

## **Jennifer's second Ravenloft Campaign**

### **Introduction**

In 2006 (so long ago) I started a new Ravenloft campaign, my second serious campaign in this setting. The campaign is still running and we have gamed together for a very long time. Unfortunately I don't have as much time for this campaign as I would like. My son was born in January 2007, I started working full-time in October 2007 and my daughter was born in August 2009. This all eats into my spare time, so regrettably I can't put as much time into this campaign as I did in the previous one. So for this campaign I opted to use more published adventures and information about NPC's in the worlds of Ravenloft, in the hope that this would save me some time.

This is a second edition campaign, mainly because I am too lazy and cheap to invest time and money in learning and buying the rules for the 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 3.5<sup>th</sup> ed. or the 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (it is true what they say about the Dutch).

This campaign is set in 735 BC and further. I wanted to experiment with running the players through the adventures leading up to the Grand Conjunction. I had two reasons for this, I liked to get to know some more about the early history of Ravenloft and I also heard many good things of these adventures on the Fraternity site.

The campaign starts in Martira Bay in Darkon. This is to contrast it with my earlier campaign, which started in the backwater of Potter's Field in Mordent. Darkon is a much larger domain, a grand player in the political scheme of things and Martira Bay is a large, modern city with many peoples from different backgrounds. The memory-problems of Darkon gave me some trouble, but I think I managed to work around them.

### **Characters**

Not all the players had extensive experience with Ravenloft, so I took some time to explain the nature of the setting to them and encouraged them to write an extensive background for their character. I even used the "Champions of the Mists" to give them an extra kit next to their character class.

#### **Herman Superior – played by Daniël**

Herman Superior (30) is a wild-mage/pistoleer. He is a son of the middle-class Superior family with delusions of his own coolness. He would like to be a powerful mage, but lacks the discipline for the hard study this requires. He has made a career of cutting corners by becoming a wild-mage. This allows him to cast powerful spells, but with unpredictable results. Since he wants to protect himself if one of these results comes back to bite him, he has also invested some of his money in his two guns, he named them Rachel and Vera.

Herman's delusions of coolness make him think he is quite a ladies' man and he spends a lot of money on women of negotiable affection. He likes to hang with a rough crowd and goes drinking in the seedier bars of Martira Bay, much to the grief and worry of his parents. They wonder if he will ever grow up to become a responsible pater familias.

I interpreted Darkon as a sort of Roman Empire gone horribly wrong. This would explain the different peoples living in Darkon and the arrogance and belief in their own superiority by the Darkonese. This is why natives from Darkon have Latin-sounding names. I also scoured the boards of the Fraternity for a better Wild Surge Table, since I felt that the original Wild Surge Table was too light-hearted for the Ravenloft Setting.

### **Clemens Superior – played by Sander**

Clemens Superior (25) is a Paladin/ Monster Hunter. He is the cousin of Herman Superior, their fathers were brothers. As Herman is the black sheep of the family, Clemens is supposed to keep an eye on him. Clemens is a Paladin in service of the Eternal Order. At this point in time the Eternal Order is not yet the organization of powerful crowd control it would be in later years, although those first are to be seen for the careful observer. For several reasons Clemens is not a very careful observer.

Clemens is attracted to the obsession of the Eternal Order with the dead and the proper rites surrounding the burial and remembrance of the dead. As a paladin he helps out the priests of his local church with those tasks the priests cannot handle themselves. Usually these are more martial in nature.

*Secret information – Sander was not aware of this.*

Clemens Superior is actually an immigrant into Darkon. Originally he came from Har'akir as a paladin in the worship of Osiris. His real name is Oded Fay<sup>1</sup>. He came into Darkon hot on the heels of a man who robbed some graves in Har'Akir. As this was a very severe crime, he was followed by the mentor of Oded and Oded himself. In Martira Bay the thief managed to kill the mentor, wound Oded and get away.

In due time Oded fell in with the Superior family, was adopted as a son and heir and forgot all about where he really came from. His new relatives, including Herman, of course still remembered the adoption ceremony, but this is not something that is brought up every day (people don't KEEP greeting each other with "hello, adopted cousin"). He became a paladin for the Eternal Order, because the worship of Osiris also had a lot to do with the burial of the dead and the proper procedures surrounding the dead.

Incidentally, in the Roman Empire it was quite normal to adopt a young man as a son into a family, if that family lacked sons/ heirs.

### **Angus of Tepest – played by Joost**

Angus of Tepest (22) is a psionist/coalburner. He was born and raised in Tepest and he inherited the psionic powers of his mother. In due time he joined the guild of coal burners in Tepest. In reality this is a secret society of psionists who cultivate their powers under the guise of guild meetings.

The powers of his mother caused her to be burned as a witch. Angus and his father left Tepest, afraid that the hysterical mob would go after them as well in due time. After some travels they ended up in Darkon. Due to the loss of his wife and the hardships of life on the road, Angus' father soon died as well.

Angus made his way to Martira Bay and managed to garner some income with his coal burning skills. He is still looking for other members of his guild, to start training his mental powers again.

*Secret information*

Angus has been in Darkon for about a month now. Soon he too will start to forget where he came from.

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<sup>1</sup> [named after the actor from the Mummy](#)

**Floortje – Played by Rian**

Floortje (12) is a Thief/ Ghostwatcher. She is a young girl and an orphan. She is taken in by the Sisters of the Eternal Order (at this point in time they still perform charitable works). The Sisters take care of several orphans and street children. They see to it that these children are fed and clothed and in time learn a job.

Floortje turned out to be a particular wild street urchin and the Sisters had some trouble with keeping her in check. Recently they have made her a squire to Clemens Superior, who is a paladin of the Eternal Order. Perhaps he will be able to direct her energies towards a more suitable goal.

*Secret information*

Floortje is actually Lady Velouria of Ravenstein and Avezaath<sup>2</sup>, a low-ranking noble with a small estate. Her parents were brutally murdered by her ambitious uncle and aunt. They think Velouria is dead as well and that they can now rule the estate in peace. Velouria got away in the attack and made her way to nearby Martira Bay. In Martira Bay the trauma of the attack and the loss of her parents caused her to forget much of her past and fall in with the street urchins of Martira Bay. In time she was taken in by the Sisters.

Because she is a ghostwatcher, she still sees the ghosts of her father and mother around her. They are watching her and trying to keep her safe. She is reluctant to put them to rest, since that would mean missing their company.

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<sup>2</sup> These are the names of actual towns in the Netherlands.

## Chapter 1: Introductions

A short self-made adventure to get the characters into contact with each other.

*Session I: 17 November 2006*

3 April 735 Barovian Calendar, Martira Bay, Darkon

In the early morning Clemens Superior is called tot the office of the most senior priest of his Temple of the Eternal Order. This is a smallish temple, taking care of the spiritual needs of the people living in the neighbourhood. This neighbourhood consists of well to do middle class people. They still have to work for a living and are not nobles, but they are rather well of, pretty influential within their own social sphere and things like hunger, poverty and homelessness are not really a problem.

The senior priest informs Clemens that there is some sort of problem at the gravesite connected to the temple and that he should look into it. Perhaps there is some sort of grave robbing or vandalism going on, and this should be stopped immediately. Clemens is shocked that someone would desecrate graves and disturb the dead, as everyone knows how powerful they are. He takes his young squire Floortje with him and they go the graveyard immediately.

At the graveyard there are already some panicky people from the neighbourhood, watching, talking and spreading gossip like wild. Among them are Herman Superior, returning home from a night of drinking and Angus, the coal burner, who supplies local businesses and homes with coal for their fires. Herman and Angus are the only unafraid people in the small crowd. Everybody else is afraid that the dead will rise. Either they are already doing so, or they will in retribution for the desecration of the graves.

Then Clemens, Floortje, Herman and Angus step into the graveyard. They can see what is going on; a skeletal arm is growing from one of the graves. The group becomes rather afraid as well when they see this<sup>3</sup>. After some time they manage to get a hold of themselves and perform some real research into this strange phenomenon.

At the grave of Adrianus Maximus a skeletal arm grows from the grave, clawing at an ominous grey sky. Herman remarks that this is a traditional punishment for children who hit or in other ways disrespected their parents<sup>4</sup>. From the dates on the gravestone the group can see that Adrianus died earlier this same year and lived to be 20. He was the only son of Vincent and Theodora Maximus, a family of tailors from the neighbourhood.

Floortje remarks that the arm of Adrianus has turned to nothing but dry bones remarkably quickly for someone who has been dead for less than six months. Angus pushes against the skeletal arm with his staff. The arm falls apart in small bones without much resistance.

Clemens proposes to open the grave and cremate the body. He knows the Eternal Order has tried to rebury the body without much effect. Herman feels that the group should investigate the life and death of Adrianus first. Perhaps there is some sort of sinister curse at work, which causes these problems.

Clemens ignores the remarks of Herman and starts digging up the grave with Angus. Soon they have discovered the grave. It is not buried deep enough, nowhere near the required six feet. The group wonders if the family knows their son lies in a shallow grave. Clemens then opens the coffin. Only the arm has turned skeletal. The rest of the body is in a state of decay consistent with a body buried for a few months. How is this possible?

Clemens asks Angus to fetch wood and lamp oil. With it they will burn the body. While the body burns, Clemens intones some prayers and blessings over the dead body and the grave.

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<sup>3</sup> Fear checks all round.

<sup>4</sup> [Actually a real Dutch/ German legend.](#)

As the fire dies, Clemens closes the grave again over the remains. Herman still doubts that this solved the problems, but Clemens is certain and reports success to the priests. The priests are very grateful and reward all with a gold piece.

Herman rather likes the warm feeling brought on by a day's honest work, although he still feels that this is not over yet. He decides to ask around for a bit. He knew Adrianus as a part of his social circle.

Adrianus was the only child of Vincent and Theodora Maximus and he was about to take over the tailor shop of his parents. But in a tragic accident he was run over by a beer cart. The horses were spooked somehow and bolted, dragging the cart with them. They hit Adrianus and he was crushed by the enormous kegs full of beer. His mother was so upset by his sudden death that she was unable to be present at his burial. His father too was absent, as he had to take care of Theodora.

So only the drinking buddies of Adrianus and the priest and undertaker were present at the burial. Herman decides to talk to the priest and undertaker as well. He soon realizes that these two prefer to be lazy rather than tired and that they have been cutting corners with the burial ceremonies.

4 April 735 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

In the early morning Clemens and Floortje are woken up and summoned to the temple. There he hears that the arm of Adrianus has clawed its way up out of the grave again. Clemens realizes that his cousin Herman was right and he goes to wake him up immediately. A groggy Herman fills Clemens in on what he learned the day before. Angus is woken up as well and all are very upset about what has gone on.

Clemens decides to inform the temple priests of the laxity of the priest and the undertaker. Floortje wants to talk to the parents of Adrianus. The group decides to pay a visit to the tailor shop.

*Session II: 1 December 2006*

4 April 735 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

The group is paying a visit to the Maximus family. Clemens talks to a sniffing Theodora, an older woman with grey hair. She talks about her son, to hear her talk; he was a paragon of virtue, led astray by bad friends and impossible demands from a harsh father. His death as a result of a hit by a runaway beer cart crushed her completely. Clemens thinks this is very suspicious, for a young man to be so suddenly killed.

Angus starts to ask all sorts of painful questions and Theodora quickly becomes too upset to talk. Herman intervenes and directs Floortje and Angus towards the seamstresses in the shop, to pick out a new dress for Floortje.

Clemens continues to talk to Vincent, the father of Adrianus. He wants to know why both parents were unable to attend the funeral of their only child. He finds that highly suspicious, no matter how upset they both were at the death of their son.

In the mean time Angus is talking to the seamstresses, who like to gossip with the red-headed stranger. They tell him that Adrianus drank way too much beer, it would kill him eventually. Everyone was very surprised when it turned out to be so quick. His parents were very worried about his beer consumption and this led to a lot of tension and fights between the parents and their son. Especially Vincent was very upset about the behaviour of his son and heir. The last time Adrianus was fighting with his mother. His father intervened and sent Adrianus away

from the house with the words: “Beer led you to mischief; it will lead you to grief!” And then he was hit by the beer cart.

The group wonders if this curse is the cause of all the problems they now have with the body of Adrianus. Angus wants to confront the parents with this new information. Floortje thinks that the remains of Adrianus must be presented with a beer. Herman will admit the curse probably caused the death of Adrianus, but why is his arm growing above his grave, causing all this unrest. Angus and Herman wonder if someone must come to accept the final death of Adrianus. Herman also wants to talk to the lax priests again. Their disrespectful treatment of Adrianus must also play a role in the fact that he cannot rest in peace. Clemens makes a decision and decides to talk to the lax priest once again.

Herman and Angus intimidate the young priest Berend and he confesses that he and the undertaker were very lazy indeed and buried many recently deceased people in shallow graves with insufficient rites. In the case of Adrianus, he was buried without his parents attending. So only his drinking buddies were present. They were not too bothered with the specifics of the burial. But never before were there any problems afterwards.

Clemens concludes that failing clerical service, in combination with the emotional situation surrounding the sudden death of Adrianus caused all the problems. Possibly the only way to stop these problems is to make the parents face the reality of the death of their son and their own part in his death.

Clemens shares his insights with the rest of the party. Angus suggests that the parents make a visit to the grave of their son. In all this time, they have never visited his grave. Floortje adds that especially the mother should know that her son is not in a better place, but is still suffering. Clemens manages to convince the parents to visit the grave of their son and to make their peace with him<sup>5</sup>.

At the graveyard the skeletal arm still claws at a gloomy sky. It is a subdued group that visits the grave of Adrianus Maximus. Father Vincent tries to make peace with his son and forgive him for his sins towards his family. But he also tries to acknowledge his own mistakes in demanding too much from a son who had other ideals than his father and he regrets his angry last words to his son. Theodora has more trouble letting go. She insists on clinging to an ideal version of her son and their suffocatingly close relationship.

Clemens admonishes Theodora sternly, Adrianus was no angel and he disrespected his father and mother. Finally, sobbing she admits that her son was on occasion a bad boy and abused her love for him to indulge his own vices. Finally she gives vent to her anger and disappointment in a son who abused her love so.

And then a miracle happens. The skeletal arm retreats into the ground and the sun finally breaks through the clouds.

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<sup>5</sup> All that paladin charisma counts for something.

## **Chapter 2: Ravenstein and Avezaath**

After the last session the game went on hiatus, as my son was born in January 2007 and I needed some time to recover and get some new energy for gaming late into the night (kids really take it out of you).

In this chapter the group investigates the background of Floortje the orphan some more. This is also a self-made adventure and meant for the group to gain some more experience in working together.

### *Session III: 18 may 2007*

5 April 735 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

The group was rewarded by the Eternal Order for laying the spirit of Adrianus Maximus to rest. For the first time in his life Herman puts some money aside, he wants to save it to be able to buy a bigger gun. Floortje spends a part of her reward money on candy.

Clemens feels it is time to take the education of Floortje more firmly in hand. He starts to instruct her in the tenets of the Eternal Order. He also wants to research her background; perhaps some of her relatives are still alive. In the books of the temple he tries to find some more information about her. As she had lived for some time in the orphanage, they must know where and when she was found and admitted. As he searches through the books, a sudden gusts of wind rifles the pages of the books and they fall open on the page that describes Floortje.

Clemens learns that Floortje was found near the village of Ravenstein, a small hamlet a days travel from Martira Bay. He then goes to question the two priests who found her and admitted her to the orphanage. Then he goes to talk to Floortje herself. She remembers little from her time before the orphanage. She knows her parents are dead and that something horrible happened. She does not seem to know about any living family members.

Clemens wants to travel to Ravenstein with Floortje to find out more about her background. As he prepares himself for the journey, Herman joins him. Herman's mother is very much taken with her nephew Clemens and his career within the Eternal Order. She wants her son to do the same and join the Eternal Order, so Herman wants to be elsewhere for a while. Clemens asks Angus to come along with his cart as well, as Floortje cannot travel on horseback all the way to Ravenstein.

On the way to Ravenstein the group encounters some bandits, but they are easily dispatched. The group travels on.

### *Session IV: 1 June 2007*

7 April 735 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

The group arrives in Ravenstein, a small village north of Martira Bay, there are about 100 inhabitants. The village is surrounded by a dry moat and a low earthen hill. So close to Martira Bay all is quiet and safe.

To enter the village the group must pass a large graveyard, lying on the southwest side of the village. Out of curiosity the group enters the graveyard to take a look. As soon as they enter, Floortje faints<sup>6</sup>. A worried Clemens puts Floortje in the cart and covers her with a blanket. Then they search the graveyard, was there something there to scare her?

The group finds nothing out of the ordinary. It is a graveyard for the villagers; all the graves are neatly maintained. There is a larger mausoleum for the local noble family, the Ravenstein

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<sup>6</sup> A failed horror check, although the rest don't know that.

and Avezaath family. There they see that less than a years ago Octavius, Cornelia and Velouria Ravenstein and Avezaath all died on the same day. They were husband and wife and their young daughter. Velouria was eleven years old at the time. Herman becomes instantly worried as he sees this<sup>7</sup>. These dates correspond with the time that Floortje was found. Had Velouria lived, she would now be Floortjes age. Are Velouria and Floortje twins? Or are they one and the same person? Is there something more sinister going on? Who is buried there?

Hurriedly the group goes on to find an inn, so Floortje can be put to bed. She still will not wake up. The small village only has a very small inn, more of a local pub, with some rooms where the owner and his family and the occasional traveller can sleep. Clemens sits up with the still sleeping Floortje and worries. He feels some sort of presence in the room, but he sees no one.

After some time his cousin Herman comes to relieve him, so Clemens can get a bite to eat. Clemens asks the innkeeper's wife about the deaths of Octavius, Cornelia and Velouria. She tells him the family died suddenly in an accident with their coach about a year ago. They were the local nobles of this estate, which encompasses the villages of Ravenstein and Avezaath. She thinks that Floortje looks a bit like Velouria, a bit older and skinnier though.

That night Floortje starts to sleepwalk, mumbling "I am coming." She is quickly found and returned to bed.

8 April 735 BC, Ravenstein, Darkon

The next morning Clemens shares his worries about Floortje with Herman. They also find out a bit more about the local situation.

After the death of Lord Octavius and his family, the estate of Ravenstein and Avezaath fell to Lord Herod and his wife Agatha. Lady Agatha was the younger sister of Lady Cornelia. The new lord and lady are not universally popular, but neither were Lord Octavius and his family. Herman immediately suspects that Floortje is in reality the daughter of Lord Octavius. Clemens immediately wants to reunite Floortje with her living relatives. Herman warns him against that. Lord Herod has profited from the death of his brother-in-law. He might not be pleased to meet someone who has a better claim to his title and estate. He might even have a hand in the death of his family members. If that is true, Floortje is not safe here at all. Clemens admits he had not thought of that<sup>8</sup>.

Clemens and Herman take a still unconscious Floortje to the local priest of the Eternal Order. Father Julius hears the story of Clemens and Herman. He thinks that Floortje looks a bit like the young Velouria, but all small girls look alike. Since they were badly mangled after the accident with the cart, Father Julius has never seen the bodies of the family after their death. Clemens and Herman state they want to open the grave of Octavius, Cornelia and Velouria, to check if there really is a body there. If it is true and there is no body of Velouria in her grave, then there might something to their suspicions and they must inform someone else of their suspicions as well. And the claim of Lord Herod to the estate of Ravenstein and Avezaath becomes much shakier.

Father Julius is shocked when he thinks of all the implications. He proposes to open the mausoleum and open the graves together with Clemens and only with Clemens. As members of the Eternal Order they have a duty to check if the dead have been buried with all proper rites. He does not want to upset the townspeople by disturbing the peace of the dead and he does not want to tip off the current Lord and Lady. So he proposes to open the graves at midnight. Clemens agrees with this plan.

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<sup>7</sup> His INT score is a lot higher than Clemens's.

<sup>8</sup> See what I mean about the INT scores?



Clemens asks his cousin Herman to keep an eye on the still sleeping Floortje that night, while he goes with Father Julius to the graveyard. Herman agrees to do so; he thinks that Floortje might sleepwalk again. But he is also worried that Clemens might meet all sorts of trouble, digging around in a graveyard at midnight. So Herman leaves the village and starts casting his spells in private. Knowing that his unique approach to spell casting comes with a price, he likes to have some privacy while he does it.

Herman tries to cast a spell to offer himself some more protection. Unfortunately he does not pay as much attention as he should and he is suddenly surrounded by a melting wall of ice. It melts in due time and he is able to leave, feeling somewhat foolish.

9 April (midnight) 735 BC, Ravenstein, Darkon

Clemens set out for the graveyard, leaving Herman in charge of Floortje. Herman does not want Clemens to go alone, so he asks Angus to keep an eye on Floortje, while he goes after Clemens. He does not notice Herman following him.

Clemens makes his way to the home of Father Julius and together they go to the graveyard. There Father Julius opens the mausoleum of the Ravenstein and Avezaath Family. Inside the cold, dark and damp mausoleum, they hesitate before opening the grave of Velouria. They are deeply shocked when there are only rocks lying in the coffin. There is no sign of a body. Clemens feels very bitter and Father Julius is angry. Here too people do not take the burial of the dead seriously and disrespect both the living and the dead. That the dead have not already risen up to punish this horrible travesty is only a matter of luck.

In the graves of Octavius and Cornelia lie two bodies, presumably they are the bodies of Octavius and Cornelia.

Clemens and Father Julius return to the village. They are still very disturbed about what they have found and want to discuss all the implications in the morning.

On his way back to the small inn, Clemens runs into Angus, who is holding Floortje in his arms. Clemens helps him to bring Floortje inside and asks him where Herman is, since he left Herman in charge of Floortje. Angus tells him Herman went after him. Clemens is unsurprised, he expected Herman to be unable to stick to his agreement with Clemens. Clemens asks Angus to keep an eye on Floortje and goes out again to find Herman. He finds him and together they keep watch over the home of Father Julius throughout the night, worried that harm may come to him, now that they know more is going on in this peaceful little village.

Just before sunrise the village is woken up by a loud crack. After some hurried searching, it turns out that the millstone in the village mill has cracked in two peaces, which is very odd, since it was brand new, a gift from the new lord. Clemens and Herman overhear the villagers gossiping. Last week all the pigs in the village died of old age, and they were a gift from the new lord as well.

In the inn the group has some breakfast consisting of bread, eggs, cheese, honey, goat's milk, porridge and bacon pancakes. Clemens and Herman discuss the adventures of the previous night.

Some sort of dishonesty is being committed. Velouria, heir to the estate has been declared dead, but there is no body. Lord Herod and Lady Agatha have profited from her disappearance, they now claim the estate illegitimately. But did they cause the body of Velouria to disappear, or are they innocent? And what about the accident of the coach of Lord Octavius and his family, was it really an accident, or was it some sort of an attack?

Clemens wants to draw the attention of some higher noble to this case. And he is also very worried about Floortje, who still sleeps. She must wake up soon and if she really is Velouria, she might be in grave danger by remaining here.

Later that morning they speak with Father Julius. He agrees with them that Lord Herod and Lady Agatha have committed several crimes. First of all declaring Velouria dead, while there was no body. Secondly they lied to the Eternal Order about her death. Lastly they claim the estate of Ravenstein and Avezaath without any legal basis. They might even be responsible for the deaths of Octavius and Cornelia.

Father Julius will write letters to his superior within the Eternal Order and to the Baron of Martira Bay, detailing the events in Ravenstein and Avezaath and their suspicions concerning the deaths of Octavius and Cornelia, the disappearance of Velouria and the role of Herod and Agatha.

*Session V: 15 June 2007*

9 April 735 BC, Ravenstein, Darkon

The group leaves Ravenstein for Martira Bay. Clemens carries two letters, one for Baron Antonius of Martira Bay and another for Bishop Gregorius of Martira Bay. Floortje is still unconscious and wrapped in blankets she is placed in the cart of Angus. She looks terrible now that she has not eaten for two days.

As soon as the village of Ravenstein disappears from view, Floortje slowly wakes up. She remembers nothing from the last few days. She still thinks it is the 7<sup>th</sup> of April and that the group is still heading towards Ravenstein. Clemens and Herman pay a lot of concerned attention to her. They also fill her in with the latest news, but do not tell her about the grave of Velouria, which was filled with stones. They feel it might be too shocking for her.

Then the group hears excited barking ahead of them. Clemens rushes forward to investigate and sees a troupe of large and vicious wolves. They are eating the bodies of the bandits the group met here a few days ago. Clemens manages to keep his horse under control. He then charges into the wolves, wounding one. Floortje then dispatches it with a stone from her sling. The remaining wolves attack Clemens. One manages to drag him from his horse and the horrified group sees how Clemens is shaken like a rag doll by the monstrous wolf. He seems dead.

The group bursts into action. With a spell Herman manages to disintegrate the wolf savaging Clemens. It disappears with a small thunderclap. No one is more shocked than Herman, he never thought it would work. Still Angus and Floortje are pretty shocked and have a new respect for Herman.

Angus uses his powers to save Clemens, because he is still uneasy about letting others know about his powers, he tries to make it seem as if he is using herbs. Floortje and Herman see through his ruse, Clemens was severely injured and no amount of garlic compresses would cure that. Clemens regains consciousness and does not remember anything after being dragged off his horse. He does not realise he was nearly dead and made a miraculous recovery.

The group decides to rest and recover for a day before going on towards Martira Bay.

10 April 735 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

The group returns to their homes. Clemens and his squire Floortje pay a visit to Baron Antonius and Bishop Gregorius and inform them of their findings in Ravenstein. Both men are disturbed and promise to investigate the matter.

### **Chapter 3: The Vistani**

In this chapter the group has their first encounter with the mysterious Vistani, which will set in motion quite a bit of the plot for the coming sessions. As I said before, I wanted to use a bit more of the published material for this setting to save myself some time, but since I do not have everything, I must improvise on occasion. For example, I have no idea how the party meets Hyxosa for the first time, so I made something up.

*Session VI: 29 June 2007*

9 may 735 BC, Ravenstein, Darkon

A month has passed and a lot has happened. Baron Antonius of Martira Bay has investigated the suspicions of Father Julius and Clemens Superior concerning the deaths of Octavius, Lord of Ravenstein and Avezaath and his family and the role of Herod and Agatha. Herod and Agatha were arrested, tried and convicted of several crimes, among which conspiracy to murder, murder and crimes concerning the burial of Velouria. Floortje was recognized to be Velouria, legitimate daughter of Octavius and Cornelia. She was installed as Lady Velouria of Ravenstein and Avezaath. Since she was clearly too young (only eleven and a half) to rule the small but profitable estate, Clemens Superior, Paladin of the Eternal Order, was appointed as her Guardian. He has the duty to rule the estate in her stead and see to it that she has the education befitting a Lady of the realm. When Velouria reaches her majority at the age of sixteen, she may rule the estate in her own name.

