

GAME SESSION FIFTEEN: LEVKAREST – BALL AFTERMATH

Thanks to Llana for scrubbing this session!

November 24th, 747 (continued)

The session starts after the heroes get the letter from Gennifer. They speculate on their next actions. They agree to try and stay away from Lady Ivana (leaving out the Deathstone, the Icon of Danzig and the ermordenungs adventure possibilities). (*DM note: why? Are they afraid of something?*)

They leave for Richemulot, with the goal of reaching Gennifer's inn before the night. They had previously asked for directions from the messenger who brought the letter. The messenger had told them that they have to arrive before sunset if they want to get a room there.

Tara stays in Levkarest in order to explore the Cathédrale's apocryphal writings, after Johann told her she was allowed to read this "forbidden" material.

The heroes pass through the town of Sturben, where they notice the old fortifications are still scarred from the previous Falkovnian invasion, and then go along the Vasha River toward Mortigny.

Just after noticing the trees do not have the tell-tale bluish mosses of Borca, they arrive at the Mortigny Way Inn. It's just before sunset. They enquire of the inn owner, but he says "No lady by the name of Weathermay-Foxgrove is here." The heroes understand she registered under a false name. They get two rooms for themselves, then go back to the main room for dinner. They have a choice between goose and wild boar. The cuisine is delightful, with plenty of herbs, oil and garlic to enrich the taste of the meat.

Later, Gennifer arrives downstairs. She looks sick and pale, but she appears much relieved to see the heroes. MacRazbunare gallantly offers his arm to help her. She orders plain gruel only. She tells the heroes that Ivana's antidote really saved her; otherwise the poison attacking her constitution would have killed her. She wonders why Ivana did show mercy.

Her sister Laurie went back to Mordentshire, and Gennifer will get there too as soon as her health is well enough so she can travel. Laurie went to Mordentshire to notice her uncle, George Weathermay that they found Natalia's trace. George has been chasing her for nearly a decade.

Their discussion wanders on to the Deathstone. Gennifer explains that she used Bevel to get to the artefact hidden in Misericordia's wine cellar, but, as they know, this attempt turned sour. Her "uncle" Rudolph Van Richten had once quickly seen the Deathstone with Ivana's permission. It's very old, possibly millennia, and its 3' x 3' cubic form is covered by strange signs. One of these signs was identified as "death" in Har' Akir, a desert island hidden in the mists. Other signs looked similarly alien and threatening. Van Richten noticed that a small part of it was scraped, as if one wanted to have the stone's substance in powder form? Gennifer thinks it is perhaps linked to Ivana's youth, or the creation of the pale people, the ermordenungs.

Gennifer learned from Bevel a few things about these strange people: they are able to deliver poison by touch. And they have been "transformed" to ermordenungs after a stay in Misericordia. These people are either in the arts (where Ivana compensates for a while on her inability to have a

lover), or in position of powers, such as the city accountant, Clotilda Taroyan. Bevel also said to Gennifer that the word “ermordenung” meant “act of killing” in Falkovnian. Some people sneer that “Ivana is always surrounded by her murders...”

Making a link between the iconography of Ezra which is similar to Ivana’s appearance, and that the women killed near the Cathédrale have a comparable look, Petrak emits the hypothesis that the women killed near the Cathédrale have their vitality or youth somehow stolen to fuel Ivana’s forever young look. *(DM note: good idea, but the culprit is the Gargoyle!)*

The heroes ask Gennifer about the Icon of Danzig, but she has never heard of it. Asking for more information about this item and its power, she says this could be a rare artefact if its divinatory powers are not altered the way they often are in these realms.

Concerning the Jongleur, she knows little, and adds that nobody knows much about him. Some say that he is a vistani and that his parents threw him in the fire when he was born for unknown reasons. His skin is said to be covered in scars, and this is the reason most of it is hidden under his colourful wrappings, gloves and mask. Nobody can tell of his whereabouts after he was born, but a decade ago, he became the most loyal bodyguard Ivana ever had...

They ask her about Johann Severin’s link with Ivana, but Gennifer doesn’t know him.

Later, MacRazbunare’s well-practiced healing skills cannot do anything to help Gennifer. He identifies the poison as extremely potent, surely a mix of dangerous toxins.

They leave Gennifer in her room and go to sleep.

November 25th, 747

Just after midnight, Varadan has a nightmare... It is similar to that of the other night, but there are major differences:

Varadan is a soldier, and his mission is to attack dangerous road brigands. They are easy to kill and Varadan takes pleasure in massacring them. All the killed brigands turn into monks Varadan knew when he was young!

The scene quickly changes to that of a boat, where Varadan stands with his soldierly comrades. Huge waves crash the monks’ bodies onto sharp rocks. Oddly, their bodies are aflame.

Suddenly, Strahd is there on the boat! He tells “Ottar” that he is very proud of him!

He then sees Tara dressed as a monk. It is obvious Tara doesn’t realize what is happening near the shore and that it is very dangerous for her to be there. Varadan wants to save Tara and yell at her to get away and flee but he can’t! Varadan seems paralyzed. Strahd, with his piercing gaze, seems to perceive the conflicting emotions in Varadan and smiles evilly. He sees the soldiers surrounding Tara and hears her screams!

Varadan awake, and feels he lost some of his ability to focus on a problem *(DM note: minus one intelligence ability point)*. Again, the guilt is felt in his guts.

In the morning, MacRazbunare casts a *Lesser Restoration* spell upon Gennifer, and it helps her to get better. However Petrak's same spell upon Varadan doesn't do anything to his intelligence... They discuss Varadan's dreams: is it related to Celestina / Gabrielle? *(DM note: they are cute when in the woods like this).*

MacRazbunare tries a healing check on Varadan: according to him, the illness affecting his mind isn't physical, but probably mental. Yet MacRazbunare tells him he's been poisoned! *(DM note: false information. Roleplay by MacRazbunare's player. He wanted to test Varadan, who supposedly would have noble blood in him aka Von Zarovich blood.)*

They ask Gennifer for her advice on Varadan's nightmares. She was readying her backpack to leave, but listens to Varadan's tale of bad dreams. He tells her that for a week, he has been having nightmares based on a traumatic event in his past. However, his position is reversed in the nightmares: he has a "bad guy" role, hurting the people he loves. When he wakes up, he feels he has lost some of his intelligence. Also, he is poisoned, according to MacRazbunare. She is perplexed, especially about the poison part. She says there are mental clinics where he could get treated for these nightmares. She doesn't know more but promises to ask her uncle Van Richten when she gets back home. Van Richten knows a famous doctor in Nova Vaasa, Dr Illhousen, who specializes in mental problems. She promises she will write them in Levkarest when she gets an answer, and then leaves the inn for Mordentshire.

For the rest of the day MacRazbunare wanders the woods around the inn to get the herbs and plants needed to make an antidote for Varadan's poison. The concoction tastes awful and MacRazbunare insists Varadan has to drink all of it. Varadan's tongue turns blue. Later, a *detect poison* by Petrak detects nothing on Varadan.

(DM note: of course, since MacRazbunare lied. MacRazbunare is convinced that sooner or later Varadan's Von Zarovitch blood will emerge and Varadan will turn against his friends. MacRazbunare is wary; ever since childhood he was distrustful of Von Zarovitch... He decided to make an awful-looking concoction, convinced Varadan would never drink it since he would lack trust in a Machiavelescu, and thus reveal his true Von Zarovich nature. But Ottar drank the potion, to MacRazbunare's surprise. So Ottar trusts the other heroes and thus could be likewise trusted. To be continued ...)

November 26th, 747

Early after midnight, Varadan has another nightmare... It is very similar to the one a week ago.

Varadan is a soldier, and his mission is to attack dangerous road brigands. They are easy to kill and Varadan takes pleasure in massacring them. Eerily, the scene switches to the monastery where Varadan grew up, and all the killed brigands turn into monks!

He sees piles of monk corpses. Soldiers are cutting off the heads and putting them on pikes, or are stealing the monks' meagre possessions. Varadan feels bad about what he has done, and of the fact that they are stealing from the corpses of his friends.

Suddenly, Strahd is there! He is twenty feet tall. He tells "Ottar" that he is very proud of him.

Then they see a young monk Varadan knew when he was young. He is walking toward the monastery. It is obvious the young monk doesn't realize what is happening and that it is

very dangerous for him to be there. Varadan wants to save the young monk and yell at him to flee but he can't! Varadan seems paralyzed. Strahd, with his piercing gaze, seems to perceive the conflicting emotions in Varadan and smiles evilly. He sees the soldiers surrounding the young monk and hears his screams!

Varadan awakes, but he feels better than the other nights. His mind seems intact. At the end of the dream, he felt that he could resist Strahd's order; somehow he felt he was very close to being able to resist the paralysis.

But in the morning, his tongue is still blue from MacRazbunare's antidote potion.

Petrak suggests they go back to Levkarest, to find if Tara had nightmares too. They leave the Mortigny Way Inn and get in Levkarest around 4 pm. Tara is in the Cathédrale. She is praying in front of Ezra's large twenty-feet high statue. When she sees the heroes, they go outside to talk.

"You have no idea what you can find in the apocryphal texts," Tara said. "Now I understand better why there were two schisms in the Ezran church history!" Grimly, she adds "But I'm not sure the church could survive a third schism..."

The heroes inform her of Varadan's nightmares. Pouting, she tells she has had nightmares too, and that they affected her ability to think clearly. It was again about a wedding in a chapel located in the middle of a cemetery. All the guests were zombies. Suddenly, everybody had a glass of sparkling wine in hand, except Tara, who had a glass of blood... Shameful, she says her scream probably awoke half of the town!

The heroes mention Gennifer's first thought about a mental clinic. "You mean, I'm insane?" asks Tara, clearly upset by the idea. They wonder if this "curse" is related to the Von Zarovich Legacy book. They compare the dates: they found the manuscript in Haptmeyer estate on November 13th, MacRazbunare read it the 15th, and Varadan started having nightmares on the 17th. Petrak asks Tara if the high priest could examine her with divinatory spells. When she goes back inside the Cathédrale to inquire, the heroes go back to their inn, the Defraya Manor.

On the way to the inn, Exigu shares with the others that he had the impression Tara wasn't comfortable around Varadan. "Probably because of what I represent", Varadan propose. "Maybe she's trying to avoid her destiny," he adds. However, the heroes never told Tara of their findings on his Von Zarovich blood line...

November 27th, 747

Another nightmare for Varadan.

In the morning, the priests of the Cathédrale try a few divinatory spells on Tara. They find her under some kind of supernatural enchantment. "Something" has a hold on her mind. They also detect that the Von Zarovich book is *highly* magical, and that some additional magic hides this magic from detection spells!

The rest of the day is spent quietly, waiting for Gennifer's letter. Believing the Von Zarovich Bloodline book is cursed, MacRazbunare copies it. Others go to the port to look for the Virago, Nathan Timothy's infamous boat, but it isn't there.

Varadan spends time in a tavern, trying to get additional rumours. Among other things, an artisan told a story that troubled him...

It was night and I was driving my carriage back from Karina. When I was a mile or two away from Caina, I happened upon a sad-looking woman while crossing a bridge.

Being, as you know, always kind-hearted to a young lady, hee hee, I offered to bring her to town or any destination of her choice. With a forlorn sigh, the woman asked to be taken to her father's house, providing directions from the bridge.

Following her instructions, we approached a small cottage. It's partly hidden in the woods just South of Caina. I never realized there was a house there, by the way. As I looked over to the woman to tell her that we had arrived, I found that she had vanished! But surely she could not have exited my coach without me noticing? Perplexed, I knocked upon the door of the cottage, wondering if she had already entered, unseen by me.

The door opened, and out stepped a wizened old man. He was dressed in a white shirt, with a dark red coat and pale green pants. To my surprise, the old man was not at all shocked or concerned by my story. He quietly explained that his daughter died long ago when the bridge collapsed. Even though the bridge has since been repaired, the young woman's spirit continually haunts it, trying to get home so that her dear father will not worry. Sadly, her spirit is doomed never to make it to the doorstep of her cottage.

I was so spooked, I went back home quickly to get myself a glass of Invidian brandy!

But what surprises Varadan is that he had already heard a similar ghost story in Zeidenburg. Similar folk tale, perhaps? However, what's very odd is that the description of the old man was the same! Varadan walks to the artisan and asks him for the location of the cottage, which the man gently provides. Varadan thinks he should get there to enquire. *(DM note: from the VRG to the Mists, of course. I wanted to introduce the notion of oubliette. And it's a cool story, so why not tell it when players ask for rumours?)*

November 28th, 747

Quiet night for Varadan.

In the morning, they cast an *augury* spell on "burning the Von Zarovich book". The divine magic states no positive or negative effect. They throw the book in the flames. It burns normally.

They pass the day searching in the Cathédrale's library about mental problems with nightmares as symptoms, and also about Strahd and Tatyana (which they also suspect as a possible cause of their nightmares). *(DM note: I used the "search in library" mechanics from the VRGttMists, giving a DC to information they might find, from very easy (DC 15) to very difficult (DC 25)).* They find that this kind of madness was usually gained after a trauma, even a long-forgotten event. Many asylums could help Varadan and Tara, but the professionalism and skill of the doctor is very important, as there are many charlatans and butchers in this profession. This kind of affliction rarely has a supernatural cause. On Strahd, they only find the official Barovian version of the event: the Dilisnya clan poisoned nearly everybody at the wedding. There is no mention of a recurrence of Tatyana's spirit.

During the night, the only interesting thing mentioned at the Inn is the death of Nikolai Pyotrovich, the enlightened sculptor who made nearly all the sculptures of the Cathédrale. He died after finishing the last statue, probably of exhaustion. *(DM note: from the "Gargoyle of the Great Cathedral" BoSorrows article by Andrew Cermak. Another adventure hook in the making...).*

November 29th, 747

Another quiet night for Varadan. In the morning, Johann Severin generates some divine magical detection on Varadan. He find an enchantment by a supernatural creature on his mind.

A visit to the port shows no sign of the Virago. Later this day, they get a letter from Gennifer:

Dear Varadan,

After discussing your nightmare case with my uncle, we have become very worried for you. The poison symptom puzzles us, and for the moment we do not think it is related. Judging from the little information we have, the possibility is high that a supernatural creature is attacking your dreams, turning them into the horrible nightmares you had. It may sound strange, but my uncle heard of many similar cases.

It could be an incorporeal creature called "Bastellus", a charm by an arcane practitioner, or, in the worst case scenario, an attempt by a member of the Nightmare Court to seize you to their atrocious land of neverending nightmares.

Come quickly to Mordentshire and ask for Van Richten's herbal shop. Until then, take all measures to augment your inner mental strength against their attack. Our thoughts are with you,

GWF

They prepare to leave the next morning for Mordentshire, and Tara agrees to go with them since she too is plagued by similar nightmares. The rest of this day is spent in the library, where they search for "bastellus" and "Nightmare Court" information. They find that a bastellus is also called "dream stalker". It invades its victim's dreams and changes them to horror in order to feed off the sleeping victim's fear. It can change its form but it's mostly seen as an incorporeal shadow, difficult to see in darkness. On the Nightmare Court, they find very little: it's a new theory on the supernatural and dreams brought forward by Dr Illhousen of Nova Vaasa... It is highly controversial in the mental health milieu.

They spend the night in a lighted room, where the heroes take turns watching Varadan and Tara sleep. But they see nothing. The dreams of Varadan and Tara are quiet.

November 30th, 747

In the morning, they depart toward the Mortigny Way Inn. The trip is uneventful until Varadan is attacked by a tree! A dead-looking tree grapples him from his horse and pins him on the ground, while the other heroes slash wildly at it and MacRazbunare sends powerful fire spells on it. The monstrous tree inserts two blackened and dried roots inside Varadan's body and it begins to suck his blood! Varadan feels weaker instantly. Petrak destroys it with a powerful smite power attack.

Tara cures Varadan. His constitution seems lowered and he still feels weaker from the attack.

Back on their horses, they see another of these monstrosities a little farther away, but they are able to flee without fighting. At the Mortigny Way Inn, they advise the other travellers of these monsters on the road.

MacRazbunare heals Varadan. The night is uneventful.

GAME SESSION SIXTEEN: TRIP TO MORDENTSHIRE, VIA FALKOVNIA

(January 8th, 2006)

Thanks to Llana for scrubbing this session!

Following is a map made with CC2 and the great help of the Mordent Cartographic Society (Thanks Pierre!). I added to it their travel itinerary of the session:

Dec 1st: *they leave the Mortigny Way Inn and cross Mortigny, Ste Ronges and Pont-a-Museau. At the end of the day, they cross the Falkovnian border (in yellow on the map), and sleep in the woods near Silbervas.*

Dec 2nd: *They try to enter Silbervas, but flee towards Chateaufaux. Later, they find the Musarde river is blocking them so they go south to Pont-a-Museau, then for a trip in the countryside toward Chateauoir. They sleep in the rural area.*

Dec 3rd: *They arrive in Chateauoir and continue south toward Mordentshire.*



DM note: with CC2, I made a players map where I removed from it all DM-only known locations, of course, but more importantly all domain borders – something the players have to experience to learn, IMHO. You'll see in this session it worked well :) Take a Verbrek hunt, it's much more fun if the players doesn't know exactly where the border is. And most domain borders do not have a painted line on the ground ☺

December 1st, 747

In the morning, the heroes have a discussion. Varadan proposes that the ermordenungs, who operate many galleries near the Levkarest Cathédrale, are also the culprits for the case of women disappearing near this Cathédrale. (DM note: of course, he is wrong. The culprit is the Cathédrale's gargoyles ;))

At 8am, they leave the Mortigny Way Inn and arrive in Mortigny about an hour later. They watch the port area for the Virago, but Timothy isn't there. They leave the town for Ste Ronges. They

are surprised to see a lot of traffic on the road between Mortigny and Ste Ronges – many messengers, artisans, farmers, and other travelers.

They know that the leading family in Richemulot is the Renier family, but they do not recall much more (knowledge (nobility)).

They arrive in Ste Ronges just before noon. The walled city is well-known for its sword-craft. They try to find a sword made of adamantite, but nobody has even heard of this metal. The town has many poor areas. They leave for Pont-a-Museau. Again, there are many people on the road between Ste Ronges and Pont-a-Museau.

Pont-a-Museau is a very large city, build on many islands on the Musarde. They pass through the islands using wooden floating bridges. They notice many rats near these bridges. The town has a very large port, with many taverns, inns and specialty crafts. No Virago here either.



They see a large paddleboat, called the River Dancer, announcing theatre shows. They leave Pont-a-Museau for Falkovnia. After leaving the outskirts of Pont-a-Museau, they notice the amount of traffic on the road has diminished to nothing.

(DM note: I think they missed something here – they heard a few times that Falkovnia had repressive policies against non-humans, but they didn't think of it and went that way with an elf and a halfling :))

At the end of day, they arrive at the border. It is a guarded border, and guards position themselves to block the way. They see watch towers every thousand feet along the Falkovnian border. All guards have an eagle on their foreheads. A bellicose captain yells at them, asking where they are going and the purpose of their voyage. They answer that they need to take this road to go to Mordentshire.

He tells the heroes he will present them important travelling papers, which they should not lose as they will be checked often during their stay in Falkovnia. They also need to pay a tax of 1 gp for each person carrying weapons, which is restrained by a complicated “peace bond”. The Captain fills a form for each hero (*see prop hereafter*), and for Tara. They also have to sign the Oath not to harm the state property.

The captain fills out the form while looking suspiciously for a long time at Exigu and Austizel, but says nothing. With an evil smile, the captain wishes them a good trip ...

Temporary authorisation privilege to pass through Falkovnian land

For: _____

City of residence: _____

Work ability (ies) : _____



City (ies) visited in the last month and other comments:

I signed this oath: I will not harm the state or the property of Vlad Drahod during my stay _____

Date: _____ Valid until: _____

imstechen

Restriction: _____

Paid taxes: _____ Amount: _____

Auth. by: _____, representing Jarden Kvedehnochen, Falksührer, Ministry of Finance and Trade

They wonder what “imstechen” means, since this was checked for Exigu and Austizel. Then they realize they are demi-humans... (DM note: “imstechen” means impaled in Falkovnian – Gaz II (evil DM laugh)). Later on the road toward Silbervas, they see many chopped heads on pikes... Many of them are demi-humans!

Tara asks them if it’s really a good idea to enter a military-controlled city like Silbervas with two demi-humans. They change their plan of reaching the city for the night and decide to sleep in the woods, about a mile from Silbervas. They hide their traces from the road.

During the evening and the night, they see many torch-bearing patrols on the road, coming back and forth from the Falkovia – Richemulot border. This is really a police state, they think.

(DM note: I would have believed those unsubtle hints would have made the players cautious of any soldier encounter in Falkovnia, but still they planned to go in the Falkovnian city with two demi-humans in the group ...)

December 2nd, 747

The night is quiet. The next morning, they hear dogs barking on the road. They can’t see them because of the distance, but judging from the speed when passing by, they are walking as if they were on a search mode. What are they searching for? They let them pass and, when it is safe, they look at the traces in the snow: two packs of 15 dogs on each side of the road, and seven horses’ tracks.

(DM note: But still they head directly for town as the road passes through Silbervas, instead of looking for a way to circumvent the city. Oh well, they asked for it...)

The entrance of Silbervas has guards at a control point. Many farmers and poor-looking workers are in line. They are all clutching papers and they look terrified. A guard tells a farmer that his working papers are outdated. The farmer is close to tears when he says he couldn't know since he can't read. But this doesn't move the guard and the man is pushed toward a grim tower entrance...

Reaching the heroes, the guard yells "Papers!" He reads the heroes' traveling papers for a moment then waves at Exigu and Austizel for the tower entrance. "For control! Schnell!" he says. When MacRazbunare asks for the reason of this, the guard says, "Demi-humans are property of the state!" MacRazbunare tries to talk with the guard, arguing that these demi-humans are his personal slaves but it doesn't change the guard's opinion.

Now, other guards are arriving near the group, looking aggressive, and begin to make a circle around the heroes... Petrak is the first to make his horse turn around and leave at full speed. The others imitate him! They hear guards shouting alarm calls behind.

When they have a quarter-mile advance, they see six cavaliers running after them on horses. They are clad in black and have long war spears. But the heroes' horses are faster. Tara suggests they turn west and cross the Falkovnian rural area as fast as they can to get across the countryside toward Chateaufaux.

They agree and exit the road, racing along the south bank of the river leading out of Lake Kriegvogel. They don't see the cavaliers anymore: it seem they have succeeded in putting distance between them.

But later they see three red eagles circling over them! They are out of reach of arrows. They keep circling and screeching over the heroes' position *(DM note: those are Blood Hawks from LotB)*.

They find the Musarde river blocking their way and it's too large to cross (about 2 000 feet). They are not sure the thin-looking ice can withstand their weight. So they turn south, toward Pont-a-Museau. They pass between Falkovnian watch towers and cross the border. The eagles cease to follow them. They see flashes and mirror signals sent between the watch towers.

Around noon, they are safely back in Pont-a-Museau. There they speak to a halfling, who advises them not to go to Falkovnia with demi-humans... They leave for a countryside trip from Pont-a-Museau toward Chateau noir.

The trip is uneventful except after leaving the farm outskirts, where they see ogre-sized traces.

When the sun is down, they search for a place to pass the night. They see a small patch of trees and move toward it. *(DM note: this is the Grotto, from the Haunted Sites netbook, by Robert VandeVeegaete. The description that follows is taken from it, and adapted to winter season for my campaign. I love this netbook for this kind of encounter placed here and there.)* The ground suddenly rises up to a small hill. The other side is a steep cliff facing a wooden area. Well-tended bushes and flowers line the hill. On the side of the cliff, steam pours into the cold November air: a small hot water stream from the rock wall (about eight feet up) falls down through a series of small pools into an icy pond. Fishes are seen moving beneath the pond's ice surface. An oval of well-tended grass is circled by old oak trees, sleeping for the winter. Beside the pool is a cave

opening, and on each side of the cave is a large oak covered in ivy. The cave is about eight feet high and has a floor of sand. No tracks can be seen.

MacRazbunare, a druid, suspect this area is well-tended and unnatural, possibly the work of a druid. They do not dare enter the cave. They call out to signal their presence but no one answers. Respectful of a druid's sanctuary and perhaps afraid of disturbing it also, they go to sleep by another patch of trees seen a little farther. During the night, there will be one hero guarding the camp, in a two-hour rotation mode.

December 3rd, 747

They resume their travel around 7 am. The countryside is very beautiful and calm. Later, they see lakes in the north. These lakes' locations on the map shows they are on the right track and they should be soon arriving in Chateaufort.

Around noon, they are at last back on a road, near the small village of Chateaufort. This village is very small and people look at the heroes with mistrust.

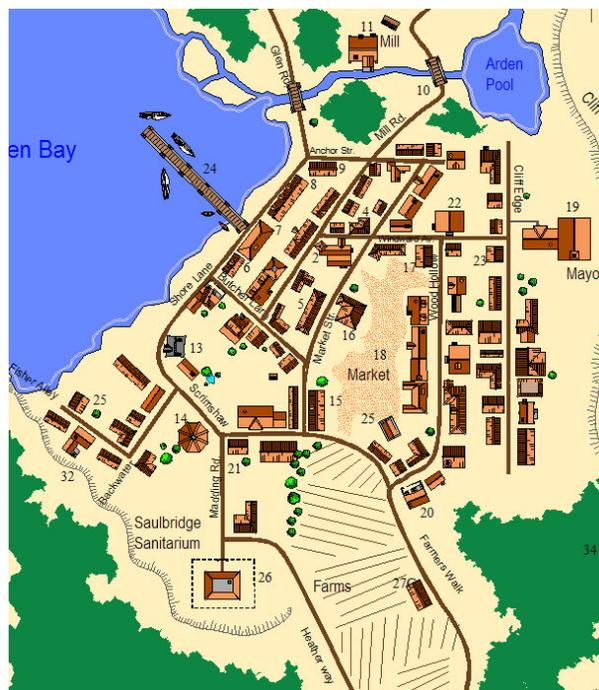
The southbound road is quiet. On the left, a large seemingly endless moor is seen. It's really uninviting. The heroes also see many abandoned manors on the road, often barely visible in the trees. At one place, a sign on the road announces this property, but the paint had been entirely washed out years ago. Another manor has burned. One manor on the moors seems well-tended, despite its unusual location. The sign announces the Wescote Manor.

Then the landscape changes to farms. Later, they arrive on Mill Rd to Mordentshire. After a bridge, this small village is located on a bay near the sea. It is the first time some of the heroes have looked at the sea.

The village has a timeless feel. Every house is the same greyish colour because of the sea wind carrying salt. The city center seem poorer than the outskirts of the town, where larger residential buildings are seen. Laundry is drying in the wind and a few pies are cooling on window borders.

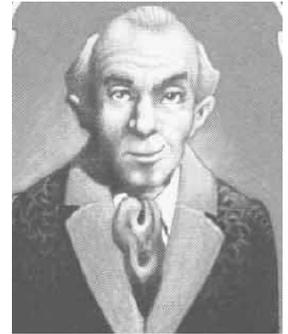
Patches of fog drift lazily through the streets. These streets are quiet, and few people are glimpsed. A little girl stares mutely at them from a distance, clutching a black cat. After a moment, she runs inside a house. *(DM note: an atmospheric wink to I-10)*

They wonder how they will find Dr Van Richten's Shop when they happen to be just in front of it, at the Corner of Market St and Windward St. The shop is a two-storey building, with large church-like windows on one side. The druid notices well-tended belladonna and garlic plants in front of each window.



(DM note: I used the description of VR shop from Dragon # 260 by Cindy Rice and Steve Miller, and the map derived from it from the Mordent Cartographic Society).

A chime is heard when the heroes open the door. The heroes are in a typical herbal shop. From a door at the other end, they see a man enter the room. He is in his mid 50's, short in stature and not strong-looking. His blond hairs are now turning grey. His smile is friendly when he sees the heroes. "Ah, you have arrived!" After introducing himself, Van Richten invites them to go by the next room, a comfortable waiting room. He announces that he has asked Mrs Polk to make some tea while he fetches the Weathermay-Foxgrove twins.



The room has many comfortable places to sit, but also a harpsichord, a metal stair going up and many bookshelves along the walls. The most striking feature of the room is the large two storey-high windows. Van Richten says he bought them from a priest of the Morninglord who closed an old church years ago in what was Gundar.

Half an hour later, they hear the chime again, and the twins enter Van Richten's salon. They look happy to see the heroes and Tara. They inquire on how quiet their trip to Mordentshire was ("Problem in Falkovnia? Should have avoided it! Never go there with elves and halflings!").

Then the discussion turns to the nightmare problem. The players reveal what they did with Talena's Von Zarovich book – it was thrown in the fire. They also tell their host that Varadan might be a lost Von Zarovich, by the name of Ottar Von Zarovich. Tara look shocked to hear that (they didn't tell her this secret yet), but she doesn't comment or say anything.

Then the discussion switches to the heroes' hypothesis on the nightmares' meanings for Varadan and Tara. Van Richten says, "If I may, let's not go into these explanations yet, but see what solid facts we have in this case." First fact: Varadan and Tara's nightmare are nearly simultaneous – they are experienced the same nights and follow the same "cycle". Second: both experienced difficulty in concentration and focus of mind after some of these nightmares, especially when it ended with the feeling they had lost a battle or a similar negative emotion. Third: both saw a ballerina in these dreams.

For Van Richten, all these facts lead to one cause: the Nightmare Court. He explains that he did much research with his friend, Dr Illhousen in Nova Vaasa. According to Van Richten, Illhousen discovered the existence of dark beings that feed from the negative emotions of nightmares.

Illhousen classifies the patients in two categories: the demented (with physiological problems, or trauma from a terrifying experience) – they should be treated in a mental health clinic; or the deranged, who are disturbed by a third party source, most often supernatural.

Illhousen have found that if nightmares are recurrent, with aberrations – discordant notes from dark entities, and that dreams are sometimes shared by more then one person, there are good chances that the Nightmare Court is active. Illhousen has identified six members of this evil Nightmare Court:

- The Nightmare Man – the rarest and the most dangerous. He is hidden under a black cloak covered with tiny spiders;
- Morpheus – especially when the dreamer has remorse for not being able to finish an important task. He is a red-skinned man, with strange features like elfin ears and narrow eyes like those of the Rukushima Taiyoo people;

- Hypnos – when frustration and a general feeling of being inept is the conclusion of the nightmare (aristocratic man in a coffin, sleeping with an eye opened);
- Mullonga – fear and apprehension (hag-like woman);
- Rainbow serpent – haunt traitors (winged serpent); and
- Ghost dancer – often with people who couldn't save people from a horrible fate (ballerina with blood on her white robe).

Concerning the Ghost Dancer, who seems to be the culprit here, Illhusen notes that her tattered garb and bloody hand prints on them hint that this entity had found a tragic end. If Illhusen were able to encounter her, he wanted to ask her why she performed her ballet to guilt-ridden tunes. In the nightmares she induces, the Ghost Dancer exaggerates this guilt and feeds from it.

