

Campaign Journal

Ravenloft: The Shadow Rising

General notes and Introduction

Hi, everybody! My name is Jeremy Puckett, though online I'm known as Hida Jiremi. As you might be able to guess from the handle, I'm something of a fan of the Legend of the Five Rings RPG and CCG, but I'm also a long-time player and GM for Ravenloft. I've been buying Ravenloft stuff since the original setting boxed set, and the only significant piece of Ravenloft RPG material I don't own is the *Domains of Dread* hardcover.

My last Ravenloft game ran almost two years, and carried my PCs through the epic arc of the Grand Conjunction, as well as quite a bit else. While I would love to rant on for pages about that group (and may yet actually write a campaign journal about them), this journal is about my current game, *The Shadow Rising*. As might be constructed from the title, the campaign's main theme is the rebuilding of the Core after the Grand Conjunction, the coming of the shadow fey, and Azalin's bid for freedom that culminates in *Requiem*. I also intend to take the timeline past *Requiem* and toward the modern arc, as a set up for my next Ravenloft campaign, which will hopefully carry the PCs... well, perhaps that's too much information.

With this campaign, I wanted to do something different than in my last one, and so I'm trying for a sense of immersion within the campaign world. I am going about this by asking the players to keep character journals, for which they will be rewarded with small amounts of XP, and have built a Yahoo group filled with world material and campaign art, which will hopefully inspire the players to think "inside the box," as it were.

I have started the PCs at higher than 1st level, to better reflect the difficulties of their individual situations, as well as to create a PC party that is somewhat competent and world-wise from step one. I also started PCs at different levels in order to create a pre-campaign background of interconnection. The PCs for this campaign are also harder-edged and somewhat darker than my previous PCs, which is good, since I want to explore the darker aspects of the human psyche with this campaign.

PC Descriptions

Tandora von Sydow: Tandora is a Borcan priestess of Ezra whose aristocrat mother died giving birth to her. Rather than the normal complications, however, Tandora's mother "died" of a fever while pregnant and was laid in her grave before the gravekeeper found Tandora—her mother was just comatose when she was prepared for burial and gave birth in her coffin, only then dying of blood loss. Tandora's father gave the child over to a Richemuloise orphanage to be raised, unable to bear the sight of the child that had killed his beloved wife but unable to smother her (the usual fate for unwanted children).

The orphanage's staff, Ezrans, thought Tandora simple as a child, since she would spend much of her time staring off into space and talking to imaginary friends. The children, however, avoided her—they knew that strange things tended to happen to people near Tandora. Once, a bully picked on her; the boy was found dead in the orphanage's cistern that night—while Tandora was at prayers with the other children. After that, no one picked on her again.

At the age of eight, Tandora was already a classical beauty, thin and graceful with black hair and unnerving violet eyes. Her father came to the orphanage, hoping to find some solace in the girl's life, but left hours later, weeping and broken. The priest in charge of the orphanage sent a secret missive to the Borcan See to inform them of the truth about the girl—she could see and speak to the ghosts of the dead. Born into the grave, Tandora's circumstances placed her close to the spirit world—a talent the church would find useful.

After that, Tandora was given a fine education in both noble behavior and the dogma of Ezra. Her new teachers found her to have a keen intellect that had never before been challenged, and under their tutelage she blossomed into a priestess and investigator. Now a grown woman, Tandora is a harrier—a cleric devoted to uncovering the enemies of her faith. Not just a priestess but a spy as well, Tandora considers herself the right hand of Ezra, and she would do anything to protect her beloved faith. She is ready to travel out into the world and carry forth Ezra's justice, but she may not be prepared for what it will cost her.

Tandora's greatest sorrow is that her father is a broken man who she never really got to know; she would give almost anything to know him and make him proud of her. She prides herself on never drawing a weapon (though she carries a longsword for ceremonial purposes).

Quick Statistics: LN human female Cleric 2

Mayhew Engels (Brother Mayhem): Mayhew Engels is a native Gundarakite who grew up near the Barovian border and had family on both sides of it. After the Conjunction, he joined the Barovian army, believing that their proposed campaign to annex Gundarak would bring stability to a country he cared for, which had been in anarchy since the fall of the Gundar dukes. Instead, he found himself involved in a bloody crusade to subjugate people he once called friends and relatives.

After the Teufeldorf Massacre, at which Gundarakite leaders were slaughtered under a flag of truce, he requested a release from duty. Again, he found no comfort, as he was instead transferred to Krezk to act as an enforcer for the regional boyar. When the boyar killed a Gundarakite farmer for “being insolent,” Mayhew decided that he had had enough. He took the farmer's scythe from the ground where it lay and struck down the boyar, then went on the run.

Finally, Mayhew found asylum in Borca, at a monastery just outside Levkarest. While there, he continued to follow his newfound ideals of protecting the common folk from their “noble” masters. His somewhat rough methods led the monks to dub him “Brother Mayhem.” Now, he has been called forth to repay their kindness by acting as Tandora's guardian in her travels. Each of them know that the other is their true mission: he has to keep her alive, and she has to find a way to redeem him, a fallen man.

Quick Statistics: CG human male Fighter 2

Mariette d’Fanchon: A hard-nosed bounty hunter from the streets of Pont-a-Museau, Mariette’s parents came to Richemulot seeking a better life. When she was a child, bandits broke into her family’s home seeking wealth. Her parents hid Mariette and her younger brother Philippe in a secret closet, and died when the vindictive bandits discovered that the d’Fanchons were poor. Mariette watched helplessly as her parents were butchered, and vowed that night that she would find a way to stop everyone who preyed on the weak and make them pay.

After she and Philippe were sent to an Ezran orphanage, Mariette began to suffer debilitating headaches and was picked on by the bigger children as the “new girl.” It all came to a head one day when a bully pushed Mariette too far, and her hate boiled up out of her in a wave of power—the bully nearly died from the crackling energy that leapt out of Mariette and into him. Fearing that Mariette had been tainted by a witch (or was a witch herself), the anchorites in charge of the orphanage separated Mariette and Philippe, sending her to the orphanage they reserved for “troubled” children for observation. Mariette escaped and spent the next half-dozen years on the street, living hand-to-mouth and avoiding the roving gangs of vicious street urchins that wanted to recruit her or kill her.

Finally, Mariette drew the attention of a mentalist, a middle-aged man with a gift for reading minds. He instructed her in her powers and tried to teach her a credo of superiority to “normals”—a credo that she perceived as just another form of bullying. Accepting the training but not the teachings, Mariette left her mentor and subtly turned her powers to the capture of dangerous criminals. She was so successful that she was offered a position in several noble police forces, but declined and has remained an independent operative. Her proudest achievement has been the awarding of a set of exquisite manacles from *le Serrure et Cle* as a thanks for her help in solving a difficult case. She hopes that she can someday find Philippe, avenge her parents, and rediscover her waning faith in the goddess that took them all from her.

Quick Statistics: N human female Wilder 2

Tad O’Brian: A farmboy from Tepest, Tad thought he had found happiness at a young age when he was married to his childhood sweetheart. The terrors of the Upheaval were nothing compared to the joy in his heart, especially when his wife gave birth to their first child. Nothing good can last in Ravenloft, however. Tad came home from working in the woods one day to find his house ransacked, much of his family—including his wife and child—murdered at the hands of ravenous goblins. Tad’s world was consumed in fire as his hate poured out of his body, charring the goblins to ash and setting his house aflame. He staggered away, exhausted and wounded, sick at heart, able to save only one of his youngest siblings.

He lost consciousness in the woods near the village, and another survivor of his family, his eldest sister, happened upon him as he slept. When he awoke, she cursed at him, calling him a monster, as bad as the things that had killed their family. Out of the love she once held for him and for saving their youngest sister, she had told the villagers that

he had died in the fire too. If he ever came back, though, she'd see him in the hands of the Inquisition. Now he was truly alone, for none would take in one such as himself—a witch.

Tad fled Tepest, seeking to escape his pain and to escape himself. He journeyed west across the Core, skirting the southern tip of the Shadow Rift, finally arriving in Borca. There, he found refuge and comfort in the teachings of Ezra. He spent almost six months in a monastery in Levkarest, basking in the joy of faith, but all the while he could still feel the hate and pain inside him, howling to be let free. One of Tad's few friends at the monastery, Brother Mayhew, has taught him the beginnings of how to use anger to your own benefit, but he still has a long way to go before he can cope with what happened to his family, and with what he is now.

Quick Statistics: NG human male Sorcerer 2

Aria von Drachenggaard: Aria is the only child of the noted monster hunter Karl von Drachenggaard, a sometime acquaintance of Dr. Rudolph van Richten. As a young girl, Aria would spend much of her time emulating her beloved father, pretending to be a noble warrior armed with spell and pistol. She wanted nothing more than to follow in his footsteps and fight evil alongside him. Sadly, it was not to be. In Aria's teen years, shortly after her father began work constructing a mystic weapon against darkness, an old enemy of his caught up to them and murdered Karl. This enemy, a vampire whose name Karl had never revealed to Aria, killed Karl in a terrible battle, stole the plans for his weapon, and nearly killed Aria as well. She managed to hold on to life, however, and carry with her the burning desire for vengeance.

Her father's sister would have none of Aria's "foolishness" and sent her off to a finishing school for aristocratic ladies in Richemulot. For a time, she studied under the notable choirmaster Antonio Davidovich, but the life of a noble lady was not for her. Just after she came into her majority, Aria abandoned her musical training and set off into the world, determined to make a name for herself and avenge her father's death. She also seeks to master enough magic to uncover the secrets of the mysterious weapon Karl was working on at the time of his death, a device he called the *Pistolet de Soleil*.

Aria carries her father's masterwork pistol with her at all times, as well as her signed copy of *Van Richten's Guide to Vampires*. She has considered tracking down her "Uncle Rudolph," but knowing of his retirement she has sought to leave him in peace and comfort.

Quick Statistics: NG human female Bard 1/Fighter 1

Sluchainaya Zoyadoch' Romanovna fitzHiregaard (Taina Zoyadoch'): A semi-acknowledged illegitimate daughter of Lord Tristen Hiregaard and a minor vassal noblewoman, Taina grew up in her father's shadow, always around him but never truly a part of his life. A fascination with animals at a young age led to her being apprenticed with the Hiregaard family's animal handlers—falconers, woodsmen, and horse trainers. Even Lord Tristen marveled at her ability to communicate with animals, and she was never happier than when she could show off some new trick she had taught one of the animals in her care.

At a very young age, Taina's mother was murdered, as frequently happens to Lord Tristen's lovers. She was present for the attack according to her surviving relatives but she remembers nothing of that terrible night. As she grew older, her uncanny knack for understanding animals—almost seeming to speak with them—gained her a reputation as unmarriageable with other nobles. Her uncle Georg sought only to make her happy, letting her pick her own path.

At the age of nineteen, Taina went with Georg to a friend's party, only to find there that the friend's son had managed to capture a plains cat and was keeping it in a cage, starving it into submission. Taina could not take the creature's suffering, and sneaked back later that night, freeing it from its imprisonment. Her uncanny knack kicked in once more, and the cat quickly befriended her as she took it back to Georg's estate and nursed it back to health. When Georg's friend confronted him on the matter, he lied to the man's face and sent him on his way. That night, Taina realized that she had made a man who cared deeply for her dishonor himself on her account. In shame, she packed her things and prepared to depart. Georg stopped her at the gate and told her that she would always be welcome home; as a parting gift, he gave her his finest *rudbolge* steed.

Taina thinks of home often, but she has never once looked back. Now, she travels in the outlands (everything but Nova Vaasa, in Taina's mind) and seeks to make something of herself. She has no idea what yet, but she knows that it will come to her in time.

Quick Statistics: LG human female Aristocrat 1/Ranger 1

Antonio Davidovich (Claudius Trotsky): Antonio Davidovich is a man who does not exist. From his childhood, Claudius Trotsky was taught to keep his head down and stay out of the way of more influential nobles, that his family's wealth was tenuous enough given the state of Dorvinian politics that they could not take risks. Claudius grew up talented and handsome, but unsatisfied with his lot in life. He began to seriously think about travel, that perhaps leaving his poverty-stricken homeland and spending some time abroad would lighten his heart.

The decision was made for him one terrible night. He was caught out after dark and was hurrying home, when he noticed a girl not much younger than himself in the same predicament. He raised one hand to greet her, and as she moved toward him *something* came out of the darkness and snatched her away. As Claudius stood there, dumbfounded, listening to the girl's screams as she was carried off, he blacked out. He did not regain his senses until the next day, when he was home in his own bed. Locked in melancholy, he realized something over the next few days: the strong preyed upon the weak, and always would so long as men lacked courage—as he himself had lacked courage.

