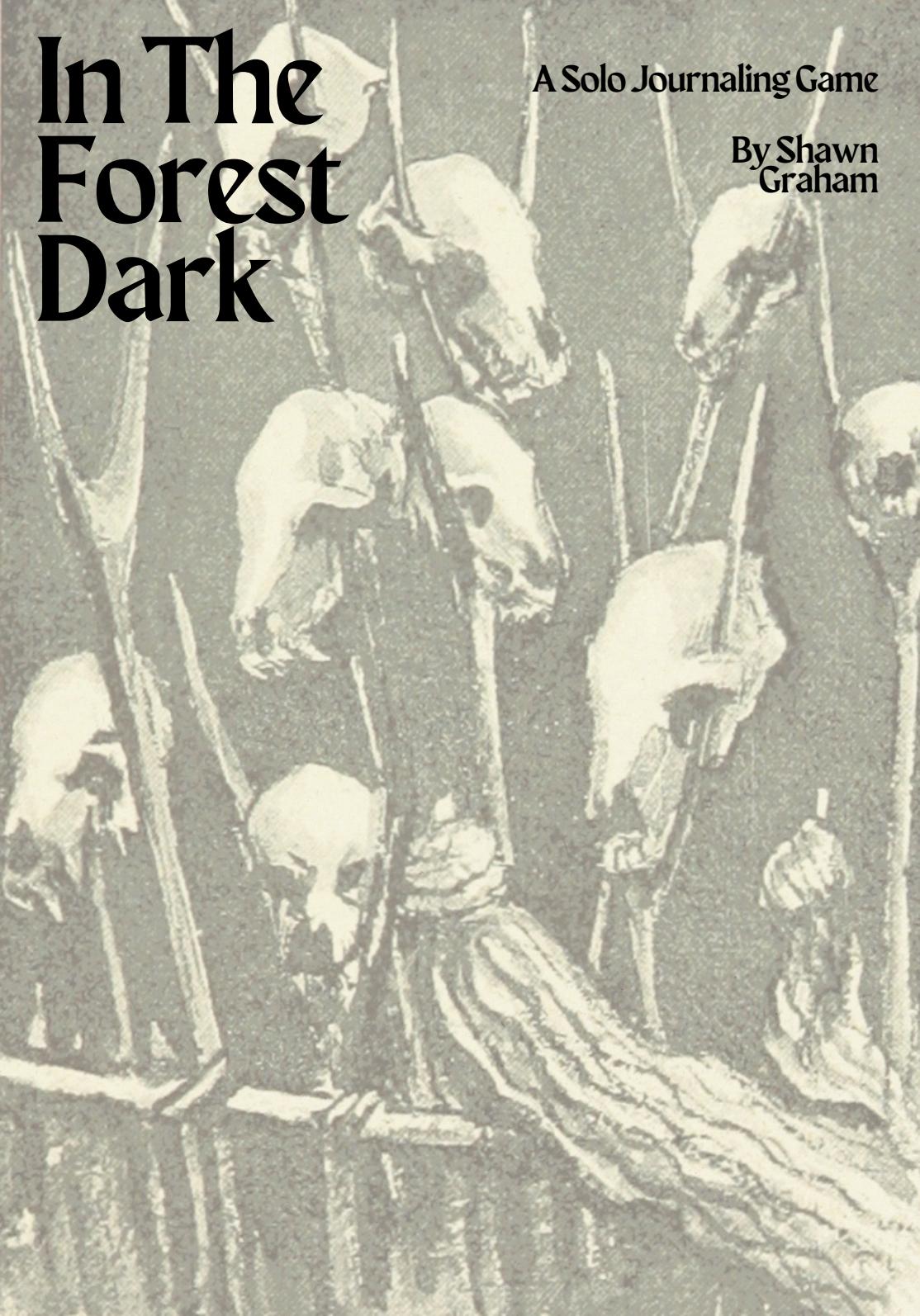


In The Forest Dark



A Solo Journaling Game

By Shawn
Graham



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When Poppaeus and Sulpicius were Consuls, disaster struck.



The sounds of battle have faded. The screams no longer echo through the forest. Three days of slaughter, and now... silence.

You are Gaius Severus, Centurion of the XVII Legion, survivor of Teutoburg. The eagles are lost. Varus is dead by his own hand.

And you... you must lead what remains of your century through these cursed woods, past tribes baying for Roman blood, back to the Rhine. Back to civilization.

But the Germans are watching. Always watching. And your men... your men are changing.

You are Centurion Gaius Severus, survivor of the Teutoburg Forest massacre. Guide your remaining soldiers through hostile Germanic territory, maintaining discipline and Roman virtue while starvation, madness, and barbarian ambushes threaten to destroy what remains of your century. Record your journey on your remaining wax tablets so that Rome will know what became of the lost XVII Legion.