A classic case of someone plagued by the Ghost Dancer's guilt was that of Elswick, which Van Richten reads from an book written by Illhusen:

(DM note: from the Nightmare Lands boxed set, book 1)

Consider the case of Elswick, a young elf from Helbenik in Valachan. Elswick's love, a girl named Zarana, lay dying in her father's bed of some dire illness. The village priest told Elswick that only a flower found in the southern hills could save Zarana's life. The young hero embarked on his journey without hesitation. Along the way he encountered many savage beasts and hideous creatures, but somehow he managed to defeat or escape them all.

Elswick retrieved the flower and was on his way back to Zarana when he came upon a kindly stranger. The stranger said that she had heard of Elswick, and that he had defeated many fiends in recent days. Elswick, filled with pride, said that he had. The stranger then pointed to a forlorn keep high on a hill above them. She said that a monster had recently taken refuge in those ruins and that if it was not destroyed now, it would grow more powerful and eventually wreak havoc on the nearby villages. Elswick bravely said that he would deal with this menace, and spurred his great charger up the hill.

Unfortunately, the monster was much stronger than Elswick had anticipated. While he survived the encounter and managed to stagger back to the closest town, he lay unable to move for several days. When he finally came to his senses, he realized that Zarana was still depending on the rare flower that he was to deliver. He patched his wounds as best he could and rode back to Helbenik, but it was too late.

Zarana had died two days prior. Elswick wept for days before finally falling into a deep, fitful sleep. His nightmares were filled with thoughts of Zarana's suffering, waiting patiently for a saviour that would never come. The Ghost Dancer noticed the lover's grieving nightmares and drew him into a macabre dreamscape. Now Elswick relives this sad tale nightly. He searches for the flower that will save his love, and when he finds it he is somehow sidetracked once again. When Elswick realizes his mistake, it is always too late-Zarana is dead again.

Some nights Elswick experiences a different dream. Sometimes he wanders through the Valachan night chased by a ghostly specter. The phantom wafts behind him, always drawing closer if Elswick slows his pace. The spirit moans that she is Zarana, and that

Elswick's pride caused her death. This, in turn, fills the elf with guilt and remorse of such a terrible level that he can barely endure it.

Such is the broth that the Ghost Dancer craves.

After a concerned look at Varadan and Tara, Van Richten continues. "Illhusen," he said, "found a treatment, or at least a method to get rid of this deadly supernatural attention." The dreamer must first increase his mental strength against the dream. Each time a dreamer doesn't feel guilt at the end of a recurrent dream, he increased his mental strength. Ways to help are *Owl's Wisdom* and similar spells. Illhusen warns that those unable to augment their strength and build a wall of will against the dream are sucked into the ghastly Nightmare Land...

When the wall of will is strong enough, the dreamer feels that he can now fight something he couldn't before. For example, Varadan would be able to fight this Strahd entity and push him out of his nightmares. The next nightmare after this realization is decisive: either Varadan succeeds or he will be insane! But he and Tara won't be alone in this fight: other dreamers will be able to join them if the dreamers wishes them to.

The topic of discussion then changes to lycanthropy. The good doctor tells them no more of what they already know about the method to get a cure. But Van Richten tells them not all afflicted lycanthropes try to get a cure, and some of them are able to control it, like the "moonchild"... It's a path the heroes might want to choose. (*DM note: I gave them the Moonchild PrC info from Gaz 4*).

Then Laurie tells them the coach has arrived. It will bring them to their grandfather's estate, Heather House, where they are invited for dinner by Jules Weathermay (The heroes are slightly uncomfortable to learn that Jules Weathermay is the *lord* of Mordent!). In the coach, they meet Daniel Foxgrove, the mayor of Mordentshire and father of the twins. He is friendly and glad to meet the heroes and Tara. He seems to have been acquainted to Van Richten a long time.

The heroes learn that the twin's mother, Alice Weathermay, Jules' first child, died when the twins were a few months old. Jules had only one other child, George Weathermay. Daniel Foxgrove works hard as mayor and in his boat construction enterprise, in part because he tries to forget his late wife.

Heather House is located on the southern outskirts of Mordenshire and it's a large mansion. There are many guards at the gate and around the estate. They are pressed by servants to move into the dining room, where Jules already is. Jules is an old man, in his late 70's. But his mind is still sharp and his physical health, strong.



The evening is spent having dinner, with interesting conversation.

When the heroes have described their trip to Falkovnia, Jules shares his worries of Falkovnia. "Should there be a war, it would be very difficult for us in Mordent to hold the place against Falkovnians. Their army is too large," he said. He explains the Treaty of Four Towers, a mutual agreement of defence between Mordent, Borca, Richemulot and Dementlieu. He hopes he will never need to send armed forces to help the neighbouring states, as it could put Falkovnia's aggressive focus on Mordent.

“But Vlad Drakov is a fool,” concludes Jules, “and he prefers to attack larger nations like Borca or Darkon for the prestige he would find in conquering these lands.”

Another thing worries him. Jules is old and none of his family members have shown interest in ruling Mordent after his departure. That could put Mordent in a weaker position. His son George is wandering the world in search of adventures; his son-in-law Daniel has plenty of work being mayor, and has often said he doesn't want to rule the whole state. “This only leaves my favourite twins,” Jules says with a smile, adding to Laurie and Gennifer: “When are you going to stop those adventuring follies and get proper husbands? Mordent needs a strong leader, and if it's not George, it's one of you!” The twins roll their eyes in unison during this tirade from their grandfather.

Eager to change the subject, Gennifer asks Jules, “Do you still have that old tome with spells, the one I read when I was younger? Your guests are fighting for all that is good in this world and would benefit from reading this book.” Jules agrees to lend it to the heroes during their Mordent stay, and asks a servant to get it. The heroes are surprised to find in the old book a compendium of spells!

(DM note: My players own no Ravenloft book, not even the RL PHB. I took this occasion to give them a book with the spells commonly found in Ravenloft: Allergen, Alter Person, Anaesthesia, Awaken Guilt, Control Shape, Dark Sentinels, Dead Man's Tell, Death Sight, Deconstruct, Diminish Undead, Epiphany, Feast of Oblivion, Feign Undeath, Greater Reflect Pain, Ground Fog, Identify Spoor, Immerse Mind, Induce Lycanthropy, Insatiable Thirst, Insight, Locate Mark, Object Glamor, Protection from Curses, Ray of Fatigue, Reflect Pain, Rheumatism, See Ethereal Resonance, Shackles, Siren Song, Soul Anchor, Strahd's Baneful Attractor, Suppress Lycanthropy, Wall of Gloom)

They thank their host for the night, and go to Daniel Foxgrove's manor, where they are invited to stay. Tara and Varadan stay awake while the spellcaster heroes sleep and learn useful spells to increase their will against the nightmares.

December 4th, 747

When all spells are prepared, Tara and Varadan are glad not to have to fight slumber. They plan to sleep during the day, while the other heroes, Van Richten and the twins watch over them. In the morning, Varadan and Tara each experience nightmares three times. But the heroes are ready with the help of *Owl's wisdom, Guidance* and *Resistance* spells.

Tara's new nightmares are terrifying: in the dream, Varadan is now the groom, a vampire, and he tries to bite her! Varadan's nightmares are the usual guilt-plagued dreams.

But the spells to help them are useful: in the early afternoon, both awaken from a nightmare and feel they can now resist the dark force in them – Varadan yelled for the young monk, who was able to get out of the guards' reach; and Tara pushed Varadan and threw a crossbow bolt at his heart. Her nightmare ended when the bolt was about to touch his heart.

The next time they dream should be the decisive moment Van Richten told them about!

GAME SESSION SEVENTEEN: THE LAST NIGHTMARE? AND HOWLS IN THE NIGHT

(March 26th, 2006; Five players were present; Virevan was played then by Martin)

Thanks to Llana for scrubbing this session!

December 4th, 747 (continued)

It is 11 am and the heroes are preparing for the final showdown with the Nightmare Court. They plan to enter Varadan, then Tara's nightmares to defeat the evil entity plaguing their dreams.

They ask Van Richten a few questions about dreams (he knows Dr Illhousen, an authority on the matter). Van Richten doesn't know whether dreamers can exit a dream whenever they want, and thinks a dreamer awakened by somebody will simply be ejected from the dream. He also reminds them that if Tara and Varadan are unsuccessful and die in the dream, they can be driven permanently insane...

Just before they go to sleep, David Foxgrove enters the room. He says: "Aye, hounds do prowl the countryside at night in Mordentshire. They haven't been seen near the town, but they've been harrying the outlying farms, killing those who wander abroad in the night. Everyone's afraid to travel after sunset. Oddly enough they're never out when the sun's up- nobody's ever seen one in broad daylight... What this town needs is someone to get rid of those dogs. We heard them very close to the town last night. There's a meeting to discuss a possible wild dog hunt this afternoon." He wishes the heroes good luck in their quest and leaves the room.

The heroes return to the subject of the nightmares: Van Richten and the twins will watch over the sleeping heroes. Varadan falls sleep, then the others. All is quiet in the room ...

In his dream, Varadan finds himself in a forest. It is night but a large moon gives enough light to see by. He is a monk this time (he'd been a soldier like in the previous nightmares). He "knows" about the upcoming monastery massacre by Barovian forces, and is trying to get there in time to warn his friends. He also "knows" that if he can't warn them, they will all be killed by the soldiers. He runs through an neverending forest, seemingly for ages. He is aware of a sense of helplessness but is able to fight this emotion (*DM note: Will DC 18 or "frustration" from Nightmare Lands, book 2, page 37*). Suddenly he sees on a high mountaintop the monastery burning ... (*again Will DC 18 or "frustration"*)

Suddenly, in the forest, he sees stairs going down... Varadan waits for a moment, listening for any sound from the hole. Hearing nothing, he lights a torch and enters the dark pit.

The scene changes completely. Varadan wanders at night, in a bleak castle. At one point, he stumbles into a hole, and bats envelop his fall. He seems to tumble for a long time (*again Will DC 18 or "frustration"*) and then is eerily back in a dusty corridor in the castle. He looks out a nearby broken window. He is about four floors up and sees wedding preparations in the courtyard below. Servants are setting up decorations and flowers, erecting tents, etc.

Far beyond, in a green field, he sees a chapel in the mists.

Varadan spots a creepy black-cloaked person in the courtyard, moving from one shadowy corner to another. Varadan "knows" this person is Leo Dilisnya, the poisoner, who wants to kill him and

Tara. He fires a crossbow bolt from his window, and successfully hits him. The lurker hides behind a tent.

More corridors...

Opening a door, he arrives in the courtyard and sees Strahd! The dark-cloaked vampire is watching Varadan, smiling evilly. He is 14 feet tall and roasting babies on a grill! Varadan is frightened (*DM note: fear check DC 16*). Strahd shouts, "I am the land". He waves at a group of trees; they uproot and run after Varadan (*DM note: 12 Gray Morph*).

Varadan runs back into the castle...

He is back in a bleak corridor, near a window. He peers out at the wedding celebrations. He sees Tara, all dressed in white. She is very happy and unaware of the creepy shadow entering her tent...

Varadan wanders the corridors again. He opens another door and is back in front of Strahd! Again Strahd yells, "I am the land"; again the trees uproot and chase Varadan (*DM note: same as above*). This time however Varadan runs toward the chapel and easily evades the trees.

(DM note, I had the "castle" part of the nightmare as an endless loop: 33% - look outside a window at the wedding preparation; 33% - fall in the bat-infested hole; and 33%- face Strahd in the courtyard. If Varadan ran back inside, I rolled the results again. The only way to break this cycle was to run past the trees and toward the chapel, as Varadan did.

Varadan is en route to the wedding. He is dressed as the groom. Servants call him "Sergei" and tell him to hurry...

The road to the chapel now passes through a cemetery instead of the green field... While passing through, dead monks suddenly emerge from the black earth! They are vampire monks. (*DM note: combat stat: 4 Gray Morphs*). Varadan stakes the closest one with a successful strike from his crossbow. The other monks look shocked. One yells at Varadan, "What are you doing? You are one of us!" Varadan notices that he now has fangs! Furious, they attack Varadan.

Varadan suddenly has the impulse to attack them with his vampiric powers, which he does. His new powers are amazing: every time he hits a monk, he destroys it (*DM note: it was a DP test to find out if Varadan accepted his Von Zarovich nature*).

He continues on the road after the battle. The cemetery is really weird; corpses and bones are tossed everywhere like toys by a spoiled child.

The chapel is in ruin. It's full of cobwebs and the stained glass windows are dusty or broken. Varadan enters it.

Another scene change. Varadan is now near the altar inside the chapel. Tara is at his side, in a white wedding robe. Her eyes show her fear, and they talk. Tara is lucid and Varadan knows this is the "real" Tara. They are now in *her* nightmare...

The church is full of dead people. The last row is occupied by dead monks. They are in flames...

A priest arrives in the aisle. As he approaches, Varadan and Tara see that he is bloodied and in fact quite dead. A knife's handle protrudes from his back. Varadan recognises that it is a Baal Verzi knife (infamous ring of Barovian assassins). The priest takes his place near the altar but doesn't say anything.

Tara and Varadan tell the dead priest that they do not want to get married. The chapel ceiling starts to drip blood, slowly at first, but increasing quickly to rain. The guests do not seem to be aware of this. Tara's white robe is now stained with dripping blood...

Then the "altar" opens. It is in fact a coffin and Strahd comes out of it! This seems to be the signal, as the priest and Strahd viciously attack Tara and Varadan. Varadan summons the other heroes to help and all appear in the dream chapel except Virevan.

(DM note: Who else can enter the dream when "summoned" by a dreamer? I had the other players roll a DC 20 Will save. The sleeping mind normally fights against being called upon, and tries to refuse this. By luck, only Virevan made this save and was thus excluded from the fight. "Strahd" is an Ennui while the priest is a Shadow Morph. The Ghost Dancer was adapted from the Nightmare Lands boxed set as a CR 10, 84 hit points entity.)

Tara is badly hit by the "priest" and can't defend herself as she has no weapons. She is protected by Petrak, who manages to get between "Strahd" and her. They see the ballerina (the Nightmare Court's Ghost Dancer) at the chapel entrance, dancing eerily. Rows of dead corpses in the chapel pews prevent the heroes from attacking her directly. Varadan and Mac Razbunare fire *magic missiles* at the ballerina. Tara uses a *detect undead* spell and tell the heroes that the priest and "Strahd" are not undead creatures.

The Ghost Dancer casts *shield* on herself, protecting her from the *magic missiles*. The others fight the "undead" and find their ordinary weapons to be insufficiently effective against the priest and "Strahd". The priest suddenly howls like a madman, and Austizel and Exigu are paralyzed where they stand. The casters still throw spells at the ballerina, (*cleverly*) hoping that defeating her would end the nightmares. During the battle, she retaliates with a *slow* spell, but luckily all the fighting heroes succeed in shrugging off this effect.

Meanwhile the priest hacks violently at Varadan, who eventually falls to the ground, unconscious. Tara was about to heal him when she suddenly seems struck by a wave of terror. She runs to the back of the chapel and passes through a door that has just appeared! The remaining heroes see with horror that Tara is running toward a misty cliff, à la Tatyana! In a few seconds, she will jump and be lost... Austizel shakes off the paralyzing effect and run after her, but fails to grab her. MacRazbunare is now alone against the priest; he stops casting spells at the Ghost Dancer in order to defend himself...

When Tara is about to jump off the misty cliff to her death, Petrak defeats the Ghost Dancer with his last *Produce Flame* at the ballerina, who appear to take flame and burn in a quick combustion, as if she were made out of thin paper ...

Then the dreamers awaken!

Van Richten and the twins are relieved that all went well. Varadan is in shock, but finally manages to get hold of himself. Tara and Varadan are able to focus their thoughts with more clarity (*DM note: I removed an Intelligence penalty gnawing at them because of failed saves*

against nightmares). They have the impression that a part of their minds was controlled, and that this influence has left their minds...

Later, Varadan notices that he's more perceptive than before, the cunning of Von Zarovich now within him (+2 *intelligence as a Von Zarovich (Legacy of the Blood)*, a bonus for being harassed by the DM with these dreams for the past six or seven sessions!). Tara expresses an urge to go to Barovia. She is able to control this desire for the moment...

Always alert, Petrak asks Van Richten about Nathan Timothy. Van Richten knows little about him: he was possibly the darklord of a place called Arkandale (now included in the Verbrek woods). Timothy spends his time on a boat; he isn't comfortable when far from the water. He is also able to change the appearance of the *Virago*, his boat. This may explain the heroes' failure in finding him; they were looking specifically for a blue sailing boat in the ports they visited.

Van Richten asks the heroes if they're aware of Timothy's lycanthropic allergen. The heroes mention that they got this info from Patrick Connor; Van Richten has never met this wolf hunter. It's gold for Timothy, and they suspect that it's probably silver for Natalia.

Van Richten mentions the arrow of needles he invented to gather this information. The arrowhead is replaced by sharp needles of various materials known to be allergens to lycanthropes or other beasts: silver, cold iron, gold, wood, etc. The hunter launches this arrow at the lycanthrope, and then tries to recover it. The needle with blood on it is the most likely allergen. The old monster hunter promises to give a few of these to the heroes.

While the party rest for the remainder of the day, Van Richten offers to show Mac Razbunare his store (Mac Razbunare is a druid and herbalist). He shows the druid many plants that he's never heard of. Van Richten had studied medicine in Darkon when he was young; he felt it wasn't for him and focused on herbal healing. After many trips around the Land of the Mists, the old herbalist knows many helpful and dangerous plants. (*DM note: I gave Mac Razbunare's player excerpts of the Gaz about plants, in a short home made PDF I called "Van Richten's Guide to Indigenous Plants of the Lands of the Mists". I removed most of the DM info from the Gaz sidebars, of course!*).

Van Richten also reveals that Gennifer was bitten by Natalia Vorishkova ten years ago. Recently, George Weathermay-Foxgrove rode his horse quickly from Kartakass and brought home a fresh bloom of the Nightbliss plant. The plant affected Gennifer, confirming that she was infected by lycanthropy... She doesn't know yet that she is an afflicted lycanthrope.

George roams the land seeking Natalia. Van Richten assures Mac Razbunare that the heroes shall get the whole family's aid to destroy Natalia and Nathan. If only they could locate them!

Van Richten recently heard ghastly news about Natalia from his contacts. She's become some kind of psychopath, with a "feel" for finding other potential psychopaths. She then "pushes" them towards horrible crimes. He gives Mac Razbunare a portrait of Natalia Vorishkova that they use in their searches. While it was done ten years ago, she probably hasn't changed much as lycanthropes age slowly.



Meanwhile, Exigu goes out, voluntarily helping the villagers in their search for the roaming wild dogs. He finds a small group at Dawson's farm, on the north eastern outskirts of the village. Streams of mist float lazily above the ground. Exigu offers

his ranger skills to the Sheriff. *(DM note: the player told me this to explain his PC's activities during the afternoon, not expecting that it was the next adventure i.e. Howls in the Night)*

The Sheriff looks grimly at the halving, and asks Exigu to follow him to the barn. Sheep carcasses are all over the place. All have been bitten on the throat. A man lies dead in a corner. He appears to have been bitten savagely too. He also says that the dog hunt has been postponed to the next day because they found Dawson's body.

A large dog-like statue of mud and straw is on the body. "Someone's got a morbid sense of humour," the Sheriff says. Exigu notices that the statue has traces of blood on its maw.

Suspecting a construct, Exigu tells the sheriff to put the "wolf dog" statue in a locked place, and to search the barn for more clues. He says that he will go outside to put his tracking abilities to good use. But before he leaves, the sheriff tries to move the statue from the farmer's cadaver. It turns to dust! It seems that it was very brittle...

Exigu goes outside and looks for recent tracks. He finds large wolf- or dog-like tracks going toward the barn, but none leaving. Following them backward, they cross the farmer's prints on the outskirts of his farm. The farmer had a routine where he'd laid traps for rabbits.

He follows the "wolf" tracks into the bog. Suddenly, Exigu's feet are stuck in a quicksand! His dog, Patu, helps to get him out of danger. Exigu is puzzled; the tracks are passing *over* this area... He notices another odd thing- the tracks are shallow for a beast of this size. Then the utter silence of the area strikes him. No birds or insects are heard. The mist also seems thicker... Exigu decides to go back to the farm *(DM note: he was spooked, heh heh!)*.

The Sheriff tells Exigu they found nothing else in the barn. A wild dog hunt is then arranged for eight am tomorrow morning. Exigu tells the sheriff that the "dog" was probably created, not a natural dog.

That night there is a quiet dinner with the twins. After the meal, Daniel Foxgrove enters the dining room. He chats with the heroes about the dogs; Exigu's account of the afternoon is news to him. He asks "Oh, when do you plan to leave Mordent?" When the heroes answer that they do not know, he doesn't seem satisfied. He leaves the room looking preoccupied after saying goodnight.

December 5th, 747

The heroes wake up early, noticing that rain fell during the night. They go to Dawson's farm before the planned village hunt to begin their own. They follow the tracks into the humid bog. Skeletal dead trees are dimly seen in the mists. Visibility in the fog is poor (about 100 feet).

Suddenly, they hear loud barking ... all around them! The heroes turn back toward the farm.

The dogs fall silent- and suddenly their swiftly running shapes emerge from the mists, in a circle around the heroes. The "dogs" are large (6' long) brown filthy mastiffs. There are nearly a dozen of them. The heroes position themselves for battle. They notice the dogs do not have eyes! Their maw drool.

A long battle (9 rounds) occurs in which the hounds savagely attack the circle of heroes. Their bite is fierce. When they die, they dissolve into a puddle of mud and straw!

Healing spells are cast after the battle. Thankfully no one died, but it was close for some of the heroes. Then they hear a scream; an old man appears. He is being chased by another hound. The man looks weak and his footing, unsure. The following beast appears to “play” with him, like a cat with a mouse. The old man sees the heroes and runs towards them. But the hound jumps and bites him in the back. The man falls, looking dead!



The hound attacks the heroes, and after a short battle dissolves into a mud and straw puddle. Petrak cures the unconscious man.

“Thanks t' ye fer yer timely assistance. Without it, I'd surely be dead. Y' know, this is th' first time I've ever seen these hounds during th' daytime. It's supposed to be safe to go out in the light! Maybe it has to do with th' mists?” An involuntary shiver shakes his frail frame. He is Douglas Michaels, and the gardener of Sir Burton Wescote, the owner of this property. He was gathering herbs for cooking when he was surrounded by the hounds. “Suddenly”, he says, “they all left except a nasty one.” He asks the heroes to escort him safely back to Wescote Manor.

After 15 minutes of walking, the sun slowly pierces the mist and the clouds. The heroes can see a large building emerge from the mists. Douglas Michaels announces that this is Westcote Manor.



Approaching, the heroes notice the manor is old, in very bad shape, and in need of paint. The first floor's windows are boarded up. Michaels say “I'm the gardener, and my work is my pride.” Indeed, the surrounding grounds are well-kept.

He explains, “Yes, it's because o' them bog hounds. They've thrown themselves at the windows and forced their way through the doors more than once. Ah! This is Sir Wescote!” and he waves toward a man exiting the manor.



Sir Wescote hears the tale of his gardener's rescue. He looks pleased and warmly thanks the heroes for their courage. “These beasts”, he says, “have haunted the estate for the last forty years. We used to see them infrequently, but a year ago, they grew both in number and ferocity.” He was thankful that nobody on his estate had been wounded (or worse) by the dogs until this morning.

Petrak feels he has more to say, and presses him. Wescote, gloomy, tells them of a curse on his property. He needs help and asks the heroes if they can aid him. If they will agree, he invites them to spend the night. “Then you'll see the troubles I have.”

The heroes are still in need of healing, and don't completely trust Wescote. They promise that they will come back later to help him.

Walking back towards Mordentshire, they see the villagers' hunt. They ask for the Sheriff, and are told that he is at Dawson's farm. They go to warn him of the hounds. "The villagers," they say, "Can't fight these creatures. They're too strong and dangerous! Call the hunt to a halt!" The sheriff does, after thinking about the matter for a moment.

The heroes enquire about Wescote Manor, and tell the sheriff that they met Sir Westcote. He explains that the hounds have been in this area for a long time. They usually haunted the northeast countryside of Mordentshire and never had been as close to town as in the last few days. He tells the following tale (*from HitN*):

"A long time ago, Burton Wescote and Ann Campbell were engaged to be married. It was an arranged wedding, valuable to both families. There was no love lost between the Wescotes of Mordent and the Campbells of Dementlieu, but the groom, at least, was willing to go through with the marriage. Ann's family brought her to the manor so the couple could get acquainted before their union, though Ann remained vehemently opposed to the wedding. The rest of the Campbells stayed at the inn here in Mordentshire.

"Sometime during the night, Ann fled the manor into the bog, but not before killing Michael, one of the Wescote brothers. He'd apparently tried to prevent her from leaving. Burton set the dogs after her. Later, he said that he had trained them to subdue their prey and ordered them to do so when he loosed them. He and his dogs raced through the night after the fleeing Ann. The dogs outdistanced Wescote and gained ground on the girl. She fled into the mists that always seem to rise near the bog, the dogs close at her heels. Wescote ran after, a few minutes behind.

"Whatever happened out there, no one really knows.

"Wescote returned covered in mud and slime; his face was scratched by brambles, and his clothes torn from where he had stumbled on his chase. They say he was crazy with fear ... or loss. When questioned, he would say nothing of what had happened in the moors, except that Ann had died in the bogs and that he had had no hand in her death.

"Naturally, neither family believed him— Michael and Burton Wescote were known to be the closest of brothers, and everyone thought Burton had killed Ann in revenge. The Campbells thought it likely that Burton had chased Ann into the moors for the express purpose of killing her, but none could prove it. They moved back to Dementlieu, cursing the Wescote name. The Wescotes praised Burton for pursuing the murderer to her death. The two families, which hadn't got along in the best of times, became bitter enemies.

The sheriff asks the heroes, "So you met Sir Westcote? I've never met him. He rarely leaves his estate, and sends his servants to town for the estate's needs." Thinking a moment, he adds: "Regardless, the people of Mordentshire and the neighbouring villages know better than to go out on the moors when the moon is high and the mist rises. The howls sound as soon as the sun sets, and only a fool would challenge the beast or beasts that make such horrible cries. A few who have gone out seeking the lair of the creatures have found nothing, as though the monsters vanished during the daytime. Those who have sought the beasts in the night have been found in the morning at the edge of the moors with their entrails spilled about them. Needless to say, Mordent people pretty much leave the place alone these days... We need to get rid of those dreadful dogs."

They walk back toward Daniel Foxgrove's house. The twins are surprised to find them covered in nasty bite wounds. After healing spells are cast, the heroes tell about their actions that morning. The twins tell them the Wescote story, but nothing different from the Sheriff's tale.

The twins say their father is looking preoccupied and sad. He'd again asked them when the heroes would leave Mordentshire. The twins were unable to make their father explain his mood...

Mac Razbunare asks them if they know a good library with arcane spells, since the heroes recently grew in power and need access to greater spells (*DM note: they gained a level after the hound battle*). Gennifer offers to share her own spellbook with Mac Razbunare and says she got these spells at the University of Dementlieu's Department of Arcane Magic. She offers to write a letter of introduction for them, addressed to the head of the university, Lord Balfour de Castelle.

GAME SESSION EIGHTEEN: BACK TO NATHAN TIMOTHY

(April 23rd, 2006; Five players were present, except Austizel's player then played by Yvon))

Thanks to Llana for scrubbing it!

December 5th, 747 (continued)

All the heroes except Varadan gained a new level at the end of the last session. They had a discussion about the Moonchild PrC (from the Gaz). They fear the two PCs infected with lycanthropy (Varadan and Virevan) might turn evil soon. Their conclusion is that they need this PrC (but not till next level because of the PrC prerequisites), and meanwhile will try to destroy Nathan.

They are concerned that if they do go after Nathan, they can't bring the two infected heroes. They fear Nathan might be able to control them. In a short IC discussion?, Van Richten tells them that some- not all- werewolves are able to control their progeny. He knows Natalia can, but is uncertain about Nathan. Until then, they have wisely invested a lot of ranks in the Control Shape skill.

*I've marked in bold the class they chose in which they added a level: Exigu is now a Ranger 3 / thief **3**; Petrak, fighter 2 / priest **4**; Virevan, Fighter **4** / priest 2; and MacRazbunare Druid 3 / Wiz **3**. Austizel's player was not present, and could not be reached, so we do not know yet his choice (he is currently Ranger 2 / Wiz 3) – we'll see next game.*

The heroes decide to take a break from the adventure, so that the spellcasters can learn new spells. Jules Weathermay had loaned them a book (*see end of session 16*), and Gennifer had also offered to share her arcane spellbook with the heroes. Gennifer will also learn new spells from them: *sleep, shocking grasp, true strike, silent image, chill touch and ray of enfeeblement.*

In the meantime, Petrak and Exigu bring a message to Burton Wescote: “We haven't forgotten you; we will be back to help you as soon as we can.”

They discuss the focus for their next adventure: the destruction of Nathan Timothy and Natalia Vorishkova. Van Richten suggests that they begin their quest in Karina, the main port frequented by Nathan. He also sends a message to George Weathermay in Nova Vaasa:

Dear George,

We plan to go after N's groom soon. We'll be with some adventurers who have good reasons to get him out of the way - the moon. They think they saw N too. Meet us at the Golden Field Inn in Karina around December 22nd, or send us a message if you can't be there.

Regards,

RJR

The next ten days are spent quietly learning spells.

December 15th, 747

Tonight is the full moon, a day the heroes dread because of their afflicted friends. Through his friendship with Donnaire, the Mordentshire Sanitarium Director, Van Richten manages to get an isolated row of cells: a small wing of eight cells will be emptied for the heroes. No other patients will be in this wing of the building.

After dinner, Varadan and Virevan enter their cells, and Exigu locks them in. Van Richten and the twins are present, as is Tara Kolyana, whose spells might help.

Around 9pm, Varadan feels a rage slowly filling him. The others cast spells to help him: *Guidance*, *Owl's Wisdom* and *Protection from curses* (*I ruled this last spell could have an effect on afflicted unwanted transformation*). Later, it's Virevan's turn, and luckily their mental efforts to maintain their humanity succeeds in both cases! They do not transform into hungry beasts. (*Wow, lucky dice rolls here for both!*)

They wait in their cells; their blood urge doesn't seem to come back. The twins are relieved that they could control themselves, and go home to sleep.

After a while, they decide to release Varadan and Virevan ... to discover that their cell doors were unlocked! But Exigu is certain that he locked their doors, and had even checked twice!

The heroes wonder who could have unlocked the doors without being seen. They wonder briefly if Gennifer has turned evil. Van Richten however assures them that she doesn't have *knock* in her spellbook. An invisible thief? It's unlikely that he would have been able to pass unnoticed into the narrow sanatorium corridor. MacRazbunare suspects Nathan Timothy, while Petrak says that Daniel Foxgrove would like to see the heroes gone from Mordent...

Someone is really looking to cause them trouble...

DM note: I need to explain a few things here that had only been hinted at before. Lord Wilfred Godefroy is trying to get rid of the heroes, seeing them as potential threats. He's been threatening Daniel Foxgrove, warning that he will torture the spirit of his dead wife (the twins' mother) unless they leave (This background info is taken from Godefroy's Gaz entry). This is the reason why Daniel Foxgrove has asked several times when they are planning to leave Mordent – Godefroy is slowly putting the pressure on Foxgrove. Neither the twins nor Van Richten know about this, of course).

