

‘EL SOL SANGRIENTO’

An Example of Crafting an Adventure—Key Characters—Locations—Inciting Evil: Comancheros—Introduction: Ayúndos—Complication: Taos Pass—Complication: Comanchero Canyon—Reversal: The Raiders—Revelation: Paraibo—Revelation: Parley—Resolution: Plunder—Denouement

“Depopulated towns and villages, deserted haciendas and ranches, elegant and spacious churches falling to decay, neglected orchards teeming with fruit, and broad fields once highly cultivated, now overgrown with shrubbery and weeds show to what extent the country has been overrun.”
—John Russell Bartlett, Mexican Boundary Commission, February 19, 1852

“El Sol Sangriento” is a sample *Gunslinger* adventure. Most elements were generated randomly from the tables in the CRAFTING AN ADVENTURE chapter. Others were extrapolated from them. Some challenge types were rerolled to avoid repetition. After reviewing all the elements we may call it “El Sol Sangriento” or “The Bloody Sun.”

“El Sol Sangriento” is far more wordy and detailed than adventures need to be. It is fulsome so as to explain and inspire. Learn from it what you wish and let your imagination take in the reddening expanses of the Judgment.

Key Characters

We can generate random character details using tables in CRAFTING AN ADVENTURE and in the NAMES IN THE TERRITORY appendix.

Ally: A Mexican Outlaw

Random Name: Lorenzo Teodosio Aguirre Pineda

Critical Setting Element: A remarkable canyon, pass, hill or mesa

Goal: Justice or Revenge

Motivation: Vengeance

Temptation: Bravery

Primary Antagonist: A Comanche Hunter/Raider

Random Name: Restless Heart

Critical Setting Element: A magician or medicine person has the secrets of supernatural powers

Goal: Honor or fame

Motivation: Greed

Temptation: Courtesy

The raider being the primary antagonist, let's say he is also a medicine man of rising influence and vast ambition. He strives to walk the paths of war and spirit alike. He has embarked upon a great raid to cement his wealth and reputation.

Secondary Antagonist 1: A Mexican Comanchero

Random Name: Hesiquio Romero Salazar

Goal: Extrication from a terrible deal

Motivation: Deceit

Temptation: Patience

The primary antagonist is Comanche so let's say he and this secondary antagonist have a long history of trade. Recall that the gunslingers' ally is an outlaw who wants justice or revenge. Let's say the outlaw was another comanchero in partnership with this secondary antagonist but was treacherously ousted.

Secondary Antagonist 2: A White American Industrialist

Random Name: Mary Edna Darden

Goal: Medicine

Motivation: Tyranny

Temptation: Diligence

This must be someone with great reach to exert dire influence into Coronado, the adventure's setting. It might be interesting to make this a female industrialist since women with power are rare in New Jordan. Maybe she owns an arms factory in Pueblo or Fort Calhoun.

To make things urgent let's say she's dying. Let's say she is in the last stages of consumption, described on page XX. She has heard that a Comanche medicine man can heal her. She is dealing with comancheros who know him as an intermediary. Being an industrialist means wealth and being motivated by tyranny means comfort with ruthlessness. Let's say she has some hired guns of her own who are paid well to do anything to keep her alive.

Locations

Let's start putting it together. The adventure takes place in Coronado. This adventure puts the gunslingers in the middle of three dangerous forces: rival comancheros, an ambitious Comanche raider, a desperate industrialist. The raider wants to gather riches and make a notorious raid to gain fame and influence. The industrialist is willing to let it happen as long as it does not harm her. The comancheros want to profit.

The Town

Let's say all three converge on a small and isolated village. Someplace without influence or resources of its own. Since the primary antagonist is Comanche, let's place the town along the Canadian River or the Pecos River near the Comancheria. It is clearly under threat so let's call it something dire. How about Puesta de Sol Rojo, "Red Sunset." Perhaps we can put Puesta de Sol Rojo near the east end of Palo Flechado or Taos Pass, a green valley of the Cimarron River east of Taos long used as a route between the trading fairs at Taos and the eastern plains. We could even put it on the map in place of Rayado, a town built in 1848 on the Santa Fe Trail despite Apache and Comanche raids. It is built among trees near a creek, overlooked by wooded hills, and surrounded by sparse grasslands. It stands one hex south of the village Cimarron founded ten years later and a few miles north of high mesas. *Rayado and Cimarron maps.*

The Hacienda

Darden should be distinctly apart from the townfolk and the comancheros so let's say she has taken residence in a hacienda on a ridge overlooking the wooded mission and village. Maybe it is owned by an old family who live elsewhere and is home to the alguacil or sheriff who commands the town militia. It sounds like the alguacil and militia are going to get caught in the middle before the gunslingers ever arrive. *Rayado map.*

Comanchero Canyon

One critical element of the outlaw Lorenzo's part in the adventure is a remarkable canyon canyon, hill, pass or mesa. Let's call that a hidden canyon where the comancheros meet the Comanches. We can call it Comanchero Canyon. It could be in Taos Pass or in the hills near Sol Rojo, whichever works best when it comes up. *Cimarron map*.

