need to keep a wanted poster of themselves is typically only wanted for \$50 or so. Pitiful, really.

The entrance to the burial grounds is about five outlaws into the mine. The mine continues after that, but has nothing else in it. The silver played out in the mine long ago.

The burial grounds are a more natural cavern, so players should be aware that they're leaving the mine proper. They pick their way through some narrow passages, finally opening out into a massive cavern. Their lamps can't fully illuminate the chamber. Niches carved into the rock contain skeletal remains that are clearly not of outlaws (less clothing, for one).

In the middle of the chamber is the last outlaw, and the skeletal remains of Marshal Cooper. Cooper chased the outlaws into the mine, picking them off one by one, until reaching the last one. They killed each other and collapsed onto the floor of the chamber, the saddlebags full of money between them.

That's right, there is loot! If you're a sadistic GM, you can make it Confederate money that's worthless, although I wouldn't give much for your chances of making it out alive.

Just about the time everyone is celebrating, six hulking Indians step out of the shadows, followed by Stillwater. He explains these are sacred burial grounds, and cannot be desecrated by tourists, so they'll just have to kill the PCs now. He'll be open to other suggestions, such as the PCs taking the money, vowing silence, and demolishing the hidden entrance to the mine. But it's so much fun to watch their faces when he says they're going to have to die, so enjoy that before taking the deal.

If a deal is made, Stillwater and his friends stick around until all aspects of the deal are concluded, then they fade away into the hills.

Oh, and the eerie wailing? There a stalagmite in the burial chambers carved to catch the wind coming from the entrance into the hills, in such a way as to cause the wailing. Yeah, you're right, I just made that up when I first ran this scenario, but it sounded good so now it's official.

NPCS

Calhoun

Wanted desperado looking for one last big score – 5
Quick draw gunslinger with plenty of notches on his belt – 4
Accomplished horseman – 3

Calhoun has piece 1 of the map

Calhoun's Gang

Wannabe gunslinger looking for a big score – 2

These thugs are used to working together to intimidate and or kill civilians, so each extra thug in an action automatically adds one dice to the leading thug's roll. This doesn't apply to Calhoun, only to a group of thugs operating as a unit. This is designed to encourage PCs to try something other than an outright gun battle, so feel free to ignore it if your group would enjoy a gun battle.

Calhoun has a dozen of the thugs. Some will be in the general store, others in the saloon.

Stillwater

Inscrutable Indian looking for justice – 4

Keeper of old lore – 3

Ancient warrior with more wrinkles than God – 2

Stillwater has piece 2 of the map. Stillwater is in town to ensure that the map pieces are destroyed, or, failing that, that the discovery of the mine does not become public knowledge. As you'll see below, the mine broke into an ancient burial chamber of Stillwater's ancestors. If the mine became public knowledge, the burial chamber would be desecrated by treasure hunters. Stillwater and his friends will kill to prevent that.

Stillwater's Friends

Indian warrior looking to protect his culture – 4

Impressive looking hulk of a man – 4

Stillwater has six of these friends. They are waiting in the burial chambers, in case they need to kill any discoverers.

Reginald Forsythe

Treasure hunter and con man extraordinaire – 4

Fake British aristocrat with an impressive pedigree – 3

Charming rogue – 2

Forsythe has piece 3 of the map. Forsythe is primarily interested in profit. He found the map piece, heard about the legend, and thought he'd come to town to see if he could locate the mine. He's just as willing to use the map piece as part of a con to get a pile of money for himself.