Daniel informed Godefroy about the heroes's concerns about the approaching full moon. So Godefroy came this night to the Sanatorium. Invisible, he unlocked the cell doors, hoping that the lycanthropes would wreak havoc in the place, forcing the heroes to flee or leave Mordentshire... But they were able to control their shape.

December 16th, 747

In the morning, the heroes visit the port area. There is no boat with the name Virago, nor did any strange boat leave during the night.

They go back to their arcane studies.

December 20th, 747

Quiet trip to Ste-Ronges, then the Mortigny Way Inn. They wonder if they should cross the Verbrek forests and sleep in the Rolling Fork or Thoslow hamlets. It would quicken the trip by one day, but Van Richten says these wild areas are dangerous.

They decide to pass through Borca instead.

December 21th, 747

Quiet trip to Sturben, then Levkarest.

They keep a low profile in the city, staying quietly in the inn.

December 22th, 747

Quiet trip from Levkarest to Ashington.

Before leaving, MacRazbunare goes to a local herbalist shop to learn more about poisonous mushrooms... He buys a mushroom oil: "Very good for getting rid of rats," the merchant says. There are other kinds of mushrooms, but the local herbalist refuses to sell them to him. But MacRazbunare studies them so that he may recognize them if he should see them in the wild.

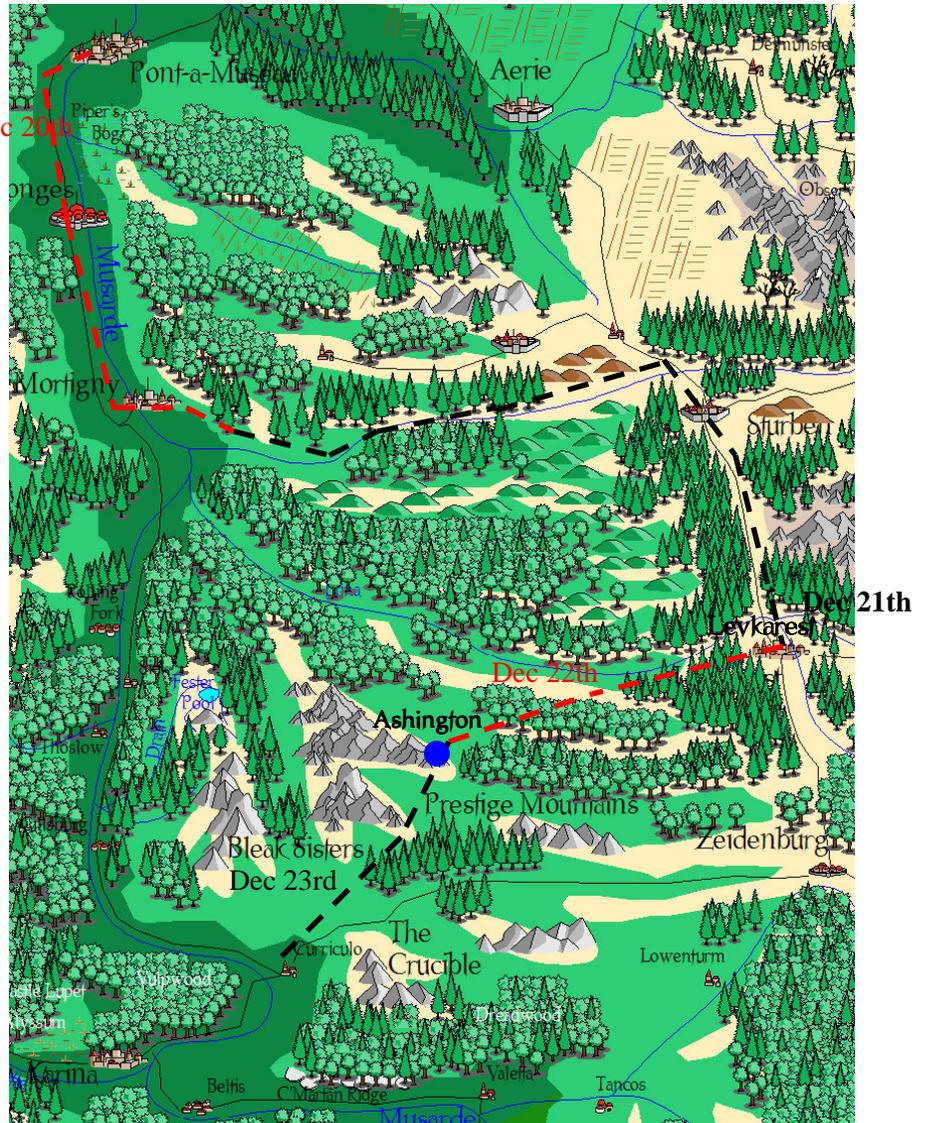
(DM note: as an herbalist IC, this player really wants to exploit the "Van Richten Guide to Indigenous Plants of the Mists" that I gave him – see last session. He was looking for Wraithroot in Mordent and Hermitshawl in Invidia, but it was not the right time to pick them.)

In Ashington hamlet, they are treated like heroes (*see sessions 12 and 13*). The Vashon family tells Van Richten of the heroic actions of the party in defeating the curse of Ashington Manor.

December 23rd, 747

They leave the Ashington hamlet, going South.

Suddenly a rope is raised just in front the heroes' horses on the road! The rope is at breast-level. The two first heroes on the trail, Petrak and Virevan, fall from their horses and are badly hurt by



the trap; Petrak is stunned. The next rows of heroes are able to easily avoid the rope. *(DM note: this is how I played my improvised trap: a +6 touch attack trap, with a reflex save of DC 18 in order not to get stunned for 1-4 rounds. Reflex saves of DC 15, 13 and 11 respectively were required for the second, third and fourth rows of heroes to avoid the rope.)*

They see seven hulking brutes in the woods, nearly nine feet tall! They wear black cuir bouilli leather armor, with the Karina (or possibly Invidian, they don't know) insignia on them!

Spells are thrown as the brutes approach. Four of them are stuck in MacRazbunare's *entangle* spell. One of them has a bow and shoots deadly arrows at Austizel, nearly killing him with only two arrows. The other ogres hit hard with blunt swords or wooden clubs. The heroes respond with spells and arrows; Van Richten, with a heavy crossbow. It is quickly apparent that the heroes are no match for these powerful creatures, and they choose to flee. MacRazbunare's spell, *Wall of Gloom*, creates a wall between the heroes and the ogres. The ogres are unwilling to cross it, after seeing one of their friends emerge from it in fear.

The largest ogre is killed by arrows. Varadan runs toward him to search his body: forty gold pieces and a potion (conjunction aura - *a potion of CSWounds*). Then he sees a man, bound by ropes, in what appears to be the ogres' camp. The man is alive. The heroes untie him while the ogres threaten to run around the magically-entangled area and the *wall of gloom* to resume their attack. The heroes remove his gag.

"Quick!" he says with a foreign accent, "Let's leave the place. There is a total of 15 of them!" The heroes get on their horses; the rescued man, with Petrak. They flee, hearing ogres running toward them from the north. They are able to escape the area safely.

The man is a merchant named Ivram Kopesk (*USS 2002, NPC article, helpful when you need a quick NPC – this ogre attack was an improvisation of mine*). He is grateful for the rescue. Ivram is the last survivor of a caravan of merchants attacked by the ogres. The other five people were eaten yesterday by the brutes. It seems the ogres were supposed to get supplies from Karina, but for some reason didn't. They'd decided to hunt and attack the passersby.

At 4pm, the heroes arrive in Curriculo. Ivram leaves them here, thanking them again.

In the port area, they learn that the *Virago* stopped yesterday for supplies in Curriculo, and left going south...

GAME SESSION NINETEEN: BACK TO NATHAN TIMOTHY -2

(August 27th, 2006; four regular players were present, plus our guest Patrick P. (Jonathan Winters on the FoS board). Martin (MacRazbunare) and Patrick (Virevan) were absent.)

Thanks again to wonderful Llana for help in revising my texts!

Benoit, who plays Austizel, finally chooses to put his new level in the ranger class, making him a Ran3/Wiz3.

Very short recap: the heroes decide that they need to kill Nathan Timothy (two of them are afflicted lycanthropes, thanks to Nathan) and travel from the WF's home in Mordent toward Karina. They have just arrived in Curriculo, Invidia

December 23rd, 747 (continued)

The heroes decide to stay in Curriculo for the night and select the Plowshare Inn. They register as two separate groups, in case Malocchio is looking for a party fitting their description (*The heroes finished the Evil Events, with Malocchio being bound to Invidia in mid-November, and they fear his wrath should he know they are back in Karina*).

While they are dining quietly at the Inn, they listen to local gossip. Ivram Kopesk, the merchant they saved from the ogres earlier that afternoon (*session 18*), enters the Inn and see the heroes. He walks toward Petrak. He hands him a pair of black gloves under the table so that he is not seen by the other tavern patrons. Pointing to the giorgio purple scar on Petrak's hand, Ivram whispers, "I was talking with my merchant colleagues in the city when I learned something important that I felt you should know. It's not a good time right now to walk in Karina and say you are a friend of the vistani. You should hide this scar!" After thanking the heroes again for saving his life, he leaves.

Other people in the inn are discussing how Curriculo is taking advantage of the political situation in Karina. The construction of new warehouses was a stable industry before, but now it's booming. The main topic of conversation is the burning of two warehouses in the last three weeks. It seems Karina doesn't like to see its business taken away. The merchants here have reacted by raising a militia to patrol the docks and the warehouse district at night. But the threat of merchandise going literally up in smoke has already made many merchants reconsider their relocation here.

The rest of the evening is spent with Van Richten, who tells about his adventures. Through them, the heroes learn that the vistani can be very useful: they make out a lot with their divination; their ability to navigate through the Mists to cover great distances quickly, and to reach an island in the Mists. Van Richten adds that he should have used their abilities more often in his career, but hadn't trusted them. One of the heroes (MacRazbunare) feels that Van Richten had probably suffered long ago some painful event or tragedy that involved vistani.

Van Richten recaps the basics on hunting werewolves. He tells the heroes that the allergen for Nathan's breed of werewolves is fennel, while most other types hate a plant called wolfsbane (*I also used the "Tricks and tactics" section on lycanthropes from the ever useful VRA to tell the players what they should know. In fact, I used this discussion with VR to tell them a few things about the RL setting – remember, I didn't give them permission to read the RCS*).

December 24th, 747 (no, dear heroes, there is no Xmas in Ravenloft)

The half-day travel from Curriculo is traversed without any problems. The walled city of Karina has more guards than before. The heroes notice with horror that there are many vistani corpses hung from the city wall on each side of the entrance. There are charred remains of burnt vardo too. A few well-fed ravens look at the heroes when they arrive at the city gate...

The group of heroes divide again into two groups to avoid possible trouble from Malocchio.

Each group gets a barrage of questions from the guards: "What is your name? Where were you born? Where do you live? Why do you seek to enter Karina?" And the last question: "Have you seen or spoken to vistani recently?" The guard is listening carefully to the heroes' answers, looking for lies, but he seems satisfied by what he hears and let both groups enter. The toll to enter has risen sharply (it used to be 1 c.p. per visitor; it's now 1 s.p.).

Their first stop is the Golden Field Inn, but George Weathermay isn't there, and no message awaits the heroes or Van Richten. However they know travel is long from Nova Vaasa, so a few days' delay isn't worrying them. They also do not know if George was home when Van Richten's letter arrived (*see session 18*).

They find four rooms at the Godfinger's Shadow Inn, located one block from the Golden Field Inn, in the wine festival area (4 rooms at 1 sp/room).

A walk in the port area reveals the *Virago* (Nathan Timothy's boat) moored in front of the infamous Black Dog Inn. The door to this inn is open, and loud talk noise is heard from inside. The *Virago* has been transformed now into a small goelette, built for speed. (*DM note: one person on the RL mailing list had the fabulous idea that Timothy could change the shape of his boat to throw suspicious victims off the trail. Whoever you are, thank you!*).

The PC's go into an alley and unearth some of the goods they once stole from Timothy's boat (*see session 8*): 4 pieces of lady's jewelry pieces (20 gp each); a silver whistle (25 gp); and a woman's handkerchief bearing the initials "DLB", embroidered with small pearls (20 gp).

The objects are shown to Van Richten, who doesn't recognize the initials "DLB". He suggests that the whistle is probably a tool for Nathan to call his pack. A silver whistle might have a very precise tuning which werewolves' fine hearing could discern from others. They do not dare try it.

They return to the inn around 4pm. They discuss plans to hire Nathan on a false job, in order to get him out of Karina and away from his Black Dog and Falkovnians friends.

Around 5pm, Van Richten goes to the Golden Field to check for messages. When he is back, his face is white, as if he has seen a ghost. He hands this message to the players:

Dear friends,

L has vanished! I think she was kidnapped from the garden behind our house, the morning after the day of your departure. I am continuing my inquiry here and await further developments. I am deeply distraught.

GWF

DM info: I mentioned on the board (when I asked for suggestions) that I wanted to complicate this hunt for Nathan even more. Hey, that's what DMs are for ☺
So werewolves (or their agents) intercepted (and devoured) the messenger sent for George Weathermay on Dec. 5th (see session 18). There are many effects from this.
First, it means George won't be there to help them against Nathan and Natalia.
Second, Natalia and Nathan had plenty of time to send four werewolves to kidnap GWF and bring her to Karina as a bargaining chip against VR and the heroes. But they kidnapped Laurie instead of the other twin (thanks to Deepshadow for borrowing this ID confusion)!

They are surprised by this. They decide to ask Keith Delalune for guidance (*DM note: you remember Keith is an undercover Kargatane informant ☺*). They meet him at the presbytery. His sorry fat and greasy shape is foreboding, but he is very happy to see the heroes again. They tell him of their plans to have someone hire Nathan for a false job, in order to make him leave the safety of Karina.

Keith will ask “a few people around” if someone they know could be paid to hire Nathan. Keith insists that his own name should be left out of this, and then asks the heroes to come back in one day.

They ask him what has occurred in Karina recently. They learn that since their departure, Malocchio Aderre has quickly and without opposition established his hold on the militia and all that's political in Karina. So far, his control is only in Karina but it is clear he is looking at other cities nearby, including Curriculo and other smaller villages.

Commercial taxes have seen a steep rise, and Keith thinks it's to fund mercenary hiring. There are also rumours of more Falkovnian troupes arriving soon in the city. That's caused much grumbling, and a civil war could be threatening.

The hunt of vistani is systematic, and they are killed where found. There is a bounty on them: 25 gp per body. Those helping them are harshly punished.

The mad Gabrielle Aderre is said to have found refuge in Castle Hunadora in eastern Invidia (in an area that was Gundarak before this land was split between Barovia and Invidia). She is said to be slowly getting better, and she is surrounded by many supporters. So far, Malocchio hasn't attempted anything in this remote area. There are also rumours that Gundarakite Freedom Fighters are welcome in this area, and an alliance might even be in discussion. The heroes do not tell Keith Delalune that they are former Gundarakite Freedom Fighters!

Back to the inn ...

December 25th, 747

At 2:30 am, something breaks Petrak's window. The heroes find a small leather bag. In it, they find a rock, a piece of paper and a human finger! The message says:

LEAVE THIS CITY OR YOU WILL NEVER SEE YOUR SWEET AND TENDER GENNIFER AGAIN.

They note the confusion between Laurie and Gennifer, and wonder if Gennifer was kidnapped too. Van Richten, disgusted, examines the finger. Looking somewhat relieved, he says that this probably wasn't from one of the twins' hands.

The next morning, the rangers (Exigu and Austizel) and Van Richten examine the traces in the alley under their window: human leather boots. Nothing else is discerned from this enquiry.

They leave their hotel to go to Matton Blanchard's home, hoping that he might be able to help them to speak to Scar Tabor, the head of the local thieves guild (*all these NPCs are from Evil Eye of course*).

When they exit the inn, Exigu notices that a street seller (lamb sausages on a grill) seems to be watching them. When they are farther down the street, they see him talk to a street urchin, who then quickly runs in the opposite direction.

Exigu follows the boy across town until the kid enters the Black Dog Tavern! Two minutes later, the young boy exits the tavern, nearly running, watching his back as if afraid of something. He walks back toward the merchant area.

Exigu thinks that he himself is now being followed by two men who were busy mending a net on the waterfront. He is able to make them lose his trail and he sees them speaking to another street seller.

Exigu stops spying and walks toward Matton's house to join the others.

Meanwhile, the heroes have been told by a servant that "Mr Blanchard isn't in town, and we do not know when he will be." Petrak asks him if he can be reached somehow, and the servant says: "He can't. But if you want to leave a message here, we will make sure he receives it upon his return." The heroes depart without leaving a message. They think that Matton is probably still with Gabrielle.

At 10:30 am, they visit Keith Delalune to let him know of recent events, and to tell him that they are abandoning their plan to hire Nathan, since it seems they are being watched. Van Richten adds that "one, possibly both, of my dear nieces was kidnapped. Should you learn anything about it, we would be extremely grateful." Keith informs them that he will try to help them, and that they should come back and see him tonight at 8pm.

They return to the inn around noon. They do nothing special in the afternoon except to make plans for someone to spend the night on the nearby roof to watch the alley near the inn.

At 7:30 pm, they leave the inn with their adventuring gear, as if they were leaving town. The sausage street seller is still there.

But instead of leaving Karina, they go to Keith Delalune. The old lady at the presbytery looks perplexed when she sees them. She says she received an order to bring them to confessional room #1, in the church, instead of the usual boudoir where they always meet Keith.

In the church, all is dark and quiet. Their steps echo.

Petrak and Varadan enter confessional booth #1, while the rest of the group scatter around the church to watch.

“Good evening”, says Keith, hidden in confessional booth #2. “I’m sorry for these unusual precautions, but I’m with a guest who wishes to remain anonymous.

“We have learned that a prisoner is being held by Falkovnians in Karina. However, this prisoner is not held inside the Falkovnian prison, but instead in a butcher house near the Falkovnian enclave. So they are not official prisoners. It seems that the Falkovnians are helping some of their underground friends.”

Petrak asks how they can be sure that this prisoner is someone the heroes know.

Petrak and Virevan hear a whisper in the third confessional booth, and Keith says “Trust me, we know it’s somebody important to you. The butcher house is located on Alyssum Road, just west of West Street.”

There is another, longer whisper meant only for Keith’s ears. Both Petrak and Varadan identify the whisperer as a young woman. Petrak remembers once meeting a peculiar young woman, speaking to Keith...

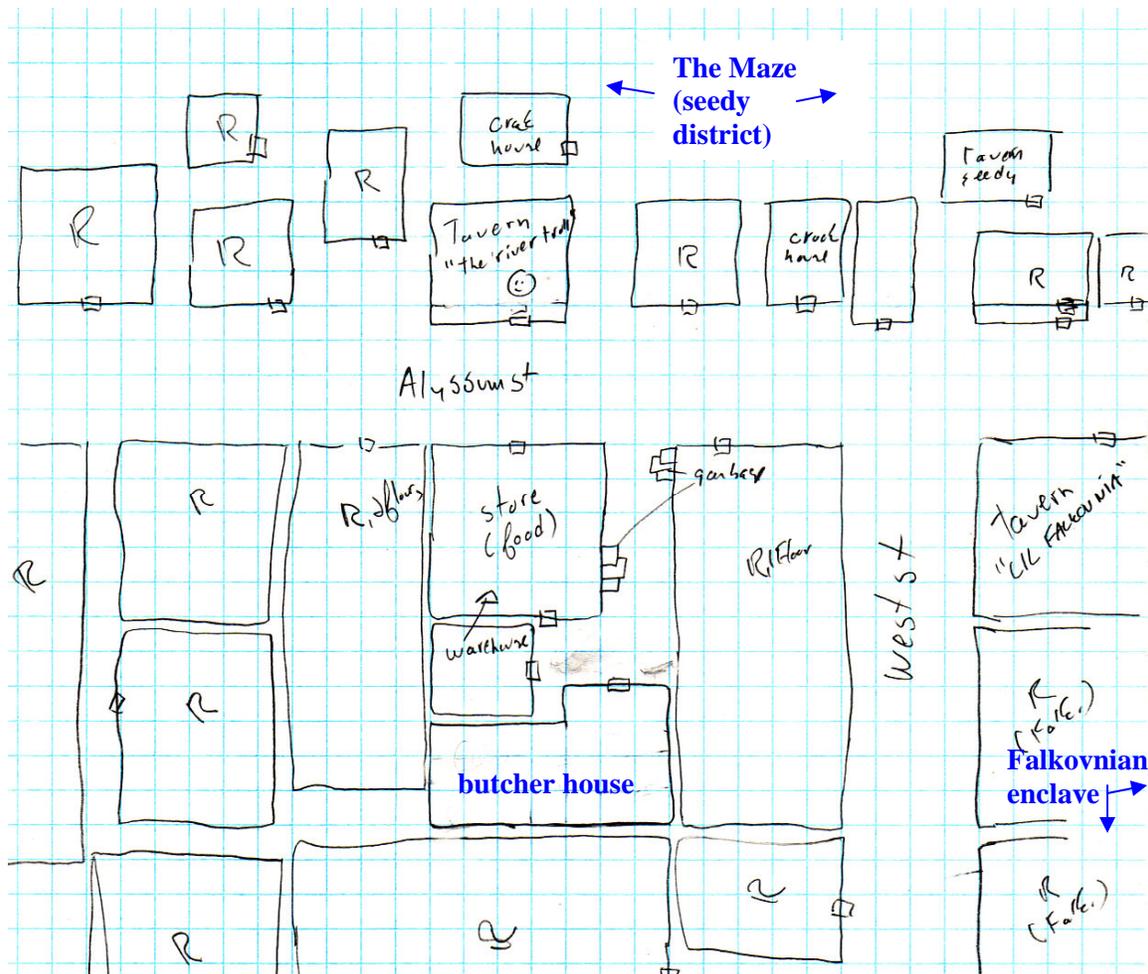
“We hate Falkovnians as much as you do”, says Keith after the whispers stop, “And we always try to harm and annoy them. If you are successful in this rescue, keep a low profile: we will spread the rumour that Malocchio’s secret police rescued the prisoner. The more mistrust and confusion we can instil between Malocchio and the Falkovnians, the better we will be. Now go, and good luck...”

Keith opens his booth’s door and waits for the heroes to exit theirs. Booth #3 remains closed. Keith Delalune leads the heroes back to the presbytery, and then to the boudoir. They ask him if he knows of an inn that’s located in a quiet street, but he cannot think of one large enough for a party of seven. He offers rooms in the nearby orphanage, and reminds the heroes that he founded it, but they decline, not wanting to put the children in danger.

They go in the area where the butcher house is while staying away from the Falkovnian enclave. Alyssum Road is at the southern edge of the Maze district in Karina, a seedy place. Many people are in the street here: cheap hookers; drunk or drugged people; even people asleep on the ground. One of the cheap taverns is named “The River Troll” (*a running joke with my players about Nathan’s reason to sleep on dry land when they first met him*).

They find the butcher house. It is very near the Falkovnian enclave. There is light inside the butcher house. There is a guard in the alley in front of the door, and he is in the dark.

Exigu the halfling is the only one who can crawl between the cramped buildings and make an accurate map of the place around the butcher house:



The butcher house has thick walls, and probably holds (or used to hold) a cold room.

The guard is a problem and could trigger an alarm. They plan to have Exigu sneak ahead to attack the guard first from behind, and then the rest will join in to kill the guard quickly. They will force the door open, rescue Laurie and run away before the Falkovnians are alerted.

They move into position. But things never happen as planned ...

Exigu and Austizel see a dark shape upon the butcher house roof, just over the guard! They do not do anything; they just watch. They hear a pebble being tossed in front of the guard, who falls for this old trick and looks down to see what it is. The heroes hear him gasp, and suddenly the guard is suspended from the roof, trying to grab the garrote that stops him from screaming! Exigu and Austizel let go their volley of arrows on the guard, who quickly stops moving.

Exigu moves to the butcher house door and listen inside: three voices. They do not seem to have heard anything. The dark shape on the roof approaches him. He sees it's the Midnight Slasher! She doesn't give him to say, let alone think anything; she quickly says, "The girl was moved from here an hour ago, but a little boy still held captive here. Save him and I'll tell you more about the girl's whereabouts. The code to enter is three knocks, then two. Meet me with the kid in fifteen minutes at the corner of Tower and Bog." She abruptly leaves.

The heroes regroup in front of the butcher house, and Exigu knocks on the door as recommended. The door is unlocked and opens. There are three Falkovnians inside (two soldiers and an officer), and another man. They are taken by surprise when the heroes rush in and attack them!

Varadan stuns a guard with a *color spray*.

The fourth man changes into a large half-man, half-wolf thing! The horror of seeing and hearing its flesh contorting wildly over bones enlarging and changing shape! The beast before them has a great hunger and wickedness in its eyes.

Yet the wolf beast feels the wrath of the heroes: *magic missiles* from MacRazbunare and Varadan, and arrows from Exigu and Austizel. The beast is quickly slain and reverts back to human shape.

Varadan however hesitated a moment before unleashing his magic missile, as if he felt some kinship with the beast. Was he another person infected by Nathan?

The guards are quickly slain, as is their officer, who is still cursing them in his foreign tongue as he falls to the ground (*diehard feat*). The heroes finish him off.

Inside the cold room, where many cattle carcasses are hung, a little boy is bound in chains in a corner. Exigu recognize him as the street urchin who was sent to give a message to someone in the Black Dog tavern! "Save me!" the child pleads.

Exigu removes his chains, asking him "Who were you paid to send a message to this afternoon at the Black Dog?"

"Nathan Timothy," the boy answers.

"What was this message?"

"It was: *the seven just left the inn, but didn't leave with all their travel gear.*"

They search the room and the bodies, and Petrak finds a leather tube on the werewolf. *Detect magic* reveals that it is magical. It is a scroll of *suppress lycanthropy*.

Van Richten questions the boy about the girl who'd been held prisoner here. The boy answers, "Yes, there was a girl held here until may be an hour or two ago. She had bruises on her face, but appeared all right otherwise. Three guards moved her out of here. A few hours before that, when they brought us food, a woman came here and teased the girl, saying that she would '*transform her tonight so she could eat me*'. I don't know what this meant but I was afraid of her when the other woman left." His description of the visiting woman is that of Natalia Vorishkova: short woman, brown curly hair, dark eyes!

“When this woman left, the girl whispered ‘*But it’s not me!*’ a few times. I do not know what she meant”, added the boy. “Now, can I go away from here?”

Exigu tells him to stay with them a few more minutes, and they walk to the intersection of Bog and Tower. There, the Midnight Slasher appears from a roof and scares the boy. Changing her voice to appear as a ghost (so the boy doesn’t see she is a woman), she tells him to become an apprentice and learn a proper trade. “Stay out of the bad streets, or next time I will get YOU!”

The boy runs away...

The Midnight Slasher smiles madly for a short moment, strange emotion in her eyes, and then turns to the heroes. She says quickly “The girl was moved from the butcher house a little more than an hour ago. She was put on the *Virago*, and the boat sailed west on the Noisette River.” She disappears from the roof’s edge without answering Exigu’s questions...

GAME SESSION TWENTY: BACK TO NATHAN TIMOTHY -3

(September 10th, 2006. Martin was not present; Petrak was played by Jean-François. Sylvain wasn't present and Exigu was played by Benoit)

December 25th, 747, 11 pm

The heroes cast a few healing spells, then race across Karina to fetch their horses. They do not seem to be followed. They leave Karina by the West Gate, heading toward Verbrek. The terrain quickly becomes muddy, as a marsh lies on the northern side of the Noisette, but a safe road follows the Noisette's northern shore. *(DM note: don't ask me why but I was sure there were marshes between the Vulpwood and the Noisette River. Anyway, in game, I needed to delay them!).*

They eventually see a wooden shack, where a man is fishing crawfish by night with a lantern. He says the *Virago* passed by about 20 minutes before the heroes arrived, going west.

The terrain is even muddier after this point, so they decide to walk at the horses' side, since this will lower their chances of getting stuck in treacherous mud patches that could delay them.

December 26th, 747

They walk on the dark and misty borders of the Noisette River. After twenty minutes, they see the *Virago*! It's on the southern border of the river. There is no light aboard; the sails are down. They stop and listen, but are unable to hear anything.

Since the Noisette is close to 80 feet wide in this area, the heroes decide to walk toward the village of Alyssum in Verbrek, where they will try to cross the Noisette.

At 2:15 am, they enter Alyssum, where everyone is asleep. They "borrow" three small boats (Each is large enough for 3 persons. They are seven: Van Richten is still with them). They leave their horses behind, with the message:

WE'RE SORRY, WE ARE TRAVELERS IN A HURRY. WE LEAVE THESE SEVEN HORSES BEHIND AS A GUARANTEE FOR THE RETURN OF THE BOATS. WE SHOULD BE BACK WITHIN A FEW DAYS.

(DM note: you may remember Alyssum is a very dangerous werewolf village, in sheep's clothing... The next morning, the werewolves are quite unhappy about this!)

A man is on a nearby merchant boat, watching. He observes the heroes' actions from a distance but doesn't do or say anything.

At 2:30 am, they are on the Noisette River, rowing their boats toward the *Virago*. Small patches of mist lazily drift over the dark waters...

Around 4:30 am, they are in sight of the *Virago*. They bring their boats within 500 feet of it. Austizel and Exigu approach the boat, making sure they remain hidden and silent. In the forest, the trees are very high and massive. Large patches of lichen grow on their bark. A lone wolf is

spotted sleeping near the *Virago*. A trail leaves the *Virago*'s landing place, going south, through the forest. The rangers identify the traces: two traces are large with claws – werewolves- and one is human, probably female, who seems to have been dragged along. This must be Laurie, they think.

Climbing up a tree, Austizel sees an austere religious building, possibly a monastery, about half a mile south of the Noisette. It is set on top of a hill.

They go back to the rest of the group waiting for them near their rowing boats.

Meanwhile, Van Richten and MacRazbunare are impressed by the size of the trees. The oaks, rowans and hazelnut trees are nearly twice their normal size. Van Richten wonders if it's the proximity to Sithicus, with its elven eldritch magic, that would be the cause of such impressive growth.

They decide to kill the guarding wolf, in order to get closer to the *Virago* and inspect it. They plan near simultaneous attack by bow and crossbow on the wolf. The attack is swift and deadly: the animal is dead before it runs away or howls.

Nothing more is found near the *Virago*, but the heroes do not dare enter the boat.

The heroes follow the trail going inside the forest. Not wanting to mix their own trail with the werewolves', they follow 15' to 20' away to its right.

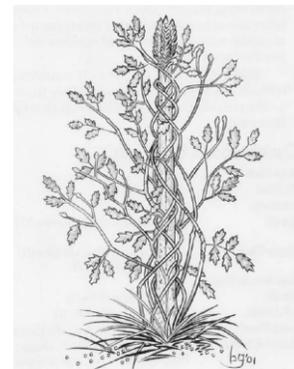
Suddenly, bushes start to move and attack the heroes! At least three large bushes uproot themselves and lash their razor vines. The vines seem to harshly scratch skin and feed on the blood beneath!

Austizel gets blinded by a thick blast of spores in the face. The other heroes see some kind of node in the middle of the plant, and concentrate their attacks on this. Then MacRazbunare gets blinded too. The heroes try to flee these vegetal furies, but the blinded members slow the group, and the green horrors are quick to reach them and attack. Austizel is suddenly stuck in a patch that grapples him, like an *entangle* spell...