The Gunslingers

The adventure begins after the betrayal of the outlaw Lorenzo so let's say the gunslingers learn of the trouble elsewhere. If Puesta de Sol Rojo is outside the Taos pass then Taos as a trading center is a natural place to find them. Perhaps the contacts who implore them for aid crossed the mountains after finding no help in Cimarron.

Scene 1 (Inciting Crime): Comancheros

Location: Puesta de Sol Rojo

The Inciting Evil: Abuse of power motivated by malice

According to a roll on the INCITING CRIME table, the crime that leads to the gunslingers' involvement with the comancheros and Comanche and a New Jordan industrialist is an abuse of power. Let's see what shape the adventure takes.

Let's say Hesiquio and the Lorenzo were partners. Hesiquio made a deal with the industrialist Darden (she never allows strangers or employees the familiarity of using her Christian name) to use her hired guns to help him kill Lorenzo and Lorenzo's loyalists so Hesiquio can take total control of the comancheros.

The betrayal and abuse of power happens between the ally and the antagonists. There's no need yet for the gunslingers to be present. Let's play it out with just the NPCs. The players can play the outlaw and a few of his loyalists.

Keep it brief. We already know how the scene ends. That means the players have little actual control over the course of events. Play it very briefly for the excitement and suspense of Lorenzo's betrayal and escape and then move on to the gunslingers themselves.

To facilitate that, let's give each player's temporary character an explicit instruction and motivation that overrides all others. Lorenzo's is "Escape a losing fight to fight another day." His followers' should be "Protect Lorenzo."

Start in the town plaza. Riders come down from the hacienda. Hesiquio surprises Lorenzo by announcing that these are not strangers but friends. The riders are well-armed American men, all or mostly white. A random name for the chief hired gun: Charles Gross, but let's make it Charlie Gross.

Hesiquio introduces Charlie and says these men work for the gang's new partner Mrs. Darden, a prosperous businesswoman from Promise. Lorenzo and most of the gang have no idea what Hesiquio is talking about.

Hesiquio says all is well, that working with Mrs. Darden will make them all rich. Most of them, anyway. Then gunmen on the sides open fire.

Each temporary player character comes under attack by three enemies they thought were friends. The outlaw Lorenzo is to be the gunslingers' key ally later, so he should get away. When you roll dice for an attack against him just say every attack misses or inflicts only one or two damage.

The alguacil (random name: Felipe Álvarez Rios) and a couple of militiamen try to stop the fighting. The bloodthirsty comancheros and hired guns turn on them, too.

Lorenzo and a few loyalists and militia mount horses and escape into the night. Darden takes up residence in the hacienda. Comancheros and hired guns now control the town of the red sunset.

Scene 2 (Introduction): Ayúdanos

Challenge Type: diplomacy, negotiation, influence

Location: Taos

Comancheros and betrayals and ambitious Comanche raiders. This sounds like an action-packed adventure.

We need a powerful motivation for the gunslingers to go to Puesta de Sol Rojo. Let's say two refugees from the town meet the gunslingers and try to recruit them to help dislodge the comancheros.

"Ayúdanos," they say, "Help us."

Let's say the refugees are a father and his adult daughter. Featuring an adult female from the village provides a possible romantic interest for a gunslinger in addition to their male allies and antagonists. Let's say the daughter insisted on coming because she speaks English and Spanish while her father speaks only Spanish. To give them deeper motivations let's say the slain alguacil was the man's brother and the daughter's uncle. Random names for the refugees, matching fathers' surnames with the alguacil: Miguel Álvarez Fuentes and Florencia Álvarez Arellano.

The refugees have gathered savings from around the village and from the alguacil's family to hire help. Let's make it \$1,006: equivalent to about one month's income for about 50 poor villagers and adding \$6 to make the number convincingly specific. If the gunslingers lack horses, say the refugees brought enough money to offer an advance that would cover buying them.

It could be fascinating to see how noncombatant gunslingers (so to speak) approach this violent trouble. The refugees approach even gunslingers who are not expert combatants. They may ask help from Taos soldiers who in turn hire the gunslingers to come as scouts and advisors. A random name for a teniente or lieutenant in command of a cavalry troop: Celilio Pérez Beltran.

In that case, the gunslingers may have to help the refugees win the cavalry over. Make it an extended test in which the gunslingers must roll more successes than failures. That requires each player to contribute. Perhaps Teniente Beltran gauges the mettle of the gunslingers as a group. Let the players decide how they attempt to convince him and what skills or resources they can bring to bear. A CHA test could certainly apply but encourage the players' creativity. If one describes unexpected but intriguing use of a skill to convince the cavalymen, let it catch Beltran's attention. Beltran can be persuaded to come even if they fail the extended test. But the cavalymen's morale and reliability will be much greater if the gunslingers succeed.

A typical soldier encounter features 2d6+12 soldiers so let's say 19 cavalry accompany the gunslingers. By the terms of NPC GROUP ATTACKS on page XX let's say the cavalry are mediocre combatants if the gunslingers' extended test to convince them failed. They are good combatants if it succeeded.