The group has undergone changes as well. They now all live in Ravenstein. Floortje lives as Lady Velouria in the castle (more of a large country house really) in Ravenstein, together with Clemens Superior as her regent and Herman Superior as her court-mage. Herman tries to get away from his mother, who still sees a career in the clergy of the Eternal Order for her son. Angus too has relocated to Ravenstein, since he could not get used to the pressures of the big city life of Martira Bay after growing up in Tepest.

Clemens wants to inspect the entire estate belonging to Velouria. He has a responsibility to manage the estate profitably for his ward, he must educate her in the management of the estate and the people should get to know their new Lady. During the inspection Clemens gets to know the people of Ravenstein and Avezaath, who are very happy to have Velouria as their Lady. The adoration of the people also caters to Clemens's vanity. Clemens sees to it that Velouria gets a small pony, which she names Killer and tracks down her old nursemaid.

10 may 735 BC, Ravenstein, Darkon

Clemens has installed the practice of holding daily audiences in which the people can approach him and Velouria with requests and complaints. This way the people can express their troubles and worries and Clemens and Velouria can get to know the people better. Today a messenger from Baron Antonius presents himself to Clemens and Velouria. He tells them that Herod has managed to escape the prison while awaiting his execution. The life of Velouria might be in danger as he seeks revenge.

In the mean time, Angus is burning coals in the woods surrounding Ravenstein and practicing his powers. He then sees two very tired-looking Vistani, a young man and a woman. They introduce themselves as Hyxosa and Valana. They are fleeing persecution from their kinsmen. Hyxosa gives Angus a piece of paper and tells him it must not be lost at any cost. He then

faints. Angus feels pity for the tired couple and lets them rest in his hut. Later he takes them to a room in the village inn, where they can regain their strength.

While this is happening, Clemens receives someone else during audience. It is an older Vistana man, Alexi Zarovan. He asks Clemens' permission to raise a camp outside Ravenstein. He and his kinsmen are in pursuit of two Vistani criminals and they were last seen in the vicinity of Ravenstein. Their crimes were severe and they must be put to death for their sins. The fugitives are a brother and sister.

Clemens becomes extremely worried. He has many prejudices about the wife-seducing, child-stealing, coach-chopping and knife-fighting Vistani, but on the other hand he does not want to anger them by refusing their request. So he gives Alexi permission to make camp near the Castle Ravenstein, so he can keep a closer eye on them. He does not want to give them permission to kill the criminals, since only the worldly authority of Baron Antonius may pronounce such a judgement in this vicinity. Herman agrees with Clemens.

Alexi tries to explain the nature of the crimes of this couple. The man is some sort of mage and foretells the future, a grave crime. The man should have been put to death as a baby. His sister has helped him escape his punishment repeatedly and should die for that as well. Since Herman is also a mage, the group does not really understand the problem. After some time it becomes clear that there is some sort of cultural problem going on, the man was not supposed to be able to do foretelling at all. He is committing some sort of gender transgression crime. Clemens and Herman understand it less and less and are becoming more and more worried. Clemens informs the messenger from Baron Antonius of the arrival of the Vistani and their hunt for a criminal.

In the mean time, Angus goes to the small library of Castle Ravenstein to study the scroll and find out a bit more about Vistani. The scroll has a short poem on it with six signs foretelling some sort of trouble. The library is not very large and deals mostly with the history of Ravenstein and Darkon.

The Vistani are a group of wandering peoples who have the power to foretell the future. It seems that only the women of the group can foretell the future. He also finds mention of the house of Deagon.

Later that day the group shares a meal in Castle Ravenstein. The messenger from Baron Antonius joins them for the meal. Clemens informs everybody of the arrival of the Vistani and their mission. Angus mentions that he too has met Vistani and he lets the others believe that it is the same group that is making camp outside Castle Ravenstein at the moment. He does not tell anybody that he probably met the criminals the Vistana Alexi and his group are hunting. He lies to Clemens and the others about this. Angus also suspects the messenger from the Baron to be more than he seems.

Herman wants to go out that evening, to ensure that nobody is mistreating the Vistani and giving them a reason to become angry at the people of Ravenstein<sup>9</sup>. Velouria wants to visit the camp of the Vistani, which is expressly forbidden by Clemens<sup>10</sup>. He sends her to her room. Velouria reacts by climbing out of her window, down the wall and goes to the camp anyway<sup>11</sup>. Angus also goes to the camp, he wants to have his fortune read.

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<sup>9</sup> Perhaps I overdid it, the group seemed to be really scared about the presence of the Vistani.

<sup>10</sup> He really takes his responsibilities as a guardian seriously.

<sup>11</sup> This turns out to be very typical of Velouria. She is a thief, so inherently lawless and disinclined to listen to good advice. Plus she is a teenager and doubly eager to rebel.

Angus goes to the camp and has his fortune read by the elderly Madame Eva Zarovan, she lays the cards for him in the privacy of her Vardo.

	The Marionette	
The Invoker	The Esper	The dictator
	The Dark Lord	

It is very obvious that these cards profoundly shock Madame Eva. As Angus asks what this all means, she fobs him off with an obviously made up story about bad spells in the past and a glorious future lying ahead of him<sup>12</sup>. Madame Eva is especially upset about the presence of three Grand Cards, as this means that Angus is truly destined for great things, the core will shake with his actions. Madame Eva also realised that with the presence of the Marionette and the Darklord, Angus will also be involved with her relative Hyxosa and one of the rulers of the Lands. His actions might impact the welfare of all the Vistani.

Madame Eva is overcome with fear, the world is falling apart and there is very little she can do to stop that. She tries to get rid of Angus as quickly as she can by telling him some believable lies about the cards. Then she needs some time alone to think. Angus decides not to push Madame Eva for more answers, since he is afraid she might become angry and curse him. However the fact that she lied to him, makes him all the more curious about the meaning of the cards.

As Angus returns to Castle Ravenstein, he is watched by Velouria, who managed to climb out of her window and sneak out of the castle undetected. She made her way to the camp of the Vistani and sneaked about there. She did not learn much, but decided to steal an unattended violin<sup>13</sup>. With the violin she sneaked back into her bed.

Herman too visits the Vistani that night and he speaks with Alexi Zarovan, who is in charge of the Vistani. Alexi is deeply worried about his kinsman Hyxosa and tries to explain the problem to Herman. Only women may foretell the future, for men to foretell the future is an abomination which will lead to ruin for everybody who comes into contact with such a man. This is why male children with the gift of foretelling are killed young. For some reason Hyxosa was allowed to live to adulthood and he started to foretell the future. As expected he foresaw something horrible.

Alexi does not think that tracking down Hyxosa and killing him as the Vistani law demands will solve anything. He has already made his predictions and others know of these predictions, so the events which will allow the predictions to come to pass have already been set in motion. The killing of Hyxosa will not stop that.

*Session VII: 13 July 2007*

11 May 735 BC, Ravenstein, Darkon

The next morning starts very cold and clammy. A very thick fog obscures everything, people can hardly see across the street. Herman realises that this weather is unnatural, in view of the

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<sup>12</sup> The Esper represents Angus with his powers of the mind. The Dictator refers to the people who have burned Angus's mother for a witch. The Invoker represents Angus's future in which a lot of knowledge might be gained, but at a high cost and possible danger. The Marionette refers to Hyxosa who has become a puppet of the powers that be. Even though he is a prisoner of the machinations of the Dark Powers, he does not want to cause any harm. The Dark Lord refers to Azalin Rex, he will oppose Angus and Hyxosa, as he cannot let things lie and he wants to influence the outcome of the Grand Conjunction.

<sup>13</sup> She is quite the little kleptomaniac.

weather the night before. Furthermore, these fogs are usually some sort of omen for bad things to come. During breakfast the fog clears.

Herman and Clemens discuss the presence of the Vistani. They feel that the Vistani may kick a member out of their tribe, but executing him is out of the question on land that is managed by the Darkonese nobility. Clemens also feels that men should be able to practice magic, even if they are Vistani. He wants to find the fugitives and provide them with protection against their kinsmen. Herman worries about the revenge of the angered Vistani and tells Clemens about their powers of curses, predictions, fire making and the calling of the Mists. Then a member of the local militia enters and tells Clemens that the Vistani are on the move again. They seem to be leaving.

Clemens wants to meet one last time with Alexi, to wish him farewell. He goes to the camp and meets with Madame Eva, who is overseeing the packing while she is idly playing with her cards. Clemens asks her some questions while Madame Eva is randomly laying down cards and picking them up again.

The Vistani are leaving because the criminal and his sister have gone from this place. The criminal is no mage, but something much worse (The Paladin). She tells Clemens that he has predicted the future and the future looks bleak indeed (The Charlatan). He has predicted the end of the world as everybody knows it (The Bishop). And now we try to get a hold of the prophecy to find out how this all will affect the Vistani (The Necromancer). So the Vistani too will leave here, in pursuit of the criminal (The Ghost).

	The Charlatan	
The Necromancer	The Paladin	The Ghost
	The Bishop	

At that point Madame Eva realises what she is doing and she looks at the cards in shock. Then she quickly tries to gather them up and hide them from Clemens. But he stops her and asks her what the cards mean. With some reluctance she explains<sup>14</sup>.

The Paladin is the most important card and influences all the other cards. The Charlatan refers to the past of the Paladin. Someone in the past of the paladin is other than he seems, he actively tries or tried to deceive the Paladin. The Bishop refers to the future, someone in a position of high power, possibly religious power, influences the life of the Paladin. The Necromancer tries to influence the actions of the Paladin. The Ghost represents something from the past of the Paladin. Since Madame Eva was not concentrating when laying these cards, she does not want to speculate too much about possible meanings.

Herman does want to speculate though<sup>15</sup>. The Paladin stands for Clemens himself, after all, his is a paladin. The Ghost stands for the secret of Velouria, who for a time lived under another name. The Necromancer and the Bishop stand for Azalin Rex, he is both King of Darkon and ruler of the Eternal Order, therefore he is both Clemens's worldly and spiritual leader. The Charlatan can refer to a lot of people. Velouria pretended to be a street urchin for a while, Herod and Agatha pretending to be nobles, Herman being both a playboy and a court mage. Even Angus has something to hide with his "herbal compresses". Clemens does not really believe the predictions of the Vistani.

<sup>14</sup> Not even Madame Eva can resist the charming personality of Clemens.

<sup>15</sup> Although he is horribly wrong. The Paladin does refer to Clemens himself. The Charlatan also refers to himself; he is no Paladin for the Eternal Order, but for the God Osiris. The Ghost represents the dead mentor of Clemens, whose death is completely forgotten by Clemens and remains unpunished. The Bishop and the Necromancer both refer to Azalin, who is both the religious and secular superior of Clemens and can direct his actions as long as Clemens believes himself to be a Darkonese citizen and member of the Eternal Order.

Later that morning there is another shocking message. The orphanage of the Eternal Order in Martira Bay has burned to the ground, there are no survivors. All 32 orphans and 5 Sisters who looked after them are believed dead in the fire. Baron Antonius suspects that this drama was caused by the escaped convict Herod, for Velouria spent some time in this orphanage. Maybe he believed she still lived there.

Clemens is instantly worried and arranges for more protection for his ward. He also plans to attend the funeral of these poor victims. After all the Sisters were his colleagues. Velouria too wants to attend, as she lost friends in the fire.

12 may 735 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

The whole group travels to Martira Bay and they arrive there late at night. Clemens manages to secure lodgings for them all in the temple of the Eternal Order, where Clemens worked until recently.

13 may 735 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

The group goes to Sheriff Alanik Ray who was charged by Baron Antonius to find the cause of this dreadful fire. Alanik Ray turns out to be a youthful looking elf with blond wavy hair. He has a little office filled with chests, cupboards and strange stuff. This notable elf is the Sheriff of Martira Bay. He has trained his troops well and only concerns himself with the unusual, strange or political cases of crime.

Alanik can tell the group that the fire in the orphanage has had to spread incredibly fast, magically fast even, to make so many victims. However, 5 persons are missing, 4 children and one Sister. Alanik hopes that these persons were somehow able to escape the fire and are still alive somewhere, but he does not really believe so.

Clemens tells Alanik about Velouria and her uncle Herod, who conspired to the murder of her parents and tried to kill her. He has recently escaped and might be responsible for the fire.

Alanik tells the group that people regularly disappear and are probably murdered, but it always concerns sailor, tramps, prostitutes and other low-lives from the harbour area. The orphanage had nothing to do with that at all. So he is baffled by this fire.

Then a young human man comes running into the office and blurts out that five bodies were found in the harbour, 4 children and an adult woman. Probably the missing people from the orphanage. They were not burned.

Clemens: This looks like a mystery.

Herman: No, this looks like kid-napping and murder.

## Chapter 4: The Rift Spanner

In this chapter the group has a run-in with Styrix the Hag and her Rift-Spanner from the Ravenloft Monstrous Compendium. This chapter firmly establishes the character of Clemens Superior as the leader of the group and its moral compass. It also sheds some more light on the Eternal Order.

*Session VIII: 27-07-2007*

13 may 735 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

Everybody becomes convinced that the fire in the orphanage were a murderous attack by Herod to strike back at Velouria in revenge for surviving his first murderous attack and engineering his downfall. Herman wants to use Velouria as bait to draw Herod out into the open, where he can be defeated. The rest do not think that is a good idea.

The group goes to the harbour to inspect the bodies that have been found floating in the harbour. The bodies indeed turn out to be the bodies of the nun and the 4 children that were missing from the orphanage.

As the group inspects the bodies, Velouria looks out across the bay and sees a large mansion on the other side of the bay. It looks old and abandoned, the roof has collapsed and the windows look like dead eyes. It gives Velouria the willies and she points it out to the others.

Clemens wants to give the bodies a much closer look and asks Herman to look after Velouria<sup>16</sup>. Velouria is too young to see dead bodies.

Herman, Angus and Velouria don't feel like waiting for Clemens for the better part of a day in the Hospice of the Eternal Order. They decide to take a closer look at the abandoned building Velouria saw on the other side of the bay. Velouria is afraid of the building and does not really want to go. This leads to the following conversation.

Velouria: Explain to me again why we are going to the scary, lonely, dilapidated house?

Herman: The alternative is to grow bored.

The small group writes a letter to Clemens and they set off<sup>17</sup>.

In the mean time Clemens is taking a very close look indeed at the bodies found in the harbour. The bodies show signs of bruises and scrapes. They signify that the children and the woman have been in a fight or were roughly manhandled. None of the injuries were serious enough to result in death. It is unclear why the children and the woman died. The woman has an impression of a belt and buckle in her lower arm. She was restrained for some time and fought the restraint.

Angus as put his pony in front of his cart and the small party drives off along the bay towards the abandoned building. At first this starts out as a nice outing in the lovely spring weather. The small group meets more families walking, riding or driving on the small road along the bay. This is obviously a recreational area for the well to do people from Martira Bay, they come here to enjoy the sights and pick nick and suchlike.

As the party goes further and further it becomes quieter and soon they are all alone. By the time they are about halfway between Martira Bay and the abandoned house, they come across a small grassy clearing. There is a small hut and a particularly ugly and old woman stirring in a bubbling kettle in front of the hut.

Velouria still wants to go back, but Herman wants to pump the old woman for information about the abandoned house and the possible inhabitants. So he creates a floating globe of

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<sup>16</sup> Even though he knows this is not a good idea, only a month ago, Herman abandoned this exact responsibility.

<sup>17</sup> Even though he does not know how to read or write, and they know this.



plum brandy and offers to share this with the old woman<sup>18</sup>. Without blinking the woman downs one gulp after another of the very alcoholic drink, without any noticeable effect. Herman has to keep up with her if he does not want to look like a wimp. She tells them that she does not know of anybody living in the abandoned mansion, as far as she knows it was always abandoned.

Then, halfway through the brandy, Herman thinks he sees an eyeball floating in the bubbling soup in the kettle<sup>19</sup>. The old crone gives the soup another stir with her spoon and the eyeball disappears again. Herman decides it is time to leave right now. Angus is surprised, but does not contradict Herman.

Herman: We are going home right now! We are looking after Velouria and she wants to go home!

Angus: Who are you and what have you done with Herman?

On the way back Herman tells the rest what he saw, or thought he saw. He surmises that the old woman might have been a Hag in disguise. Angus tends to agree, he knows about Hags, coming from Tepest. He greatly (and rightly) fears them.

Back in Martira Bay Clemens is furious with Herman. He took Velouria on an outing, while he was supposed to go home with her and protect her with all his might, now that there is someone on the loose who has a grudge against her and is not afraid to kill to satisfy his need for revenge. Herman tries to defuse Clemens's anger by telling him of the Hag they met. This does not work.

Clemens: So 'take Velouria home' becomes 'take Velouria on a drinking binge with Hags'!?

Clemens doubts Herman's story. After all he has proven before to be untrustworthy and he was by his own admission at this time heavily inebriated. He decides never to trust Herman again, not even with a small mission.

Clemens sends Velouria to her room in the Superior house. Herman muses that no one in the Superior family, aside from himself and Clemens, knows how to defend themselves against a serious opponent, or monsters. He worries about his parents and the servants. Clemens agrees and sends a servant to ask Sheriff Alanik Ray if it is possible to have some more city guards in the area of his home.

Clemens tries to get a clearer picture from Angus about the powers of Hags and the kind of threat they can pose. Angus paints a grim picture indeed, of giant women with claws and huge teeth to tear and rend the meat off their human victims. And they can also use magic to lure victims to them and to appear other than they really are. All in all they are a nigh unstoppable force of evil.

Clemens decides that this threat is so serious that it should at least be checked out. Perhaps Herman was out of his mind with drink and imagined all sorts of horrors in a simple peasant meal<sup>20</sup>. But perhaps there really is a Hag preying on the people of Martira Bay, after all Sheriff Alanik Ray had people missing from the harbour district regularly, a Hag must eat a lot. A short trip to check things out would not be a waste of time at all<sup>21</sup>. Herman insists that Velou-

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<sup>18</sup> Herman believes in the power of alcohol.

<sup>19</sup> He can't be sure after that much brandy.

<sup>20</sup> No need to imagine things, a peasant meal can contain all sorts of things; do you know what goes in a good homemade sausage?

<sup>21</sup> Clemens's paladin urges are asserting themselves. In every action he takes he tries very hard to think of the needs of the community first. He strongly feels that his first duty is to see that those entrusted to his care are at all times as safe as he can keep them. This goes for Velouria, his ward, his adopted family and all of Darkon, since they are all members of his church.

ria comes with them. After all, they are easily the most powerful force in Martira Bay and would be able to protect her. If they feel the situation is so dangerous that they cannot protect Velouria, they should turn back and gather more allies. And this would also protect the rest of the Superior family.

Herman intends to make some silver bullets for himself; these are usually effective against a lot of monsters. He also sees to it that Velouria gets some for her sling. Clemens petitions the Eternal Order to get a silver sword on loan for this quest.

14 May 735 BC

Completely prepared and very nervous, the group sets out towards the mansion. After a short time they come to the clearing. There is no sign of the old crone, her kettle or her hut. Clemens thinks that everyone was taken in by Herman's overwrought imagination. Herman sticks to his version of events. Angus thinks that someone cleverly made use of illusions and Herman thinks that the Hag has left the area.

The group continues to the abandoned mansion. The broken-down entry gate is ornamented with a graceful "H". The mansion is searched, although there is very little to search. The roof has partly collapsed some time ago, which wreaked considerable havoc on the upper floors. Only the ground floors are safe to walk on. And they are severely damaged as well.

In the large kitchen they can hear a faint scratching noise. After some searching the group finds a hatch in the floor, probably leading to a basement for provisions or coal. They go down and the scratching becomes louder, a squeaking can be heard as well. After some more searching they find a hidden door, the scratching and squeaking comes from behind the door.

Clemens boldly opens the door, behind it lays a terrible horror. It is a huge stinking maggot, but to make it even more terrible, it has a human face. This abomination made the scratching and squeaking sounds as it tried to get through the door<sup>22</sup>.

Clemens puts the thing immediately out of its misery with one heroic strike of his sword. The small hallway behind the door turns into a gooey mess because of it. After that Clemens immediately wants to return. This is way too dangerous for a little girl like Velouria; she will be hurt or traumatized. She should be put somewhere safe. Understandably, Velouria will have none of this, but she is a minor and Clemens's ward<sup>23</sup>.

*Session IX: 24 august 2007*

14 May 735 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

Late in the afternoon the group attends the burial of the victims of the fire in the Orphanage. As all the 32 orphans and 5 Sisters died in the fire, this is a disaster of epic proportions for Martira Bay, so many people attend the service. All the priests and their associates of the Eternal Order are in attendance, as are the grown men and women who started life in the orphanage as well as many members of the general populace.

In the cathedral of Martira Bay Bishop Gregorius leads the service. He emphasizes again and again that it is of the utmost importance that these victims are buried with all possible ceremony and that memorial services will be held for the at very regular intervals<sup>24</sup>. Because of the violent death of these young children and Sisters they will be more likely to return as the vengeful undead and punish the living. The living must protect themselves from this by observing all the ceremonies.

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<sup>22</sup> A "Larva" from the planescape setting.

<sup>23</sup> He really is a paladin and already very disruptive to the flow of the story. On the other hand, this is excellent role-playing.

<sup>24</sup> Nicely filling the coffers of the Eternal Order in the process.

Clemens feels a lot of righteous anger at this atrocity. He wants to take revenge of the person who committed this horrible crime. Velouria feels some very conflicting emotions. On the one hand she is shocked by the death of all these people, but on the other hand she has some trouble with feeling very strongly about it all, which worries her<sup>25</sup>.

Then the services ends and members of the Eternal Order carry the coffins out to the graveyard, where they are buried in a long row of freshly dug graves. Then follows a very sober burial meal at sunset.

Clemens wants to discuss their findings of the huge maggot and the sightings of the Hag by Herman with Sheriff Alanik Ray. Velouria thinks this is a bad plan and does not want to share any information with the Sheriff. Clemens chides her: “Why would we want to keep this a secret?”<sup>26</sup>

Later that night Clemens and Herman have a meeting with Alanik Ray in his office. They tell him all about the huge maggot and the Hag. Since Herman has nothing to prove his story, Alanik Ray does not believe him. But he does believe Clemens and orders him to check out the tunnels under the Estate, he suspect they run all the way to the cliffs overlooking the bay. Perhaps this tunnel is used for some sort of illegal practice, like smuggling.

The Sheriff promises to send his men to the home of the Superior family, to protect them and Velouria. Herman remains worried for her safety and feels that she would be safest near Clemens.

15 May 735 BC

During breakfast with the Superior family a watchman from Sheriff Alanik Ray comes to fetch Clemens and Herman. There have been new developments. Velouria tries to come along, but Clemens thinks it is too dangerous for her to leave the house and sends her back inside. Outside they meet up with Angus and they all go to the offices of the Sheriff.

There Alanik tells the group that another body was found in the bay. A man this time and the body was partly eaten as well, perhaps by fish. Herman sticks to his theory of a Hag, as they eat the flesh of people. Clemens now feels that the underground tunnels at the Estate might also be a way of dumping bodies in the bay, a sort of refuse-chute. The group decides the need to investigate these tunnels further, immediately. They send word to the Superior family and set off to the estate.

At the estate the group quickly goes to the tunnel underneath the kitchen. Once they are there and ready to take the first steps into the tunnel, they are surprised by Velouria. She escaped the Superior home and made her way to the estate<sup>27</sup>. She wants to join her foster father and uncle on their adventures. She really makes a very tearful play out of this and melts the hart of Clemens. He relents and decides to take her home, instead of just sending her back. This is not at all to her liking and she starts to argue.

At that moment the party is attacked by another maggot. It is quickly dispatched, but Clemens is bitten in his foot and wounded. Clemens wants to return now to treat his wound; Velouria again tries to protest but is told to shut up. Herman and Angus work together to heal the foot of Clemens. Everybody is rather worried the bite of such a hideous monster might be poisonous.

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<sup>25</sup> I had not spotted this before, but the traumas she suffered will of course have damaged her permanently. This already shows in her disregard for rules and her kleptomania, but is she also emotionally damaged?

<sup>26</sup> Clemens being well played again. With this one sentence he not only shows he takes his responsibilities towards Velouria's upbringing seriously (he is not just keeping her alive, but he also morally educates her), but he also wants to work through established channels of authority and he thinks of the needs of his community.

<sup>27</sup> She might be disobedient, but she is brave.

*Session X: 7 September 2007*

16 May 735 BK, Martira Bay, Darkon

In the early morning as the group is having breakfast in the Superior home, a letter is delivered to Clemens. As he cannot read, the letter is read out loud by Herman. It is an invitation by the priestess Tavelia to come to the Cathedral of the Eternal Order; she has some information on the fire which destroyed the orphanage and the murder of the orphans. Clemens knows priestess Tavelia; she is the right-hand woman of the Bishop Gregorius. He feels there is nothing out of the ordinary about her request and as a lower ranking member of the hierarchy he must obey. He will visit the Cathedral and take the group with him. Including Velouria, it is too much trouble to leave her behind and if she is not safe inside the Cathedral, nowhere is safe for her<sup>28</sup>.

Later that morning Angus drops by. After healing Clemens's foot the other day, he feels he must confess the full extent of his powers to them. The rest of the group is surprised. They assumed that his powers were the result of some sort of priestly powers, they never suspected the force of psionics, which is rare in Darkon. Clemens especially feels uncomfortable with these strange powers. Herman promises to help keep Angus's powers secret by pretending to cast spells if necessary.

Later that day

After the sun has set the group departs in the coach of the Superior family for the Cathedral of the Eternal Order. The Cathedral is big and imposing, it dominates that part of Martira Bay. It is clear that the Eternal Order watches over the people from Darkon. The Eternal Order is the last bastion defending the living from the wrath of the dead. The group can admire the architecture of the building before they are taken to Priestess Tavelia.

Priestess Tavelia is a young and attractive woman with long wavy brown hair. She sits in a small office and is looking over some paperwork as the group is led before her by a lower ranking priest. She puts aside her papers and addresses the group. Velouria, Herman and Angus are very impressed with her, her charm and her beauty<sup>29</sup>. Clemens less so, he sees her as his superior in the Order, one of many.

