

# The Town of Summerville

A Web Enhancement for Teenage Hotrod Werewolves From Mars!

BY COREY REID

Summerville is the default setting for THWFRM! It contains all the wonderful cliches of the various genres that make up the game, conveniently situated in comfortable sunny California. This web enhancement describes each region of Summerville, listing the notable spots and key individuals in each. Additionally, the end of this enhancement includes a recommended viewing list.

If you are a player in THWFRM!, you shouldn't read this. So stop. Game masters, hang around. Smack your players on the head if they won't leave.

## Summerville Overview

Why are so many monsters and nutcases living in one small town? Well, why should big cities get to have all the fun?

Depending on how humorous you want your game to be, the townsfolk of Summerville could be blissfully unaware of the monsters in their community, maintaining that constant 50's TV show-esque belief that the world is 'normal.' Or, in a more serious game, some villainous group may have infiltrated the town, taking pains to erase the memories of anyone who sees too much. This is, of course, not a government

organization, because the government can be trusted.

Key figures in the community are given Impassioned Plea (IP) modifiers. If the characters have that figure on their side when they make an Impassioned Plea to the Townsfolk (using the Diplomacy skill), they gain the listed modifier.

## The High Woods

Up here is where nasty creatures usually end up hiding if they're looking for a little isolation. The High Woods are a line of bluffs that overlook Summerville and are covered in thick forest, suitable for hiding all sorts of unpleasantness. Rumours has it that old rumrunners used to hide bodies up here, and of course this is where the fast kids go to prove their courage.

## Notable Spots

Lover's Leap is the cliff that overlooks the ocean. This high bluff, out of sight of the town itself, is topped with a wide clearing that's well-known for the daredevil car races and stunts that the bad kids exult in. There's plenty of side roads heading up here, many of which pull into secluded lanes

that overlook the twinkling lights of the town and offer romantic hideaways for out-past-curfew teens. At least one of these side roads leads to an overgrown altar erected nameless ages ago, consisting of three flat-topped boulders, each as high as a man and twice as broad, forming a hallowed site for certain rituals long forgotten. Forgotten by everyone, that is, except **Crazy Herman** (IP -4), the old man who camps up in these woods. Every so often, Herman's neurons line up and he remembers the rituals and the spells that drove him mad in the first place. If unsavoury folk from out of town were looking to conduct such rituals, they'd probably start by grabbing Herman.

The Summerville Planetarium sits at the top of one of the bluffs. This dome-topped structure offers instructive courses on astronomical science, and often features guest lecturers (usually from some little-known European principality, speaking with odd accents and studying the wholesome cheerleaders in a matter not at all reassuring). The facility is run by **Doctor Adolph Engelborg** (IP +1), a German scientist who offers a public facade of pleasing civility. Of course the complex equipment in the Planetarium offers concealing cover for other, less educational gear. Doctor Engelborg has created a computer here of Top-Secret power, and is working to breed a new super-race of human beings. Every graduating class, a few kids disappear, yanked into the bowels of the Planetarium and Doctor Engelborg's fiendish clutches.

Corman's Farm, a secluded, scraggly old homestead at the foot of the High Woods, offers invading space aliens a convenient entry point. It's isolated, it's shunned by locals, and it's manned by a figure already

considered insane by most people in town, so any ranting about Martians is likely to be disregarded. **Old Man Corman** (IP -2) used to be a millionaire, but lost all his money (and his family, too - though nobody talks about that much) and retired to this run-down farm. It's not much of a farm, and every so often Corman comes into town to buy a few supplies. Of course, lately he's been looking a little strange. Sort of stiff. And he mentioned something not computing.

## Downtown

The center of town, Downtown is what most people think of as the "real" Summerville. Shops and business offices mix with simple houses and a couple of apartment buildings. There's a few stoplights but traffic is light and the roads wide and usually untroubled by screeching tires and revving engines. Except when flying saucers descend and begin disintegrating citizens.

## Notable Spots

The Summerville Courthouse also serves as the civic operations building, housing the mayor's office and the police station. This stately marble structure provides a reassuring presence to the law-abiding folk of Summerville, and an easy target for rapacious mutant insects. This is always an easy place to find **Mayor Sheffield** (IP +3) or **Sheriff Walter "Dub" Taylor** (IP +2). Mayor Sheffield does not like to be bothered by non-voting citizens, and Sheriff Dub hates kids in general, claiming they are the main troublemakers of town.