That day, Claudius Trotsky left behind his wealth and station and fled out into the world to find courage. Under the assumed name of Antonio Davidovich, and half a dozen others, Claudius has offered his talents to various resistance groups in the western Core, acting as a healer, a spy, and a supply runner. His eventual hope is to return to the now-unified Borca and cast down the Dark Twins, ending their reign of terror.

As one of his covers, Antonio acted as a music teacher at a girls' school in Richemulot for a few months before the Great Upheaval. During his time there, he formed a father-daughter relationship with a talented acolyte of Ezra named Tandora, and taught her the

ways of poison and alchemy. Now the two of them meet once more, her a beautiful woman and him the father she never had.

Quick Statistics: N human male Bard 2

GM's Notes

As you can see, most of the party has some sort of background secret that they would rather keep quiet. This creates an innate party tension that will be interesting to see played out.

Of the current players, only one (Tandora's player) has ever been in an extended Ravenloft campaign before, and only one other (Marianne) has ever played in a short Ravenloft game (a mini-campaign I ran in the summer of 2003). Most of them only know that the game is gothic horror, and know nothing of the concept of darklords, dark powers, or any of the other standards of the setting. Tandora's and Marianne's players have agreed to not disclose any of this information to the others, and have done a pretty good job of it so far.

Intriguing as well is that Taina is actually the daughter of Nova Vaasa's darklord (at least, his alter ego); Taina's player has never played Ravenloft before and only knows that Tristen Hiregaard is a womanizing nobleman. As might be guessed, Taina's animal companion is a juvenile plains cat. She has named him Воль (pronounced BOL). Her warhorse is called Заём (pronounced ZAY-om).

The first few sessions do not include Antonio. The character was generated, and then the player had to bow out due to personal concerns before the game actually started. His character is still included due to his desire to join the game as soon as these issues are worked out.

The female-to-male proportion of players (there are no cross-gender characters) is large, at four female players, and two male players.

Marianne is a wilder, the first psionic character I have ever had in a non-Dark Sun game. This pleases me, since I've long been an advocate of psionics in D&D, and especially in Ravenloft. Her powers tend to focus on debilitating her enemies and distorting their perceptions (think "The Shadow" from the old radio plays) but she does have a last-resort attack power: *energy ray*. I have increased the number of powers known for wilders by one (so they start with two instead of one and increase from there), as I think the small number of powers is not balanced against the class theme.

Tad's player often plays spellcasters, but playing a spellcaster that hates his own powers is a first for him. He is very interested in seeing how Tad will work as a non-optimized spellcaster (his highest ability scores are his Strength and Charisma) who only uses his spells when extremely angry or desperate. His current plan is to eventually take a level

of barbarian (to represent his sudden anger) and eventually go for the rage mage prestige class.

Tandora is eventually going to take a level of assassin, and from there work on Stygian attendant. She is skilled in the use of poison and has no qualms about removing obstacles with venoms of both the lethal and non-lethal types. She is not truly evil, because she works only for the greater good of Ezra and the Church, but she walks a thin line.

If/when he joins the game, Antonio plans to go for the assassin and court poisoner prestige classes while maintaining his neutral alignment. While an essentially decent person, Antonio believes that the only way to remove evil from power is to use its own ruthless methods against it. His eventual goal is to become prominent enough to become one of Ivan Dilisnya's courtiers, get himself addicted to Borrowed Time so that he looks trustworthy, and then betray Ivan at a critical moment, hopefully killing both Dark Twins. He would consider his own life an adequate payment for their destruction and Borca's freedom.

Aria is planning on taking Craft Magic Arms and Armor, and then building the *Pistolet de Soleil*, a gun that fires sunbeams. She also is planning on either the pistoleer or weapon master prestige classes.

Mayhew is working toward heading into the holy liberator prestige class. He fights with a somewhat unusual style: hammer and *scythe*. He manages this with the Monkey Grip feat (*Sword and Fist*) and the Two-Weapon Fighting tree. He also carries a sickle and several knives as back-up weapons. His eventual goal is the reunification of Gundarak—under his rulership and the worship of Ezra.

Lofty goals from some of these folks, eh?

Ravenloft: The Shadow Rising

Session 1: The Key to Midnight

Date: September 27, 2004

Wherein our Heroes are contacted by a mysterious Patron, who offers them a most intriguing proposition involving the recovery of a stolen Book and which may in turn be related to a missing Key.

Setting

Place: Levkarest, capital of Borca

Time: April 6, 744 BC

Dramatis Personae: The PCs

Aria von Drachengard, a pistoleer and monster hunter (Amy Payne)

Taina Zoyadoch', an animal tamer from the Distant East (Anna Rice)

Mariette d'Fanchon, a hard-bitten bounty hunter (Jamie Palmer)

Lady Tandora von Sydow, a noble-born priestess of Ezra (Chisa Yap)

Tad O'Brian, a troubled youth from a rural land, Lady Tandora's page ("Evil" Joe LaMothe)

Brother Mayhew Engels, a revolutionary from a destroyed nation ("Capn" Robert Brown)

Dramatis Personae: The NPCs

Zinerva Desfraya, owner of Desfraya Manor, a noble boarding house

Marek and Flegon, street thugs

Theldrat Meldorp, a locksmith and keymaker

Sentire Levin Postoya, head librarian of the Great Cathedral of Ezra

Irontusk, caliban dockworker

Solnia, his halfling compatriot

...and miscellaneous members of the Borcan militia and the Green Dagger Gang.

Summary

The PCs are drawn to Desfraya Manor (2) in Levkarest by a series of mysterious letters sent by a would-be patron. Meeting there, they find themselves the only guests in the noble boarding house and gradually become acclimated to one another's presence. On the day they are to meet with this patron, they are having breakfast outside, only to witness a break-in at a shop across the street. Tandora, her retinue, and Mariette move to stop the thugs, only to be insulted and threatened by them. After reason fails to move them from their larcenous business, Mayhew does—with his scythe.

The thugs are taken away by a (somewhat disgruntled) squad of militamen and the group rejoins their breakfast companions. They find that Aria and Taina have already become acquainted with the patron who sent them their letters, Sentire Levin Postoya (3). The Sentire informs them that of the several dozen letters he sent out, the PCs are those that

chose to meet with him on this day. The Sentire's goal in gathering them together like this is to create an independent troubleshooting organization that can involve itself in matters the Church would prefer to stay out of but cannot simply ignore. As well, their group purpose would be to offer aid to those requiring it, at a suitable fee, naturally.

As a show of good faith and a test of their abilities, Sentire Postoya requests that they recover for the Church a stolen book, the *Midnight Clarion* (4), a tome that has been mystically sealed for many years. Upon hearing that a locksmith's "lucky key" was stolen as well, he immediately connects the two and charges the group with finding either the book or the key, for surely one will lead to the other. The party agrees, and as the first part of their plan interviews the locksmith, Theldrat Meldorp, and the thugs that stole the key.

Theldrat informs them that the key was given to his father fifteen years ago as a gift from a traveling sorceress (5), and passed on to him eight years ago after his father's death. His father claimed that it was a lucky key and would never let it out of his possession. After his father died, Theldrat kept the key in the store's window as a lucky charm, and fears now that his business could suffer for the loss. In turn, the thugs reveal that they stole no key—they were given leave to loot the place by a friend of theirs who had robbed it earlier, a caliban dockworker by the name of Irontusk.

Following the trail of clues to the River District, the party finds Irontusk, a hulking brute with one long tusk jutting from his lower lip, capped in wrought iron. His companion, a halfling named Solnia, tries to warn him off, but Aria quickly unmans him with her cunning fast-talk and ladylike charm (6). He reveals that he was paid—and handsomely—to steal the key by a local gang, the Green Daggers (so called for the green dagger-shaped brooches they wear in their cloaks).

The party traces the Green Daggers to an "abandoned" merchant manor on the edge of the River District. Breaking in, they find themselves attacked by a monstrous hunting cat, a krenshar (7). Though some wounds are sustained in fighting the beast, Mariette's skill with the guisarme fells the foul creature. Moving on, they discover four gang members suffering from an illness Tandora recognizes as advanced blinding sickness, a condition that will soon cripple them, and soon after kill them without proper medical treatment. Tandora send the others out to scout the house while she and Mayhew stay behind to make the men more comfortable and say a few prayers for them (8).

Taina and Tad explore one wing, while Aria and Mariette take the other. Taina and Tad's exploration goes uneventfully, except for the discovery of a dead guard and a servants' door leading to the empty stables. Aria and Mariette's search runs a little less smoothly, with a run-in with a living (if sick) guard, and Mariette's encounter with a falling-log trap. The group meets back up in the main foyer and presses on.

Coming to the house's main stair, a magnificent chandelier suspended above the room, Aria becomes immediately suspicious. She notices a Green Dagger hiding at the top of the stairs, ready to cut the chandelier's rope, and shoots the gang member. Startled by a

bullet wound, the woman cuts the cord too soon and makes a run for it, only to be brought down by a well-placed shot to the back. The party ties up their prisoners and takes a breather before penetrating the heart of the manor.

Quotes of the Session

Tandora: Maybe you should consult a locksmith.

Theldrat: I *am* a locksmith.

Tandora: Well, that's... fine... then.

Aria: If you have any information, I could make it worth your time.

Ironusk: Not think so. No way. Not talk about robbery.

Aria: Who was talking about the robbery? I just want to know if you're free tonight.

GM's Notes

1—This adventure is based on “Mad God’s Key,” a tournament-style adventure published in *Dungeon Magazine*. The adaptation is fairly thorough, however, with almost all of the events altered in some way to make sense in the gothic horror context of Ravenloft.

2—Desfraya Manor is mentioned in *Ravenloft Gazetteer IV* as a boarding house run by a noble family that has been removed from their position by Ivana Boritsi because they were favored by her mother Camille. The PCs are staying there at the Church’s expense.

3—At this time in continuity, Levin Postoya is a bookish scholar with a high rank in the Ezran hierarchy mostly due to his position as the head of the Great Cathedral’s library. This is almost a year before the death of Praesidius Alexei Raskolka and Postoya’s elevation to that position.

4—I ran a Ravenloft adventure a number of years ago including a book called the *Midnight Clarion* long before the Gazetteers established that as the secret doctrine of the Morninglord. For purposes of continuity (and sheer coolness of the name), the book’s title has remained unchanged.

5—The traveling sorceress mentioned is a PC from the same previous game as the *Midnight Clarion*. She sealed the book rather than trust the Ezrans to do it, and gave the key (enchanted with a permanent *knock* spell) to a locksmith that had helped them out in a previous adventure. This is why the elder Meldorp had been such a successful locksmith; his son thought the key was just a lucky charm.

6—“Ladylike charm” in this case refers to blatant seduction. She had to take a hot bath after seducing the caliban, but managed to leave him heartbroken without having to carry through on a single promise.

7—Krenshar live in Hazlan, according to *Gazetteer I*. The leader of the Green Daggers kept this one as a pet, and to feed enemies and traitors to it.

8—Actually, Tandora decided that since the men were thieves and almost dead anyway, the kind thing to do would be to put them out of their misery. She said prayers while she had Mayhew smother them in their beds as an act of mercy. His alignment suffered slightly, and both of them made dark powers checks, at which they succeeded.

Ravenloft: The Shadow Rising

Session 2: Double Troubles

Date: October 4, 2004

Wherein the Heroes meet a charming thug, discover the true mastermind behind the thefts of the Book and the Key, and prepare for a Journey.

Setting

Place: Levkarest, capital of Borca

Time: April 6-7, 744 BC

Dramatis Personae: The PCs

Aria von Drachengard (Amy Payne)

Taina Zoyadoch' (Anna Rice)

Mariette d'Fanchon (Jamie Palmer)

Lady Tandora von Sydow (Chisa Yap)

Tad O'Brian ("Evil" Joe LaMothe)

Brother Mayhew Engels ("Capn" Robert Brown)

Dramatis Personae: The NPCs

Tisa and Risa Tyran, halfling twins, mockingbirds

Cyrathas, charming leader of the Green Daggers

Summary

After tying up their two prisoners, the party presses on deeper into the Green Daggers' manor. They discover a room full of icky spiders (2) and quickly move on, sealing the room up once more to avoid dealing with said spiders. In their search, they do manage to find a room filled with disguises and another with a map of the city on a table. Near the map are two ledgers, one of normal business expenditures and another of criminal endeavors. Included in the second ledger is the information that the Green Daggers have largely been out of business for two weeks with severe illness: only two (listed as Tisa and Risa Tyran) are not infected or dead. They take the ledgers as possible evidence against the Green Daggers and continue on.