Scene 3 (Complication): Taos Pass

Challenge Type: diplomacy, negotiation, influence

Location: Taos Pass

From Taos the gunslingers must travel three hexes east on the road through the Taos Pass and then one hex southeast over plains. The journey is likely to take a full day. We rolled "wilderness travel" for the

challenge but this journey is too short for that. And this scene should be where the gunslingers meet their key ally. Let's make the challenge about diplomacy and negotiation and influence instead.

The gunslingers ride through the mountains with wooded hills on either side. The outlaw Lorenzo and surviving loyalists and militia find the gunslingers on the road and size them up. A typical bandit encounter has 3d6 bandits. But these are survivors of a slaughter so let's use half that number. Lorenzo then five followers, mediocre combatants by the terms of NPC GROUP ATTACKS on page XX.

The refugees Miguel and Florencia recognize Lorenzo and tell the gunslingers who he is.

What does Lorenzo want most? To lead his comancheros again and to kill the traitor Hesiquio. Lorenzo needs to learn why the gunslingers (and soldiers if they came) are going to Puesta de Sol Rojo. Are they going to protect the village? He enthusiastically says he wants the same thing because Sol Rojo has been a valuable trading post and source of shelter for his people. He adapts his enthusiastic offer of support to whatever motivates the gunslingers. He needs their help against Hesiquio. Lorenzo tries to make them think they need his help even more.

Cavalrymen with the gunslingers likely regard Lorenzo with scorn as a comanchero and slave-trader. Or perhaps Teniente Beltran has traded with Lorenzo's gang before and regards him wariness but not ill will. The Judge should decide in the moment. Do the players need a further challenge or complication? They must convince Beltran that unsavory allies are sometimes necessary.

If they strike an alliance with Lorenzo, he guides them to the comancheros' hidden canyon one hex off the trail.

If they do not strike an alliance with Lorenzo but go straight to town, skip Scene 4 and change the location of Scene 5. Review information that those scenes would provide to the players. Work that information into conversations with characters in Puesta de Sol Rojo or while passing through Cimarron on the way.

If the gunslingers include a doctor or healer, let Lorenzo tell them about the disease that eats away at Mrs. Darden. The gunslingers could seek supplies to treat her and hope to talk her into withdrawing from the village. This adventure is set among the hills of Coronado, where ephedra sometimes grows. See RESOURCES IN CORONADO on page XX. Ephedra could at least relieve the symptoms of Darden's consumption: see FRONTIER MEDICINES on page XX.

Scene 4 (Complication): Comanchero Canyon

Challenge Type: defense, raiding, revenge.

Location: Comanchero Canyon.

Since this scene features an explicit confrontation, let's say Hesiquio and a band of his picked comancheros are camping and waiting to meet Restless Heart's Comanche scouts. A typical bandit encounter has 3d6 bandits so let's use that: Hesiquio has 10 comancheros. They are mediocre combatants by the terms of NPC GROUP ATTACKS on page XX.

Confronting Hesiquio

When the gunslingers see signs of Hesiquio's men, Lorenzo proposes that his people and the gunslingers attack them at once. The gunslingers must decide how to proceed.

If the gunslingers and Lorenzo kill Hesiquio and his followers, Lorenzo says they should camp in the canyon. We rolled "supernatural horror" for the nature of the next scene, so let's say it turns out Lorenzo does not give away a surprising secret: that he expects to meet Restless Heart there this very night.

If they let Hesiquio speak, he says he wants out from under the industrialist and her hired guns. They keep changing the deal. Hesiquio suggests an alliance with Lorenzo and the gunslingers. He says they should forget recent grievances and work together. They should facilitate the meeting between Darden and Restless Heart without being threatened by the hired guns.

Is Hesiquio lying? That's up to you, the Judge. Maybe he only wants to buy time until Restless Heart arrives so he has help killing or capturing Lorenzo and the gunslingers. A gunslinger's INT test opposed by Hesiquio's CHA test could see through such a deception.

Whoever is left, the comancheros expect to meet Restless Heart tonight to reaffirm their friendship with him before trading at Sol Rojo. Lorenzo does not know the details of Hesiquio's deal with Darden and Restless Heart that will destroy Sol Rojo forever.

If a gunslinger is a doctor or nurse then the gunslingers may find injured among the comancheros that they can treat, perhaps adding to their friends and allies when they need them later. Making the attempt is risky because it uses resources and failure makes every NPC skeptical of the doctor's or nurse's skills and draws ire and grudges from the patient's friends.

About the Comanches

By conversing with Hesiquio, Lorenzo, the villagers or the soldiers the players can learn what details about Comanche culture that you wish to include: see COMANCHE FEROCITY on page XX. Restless Heart and his band regard Hesiquio and Lorenzo as friends, as honorary kin. Frequent gift-giving maintains that friendship and opens the way to trade.

Scene 5 (Reversal): The Raiders

Challenge Type: supernatural horror.

Location: Comanchero Canyon.

The Comanches come to the canyon led by the raider Restless Heart. Or rather by the raider's vicious and virtue-free emanation: see EMANATION on page XX. That way the gunslingers don't have an easy way to rid themselves of the primary antagonist.

A typical encounter with raiding Natives has 4d6 raiders so let's use that: Restless Heart's double has 14 raiders. They are good combatants by the terms of NPC GROUP ATTACKS on page XX.

