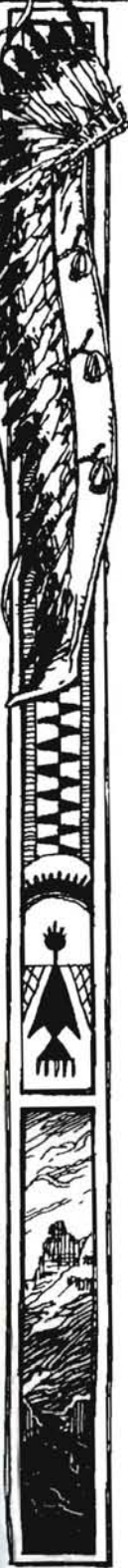
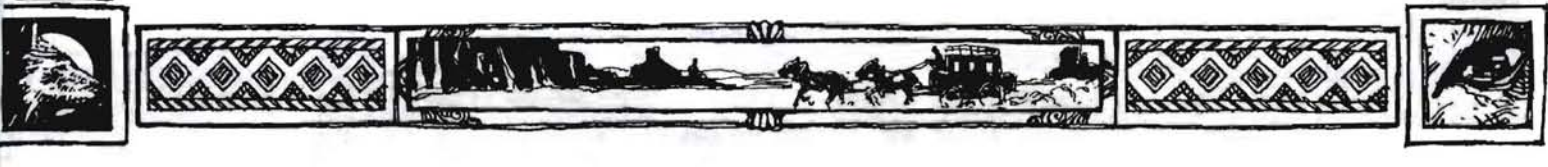


# THE WOLVES™

Sample file



**By Nancy Amboy, Andrew Bates, Richard E. Dansky, Steve Miller, Derek Percy, Ethan Skemp, John Wick and Fred Yelk**





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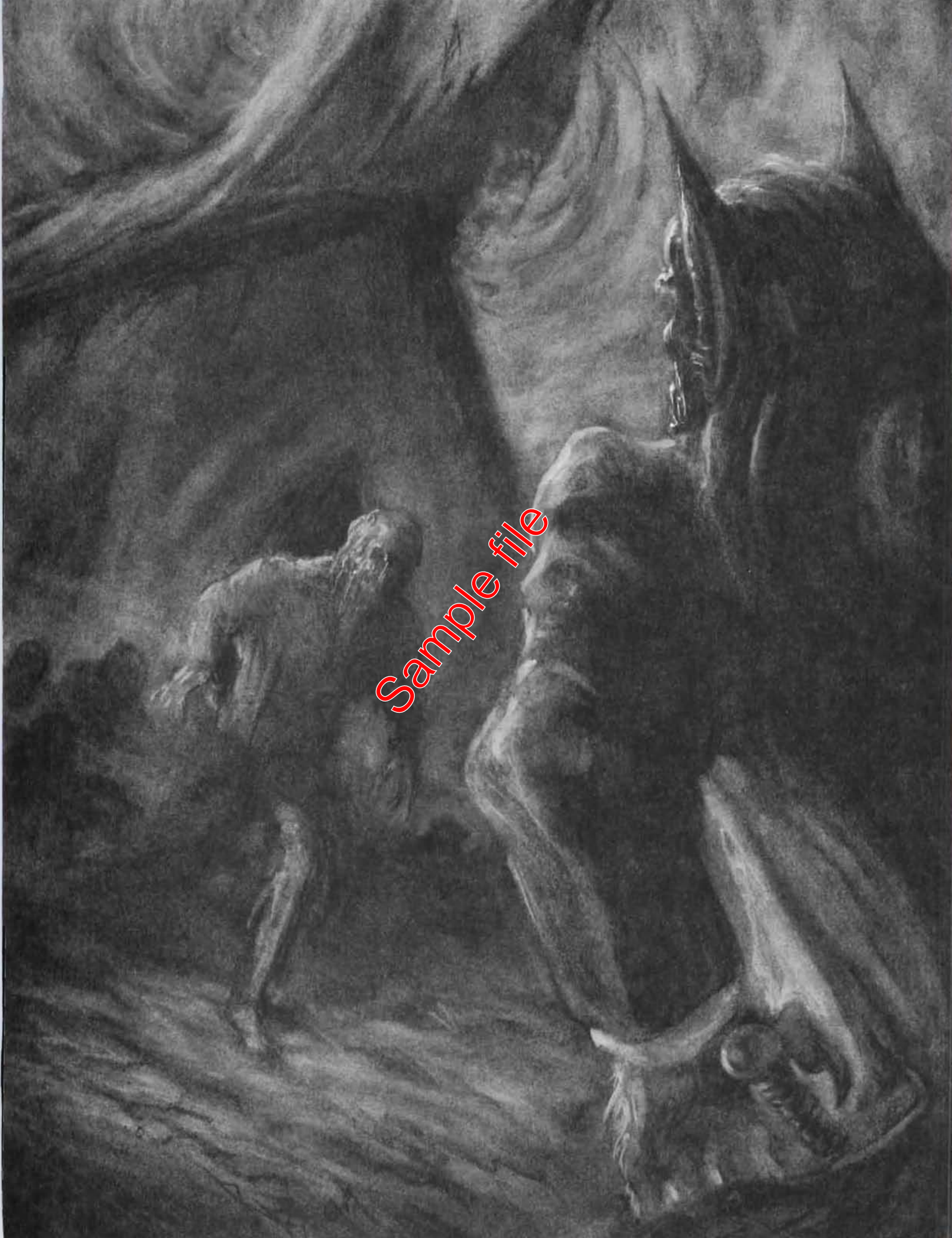


