

GAME SESSION FORTY ONE: AND MORE WEIRD THINGS IN MORDENT -18

(played May 30th, 2010. Austizel played by JF)

February 24th, 748 – 10h30 am

(This is the end of the chapter from the Skinsaw Murder adventure (Paizo's Pathfinder) I added to my campaign)

The heroes find themselves at the entrance of a large but dark cavern. It's lighted by a few candles only, and because it's quite large, they do not see the other end of the cavern. It contains several items of furniture: a table cluttered with all manner of what appears to be garbage: empty bottles, bits of clothing, crumpled bits of paper, and more, lying in neatly organized rows. A painting leans against a chair. A smaller table farther in the room has fine porcelain plates, and crystal ware. However, the "food" on these plates and platters is rotten meat, in some cases humanoid in source, and in all cases writhing with maggots. Thick, rotting blood gels in the crystal...

There are many wooden crates everywhere in the room, and possibly more furniture in the darkened end of the room.

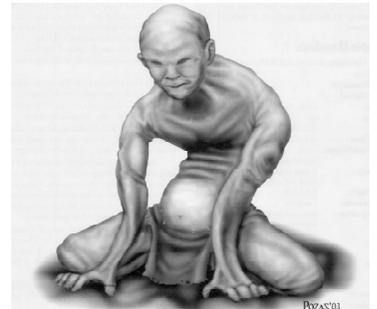
But a horrific stench seems strongest to the right, where the cave's wall has been overtaken by a dreadful growth of dark green mold and dripping fungi. At the center, a patch of black tumescent fungus grows, its horny ridges and tumor-like bulbs forming what could almost be taken to be a humanoid outline?

What appears to have once been an exquisite puzzle box the size of a man's fist lies smashed on the ground at the fungoid shape's feet.

At the end of the room, a chair whose high back and cushion are horribly stained by smears of rotten meat and its arms are sticky with blood. There is someone seated on this chair. This tall and lean man wears blue noble clothing in fashion in Borca...

DM note: small summary! Aldern Fordstone is seated on the chair (this NPC was turned to a ghoul when exploring the cavern layer of mansion). The fungus on the wall comprises of the remains of Vorel Fordstone (grandfather of Aldern) - after his wife disrupted the ritual he was performing here to become a lich, the necromantic energy lashed back and destroyed his physical body, transforming it into the fungoid corruption that grows on the wall here.

When he sees the heroes' arrival, the man on the chair says "Oh fun, more Barovians..." and then he yells "attack!" This command has the effect of prompting strange creatures to leap out from some of the crates. These creatures are humanoids but they exit from crates that are sometimes quite small, one cubic foot! They do not appear to have bones but solely flesh and muscles!



DM note: this fun adventure has the usual design mistake of having the "boss" at the end of the adventure all alone. Aldern isn't that a challenge when alone, so I added half a dozen boneless under his control.

While the boneless creatures move toward the heroes, MacRazbunare, Varadan and Austizel hurls *magic missiles* at Aldern.

Virevan moves to the battle but he is suddenly struck with dizziness for a moment. He sees the broken puzzle box shake and feels his own shadow melting with the body imprint on the wall. Then he has the compulsion to eat this fungus in order to take back his shadow from it! (*DM note: another haunt from this cool place*) But he resisted this suggestion and resumes the fight and slashes a boneless. He notices his sword isn't making all the damage it should. The body of these boneless is tough like hardened leather!

Two boneless attack Petrak and Virevan. Their attack is a slamming one and they hit hard. In the distance and semi darkness, Aldern gets up from his chair and moves toward the battle while more *magic missiles* hit him. He has a large and bloody war razor. Petrak is able to turn undead and 3 boneless runs from him on all fours, at an astounding speed (60 feet!).

Aldern's body exhale a ghoulish odor and Exigu and Virevan are sickened. With his holy symbol, Virevan is able to turn the other boneless creatures.

Now very close, they understand Aldern is undead and somewhat ghoulish. He hits one of the heroes hard with his razor, and one vicious attack does 22 hit points! Petrak attack with a power attack. MacRazbunare tries *melf acid arrow* on Aldern. Austizel hurls a *disrupt undead* but the ray misses. Virevan is again dizzy from the shadow effect.

MacRazbunare's wolf growls looking back at the door where they came from... Virevan hits Aldern but Exigu's arrows miss. Aldern attack with his deadly razor and Varadan falls, unconscious. Petrak attacks, but misses. MacRazbunare's second *melf acid arrow* also misses. Austizel hurls another magic missile but they now notice it is absorbed by a piece of jewelry on him... While Aldern was far and in the semi darkness, they didn't spot this.

Virevan and Exigu are still sickened. The battle continues, and MacRazbunare throws a *flaming sphere* at Aldern, they goes at the door to see what made his wolf growls: about fifteen more boneless are coming! Austizel casts a *melf acid arrow* at Aldern. Aldern suddenly stops and ask "but where is your headless bitch?" but the battle continues.

Virevan hits Aldern, who hits Petrak again. Petrak casts *produce flame* on Aldern. MacRazbunare closes the door and *summons wolf* to help against the coming boneless. Varadan and Austizel casts *disrupt undead*, and Austizel's spells kills Aldern. Aldern murmurs "now it's over" when he falls.

Then Virevan is dizzy again and moves toward the fungus! Petrak grapples him and Virevan get calmer. Petrak cast cure serious wounds on himself. They see the boneless in the room moving aimlessly in the room, until they get close to their box, where they enter.

After the battle, the heroes throw oil flasks at the fungus patch, burning it. They can't identify the humanoid shape in the molds, but ther are convinced it is Vorel. They cast cure spells.



Detect magic in the room: Aldern's war razor (+2), a brooch (abjuration) and a ring (abjuration). He also has other jewels worth 200 gp. On the table, there is porcelain and silverware for 20 gp.

They investigate the painting near the chair. It is a copy of a painting of Iecha they saw in a room upstairs, but Aldern added to it blood and excrement in a weird artistic taste, or perhaps sense of humor. If cleaned, the value of the painting is 75 gp.



In a box, an alchemy set is worth 20 to 25 gp.

They decide to burn Aldern's corpse.

Under a writing desk, they find a bag containing the wooden box with the Ezra heretic texts! They have recovered the stolen texts. The wooden box alone is heretic, depicting Ezra and its followers as undead?



On this writing desk they find a letter:

My good friend Aldern—

You have served us quite well in the last months, and I'm very pleased to do business with a Borcan noble of your stature. The last delivery you harvested from the caverns under your mansion far exceeds what I had hoped for. Our client was thrilled.

So you may consider your debt to the Red Vardo Traders paid in full. We will help you get rid of this stupid mummified cow you had for wife, and make sure the square heads from Mordent can't get you in jail. All will be back to a new life for you.

Because as promised, here's the solution to your little flesh hunger problem. The stolen documents have to be delivered to a cavalier waiting for it at the drowned chapel. This is another of our esteemed clients I told you about, a very nice person to meet. Go meet him and give him the documents. I would have done it myself but do not have much time these days, and he is very close to your manor, so you understand it will be much easier for you than for me.

As a payment for you, as discussed, he will give a potion and the ritual needed to get back to life again.

Hope to do business with you again soon,

Your friend,

JM

Also, in the writing desk, is Aldern's journal!

*Aldern Fordstone's Personal Journal
(excerpts)*

739 — first entries: Aldern is 16 years old. He is raised by rich Borcan relatives. He is curious of his origins and wonder why nobody tells him more about his mother and father. Why did they killed themselves?

739-745 — few entries, and nothing of interest (school, first love, etc.)

746 — Summer - her fiancée is from Darleon, her name is Iesha. Iesha is surely the most beautiful woman Aldern have ever met, a goddess with raven-black hair and luscious curves, the voice of an angel and the heart of a lion. Aldern falls wildly and passionately in love with the darkonese girl. They got fiancé and planned to marry as soon as they finished their studies. She also came from a rich family.

October - An aunt had told him that now that is twenty years old, he could claim Fordstone Manor in Mordent as his own. She is paying for the Manor's minimal care since he went to Borca. I just have to go to Mordentshire to speak to Rogor Craesby. He will show me the way.

747 — January. His first impressions of the Manor are horrible, but he soon sees the beauty of the site, and the family history linked to it, and plans to renovate the entire Manor to get a new branch of the family living there.

But he has trouble finding skilled laborers and servants to aid him in restoring his family estate—Fordstone Manor's haunted reputation had decades to take root in local Mordent superstition.

Worse, he found the manor's cellars were infested with rats—horribly diseased and aggressive rats that kept to themselves as long as no one ventured too far into the basement.

The job to do was enormous, from the need to patch the leaky roof in dozens of places to dealing with the strange and repugnant fungus and molds that grew so tenaciously in the basement.

After a while, he goes back to Borca, marries Iesha, and brings her to the Manor.

She hates it. Aldern is bitter as Iesha doesn't appreciate all the sacrifices he is making for her. "I do it all for you"

Aldern's passions and lust for Iesha gave way to jealousy and paranoia, and he grew overprotective of his wife's honor to the extent of locking her in the manor during his business trips.

June - Then, one night after arriving home late from Mordent, Aldern found Iesha and one of the carpenters together in the library. He went mad and brained the man with a book holder, causing Iesha to fly into a fury of shouts. When Aldern recovered from his rage, he found he'd strangled his wife to death with her own silk scarf!

In a growing panic, Aldern disposed of the carpenter's body by throwing it down the nearby well, but he couldn't bring himself to do the same with Iesha. Instead, he wrapped her corpse in a sheet and hid it in the attic, locking the door and intending to return later to deal with the evidence.

He then fled to meet his contact from the Red Vardo Traders. They would take care of the problem, and would give their advice and help on how to handle this tragic turn of events and avoid justice.

One of the Red Vardo Traders promised him they'd take care of his problem.

In the weeks that followed, Aldern explained that Iesha was away visiting friends in distant Darkon and that work on restoring his manor had come to a break while he awaited more funds to pay for the final stages of the restoration. He kept up a brave face in public, but

in truth, he was slowly being driven bankrupt, both morally and financially, by the Red Vardo.

October - Every week, they demanded more payments in return for their cover up services (implying that if Aldern didn't continue the payments, they would reveal the truth of his murderous acts).

November - One day, he told J of the strange diseased rats plaguing the undergrounds of the Manor. The Traders said they had a client for this kind of thing and asked Aldern to capture one, or more, and bring them in a cage.

When Aldern searched the basement, he heard a strange scratching from under the sagging floor in a central room. Assuming the sounds to be the rats he sought, he dug through the floor and uncovered an ancient stairwell, one that led to his ancestor Vorel's hidden laboratory under the manor.

In these caverns, he finally discovered not only the rats he sought, but the source of their affliction: a disturbing patch of fungus that grew along a cave wall.

Harvesting both, he unknowingly exposed himself to latent necromantic contagions, and he succumbed to a potent form of ghoul fever.