Lorenzo or Hesiquio may express alarm to the gunslingers before the parley begins. It's Restless Heart, yes. But sometimes Restless Heart is worse than other times. Far worse and far more dangerous. In those times you can feel it coming off him, feel it shivering your reason like a fire eats away the edges of an old map. And indeed Restless Heart exudes a palpable sense of *wrongness*. His own warriors take care around him.

Double Dealing

Lorenzo (or Hesiquio if he lives) introduces the gunslingers to Restless Heart. He instructs them to each offer gifts worth about \$10 to show themselves as friends who are looking out for Restless Heart's interests. Remember that Restless Heart's emanation has no virtues. He looks the gunslingers over like he's choosing which slab of beef to butcher and cook.

If the gunslingers slew the comancheros, Lorenzo attempts to make a deal with Restless Heart. A gunslinger who knows Comanche or Plains Sign Language can follow the exchange. Their ally turns out to be as dangerous and cruel as the other comancheros. He offers the raider their pick of slaves from the villagers and loot from the industrialist's hired guns.

Do the gunslingers understand the exchange? What do they do about it? Are Coronado cavalrymen with the gunslingers? If so, they prepare to attack the raiders and try to persuade the gunslingers to help them. If the gunslingers take the Comanches' side, Teniente Pérez Beltran orders his men to kill or arrest the gunslingers too. The gunslingers' best option may be to talk Beltran into biding his time.

Restless Heart's cruel emanation cannot be talked out of attacking the village. His plan depends on emptying Puesta de Sol Rojo of everything of value. Including its people. And he has an arrangement with the industrialist Mrs. Darden. A gunslinger who makes an INT roll might see a cruel, knowing twist of a smile on Restless Heart's face as he talks about Darden and their arrangement. The raiders refuse to say more.

If the gunslingers do not know what passed between Lorenzo or Hesiquio and Restless Heart, no one tells them. The comancheros say only that Restless Heart is going to meet the American woman and they expect to be offered gifts to establish friendship.

Confrontation or Cooperation

This has the makings of a catastrophic encounter for the players. Review **PLAYER EXPECTATIONS** on page XX. The gunslingers are probably outnumbered by vicious foes. If the gunslingers stand firm, the Comanches and comancheros attack them. Even with the aid of cavalry it might be an awful defeat. That is likely to result in the cavalry all being killed in fighting or tortured to death.

If the gunslingers escape, a few raiders pursue to drive them away from the village. The pursuers retreat if the gunslingers turn on them.

If the gunslingers and cavalry overcome the Comanches and comancheros, Restless Heart's emanation vanishes. The gunslingers can ride on to Puesta de Sol Rojo. Skip Scene 6.

Scene 6 (Revelation): Paraibo

Challenge Type: diplomacy, negotiation, influence.

Location: On the road.

If the gunslingers remained with the comancheros and Restless Heart, they will make an impression on Restless Heart's cruel emanation as either sturdy and dangerous or as potential prey. It is one or the other for each of them. Either way, disrespect makes him a lethal enemy in waiting.

This scene could be a great way to inform the players about the characters in this adventure and about the larger setting of the Territory. And it can push them to engage in diplomacy and make choices that can have enormous repercussions.

Conversing With Restless Heart

Restless Heart says he is a small paraibo or chief but will be a great one soon. He is curious about the gunslingers' accomplishments. He asks what kind of fighting and killing they have done. He admires honest tales of violent victory.

If the gunslingers make a good impression on Restless Heart, he offers a gift to the one who makes the best impression: one of his own buffalo robes or a good rifled carbine. That impresses the others. In Comanche eyes such a worthy gift establishes a bond of honorary kinship between them. Refusing the gift or treating it like a bribe or turning on the Comanches after accepting it offends them deeply as a betrayal.

An exchange that goes especially badly may result in one of the strangers beaten, tied up, and subjected to torment. Restless Heart sees torture as a way to open a foe's inner mind to the otherworld and prepare his spirit for death.

Philosophizing With Restless Heart

Scene 6 is a revelation scene. It could make a great time to explore an NPC's philosophical discovery, described in PHILOSOPHIZING on page XX. That could come in the next scene, also a revelation, but an epiphany to explain something about Restless Heart himself sounds too good to pass up. It likely emerges if the gunslingers talk to Restless Heart about his motivations. Let's roll it up and see what emerges.

THE ELEMENTS

First, we know it involves a virtue or vice at the heart of the scenario. Let's look to Restless Heart's own motivation, the vice of greed.

We roll 1d10 on the PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOVERY & ENCOUNTER table on page XX for the encounter at the heart of Restless Heart's tale: 8, an artist or singer.

We roll 1d20 on the PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOVERY & ENCOUNTER table on page XX for the nature of the discovery. It too comes up 8: Restless Heart discovered that the virtue or vice in question, greed, is proof of the superiority of the speaker's religion, nation, ethnicity, social class, vocation, art.

For details about the artist we roll 1d100 on the ALLY OR ANTAGONIST CULTURE table on page XX. Let's use Restless Heart's own culture as the column for that roll. A 26: Arapaho. A roll of 1d12 on the ALLY OR ANTAGONIST OCCUPATION table on page XX comes up 5: a Native farmer or hunter. For an Arapaho this means a hunter.

