

Ravenloft Campaign Log—Wed. Night Game—Introduction

GM's note: This is the first full Ravenloft campaign that I've been able to put together in a long time. While it's good to put my books to good use in the setting that I love, I've been somewhat stringent on my players to attempt to stay in the Gothic mindset simply by enforcing the rules of the setting. Languages are limited (making more intelligent characters serve as translators) and so far there's been little technology available. However, I'm somewhat stymied by the fact that none of my players have played in Ravenloft before...at any rate, they're an eager group and this should be fun.

And now, our cast:

Tallorn Whetfield (Lionel Worman)—a slightly older human male ranger, who set out from Tepest after a less-than-desirable altercation with a rival farmer. Talorin is somewhat grizzled and bears two keen blades at his sides but, for some odd reason, keeps his head completely shaved at all times. (Human Ranger 1)

Dera Cahro (Karl Schmitt)—a slender female with dark hair, Dera often is seen wearing a thick cloak, obscuring almost all of her features. Suspicious, yet nevertheless heroic, she speaks only an obscure form of Balok that hasn't been spoken in centuries. (Half-Vistani Diviner 1)

Damonion Thassalou (Rachel Meier)—an almost 'cat-like' human male with a quick wit and a quicker blade. However, growing up in the streets of Richemulot has given him a fanatic obsession with the power of secrets and information. Privacy is of the utmost to Damonion, despite his gregarious nature, but for reasons unrevealed. (Human Swashbuckler 1)

Rimo Gossamer (Brian Metzger)—the oldest member of the group, yet the least experienced, the Darkonian warrior Rimo is eager to prove himself in battle against the evils of the world. A skilled archer, Rimo never travels without a certain keepsake that he keeps well hidden, though few know what this item is or why Rimo keeps it. (Human Ranger 1)

Sik (Silas Burdick)—a young, trim female with a disturbing glare in her eye, this outsider seems disturbingly paranoid. While almost amazingly fit, she seems to have an air of violence and mistrust about her, leaving the other characters wondering whose side Sik seems to be on. (Human Outsider [Faerun] Rogue 1)

Dario DeLuna (TJ Falzone)—a suave swordsman and trickster, Dario grew up in Mordent where he met up with the wandering Damonion. Not much is known about his past, though rumors tell of a strange tattoo marking Dario's back, and the rogue has an almost unnatural hatred for the hazy geists of the spirit world. Dario is currently in search of the famed Dr. Rudolph van Richten, whom he believes may be able to assist him in some venture...but Dario has yet to divulge what exactly that venture is. (Half-Vistani Rogue 1)

GM's notes:

As you can probably see, no member of our group goes without carrying some form of secret with them. Strangely enough, that was their doing, and I'm just enjoying their creativity as it plays out.

Something odd for you—three of the six characters in this game are 'cross-dressing'. Damonion is played by a female, and both Dera and Sik are males in real life. Odd, no? Damonion was originally intended to be a Bard, but after some deliberation with his player, Rachel, the Swashbuckler class from the "Complete Warrior" book seemed to be a better fit. I thought it worked nicely with the renaissance domains.

Dera chose Diviner as her specialty for a very good reason, as we'll find out sometime later. Beyond this, I've allowed her to take an extra opposed school to gain access to the "Conjuration: Healing" spells such as Cure Light Wounds. I wanted her spell list to be somewhat different than an average wizard's, in addition to the dire need of curative magic that the party needs.

Also, keep in mind that this party is not "balanced" in the traditional sense. There is no cleric. There is no "tank". While this may prove to be difficult for them, I would rather have them enjoy the game than be forced into a character that they don't like. That said, many forms of encounters would prove to be somewhat more difficult than usual for them. With luck and a bit of ingenuity, though, our heroes will bring light to this darkened world in the end.

Ravenloft Campaign Log—Wed. Night Game—Log I

Our story begins on the roads of Invidia, where a storm began blowing in. Two weary travelers, Dario and Damonion, came to a crossroads as they traveled north towards Port-a-Lucine, the jeweled city of culture in Dementlieu. Approaching from the west, just as they arrived were two grizzled warriors, both heavily armed and dressed as woodsmen. The rain drizzled down on the quartet, as introductions were made all around. Named Rimo and Tallorn, the pair of rangers told Dario and Damonion they were heading towards Darkon and agreed to accompany the two wanderers in making their way north. (1)

Rain began blowing in heavily and wind whipped across the adventurers' backs like the lash of a slavedriver. Trying to gain shelter amongst the overhanging trees, the quartet huddled beneath their cloaks as Dario attempted to light a fire. After several tries, the wily rogue managed somehow to get the wet wood to burst into flame. (2) Unfortunately for them, the soaked kindling put forth a thick smoke, which billowed around the group and left them gasping for air.

