

BIG SKY

Out on the prairie, family secrets are buried deep. When the howls echo over the land, do the envoys have the courage to do what must be done?

Important Traits: This game involves some combat, but having some kind of Protective discipline (either Line of Defense or Sphere of Protection) is key. Infectives only need one successful attack to kill an envoy. Having someone with a Tracking specialization is useful, too.

I've run this game with Basil "BB" Bottomley, Thomas Simpson, Miranda Chase, Genevieve Ashford, Rory Calhoun, and Miakoda Lawrence.

Major Menace: Jackson Palmer, an infective werewolf. Potentially a pack of infectives, if things go really off the rails.

Writer & Developer: Matthew McFarland

Editor: Maggie Carroll

SETUP

The Palmer Ranch outside of Winifred, Montana has been in the Palmer family for generations. The Palmers have a reputation for being insular and strange, and the less polite folks in the area even say they're inbred. The truth is that in 1944, Jackson Palmer returned to Winifred from France with a terrible secret — he had contracted lycanthropy.

Jackson was part of an Army unit fighting the Germans when his troop crossed paths with a German force in Normandy. In the middle of a tense cat-and-mouse in the forest, an infective werewolf pack arrived. They killed most of the soldiers, and infected a few survivors. Jackson, stronger of will than most of his fellows, managed to resist the Howling after he'd been bitten, and killed or drove off the beasts. Badly injured (but recovering well), he was sent home. All was well for nearly two years, until he heard wolves on the prairie, and then he Changed.

He bit his younger brother, Clyde, who Changed immediately and attacked their livestock. Jackson

managed to keep his brother from biting any other people, but realized that he had to be stopped. He shot Clyde out on the prairie and told their parents he'd fallen while climbing, and then buried him in the family plot. He then set about driving away or killing any wolves that came near the ranch.

Jackson has managed to keep his head, for the most part. He's only ever killed two other people besides his brother. One was a traveler named Miguel Aguillo, whose car broke down near the Palmer's fence. Jackson buried his bones under a tree near the southern edge of the Palmer property. The other was his grandniece Belle's boyfriend, Edgar Grace, who was sneaking onto the property to meet Belle. Jackson, roaming the ranch in wolf form, took his throat out. He fed Edgar's body to the pigs, but his bloody and shredded clothes are buried in a trash bag near the sties. Belle witnessed her boyfriend's death and hid. She didn't see Jackson change, but saw him coming to collect the body. He convinced her that Edgar's rich family would sue the Palmers and they would lose the ranch if the truth got out, so Belle has remained quiet. She shares Jackson's fear and hatred of wolves, though, since as far she knows, a wolf killed her high school sweetheart.

Currently living at the Palmer ranch are:

- Jackson Palmer (91, never married, no children, infective werewolf);
- Belle Ashton (45, never married, no children);
- Mila Palmer (nee Rodriguez, 48);
- Ryder Palmer (68);
- Jose Rodriguez-Palmer (26);
- Christopher Rodriguez-Palmer (24);

SAVE

Recently, a conservationist group tracking wolf movements through Montana noted wolf spoor near the Palmer ranch. They asked Jackson (now the patriarch of the Palmer clan) for permission to search his property, but he refused, saying that he killed any wolves he saw. He and Randy Jenner, one of the conservationists, got into a fight at a bar in Winifred. During the fight, Jackson nearly lost control, and threw Randy over a table (pretty impressive for a man of 91!). Randy, originally from Chicago and vaguely aware of the Unknown, contacted Thomas Simpson and told him what he'd seen. Simpson assembled a team.

The team arrives in Winifred after a series of puddle-jumper flights (unless someone wants to drive). Finding hunting gear isn't difficult, but anything high-tech is impossible to come by (there's a Wal-Mart about three hours north in the town of Christina). Wi-Fi is scarce in town; the bed-and-breakfast has it, as does the library, but most of the other businesses don't bother.

Winifred has a population of about 250 permanent residents. Most of them live in the town but commute to other towns to work, and the others are retirees. The town has shrunk considerably over the past few decades as most of the young people move away.