Passing through a curtain, they find themselves out on the roof, on a walkway of a type called a Widow's Walk (3). The walk leads to the other part of the second floor, fronted by a patio with sturdy double doors. Opening the doors, the party finds a room whose expanses are concealed by hanging green silks billowing in a slight breeze (4). Tad sees in the room a little girl with brown hair and a pink dress who giggles at him and runs off. Entering the room to find the girl, the party soon finds themselves lost among billowing green silk.

Things turn sour as the little girl reappears, only to stab Mayhew in the side with a long dagger and disappear back into the hanging silks (5). Before the party can react, she strikes again, stabbing with deadly precision—then does so again mere moments later, too fast for anyone to have recovered. Wounded and bleeding, realizing that the tactical advantage is on their enemy's (or possibly enemies') side, Mayhew calls for a retreat and falls back from the room onto the Widow's Walk. The rest of the party falls back as well, and once on the Widow's Walk an alchemical smoke grenade fills their air with cloying black smoke (5). Visibility fails, and Tad moves to block the doors to give the rest of the party time to get away.

The little girl closes up with Tad and stabs him in the gullet, causing the hate and fear to swell within him. Unleashing the magical might within, Tad attempts to lash out at the girl but fails. Mayhew closes in to help his young friend, dropping his scythe and snatching the girl up, intending to fling her from the roof (6). At this point, an identical girl comes running out of the silken room, tumbling into Mayhew's legs and knocking all three of them to the ground, two stories below. The second girl manages to tumble down safely, while the grappled girl flips Mayhew onto the bottom of their fall, allowing him to absorb most of the impact.

Mariette reveals her dark secret when, to aid Mayhew, she conjures up a bolt of flame and flings it at the standing twin, narrowly missing (7). Mayhew manages to choke out the grappled twin, while Taina's trained puma takes down the other. Despite their rancor against the girls—obviously the Tyran twins—the party merely ties them up to take them in for prosecution. Binding their various wounds, they move on, set on finding the gang's leader, whom Irontusk has told them is named Cyrathas (8).

Finally pushing to the inner sanctum of the Green Dagger headquarters the party encounters the urbane gang leader Cyrathas, a thin, handsome blond man wearing a red velvet robe and drinking thick brandy from a snifter. After a friendly discussion with Cyrathas, the party learns that the Green Daggers were hired to steal the locksmith's lucky key by a priest of Ezra that called himself Veltargo and carried around a large, bound book (9). In exchange for the key, Veltargo gave Cyrathas enough magical potions to cure a few members of his gang's illness; he himself, he claims, is immune (10). Cyrathas cured the Tyran twins (for whom he seems to have some real affection) and plans to rebuild his gang after the heroes depart.

During the conversation, Aria notices several disturbing facts: Cyrathas is obviously not Borcan (as his name would suggest) but Dementlieuese or Richemuloise; he is extremely pale; the liquid in his snifter may not be brandy at all; and there are no windows in his private room—not one. Aria later expresses her fear that Cyrathas may be a vampire (11).

In the meantime, however, the group gives its initial report to Sentire Postoya about their progress, and that the book's thief was apparently an Ezran priest. Sentire Postoya denies the possibility, informing them that a junior priest was robbed of his robes and holy symbol almost a month ago, but the investigation had stalled out from lack of manpower and because nothing truly valuable had been taken. The robbed priest, Altamaic, had

managed to snatch a pendant from his assailant—a beaten copper medallion in the shape of a clenched fist squeezing out a drop of blood with a series of irregular bumps on the back. Sentire Postoya gives the medallion to the party and says that a sage might be able to identify what it means.

Mariette and Tad began asking around, while the others rested from the ordeal. Mariette managed to find a sage who asked 50 gold nightshades to identify the medallion, a price she considered entirely unreasonable. Expressing this to the others, Tandora had the Church issue a receipt for payment on the information, and a different sage took a few hours to find the necessary information.

The pendant turned out to be what is called a cairn charm (12), usually associated with the tombs in the Cairn Foothills of the Balinok Mountains. A cairn charm is designed to allow entry to a tomb as well as repulse evil spirits and identify the tomb's occupants. This particular charm was associated with the *Cairn del Sanguinis Eternitas* (13), the Tomb of Blood Everflowing, a crypt noted by explorers for the copper-tinged waters within. This tomb was built in ancient times by Terg raiders as a resting place for several of their chieftains, sanctified to their demonic deity, Irlek-Khan (known to the modern Gundarakites as Erlin, god of slaughter) (14). Discovering these facts, Tad was somewhat nonplussed, but the party nonetheless began to outfit themselves for a two-day journey into the Cairn Foothills in northern Barovia.

Quotes

Amy (OOC): What do I have to do? Say "Get over here and take me, you enormous hunk of a man!"? (15)

Tandora: I managed to find a hidden door, but I can't open it. We need a way to open the lock.

Aria: Call Mayhew. He has a skill for opening doors—with his hammer. (16)

GM's Notes

1—This session is a continuation of the previous one, an adaptation of the adventure “Mad God’s Key” from *Dungeon Magazine*.

2—A swarm of tiny spiders. The party managed to seal the door with resin before they could even get out of the closet they had been hiding in.

3—Widow’s walks are one of my favorite architectural structures, ever since I first saw one on the map for Misericordia in the old Ravenloft boxed set. I’ve always wanted to run a fight on one, and now I’ve gotten my wish.

4—I saw *Hero* the week before running this session, and I couldn't resist the iconography of a fight amongst hanging silks. The original adventure includes a similar encounter, but I love running fights in unusual terrain, so I spiced it up a bit.

5—Smokebombs work really well if your enemies fall back to a position where they can't maneuver out of the cloud.

6—I ruled for this purpose that if you can pin someone with a grapple check, you can just as easily toss them five feet or so. Mayhew managed to grapple Tisa (being size Small hurts in situations like this) and was getting ready to toss her. He probably would have won the second grapple check, but Risa managed to beat him in her bull rush attempt and just threw them all off the roof. They figured they could take the fall and he couldn't. As it turned out, he was pretty hurt, but they didn't get away.

7—This is the first time Mariette got to use *energy ray* in front of the party, and most of them were deeply confused. After all, the priestess and the bard could both tell that she wasn't casting a spell, and she had never indicated that she was a spellcaster. After the fight, she admitted to being a psychic and frankly told them that her powers were none of their business. Mariette's bluntness stymied them thoroughly.

8—Cyrathas is smooth... like butter.

9—Now the plot starts to come together. This Veltargo fellow robs a cleric of his robes and steals the book, only to find that it can't be opened. He finds rumors of a locksmith's "lucky key" and uncovers records showing that the key is probably magical. To avoid attracting too much attention, he decides to enlist aid. He secretly infects the Green Daggers with blinding sickness, presents himself as an Ezran healer, and promises to cure them in exchange for stealing this key. Unfortunately, the gang is too sick to do it on their own and subcontracts to a caliban thug... who involves his friends... who draw attention. It just proves that three can keep a secret if two of them are dead.

10—Absolutely true. The Tyrans were never infected, though; the potions Veltargo gave them were just flavored water. If Cyrathas ever finds out, he's likely to be quite irritated. I love the concept that all legal penalties in Borca are handled through base coin; it makes it so easy for choice villains to "escape justice" in a perfectly legal fashion.

11—Yes, he certainly is. Cyrathas is an assumed name, too. He is actually a street thief named Malcolm who was a PC from a previous game. He got turned into a vampire during the adventure *Feast of Goblins* and was taken prisoner by Dr. Dominiani. The PCs had to leave him behind, but the party's paladin swore to one day track him down and free him. Malcolm's freedom and the paladin's promise are also part of my current campaign's backstory.

12—The cairns and tombs in the Balinok Mountains are discussed in *Ravenloft Gazetteer I and III*. The cairn charm is a bit of flavor from the original adventure that I kept because it was spiffy and neat.

13—How do you like my fake Latin? I know real Latin, but this sounded cooler. Yes, the sage they spoke to is an expatriate Darkonian, explaining the use of the name.

14—Mayhew immediately recognized the name of Erlin. During his time with the Barovian military, he spent some time putting down Erlin cultists in the Gundarak hills.

15—There's been quite a bit of byplay between Aria and Mayhew. Mayhew's player has established him as a shy man, brash and loud in combat but not really comfortable with women. Aria is a beautiful, strong woman with talent and an appreciation for strong men. She's been pretty aggressive in pursuing his friendship... and maybe more than that. We'll see as things progress.

16—Nobody in the party has the Open Lock skill. Mayhew solves this by breaking down every door they find with a lock on it. That's going to be a problem for him in the future.

17—On a personal note, I'm very pleased that my party has yet to kill a single person in combat. They always take prisoners, and they always check downed foes to make sure they don't die. Mayhew and Tandora's mercy killings in the first session are made significantly more poignant by the fact that the PCs are not thoughtless killers.

Ravenloft: The Shadow Rising

Session 3: The Tomb of Blood Everflowing

Date: October 11, 2004

Wherein the Heroes travel across the land to a forgotten Tomb and confront its Guardians, seeking to recover a stolen Book and Key.

Setting

Place: Levkarest, capital of Borca; the Cairn Foothills, Barovia

Time: April 7-12, 744 BC

Dramatis Personae: The PCs

Taina Zoyadoch' (Anna Rice)

Mariette d'Fanchon (Jamie Palmer)

Lady Tandora von Sydow (Chisa Yap)

Tad O'Brian ("Evil" Joe LaMothe)

Brother Mayhew Engels ("Capn" Robert Brown)

Dramatis Personae: NPCs

Veltargo Venazzi, Gundarakite priest of Erlin

Ilsanarr, his lieutenant

...and various cultists and worshippers of Erlin...

Summary

With Aria fallen suddenly ill (2), the others had to choose between waiting for her to recover or pressing on immediately. Knowing that time was of the essence in this matter they chose to depart immediately, leaving Aria in the capable hands of Lady Desfraya and her servants.

The group traveled east from Levkarest into Barovia, to the Cairn Foothills of the Balinok Mountains, a journey in which Taina's masterful tracking and navigation skills proved invaluable (3). Halfway through the trip the party stopped at a hospice run by the priestesses of Hala, goddess of nature and magic, rather than camp in the wilderness. Tad and Mariette especially found their gracious hospitality to their liking, and were somewhat confused by the disdain some of the other guests showed their hosts (4). Rested and fed, they moved on the next morning.

Once across the Barovian border, the air immediately seemed to become colder and more oppressive—or perhaps that was the influence of the Balinok Mountains, their peaks permanently shrouded in winter. After another half-day's travel, they found themselves briefly in the large town of Krezk (5), but chose to continue on rather than wait for the next morning. This decision cost them in terms of supplies when, halfway to their

destination and almost nightfall already, a starving pack of wolves picked a fight with them.

In the first moments of the battle, the wolves tore out the throat of one of the wagon horses and menaced Taina and her mount, Zaëm (6). Mayhew willingly threw himself into the fray, swinging hammer and scythe with deadly efficiency amongst the wolves, while Mariette used her greater reach to her advantage, attacking from the wagon with her guisarme. Tad struggled to control the wagon's remaining horse, succeeding only with great effort, and Tandora avoided getting in their way, knowing that her lack of combat skills could only impede their efforts.

Mounted on Zayom, Taina was a deadly whirlwind, directing her plains cat, Воль (6), to attack, utilizing her mount as a living weapon, and crushing skulls with a flail. Within moments, the wolfpack was reduced to a single living member, and Taina frightened it away with a series of growls, howls, and teeth baring (7). Tad, finally bringing the horse to calm (8), became convinced that Taina could talk to animals, but she refused to explain how she could make such sounds, or how the wolf could seem to understand her.

Taking stock of their losses, the group found that they had been lucky: one horse lost and no serious injuries. Mayhew butchered the downed horse (9), much to Taina's horror, and the group then made for a nearby outcropping on which to set up camp. The night passed with only the distant cries of wolves to remind them of the wilderness' dangers, and the pressed on in the morning.

Through Taina's expert woodland skills they managed to find the entrance to the cairn they sought. Воль refused to enter the underground tomb (10), so Taina left him to guard the horses and wagon. Making their way inside, they found a tomb whose sarcophagi had been shattered and looted, and a great pool of blood (11). Mayhew volunteered to explore the blood for any clues to their next destination, but it was Mariette who found the depression that could hold their amulet and open the hidden door to the next level. Mayhew was nearly swept away in the bloody flow that ensued, but managed to keep both his feet and his wits about him.