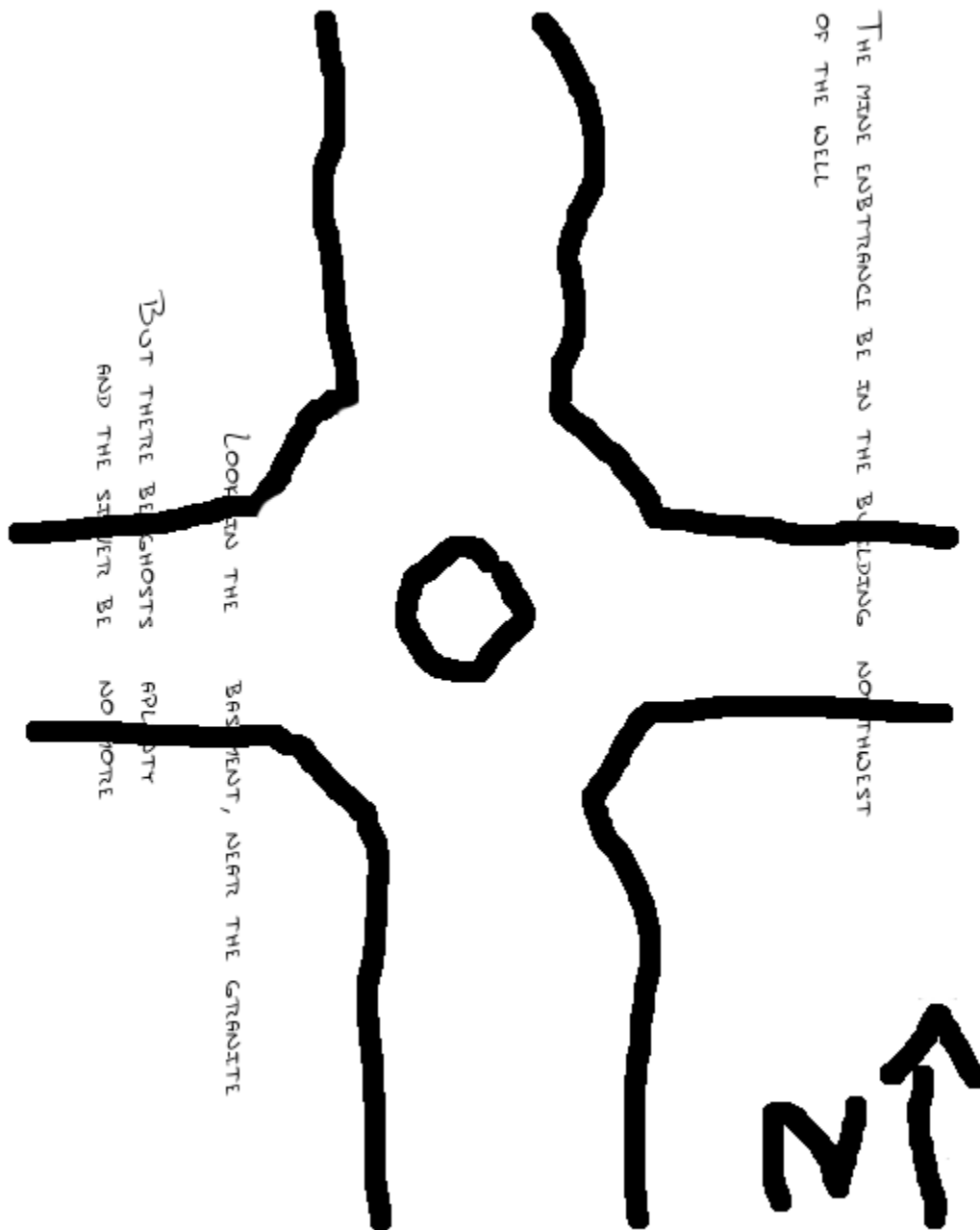
Mayor Jenkins

Stuffy bureaucrat – 4

Snobbish ex-general store owner – 3

Mayor Jenkins is a self-important man who tends to look down on mere merchants. Nevertheless, he does try to do his best by the town.

Map Pieces



To prepare the map, print it out and then tear it roughly into four pieces. There are gaps in the sentences where the side to side tears should go, but make sure that the contours of the pieces are rough enough to provide a good match when players are fitting them together.

Piece 1 is the piece that starts, "The mine entrance be...". Piece 2 has the north arrow on it. Piece 3 has the bit about the granite. Piece 4 is the one that's left over. Give a PC who seems like they'd be entertaining piece 4.

This is the fake map piece a previous saloon owner created and framed. The saloon still charges a penny to see the map piece. It's covered by a little curtain and hangs behind the bar. Tear it pretty close around the text and path, so that it looks like the path might continue onto the rest of the page.

Map to the lost Gulliver mine