THE PALMER FAMILY

The Palmer Family Tree provided at the end of this scenario lists names, birthdates, and dates of death, but to put all these people in greater context, we've listed them here. Note that much of this information is readily available with a Research check, but it's not listed as vital clues because a lot of it doesn't really matter for purposes of this case. The information that *does* matter for the case is listed below under The Case, but in running this game, I've found that some groups get really into digging into the Palmer family history and it's handy to have answers to their questions.

Starting at the top, then:

Grace and Washington Palmer: Both moved to Montana from points east. Grace Palmer's maiden name was Milliner. Both died of natural causes, but most of their records are lost. They are both buried in the family plot on the ranch.

Emma Larkin (nee Palmer): The eldest child of Grace and Washington, she married a man from Butte (Steven Larkin). Larkin was an alcoholic and died of liver failure in 1970. He alienated both of their children (see below) along the way. Emma outlived him by nearly 25 years and died in hospice in 1995 of natural causes. She and Larkin are both buried in the family plot on the ranch.

Jackson Palmer: Discussed throughout the case.

Eldon Palmer: Third child of Grace and Washington. Married a woman named Mary Michaels and had two children (Michael and Amy). Both Eldon and Mary died of natural causes a few years back (2009 and 2007, respectively) and are buried in the family plot.

Clyde Palmer: Not quite 16 when Jackson Palmer returned from war and accidentally killed him as a werewolf. Buried in the family plot.

Jean Palmer: Youngest child of Grace and Washington. Died at age 4 of scarlet fever.

Mary Ashton (nee Larkin): Eldest child of Emma and Steven Larkin. Married Timothy Ashton, a local rancher. Timothy died when he was thrown from a horse (age 46). Mary and their daughter Belle moved in with Jackson and the Palmer family after Timothy's death. Mary died of cancer in 2014.

Belle Ashton: Child of Mary and Timothy Ashton; Jackon's grandniece. As a girl and teenager would frequently spend nights at the Palmer ranch. Traumatized by witnessing the death of her boyfriend, never married. Now manages the business affairs of the Palmer Ranch.

Ryder Palmer (nee Larkin): The youngest child of Steven and Emma Larker, Ryder moved to Arizona at age 18. He lived there for years, and eventually married a much-younger woman, Mila Rodriguez, and changed his name to Rodriguez-Palmer (but goes by "Ryder Palmer" in town) in order to spite his unpleasant father. When his mother died, he and his family moved back to Winifred to help run the Palmer Ranch.

Jose Rodriguez-Palmer and Christopher Rodriguez-Palmer: Sons of Ryder Palmer and Mila Rodriguez-Palmer. Both work on the Palmer Ranch.

Michael Palmer: Eldest child of Mary and Eldon Palmer. Never married, died in Vietnam at age 19. Buried in the family plot.

Amy Westin (nee Palmer): Younger child of Mary and Eldon Palmer. Married Bradley Westin, who was a doctor doing his residency in the hospital nearest Winifred. Both of them died in a car accident in 2010. Buried in the family plot.

Jennifer Westin: Older child of Amy and Bradley Westin; lives on the Palmer Ranch.

Lily Tavis (nee Westin): Younger child of Amy and Bradley Westin. Married John Tavis; they live in Billings.

Any details not supplied can be made up on the spot. If the PCs want to talk to extended members of the Palmer family, use your best judgment and the results of an Interview check. Everyone knows that Jackson Palmer is the head of the family, and speaks highly of him. Most of them know that Steven Larkin was an abusive drunk and that Emma Larkin's health and quality of life improved after he died, and that the Jackson unofficially adopted Ryder after Larkin died. Remember, though, that this is family dirty laundry, meaning that the family is unlikely to talk to the PCs without a good cover story (and probably a Communication check to grease the wheels, with at least a -20 modifier).

TIMELINE

Winter, 1944: Jackson Palmer's squadron, fighting Germans in France, stumbles across a pack of infective werewolves. Jackson is wounded, but survives without Changing.

Spring, 1944: Jackson Palmer returns home to Winifred, MT.

July 10, 1946: Jackson is out on the ranch with his brother at night when they hear wolves howling. Jackson Changes and bites his brother, Clyde, who also immediately Changes and slaughters some of their livestock. Jackson recovers his senses and shoots his brother dead. He tells his family that Clyde fell down some rocks and broke his neck, never allowing them to see the body. They bury him in the family plot the next morning, and the local authorities never question the story.