Priestess Tavelia informs the party of the Havilland Estate they have been investigating. The Eternal Order too has had some information that strange goings-on have been taking place there. Also a dangerous object was stolen from the Cathedral and she suspects it was taken to the Havilland Estate by the people who make it their lair. She orders Clemens to gather a group of people to inspect the Havilland Estate and find and return the object. She also offers to take care of Velouria in the mean time, she is too young to enter in such dangerous adventures. Velouria and Herman are in favour of this idea and agree, Clemens finds this somewhat odd, but is too relieved to have Velouria taken off his hands by his superiors to enquire too closely. He sees no problem with leaving Velouria in the care of his superiors.

Velouria remains this night in the Cathedral, she will stay with other people living and working in the Cathedral (think choirboys and such). Later that night, when she should be sleeping in her dorm, she sneaks out and starts to investigate the Cathedral<sup>30</sup>. She is soon found out by a very intimidating priest, who escorts her back to her dorm and locks her door.

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<sup>28</sup> Insert sardonical DM laughter here.

<sup>29</sup> Tavelia is using her charm abilities on the party.

<sup>30</sup> She has no real reason for this, except her rebellious streak.

17 May 735 BC

The next day Clemens, Angus and Herman set out for the Havilland Estate, this time they will completely search the house and the basement without having to worry about the safety of Velouria.

Without too much trouble the party searches the underground tunnels. They find a pit crawling with hundreds of the huge maggots they found earlier in these tunnels. With some working together they manage to kill all the maggots with fire. Herman manages to create lots of oil, which Angus sets on fire and he maintains the intensity of the fire. The maggots all burn to a crisp, popping as they die.

After some searching the group also finds some sort of living space and a laboratory or research area. In here they find a log or diary, a buckle and loose parts of some sort of machine. Furthermore they find a horrible object, a chopped off human hand, with the fingers bound together with twine so that they form a sort of threefold candle, this is the object Tavelia sent them to find. They also find a seal ring with the arms of the Ravenstein and Avezaath family of it. The party presumes that the escaped Herod spent some time here.

The party leafs through the diary conclude that Herod was not the only occupant of this place, but that there was also another person, perhaps the Hag. This person was doing some sort of research into the stars and machinery manipulating the fabric of space and reality. Apparently some machines only work when the stars are right; conjunction is the word the researches used.

They party wants to leave, fearing the return of the Hag.

In the mean time Velouria has a good time with the other children living on the Cathedral premises. She hopes to see Tavelia again, but she has no such luck.

On the way back to Martira Bay Clemens's horse makes a bad step and lames one leg. The group is forced to spend the night in the open; they cannot make it back to town with the horse.

That night Velouria is alone again in the Cathedral. She tries to go out of her dorm room and finds out that it is locked. She is very shocked about this; she thought she was a guest, now she feels like a prisoner. She immediately tries to escape from the window. Looking from the window to scout a path down to the street, she sees a man climbing the walls of the Cathedral. He crawls along the walls like a fat spider, carrying a small choirboy with him. He disappears into one of the windows of the outbuildings.

Velouria is beyond shocked. The Eternal Order is infiltrated by some sort of monster, which preys on the people the Order is supposed to protect! Tavelia might be in danger! She wants to go out and warn Clemens. So she immediately escapes through the window, makes her way down to the ground and makes her way through the dark night in Martira Bay to the house of the Superior family. She hopes that Clemens is there and for some reason did not collect her when he returned. On her way there, a bandit tries to rob her, but she keeps running and soon outdistances him.

At the Superior home, she is welcomed and allowed in, but she learns that Clemens, Herman and Angus have not yet returned.

18 May 735 BC

At first light Velouria sets out for the Havilland Estate to try and find her foster father and his party<sup>31</sup> on her pony Killer. Close to town she meets the rest of the party and in panicky tears she tells Clemens of her adventures. Clemens is shocked and believes her. His holy Order infiltrated by evil spawn of the night! Angus and Herman are shocked as well, Tavelia might be in danger! They suspect the monster might be a vampire, posing as a human, crawling along the walls like that. The whole party returns to the Cathedral, they want to speak to Tavelia immediately, but are told this is not possible, as she led a service the whole night and is now taking a well deserved rest.

*Session XI: 5 October 2007*

Herman is convinced the three fingered hand will bring nothing but misery and he wants to be rid of it. Velouria failed a horror check after seeing the man crawling along the walls and carrying a small boy. She now suffers from nightmares.

18 May 735 BG, Martira Bay, Darkon

Later that day, after noon, Tavelia is able to meet with the party<sup>32</sup>. She hears their story and is deeply shocked, but not surprised as she too had suspicions about a monster living on the premises. She thinks she knows where this monster hides. She is in favour of immediate action to protect the whole of the Cathedral and the people of Martira Bay. The party and she are powerful enough to meet with any monster. She leads the party into the basement and hallways beneath the Cathedral complex<sup>33</sup>. This consists mainly of all sorts of storage rooms. After some time following Tavelia, she finally leads them to a small, room with a low ceiling. In the room stands a single coffin. Angus holds a light, while Clemens opens the coffin. In it lies a man, dressed in the robes of the priesthood. He wakes as the light falls on him<sup>34</sup>. He calls out: "Lady Tavelia, wha...!" And then Clemens slams a stake through his heart.

The group is very relieved by this easy success. Tavelia takes the group back to her office, thanks them, rewards them and sees them out. Only when the group is standing outside in the warm afternoon sun, do the questions come to them. Herman proposes they go to a small inn and talk things over, a lot has happened in the last week and needs to be talked over.

First of all, the vampires inhabiting the Cathedral, was the one Clemens killed the only vampire on the premises? What happened to choirboy Charlie? Tavelia was uninterested in answering these questions.

What about the Hag and the strange machinery in her basement? Is she gone? For good, or ill she return and wreak more havoc? What about Herod? Did he start the fire in the orphanage? Why, he must have known Velouria was no longer there. Or was it the Hag, who needed bodies to power her infernal machine and then burned the orphanage to hide the crime of the kidnapping of 5 of its members? Is there a connection between Herod and the Hag?

What about the appearance of the Vistani and their hunt for the criminal male seer? Was he too looking for the machine? Perhaps to manipulate conjunctions?

After some time the conversation returns to priestess Tavelia, the group is worried for her safety and is convinced that the one vampire they destroyed so easily cannot be the only one. There might be more of them menacing Tavelia. How to draw them out and keep her safe?

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<sup>31</sup> And she is only 11 years old, very gutsy.

<sup>32</sup> Tavelia is able to move around in the daylight hours, but prefers not to. Only direct sunlight harms her, but within the building and offices of the Cathedral she is safe enough.

<sup>33</sup> Easy enough, since Velouria, Herman and Angus are still under her influence and Clemens is following a superior.

<sup>34</sup> He too can wake during daylight hours, but prefers not to.

Perhaps Herman can pretend to be Tavelia to draw them out. Velouria wants to enter the Cathedral and investigate the goings-on there further. Clemens wants to meet with the priestess and discuss their worries with her. The rest do not want to burden her with this fearful information until they know more.

In the end it is decided that the party will attend the evening service and that Herman and Velouria will go to the dorms, with the excuse that they are looking for some stuff of Velouria. Clemens and Angus will attend the service and keep an eye out for strange things happening.

*Session XII: 19 October 2007*

Late at night 18 May 735 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

The party is in the Cathedral attending the evening service. The Cathedral is rather full with people, so Herman and Velouria are able to sneak off without being seen. They make their way to the dorms of the children living in the Cathedral. There they find Charlie; he lies in bed and looks pale and wan. Herman makes him some blood wine<sup>35</sup>. Charlie is a cute little guy, pale with brown curls and freckles. Velouria wants to chop off his head as some sort of pre-emptive measure against possible vampirism<sup>36</sup>.

Charlie tells Herman and Velouria that he has been ill and is slowly recovering. He suffered a fever and some bad dreams. The priestess Tavelia has saved him.

Downstairs the service is over. Clemens and Angus have stayed behind; hiding in the shadows and hoping to be able to speak with Tavelia after all the other worshippers have left. As the people file out of the building, Tavelia remains behind with two other priests. They are talking softly. As the cathedral is built to magnify the sound of speakers, Angus and Clemens are able to hear them clearly.

Tavelia speaks with the other priests about the destroyed vampire in the catacombs. It becomes clear that she used this vampire as a sacrificial lamb to throw the dumb meat off the scent. They will now believe the threat is removed and this leaves Tavelia and the others free to rule the cathedral and the city.

Angus and Clemens realise the situation is much worse than they expected. Clemens starts to scream and runs from the Cathedral out into the square, where some worshippers are still standing around, reluctant to go home on this balmy evening.

Upstairs Herman and Velouria hear the screams of Clemens coming in through the dorm window. As they look out, they see him fleeing the building. They immediately realise that something is very wrong. Herman uses smoke form and flees through the walls with Velouria and Charlie.

Outside the general public was spooked by someone fleeing the Cathedral screaming like a madman. But they become really scared when a wisp of smoke or mist descends from an upper storey window and travels along the roads, especially since it looks like a shape of a man with some children.

Angus is the only remaining witness and menaced by three vampires. He manages to concentrate long enough to transform into a form of ectoplasm and he escapes.

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<sup>35</sup> It sounds worse than it is, it is a Dutch fortifying drink for people suffering from general weakness. Cheap wine with some additives.

<sup>36</sup> This was a bit worrying.

*Session XIII: 2 November 2007*

Early morning 19 May 735 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

Angus goes to the home of the Superior family in the hope of finding the rest of the party there. He is in luck; Herman opens the door and lets him in. Herman is profoundly worried, he is the only one he came through the ordeal without some sort of trauma. Clemens, Velouria and Angus as well are all so badly affected by what they saw; they are not able to function normally<sup>37</sup>. And now several powerful vampires know about them, as soon as it becomes dark again, they will no doubt be attacked and silenced, or worse.

Herman decides to flee with the party and the Superior family. He warns Sheriff Alanik Ray about his discoveries and leaves with the party and the Superior family to Ravenstein. There he will be able to hole up and defend his family from the attack of the vampires. They will not be able to enter the village without notice.

On the way to Ravenstein the party meets other refugees. They are fleeing the town since last night a group of ghosts was seen around the Cathedral. Not even the priests were able to put these ghosts to rest. No doubt the dead have finally had enough and are now rising to take their vengeance on the living.

Herman really pushes the horses to the limit and they make it to Ravenstein late in the evening.

20 May 753 BC, Ravenstein, Darkon

Clemens and Herman install their family safely in the Estate at Ravenstein. Then they and the rest of the party travel on to Il Aluk. They want to warn their liege Azalin Rex of the corruption of the branch of the Eternal Order in Martira Bay. He must know how his message was perverted there.

Herman wants to visit the University of Il Aluk as well, to study possible cures for the affliction of his friends.

26 May 735 BC, Il Aluk, Darkon

The party arrives in Il Aluk and they are completely overwhelmed with the grandeur of Il Aluk. There are so many people, so many different sorts of people, huge buildings and so much more.

As a member of the Eternal Order it is relatively easy for Clemens to manage an audience with a high ranking civil servant of Azalin Rex. He attentively listens to Clemens's report and promises to investigate these allegations further. The report of Clemens corroborates other reports of irregularities in Martira Bay, so the civil servant is inclined to believe something odd is going on. He will certainly inform Azalin Rex of these developments.

In the mean time Herman is visiting the university of Il Aluk; he is looking for the faculty of mental or medical science. His friends all suffer ill effects from their encounter with the corruption in the Cathedral. Velouria is suffering from nightmares and has not slept without magical aid for some days. Clemens has developed an irrational fear of church buildings and Angus is deeply afraid of women with long brown wavy hair. This makes it impossible for them to function normally and a cure must be found soon.

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<sup>37</sup> Failed Horror Checks.



After some asking around Herman finds a Dr. Rorsach. He discusses his friends' problems with him and runs into some trouble. It is clear that the good Doctor does not believe in the existence of the friends. He thinks Herman has invented the 'friends' so he can talk in some privacy to the Doctor about his own problems. It is clear he suffers from some deep seated sexual frustration towards women; this expresses itself in a deep fear of women with brown hair and of the Eternal Order. The Eternal Order is a representation of moral authority and social repression. This all expresses itself in the kleptomania and nightmares he so clearly suffers. The kleptomania is another way of defying the rules of society and the nightmares are an expression of his fear of punishment for his breaking of the social rules.

Herman feels he is not getting anywhere with Dr. Rorsach, so he decides to force the Doctor to come with him and so meet his suffering friends. At the inn the Doctor at last becomes convinced that Herman is not a very troubled individual, but that the party-members are. he can offer some help. Hypnosis, magic and psionics can all be used to modify the memories of the suffering party members. If they cannot remember their trauma, it will no longer trouble them. And there are of course more modern and controversial therapies available if the party wants to try that.

*Session XIV: 16 November 2007*

A year of playing. I think we celebrated by watching [Black Sheep](#).

27 May 735 BC, Il-Aluk, Darkon

Now that he is in Il-Aluk, Angus searches for more coal burners, a secret society of people who are able to use psionics and who use the guild of coal burners as a cover for their strange activities. After some searching around, he finds a chapter of the guild in Il-Aluk. He is able to identify himself as a legitimate if foreign member of the guild. The guild is willing to accept him, but they want to test his abilities first.

Velouria continues to steal, which causes no end of trouble. She tries to steal everything everywhere, picking pockets, stealing pills from doctors, produce from market stalls. After a while she grows careless and a victim catches her in the act. Clemens tries to smooth things over, but he is very worried and realises that his ward needs some sort of help. He tries to find a hypnotist at the university. At the moment the group feeds Velouria alcohol until she becomes insensible and sleeps through the night, but this is no way to treat a young child.

Herman too, keeps visiting the university. He wants to learn more about magic and the state of Darkon. He finds some old documents detailing the Kargat and the role of Tavelia in the Kargat. He realises that the Eternal Order is some sort of cover-organisation for the Kargat, the secret police.

Angus researches Hyxosa and conjunctions. He learns little of the Vistani, but at the faculty of Experimental Metaphysics he learns more of the existence of other worlds and how to open gates between these worlds. Conjunctions of planets and stars play an important role in the opening of these gates.

Once back at the inn, Herman shares his discoveries with the rest of the party. The Eternal Order is nothing more than a front for the Kargat. Is the Kargat a government within a government? Especially Clemens is shocked by this. Does his liege Azalin Rex know about this organisation? His name as spiritual leader of the nation is being abused! Clemens finds it hard to accept that the Church, to which he has dedicated such a large part of his life, is so abused. As the party is discussing this, a group of watchmen enters the inn and orders the party to come with them. This is the wrong tone and a fight is imminent.

Clemens cannot watch this and uses all his considerable charisma to calm both parties down. After some talking the leader of the watchmen deigns to explain why the group is wanted. Azalin Rex himself wants to meet with the party at Castle Avernus. The party is very impressed and as good citizens they follow the watchmen.

At the imposing Castle Avernus the party is quickly brought into the presence of Azalin Rex. His throne room is huge, dark and very intimidating. When the group is in front of the throne, they are struck with cold fear and they hardly dare to look at their rightful king.

Azalin speaks to them and tells them that the threat of Tavelia is removed from Martira Bay. He is grateful to them for bringing her and her machinations to his attention. But there is another danger in Martira Bay still. The criminal Styrix escaped the dungeons of Avernus and fled to Martira Bay. He orders the party to go back home, find Styrix and kill her. Any and all of her possessions must be brought back to Castle Avernus.

Azalin Rex understands that the party will need help with that and he bestows gifts upon his loyal subjects. Clemens receives a large sword, Herman a book full of spells, Velouria some knives and Angus a bracelet with a very large, black, shiny jewel set into it.

Very much impressed with their visit to their monarch, the party returns to the inn. There Velouria tries to test some of her stolen pills in Herman. Thankfully Herman suffers no ill effects, but this might have ended very differently and Velouria is forever tainted by her evil deeds<sup>38</sup>.

Angus puts on his bracelet and discovers he cannot take it off. And that he is in contact with Azalin Rex.

#### *Session XV: 14 December 2007*

3 June 735 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

Through the bracelet of Angus, the group is in touch with Azalin Rex. He leads them to an abandoned house in the harbour of Martira Bay. It is a dilapidated and dishevelled building. Normally several families would be living in the apartments, but now it stands forlorn and empty. Carefully the group opens the door and enters the hallway. They see bloodspots on the stairs.

Then Angus hears screaming from the basement. The party goes downstairs, with Clemens in front. In the basement the group discovers the new laboratory of the Hag Styrix. It is dominated by a huge apparatus. In the middle is a globe with lightning flashing inside. Three chairs are mounted on some sort of turning wheel surrounding the globe. An old man and a child are strapped in two of them. In the third chair sits a vision from a nightmare, a huge ugly woman, with black matted hair, red claws a midnight-black skin and talons.

As the group enters the basement, the wheel with the chairs starts to turn, spinning around the globe with the lightning. The lightning starts flashing faster and faster as the speed of the wheel increases. The group starts to attack, hoping to disable the hellish machine. Herman's magic especially is very useful. Somehow he makes a hellish noise, which distracts the Hag so badly that she can do nothing but scream and cover her ears<sup>39</sup>. The hellish machine starts to wind down and finally stops completely. Herman is able to untie the old man and the child. Velouria sneaks up to the still suffering Styrix and backstabs her, killing the monster.

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<sup>38</sup> A failed powers check

<sup>39</sup> Occasionally the party is extremely lucky. The noise is a wild surge effect from an otherwise useless spell. Due to luck with the saving throws, the hag is the only one affected by the sound.

At the death of the Hag, the empty machine suddenly starts turning again, faster and faster. The group flees up the stairs. Halfway up the stairs, they hear a thunderous boom and a rushing wind. When they look in the basement again, the machine is gone and so a rather large part of the basement floor. The Rift-Spanner teleported away, but no one knows where.

10 June 735 BC, Il Aluk, Darkon

The party reports to Azalin Rex. Angus hopes for a heroes welcome, but Azalin is very angry that the party did not manage to capture the Hag or that they did not bring the Rift-Spanner back to him.

## Chapter 5: Night of the Walking Dead

My first published adventure. I decided to run this, because I want to run the Grand Conjunction with my players and because I read on the boards that this was a good adventure to play. I rather liked it, a complex story, not too heavy on the fighting. The only downside was my own planning, I ran this as the party was too powerful and did not beef up the antagonists enough, so the party was never in any real danger.

“The light of the sky shining over the dead shall gutter and fail, turning all to red.”

*Session XVI: 11 January 2008*

11 June 735 BC II Aluk, Darkon

The party has killed the Hag and has been duly rewarded by their king Azalin. Now they need to find a new way to keep them selves occupied. For Clemens his task is clear, he must return to the estate of Ravenstein and Avezaath and take the education of Velouria in hand again, although he would like to know more about the miniature flail he has carried with him for as long as he can remember. Herman feels the same way; he wants to get back to studying his magical powers and the status of being a court-mage. But he also wants to look into the political machinations in his home-country. Angus wants to become a member of the Darkonese coal-burners.

Clemens decides to go shopping for Velouria in the cosmopolitan II Aluk. As he passes several shops, he enters an antiquarian shop in the hope of finding out more about his flail-heirloom. The shop is rather run-down and grimy. It seems to double as some sort of pawnshop. The old man running the store recognizes the flail however. It is a ceremonial implement of the priests from Har’Akir. Har’Akir is an isolated desert realm, but on occasion travellers from there make their way to II Aluk. The old man even points out the lettering on the flail, Clemens had thought it to be some sort of decoration, but it is actually a line from their holy writings.

In the mean time Velouria has grown bored and wandered off to look at all the stuff in the shop. She is soon attracted to a small statuette of a scorpion, made of some sort of pinkish crystal. Soon she has stolen the wondrous figurine. As Clemens wants to leave the shop, he thinks to pat Velouria down, finds the statue and gives it back to the rightful owner. A vengeful Velouria listens to the desperate preaching of Clemens.

As they are walking back to the inn, Clemens and Velouria come across a marketplace, where they see a horse trader viciously abusing a very skinny horse. Clemens is appalled at the abuse of an innocent animal. And slightly disturbed as well, only last night did he dream of a horse just like that<sup>1</sup>.

Clemens tries to stop the trader from abusing the animal. In the end he buys the animal from the trader, just to stop the abuse. The horse, a large, grey stallion with clear, intelligent eyes, is really in a very sorry shape. Clemens uses his powers of Lay on Hands to cure the horse. The horse clearly benefits from the attention. Clemens turns away, looking for some sort of bridle to use on the horse. While he is doing that, the horse suddenly rushes past him, attacking the horse trader with his hooves and teeth, instantly killing the cruel man. Clemens is horrified at the sudden bloodshed. Then he sees that the trader was carrying a knife, trying to attack

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<sup>1</sup> Introducing the paladin mount, ravenloft style.

Clemens. The horse has just saved his life! Clemens is very grateful and is now certain he and the horse were meant to be together. He names his steed Swift Justice<sup>2</sup>.

In the mean time Angus too has some adventures. He has made contact with the Il Aluk branch of the coal-burners. One of them, Timon, has volunteered to be Angus's mentor and sponsor within the guild. He tells Angus that becoming a member is a lifelong commitment. Then he gives Angus some tea...

...Angus wakes up in a dark cell. He makes some light and sees that he is in a very small cell. Suddenly water starts to flow into his cell. Soon the water comes up to his knees, his thighs, and his chest. Angus transforms into a large fish and swims around the tiny cell. Then the bottom falls out of the cell.

In the rushing torrent Angus the fish follows the water until he lands in a small underground lake. Angus swims to the shore and turns into a human again. He walks up a small, dark, cold beach. He stumbles onto the skeletal remains of a man<sup>3</sup> holding a small statue<sup>4</sup>. Angus takes the statue and walks on. He is met by Timon, who congratulates him on becoming a member of the Darkonese coal-burners. Angus is happy and glows with pride. His only regret is that his parents from Nevuchar Springs didn't live to see this<sup>5</sup>.

Back at the inn, Angus passes the statue on to Herman for further research<sup>6</sup>.

*Session XVII: 22 February 2008*

1 August 735 BC Ravenstein, Darkon

Back in Ravenstein the group tries to put their past experiences behind them and get back into the stride of a normal life. This is not a success. Their horrific experiences bother them and prevent them from having a normal life. Strange dreams bother them as well. Clemens especially keeps dreaming of a hot sun burning down on a sandy, hilly landscape. He was a figure of importance there, performing important works. The world of Darkon seems strangely dreary and cold compared to that. Herman has dreams of fame, success and untold wealth, finally surpassing his cousin Clemens in status and fame. The little statue seems to play a large part in that.

Herman does some research into the little statue and finds that it is no statue at all, but some sort of living being. Some sort of monster fulfilling the deepest wishes of the holder of the statue. Herman presumes that there will be some sort of price to pay, since nothing comes for free. Angus wants to get rid of the thing. Nothing good will come of this. Herman is not in favour of this. By throwing it away the thing might fall into unsuitable hands, or it might even return to them<sup>7</sup>. Herman proposes to present the thing to Azalin Rex. After all it is a law of the land that all magical items be donated to the Eternal Order and so to its leader, Azalin Rex. A powerful mage like Azalin Rex will be able to deal with a thing like this.

Clemens wants to take the education of Velouria in hand. She is growing older and must be introduced to her peers. The sons and daughters of other local lords, after all she will pre-

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<sup>2</sup> He does not think about the illogic of the trader attacking him, the powers of the ravenloft mount at work.

<sup>3</sup> Presumably another aspiring coal-burner.

<sup>4</sup> The Wishing Imp from the Ravenloft Monstrous Compendium III.

<sup>5</sup> And the Darkon memory alteration kicks in. Angus now believes himself to be a Darkon native from Nevuchar Springs.

<sup>6</sup> That was a bit unexpected. This party is really rather levelheaded and sensible.

<sup>7</sup> Herman is highly intelligent and dangerously genre savvy.

sumably marry one of them. So Clemens organises a tour of the surrounding fiefs and estates so that Velouria can meet her peers and perhaps some sort of proto alliance can be arranged. Herman is supposed to come along as her court mage and Angus wants to come along to open up new markets for his products. The closest fief is that of Babyioniënbroek<sup>8</sup>.

The party sets out for Babyioniënbroek. It is not far and the group feels it will be a cheerful outing to a peaceful neighbouring estate. Soon the group notices how the landscape changes, it becomes flatter and wetter. A fog rises and swirls around the legs of the riding horses. Then the sky grows dark, it seems like a summer thunderstorm is brewing. The group wants to hurry to find shelter before the storm unleashes its fury. The fog rises and thickens as well; soon no one can see a thing. Velouria wants to storm off, to find shelter. But Clemens is afraid of losing her in the fog and stops her.

In the strange mists the group waits for the rains to fall. But somehow this never happens and after a while, the fog clears. Suddenly the temperature rises steeply and the group is surrounded by strange bird noises, not native at all to Darkon. As the fog clears completely, the party is stunned. Instead of the Darkonese countryside, they now see before them a tropical swamp. There are tall trees with strange roots that seem to grow above ground. Everywhere is water, flowing slowly or in stagnant pools. Weird creepers and mosses hang from the trees.

The group is in a serious swamp and the ground is unstable, already the wheels of Angus's cart are sinking in the muck. Angus quickly unhitches the pony. Velouria decides to climb a tree and see where they are. She sees a sea of leafy green interspersed with pools of water. In the middle distance she sees a light shining. She also sees that the sky consists of dark, angry rain clouds. A summer storm seems imminent. Herman wants to make some sort of emergency signal to call for help. Velouria opposes that, as you never know who might come to investigate a sign like that.

The party decides to travel towards the shining light. They are slightly worried, as they don't know what they might encounter. Velouria tries to reassure the rest by saying that if the people near the light turn out to be hostile, they can always kill them at that point<sup>9</sup>.

On their way to the light, the group wades through a slow moving stream of shallow, lukewarm water. Suddenly it turns out that the tree trunks floating in the water are some sort of monstrous lizard with huge teeth. They attack Herman and they try to drag him under water. A short but panicked fight takes place and Herman is seriously injured. Angus and Clemens manage to kill the monsters.

The light turns out to be a small Vistani camp, consisting of an old man, his daughter and her husband and another son. The group is invited to join the fire and a meal. After the meal, the old man tells the party where they are. They are in the domain of Sourange, a land of tropical swamps. The party has never heard of this place and they are amazed that they managed to get here. They have of course heard the stories of strange mists abducting people, but they never believed the stories to be true.

The old man continues to describe the land they are in and the recent troubles that plague it. He tells of the village Marais de Tarascon and the troubles of the de Tarascon family. They lost one son, another went mad and the third is trying to keep the family and village together, even though it is ripped apart by a strange disease and the walking dead.

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<sup>8</sup> Another small Dutch town.