Traveling down the revealed stairs, the party encountered a trio of walking dead men, shambling undead horrors with a desire to extinguish the spark of life (12). Mariette, used to living foes, found herself paralyzed with fear at the thought of fighting the dead. For the first time in many years, she lost her nerve, a lapse for which she felt terrible after the battle (13). Though they were terrible to behold, the rest of the party made quick work of them and made their way further down.

They found that the stairs wrapped around a hundred-foot-deep pit shaft that overlooked an underground lake of blood (11). Making their way to the bottom, they could find no easy way across the blood and realized that they would have to swim or wade. Fortunately, the blood was only three feet deep, but Taina and Tad frankly refused to enter it. In the end, Mariette and Mayhew had to resort to carrying them across, Mayhew

even leaving his precious weapons behind to do so. Tandora agreed to cleanse everyone on the other side as well.

Mayhew went back alone for his weapons, only to be ambushed halfway back by a group of eight bloody human skeletons (14). Tandora focused the power of Ezra to turn away the wretched things, and succeeded in sending them back to their proper rest (15). The group finally rejoined at the ledge on the other end of the bloody lake, and found themselves confronted by a swarthy man wearing a breastplate and carrying a sickle. He called for reinforcements, and three men in thick hides bearing similar weapons quickly came to his aid.

The group entered pitched battle with the four adversaries, and as they seemed close to triumph, the true villain made his appearance. A tall, thin, balding man with crooked teeth, carrying both a sickle and a short sword, he called himself Veltargo—and he was not alone. Accompanying him, bedecked in armor and plating, was a skeletal bear of great size and obvious might (16). The battle was renewed, though the cultists quickly fell to the party's greater skill.

Tad, fearful for his life and pained by wounds, reached into the deepest part of himself and pulled out a dark force that ate away the face of the cultist fighting him (17). He fell against the next attack directed toward him, however, leaving him little time to contemplate his terrible deed. Taina was the next to fall, fighting Veltargo's lieutenant Ilsanarr, though she managed to deliver a few stinging rebukes with her shortbow to them both before falling. Mayhew was absorbed in battle with the great undead bear, but realized that his skills would be better utilized against the living and moved to engage Veltargo.

Mariette unleashed her psychic might against Ilsanarr, crackling bolts of raw lightning into his metal breastplate and leaving him smoking on the ground. Mayhew and Veltargo clashed against one another, inflicting grievous wounds, as Tandora moved to save the lives of her downed companions. The great bear shuddered and rebelled, forcing Veltargo to cease his assault on Mayhew to bring it back under control. Mariette ended its existence in the next moment as it charged her, her guisarme neatly beheading the foul creature and shattering her fear of the undead. Bloody and beaten, Mayhew and Veltargo traded blows once more, each knowing that a single powerful blow could finish the other. The battle was ended by an unlikely source; as Mayhew and Veltargo sought to gain advantage over one another, Mariette, using the last of her mental strength, streamed deadly fire into Veltargo's body.

With their enemies defeated and their friends stabilized, the battered comrades searched the cult's lair for the book and the key. The book was on a stand before a basalt statue of the demon-god Erlin, several of its pages missing, and the key nearby. With Veltargo's personal effects was a letter from an unknown source, directing him to remain in the tomb to await the letter-writer's return with necessary components. The letter was signed only "J.K." (18)

The book and key finally recovered, the party made preparations to return to the surface with their unconscious friends and make their way back to Levkarest.

Quotes

Veltargo: Gundarak will rise again!

Mayhew: But under my leadership, not yours.

GM's Notes

1—Gah! This note section gets longer every time I write an entry. Let's hope that settles down after a while.

2—Amy couldn't make it to this session due to personal troubles. After the build-up between Mayhew and Aria, it's somewhat disappointing that she couldn't be here for the conclusion of the adventure. A sudden illness provides a decent reason that she can't go along.

3—Survival is one of the skills that Taina has maximum ranks in, and her skill seems nearly legendary to everyone else since they don't have the Track feat at all. Taina's player had also been having usefulness issues before this session; now, she sees that she's very good at something.

4—Tad's superstitious and insular background works very well here. The priestesses introduced themselves as worshippers of Hala, the goddess of nature. He has no idea of her secondary influence over magic, or that Hala's priestesses are called "witches." His generosity toward them is due to their kindness; it'll be interesting to see his reaction when he realizes who they are.

5—I actually had an encounter planned here, but they pressed on.

6—See the introduction for pronunciations.

7—Thank you, wild empathy class feature.

8—Tad is a farmboy. Animal Handling is a skill he's good at. Nothing weird or supernatural here; he just has skills that represent his background.

9—Part of this is pure practicality on Mayhew's part. He realized that their supplies might run thin if they get caught out during a storm (still likely in April even in the foothills of the Balinoks) and that the horse would otherwise just go to waste. Taina's horror was increased by Mariette's insistence on getting a share of the horsemeat—she decided out of character that since Richemulot is like real-world France, she considers horsemeat a delicacy.

10—The cat lacks the trick that allows him to go underground. Taina made him stay with the wagon.

11—Pools and lakes of blood are usually a little overboard for Ravenloft, but I left them in the adventure to help highlight the grotesque nature of the worship of Erlin. The area practically crawls with ethereal resonance, and the combination of hot springs, ethereal resonance, and blood sacrifice leads to a somewhat bloody atmosphere.

12—Zombies. Just plain old zombies. They get scarier when they're described like this, don't they?

13—Hello, failed horror check. Goodbye, nerve. Mariette failed the horror check and became fearful of the undead for the remainder of the adventure.

14—Again, normal animated skeletons.

15—In my Ravenloft games, I've always allowed clerics to destroy mindless undead. Intelligent undead are still immune to being destroyed through turning.

16—The cultists had brought the tomb's guardian, a skeletal bear wearing chain barding, under their control through the use of rebuking. Unfortunately, any time Veltargo's control slipped, his control of the bear slipped too.

17—Tad's ability to inflict damage with negative energy is part of his hidden character background. More of this will be revealed in future adventures.

18—"J.K." is Janos Kaiser, a villain from my previous campaign better known to the PCs as Kaijanoth. Again, more about him will be discussed later. Are the missing pages important? Oh, yes.

19—This session is the first time that the PCs have killed in combat. Tad has never killed anyone before, so when he wakes up he's going to be rather upset.

Ravenloft: The Shadow Rising

Session 4: Thirds of Purloined Vellum

Date: October 18, 2004

Wherein the Heroes hit upon an idea for a business venture, only to discover that the road to success is rockier than might be imagined. New friends must depart, while old ones are rediscovered, and a plea for aid is answered.

Setting

Place: Levkarest, capital of Borca; the Cairn Foothills, Barovia

Time: April 13, 744 BC

Dramatis Personae: The PCs

Tandora von Sydow, an Ezran priestess, noble-born (Chisa Yap)

Tad O'Brian, her tormented page, a burgeoning—and unwilling—sorcerer ("Evil" Joe LaMothe)

Brother Mayhew Engels, Tandora's strong right hand ("Capn" Robert Brown)

Mariette d'Fanchon, a hard-bitten bounty hunter possessing strange mental powers (Jamie Palmer)

Taina Zoyadoch', a naturalist and tracker with an uncanny knack (Anna Rice)

Antonio Davidovich, a noted public speaker and chorist, Tandora's former teacher (Mark Weber)

Dramatis Personae: The NPCs

Zinerva Desfraya, owner of Desfraya Manor, disenfranchised noblewoman

Dughbhlas Kathkallan, a Mordentish merchant somewhat unfamiliar with Borca

Bez, Kathkallan's soft-spoken bodyguard

Galliad, Kathkallan's missing page and journeyman

Jasaar Arrasti, a Hazlani merchant

Catellion, owner of the Platinum Quill, a caravansary

Anteashara ('Shara), Catellion's fiancée and partner

Summary

After defeating the final guardians of the stolen *Midnight Clarion* in the Tomb of Blood Everflowing, the party escapes the wilderness of the Cairn Foothills and limps back to nearby Krezk(2). They remain there through the next day, giving the most severely wounded party members, Tad and Taina, a chance to recover from their injuries. Tad is silent and sullen during the recuperation; the toll of taking a man's life shows heavily upon him. Rather than wait for full health, they press on as quickly as possible, though another night at the Halan hospice is necessary, lest they become caught outdoors after dark.

They return to Levkarest and make their way to the Great Cathedral, where they present their report to Sentire Postoya. Though angered at the book's defacement and somewhat disturbed at the removal of a number of pages, Postoya acknowledges the book's return and the punishment of its thieves as a victory. The Sentire graciously thanks them for their service and reminds them that their connection to the Church must be significantly more circumspect in the future. As a more temporal reward, he grants them several hundred gold nightshades as starting capital for their burgeoning business.

Upon their triumphant return to Desfraya Manor, they are saddened to discover that their inspiring and personable ally, Aria, has departed in pursuit of a personal matter (3). As a salve for the loss, another respondee to Sentire Postoya's invitation has arrived: Antonio Davidovich, a former tutor of Lady Tandora's, who left teaching at the Rien School for Girls under unusual circumstances and has been rarely seen in the last three years (4). His and Tandora's reunion is a pleasant one, though Taina is obvious in her suspicion of their motives (5).

After some discussion of their group directives and goals, there is a brief period of embarrassment when the group realizes that none of them has any actual administration skills for the sort of business they are looking into. Overhearing their discussion, Lady Zinerva offers up her own not-insignificant skills as an accountant and business manager (6). The group finds her terms amenable and she offers to have the proper indentures drawn up if they will fetch some vellum from the Trades District.

The group realizes that in order to have a proper indenture and license of practice drawn up, they will need to have a company incorporation—in short, a group name. Much intense debate ensues, with all sides agreeing that an ecclesiastical solution is not the best, considering their ostensible separation from the Church of Ezra. Finally, they agree to have their name imprinted as "The Dawnguard." (7)

Tad, Antonio, and Tandora travel into the Trades District to shop. Mariette retires to the hot springs (8), Taina begins the arduous task of teaching her animals new tricks, and Mayhew continues to work on his unique fighting style. Acquiring the vellum is easy enough, but upon leaving the shop, the shopping expedition comes across a scene not unusual in Borca: innocents being accosted by thugs. In this case, six knife-wielding men threatening a red-cloaked merchant and his bodyguard. Tad yells out a warning to the two to prevent them from being flanked, and then the fray is joined.

Antonio moves to harry the attackers and inspire his allies, while Tad rushes into the conflict, swinging his staff with impunity. Tandora, recognizing her place, stays close enough to the melee to heal those that fall but far enough to avoid direct confrontation (9). Stabbed deeply, Tad's icy rage wells up as a blast of arctic cold and razor-sharp ice shards, nearly killing one of the attackers at a shot. Finally, the others learn their lesson and flee the scene, leaving Tandora to bind the fallen.

The merchant thanks the group profusely, and they offer him a chance to rest and recover his senses in their home. Seeing a valuable opportunity before him, the merchant

introduces himself to the united group as Dughbhlas (10) Kathkallan, a Mordentish trader specializing in royal jelly, a kind of honey useful for cosmetics and youtheners. His bodyguard he introduces simply as Bez. In his first trip to Borca, a year ago, he managed to find a potential buyer for his honey and had a number of indentures drawn up regarding that deal, and another to buy vanilla. Now, however, on his return trip, things seem somewhat more sour.

The market on vanilla beans has become inflated in the year since the deal, making the price he can contractually buy them at significantly lower than the market average. As well, his honey production was well above his previous estimates, leaving him a greater room for profit. With the indentures he had signed, Kathkallan would soon be an extremely wealthy man. Unfortunately, when Kathkallan sent his assistant and journeyman Galliad into town with the paperwork to arrange bodyguards and transportation, the young man never returned. Kathkallan trusts Galliad—the boy is a long-time friend of his family—and so is more fearful for the lad's safety than worried about theft. Kathkallan offers the party employment: find Galliad and be rewarded, a reward that will be noticeably more significant if the party can also recover the missing indentures.(11)

The group agrees and immediately begins beating the bushes of the criminal underworld for some answers. As near as can be told, Galliad's path was to take him to Jasaar Arrasti's pavillion to remind the Hazlani merchant of his obligations. From there he would go to the headquarters of Greater Galleon, a trading company with whom Kathkallan had an arrangement for vanilla beans, and then to the Platinum Quill, a caravansary (12) specializing in coordination and protection. Somewhere along the way, before reaching the Platinum Quill, the young man had simply disappeared. Catellion and his fiancée, 'Shara, could offer no clues, having never actually seen Galliad.(13)

Gathering once more at the Manor, the group chose to rest for the night and visit the various trading houses the next day.

Quotes

“Evil” Joe (OOC): His name is Bez? Can we tilt back his head and get candy to pop out?