October 10, 1972: Miguel Aguillo is driving across the country when his car breaks down near the ranch border late at night. He crosses the fence to try and find help. In wolf form, Jackson attacks and kills him. After coming to his senses, Jackson buries Aguillo's bones under a small tree on the southern edge of the property and hides his car in a disused shed.

April 8, 1987: Edgar Grace (17), son of a wealthy family from Lewistown (about 40 miles south of Winifred), sneaks onto the Palmer Ranch at night to visit Belle Ashton (Ashton does not live there at the time, but visits frequently). Jackson, out roaming the property in wolf form, attacks and kills Edgar. Belle witnesses the attack and runs to get help, but Jackson beats her back to the house and tells her that he has already shot the wolf that killed Edgar. He convinces Belle that Edgar's rich family will sue the Palmers into poverty if they find out, and convinces her to stay quiet. He promises to bury Edgar with dignity, but instead feeds the body to the pigs and burns his clothes. He moves Edgar's car into the shed next to Aguillo's.

May 11, 2015: Randy Jenner, Leila Quincy, and Peter Diaz (three conservationists studying wolves and pack behavior) spot a pack of wolves slipping onto the Palmer Ranch through a gap in the fence along the southern border. They do not cross the fence, but set up camp on public land outside of town.

May 12, 2015: Leila contacts the Palmer Ranch and speaks to Belle Ashton, who very politely but firmly tells her that the conservationists are not welcome on the ranch. The conservationists decide to wait it out and make another attempt to reason with the Palmers.

May 13, 2015: Randy calls the Ranch and speaks to Jackson himself. Jackson tells him much less politely to go away, that he kills any wolves he finds. That evening, Randy, Peter, and Leila go to the local tavern. Randy, a bit drunk, mouths off about Jackson, and when he realizes Jackson is in the bar, becomes insulting and belligerent. Jackson grabs him by the collar and throws him over a table. Jackson's family (his nephew Ryder and his grandnephews Jose and Christopher are with him) quickly usher him out. Peter and Leila take Randy back to the campsite.

May 14, 2015: Randy contacts Thomas Simpson, his doctor in Chicago. *Start of case for the PCs.*

May 15, 2015: SAVE team arrives in Winifred, MT.

May 17, 2015: If not stopped, the conservationists sneak onto the Palmer Ranch after sundown, trying to track the wolves and drive or lure them out of the rank. Jackson finds them and attacks, infecting Leila, who quickly infects the other two.

May 17, 2015: The werewolves infect the other inhabitants of the ranch. Jackson, having lost control of his home, commits suicide with a shotgun, but the damage is already done.

THE CASE

TOWN & HISTORY

Palmer Family (Research): Note: Any Research check into the Palmer family history gets the PCs a copy of the Palmer Family Tree, regardless of the result. You might require separate Research rolls for different branches of the family or even different family members, depending on how many details you feel like making up and how long you want this case to take.

- False Lead: Mention Steven Larkin's death
 of liver failure in 1970 or the car accident
 in 2010 that killed Dr. Bradley Westin and
 Amy Weston. Neither of these events are
 especially significant to the case, but they
 make for interesting targets for conspiracyminded characters.
- Vital: The Palmer Ranch is the largest ranch in the area, and dates back to the 1920s. Jackson Palmer (b. 1924) is the oldest living resident of Winifred and owns the ranch. His closest kin are his nieces and nephews. He is a World War II veteran and received a Purple Heart in 1944.
- Interest: Belle Ashton, Jackson's grandniece, runs the day-to-day business of the ranch, signs paperwork, arranges for deliveries, and is functionally in charge. Ryder Palmer, his wife Mila Rodriguez-Palmer, and their sons Jose and Christopher work the ranch, along with some hired hands, depending on the season. Jennifer Westin, Palmer's grandniece through his younger brother Eldon, also lives on the property and works the ranch.
- Esoteric: Jackson's younger brother Clyde died in 1946, two years after Jackson came home from war. He, like most of the Palmers and their extended family who have passed on, is buried in a family plot.