When, finally, the smoke cleared, the quartet quickly found that they were in unfamiliar surroundings. The road leading north was all but gone. Dense forest pressed around them, like a solid wall of living hardwood. Immediately, all four began questioning as to what, exactly, had happened.

However, the smoke that had just so recently swept around them slid slowly through the woods, and dissipated, leaving two odd figures in its wake. The first, a robed individual, stepped forward boldly and, after some odd smatterings of attempted conversation, introduced herself as Dera in an ancient form of Balok. (3) The second person, small and lithe, quickly disappeared into the shadows and scrambled up a tree for safety.

Just then, the howling began. Tallorn's ears perked up and interpreted the sound—wolves, howling as if they were of one voice, though many. (4) With a worried expression, the ranger was quick to let his comrades know of the unnatural feel to the sounds. Looking out through the shadows of the trees, wary of the wolves, the adventurers swiftly realized that there were bigger problems to deal with first. At least 75, if not more, humanoid figures were slowly forming an ever-tightening noose around

the warriors' positions. Begging the newcomer to join them in fleeing this menace, the five dashed madly through the forest, attempting to get away from the mass of bodies. Listening carefully as he ran, Tallorn recognized the sounds of a chorus of voices over the winds. In a dissonant, off-key tone, the forest echoed with the sounds of a morbid Tepestani children's song. The look on the warrior's face, as he recognized the tune, harrowed the very souls of his comrades.

Fate was not on the warriors' sides that night. Dodging both the howling winds and the mocking cries of the mysterious figures, the group ran through the night and to the edge of a small clearing in the woods. Edging nervously around the expanse, they noticed a line of seven figures, linked hand in hand, in the center of the clearing. Drawing blades, the group approached...only to hear the hideous song pour forth in one voice from their collective throats. As lightning flashed across the heavens, at last the mysterious figures were revealed—flesh rotted and fell from hollow bones, and each of their mouths was twisted in a hideous grin as they sang. (5)

Battle was joined. Acting swiftly, Tallorn charged one of the beasts, with two swords drawn. However, he direly underestimated the unholy strength of the creatures. With a powerful blow from its meaty fist, Tallorn fell with a gaping head wound, bleeding on the rain-soaked earth. His allies gasped in revulsion, but held their ground to stave off the undead menace. (6)

The conflict boded direly for the adventurers. While scoring several hits, Damonion's was soon surrounded by three of the creatures. The hands of a girl, no more than 12 years old, soon clenched around her throat, and the brave swordsman fell. Dera, realizing the horrible fate she would endure at the creatures' hands, summoned an arcane mount to bear her and Dario away from the combat, but as she tried to grab the young rogue's hand, she slipped from her saddle and the mount vanished. Fearing for her life, the lithe figure fought her way past one of the walking corpses and scrambled up a tree, where she rained down crossbow bolts.

Were it not for the heroics of young Rimo, though, the group may have met a grisly fate. Eschewing his favored bow, he waded into the fray with a longsword and cut down several of the creatures where they stood. Quickly binding Tallorn's wounds, he defended Damonion until Dera and Dario regained their bearings to form a more

organized retreat. As the creatures slowly fell, the staggered Tallorn managed to speak some unknown incantation, reviving Damonion and allowing all 6 warriors to continue their flight. (7)

After an exhausting run, the group finally arrived at a small settlement. Strangely, though, lights still burned in the four buildings despite the fact that it was well into the night. Desperately seeking refuge, the sextet shambled into the largest of the buildings, apparently once a town hall. Deserted, the hall stood silent. No life moved in the hall, save the adventurers themselves. However, a silent figure sat face-down at a table in a darkened corner of the room. Fearfully examining the body, the warriors came upon a sheet of parchment on the desk, in a strange script:

Such are the final words of Hyskosa, seer of time...

A town shall be razed, then rebuilt in a day

The One Who is Many shall raise them from clay.

The circle of slayer and prey will be sundered.

Yet death brings no rest for the world-weary hunter.

The four pillars of alabaster will fall,

But a demon's sheer will shall use three as his thrall.