Anna: Okay, I'm going to roll my hit points now.

Joe: Why are you rolling a d6?

Jamie: Yeah, you're a ranger.

Anna: Oh, do I not get d6's? Do I only get d4's?(14)

GM's Notes

1—Again, an adventure adapted from *Dungeon Magazine*: “Thirds of Purloined Vellum,” originally set in the country of Amn in the Forgotten Realms, a merchant nation based on

Renaissance Italy in much the same way that Borca is. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to use it while I still could.

2—I passed on my original encounter idea for Krezk, mainly because of how beaten up the PCs were when they passed through, but at least partly because of how psyched I was about this adventure. Instead, they actually got a quiet night in the town.

3—Sadly, Aria's player has left the game permanently for personal reasons. All of us are very disappointed to see her go, especially Brother Mayhew. The introduction of Antonio Davidovich went very smoothly, with Tandora immediately accepting him and the others somewhat leery, considering his reputation as a womanizer.

4—See the Introduction for Antonio's whereabouts during the last three years. The public reason given for his dismissal from the Rien School for Girls is "inappropriate conduct with a female student," which isn't true at all. He was removed from his position for his politics.

5—Tandora regards Antonio as a surrogate father, but they rarely speak of the nature of their relationship around other. Taina believes they might be lovers, but would never say that to their faces. Tension builds yet further.

6—This one caught me completely off-guard, honestly. I never expected them to ask Lady Zinerva to help them manage their accounts, but the request makes perfect sense. She's the matron of a formerly wealthy noble house that managed to keep some of its holdings even after falling out of favor with Ivana Boritsi—that indicates some serious acumen to me. I haven't decided yet how far along the shady merchant axis she is (or the rest of her family, for that matter), so we'll see how well this works out.

7—The argument over a group name went on for over an hour! I don't mind, since I really prefer for adventuring groups to have a name to introduce themselves by, but some of the ones thrown around were interesting in their own right. At one point, the name "Guardians of the Mists" was seriously proposed; I had to bite my tongue to avoid laughing.

8—Borca has numerous hot springs, according to *Ravenloft Gazetteer IV*, and almost every noble estate is supposed to have their own. I also like the hot spring dynamic as a long-time fan of anime.

9—Four whole sessions, and Tandora has yet to pull a weapon or cast an offensive spell. Let's see how long she can hold out.

10—That's pronounced "Douglas."

11—I love this sort of plot, mainly because few PCs are business-savvy enough to just figure it out right away. Kathkallan is on the up-and-up, but he would still be making money even if he had to renegotiate his contracts. Their loss significantly cuts his profits

(not eliminates them) but it still hurts a merchant's pride for that sort of thing to happen. Of course, there's the distinct possibility that if the papers can go through a quick spate of forgery that someone else could end up with Kathkallan's fortune entirely. I love the Borcan legal system!

12—A caravansary is a business that organizes caravans, hires guides and guards, and keeps things orderly during the trading season.

13—During this encounter, only Tandora and Antonio were present to interview the staff of the Platinum Quill. The others were standing around outside, discussing the weather (and keeping watch).

14—I include this exchange mainly to highlight how new Anna is to role-playing. The Eberron mini-campaign I ran a few months ago was the second or third game she had ever been in, and the first D20 System game she had ever played in. Her character in that game was a psion, and they get d4 hit dice. She said afterwards that she had initially assumed that rangers were better than psions, but her first thought on being told the die wasn't a d6 was "Well, if it's not better, it's the same or worse." She was excited all out of proportion to learn that rangers got d10 hit dice.

15—It occurred to me not long after I sent in the Introduction and first spate of campaign journals that while a good bit of description is given to the PCs' personalities and histories, little is said of their looks. So I will hereby give a rundown on the player characters and their appearances.

Character Appearances

Tandora von Sydow: Tall, for a woman, with a thin and willowy build. Tandora has ebon-black hair that hangs almost to her waist and disturbing violet eyes. She is never seen in public in anything but her clerical vestments, the green and white robes befitting a priestess of Ezra, but she eschews the habit as a matter of practicality. Tandora wears knee-high white leather boots with thick soles, making her seem taller than she really is. Tandora is nineteen years old.

Mayhew Engels: "Brother Mayhew" is a very untypical Gundarakite. Standing a few inches over six feet, blond-haired, and blue-eyed, Mayhew grew up being mocked by the other children for his physical differences. His father was a foreigner that settled in Gundarak due to love for a local woman, but Mayhew's mother never told him where his father originally came from. Mayhew has a sculpted physique and would be extremely handsome, except for the perpetual stubble on his chin and the fact that his clothes are inevitably wrinkled and dirty. Mayhew speaks in a thick Luktar accent and is prone to singing bawdy bar songs in his native tongue. Mayhew is twenty-nine, has never been married, and is terribly shy around women.

Tad O'Brian: Tad could best be described as a strapping youth, broad-shouldered and strong-limbed. He has dusty-red hair, hanging shaggily in his eyes, and the pale skin associated with the Tepestani. He stands shorter than Tandora (even without her boots) and Mariette but taller than Aria or Taina. Tad's eyes are a shockingly bright green, and he has a perpetual scowl on his face. He dresses appropriately for his station—neatly but not richly. He carries a quarterstaff and the silver knife he inherited from his father. Tad was married at fourteen, widowed at sixteen, and is seventeen now.

Aria von Drachengard: Aria is a Borcan beauty, dark-haired and light-eyed, but she chooses to keep her hair cut short, to just above her shoulders. She habitually dresses in a long leather coat (concealing armored plates within the lining), divided riding skirts, and blouses in subdued tones. She wears a long scarf that was her father's as a memento, and carries his pistol with her everywhere. Concealed inside her coat's pockets are several knives, a whip, and extra ammunition. Aria is in her early twenties, but prefers not to discuss her precise age.

Mariette d'Fanchon: Mariette is an oddity—a red-haired Richemuloise. Her blue-green eyes are close-set, making her seem suspicious. She has light freckles on both cheeks and her shoulders. She wears her curly, carrot-red hair long and loose, rarely styling it or tying it back. Mariette's preferred outfit is a hardened leather bodice that acts as moderate armor, skin-tight leather pants, calf-high riding boots, and a long cloak. She carries a longsword and several daggers, but she prefers her favored weapon, the guisarme. Hidden in the bodice is a crystal pendant on a strong chain—Mariette's psicrystal, a piece of her own personality refracted into a psionically aware prism. Mariette is twenty-two, and is starting to feel the sting of being an "old maid" but is unwilling to settle down and give up her freedom.

Taina Zoyadoch': Taina's natural hair color is a deep auburn, but she keeps it dyed brown to avoid the attention that a natural redhead attracts in her own country. Her eyes are blue and her skin tone a light tan. Taina is extremely slight, standing just shorter than five feet, and fine-boned. She typically wears divided riding skirts in the Vaasan style, knee-high riding boots, and silk riding blouses in bright natural colors. Taina never goes outside without putting on a kerchief over her hair, and always wears a piece of jewelry she inherited from her mother: a golden chain adorned with small bangles, worn across her forehead. Taina is nineteen years old, though she prefers to say that she is in her twenties when asked.

Antonio Davidovich: Though a man of many faces, Antonio's natural appearance is that of a slim, dusky skinned man in his late twenties. His black hair is curly and loose, and unlike most native Borcans he wears a full, bushy beard, a habit he adopted in Falkovnia during his time with the Freeman. He dresses in the most current Borcan styles, in muted grays, whites, and blacks. However, for festive occasions, he has a number of gaudy, bright outfits he wears specifically to convince others that he is a fop. Antonio is not exceptionally handsome, but he makes up for it with plenty of charm and style.

Ravenloft: The Shadow Rising

Session 5: Trails of Purloined Vellum

Date: November 1, 2004

Wherein the Heroes follow the trail of stolen papers, only to find a trail of Deceit and Death. The criminal is revealed, and retribution follows.

Dramatis Personae: The PCs

Tandora von Sydow (Chisa Yap)
Tad O'Brian ("Evil" Joe LaMothe)
Brother Mayhew Engels ("Capn" Robert Brown)
Marianne d'Fanchon (Jamie Palmer)
Taina Zoyadoch' (Anna Rice)
Antonio Davidovich (Mark Weber)

Dramatis Personae: The NPCs

Dughbhlath Kathkallan, a Mordentish merchant somewhat unfamiliar with Borca
Bez, Kathkallan's soft-spoken bodyguard
Galliad, Kathkallan's missing page and journeyman (dead)
Jasaar Arrasti, a Hazlani merchant
Omanner, Arrasti's page and bondsman
Catellion, owner of the Platinum Quill, a thief and killer
Anteashara ('Shara), Catellion's fiancée and partner
Gil, Catellion's best friend
Holm, Gil's partner
Lord Mantatlus, a ruthless merchant and wizard
Nashafeen, a courtesan
Zinni, a courtesan (dead)

Summary

The next morning, the heroes resume the search for the missing youth, Galliad. Backtracking him to the pavillion of Jasaar Arrasti (2), they travel there to confront the merchant on the boy's disappearance. Arrasti, who has a contract with Kathkallan, is singularly disinterested in Galliad's whereabouts, and seems even delighted at the notion that the indentures—with a contract that is now no longer in his favor—are missing. The party decides that his open glee and snotty attitude make him unlikely to be a suspect in the boy's disappearance and question his page and guards.

In private, Omanner apologizes to the group for his master's rudeness, explaining that he usually does not act in such a fashion. The current dilemmas with the contract with Kathkallan have made him irritable, and his happiness at their situation is unseemly at best. Omanner explains that Galliad was supposed to come back with Kathkallan later today, and that he left Arrasti's pavillion healthy and well. The guards are actually

somewhat more helpful in this regard. Pleased that Antonio is willing to speak to them as people and not property (3), they reveal much to him, including that Galliad met up with a beautiful woman just outside the tent that they recognized as a local porter named Anteashara. Again, the clues seem to indicate the employees of the Platinum Quill as being involved somehow.

The group separates to better investigate the backgrounds and activities of the Platinum Quill's staff, focusing especially on Catellion and Anteashara. They discover that while Catellion styles himself as a Borcan, he is actually from Dementlieu and has been in trouble with the law before. Specifically, he is known to the black market as a shuffler, a type of fence that specializes in stolen and forged papers (4). 'Shara is a native Borcan, a skilled and well-known porter and local guide. They are also known to associate with two toughs, Gil and Holm, and 'Shara sometimes works with a guide named Bernal who hangs out at an inn called the Silent Siren.

Mariette and Tad go to watch the Platinum Quill for activity, while the rest do some catching up on their various information resources. Unknown to the others, Antonio disguises himself and proceeds to stake out the Quill as well. While the group is staking out the Quill, 'Shara leaves by a back way, heading for an upper-class section of the city. Tad doesn't notice, but Mariette and Antonio stalk her through the crowded streets of Levkarest, each trying to stay hidden while staying within sight of their prey. 'Shara, noticing her stalkers, tries to shake them off in the crowd, and only Mariette manages to stay in pursuit. Finding themselves on the Path of Silk Flowers (5), the home of most of the city's courtesans, 'Shara finally turns on her pursuer and confronts her. Mariette tells her nothing and departs to rejoin Tad and tell the others what she's found. (6)

Taina and Mayhew go to the Path of Silk Flowers themselves to ask a few questions, but find out little besides the fact that many of the prostitutes find Mayhew attractive. Taina promises to bring him back at some point in the future, and she and the deeply blushing Mayhew depart. (7)

Tandora leaves to check on some of her own contacts. She disguises herself as the absent 'Shara and goes to the Platinum Quill herself, hoping to find out the truth. While there, she discusses matters of import with the completely oblivious Catellion. Though somewhat disgusted by his affections, she holds out long enough to discover the name of their current employer: Mantatlus. She also finds that Galliad is dead, along with a prostitute, but not how they died. When she returns, she reveals the name of their true enemy.

They investigate this Mantatlus, and find that he is a Dementlieuese merchant trained for a time at *l'Academie de Legerdemain*, the Academy of Magic. They also discover that Mantatlus is his stage name (8), which he uses all the time now, but are unable to uncover what his real name might be. In their searches, they find that Mantatlus' manor is on the Avenue of Chimes (5), adjacent to the Path of Silk Flowers, but cannot determine which of the many houses on that street it might be. In asking around, they connect Mantatlus to 'Shara, in that she is known to have a business partner that lives in that part of the city.

Antonio goes solo this time (9), hoping to uncover more information about the mysterious Lord Mantatlus. Hearing again about 'Shara's various business partners, the rest of the party realizes that Kathkallan and his bodyguard are staying at the same inn as 'Shara's friend Bernal, and they rush there to make certain they are safe. Believing they might be in danger where they are, they refer the two to Lady Desfraya and help them move their possessions. By the time they finish, it is past dark.