Horrified from this horror and hunger, J asked if there was a cure to this affliction.

January - J first promised me a ghoul cure from a "night market", but instead, in the latter months she had me do dirty works for the Traders, like if I was working for her as a peasant: recover for her two bodies from Mordentshire's cemetery, with Rogor's help, help plan and cover up for the kidnapping of one of the daughter of Mordentshire's mayor, hold some hot stuff for her safe, etc.

Who does she think she is, this bitch? I'll get her head as soon as all of this is finished.

And recently she made me kill the farmers to make more ghouls to help her.

And more little errands I do not wish to say here...

Why?

February - Soon, J wrote that I will have to meet some kind of cavalier from Darkon and give them the stolen documents. Then they should give me the cure potion, she said.

I do not trust her at all, but do I have the choice? I feel used like a chess piece. Who are these black riders?

DM note: I added the heretic document idea to the Skinsaw murder adventure. So Montarri stole the documents for Necropolis's Death and was supposed to deliver them to one of Death's Horsemen. She had real doubts over this encounter, so she asked Aldern to do the delivery. But the heroes arrived before Aldern went to meet Death's Horsemen (a meeting that would have badly ended for Aldern as Death instructed his Horsemen to kill Montarri when the documents were delivered).

Montarri was paid in full, so she doesn't care and this was a possible way to get rid of Aldern, to whom she had promised a cure to his ghoulish affliction, something she lied about, of course.

You also note the DM nerdish fun with Montarri when Aldern said "but where is your headless bitch?" during the battle or wrote "I'll get her head as soon as all of this is finished." :) OK, back to the story...

The heroes wonder if they should open the wooden box to look at the heretic documents themselves. They also think JM's letter was a double cross from Aldern, since meeting this "death knight cavalier" (from the rumors they had heard) is probably a bad idea.

They also find an alchemy kit in one of the crates, worth 25 gp.

Noon. The heroes exit Fordstone Manor. They see the fifteen boneless in the cavern pool, moving aimlessly.

At 1 pm, they are at Hambley's farm. They cast *detect poison* on Virevan: negative.

They get some rest, after hiding the horses and organizing watch schedule.

February 25th, 748 – 6h00 am

After learning spells, they *identify* the magical ring as being *protection +1*.

They cast an *augury* spell, asking if it is dangerous to open the wooden box containing the heretic text: negative. They open it and it contains five old books, and more recent loose papers. Another *augury* to ask if it is dangerous to read the papers: negative. *Detect poison*: negative. They open the first book, but its ancient Mordentish and they will need time to translate it.



They go back to the manor, and go back inside for an unexplored bit of tunnels. It leads to a dead end, where a well opens in the sky. They see the corpse of Virevan's horse. The whole seems vacant of all monsters. They gather some wood to burn the manor.

Inside his head, MacRazbunare hears a feminine voice "I want to be buried in the family parcel, in Martira Bay". They know Martira Bay is in Darkon, and they realize it's Iesha (Aldern's murdered wife) speaking to them. They recover her mummified body in the attic, and get the manor to burn!

In the distance, watching the manor starting to burn, they see three strange creatures, extremely shiny, but tall (8', 10' and 12'!) exiting from the mansion in flames. The creatures move toward the heroes! The heroes get on their horse and flee the area, leaving the creatures behind.

DM note: a last trick of this haunted house – three glass golems, but they avoided this fight (for the moment).

But while the manor is destroyed by fire, the mushroom patch containing Vorel's spirit in the cave is still there. This could eventually be used as a let's return to Fordstone to finish the job (exorcist-like expedition).

But they still have to meet War (Death's Horsemen) to add a little pressure to the adventure, and more clues as to what is going on. Don't worry, they will get some help as they can't deal with War at this level. But they will have to face him five long rounds before ...

The heroes run back toward Hambley's farm on their horses, but after a short while, they suddenly stop, because at a curve, a cavalier is standing in the middle of the road! It is not very far from the trail leading to the drowned chapel.

The macabre rider's is wearing a highly stylized full plate with a draconic motif. Whoever this battle-scarred knight was in life, he fared poorly; the bloody, black steel is buckled and punctured by dozens of mortal wounds. Its helmet's visor is closed and its helm has been bashed in, as if by a heavy mace or maul. No human skull could still be intact inside it. It wields a bastard sword at his belt, its dark rusted blade darkened by dried blood and smoke...

The steed is an undead heavy warhorse. Its heavy steel barding worn has not protected it from countless gruesome wounds. Drops of blood flow from its nostrils, and its hooves shows more blood spots, as it recently trampled something to pulp.

The knight then speaks to the heroes, and its guttural voice sounds like the clashing of steel and the screams of maimed men and horses! “What are you doing in this isolated region?”

The knight seems very angry, often has the reflex to close his gloved hand on his sword’s pommel, and growls from self restraint frustration...

Petrak – We are here to help farmers that are having problems.

Knight – Does any of you follows this bitch known as Ezra?

Petrak – there are none.

Knight – I don’t like to be lied to (more frustration growling)

Petrak, gulping – I am a fervent follower of Ezra.

Knight, speaking at Petrak – Me and my brothers are here looking for the heretic documents about Ezra. Do you know where these are?

Petrak, lying, looking at the smoke in the sky behind him (the manor) – you have your answer there!

The knight then gives two blows at Petrak horses, and it dies! Petrak changes his mind and wishes to give the box to the knight. The knight retreats a few feet, takes his sword in hand, and black flames erupt from his blade! Petrak opens the bag and shows the box containing the documents... but the knight’s steed is now charging toward the group! His sword transformed to a lance! Everybody runs in all direction, wishing to avoid the knight’s charges!

First the knight charges toward MacRazbunare (-22 hp). MacRazbunare sends a *flaming sphere* at the wooden box, hoping to distract the knight from them! But the next round, it turns toward Virevan, who is hit for -20 hp. At this exact moment, another wound opens on MacRazbunare’s body and starts to bleed (-11 hp, an old wound from the battle with Nathan Timothy!)

While the knight prepares for another charge, they throw arrows at him (no effect) and spells: *disrupt undead* and *magic missiles*. The undead knight hits Petrak this time (-24) while another old wound opens on MacRazbunare’s (-11!) and the same thing on Virevan (-10!). What an horrible thing they are facing!

Petrak gives a *cure serious wound* on MacRazbunare, and Austizel sends *magic missile* at the undead horror. Virevan cures himself with spells. MacRazbunare throws another *magic missile* at the knight.

It charges Petrak again (the only one within range): -35! Petrak falls to the ground! Virevan has another old wound making him bleed (-10), but nothing else happens to MacRazbunare this round.

Austizel sends another *magic missile* at the knight, while Exigu hits him with a sling. Varadan cast *disrupt undead*, and Virevan cast cure spells on himself. The knight turns, preparing for another charge, but suddenly it falls to the ground! The knight and its steed transforms into rot!

They are surprised by this sudden and brutal apparition, as well as its strange “death”. They check for Petrak, but his is truly dead. And two more deadly bleeding wounds appear on Petrak’s dead body...

They recover the wooden box (a bit damaged from the flames) and Petrak's body and they get back on their horses...

Cut scene sent to the players afterward:

The saddened heroes wrap Petrak's bloody corpse and put him on Exigu's horse.

A thousand question in their heads... what was this horrible creature? What was it doing there? Why was it searching for the texts? What of its brothers it spoke of?

And why did it suddenly fell to rot?

At the same time, a merchant on the road between Mordentshire and Chateaufaux is quite surprised to enter an eerie patch of fog near Dementlieu's frontier, and to exit the fog facing toward Mordentshire again!

DM note: the battle got the attention of Godefroy, who closed his border to cut the link between Death and its horsemen (one of the ways to destroy them, however, they will reform in Necropolis). Godefroy hates the heroes, but hates even more other darklords playing in his sandbox.

GAME SESSION FOURTY TWO: AND MORE WEIRD THINGS IN MORDENT -19

(played August 15th, 2010. Austizel played by JF, Exigu by Martin)

February 25th, 748 – 11h00 am

After the deadly battle, they travel the forest toward Mordentshire, where they arrive at 1h pm.

Tara tells the heroes that Martigan is still in Levkarest. She gasps in horror when she hears the heroes' story about the deadly undead cavalier. She says it reminds her of something she read about a prophesy: the Time of Unparalleled Darkness. There are three of these cavaliers: Famine, Pestilence and War.

Without waiting for Martigan, she says she will use the Mordent's church resources to raise Petrak from the dead, as he fell during a task for the clergy.

She offers the heroes to keep the heretic documents in the church's vault, but asks the players to stay in the church to guard it during the night (she isn't comfortable in guarding this by her alone).

The heroes then go see Van Richten and tell him about the heretic documents saga, that Aldern Fordstone was now a ghoul (*session 41*), and of their deadly battle with the Cavalier. At first, the heroes think they have encountered Pestilence, but they later realize that in fact they battled with War. Van Richten tells them the mists at the border were raised for about an hour, according to travelers and merchant.

He knows this about Death's Horsemen: although it appears undead, it is a creature composed of animate negative energy manifested in physical form. Three Horsemen serve Death – a sinister creature living in Necropolis – they are known by many names, including Famine, Pestilence, and

War. A Horseman is surrounded by the forces of entropy. Its touch — even its mere presence — spreads the affliction for which it is named.

The heroes ponder why did Godefroy saved their lives by closing the border? Why would this being known as Death need these heretic texts?

Tara cast raise dead on Petrak.

She had the time to read Oleg's notes on the heretic texts and that is what she learned of it:

The texts are in ancient Mordentish, and coded, but it is a code well known to those who have studied many ancient texts, like Oleg (*session 34*). In this wooden box, there are sufficient ancient documents and letters from the first anchorites between themselves to seriously shake Ezra's church foundations if they fall in the wrong hands. There are the first versions of the Myths, and discussions to make these better and more appealing.

Among other things, there are discussions on Camille Dilisnya's (Ivana's mother) participation in the early church - not just in funding the Cathedral and early printings of the books, but also influencing editorial choices in how the books were written: correspondence that outlines Yakov's arguments that the church could be used as a method of controlling the masses.

There are even hints of the threats and bribes delivered to the anchorites by Camille Dilisnya after she poisoned Yakov - "refuse my gifts and die".

This profane influence secret would only affect the sect they founded, but it would still be a profound impact on the Ezraite faith.

Later this day, Tara receives a letter from Levkarest:

Dear Tara,

Please come to Levkarest with Petrak's team as escort. Things are strange here but we need the texts to be safely hidden in the Cathedral's secure vault. After their delivery, the texts will be safe and under their responsibility.

Please stay at the Desfraya Manor, and I will meet you there.

Act with discretion.

James Martigan

Some of the heroes go to a merchant to buy a new horse to replace that of Petrak, which was killed by War.