Palmer Ranch (Research):

- *Vital:* Characters can easily get a map of the property from the county seat (in Lewistown, about a 45 minute drive), that indicates the borders of the ranch.
- Interest: The characters find permits for a garage and house to be built on the property, dated August 1970.
- *Esoteric:* Only the garage was ever built, but it is too far away from the other buildings to be useful.

Clyde's Death (Research or Interview):

- Vital: Clyde died in 1946, about a month before his 16th birthday. He was killed in an accident — he fell down a rocky embankment and broke his neck. His brother witnessed it but was unable to help him.
- *Interest:* Clyde was buried in the family plot the morning after his death.
- Esoteric: There is no autopsy or coroner's report — the death certificate and cause of death were all "per family."

Jackson Palmer's War Record (Research or Interview; requires some way to view military records):

- Vital: Jackson Palmer served in the Army, and was wounded in battle in France, in 1944.
 He was awarded a Purple Heart and granted a medical discharge.
- Interest: Jackson was the only member of his unit to survive that engagement. Reportedly his squad stumbled across a squad of German soldiers in a forest, and in the ensuing firefight most of them were killed.
- Esoteric: Jackson's wounds were initially listed as "mortal," but reports from later in the month note him walking and functioning almost normally.

Incident in the Bar (Interview): Note: Talking to locals about what happened in the bar carries a -20 modifier if the PCs identify themselves as being affiliated with the conservationists. If they come up with a plausible cover story as to why they're in town, they don't incur this penalty.

- Vital: There was a fight in the bar the other night when some punk kid got in Jackson's face about going onto his land to track wolves. Jackson shoved him and he lost his balance.
- Interest: Jackson is over 90 years old, but still very strong and vital. There's no way he pushed the kid that hard, though, so the kid must have been faking it and overdid it he flew over a table like he'd been thrown.
- Esoteric: Jackson's nephews, Chris and Jose, were holding him back from going after the guy, and maybe this was a trick of the light, but it looked like they were physically straining to do so.

RANCH AND SURROUNDING AREA

Conservationists (Interview):

- *Vital:* They followed a small pack of wolves to the southern edge of the Palmer Ranch. The wolves entered through a gorge below the fence, which allowed the wolves to walk from the road right onto the ranch.
- *Interest:* The conservationists have been scrupulously careful in choosing public land to camp on, cleaning up their space, and staying out of the way of locals as much as possible. They are aware they are not welcome.
- Esoteric: Leila has been known to trespass on private property in order to photograph or tag wolves.

Palmer Ranch, perimeter (Investigation): Note: Getting this information requires driving the perimeter of the ranch. The characters can narrow it down to where the wolves entered by talking to the conservationists first.

- *Vital:* The ranch is huge, and a wire fence runs around the entirety of the property. It is badly maintained, though, and damaged in places by trees and other vegetation. In particular, a large tree has grown through the fence on the southern edge of the property, and a small gorge has opened. This allowed the wolves to walk right under the fence, and climb up the side of the gorge (about 7 feet deep at most) onto the property.
- Interest: Characters find evidence of wolves entering the property — fur, tracks, etc.
 From another angle, a large shed is visible on the property. It has a heavy chain and a rusty padlock, and looks as though it has not been opened in years.
- *Esoteric:* The tree's root structure is visible in the earth wall on the side of the gorge, and something white is visible in the dirt. In another part of the perimeter, the characters can find the letters "BA + EG" carved in a tree with a heart around them; this carving is clearly decades old.

Palmer Ranch, old tree (Investigation): Note: Sensing the Unknown here carries a +10 modifier.

 Vital: A moment's digging reveals a human skeleton buried in the dirt. It was obviously buried under the tree several decades ago, and the tree grew up around it,

- eventually exposing the skeleton when the gorge opened. The skeleton belongs to an adult man.
- *Interest:* Bite marks on the arm and leg bones are consistent with the general shape of a wolf's mouth, but much bigger than a usual specimen.
- *Esoteric:* The corpse's spine is cracked where the head meets the neck, and the same teeth marks are visible. The wolf bit into this man's neck from behind and shook him like a rag doll, killing him.

Palmer Ranch, old shed (Investigation): Note: Sensing the Unknown here carries a +10 modifier. Getting into the shed requires appropriate tools and a Prowess check (or the Feat of Strength discipline), or some other clever method. Making too much noise might alert Jackson (see Running Big Sky).