A roll of 1d100 on the ALLY OR ANTAGONIST GOAL table on page XX comes up 5: extrication from a curse.

A roll of 1d100 on the SETTING ELEMENT table comes up 3: an abandoned town or village. For an encounter with an Arapaho hunter in the Comancheria let's call that an Arapaho rancheria, a long-term camp used season after season, now abandoned.

A roll of 1d10 on the THREATS & CHALLENGES table on page XX comes up 4: defense, raiding, revenge, robbery, rescue.

Let's put all that together.

THE TALE

Restless Heart went to raid an Arapaho village. We know from ARAPAHO on page XX that the Arapaho are generally allies of the Comanche. Let's say this village was the winter home of a clan whose leader offended Restless Heart in some way and refused to make amends. Rolling on the NATIVE NAMES table on page XX gets the name Fragrant One Above. Restless Heart's temptation is the virtue of courtesy. That clan's chief may have refused to return a show of courtesy and goodwill.

So let's say Fragrant One Above wanted and received permission to take Restless Heart's sister as a wife. Restless Heart came the next spring to ask the chief's support in a raid that Restless Heart needed to undertake to gain horses and slaves for his clan. Fragrant One Above rudely refused. He must have had plenty and had no need to raid for more. That made Restless Heart's case for the raid look weak to other chiefs. They too refused to back him.

Fragrant One Above came to Restless Heart the following winter. Fragrant One Above had grown sick and believed he had come under a curse. He knew Restless Heart's skills as a medicine man and asked for help. Restless Heart said he would come to Fragrant One Above's village.

Restless Heart went to the Arapaho village not with medicine but with warriors. He found it abandoned but for Fragrant One Above, singing songs to his people's spirits for strength in casting out sickness. The people had gone to another village in fear of the curse.

Restless Heart might ask the gunslingers what they would have done in his place.

What Restless Heart did was tell Fragrant One Above to be at peace for his illness was about to end. Then he buried his axe in the Arapaho chief's head. Then he took his warriors to find Fragrant One Above's people. They took all of Fragrant One Above's horses and slaves and wives. They killed warriors that fought them. And they went home wealthier than ever.

Restless Heart says he learned a great lesson from Fragrant One Above. He learned never to ask for what you want from someone in a position to refuse you. Ask only those who cannot say no. Take what you want from the rest. That is Restless Heart's way. To him that is the Comanche way. His victory proves it is superior to all others.

Scene 7 (Revelation): Parley

Challenge Type: persecution, feud, fraud, theft.

Location: Puesta de Sol Rojo.

Darden's gunmen and the comancheros have taken over the town to keep everyone in place, so we can say there are few villagers in sight when the gunslingers arrive. Only those who have to be outside: working fields, tending ranch animals, serving the occupiers. The town's many children are all kept behind locked doors in ramshackle houses of adobe and wood.

Hearing reports of the gunslingers approaching, the industrialist's chief gunfighter Charlie Gross asks for a parley with them and with any the comancheros with them.

A typical posse encounter has 4d6 members so let's use that: 14 hired guns. They are good combatants by the terms of NPC GROUP ATTACKS on page XX. Let's say Charlie leaves four of them at the hacienda to guard Mrs. Darden and approaches with the rest in a show of force.

Charlie offers to take the gunslingers on for substantial pay from the industrialist, what they'd earn in months of working a high-paying job. Let's make that \$300 each. If they agree? Then the hired guns and Hesiquio's comancheros kill Lorenzo and his remaining followers as well as any soldiers who remain.

If the gunslingers defeated the comancheros and Comanches in Comanchero Canyon, let's say the rest of Hesiquio's comancheros wait for him in the village, 3d6 of them: 10 more comancheros. For the leader who replaces Hesiquio let's roll a new antagonist from Coronado on the ALLY AND ANTAGONIST CULTURE table. A roll of 77 gives us a Puebloan. Comancheros are generally men due to the rough and ruthless life but it might be interesting to make Hesiquio's lieutenant a violence-hardened woman. A random Native name that would work for a man or a woman: Hungry Rabbit.

If Lorenzo returns, the comancheros in town fall on each other. Some favored Lorenzo but switched sides because they could not escape. Those who expect retribution attempt to flee. Others attempt to murder them.

Dealing With the Factions

Let the players say how they approach the factions in Puesta de Sol Rojo. Restless Heart is expected just before the next sunrise. Do the gunslingers attack the comancheros and hired guns? Try to rouse the terrified villagers? Try to meet the ailing Mrs. Darden and change her mind? How well they succeed depends on their approach and skill and luck.

Darden should be an especially hard sell. She is dying. Restless Heart is her only hope. She is ready to hand over this entire village and another one besides to save her own life. She would rather do that than spend her own hard-won wealth on gifts to win Restless Heart's favor. Especially since gifts would serve Restless Heart's own purposes as an up-and-coming raider less well than loot and slaves won in a raid.

Medically-minded or scientific gunslingers who found ephedra earlier could try to sway Darden by offering treatment. How she responds should depend on the players' approach and the gunslingers' skills and reaction roll. If they convince her that she need not strike some desperate and deadly deal with Restless Heart, that is hardly the end of the adventure. Restless Heart still comes with many raiders.