Knowing that this Mantatlus is a rich merchant, Antonio realizes that they will never persuade the city guard to permit a search of his manor. Further, as a native Borcan, he realizes that Mantatlus will be able to squirm out of any trouble he gets into by plentiful bribes (10). He thus takes it upon himself to take Mantatlus out of the picture—by more permanent means. He waits until after dark and travels to the Avenue of Chimes in disguise, where he stakes out Mantatlus' manor, roving through the city and returning every couple of hours.

Finally, just before midnight, the last of the lights on the first floor are out, and only one dim candle shines in the second-story tower's window. He makes his way to the back of the manor wall, scales it silently, and finds himself in a garden filled with fragrant plants. He recognizes one of them as an exceptionally poisonous variety called the Pillars of Parthenope (11), and tries to avoid it, only to have its vines animate and try to drag him to his death. He escapes them and moves out of their range, and begins to case the manor.

Finding the doors locked and all of the windows solid panes, he moves to one of the ground floor windows and cracks it with a cloth-wrapped rock. With no alarm raised, Antonio sneaks inside, where he ransacks the study looking for the papers. He does not find them there, and moves to the second floor, which he discovers is a small gallery filled with art objects. Sleeping in one corner of the room is Catellion, propped up against a wall (12). Deciding to deal with opposition before it can become such, Antonio sneaks over to the man, avoiding the tripwire and nightingale floor placed nearby, and attempts to cut his throat without waking him (13). Only luck saves Catellion's life, as he reels to one side before the knife can find his life's blood. (14)

Catellion raises a hue and cry, and Antonio, knowing himself to be outclassed, makes discretion the better part of valor. He runs to the other end of the room, crashes through the window, and leaps to the street below (15). Catellion uselessly fires at him with a hand crossbow as he flees, then wakes the household. Gil and Holm set out into the street to find the unrecognizable burglar (16). Antonio makes good his lead and returns to Desfraya Manor, only to find it almost empty.

With Antonio not returned by sunset, the group begins to worry about their missing compatriot. Perhaps, they fear, in his quest for information he has been found out and either captured or killed. With this distressing thought in mind, the remainder of them travel to the Path of Silk Flowers and the Avenue of Chimes to find their missing friend. Asking around, for this part of the city is active even late at night, they find that none of the courtesans have seen Master Davidovich, nor do they know exactly which home on

the Avenue of Chimes belongs to Mantatlus. They do, however, reveal that Catellion's friend Gil sometimes sees one of the local girls, named Zinni. Tandora fears that this is the dead prostitute that Catellion was talking about.

Mariette notices that the group is being followed by one of the courtesans, and confronts her (17). The girl introduces herself as Nashafeen, and asks if the party happen to be adventurers. Receiving a response in the affirmative, she begs them to help her find her missing friend Zinni. She manages to inform them that Zinni regularly saw a client named Gil, and that recently Gil hired her to throw a "surprise party" for a friend of his, and that she should dress nicely. She never came back from the party, and now Nashafeen is fearful for her friend. Likewise, she is afraid that if Gil killed Zinni, he might come back to kill her too, just to tie up loose ends.

As the group finishes speaking to Nashafeen, a sudden alarm is sounded outside. They rush out into the street to find a squad of Borcan militia racing for the Avenue of Chimes. The party follows this squad to a house, standing in front of which is their new acquaintance Catellion. He looks angry and is holding a bloody bandage to the side of his neck. The guard informs the party that a burglar just ran off and to be on the watch for him, but decline their direct aid in the matter. Catellion, likewise, refuses their help; since only Tandora and Antonio spoke to him in the Quill, and he never saw the rest of the group, he finds Tandora familiar but cannot quite place her (18). As an Ezran priestess, she insists that it is her duty to help a man in pain and gives him a small amount of mystical healing as well as a medication to help the pain and avoid infection. (19)

After he goes back inside the house, Tandora notices the ghosts of Galliad and Zinni standing next to the garden door, their faces bloated with poison (20). Following her gaze, but not realizing what it is she sees, Mayhew and Taina move to the garden door and begin snooping around. The guards try to chase them off, but Mariette and Tandora manage to convince them that they saw someone run around to the back, and they dash off to apprehend this fake criminal. When they are out of sight, Mayhew pops the garden door open with his usual method, and the lot of them scurry into the garden.

Tandora finds the ghosts within. While the others investigate the garden, she quietly asks them where their bodies are and moves to uncover the ground where they point. When she moves to the area, though, her senses are overwhelmed by the scent of the berries growing on a nearby tree. Tandora crams handful after handful of berries into her mouth, unable to stop herself even when she realizes that the berries are poisonous. Tad and Mariette rush to stop her but are themselves overwhelmed by the scent.

Mayhew covers his mouth and nose, rushing in to hack at the vine, while Вольь drags Tad and Mariette away from the tree. Tandora manages to regain her senses and crawls away. Finally drawn by the noise, Mantatlus and a half-dozen hired guards rush to the garden, and battle begins. Mayhew immediately rushes up to Mantatlus, heedless of his own safety, while Tad draws in a cloak of darkness about himself. Taina and Mariette face off against several of the guards, while Tandora begins to clear away a patch of earth on the ground. When she finishes, everyone can see revealed the bodies of Galliad and Zinni,

who obviously succumbed to the berries themselves and were buried by the moving vines of the plant.

Though Mantatlus inflicts grievous harm on Mayhew, the burly warrior brings him down with some support from Tad, and half of his guards are dropped in seconds. After the few remaining guards flee, they bind the wounds of the fallen and search the house for the missing indentures. They find them, and call for the city militia.

Quotes

Mark (OOC): Sorry I was gone so long, but I desperately needed to role-play finding a prostitute.

Jamie (OOC): These berries are a taste sensation! I just can't stop eating them! Num-num-num!

Tandora: Behold, Lord Mantatlus! Here is the proof of your wrongdoing! (points to uncovered graves)

Mantatlus: Just some fertilizer... and I think that proof is only worthwhile if you yet live to inform anyone of it! Kill them, and let their bodies join these two in the earth!

GM's Notes

1—This is, naturally, a continuation of the last session. Everyone seems to be able to get along with Antonio; though Mayhew and Taina can't stand him personally, they're willing to work with him. Taina is still convinced that Tandora and Antonio are sleeping together because of all the time they spend alone in his room. Actually, they're discussing poison, alchemy, politics, and other esoteric subjects.

2—Arrasti's name sounds exotic enough to be Hazlani, I think, though I'm not sure if it fits the scheme offered in the sample names from *Gazetteer I*.

3—Because they're Rashemani, and Arrasti is Mulan. I plan on using these characters again in a later adventure, revolving around the fact that Omannar is Arrasti's half-Rashemani bastard son.

4—I figure there's a different name for every kind of fence, smuggler, and thief out there. I did some research into Victorian-era slang for the previous adventure and this one. I forgot to include a GM's note about it in Session 3, where I describe the Tyran twins as "mockingbirds." A mockingbird is a woman that dresses up as a little girl or a teenager to scam people. There are plenty of others, including cuckoo (an individual that pretends to be a lost family member to claim part of an inheritance), lark (a thief specializing in stealing from people's clothes while the owners bathe or swim), bludget (a female pickpocket), and dozens more. Slang is important for verisimilitude.

5—Streets in a medieval society should always have evocative and interesting names if interesting things happen there or rich people live there. The modern tendency to name everything “Person Street” or “Place-far-from-here Avenue” is both unfortunate and dull, if somewhat more efficient.

6—I can’t explain in words how effectively Mariette shuts down ‘Shara in this scene. After noticing she was being tailed, ‘Shara tried to confront Mariette. I had in mind (and thus ‘Shara had in mind) that Mariette would try to lie, something transparent and obvious, and then ‘Shara could get legitimately angry and make a scene to blow Mariette’s cover. Instead, Mariette just told her, in possibly the straightest voice I’ve ever heard, “I don’t have to tell you anything.” Then she just walked away, leaving ‘Shara standing in the street, looking stupid.

7—Did I mention that Mayhew is extremely shy around women? At one point, Taina was actually offering to sell him to some of the women there! Ha!

8—According to *Gazetteer III*, wizards trained at *l’Academie* take stage names to conceal their true names, largely to avoid ridicule for learning magic.

9—Antonio’s solo mission took nearly an hour to roleplay, leaving the rest of the group stuck in the other room. Fortunately, they’re used to this sort of thing and didn’t take it amiss. While he may have failed in what he set out to do—kill Mantatlus—his actions wound up being a great help to the rest of the PCs later.

10—I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: I love the Borcan legal system.

11—The Pillars of Parthenope: poisonous plant that emits a highly alluring pheromone, driving creatures that smell it to compulsively eat the berries that grow on the vine. The creatures then dies, and the somewhat mobile roots drag the unfortunate corpses under the topsoil to act as fertilizer. Ew.

12—Catellion’s presence in Mantatlus’ manor is due to PC action. Because of Tandora’s disguise, when the real ‘Shara returned and admitted that she had never been around, Catellion sent her off to stay with friends, while he, Gil, and Holm went to guard their boss. Catellion placed himself in the art gallery on the second floor—the second-safest place in the house after Mantatlus’ bedroom—and had Gil and Holm on watch. Unfortunately, Gil and Holm tend to play cards a lot, and didn’t really take the threat seriously.

13—Yes, a dark powers check was involved here. Antonio passed by a wide margin.

14—Antonio managed to avoid all of the traps, the nightingale floor, and avoid waking up Catellion, only to be foiled by a natural 20 on the Fortitude save. Hey, sometimes it happens.

15—I especially love this sort of thing: a cinematic leap through a second-story glass window while being shot at.

16—Antonio’s Disguise skill checks are insanely high. He has a good Charisma, maximum skill ranks, a disguise kit, and the luck of the devil. The sad Spot checks of the goons involved did not penetrate his disguise at all.

17—Mariette does a lot of direct confronting, I notice. I suppose I can’t expect anything else from a self-described “hard-bitten bounty hunter.”

18—Catellion’s Intelligence and Wisdom are only middling, and there are a lot of Ezran priestesses in Levkarest. I figured that it would take a little while for him to remember where he saw her before, especially since the previous time they spoke, she seemed to totally buy his story about Galliad and he didn’t expect to see her at Mantatlus’ house, of all places. She never gave him the chance.

19—A *cure minor wounds* to aid the Bluff check later, Catellion was counting his blessings that a priestess would just *give* him medication for free. Poisoning someone doesn’t count as a weapon, as far as I’m concerned, so Tandora still has her perfect record as of the end of this session. And it was only a knockout poison (oil of taggit, for those that care).

20—Tandora can see ghosts, remember. No one in the party knows about it, not even her mentor, Antonio. This is probably going to come out sooner or later, since I plan on involving them in courtly politics soon, and they’re liable to meet up with Tandora’s father—and the ghost of her mother. I’m also going to be running a ghost story adventure sometime soon.

Ravenloft: The Shadow Rising

Session 6: Wish Upon a Falling Star

Date: November 8, 2004

Wherein the Heroes are given the task of recovering a fallen Star from a most unpleasant locale.

Setting

Place: Levkarest, capital of Borca; Delmunster, a small town in Falkovnia

Time: April 15-25, 744 BC

Dramatis Personae: The PCs

Tandora von Sydow (Chisa Yap)

Tad O'Brian ("Evil" Joe LaMothe)

Brother Mayhew Engels ("Capn" Robert Brown)

Mariette d'Fanchon (Jamie Palmer)

Taina Zoyadoch' (Anna Rice)

Antonio Davidovich (Mark Weber)

Dramatis Personae: The NPCs

Lady Zinerva Desfraya, mistress of Desfraya Manor

Dughbhlath Kathkallan, a merchant

Bez, his bodyguard

Nashafeen, a courtesan of the Path of Silk Flowers

Thull Arksum, sage of history and astronomy

Vera Longdagger, a tavern wench

Luther Kragula, an innkeeper

Ludwig Vanderleden, a famous but dishonored bard

...and various villagers of the township of Delmunster...

Summary

Upon the arrival of the city militia, Mantatrus and Catellion are taken into custody in preparation for charges being leveled against them. The hired mercenaries are sent on their way with their pockets empty, and the party is given a stern warning against interfering in city business. The group fails to mention the large chest they have taken from the wizard's manor, and recover it once the guards have departed. They drag themselves back to Desfraya Manor, beaten and battered, only to find the missing Antonio sitting in front of the fire with a snifter of brandy, waiting for them.