<sup>9</sup> For some reason the others do not find that reassuring at all. And it is another sign of Velouria's disturbing lack of empathy.

The group is invited to spend the night at the camp and they do so gratefully. They still fear that a storm might break at any moment, but it never happens. That night Clemens has some strange dreams in which he visits the hot, sunny, sandy land again. He feels at home in a way he never feels in Darkon. He feels that the sunny land is much more real than the life he is living when he is awake.

*Session XVIII: 7 March 2008*

Day 1<sup>10</sup>, The Swamp, Sourange

The group wakes up and they find that the family of Vistani has disappeared. There are no trails to be found, nor had the large and heavy Vardo trouble moving in the soggy swamp ground. Still the rain clouds swirl overhead.

The group follows the directions of the old Vistani man towards the village of Marais de Tarascon. Even though they fear a lot of trouble lays that way, after hearing the stories of the old man. But they really have no where else to go and they want to find a way to get back to Darkon. Herman's weather sense tells him there might be more rain later that day, so the party quickly packs up and travels in the directions of the Vistani.

The group travels without too much trouble through the swampy jungle. After a while they come to a large lake. At the shore of the lake is a small hut on poles. It looks like a simple hut for hunters or fishermen, who stay for a night of hunting or fishing. From a small window shines a weak light.

Clemens decides to approach the hut and ask for more directions towards the village of Marais de Tarascon. As he comes closer, a rope ladder is let down, so Clemens can climb inside. Inside the primitive hut he sees a young man surrounded by lamps and holding a children's book. There is something wrong with the man, he does not greet Clemens or talk to him. He is not hostile, but very strange. Clemens thinks he might be dim-witted.

Clemens signals the rest of the group that all is safe and they enter the hut as well. They too find the young man very odd, but he seems harmless enough. Suddenly he starts to talk, but not in an intelligible manner. He mentions the land, evil things, dark nights and six signs. The group wonders what he might be talking of, perhaps the predictions of the Vistani they met yesterday in the jungle.

Since the hut does not contain anything of interest and the young man seems simpleminded, but well cared for, the group decides to leave. They will learn nothing here. Then they hear the sound of a paddle and a boat. A short time later an elderly man enters the little hut; his long white hair is in a very dashing ponytail. He is very surprised to see the group. He introduces himself as Father Brucian, the religious leader of the village of Marais de Tarascon.

Father Brucian tells the group of the young man, he is Luc de Tarascon, the youngest son of the de Tarascon Family. About three weeks ago Marcel de Tarascon, eldest of the brothers died unexpectedly. Luc must have witnessed something horrible about the death, because he has behaved like this ever since that time. There is one other brother left, Jean de Tarascon. Since the death of Marcel several other people have died as well in the small village of Marais de Tarascon.

In spite of this bad news, the group still wants to go to the village. Brucian points the way for them and tells them how to transport their horses around the shores of the lake. When the group leaves, Luc gets up and follows them, not saying a word. The group finds this strange but slightly hopeful; perhaps the young man will shake off his strange affliction.

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<sup>10</sup> At this time the date is unclear. I feel that the prophecy of Hykosa is manipulating time as well as space.

In the village of Marais de Tarascon the group goes to the Full Moon Inn and takes some rooms there. The very talkative serving girl Katey tells them all about the zombies and the disappearances. Velouria hears all this, but soon becomes very bored, she wants to do something. At this point Luc is still silently following them around.

After eating a light meal, the group decided to check out the small village. They feel the air-pressure rising, but feel that they will be able to return quickly to the inn if the storm breaks. The village is indeed rustic and small. The only real point of interest is the local cemetery. Due to the high water level most of the families here opt to inter their dead in mausoleums. As the group wanders around, they notice the mausoleum of the de Tarascon family. The last to be buried there is Claudine Tarascon, beloved mother of Marcel, Jean and Luc. The group is surprised at this, why is Marcel de Tarascon, who died three weeks ago not buried here?

Some time later, the group is met by Pierre, who takes care of the graves and the cemetery. He tells them that Marcel indeed passed away and that Brucian tried to raise him. Apparently this did not work out, but Pierre has never received a body to inter in the mausoleum. The group is impressed with the clerical might of Brucian.

### *Session 19: 21 March 2008*

#### Day 1, Marais de Tarascon, Sourange

In the Full Moon Inn Clemens thinks of zombies. He knows about them from his time in Darkon. They are very weak undead. Some wizards and clerics manage to raise dead bodies into a state of mindless obedience. This is of course an abomination in the eyes of the Eternal Order, as this interferes with the dead, who own the land of Darkon. They will probably take offence at something like that. On occasion these undead can arise spontaneously.

Herman thinks of the de Tarascon family. Would they be looking for a cheap alternative to paying wages? Would they kill and then raise the bodies of their workers? Things like that have happened before; people will do almost anything out of greed.

#### Day 2, Marais de Tarascon, Sourange

In the Full Moon Inn the group enjoys a large breakfast consisting of porridge, eggs, ham, bread and coffee. Outside, the weather is still gloomy, humid and clammy. Thunder rumbles in the distance. Herman consults Katey on his theory that the de Tarascon family has turned villagers into undead as some sort of horrific cheap labour. She scoffs at that notion.

After breakfast Katey asks the group to leave the Inn for a few hours, she is going to close the Inn so that she and her co-workers can attend the funeral of Jeremiah. Jeremiah passed away yesterday and today is the funeral. Most of the village will attend. The group decides to attend as well; maybe they can learn something of these strange events.

Katey was right and the whole village turned out for the funeral of Jeremiah. The priest Brucian has a short service in the open air, remembering all the good deeds of Jeremiah. The populace listens intently. To the groups horror the coffin of Jeremiah is tied up with ropes and a large chain. Occasionally the coffin moves and thumping can be heard. The standers-by are profoundly worried and scared of the movements and sounds, but none of them try to open the coffin. Neither do any members of the group.

The short service is over and the onlookers go to the cemetery, where Jeremiah will be put up in the mausoleum of his family. After the door of the mausoleum is closed by Pierre, the funeral is over and one by one the villagers depart. The group stays behind and approaches Brucian, who has stayed behind as well. From the small mausoleum the sounds of Jeremiah can still be heard.



Clemens tells Brucian that he is a paladin of the Eternal Order and has some experience with the laying to rest of the restless dead. Brucian appreciates the offer of help and would like to make use of it, but not right now. He proposes the group returns at sundown.

At sundown the group returns to the cemetery and they meet with Brucian. Thankfully he carries a light. Due to the storm clouds, it is extremely dark at the cemetery, although distant flashes of lightning outline some silhouettes. He quickly leads them to the mausoleum of the family of Jeremiah. There he opens the door. Inside the bound coffin of Jeremiah still moves around and will do so until what remains of Jeremiah manages to escape or rots beyond the ability to move. Brucian opens the coffin and an enraged zombie jumps from the coffin and attacks Clemens. Clemens coolly swings his sword and destroys the foul abomination.

Brucian is grateful for the help of Clemens and the rest of the group. He shares his worries with them. The last few weeks everything has gone wrong in Marais de Tarascon. Marcel died, Luc went mad, and people die and rise as zombies. Sometime people even disappear and are not seen again. This worries Brucian the most. Brucian greatly fears the future.

On the way back to the Full Moon Inn Clemens worries about himself. He suffers from strange dreams and nightmares about the sunny, sandy land. As he tried to bless the remains of Jeremiah he remembered other times and places in which he did the same. But they were not in Darkon. His whole life in Darkon seems like a strange, dark dream.

Day 3, Marais de Tarascon, Sourange

The next day is still threatening rain and storm. The strange weather makes the group edgy and they decide to go out and walk for a bit. The group manages to prevent a murder in the twisty streets of Marais de Tarascon. They heard the scream of a young woman and the party rushes to the rescue. They manage to scare off the assailant, Velouria throws a knife after him and Clemens chases the assailant through the street of Marais de Tarascon. Eventually he loses the caped assailant at the edge of town. Clemens sees the fields of sugarcane and the ancestral Estate of the de Tarascon family.

The group now thinks that Jean, last sane, living member of the de Tarascon family might be behind the attacks on the town. They decide to pay a visit to the Estate and snoop around for a bit. They leave the horses at the Full Moon Inn so as not to attract too much attention. As they leave the village they notice that for the first time, Luc is not following them. They feel rather relieved about this, as they were very creeped out by his strange, silent presence.

At the plantation the group sees that the fields are neglected, weeds grow everywhere and plants have not been harvested. The building looks deserted, there are no sounds of the many servants a place like this needs.

The group knocks at the front door and there is no reaction. After a while Herman uses magic to turn his right arm into a huge snake, which worries the rest of the group. The enormous snake slithers up a pillar and onto the railing of the balcony above the front door. From there it pulls up the rest of Herman. On the balcony, Herman looks through the windows and sees some sort of office room. He opens the door and goes inside. Inside he opens the door into the hallway and sends the snake out to investigate. Soon the snake sees some servants carrying a meal. The snake cannot see well and sees nothing wrong with the servants; however they do have a room temperature body heat. Herman immediately concludes that they must be some sort of undead, probably zombies.

Herman helps the rest of the party up as well and shares his findings with them. The group decides it is too dangerous to return through the fields to the village, so they will spend the night barricaded in the little office<sup>11</sup>.

*Session 20: 4 April 2008*

Day 4, De Tarascon Estate, Sourange

The group spent the night in the office of Jean de Tarascon, at the de Tarascon Estate, while they knew zombies lied downstairs as servants. They probably ate the flesh of the dead and disappeared villagers. Herman and Velouria were especially cold-blooded and managed to sleep that night. Angus and Clemens were too nervous to sleep and kept watch.

Then the group hears that Jean de Tarascon has returned to the Estate. He calls his zombies to him and tells them to search the fields, looking for intruders and unknown people. He knows about the party and wants them out of the way. The group worries when they hear this and they prepare themselves for a big fight. Herman uses many spells to protect himself and the group. Clemens positions himself close to the door and asks the rest to get the clothes iron for the spring cleaning. The group looks on confusedly. Angry that the rest seems to be lollygagging, Clemens grabs a cabinet and puts it in front of the door<sup>12</sup>.

The moving of the cabinet has alerted Jean that someone is upstairs. The group hears him coming up the stairs, while he orders his minions to feed the goldfish. Then he sees the group and attacks them. He is soon followed by his loyal zombies who cry for “Calves, calves!” Clemens stands behind the cabinet to hold off the first wave of attackers. “Puddle, skirt, topsy-turvy!” he screams at them. More zombies follow and Clemens tries to give orders to the rest of the group to help him. “Cover the walls with floral wall-paper, and then I will iron the floors with the cat!” After some blows, Jean and the zombies are killed and the strange aphasia disappears again<sup>13</sup>. The group flees back to Marais de Tarascon.

*Session 21: 18 April 2008*

Day 4, Marais de Tarascon, Sourange

The group has just killed Jean de Tarascon, who used the bodies of the villagers as some sort of horrific undead servants. They return to the village to speak with Father Brucian. They still worry about the whereabouts of the body of Marcel de Tarascon. They killed Jean and Luc has joined them again, but is still as silent and weird as ever. Was the body of Marcel eaten by the zombies, was he a zombie?

During this conversation Luc starts to mumble again about the signs signifying evil. Angus suddenly realises what the boy is talking about and together, in perfect unison they recite the prophecy of Hykosa. When they come to the couplet about the Son of the Suns, Clemens feels very uneasy indeed, but he does not understand why. After Angus and Luc have finished, the rest of the group wants an explanation.

Angus confesses how he got the prophecy of Hykosa when the group lived at the Ravenstein Estate. He promised Hykosa to keep the scroll secret and feels guilty that the rest of the group now knows about it too.

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<sup>11</sup> Yes I know, I find it a strange decision as well.

<sup>12</sup> A wild surge, confusing tongues to be precise. Nobody can understand anybody else. Mass aphasia.

<sup>13</sup> Too bad, it was really fun and the group was a bit worried about not being able to coordinate their attacks.

Herman foresees that the prophecy is indeed accurate and that every couplet predicts some sort of event and when all events have come to pass, it will mean the end of the world. So all the couplets must be prevented from occurring, or at least the last one mustn't occur.

After the group has calmed down a bit, Father Brucian tells all he knows of the life and death of Marcel de Tarascon. He was killed when he was together with Luc. Jean begged Father Brucian to bring Marcel back to life, but for some reason Father Brucian failed. Since all the bad things on the area started happening after his failed attempt at resurrection, he suspects that his attempt partially succeeded. He thinks that Marcel may have come back as some sort of undead and that he is behind all the recent killings and attacks.

As Father Brucian tells all this, the storm that has been threatening for the past 4 days, finally breaks. Rain falls down in torrents, lightning flashes and strikes treetops in the forest, thunder roars with deafening might. It is truly an intimidating storm. Then a man crashes through the door of Father Brucians home and babbles incoherently about zombies, raised from the dead. The group is frightened; they have been fighting zombies just this morning and exhausted their spells. Quickly they run outside and try to get as many villagers as possible into the Full Moon Inn, the largest building in the village. From there they will hold off the zombies. Herman uses spells to seal the doors.

Angus and Herman cook up some crude Superior-cocktails<sup>14</sup> to keep the zombies at a distance. This works, but they also set parts of the village on fire. This adds to the panic and confusion of the people. The slaughter is terrible to behold. Villagers are killed by zombies, who in turn are killed by the intrepid group. For the fugitives this is a truly traumatic experience. They see their loved ones, still recognizable, returned from the dead as horrific undead monsters. These monsters are brutally killed by fire (Aunt Cecile! No!). And all the while the rain keeps rushing down, flashes of lightning outdo even the fire consuming the village and screams of the dying are drowned out by the thunder. And still the zombies keep coming.

Angus and Herman realise that they must rest. So everybody barricades themselves into the inn. Clemens and the able bodied defend the inn from the zombies and Angus and Herman catch some well deserved sleep.

Day 5, Marais de Tarascon, Sourange

The new dawn rises, but due to the zombies laying siege to the inn, the torrential rain and continuing storm, very few people see this. However, Angus and Herman are rested and feel up to some serious zombie-smashing.

Clemens saddles Swift Justice and storms out of the stables, dealing death and destruction to the zombies still laying siege to the inn. Angus and Herman follow him, mopping up the remaining moving bodies. The group makes for the cemetery, as they feel this is the place where all the trouble concentrates.

At the cemetery the group goes to the old part of the cemetery, where the old and forgotten mausoleums stand. There they soon find the crypt where Luc and Marcel did their exploring. There the group fights some zombies who seem older and are more powerful than the recently risen undead villagers. Then they see a faint light shining from the De Tarascon mausoleum. There they find the undead horror that Marcel de Tarascon has become after the unsuccessful attempt of Father Brucian to raise him from death. Marcel is involved in some strange ritual. The group decides not to wait for the completion of the ritual and they use violence to stop it. While the group fights Marcel, the rain suddenly stops and some sort of eclipse takes place.

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<sup>14</sup> Molotov-cocktails.

The mausoleum is awash with a strange red glow, which gives the fight another hellish dimension.

Then, after a harrowing fight, the long-dead body of Marcel finally falls. The group is relieved and they search the mausoleum, trying to understand what Marcel was trying to do. They find a scroll with the six signs of Hykosa on it. Strangely enough, this scroll seems to be very old, whereas the Vistani that Angus met and the band that was chasing them and met with Clemens met with the group no more than a few months ago.

As the group steps out of the mausoleum, they see that all the zombies beleaguering the village have dropped lifelessly to the ground. The rain clouds have disappeared. Still the landscape is awash in the strange red light. They see that the moon is covering the sun and that for some reason it has turned red. As the moon moves slowly away from the sun, the light grows strong and normal again. Very soon steam rises from the soaked ground.

On rereading the scroll, Herman realises that at least one of the signs has come to pass. The light of the sky has turned red and it had shone on the walking dead. Perhaps another sign has also come to pass. Many orphans died in the fire at the orphanage, perhaps one of them had a stern mother.

## Chapter 6: Blaustein

A short chapter between Hexads. After the adventures of the previous chapter, the group needed to return to some sort of normalcy and I did not want to move to the completion of the next Hexad. So the group will visit Blaustein. This will also focus a bit more on the extraordinary position of Velouria as the only woman in the party. As she grows older, it will become increasingly difficult to travel with her.

*Session 22: 16 mei 2008*

Day 6, Marais de Tarascon, Sourange

After the horrifying events of the day before the group and the villagers need a day to recover. Clemens has an unsettling experience in this time. He realises that his name is really Oded Fay and that he is from Har' Akir and not Darkon at all. He is no paladin for the Eternal Order, but for the Green Hand, worshipping Osiris. He now remembers the happy times he spent with his mentor, a full priest of Osiris. He remembers their quest to bring a known grave-robber to justice, how this quest brought them into Darkon. He remembers the despair when the thief killed his mentor and the anguished tears that fell as he promised his wounded and dying mentor to bring the thief to justice. He remembers being taken in by Clemens and Olivia Superior and in due time they adopted him and made him their heir. He remembers. Angus has a similar experience, he remembers that he is not from Nevuchar Springs, but from Tepest.

By now Velouria has turned 12. Oded Fay worries about her. Where can he find a woman to teach her the things only a woman can teach her?<sup>1</sup>

The villagers are very grateful for the assistance the group has given them, but now they feel it is time for these unsettling people to leave again. They are given directions to the harbor city of Port D'Elhour. There they can find a ship to any port.

Angus and Oded Fay compare their experiences and realise that something in Darkon must affect their memories. Herman knows about this, many people sometimes have trouble with their memories, after they have come to Darkon or leave it. But this is the first time he sees the phenomenon up close. He remembers Clemens' adoption very well. It is rather normal for highranking people without heirs to adopt one. Uncle Clemens and Aunt Olivia did not have an heir and so adopted a bright young man with a shining career in the Eternal Order. Oded Fay worries some more. Even though his memory was affected, his essential character still led him to a life in service of religion. Angus too remained a loyal coal burner, even though he did not remember his past in Tepest. So what new role was there for a murderous grave robber from Har' Akir after he entered Darkon? Herman suggests that he might have found his place with the Kargat, the Darkonese secret police. Angus also worries about what will happen if he and Oded Fay return to Darkon. Will they again lose their memory? He does not want that. How soon will he lose his memory?

While the group is discussing this, Velouria has wandered off. The discussion bored her. She walks through the streets and wonders in the direction of the harbor district. Usually this is a low part of town. But in Port D'Elhour there is a very nice boulevard along a part of the beach. It gives a very nice view of the ocean and there are several shops on one side. This

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<sup>1</sup> Rather poorly put, but he means things like the sex talk.

street attracts a lot of people taking the air and the view. They do not pay much attention to Velouria, who robs them blind. When she makes her way to one end of the boulevard, she passes a dark alley. In it she sees a couple of neat-looking sailormen. Completely unexpectedly they hit her on the head and she faints.

Velouria wakes up with a terrible headache in a small wooden room. The room seems to tilt to and fro. After a bit she realises she is on a ship. It moves! She is abducted!

By now the rest have discovered that Velouria is missing. Using his spells Herman tries to locate her. She is on a ship named "Pride of Blaustein". The group races to the harbor, just in time to see "Pride of Blaustein" leaving the harbor. Quickly they commandeer another ship, "Siren", and give chase. Angus turns himself into a dolphin and gives chase as well. Outside of the harbor lies a large mistbank. The "Pride of Blaustein" disappears into the mist and "Siren" follows.

Meanwhile Velouria does not like being abducted. She decides to escape. In a rage she throws herself at the door, which gives way. She now stands in a very cramped hallway. She hears stumbling footsteps above, someone is coming! Quickly she darts into another room, some sort of storage. She hides behind some vats.

Some men are walking along the small corridor. She hears them talking. They heard the sounds of her breaking down the door and they are checking if the fiancée is all right. In horror she realises that she, a 12 year old girl, is the fiancée. The men, the same sort of neat sailors she saw in Port D'Elhour, enter the storage room. Velouria throws coconuts at them, knocking out one man with a lucky throw. But then she is overpowered.

For the worried group on the "Siren" the mists finally clear and they see a small rocky island. There is a tiny harbor with some ships, "Pride of Blaustein" is among them. There is a small village built on the cliffs near the harbor. Above that towers an enormous castle with 4 towers.

*Session 23: 13 June 2008*

Day 6, Harbour, ?

The group has arrived in pursuit of the "Pride of Blaustein" in a harbour on a very small, rocky island, presumably this is the village or country of Blaustein. The "Pride of Blaustein" is moored to a dock. The smaller vessel "Siren" is still adrift outside the harbour. The group is reluctant to enter the harbour, but they also need to rescue Velouria. Herman wants to save his employer, he uses magic to write a threatening message in the sky for the return of Velouria. There is no reaction from the ship or the village. Angus uses his ectoplasm form to be able to enter the ship "Pride of Blaustein", to see where Velouria might be. He sees the crew, but no Velouria.

Eventually the "Siren" moors at the docks as well, next to the "Pride of Blaustein". Oded Fay walks onto the dock, towards the "Pride of Blaustein" and demands his daughter back<sup>2</sup>. This gets a reaction, just not the one Oded Fay expected. The crew and the harbour-labourers welcome Oded Fay as the 'Father-in-law' and are very friendly and congratulatory him with the engagement of his daughter. This deeply disturbs him and the rest of the group. Velouria is only 12, way too young to get married.

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<sup>2</sup> They did not think that this was the time to reveal that Velouria has no living family left.

In the meantime, Velouria was hustled off the ship and into the large castle. She saw little of this, as she was properly subdued by the crew of the “Pride of Blaustein” after she nearly killed someone with a coconut.

In a very richly appointed room (wall-hanging, curtains, pillows, furniture everywhere) she is bathed by a servant, dressed in fine new clothes and fed with very expensive food. Velouria is used to the good life as a minor noble in Darkon, but this is something else. During all this, Velouria questions the maid. The maid is not very bright and tells Velouria all she wants to know.

The island is ruled by Captain Bluebeard, so called because he paints his black beard blue, to scare off enemies. The captain intends to marry Velouria and make her the happiest woman alive. The highest honours will be bestowed on Velouria in the course of this marriage.

Velouria indicates that she does not want to get married. The maid does not understand her and tells her that she will not be married for some time. But when she is grown a bit more, the Captain will make her the happiest woman alive. Then Velouria tells the maid that she would like to be alone for a while. The maid misunderstands her again and shows her the privy. The maid will not leave Velouria however.

By now it is late afternoon. The maid wants to take Velouria down into the village for some exercise, as the bride-to-be should remain in perfect health for the Captain<sup>3</sup>. Tragically, he lost a wife to illness. So now everyone will see to it that Velouria stays healthy by eating properly and exercising. Also the maid and Velouria will not spend the night in the castle. The first wife of the Captain still haunts the castle after her death, so no one remains there at night. As she walks through the castle with the maid, Velouria keeps seeing female shapes flitting just out of sight, around corners and through doors<sup>4</sup>.

Once outside the castle, the dim-witted maid is no match for the ingenuous thief that Velouria has become. She soon escapes her captor and makes a bee-line for the harbour. There she soon meets with her foster father Oded Fay and her friends. The villagers on the docks soon realise that they are looking at the Fiancee and her Father and they become extatic with joy. They surge onto the dock and all try to personally congratulate Oded Fay and Velouria. They become scared of the press of bodies of all these friendly people.

The atmosphere soon changes when Captain Bluebeard himself enters the scene. He orders that his Fiancee and her family must be brought to the castly, to enjoy the hospitality of Blaustein. The crowd surges forward again to obey the wishes of their beloved Captain. Some villagers fall into the dangerous waters between the docks and the ships because of the press of bodies.

The group tries to keep the mob away and get back on their ship “Siren”. Some of the villagers are killed, while the group tries to accomplish this. Then Captain Bluebeard enters the fray, he does not want to lose a chance to mold his juvenile wife to his own wishes. Then Angus shows his worth. With one hand he releases a thunderbolt of electrical energy, which hits the captain in the chest. All the hairs of his blue beard stand on end. Jerkily he moves around the dock, while sparks discharge from all the metal bits of his uniform. Still sparking he falls into the waters of the harbour. Deeply shocked the populace looks at the downfall of their captain<sup>5</sup>.

Quickly the group rushes on board the “Siren”. The captain quickly lifts the anchor and the ship leaves the harbour, before the crowd can turn hostile on the killers of their beloved ruler.

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<sup>3</sup> The friendly but brainless chatter of the maid drove Velouria nuts.

<sup>4</sup> This is Velouria’s Ghost Sight at work, a trait I do not use often enough.

<sup>5</sup> Rather anti-climactic I felt. The group was too powerful for this encounter.

The death of Captain Blue sends shockwaves not only through the crowd, but through the physical land as well. The Island quakes and shakes. The castle starts to collapse and the buildings of the village as well. The rocks and masonry falling into the harbour cause waves, which cause more destruction. The continuing quakes make these waves bigger and more powerful. Desperately the "Siren" makes for open water, while the screams of the villagers on their sinking Island follow them.

On the open sea the "Siren" is still not safe. They are followed by larger and larger waves which toss the little ship to and fro. Then the "Siren" is dragged along by a huge wave towards a maelstrom. Further and further down they go, while the crew of the ship tries desperately to escape. Eventually the little ship is smashed to splinters and group tries to hold on to pieces of the wreckage. But eventually everyone is swallowed by the dark waters.



## **Chapter 7: Touch of Death**

Oh please, you didn't really think that was the end, did you?

In this chapter the events of the adventure Touch of Death are played out. We return to Har'Akir, the native land of Oded Fay, formerly known as Clemens Superior. Things have gone rather downhill since he left his native country.

I rather liked the Touch of Death adventure, but I played the Vistani girl Dulcimae as extremely dim-witted, only because of her pose on the front cover of the adventure. Someone who drapes herself so helplessly in front of a huge mummy can't have more than two brain cells to rub together.

"Seventh time the son of suns doth rise  
to send the knave to an eternity of cries."

*Session 24: 11 July 2008*

?, ?

Oded Fay wakes and sees he lies in the sand. As he rises he sees he lies on a beach, the gentle waves of a crystal-clear turquoise sea lapping at his feet. Some way away he sees the bodies of Herman and Velouria. They are not moving.

The sky is deep blue and the sun shines down with murderous heat. The beach slowly changes into dry, sandy dunes. Oded Fay realises they need to find some shade fast, before everybody gets a sun stroke.

Oded Fay wakes Herman and Velouria; they remain very dazed and confused. They don't seem to wake up properly. Oded Fay herds them to some palm trees and shrubs. He sits them in the shade of the trees and folds some primitive hats out of the leaves of the palm trees. Angus, Swift Justice, Herman's mule Tiffany and Velouria's pony Destroyer are nowhere to be seen. Most likely they died in the apocalyptic aftermath of Bluebeard's death and ensuing shipwreck.