Philosophizing With Darden

If there came no good chance for philosophizing with Restless Heart, there might come one if the gunslingers spend time with Mrs. Darden. If you recall from CHARACTERS on page XX, her motivation is tyranny and her temptation is diligence. A lesson in the value of tyranny sounds more interesting than one about diligence. Darden is from Promise so let's say this event happened there.

THE ELEMENTS

Let's roll some elements of Darden's tale:

- *An Encounter With:* A wicked sorcerer
- *Character Details:* A white American ranger whose goal was fame
- *Critical Setting Element:* An isolated homestead or camp in the wild in Promise
- *Nature of the Conflict:* Defense, raiding, revenge, robbery, rescue
- *Inciting Evil:* Murder

- *Epiphany*: Tyranny proves that life and reality and the world are a dream

THE TALE

Let's weave that together. This must have been a bloody event in Darden's life and it resulted in a lifelong lesson in tyranny and the meaninglessness of life.

Let's say it happened when she was a child. Perhaps very young, just barely old enough for the memories to linger. The isolated homestead was her own home. She is a wealthy industrialist and it is rare for them to start with nothing, so we can say her father was a miner who struck a fantastic claim while living rough with his family in the mountains. The theme here is tyranny so he must have held his young family in terror. Perhaps they feared dangers and wished to move back to civilization. He refused and insisted on his way.

Defense, raiding, revenge, robbery, rescue: The Darden home came under persecution by a gang of rival miners and outlaws that learned of the gold strike and tried to coerce Darden into sharing. It sounds interesting to make the leader of the gang a woman, so let's roll her name: Amanda Moore. In fact, for color let's give her a Native nickname: a roll of 7 on 1d100 yields "Bitter" or "Blossom," but those sound great together so let's use both. Amanda "Bitterblossom" Moore, vicious extortionist of miners.

A friend took word to Fort Alexander. A ranger volunteered to respond. A random name comes up as Alexander Lee. Rangers often respond in troops but some prefer to work by themselves. Lee must have had many secrets from his fellow rangers. But he hungered for fame, for glory that threatens all secrecy.

The crisis had advanced by the time Lee arrived. The Bitterblossom Gang had moved into the Darden house and taken over to increase the pressure on stubborn Mr. Darden. Young Mary Edna Darden probably did not quite understand what was going on. She knew only that strangers lived with them now and no one in her family liked them.

One evening Lee hailed the house from outside. He said he was Ranger Lee and had heard Bitterblossom Moore had moved in and there was trouble. Bitterblossom forced Mr. Darden to reluctantly say there was no trouble. Then she did all the talking. She said they were guests and Lee was not. It was private property. He had to go.

We know Lee turns out to be a wicked sorcerer and wanted fame. Let's say he agreed to depart and offered a jug of good whiskey as a gesture of goodwill to smooth over the disturbance. Maybe he even hinted that he hadn't realized the whole gang had moved in and really he was too afraid to deal with them by himself. He left the jug on the porch and rode off.

Bitterblossom and her boys celebrated their humiliation of the ranger. They all got drunk as they could, leaving only one of them on a surly and temperate watch. Late, late in the black night Mary Edna awoke to cool air and strange sounds. The front door stood slightly open. In the light of a banking fire an

invisible spirit seemed to move among the cabin. The guard was dead in his chair and covered in blood. The sleeping outlaws one by one gurgled as an unseen threat slit open their throats. The other Dardens awoke and began screaming. Bitterblossom came awake in confusion.

Suddenly Ranger Lee was there smiling, a pistol in one hand and a bloody knife in the other. He made Bitterblossom do the rest. Told her to turn away from him, produce her pistol, shoot the family before they could run. She started with the father. Then the mother. Then the rest of the drunken, bleary outlaws. Then the children. She faltered at Mary Edna. And not even Lee could demand the murder of the tiny girl. He told Bitterblossom to drop her pistol and knife and run with what gold she had already stolen from the Dardens. He watched her clumsily mount up and ride a few seconds and then he raised a rifle and shot her in the back.

Lee turned to young and uncomprehending Mary Edna and said all was well. She would someday inherit all her father's treasure. And in the meantime Lee would be her father. He told her he knew magic. Did she know what magic was? Not tricks. It was simpler than that. It was knowing that the world around you is not really there. Nothing that lives, no one you meet, is quite real. Everything is a dream. And you can bend that dream to your will. Maybe he would teach her how.

Lee gained fame from his so-called rescue of Mary Edna, the sole survivor of the Darden Massacre perpetrated by murderous and treacherous outlaws. He gained wealth from benefactors and from books about his imaginary exploits. He grew old and grasping. He never taught her a single magical spell, never a name of all the demons he invoked for his advantage. She thought of him as her father for many years. But she saw her family and smelled the smoke and blood of their deaths in her nightmares, her dreams within the dream of her life.

One day she inherited the estate that her true father's family had taken over. She invested her new wealth well from the first. She hired hard and secretive men to ambush and murder old Lee in the street. She inherited his money, too, all he had earned from the massacre of her family.

You see, she had learned magic that Alexander Lee had not meant to teach. The magic of will and wealth. With those you can change a world that no longer suits you.