Keep your tablets safe. They will vindicate your name.

'In The Forest Dark' is a solo role-playing game. You use cards and dice to generate prompts that describe the events you are reacting to, the situations you are in.

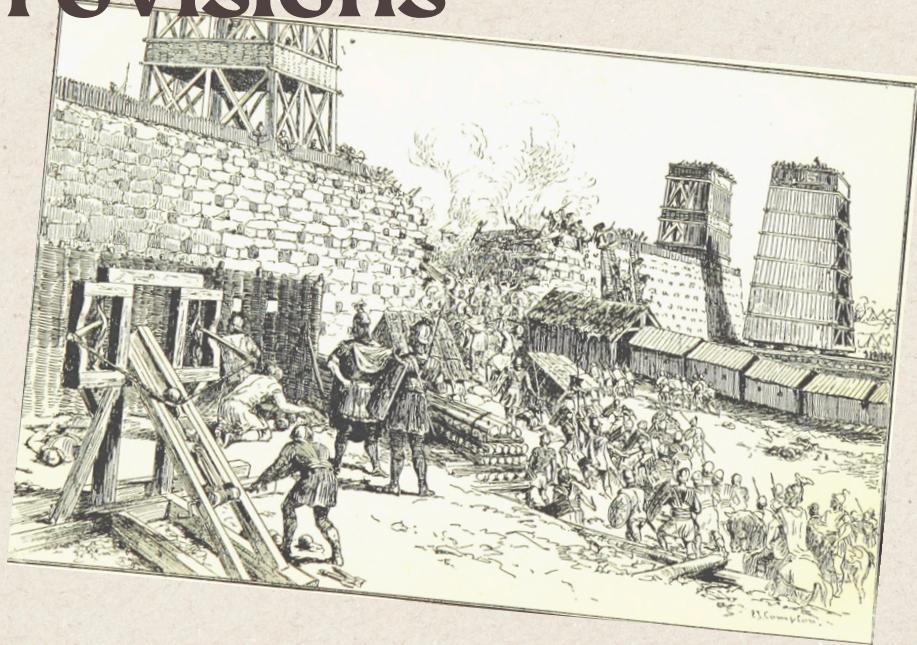
You chronicle your response; your responses influence what happens at the next die roll, the next pull of the cards.

How would Gaius react?

How will you react?



Provisions



You will need:

- Standard Deck of Cards: Each suit represents different challenges facing your century
- Block Tower: Represents your mental tranquility, your auctoritas
- Tokens: These represent your remaining men. Roll 2d6 and multiply by 2: that's how many men you have left, to begin with
- Two six-sided dice: Used for encounters with Germanic tribes and internal conflicts
- A journal to record your findings
- Suitable atmosphere (martial music, the wind through the trees at twilight, the stillness before the storm)

Your First Entry

Begin by recording your first entry after the massacre. What do you remember of those three days of slaughter? What became of Varus? How many men remain under your command?

Shuffle the deck and build the tower. Roll 1d6 and draw that many cards - these represent your first day of survival. Follow the instructions on the cards and record your experiences.

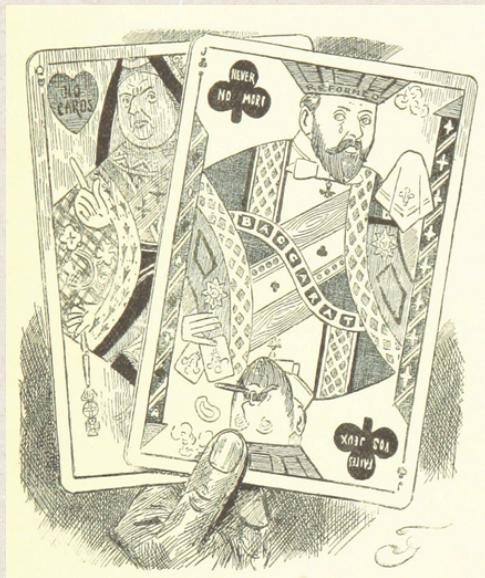
Then march onward, one day at a time, toward the Rhine... and safety.

If the tower falls, you have lost control of your century and death follows swiftly. If you run out of tokens, your men have all perished or deserted.

Events

Spades: The Hostile Forest
The Germans know these
woods. We do not.

Diamonds: Resources
and Survival
The forest provides... if
we dare to learn its
ways.



Clubs: Mental Strain
Are we still Romans? Or
are we becoming
something else?