Herman and Velouria are unable to formulate any plans for their own wellbeing, so this task falls to Oded Fay as well. Oded Fay feels very tired and drained after his ordeal, but if he fails his friends now, they will all die. In the distance Oded Fay sees a small line of green against the dunes. He concludes that water may be found there. He tries to get Herman and Velouria to the source of water. As he tries that, he realises that Herman and Velouria have lost their memory during the traumatic experiences of the recent past.

The little strip of green turns out to be a small well with a village surrounding it. The villagers greet Oded Fay warmly. With a shock he realises that he understands what they say. He is back home in Har'Akir and these are his people.

The shipwrecked group is housed in the temple of Osiris, where they can recuperate after their ordeal. The little group falls into a deep sleep.

That night, a scream wakes Herman. He hears how someone is dragged along the sand against his will. Bravely he ventures out of the temple and manages to chase off the abductor and save his victim. As he comes closer to help the limp victim, he sees that the victim has turned into some sort of primitive mummy, dried by wind and heat. Despite the noise, no one else came to help their fellow villager.

By now, Oded Fay has awakened as well and he and Herman wake the priest of Osiris and compel him to bury the body with all due regards. The priest is a weak and small minded man and does not offer much resistance, although Oded Fay and Herman notice that he is very unwilling to do his duty.

Oded Fay realises that the short respite has restored the mind of Herman. He hopes that Velouria will recover quickly as well.

*Session 25: 25 July 2008*

Day 1, a small village, Har' Akir

The next day, Oded Fay feels completely at home in the little village. The sense of being slightly out of place, which has always haunted him in his years in Darkon, has left him. He makes himself known as a servant of the Green Hand and is welcomed as such. While Oded Fay looks and asks around, he notices that all is not as it should be. Osiris seems to have turned into an angry and vengeful god. The people fear him, as they worship him. The other gods do not seem to receive their share of worship.

The group exchanges fire water (made by Herman) for some supplies like clothing, weapons and a small donkey. Oded wants to travel to the capital of Har' Akir, a town called Muhar. The group then departs the small village and makes for Muhar. By now Herman and Velouria have recovered their wits and are anxious to return home. They have left behind Darkon for more than a week now and are worried about those they left behind.

On the road along the coast towards Muhar, Oded Fay sees his beloved Swift Justice again. Apparently he too survived the shipwreck. Angus and the mule Tiffany have also survived the demise of Blaustein.

Oded Fay wants to continue to Muhar to find out what has happened to the cult of Osiris. Why is it so much more dominant than before? Why is Osiris a more demanding god? Oded Fay feels that Osiris should be restored to his proper place and that the other gods should receive their due as well. Velouria is fine with this change in religious politics, it will mean that the other temples are abandoned and the fewer people will care if their treasures are stolen<sup>1</sup>.

Then the group meets with the Vistana Dulcimae and her brothers. They stand around the Vardo, which has fallen on its side. The group helps with righting the Vardo. A grateful Dulcimae thanks the group and promises them a reading of the cards. Her brothers do not agree with that, but Dulcimae brushes them off.

The group moves on together with Dulcimae and her family towards Muhar. Along the way the group sees a hand sticking out from the sands by the sides of the track. After some investigation they see that the hand belongs to a person who is deceased for some time and that the rest of the body is still buried beneath the sands. The group decides that the body deserves a real burial, so they dig it up and lay it respectfully on the Vardo and take it with them to Muhar. With her Ghost Sight Velouria can see how this man died. His ghost is constantly re-enacting his own death. The man fled something, was overtaken, strangled and then withered into an instant skeleton.

These images frighten Velouria and she asks Oded Fay to tie the body down firmly, just like Father Brucian did with the bodies in Sourange. Oded agrees that this is no more than a sensible precaution and does so<sup>2</sup>. Oded Fay further wants to protect the body from evil influences. He realises that the ceremonial flail he still carries as a memory of his fallen master, is a powerful holy symbol. With the lipstick of Dulcimae he draws a flail on the chest of the unfortunate mummy, and so hopes to protect the soul of the poor victim.

In Muhar the small caravan draws quite a crowd, as strangers are something novel. The villagers have never seen anything as exotic as a Vardo or the Vistani family. The villagers see the body on the Vardo. They recognize the man as one of their fellow villagers and a huge

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<sup>1</sup> Thoughts like these earn her a powers check, without any effects however.

<sup>2</sup> Funny, even though the encounters in Sourange were never really dangerous for the group, it did scare them.

wailing goes up. Eventually one woman comes forward who identifies the man as her husband. She wants to take him home for a burial. Oded Fay gently dissuades her, he convinces her to take the body to the temple of Osiris for preparation for the burial. The woman is persuaded to give up her claims and she calms down a bit. The group is worried that a body that looks so old, passed away only recently, going by the reactions of the villagers.

The caravan comes to the centre of the village. There is a temple of Osiris and the holy well of the village. In front of the temple stands Isu, the high priestess of Osiris. She welcomes Oded Fay back to his home. She invites the group to stay in the temple for as long as they want. Dulcimae and her brothers decline. As Vistani they want to stay in their Vardo. They set up camp close to the holy well.

*Session 26: 8 August 2008*

Day 1, Muhar, Har' Akir

Oded Fay wants to spend the night in the temple, in his home, to be close to the dead man they found. He fears the manner of his death might compel the poor soul to walk again. He wants to be on hand then to be able to intervene. He cannot leave that responsibility to Isu. Velouria and Angus do not share this view. They want to be as far away from the dead body as possible. Herman sees no problem with staying near the body at night. He also wants to stay near Dulcimae, as he has taken quite a shine to her.

That night, when the villagers are all asleep, Herman goes to the Vardo of Dulcimae and her brothers. He wants to talk to Dulcimae and he manages to gain her attention. He tells her that only yesterday he fought with a mummy, who turned his victim into mummies as well. He feels that with finding this new mummy, more fights with mummies are on the horizon. He would like for Dulcimae to predict his future. In exchange he will let her know who the great love of her life is<sup>3</sup>.

Then Dulcimae starts to cry. She tells Herman that she really is not very good at predicting the future. She is nowhere near as good as her mother in laying the cards. Her brothers blame her for the fact that they ended up in Har' Akir, which was not their intention at all. Herman comforts her<sup>4</sup>.

When Dulcimae is calmed down a bit, Herman performs the "True Love" spell for her. It turns out that Herman is not her True Love, but that her True Love is to be found some 30 kilometres to the west. Looking west, Herman can see some sort of cliffs in the moonlight. Herman is rather disappointed that he is not the true love of the pretty Dulcimae. He is looking for love and recognition. He knows he will always stand in the shadow of his more accomplished cousin Oded Fay and sometimes jealousy rears its ugly head. He just wants to accomplish something for himself that Oded Fay does not also have.

Dulcimae is completely oblivious to this soul-searching of Herman and wants to set off in the middle of the night into the dangerous desert in search of her true love. Herman manages to convince her that this is not a good idea and that she should at least take her brothers with her if she goes in search of a husband.

In exchange for the revelation of her True Love, Dulcimae wants to arrange a card reading for Herman and his companions. Herman calls his sleepy companions and together they sit around Dulcimae while she lays the cards.

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<sup>3</sup> He is hoping it is him, he is a romantic, really.

<sup>4</sup> Just look at the cover of "Touch of Death", Dulcimae is the kind of dimwitted woman who would cry in the arms of a complete stranger about her failures and insecurities.

This first card is a Knave of Spades; this refers to an evil man, who does not know his proper place. The second card is a Queen, who no longer serves her king. Then comes the sign of 6. Next is the Ace of Clubs, which refers to a special person with great powers. The fifth card is the King of Spades, the true lord, but a wrathful one and one with great power. The last card is the 4 of Diamonds, 4 nights will pass before the predictions of these cards will come to pass. But it also refers to great riches to be found.

After he sees the sign of six, Angus immediately thinks of the prophecy of Hykosa and his six signs foretelling doom for all the land. He thinks that the third prediction<sup>5</sup> might come to pass in this very land. As Angus shares his thoughts with the rest of the party, Oded Fay thinks of an ancient Pharaoh, Ankh-Te-Pot. He was a powerful and evil Pharaoh and he ruled Har' Akir in ancient times with an iron fist. Because of the evil deed he committed while he ruled as a god, he can find no rest in the afterlife with the other gods. So occasionally he becomes restless and wanders the dunes of his former realm. In the prophecy that refers to the Son of the Suns, the title of the ancient Pharaohs, it is also said that he will send a knave to an eternity of cries. The group feels they can live with that, although innocent bystanders might get caught in the fallout.

Velouria identifies the Queen who no longer serves her King as the High Priestess Isu. The group thinks someone else might pretend to be the god Osiris and mislead her in that way. Oded Fay knows that there is a series of great cliffs to the west of Muhar, a great temple of Osiris may be found there. In ancient time the dead, including the pharaohs of old were buried there as well. Angus and Oded Fay both wonder who the King and Knave of Spades might be. Velouria is worried about this prediction and she wants to soothe her worries with more weapons. She wants to buy throwing knives. Only for the group to realise that in a village this small it might even be hard to find a smith who is able to make knives for weapons, let alone delicate throwing knives. The backwardness of his homeland suddenly hits Oded Fay. He has been spoiled in Darkon, where everything is available, for a price.

Angus thinks the group and Har' Akir might have 3 to 4 days before something goes seriously wrong. Herman thinks the group should accompany Dulcimae, if she goes looking for her true love. Her true love is to be found among the cliffs as well.

The group returns to the temple of Osiris. It is very late and they are tired of travelling and worrying about the near future.

Later that night Angus, Oded Fay and Herman are awakened by a blood curdling scream. They rush out into the moonlit, freezing night and they see something terrible. On one of the dunes near the village stands an old mummy. It seems to be directing a horde of zombies towards the Vardo of Dulcimae and her family. Her brothers are trying to defend her, but they are fighting a losing battle against these undead horrors.

The horrors of these monsters, which defile everything he believes in, overcome Oded Fay. He becomes enraged to see the dead so abused. Roaring and frothing at the mouth he throws himself into the fight<sup>6</sup>. Angus flees the scene and hides under Velouria's bed<sup>7</sup>, waking her. All the while Herman keeps his cool and he uses an illusion of fire raining from the skies, burning all in its path. It does not have its usual effect, a part of the zombies indeed flees, but the mummy on the dune top is not fazed and merely directs more zombies towards the Vardo of Dulcimae.

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<sup>5</sup> The group thinks that the mass murder of the orphans and nuns in the Orphanage of Martira Bay was the first sign.

<sup>6</sup> A failed horror check, Oded Fay becomes enraged.

<sup>7</sup> Another failed horror check.

The zombies become more violent in their onslaught and try to kidnap one of Dulcimae's brothers. Oded Fay sees this and still frothing, comes to his rescue. But in his blind rage he is no longer very discerning about where his sword lands. He kills Dulcimae's brother with one stroke of his sword, arms and legs bounce everywhere<sup>8</sup>.

Herman sees that in spite of his great powers, the tide of the battle goes against him, especially with allies like Oded Fay. He uses one mighty spell and suddenly Oded Fay and the five zombies he battles seem to disappear. A form of calm returns to the battlefield and Herman focuses on the remaining zombies. In the meantime Velouria has arrived at the battlefield. The first thing she sees is Herman casting a mighty spell after which Oded Fay and the monsters he battles suddenly disappear from her normal sight, but reappear in her Ghost Sight<sup>9</sup>. Her first thought is that Herman must have killed Oded Fay and that he must die by her blade for that, he is in a perfect position to backstab. But then she realises that Herman would never do something like that intentionally to his beloved cousin Clemens Oded Fay Superior<sup>10</sup>.

### *Session 27: 12 September 2008*

#### Day 1, Muhar, Har' Akir

The fight still continues. Oded still fights the zombies in the Border Ethereal. Angus has conquered his fears and tries to kill zombies with the use of his fire staff and his displacement abilities. Velouria dispatches one of the monsters with her daggers. Herman tries to use Stinking Cloud and Fire Stars to keep the undead horrors at bay. No matter how hard they fight there seem to be more and more zombies. And no one has even been able to land a blow against the monster who is directing the zombies from a nearby dune.

Then the fight becomes even harder. One of the brothers of Dulcimae is caught and kidnapped. The zombies leave with his writhing form across the dunes towards the deep desert. Then another brother is captured as well. Angus takes on the form of a mountain lion and chases them. The zombies seem to have gotten new orders and leave the battlefield.

Herman uses another spell to augment his physical powers and manages to kill two zombies. The Mummy on the dune top now understands how truly powerful Herman and the rest of the party can be. He retreats and takes the zombies with him. Velouria is deeply impressed with the range of powers Herman commands and secretly wishes to be able to wield these powers as well.

Angus still follows the zombies through the dunes, slowly he gains on them. But he grows tired of maintaining the form of a mountain lion. He roars in futile rage at the zombies. Then the zombies sink into the loose sand of the desert, taking their kidnap victims with them. Desperately Angus changes back to his normal form and tries to save them. This fails, as the zombies sink down and try to drag Angus with them. After some struggle, he manages to free himself. He marks the spot where the brothers disappeared and returns to the village of Muhar.

### *Session 28: 19 September 2008*

#### Day 2, Muhar, Har' Akir

Oded Fay is overwhelmed by guilt. Due to his rage-fuelled actions an innocent man lies dead! A man he was honor bound to protect! He wants to ask Isu, High Priestess of Osiris for abso-

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<sup>8</sup> The Rage, combined with a critical fumble, which causes triple damage.

<sup>9</sup> Velouria has the Ghost Sight ability, although it is sadly underused.

<sup>10</sup> Successful Wisdom check, whew.

lution for his sins. He must make this up to Osiris, the family of the man he killed and himself, if he is ever to function as a proper paladin again.

Herman tries to console Dulcimae after she has lost three brothers in one night.

Oded Fay visits Isu together with Velouria to ask for a way to find forgiveness. Isu seriously listens to his story. She then tells him how badly he has behaved by letting rage direct his actions. And letting his emotions rule him. She gives him a proper punishment. He must spend 5 days and 5 nights in the deep desert. He must continuously pray to Osiris for forgiveness. Oded Fay accepts this punishment as just.

Isu is not as she seems however. Velouria's interpretation of the cards is right. Isu is no longer a servant of Osiris, but now serves another. Isu is very happy that she was able to get the powerful Oded Fay out of the way this easily. Her plans are coming to fruition and she feels that Sen-Met<sup>11</sup> will be able to easily deal with this intruder.

Oded Fay returns to the rest of the group and he tells them of the penance he has been given. Then he immediately goes to search for some food and drink for five days and nights. He plans to start his penance immediately, to regain his sense of self worth. Herman is the only one who does not like this penance one bit. He wants to know where Oded Fay will go. Oded Fay tells him that Osiris will protect him, if he is still worthy of protection. Velouria wants to follow Oded Fay at a distance, just far enough away for Oded Fay to think he is facing the dangers of 5 full days in the desert all alone, but close enough to help him if things get tricky. Herman decides to follow him from a distance with his magic.

While Oded Fay is packing for his long stay in the desert, the villagers find another dead body. This one is holding a scrap of Angus's clothing. Very soon the enraged mob is screaming for his head. In a panic Herman and Angus wonder what to do. Velouria is calmly preparing to discreetly kill the ringleaders of the smallish mob. Oded Fay steps outside and speaks some soothing words to calm the mob down. Their rage cools and the mob disperses<sup>12</sup>. Oded is finally fully packed and goes to say goodbye to his horse Swift Justice, before he goes into the desert for his penance. As he is stroking the ears of his beloved horse, he suddenly realises that what he is doing is extremely stupid and dangerous. Oded Fay made a slight mistake, truly an accident. The victim was a foreigner to boot. There is no reason at all to go into the dangerous desert for some sort of penance over this. Oded Fay has done nothing which deserves punishment and he should tell Isu so. Confused Oded Fay steps back and these strange rebellious thoughts die away<sup>13</sup>.

While Oded Fay departs, Herman and Velouria discuss what to do next. It seems clear to them that the strange happenings in this land and the predictions of Dulcimae are tied to the strange Mummy they saw last night, directing the actions of the zombies. If this Mummy is laid to rest permanently, all the other problems will probably die away as well. Herman and Velouria think that they can make Angus go along with this line of thinking. Velouria is very irritated with Oded Fay and his need for a quest; she feels that the death of Dulcimae's brother at his hands was a tragic accident, with no need for penance.

Herman and Velouria realise that if they want to go after the powerful Mummy, they will need more powerful weapons than they have now. They want to have their weapons blessed by Isu, who as a priestess might command powerful magic against these undead beings. They present themselves to Isu with their quest, and after hearing them, Isu blesses their weapons. Then Herman and Velouria want to set off to find Angus and take him along. Perhaps this can all be solved before Oded Fay comes back from his meditations.

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<sup>11</sup> For those of you who do not know the adventure, Sen-Met is the Mummy posing as another Mummy, Ankh-Te-Pot. He is in league with Isu.

<sup>12</sup> It is that extremely high Charisma again.

<sup>13</sup> The influence of Swift Justice, the Ravenloft Paladin Mount.

Herman uses his mage sight to take a look at the weapons blessed by Isu and he sees that nothing as happened to them. He does not know much about divine magic, but he knows that he should be able to see something of the holy power imbuing them right now. He tells Velouria that something is seriously wrong. The weapons are powerless and Isu lies about what she does.

After some thinking, Herman draws some far reaching conclusions. Isu lied to them and pointed them at the evil Mummy, knowing they were seriously underpowered. She also sent Oded Fay into the desert for a penance, which does not make much sense. This, combined with the predictions of Dulcimae of the night before, points to the fact that Isu is not misguided in her actions, but is actively in league with the powers that wreak havoc here in Har' Akir. Where the group first thought that Isu might be misguided in serving the wrong King, they now feel that she is actively in league with a usurper to displace the rightful King of this place. Oded Fay might be in some serious danger!

Herman immediately scrys in the fire to find Oded Fay. He then find Angus and together with Velouria they set off to find Oded Fay and tell him all this. Oded Fay is very touched when his friends come to seek him after his first day of meditating in the burning sun. He is then deeply shocked by the news that Herman gives him. He wants to return to Muhar and confront Isu with this. This might turn into a fight with Isu, if she is truly become evil. Is this what Osiris would want?

Herman proposes to remove the wandering Mummy from the equation first. He feels that it is still possible that Isu is under some sort of evil influence. If this influence is removed, she might return to normal again.

*Session 29: 3 October 2008*

Day 2, The Desert, Har' Akir

Herman has told Oded Fay that the high priestess of Osiris, Isu and his superior, is not to be trusted. Oded Fay wants to confront Isu with this knowledge. Angus advises against this, he is still horrified about the manner of death of Dulcimae's brothers. They were pulled under the sand by some strange mummified zombies. He wants to chase down and destroy these zombies. Oded Fay feels that the brothers of Dulcimae are dead by now. But perhaps not and saving the innocent takes precedence over avenging wrongs. As long as the bodies of the brothers are not found, there might be a chance, however small, that they might still be alive. The very least Oded Fay and the rest of the party can do is try to find and possibly save them. Angus marked the spot where the brothers were pulled under the sand, and he can take the rest of the group to it.

The group follows Angus to the spot where the zombies disappeared in the sand with the still living brothers of Dulcimae. There Oded Fay notices how close they have come to the hills and cliffs of Pharaoh's Rest. Oded Fay leads the rest of the group into the deep valley between the hills. In these hills and in the valley are many burial sites from long ago. Even the temple to the ancient and evil Pharaoh Ankh-Te-Pot may be found here. Could this be the heart of the strange conspiracy in Har' Akir?

As the group moves into the hills, they are soon spotted by some hounds. These hounds immediately chase the group and soon attack. At the steps of the burial site for the great Pharaoh Ankh-Te-Pot the group defeats the first group of these hellish hounds. In the distance they see a second group approach. The group flees into the shade of the temple.

The temple turns out to be a huge complex of buildings inside the hillside. The group first ends up at the temple to Ra. They see many wonderful ancient statues there. One of them is

horribly mangled and partly destroyed. The group wonders how that could have happened; while the others are still in such superb condition after all these years.

After that the group wanders into the great hall, which contains the huge statue of Ankh-Te-Pot himself. Awestruck the group stares at the immense statue. After a bit they notice the many trails made in the dust on the floor. They follow one set, which seems to end in a wall. After some poking around they find the hidden door. This door swings open into a rather cramped but very nicely painted and sculpted hallway. It is clear that this hallway will lead to an important place. Somewhat nervous the group moves on.

The cramped hallway leads the group to a room with two standing sarcophaguses. With his mage-sight, Herman sees that both burial chests contain a re-animated mummy, which will probably become active if the burial chests are disturbed or the group tries to pass the sarcophaguses into the rest of the hallway or down the stairs to another, lower level. One of the burial chests contains a powerful magical object. The group pro-actively decides to set one of the coffins on fire and they brutally battle the other mummy. After a while they are victorious. They decide not to search through the remains for the magical object. They are worried it might be holy and they do not want to desecrate it further.

The group decides to follow the hallway. This takes them to a large hall which contains a huge ship on a pedestal. Oded Fay identifies this correctly as a ship to take the dead to the afterlife. The group searches the ship, but it is empty, except for a huge gong. There is no hammer or anything to sound the gong.

In this huge hall there is another doorway, guarded by two statues, which leads further into the complex. The group is afraid to approach the statues and goes back down the cramped hallway they came from. In the smaller chamber with the two sarcophaguses, they decide to take the stairs down to the lower level.

The stairs lead into another chamber with a lot of sarcophaguses in it. Herman determines that all the burial chests contain re-animated mummy, ready to come to violent life at a moments notice. The group decides to be very proactive again. Herman flood the small chamber with oil. Angus then lights the oil with his fire staff. With his powers he then keeps the fire hot and blazing. The mummies inside the coffins all catch fire and quickly burn to ash.

Except for one. With red eyes, glowing in rage, it steps unharmed through the fire, approaching the group in the stairs, with murder in its bandaged heart. Herman panics, pulls one of his guns and shoots Angus in the back<sup>14</sup>. Angus is not particularly fazed, as his eyes were just struck by the sight of a red hot glowing Ankh on the chest of the Mummy. Through a haze of pain and fire he understands that this thing might be very important. He uses his powers to pull the thing to him. After a bit the chain holding the Ankh snaps and the Ankh flies through the room into the hands of Angus.

The group flees the approach of this obviously powerful Mummy. They greatly fear that the Mummy is Ankh-Te-Pot, risen to punish evildoers. And they have certainly been doing evil in this temple. In their panic and confusion, they run towards the great hall with the ship instead of the exit. Angus rushes up the stairs, into the ship and bangs the Ankh on the gong. He is not very clear why he does this, but he instinctively understands that this gong will send a message.

The result is ear shattering. The vibrations of the gong are deep and seem to deafen everyone. When the sound finally dies away, a deep voice booms throughout the complex: "Who awakens Ankh-Te-Pot? Who disturbs the rest of the Pharaoh?" Only then does the group realise that the Mummy who had chased them was not Ankh-Te-Pot! The real Ankh-Te-Pot was asleep all this time. The strange happenings in the land passed him by.

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<sup>14</sup> Critical fumble.



From the doorway between the two strange statues comes a Mummy. But the Mummy which chased the group also enters the hall, on the heels of the party. When the two Mummies see each other, they no longer bother with the group, but assault each other. Their titanic fight shakes the foundations of the temple. The group slips away, while the two ancient monsters fight.

Rushing out, Angus again strikes off one of the predictions of Hykosa. They are still closer to the night of evil which will descend over the land. Oded Fay realises how far Isu has wandered from the teachings of Osiris, if she allied herself with one of these two mummies.

The group leaves the temple and rushes into the shimmering mirages of the deep desert, never looking back.

## Chapter 8: Intermezzo

In this chapter there will be some more room for character development and contemplation, after the harrowing events in which the group was witness to at least two signs of the coming night of darkness. Two years have passed as well, this means that Velouria is now a bit older.

*Session 30: 17 October 2008*

17 May, 738 BC, Ravenstein, Darkon

It has been two years since the group returned from Har'Akir. They have permanently settled in Ravenstein and have focused on the education of Velouria, so that in a few years she may become a worthy, young lady, capable of managing her own estate in service to her king, Azalin.

Oded Fay Clemens Superior has grown to become a very capable overseer and the estate of Ravenstein and Avezaath has really bloomed under his care. Velouria will soon rule a very small but wealthy domain.

Velouria is now 15 years old, less than a year remains until her majority. She has converted to druidism<sup>1</sup>. In Har'Akir she saw what powerful magical spells can do. And she wanted the same. She was not attracted to the sterile world of study and books (even though Herman cuts as many corners as he can), but to the more earthy life of a druid. Especially the destructive side of nature attracted her. Converting to druidism is a rebellious act in Darkon, where the Eternal Order grows in influence.

Herman has studied some in Il Aluk and even met two lady-friends. One is Samantha Ragna, a gorgeous, young, red-haired socialite who lives next door to his parents in Martira Bay. The other is Natalia Vorishkova, a woman he met in Il Aluk and is still a pen-pal. He has invested in some magical writings, so that Oded Fay and Angus of Tepest will not again lose their memories and think themselves to be Darkonese natives. He has also profiled himself more as a court-mage to Velouria and the village of Ravenstein can now boast the most magical streetlights in all of Darkon.

Angus has grown stronger in his powers.

Oded and Herman still feel that it is important for Velouria to get to know her fellow Lords in the vicinity. So they again set out for the little Estate of Babyioniënbroek<sup>2</sup> and meet up with the local lord there. He has a son a few years younger than Velouria and he might be an interesting partner for her in the future.

After a short time of travel, they come to the nearby village of Babyioniënbroek. They travel onwards to the Estate to meet there with the local Lord. On the way there, Velouria spots a young boy of about 12 years tormenting a cat. As a druid she cannot let this pass. So she loads her sling and lets go of a shot at the boy. It stings the boy and he flees crying into the manor. Oded is furious, he remonstrates with Velouria for using weapons at an innocent boy.

Velouria feels she is completely misunderstood by her repressive foster father. He just wants to marry her off and he cares nothing for her feelings or for those of cats<sup>3</sup>.

Inside the manor the group is graciously received by the elderly Lord Jonathan of Babyioniënbroek. He is soon joined by his younger son, Augustus. This is the boy who was shot at by Velouria! This immediately causes some strife with the party. Jonathan is understandably upset that his guests take shots at his son and heir. Oded is upset that Velourias actions cause all this trouble. Velouria is upset that no one seems to understand her and pretty soon the party breaks up.