**Dr. Mineo** (IP +1) has an office not far from the river, behind a neat picket fence. Dr. Mineo is a kindly man who provides most of the basic health care for the town, delivering children, making house calls, and no doubt rescuing kittens from time to time. He's known as a man who actually listens to kids, and is a good starting point for rallying Townsfolk.

The Blue Moon Drive-In is where to go for either a quick bite or a serious meeting with the other kids. "See you at the Blue Moon" is a common refrain among teenagers, and the drive-in is an important part of the Summerville social scene. There's always a half-dozen roadsters pulled up here, and challenges thrown back and forth can turn into an impromptu race up to Lover's Leap, where all issues of teenage courage are settled. Unfortunately the Drive-In is run by **Mildred Pierce** (IP +2) a cranky old woman who doesn't take no back-talk from kids these days.

St. Ithaca Church is an elderly building on a quiet street, tended by **Pastor Williams** (IP +1). The Pastor is a friendly, middle-aged man who is, to tell the truth, rather gullible. So gullible, in fact, that he is unconcerned that the out-of-town visitors (from the congregation in Grover's Mill, New Jersey, he's been told) who are living in the basement of the church never seem to take their dark sunglasses off, and talk to each other with a strange clicking sound.

## East Point

East Point is the oldest part of Summerville, with aging frame houses and overgrown property. The Summer River winds

through here, slow and lazy as it approaches the shore. The streets are narrow and often just dirt or only partially paved.

## Notable Spots

Along the riverbank rises Arness Hospital, where the ill and elderly of Summerville are taken care of. This institution is overseen by **Doctor Phyllis Coates** (IP +3), a stern, no-nonsense woman who views teenagers as dangerous delinquents, all of them. Her influence at the hospital is counteracted to some degree by **Nurse Joan Taylor** (IP +1), who is the Sheriff's beloved daughter (which probably makes her a likely candidate for abduction). There's a patient at the Hospital, in room 406, who's been unconscious since she was brought in. Her pulse is very strange, and Doctor Coates is unable to explain the strange bluish cast to her skin. She seems stable enough, however, and really, how could the Doctor know that this patient is an emissary from Planet Zargon, who will awake when the time has come to deliver her message?

Up on the hill that overlooks the beach lurks the Old Arkoff House, long abandoned. The Old Arkoff House is a favoured location for teens to prove their courage by sneaking inside and making off with a left-behind curio. Lately, however, that traditional feat has gotten even more dangerous, now that a Fungus Monster has moved into the basement of the house. Its spores travel up through the floorboards and infect unsuspecting teens, who then go home and infect their parents, and throughout Summerville happy families sleep, unaware that their brains are being converted into

fungus slaves, ready to prepare the world for the coming of the Mushroom Men.

Fort Harryhausen, over on the shore across from the beach, is a military base where a variety of research and experimentation is conducted. The commanding officer is **Major Fred Sears** (IP +1), a serious-minded, unimaginative officer who is nevertheless brave and steadfast in the face of danger. There's always a variety of things going on over at the Fort. Operation SkyLook is run by **Doctor Russell A. Marvin** (IP 0), and is an ongoing effort to establish an orbital telescope that will be able to take pictures of the dark side of the moon (don't think about the astrophysics too much, please). This project has garnered unwelcome attention from the Moon Monsters, who don't want their privacy (and nefarious plans) interfered with. And of course the top test pilot at Harryhausen, **Captain Gary Conway** (IP +1), has seen things in the upper atmosphere where he flies his X-37 experimental rocket plane. What things? We're sorry, that's classified.

Alongside the beach lie the twisted, rusting scaffold of the Abandoned Midway. Once a vibrant and dazzling display of electrical entertainment, this depressing stretch of fenced-off ground offers nothing but useless hunks of metal and rotting wood. Occasionally kids venture in here looking for sport, but it lacks the tantalizing spookiness of the Old Arkoff house, is much harder to get around in, and is generally damp, dingy, and stinky, so for the most part it is left alone. This suits **Doctor Siodmak** (IP -2) just fine, as it affords him complete privacy as he completes his "Towering Colossus" in the secret underground labora-

tory he's hollowed out beneath the midway. Of course he draws a significant amount of power, and every now and then the midway weirdly lights up at night.

## Riverside

The quieter, less excitable part of Summerville, Riverside looks like it was built by a television crew. Rambling ranch houses and well-groomed yards are the norm here, and the streets fill with the buzz of lawnmowers every Saturday. It's a fine place to raise a family.