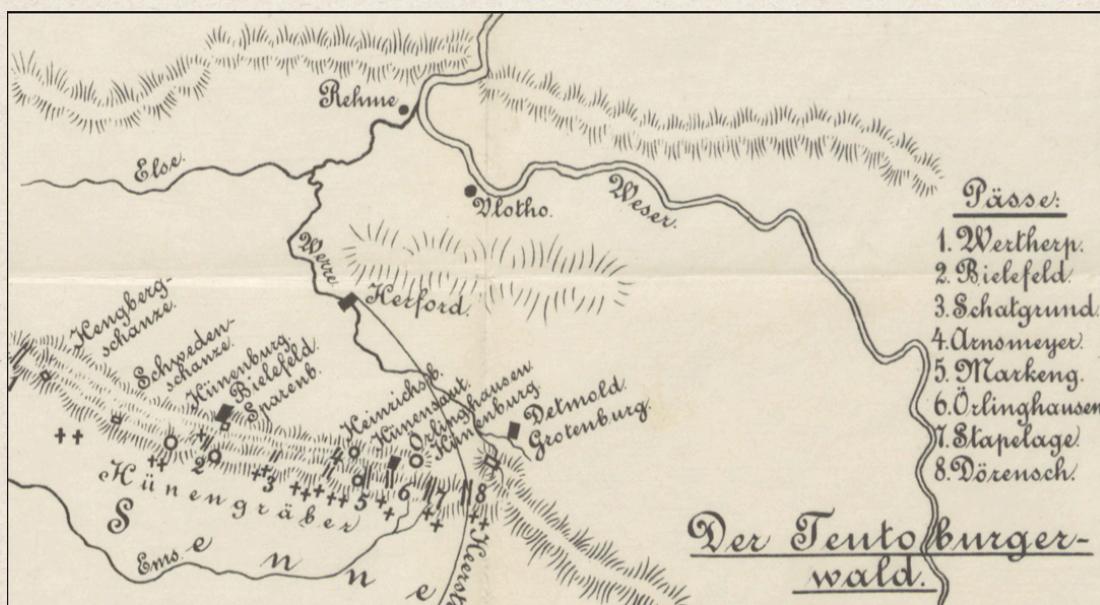
Hearts: Morale
We are Romans. We
must remember that

Dice Rolls

Certain card draws might trigger a die roll to determine positive or negative valence of possible actions. Sometimes, the die roll acts as a coin flip. Sometimes, a pair of dice might be suggested along with how to interpret the successful roll.

Rolling the dice will tell you the nature of the outcome when you encounter the Germans; roughly, anything less than six represent negative outcomes where the lower the number, the worse the experience; anything higher than eight represents positive outcomes where the higher the number the better the result.

- 2-5: Hostility/Ambush/Negative outcomes (scaled)
- 6-8: Neutral/Avoidable/Status Quo maintains
- 9-12: Opportunity for aid/trade/Positive outcomes (scaled)



Spades: The Hostile Forest

Ace: A massive Germanic war party spotted ahead. Remove two blocks. Lose three tokens as soldiers' nerves break.

King: Strange marks on the trees seem to be leading you somewhere. Roll dice to determine if this is a trap or salvation.

*Queen: The woods go silent. Roll dice as distant drums begin. Lose three tokens.

Jack: A soldier dies in a pit trap. Roll dice to determine what happens to his body.

2 Germanic war cries echo through the trees. Pull a block. Do you maintain formation or scatter to confuse the enemy?

3 A thick fog descends. Your men want to halt, but stopping means death. Roll to decide if you press onwards (7+). If you do, the fog appears to swallow up some of your men. Roll 1d to determine how many.

4 The ground beneath your feet is becoming boggy. Standard Roman formation is impossible here. Roll the dice to determine what happens when you break ranks.

5 You find Germanic tribal markers. Do you deface them to deny the enemy intelligence, or study them to learn the paths?

6 Fresh animal carcasses hung from trees - a warning? A trap? Or mere hunting? Pull one block.

7 Night falls early here. The men whisper about spirits in the darkness.

8 A stream crossing. The easy ford shows fresh Germanic tracks.

9 Wild boars have scattered your remaining supplies goring one of your men so badly death appears imminent. His cries attract... attention. Roll to determine the nature of who/what responds.

10 Lightning has struck a sacred Germanic oak. The men see it as an omen. Interpret it via a dice roll.

Hearts: Morale

Ace: Roman trumpets heard in the distance! Set aside. At day's end, roll d6. On 6, place a token if you have one. You can't attempt THE FINAL MARCH without at least ten men (tokens).

King: Soldiers suggest adopting Germanic clothing for camouflage. Roll dice to determine how this affects unit cohesion.

Queen: A soldier confesses to having served closely with Arminius the traitor. How do you handle this revelation?

Jack: Fighting breaks out over the last of the Roman rations. Roll to determine effect on the unit.