As stories of what occurred during the night exchange, Antonio expresses outrage that his hired thief could not do the job presented, and relief that he only paid the man half up front. In return, the rest of the party is somewhat horrified that they went out to look for him, and he had apparently come home only minutes after they left. On the other hand,

Antonio's hired man gave them a significant nudge toward finding Mantatlus' manor as well as distracting the wizard's guards.

They investigate the chest they brought back and find it stocked with a small amount of gold and a few magical potions, as well as something more valuable and equally dangerous: Mantatlus' spellbook. They debate what to do with the spellbook, since no wizard worth his salt would leave something so precious in the hands of his enemies. After suggestions ranging from burning it to casting it into the Shadow Rift, they decide to hold onto it for the time being and decide what to do with it after Mantatlus' trial.

The next morning, they gravely inform Kathkallan of the passing of his friend Galliad. The merchant stoically accepts the news and retreats to his rooms to grieve, leaving Bez in charge of paying the group. Tandora asks for ten percent of Kathkallan's profits on this journey, since he would have nothing were it not for them. Bez agrees, and the party receives their payment the next day. He and Kathkallan remain in Levkarest only long enough to settle their accounts and attend Mantatlus' trial before leaving for Mordent.

Gil, Holm, and 'Shara face no charges, as they were not present during the arrest, no evidence connecting them exists, and neither Mantatlus nor Catellion would turn evidence against them. 'Shara is actually in the courtroom as the magistrate begins the trial, accusing Catellion of several counts of theft, kidnapping, and accomplice to murder. The charges carry only a fine for their trouble, and Catellion is quickly set free.

Mantatlus, on the other hand, faces a double murder charge. Paying the blood debt on a servant and a prostitute would not prove difficult for the wealth wizard, but he also faces a more serious charge: falsifying documents and conspiring to falsify indentures. Borca's entire legal system runs on the principle of indentures, so falsifying them (and worse, getting caught) are tantamount to treason against the state. For his punishment, Mantatlus has his estate seized and his assets divided, and he is expatriated to his home nation of Dementlieu with the warning to never return to Borca.

The group considers their work a success in regards to Mantatlus, but Antonio continues to have lingering doubts about Catellion and 'Shara walking free. He suppresses these dark thoughts, however, and helps to lighten the party's spirits over the next few days through the playing of instruments and the telling of stories. With a few gold pieces to their names, and the incorporation papers for the Dawnguard finished up, they take a week of well-deserved rest.

Mayhew continues his daily ritual of intense practice, perfecting his fighting style one grueling inch at a time. From time to time, Tad joins him in the courtyard, still learning how to wield a sword. Much of Tad's time is taken up, however, by his charity garden and acts of penitence. Tad donates much of his take from the mission to charity, and uses a part of the manor grounds to grow vegetables and roots to organize a "soup kitchen" for Levkarest's poor. His early attempts are small-scale, as only he invests any time toward it, and few of Borca's poverty-stricken masses actually believe in his charitable intent. He refuses to give up, though.

Taina is still teaching her animals new tricks and spends a little time crafting leather goods, while Mariette spends her time running security for a few local businesses and tracking down petty thieves and cutpurses for bounty. Tandora busily sets up an apothecary and alchemical lab in the room formerly occupied for that reason by Lady Zinerva's late husband. Tandora insists that her experiments are delicate, and that the room must be kept sealed at all times, save in case of emergencies. Antonio spends much of his time performing publically, rebuilding his reputation in his home country. As well, he keeps a close eye on the Platinum Quill and its employees, sure that they will once more try something devious. Taina is somewhat taken aback by Antonio's attempts to engage her in conversation during her private time, and responds with as little courtesy as necessary to avoid speaking with him.

After a week of peace and quiet, the group is contacted by Thull Arksum, a Darkonese sage specialized in the study of history. He requests through correspondence that they meet him at his Star Tower, a few miles west of Levkarest, the next day at sunset. Agreeing to at least hear him out, they proceed to visit the stone tower at the appointed time. Thull himself is a small, gray man, old and wizened, as one would expect a sage to be. He expresses that though he is a sage of history, his true passion has always been astronomy. Ten days ago, a falling star actually fell to earth, and he managed to calculate the precise location of impact. To have such an item would make him the envy of the scholarly community, as well as advancing the cause of science significantly.

Unfortunately, the comet fell to earth in Falkovnia. He offers the party 600 gold nightshades to cross the border, recover the comet, and bring it back to him for study. Much dissent occurs in the party over the possible dangers involved, and Mayhew insists that the price is too low. Thull grudgingly increases the offer to 800 gold nightshades. The old man would obviously go higher, had he the money available, but his funds are already tapped by the offer. On the other hand, he does offer to pay in advance. The group agrees to his mission, and move to find supplies they will require on the trip. Sage Arksum gives them a map to the estimated location of the comet's fall: five miles northwest of a border town called Delmunster.

Once away from the Star Tower, the party spends some amount of time debating on the best way to enter Falkovnia. After all, it is the single most dangerous and inhospitable nation in the Core, and even though they will only be crossing the border but shallowly, the consequences for being found would be most dire. The agreed-on plan involves the party acquiring fake travel papers for emergencies, but avoiding the border guards and patrols entirely, taking only back roads to Delmunster, and from there to the comet site.

Taina goes to find a shuffler, but is unable to find one and turns to Antonio's expertise in matters of shady dealings. Antonio manages to find a shuffler easily enough, though the matter is slightly complicated by his unwillingness to retain the services of Levkarest's best shuffler: Catellion. Papers are distributed to the party, with the warning that they will stand up to border guards and town militias, but almost certainly not city guards or the dreaded Talons. Tad and Taina acquire the supplies necessary for the week-long trip to

Falkovnia, including a new wagon (to replace the one returned to the Church) and a large quantity of food and water. Antonio insists on buying a few bolts of cloth to aid in their cover as merchants returning to Borca.

The trip is largely uneventful, save for the proliferation of spring rains and gloomy days. Taking the back roads, the party sees only a few small villages and avoids them entirely, eating trail rations and hunting for fresh meat every other day. Finally, they arrive at a town sign declaring that Delmunster is mere miles ahead. They move off the road and set up a camp on a dry hill in the woods. Antonio brings up the idea of one of them going into town to see if anyone noticed the comet's fall, and naturally volunteers himself. After his departure from camp, Tad and Mayhew decide to follow unobtrusively to keep their bardic friend out of too much trouble. Tandora, skilled in the arts of cosmetics, dyes Tad's hair blond and gives both of them appropriate falcon "tattoos" on their foreheads.

In the village, Antonio scopes out the scene and visits the local inn, the Grinning Gargoyle. While there, he finds that the town, being so close to the border, has only a limited military presence and very little of the standard Falkovnian isolationism. Heartened by this, he engages the staff of the inn (specifically a tavern wench named Vera Longdagger) in conversation for some hours. Meanwhile, Tad and Mayhew are left outside in the cold, wet, and growing dark. Antonio also seems to notice someone he did not expect to see when they spy in on him, but they are unable to tell who it might be, and he does not say later.

By the time Antonio leaves the inn, he has discovered a number of important facts. First, during the entire week of the comet's fall, the town was suffering under the pall of heavy rain, so no one could have seen the comet land. Next, a few of the townsfolk are suffering from some sort of illness, and a young girl is on the brink of death. Fearful that the comet may somehow be responsible, Antonio resolves to ask Tandora to check on the girl's well-being. Finally, the town priest and healer has locked himself in his church and is unwilling to come out. Leaving the inn, Antonio meets up with Tad and Mayhew, and he shares some of his news with them.

They decide to visit the town church, an Ezran shrine, and attempt to speak with the local priest. Antonio is the only one of the three that can speak Falkovnian, so the others are basically unable to understand the conversation - which occurs through a door - until Antonio returns to them, somewhat shaken. Apparently, the priest believes that the townsfolk are possessed, and that he must keep himself locked inside the church to remain safe. Antonio sends the others back to camp, intending to remain in town for the night to avoid suspicion.

While the men have been away, the women have been involved in a deep religious discussion. Tandora is disturbed to find that Taina is not just Vaasan, but a devout follower of the Lawgiver as well, one of the few religions in direct opposition to Ezra. Tad and Mayhew return late in the night, and camp is guarded until morning in watches.

Antonio returns just after dawn, and asks that the party accompany him into town to investigate his findings. Tad, fearful that Antonio has been possessed, cuts him with a silver knife, sure that silver would burn a truly evil being. Antonio refuses to be cut willingly, but Tad manages to do so anyway, which the older man accepts with grudging good humor. Tandora binds his small wound, and the group proceeds into Delmunster.

Ravenloft: The Shadow Rising **Sessions 7 and 8: Horror's Harvest**

Date: November 15/22, 2004

Wherein our Heroes must face the enemy both within and without, and in which they discover that Nature is not always natural.

Setting

Place: Levkarest, capital of Borca; Delmunster, a small town in Falkovnia

Time: April 25-26, 744 BC

Dramatis Personae: The PCs

Tandora von Sydow (Chisa Yap)

Tad O'Brian ("Evil" Joe LaMothe)

Brother Mayhew Engels ("Capn" Robert Brown)

Mariette d'Fanchon (Jamie Palmer)

Taina Zoyadoch' (Anna Rice)

Antonio Davidovich (Mark Weber)

Dramatis Personae: The NPCs

Aleister Solodski, captain of the Delmunster militia

Hans Slodoski, his braggart son and deputy

Toret Ethan Brume, local priest of Ezra

Jorgi Gudenheit, temple curate

The Wichtensteins: Ferenc, Gretel, Leila, and Lotta, a family on the verge of collapse

The Wulches: Solomon and Myrna, general store owners

...and various militiamen and villagers...

Summary

The now-posessed Antonio leads the group into the village of Delmunster, there to convince them to sleep the night, and then move on the survivors in the morning. While in the village, the party immediately sends Antonio away to attempt to talk the village priest out of his church, which he does amiably enough. During this time, Tandora reveals to the rest of the Dawnguard that her mentor is not himself: in fact, he is not breathing. Something must have happened to him in the night to change him.

Immediately, accusations and suspicions start flying from Taina and Mayhew, who adamantly object to sleeping the night in town. Mariette and Tandora insist that it is the most efficient way to discover what happened to Antonio, while Tad simply seeks to avoid conflict. The anger in him has gotten worse—much worse—and he fears the next conflict he must engage in.

The group travels as a whole to the church, where they learn from the priest's assistant, Jorgi Gudenheit, that Toret Ethan Brume, the anchorite priest, is convinced that the villagers are possessed. This conclusion was brought to him by troubling dreams, which he termed omens, and by the normally reclusive and polite gravekeeper trying to kill the curate with a shovel. Toret Brume smashed the man in the chest, but what should have been a glancing wound to the ribs instead crushed his torso. Since then, the priest and his curate have been locked up in the church; while the curate is willing to speak to the party, he will not defy Tret Brume's orders and open the doors for them.

Armed with this new knowledge, the group travels to the Wichtenstein house, where the family has a young daughter afflicted with whatever sickness inhabits this village. There, Воль refuses to enter the house, smelling something he does not like. Taina stays outside with her companion, while the others go inside with the sick girl's father, Ferenc. He leads Tandora and Antonio to the upstairs bedroom where his daughter lies sick, explaining that she suddenly became thin and listless, and even attacked her mother with a pair of shears. Since then, they have had to keep her tied to her bed for her safety and theirs; two days ago, she stopped eating.

Tandora inspects the girl and realizes that she is suffering from the same affliction as Master Davidovich, and that by all rights she should be dead already. There is nothing that can be done for her, save make her more comfortable in her last hours. Ferenc and Gretel are devastated by the news, but accept Tandora's help and then ask to be alone to grieve. Outside, Taina is nervously watching the town, waiting to see what will happen and comforting her cat.

They move about town, asking some pointed questions about recent events, and they find that a villager recently died. Most people assume that it was from the same ailment that Lotta Wichtenstein suffered. Also, many of the villagers have noticed their fellows acting strange in ways they cannot precisely define, though mostly they chalk it up to illness and the season. Finally, they hear a rumor that a pair of village boys have killed a werewolf in the nearby forest.

In the afternoon, they are approached by a young man introducing himself as Hans Slodoski, the deputy of the town's militia. Recognizing them as strangers in town, he insists on seeing their papers. Fortunately, Master Davidovich's shuffler was skilled enough to fool a local town guard, especially one as obviously self-interested and foolish as Hans. After insuring that their papers are secure, Hans proceeds to make unseemly overtures at all of the women in the party, starting with Taina, who is more amused than angered at the gesture. Tandora manages to defuse a possibly explosive situation when Taina excuses herself from the conversation, and she proceeds to keep the deputy occupied in small talk through much of the afternoon, while the rest of the party scouts around.