Five that once stood shall splinter and quake,

As the hordes of the Pike-Lord leave death in their wake.

A house built on pain will tumble and fade

And a realm will still scream though the Black Knight has paid.

Truth be shown through eyes, though the Black Mists will rise.

Eth radk amn liwl noos igna shi izrep. (8)

While little could be discerned from this mysterious message, Damonion kept the parchment for future reference. After an hour of quiet rest, Tallorn and Rimo barred the doors, while the mysterious woman slowly explored the house alone. Coming upon what appeared to be a master bedroom, she slyly pocketed a bag of coins, each labeled "One Mournepiece" which she kept to herself.

Dera, however, was not content to merely stand by. Desiring to search the remainder of the town, she lifted the bars on the door and slipped outside, while Rimo and Tallorn protested. (9) Dera did not get so far as the first house, when disaster struck. Not noticing the stench of undeath around her, she opened the door to what appeared to be a crude smithy, when a huge bald corpse smashed her skull with a massive hammer. Watching hesitantly from the door, Rimo and Tallorn leapt into action. Rimo took a rib-cracking blow to the chest, but with a powerful two-handed stroke, felled the beast and then tended to the fallen mage. Examining the hammer, the pair found it to be well made, and kept it. (10)

While those three fought outside, Dario, apparently an expert of metalwork, came upon a vital clue. (11) The fireplace poker in the town hall indicated a form of metalsmithing found only in the remote forest land of Verbrek. However, how the group came to be so waylaid was beyond them all.

After re-barring the doors, the group fitfully rested. Dawn broke peacefully, and no trace of the undead scourge could be found. Mystified and still aching from their injuries, the sextet set out again. (12).

GM's Notes:

1—Rimo and Tallorn were never heading towards Darkon. They were actually planning to head towards the border of Valachan and Sithicus to meet with some ranger comrades. However, they told Damonion and Dario otherwise, for reasons known only to them...seriously.

2—Dario was using his Half-Vistani talent to light a fire in any conditions. (p. 36 RLCS)

3—There is a very important reason why Dera speaks an archaic version of this tongue, which will be revealed as time goes on. I'm unsure if any of the players have picked up on the clues, though.

4—The group was never meant to find the wolves, but I needed to get them moving.

They were getting just a tad too comfortable. It worked pretty well... ;)

5—If you hadn't guessed already, this is Toben the Many, one of my all-time favorite NPCs (VRGttWD p. 108). While I was wary of using him so early on, his "Borg meets Night of the Living Dead" feel worked perfectly as an introduction. Rachel, Damonion's player, was exceedingly freaked out; something I had worried about since we were playing in a conference room. The idea of a children's song came from Stephen King's "Storm of the Century" on ABC. I'll never look at "I'm a Little Teapot" the same way again.

6—Sanity Check, using my new rules! Unfortunately, everyone passed. No fun for me...

7—Tallorn has the "Redhead" feat, as Cure Light Wounds. (p. 48 RLCS)

8—Hyskosa's final Hexad, written in Patterna. I typed this up in a nice font, then promptly forgot to bring the handout. I had to work from memory and give them a hand-written version that was slightly inaccurate. I'll fix that soon. The final line is an anagram; see if you can figure it out!

9—In reality, Karl, Dera's player, was just being a bit greedy after Silas, the mysterious woman's player, found the Mordentish gold. As such, she wanted to find something in the town. She sure did. Tallorn and Rimo, however, acted out of heroism. I awarded XP according to their motives.

10—They don't know it, but the hammer is a masterwork adamantite warhammer. That will definitely come in handy, if they hang onto it.

11—Another Half-Vistani ability, as Dario is of the Kamii tribe. TJ, Dario's player, was rolling surprisingly well after the combat.

12—Figuring that he'd be bored with toying with the PCs, I had Toben just leave. The majority of his bodies were only used to keep the players on edge and their characters running. Now, lost in an unfamiliar land, they're about to meet someone who they'll deal with for the rest of their adventuring careers.

Ravenloft Campaign Log—Wed. Night Game—Log II

Rested and at least somewhat relaxed after their near-fatal encounter, our heroes left the ruins of the village in their wake, as they puzzled over the strange manuscript they found in the town hall. For lack of a better choice, the sextet began orienting themselves towards the north, in the hopes that Port-a-Lucine might be just around the corner.