## Notable Spots

Near a bend in the Summer River, tucked away from the day-to-day business of Summerville, one finds the Bradbury Cemetery, a neatly-kept garden surmounting a low hill that looks across the river at the High Woods and the Planetarium. Row after row of crosses and tombstones keep memory of the dearly departed. The Cemetery is maintained by **Leo Carroll** (IP -1), a cantankerous old man with a wicked temper. Leo's prone to letting off blasts from his shotgun in order to discourage trespassers, and as such, the cemetery is undisturbed by hooligans and other such rabble. Leo's shotgun, however, has not discouraged the Cerebrium Ants that, having been exposed to radiation, have developed super-human hive intelligence and are busily developing their nest beneath the graves of the cemetery.

The M. Landon High School, one of the social centers of town, is situated on a busy road along which hot-rodders tool their

prized vehicles to show off in front of their peers. The stern but kind-hearted principal, **Miss Mara Corday** (IP +2) tries to keep her charges out of trouble, but she remembers her own younger days and is sympathetic to the plight of the kids. And should aliens threaten, count on Miss Corday to stand tall against the bug-eyed menace.

The Summerville Train Station is not much more than a bare platform with a hut where tickets can be purchased. But there's a siding across the trestle bridge that seems to always have a few unmarked boxcars. Across the tracks (need we point out that this is the *wrong* side of the tracks?) the houses are notably smaller, the yards not at all groomed. Many houses have their windows shuttered year-round, the doors always locked. Who knows what might be going on behind those locked doors?

And who knows what strange energies have leaked forth from the Summerville Experimental Power Station? This top-secret facility is absolutely off-limits to all civilians – and most everyone else, too. All anyone can guess is that the facility must always be kept extremely cold, because workers leaving from their shifts are sometimes seen wearing heavy coats. Every worker at the power station is middle-aged and single, and they all live alone somewhere on the wrong side of the tracks. Armed guards protect the facility, where **Professor Kevin McCarthy** (IP 0) holds the highest authority. Many secret science projects are hatched, incubated, and assembled under the Professor's intense gaze. Professor McCarthy seeks nothing less than to save the Earth. He is convinced that current consumption levels will doom the hu-

man race unless drastic measures can find newer, cheaper sources of energy. To that end he is willing to make any sacrifice – especially of others.

## Adventure Ideas

Here are a number of seeds to get you started developing your own *Teenage Hot-Rod Werewolves From Mars!* game.

**Meow Mixer.** It's football season again and time to prove that every dog (or wolf) has his day, but when going up against a rival high school our heroes find out that these cats have claws. Worse, the local girls are starting to swoon for the captain of the other team, who has his own rock and roll band.

**Voyage of the Dumbed.** Too much television rots the brain so they say, but the local townsfolk start to look a little more zombified than those Leave it to Beaver episodes might justify. Then, last weekend when they showed reruns, the only thing that kept one of the PC's parents from going to the television station to complain was a flat tire. On Monday, half the teachers did not show up for school. So really, is it worth looking into?

**Woolly Bully.** A tough new werewolf on the block is causing trouble for your own furry heroes. He forms a rivalry with the PCs, then rats them out to the sheriff when they try to sneak out to the school library for late night research. But why was a bully like him hanging out at school after curfew?

**Mars Needs Women.** Waitress at the local malt-shop disappears. Little green men spotted in the vicinity. Film at eleven.

**Hills Are Alive.** A local family, the

Hills, who were thought to have recently perished in a freak meteor accident, are seen to be somewhat more mobile than anticipated, and the respected Dr. Mineo has been on a spending spree in the downtown hardware stores. The town's Hall of Records will show that the good Dr. Mineo was young Maggie Hill's godfather.

**Down On The Pharm.** Some friends of the local lycanthropes have suddenly started exhibiting some rather disturbing behavior. Could a recent rash of break-ins at the town pharmacy possibly have anything to do with it? Who knew aspirin was so useful for rocket fuel?

**Pianos From Heaven.** It's a county-wide yard sale when people wake up to find their possessions scattered across town, ruining many well-tended lawns. Could that loud buzzing noise everyone heard in their dreams have anything to do with it? Good thing the school's yearly field trip to Arness Hospital went by the mental ward, or else you wouldn't have heard that poor woman screaming about the 'gnomes.'

## Essential Viewing

There are three films that form the core of Teenage Hot-Rod Werewolves From Mars! Provided here for your pleasure and education are brief reviews of those three films.