Tad notices during their journey about the village an unplowed patch of farmland on the edge of the village that is unseasonably producing gourds, pumpkins, and other vegetables, all of which are overlarge and quite rotten. Ever superstitious, Tad claims that

this is an ill omen for the village, possibly indicating that the land has been fouled somehow. Inevitably, blame is placed upon the comet that is supposed to have fallen nearby. After investigating the gourd field, they decide to check out the graveyard, specifically the resting place of the recently deceased man. They find it overgrown with rotten and dead vines of all sorts, lending more credence to the theory of an evil plant of some kind in the region.

Having spoken to many villagers and seen much of the town, the group decides to wait until morning to do any further searching in the forest. Master Davidovich has already taken the liberty of acquiring rooms in the local inn, the Giggling Gargoyle, for the group. Taina and Mayhew, however insist in remaining at the original campsite, flatly refusing to sleep in town. Tad refuses the offered room, but secretly remains near the inn to protect Tandora in case he is needed. For several hours after dark, he remains outside in the rain and cold, waiting.

Taina and Mayhew travel less than halfway to the campsite, talking much the whole way, and come to the conclusion that while the others sleep they must get to the bottom of things. They return to Delmunster covertly, under cover of full darkness, and begin to search out the town's evils. What they manage to encounter instead is Mad Rupert, the town hermit, a man who claims that almost everyone in town is possessed or evil in some way. After listening to him ramble for some time about how he can tell someone is evil by looking in their eyes, Taina shows him hers. Whatever he sees in there drives him screaming into the hills. Mayhew is somewhat unnerved, but decides the time has come to seek out their companions and convince them to leave this accursed place.

Inside the inn, Tandora and Mariette are sharing a room and have barricaded the door from within, using a heavy dresser. Sometime after falling asleep, Mariette is woken by the sound of scraping as a sleepwalking Tandora attempts to push aside the dresser and leave. They struggle for a bit, a struggle that ends with Mariette punched in the face and Tandora dragged back into the bedroom, thrown on the bed, and finally woken up. Tandora is extremely apologetic as she comes to. Tad comes running into the inn, drawn by the loud sounds of struggle from the girls' room. When he barges in, they are still in their nightclothes, which sends him right back into the hallway, embarrassed and red-faced.

After they makes themselves more decent, they explain the situation to Tad, who mentions that the whole time he's been outside, the bard in the common room has never stopped playing. Though tired and somewhat disoriented, Mariette and Tandora agree to accompany him downstairs to question the man. On their way, they stop by Master Davidovich's room to awaken him and warn him. He dresses quickly and accompanies them on the way downstairs, where they meet Taina and Mayhew, who have just arrived.

As a group, they begin to interview the bard, Ludwig Vanderleden. Though unable to directly say anything to them due to the influence over his mind, he has managed to use music as a focus to subtly thwart the control his new master possesses over him. He speaks in circles and in riddles, as a man trapped in a nightmare from which he cannot

completely awoken. They begin to understand that the monstrous plant that has corrupted the town's flora has also gained control over the bodies and minds of many villagers - and Master Davidovich.

The plant, now understanding its lack of total control over Vanderleden through Antonio's senses, moves Antonio to silence the other bard. Only Taina notices Antonio's subtle movement, and she is too slow to stop him from neatly slashing Ludwig's throat. A short battle ensues, during which Mariette's fear of the "undead" takes control of her once more. This time, however, she is able to overcome her terror using meditation techniques learned during her years of training and quickly returns to the scene of the fight. Taina's cat runs off in terror, prompting her to chase after the reckless creature. Tad slashes Antonio deeply, causing greenish slime to seep from the wound. Before he can strike a killing blow at the boy, however, Antonio suddenly recovers his senses, his immense will able to fight off the plant for a time. Mariette takes no chances, though, and puts him prone with her guisarme, where the others strip him of his weapons.

The fight frightens the night boy, who runs off to get one of the owners. The owner complains to them about noise and insists that they pay for the damages caused. They quietly agree, mostly to get rid of him. The night boy disappears again, obviously terrified at the unusual characters staying this time. Taina returns, having been unable to catch up to her cat, but aware that he will come back in time. Antonio is stricken with grief at what he has done, and can offer them only temporary solace: he knows that his control is only temporary, and as soon as he sleeps the plant will seize control of him once more. Despite Taina and Mayhew's continuing distrust of him, the others grudgingly accept his word and permit him to rearm himself.

Now the matter of spending the night is settled; if they want to save Antonio—and themselves—they must strike tonight. As the party gathers their strength, Tad goes off to collect their things. Before he can get too far, torches approach the inn, and arrows come flying in through the windows. The podling villagers have mounted an attack!

Taina, Tad, and Mayhew place themselves in the doorway to observe the situation and hold off the tide of possessed villagers. One man comes running in, knocking Tad to the ground, but he is quickly cut down by Mayhew's prowess. Mayhew, realizing that the tactical advantage here would be to outflank them, orders the group out the back way, through the kitchen, while the podlings are still distracted with their archery. Most of the party concurs, but Tad stays behind.

Tad goes upstairs to grab up their possessions, leaving the fight in the hands of the others. As torches come crashing through the downstairs windows, he understands—someone set the inn to burn, with them in it! With no concern for his safety, Tad rushes to the second floor and begins waking the inn staff. Taina, Antonio, and Mariette, with similar ideas, rush inside the burning inn, while Mayhew makes his way around to the front of the inn to outflank the podlings. Crashing into the podlings like a wave upon a shore, Mayhew drives them before him and sends them scurrying. Outside, Tandora begins using her

priestly magic to sense for the remaining people within the inn and directs the party to their areas.

Inside, Tad has woken Vera, the inn's serving girl, and is trying the other upstairs doors. The rest show up and begin aiding him, finding all of the inn's staff save the boy. The innkeeper that yelled at them before shows great reluctance at their plan for leaving the burning inn—out the window—and Taina has Волк knock him out of it. The others leave with somewhat greater aplomb, though Taina's landing leaves her somewhat shaky. Antonio gathers up their possessions while Tad continues frantically searching the inferno for the missing boy. He runs back downstairs, into the heart of the blaze, and checks every place he can think of. Finally, he sees a trapdoor leading from the kitchen into a basement.

Mariette and Mayhew run back into the building to find and help Tad, but both are driven out by the intense smoke and flames. Tad's fear of darkness summons up his magic to ignite a mystical light, which aids greatly in his quest for the boy. The inn boy is hiding amongst boxes and barrels at the far end of the basement, and by the time Tad convinces him of the reality of the threat, the ceiling is starting to burn and the room fills with fumes. They cover their faces with wet cloths, and rush upstairs to where the kitchen is nearly impassable. Mayhew, sickened by the smoke, has grudgingly written them off as lost to the fire, but Mariette sees their shapes within and goes back one last time. Burned and battered by debris, the three of them manage to escape the blaze.

Antonio offers to heal Taina, an offer that is violently rebuked when he lays a hand on her shoulder and she nearly breaks his jaw. Mariette shouts at Taina, who can only offer that she does not like being touched, especially by men. For his part, Antonio posits that he will never offer to heal her again. Taina seems to have no objection in the matter, but a possible argument is headed off by outside intervention.

The town guard is drawn by the fire and begins barking orders at the heroes and villagers—though the poddlings who set the blaze are nowhere to be seen. Aleister Slodoski, Hans' father and the captain of the guard, insists on explanations from the group. He finds their stories of evil, mind-controlling plants utter rubbish and quickly sees through their ruse of being itinerant merchants just passing through. He also checks their papers and finds them to be forgeries. However, he does acknowledge that something dangerous is occurring in town, and with his lack of manpower the party may be the best chance to uproot it. To ensure that the others will not depart, he has Antonio placed in a cell and the group's wagon confiscated. If they cannot uncover the truth behind the town's difficulties, remove it, and return by dawn of the day after next, he will have Antonio impaled in the town square and the rest of them hunted down in the woods by Talons. On the plus side, he offers them a safe place to sleep for the night away from the “evil plant people”—in the barracks. Naturally, they refuse his kind offer. Antonio spends the night in a cell, entertaining the guards to stay awake; he understands that his very soul is at stake if he cannot remain awake.

They do rest the night, though, at the original campsite out of town, and the next morning they begin making their way toward the cometary impact site. Along the way, they pick up the remnants of Antonio's trail and realize that while he was possessed he must have gone toward the comet's actual location. The path leads them past the mayor's manor, where they find a recently inscribed message etched into his doors: "Visitors Unwelcome." Chalking it up to paranoia on the mayor's part, they continue on into the forest. Taina's tracking abilities are deeply challenged by what seems to be a concerted effort to eliminate the trail, but she is able to pick it back up with some trouble.

After several hours of travel through the forest, the group finds a wooded vale where no animal makes noise and the wind itself blows colder. Hidden among the vines and overgrown weeds of the valley, they discover enormous pods connected by thick, lashing tendrils of plant matter—and a number of podling villagers, laying one last ambush. A sturdy chop from a woodsman's axe nearly brings down Taina, and battle begins once more.

The valley is chaos as villagers attack with axes, knives, and clubs, with the party retaliating by scythe, hammer, claw, and mystic fire. Most of the group focuses on destroying the pods, having noticed that when the first pod was destroyed, one of the attacking villagers collapsed. The others attempt to hold off the villagers while the pods are destroyed, and quickly the villagers are subdued, though two die in the fight.

Mayhew and Tad begin to chop away the creeping vines while Tandora and Taina search the area to make certain they have them all. Tandora uncovers a remaining vine trying to hide itself under a rock, beneath which is a green-glowing stone and a final root mass. Though they torch the roots and finish off the plant, the green glow from the stone whitens Tandora's hair and seriously burns Mariette. Mariette uses her mental powers to freeze the stone inside a layer of ice, which helps dampen the glow, but they realize that transporting it is going to be somewhat difficult. With the doppelganger plant finally defeated, the party begins bringing the unconscious villagers about.

Ravenloft: The Shadow Rising

Session 9: On the First Day of Epiphany

Date: November 29, 2004

Wherein the Heroes visit the grave of a Loved One and try to come to terms with their new living conditions.

Setting

Place: Levkarest, Borca

Time: May 1-4, 744 BC

Dramatis Personae: The PCs

Tandora von Sydow (Chisa Yap)

Tad O'Brian ("Evil" Joe LaMothe)

Brother Mayhew Engels ("Capn" Robert Brown)

Mariette d'Fanchon (Jamie Palmer)

Taina Zoyadoch' (Anna Rice)

Antonio Davidovich (Mark Weber)

Dramatis Personae: The NPCs

Lady Zinerva Desfraya, matron of Desfraya Manor

Thull Arksum, sage of history and astronomy

...the villagers of Delmunster...

...and various and sundry goblins and wolves...

Summary

Recovering from their possession, the surviving ex-podling villagers are filled with regret and terror at their actions. After being fed and their wounds bound, the party begins to lead them back to Delmunster. Passing by the mayor's house, the group learns that the mayor, Yuri Karloff, has a bad reputation among the townsfolk, especially considering that his father was an alchemist of some sort. Despite the villagers' nervousness about their burgomeister, the heroes choose to return directly to the village and discharge their duty to both Thull Arksum and Aleister Slodoski, as well as recover Master Davidovich from gaol.

On the edge of the village, the group can see that a gallows is already being constructed in preparations for the grisly execution of Antonio. Suddenly nervous at having a dead Falkovnian soldier dragged behind her horse in a travois, Taina detaches the carrier and informs the party that she will meet them at the original campsite. Despite being abandoned by their Vaasan companion, the rest of the Dawnguard presses into town to present their findings to Captain Slodoski.

Aleister seems surprised at their reappearance and lets them know that he fully expected

them to simply abandon their friend to his fate. After all, it's what a Falkovnian would do in the same circumstance. He also seems completely nonplussed at the death of one of his men; all of his soldiers are rejects from the regular army, sent to Delmunster as punishment duty, and he bears little feeling for them. With the evidence at hand and the testimony of the surviving villagers, Slodoski has no choice but to accept their story and order their companion freed.

Antonio, exhausted and cold, rejoins the group with great joy and spends much of the trip home riding in the wagon, convalescing. They stop by the old campsite and pick up Taina, who has not even had time to set up a proper camp. Rather than taking any additional time to rest and recover from their various wounds, the Dawnguard sets off for Levkarest with all due speed, still holding to back roads and the countryside. With Taina's navigational skills and Tad's fine teamstering, they manage to return home on the night of April 30, just before the beginning of the Feast of the First Epiphany.