After a long battle, they destroy the plants, but they are alarmed by Van Richten's advice to leave the place immediately, as these plants are usually found in groups of about ten to twenty individuals... so there must be others of these nearby.

(DM note: those were Lashweeds (DoD). I reworked them as some kind of vegetal parasite that animates plants. Thus the odd central fibrous node in the middle of the animated bush – see below)

Van Richten performs healing checks on the blinded heroes, and is able to cure them.



Judging that they are too wounded to continue exploring, the heroes go back to their boats, and row in the direction of Karina. Just before leaving, MacRazbunare puts an *Arcane Mark* on the *Virago*.

They stop after 3 miles, and carry the boats into the forest, so they are not seen by the other boats traveling the Noisette.

The heroes sleep and heal themselves while Exigu watches the camp and keeps an eye on the passing ships. They rest there for a day. The stay is quiet.

December 27th, 747, morning

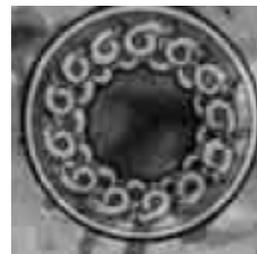
Back in the boats, they notice the *Virago* hasn't moved. On the trail toward the monastery, they stop to watch the plants they fought the day before. The middle node is fibrous, a mix of flesh and vegetable, and the disgusting things ooze blood when they cut it... Van Richten and MacRazbunare are able to get two pouches of the blinding spores.



Back on the trail toward the monastery, they keep an eye on the vegetation to prevent any more surprise attacks. The trail is heading for the monastery, but turns from it about 200 feet before reaching it, to pass around it instead.

The monastery is built as a fortress on top of a deforested hill. There is only one metallic door, and no windows on the first and second floor. On the door, some kind of circle is painted. There are belladonna (wolfsbane) plants growing on the hill around it.

Getting closer, they see the symbol on the door as a ring of serpents, each biting the tail of the one before it. Van Richten identifies this as the reclusive order of Hala. This religion's followers call themselves "witches".



Varadan goes alone to the door, and knocks. A woman opens a window on the third floor and glances at him and the rest of the heroes at the bottom of the hill. She speaks to him, but the language is unknown to Varadan. Seeing he doesn't understand, she points to the rest of heroes and say "Ulph! Ulph! Bealu! Bealu!" with a stern look. Then she stops and closes the window. *(DM note: From the Gaz, in Verbrek Ulph = wolf, bealu = dangerous; but the heroes do not realize she is talking about the druid's wolf pet)*

Confused, the heroes were about to leave the area, when the window opens again. Another woman is at the window.

"Who are you?" she asks.

“A group of travelers. We are following the trail of a friend who was kidnapped by werewolves,” Varadan answers.

“Your friend is probably at the ruined chapel. It’s where they bring them. It’s about a mile north,” she answers.

“Thank you for the information. If we are wounded, can we come back here for safety?” Varadan asks.

“That would really surprise me. This is a community of contemplative nuns, usually living in silence. The woman in charge of this convent doesn’t often open the doors to outsiders... especially if there is a wolf with them,” she said with a smirk while pointing a finger towards the druid’s wolf. “But I can’t really speak for her,” she adds.

The heroes thank her and leave.

They follow the trail in the hills for another mile, and then notice they are in front of some kind of valley. A small wood fire catches their attention. Around it are a few crumbled buildings, one of these being a ruined chapel with part of its roof lying on the ground. They also see a few werewolves in hybrid form.

They hide in the forest and watch this place from a distance. After an hour, they have seen six werewolves and one wolf...

GAME SESSION TWENTY ONE: BACK TO NATHAN TIMOTHY -4

(November 12th, 2006. Small crew! Yvon, Benoit and Jean-Guy could not be there. Their respective characters, Virevan, Austizel and Varadan were played by Jean-François, Martin, and Sylvain)

Thanks again to Pam aka Llana for help in revising my poor franglish texts!

Quick recap: the heroes are on the trail of Nathan Timothy and Natalia (Nathan's bride) as they kidnapped one of the Weathermay-Foxgrove twins. They found the place in the Verbrekan forest where she is probably kept.

December 27th, 747, 11:00 am

After seeing so many werewolves in the ruins, the party decide that they need help against that many lycanthropes. They go back to Karina to see if George Weathermay has arrived. There is still no news from him ... *(DM note: you may remember he never got this message! – see session 19)*

They go to an armoury, and request a staff tipped with silver on one end and gold at the other, for Varadan the monk. It will be ready the next day.

Van Richten and Virevan look for an alchemist as the old man suggests that could help them in this quest. After some bribing, Van Richten finds an unidentified shop in a back alley near the Karina market. After the usual introduction, the gnome Perseus explains the breadth of his knowledge *(In game, I had Perseus listing and explaining the common alchemical substances from Van Richten's Arsenal, page 58-59, so the players now know about it. You may remember I prefer to impart knowledge through roleplaying encounters than giving them the book).*

They buy two Pungent Powders, three Night Drops and order seven doses of herbal solution made with wolfsbane they'd picked near the nuns' monastery (these solutions will be ready tomorrow). Van Richten also buys disappearing ink. When leaving the shop, Van Richten tells Virevan that he felt this alchemist didn't say a fraction of what he knew or could really do ...

Later this day, they go to sleep in the forest south of Karina (staying away from potential spies from Nathan or Malocchio).

During the night, three wolves come near the sleeping characters. Their behaviour is strange; they allow themselves to be seen, and watch the sleeping heroes with piercing, if glacial, gazes. The hero on guard duty awakens Mac Razbunare, who tries to befriend the animals with his druidic animal skills. This doesn't seem to affect them. They leave the area and disappear into the dark forest. When they leave the druid's wolf is excited and eager to follow the wolves, but the druid is able to keep him by his side.

December 28th, 747, morning

The druid puts a *charm animal* spell on a raven, then casts *speak with animal*, and asks it to go watch the ruins of the chapel and look for a human woman with long black hair. Luckily, the raven seems to understand this very complex order and flies off in the right direction.

He then uses the remainder of his spell to ask his wolf about last night's encounter with the strange wolves. The wolf tells his master that he considered these visiting wolves friends, and felt an urge to go hunt with them and run wild in the forest...

After two hours, the raven is back. It tells the druid about a woman staying "in a pit of rock" (a ruined house). She doesn't move. There are many wolves near her. She smells like blood, but not like a dead animal (she is hurt, but not dead).

The rest of the day is spent going back toward Karina to get the potions promised by the alchemist.

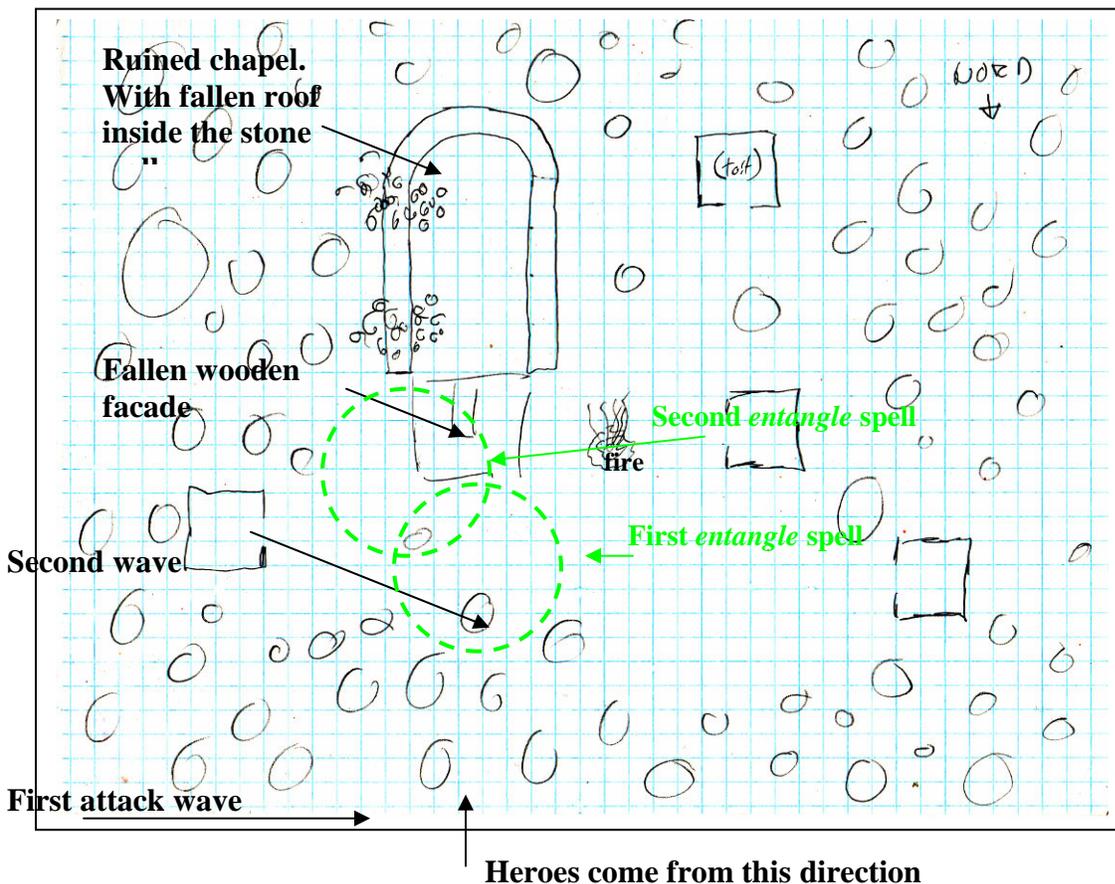
The night is quiet.

December 29th, 747, morning

They prepare themselves for battle and enter the valley...

They see the ruined chapel, with its fallen roof inside the walls, and four smaller houses near it. The chapel's stone walls are 20 feet high, but the wooden roof fell in between and is partially on the ground, leaving about 8 feet at the most under it on one side, and crawling space only on the other side.

A fire camp is in the middle, with a lone man-wolf warming himself at it.



Virevan does *protection from evil* while Petrak casts *bear's endurance* on Van Richten.

They see four wolves running toward them (“first wave” on the map). One wolf is much larger than the others. This larger wolf isn't hit by Exigu's silver arrows, so it must be one of Nathan's followers and the heroes use gold instead. It later changes into a hideous man-wolf!

Van Richten throws an herbal solution at the werewolf with success: repugnant welts appear on its face. When this werewolf is killed, its body changes into human form, and the heroes recognize him as a drunken patron of the Karina dog fight, during October's harvest festival (*Evil Eye*).

The other wolves concentrate their attack on Petrak, making him trip on the ground and prey to their bites.

A crossbow bolt from under the ruined chapel's roof hits Van Richten hard in the stomach, and he falls on the ground, breathing with difficulty! The heroes are surprised by the quick poison on the crossbow bolt. Mac Razbunare heals Van Richten and is able to relieve him of the poison's effect.

They run toward the chapel, where the bolt came from, but another wave of wolves exits a house and attack! (“second wave” on the map) They are led by an immense wolf-man, that they recognize as Nathan Timothy!

DM note: those of you that read my journals may remember Nathan Timothy isn't a normal werewolf in my game: he had the stats of an 86 hp mountain loup-garou. His vulnerability (as well as that of his clan / progeny) is gold, while Natalia's is regular werewolf silver.

Mac Razbunare casts an *entangle* spell, ensnaring three wolves and a werewolf in it.

The heroes concentrate their attacks on Timothy – sword attacks, gold arrows, *magic missiles*, etc. Petrak makes an excellent attack against Timothy with his *smite power* ability (and a critical! – 28 hp), but Timothy responds with a terrible attack. His two claws and snarling bite render Petrak unconscious in just one round!

They see a she-werewolf exit the chapel. She says to Nathan from a distance, “Kill them all, my love!” They realize that this must be Natalia!

The heroes continue bravely, but next round, Varadan falls unconscious after Nathan's deadly strikes!

Nathan however has been severely hit too, and Austizel's gold-plated arrows strike him dead.

Natalia moves to attack the wounded heroes but thankfully another *entangle* spell traps her in its grasp. Natalia says to Van Richten, “Again, Van Richten, old man, you arrive too late!” She then turns toward another werewolf and orders him, “Kill her!” The werewolf runs to the ruined chapel... this must be where Laurie is prisoner!

But about a hundred feet and two *entangle* spells separate the heroes from Laurie!

Van Richten runs toward the chapel but it is very far... Mac Razbunare casts a *wall of gloom* spell on the chapel entrance, hoping it will hinder the werewolf, but it doesn't prevent the murderous wolf from entering...

... The werewolf enters the chapel and soon after screams are heard! It's Laurie!

Exigu tries to run after the werewolf inside the chapel while the other heroes finish another werewolf and its wolf allies. Austizel shoots arrows at Natalia, still stuck in the *entangle*...

Van Richten and Exigu are able to cross the druid's *wall of gloom* and they enter the ruined chapel: Laurie is chained and still alive, but barely.

The werewolf grins, and turns to bite her. She doesn't move! ... Laurie is dead!

Meanwhile outside, Natalia is able to exit the *entangle* spell and runs away from the battle. The heroes try to shoot missiles, but she is already too far. *(DM note: I was looking to keep Natalia alive as this villain will play a larger role somewhere later in the campaign...)*

Van Richten and Exigu attack the werewolf that killed Laurie, and Exigu kills it with arrows.

They check Laurie and she is unconscious, not dead. She is near death, but Van Richten stabilizes her. They remove the chains keeping her prisoner.

The other heroes kill the werewolf and the wolves stuck in the first *entangle* spell.

They regroup and Petrak gives Laurie a few healing spells. She seems confused and says, "The voices... the voices ..." and falls unconscious again. Van Richten wraps her in a warm blanket.

DM note: that really was an incredible battle. The pacing of it was fantastic, with the incredibly timely rescue of Laurie. Cool 15-round battle, really!

Re: Laurie hearing voices- well, you'll see later ☺

They check the area for magical items: three bottles and the chains that held Laurie prisoner.

They check Natalia's traces in the woods: from her hybrid form, she quickly changed to wolf form, and ran. They think she must be already far away. They are also very weak from the battle and decide not to follow her.

Meanwhile, Exigu rides his dog Patu quickly toward the *Virago* site, in order to see if Natalia was using it. When he arrives near the boat, he sees that it hasn't moved. But while he was riding there, he saw two nuns from the nearby monastery hiding from him in the woods when they saw him.

The other heroes rejoin him near the water. They decide not to use the *Virago*, but they move its anchor in the middle of the river, so it's more difficult to reach. They go to sleep and heal their wounds in Karina.

At 1 pm, they are in the Golden Fields Inn. Petrak cures Laurie, but she seems to recover very slowly... She sleeps but it doesn't seem restful so Van Richten makes her an herbal tea to help her.

The rest of the day is quiet and Mac Razbunare practices his healing skills on the others ...

December 30th, 747, morning

Mac Razbunare and Petrak cast *Lesser restoration* and *cure moderate wounds* on Laurie. She seems better, but still very weak. Her beautiful face shows many bruises and wounds... She was badly beaten while she was a prisoner of the werewolves.

Mac Razbunare identifies all three potions as *cure moderate wounds*. When he holds the chain to identify it, he throws it away from himself as if it was a snake. He explains to the others that he felt two things when he held it: the first was an urge to tighten his fists around it and hold it as long as he can; and the other was repulsion. Thankfully, the second urge was stronger. He feels there is possibly something sentient *inside* the chain!

They go back boating to the *Virago*, with a crowbar to open the safe. But the *Virago* isn't where they left it! (*DM note: funny assumptions by the players – the boat found itself a new master as if the boat was a domain 😊*) But then they spot many rotten wooden planks at the bottom of the river. It looks like the boat was perfectly sound to take the water yesterday, but rotted overnight!

While they prepare to go in the water and explore the wreck, Austizel suddenly feels the air around him to be very cold, but nobody else seems to have noticed the cold. In a flash he has many visions of terrible things that happened on the *Virago*: defenceless people terrified; a mother screaming for her child; screams of terror; blood splattered... They decide not to explore further and leave the place. (*DM note: Nathan dead, the Virago was destroyed by its corruption. I made the place haunted of course. So many terrible things happened on the Virago ...*)

Back in Karina, the mood of the population is focused on the New Year festivities, but the players decide to stay safely inside their hotel room. They hear many joyous shouts at midnight, when many people are in the street holding candles, drinking strong liquors and singing.

January 1st, 748, morning

Laurie is still very feeble. She sleeps most of the time. Van Richten is able to understand that the voices she heard were *inside* the chain...

DM note: the chain is an item I created. The spirit of something evil is bound inside the chain. It slowly drains the person it is in contact with and drives him near insane (thus the voices Laurie spoke about when she was rescued). After this long contact with the chain, Laurie has been drained to only 3 in each ability. She will recover but it will take a while, as you will see. As to what exactly is in the chain, I do not know yet. For the moment it's an open adventure hook with the Guardians...

Van Richten sends a message to Gennifer WF that Laurie has been rescued and is with them. It also says that they will arrive soon in Mordent.

Another message is sent to George Weathermay. "This second message is to let you know you do not need to come to Karina. If you want to reach us, write us in Mordent". They also write that Nathan has been killed and Natalia was there but is now on the run. (*DM note: he will of course answer this message in a few weeks with surprise, as he never got the first.*)

Van Richten rents a large carriage and its driver to bring them comfortably to Mordent. The six-day travel does cost a small fortune (120 gp) but Van Richten doesn't ask anything of the heroes. They will leave tomorrow morning.

During the night, they bring back the rowboats to Alyssum. They do not see their horses and they do not dare to wake up anyone to ask. They leave a message. "Thanks for the rowboats; we do not have time to get the horses back." They are back in Karina in early morning after a long walk back. *(DM note: so they never met anyone in Alyssum... a pity, no? ;))*

January 2nd, 748, morning

The carriage arrives at 6 in the morning. It is large enough for eight persons. They all get inside, except Exigu who's going to travel in front with Haslav, the coach driver. He is worrying about ogre attacks, but the trip is uneventful and they are safely in Ashington Manor at night. Again, the welcome there is warm.

Eliza, Miko's mother, reminds them of Rosalia's tarokka deck that they promised they would deliver to Vistani. Truthfully, they had forgotten about this item in Petrak's backpack, but they say they haven't seen any Vistani since then. Eliza is a half-Vistani and is worrying about the Vistani pogrom in Karina, since sometimes the Invidian soldiers come close to this hamlet.

January 3rd, 748, morning

They are packing to leave Ashington, when they remember Ivana's warning that the Weathermay-Foxgroves must never enter Borca again (*see session 14*). They consider another route through the woods. Van Richten offers that Strahd himself can't see everything in Barovia, and relies on the Vistani to be his eyes.

Van Richten asks the driver if they can cross Borca in a day without stopping in Levkarest (usually it is two days' travel with a stop in Levkarest for the night). He agrees and Van Richten tips him.

The trip to Levkarest is quiet. Inside the city, in the carriage, nobody says a thing. Laurie is asleep.

They exit the city without getting into trouble and get to Sturben by midnight. The driver slows to have a better view of the possible road hazards in the night. Exigu is again on the front seat with the driver to keep him company and make sure he doesn't fall asleep.

January 4th, 748, morning

At 4 am, they arrive at the Mortigny Way Inn. They have to wait a few hours outside until the sun rises. Then the owner opens his door to the travelers. The driver sleeps.

The day is spent quietly. Laurie seems to get better everyday, but very slowly. She is now able to have a conversation.

January 5th, 748

Quiet travel day. At night, they arrive in Pont-a-Museau.

They are about a day and a half away from Mordentshire. Again, Van Richten tips the carriage driver to make it in one day only. He agrees but they will have to get up early.

January 6th, 748

Quiet travel day again. Around the end of the afternoon, they are back into Mordent, and arrive in Mordentshire just before 8 pm.

Daniel Weathermay and Gennifer give them a hero's welcome. Daniel Weathermay is extremely relieved and tells the players that his twins are the most precious things he has in life, and that he owes the party a lot.

Laurie is still feeble so she goes to sleep early. Gennifer is worried about her condition.

During the night, the heroes have the following vision... *(cut scene!)*

After the battle, Natalia is alone in a small hole in the rocks. She is licking her wounds and is shaking with rage ...

GAME SESSION TWENTY TWO: LYCANTHROPIC CURE ATTEMPT, AND BACK TO WESTCOTE MAJOR

(November 26th, 2006. Benoit and Sylvain could not be there: Austizel was played by Martin; and Exigu by Jean-François)

January 7th, 748

Nathan Timothy now dead, the next step to cure afflicted lycanthrope Virevan (Varadan chose the Moonchild PrC route) is to get an atonement. Petrak the cleric goes to the church and meet James Martigan (**BoSecrets: the highest Ezran authority in Mordent**).

Martigan is a nice person and helps Petrak to see the differences between the Ezran faith taught in Levkarest and that in Mordent. Petrak also realizes that there is some kind of rivalry between the two. Martigan proposes an exchange of services for the atonement spell; not needing anything at the moment, he reserves the right to call on the party in the future (*future adventure hooks, ha!*). Petrak discusses the proposition with the others and they agree.

Martigan asks Petrak “if he got his shield”. Petrak doesn’t understand. Martigan explains that the *shield of Ezra* is given to those who proved their valor to the clergy in a special secret ceremony. Tara Kolyana just got hers a week ago (*the LG shield*). Martigan can’t give Petrak his shield as he doesn’t know him well enough, and because he follows the Levkarest sect (*Petrak is LN. I know I twisted the way anchorites acquire the shield, but I thought it was better if one had to prove his valor - funnier RPG this way IMHO*).

Three spells are needed to try to remove the lycanthropic curse from Virevan: *atonement* (cast by Martigan); *remove curse*; and *remove disease* (Tara agreed to cast them).

Back at Daniel Foxgrove’s house, Daniel informs them that a traveler has been found dead on the road north east of Mordent. It was again the evil hounds: the entrails of the unfortunate traveler have been spilled all over the road, but he wasn’t eaten...

January 8th, 748

In the morning, the attempt to remove the lycanthropic curse: Virevan is bound, and the following spells cast on him: *Guidance*; *Owl’s wisdom*; *Protection from curse*; and *protection from evil*. This triggers his transformation to hybrid werewolf form...(DC 15 horror check for those who witness this transformation. Two fail: Exigu (14 – frozen) and Petrak (7 – run away in fear)).

All three curing spells are cast on him ... but Virevan stays in werewolf form!

Bad dice rolls from Yvon... twice! (he could reroll twice because of good luck or something I forgot), so this PC seems to be stuck with the werewolf curse forever ...

Meanwhile, Varadan embraces the Moonchild PrC. We had reworked the 5 levels of this PrC into three levels only, as five levels to wait seemed too long (especially in Ravenloft where you do not get a new level every week). I’ll let you know later how it worked. We condensed the five levels in 1st – 1-2; 2nd – 3-4; 3rd – 5 Here’s the revised PrC table:

Level	base att.	Fort	Ref	Will	Special
1	+1	+2	+0	+2	Shackle the beast*, Human Heart DC 18**, Savage Blood***, Tempered Hunger 1/2 ****
2	+2	+3	+1	+3	Scent of the bloodline*****, Human Heart DC 14, Tempered Hunger 1/4
3	+4	+4	+1	+4	Considered a natural lycanthrope; Improved Control Shape*****, Human Heart DC 12

* bonus +2 / level to control shape

** to keep his alignment when voluntarily transforming (Will)

*** at each level, save to have alignment permanently switch toward the lyc's alignment (CE)

**** has to eat half the required amount of raw meat (25 lbs a day before this power)

***** can scent other people from his lycanthropic blood line

***** can control his shape as a natural lycanthrope

Also, since this player is now assuming fully his beastly side, he got all the benefits that go with it – from the Monster Manual. Those are in all forms (human and hybrid), unless otherwise noted:

- AC +2 (Natural Armour)
- Wisdom +2
- Base save bonus of a wolf (minus ability modifiers): Fortitude save +3; Reflex save +3
- Base Attack +1
- 8 new skill points ((2 + Varadan's Int mod (2)) x 2 (wolf hd)) - can only apply to wolf skills: Hide, Listen, Move Silently, Spot or Survival
- New Feat: Iron Will
- New powers and qualities: Low Light vision; Scent; plus Alternate Form (with the limits of afflicted lycanthropes), Lycanthropic Empathy
- Damage Reduction: 5/Silver (When in Hybrid form only)

Needless to say, other players were slightly jealous ☺

*Some drawbacks (RLCS) – not all of this is known to the players (*grin*):*

- *Witnesses of the transformation have to make a Horror check (DC 15)*
- *Vulnerability to wolfbane (poison DC 20; initial d6 Co, secondary 2d6 Co)*
- *must eat 4 lbs of raw meat a day (or will starve in three days. I will ask for concentration checks DC 18 after the first day to cast spells)*
- *can transmit his curse through his bite*

The next few days, Tara and Van Richten research the chain used on Laurie – Tara at the Ezran library, Van Richten in his own extensive library.

The heroes take this time to exchange spells with Gennifer. Her spellbook:

0 – all

1 – alarm, animate rope, burning hands, chill touch*, detect shapechanger, detect undead, hold portal, identify, mage armor, magic missile, magic weapon, message, protection from evil, ray of enfeeblement*, sleep*, shocking grasp*, true strike*, silent image*.

2 – Resist energy, fog cloud, melf acid arrow, daze monster, minor image, bear's endurance, bull's strength, knock.

* learned Dec 5th from the heroes

January 11th, 748

Van Richten thinks he has found information on the chain. If what he read is true, this chain was created in the desert realms of Pharazia, and contains the spirit of a sense-draining undead, called Ishmael (*adapted from Forgotten Children netbook*). The heroes want to get rid of the item, and possibly destroy it. Van Richten suggests leaving the chain to the care of the Order of Guardians.

The brothers and sisters of this reclusive monastic order search out dangerous evil artefacts and try to destroy them. If they can't destroy it, the item is sheltered in a secret place where its evil powers won't endanger the outside world. Each monastery is autonomous and doesn't know the location of the others. Van Richten knows of one of these orders, located south of Mordent.

January 14th, 748

MacRazbunare and Van Richten depart with the chain. The trip is uneventful and lasts three days. On the way back, they harvest wraithroot blooms in a cemetery.

January 17th, 748

This is the night of the full moon. The two lycanthropes are placed back in the asylum's isolated cells. Remembering last time when the locks were strangely found unlocked, they scan the room and throw flour on the floor, to spot invisible foes. Nothing. Scent doesn't discern anything either.

Both Varadan and Virevan, afflicted lycanthropes, feel the coming of the bestial rage triggering their transformation. They miss their control check and turn into monstrous hybrid monsters. But they keep their thoughts and ethics. A second control shape attempt enables Virevan to resume human form, but Varadan stays in monstrous hybrid form for the night.

But they find Varadan cell has again been unlocked! They are at loss to explain this event. They relock his cell and check once in a while.

(DM note: again Godefroy, wishing to chase the heroes from the village by putting them in trouble – see session 18)

January 18th, 748

Varadan is back to human form in the morning. The door is still locked. They go back to Daniel Foxgrove's house, to find MacRazbunare and Van Richten has just arrived. They discuss the cell lock opening, and Van Richten says "If you have well covered the physical world, that only leaves the supernatural".

January 19th, 748

In the early morning, around 9 am, they go to Westcote Manor, to solve the curse afflicting this property. A maid, Gabrielle, opens the door. She doesn't speak, and soon after, the butler named Holmes greets them. A stern fellow, he warms up when the heroes tells him they are the ones who saved gardener Douglas Michaels from the dogs (*see session 17*). Holmes tells them the master of the house is out for the moment, and makes them wait in the dining room. Exigu notice a darker spot on the wall where a painting seems to be missing.

After an hour's wait, they hear the front door open, and quick steps going to the second floor. Then Exigu's fine hearing discerns that someone is throwing up.

They speak to Holmes, who confirms Westcote has just arrived, and offer healing. Holmes goes upstairs with this offer. However, it is turned down by Westcote, who tells Holmes to thank the heroes.

At noon, Westcote hasn't showed up yet, and Gabrielle serves them lunch. When she leaves the dining room, Austizel's spell doesn't detect poison.

At 1 pm, Douglas the gardener enters the room. He offers to show them around "while his master gets better". Douglas leads them through one of the drier trails in the bog. He shows them the resources of the bog: chive and other herbs, blueberry and other small fruits, etc. One of the trails is more frequented. Douglas tells them Westcote walks this trail once a day, in the morning. They follow it to a pond, where they find knee traces in the bog, bordering the pond.

Returning to the Manor in the middle of the afternoon, they learn that Westcote is still in bed. Through Holmes, he sends his apologies and invites them for diner. With Douglas, they visit the estate. According to him, the kennel has been empty for "at least 15 years, that is, since I've been working here as a gardener." The heroes ask if the hounds are attacking everyday. "No," replies Douglas, "but we hear them everyday." Frowning he adds: "a few days after the New Year, they entered the ballroom, but they couldn't pass the door and go elsewhere in the manor."

Ale is served in the garden by Gabrielle, and a few minutes later, Westcote arrives. He again apologizes for his condition, and thanks the heroes for coming back to help him.

He brings them to the dining room, where a rabbit stew is served, and offers the following tale:

You have heard what the other villagers have to say about my story (see session 17). About the wedding- I never meant anyone any harm, but I could see the disdain in Ann Campbell's eyes when she was brought to me for the arranged marriage. Neither of us had asked for this, but I was resigned to it. Ann was not. Although she was good-hearted, she was blind to any of my virtues. She had been raised to believe that the Westcotes were evil monsters, and her family's acceptance confused her.

The night before the wedding, she decided to flee. She paused to gather supplies for her journey to Mordentshire. My brother Michael discovered her in the kitchen. Frightened perhaps, or wanting revenge, or both, I don't know, she flailed at him, stabbing him with the knife.

*Ann fled. I, outraged at my brother's murder, set my hounds after Ann so that she could be brought to justice. But Ann ran into quicksand. I arrived too late. I heard Ann cursing me as she sank into the quicksand. When I returned to the manor, I found all in chaos. Afterwards, Ann's evil hounds appeared and my family's fortune rapidly dwindled.
(adapted from *Howls in the Night*)*

"When did all of this happened?," the heroes ask. Westcote replies that it was twenty years ago this year. "You take a walk every morning; what are you doing then?" they ask. He frowns and says that he is thinking about the family's fortune, and what could be done to restore it to its past glory.

The heroes feel something is wrong with this story, and that he hasn't said everything. They insist that he reveal everything about his morning walk and other things. After a moment, he sighs and says that it didn't happen twenty years ago, but a hundred and twenty years ago! Yes, Westcote is immortal, but this comes with a price. Everyday, he needs to drink the corrupted water from the bog. Since Ann Campbell was swallowed by the bog, he must, in essence, drink of Ann to stay alive. The stinking water is mildly poisonous and often inflicts Westcote with stomach pains and nausea. Yet he has no choice but to continue consuming it. If he does not, his body ages 10 years for every day that he tries to remain free of its nauseating influence. And no matter how old he grows in outward appearance, he stays miserably alive. He has tried to die this way but didn't succeed. Once he tried to resist the effects of the pain, but he grew so old that the agony of his old bones was unbearable. In this miserable state, he crawled to the bog, dragging his decrepit form behind him. He has no wish to endure such torment again and prefers being sick a few hours every day to that. Today, he was very ill, but usually it lasts no more than three hours.