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<sup>1</sup> She duel-classed to Druid.

<sup>2</sup> Just as Ravenstein and Avezaath, this is the name of a small Dutch village.

<sup>3</sup> You know, general teenage drama. She is going to paint her room black any minute.

A furious Oded goes home with the party. On the way back he preaches to Velouria again and again about her role as a Lady and her duties. She did not behave like a proper guest and daughter today. Velouria is heartily sick of his preaching and she spurs her pony into a fast gallop and races into the woods by the side of the road. She soon loses her companions between the thick trees.

Calmly Velouria rides on. She wants to be alone, since no one understands her. Deep in the dark woods, she decides to test her druidic powers. With a small ceremony she calls for a woodland being to befriend her. In answer to her calls a large wolf comes to her. She names the beast Tinkerbelle and returns home with it. There she resolves to teach it all sorts of tricks. At home, the relationship between her and the adult members of the group is still decidedly chilly, but they realise she is turning into a woman, and this sort of irrational, emotional behaviour<sup>4</sup> is to be expected.

24 May, 738 BC Ravenstein, Darkon

Inspector Alanik Ray sends a messenger to his trusted allies Clemens Superior and his family. Currently Martira Bay is (again) plagued by strange disappearances and dead bodies found floating in the bay. The bodies are completely drained of bodily fluids. When Velouria hears of this, she immediately wants to go to Martira Bay. "We have experience with this sort of thing!"

Oded Fay decides to pay a visit to his uncle and aunt Superior, Herman's parents. They can then extend a hand to Alanik Ray as well. Herman wants to visit Samantha Ragna, the pretty neighbour to his parents.

26 May, 738 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

Once the party has arrived at the home of the Superior family in Martira Bay, Oded Fay, Angus and Velouria go to Alanik Ray, to hear more of the strange murders. Herman is not really interested and goes out with the pretty redhead Samantha.

*Session 31: 12 December 2008*<sup>5</sup>

26 May 738 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

Alanik Ray tells Oded Fay, Angus and Velouria about the strange murders. All the victims are young, healthy men. Oded Fay suspects vampires, he is afraid not all vampires were killed the last time they were here. Does this mean the return of Tavelia? Velouria notices that these men are drained of more than blood alone. All bodily fluids are gone. And that the bite marks seem different, smaller and in many more places. Oded Fay feels there are very little leads to investigate this case. He can ask around in his family, the young men seem to be from his social circle, well off but not extremely rich.

In the mean time Herman has a very nice afternoon with the charming Samantha Ragna. They go to the modern cafés along the boulevard, they enjoy the sunshine, they drink chocolate and eat small, sweet pies<sup>6</sup>.

Herman is worried about what he has heard about the murders of young men. He thinks that some sort of killer or monster might be on the loose. When Samantha does not watch him, he

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<sup>4</sup> They are definitely all manly men.

<sup>5</sup> The 31<sup>st</sup> session. My last campaign only lasted 31 sessions. A small emotional moment for the DM, sniff, sniff. Carry on, nothing to see here.

<sup>6</sup> Think Madam Puddifoot's Tea Shop from Harry Potter (where all the young couples went).

casts Blood Lightning on himself. That way, when Samantha is attacked, he can nobly defend her and this powerful spell will take effect when his first drop of blood is spilled<sup>7</sup>.

27 May

Another body is found. This time it can be identified as a young man named Otto Flavius, of the Flavius family. Alanik Ray informs Oded Fay and Herman of this. They go to the home of the Flavius family to find out more about the last days of Otto.

The home of the Flavius family is situated in a affluent part of town. Here all the successful businessmen live. They still have to work for a living, but they run large businesses and have many employees. As Oded Fay and Herman knock on the door, it is opened by a servant, who ushers them into a salon, where Mr and Mrs Flavius receive their guests. They did not yet know that their son was dead and are deeply shocked and grieved by this news.

After Mr and Mrs Flavius have composed themselves a bit, Mrs Flavius immediately blames the harbour harlot for the death of her son. Sobbing she tells Oded Fay and Herman that her son had recently started an affair with a very low-class woman from the harbour district. And she knows what that means! Her son had fallen into the clutches of some hussy who wanted nothing but money! She was the one who had brought him into trouble and may even have contributed to his death. Mrs Flavius says she has had her son followed to a certain address in a bad part of town. She gives it to them.

Mr and Mrs Flavius are overcome with grief and Oded Fay and Herman leave them. Herman wonders if a woman or a monster might pose as a servant or other woman of low status to lure men of power and wealth, to make them her prey. But why do they need to die? Is she not satisfied with their money? Is there some sort of blackmail-scheme going on, or an angry pimp?

In the mean time Velouria wanders the streets of Martira Bay alone. She wanders the market and suddenly sees the neighbour of the Superior family that Herman has a crush on. The red hair of Samantha Ragna is unmistakable. She is walking on the arm of a young man and she is flirting with him. The hussy! Velouria decides to follow this couple to see what they are up to and then tell Herman what a faithless woman he is courting. After some time she sees Samantha enter a rundown house in a rundown part of town. She decides to wait for a bit until Samantha comes out again.

While Velouria is waiting, Oded Fay and Herman come walking down the street, looking for a certain address. Oded Fay sees Velouria immediately and leaves Herman behind, looking for the right number. He takes Velouria a bit further down the street to give her a firm talking too. How dare she leave the house and wander the streets without protection! Does she not know there is a mad killer on the loose? As Oded Fay tries to catch his breath after this angry tirade, Velouria tells him, what she found out about Samantha Ragna. Oded Fay realises that Samantha Ragna might be the murderer! She moves in the same social circles as the young men who got killed and she entered the house that Mrs Flavius pinpointed as the love nest of her dead boy.

While Oded Fay and Velouria have a moment among themselves, Herman studies the houses in the street. Then he hears the voice of the woman he loves. Samantha is standing very close behind him and is very grateful to see him there. She has lost her way and she would like for him to take her home, since she is afraid to walk alone. And since he is her neighbour, it

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<sup>7</sup> Herman really is a romantic at heart.

would not be out of the way for him. Herman knows this area is very dangerous, a murder has taken place here! He leaves with Samantha and fails to inform his still arguing friends of this. Oded Fay and Velouria have found some sort of agreement and turn to tell Herman about their discoveries. Then they see he is gone. Oded Fay is annoyed, but he has known Herman for a long time and knows that he is slightly untrustworthy and will probably not get himself into too much trouble.

Velouria decides to break and enter into the house in which Samantha went with her lover (or victim?) and to which Oded Fay and Herman were directed. Oded Fay feels guilty about this, but he says nothing. It is convenient. And they might be able to save a victim this way, or catch a criminal<sup>8</sup>.

The inside of the house is a very run down mess. There is dust and cobwebs everywhere, no furniture and a damp, musty smell. This does not look like the place for a romantic tête-à-tête. Some stifled moans are coming from upstairs. Carefully Oded Fay and Velouria go up the stairs to investigate further. There the webs are even worse.

In one room they find cocoons about the size of a man. One of them is moving. The moans come from that cocoon as well. Quickly they cut open the cocoon. The lover of Samantha is in it. As soon as he is free, he starts to vomit, he vomits blood even. Oded Fay sees the man might die in minutes and quickly lays his hands on the young man. The man stops vomiting, but faints.

Oded Fay searches the other cocoons. They are filled with red spiders. This nest of infection must be cleansed! And the young man returned to his family. Where is Herman?

*Session 32: 2 January 2009*

27 May 738 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

Angus remained at the Superior residence, while Herman and Oded Fay investigated the strange murders. Looking out from a window he sees that Herman returns, with Samantha on his arm. Herman does not go to his home, but to Samantha's home. Oded Fay is nowhere to be seen. Angus never really liked Samantha, to his mind she always looked like a predatory social climber.

Angus uses his stronger mental powers to search for the mind of Oded Fay. When he finds him, he contacts his friend. Oded Fay is struck with fear by this sudden intimate mental contact and he tries to flee from it<sup>9</sup>. After a while he calms down and is able to understand what Angus is trying to tell him. Oded Fay informs Angus that Samantha is very dangerous, she might be a murderer or in league with a murderer. She might even command strange powers.

Angus then tries to relay this information through his mental powers to Herman. Due to Herman's knowledge of arcane powers, he is not as frightened of Angus' intrusion as Oded Fay was. But he is not interested in the warnings of Angus and Oded Fay. He is entwined in the warm arms of Samantha, it looks like he might finally get somewhere with a beautiful woman. Besides that, he has little respect for the mental faculties of Angus. Herman feels that Angus will believe anything. At this moment he also disregards the warnings of Oded Fay, he wants to believe Oded Fay is wrong.

In the mean time, Oded Fay and Velouria have sent for some men of Alanik Ray. They want to have the nest of the spiders cleansed with fire. The disgusted men are happy to comply. As

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<sup>8</sup> The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Definitely the slippery slope for a paladin.

<sup>9</sup> Failed fear check.

the run down house is thoroughly fumigated<sup>10</sup>, Oded Fay returns with Velouria to their home with the rest of the Superior family.

Meanwhile, when Herman finally believes he has a chance for success with a beautiful woman, she turns into a giant, monstrous spider<sup>11</sup>, still with red hair. But now these are the short, rough hairs that help spiders with climbing. Herman is paralyzed with fear<sup>12</sup>. The abhorrent spiders makes ready to eat Herman and to leave his corpse as food for her young. However as soon as the first drop of Herman's blood is spilled, powerful blood-red lightning<sup>13</sup> crashes through the house, destroying everything in its path. The spider is struck repeatedly and dies as Herman looks on in horror. The house starts to crumble under the onslaught of the lightning. Herman stumbles outside.

Outside Velouria and Angus make fun of Herman's misery. They laugh at him for being so gullible as to believe that a beautiful woman would actually love him<sup>14</sup>.

*Session 33: 9 January 2009*

1 June 738, BC, Ravenstein, Darkon

After the events of last week, the group returned to Ravenstein to take up their normal duties again. This goes with some difficulty. Herman is filled with rage against Angus and Velouria, who laughed at him so cruelly, while his dreams of a beautiful woman to call his own were completely shattered. He feels that they have absolutely no regard for his feelings in this matter.

Angus still wonders what to do about the little statuette he has with him<sup>15</sup>. He shows it to Herman. Herman tells him some blatant lies about the statue. He surmises that it will fulfill wishes, but not in a good way. But at the moment he does not care to how much grief Angus may come<sup>16</sup>. His advice is to give the little statue to Velouria<sup>17</sup>. Velouria does not want to keep it. She feels that a powerful and odd object like that will not bring any sort of good luck. It has an evil look to it. She decides to ask her circle of druids for advice and perhaps they know how to destroy it, or neutralize it.

In the mean time Oded Fay has heard about developments in other lands<sup>18</sup>. The Dead Mans Campaigns seem to have ended, finally. He has heard about a treaty to be signed any day now in Dementlieu. The nations of LaMordia, Dementlieu, Mordent, Richemulot and Borca are willing to sign a pact of mutual protection against Falkovnian aggression<sup>19</sup>. The smaller countries do not have the powerful protection of Darkon and fear that Falkovnia might be looking towards them for expansion.

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<sup>10</sup> With fire!

<sup>11</sup> Samantha really is a Red Widow, from the Monstrous Compendium I.

<sup>12</sup> A failed fear check, who wouldn't be scared.

<sup>13</sup> A farseeing but misguided Herman cast this on himself in session 31.

<sup>14</sup> Not their finest moment, no.

<sup>15</sup> It is the Wishing Imp, introduced in chapter 5. Angus lacks ambition and is not very responsive to the lures of the statue.

<sup>16</sup> Powers check, no consequences however.

<sup>17</sup> Tsk tsk tsk.

<sup>18</sup> As foster father to Velouria, a lady-to-be, he keeps up to date with important national and international political developments.

<sup>19</sup> This will become the treaty of the four towers. I could not find much about it and sources seemed confused about the partaking nations, so at the moment it is five countries.

Angus would really like to go to Dementlieu to witness this. As a tradesman he is very well aware that Falkovnia is an important trading partner for these small countries. a mutual protection pact will almost certainly endanger this trade. They will need to look elsewhere for a lot of their imported goods, perhaps they will look to Darkon. Herman too would like to visit Dementlieu, the pinnacle of civilisation. Oded Fay thinks that a short visit to Dementlieu and some other lands will be good for Velouria. It will broaden her outlook and make her think of more than just her small estate<sup>20</sup>. Velouria would like to make a trip as well. She would also like to travel onwards to Forlorn, a small, wild land where druids still live.

Later that night Velouria visits the druids under her protection<sup>21</sup> and asks them for her advice concerning the little statuette. The druids consult and study the object. They tell her that it cannot be destroyed for at least another two weeks, when the moon is full. She should return then. Until then, she should keep the little thing<sup>22</sup>.

3 June 738 BC, Martira Bay, Darkon

The group finds a ship to Port-á-Lucine in Dementlieu. They board it and depart for new horizons.

*Session 34: 23 January 2009*

10 June 738 BC, Port-á-Lucine, Dementlieu.

After a harrowing trip along the Jagged Coast and the Isle of Agony and a short stop in Ludendorf to take on fresh supplies, the group finally disembarks at Port-á-Lucine.

The city is magnificent, with modern buildings conquering the sky, a busy and neat harbour area and a wonderful boulevard, where the rich and famous drink their chocolate and discuss the politics of the day. The pact to be signed is in the air. There are people of many nations all around and the air is thick with intrigue. A popular philosopher is in town as well, his readings are attended by many people and his ideas discussed everywhere.

The group takes lodgings in a rather sober inn and then try to make sense of all the happenings in town. They also try to restore themselves after the long sea voyage. The rest and eat and relax among themselves.

11 June

Herman wants to find a suitable mate for Velouria and he starts to ask around for men who might be suitable for a young noble woman. After a bit of asking he learns that Monsieur Dominic De Honaire is considered the most eligible bachelor around. He is not of noble blood, but very rich and the most important advisor of Govenour Guignol.

After Herman hears this, he tries to take the rest of the party along to the Blue Lantern Tavern. This is the most popular café of the moment. All the important political and cultural people gather here to drink coffee, chocolate and make deals for political gain. All the new cultural movements start here. Anyone who is anybody goes here to be seen.

In the "Blue Lantern" the group soon finds a place to sit and they look around them at the other patrons. They are mostly older, rich people. In soft voices they discuss serious matters of international importance. Herman spots a red-haired man of his age sitting alone at a table. Slightly behind him stand two surly looking men, who have 'personal bodyguard' written all

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<sup>20</sup> I find it very cute, the way Oded Fay always tries to think of Velouria's well being and education first.

<sup>21</sup> It is a bit complicated. Velouria is a worldly ruler and as such she extends her protection to the sect, so they are not molested by the locals. On the other hand, she is their student. In religious matters, the druids are more senior.

<sup>22</sup> The druids pass on responsibility very easily.

over them. The other people from the café approach this man one by one, have a short talk with him and then leave him alone again. Herman concludes that this must be the influential Dominic De Honaire.

Herman decides to be bold and introduces himself and the rest of the party to Dominic De Honaire<sup>23</sup>. His excuse for introducing the group is that Lady Velouria is of noble blood and touring the civilised domains near Darkon. She and her guardian (Oded Fay) and her servants (Herman himself and Angus) travel to meet new people and make alliances. Herman hints that the Lady Velouria is of noble blood and as such has the ear of Azalin Rex, ruler of Darkon and up until now the only one who has been able to successfully withstand the onslaught of Falkovnian aggression.

Dominic De Honaire takes the hint and thinking that through Velouria and her guardian Oded Fay he can lay claim to some sort of support from the powerful Azalin Rex against the terrifying Vlad Drakov, he invites the group to his soirée the next evening.

### *Session 35: 8 February 2009*

12 June 738 BC, Port-á-Lucine, Dementlieu

The group is invited to the home of the influential Dominic De Honaire. He has the ear of the Govenour Guignol and has a developing crush on Velouria. Velouria thinks he is a silly, fat, old man. Dominic hopes that through Velouria he can gather the power of Darkon behind the mutual protection pact that is soon to be signed here. The soirée is very busy and the ambassadors from the several nations who concern themselves with the mutual protection pact are very politically savvy and therefore attend this soirée as well.

The group is very impressed with what they see in the town house of Dominic De Honaire. Everywhere there are gorgeous women, strong men, marble, gold, velvet, tasty tid-bits and sparkly wine. This is a much higher social class than what even they are used to in Darkon. In one of the rooms Jacques Tourniquet is speaking. He is the famous and popular philosopher the group has already heard so much about. He speaks of the important role pain and suffering can play in truly understanding life and reality. Only through suffering can a person really get into contact with the world surrounding them. The group collectively feels this is utter nonsense. They have had enough encounters with pain to know it is no fun at all and that they will try to avoid it in the future. But Jacques Tourniquet seems to strike a chord with the young, naive and bored crowd of Dementlieuse nouveau riche.

Herman suspects some deeper game and looks at the speaker with his mage-sight. He sees that the philosopher is completely normal but that he seems to be awash in some evil magic or aura. Oded Fay and Angus too feel that something is very wrong with this man. The young people of Port-á-Lucine might be at some sort of risk from this man. They want to keep an eye on him.

In another room Herman sees a few Falkovnian soldiers intimidate a soberly dressed young man. The Falkovnian men are recognizable by their uniforms and the hawk claws burned into their forehead at birth. The group is shocked that their enemies are truly so barbaric as to brand babies<sup>24</sup>. The Falkovnian men are members of the Falkovnian embassy in Dementlieu. Dominic De Honaire could not really refuse them entry. He does not want to antagonize the Falkovnians unnecessarily until the mutual protection pact is actually signed and in effect. Herman talks to the Falkovnian men for a bit and convinces them to leave the young man alone. The young man is frightened, but quite irritated. He was talking with the Falkovnians about a possible trade agreement. He is Jonathan von Aubrecker, nephew to Baron von Aubrecker of LaMordia. The trade in coal and grain between LaMordia and Falkvonia must

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<sup>23</sup> At times Herman can be a bit of a social climber as well.

<sup>24</sup> As I said, Ravenloft newbies, so this really was a shock.



continue if the people of the smaller LaMordia are to survive their harsh winters. Baron von Aubrecker has come to believe that the mutual protection pact is doomed to failure as the nations will not be able to feed themselves without the grain from Falkovnia.

In the mean time, Angus as introduced himself to a gorgeous woman, Nostalia Romaine, the ambassador from Borca. She is wearing some beautiful flowers in her hair. Angus recognizes them as extremely poisonous. This does not worry him, as he is more impressed with her beauty. Her voice too, has him in raptures.

Oded Fay realizes he has not seen Velouria for some time. He tries to find her and sees that she is experimenting with the fizzy white wine<sup>25</sup>. He immediately puts a stop to this. She is too young for that sort of thing. Velouria does not appreciate this at all and feels very sullen. He takes her along to meet with Dominic De Honaire again, to pay their respects and thank him for the invitation. This time Dominic De Honaire is very charming and takes some time to talk to Oded Fay. Oded Fay thinks that Dominic is a very amiable man<sup>26</sup>. Too bad he is twice as old as Velouria, with his money and influence, he might be a good match for her.

The soirée comes to an end and one by one the guests are leaving. Herman impresses everyone by playing the national anthem of Dementlieu when Velouria and her party take their leave of their host Dominic De Honaire.

Angus wants to walk Nostalia Romaine back to her lodgings. She allows his company and they have a delightful walk in the warm night of Port-à-Lucine. She flirts with him outrageously and Angus is quite enamoured of her. As he drops her off at the door of her lodgings, she asks him about his position in Darkon. Thinking that he can impress her with his important connections, he tells her that Azalin Rex knows about his every move.

Unaccountably, Nostalia immediately loses all interest in Angus and leaves him standing on the doorstep<sup>27</sup>. A very frustrated Angus makes his way back to his own lodgings.

Outside the home of Dominic De Honaire, Oded Fay, Velouria and Herman meet with a very sick Lucine<sup>28</sup>, a young woman who attended the party as well. They saw her listening attentively to Monsieur Jacques Tourniquet. She obviously drank too much and is now sick all over the place. Velouria picks her pockets, while Oded Fay tries to heal her. Herman arranges a carriage for her to take her home. Oded Fay and Herman are surprised that a young woman of such good breeding is allowed to make such a spectacle of herself in polite society.

### *Session 36: 22 February 2009*

13 June 738 BC, Port-à-Lucine, Dementlieu

By now Velouria wants to return home. The international, political intrigue is boring to her, because she does not understand it. Also, she wants to return to the druids, because they might be able to help her destroy the strange statue. The night of the full moon draws near. Even more worrying, both Herman and Oded Fay seem to want to marry her to Dominic De Honaire and he is a really repulsive toad of a man<sup>29</sup>. She wanders around the harbour area and overhears a conversation between two sailors and their plans for the journey towards

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<sup>25</sup> By drinking it.

<sup>26</sup> Dominic's powers at work. Oded Fay is now under his influence.

<sup>27</sup> He never knew how close he was to dying. Nostalia really wanted to kiss him, but was worried that Azalin Rex might start to look for a missed servant. She knows she is not that powerful or well-protected.

<sup>28</sup> She is the Ravenloft version of Paris Hilton.

<sup>29</sup> As Dominic's crush on Velouria grows stronger, so does her antipathy towards him.

Ludendorf and Martira Bay. Velouria is sorely tempted, but decides to stay with Oded Fay and the rest of the group<sup>30</sup>.

At the Inn the Herman meets with a young man called George Weathermay, brother-in-law to Daniel Weathermay –Foxgrove, the de facto ruler of nearby Mordent. He and Herman hit it off, as they have a lot in common. They are close in age and are both very fond of modern guns and hunting methods<sup>31</sup>.

The group is still very worried about the popular philosopher Jacques Tourniquet. They feel that his speeches about suffering being the path to enlightenment will harm the young and silly in Port-à-Lucine. Later that afternoon they will attend a meeting where Jacques Tourniquet will speak further about his philosophy.

The meeting is very proper. About ten young, rich ladies and their chaperones, mostly older women, attend every word of Jacques. The meeting is in the home of Jacques. The home is small, smaller than what the attendees are used to. But it is very well appointed and certainly all seems in order. Several servants attend to the needs of the company and everyone here is treated with all due respect and decorum.

The group listens attentively to the words of Jacques and is not critical at all of his words and obviously blatant fallacies. They don't want to attract attention to themselves. The other attendees hangs upon every word of Jacques. Herman grows bored and decides that nothing interesting will happen while Jacques is still talking. He excuses himself with the false excuse that he needs to find a privy and starts to investigate the rest of the house on his own.

Herman soon wanders into the basement, finds a secret door and behind that finds a strange sort of room. Somewhere between an artists atelier and a chapel. A young women kneels, dressed in only her undergarments. She is sweating profusely and seems to worship some sort of demonic, little statue. She is torturing herself by holding her arms spread out, her hands above two candle flames and heavy weights that are hanged with sharp hooks into her arms. This construction forces her to hold her hands high above the flames, or they will burn her. But then the hooks dig deeper into her flesh. If she lowers her hands, to ease the weight hanging on the hooks, she will burn her hands.

Herman is very confused. The woman is not tied down in any way and she could easily remove herself from this torture. If she wanted to she could lower her hands away from the flames and remove the hooks from her bleeding flesh. Yet she remains kneeling, muttering things to herself and punishing herself in this gruesome way. Herman goes to her and saves her from her predicament. She struggles against him. She needs to remain there to prove to Jacques that she really, really understands his lessons and that she is close to enlightenment. Herman ignores her feeble struggles and rescues her against her will.

The rest of the group are becoming restless as well. The philosophy of Jacques is obviously deeply flawed and only the very stupid, vapid and shallow would give any credit to the idea of suffering as the pathway to enlightenment. They are also worried about Herman and what he might be up to. They excuse themselves as well.

Angus makes mental contact with Herman and takes care that Herman become practically invisible to the butler and kitchenmaid in the house. Herman suspects that Jacques is influenced by the demonic statue in the basement to spread more senseless suffering in the world by this idiotic philosophy.

Once the group meets up with Herman and the rescued woman, they find out that she is Bianca D'Almara. She is something of a heroine to the rest of the shallow girls in thrall to Jacques, as she is the only one brave enough to make the next step onto the path of suffering. Oded Fay tries to tell Bianca and the rest of the women that suffering might indeed lead to more insight into the plight of others. But that this might also be achieved by sacrificing time

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<sup>30</sup> This was actually the Wishing Imp playing on her subconscious wishes.

<sup>31</sup> They have no idea they even have a girlfriend in common!

and effort into helping others in need. For example by feeding the poor, helping the aged and so forth. The shallow rich girls feel that this is not nearly as glamorous as a torture trip and it sounds too much like work. Besides, it might get them dirty.

*Session 37: 22 march 2009*

14 June 738 BC, Port-á-Lucine

After the adventures of yesterday, the group decides to have a day off today. They wish to enjoy the sunshine, walk in the beautiful park and drink some more chocolate. Today is an important day however.

The streets are buzzing with the news. Yesterday the Treaty of the Four Towers was signed. Even though the language of the treaty was as politically neutral as possible, it was still very clear to everybody that the Treaty is meant to fend off the threat posed by Falkovnia. It goes without saying that the Falkovnians are not happy. They are in fact so angry that the Falkovnian embassy in Dementlieu is being closed. The embassies in the other participants of the Treaty are probably being closed as well. Suddenly people are worried as well. Where will the grain for next years bread come from? Will Falkovnia stop trade with the treaty partners? Will everybody be reduced to eating potatoes, like farmers?

The group is very politically and economically savvy and they start turning over all the possible implications in their minds. Oded Fay and Velouria think of Darkon. Darkon might become the powerhouse of agricultural produce for the nations of the Treaty. Oded Fay sends a message to Azalin Rex immediately with these latest developments. Velouria sends a message to her Estate to focus on the enlargement of the fields and to plan to grow more wheat and other cereals for the next year.

On the other hand, it might be that the nations of the Treaty will eventually loose out to the economic and military power of Falkovnia. Perhaps monsieur Dominic De Honaire is no longer an interesting marriage partner for Velouria. Oded Fay decides to shelve the romance for a bit, until the future has become more clear.

Angus too wants to alert his coal burners guild to these new developments. They might use their 'special' influence to make beneficial deals with people in LaMordia and Darkon to buy and sell their products. He feels this treaty might result in some sort of arms race between the nations of the Treaty and Falkovnia. This will drive up demand for weapons and the means to make them, charcoal. So he and his guild members might be looking at increased trade.

