

That Refreshing Taste

[\[The Day After Ragnarok\]](#)

Lt. Commander John Austin (USN) has been given an assignment by the Warren administration: put a team together, go to the ruins of Atlanta, and extract the formula for Coca-Cola. Why? Well, it's kind of complicated.

The short version is this: snakebite, post-Serpentfall, has stopped being a nasty, yet rare cause of injury and death and is now instead a very nasty, and hideously common, cause of death and injury. Couple that with the now unquestionable existence of magic and folklore in the world -- there's a giant Serpent head literally crushing Egypt, for any skeptical materialists still out there -- and it's natural that researchers are now going to see if any of the old folk remedies still work. And they do! At least, they at least work better.

One of those cures are mangroves. Turns out that the seeds now are in fact fairly good at ameliorating the effects of snake venom. Black mangrove is also adapting well to the changed conditions from the Serpentfall: it's even thriving in Texas and Florida, despite the colder whether. Better and better, if you mix cooked mangrove

seed slurry with a particular type of sugar syrup and water, the stuff is nigh-miraculously good at stopping and curing all forms of snakebite, including the supernatural variants. The catch? The syrup's got to be Coca-Cola. Nothing else works as well, or really at all.

No, nobody knows why. Worse, Coca-Cola syrup is by now almost impossible to acquire, because the company sold only the concentrate, and kept firm hold of the formula. Researchers have been trying to reverse engineer the composition, but they've yet to have any success. If the US government is going to restart up production then it's going to need that original formula, and that's just the end of it. Fortunately, people know *where* the formula is: it's in the vaults of the Trust Company Bank of Atlanta. Unfortunately, supposedly Atlanta burned to the ground in the winter of 1945. Then again, bank vaults are rather famously designed to be impervious to fire, and who would want to loot a syrup recipe, anyway?

Thus Commander Austin's team. They'll be launching out of Texas -- sectarian issues aside, both California and Texas agree that everybody needs this formula, or at least all the various factions of the US government do -- and will make their way along the Gulf of Mexico until they can get a quick run into Atlanta. Austin expects to be dodging

Mexican Sinarquistas, their Imperial Japanese allies, and the resurgent Klan (all of whom Austin more or less loathes equally), plus of course the usual swamp monsters, cannibal tribes, strange micro-cultures, warlords, and just plain deranged lunatics. And that's just getting to Atlanta. Assuming that the formula is there, getting it back will be another slog. Austin is thus looking for anybody tough enough, smart enough, and crazy enough to survive the Drowned Coast and Poisoned Lands. He won't be picky otherwise.

As for pay? A lifetime supply of Mangrove Coke, if the expedition succeeds. Given how many giant poisonous snakes there are out there right now, this is not at all a bad deal. And one that gives the party a certain impetus to succeed.

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