That is the reason a century-old painting of him is missing in the Westcote collection in the dining room. It was drawing too many unwanted questions from guests.

"Did you really happen to arrive too late to save Ann?" ask the heroes. "Yes," he replies.

Westcote then tells them he wants to show a ghostly depiction of the events. He says it repeats every night at three. From the second-floor window in the study, he says they will see it well.

Time passes slowly in the study. MacRazbunare notices a sheet of paper with the following poem:

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

"Que les marais prennent tes os et les gardent, Burton Westcote!
Les molosses sont tiens à jamais mais maintenant ils sont à ma main!
Vit longtemps et soit misérable, orgueilleux—"

MacRazbunare thinks this must be the curse Ann told Westcote on the night she died.

January 20th, 748

At last the clock strikes three. Westcote strides over to the large window "Ah, it begins again," he murmurs "Every night at three, her apparition forms and she takes her pack of hounds out to hunt the moors: watch!" He gazes out on the expanse of land at the back of the house as a ghostly shimmer rises from the land. From the heroes' vantage point, they can see the glow shape itself into the form of a young woman, but the heroes are too far away to make out her face. They see her gazing at the house for a moment, and then whirls and quickly races off toward the waiting moor. Soon thereafter, a pack of ravenous hounds races after her.

"That it, there she goes with her dogs," Westcote says, while abruptly closing the wooden window. The heroes do protest, but Westcote tells them there is nothing else to see. Eventually they reopen the window, but the small ghostly figures in the distance are now disappearing off into the moor, fading in the distance.

Westcote turns to the party: "That's my curse. Now you know everything. Can you help me? Will you seek out the vengeful spirit of Ann Campbell and lay her to rest, to bring me peace?"

Then Westcote leaves them for the night. The heroes say they will continue their watch through the study window. In fact, they want to search this room for more clues, while Westcote has gone to sleep. The other papers on the desk are clerical papers, mostly about money. Behind a painting, a safe is found. Exigu the thief opens it. There are many bags of coins, which they do not touch, and two old scrolls. One of the scrolls is a deed to the Westcote family property, and the other is the poem they already saw on the table. This paper is about a century old, and the writing on it is the same! So Westcote probably told the truth about his age.

During the nightwatch, some howlings can be heard in the distance, but they are far away. At four thirty, Exigu sees two hounds near the house, scenting the ground. He watches the hounds for a few minutes, and then he see in the fog something *big*. He couldn't see much in the fog, and in fact he is doubting he saw anything at all, but the thing has four feet, and is nearly ten feet long!

The rest of the night is quiet.

After the morning's arcane studies, they go outside to search for traces. Where Exigu saw something in the fog, there are indeed traces of something large and very heavy, like a giant wolf or something. But there are no traces of the smaller hounds. The larger traces lead to the pond where Westcote drinks every morning.

The heroes take the day to go to Mordentshire cemetery. Looking for the Westcote name on the funeral stones, they find a large monument with many fresh flowers. It is the grave of Alice Weathermay, the mother of the twins and Daniel Foxgrove's deceased wife. Elsewhere, they see Michael Westcote's grave (dead in 628), and other Westcotes, but none dead after the year 650, a century ago.

GAME SESSION TWENTY THREE: HOWLS IN THE NIGHT - END

(February 18th, 2007; Sylvain wasn't present so Exigu was played by Jean-François.)

Thanks to Pam (aka Llana) for reviewing my English mistakes! I owe you a glass of Grand Cru Chablis!

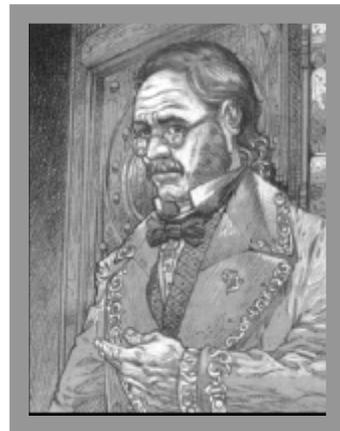
January 20th, 748

Around 3 pm, the heroes leave the cemetery and go back to Wescote Manor. Before leaving the town of Mordentshire, they check with the twins that everything is fine.

They dine with Burton Wescote and use this opportunity to ask him a few more questions. The short ghostly image re-enactment that appears at 3 am has always been there since Ann drowned, according to Burton. And this image hasn't changed since it appeared.

According to Burton's books, it is probably an independent ghostly image, a sort of impression on the plane from the negative emotions of that fateful night. Even if the curse is ever lifted, it might stay afterward as an eerie reminder of what happened here.

At the heroes' request, Burton shows them the painting that's been removed from the dining room. It's indeed very old. Burton reminds them it was removed because it was attracting annoying questions from visitors and manor personnel alike. He also reminds them that his employees don't know anything about his age. Exigu the thief doesn't spot anything odd or of value in the basement.



Burton isn't familiar with anything about a beast much larger than the hounds out there. He says the hounds usually avoided him the few times he was out at night.

At night, when Burton is in his room reading a book, the heroes explore the manor. They sneak in the rooms they haven't seen yet, and Exigu unlocks a door to the drawing room. This room hasn't been entered in a very long time, perhaps a century. Old and dusty wedding banners and ribbons hang limply from the walls. On a table, many wedding presents haven't been opened and are covered with grey dust. This room is very quiet. Austizel's *detect magic* finds something positive in the direction of the presents.

Suddenly, the maid Gabrielle appears in this corridor. She had finished cleaning the kitchen and is on the way to her room. Seeing light, she stops and sees Exigu and Austizel in front of the door to the drawing room. Austizel had a few seconds only to close the drawing room door where they were sneaking before she came in.

She asks, "Have you seen the apparition at night? All of it?" Then she wonders what could be in the drawing room and nonchalantly checks on the door. She is very surprised to find it unlocked! She says it's the first time she's seen inside it. She talks with the heroes a few more minutes than goes to her own room.

Exigu and Austizel enter the dusty rooms and find a magical sword in a richly decorated scabbard. The pair goes back upstairs to meet the others in the study.

They wait for the 3 am apparition... They look at it very carefully, and notice a few details they didn't see the first time when they saw it with Burton: the girl has dark stains in her dress and on her hands. After Ann flees, they see Burton, angry, ordering his dogs after her. Then he runs after the dogs toward the bog's eastern side.

January 21th, 748 - morning

The day is very cloudy. In the morning, they accompany Burton in his daily morning trip to the pond to drink the water. His cursed thirst sated, he agrees to show them the quicksand patch where Ann drowned.

On the way, they are attacked by three hideous vines! These vines try to strangle them with their rough bark. Petrak's clerical smithe power kills one quickly. Another has grabbed Austizel by the neck to strangle him. Another grabs Virevan! Mac Razbunare notices his *flaming sphere* isn't affecting the plants... (DM note: MM assassin vines, commanded by Ann)

During the battle, Varadan sees a rotten head coming out of a nearby pond! It is staring intently at the battle. He thinks it might be Ann. When the head sees Varadan has spotted her, the head sinks in the pond to hide itself.

When the vines are destroyed, they check the pond where Varadan saw the head: it is shallow, only 3 or 4 feet deep in the center. There is no trace of any corpse or other supernatural presence in the pond.

Burton is furious. "See? This evil woman is attacking us with these creatures!"



On the way, they ask Burton if there were adventurers in his family. They are sneakily trying to find clues to the magical sword they found in the drawing room. He answers negatively, "None but myself have ever really trained for fighting."

They also ask him whether Burton's brother knew Ann before the fateful night. Without saying so to Burton, they suspect Burton's brother may have tried something wicked with Ann, and she defended herself with the knife. Burton tells them that he had never met Ann before. He had been in Darkon for family business, and had returned to Mordent after a long stay in that area. "That is where," Burton added, "He bought the wedding present he'd wanted to offer me. A weapon, I believe..."

Later, Burton leads them to a drier place in the bogs. It is a large clearing, surrounded by sparse bushes. There are also a few trees in this area, a rarity in the bog. In the center of the clearing, Burton shows them a large patch of quicksand. He says Ann died in it.

He tells his version of how it happened: when he arrived at the clearing minutes after his dogs, Burton saw them surrounding the patch of quicksand. He saw Ann drowning in the middle of it, frantically trying to exit it. She was very angry at him. Burton tried to help her, but without a rope or a branch long enough, she was doomed. Just before her head sank, she yelled her curse.

Austizel declaims the curse's three sentences, and then senses that he is watched by something. They think that perhaps Ann won't manifest if Burton is there, so they ask him to leave the clearing. Exigu goes with him (*DM note: that was a clever way to get Ann's attention, and to make her stop sending vines to them, I found*).

Austizel repeats the curse. A ghostly woman appears: a beautiful red-haired woman. She has a basket of flowers in her hands. She is very calm while she looks at the heroes.

"What do you want?" she asks.

Austizel replies with a question. "What really happened on the night you died?"

"What Wescote said is right," she says with disdain in her voice as she speak his name, "But he didn't say that his dogs tried to bite me more than once."

"And I didn't murder his brother- it was an accident. He was drunk and tried to prevent me from running away. I had a kitchen knife at hand. It was an accident, please believe me!"

"Now listen, I can't manifest for very long during the day," she tells them, "And all I want is to be laid to rest. Know that I am not controlling the curse, and I have nothing to do with the hounds, contrary to what Burton probably told you. I believe the curse took form and is now a separate entity. If I could talk with Burton for a while, maybe I could reconcile our spirits to our fate. Can you bring him here at night, so I can manifest fully?" Her apparition slowly fades to nothingness.



Back with Burton, Mac Razbunare relates what Ann's ghost said. Wescote seems reluctant to believe her, especially about the accident where his brother was killed. Nevertheless, he agrees to meet her at night.

The rest of the day is spent making plans to recover Ann's drowned body.

Varadan (afflicted lycanthrope going for the Moonchild PrC) is hungry for meat...

January 22nd, 748

They meet Van Richten in Mordentshire to discuss this case. He doesn't know much more, and agrees that the heroes's plan has a good chance of success. At the port, they buy a small boat, which has long poles with hooks at the end.

Early afternoon, they return to the clearing and test the quicksand to find Ann's body. After thirty minutes of search, they find it. It is surprisingly well preserved by the bog's cold water. But the stink is awful!

The heroes wrap her body and go back to Mordentshire. They bury Ann's body in the cemetery, with a short ceremony.

Later, they spend part of the night there and wait to talk to her apparition should she appear, but in vain. They sleep at Daniel Foxgrove's manor in Mordentshire.

January 23rd, 748

Next morning, Van Richten asks them if they saw anything odd in the cemetery last night. The heroes answer negatively. Van Richten tells them a man by the name of Matthew Nash was unburied last night. He was a sailor drowned at sea.

They investigate and spots two traces of boots (deep, as if carrying something heavy) leading to a small cart. They can't follow the cart's traces in town.

(DM note: Burke and Hare at work! (BoSouls))

Back to the clearing during the day, Austizel says the curse's verses out loud, but nothing happens.

They make plans to go back to the clearing tonight with Burton ...

January 24th, 748

At 3 am, they watch the ghostly apparition appear near the manor, and then the heroes and Burton follow it to the clearing.

When they arrive at the clearing, Ann is there, near the quicksand, arms crossed. She is clearly trying to control her anger.

Burton goes to her and they start talking. From where the heroes stand, about 80 feet from the pair, they see the ghost's face is twisted with anger, but she is listening to Wescote. Burton is talking with a low, persuasive voice, too low for the heroes to hear. Ann's face is now thoughtful, and begins explaining her side of the story...

... when seven hounds suddenly jump from the bushes and run toward the pair! *(DM note: of course, the Moor Hound wants to stop this peace talk, of course.)*



The heroes are busy fighting three hounds, but the other four attack Burton and Ann! Burton is surprised by this attack. He yells at Ann that she is a treacherous one, since she is the one controlling the hounds. She replies that she has nothing to do with them.

Burton's first attacks with his longsword are not against the hounds, but against Ann! It passes through her, not affecting her at all. Then Wescote sees Ann trying to hurt the hounds and he direct his attacks toward the hounds. But Burton is no match for four hounds and falls unconscious (-8 hp!).

At this moment, the heroes have finished dispatching the three hounds near them, and Petrak heals Burton back to consciousness, while the other heroes destroy the remaining hounds.

Back to his feet, Burton resumes his discussions with Ann. He is angry at first, but she is calm and eventually he seems to start believing her about the hounds. "The hounds do not want us to lift the malediction," she tells him.

(DM note: I had to have Ann say the last sentence, because the players were clueless about the way to end it all. They were in fact considering whether to let Burton be slain by the hounds as they believed him to be evil!)

After a few moments, a large shape is seen exiting the bushes! It is the ox-sized black hound! It quickly runs toward Burton and nearly kills him with a single savage bite (-8 hp again!).

The heroes drag his body behind their lines to cure him again, while they attack the monstrous hound. Its bite is very powerful! (about 20-24 hp when it hits, due to power attack!). But the heroes are also deadly and swift in their attacks. They realise spells are not always working properly to attack the monstrous hound.

Eventually, the large hound flees and enters the quicksand. A large gruesome trail of blood and stinky entrails is left behind it.

Back on his feet again with the help of the heroes' spells, Burton resumes his discussions with Ann as the heroes keep a watchful eye around them.

After several minutes, they notice Ann and Burton are not talking anymore. The heroes look in their direction, and see that they are eyeing each other with respect.

Ann's ghostly form slowly fades. She seems to be at peace, and smiles radiantly at the heroes.

When she was about to fade completely, something suddenly happened to her. Her insubstantial body seemed pulled in the direction of Mordentshire with irresistible force, while Ann appeared to look at something unseen with horror! Then her image disappeared completely...

(DM note: Ann's ghost was pulled to Gryphon Hill by Godefroy's powers...)

Austizel then hears something bubbling in the quicksand. They approach the quicksand's edge and see the large hound corpse, now floating on top of the treacherous quicksand. Its body is seemingly bog preserved like that of Ann when they retrieved it!

Burton is shocked by it all, and seems genuinely concerned for Ann. But he is relieved. He feels a great weight has been lifted from his back. He thanks the heroes for their help: "I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I am forever in your debt."

Walking back to the Wescote manor, the heroes think Ann may have been recalled to the domain lord...

At 5:45 am, they enter the manor after a safe trip through the bog.

GAME SESSION TWENTY FOUR: AND MORE WEIRD THINGS IN MORDENT - I

(March 11th, 2007; Jean-François's PC was played by Martin, and Jean-Guy's by Sylvain)

(DM note: this game is concluding Howls in the Night, then adds a few horror elements inspired by Deepshadow's Mordent adventures and JWM's transubstantial halo adventure. But I'm throwing these seeds for a future game as I will end the session making them play Horror's Harvest (Dungeon adventure) instead. I love to mix things. And I know they will return hungrier for the truth!)

January 24th, 748

When they arrive at the Manor, the heroes go to sleep after the dreadful night outside in the bogs.

At noon, Burton announces that he doesn't feel the need to drink bog water, and so far he feels fine. It really seems that the curse has lifted.

He seems genuinely concerned by Ann's fate.

He tells the heroes to go to the drawing room and help themselves to the century-old wedding gifts in gratitude for their service. "These are attached to bad memories, and I want to get rid of them."

The heroes take everything they can carry (*about 1,300 gp value of merchandise*). They thank Burton, wish him well, and leave for Mordentshire. On the way, they discuss what might have happened to Ann last night. Something must be pulling the ghost to Mordentshire, they think, and Petrak says there might be a link with the mysteriously opening cell doors on full moon.

Van Richten tells them that there were no corpses unearthed from the cemetery last night (*see session 23*). Hearing about Ann's fate, the old man also thinks something is pulling ghosts to Mordentshire, and he says he's also heard that kind of story before. But he muses that Mordentshire itself isn't plagued by ghosts; so where are these ghosts going? Reviewing the town's surroundings, he offers that perhaps they are going to the "house on the hill". This place has a very bad reputation. Many tales are told about the house, and they all share the same pattern: people try to enter the house, or live in it; then run away at night in terror, wishing never to return to this region. Ten years ago, adventurers entered it but were never seen again – did they flee too?

Van Richten says there used to be a path in the woods to that house when he was young. But now it's very difficult to get there through the dense woods. He also recalls a book that he read a long time ago. Written a century ago by the well-known seer Emily Morgault, she claimed that she gained the power to see spirits after a ghost tried to use her body to avoid *something's* pull. According to the book, the ghost wasn't successful and was dragged somewhere unknown.

He also says that rulership fell into Weathermay hands after the suicide of the last lord that inhabited the house on the hill. In year 579, he committed suicide due to grief over the loss of his wife and daughter in an accident. Indeed there is a rumor that before the death of the last Godefroy, the Weathermays were kept in the shadows of this ruling family and that they gained control of the land by sacrificing one of their own to a dark entity. Van Richten doesn't believe this.

The heroes then meet the Weathermay twins. After announcing the end of Wescote's curse, they enquire about the rumors on the Weathermay family. Laurie, who is getting better with each passing day, frowns and tells the heroes that they had searched all written records about the history of the family, and found nothing to confirm them – nothing about an evil ancestor, or even one dabbling in magic.

The twins reveal that they once went to the house on the hill. It was pretty hard to find because the woods were very dense and disorienting. When they found it, they didn't enter as they felt something sinister was watching them. It's an old two-storey manor, lost in the woods on top of the hill, with a small cemetery nearby. Lord Godefroy's wife and daughter were buried there in the year 578.

Daniel Foxgrove then arrives at the house. The heroes present Wescote's wares, and he offers them 600 gp for the whole lot; they agree. They tell him about last night's events. When they mention Ann's fate, he gets visibly paler, but says nothing. Austizel notes terror in his eyes for a brief moment. He sharply states that he knows nothing about supernatural and has absolutely no interest in the matter. He then leaves the room. Everyone, including the twins, are surprised by their father's attitude.

That night, they dine with the twins and Van Richten. The old herbalist tells them that he got two messages today. The first, from George Weathermay, thanks the heroes for saving Laurie from the werewolves. In his short letter, he also writes that he'll be in the region soon to track Natalia again.

The second message was sent by Kjell Lumpenstein, a polyglot from the village of Delmunster. Van Richten's friend is calling for help; people in his village are suddenly acting bizarrely. The herbalist asks the heroes if they can investigate this matter.

The rest of the night is uneventful, except that ...

January 25th, 748

At one in the morning, Exigu hears the front door opening. He looks out the window and sees Daniel Foxgrove leaving the house, with a bundle under one arm. Exigu also exits the house and the thief follows Foxgrove from a distance.

Foxgrove goes into the woods behind his house to a clearing. A woman is waiting for him. He embraces her, and they lie down on the blankets Daniel brought. They make love, and then sleep in each other's arms. Exigu is embarrassed but remains to make sure that the couple is safe and that nothing attacks them from the shadows. He notices that the woman is in her mid 20's, while Daniel is in his late 40's. Oh well, he thinks, he is a widower after all.

In the morning, Daniel gets dressed and prepares to go back home. Exigu ends his vigil and returns to the manor...

Daniel's attitude later surprises the heroes, considering his nocturnal activities: he looks sad and barely leaves his study.

The heroes prepare for their trip to Delmunster but then hear of a noon wedding in Mordentshire. Margaret Weaver is marrying Jonathan Towtales, five years after her first husband (Cyrus Hope, a fisherman) died at sea. He accidentally was dragged underwater by being struck in a net, and

was buried in the town cemetery. They decide to go to the church to see whether they could identify the woman Daniel was with last night.

Half the town is gathered on the church steps to wish happiness to the couple. It is a Mordentish tradition; the couple and their close family will then enter the church for the religious ceremony.

The heroes notice a monk coming from behind the church. His face is hidden. He walks toward the couple and suddenly bypasses the line of well-wishers to run in front of the woman. He tries to say something but only painful and inarticulate gurgles comes out of his throat. He then gives something to the woman and then his body dissolves into a puddle of rotten flesh and blood! The woman screams, and confusion and horror seize the townspeople.

As the heroes guessed, the object in the woman's hand is her late husband's wedding ring! But he was buried with it... Van Richten tries to calm everybody down. He says he will investigate this case while the heroes are in Delmunster. One thing is certain; Cyrus Hope isn't the body unearthed from the cemetery a few days ago.

The heroes leave the surprised citizens of Mordentshire and travel to Delmunster. It is located in the South, very near Valachan. They arrive there around dinner-time. Van Richten has given them directions to Kjell's house, so they go there directly.

Their meeting with Kjell and his wife Stella is like a cold shower after this long trip. "Everything is now fine," they say. "People were acting strangely, but now all is back to normal." They add that the trouble might have been related to something the town fool did, but assure the heroes that it's all over. *(DM note: Horror's Harvest is an adventure about a doppelganger plant possessing a few of the people at a time, turning them into podlings. Kjell and Stella are now podlings)*

The heroes go to the local inn to spend the night. On their way, they see a filthy man, hiding like a child would, behind a tree. They approach him. He is pitiful, giggling madly and striking his own head with his hand. He says that his name is Rupert, and eventually adds that everybody in Delmunster is going to die, and that werewolves are going to eat everybody. Then he giggles and runs to a desolate wooden shack.

The inn is named the Giggling Gargoyle for the grinning wooden sculpture inside the tavern. It seems to be owned by two people: a tall human and a loud but clean-cut dwarf. A young woman is also at their table, looking bored. The heroes get a room, and a meal. They inquire about the fool they met. They are told that nobody knows where he came from. He came to the village about ten years ago. One week, he believes the village is threatened by vampires; the next, he sees werewolves everywhere.

They try to listen to the locals' conversation. They learn that Stella is now a close friend of Katarina Toscenu. This surprises everybody here since they've hated each other as long as anybody remembers. The local burgomaster, Karloff, is a recluse artist, not often seen in town. Klaus Unger died a week ago from a very weird illness that few have actually seen. Last thing they learn about this town is that the local priests have barricaded themselves in the church and meet nobody!

A bard enters the tavern from the office and starts to sing. His name is Vanderleden and he has been around for over a year.

Later that night, Exigu and Austizel go out to scout around while the other heroes listen from their window for any trouble or calls for help. Even though it is very late, they see lights at a few houses. In one of them, they see a carpenter making a dog house.

In the church, there is light too, and they hear people praying... They go back to the Inn.

January 26th, 748

Next morning, they hear that Gyorgi Zagorovich died during the night. The heroes go to his house: he is the carpenter who was making a dog house during the night. He fell on the floor where he was working. His widow is crying outside his workshop while neighbors try to console her. One of them is Ezra Crumsen, a large woman who happened to be the local schoolteacher.

MacRazbunare presents himself as a healer and says he wishes to investigate this man's death. The druid examines the corpse for a few moments and then exits the workshop, pale and eyes wide. He tells the others that Gyorgi's corpse reminds him of a rotten melon... it's hollow inside! His body doesn't show any bruises or marks of any sort.

They speak with Mrs Crumsen. According to her, Gyorgi was visibly sick for the last three days, but his morale was good. He wasn't sleeping or eating much and he passed most of his time building things in his woodwork shop.

They decide they need to speak with the priests. They knock at the Ezran chapel door but nobody answers. Exigu the thief unlocks the door and they enter the small chapel. Two priest are inside, one old, one young. The old one immediately gets up and screams at them to get out, while the younger one comes to the door looking more peaceful. The odor inside is awful, and the heroes notice a dead body is lying on a bench.

The young priest, Jordi, tells the heroes that the dead man is the church's janitor. This man, Umborrow, tried to kill the older priest (père Brume) six days ago with a shovel, but the old man hit him on the head and the janitor fell dead. Umborrow had been acting strangely a few days before the attack.



The heroes think something is controlling people's bodies. Petrak tries to discuss it with Brume, who says that spirits are possessing people and causing all this turmoil. When Petrak asks about the manor over the hill, Brume says the owner is an eccentric artist named Karloff. This disdainful noble sometimes comes down to the village to display his new paintings. Otherwise, he isn't seen often.

They examine Umborrow's corpse for clues. His bone cage collapses upon itself with a sickly noise, showing the body to be empty inside, as if rotting from within. At this terrible sight, Exigu needs to leave, and Virevan is paralysed, eyes wide, until Jordi covers the corpse with a blanket. Austizel is also momentarily frozen in his steps at this grim sight.

(DM note: Virevan rolled an 8 on a DC 15 horror check. He is now obsessed by this event. This is the way I played it: first, I didn't say a word about it to Virevan's player. Then, during the session, when I was alone with the other players, I told them that Virevan is always talking about

the empty corpse in the church and that he seems obsessed by it. Later, I told Virevan's player that often when he speaks, the others look at him with annoyance. ☺ Afterwards they all talked about it and Virevan's player then discovered that he was stuck with this obsession...)

They help Jordi to take Umborrow's corpse to the cemetery. Petrak promises him that he will try to help the village. In the cemetery, they see Klaus Unger's recent burial plot. They also notice the tomb of Emily Feister, 35 years old, who had died six months ago of an accident.

They visit Kjell. He seems happy to see the heroes, and says that all is well. He and his wife Stella seem thinner than yesterday. He tells them that young Lotta Wichtenstein is ill. *(DM note: the plant wants to know what they will do when faced with the strange "illness", and what kind of things they can do.)*

They ask Kjell about things only he would know (a technique they learned from Van Richten), to see if a spirit is controlling him and making him talk. He answers correctly. He also mentions that the two sons of Erdela Ruder have been in the woods recently and returned acting strangely. They often go out in the woods at night.

They tell Kjell that he seems thinner and ill, but he replies that he is on a drastic diet. He refuses to be examined by a healer.

They meet Lotta's grieving parents. They agree to let the heroes meet Lotta. Hiding their enquiry from her parents so as not to alarm them, the heroes cannot find a pulse on Lotta's body, nor any signs of breathing with a mirror! *Detect undead* is negative however. A *cure light wound* seems to be helping. *(DM note: I ruled that it slowly cured the body of 1/4 of given hp.)* Her father thinks that what's happening is due to the reconciliation of the two witches.

They remember that Katarina Toscenu is now friends with her long-time enemy, Stella. They visit Katarina *(DM note: a podling too)*. She is a beautiful, charming woman. She is making wine with her husband Liev (a Falkovnian – he has an "F" tattoo on his forehead). While he appears uneasy over the heroes' questions, she candidly answers, explaining that Stella made the first move to resolve their feud, and that she agreed to forget it and become friends. She hasn't noticed Stella being thinner, and mentions that they are both doing a new vegetable diet since last week. The heroes for a moment suspect the Toscenu wine and buy a bottle. Later, a *detect poison* proves to be negative.

In the street, they meet Erdella Ludder, who's two sons are often hunting in the woods *(DM note: she has been charmed by Katarina to say the following)*. She says that a healer from Helbenik came here two weeks ago and stayed at the Inn. He sold many potions and curing ointments. Erdella remembers that Umborrow, Gyorgi, Kjell and Stella bought them, and most likely others too.

They go back to Kjell's house. He says that he did buy potions for himself and his wife from this healer. He still has one vial left which he gives to the players. Kjell remembers the healer's name: Tecin Zafrano. The healer also told him that should Kjell need anything else, he would be in Helbenik's Blue Eel Inn until the morning of the 27th - tomorrow. He urges the heroes to meet this fantastic healer.

They go to Lotta's house and check her and the vial with another *detect poison* (area option): something in this area is poisonous!

(DM note: the plant is trying to get rid of the heroes. This was a trap that the heroes didn't fall for. The "healer" doesn't exist. The Valachan guards at the nearby frontier have been given the heroes' profiles, and they were identified as dangerous smugglers. 6 valachan militiamen and 4 Black Leopards are waiting at the frontier to ambush them. The vial contains a mildly poisonous herbal concoction)

They discuss in the street, then head back to Lotta's house and give her a few sips of Toscenu's wine. Exigu thinks this wine is perhaps shielding the drinkers from this strange illness.

Kjell meets them outside and tells them again about the traveling healer, who will leave Helbenik tomorrow. It takes about four hours to get there by horse.

They are ready to try to find the traveling healer, but learn that Lotta didn't drink any of this healer's potion (Lotta's sister confirms this).

They visit Kagla Hunger, the widow of Klaus. She is barricaded inside and won't open up. They enquire about the healer through the door. After a moment, Kagla tells them that she doesn't recall a healer or her husband talking about it.

When they leave Hunger's house, the neighbor Stella meets them. Among other things, she tells them that she gave a potion to Klaus for a toothache. She explains that he might not have said anything about it to his wife.

They go to the inn. The tall human owner doesn't remember a traveling healer coming to Delmunster two weeks ago. Then the local bard (*a podling too*) comes in and says that there was a healer at Kjell and Stella's two weeks ago. He stayed at the inn but didn't meet clients there. The human innkeeper doesn't seem to remember the healer, but he doesn't contradict the bard and merely shrugs.

(DM note: now the confusion was of course very high. Exigu's player is now thinking that the "healer" and the innkeeper are part of the same team, exploiting the town in a sinister scam.)

The heroes want to speak with the dwarf, believing him to be more truthful or at least able to give more clues on what's going on. The bard enters the office to fetch the dwarf. Some times later, the dwarf emerges from the office. The dwarf confirms that a healer was in town two weeks ago. He says that he didn't buy anything from him. But the whole thing seems suspicious to the heroes.

(DM note: thinking quickly, the bard/podling entered the office and cast alter self to change his appearance to that of the dwarf. I roleplayed the dwarf as friendly, but somewhat evasive on this question, to roleplay the bard in the dwarf's guise)

The heroes announce that they are leaving the town for Helbenik, but they stop when out of sight of everyone to talk. They wonder why fatal potions would be distributed. They think the bard and the dwarf are accomplices, while the human innkeeper inn knows nothing about the scam.

Meanwhile, the monk is hungry (his lycanthropic need for raw meat was not sated in the last few days). The druid's wolf goes hunting in the woods for him. Also, Virevan notices that the others are sometimes looking at him with impatience or annoyance *(DM note: his obsession with the hollow corpse! He now realizes that he has a problem with this terrible scene)*.

Remaining hidden outside, they watch the inn all night. Exigu even slips in, but they do not find / hear much. One woman is there with her boyfriend. They talk about their plans to renovate the inn when it becomes theirs.

January 27th, 748

They sleep in the forest, and notice that Virevan isn't sleeping well. In fact, when he awakes, he says that he was obsessed with this vision. He is fatigued.

Early in the morning, they *detect poison* on the vial Kjell gave them; it is a poisonous herbal concoction. Lotta isn't poisoned. She is much thinner this morning.

The heroes discuss last night's dreams. It seems they all had the same strange vision: *(DM note: this is taken from Deepshadow's Mordent adventure ideas)*

You are at a wedding. You turn to see a woman in gold-trimmed green, her head a crown of rolled black hair wrapped in red-orange ribbons, taking your arm. Your confusion begins to clear as you see the people turn toward you in polite applause, the woman in green whispering into your ear: "Smile a little wider, Jules. We only have one daughter, and with the fates willing, she'll only get married once."

You relax a little more into your role of the proud father. When your new son-in-law Daniel lifts the veil to kiss his blushing bride, however, you feel your heart suddenly beating as to burst...