- *Vital:* The shed contains two cars. One is a 1970s model Buick Skylark, the other is a 1987 Jeep Wrangler. Neither is operable; both have been sitting in this shed for many years.
- Interest: The license plates of both cars are gone, but the VIN numbers are still legible. If the PCs have a way to run them (Miranda Chase can do it, for example), they can learn that the cars belong to Miguel Aguillo and Edgar Grace, respectively.

OTHER

Werewolves (Research): Note: If the PCs contact SAVE for information, have the player roll against the character's Research T# or 50, whichever is higher.

- Vital: Werewolves are human beings that change into wolves. SAVE knows of two main "breeds." Inherent werewolves can only change under the full moon, and are immune to damage except from silver weapons. Infective werewolves can change at any time. One bite from an infective is enough to turn a person, and SAVE police is to terminate a bitten envoy immediately. (Since the players will check: The moon phase during the case is waning, and the half-moon has just happened.)
- Interest: Infective werewolves are vulnerable to conventional weapons, though they
 can take much more punishment than a
 normal animal.

 Esoteric: Infective werewolves are pack animals, and are forced to change when they hear their packmates' howls (normal wolf howls can also trigger the change, but SAVE doesn't know that).

Missing Persons (Research):

- *Vital:* The only significant missing persons case of the area is Edgar Grace, who disappeared in 1987. His family owned a factory in Lewistown, and was very wealthy. He vanished in April, leaving his home in the middle of night. He did not tell his family where he was going, and neither he nor his car has ever been found. He was declared legally dead in 1997.
- Interest: Edgar was dating Belle Ashton, whose family lived in Winifred, MT. The police interviewed Belle and her parents, but found no trace of Edgar on their property (other than his class ring, which he had given Belle some months before).
- Esoteric: Belle stayed with her uncle Jackson the entire summer after Edgar disappeared, and when her father died in 1989, she and her mother sold their land and moved onto the Palmer Ranch.

Miguel Aguillo (Research):

- Vital: Almost no information is available; Aguillo was driving cross country to meet up with his brother in Miami, and never made it. He left Seattle in late September 1972, but wasn't reported missing until mid-October.
- Interest: The last contact anyone had from him was in October 1972; he called his brother and reported that he was having car trouble and he hoped the car would make it.
- Esoteric: That call came from Christina, a few hours north of Winifred.

CONFRONTING THE UNKNOWN

The PCs have from whenever they arrived in Winifred on the 15th (probably in the evening, given travel time) until the night of the 17th to investigate, interview townsfolk, and perform research before anything significant happens. The conservationists stay out of town, meaning that the PCs can pretty easily claim they have nothing to do with "those hippies" if they want.

Jackson and his nephews go to the tavern every evening after they finish their day's work, so if the PCs wish to observe — or attempt to question — Palmer, they can do so. Of course, Jackson Palmer is not human, he is a creature of the Unknown, and that means that once he's aware that the PCs are investigating him, the CM should add a light chip.

From there, Jackson might use Hunter's Mark on a PC and attempt to drive them out of town. Jackson isn't really interested in killing anyone (though he's perfectly willing to do so; he's probably the most respected figure in town and the local authorities wouldn't even bother to try to search his land without very compelling evidence that something was wrong), but he does want to protect his own and he's aware that scrutiny would be catastrophic.

Killing Jackson is difficult — sneaking onto his property without being noticed is easy enough (the property is *huge*), but sneaking up on Jackson himself is nearly impossible. Starting a fight with him without using guns is suicide; he's quite capable of killing or infecting a whole team very quickly. Starting a fight *with* guns might summon his nephews, who are armed and willing to shoot trespassers (especially trespassers threatening their aged uncle!).

If the night of the 17th arrives and the PCs have not gotten the conservationists to leave or stand down, Leila leads them onto the ranch in search of the wolf pack. Jackson attacks them and infects Leila, who proves a much more willing recipient of the Unknown than Jackson ever was — she immediately infects Randy and Peter, and the next morning, infects the other inhabitants of the ranch. Jackson kills himself that morning (though if he's aware of the PCs, he might send them a message and tell them what has happened).

This is not a good outcome, of course, and if it happens, the PCs are probably best advised to leave Winifred and return with a larger team.