The two rangers, using their expertise in the wilderness, took charge. Rimo, scouting ahead with his longbow in hand, took the lead, while Tallorn, with his hands on the pommels of his paired swords, stayed towards the back and watched for signs of trouble.

At long last, cornered by her comrades, the strange female was finally asked for her name. (1) Dera and the others were told to call her Sik, but no last name was revealed. Not questioning this event, they forged through the woodlands, wary of trouble. The woods of Verbrek were no place for wandering humans, and the adventurers soon learned this lesson quite harshly.

Damonion, listening carefully, began to hear a low buzz around the group, emanating from the very forest itself. At his warning, Tallorn and Dario soon heard the same and drew steel. The buzzing grew louder and louder, as if thousands of insects were swarming through the trees.

At last, the group saw what caused this strange sound. Vicious insects with bat wings, several claw-like legs and a long, needle-shaped nose flew down around the group. (2) The majority of the group held their ground and prepared to fight off the creatures, but Dario felt his nerve splinter. As one of the creatures landed on his chest, piercing through his armor, Dario let out a harrowing cry and ran off, screaming, through the woods. (3) Aside from the sound of the rogue's cries, the remaining five soon lost track of their friend.

Battle was joined. The creatures swooped down several times, hoping to land onto the warriors and drain away their succulent blood, while the adventurers hoped only to crush the vile insects before they were too injured to fight back. Damonion, using a skilled riposte, fended off his assailant and skewered it on his rapier. Tallorn and Dera were not so lucky. Within the first few exchanges, both the ranger and the mage were

slowly being drained of their vital fluids. Rimo, acting quickly, loosed his arrows and felled some of the creatures even as they fluttered, hungry for life. Seeing his good friend in danger, Rimo grappled with the creature stuck to Tallorn's chest, ripping it free and attempting to crush it. (4) As he struggled, Tallorn gasped for air and tried to assist Dera and Sik, as they struggled beneath the claws of their assailants. With a mighty heave, Rimo flung the creature against a tree, where it flapped its wings once, then fell to the ground.

Finally, the creatures were beaten back. Dario's screams still echoed through the forest, as his friends chased him down. Finally, in a small copse of underbrush, the five found their friend as he rolled on the ground, screaming as he flailed in horror. Aiming carefully, Rimo nocked another arrow to his bow. (5) The bolt sliced through the air and buried itself deeply into the creature's back. As it stopped struggling, Dario flung it off and laid down to weep in horror.

At long last, his comrades were able to calm the frantic rogue down and get him under control. The sun slowly began to set. For lack of a better place, the group decided to make a camp and rest for the evening. Watches were set and the majority of the group settled down for a well-earned rest.

Damonion sat awake with Rimo, sharpening his blade, as night drew on. The sound of whetstone and oil on cold steel softly provided rhythm to the night, as the group rested. His sharp ears perked up, as the sound was disrupted. Footfalls softly padded through the forest floor. They were not alone. However, the sound quickly passed and their watch was up. (6) Waking up Dera, they drifted into a deep, dreamless sleep. However, Dera soon heard the same noise. Working quickly, she roused the rest of the group.

It was then that the footfalls came into sight-range. Shambling humanoids had ringed themselves around the group, slowly tightening a fleshy noose around them. Armed and frightened, the four positioned themselves around a tree in a strategic maneuver, anticipating a dire fight that may cost them their lives. (7)

Finally, the creatures came into the firelight and the all-too-familiar scent of undeath filled the warriors' nostrils. Limbs were attached to torsos with long surgical

staples. Heads lolled on necks, not supporting their hideous weight. Yet, most disturbing of all, each of the creatures' lips were stapled shut with long metal pins. (8)

Steeling themselves against the horrible sight, the adventurers readied their weapons. However, rather than tearing their victims limb from limb, the undead merely began to push the sextet north. Hesitant, at first, then agreeing to move with their vile captors, the adventurers began moving with the undead and marched through the night, without any idea where these creatures could be taking them, or for what purpose.

After a long and weary hour-and-a-half trudge through the woods, a clearing came into sight. At the far side, a statuesque log cabin stood vigil with bright lamps glowing in the windows. Forcing the six to the door, one of the creatures stood at the fore and gestured crudely towards the door. After a moment's hesitation, the adventurers slowly opened the door.