# GHOST TOWNS™

Sample file

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# LEGENDS OF THE GAROU

## Sheol Valley

Sample file



It was a bleak bastard of a valley, a barren slash through a rock mountain that left the few folks who'd seen it thinking of white bones and empty canteens. The least lucky of these were the worst off — they'd stayed. Too desperate, too weak or too stupid to move on to better land, those poor wretches settled in by the tiny trickle of a creek and started digging, hoping that there'd be gold or silver under the red-orange rocks. They'd never managed to leave.

Apart from the scattered, gray plank shacks that passed for houses, the only thing worth seeing in the valley was the church. It stood up on an outcropping above the other buildings, and the crimson light of sunset threw its steeple's shadow across the hollow like a knife wound. The white paint was covered with russet dust, and the clock — an odd feature for a church to have, with a barely visible spike preventing the minute hand from turning — was quiet as death. Almost. As for the rest of the valley, there wasn't a person stirring in the dry August afternoon.

So when the broken-down miner looked out the window and saw a stranger watering his horse in the meager creek, he was more than a little startled. But he licked his dry lips and called out to the stranger, and the stranger called back, and soon enough the miner was welcoming the newcomer into his tiny shack.


"There ya are," he said, gesturing to one of the rickety chairs. "Fraid I can't offer you that much; if I had a drink, I'd share it with you, but there ain't been a salesman out this way in months."

The stranger, whose clothes might've been new a month back, smiled and nodded. "Here," he said, drawing forth a flask and a pair of tin cups from his rucksack. "This one'll be on me."

The miner's eyes shone. "Well, that's mighty Christian of you." He gladly accepted a cup, and gulped down half the contents almost immediately.

"Careful, now," the stranger warned. "You want to make it last."





"Oh, you don't got to tell me such things," the worn miner sighed. "Got to make *everything* last 'round here. By the by, I'm Seth — and thank you for the drink. What brings you round here...?" The sentence trailed into a question.

"Hosea." He touched the brim of his hat. "I heard back in Purview you folks were having troubles, and I thought I'd maybe have a looksee."

Seth shook his head. "Gun for hire, then?"

Hosea smiled. "I have been known to let folks describe me as such."