NPCS

BELLE ASHTON

STA: 30 **WPR:** 55 **REF:** 40

Specializations: None **Drive:** Protect her family

CHRISTOPHER & JOSE RODRIGUEZ-PALMER

STA: 70 **WPR:** 45 **REF:** 60

Specializations: Unarmed Combat (B85) Rifle (E90)

Drive: Make the ranch prosper

RANDY JENNER

STA: 60 **WPR:** 55 **REF:** 40

Specializations: Tracking B70, Zoology B70

Drive: Get out of town

JACKSON PALMER (INFECTIVE WEREWOLF)

EWS: 85 (Potent) **REF:** 65 **STA:** 70

Injury: Superficial, Minor -10, Serious -20, Major -30, Critical -50, Lethal

Disciplines: Hunter's Mark, Spook

Aspects: Deadly Attack (Serious; creature form only), Regeneration (creature form only), Shapeshifter, Sturdy (creature form only), Supernatural Speed (creature form only), Vigor (creature form only)

RUNNING BIG SKY

I've run Big Sky a bunch of times, and it goes differently every time. Once, the PCs snuck onto the ranch and shot Jackson while he was out alone. Once (when I only had two players) they decided it was too dangerous and that Jackson wasn't an active threat anyway, so they left down and headed to Billings to get a bigger team. The most surprising turn of events was the time that the envoys talked Jackson into accompanying them to the Den in order to get Belle out of harm's way (now, you know and I know that SAVE doesn't let infectives into the Den, but Jackson didn't know that and it was a one-shot anyway).

When running this case, take it slow. Let the envoys talk to people, investigate history, and use their time. If they let things get out of hand (that is, the conservationists get infected), then everything has truly gone wrong. If you want to run Big Sky as a much larger Chill event, it might be fun to have a ranch of infective werewolves slowly eating their way through Montana, but if you don't want that to happen, let the PCs talk Leila's group into hitting the road (Jenner is already leaning that way).

Also, be aware that Jackson can seem sympathetic. He's a werewolf, yes, but he makes a concerted effort to avoid killing people and he really only wants to protect his family land. However, it's important to remember exactly how rare and strange that is — Jackson is every bit as dangerous as any other werewolf, and his curse is one bad night away from spreading like wildfire.

When the PCs ask SAVE for information on werewolves (and they will), make sure to stress that infectives are terrifying and deadly (if someone is playing Rory and he calls his father for information, having his father beg Rory to leave this case alone and come home goes a long way to underline the gravity of the situation).

Finally, when portraying the townsfolk, don't fall back on stereotypical "we don't like your kind 'round here" portrayals. The locals are insular, yes, but they aren't necessarily xenophobic. They don't like the conservationists, but that's because the conservationists are here trying to rebuild the wolf population, and wolves kill livestock. If the PCs come into town with no coherent reason for being there, they'll be met with suspicion (the townsfolk are under no illusions as to how interesting their town is), but if they have a good story (once when I ran Big Sky, Miakoda Lawrence claimed to be looking to buy some ranch land), they can wind up earning folks' trust. That, of course, will heighten the dramatic impact when the envoys have to hunt down and kill one of the most beloved of the townsfolk.







ENVOY ACTIVATION NOTICE









SAVE Chicago

to: <Recipient List Blocked> +

(July 08, 2015, 8:23)

Envoy Thomas Simpson is assembling a team to investigate a strange occurrence in Winifred, MT. Simpson was contacted by a former patient (Randy Jenner, 29), who was in a bar altercation with a local rancher. The rancher, identified as one Jackson Palmer, refused Jenner and his conservationist crew admittance to the Palmer ranch. Jenner and his crew are tracking wolf movements through Montana, and evidence suggested wolf activity on the Palmer ranch. Palmer, according to Jenner, said that he killed any wolves he saw, and when the argument grew heated, Palmer threw Jenner over a table. Note that by local accounts, Palmer is over 90 years old.

You are to go to Winifred, MT (pop. ~250), interview Jenner, attempt to interview Palmer, and see if any Unknown activity is discernable on or around the ranch. If so, defer to Dr. Simpson's expertise on whether you can destroy the Unknown being(s) or whether more study is necessary.

Please report any updates to SAVE's Helena office.

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