The group decides to move on towards Mordent and Mordentshire. Mordent is also a very developed realm and Herman wants to become better acquainted with the Weathermay-Foxgrove family, after he hit it off so well with George Weathermay. And although his brother-in-law Daniel Foxgrove only carries the title of Mayor, it is clear that he rules the small nation of Mordent. Perhaps an alliance with Mordent might be more profitable for Velouria in the future than an alliance with Dementlieu.

The group decides to travel towards Mordentshire. It will be a short trip of a few days.

17 June

The group has arrived in the Dementlieuse border town of Chateaunoir. Here they will spend the night. The next day, they will cross the border into Mordent. They hope to reach the town of Mordentshire by the fall of the evening, this means that they will need to leave early the next morning and travel fast.

That night they hear some strange stories of the road they plan to take. They are especially warned against the swamp and the abandoned and haunted manor that stands at the centre of

the swamp. As they ask more questions, they group hears the story of the Wescote family. A Dementlieuse girl from the rich Campbell-family was to marry the heir of the equally rich Wescote-family. But things went terribly wrong on the night before the marriage. The girl, Ann, died and some members of the Wescote family as well. Then the swamps claimed more and more of the fertile lands of the Wescote estate and the family fell to ruin. Clearly they were cursed for the acts of that evil night.

The group is interested in this story, not only because it might cause them trouble on their way to Mordentshire. Angus is interested in solving the mystery for it's own sake. Herman is interested in two obscenely rich families in the same neighbourhood.

## Chapter 9: Howls in the Night

As a part of Velouria's Grand Tour through the domains of Ravenloft, they come through Mordent and the Howls in the Night adventure is a good one. The story is relatively complex and the foes look scary but are manageable. Unfortunately my players don't always get into the right gothic horror mood and are definitely more 21<sup>st</sup> century than I would occasionally like.

Still, this is another chapter until the group gets involved in the Grand Conjunction again.

Bog take your bones  
and keep them, Burton Wescote!  
The hounds are forever yours,  
but now they lie beneath my hand!  
Live long and suffer, you selfish—"

*Session 37: 22 march 2009 (continued)*

18 June 738 BC, Chateau noir, Dementlieu

The group departs Chateau noir for Mordentshire. They travel along the well maintained road towards Mordent and enjoy the warm spring sun. After some time they enter Mordent and the area becomes very wet. It is beautiful though. The trees are green with leaves, birds are tweeting, frogs are croaking, the sun is still shining.

The group passes a small footpath leading away from the main road and they hear a scream. And some sinister barking. Quickly they enter the footpath and follow it towards the screaming. Soon they come upon a man who is beset by a group of dogs. They menace him and the man is wounded already. The group charges forward to help the man and then they see to their horror that the dogs are no dogs at all, but some sort of strange constructs made from mud and sticks. They have no eyes. Angus flees in fear, the rest kills the dogs. The dogs do not bleed, but they can be destroyed, after which they fall apart into little piles of mud. The man they rescued introduces himself as Douglas Michaels, gardener and servant to Baron Wescote of Wescote Manor. He invites them to come to the manor, so he can treat their wounds and they can catch their breaths. The Manor is built upon a slight rise. All around it the once fertile lands have turned to marsh. Douglas explains that he is the last retainer to have remained with the Baron, after the curse took effect, when Douglas was a small lad.

*Session 38: 5 April 2009*

18 June, 378 BC, Wescote Manor, Mordent

The group has arrived at the Wescote Manor. They see it is in great disrepair. They wonder that anyone still lives here. Velouria thinks that she might steal old, valuable antiques here. Angus is well aware of her kleptomaniac tendencies and resolves to keep a close eye on her. The group is greeted by the elderly Burton, Baron Wescote, who, despite all set-backs, still hangs on here. He asks the group for help in combating the curse which has claimed several members of two families, has destroyed his estate and has ruined his life. Deeply moved Oded Fay and Herman pledge their help.

A grateful Burton explains the curse to them. He tells them about the arranged marriage between him and Ann to end the troubles between the Wescote and Campbell families. He

relates the tragedy of the night before the wedding, when Ann apparently killed his brother Michael Wescote. She then fled outside into the bog and was never seen again. Burton set the dogs after her, to find her and followed her himself. But she and the dogs got themselves stuck in one of the bogs and drowned. He tried to save her, but he failed. After that night, it was clear his family was cursed. Over the course of the years the curse has claimed his family-members and his Estate bit by bit.

Oded Fay thinks that the curse is the result of the fact that Ann's body was never recovered and buried. An improper burial angers the gods and this sort of thing is the result. He wants to try to find the body and give it a proper burial.

Angus and Velouria want to know more about the death of Michael Wescote, brother to the Baron, who also died on that cursed night. They go in search of the place of his death, the kitchen. This is a huge place, partly underground to keep cool. Light comes in from windows high upon the walls. Now it is largely deserted and gone to ruin. Just a small space near the door is clean and used to prepare food for the few people who still live here, the Baron and his few retainers. This kitchen was meant for the preparation of food for far larger groups.

With the ghost-sight Velouria sees the shade of Michael moving around in the kitchen. again and again he comes down the stairs, seems startled at something. He then moves forward into the kitchen and starts arguing with someone. A struggle ensues, he staggers back and seems to die. After that, he materializes at the stairs again and the scene plays out again.

Later that night

Burton has invited the group to his study, which overlooks a large part of the bog that has crept up to the Wescote manor. Every night the horrible scene from so long ago plays out again. The baron builds up the suspense of the scene, flinging open the curtains as a small white figure seems to flee from the house and runs into the bog. Soon it is followed by some dogs, also white and ghostly. It is too far away to see much detail and the baron closes the curtains again.

Herman however uses some obscure scry spell to look at the ghostly re-enactment and the whole scene plays out very well in the fireplace as well. The group can really zoom in very close on the action, even after the baron has closed the curtains<sup>1</sup>. They see that Ann was fleeing the Baron and his dogs and that she sunk into the swamp.

Herman now intimidates the Baron into telling them exactly where Ann died, since he must know exactly. The Baron complies, he will take them there tomorrow morning. Herman thinks that Ann is relatively innocent. She did not mean to kill Michael, she just wanted to escape an unwanted marriage. Burton Wescote did not mean to chase Ann to her death with a pack of dogs, that was just how it turned out. Everything was just a huge misunderstanding and no one is really guilty of anything. Perhaps everybody could have behaved better, could have been less judgemental or hotheaded, but no one is really evil or a bad guy. He feels that Burton and Ann should have a final confrontation before she is laid to rest.

Velouria wonders why the curse seems to be becoming worse. If only Ann and Burton were at fault, why is the whole estate in ruins? Herman sagely answers that such is the way of curses.

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<sup>1</sup> See what I meant about the wrong mindset? They treated it like You Tube.

Then Oded sends everyone to bed, for tomorrow a body must be dug up. Velouria wonders where the family of Ann lives. Would they like a chance to have her remains back?

19 June

The next morning the group has a very meagre breakfast, which sends home the message that this estate is truly suffering under this curse. After that they set forth with Burton towards the part of the bog where Ann died. Burton takes them towards a small clearing, where plants stand around a shallow pool of water. Soon the ghost of Ann appears and with her is the leader with his large pack of the strange constructs, the moorhounds. After a long and vicious battle the ghost and her hounds are finally laid to rest and the swamp immediately seems less oppressive. Burton, Baron Wescote is grateful to the heroes for their assistance.

The group takes their leave of the Baron and his few retainers. The Baron is old and the group assumes he will not live long past the resolution of this curse.

## Chapter 10: Feast of Goblins

In this chapter the party has grown powerful, they are all level 9 now. This means they can pack quite a punch. After the events of Howls in the Night, they will now move on to the next prophecy of the Hexad, Feast of Goblins. This is the third sign of the apocalypse and it is a profound adventure for the group as well. Some upheaval will take place!

In the house of Daegon the sorcerer born,  
Though life, unlife, unliving shall scorn

*Session 39: 19 April 2009*

19 June 738 BC, Mordentshire, Mordent

The group has left the Wescote Estate behind them. Late in the evening they arrive in the small provincial town of Mordent. There they find rooms in an Inn and in the common room they listen to the local gossip. They hear of the Gryphon Hill Cemetery and the Godefroy Estate, which both seem to be haunted. Oded Fay feels that his services might be needed in this land, where the dead seem to find no rest.

That night the group is visited by strange dreams. Oded Fay has a nightmare about his native land of Har' Akir. Since he has left it, it has fallen into ruin, since there is no one there now to show the people the right way to honour the dead. Angus dreams that his adopted family will end burned at the stake, just as this happened to his mother. Herman dreams that he will always stand in the shadow of his cousin and that he will lose his status as a man from a prominent family.

20 June

The next morning the group visits with George Weathermay at the Weathermay Estate. The group first met with George in Dementlieu and he and Herman became very friendly, since they both shared an interest in modern weapons. The visit is a great success, Herman can chat with his friend George, Velouria hits it off with the twins Gwyneth<sup>1</sup> and Laurie<sup>2</sup>. This is the first time that Velouria actually makes some friends. In the Orphanage of Martira Bay she did not really have friends. Although she is very fond of Oded Fay and Herman, they are much older than her.

Oded Fay meets with and develops a great respect for Dr. van Richten. He feels that the good Doctor is as much a crusader against evil as he is himself.

After a day of socializing with the most important people in Mordent, the party retires to the Inn for a good night of sleep. The next day, they will continue with their grand tour of the Core. As they make their plans, a fog rises outside.

*Session 40: 3 May 2009*

21 June 738 BC, ?, ?

The group wakes up in an Inn, but they immediately realize that it is not the Inn they went to sleep in. They are profoundly worried and wonder what might have happened. They soon discover that they are very far from where they went asleep, they cannot understand the serving girls. Only Angus and Herman can understand the language. It is Kartakese and they surmise that they must be in Kartakass, the land of the bards.

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<sup>1</sup> I know her canon name is Gennifer, but my name sounds the same, it would cause confusion at the table. Gwyneth is also a nice Celtic name for a girl.

<sup>2</sup> At this point in time they are still teens, a bit younger than Velouria even.



The group decides to go downstairs and after some talking at cross purposes, they manage to order some breakfast, porridge with honey and some hot tea. In the common room, where breakfast is served, a tiny orchestra is playing soothing music. Oded Fay tells the group that this has happened twice before, they seemed to travel distances without travelling them. Each time they ended up somewhere, where they played a large part in the local events. That must happen here as well. The group was brought here with a purpose, a certain fate awaits them. They might start looking for that fate straight away.

After breakfast Oded Fay finds a local street urchin and asks him for a tour of the town, for a small fee. It turns out that the group is in the small town of Harmonia and the urchin takes them to see all the sights. They see the Amphitheatre and the connected Crystal Club. They also take a walk on South Hill and along the impressive battlements that surround the little town.

The group is very impressed with the battlements that the small town sports. Especially since the countryside seems so peaceful. They ask the urchin the reason for the battlements. He tells them about the wild animals that live in the forest. The group does not really believe this, mere animals, no matter how wild, could be held off with a dry moat and a wooden fence. Then the urchin tells of a nearby land, Gundarak, which has a mad ruler, Duke Gundar, who is a threat with his great armies. He can even call forth the dead to do his bidding. This worries the group and in their eyes, justifies the huge defences.

After the tour of the little town, they see a man in a panic running down the street. He calls for help, since a dangerous prisoner has escaped and is causing mayhem in the small prison. The group knows when duty calls and offers to help the little man. It turns out that the man is the head warden of the town's small prison. The prison usually locks up the trouble makers that a small town might have, drunks, thieves and other vandals. This time it turns out that one of the inmates is a bit more dangerous than most, the puny bars of the prison could not hold this menace and the prisoner has escaped.

The group does demand that the rest of the prison guards help them with their dangerous task. After all, it is the task of the guards to guard the prison, the group is merely lending assistance. Inside the prison, their task soon becomes a lot more difficult. The prison is small and dark. Some prisoners are still in their cells, others are already dead. They soon become aware that the prison warden has locked them inside the prison, presumably to prevent prisoners escaping. The group is not happy about that however. The group sends the guards forward, as they know their prison best.

One by one these guards die horrible deaths. The group can get no clear view of their attacker. It is dark in the prison and there are many hidden corners, where the prisoner can hide. He seems to very powerful however, as he kills the guards quickly, usually with just one blow. Finally they manage to corner the prisoner in the last cell and try to attack. Herman uses one of his powerful spells and creates some sort of vortex of power inside the chest of the prisoner. They can hear his screams. Oded Fay looks around a corner. He sees that the prisoner is trying to change into some sort of horrible wolf-monster, to counteract the damage of the vortex. This is an abomination in the eyes of the Gods and he wants to attack. But the vortex is too dangerous. In the end this kills the strange man-wolf monster.

The group is very nervous. Is this some sort of werewolf<sup>3</sup>, they have heard stories about those monsters. They also no longer trust the prison warden. He has lied about the dangerous nature of the prisoner, leading them to believe him an ordinary human. He has locked them in here. He might keep them here to stop the possible plague of the werewolf from spreading. Thankfully, Herman has a way of saving them. With a very valuable silver wrought miniature

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<sup>3</sup> The group does not know much about Kartakass and the nature of the inhabitants. They think they are dealing with werewolves instead of wolf-weres.

door, set with rubies, he manages to mass teleport the group outside, to a lonely alley. Oded Fay and Velouria are a bit dismayed about this. They suspect the material component to this spell was rather costly. They also know that Herman has no source of income of his own, so that this little spell came out of the coffers of Velouria's Estate.

Before this can devolve into an argument about the financial solvability of the Ravenstein and Avezaath Estate, the group is interrupted by an argument at the mouth of the alley. They see a young woman being whipped by a man and menaced by his two large dogs. The group will not let that pass and intervenes. The man quickly leaves the scene and lets his huge wolves deal with the party. Herman, Oded and Angus dispatch the wolves. In the mean time Velouria shadows the man. She follows him to the city walls and then watches as he changes into a wolf, jumps into the river and swims to the other side. In deep thought she returns to the rest of the party.

*Session 40: 17 May 2009*

21 June 738 BC, Harmonia, Kartakass

Late at night the group has rescued a young woman from an assault by a violent man. The woman introduces herself as Akriel. Herman immediately tries to woo her and introduces himself as a hero. Akriel is very grateful and tells the group something of her history. She is stalked by a bard who will not take no for an answer. He wants to marry her and will stalk her and assault her until she gives in. Her father<sup>4</sup>, her only living relative, feels that the bard would be a good match for her, and will not listen to her objections. She is however in love with someone else, Dr Daclaud Heinfroth from nearby Gundarak.

The group decides that the woman is clearly overwrought. They take her to a civilised café and try to calm her down with some drinks and get the whole story from her. Inside a warm little café with some nice drinks in front of them, the group hears more.

Akriel is looking for the Crown of Soldiers. This powerful object will enable her to fight off her stalker, defy her father and marry the man of her dreams. Herman is overcome with this story of sadness, oppression and true love. He promises: "Have no fear my lady. My friends and I will solve this problem for you."<sup>5</sup>

Oded Fay wants to do the right thing for Akriel, and that is obviously to help her marry her true love.

Velouria is less overcome by the drama of it all. She feels that Akriel as an obviously well-off woman, is behaving like a doormat. Women of her position should be able to take care of themselves. She wonders if it might all be some sort of ruse. Perhaps a lot of trouble could be averted if she stabbed Akriel in the kidneys right now<sup>6</sup>.

Angus does not trust Akriel and finds her story a bit lame and suspects that the Crown of Soldiers might do more than reunite her with her lover. The crown is probably evil<sup>7</sup>.

Herman counters that with: "This woman and the crown are the first sort of quest we have stumbled on since our strange journey through the Mists. This must be our fate to become involved in this."<sup>8</sup>

The group and Akriel decide to meet again in a few days in the Old Kartakan Inn in Skald in a few days. Akriel wants to find out some more about the location of the Crown of Soldiers.

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<sup>4</sup> The group has no idea who Akriel is, or who her father is.

<sup>5</sup> Ill-omened words for those who know about my previous ravenloft campaign.

<sup>6</sup> Probably, but it would cause all sorts of new trouble. So thankfully she does nothing.

<sup>7</sup> I agree with [Gonzoron](#) that this is a nice adventure, but that the stories of the NPCs are too thin for the experienced PCs.

<sup>8</sup> I have said it before, Herman is dangerously Genre Savvy.

22 June, Harmonia, Kartakass

The next day the group decides to eat in the Crystal Club. They have gathered from the tour by the street urchin that it is the place to see and be seen. They want to go there to find out more about Akriel Osterhausen, her cruel father and the strange stalker who will not take no for an answer. They also want to invest in silver bullets and silver daggers. They are afraid that the werewolf in the prison was not the only one, of that he has managed to infect more people during his stay in Harmonia. They also want to return to the prison to collect their reward from the warden for killing the wolf monster.

At the prison the warden reluctantly hands over the promised money to the group. While he does so, Velouria lightly stabs him with her new silver knife. After the outrage has died down, she explains that it was to see if the man really was human, as a werewolf would have reacted differently to the silver. To calm the man down, Angus heals his wounds. Oded Fay cannot fault Velouria's reasoning, but urges her to find other, less aggressive ways for her to test her ideas.

In the beginning of the evening, the group goes to the Crystal Club. Oded Fay uses his almost inhuman charm to gain free entry<sup>9</sup>. The rest has to pay the entry fee of one platinum piece. Once inside the group takes a table and is served a complimentary small glass of Meekulbrau. As the adults talk to the serving girl, Velouria sees her chance and drains it immediately. She gets drunk almost instantly. Angus notices this and used his powers to neutralize the alcohol in her system. She sobers up just as quickly.

*Session 41: 31 May 2009*

22 June 738 BC, Harmonia, Kartakass

Inside the Crystal Club the group is enjoying themselves. They have ordered some hors d'oeuvres and are drinking their second round of drinks. Velouria takes to the dance floor and soon has a partner to dance with. Oded Fay too decides to let his hair down and he tries to dance as well, hopelessly outdated of course.

Herman and Angus are a bit more used to drinking and a bit more aware of the scams that might be run on foreigners in a place like this. They see that many of the patrons are very hairy and feral-looking and a bit more aggressive than usual. They suddenly suspect that this might be some sort of hang-out for the werewolf monsters of this land. The realization overwhelms them with cold dread. Here the wolfmonsters prey on the unsuspecting tourists and enjoy themselves with a nice night out at the same time! The monster in the prison was not alone, he and his kind run this land!

Herman uses his powers to curse Velouria's dance partner with bad luck and Angus uses his powers to cause him to trip and fall down during a complicated dance move. Velouria realises what happened. Herman and Angus and Oded Fay never want her to have any fun! She retreats with her very charming partner into a secluded corner of the Crystal Club. Herman and Angus rush to Oded Fay, interrupt his funky chicken dance and tell him about their suspicions and the danger Velouria might be in.

The group is very worried and they should be. The Crystal club is filled with patrons. And they might all be terrible shape changing monsters. They might be the only real humans in here! Will they ever see the sky again? Suddenly everyone looks terrifying, teeth seem sharper, hair seems longer, nails look more like claws. Are they surrounded by monsters or is their imagination running away with them?

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<sup>9</sup> Strange really, Paladins have enough charm to always have it their way, but then their morals compel them to never capitalize on it.

Angus uses his powers to telepathically warn Velouria. She is no fool and immediately tries to backstab the young man she is with<sup>10</sup>. In response the young man transforms into a wolf monster and attacks her<sup>11</sup>. Angus turns into a huge scorpion<sup>12</sup> and tries to sting the werewolf monster with his poisonous stinger.

The group would like to leave right now. They are confused about where they are. They have all drunk a bit more than they should and the interior of the Crystal Club is very disorienting with all the gleaming crystals and the mirrors on the walls. Herman manages to make green flames fall from the ceiling. These seem to hurt the wolf monsters. Velouria heats up the metal of her knives with a spell. This also inconveniences the wolf monsters. Finally they manage to get out and get back to their Inn. There they barricaded themselves in their rooms. That night they sleep undisturbed, possible the wolf monsters were a bit taken aback by the force their intended victims managed to unleash in their sanctuary.

*Session 42: 14 June 2009*

23 June 738, Harmonia, Kartakass

The group departs Harmonia for the nearby village of Skald. They are badly shaken by the events of the previous night and want to leave Harmonia behind them. They realise that they cannot kill everyone who looks particularly hairy, but they are sorely tempted. They are also low on resources, especially Angus spent a lot of his mental powers and is not yet fully recovered. Herman offers to conjure a flying carpet to carry them all to Skald. This would mean leaving the beasts behind. Angus is against this, the beasts are necessary to carry supplies. It is decided that Herman will travel by carpet with the entire luggage. And Oded Fay, Velouria and Angus will travel together on horseback. This way they will travel faster. Travelling in the woods between Harmonia and Skald, Tinkerbelle, the wolf companion of Velouria spots five other wolves. The group is immediately intimidated. Are these the horrible wolf-monsters again? They cannot handle five of them at this time. But it turns out it are just normal wolves and easily dispatched. The group calms down for a bit.

As the sun sets, it becomes clear that they will not reach Skald before nightfall. Luckily, they find a nice clearing next to the road, where they can easily make a camp for the night. There is even a rude, dilapidated hut, built by previous travellers. It is badly maintained, but it will serve as a shelter for the night. The hut turns out to be occupied by a lone female bard, Eline of Skald. She is travelling towards Harmonia. She had also decided to spend the night in the small hut. Velouria does not trust her at all and would prefer to move on. The rest of the group is very tired and feels that a lone woman will not pose much of a threat. Since she is not particularly hairy, they feel it is unlikely that she is a wolf-monster<sup>13</sup>.

Herman immediately tries to impress Eline with his cooking skills. He uses some spells to make a feast. He serves deer-steaks on beds of oak-leaf-lettuce. The group shares their meal with Eline and chat with her. Herman is tempted to try his True Love spell on Eline, but after the disastrous effects this had on Dulcimea in Har' Akir, he decides against it.

Later that night, everyone goes to bed. Herman creates an alarm at the edge of the camp, as soon as anything tries to enter, they will be warned. Oded Fay offers to take the first watch

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<sup>10</sup> She is easily convinced the young man is evil, I suspect she was just waiting for a chance to backstab anyone, really.

<sup>11</sup> Luckily she was right to stab him.

<sup>12</sup> He now has animal affinity.

<sup>13</sup> Let that be a lesson to you all, prejudice will get you into trouble.

and watches over the sleeping group by the campfire. Velouria and Eline sleep in the small hut, and the men sleep outside in the warm June night.

At midnight Eline transforms into a huge wolf-monster and attacks Velouria. Velouria was no fool and expected something like that. So she slept with her weapons nearby. She was awakened by the noise of the transformation and immediately hollered for help. The rest of the group rush in to help.

Oded Fay is the first to enter the dark hut, he desperately battles with the wolf-monster to defend his ward and is grievously wounded. In time Herman and Angus wake up as well and help Oded Fay in his fight. The monster of Eline of Skald is soon killed. But Oded Fay was wounded by the beast. Will he too turn into a monster and turn on his friends? In fear the group looks up at the sky. The moon will be full in another three days<sup>14</sup>.

#### *Session 43: 4 July 2009*

This will be the last session for some time. My daughter was born in august 2009 and I needed some time to recover. A strange realisation that this game has been running longer than both my children are alive.

#### 24 June 738 BC, Kartakass

Late in the next day the group reaches Skald. At the toll bridge they pay the required toll with some grumbling, but they see no other way to enter the village. The group is very paranoid about the presence of the wolf monsters and look askance at everyone they meet. Angus and Herman feel that these monsters might be everywhere. Everyone they meet might turn into a slaving beast and devour them.

Oded Fay is less nervous about meeting wolf monsters. It will be a full moon in another two days. He is deeply worried he might turn into an unholy abomination. Will he turn on his friends? Will he be forever tainted and unable to perform his duties as a paladin? Herman tries to think of a solution to protect Oded Fay and the rest of the party against him, should he turn into an unnatural abomination.

The group takes rooms in an inn, not the Old Kartakann Inn, as they feel they would draw too much attention to themselves there. The group chats a bit with the serving girl and they learn that the last name of Akriel is not Osterhausen, as she told them, but Lukas. She is the daughter of Harkon Lukas, Meistersinger of Skald. This makes her father the most important man in the land and by default Akriel herself one of the most important women in Kartakass. This throws a whole new light onto her plans and her fathers wishes. There is no way an 'unwanted suitor' would threaten and pressure the most powerful woman in the realm into marriage

The group thinks that the man who threatened and abused her might be her own father in stead of some unlikely 'unwanted suitor'. Her quest for a crown to rid herself of this man throws a whole new light on the local political landscape. Perhaps she wants to use the crown to depose her father and rule Kartakass for herself, perhaps jointly with the mysterious Dr. Heinfroth of Gundarak

The group decides that they do not want to give the crown to Akriel. They do want to take out the bard for her, if he really exists, but they doubt that. The group wants to give the crown to Azalin Rex, as they should anyway, as loyal Darkonians. On the other hand, if this is some sort of cursed item, they might lead their king into trouble with it.

Or they might depose of Azalin Rex altogether with the crown and rule Darkon in his stead. The ambitious Angus likes this thought.

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<sup>14</sup> They still do not realise that the wolf monsters are not werewolves, they are very afraid that they too will turn into subservient werewolves.

*Session 44: 31 January 2010*

The gaming group returns! In the meantime I have been cooking up a horrible scheme with Sander, the player of Oded Fay.

25 June 738 BC, Skald, Kartakass

The group has sided with Akriel Lukas in the brewing conflict over control of the Crown of Soldiers.

Angus, Herman and Velouria get together without Oded Fay to discuss their situation. Velouria thinks that Akriel might be one of the wolf monsters as well, her father, Harkon Lukas would then probably also be a wolf monster as well. That would add to her (and his) influence. She thinks that the wolf monsters would not tolerate such worldly influence in someone who was not one of their own.

Herman thinks that there might be two factions of wolf monsters. One is headed by Akriel and is scheming to get the crown and the other might be headed by her father or the shady 'bard'. They are involved in some sort of silent struggle for supremacy of Kartakass. Her father might not even be aware of the brewing conflict yet. He suggests getting the crown and then playing both factions against each other.

Velouria offers a third option. To use the crown to destroy both factions of monsters who rule this country. She also stresses to keep this information away from Akriel. Herman agrees with her and tells her to let Oded Fay have this conversation about accepting the quest for the crown. No one will believe that a paladin would lie. Angus says that Oded Fay would never lie. Not even to a monster. Herman agrees, which is why these plans are made without Oded Fay present and he will not be told of these plans.