2 A soldier suggests abandoning armor to move faster. Pull a block.

3 Men are speaking Germanic tongues in their sleep. Remove one token.

4 Your optio questions a command publicly. Discipline him, but the damage to morale is already done. Pull two blocks.

5 Someone's been keeping a Germanic fetish. Do you punish this superstition or let it slide?

6 The men want to hold proper rites for the fallen. Time or safety? Roll die; 7+ you press onwards leaving the dead where they've fallen.

7 A soldier recognizes his brother among the Germanic warriors. Pull a block.

8 Morning roll call reveals how few you are. Pull a block.

9 Veterans begin teaching younger soldiers Germanic war cries as disguise.

10 Someone suggests eating horse meat. Roman cavalry never eat their mounts. Pull a block.

Diamonds: Resources and Survival

Ace: Food stores critically low. A soldier forages for mushrooms; you lose a day to violent vomiting. Pull a block.

King: Discovery of a Germanic village. Do you raid for supplies or try to trade?

Queen: Roman equipment failing in the forest. Germanic alternatives present themselves.

Jack: Hidden cache of Roman supplies found... along with bodies. Pull one block.

2 Roman rations are spoiling in the damp. Forest acorns are plentiful. Roll to determine how bad the resulting stomach cramps. Pull one block.

3 Your waterskin is empty. The only water source is a Germanic sacred spring. You are witnessed...

4 Roman sandals are falling apart. Germanic boots on dead allies still sound.

5 A soldier's wound is festering. Germanic herbal poultices or Roman prayers? Decide, then roll to see how effective.

6 Heavy rain has ruined the last of the bowstrings. Pull one block.

7 Your men spot a Germanic hunting party. Lay an ambush to steal their supplies and equipment. Roll to determine success (10+). If you fail, roll 1d to see how many men you lose.

8. The men are abandoning equipment in their haste. How do you deal with this? Roll the dice to determine effectiveness.

9. A Germanic village has left tribute at a forest shrine - dried meat, mead, fresh bread. Taking it means surviving, but also means risking their gods' wrath. Pull a block if you take it (incurring these gods' displeasure), remove a token (one of your men dies of hunger) if you don't.

10. You drink from a polluted stream. The source of the befoulment becomes evident... pull one block from the horror.

Clubs: Mental Strain

Ace: Nightmares of Varus's shade. Pull two blocks.

King: The strange sounds of the forest trigger powerful, debilitating memories of the battle, like you've never had before. Pull one block.

*Queen: Memory of Rome provides comfort... or deepens despair?

Jack: A soldier breaks down, calling out to the gods for salvation; the noise attracts... attention. Gods? Ours or theirs? Pull two blocks.

2. The forest whispers with the voices of the dead. Pull two blocks.

3. Your dreams show Varus beckoning you to join him. It is tempting, the idea, to fall on one's sword... pull one block

4. Men claim to see Roman eagles in the trees, leading them astray.

5. In your dream, you're back at the officer's tent when Arminius' betrayal was first revealed. But this time, your face in the lamplight is his face, and the Germanic words of treachery spill from your own mouth. Wake to find you've given orders in your sleep. Pull two blocks.

6. Your prayers come out in Germanic tongue. Pull one block.

7. You catch yourself thinking how easy it would be to just stop. To just... go germanic. What's happening to you?

8. The men no longer speak; their eyes are dead when they look at you. They hesitate just a bit too long before following your orders. What are they thinking? Pull one block.

9. Your reflection in the stream looks increasingly barbaric.

10. Write in Latin. If you can't remember the words, pull a block.

The Ending of Things

The Final March

Each token represents a man sent out to scout ahead. Once you have ten men out scouting, one of them makes contact with Lucius Caedicius, commander of the garrison at Aliso (pulling the Ace of Hearts plus setting aside ten tokens). Caedicius is making a break for the Rhine. If you can reach him in time, you can join with his forces.

To determine this, you must make three final card draws right now and follow their instructions.

- If you survive, you've reached Caedicius and the prospect of returning to Roman territory
- If the tower falls, you perish within sight of salvation

Ave et Vale!

If you make it, write about your fear about explaining what happened, to your superiors in Rome, and try to frame things appropriately for your ultimate vindication. But remember, Rome does not take kindly to defeat.

Dis Manibus

If you don't make it, write the archaeological excavator's site diary for the day your remains (and wax tablets) are discovered two thousand years hence.

Afterword

The historical Teutoburg Forest disaster resulted in the loss of three entire Roman legions and profoundly impacted Roman expansion into Germania. Many small groups of Roman soldiers likely attempted similar journeys of survival, though few made it back to Roman territory.

For more on Varus, see Joanne Ball's biography

<https://www.penandswordbooks.com/9781399088329/publius-quintilius-varus/>

To get started on the archaeology of the disaster, Livius is not a bad place to begin:

<https://www.livius.org/articles/battle/teutoburg-forest-9-ce/teutoburg-forest-4/>

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