### Earth vs. The Flying Saucers

Earth vs. The Flying Saucers is an iconic film. You'll recognize at least half-a-dozen moments or devices from this movie that have been replicated over and over again through the succeeding decades. You'll for-

give us if we refrain from summarizing the plot, since the title does such an admirable job. There's the Earth. There's the Flying Saucers. They fight.

This is not only the *type* but the *actual* movie that Mars Attacks is spoofing – much of the latter movie is nothing but jokey updates to sequences from this film.

And it has to be said that EvTFS deserves a certain amount of spoofing. It's big silly fun, and you know, either you like movies where "oscillating sonic rays" smoke UFO flying systems, or you don't. We, fortunately, fall firmly into the former camp, and as such, EvTFS delivers a variety of pleasures.

Hugh Marlowe's somewhat constipated performance is among those joys. He gives us a no-edges-smoothed, no-depth-required Heroic Scientist, more than up to the job of delivering Planet Earth from fearsome space aliens. This is a performance without a single wasted breath. One suspects, without a single wasted take. Marlowe has his "worried about the future" frown and he puts it to good use throughout this film as he, er, worries about the future.

Yeah, yeah, flying saucers destroy Earth landmarks. Ray Harryhausen handles the special effects – and again, either you love stop-motion or you don't. This stuff was probably a lot more convincing 50 years ago, but if you can let go of your "it looks fake" issues, there's a lot of inventiveness and fun to be had watching landmarks get demolished by flying saucers.

Of course it looks fake. It *is* fake. Fifty years from now, people will be shaking their heads, wondering how anyone sat through obviously fake stuff like Independence Day. It's just fake with a message. And that mes-

sage appears to be, "People who aren't like us are *bad*. Make them crash and die."

Well, it's the 50's in America.

## I Was A Teenage Werewolf

For me, Michael Landon has forever been "Pa" from *Little House on the Prairie*. For my mom, he's "Little Joe" from *Bonanza*. I understand he is also known to many as "John Smith" from *Highway To Heaven*. But before all of these, he was "Tony Rivers" – *The Teenage Werewolf*.

The movie opens with a great fight scene in which we find our hero losing his temper and causing trouble – again. Stern lectures from kind-hearted police detectives don't seem to have much effect, either, and pretty soon Tony finds himself strong-armed into seeing a "head-shrinker," Dr. Alfred Brandon.

Brandon is thrilled with the opportunity. He recognizes Tony's short temper as a kind of evolutionary throwback, and far from trying to cure the boy, he sets about trying to encourage the violent and animalistic tendencies of his unsuspecting patient. Bad, and hairy, things predictably ensue.

*I Was A Teenage Werewolf* starts out great. That first fight scene, as mentioned before is a doozy. Not a swooping-camera-wire-fu-we-trained-for-six-months kind of doozy but a this-one-guy-over-here-is-really-honestly-trying-to-beat-the-brains-out-of-this-other-guy-over-there kind of doozy. It's a wincer. People get hurt. It's raw and it's real and as a set-up, it's all kinds of good.

The characterization of Tony is well-observed. In one sense the film is a kind of "Make sure you behave, kids!" sort of mes-

sage, but it also provides some very subversive ideas – "Don't trust the solutions your parents try to force on you because they'd rather you were dead than disobedient and hairy."

There's a scene involving a lathesome gymnast that forms the "horror" highlight of the movie and rather unfortunately, things go sharply downhill from there on. But until then, this is a fine little movie given heart by some earnest performances and a quick story-telling style that keeps everything moving along well.

## Rebel Without A Cause

That James Dean, he sure could act. And in this fine melodrama, he's put up next to greats like Sal Mineo and Natalie Wood (and watch for a *very* young Dennis Hopper), and the result is real magic. This is *Happy Days* with edge, greasers, and hot-shots mixing it up and trying to grow up surrounded by parents and authority figures who just won't understand.

Teen angst has never been so romantic. And it's been plenty romantic through the years, but this is where it peaks.

Lots happens in this movie. Knife fights, games of chicken on cliff edges, death, terror, and mistaken identity all collide, held together by teenage threads of friendship and desire. Some desires can't be repressed, and only destruction can see us through sometimes.

This film prefigures nearly everything we think about teenagers and adolescent life. The need for fellowship among one's peers, the alienation from parents and authority, the despair and recklessness – it's all here. Teenage life has been a rich line of ore in

movie history, but this is one of the purest nuggets you'll ever find.

And man, can James Dean act. Seriously, folks ain't lying when they say that.