Later that day the group meets with Akriel in the Old Kartakann Inn. They feel decidedly out of place there and fear that it is just like the Crystal Club, a place for the wolf monsters to gather. Oded Fay tells her that he and his group of friends will try to find the crown for her. Secretly he hopes to be able to use the crown to put things right in Har' Akir<sup>15</sup>. Akriel is overjoyed and tells the group what she has managed to find out. The crown is supposedly lost in the canyons beyond the Ariakalis Hill, which form the border between Kartakass and the strange land of Bluetspur. It is too dangerous for her to go there, as the place is haunted by monsters.

After sealing the deal with Akriel, the group decides to prepare for the hazardous journey. Herman decides to do some research of his own into the Crown of Soldiers in the town archives. If this really is a local artefact of some importance, there must be some record of it. He finds a lot of interesting information, which he shares with the rest of the group later that night.

It turns out that there is no record at all of a Crown of Soldiers. But a Crown of Souls is mentioned several times. This crown was made by an evil wizard called Deagon Daglan. The group makes the connection with the verse from the Hexad. The group immediately realises that they are now here to witness another sign of the apocalypse. The signs are coming fast, how long before the apocalypse itself happens?

Other questions need to be answered as well. What is the role of Akriel and her father in the coming apocalypse? Are they part of the House of Daegon? What about her unwanted suitor, the 'bard'? Is he a member of the House of Daegon?

Angus wonders if someone should just put on the crown and utilise its powers. Herman forbids this. Its evil powers will surely manifest themselves when someone wears the crown.

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<sup>15</sup> The Crown of Souls is not even in play, yet it already exerts its dark influence on the party and makes them more ambitious.

Especially if that someone is not the destined wearer of the crown. Velouria and Oded Fay think that in the right hands the crown might be used for good. Oded Fay would never want to have anything to do with an object that so explicitly manipulates the dead.

*Session 4: 14 February 2010*

26 June, 738 BC, The Ariakalis Hills, Kartakass

The group has departed Skald and has moved south, towards the Ariakalis hills. Beyond it lies a canyon, where in the old days bodies were buried. According to Akriel, the Crown of Soldiers is buried there. The Ariakalis Hills are blooming with some lovely flowers, their scent seems very calming to the group. The flowers are called Cymbelmine<sup>16</sup> and must have some sort of healing properties, so nice is their perfume.

As the group enters the canyons beyond, they are struck by the abrupt change in weather and geography. The canyons are really very dry and desert-like, but clearly made by flowing water, no trace of which is to be found. As they move deeper and deeper into the canyon, they see more and more fossilized bones in the canyon walls and –floors.

Then they see a truly strange site. A huge ribcage of bone rises from the floor of the canyon. It must be the ribcage of a dragon or something, to be so big as this. It seems that people are trapped inside and are unable to leave under their own power. Herman uses the spell *There/Not There* to remove one of the ribs, so the people are able to leave. Then it becomes clear that the people in there are trapped. Oded Fay moves forward to help them escape. Then some unseen enemies shoot a net from the breastbone of the ribcage, it manages to trap Velouria and Herman. Oded Fay moves to free his companions, while Angus tries to set fire to the catapult that is shooting the nets.

Then it turns out that the enemies are extremely ugly little monsters with huge teeth. They are so ugly in fact, that Velouria becomes afraid of them. Herman invokes his blood lightning spell after one of the monsters scores a hit. Even though this is a rather powerful spell, not all the monsters are dead. Velouria tries to wound one with her knives. She makes little difference and in frustration she wishes for a better knife<sup>17</sup>.

Herman uses another spell, which releases shurikens of fire and wounds more of the monsters. Oded Fay attacks one as well, but it turns on him and damages him badly. The terribly ugly monster grabs him and starts to eat him! Oded Fay manages to kill it, but in horror he flees from the scene.

After the fiery shuriken, the rest of the party mops up the severely wounded monsters. As they are doing so, Velouria spots something shiny embedded in the canyon floor. After some digging it turns out to be a large knife of very small sword. It fits her hand perfectly. As she wields it, she feels stronger<sup>18</sup>. Then the party takes some time to heal themselves. Then they take a look at the people who were trapped under the ribcage. These seem to be locals, kidnapped from nearby farmsteads in Kartakass. They are very grateful to be rescued, but they are very weak. Angus expends all of his powers in healing them.

Velouria finds this a waste of powers, as they are nowhere near to finding the Crown and these are just peasants. Furthermore, she feels that the rest of her party are her servants<sup>19</sup> and therefore should attend her wishes. Angus and Herman insist however in escorting the rescued people back to Kartakass and rest there to restore their depleted resources. Velouria is furious

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<sup>16</sup> A flower from Middle Earth, I was told.

<sup>17</sup> While still carrying a wishing imp.

<sup>18</sup> The wishing Imp sure is prompt, it is a powerful knife as well, HPs are transferred from the victim to the wielder and it gives her +3 STR when she is angry. There are some downsides as well of course

<sup>19</sup> Technically true for Herman and Angus, who are in her employ.

and seethes quietly. She feels that due to Oded Fay's cowardice and insistence on escorting these peasants back, they are wasting valuable time<sup>20</sup>.

*Session 46: 28 February 2010*

29 June 738 BC, Canyons.

After escorting the rescued peasants back to Skald, the party remained there for a few days to restore their powers. Then they returned to the strange canyons. Once there Herman uses a scrying spell and an answer spell to find the Crown of Soldiers or the Crown of Souls, as the case may be. His spell leads him in the maze of canyons to a cave entrance. The party enters the dark maw with some fears.

The dark cavern soon widens into a chamber with two passages leading off it. All sorts of runes of a terrible nature chiselled into the walls. Even though the party is unable to interpret the runes, they feel the dark nature of the runes affecting them. Only Herman understands the most of the runes and is able to shake of their warning as posturing of a powerful, but essentially deeply insecure spell caster. He is never insecure.

Then the party moves on into the northernmost passage where the floor is covered in some sort of dark gas. It moves around in the air displaced by the party, but it does not move away or rise. The group is able to breathe normally. Herman uses his mage sight and sees that the gas is magical in nature. It will slow down anyone moving in it. It might have other, sinister properties as well. Angus uses his powers to attach a rope-bridge to the ceiling of the passage. That way the party will be able to traverse the passage without disturbing this strange, dark gas. As Angus is busy, a skeletal arm rises up from the swirling gas and makes a grab for him. Herman fires one of his guns on it. It does no damage, but Velouria is temporarily deafened by the enormous boom.

As Angus is finished, the party makes moves to use the rope bridge. Herman can't resist showing off and uses a spider climb to turn into some sort of human gecko and traverse the passage that way. The rest uses the rope bridge. Oded Fay is a bit clumsy and falls off into the gas. Immediately an arm materialises and makes a grab for his Holy Avenger. Luckily the holiness of the sword is enough to repel the arm<sup>21</sup>.

The passage widens into a chamber again, some sort of earthquake has taken place here Velouria is the first to enter and she investigates the room. Herman soon follows her. Together they discover that one of the walls is actually a part of the floor, which was lifted up in the earthquake. Beyond it is a passage into another room. The group manages to scale the ridges and they move into the next chamber.

In the next chamber, they see a young woman lying on an altar of some sort. She seems to have been sacrificed. Before they can become enraged about this, some skeletons and dead bodies in the chamber return to life and they attack the party. As these are rather weak monsters, they are easily dispatched. Oded Fay and his Turn Undead powers come in handy here. Then the party turns their attention to the body of the girl. On closer inspection, the girl is not dead, but barely alive. Oded Fay uses his lay on hands ability and quickly revives her. With his mage sight Herman sees that the slab is connected to the girl and is sucking her life away. Oded Fay becomes enraged and attacks the blasphemous stone. With his holy sword he quickly reduces it to mundane rubble<sup>22</sup>.

The girl tells the group that her name is Clara and that she is a dairymaid from a farmstead in the Ariakalis Hills in Kartakass. She was abducted a few days ago and left here on the slab to die. The group decides to escort her back home. They feel they cannot leave her to find her own way back through the canyons.

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<sup>20</sup> Her true colours are shining through. Perhaps she was really frustrated about her miss with the goblins.

<sup>21</sup> A very lucky save really.

<sup>22</sup> I felt that a Holy Avenger, wielded by a paladin in righteous fury was powerful enough to destroy the stone.



As the party comes to the passage with the strange dark gasses again, they walk through it, but levitate all magical items high above the gasses. The arms leave them alone.

*Session 47: 14 March 2010*

1 July 738 BC, Canyons

After returning Clara to her family near Skald, the party takes the time to recuperate again and then they return to investigate the canyons further.

They enter the same cavern again, but this time they move into the eastwards passage. There they enter a chamber which holds a truly stunning site. From a pit swirling with mists rises a huge skeleton, it must be the skeleton of a giant. From the edge of the pit a bridge made of bones leads towards the enormous skeleton. To other large but not gigantic skeletons guard the bridge. The light in the chamber is caused by the magical fire burning in the bellies of the smaller skeletons.

The party decides not to wait for a reaction, but to attack the smaller skeletons immediately. Oded Fays Turn Undead ability comes in handy and the skeletons are easily dispatched.

Then Angus turns into his ectoplasm form and floats along the bridge towards the giant skeleton. Then he floats up the stairs, which are concealed in the spine of the skeleton. The rest of the group slowly follows, taking their hints from Angus through his mindlink.

The exit the stairs in a room with a billowing curtain. Behind the curtain is a weird sight. An ugly and old hag sits in some sort of gruesome bone chair, built to resemble a squatting skeleton. As the group enters the room, the hag orders the bone chair to move. It transforms into a giant skeleton, which moves towards the group. The hag inside it, directs its movements.

With a lucky blow with his Holy Avenger, Oded Fay manages to hit the knee of the skeleton, destroying it. The skeleton crashes to the ground. Velouria sees her chance, her anger lending her strength<sup>23</sup>, she backstabs the witch as she is stuck in the ribcage of the prone skeleton. The rest of the party sees their chance as well and they close in for the kill.

With the death of the old hag, the strange skeleton structure starts to collapse. Herman casts Drawmeij's Instant Exit and the group is transported to another part of the dungeon<sup>24</sup>. the group reappears in a room which is covered in mist. At the far end of the room are a few steps, that lead up to a black, marble pedestal. On this pedestal is a blood red pillow, upon that a golden crown, inlaid with all sorts of jewels. Velouria is not so easily fooled and used her old thieving skills to examine the room thoroughly. She discovers that the room and the crown are not what they seem and probably a trap. She also notices that the marble pedestal is some sort of secret door. She is not strong enough the move it though.

Herman wants to blow up the pedestal. Velouria tries to warn him, it will set off the trap.

Herman is so sure of himself. It will only disable the trap. Herman sets his plan in motion.

After the deafening blow, the room starts to collapse. Beneath the room is another cave and the party falls into that. They take a tumble down the rubble of the collapsing cave and up in a sort of passage, full of mists, which leads to another room.

Herman, Oded Fay and Velouria walk on into a strange chamber where two huge rib bones span a chasm. They cross each other in the middle. Angus decided to leave the party and search for another way out. He walks on through the cavern and finds a small hole, which seems to lead to a cavern that lies below the system where he is now.

*Session 48: 28 march 2010*

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<sup>23</sup> Her brand new sword, actually.

<sup>24</sup> In the adventure 'Feast of Goblins' the chambers in the canyon were numbered, I rolled d20 to decide where they would arrive. Room 11 to be precise.

1 July 738 BC, Canyons

Angus used his telepathy to call the group to him. They felt the strange hole in the ground was a more promising venture than trying to cross the strange rib bones. The group descends the hole in the ground and they enter a chamber, where the walls are covered in evil-looking runes<sup>25</sup>. The room is filled with skeletal warriors as well. But the powers of Oded Fay keep them at bay and they are easily dispatched. The old thieving sensibilities of Velouria start to tingle and soon enough she finds a secret door in this room. After a bit of fiddling with the lock, the door opens.

This door leads into a small chamber with an odd carving of a skeletal warrior in the far wall. It seems to be some sort of bas-relief. But the hands of the skeleton reach out from the stone into the room. Above the skeletal warrior an inscription reads "Place your life in my hands and I will show you the way." After some thinking, the group figures it out and they pour some of their blood in the hands of the statue.

When the blood is poured into the hands of the statue, it seems to come alive and cast some sort of horrible spell. After the light and sound-effects die away, an archway, filled with red mist has materialized in the chamber. The group steps into the archway and suddenly they find themselves surrounded by mist. They seem to stand on a floor, but they can see no walls and have no idea of direction. They all hold hands and try to find a way out.

After what seems like eternity in the mists, they finally stumble into a really weird room. They have all entered the room through different doors on opposite sides of the room. Even though they were holding hands a moment ago. But it gets weirder than that. In the middle of the room is a large hole in the room. Over that hole hangs a huge skeleton<sup>26</sup>, suspended by chains. On its skull is a crown. This must be the Crown of Souls the group has been looking for.

Angus immediately uses his powers of telekinesis to make a grab for the crown. The skeleton comes alive and drops the crown in the pit. At the same time for skeletal monster step through the door, through which the group just entered. As the rest fight for their lives, Angus uses his powers to levitate into the pit. There he sees a terrible monster defending the fallen crown. Unperturbed Angus uses his telekinesis again to lift the crown to his hands. He then levitates up again and leaves the monster to his own devices.

Under leadership of Oded Fay, the skeletal monsters are easily dispatched. He uses his powers to Turn the undead and he protects his loved ones from evil, with his powers. Herman and Velouria also unleash some destructive forces. Herman has used his powers to make himself a sword. As a strange side effect, it seems to glow with little lights.

Angus takes this moment to put on the Crown of Souls but nothing happens<sup>27</sup>. He feels cheated. He has risked life and limb to get this Crown. It might have been his ticket to power and glory, but it seems to be nothing more than an ordinary crown! As he feels that it does not work, he gives the crown to Oded Fay. Oded Fay is a lot less personally ambitious than Angus and he fails to see the significance of this gesture. Velouria and Herman are not as naive as Oded Fay and they realise that Angus has already tried the Crown of Souls and that it did not work for him. Herman thinks that Angus is particularly foolish to experiment in such a way with a powerful magical artefact. He recognizes the evil emanations coming from the thing.

Herman and Velouria both notice a change in Angus. He seems to be more ambitious and irritable. Could the Crown already be exerting its influence?

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<sup>25</sup> Again!

<sup>26</sup> Again!

<sup>27</sup> Radaga is recently dead and the death of his last descendant has incapacitated Daglan, who inhabits the crown.

Now that all the skeletal warriors are dead and the crown is recovered, it is time to leave. But as the party approaches one of the doors, another skeleton manifests again. They dispatch it easily, but are a bit worried, will they be able to leave? Then they figure it out. Only one person can go through the door. But a monster appears every time the door is used. So the weakest should leave first, and the strongest later.

Oded Fay is the strongest fighter against these undead abominations. So soon Angus, Velouria and Herman leave through the doors. They wait in the room with the strange statue for the appearance of Oded Fay.

He does not appear.

They wait a bit more.

He does not appear.

They become worried.

He does not appear.

Herman uses a scrying spell. They see Oded Fay in the room they have just left. He lies lifeless on the floor. A skeletal monster standing over him.

Angus and Velouria decide to fetch their friend from the other room. They go through the whole ritual with the statue and the blood again. In the other room, they are confronted by the monster that attacked Oded Fay. Oded Fay still lies on the floor. He looks like he is dead!

Angus tries to use superior invisibility on himself, Velouria and Oded, but the monster is not fooled. They must kill it, without the powers of Oded Fay to support them. Then Angus and Velouria must take the body of Oded Fay and destroy the guardian monster of the southern door. Thankfully this one is dispatched easily. Velouria takes the Crown of Souls and Angus lifts the body of Oded Fay. As he lifts the motionless form of his friend, he realises his friend is really dead!

When they return to the room with the strange statue and Herman, the reality of the situation hits them. Oded Fay, paladin and moral compass of the party is really dead<sup>28</sup>. He died trying to protect them and he will not return to them. Especially Herman and Velouria have a bad emotional break down. Their cousin and foster father will not return to them. Herman was always slightly jealous of his more successful cousin, and now he is dead. Velouria does not want to lose another loved one, after all the losses she has already suffered.

Herman summons a carpet made of air and the party puts the body of Oded Fay on it. Then they climb up themselves as well. It swiftly takes them out of the caverns, the canyons and on to the Ariakalis Hills, where the Cymbelmine blooms.

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<sup>28</sup> This was orchestrated together with Oded Fays player (Sander) and executed superbly. The rest was shocked, after three-and-a-half years of playing I killed off the paladin. The reason was that he was the moral compass of the party. All the ambitions and dark urges of the rest of the party came to nothing, because the paladin, their foster father, cousin and friend, disapproved. It killed all intra-party conflict.

In retrospect, this character made my job harder. In my previous campaign I hardly had to think of new intrigues, the party was so dysfunctional, they created their own adventures. But this party was kept on the straight and narrow by their trusted and liked paladin, so all conflict and development had to come from interaction with the DM.

So, a lesson learned for me. A lawful good character can be disruptive to the game, just as much as a suicidal chaotic evil character.

On these peaceful hills with the lovely white flowers, the group will bury Oded Fay. As Velouria prepares his body, she is assailed with doubt. She cannot lose another family member again. She has lost too many. Oded Fays body is dead, but until he is buried, his spirit is still with them. As soon as he is properly buried, his spirit will pass over to the next world.

But what if he was improperly buried?

His spirit would not pass, but remain with her. With her Ghostsight she would still be able to see him. Just like her parents. But Oded Fay would probably disapprove of that. He was all for the proper treatment of the dead. But wouldn't he want to watch over his ward, even from afar?

In the meantime Herman muses on Oded Fays life. Oded Fay had not been able to finish important tasks. He did not see Velouria reach her maturity. He was not able to guide the people of Har' Akir back to the worship of Osiris. He never found the murderer of his mentor. Herman vows to himself to finish all the tasks of Oded Fay, his late cousin. As Oded Fay is laid to rest in a grave in the Ariakalis Hill, together with his Holy Avenger, Velouria decides to wilfully botch the burial ritual. That way his spirit will still roam the mortal world and she will not have to do without him<sup>29</sup>. She feels slightly sullied<sup>30</sup> by this, but feels it is for the best.

*Session 49: 11 April 2010*

2 July, 738 BC, Ariakalis Hill, Kartakass

The group is still in shock about the death of Oded Fay. Herman is sobbing over the grave of his dearest family member. Velouria too, is very wrought up, but she keeps her feelings all bottled up inside. Angus feels rather detached. He will miss the most powerful party member. They will have a hard trek back home, without him.

The group has the Crown of Souls, so in that way, their mission is a success. They decide to head back to Skald, to meet up with Akriel. Without Oded Fay, all their other plans with the Crown of Souls seem rather empty. They would like to leave this terrible place.

Before the party leaves, Herman decides to study the crown a bit further. He sees that some sort of intelligent power is connected with the crown. It is a very mighty artefact. He warns Angus and Velouria not to wear the crown. It might leave them vulnerable to the powers locked inside the crown.

Angus does not want to lag behind in examining the crown. He uses his mindlink abilities to make contact with the entity inside the crown. This goes horribly wrong. His mind contacts the mind of another being. This mind seems to be asleep, but it wakes on the contact with the mind of Angus. Angus runs away in fear<sup>31</sup>. But it is too late. His mind is soon taken over by the mind of Daglan Deagon, who has waited for centuries for such an opportunity. as soon as Daglan has taken control of the mind and body on Angus, he returns to the rest of the party,

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<sup>29</sup> Bingo! Within five minutes of killing off the paladin, the first character commits an act of evil. She automatically fails her powers check. She violates all rules of human decency, violates the rules of her own druid religion and the rules of the religion of her foster father and of her secular lord, Azalin Rex. See what I mean about the paladin keeping them on the straight and narrow?

<sup>30</sup> And so she should! She is on her way to become a Heucuva, because she behaved as a false priest. Her golden sickle is tainted and cannot be cleaned.

<sup>31</sup> A failed horror check, aversion.

pretending to be Angus<sup>32</sup>. He claims to have battled with the entity inside the crown. He no longer wants to touch or hold it.

Angus warns the group that Radaga has risen as an undead entity, his contact with the crown revealed that. Herman wants to take her out. She is possibly looking for a way to regain the crown. To have an undead witch on the loose in a country filled with wolf monsters, might only make matters worse. He wants to try to take her out. Velouria objects. They have no stake in this place, they came for the crown and now, at a terrible price, they have the crown. Why risk more in trying to defeat this witch?

Herman and Velouria are aware that something is wrong with Angus, but they are not certain what it is.

Herman asks Angus to use his powers to take them nearer the undead witch. Daglan has no way to use the psionic powers of his host body, so he lies and tells them that he has a terrible headache and is not able to use his powers.

Herman then decides to take the crown to Akriel and offer it to her. If the undead witch Radaga is here for the crown, she will follow them and probably attack Akriel for the crown. The wolfmonsters might get in on the action as well. The party can then take out whoever survives that clash.

Herman wants to fly towards the Crystal Club, sit on the roof and wait for trouble to find them there. Angus wants to try to contact Akriel, so it is certain that she will show up as well.

Herman asks him to inform Akriel through a mind-link, as he has used in the past with the party-member. Angus refuses, saying this is not possible.

Herman and Velouria become suspicious that Angus has not used his powers since he has put on the crown.

Velouria manages to lure a sparrow to her. With a message for Akriel, she sends it off again. Herman creates a flying tapestry, which transports the remaining party members to the Crystal Club.

As the Crystal Club is cut from the side of a cliff face, they land on top of the cliff. There they hide in the bushes. Herman casts a protection from notice and they feel they are safe from prying eyes for the time being. Velouria studies the crown. It scares her, they dared so much for it and their quest for it killed the only father she ever knew. As she studies it further, she realises that the aura of terror that surrounded it, is gone. It now seems to be no more than a powerful artefact. The sense of an intelligent menace no longer surrounds it<sup>33</sup>. This frightens her even more.

As Herman and Velouria try to prepare for the confrontation with Akriel and Radaga, Angus suddenly start to behave even stranger. In very formal Darkonese he tells them: "Take care, act in my interest, this is not my servant." Then he seems to return to normal. None of them can figure out what just happened<sup>34</sup>. Velouria trusts Angus even less now. Angus complains even more of a headache. Velouria wants Herman to study the crown more extensively. Herman concludes that it is very likely that the crown might take over Angus or even Velouria and use them as an instrument to work its will in the world. As a result of that they fear Angus even more.

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<sup>32</sup> And within ten minutes, another party-member is essentially removed from the party. See? Killing off the paladin was the best thing to happen to this party!

<sup>33</sup> Because that intelligent menace now controls the body of Angus.

<sup>34</sup> It was Azalin Rex, with the bracelet he has given Angus ages ago he can keep tabs on the party. They seem to be involved in every major upheaval in the core. And he noticed immediately when Daglan took over Angus. It took him some time to break through Daglan and warn the rest of the party. They were clueless though.

Velouria tries a detect charm on Angus, she detects nothing. Angus however noticed that she tried the spell on him. Herman tries his powers of astrology later that night to predict the future and hopefully shed some light on their predicament. Nothing is made clear, except that the future is dark and clouded and everything is influenced by powerful magical currents. But that is nothing Herman could not have realised himself.

3 July, 738 BC

The day that Akriel will meet with what remains of the party dawns. Angus wants to create a public fight in the amphitheatre in front of the Crystal Club, between Akriel and Radaga (although he knows that Radaga will not show up, she is moving south-east, where a new realm is coming into existence for her). Velouria agrees with this plan, as long as she and Herman and Angus will be able to leave quickly.

Akriel approaches the amphitheatre. Angus has put the Crown of Souls in a bag and descends down the cliffs to meet with Akriel. He challenges her to tell all concerning the Crown. Akriel confesses the story of her and Dr. Domiani. He can pay the party for their efforts. Akriel will send him a letter. The party can then take that with the crown to the good Doctor in Gundarak. While Angus and Akriel talk in the amphitheatre, Herman and Velouria observe them from the cliffs above. Herman realises that he has not had a mindlink with Angus, since Angus first laid hands on the Crown. He does not know at all what Angus might be thinking. Angus was very fond of the mind link in the past, why not now?

Angus does not want to deal with Dr. Dominiani, he wants his money from Akriel, kill the witch Radaga and leave. Velouria is more interested in travelling to Gundarak.

*Session 50: 16 may 2010*

Fifty! My goodness, this group has come together 50 times in the past 3,5 years. Another milestone.

3 July 738 BC, Cliffs above Harmonia, Kartakass

Angus is still possessed by the sorcerer Daglan. He wants to kill the rest of the party members and then murder the witch Radaga<sup>35</sup>. That way he will be able to maintain his grip on the Crown and its powers. The rest of the party has no faith in a fair deal with Akriel or her lover Dr. Dominiani.

Angus pretends to accept the deal with Akriel and then makes his escape back to the rest of the party on top of the cliffs above Harmonia. There he informs them of the presence of the witch Radaga, she is moving south. He claims to know this through contact with the Crown. The rest of the party no longer has any interest in dealing with Akriel and her lot, as they feel they will get burned anyway. They do feel that Radaga should be stopped.

Herman conjures a flying carpet, on which they can travel south very fast to stop Radaga. On their way there, they see an army of assorted undead monsters moving steadily south. Herman feels that this is wrong in every way. These monstrosities must be destroyed. Velouria feels the same way, but largely because Oded Fay felt this way.

Herman makes it rain blood on the monsters. It does not hurt them, but because they are mostly mindless undead, they try to lick up the blood<sup>36</sup>. This was mostly meant as a diversionary tactic. He then uses his Wizard Sight on the witch and sees she has turned into a wight. He then calls Fear Fire down on the assorted monsters. The weak ones flee.

By now Radaga has seen the party and tries to flee them with her army of monsters. The party overtakes her (with the flying carpet ) and blocks her way.

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<sup>35</sup> Or the other way around, he does not really care.

<sup>36</sup> A disgusting sight, really.

Then Angus steps forward and challenges the wight-witch. She seems to show real fear for the first time. She makes the giant skeletons in her party step forward. Then there is an exchange of magical fire between Herman and the witch, in which Herman is badly wounded. Velouria steps forward to heal her friend. Then Angus starts to manifest obvious wizard spells. He Blinks behind the witch, uses Lich Touch on her. Then he casts Wall of Bones around her. The witch fights her way out. But she is finally defeated by a last Lich Touch. Velouria is revolted<sup>37</sup>, she now knows for sure that whatever makes Angus' body move, it is not the mind of Angus. Herman uses his gun to shoot at the Crown, in the hopes of destroying it and thereby freeing Angus from its nefarious influence. It does not work. After some more exchange of magical spells, Angus manages to flee into the mists.

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<sup>37</sup> As in the horror-effect.