

BROTHERHOOD OF BELIAL



As the state capital and a crucial rendezvous for Union troops during the Ore War, Augusta is a major city in Maine. With a regular steamboat service along the Kennebec River and the heavy railroad passing through each day, the city is a shining example of Union industrial modernity and prosperity. Despite its rapidly growing population and frequent transient visitors, the lawmen of the municipal police force are faced with a surprisingly low crime rate that can be dealt with at a leisurely

pace. That is until the winter of 1873 when the Shadow War came to Augusta.

A wave of vicious crimes swept the city leaving a bloody trail of destruction in their wake. Murders, beatings, rapes, and numerous muggings were perpetrated by what appeared to be a gang of cutthroats and outlaws. More brutal acts were committed in the first three weeks of the spree than had been recorded in the previous three years. Worse still, the gang proved to be incredibly elusive

despite the best efforts of Marshall Jim Dugan. With a string of commendations to his name from his time in Chicago, Jim had expected to break the gang within a week. But three months later, the lack of a breakthrough was really beginning to take its toll on the Marshall and his posse.

Reports from surviving victims were confused and outlandish, often sounding more like something from a dime novel or a Wild West campfire tale. Accounts alternated between the attackers being hulking, inhuman brutes while others claimed that the attackers simply vanished after striking. Oliver Driver, the force's dog handler, was added to the posse along with two faithful hounds in the city's service. Even the highly talented noses of Storm and Shadow were unable to get a trace on the perpetrators of these ghastly crimes. In the face of mounting public pressure, Jim desperately needed results.

Marshall Dugan followed a hunch that led him and his posse to a set of abandoned freight houses on the banks of the Kennebec River. A lead had put five of the initial crimes in that area and Jim wondered whether the gang was had been operating further afield over time. Sure enough, with his team in tow, Dugan finally discovered the gang had been using a rotting attic as their hideout. It was unsurprising, with the stairs having long disintegrated and the attic completely inaccessible, that the location had been overlooked in the initial investigation.

Bursting into the hideout, the lawmen stumbled across the suspects enacting some sort of bizarre ritual. Candles covered the floor and walls; blood was daubed on the rotten floorboards in intricate patterns. In the horror and confusion, Florence Delany fired a burst from her Thompson rotor gun and all hell broke loose. Officers Flack and Marquez managed to put down

a few of the fleeing outlaws while Delany continued to spray the room. A round from Marquez's rifle struck an RJ cannister, causing it to explode and the warehouse was engulfed in flames. In the ensuing firefight, not a single member of the gang emerged from that warehouse alive. The injured and the dead were consumed by a raging fire that devoured the structure. Despite the loss of life and property destruction, the crimewave that had gripped Augusta was ended that night and commendations for Marshall Dugan and his posse were readily given by the mayor.

But it is a fool who thinks that an ancient power like the chiropteran god Belial would not punish those who slaughtered their acolytes and disrupted their rituals. From that moment, every member of Jim Dugan's posse was tainted by Belial and marked as his playthings. Each of the officers was cursed to only exist as things shifting in form. Most of the time they remained as bitter and haunted versions of the people that they once were. But at other times it amused Belial that they would transform into his likeness - fang mawed and winged limbed nightmares. At first, these transformations were uncontrolled and painful, but over time many of the Augusta police learned to control this dark secret shame. Though irrevocably changed and facing the certainty of a lonely and monstrous death one day, the posse still hoped to use their newfound strength and abilities in the line of duty to try to serve their city. Such is not the purpose of the Bat God, however, and as the lawmen under Jim Dugan's command respond to criminality with their newfound preference for brutality and lethal force, they unwittingly continue to carry out Belial's great plan in the Shadow War.