"No offense, friend." The battered miner spread his hands. "But I daresay you won't find nobody you could shoot here, and nobody who could pay you for it. We're a poor town, and our problems ain't so easy to deal with."

"The word 'town' is a little generous," replied Hosea. "And as to the nature of your problem — well, I'm more curious than anticipatory."

A minute went by before either spoke, a minute in which both men looked each other over carefully. Finally, Seth said, "You a superstitious man, then?"

"Not the right word. Just curious." The chair creaked as the gunman leaned back and casually looked out the window, across to the church. The fading light shone from the polished handle of a revolver, just barely revealed by his shifting coat. "So tell me about this valley, Seth. Sheol. It means Hell, right?"

"Sure does, in Jewish or somethin'. I guess if you know that, you heard tell how this place got its name then."

Hosea shrugged. "Not from a local."

The miner sighed darkly. "You wouldn't. Ain't nobody been born here in the last thirty years that's managed to get out. Wolves, or something got a few that tried — all we found were their bones. Picked clean."

The lanky traveler poured a little more whiskey into the tin cup. "The story?"

A worn smile spread across the miner's features, and he nodded gratefully before downing half the liquor. "Well, t'ain't much to tell. The first folks to get here were about three or four families, who'd got lost over the winter. The valley seemed as good as any other at the time, I s'pose — couldn't tell the soil for the snow, and lots of places among the rocks to hide from the wind."

He sighed again, deep and slow. "T'weren't but a few who lived through to spring. And game's pretty scarce around here, so I wonder..." He trailed off, staring out the window. Then he shook his head quickly. "Well, never mind that. I heard that with more of the first folks here buried than living by spring, they were in no mood for callin' this place Pearly Gates or any sort. And with

no real resources for travelin', and not even any Injuns near to trade with, they had no chance of gettin' out. So they dug in, and haven't been able to get out since."

The gunman shifted in the chair, a thoughtful look on his face.

"Tell me about the church."

Seth's eyes darkened. "You *have* heard about this place."

Hosea's expression didn't change. "Humor me."

"Well, not too long ago, folks figured that we was just gonna up and die if nothin' were done about it. Didn't have merchants comin' round, nor enough money to buy drink even if they did. Needed *somethin'* to live for, and well — you don't see nothin' that inspires hope here, do you?"

"So they sent for a preacher. The one they got was a fiery fella, and had more than a little money from his daddy back East. He came ridin' at the head of a wagon train, all loaded down with wood and nails, and he set his men buildin' *that*." The old miner shook his head ruefully. "Set that big clock in the tower — was real insistent about that — and started a'preachin' almost 'fore the paint was dry. He was good 'nough — set you thinkin' thoughts of Heaven even though you was stuck here in Hell."

He paused, then, and shook his head. "The real trouble started up then, not too long after. Every night, 'round one in the morning, we started hearing things. First the clock'd strike, and then... I don't want to say." His gaze strayed out the window, then came back to settle on Hosea. "And seeing things... God strike me blind if I lie, but the church wall started *bleeding* then. Every night. It was *real*, too. I know 'cause I took a light out once and got a good look." He shuddered. "We began shuttin' ourselves inside our shacks then. The preacher was the only one who'd dare to go outside at night, and we'd hear him a yellin' and hollerin' at the top of his lungs, tellin' them haints to go on back to Hell and leave us alone. Clancy even shimmied up the steeple once and spiked the clock so it wouldn't reach one. The preacher tore out the spike the next mornin', and chided us all for cowards."

He took a breath, and then his voice came out very low. "I ain't one to say for sure, and you'll probably laugh in my face for this, but the last we heard from that preacher, he was goin' on about walkin' bones. Swear it on my daddy's grave."

He screwed up his face mournfully. "But that was it for him, though. He took what little silver there was right out of the poorbox, melted it down and cast it into bullets." He chuckled miserably. "And he went up the side of the mountain jest past midnight, and we all heard him a'shootin' — and that was the last of him. Never