February 26th, 748 – early morning

They travel toward Chateau noir, then through the fields toward Ste-Ronges. They pass near the now nearly familiar strange grotto (a druid's grove? See session 16 when they first saw it) but it is very quiet as usual. They do not disturb it and decide to sleep a short distance from it.

During the travel, Mac Razbunare asks if (and why) they should save Ezra from this impending embarrassing public shame. Tara answers that, truth or not, Ezra is one of the few beacons in the mist, so it has to be saved for good.

Petrak cast *comprehend languages* on the texts, but what he read things is very similar to Tara's account.

February 27th, 748

Quiet travel to Ste-Ronges (Richemulot).

February 28th, 748

Quiet travel to Sturben (Borca). Passed the scarred fortifications, they see a large group of persons in the public square. They learn there will be an execution tonight, at 7h37 exactly. They stop at their hotel (the Green Mirror, with hot water in each room) and go back to the central plaza to witness the events.

They see a man (a noble convicted of tax evasion, from what people say) in an iron cage, inside a fountain. On one side of the fountain is the statue of a double headed dragon, wide mouthed. The statue is named Wyrmsbreath. Many times per day, but one time being at 7h37 exactly, a geyser erupt from the earth's belly, pass through the statue's mouths to drench the cage in boiling hot water.

The heroes see the man, crouching in fear, while hostile people wishing him to survive Wyrmsbreath ... to die the next geyser eruption in prolonged sufferings. However, at 7h37, the crowd silenced as a low howling noise suddenly emerged from the statue (the wind exiting the pipes), then the sudden rush of boiling water on the cage. The man's death was quick, if not painless.

February 29th, 748

Quick travel to Levkarest, where they arrive around noon. Levkarest is a major trade center, with many shops (many of the Boritsi Trading Company), eateries and art galleries. The heroes stop at the Defraya Manor Inn, as Martigan requested in his letter, and stay in their room, guarding the texts.

Petrak goes alone to the Cathedral and asks to get his Shield. There he meets an anchorite woman by the name of Nicoletta. After checking that he has the basic qualifications to get this power, she sets an appointment for March the 1st.

(DM note: IMC, to get the Shield of Ezra, you need to pass an examination test sometimes after you reached 5th level)

When Petrak is back, the heroes go buy some ordinary weapons (dart, hammers), then go to the Cathedral this time to access its library.

The Great Cathedral towers above the rooftops of Levkarest, in Borca. Having taken sixty years to build, its last stones were laid in place less than a decade ago, and it remains a pristine testament to Ezra's glory. The towering stained glass windows sparkle, and the marble floors still gleam. The cathedral owes much of its beauty to the sculptures created by the late artist, Nikolai Pyotrovich. A glorious statue of Ezra looms over the altar, beatifically watching over her clergy and congregation, while monstrous gargoyles, symbolizing the Legions of the Night, cluster near the vaulted ceilings and atop the Cathedral roof. A viewer with a keen eye will note Pyotrovich's eye for detail; all of the stone Legions, no matter where they may be perched, are caught in a fearful pose, shying away from the icon of Ezra (*church descr. by John Mangrum in Anchors of Faith*)

The library is on the second floor, in the west wing of the Cathedral. They spend three hours there, looking for spells and information on Godefroy's deadly cane (Petrak lost Charisma points when the met Godefroy, session 30), but to no results at all.

They go back to their room and wait in vain for Martigan to return...

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... but near the closing of the tavern, a street urchin carries a message for them: "your friend awaits you at the Cathedral". It is 2 am! They suspect something foul.

They go in this direction, but passing between houses so they are less seen by possible guards and watchers. The side door of the Cathedral is locked from inside, so they have to pass through the front door. There, a guard tells them "he is waiting for you on the second floor".

While they stand on a large bridge-like structure on the second floor, suspended over the church, they see a man in the distance. Varadan the monk runs in this direction to see it is Martigan! He looks asleep. Varadan tries to awake him, but Martigan is confused, and waves while saying "get away, you ghosts." After a moment, he gets back to reality and recognizes Varadan. He says "go away, it's a trap!" and adds "I hope you didn't bring the texts here?" (They did)

Exigu hears a door opening on the main floor, and hears people climbing the two flights of stairs!

Then a person emerges from under the bridge, climbing on a hidden rope. He stands between Varadan and the rest of the group. MacRazbunare cast *wall of gloom* at one staircase, to block it. Tara cast *prayer*. Another person climbs from under the structure to get between the group and Varadan.

Then a group of three people suddenly open the library door and attack Varadan, who retreats toward the other heroes. Exigu hurls arrows at the attackers. Another door opens and other men exit from this room and surround Varadan! Then a third invader climbs on the bridge!

The three persons who climbed from under the bridge wear light armours and look like rogues. Also they are pale faced and the heroes think these are ermordenungs!

Austizel cast *magic missile* at one man and kills him: now Varadan isn't surrounded anymore and he runs toward the other heroes. One ermordenung throws darts at Exigu. The dart is covered

with a greenish sticky substance... Exigu feels weak. MacRazbunare *summons nature's ally* and summons mastiffs between the heroes and the ermordenungs. One of them bites an ermordenung and howl from a sudden pain! The mastiff shy away from them, but Macrazbunare has them fight the other attackers. The ermordenungs throw more darts at Austizel and Varadan. Austizel's *magic missile* kills one ermordenung!

Varadan reaches the group, after leaving caltrops to slow pursuers. The ermordenungs stay out of close range, throwing darts to the group from a safe distance. Some of these darts have a hollow tip and a gas is released when it breaks on a hero! Macrazbunare cast another *summons nature's ally* and summons a bat swarm. Tara cures the heroes. On the bridge, the mercenaries attack the mastiff.

At one point, the heroes see Johan Severin who sees the battle and calls for help. He is able to get to Martigan and carry his chair to safety.

One ermordenung throw a dart at Virevan, who suddenly feels extremely weak (*DM note: Virevan loose 7 points of Co! Royal Morrell from Borca Gaz*). The battle rages and Tara cast *delay poison* on Virevan. Exigu and Austizel throw arrows at the mercenaries. Varadan cast *color spray* and stuns of the ermordenungs!

The heroes, with the help of the mastiffs, are eventually able to succeed and eliminate all their opponents.

The heroes go back to the room where they saw Johann drag Martigan. It is locked but Johann opens it when he recognizes the heroes' call. He let them in and locks the door after them. Severin is surprised of this attack inside the Cathedral. After an hour, regular church guards are patrolling the area, and they are able to exit their locked room.

Martigan was drugged but is getting better with passing time.

The ermordenungs carry thief tool, darts, and other small bottles marked "X X X". However, their body is slowly rotting away like if they were melting. After a couple of hours, only blood marks the spot where these died. (*DM note: a twist on ermordenungs, could also be a twist just for these rogues ermordenungs*)

The heroes let Johann investigate and accept his offer to rest in a safe area of the cathedral. The box containing the texts is now deposited inside the Cathedral's mighty vaults.

In the afternoon, when the heroes have rested, Johann tells them the night guards were all put to sleep by a drug and that's how the mercenaries were able to enter the church. Also, the bandits accompanying the three ermordenungs are mercenaries from outside the town. The leader of the pack is a shady ermordenung rogue, usually acting as a mercenary too, so they guess this attack wasn't Ivana's command.

GAME SESSION FORTY THREE: TO DARKON AND BEYOND -1

(played November 21st, 2010. Austizel played by JF)

February 30th, 748 – 3 pm

DM note: After the battle, Exigu gets one level, he choose Ranger 4th

Exigu buys a riding dog in the afternoon, and starts training it.

Petrak checks if there are vistani in Levkarest, as he wants to give them the two tarokka deck the heroes still carry, but there are none.

In shops, MacRazbunare looks for world maps. He finds one in a shop but it is strange! There is no Shadow Rift north of Barovia, but lands called G'henna? Dorvinia? Markovia? He buys it for 5 gp.

(DM note: this David's pre GC map from the FoS map Vault)



They also meet wizards among anchorites at the Cathedral, and trade spells with them. They get *Detect secret doors*, *Tenser's floating disk* and *feather fall*.

They talk to Martigan and ask him who would be interested in stealing the heretic texts (for which they fought last night). He says he doesn't know, as the Levkarest church is mostly neutral in politics, and its first reflex is always diplomacy.

Martigan tells them that "he doesn't forbid them to enquire in parallel with the church's own enquiry". Because it's sure that the top level of Levkarest church is currently making an enquiry, with divination spells and all. However, Martigan adds, the results might stay secret and even me will not know of all of its results".

5h00 pm. Back at the hotel for dinner (Defraya Manor), they are surprised as they got an invitation for dinner at the Boritsi Music Hall, in a private lounge... and it is signed by Nostalia Romaine, Ivana's closest friend! What is it she wants? The heroes suspect it has to do with last night's battle at the Cathedral.

They spend the night at this tavern, gathering information on the Red Vardo Traders. People saw them pass through the area quite often, but not for long stays. They were likely travelers to elsewhere. The Death's Horseman doesn't ring a bell to anyone. They ask about strangers coming to Levkarest (to get information on those that attacked them yesterday night), but that has too many possibilities: many strangers come to Levkarest to try their chance in arts and other lucrative projects commissioned by the Boritsi or the Dilisnya.

They meet Ivram Kopesk (*a merchant the players saved from Invidia Ogres in session 18*) at the Rosebud Thorn Inn. He is very happy to meet them and offers beers and gossips. From him, the heroes learn that a civil war is brooding in Invidia: the mother against the son. There is a rumor that a siege of Hunadora (former Gundar palace, now occupied by Gabrielle) is under preparation.

They go to bed.

March 1st, 748 - am

In the morning, Petrak goes alone to his church appointment with Nicoletta.

What follows in the Levkarest Church was played by email a week before the game:



DM note: You know I never give things freely to my players, but make them work a little for it, and making it through role play or quests. I had already said that Petrak had to prove himself so he could get the Shield of Ezra. There it goes.

The guards at the entrance ask Petrak to go to a little room on the third floor, and they provide a laissez-passer bearing his name, and signed by Nicoletta Ladubay. The room contains a large table where six priests are waiting, four that Petrak never saw before, plus Johann Severin and Nicoletta Ladubay. Johann greets Petrak as the others do (and doesn't mention that he met Petrak previously – see previous session and session 13).



This room is magnificent: everything is marble white and behind the six priests, a large glass window opens on the main altar area of the Cathedral. The large Ezra icon seems to be watching directly inside this well lit room.

Nicoletta invites Petrak to sit on his side of the table, facing the other six, and he is offered water perfumed with rosemary. Nicoletta tells him that his examination will start now, and it should last about an hour.

She first asks him to cast a third level spell, to show his experience. Petrak says he died recently, so he lost that level. Nicoletta invites him to the same thing, with a second level spell. She says the examination will continue as he once achieved that level. However, the new powers will be available only when he will get back to 5th level.



DM question by email: Martin – from the list of all spells you can cast at this level (no need to check if you have it in memory or not), which one do you cast, and how?