Turning to Exigu:

Looking at the woman Daniel is kissing, you realize almost thirty years after his wedding day, you caught Daniel Foxgrove making love not to his mistress, but to the ghost of his dead wife...

(DM note – this made a cool session end ☺)

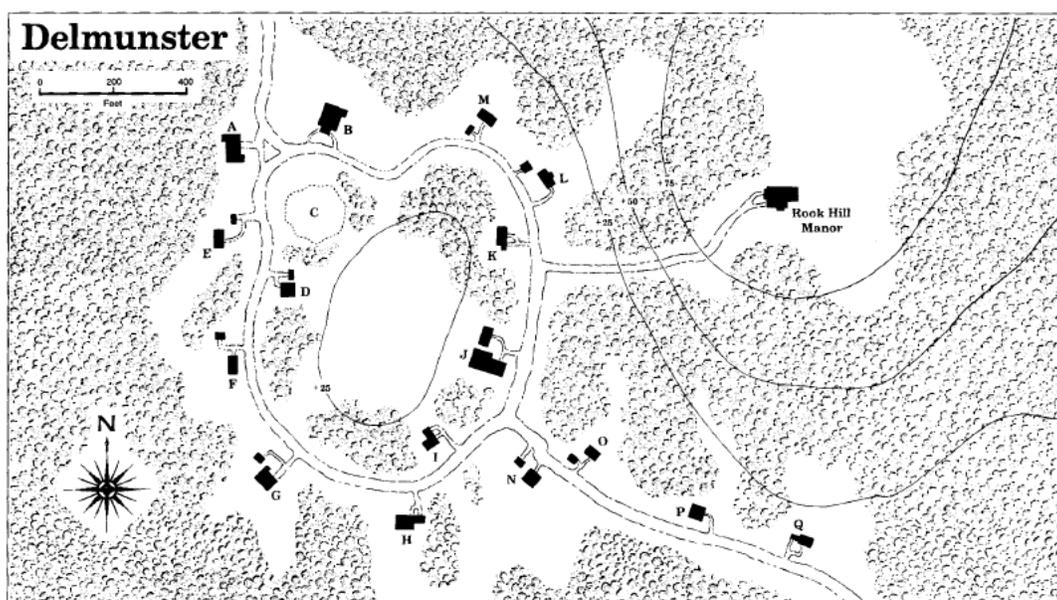
GAME SESSION TWENTY FIVE: AND MORE WEIRD THINGS IN MORDENT -2

(May 6th, 2007; Jean-Guy's PC was played by Benoit, and Martin's by Jean-François. Funny thing, Jean-François (you may remember he is playing an ex. Gundar noble) refused to play Jean-Guy's PC (a Von Zarovich), alleging conflict of interest ☺)

January 27th, 748 – 7 am

The heroes discuss a new hypothesis: the healer they heard of (see last session) is possibly a scam of the bard in disguise? But what is the bard's interest in doing this?

They decide to pay an early visit to the recluse burgomaster, Mr Yuri Karloff, at Rook Hill Manor, to ask him of what he knows.



Last night, they slept in the woods and choose to go to the manor house through the woods, to remain unseen from the villagers. The manor house on the hill is large but austere, and shows many signs of decay. Crawling ivy covers it. The roof shows a large hole (about 5 feet large). The stable reeks strongly of rotting hay. They go for the main door.

The front door shows a message « Visitors UNwelcomed » scratched on it with a dagger (*Room #7 for those who have this Dungeon adventure*). They knock two times, but there is no answer. Exigu the halfling thief unlocks the door, but when he enters a man gets up from behind a sofa and fires a crossbow at the halfling! The man, dressed as a butler, tells them to leave this place, that they are not welcomed. But the heroes move to encircle him and thus attempt to intimidate him to make him stop the fight. But the man isn't impressed at all and he resumes attacking Exigu with claws strong as steel! They attack the man, who is quickly found to be some kind of resilient undead creature. The creature ignores magic missiles and has damage reduction. (they guess a fast juju zombie covered by some kind of illusion or enchantment?). After the victorious fight, Exigu gets a few healing spells. The room is filled with strange furniture, tapestries, and stuffed bats hang from the ceiling.

They explore the manor. On a door, a small needle hurts Virevan on the hand. But it seems no ill affect him. Behind the door is a library (*room #10*). The room has a dusty bookcase, and a fireplace. A large green rug with a snakelike design is in front of the fireplace. A secret compartment is found on the fireplace. It is trapped with a ball of greenish liquid, but Exigu is able to dismantle it. The secret compartment contains the Karloff family papers (a deed to the land signed by Lord Wilfred Godefroy about 200 years ago), and a magic paper. They choose to identify this scroll later. In the bookcase, a book shows a strong magic aura (illusion-phantasm): *Sergei von Daragor's Tales of Terror* (*DM note: a cursed book, with phantasmal killer spell to any who reads it*).

The next room is a dirty dining room (*room #8*). The round table is very dusty, with many spots of wax droppings from the chandelier hung over it. Over the fireplace, a boar's head is displayed. Its eyes seem to follow the heroes in the room. Magic detection spells says it is magical. An illusion is in fact hiding the mummified head of a man whose distorted face suggests he died in horrible pain. The heroes guess this enemy of the family was possibly put there as gruesome display, well hidden by an illusion. (*DM note: added by me for atmosphere © But this adventure is already describing extremely well all the rooms and other places. I changed very few. Well recommended!*)

The kitchen (*Room # 9*) has three trunks filled with various dried food items. The next room is a bedchamber (*room #11, without the trap*). On the bed is a form, apparently sleeping. It is completely hidden in the blankets, and isn't moving or even breathing. They wonder what this can be and are extremely cautious from then on.

Then MacRazbunare is hit in the back! When he returns to face his attacker, the other heroes sees a huge meat cleaver stuck in his back! Then a maid holding a feather duster hurls herself from the second floor and attacks Petrak with her strong claws. Then a third creature jumps from the bedchamber and attacks! These creatures are of the same type as the butler. The fight is difficult but the heroes are victorious. After the fight, Petrak feels unwell (*he loses two constitution points*). Exigu notices the maid's claws were coated with a sticky black substance. *Delay poison* spell is cast on him.

A search of the bedchamber shows nothing, except a half bottle of wine named "Borcan Brimbubbly wine." MacRazbunare later identify it as contact poison (*DM note : 8 doses; DC20, d6Co, d6Co*). The form on the bed was simply folded curtains to make believe someone is there.

Upstairs is a painting gallery (*room # 12*). All are gruesome and morbid, but technically well done: a man tearing the face of his bride; an eyeless man in a forest of evil looking trees, crimson lips with vampiric tooth, a hag with a bat stuck in her hair, a werewolf with a bags of limbs, scarecrows with human heads and dancing people with puppet strings attached.



A door leads to the roof. They think they saw everything of this house, but Exigu see another room accessible only from the roof top, and not visible unless you walk to one extreme side of the parapet. The roof shows a hole to this slightly concealed place. From the roof, it seems the hole was made by an object falling on the house, and not at all by lightning as the misled villagers told them.

Inside this room (*room # 14*), the only source of light is the light from the hole in the roof. The room smells of dust and decay. Many tables fill the room, with large beige shrouds hiding what's under them... The tables are filled with dusty laboratory equipment, and wizard's paraphernalia. In the middle of the room, many broken tiles and pieces of wood from the roof litter a large space.

MacRazbunare notices something moving in the room. He decides to move toward the area where he saw the movement. Then a man emerges from under a table and walks on the wall as a spider! After getting at 20 feet high,



he looks at the heroes. The man is about 55, without any hair but a strong beard. But his face shows deep insanity: his eyes are fearful of the intruding heroes like a child would, and he drools slightly. It is probably the burgomaster, the heroes think.

Exigu try to calm him. Austizel tells him that they came to see him about the illness, but incomprehension is seen on the man's face. He doesn't answer their questions about the illness but suddenly yells at the top of his lungs "the treeeeeeees!"

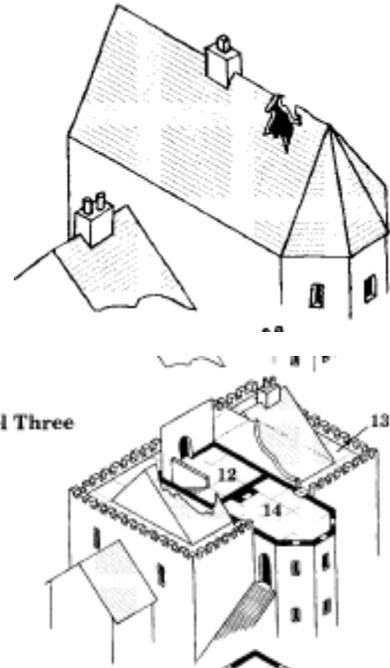
"What is in the trees?" Austizel asks, but he doesn't answer.

The heroes ask about the butler and other manor personal, but he laughs madly, then say "they've always been like that" (*DM note: from background story, a sorcerer ancestor of Karloff made them*).

Austizel says "we want to cure the population, that's our only reason to come here and talk to you." The man glances fearfully at the hole and say "it came from there."

"How much time since this is happening?", they ask. But he replies "centuries!" while laughing again madly. "How to cure this illness?", they ask, but fearful incomprehension again in his face. They ask is anybody ever survived this illness, and again he laughs madly while getting a few feet up on the wall.

They ask him what fell through the roof and he waves toward a dark corner of the room. The heroes notice a new painting. It shows a hideous cucurbitaceous plant, with very large whitish pods. Karloff murmurs "the seed! It's the seed! It grows in the earth!" Then his face shows absolute terror and he gets on the roof.



Before the heroes can do anything, he hurls himself to the ground! He is dead, beyond the help of curing spells.

They go back to the laboratory room. Behind the painting, Karloff wrote:

*Forest, somewhere safe. But no!
The seed! It grows in the earth!
A falling star!*

They examine the broken tiles on the floor: no charred bits like if lightning would have struck it or if something exploded. Something heavy passed through the roof. A large mark on the stone floor was made by a hard, heavy object hitting the floor.

The heroes now deduct evil came from the sky and took form as a plant. They examine one of the undead servants, and wonder if they were infected by the plant as well, which could spread two types of illness (*DM note: nope, the servants were in fact preserved with the use of some magical oil*).

In the library, they check for books read recently, judging from the amount of dust on them. Two books have been read, both on astronomy. But at first glance, the books are filled by esoterically tainted concerns and are next to useless.

They quickly explore the lower level of the house, without finding anything new. (*DM note: in one of the trunks (room #3), they unknowingly release an undead cloaker (they quickly dismissed the old rotting cloak (in Dungeon, it was an Executioner's Hood but I replaced it for an undead cloaker.) The undead cloaker was hungry but intelligent and knew it wasn't the best time to strike. It didn't move, appearing as a cloak. Since they didn't lock back the trunks, it will be back later, promised!*)

At 10h am, they are back in the village, to meet Erdella Ludder's sons, but they are hunting in the forest by then.

Then they go enquire about Lotta's health, and her grieving parents tell them she is very feeble, but still alive. They tell the heroes that four people died of the illness last night: the Lumpenstein couple was found dead, as well as the Wulch couple (merchants).

Looking for evil in the woods, they ask Lotta's sister, Leila, to show them where they usually play in the woods. But nothing strange is found in the forest where they made this house in a tree. Meanwhile, when conversation with Leila is about the manor, Leila tells them lightning fell on the burgomaster's house, who then asked the carpenter Gyorgi Zagorovich to fix it. Knowing Gyorgi also died of the illness, the heroes think he was contaminated then. Leila also tells them the butler of the manor is always angry when they are too close from the manor, and he often threw rocks at the girls to make them flee. The heroes say nothing to her about this creature or of its fate.

At noon, they go to the church, to discuss with the priests. There, they learn that the old priest left for Darkon. He has decided to abandon the town to its horror! The young priest, Jorgi, is very discouraged. He tells them that he heard Kjell yesterday telling many people that the heroes are in fact the cause of this illness, and that they must have brought it with them. "He was warning people not to talk to you!," he says.

The heroes explain about the hypothesis that a plant came from a meteor or something similar. But they still don't know how the contagion is made. They establish that people with the illness do get thinner quickly, are more sociable than usual, and seems very busy suddenly with their ordinary tasks. They ask Jorgi to tell everybody in Delmunster "to stay away from the woods, and to avoid unknown plants," which he does in the afternoon. *(DM note: of course, this is also told to the doppelganger plant's pods Katarina and Ludwig Vanderlen (the inn's bard). You realize that for the plant, this means war ☺)* The rumors of the hole in the burgomaster's house is discussed: everybody believes it was caused by a lightning strike, but that is odd according to Jorgi, since it didn't fell on the nearby chimney, who was higher from the ground. The burgomaster is a decent fellow, said Jorgi. He is mostly leaving the villagers to themselves, preferring art. He gets many visitors from outside to buy his weird paintings. The heroes do not tell the burgomaster jumped to his death.

Jorgi tells them he noticed this morning that Katarina Toscenu lost weight. The heroes then go to her house. She isn't there, but they speak to her husband, Liev. The interview starts badly when he refuses harshly to talk to "a halfling" (Liev is from Falkovnia!). To the others, he says that according to him the whole village is weird since Unger died. Another example: Katarina took rather well the news that her new friend Lumpenstein has died last night. He tells them she is in the forest to gather some herbs, and they follow his instructions to meet her there.

She seems happy to see the heroes. They talk about the lightning that fell on the burgomaster's house. The night it happened, she said, there was an electric storm. She didn't see the strike that fell on the manor, but saw another that fell "possibly a mile from here, south of Delmunster." *(DM note: she is a controled pod. This story is a lie, a false lead so they loose precious time over it.)* She agrees to show them where it fell, after she cooked lunch to her husband.

They spy on her: she cooks a soup, gets two bowls for her and her husband. He seems to be worrying about her when she can't see his face. They talk during the whole lunch, then he goes back to work at the winery, leaving her at the table. Then, the heroes see her throw away her own bowl, noticing then she didn't eat at all.

The heroes think the cause of the illness might be food prepared by ill people. They decide to eat their adventurer's rations from now on.

After lunch, Katarina brings them in the forest to show where the second lightning fell. But her memory or orientation sense is bad, and they walk for a long time in the woods while led by her. They eventually think they are losing their time and go back to the village.

They go back at Erdella's house and talk with her sons, Karl and Kent. They are about 17 years old. They claim they have recently fought a werewolf and drove it back to the woods! When asked where they hunt for rabbits, they say it's just behind the church. But MacRazbunare do not believe them *(sense motive)*. He gives them one gold piece, and explains them the woods are not safe these days, so he asks them to avoid going there until the illness is over. He also says he doesn't believe they said the truth about their hunting spot. They concede, and say they want to protect their usual hunting place full of game. They reveal the heroes where the real hunting place is, when the heroes have promised not to tell anyone. They didn't see anything wrong in this part of the woods (north-west of Delmunster)...

It's now about 6 pm.

DM note: as war is declared ☺, the doppelganger plant then tried to control one of the heroes, and succeeded in controlling MacRazbunare, the first heroes it tried. These are the notes I send to this player:

Notes to MacRazbunare:

- *Your mind has been taken over by an evil intelligence. You can't reveal / hint that to other players. This intelligence is genius and never makes you do or say anything risking to be discovered.*
- *Lotta, Katarin Toscenu and Ludwig Vanderlen (the inn's bard) are now your friend, controlled as you are. You will never endanger them. You will try to make sure the other heroes think that what they say is truth. Use all your influence!*
- *Any investigation lead they say should be explored in details, in order to make the other players loose as much time as possible in the process.*
- *At all cost (lies, whatever, but not force for the moment), you will never go in the part of the forest that is just north of the burgomaster's manor. If this part of the forest is to be searched, try to go there alone with your wolf. If anybody else is with you, use your wood knowledge to walk in circle and avoid a specific spot you know (about one mile feet straight north of the manor).*
- *You see your pet wolf looks at you funny, and stays some distance from you, but so far the heroes didn't notice it. If they notice something, blame the wolf and get rid of it (not necessarily kill it)*
- *You know you or all other controlled friends are expandable if the "intelligence" finds you or any of them useless, or if a plan needs it...*
- *Next time your druid learn spells, take all spells for the eventuality of a battle against the other players. Lie that you took the usual curative / helpful spells.*

GAME SESSION TWENTY SIX: AND MORE WEIRD THINGS IN MORDENT -3

(June 3rd, 2007; Jean-Guy's PC was played by Martin, and Benoit by Jean-François)

January 27th, 748 – 7 pm

It is now close to the night. MacRazbunare has been charmed by the plant and starts his sabotage job... *DM note : Dopp plants usually charm people during the night, but it was easier to brief Mac Razbunare's player long before the game instead of during the game, and risking other players suspecting things. So MacRazbunare was now a podling, in action a few hours before it should have been according to the rules.*

Mac Razbunare says that they should again explore the southern area, where Katerina saw the lightning strike, and then go survey the area where the two boys are hunting rabbits. *DM note: doing that, the heroes would stay away from the area north of the Manor, where the meteor was buried by the mayor.*

They go back to the Inn and on the way get their horses left in the forest. They proceed to make an inventory of their trail rations, and eat only that from now on. *DM note: I asked to make an inventory, since in the last game they suspected food to be the cause of the illness, and said they would only eat trail rations :)*

They check the scroll that was found near the mantelpiece of the Manor: *Hypnotic Pattern* and *Spectral Hand*.

January 28th, 748 – 7 am

They sleep while one of them is on watch. Those on watch do notice that Virevan is sleeping poorly, like if making bad dreams, or mumbling in his sleep. In the morning, they cast *Epiphany*, *Bless*, *Guidance* and *Resistance* on Virevan. (DM note: to help his reaction to the failed horror check (see session 25)).

MacRazbunare announces he will stay at the inn today to learn the *Spectral Hand* spell. The others are surprised and resist the group being separated. But Mac Razbunare insists on learning this “useful” spell and says: “something will happen in the village, not in the forest.” After a while, the others decide to go in the forest, while Austizel will stay with Mac Razbunare.

The four others (Virevan, Varadan, Exigu and Petrak) go in the forest. They see deer traces, and go hunting the animal for Varadan’s hunger. When the deer is shot dead, Varadan eats a large part of it, raw. The three others find this disgusting, especially Virevan, the other afflicted lycanthrope of the group. Varadan has to find a creek to wash his bloody clothes.

They walk in the forest toward the manor. They see the mayor’s cadaver; it wasn’t moved from where he fell from the roof. The garden behind is very badly kept. But they do not find any traces going from the manor to the forest (DM note: the mayor buried the meteor around the 10th, 18 days before. Since it rained a couple times too, the traces were not visible at all.)

They find a shovel in the carriage. They guess that Karloff used it to bury the meteor that fell on his house. It has chunks of clay on it. They try to remember where they saw clay. They discuss what is the “somewhere safe”, as written behind the last painting by Karloff. They consider it might be in the cemetery, and that would be the link with Umborrow, the gravedigger who was among the first to be affected by the illness. They go there and meet Jorgi. He is digging two holes, one for the Lumpenstein couple, and another for the Wulch couple. He invites the heroes to the ceremony at 2pm this afternoon. “Given the rumors about you, it might be a good idea that you show that you care about the villagers.” They agree. They inspect the rest of the cemetery, and do not find anything suspect. The holes do not contain clay, so the meteor was probably buried elsewhere.

They go back to the Inn... to find MacRazbunare attached! With a note on him: “Leave this village right now.” And Austizel is missing! MacRazbunare, when detached, explains that the bard suddenly came in the room with another person that MacRazbunare says he didn’t see. He tells that they cast *Hold Person* spells on both of them, and both failed to resist the spell. Then they carried Austizel away and attached MacRazbunare with the warning note... DM note: well, as you suspect, things didn’t really happen that way ;) Mac Razbunare suddenly opened the door and let the bard and the old priest (the one that supposedly left the village for Darkon, a podling too) in. They did cast simultaneously on Austizel (remember the podlings are in constant communication with each other), who failed one of the save. Then, they attached their podling friend MacRazbunare, for the others to find, and left with Austizel ... Another success for the plant.

They run downstairs to survey the inn’s owners. The dwarf says that the bard borrowed his cart this morning “to go South to Helbelnik for a performance tonight” DM note: false information from the podling bard to the dwarf, to confuse the players and make them loose even more time. The girl with a bored attitude confirms that the bard was with someone wearing a cloak and a

hood, as not to be identified. According to her, there was something in the back of the cart, hidden by a blanket.

At 12h30, the heroes get on their horses and check for fresh cart tracks once in a while. After a couple of miles going South, they see the cart on the side of the road. The cart is abandoned, and the horse is eating grass from the side of the road. Those with scent capacities (Varadan, Exigu's dog and MacRazbunare's wolf) say that Austizel was carried in this cart.

They also notice a red mark on the horse's behind. They realized they were fooled by an old trick: the cart driver debarked, then slapped the horse and made it move further along the road until the horse eventually stopped. Since they were checking for cart tracks only once in a while, they didn't spot this.

They walk back while checking for tracks in the dirt to find where the driver and his passengers have disembarked. After a while, MacRazbunare spots tracks that leave the cart and go south west (*DM note: opposed to the manor direction. This is false information, of course. MacRazbunare knows exactly where the bard and the old cleric stopped to carry Austizel in the woods, and is trying to lead them again in a wrong direction.*)

Strangely, those with the scent ability find nothing where MacRazbunare shows the tracks only he can see. They discuss the *Pass without Trace* spell and deduct that the bard might have cast it. *DM note: *lol**

Meanwhile, Exigu notices that something is strange with Mac Razbunare: his pet wolf is usually very close to him, and Mac Razbunare is often showing marks of affection to his pet. Today however, they wolf is standing a good 20 feet from the druid at all time, and Exigu notices too that the wolf often has a small hesitation time before obeying to Mac Razbunare's commands.

Exigu asks Mac Razbunare about a fact only he would know. Mac Razbunare answers correctly, but he is now distrustful of the halfling. While Mac Razbunare is away, Exigu asks Varadan to scent everybody in the group to find if everything is normal. Varadan is surprised but agrees to do so. Meanwhile, Exigu and Mac Razbunare test each other in an increasing aggressive way, much to the surprise of the rest of the group who wonder what is going on. *DM note: funny roleplaying here from Mac and Exigu's players!*

At one moment, Exigu denounces Mac Razbunare as a doppelganger, or someone disguised. He asks Mac Razbunare to cast any spell, and Mac Razbunare cast *purify food and drinks*. But the others can't verify which spell was effectively casted, so the doubt remains...attacks Mac Razbunare with two arrows! Sneak attack! But Virevan overrun Exigu to calm him, and Mac Razbunare cast *Warp Wood* on Exigu's bow! Everybody knows Mac Razbunare could have cast a much more lethal spell. (*DM note: to show his goodwill ☺*) The druid Mac Razbunare gets a defensive position in the woods. Exigu is confused... In this confusion, Mac Razbunare is very calm and insists the others to cast *Detect Charm* on him, to free him from Exigu's suspicion. He also suggests that Exigu might be the one who isn't normal.

The other heroes question Mac Razbunare about the fact he saw traces on the road, but nobody else saw anything. Exigu explains why he believes that MacRazbunare is not himself: his wolf is keeping an odd distance from the druid. Even Varadan (with scent ability) says that MacRazbunare's odor is different. Exigu then has the idea to test everyone with a mirror, since people with the illness do not have a breath. Exigu passes the test, but not Mac Razbunare!

Follows a short battle where the druid retreats in the forest after casting *Entangle*. The others get on their horses and go back to the village, while Mac Razbunare throws *Magic Missiles*, *Melf Acid Arrow* and *Wall of Gloom* at Exigu and his faithful dog mount, Patu...

They escape Mac Razbunare's volley of spells and go back to the village, while again trying to search for traces where the driver has debarked from the cart, in the hope of finding kidnapped Austizel...

At 7h30, about half a mile from the village, the remaining heroes find traces. Two people carrying something heavy. That must be the bard and the other person, carrying Austizel. The night is falling and the weather is rainy, so they decide to follow the tracks in the darkness ... The tracks are as if to confuse a person tracking them, in a zig zag pattern. They lose time and soon it is dark. *Dm note: he he ...*

But they fall in some kind of ambush! They heard Austizel crying in pain in the dark forest! They go in that direction. But Petrak isn't fooled, and informs his friends the voice is a mimicry of Austizel's. Then they hear two voices, one left, one right, casting spells! The voice on the left is an old man they recognize as the old cleric! His *Hold Person* spells paralyzes Virevan! The voice on the right is a woman, Katarina! She cast *Magic Missile* on Varadan! Then they see "Austizel" attached to a tree, and Mac Razbunare near him, smiling coldly. They move for battle...

Then they see it. An alien looking plant, repulsive, near the place where the false Austizel is attached. They target their attacks toward the vines and five large, hideous, whitish long pods behind it. The pods are four to six feet long and remind the heroes of coffins...

But now Petrak, Exigu and the monk Varadan are the only one left to fight (Virevan is held)! And there are at least four opponents, one of them being Mac Razbunare. Also, they fear the plant has other ways to defend itself...

The battle rages on, while Petrak is attacked by the old cleric, and Katarina stays safely away, having *mirror images* of herself, and she hurls *Magic Missiles* at Varadan. The false Austizel is eventually revealed to be the bard, who tries to charm Varadan with magic from his flute: *Cause Fear*, then *Lullaby*.

But the heroes concentrate on destroying the plant and its pods. Once, when they hit a specific pod, they notice the old cleric shaking, like if he was hit directly. They understand they need to destroy the five pods they see, by sling or directly with weapons. Mac Razbunare runs toward Virevan held by magic with his scimitar! The old cleric tries to hold Exigu, but Exigu shakes off the effect.

When they think they have finished destroying the plant, Exigu notices a second patch of vines, with four pods, about 40 feet from the first... and then a third patch ... When one of the pods from the second vine is destroyed, Mac Razbunare falls to the ground just before hitting paralysed Virevan... The druid is unconscious, and loudly tries to catch his breath like someone who spent long minutes underwater. Then Virevan's *hold person* ceases. He gives a *Cure light wound* to Mac Razbunare, to make sure he stays alive.

The old cleric *Inflict Serious Wounds* on Petrak! But then his pod is destroyed and the cleric falls on the ground. Then Katarina is out of spells and runs after Exigu, but her pod is destroyed and she falls on the ground. Then, it's the bard's turn to be neutralized ... *DM note: that was a cool 13 rounds battle!*

The second to last pod they destroy contains a body! When the pod is opened, they see Austizel emerge from its gummy vegetal goo, eyes wide, in a state of shock! His arms flail wildly, like a man drowning in panic. They calm him, but he remains in a state of shock.

Then they notice there is no noise in the forest at all... Nothing...

They rush for the destruction of the plant. Exigu unearths the roots from the plant, a sickly rope-like root, with nauseous tumors on it. The roots connect all three vines... and a fourth spot! They notice the earth there was moved less than a month ago. They unearth a heavy, black round rock with a repugnant white fluid oozing out... While Exigu holds it in the air, a new sickly white root suddenly sprouts from the rock and tries to touch the ground!

They make a bonfire and burn everything with oil. They take their time and do not stop until all pods, vines, roots and meteor have been burned to ashes... The meteor itself is consumed in the blaze.

Meanwhile, after an hour, the old cleric, Katarina and the bard do wake up, confused. They ask the heroes who they are (they never saw them before being controlled), and why they are standing in a forest at night... Mac Razbunare also awoke about an hour after his pod's destruction. He wonders what happened: his last souvenirs are walking in the woods with Katerina.

There were a total of ten pods in the vines.

Around midnight, everything has burned and they go back to the village, bringing back the old cleric to the church, Katarina to her husband, and the bard to the Inn.

They sleep well ...

January 29th, 748 – 7 am

They get up early, and learn spells. They get breakfast at the inn, and insist that “no zucchini or cucumbers are to be found on their plate.”

Austizel is still feeble, and unable to talk. They cast *Lesser Restoration* on him, and he seems better.

GAME SESSION TWENTY SEVEN: AND MORE WEIRD THINGS IN MORDENT -4

(September 30th, 2007; Sylvain's PC was played by Martin, and Benoit by Jean-François)

DM note: in the game, the heroes are now in Delmunster, where they just concluded with success the adventure with the Doppelganger Plant last evening.

January 29th, 748 - 7 am

The heroes identify the arcane scrolls found in the Mayor's Manor – *Mending, Fog Cloud* and *Mordenkainen's Lucubration*.

In their room, celebrating the end of the Doppelganger plant adventure, they recap the possible adventure hooks they might follow next (*DM note: that was a fun exercise as my own list is sometimes different from theirs ;).* Some of these hooks will be used very soon as you will see):

- try to cure/relieve Virevan from lycanthropy – is there other ways?
- Gennifer’s lycanthropy – learn more about it?
- Find and destroy Natalia
- Find the reason why the dead spirits are pulled toward Mordentshire? (i.e. Ann Campbell, session 23)
- What is this House on Gryphon Hill?
- Go back to Keith de Lalune in Karina – for Petrak’s Shield of Faith?
- Learn new arcane spells from the twins’s books when time allows
- Bring back Rosaleen’s taroka desk to the vistani (see session 13, Ashington Manor)
- What is the link between Tara Kolyana and Strahd?
- Petrak’s lost sister? (as found in session 8, Evil Eye’s mystery house vistani exhibit at the fair)
- Get some news from Ardonk Szerieza and the Gundarakite Freedom Fighters
- Levkarest mysteries: the stone under Ivana’s castle, the ermordenungs, the women disappearing near the Cathedral – what is the link between this?
- What opened the locked cells on the full moon? (see session 18 – the two afflicted lycanthrope in the group were isolated in an asylum cell on the night of the full moon. But someone/something unlocked the cells)
- What is going on with Daniel Foxgrove? His ghost wife?

At 8h30 am, they hear the low noise of many persons talking in the inn’s main room. Then Jorgi the young priest knocks at their door. “I have to talk to you. We have gathered the villagers in half an hour for an announcement on the causes of last week’s problems. But I’d like to have a few questions with you first. What happened with the mayor? Karl and Kent Ludder found his remains early this morning. He was thrown from the roof, or he fell from it, we don’t know. But the young hunters also found many traces around the mayor’s property, and it was easy to identify these as yours... Now, they haven’t said a word about it to anybody but me. You surely understand that we’d like to hear your story...” The heroes tell the truth, i.e. that the mayor was insane, and that he hurled himself from the roof. Jorgi accept this version.

Then Jorgi and the heroes go in the tavern’s main room. It is full and the heroes recognize many villagers. There, Jorgi gets on a chair and explains the events “... a plant that fell from the sky ... the plant controlled people... we can’t do anything for those that died... the mayor committed suicide... and thank you to our saviors”, waving at the heroes. The crowd erupts in cheers and the heroes are properly thanked for saving the town.

In the morning, they go back to the mayor’s home, to scan it using *detect magic* spells. On the way they cross path with villagers coming back from the Mayor’s house. They say they wanted to see it but didn’t enter the Manor itself. A sense motive tells they are saying the truth.

In the Manor, they do not find anything more... then Mac Razbunare’s wolf sense something and starts to growl! In a trunk, an old rotten cloak suddenly moves and attacks! (*DM note: they had already searched this trunk, and the undead cloaker made no move then, thinking it would stalk them afterward, but it found out it was locked behind a secret door it could not open (!) This time, it attacked as soon as the trunk was opened!*) The monster is not hurt by non magical weapons. They kill the monstrosity, but it had time to wrap around Varadan and drain his heat from its unholy undead touch (level drain).