Before them stood, as still as a marble pillar, a powerful figure. A man, perhaps in his mid 50s, with receding brown hair and a dire gaze in his grey eyes, invited them in. (9) Fatigued and ready for rest, the six nodded reluctantly and stepped into a lavishly furnished sitting room. Immediately, the figure bade the six to introduce themselves. After their introductions, he gestured to himself, introducing himself as one Dr. Gregorian DelShonar, and then begged them to sit in the dining room, so that they might be refreshed.

Seated at the long oak table, the group anxiously wondered what this strange man could want from them. DelShonar took his own seat at the head of the table, then smiled as the door to his rear opened. From the kitchen came four massive automatons, each shaped in ghastly mockery of the human form. Bearing heavy platters, they placed them silently on the table, then slid back into the kitchen, leaving only the echoes of their crunching gears ringing in the ears of the party. (10)

Gregorian smiled. Announcing the repast to be ready, he lifted the cover on the main platter and began carving a roasted peppered lamb in a red wine sauce. As the group ate, the enigmatic man appraised them and asked what business they had in Verbrek. Answers were provided reluctantly, though Gregorian's face remained as stoic as marble.

As the rest of the group discussed their situation and where to go from this strange place, Dario quietly asked the doctor if he knew another noted figure, Dr. Rudolph Van Richten. (11) Thinking wistfully, DelShonar told the young dilettante that, yes, he did in fact know the peerless monster hunter. In fact, DelShonar had studied medicine and alchemy under the doctor for two years, in their shared hometown of Corvia, Darkon. When Dario pressed him for more information, DelShonar told him that, frankly, Van Richten had all but disappeared, though rumors spoke of his commitment to a mental institution on an island off the coast of Mordent. (12)

Dario continued to speak with DelShonar, while the others bickered. At last, DelShonar interrupted their arguments, suggesting that they follow the nearby river to the east, which would lead them north through the barony of Richemulot into Port-a-Lucine. DelShonar even gave them the name of a steamboat operator, one Nathan Timothy, who might offer to ferry them into Richemulot. This, in turn, got the others questioning the doctor. He indicated that he had gotten his doctorate in Pont-a-Museau, and had begun research on his book there. Curious, the group asked if he had a copy of his book. Rising slowly, yet quite pleased at their curiosity, DelShonar set a thick leather-bound tome onto the table. (13)

After the group flipped through DelShonar's book, the doctor eyed them carefully, telling them abruptly that it was time for them to leave. Begging for rest, the group pleaded with DelShonar for one more night, but the doctor had other plans. Rather than let them rest, he told the four that they would be used as field test subjects for a group of his latest constructs. They had five minutes to run, before the undead scourge would begin following them.

Running like madmen through the wooded night, the adventurers sprinted to the east. Soon after, the sounds of undead footfalls began to dully crunch through the underbrush around them. Harrowed, the group ran on, but as they dodged the trees, four skeletal forms leaped down on top of them!

Immediately, the warriors started to beat them back. Using the hammer found in the town only a day earlier, Rimo smashed two of the creatures into oblivion. However, the victory was not without its price. For a second time, Tallorn's defenses failed and only Dera's sorcery managed to save him. However, even then, a dying blow from one

of the creatures managed to slash her throat, leaving her bleeding on the forest floor. Calling on the spirits of nature, the newly-healed Tallorn staved off the bleeding and helped the young mage to her feet. (14) Their flight resumed.

At long last, the six arrived at the river's gorge. A dire thirty foot drop led into a rough, rapid-filled gorge, which all six gaped at. A single, rickety rope bridge crossed the abyss. With trepidation and fear, they began to cross. (15)

Deftly, Damonion made his way across first, successfully. Tallorn came next, but had some difficulties getting across. Eventually, after some minor slips, he emerged on the far side. Sik made her way next, and gracefully ran across the bridge with no problems whatsoever. However, when Dario stepped onto the bridge, his balance failed him. The bridge twisted beneath his weight, flinging him off. Only by swiftly grabbing the thin handrail was the young rogue saved. Thinking quickly and holding on for dear life, Dario pulled his rope and grappling hook from his pack. Swinging it across, he failed to make contact and nearly lost his grip, which would have left him plummeting into the raging river below. Breathing deeply to keep his cool, an idea struck Dario. Using his grappling hook as a sliding device, he slid down the handrail over to the far side, where Damonion and Tallorn quickly hauled him onto land. (16)

This left only Rimo and Dera. Rimo was firing shots from his bow at the slowly approaching horde, while Dera mounted the bridge. However, halfway across, the young mage slipped from the bridge and plummeted into the river below. Rimo, in a valiant act of heroism, dove in after the mage, desperately trying to keep her head above water. With a massive feat of skill, Rimo grabbed up the drowned mage as well as a rope tossed down by Dario. Eventually, the four pulled up Rimo and Dera, and Tallorn began to resuscitate the quickly drowning mage. (17)

As Tallorn worked and Dera began breathing again, Rimo and Dario slashed the ropes on the bridge, leaving the bewildered undead without a way to follow them. Now, all that remained is to rest and search for the enigmatic steamboat captain, Nathan Timothy, in the hopes that they could make their way north. (18) Port-a-Lucine seemed to be only a hopeful dream, at this point.