One of the priests adds "why did you choose this particular spell?"

Martin answered : "My choice of spell is Cure Moderate wounds. I choose this spell because it is included in my anchorite domain spells and that it represents my philosophy to help our forces and fight our common enemies."

"A healing spell? Interesting", says Nicoletta. But from what little Petrak sees on Johann's face, it is clear he has well answered.

They take a moment of silence and meditation, then a priest seated between Johann and Nicoletta asks: "of all the things you know about Ezra, what is it that makes your skin crawl, or what fascinates you? How strong is your faith?"

Martin answered : "This is the Book of Ezra citation that fascinate me : "EZRA SET FORTH ON A QUEST TO FIND A GUARDIAN FOR HER PEOPLE. SHE SOUGHT THE ONE PURE HEART WHO WOULD ASSUME HER ROLE."

And he adds "And my faith in Ezra is strong."

Nicoletta: With that interesting quote in mind, how do you see your role in the church of Ezra?

Martin answered : “It won’t be me that define my role but Ezra. With all my personal limitations, I see myself as a canal for Ezra, so she can take her role of « Healer » and « Guardian ».”

And the examination lasts another hour. After Petrak has answered all their questions, the six priests retire for a short moment in a room nearby, leaving Petrak alone in the sunlight room with the large icon of Ezra looking at him.

But the wait is short: they come back after a few minutes only. Nicoletta announces “Petrak, you’ve been admitted in the rank of those able to protect themselves with their faith in Ezra. We think your humility and your call to help those in need shall make you a great strength against the darkness in this world. You are now able to pierce your way in the mists with more accuracy. The shield, however, will have to wait until you get back to that 5th level of priest. Congratulations.”

March 1st, 748 – same time

The wizards meet Claude Dulocq, an anchorite willing to trade wizard spells with them. (*DM note: NPC from USS 2002. Looking to start the Fifth Sect of Ezra, after a vision he got. Claude, however, doesn't know that he is slowly but inexorably giving his life force and the life force of all his anchorites to a being from Hell, an Erynies, with plans to start a religious war in the Land of the Mists.*) Claude is a tall gaunt man in his early sixties. Although he has no formal role in the hierarchy of the Great Cathedral, he is one of the oldest anchorites in the temple, and therefore he is much respected. Dulocq is cooperative in the spell exchange, but he is eager to know which cathedral has Petrak’s allegiance in Ezra (which is the Levkarest church). Dulocq seems disappointed.

When given the chance, Petrak discusses this with Martigan, the most senior anchorite priest of Mordent, “I don’t know where he stands, as me too he has one pushed me back. I also heard him badmouth the church of Darkon as well as that of Richemulot. So I don’t know where he stands”. Petrak thinks he want to start a fifth Ezra sect (*right on, dude!*).

At 7 pm, they get to their rendez-vous with Nostalia Romaine. The Boristi Music Hall is brand new, an exquisite building of pink marble. A sign says a concert will happen at 9 pm. They notice the Borcan flag: a burgundy flag, with 9 stars and a black and silver snake cut in 9 pieces. Officially, it symbolizes the nine original city state of Borca.

They knock at the door, show the invitation, and the Hall personnel brings them to a cozy dining room. It has only one door, which makes the heroes nervous.

On the opposite wall, a wooden jalousie enables the patrons to look at the concert room without being seen.



A large table is surrounded by ten comfortable red velvet seats. (*DM note: to make the players nervous, I asked them to choose a seat for their PC*).

A servant enquires what they would like to drink, and leaves the room.

The heroes wait in this room for 20 minutes while all they hear is the nearby orchestra tuning their instruments.

Then Nostalia Romaine arrive, and really, what a ravishing, alluring beauty. Slender and elegant, she moves with the grace and agility of a dancer. She stands just under six feet in height, with crisp dark eyes that stand out from the unnaturally pale complexion of her skin. Her ebony hair, which she wears in a thick braid, falls almost to her knees. She wears long, elegant gloves... (*Description from RL MCII*)



She is accompanied by Clothilda Taroyan (the *tollere* (or accountant) for the city of Levkarest and the Misericordia estate). The woman is also very pretty, again dressed in green, and pale skinned. She wears elegant long gloves and has a silver cigarette-holder. Petrak notices she is wearing an Ezra shield as a charm. She salutes the heroes warmly, but doesn't talk much during dinner, listening to the heroes and watching them closely....



Nostalia shakes their hand, and thanks them to accept the invitation. "Since the concert is only in a few hours", she says, "I asked for diner to come right now" and servants enter with food and wine : fish soup, roasted stag with wine and mushroom sauce, then petits fours with honey and almonds.

During dinner, the wines are often filled by servants. They notice the servants are tasting each plate and bottles before serving the heroes and Ivana's friends.

Nostalia is charming and playful. Her aristocratic tones come across clearly. She makes small talk about many subjects... herbalism is quite advanced in Borca. Thanks to Borcan Herbs, woman do not have to bear unwanted children!

Looking at Petrak... "the Vistani? A necessary nuisance... Invida are savages, and are dangerous, especially with their alliance with thrice savage Falkovnians... They will soon have problems with us as they send us ogres on our lands to hunt vistanis, and with Uncle Strahd too, as the Count is fond of these card readers..."

MacRazbunare enquires for a map, and shows her the map they bought the day before. She says the map is before the Grand Upheaval, an event that happened just 8 years ago, but strangely, few people remember of it. The earth shook for three days. Looking at the map "Dorvinia? It was merged with Borca. Ghenna became the Shadow Rift, Bluetspur? What is that and where it went, I have no idea."

She asks the heroes where they are staying in Levkarest, and they answer the Defraya Manor. She says there are far better places in Levkarest. This is in line with what the players know about the fall from grace of the Defraya family in the Boritsi's eyes.

The servant serves café – « an importation of the Boritsi Trading Co, very rare. It is an infusion of roasted beans », and then, with a wink, she says to Varadan, with a suggestive wink « It keeps you awake at night ... »

8h30 pm. Then Nostalia asks the servants to leave the room. The heroes understand the talk will be more serious from now on, but Nostalia has the same charming tone. “Mademoiselle Ivana asked me to meet you to enquire on a few things. What happened yesterday at the Cathedral?”

Petrak answers the group was supposed to meet Martigan, but were ambushed and forced to defend themselves.

She asks for a description on the attackers, and Petrak provides it: the three persons wore light armors and looked like rogues. They were very pale...

Nostalia says “I think we know them, they are not Ivana’s. We will find who asked them to attack you and we will eliminate them.” (for the first time during the dinner, her tone is very cold. She then asks “What are these ancient texts that everybody speaks of since yesterday? Did you read them? What is it about?”

Petrak says he didn’t read them (a lie) and adds they are not in authority to freely discuss about these.

But Nostalia is insistent. The heroes eventually tell the whole story, from Helbelnik to Aldern to the battle in the Levkarest cathedral.

« If you excuse me for a few minutes », and she exits the room. The heroes can’t discuss much, as Clothilda is still seated with them, looking thoughtfully at her cup of coffee. Everybody is silent in the room.

Nostalia is back after ten minutes, with Ivana! Before the door closes on the girls, the heroes can see the Jongleur standing in front of the door. She salutes the heroes, and the heroes notice she is colder than Nostalia. “It is pleasant to meet you again, especially after your heroic battle to protect the church”.



Ivana looks like a 18-22 year old girl, in the prime of her youth and beauty. Her lips are an exquisite (and luscious) shade of pinkish red.

A nervous servant comes to Ivana and asks her what she wants for food or drink. Ivana asks for a café, with chocolate cream on top. She makes small talk during the time her coffee is prepared. “This morning, a hellspout (*DM note: Borcan geyser activity*) appeared on the very ground of Misericordia, inside my own walls! Very unpredictable, these geyser apparitions!” She takes a sip of water and she adds “common lore holds that ancient Borcans feared the hellspout as lairs of demons, dragon and feys! Nonsense, isn’t it!”

When she is served, the servant was going to taste her coffee as the servants did with all plates and drinks, but Ivana waves her away. Nostalia tells the servant to leave the room.

Always charming, if a little annoyed in her tone, she adds « I'm glad the texts are safe inside the Cathedral Vault, and that matter is forgotten. One thing I can't stand is calumny on my family, even if I understand this is all but a bag of lies. I want to be sure this information will not exit this room... and I'm sure you'll tell Miss Tara Kolyana will keep her tongue too, isn't it? ».

The heroes nod in agreement. Petrak adds that he is very angry at the unknown party trying to steal these ancient documents.

Ivana nods then takes a moment to think, while sipping her drink. “From now on, you will work for me” (the heroes gasp!) “You will report to me any information against me. You know, there are many persons wishing to take my place in Misericordia. Report any information to Nostalia, she will know what to do with it and will reward you”.

Then she turns to Varadan, with a strange smile ... “You, I'd like to invite you to Misericordia tonight, as I'd like to know more about you ...”

But she is interrupted by sudden noise: someone enters the diner room by slamming the door on the wall! A thin man enters the room. His hairs are graying, but still streaked with the blond of his youth.

The heroes see the Jongleur standing in the door, menacing guards wishing to enter the room after the man.

DM note: I asked the heroes about their actions when this happened, and the result is nobody moved. MacRazbunare spotted Clothilda removing a glove under the table when the door was slammed... And Exigu and Virevan noticed Ivana's face changing a very small moment, turning cold and cruel at the sight of the man... this is the first time my players saw this image of Ivana, serious and mean looking. I always used the other image (previous page) for her, as I thought it was more in tone with her public image.



The man is loud and his voice sweeter than honey “My dear cousine, how are you in this marvelous night? Always shining in beauty and youth as I can see!” The heroes realize this is the infamous Ivan Dilisnya, Ivana's cousin!

(A few PC made their sense motive DC 20 check – he is envious and angry of Ivana)

He gesticulates like a caricature of theater play and says to Nostalia and Clothilda “but who is there too? Mesdames Romaine et Taroyan! Bien le bonsoir, mesdames, the pleasure to meet your charming company is always renewed!”, with a pretentious laugh.

Then he switches his attention to the heroes and with some cape effects, asks “And to whom I'm honored to be in the presence of?”

The heroes are a little surprised and do not answer right away. Quickly, Nostalia says “these are people that were going to take leave of our company”. She hands concert tickets to the heroes and adds “Gentlemen, it was a pleasure, so sad to see you leave this soon. Here's a ticket for tonight's concert for each of you.”

The heroes take the tickets and leave the room, while Ivan watches them with a smile. Nostalia close the door after them.

The heroes are now in the Main Hall, and get to their places (third row, left). The room is nearly completely filled by patrons. Exigu is tempted to pickpocket the crowd, but refrains from doing so, as he feels watched.

Ivana and Ivan arrive minutes later, together, and take their seats (front row, center).