The heroes quickly prepare a plan to help Varadan pass successfully his Fortitude test in one day, to help him recover from the monster attack (*recover the level drained*). They go meet the priest: tomorrow morning, Father Brume will cast a *prayer* spell while the heroes will add *Protection from evil*, *Guidance* and *Bear's Endurance* on Varadan.

They exit the manor and are back to the inn. There Austizel learns a new spell, *Hypnotic Pattern*, as does MacRazbunare (*Mirror Image*).

At night, all the villagers are back to the inn, where celebrations are under way. There are also sad moments for the mourning of those who were destroyed by the plant's voracious appetite. Young Lotta is there too, and her parents warmly cheer the heroes.

January 30th, 748

The heroes cast spells on Varadan, who notices when waking up that the energy drained by the cloaker is thankfully back.

They *identify* the *Tales of Terror* book found in the mayor's manor. The identifying spell tells of a book with 12 short stories. When you read a story thinking of an enemy, this enemy can enter the story and be kept forever prisoner of the book. The heroes think the spell doesn't say it all and are wary to use it. (*DM note: false reading of course. It's a cursed book where the reader is struck by a Phantasmal Killer*)

Before leaving Delmunster, they hear of a merchant coming from the Valachan border. He says a full regiment of Valachian at the border is searching every traveler with a description of the heroes! They are wanted for kidnapping, theft and selling poisonous potions as healthy ones. It is probably one of the victims possessed by the plant who set this trap? The inn owner assures the merchant that the heroes are, well, heroes, and that search at the border is a misunderstanding.

Anyway, the heroes are not going this way South, but to the North instead, toward Mordentshire. When they are leaving, they see Mad Rupert running after them, giggling and yelling "I know you will be back! Soon!" They ignore the mad man.

They travel the southern part of Mordent, miles after miles of empty march, and an occasional lonely farm here and there. On the western side of the road, between the road and the Sea of Sorrows, the dense and Lightless Woods's thick canopy never the sun dissolve the lazy tendrils of fog at the feet of the trees...

At the end of the day, the heroes arrive at Mordentshire. Their first stop is Van Richten's herbal shop, but they do not get any answer at the door. Then they go to the Weathermay-Foxgrove twins, where they find Van Richten taking aperitif wine with the twins. They meet the heroes, and are surprised and relieved of the doppelganger plant story end.

Asked about the *Tales of Terror* book, they said they would try to find something about this magical book in their libraries. Van Richten offers that the book might be genuine, and work as described, but there is surely a price to pay for its use?

Van Richten tells them about a new rumor in town. He heard townsfolk saying that "one of the twins's new friends is a blood thirsty monster hiding under human face. It is probably him who unearthed the body of Matthew Nash!" (see session 23). Van Richten and the twins are worried that someone knows, or guessed, about the lycanthropic nature of Varadan or Virevan. And that

they are being accused of unearthing dead bodies... Van Richten and the twins have tried to trace this rumor to its first propagator, without success.

(DM note and now we switch back to the Transubstantial Halo adventure, as sketched by JWM on the board. I added a lot of details to the outline, including the item's backstory)

On the other hand, Van Richten learned more about Cyrus Hope (the man who interrupted the wedding, dissolving into a pool of rotting flesh (see session 24). Van Richten had the grave of Cyrus Hope opened: it wasn't defiled in any way, and Cyrus Hope's body is resting in peace. However, a very odd thing is that the skeleton in the grave had a *perfect copy* of the wedding ring the creature tried to give to Margaret Weaver! It has exactly the same wear and tear marks...

Also, the twins were able to locate a small order of monks in a monastery half a day south of Mordentshire. Their order's strange symbol is the same as the one embroidered in the creature's monk tunic. Gennifer adds that this order's of monks are hog growers, mostly never seen in town. They keep to themselves. Van Richten thinks the symbol could originate from the desert island of Har' Akir, because of the cross (ankh) that means "life" in this place.



The location is not very accessible through the Mordent moor, but it is a water mill located near the Arden river. Van Richten suggests going there by boat.

They sleep at the Foxgrove manor. Late at night, they hear Daniel Foxgrove coming back to his home.

February 1st, 748

The night is quiet, but during Virevan's night watch (2h30 am), he hears footsteps *inside* the room where his friends are sleeping! He opens a lamp but sees nothing... He or other watchmen do not hear anything else for the rest of the night.

Next morning, Petrak notices a message written in the dust on a table:

THE LORD IS THE EVIL

They wonder what this message is about, and from whom. They suspect Lord Jules Weathermay of being this evil lord ...

At 9h30 am, they leave by canoe on the Arden river. They use two canoes, three persons in each. The trip is uneventful and they see Westcote Manor in the distance. Near noon, the river is very foggy, making the visibility less than 30 feet... In this section, the river is shallower and wider. The heroes decide to stay near the northern riverbank for direction.

Suddenly a tall scaly humanoid jumps from the water and attacks the first canoe! The fish-headed monster seems to be in an area where the water is about waist deep, about three feet. *(DM note: a ruse. The reaver was standing on a rock. Elsewhere than on this rock, the water was about 8 feet deep. But the heroes didn't jump in the water to fight.)* The fight starts and the heroes are uneasy from fighting in a canoe. The monster retreat in the water, but then five more scaly creatures attack at once, surrounding the boats! One of them grabs Exigu the halfling and tries to drag him

in the water, but Varadan helps stay in the boat, hitting the creature with his Stunning Fists. MacRazbunare cast a *Wall of Gloom* spell. The creature's underwater speed is impressive, and they maneuver to circle the boats and attack. One of the creatures enters a canoe and attack! When they grapple someone, the victim gets bruised by the spiny scales on the monster's body. One of the heroes's boat manages to get on the banks of the river, and MacRazbunare is chased on the ground by a wounded, but very aggressive creature! After six rounds of combat, five creatures are dead, and the last monster retreat.

The heroes get on the bank of the Arden river for planned resting and healing. There, MacRazbunare notices the sudden eerie silence of the moor – no noise from insects, birds, or anything... Spooked, they decide to go back to Mordentshire to get healing. Also, they wanted to see if the fog has somehow displaced them again...

Around 3 pm, they are back to Foxgrove Manor. The twins have a social event tonight, a fund raising event for Mordentshire's asylum. The heroes visit Van Richten and ask him to make them wraithroot tea (*see Mordent Gaz*). The heroes tell Van Richten of last night's ghostly encounter, but choose to do not mention the message in the dust.

Exigu drinks it at 9 pm and walks through the house, receptive of any ethereal disturbance. He didn't see a ghost, but he has a vision when on the second floor, near Daniel Foxgrove's boudoir:

...it's been almost half an hour since the screams ceased, and another hour before that since the doctor disappeared back into the bedroom with an anguished look on his face. A man of twenty-two, George sits beside you again for the first time in five years, distraught beyond anything you've ever seen from him, your hands around his shoulders feeling his arms tense with every breath, inhaling anguished grief only to breathe it out again as helpless rage.

Between breaths, the door opens on Daniel, his blonde hair brown with sweat and tears, his eyes red, barely choking the words out: "Cover the mirrors."

Rage, white hot like a branding iron, sweeps into George. His screams and accusations are noise in your ears, drowned out by your own heartbeat. Your baby girl, dear sweet Alice, is dead, and though the doctor was able to save her precious girls, you fear, for how can there be light in a world without her?

The heroes see this vision from Jules's point of view. They discuss it and go to bed.

February 2nd, 748

But just after midnight, in the room where they are now, Exigu has another similar vision ...

George and Alice are gone, and Daniel is raising the twins Laurie and Gennifer with the help of servants. Your lordship office in the Foxgrove Manor seems so cold, so bare (Exigu realize the heroes are in a room that was formerly Jules's office). Days and weeks pile up on your aging frame like earth on a coffin, steady and inexorable. When monster hunting George finally returns home with a fiancée, years after you gave him up as bones in some beast's lair, you feel a surge of joy with the thought that your son may settle down and continue the Weathermay name he's fought so hard to ennoble. Your heated arguments with your son went unmentioned and you were able to make a modicum of peace for the sake of his new bride.

Such a delicate beauty, too, with a demure, exotic air and a name to match: Natalia.

The next day, Van Richten explains them that the ethereal space has a memory, mainly (but not exclusively) for negative emotions – the ethereal resonance...

DM note: those familiar with the board will remember Deepshadow's Mordent adventure. I borrowed the two cut scenes/visions from his great tales, modified to fit my own story. At this point, I liked how they would see visions from Jules's point of view, since they believed him to be the darklord of Mordent!

GAME SESSION TWENTY EIGHT: AND MORE WEIRD THINGS IN MORDENT -5

(October 21th, 2007; Sylvain's PC was played by Martin, and Benoit by Jean-François)

February 2nd, 748

They talk to Van Richten, and order him a few of these “identifying arrows”, with needles of silver, gold, bronze, ivory, iron and cold iron (*idea from VRA, IIRC*). When you fire it at an opponent, and retrieve it, the needle with blood tells you which vulnerability the creature has. MacRazbunare also asks him for some more wraithroot.

While at Van Richten's, they *detect magic* on the wedding ring given by the creature to Margaret Weaver: not magic. Van Richten stores it back into his desk.

At 9h00 am, while going back to the Arden Pool, the heroes notice Jules Weathermay's horse carriage in front of Daniel Foxgrove's house.

But soon, they are back in the canoe, but this time they attach these side by side for stability. They pass the place where the aquatic reavers attacked yesterday, without any problem. All is quiet.

(DM note: the following areas (the squatters, the sunken village, the canal, the wind mill and the manor) are from Stephen of the Fraternity's "Boggy Downs" QtR article. I had no immediate plans for it, but I liked this creepy place and kept it for atmospherics. It worked. The heroes will surely go back there in the future)

Half an hour later, on the border of the Arden river, they see a ramshackle village of tents, built with refuses and scrap material. A village of squatters. The villagers look at them angrily, not necessarily eager to talk to the heroes, putting their hand to their dagger hilt. But still the heroes stop to talk. They try to get more directions for the monastery. The villagers tell the people from the monastery are rarely seen outside it. They tell them of Boggy Downs, an abandoned place, sunken, where strange lights are seen at night. They never saw the dangerous fishermen the heroes are describing.

The heroes ask if they could come back here for rest, should need be. A younger person warns them about the Donnelys, a family of nine ruffians. “They are not in the village now, they are hunting. Or you would have been into troubles with them already...”

Further south, they notice a disused man-made canal, from the Arden river and going west, toward the sea. It has been abandoned a long time ago, and it is filled with weeds.

A little further south again, they see a sunken village. It seems that this unnamed village was sunken a long while ago. Where stood the village is now a small stagnant lake, filled with crumbling stonewalls, floating timber and other debris. Most buildings are opened to the elements, having collapsed during the deluge or afterward. When they approach, they notice the water in this “lake” is very stagnant and clear. They notice pale corpses are floating underwater. They are extremely well preserved, and their opened eyes seem to watch the heroes pass... There are at least twelve of these villagers corpse near the canoes. Not looking for trouble, the heroes head their canoes back to the river.

South of the sunken village, they see two buildings standing on the edge of the water: an old mill, and a manor-like house on a small hill.

The windmill’s blades turn lazily in the breeze, but in silence... They look inside, to see the mill infested by mould and fungi of all colors. The heroes do not enter this creepy place.

The manor is surrounded by a crumbling stone wall, now covered with ivy. The rusting iron gate is opened. The manor itself is in better shape, but ivy covers its walls as well. Inside, the manor is empty and the hero’s footsteps echo in the empty rooms. Very few furniture remains, probably packed and moved, or looted since the place was abandoned.

A small chapel however is filled with old furniture, boxes and crates. It seems to be some kind of forgotten storage. MacRazbunare’s wolf sense something strange and is uneasy when near the storage. A *detect magic* spell in the empty house shows nothing.

Suddenly, they hear footsteps on the second floor. They explore this area, but they find nothing. Then they hear a clockwork bell ringing on the first floor. But again their investigation shows nothing that could have made the noise...

An exploration of the cellar shows nothing important.

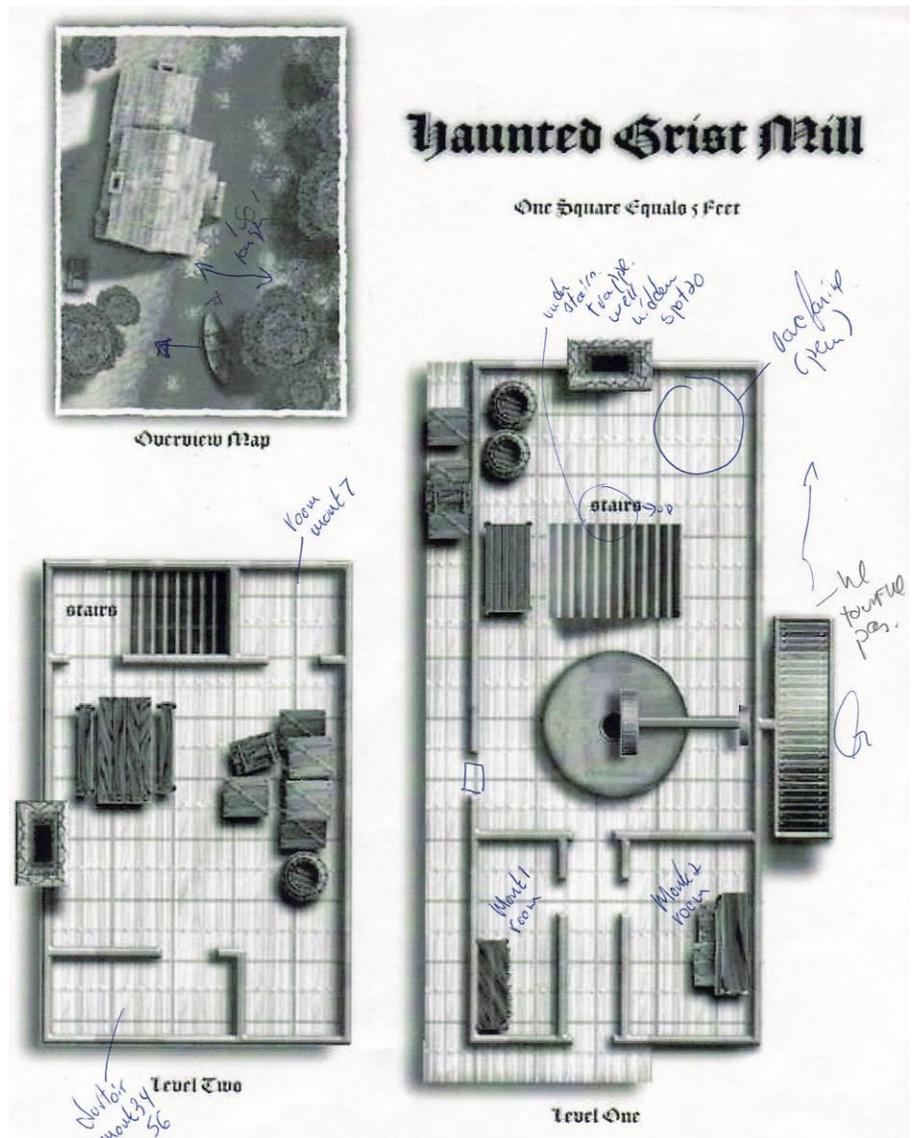
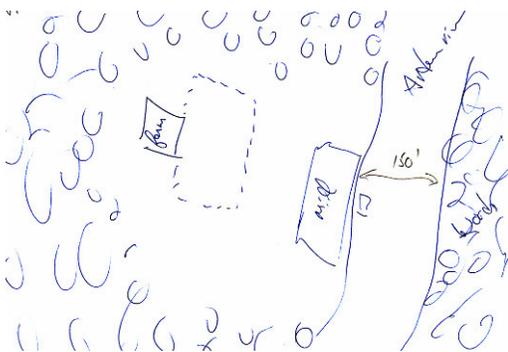
They then enter the chapel. They notice MacRazbunare’s wolf is weary of the altar and stays away from it. Virevan notices the front of this altar has been covered with plaster. They remove it with hammers, to find a sculpted basalt where one could see a symbol of a death god, Erlin: a sickle crossed with a hog-slaughtering knife, stained with blood and overlaying an orb of night sky, glittering with sinister stars. Virevan remembers reading about this forgotten evil cult when he was studying in the Morninglord church. The cult is about chaos, death, evil and trickery. Petrak destroy the symbol with his warhammer. They are under the impression their blows echoes far in the house and possibly elsewhere... may be in other planes as well?

They get back to their canoes, and continue their trip southward... They notice a ruined dam on the river. Maybe this dam opening was the cause of the flood?

Another mile on the Arden river, and they see the monastery. It is a simple hog farm, with a water mill near the river. The number of hogs is impressive for a monastery this size.

A monk is seen on the mill. He has seen the hero's canoes and is talking to another unseen person via a trap door on the roof.

(DM note: I used a WotC map of the month "Haunted Grist Mill" as well as that of an underground cave from the same series of online free maps.)



And here's the quick battle stats I made before the game for the 13 monks (made from the SRD files):

Level	No+Noms (C = carnatis)	Fort Save	Ref Save	Will Save **	HP	Flurry of Blows	Unarmed Damage	AC
1st	1Bruno, 2Ardrige, 3Arthur, 4Baker ^C , 5Edmund, 6Emerson ^C , 7Gilly	+2	+2	+2	10	+1/+1	1d6	14
2nd	8Hurts, 9Ogden, 10Lamport ^C	+3	+3	+3	15	+2/+2	1d6	15
3rd	11Thelonious	+3	+3	+3	20	+3/+3	1d6	15
4th	12Benedict	+4	+4	+4	25	+4/+4	1d8	15
5th	13Pierpont	+4	+4	+4	30	+5/+5	1d8	17

A young monk comes to them as soon as they get on the river bank near the mill. He is wearing the same rough clothes as Cyrus Hope when at the wedding. The monk, Gilly, explains that they are welcomed to stay for the night, but they can't stay inside the compound, as the monk order values its calm and isolation. The heroes insist but they are again told they won't meet anybody but Gilly. Reluctantly, the heroes agree to spend the night in their own tents, thinking they will be able to spy the monks from there.

After an hour, the young monk is back. He brought some cured ham to the heroes as a gift. As he was going to get back to the monastery, the heroes tell him about the interrupted wedding, the wedding ring, and tell they are sent by Van Richten. Some heroes felt that the monk was suddenly very saddened by the wedding story. The monk doesn't say anything, and suddenly turns back and walks toward the mill.

After a long moment, three monks exit the mill and walk toward the heroes. Gilly is accompanying two elder looking monks, who present themselves as Thelonious and Pierpont.

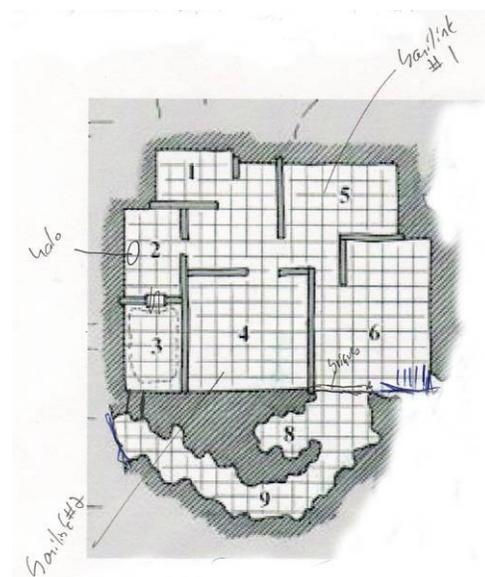
Thelonious starts by telling the heroes he thinks they are telling the truth. "We know of Cyrus Hope. I understand why you are here to investigate. We are not evil people. We are of the Guardians. Let me show you."

He asks the heroes to follow him. They enter the mill, and get in the cellar by a secret door in the floor under the stairs going up. He first shows them two large reptile creatures. These reptiles have eight legs each!

Thelonious continues: "These are basilisks we breed for protection. Notice the leather hood over their head, preventing them to attack us with their petrifying gaze. But know that their gaze extends to the ethereal plane, where spirits are. These creatures are guarding the way to an artefact we wish to keep secret. The walls are also sealed with basilisks blood, to prevent any attempt by spirits to sneak to this ... " And he shows them a simple ring of flattened silvery metal, about three feet across. It is hanging on a wooden cross.

"This is the Transubstantial Halo", he says. "It was created a century ago on Har' Akir, by a medium who wanted to temporarily reunite dead people and their loved ones. The halo was created to help the relatives of a dead person have a last meeting with him or her. You know we all have things we wish we would have said to a dead relative before his departure. But, as it happens often in these bleak lands, the obsession of the medium to do good backfired. Something corrupted the halo: the spirits came back to flesh, but in a corrupted fashion. But many spirits hard of it and used it to get back in the world of the living. Eventually appalled of the potential misuse of his creation, the medium gave us the halo so we kept it away from spirits. Here, in Mordent, there are few spirits in the area so it is a good place to guard it. Sometimes, the spirit of people like Cyrus Hope finds the halo, enter it and turn back to flesh, we can't help it. Provided these are decent people, we keep them with us. Cyrus stayed with us for three years. The problem is when Cyrus heard that his wife was going to remarry..."

"You see, the spirit being incarnated again - into what we call Carnatis - needs to eat raw flesh to sustain its corrupted metabolism. Three pounds per day. If a carnatis does that each day, it can have an otherwise nearly normal life. Miss this, and the amount of daily flesh is doubled for the



rest of your life each time you can't get enough flesh within one day. Also, importantly, strong emotions are to be avoided, as it can make your corporeal envelope dissolving... with the horrible results you saw with Cyrus."

"All spirits are made visible when within 100 feet of the halo, even if they do not manifest physically. As for when a person of flesh jumps in the halo to become a spirit, it is also temporary. We have made tests over the years, and normal people last about 3 or four days, after which their essence forever dissolve to nothingness."

Thelonious was going to continue his explanations, but sudden shouts are heard from the mill. A young monk comes down the stairs, shouting "we are attacked! By spirits!" The monks position themselves in the staircase to defend it, but soon after a conic blast of cold kill half of the monks! Varadan is hit too! At least one of the monk's bodies turns to a poodle of flesh. The last of the monks and the heroes are trapped in this tunnel without end! The heroes get to the stairs and fight along with the monks. Then a sinister *cloudkill* spell descend the stairs and threatens the hero's life and force them to retreat.

Thelonious is overwhelmed by the events. He says, "These attackers are too strong for us. I suppose these spirits want to use the halo to get back to flesh. We can't prevent this, as we will die for nothing if we try. Let's jump on the other side with the halo. And we'll get back to flesh after they are gone." And he jumps in the halo, disappearing. Other monks follow him.

After some hesitation, the heroes jump too through the halo ... and find themselves ethereal! Some of the monks leave this place by jumping through a small section of the wall not sealed with basilisk's blood. But the heroes stay, as, the attackers approach. The heroes see five ghosts (a woman wizard, three men with longswords, and a dwarven cleric). They manage to pass the basilisks and get to the halo... The woman is emotionally shaken, and she says "We passed through it! The old won't be able to control us anymore!" (*DM note: the players think of Jules Weathermay again*)

The heroes try to talk with them but the attackers do not answer back. "Ignore them, Radin", says one of the man, "they will soon know what will happen to them. Let's pass through it and get out of here!", and they jump through the halo ... to become flesh again on the prime material world. They shout screams of triumph. One man cries from joy.

The spirit heroes wait for the attackers to leave so they can go back to flesh too. But one of the fighters kills a basilisk with his arrows, then move toward its corpse for something the players can't see. He is back after a moment, carrying something bloody in his hand. He comes near the halo and removes the ring from its stand to put it in a large bag made of linen... bloodied with the basilisk's blood!

It takes a second for the heroes to understand the attackers are planning to leave *with* the halo, and the basilisk's blood on the bag will prevent the heroes and the monks to jump through the halo!

The five attackers stop at the mill to eat all they can of ham, and carry large quantities of meat with them. Around 5h pm, they get the heroes's canoes and leave with them, after waving goodbyes at the heroes and the monks ...

The heroes follow them on the river, a good hundred feet from the halo to remain invisible, while most of the monks decide to stay at the monastery to watch the basilisk. Thelonious is coming

with the heroes for a time, in order to teach them how to use the power of “manifest”. “Otherwise”, he said, “you are absolutely invisible and unable to affect anything in the prime material world.”

Other monks come out of the hog farm, they were not part of the fight so they are corporeal. Thelonious “manifests” to them and tells them of what happened, and that that they should watch the basilisks until they get the halo back.

The five attackers row back toward Mordentshire, not seeing the invisible heroes following them in the ethereal. The heroes stop once in a while to heal themselves.

Suddenly, when they are nearer Mordentshire, they feel a strong pull toward Mordentshire! Varadan, Virevan and Petrak are able to resist, but MacRazbunare, Austizel and Exigu are pulled toward the town. Thelonious is pulled too. They can’t resist it in any way. The heroes who successfully resisted the pull decide to follow their friends instead of following the attackers, so the group isn’t divided. Also, by staying with Thelonious, they would learn how to manifest their spirit bodies.

The pull brings them not in Mordentshire, but toward the House on Gryphon Hill! The House is a crumbling manor, surrounded by a fence. A small cemetery is located nearby. The heroes see many ghosts like them watching them from the house. These spirits look fearful of something...

But suddenly the pull stops, and in front of them, in the front yard, stands the ghost of an old man, holding on to a cane with a gryphon head. He wears clothes that fell out of fashion at least a century ago. He has a stern, authoritarian allure as he watches the heroes before him.

“Welcome to the House on Gryphon Hill. I am Lord Wilfred Godefroy...”, he says.

GAME SESSION TWENTY NINE: AND MORE WEIRD THINGS IN MORDENT -6

(April 6th, 2008; Benoit’s PC was played by Jean-François)

February 2nd, 748, 6h30 pm

DM note: since they jumped in the halo, the game starts with the application of the ghost template to the PC’s sheet, with some modifications by yours truly so they do not get too powerful (Mainly, since they are not really dead, non magical weapon can hurt them).

And this is the version of the halo I used in my game:

Transubstantial Halo

(from an original concept by John W Mangrum)

This item was created a century ago in Har’Akir by a gifted medium, Abdul-Ruhi, who wanted to briefly reunite a newly deceased with his loved ones, so they could make proper final farewells. Abdul-Ruhi often said with sadness: “we all have things we wish we could have said to a dead relative before his departure.” But, as it happens often in these bleak lands, the obsession of the medium to do good backfired. Something corrupted the halo: the spirits came back to flesh, but in a hideous corrupted fashion. But also many spirits heard of it and used it to get back in the world of the living. Eventually appalled of the potential misuse of his creation, and unable to destroy the halo, the medium gave it to the Order of the Guardian to keep it away from spirits.

The halo is simply a flattened ring of silvery metal about a yard across. A hundred feet from the halo, insubstantial creatures become visible to those on the prime material world. Also, no detection spells will function within this hundred feet radius, nor the halo itself can be detected in any way from outside by magical detection spells.

Incorporeal spirits who pass through the halo become soulless, animate flesh – called carnatis. In 3.5 terms, they'd be "living constructs." A carnatis would look essentially normal at first (though a distorted spirit might be accordingly deformed when incarnate). Its metabolism is unbalanced, however, and to maintain itself, it must consume a steady supply of raw flesh - 3 lb of raw meat each day. Failing this requirement, the carnatis loose 20% of his hit point permanently as the carnatis's shape has started dissolving into rotting flesh. The daily quantity of flesh needed is then doubled to satisfy the unstable metabolism of the carnatis. His appearance is now like a living person whose flesh is in part rotted, like a leper. It becomes more and more degraded if the daily requirement of meat isn't met. And if you eventually horribly dissolve into a pool of rotting flesh and blood, you are permanently dead.

Strong emotions also affect carnatis's unstable bodies (depending on the strong emotion force, a suggested 5%-20% chance that the shock of this emotion permanently cause a loss of 20% of hit points like if a daily meat requirement was missed).

As for flesh to spirit, it works essentially the same way. Any corporeal creature that passes through becomes an incorporeal spirit. This simplest way to handle this is to simply apply the ghost template – even to soulless creatures like constructs. However, any physical flaws the subject possesses (including scars, lost hit points, etc.) are also reflected into the subject's spirit. The ghost template is applied to the creature (except the protection from normal weapons - since they are not really incorporeal in their essence, non magical weapon can hurt them).

And as with the carnatis, you can only last so long before your spirit breaks up and fades away (a number of days equal to three plus his Charisma bonus (minimum of 1). After that you have to succeed a Will DC 20 or break up and dissolve permanently in ethereal dust).

The newly turned to ghost creature can Manifest^{RLCS}, but they have to learn the proper meditation stance from somebody. Even then, they can manifest only if they first succeed a Will DC 20 (if they miss, they can only retry 24 hours after – which can become a stressing problem considering the short length one can stay in ghost form). Once they know how to manifest, they can do it as a move action anytime. Otherwise, the PCs can't be seen or communicate with the living, so they are seen as unquiet spirits.

If you use the halo again, you get back to your original state, with carnatis turning back to incorporeality keeping all the disintegrating effects if they missed a daily meat requirement (hp permanently loss, and hideous ghostly appearance). An hour is needed to be able to use the halo to shift again (when you use it, the halo is useless for you for an hour but could be used to shift others).

If one dies while transformed by the halo in any form, he is permanently dead (ghost can't rejuvenate and come back, carnatis dissolve to rotting flesh and blood and can't be raised).

There are some odd after affects of using the halo – Will DC 12 or become permanently afflicted with odd but frightening new conditions. DM is encouraged to create strange aftereffects developed from these feats (or similar necromantic or spirit-related effects): Cold Ones (Mindless

undead ignores you), Ethereal Empathy (Sense the emotions imbued within ethereal resonance), Ethereal Touch (Able to attack incorporeal creatures), Ghostsight (See ethereal creatures), Haunted (You have a guardian spirit, with better perception), Unwholesome Ichor (You are distasteful to creatures biting you). Some of these effects could be usable once per day or with other limitation the DM sees appropriate.

The halo's powers do not affect darklords.

Recap: now in ghost form after they passed through the transubstantial halo, Thelonious (a monk from the Order of Guardian monastery) and the heroes stand before Lord Wilfred Godefroy, after three of them were pulled to the House on Gryphon Hill by a mysterious but irresistible force.

They are inside the property, near its front gate. Three hundred feet from the entrance gate, the House on Gryphon Hill looks desolate. Quickly, in this place, the heroes can see that a slightly different ethereal image over the reality seen in parallel on the prime material world! For instance, the normal hibernating trees on the material world are covered by sinister looking ethereal mirror image of themselves, making them look dead, or twisted. The heroes hear strange noise in the distance, like sad violin and people sobbing. Many patches of mists surround the House, like if oozing from it. Lastly, the manor looks more crumbled in the ethereal than in reality. In the distance, an old cemetery is seen in the backyard of the House.



The three heroes that felt the irresistible pull to gather to this area feel the manor is the source of the pull.

A swarm of ghosts are fearfully watching from afar in the House, showing only their heads and retreating inside when Godefroy looks in this direction.