As for Restless Heart? The villagers? The dead and the dead to come? Darden is dying of consumption. But she is not ready to fade. She means for the magic of her money and Restless Heart's spirits to keep her alive. Anyone who opposes her is but another illusion to be swept aside, to be stilled or slain, to be silenced like the quelling of an unhappy dream.

The Raider Arrives

About noon the day that Restless Heart is expected in town, Charlie sends his men out to round up all the villagers and lock them in the mission's cramped adobe church. Charlie is the only one of his men who knows what Darden has planned for the village.

Restless Heart's Comanches come to the village at the last red glow of sunset over the mountains. In the falling darkness to the east the real Restless Heart comes riding with the rest of the Comanches. The emanation vanishes when the real Restless Heart comes into sight.

Let's make the new band equivalent to an encounter with another 4d6 raiders. Comanche women and youths often follow warriors to help take captives and animals. Let's say those account for half of that 4d6. So it's 2d6 warriors who are good combatants by the terms of NPC GROUP ATTACKS on page XX and 2d6 women and youths who are mediocre combatants.

Restless Heart takes half of the Comanches along with Charlie Gross and half of his men and half the remaining comancheros up to the hacienda to meet Mrs. Darden. When Restless Heart is out of sight, his brutal emanation appears again among the Comanches in the village.

Through a comanchero translator, Restless Heart pledges to heal her after his warriors take what they want from the village. He explains that Mexican soldiers last summer pursued warriors of his tribe who had seized horses and slaves from a village whose people refused to offer gifts of friendship and hospitality. The soldiers killed a dozen men, women and children in camp. Restless Heart gathered his followers in this expedition to take revenge on Mexicans for the killings.

Darden agrees to the offer and tells her gunmen and the comancheros to make it happen. Unless the gunslingers interfere the raider goes into the hacienda with Darden and begins the ritual to heal her. In one sense, the village itself has become a ritual sacrifice.

Scene 8 (Resolution): Plunder

Challenge Type: defense, raiding, revenge

Location: Puesta de Sol Rojo and the hacienda

The villagers are disorganized with the destruction of the militia. Let's say there are about fifty villagers, about what you would expect in a small place like this. And let's say 2d6 of them are able to fight. They

are poor combatants and have no weapons but bows and spears, knives and ancient muskets. Unless inspired to desperate courage they take flight immediately rather than standing and fighting. The Comanche warriors set about killing the fighting-age men and taking the women and children of the village as slaves. Let's make that ten men to be slaughtered and the other forty villagers to be captured.

Stopping the Slaughter

How might the gunslingers approach this horror?

They could try to offer greater rewards for the raiders to stop. That would mean convincing Restless Heart's lieutenant that they can provide as much as the value of forty Mexican slaves. An average Mexican slave is worth \$150 in ransom according to RESOURCES & RANSOMS on page XX. That's a total value of \$6,000.

Otherwise the only thing to stop the raiders is a fight. The comanches consider it a contemptible betrayal if the gunslingers attack them after having exchanged gifts and being made honorary kin. The comancheros all take the raiders' side. Only if the gunslingers have made particular friends with individual comancheros do those aid the gunslingers against their own people.

The gunmen are split. Some of them are hardened and vicious enough to let this town be destroyed. Others are appalled. They have grim and desperately miserable looks. But they say nothing and do nothing unless the gunslingers appeal to them. That likely requires a stirring argument and a CHA×5 test. Success persuades half of them to side with the gunslingers, or all of them except Charlie with a critical success, and the rest to ride off in disgust with the whole thing. Failure persuades a third of them to side with the gunslingers and another third to ride away, leaving a third with Charlie. With a fumble, none switch sides and in their anger they are first to attack the gunslingers when things go bad.

The gunslingers may well be up against far more than they can handle. Explicitly encourage the players to think strategically. The gunslingers' only option may be to step back from the horrors now in order to seek help and launch a rescue later.

Killing the Killers

Killing Restless Heart only once is not enough to stop his evil. Should his first form die his emanation remains and becomes his true self, an eidolon given life, concentrated vice with all virtue burned away. His first corpse vanishes after an hour. Having experienced death he changes his plan. He tells his followers to wait until the surviving gunmen return. He and his followers turn on the gunmen in a brutal slaughter. Then they turn on the comancheros in a final betrayal. Then they round up the men of the village, all over age twelve. Under Restless Heart's leadership they spend the rest of the night in joyous torture as if they had conquered a dedicated enemy in war. One victim faces fate so bravely that they let him live out of respect: choose a comanchero or gunfighter the gunslingers came to know better than

others. The gunslingers can learn the tale from them when they return to the village or by a meeting afterward on the trail. The Comanches depart just before sunrise, taking all horses and the scalps of all the slain and all the children and women of the village as slaves.

Can the gunslingers ever learn the mystery of Restless Heart's duplication and survival? Perhaps one with psychic or magical powers dreams hints that they might fashion into an oblique explanation. Present it however best suits you. I like the idea of indulging in grandiloquence to heighten the dreamer's disorientation:

A sun red as old blood hangs against a bone-white sky like a stain and sets slowly over the figure of a horseman, a rider unseen who casts a cruel shadow on ground dry and gray as smoke. Ruddy light slowly dims and sinks and the shadow grows. The man diminishes until in a final vanishing of that terrible bright clot the man vanishes and only his shadow stretches across the barren and darkening earth.