Before the concert, a presentation is made of the concert tonight, and the person address the crowd about VIP Guest in the evening tonight : Ivana, Ivan (as if nobody noticed them!) and Sulo Boritsi (Ivana's Brother).

The concert last 45 minutes. Macrazbunare notices that the two ermordenungs (Clothilda and Nostalia) are speaking in hushed tones during the whole concert, in each other's ear. But Macrazbunare is fascinated by one detail: *they take great care not to touch each other...*

At the end of the concert, after the applause and the encore, the heroes see Ivan and Ivana having a discussion that is in fact a well controlled spite at each other. Austizel hears they are in fact menacing each other. Seeing the heroes still seated and trying to listen to the conversation, two ermordenung working for the Music Hall invites them to leave their seats and get to the main Hall, leaving Ivana and Ivan to their private conversation...

In the hall, the patrons discuss the concert somewhat pompously, drinking warm brandy and coffee. Among them, the heroes count about a dozen ermordenungs.

Exigu notices Garet Tallgallow (the Halfling thief, see session 13. He is friendly with Exigu) "working" in the exiting crowd. "Ivana's cousin? A dangerous, maniacal, psychotic! He lives in Dilisnya estate, looking on the Shadow Rift. Many artists and actors are invited to the manor, but not all come back!"

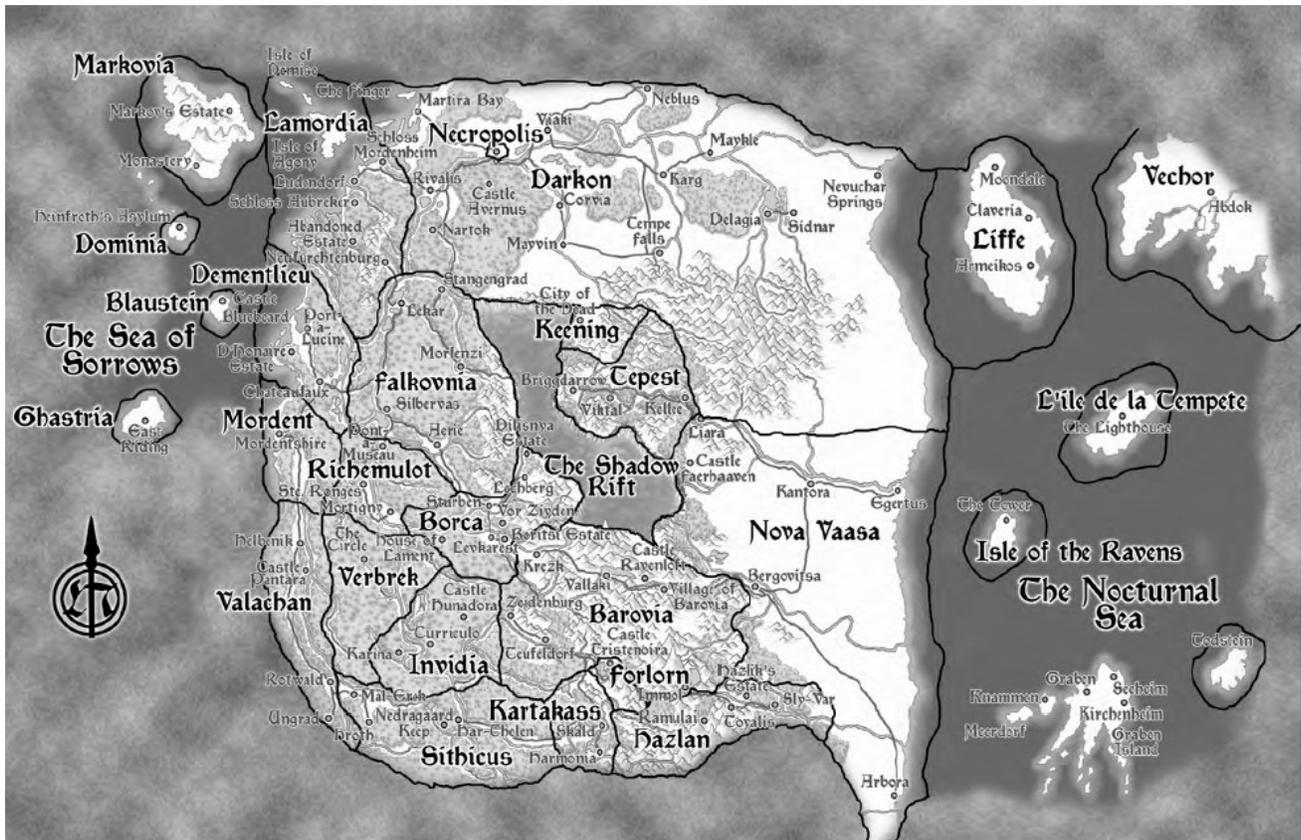
Back in their hotel room the heroes discuss the night's events. They share what they saw and spotted during dinner and after. They wonder if Ivan is behind the cathedral attack? Austizel adds that during the concert he saw the Jongleur in the private room, jalousie opened, ready to jump in the concert Hall should anything happened.

They wonder if the ermordenungs are not immune to another ermordenung's poison?

Quiet night...

March 2nd, 748

The wizards continue sharing spells with Dulocq. Early afternoon, they receive a map at the hotel, curtesy of Nostalia with a note "all territory limits are approximate".



March 3rd, 748

The heroes leave for Mordent (quiet trip), so they can board a boat leaving for Darkon (to put Iesha's body to her final rest). They arrive on the 5th.

March 5th, 748 - night

They meet with the twins. On March 1st, they say, there was the meeting of all Mordent mayors. We questioned Mayor Seffirin Hezer (*from Canondale, he is suspected of poisoning his wife, see session 32*), but they had to let him go since they had no proof...

March 6th, 748

9h30 am. In the morning, they leave for Canondale, and check ethereal resonance near the tree where Samuel was killed (*session 37*): they see the dead tree becoming ashes and disintegrating, and it becomes the face of Martha's. They see a splash of blood and Martha's face disappears, while they hear a man laughing... It's difficult to interpret these readings. They remember Samuel loved Martha too, and wanted to meet with feys when he was killed.

(DM note: I hate these "on request" symbolic impro! This was for despair (Samuel's feeling) and violence (he was killed by a fey). Martha is a changeling (her emotions taken by a fey). Samuel cared for her but was killed by a Terg fey when he tried to force it to release Martha's soul. The heroes are on this case since Martha's little sister, Faith, gave them Martha's personal journal, where they learned of her dealings to become a changeling)

They go back at night (feys do not come out during the day) and try to identify strange or untypical plants (a fey sign). They find a rosetree with splendid roses for the season (March), well hidden inside the plant by dead leaves and branches.

They compliment on the roses loudly, hoping to attract the attention of the feys. After a moment, Petrak sees a butterfly on Virevan's shoulder. Virevan adds that Martha's transformation was made with good intentions, but in the end it caused pain to Martha's loved ones, of which Martha's sister (Faith). "I'd like to talk to you", he adds.

The butterfly turns around Virevan and moves farther. Virevan understand it tries to lead him away from the rest of the heroes. It leads him about 60 feet, then stops. It transforms into a strange little fey, about a foot high. Its hair are red (Carrot top, or Alven) and it has orange butterfly wings.

With a very small voice, it asks "so you ask me to remove the emotions from Martha's little sister too?"

Virevan "No! This situation made other people around Martha very unhappy. I think Martha didn't realize what she asked for. Can we reverse this situation?"

The fey "How strange you are, humans? Why think of doing this? She is quiet now, and she feels no pain..." but Virevan affirms he still want to make Martha's soul back.

He asks about Samuel. "Oh, he tried to force another fey, but a more malign one, I fear", she answers.

"I'm not the one holding her soul", she says, "the fey that did it is now living in the Shadow Rift! But before she left, she exchanged the girl's soul with another fey. I don't know which one, however. You should speak with Emelia at the Midnight Market."

Virevan says he has never heard of it. But she says "I will send you an invitation. Remember that all at the Midnight market is exchanged, no money involved. Wherever you are, you will get the invitation." And she adds "Glad you appreciated the roses" and back in butterfly form, she flies away. She is quickly swallowed by darkness.

They sleep in Canondale (In Easy1's house).

March 7th, 748

Petrak provides an Ezra ceremony to the Canondale pious villagers in the morning, then the heroes leave for Mordentshire.

10h00 am. Van Richten's maid tells them the herbalist and adventurer sleeps badly, and feels over strung by his thoughts. (*DM note: preparing Bleak House...*)

The heroes now plan to get Iesha's body back to a cemetery in Darkon (*see session 41*). In Mordentshire, there is a boat whose name is the *Black Pelican*. Captain Howe agrees to bring them to Martira Bay, to the cost of 10 gp / person. Animals (Exigu's dog and MacRazbunare,s



wolf) will have to be in a cage. They learn the boat already has a passenger, a fellow named Viktor Hazan. The boat has 8 sailors, one of which is from Blaustein.

The heroes enquire the Weathermay twins about Captain Howe, and hear he has a good reputation. The price to Martyra Bay is a bit high, as 5-7 gp / person is the norm.

1h pm. They go back to Van Richten and see him pale, sick looking. He says he can't sleep. It happens once in a while, Van Richten says, "when I think too much about all those good companions I lost during the fight of evil".

The heroes ask about the Midnight market, but Van Richten never heard of it. They also ask for seeds and stuff to bring feys, but the herbalist says it depends on which type of feys. "Firs, for example, might be interested in clockwork, other in books or art. Only Alvens like rare seeds."

"Now let me back to rest, I need some quiet time", he says.

GAME SESSION FORTY FOUR: TO DARKON AND BEYOND -2

(played December 5th, 2011. Austizel played by JF)

March 7th, 748 – pm

For the boat trip preparation, they buy cages for Exigu's dog and MacRazbunare's wolf. They also buy a fishing net box to put Iesha's body inside (*they are bringing Iesha from the Fordstone manor to Darkon for her final rest – see session 39.*) so there are less questions asked when they will embark the body on the boat.

Virevan notices one man on the *Black Pelican*, with a mean look, with long blond hairs, and strange tattoos. He seems to be the highest person in charge after Captain Howe (*a man from Blaustein*)

3h pm – The heroes speak with the twins. Viktor Hazan is a Dementlieu University teacher. They read of his work, but they do not remember his field of expertise. They send Hazan a written invitation for diner through a servant. The servant goes to the *Black Pelican* but someone answers that Hazan is not there now. The servant leaves the invitation.

Laurie mentions she got a letter from Raoul Morel in Blaustein. Blaustein has the reputation of a pirate's haven. In the letter, he offers her to meet him. She hasn't answered yet, and probably will say no, much to the teasing of Gennifer with her attracting noble's attention and romance. The only reason to go there, Laurie says, would be to see the mine where the blausteins gems are taken from. Laurie also shows the players a blaustein gem she bought recently. It is mounted on a silver brooch. The players realize they will pass nearby this island in their trip to Darkon. Gennifer says the Laplantis noble family was selling part of their family heirloom and a property. Gennifer and Laurie bought some ancient furniture too.

