Dogs in the Vineyard

The shopkeeper from Back East? His wife isn't really his wife. He's the procurer and she's the available woman. Their marriage is a front.

Your brother's son, your nephew, is fourteen years old. He's been stealing money from his father, your brother, and taking it to visit this woman.

Your brother is in a bitter rage, humiliated by his son's thievery and grieving his son's lost innocence.

He's going to shoot her.

What do you do?

Dogs in the Vineyard is a Western Roleplaying Game about God's Watchdogs, young men and women called to preserve the Faithful in a hostile frontier territory. You play one of these Watchdogs and your duty is to travel between the Faith's isolated congregations - its branches - and hold the Faith together. You'll face danger, sin, betrayal; you represent God's judgement and God's justice directly; you'll root evil out and act as judge, jury, and if needed, executioner.

You have a badge of office: a long coat, colorful, beautiful, hand-pieced and quilted by your friends and family back home. To you, it recalls their love and your duty; to others, it's a powerful symbol of your authority.

Starting Watchdogs are all young men and women at the end of their teens or the beginning of their twenties. They've just spent two months or more in training, education and ceremony to prepare them for their duties. They know one another, although they didn't necessarily choose one another as companions. They are, to a one, unmarried virgins. They're allowed to travel mixed and unchaperoned, because of the strength of their devotion and duties.

The Prophets & Ancients of the Faith have formulated Doctrines that the Faithful must follow, unless a Dog has ruled otherwise. Doctrine describes the eight major Sins as Violence, Sex, Deceit, Disunity, Blasphemy, Apostasy (False Worship), Worldliness and Faithlessness. But the King of Life is also pragmatic, and allows those He has deemed worthy to judge exceptions to Doctrine in order to preserve the Faith as a whole. This is the job of the Watchdogs.

Every Watchdog has a mandate from the King to give judgement on individual cases and can take whatever steps are necessary to preserve the faith of a branch. But Watchdogs only rule on a case-by-case basis; so, for example, as Doctrine says that homosexual marriage is wrong, it is wrong for everyone - except those the Dogs have married because they have special dispensation. If a Dog kills someone in cold blood, it is because the King of Life wanted it. This is important: Every decision, every action that a Faithful Watchdog makes is the will of the King of Life, no matter what the Dog does. Dogs act on behalf of the King of Life; if anyone has a problem, they can take it up with Him.

This is important, because Watchdogs must find and deal with Sin everywhere they find it, as the presence of Sin opens a community to attacks from Demons. Since demons are non-corporeal, the demonic attacks take various material forms, some subtle, some overt. The demons might isolate the community, endanger its survival, exacerbate its injustices, cause sinners to prosper, or oppress the community's Faithful. Watchdogs are all instructed in the proper Ceremony to control, bind or exorcise these Demons, but should also be mindful to remove the Sin, lest more Demons arrive.

Those who use Ceremony incorrectly, or just through their Sinful ways, attract the attention and obedience of the Demons. That's called Sorcery, and those who do it can command the Demons to help them, do their bidding, and possess people. Sorcery will eventually lead to hate and premeditated murder, which is the demons' ultimate goal.

Dogs in the Vineyard uses a simple, yet unique, 'raise & see' dice-pool mechanic that can resolve a gunfight, an argument, or something that goes from one to the other, in a dramatic manner, encouraging great description as it does so.

Dogs in the Vineyard is a small press publication from Lumpley Games. Visit the official website at http://www.septemberquestion.org/lumpley/dogs.html.