Killing Mrs. Darden throws the gunmen and comancheros into confusion, should they survive the night. The comancheros and gunmen stand off to seize Darden's gold: \$4,000 in gold coins in a small, iron lockbox. There is treachery and ambush and murder between them until the winners flee with treasure. Or the gunslingers do.

Guns in the Hacienda

In order to make it not look too hopeless to the players, let's say the hacienda has four small, rooftop cannons mounted on sturdy corner platforms. They are equivalent to twelve-pounder mountain howitzers. Enough villagers know how to work them to act as gun crews if gunslingers act as gun captains or inspire villagers or hired guns to act as gun captains. If the cannons are turned on the comanches with at least three successful Shooting rolls, the comanches and comancheros retreat.

If your gunslingers include scientists or engineers, you might establish that the hacienda's supply of gunpowder is dangerously low but there are materials in the cellars or in caves nearby that could yield more: charcoal from recent fires, sulfur stored away in the cellar with the intent to trade it, a guano cave in the mesa where saltpeter could be harvested if enterprising gunslingers could reach it. And if they hold off their enemies long enough. Mixing gunpowder is quick but it is unreliable unless they take hours to mix it wet and let it dry.

Letting It Happen

What if the gunslingers do not interfere? After slaughtering the village's men, the Comanche women and youths and 2d6 warriors depart with plunder. They take stolen horses and goats and weeping slaves to the comanchero canyon to wait for Restless Heart. Once those are away, the remaining Comanches and the comancheros offer to let the gunslingers go and take their own share of the plunder. Let's call that

\$200 worth of things that can be found in a village: food, tools, fine clothing from the hacienda, treasures from the church, horses and goats, saddles and riding gear, assorted coins.

The raiders and comancheros then attack the hired guns. The hired guns are no kin of theirs, not even honorary. The Comanches plan to take industrialist hostage once Restless Heart heals her. Whatever passed before, the hired guns welcome the gunslingers as allies now.

Darden stirs after hours of treatment by Restless Heart’s magic, disease cured but mind disturbed and her whole demeanor and outlook shaken by the supernatural. The Shadow gathers about her and lingers.

Denouement

Do the gunslingers stand or flee? Do they overcome the comancheros and the Comanches? Do they strike a deal that may be impossible to fulfill? Do they flee and seek help to pursue the raiders and rescue the surviving villagers? All that is up to the players. Pursuit might be one additional scene, an apocalyptic finale, or the beginning of a dire adventure in itself. Take notes and look for ways to use their hard choices and the enemies and allies they have made to inspire later adventures.

KEY CHARACTERS OF “EL SOL SANGRIENTO”

NAME	ROLE	DESCRIPTION	MOTIVATION	LOCATION
Lorenzo Teodosio Aguirre Pineda	Ally	Outlaw from Coronado, betrayed comanchero	Vengeance	Taos Pass
Miguel Álvarez Fuentes	Friend	Refugee from Puesta de Sol Rojo seeking aid in Taos, husband of Florencia Arellano de Álvarez	Love	Taos
Florencia Arellano de Álvarez	Friend	Refugee from Puesta de Sol Rojo seeking aid in Taos, wife of Miguel Álvarez Fuentes	Bravery	Taos
Mary Edna Darden	Secondary Antagonist	White industrialist from New Jordan who seeks the magic of Restless Heart	Tyranny	Puesta de Sol Rojo
Charlie Gross	Foe	Leader of Darden’s hired gunmen	Loyalty	Puesta de Sol Rojo
Celilio Pérez Beltran	Friend	Teniente or lieutenant of Coronado cavalry	Responsibility	Taos
Felipe Álvarez Rios	Deceased	Alguacil or sheriff of Puesta de Sol Rojo	Cheerfulness	Puesta de Sol Rojo
Restless Heart	Primary Antagonist	Comanche raider and medicine man with supernatural powers	Greed	Comanchero Canyon
Hesiquio Romero Salazar	Secondary Antagonist	Comanchero leader from Coronado who betrayed Lorenzo	Treachery	Comanchero Canyon

COMBATANT GROUPS OF “EL SOL SANGRIENTO”

GROUP	QUALITY	WEAPONS	NUMBER
Coronado cavalrymen	Good or mediocre	Lance, flintlock pistols, lariat, saber	2d6+12 (19)
Lorenzo’s loyalists	Mediocre	Caplock carbine or shotgun; Bowie knife	3d6/2 (5)
Hesiquio’s comancheros	Mediocre	Caplock carbines or shotgun; Bowie knife	3d6 (10)
Comanche raiders	Good	Flintlock carbines, lances, or bow; tomahawk	4d6 (14)
Darden’s hired guns	Good	Caplock carbine or coach gun; caplock revolver	4d6 (14)
Combatant villagers	Poor	Bow or spear; knife; a few Brown Bess muskets	2d6 (7)
More Comanche raiders	Good	Springfield musket, lance, or bow; tomahawk	2d6 (7)
Comanche women & youths	Mediocre	Knife	2d6 (7)