The clear pale blue gem is unique and superb. About the size of an olive, it reflects on Laurie the light of day in a thousand colors like if they had a miniature sun in them. Very beautiful. Austizel estimates it is worth 25 000 gp! Laurie said she paid 800 gp only to get it, and think the Laplantis didn't know how to appraise it.

DM note: Raoul Morrel is Bluebeard's current name. This is an adventure hook from my part in the Sea of Sorrows FoS Report:

Adventure hook: The Blaustein Gems

Any bard from the western coast can easily tell you the following story: "The jewelers and aristocrats of the Core circulate the legend of a source of unusual and flawless blue gems found on the island of Blaustein. The gems are called, unsurprisingly, blaustein gems, and few are those who truthfully can claim to have seen one. The blaustein gems are said to be worth a king's ransom. They are also said, in hushed tones, to be cursed, as the few wealthy nobles known to own one have become recluses, their manors decaying around them, the servants dismissed, and visitors turned away at the gates."

This reputation doesn't scare would-be wealthy buyers, who would like to show their prosperity by owning of these very rare gems. There are a little more than a dozen of these gems in circulation outside of Blaustein, in the whole world of the mists.

These clear pale blue gems, about the size of an olive, appear once in a while on the Rais market, and usually fetch extremely high prices, sometimes as high as a few thousand gold pieces. These are prized by rich collectors of the core for their unusual ability to reflect on its wearer the light of day in a thousand colors like if they had a miniature sun in them.

Nobody knows these gems are sold by Bluebeard himself, and these are the solidified *eyes* of his previous wives. A supernatural event Bluebeard can't influence and doesn't understand, the eyes of his wives, when they dry out from the hanging bodies after being murdered, eventually fall on the floor as these blaustein gems.

Bluebeard make sure these are sent to the rich houses of the core because *he can see through them* when he concentrates on them for a minute using the large mirror in the sitting room (as with the spell *scrying* (Will DC 16 negates if the gem is worn)). The Lord of Blaustein also uses these to cast a variant of his *dream* powers to lure vain women to his island.

(after an idea by Chris Nichols, "Myths of the Core", Book of Sacrifices)

Meanwhile, around 7h pm, Virevan (watching the boat for unusual activity) sees a man embarking the *Black Pelican*. He is wearing old fashioned noble clothing, but his hair are uncombed and look odd on an otherwise distinguished looking man. He has a fishing rod in a hand, and a basket in the other. He reads the message sent to him by the twins (so Virevan realizes this is Viktor Hazan), but goes in his cabin and doesn't exit from the boat. Virevan sees him watching at a port-hole for a moment, and then a lantern is lighted in this cabin.

At 10h pm, Exigu replaces Virevan to watch the boat. At 11pm, there are sailors coming back from taverns. They looked like they had fun, but they are not overly drunk. The watchman on the boat pulls the footbridge from the docks.

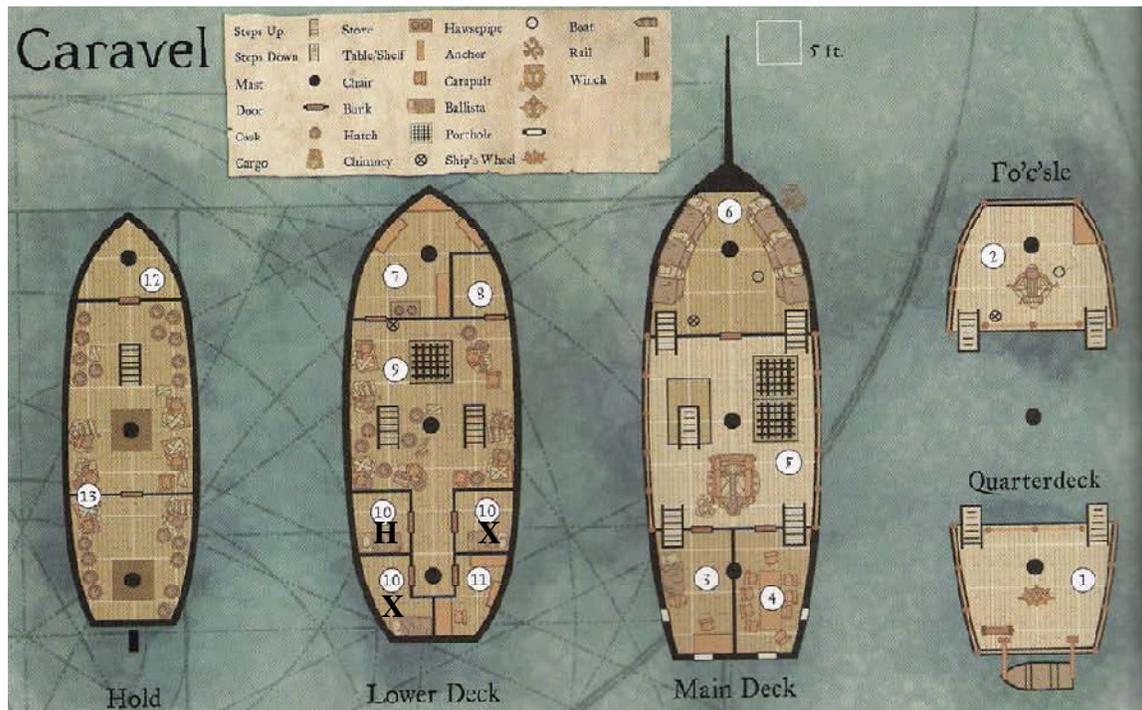
March 8th, night

Exigu notices the light in Hazan's cabin is shut down at 2 am.

The rest of the night is quiet.

6 am, they learn spells and then bring the box (containing the body, it is closed by a lock) and the cages to the *Black Pelican*. These boxes are put in the boat's hold.

Captain Howe shows them their cabins, where they sleep in two groups of three persons (marked with an X on the following boat map). Hazan is in the one marked with an H. The cabin's doors do not lock. The heroes decide to keep their armors during the trip, while Petrak leaves his Tower shield in the cabin.



(Caravel map from *WotC's Stormwrack*)

They pay Howe the trip price (10gp x 6 persons).

The twins have awoken early to say goodbye to the adventurers but they do not stay very long as sailors whistle and say rude things to them (basically asking them to embark so they could have fun...).

8h00 am. The boat leaves and quickly it sails through patches of fog. The vision at sea is about half a mile maximum. The sun is only seen feebly, through a thick layer of grey clouds.

The fogs of the Sea of Sorrows are extraordinarily thick and clammy. When the ship sails into a fog bank, time seems to stop. An unnerving silence sets in as the Mist deadens all sound and chills voyagers to the bone. Visibility is reduced to a few yards, forcing the sailing vessel to drift helplessly at the mercy of the winds and currents...

Austizel and MacRazbunare stay in their cabin, to exchange spells from their spellbook.

By mid morning, some of the heroes do feel seasickness. Varadan is sick and throws back his breakfast at sea, while the sailors look at him with knowing smiles. While looking at the sea, Varadan notices there are sharks following the boat... In their cabin, MacRazbubare and Austizel do not feel very well, but they are not sick.

Quick rules I adapted from stuff found on the net. Each morning: d20 roll to see if the PC is seasick. On a roll lower than 10, the character is seasick (gains a +3 bonus for each successful save, cumulative for this trip). If seasick, roll on following table: 1 to 6 Dazed, 7 to 12 slowed, 13 to 20 sickened. This effect persists until the character takes a short or extended rest, after which they may make another saving throw in the same manner.

At 10 am, Viktor Hazan is up on the deck. Viktor Hazan is in his early fifties, short and thin. His salt-and-pepper hair is unusually long for a university professor and left uncombed and flowing in all directions. His manners are somewhat old fashioned, but in contrast he sometimes uses the latest slang of his students' expressions. He wishes those heroes on deck a safe trip, and asks if any of them likes fishing. "I hope you do, that's about the only thing to do on the ship for us (non-sailors). And the cook, Botswin, is very good with fish, should you catch anything edible".

Viktor seems to be very knowledgeable on travels, and he explains that efforts by mariners and explorers to chart the Sea of Sorrows are hampered by the fact that most of the sea is hidden by eternal fog banks. No two captains have been able to chart a consistent course to the lands that are rumored to exist there. One captain who holds a course through the Mists will reach the island of Dominia, while another (or even the same captain) will find himself running aground another place when trying to plot the same course. *(DM note: descriptions from Domains of Dread)*

They show him the map they found in a Levkarest shop (session 43). Viktor tells them this map is for the land before the great change of year 740. This year, G'henna and Markovia went down, it seems, and the Shadow Rift was created. Markovia was rediscovered later as an island on the Sea of Sorrows.

He tells them about Darkon memory change. It happens after a few months, you'll think you are native to Darkon.

When questioned about his expertise at the University, he answers he does study philosophy, more precisely of the places and their physical and other links. He like to know more about how the land is, the mists, everything. "Sometimes the countries are surrounded by barriers, nothing can enter or exit them. Also, if you enter a patch of mist, sometimes you exit another place, sometimes far from where you entered. This is fascinating, don't you think? The only ones able to navigate the mists are your friends, the vistani", he said while looking at Petrak's hands (*giorgoto scar*).

Mac Razbunare shows him the old core map. He is surprised to find the Shadow Rift isn't there, but doesn't add much to this comment.

The heroes ask him about the Death's War character they met in Mordent, but Hazan doesn't know about them *(DM note: you bet he does! At this point, he realized the heroes are powerful and could be used in his scheme)*

The rest of the day, Hazan spends it fishing and sleeping, rocked by the boat's movement.

At 4 pm, a watchman shouts "boat ahead!". The heroes join Howe on the Foc's'cle, to watch the boat. Its sailing is detached and flowing in the wind. After Petrak's question, Howe answers "no, it's not pirates, we won't meet them in this trip".

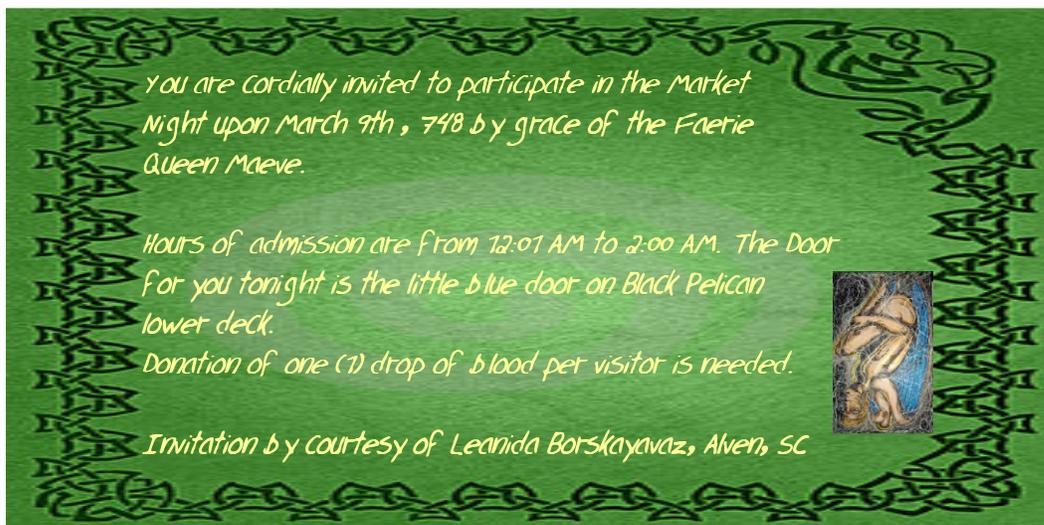
"We will pass nearby this boat to see if people need help".