Lord Godefroy looks at them for a moment, his calculating eyes watching the heroes. His ghostly right hand is clutching his gryphon headed walking stick. Wearing clothes that went out of fashion a century ago, Godefroy's ghost is that of a man aged 70. When he speaks to them, his tone is condescending, and his voice hides with difficulty a continuous anger. The questions he asks one at a time are "Who are you?", "Where do you come from?" and "Where is the halo?"

DM note: the players started by answering evasively to his questions, but quickly became very close to the truth when I asked one of them his bluff skill score! I was prepared to have Godefroy's Sense Motive +12 vs the PC's bluff answered by his charisma draining walking stick.

Godefroy is very arrogant and superior. He often comments on them being peasants, while he is of noble stock. Even when MacRazbunare says he is a noble from Gundarak (which is true, see his background), Godefroy sneers at his family's incompetence to keeping the power over the peasants. "You did not deserve to be in charge."

However, his arrogant speech is suddenly interrupted by the appearance in front of him of two ghostly characters! A woman wears noble clothes, from a distant past, but they are stained by blood and from a stay in dirt. Her face is distorted by hate and she ignores the heroes and look at Godefroy's face. The other character is a little girl, in night gown, holding a stuffed bear in her hand. A large reddish bruise is seen on the right side of her head. She also ignores the heroes and look at Godefroy, before asking him in a pitiful voice "Why father? Why did you kill us?" The heroes understand this is the ghost of Estelle Weathermay, Godefroy's wife and Lilia, their daughter!

Godefroy is very surprised of this appearance, fearful, and try to run away from these ghosts, but they attack him in a swarm and begin tearing at his ghostly flesh as if their hands were sharp and never missing talons. The woman hurls maledictions at him. Godefroy screams in pain and tries to counter attack these ghosts from his past with his fist and his walking stick, but his attacks simply pass through the ghosts, not affecting them at all! Godefroy runs toward the House, while being torn apart bits by bits...

Exigu decides to take this opportunity and attack Godefroy! "I hate people who kill their family, I want to destroy him", he said. Some of the heroes join him, but Godefroy is already a move in front of them, and they can't reach him, except by missiles, but their arrows misses.

Petrak says "Stop, we will help you!", but Godefroy answers "Leave me alone!" and Petrak feels hints of shame in his voice. They try to tag on the fleeing Godefroy for a moment but he yells again "Stop following me! Now!" The heroes stop their chase and watch Godefroy flee to the back of the House to hide, while still being savagely attacked by the woman and the child. They understand Godefroy tries to hide this scene from the heroes by running behind the House.

A few minutes after Godefroy disappeared behind the house; many ghosts exit the house and fly in front of it, talking in small groups. The image is that mice enjoy more freedom when the cat is gone... The heroes who were affected by the pull of the house are still feeling it and can't pass the fence surrounding the property where the house stands.

A small group of ghosts flies toward the heroes. In this group, the heroes recognize Ann Campbell, and Alicia Weathermay. They are also four ghostly men, never seen before by the heroes.

Ann Campbell says she is sincerely dreary that the heroes "are dead". The heroes explain they are not truly dead yet, and that they passed through a magical item that transformed them into ghost forms. The ghosts confirms that the woman and the child are Godefroy's first family (Godefroy married Estelle Weathermay in 566). Watching their back, fearful of Godefroy coming back, they affirm that Godefroy is often beating them with his walking stick, for any reason, real or imagined. "Be careful of this awful cane, it drains your will to live". (*DM note: charisma drain. Something very useful for a ghost!*)

Alice reveals that she the one who warned the heroes with the message in the dust ("The lord is the evil" – a message that was misunderstood by the heroes at the time).

They also say that Godefroy can grant any ghost permission to leave the estate, but only does so when it suits his goals. Such is the case for the ghost adventurers who attacked the monks. The others remain in the House on Gryphon Hill to be tormented, or as hostages to make sure the temporarily liberated ghost comes back.

They also say that Godefroy is ripped to pieces by his family once per day, usually later in the evening, which probably explains his surprise at seeing Lilia and Estelle appear to him this early. While the official story is about a horse accident that killed them both, the truth is more sinister: in year 568, Godefroy killed them both one night, enraged on his wife for failing to deliver him a male heir. He also killed Lilia when she tried to defend her mother. The next day, he told his lies to the constables, even going as far as killing one of his best stallion to add credibility to his story. He got away with it as far as mortal justice is concerned...

What happened next is unsure, but the ghost of the House whispers that Godefroy was tormented each night by the ghosts of his wife and daughter. One night, on the first day of 569, he killed himself to stop his torments. In his last will, he asked that his remains were to be interred in the Weathermay mausoleum instead of the family cemetery on the property, where his wife and child remain. The ghosts adds that this family cemetery is crumbling old, behind the house, but those two tombs are still standing straight with their inscription legible. The ghosts speculate that Godefroy tried to stop his curse that way, but was unsuccessful!

After a moment, the ghosts are nervous and say they will go back to the House, so Godefroy doesn't catch them speaking with the heroes. Alice adds that she has the permission to get out of the property to go see her husband Daniel. She knows that Godefroy is thus manipulating them by tormenting Daniel about it. Alice Weathermay pleases a last time "He wants my father! (Jules Weathermay) And my daughters!"

Alone again, the heroes discuss for a moment the possibility of transferring Godefroy's remains in the family cemetery, to possibly weaken Godefroy.

Thelonious shows them the meditative state of mind they have to reach to lower their inner energy level in order to be able to *manifest* in the prime material world. All are able to achieve it, except Varadan, who will have to wait on day to try again.

After an hour, Godefroy is back from the House. He is very angry, but keeps it within him. "It would be best for you if you forget what you have just seen", he says menacingly.

Godefroy makes a pact with the heroes. He will allow them freedom to leave to House, so they can find the halo, use it to restore themselves to flesh, and then, and bring it back to him for other tasks. He would do it himself, but he can't leave the House estate (*DM note: a lie, of course*).

He says he wants it to restore his wife and daughter to life, and that he is repentant for his crimes. He says he doesn't want to keep the halo for himself. He tells them to bring the halo to Daniel Foxgrove's Manor, not the House itself.



Godefroy answers a few questions before asking them to leave. The heroes learn that the adventurers' ghosts who attacked the monastery were the adventurers who invaded the House ten years ago, those that were never seen again... They are Iroya (woman wizard, from Richemulot;

“hopelessly insane” according to Godefroy), Elias Throgmorton (fighter, from Mordent, “another weak noble family who could not remain in power”), Barnabé (a ranger, from Richemulot), Urran (fighter, from Darkon) and Radin (a dwarven cleric from Darkon).

He doesn’t know where they are hiding now, but he guarantees them that they didn’t leave Mordent (*DM note: players understood - domain border closed!*).

Then Godefroy leaves them and enters the House. At the same moment, the heroes do not feel the pull of the House anymore.

At 8h00 pm, Thelonious and the other accompanying monks travel back to the monastery, after wishing the heroes good luck in this quest. The heroes leave the House’s vicinity to fly toward the town of Mordentshire. They scan the village by flying about 20 feet over the house top in a line-like position used in a wilderness search, using the halo’s properties of making the insubstantial appear in a range of a hundred feet. They quickly conclude that the halo isn’t in Mordentshire.

They then travel a mille down the Arden river (where they last saw the invaders before being pulled by the House), looking for the halo’s effect or the canoes stolen by the invaders. Without success. Then they watch around the Arden Bay, the warehouses large enough to hide the canoes, the road going north toward Dementlieu, watching for eventual trails leaving the road for the forest (two fresh cart trails, one going to Westcote Manor, another going north), and finally the Westcote Manor, because of its location near Arden River. No success there either.

February 3rd, 748

At midnight (!) they have Van Richten waking up, to ask him if he saw the adventurers. After his surprise of seeing the heroes in this spirit state, and after a few questions he could not keep to himself over what happened, he says didn’t see them today, but remembers talking to them ten years ago as they did seek out his advice before investigating the haunted House on Gryphon Hill.

He then tells the heroes to come back tomorrow; he would perhaps have better ideas after a night of sleep.

The heroes “sleep” in the ethereal over the Arden river entrance, so they would see any canoe in the night. During the night, Exigu explores again the road going north and south of Mordentshire, as well as the borders of Arden Bay, without seeing anyone.

The heroes learn their spells.

The Gundarakites remembers that today in their homeland of Gundarak is the Day of Silent Hope, another occasion of adding some barbs against MacRazbunare (former Gundarak noble) ...

Day of Silent Hope

A visitor to Barovia on this date might barely know that any particular event is being commemorated. To an ethnic Gundarakite, however, this day is an important reminder of why hope is worth maintaining in the face of tyranny.

When Duke Gundar was assassinated on this day in 736, the Gundarakites experienced a brief, but liberating sense of freedom. Their joy was cut short when Lord Strahd annexed the lands of the former Gundarak, and Barovian boyars and burgomeisters moved in to rule over the natives.

Gundarakites use this day to privately remember what freedom felt like. Within the confines of their homes, they pray for the strength to live through this time of oppression so that they might again see themselves free of tyranny. Whether praying to the Morninglord, this helps maintain the guttering flame of hope they keep deep within their breast for the coming year.

Obviously, the Barovian boyars and burgomeisters do not approve of such an event. Used to keeping secrets from their overlords, however, the Gundarakites are remarkably adept at ensuring no indication of the day's activities is seen by the Barovians. As such, little action has been taken to date to stop this day of prayer. (*from Book of Secrets*)

At 7 am, they are back at Van Richten's. He asks them more question about their adventures (the halo, the battle at the monastery, how they jumped in the halo to avoid being killed). The heroes tell him of Lord Godefroy, and Van Richten is surprised to hear this historic character is still haunting the House of Gryphon Hill as a ghost, and that he is controlling Daniel!

According to Van Richten, one of the invading ghosts is Elias Throgmorton, who was raised in the area and knows well the forest around Mordentshire. Van Richten gives them the location of the abandoned Throgmorton estate, located north of Mordentshire (the family got near bankrupt and moved to Dementlieu). But Van Richten tells them of the legend about this area: the Boistribue Manor has been "lost" centuries ago in the wood, and some people have seen it "stalking" the area like an animal would! People encountering it are never seen again, so the legend says.

The heroes ask Van Richten to enquire in town for any stranger who bought / stole a cart, a boat or horses. Or perhaps bought meat in abnormally large quantities?

At 8h30 am, the heroes arrive at the Throgmorton estate (*I used the map of DMG II p 151*), to find it empty, and no traces of recent visitors are found either. But remembering one of the adventurers is a ranger, who could possibly hide their traces, they make concentric circles around the manor, again watching for the halo to make them visible if it is close by.

At 10h am, they spot an "undead" tree eating the corpse of a deer. They manifest. The tree isn't frightened. Petrak tries to speak to it, but it doesn't answer. MacRazbunare the druid tries sylvan, and the tree, surprised, answers back. They learn the following from the tree: "I haven't seen anything in these woods with two legs, or I would have eaten it anyway". It is not native to the area, but in fact traveling to the north, "where something will soon happen", but it doesn't want to say more. (*DM note: guess what?*)

At 10h30, they are back to Westcote manor, but everything is normal there. More exploration in the surrounding marsh area shows nothing.

Back to Van Richten's house around noon, they learned that strangers bought two complete carcasses of pork yesterday night, as well as a cart. Van Richten goes back to town to gather more information. The heroes wait at the herbalist's house.

An hour later, the heroes are surprised to get the visit from the Weathermay twins. They are surprised to see the heroes inside, but not as much as it could be predictable ... "Van Richten doesn't know we are also helping you. We found out he was inquiring for you this morning when we heard of his enquiries in town. We don't know how he found out, but our father (*DM note: Daniel Foxgrove*) told us you were in trouble, and basically what happened to you. We are really troubled of this situation. Even more so since our father told us after his briefing not to come back

to him with our findings, that he didn't want to know how we helped you... Do you understand anything in this?", the twins ask, but the players lie and say no.

"Anyway", Laurie continues, "the cart that was bought by the strangers is a false lead. It was thrown in the water in the port shortly after being bought. It was easy to do it without being seen, as the warehouse street is desert after 5h pm."

"We'll go back in town to find more, and will be back here with anything useful", they say before leaving.

While MacRazbunare stayed at Van Richten's for coordination, the other heroes go investigating near the port and find the place where the cart was drowned, after the twins' precise directions. They find tracks of a dwarf among other human tracks, and also tracks of the two canoes.

They decide to explore the coast south of Mordentshire. Not the north for now, trusting the treant's appetite and senses. They look for traces where the canoes could have landed, as well as traces of fire and signs of camping.

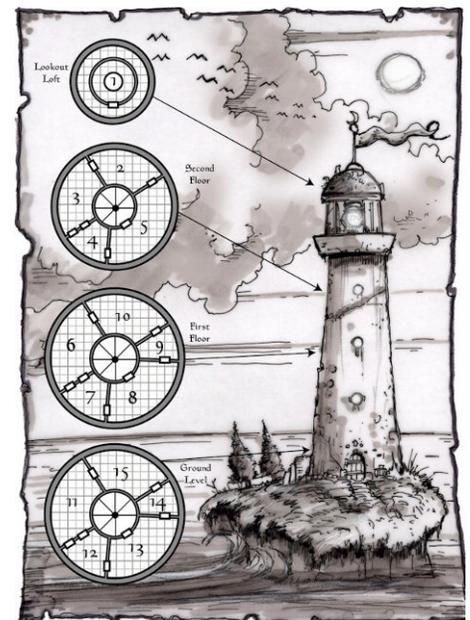
Suddenly, near an abandoned lighthouse, they reappear! The halo is in the lighthouse! They see Barnabé on top of the lighthouse, watching in direction of Mordentshire. Thankfully, he hasn't seen the briefly appearing ghost shapes of the heroes, who retreat quickly outside the halo's revealing range. The heroes sent one of them fetch MacRazbunare.

They watch the invaders from afar, so they do not leave the lighthouse. The invaders appear to be making turns watching toward Mordentshire. They spot the canoes hidden on the sea side. From visibility tests, they deduce that the halo is one floor below the top floor. The lighthouse is very old and shows numerous signs of dereliction.

DM note: for this location, I used this map from WotC's map of the month. You'll notice I used the descriptions from Almadrask's Lighthouse by Joseph P. Laycock (Haunted Site netbook). It is haunted by the ghost of a dwarf (Almadrask). They will encounter him later. I located it on the small island south of Arden bay (map from I-10).

The heroes wait for 6h30 pm, so Varadan can try again to *manifest*. (24 hours after the failed initial try). Even with help from *Owl's wisdom*, *Guidance* and *resistance* spells, he is still unable to manifest. So the heroes will attack without him. Moving ethereally underground so they remain unseen, they enter the lighthouse from underground to the first floor... but Austizel is victim of an exploding glyph! Quickly they move up through the floors (another glyph on second floor!) and surround the monastery invaders who were getting ready for battle on the third floor of the lighthouse.

Barnabé is holding the halo on his backpack. They focus their attacks on the most dangerous of the five, the wizard Iroya – *magic missiles* and *flaming sphere*. The heroes use well the advantages of being incorporeal (having cover and similar). But Iroya makes a deadly cone of cold (47 hp!) which nearly kills Petrak (at -2 hp). The next round, MacRazbunare finishes her off with a *magic missile*. But Radin succeed in *hold person* on Austizel, and the ghosts focus their



attacks on this helpless character. Virevan drags him back in the walls. Eventually, the last one standing is Radin, Exigu kills him with one last arrow...

GAME SESSION THIRTY: AND MORE WEIRD THINGS IN MORDENT -7

(April 20th, 2008; Benoit's PC was played by Jean-François Lévesque (a new player!) and Sylvain's by Martin)

February 3rd, 748, 7h00 pm

MacRazbunare uses the halo to get back to flesh, and it feels good to sense the blood circulating in his hands. The others follow him.

Varadan (our resident Moonchild PrC) is suddenly very hungry and gets a meaty fill from the remains of the pork carcasses. While he feeds, he sees the ghost of an old dwarf watching him briefly before disappearing. He is crippled and hunchback, but his clothes are of fine quality. They wonder if this is a spy for Godefroy... or a ghost tied to the lighthouse?

Radin's holy symbol is that of the Eternal Order, from Darkon – a hooded human skull over a cross. From what the heroes know, it is a strange religion, where death is revered and feared, but only so it doesn't get more present in your life.



Petrak and Varadan gets away from the lighthouse in canoe, so the others can cast effectively detection spells in the lighthouse. Three things are magical: a ring Iroya wore (**Protection +3**) - it is oddly staying a little warm, Barnabé's longsword (+1) and a crystal bottle with a metallic stopper (**Ghost Trap, from LoBlood**). While they are in the canoe, Petrak and Virevan see briefly the ghost of the dwarf, watching toward the sea before vanishing.

8h pm. They explore the lighthouse. Its walls have become dingy and covered with gray-white lichen, especially on the sides facing the sea. The entrance is a rat-gnawed door of heavy oak that can no longer keep out the icy winter blasts. The delicately-carved sea nymphs that once graced its wooden face have become gnarled and twisted with age. Austizel believes the lighthouse's architecture was built by dwarves a long time ago.

The rooms smell of damp and vermin. The furnishings have long since rotted away. In one room however, they find a small wooden chest. Believing it could anger the ghost of the dwarf, they do not touch it. While they are a moment outside, they see him again watching the sea from the top of the lighthouse.

They decide to sleep and recover on the ground floor inside the lighthouse, with people watching in turns.

MacRazbunare notices that his wolf smells him often, like if MacRazbunare was now different. Oddly, the only one the wolf smells is MacRazbunare. Patu, Exigu's dog, doesn't act the same way toward Exigu. *Detect poison* shows nothing. The others compare the way the wolf strangely acts with when MacRazbunare was under the control of the Doppelganger's plant.

At 11h pm, Petrak sees the ghost of the dwarf exiting the room where the chest is, and go up the stairs. He doesn't follow him.

February 4th, 748

1h am. During his watch, Virevan sees a boat leaving for the sea, about a mille off the coast. But quickly he notices the whole scene is supernatural – the light around the merchant boat is ghostly, and while the sail is fully opened, the boat travels very slowly. *(DM note: ethereal taint manifesting. It is related to the dwarf's story, as you'll see later).*

In the morning, MacRazbunare cast a *Speak with animal* on his wolf, which explains his behavior “You smells like something that doesn't taste good. Can't say what. At the same time, I recognize and do not recognize your odor.” *(DM note: the halo's power were suddenly very appealing to the players, who were not sure of giving it back! So I really had to give an element of risk or they will never give it back to the monks ☺ Mac Razbunare got Unwholesome Ichor (as the feat))*

They also *identify* the magical crystal bottle, a Ghost Trap. *DM note: you can use it to trap any incorporeal being within 30 feet (Will save). If the ghost target makes its saving throw, the item is useless for 24 hours. But if it does, the trapped ghost can only attempt another save to escape after a year.*

8h am. They get in the canoe and travel to the monastery, without stopping while passing in Mordentshire. At the monastery, they let the monks use the halo to transform back to flesh those who jumped with the heroes when the attackers invaded the monastery. They are very grateful. They invite the heroes to a feast of roast pork and apple cider.

Thelonious asks them what are their plans with the halo, i.e. do they plan to give it to Godefroy? The heroes are not very pleased with the idea of transforming back Estelle and Lilia to carnatis, as the life of a carnatis is very difficult and dangerous. Petrak suggests that at least they won't give the halo to Godefroy after he uses it, and that they would bring it back to the monks afterward.

MacRazbunare enquires about possible aftereffects of the halo. Thelonious says that there are rare, but he remembers a monk that was ignored by mindless undead after he used the halo.

1h30 pm, they travel back to Mordentshire, and arrives at 4h30 pm at Van Richten's, to discuss with him the moral dilemma of using the halo. Van Richten agrees that Godefroy seems to have an interest in this request, so he doesn't suffer anymore from the attacks of his wife and daughter. Godefroy probably has also the means of making sure they are well kept as carnatis.

They also reveal that Godefroy is controlling Daniel Foxgrove, which surprises Van Richten a lot! They also tells him not to say anything to the twins, to protect the image they have of their father...

5h pm. They get to Daniel Foxgrove's Manor, to talk to him in private, but instead the twins open the door and are extremely happy to see them. They are invited for diner, and the heroes tell them the tale of the halo recovery.

They share with them the tales about the lighthouse. Almadrask was a dwarf who got a lot of success by being a merchant on the seas, something very peculiar since dwarves are not usually prone to travel across the water. Almadrask once had an accident, and he was forced to retire. His back was now humped like a whale and he walked with a crippled gait. In his bitterness, he resigned to the lonely life of a lighthouse keeper which he had built by darkonese dwarves near the Arden bay. But Almadrask fell in love with a Mordentshire woman, but this woman wasn't

faithful, and she soon left with a merchant captain on his boat. Almadrask begged her not to leave, but to no avail. Then it is said he leapt from the tower. His body was never found, and the lighthouse was abandoned. Some people coming very close to the lighthouse say they see him on top of it, endlessly watching the sea...

The twins tell them of Professor Arcanus traveling show, arrived in town at the end of the day. According to the twins, Arcanus is a street magician, but also a charlatan, as he shows supposedly genuine “relics” from the core, but all of it is false according to the twins. (DM note: not sure at this time what I'll do with it, but I like the idea of MacRazbubare – former Gundarak noble and Varadan – Von Zarovich bloodline, running after Gundar ☺)

Also, the logging hamlet of Canondale in the forest north of Mordentshire is without contact with Mordentshire since a few days. (DM note: Azenwrath is coming! That is why they met the corrupted treant the other day).

The twins also ask what the heroes plan to do with the halo, and why they want to talk with their father, who is not known to warm feelings toward the heroes... The heroes answer they still don't know what to do with the halo, then evasively answers about Daniel Foxgrove, but clearly Laurie isn't convinced they say the truth. She gets up shortly before the end of the meal, to come back minutes later. She invites the heroes to a cozier salon, for digestive drinks, while they wait for Daniel Foxgrove's arrival.

About five minutes after the drinks are consumed, Laurie then again starts questioning directly about the halo, with even Gennifer surprised of the boldness of this attempt, but this time Petrak answers her in all details! (DM note: potion of truth against vistani that was put in Petrak's glass by Gennifer. Petrak is a Giorgio so I stretched it a little ☺. I simply took Martin apart and told him to answer truthfully to all the questions asked to him). So the twins learn about Godefroy's existence in the House on Gryphon Hill, his curse and his plans with the halo. Petrak explains that Godefroy is controlling ghosts to act as spy and control some people for his own interests. After more questioning, Petrak even tell them that their mother's ghost is still bound to the House, and that Godefroy is controlling their father by menacing her! This revelation is extremely painful to the twins, who decide to retire, watery-eyed, and let the heroes wait alone for Daniel. Before leaving, Laurie gives a small piece of paper to Petrak (“Sincere excuses. Laurie”).

Alone, Petrak reveals he was tricked by something to say the truth. The heroes *detect magic* to find Petrak's cup slightly magical (enchantment)... A spellcraft check tells MacRazbunare that it is some kind of *zone of truth* spell.

MacRazbunare is wondering why the twins are so shocked by these revelations. He thinks it might be linked with missions given to them by their father, and they just understood who the real client was. Have they just found out they were they manipulated by their father?

Virevan and Petrak go meet Van Richten to tell them about the twins and what the girls had just learned. Meanwhile, MacRazbunare makes some test and get a sample of his blood to have his wolf and Exigu's dog smell it. Both animals react badly to it. MacRazbunare thinks his problem might be similar to the Unwholesome Ichor feat (DM note: good guess ☺).

8h15 pm. Daniel Foxgrove is back to his Manor. He accepts to meet the heroes for a few moments. In the conversation, he says he knows what the halo does. Daniel suggests that they should bring it to the person who asked you to retrieve it (he isn't naming Godefroy by name). After questioning by the heroes, Daniel says “does the mouse have a choice in obeying the cat?”

After hearing the heroes' suggestion, Daniel says that "sadly, I'm not sure it's a good idea to use the halo on my lovely Alice. He can hurt corporeal beings too. I'd prefer if we could find a way to have her soul rest in peace permanently, away from him." He also reveals that "he can exit the House on Gryphon Hill, it's him who comes here to meet me." The heroes understand Godefroy lied to them when he said he could not leave the hill and do it himself.

He is under control to Godefroy since a decade. Daniel says his instructions were not for him to get the halo to the house on Gryphon Hill, but that Lord Godefroy would come to Daniel's house.

"Now you surely understand I can't be seen talking to you. The best of chances to you, good night", and he leaves the salon.

The heroes then ask a servant if they can get a hold of the twins, as they want to talk to the girls. In fact, they just want to make sure they do not act foolishly over grief. But the servant come back and tells them "the twins are in their room, and they do not want to talk to anybody. They said they will meet you only tomorrow morning".

But a few minutes later they hear one of the twins (they could not say which from the distance) howl a angry "How could you do that?," followed by a strong door clapping sound. Exigu the halfling tries to hear at Daniel's bedroom door. One of the girls is sobbing, while the other one is able to control herself...

Daniel "what do you think what else I could have done? I didn't have the choice, he was going to hurt Alice... your mother!"

Twin "How could you do that?"

Daniel "I tried to protect you for the longest time possible. This was always on my mind."

Twin "we could have done something should you have told us, or our uncle (Van Richten)! We could have moved elsewhere, leave this influence, I don't know, we could have found something..."

Exigu hears movement inside the room and is able to hide before the twins exit their father's room. The halfling goes back downstairs, unseen, to tell the other of what he heard. The heroes install themselves in the room allowed to them as their dormitory, and go to sleep around 9h pm, with guards on duty in turns.

But at 11h10 pm, during Petrak's watch, Godefroy passes through the wall and enters the room! Godefroy is menacing Petrak with his cane: "My lovely wife and her brat will arrive soon. *You* will pass the halo through them to transform them." The other heroes awaken slowly, surprised!

Petrak says he'd like to cast *Bull's Strengh*t on himself, but Godefroy tells him menacingly that Petrak didn't need this spell to succeed in this task. MacRazbunare howls for help but Godefroy tells him to shut up. But they hear noise upstairs.

After a short wait, Lilia and Estelle appear in the room! As usual, they ignore the other to focus their hate on Godefroy. Godefroy is menacing Petrak with his cane: "do it!". Away from the cane's reach, MacRazbunare cast a mirror image on himself. Petrak tries to pass Estelle through the halo but misses (*lamentable d20 roll, he couldn't have pass the halo through an unmoving 3 feet pole!*). Godefroy is angry at this "incompetence", but orders Petrak to try another time.

Exigu tries the Ghost Trap on Godefroy, but its magic doesn't work on Godefroy... Petrak tries again to pass Estelle through the halo but fails again (!). Godefroy screams in frustration "try again!"

Suddenly, the twins open the door to the dormitory and run inside it! They see Godefroy and their hate is visible in their face. Then Lilia stops taunting her father and attacks him! Godefroy is powerless against her attacks and screams in pain. Petrak uses this opportunity and tries to pass *Godefroy* through the halo! He succeeds, but it doesn't work – Godefroy seems immune to the halo's power! Godefroy hits Petrak in rage with his cane! Gennifer cast a *magic missile* at Godefroy! "You little whores stay out of this!" snarls an angry Godefroy. Varadan move to attack Godefroy too. Then Estelle stops her cursing and she attacks Godefroy with all her fury.

Varadan then uses the halo on Estelle, who is transformed to flesh! She seems in shock and she stops her attack, batting her eyelids as if coming out of a trance. Exigu hurls arrows at Godefroy, who ignores it completely (it pass through his incorporeal shape).

Then Varadan uses the halo to pass Lilia through it! She is also in shock of being flesh again, as her mother.

Surprisingly, Godefroy change attitude and tell her wife and child that he is sorry, and that he wishes they could pardon him... the heroes back down from Godefroy, and regroup away farther in the room. This is the opportunity Godefroy was waiting for: suddenly, he attacks Estelle with his cane! Virevan jumps and tries to pass Lilia through the halo but it doesn't work! (*DM note: an hour is needed to shift again through the halo*). Lilia attack Godefroy to protect her mother but she is powerless against the ghost!

Virevan grabs Lilia and runs away with her, away from Godefroy! Petrak cast *Bull's Strengh* on himself. Godefroy attack Estelle a second time and Estelles dies under the heroes' unbelieving eyes! She falls on the ground where her carnatis flesh dissolves to nauseous flesh and blood. Laurie runs at Virevan's side to help him protect Lilia. Godefroy laugh in evil joy at the death of his wife!

Virevan runs away with Lilia in her hands, but Godefroy says "give me my daughter! She tortured me for too long!" while he laughs again. Virevan runs outside Foxgrove's manor. Confident, Godefroy walks in Virevan's direction, still laughing evilly. When he passes near Gennifer, she hits him with her magical dagger "die, bastard!", but he ignores her.

Suddenly, from under Godefroy's feet, a pool of sick red ichor bubbles up through the floorboards! It quickly takes a shape very similar to Estelle's shape! Godefroy is stunned by this new apparition.

Persuaded that Lilia has something to do in this, like some kind of curse, Virevan puts her down and say "do what you need to do", but the little girl gets to her knees and wails pitifully...

The sick bloody shape of Estelle suddenly enters the space where Godefroy's incorporeal body stands, and starts *melting* with him! The heroes can see the red substance run through Godefroy's veins and it enters is mouth. Godefroy screams in indescribable, as-yet-unmatched agony... After a moment, he vanishes along with the ectoplasm red monstrosity that was his wife...

DM note: pretty cool battle!

11h30 pm. Lilia asks “where is my mother?” but nobody answers her. The twins take her away, whispering gentle things in her ears. Getting on top floor of Daniel’s house, they look in the direction of Gryphon Hill, half expecting fireworks or something after the demise of Godefroy, but all seem quit in this direction.

Daniel appears in the dormitory. Virevan asks him “Godefroy is gone. Do you want us to save Alice? Should we go to Gryphon Hill?” Daniel has hope in his eyes, but he is too shocked to take a decision.

With Lilia taken care of by the maids, the twins get to the salon to get port wine and talk with their father about these last events. The heroes are not invited, so they decide to go back to sleep.

February 5th, 748

But only ten minutes later, Jennifer asks them to get to the salon. They follow her, to see Laurie is there, along with Daniel, holding the ghostly hand of his wife Alice in his hand...

Daniel tells the heroes he wants the halo. Virevan asks if Alice knows about the consequences of using it, but Daniel and Alice nods in unison.

The heroes ask Alice “Are all the ghosts gone from Gryphon Hill?”, but Alice answers negatively “no, I just have a longer leash.” Daniel again asks for the halo. The heroes refuse, saying it’s better if the halo remains under their guard. But they can use it on Alice, should they want to.

Daniel understands. He says their decision isn’t taken, so they’ll retire and come back later. The heroes go back to sleep... to awake only the next morning...

8h00 am. The heroes learn their spells and MacRazbunare *identify* Iroya’s ring (protection +3).

Petrak doesn’t recuperate the charisma points lost to Godefroy’s dreaded cane! Even *lesser restoration* isn’t effective... *(DM note: it’s permanent! Then I ended the session on a dramatic note:)*

Next, they meet Laurie. She hasn’t slept at all during the night and appears to have cried a lot.

“Our mother is gone,” she said. “She decided to try her luck and she left Mordent to go as far as possible from here. We decided this after our first family meeting in more than 20 years ...”

“How cruel to meet our mother (*she died giving birth to the twins*) and have her leave us so soon...”