The sailors are nervous as the *Black Pelican* approaches the barely floating shipwreck. A bigger boat than the *Black Pelican*, its name is the *Red Widow*. There are no traces of battle, and the doors going inside the ship are all opened. But there is nobody on board, and nothing answers when Howe shouts at the boat.

Petrak notices Howe then looking at Hazan, who makes a discreet “let’s go” move with his hand. Howe orders his crew to continue without more enquiries on the *Red Widow*. Petrak asks Hazan if he knows this boat. Hazan says no, but he has seen this kind of sorry sight many times in his life.

Howe tells the heroes rumors about ghost ships, the most famous of these being the *Relentless*. Other Sea of Sorrows threats include pirates (but not a danger for this trip, he assures), a plethora of sea monsters, and even sea zombies from sunken ships...

At 7 pm, after diner, the heroes stay in their room, and organize a watch. Virevan is surprised to find a paper scroll under his pillow! It is attached by a colourful silk ribbon.



The door on room #8 (see boat plan) is blue! The heroes try feverishly to find interesting seeds to give a fey. From the cook, they find peppercorn, celery and coriander seeds. MacRazbunare the druid adds wraithroot seeds (*see session 22*).

They go to sleep at 7h30 pm, and awoken at midnight...

March 9th, night

The heroes move in the lower boat deck, to the blue door... which opens silently a moment before they can open it. Inside, they are greeted with a small room, one that resembles an old-fashioned Mordentish parlor, with cozy couches and upholstered walls. Upon a side table is a collection of six silver bowls, each with a small knife, a towel, and a tiny glass bottle of iodine. There is no other door except the one they entered by.

DM note: main concept, descriptions and excellent Midnight Market ideas borrowed from Neo Tiamat, completed with RL ideas I had, and many characters from the Neverwhere RPG game

and novel. This was played as a bizarre event, but it was clear many things here were very dangerous...

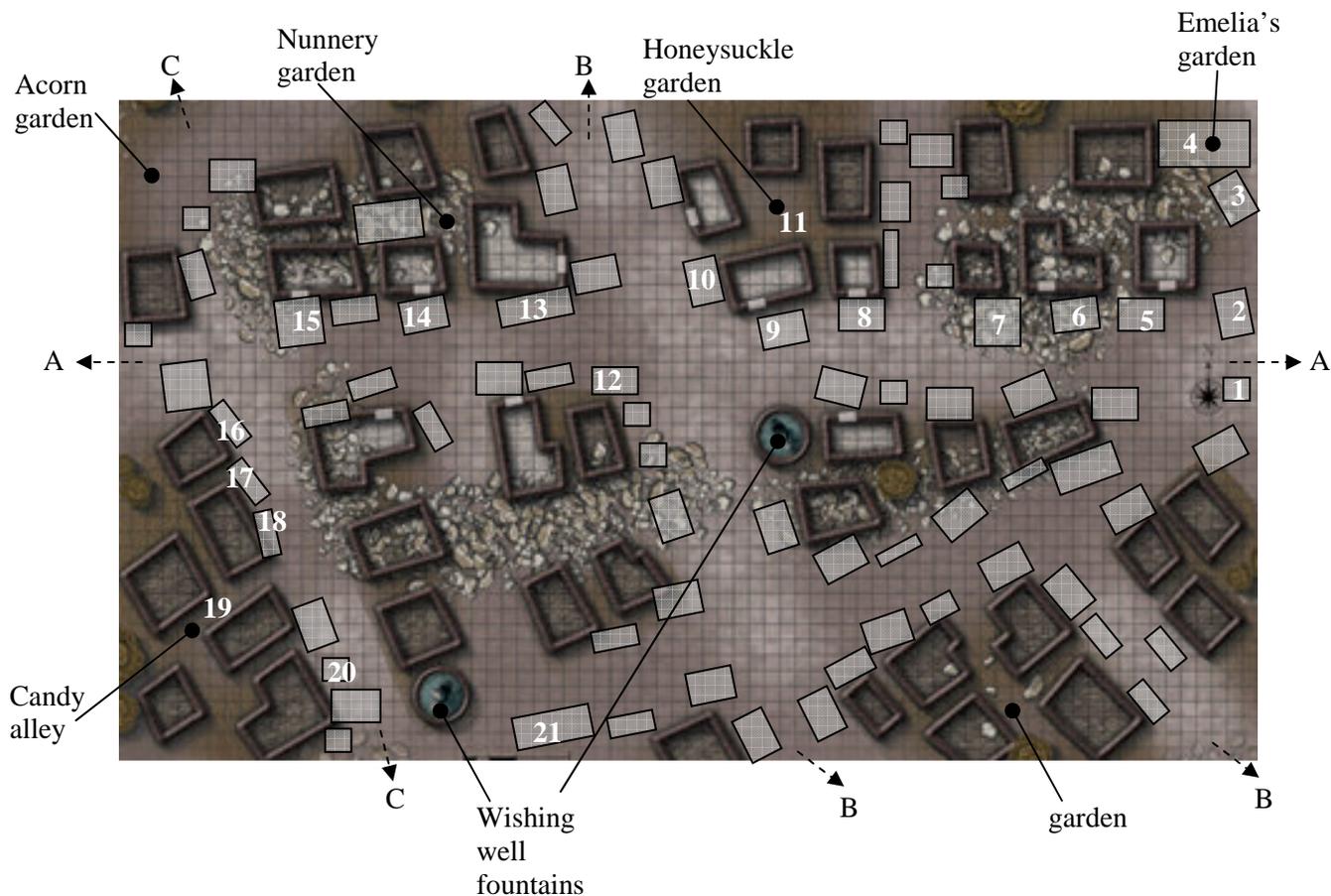
As requested in the invitation, the heroes each put one drop of blood in their bowl. The blue door behind the visitors reopens ... into the Midnight Market!

Their ears are assailed by noise from a large group of persons, and their nose by smells of strange spices.

The Midnight Market is the size of a good-sized city block, though it feels much smaller and more claustrophobic because it is full of people. Narrow streets of grey cobbles meander everywhere, while tiny alleyways lead off into the darkness. Tall houses, four, five stories in height crowd alongside the streets. The townhouses windows are unlighted. A light drizzle comes down on the Midnight Market, and the grey sky makes it impossible to tell what time it is. Flocks of ravens roost in the upper building levels.

Flickering lamps illuminate the streets, but on the whole, the place feels somehow sombre, grey, and muted. The Midnight Market is on the street level, where the merchants of the Market have set up their colourful tents and stalls.

(DM note: this is the map I used for the MM. Arrival spot is where the north is indicated. On the players map, I draw stall and tents as they explored the MM. Around the map was uninviting blackness. In fact, if you move out, you come in from the other side of the map – see appropriate letter. Places are numbered in the order they were discovered.)



There, they sell everything and anything. The heroes could smell food. All kinds of food. Everybody was buying. Everybody was selling. People from all size and types were there in the streets. It seemed at first like pure madness. People argued, haggled, shouted, sang. They hawked and touted their wares, and loudly declaimed the superiority of their merchandise.

Music was playing – a dozen different ways on a score of different instruments, most of it improvised, strange, improbable.

DM note: I had a lot of fun to simulate a music that would fit, blending in a mixer songs. Some were played in repetition, but with a delay. Some are played in reverse. There are quiet moods and more lively ones. In it are the Brad Meldhau hypnotic Eyes wide shut piece, with stuff thrown in like Public Image drumming, crowd noise, Zappa, various loud and lively pieces of Balkan music from Emir Kusturica's movies, screeching violin from Hitchcock's bath scene, and even the Beatles's Number Nine. I wanted something strange, and improbable. It's always disturbing. The piece is 18 minutes long, and can be played in a repeat mode while in the market. When the players made fun complaints, I augmented the volume a notch so they knew it was here to stay. ;)

Near their arrival place in the market, there is a stall (number 1 on the map) with a small woman, with long finger nails and silvery hairs. “You! Would you like to buy a beautiful portrait to grace your abode? But if the woman in the painting screams at times, pray, ignore it. It does that sometimes...”

“Or would you prefer an herbal infusion to cure a persistent cough? Certainly, here is some just in from Sri Raji. Ah, yes... the periodic burping of serpents is a side-effect. It's quite harmless. Just make sure you kill all the snakes by night fall.”

But the heroes stay focused and ask for Emelia (*see session 43. Emelia's name was given by an Alven fey, when the heroes were looking for the fey that held Martha's soul, Martha is now a changeling*).

“To find the Lady of the Gardens”, she said, “go toward my right, a few stalls from here”.

(DM note: I knew the sequence they had to pass to get the needed info. For the in betweens, I made a list of 50 stalls, based on the Beachum's Emporium good list (USS 2003), and added a few notes on who tended these stalls. I threw them randomly as players went in the market).

- 1 Alcohol, Beer and Wine – ogre-like, drunk
- 2 Breads - brags
- 3 Cheeses – elves
- 4 Corns - alven
- 5 Exotics (cacao, coffee, olives, riz) – SriRaji men
- 6 Flours – Falkovnian “F”
- 7 Fresh/Dried Fruits - ?
- 8 Jams, Jellies, Curds, Marmalades – Old grand mother
- 9 Meats – ogres and/or powrie
- 10 Milk and Butter - ?

- Arak, sith (Shades)
- Half-fey
- The Cave Painters (children, graffiti)
- Velvets **
- Beak **
- Mr Croup & Vandemar (hired killers) **
- Varney **
- Victoria **
- Bogeyman?
- Maekon ?

Toward Emelia, the heroes pass in front of a woman selling powdered spice. Her breast is half hidden and she has a large “E” tattooed on her front head (2, *from Vechor*)

Then a stall were a man dressed in dark is selling clams and mussels on ice. (3, *seatouched from Nocturnal Sea*). He has bulbous eyes.

Then they see a green tent with a sign “the Lady of the Gardens” (4). Inside, a young woman is tending her botanical gardens. She looks at the heroes when they enter her tent, but she quickly resumes her work. Her collection of plants and orchids is almost entirely original.

After the players ask, she presents herself as Emelia Lockhart. Virevan explains her about his meeting with an Alven, Martha’s soul, and all the reason they are in the Midnight Market.

“Yes”, she said shyly, “I can answer your question. You can trade what?”, and then she adds “bring me a bottle of fresh rose water”.

Back in the market, the heroes look at the stalls to find one selling rose water. They walk back to “main street”.

They pass again near the silvered hair woman (1), who asks them “Would you like the skull of an unshriven mass murderer for a magic ritual? Well, it may require placing an order, but be sure something can be arranged”, but the heroes do not answer her.

A man selling nuts (5). He has black eyes and nails.

A medical stall. A tall, gauntlike, sinister man in high hat, is asking if anyone needs medical attention. When they pass near him, they notice a smoke odor (6, *yes, this is the Carnival’s Puppetmaster! I always wanted to bring him back. Adventure hook, adventure hook!*).

Further in the street, a dwarf selling lumber (7), another dwarf, crippled, selling various ore chunks (8), and a man selling animal skins (tall and very large man-like, 9).

Between two tents, they see a garden (11). They enter it, a beautiful garden of night blooming flowers. A dwarf asks them for money and Virevan gives him 1gp.

Then a stall with an old grand mother with an apron (12). She sells jams, jellies and marmalades. The heroes ask her if they have rose water. She does. She is strange as she sometimes yells “marmalade” instead of speaking this word in a normal tone. But the trade is not for money, she

asks what the players had to barter, in exchange for a joke. (*Petrak's players was at first speechless when I really asked for a joke, but he eventually found one*). The old lay yells each time she says the word "marmalade"...

She finds the joke funny, agrees to the trade, and the heroes are back at Emelia's with the bottled rose water.

DM note: I borrowed this barter trade hierarchy from Neverwhere, and added ideas I got from Isabella and Rock:

It's either good or service exchanged, or for a future favour. Favours must be repaid on command. Your word is your absolute bond and can be used to purchase things when you have nothing to barter. If you break your word you have no currency.

Minor Barter Items - scrap (Worth one minor item). *A cotton handkerchief, an antique coin or one made of gold, a broken toy, a dead body belonging to no-one in particular, a half used deodorant, a woollen hat, a piece of hand-crafted jewellery of a non-precious type, a good meal, a few sheets of blank paper, a boring or useless book, a broken watch or toy, a minor favour, rags and sackcloth clothing, a lock of hair, a joke, a minute of your time, your lunch.*

Average Barter Items – useful item (Worth four minor items). *A good pair of boots, a knife, gloves, a working watch, a working toy, a lamp or torch, semi-precious jewels or average jewellery, an average favour, a slave, leather armour the hire of a renown Guide or Bravo, per day, the colour of your eyes, a perfect red rose, 16 pomegranate seeds, a piece from a chess set, your wisdom teeth.*

Major Barter Items – crafted item (Worth eight minor items). *Precious gems or fine jewellery, a sword or axe, a bow or crossbow, a major favour, chainmail or a flak jacket, a musical instrument, a spear or other polearm a minor enchantment or blessing, a dance with a fey in a fey circle, save a dryad from death, sneak a kiss from a nymph, your smile, 3 nights of nightmare, bag of fingernails from a dead person, be beaten until near death (-9 hp), your firstborn child, your ability to sing, 5 random pages from your spellbook.*

They give the bottle to Emelia. She tells what she knows: "Martha Ward's soul was taken by the very sympathizing Mrs Lovleen Tribarham on September 3, 747. Mrs Tribarham is Alven. She now lives in the Shadow Rift. But it was exchanged here in Midnight Market. I do not know with whom, but the Abbott knows it, I believe."...

On the way to the Abbott, they pass in front of a woman selling hot spicy food (13), then a stall with elves selling bows (14). In this store, they find a bow enabling 15 strength damage bonus. The elf woman asks for 5 random pages in his spellbook! Knowing MacRazbunare had a copy of most spells, Austizel agrees (he temporary loose *magic weapon, melf acid arrow, invisible eye, knock and invisibility*).



Meanwhile, MacRazbunare notices that the ravens on the buildings are slightly transparent...

On the street, he is asked by an elven woman with red hairs if he is in the market for cheese, which she carries hidden under her coat...



They eventually get to the “Abbott”, a friar dressed old man, selling teas (15). The Abbott is an amiable and friendly man. The heroes tell him what they are looking for (who has exchanged Martha Ward’s soul with Lovleen Tribarham). The Abbott says he knows, and asks in exchange “either you drink this extremely poisonous tea, which really isn’t a good idea, believe me, or get me a jar of honey”.

Back to the preserve stall with an old lady with an apron (12), and get honey from her, in exchange of a lock of hair from Petrak. She still yells each time she says the world “marmalade”...

Back to the Abbott, who is happy to get a new jar of honey, of which he puts a teaspoon in his tea. “Jolly good”, he says. What he knows: “Martha Ward’s soul was exchanged through the usage of force by the very sympathizing Mrs Lovleen Tribarham to the vile Zail Zeenat on December 15th, 747. Zail Zeenat is a Red Cap fey”

And the heroes ask “and where is Zail Zeenat?”, but the Abbott doesn’t know. “You should speak with Sahadjleen de Beliviue”, he says, and tells them where to find this person (the tent with the image of a clock). The heroes ask him about the nearby wishing well. He says there are two in the Midnight Market. One grants your wishes, the other one does the contrary, so nobody tries them. The heroes are tempted to defy fate through logic.

On the way there, a stall selling weapons, by the Clan Karkar, a family of gnomes (16). The heroes are greeted by Malthus Karkar, a squat, large-nosed figure dressed solely in black silk, his face shrouded in shadows. A large orb of light, similar to a will-o-wisp, hangs by his side. They see a well made hand axe, but the price is 275 gp and three pints of blood. They do not buy it.

The next stall is weird, even for the Midnight Market (17): Grandmother Thorne resembles an old woman, a Barovian babushka with a hunched back and faded shawl over her head. Grandmother Thorne's eyes have been pierced by two massive rose thorns, 4 inches each. An ooze of blood stains her dress. She explains she buys and sells emotions... They leave it without making “business” with her.

The next stall is a grey tent, and the sign says it buys very rare and exotic goods (18).

From the street, they look at an alley called “Candy Street” (19). Every sweet indulgence known to man (or beast) can be gluttonously engaged in on Candy Street. The feys seem to love it.

Then they see two strange persons, standing just in front of them. One is short and plump, a greasy little man with eyes of faded china blue and a fox-like aspect. He has sharp, piggy little eyes. The other is very tall and perpetually hungry with brown eyes that make him look more than a little wolfish. The short one is holding his visit card toward the heroes. “We are Croup and Vandemar,” he said, smoothly, “the Old Firm. Obstacles obliterated, nuisances eradicated, bothersome limbs removed and tutelary dentistry.”

(« Nous sommes Croup et Vandemar, » dit-il, « la vieille firme. Obstacles effacés, ennuis supprimés, membres gênants enlevés et cours d’art dentaire »)



“Take this card. Just read our names on it, and we’ll be there”, he added, and they resumed their walk in the opposite direction.

DM note: the strange and dangerous Mr Croup & Vandemar (hired killers), from Neverwhere.

The baffled heroes then see a tent with a clock on it, near the intersection (20). That is where Sahadjleen de Beliviue is displaying his services.

But the heroes go back to talk with Croup and Vandemar, telling them that they have a problem with lycanthropy. “Excellent, we’re up for it”, said Croup, “... we’ll turn him to bloody pulp and we’ll even clean the carpets afterward”. But the heroes answers negatively and go back to the tent with the clock.

In the tent, the lighting is low (only one candle). An eerie tall creature is holding a raven in one hand, and a clock in the other. The heroes explain they are looking for the location of Zail Zeenat.

Sahadjleen look at them, but doesn’t answer with his mouth, but the heroes hear his voice in their head. “At this very precise moment, I can help you. There are two conditions. The first is that you bring me a bag of fingernails from a corpse. Now, go.”



Drawing by Isabella

The players are back in the busy streets. Where to find this? A big stall nearby has a sign “Laud Street - Opium garden” (21). Curious, the players enter. The odour is a mix of sweat and spice. The crowd of patrons, all asleep on mattresses, are all humans. No feys here. They discuss with the owner, a woman with pale hairs and amber eyes, and she quickly asks them to get rid of a body. A client died on the premise and it’s not good for business. She pays the heroes in opium.

The heroes lift the corpse and go in the back of this rent, to rip off all the nails on the corpse. Then they leave the body leaning on a building door.

They enter Sahadjleen’s tent with the bloody bag of nails. He nods, and then the voice in their head says “Now at this very precise moment, I want to learn when you could die from natural cause, if you do not die before, more violently”. He watches Petrak intensively, than he writes something on a paper, which he then burns with the candle’s fire ...

The voice in their head then says : “Zail Zeenat, at this very precise moment, is in a cage... in the manor of Lady Jacqueline Montarri” (the Red Vardo leader) !

They thank him and exit his tent. They talk about leaving the Midnight Market, and Petrak notices a blue door very similar to the one they opened in the boat. Opening it, they find themselves back in the boat! They have been 2 hours and a half in the Midnight Market.

There is no moonlight, all is very dark in the boat. They go to sleep, after setting a guard routine.

March 9th, morning

The next morning, they realize the time spent in the Midnight Market seemed like only about a minute outside...

The next morning, Virevan fight is seasickness and is not sick.

Austizel begins rewriting the spells he lost in the bow trade, from Mac Razbunare's spellbook.

They talk with Hazan again during the day. He tells them is a member of an occult healing association (*a lie, he is looking for things that can be of use by manipulating the heroes*). Petrak says he did loose charisma after being hit by Godefroy's deadly cane. He also says two members of the team are afflicted with lycanthropy. For Godefroy, he can't do a thing, but he will look for it when he will arrive in Martyra Bay.

They are now near the Isle of Agony, a cold and bleak island surrounded by ice, Hazan explains, said to be the lair of a creature that fled from Mordenheim's famous scientific laboratory. This thing is known as the Snow-killer, the Patchwork man or the Phantom. The locals attribute all mysterious death to this creature. Outside, the winds shriek constantly and howling echoes it ...

The Finger (archipelago) ends with the island of Demise, a desolate isle with a reputation for doom for shipwrecked mariners or explorers.

March 10th, morning

They notice the crew is looking at them strangely. Howe asks them what is in the box they brought on board. When the heroes answer evasively, he asks "WHO is it in this box?" The players tell him the tale of Iesha. Howe says he doesn't care that they brought a corpse on board, but he says many sailors are very superstitious and he would like to have been told about it.

In the hold, the heroes find the lock has been broken by the sailors and garlic gloves were added in the box.

Around 1 pm, they are in view of Martyra Bay. Hazan recommends the Yawning Eddy Inn as being superior in quality to those seedy inns and taverns from the harbour.