GM's Notes:

1—So much for cliché introductions, eh? I've found that my groups rarely, if ever, have the type of introductions that begin "so, you're all sitting in a bar..." This time, as it has before, we've gone an entire session without everyone knowing everyone else's name.

2—Ah, stirges. Honestly, these things are nasty little buggers. They use a melee touch attack at a nice +7 bonus, which does 1d4 Constitution damage. Their challenge rating? ½. They're almost ridiculous in how difficult they can be. Keep in mind that this combat left four of the characters—Tallorn, Sik, Dera and Dario—with severe Con damage. That'll be hurting them for a while.

3—Whoo...this was a mess. Dario rolled a natural 1 on his Fear check, which prompted a Sanity check, which he also failed. To say the least, he was out of combat for a while. There will be repercussions for this for quite a while in the future. Fear of insects, anyone? Or maybe blood? Only time will tell.

4—Technically, Rimo shouldn't have been able to do this, but it was just damned cool. The idea of a warrior risking his life to rip off a creature from his friend and try to grapple it himself just seemed so cinematic and heroic that I let him do it. Plus, the natural 20 he rolled on his pin check sealed the deal for me. A very cool job on Brian's part, as he played this to the hilt.

5—What can I say? Rimo is one lucky ranger. Even after the penalties for shooting into melee, he still managed a solid hit, which probably saved Dario's life.

6—Nothing like failed Listen and Spot checks, eh? I tell you, if this group were any less observant, they'd be dead by now. At least Dera's Wisdom modifier bailed them out in this case.

7—I described this to be at least 30-35 zombies surrounding them. Considering their recent circumstances with Toben the Many, they were very wary of taking on such a massive force. A good maneuver on their part. The zombies were meant to be a plot device and nothing more—they weren't meant to be fought.

8—Technically, I shouldn't be calling them 'zombies', though. The undead are ones of my own making, called Screaming Men, which DelShonar made himself. Alack, though, I didn't write up full stats for them. If you have the "Van Richten's Guide to the Walking Dead", you can make them yourself, I'm sure. Take the 'Dead Travel Fast' ability and

give them a sonic-based cone attack (Fort save for ½). They work quite nicely, at any level. I also enforced a Sanity check for seeing them—they're pretty nasty.

9—The main villain, though they don't know it yet. DelShonar and his Theory will factor into their lives in more ways than any of the group can anticipate right now.

10—Another low-grade Sanity check, as none of the characters would have ever faced anything like these before. Plus, the sound of their grating gears was quite hideous. It didn't really matter much, though, as everyone passed.

11—Dario seeks Van Richten's advice to take revenge on Lord Wilfred Godefroy, who killed one of his friends. With Van Richten's disappearance and dealings with Godefroy unlikely, Dario's goals may be out of reach. However, the group will be spending some time in Mordent, and one never knows what may happen.

12—Dr. Heinfroth's asylum. I'd love to run this with the PCs, but I have to make someone go crazy first. We'll see about that...

13—The prologue, which was given as a handout, is available on another link, or by request.

14—Again, Tallorn's 'Redhead' feat comes in handy.

15—This entire scene ran like "Raiders of the Lost Ark," which was exactly the feel I was going for. With a mass of undead chasing them, the priority was obviously to get across as fast as possible, despite the poor conditions. I ran this using a series of Balance checks and Reflex saves, done very loosely, so that no character died simply by a bad roll of the dice. I may have been too nice, though, but the fear of falling off the bridge was still quite well instilled.

16—Dario was quite inventive here. I appreciate inventiveness, so I let him cross safely.

17—Again, Rimo saves the day. Within his party, he's beginning to make a name for himself. Quite impressive.

18—I'm unsure of what to do with Nathan Timothy yet, but I'm sure it will be something else. It's an opportunity I can't turn down. At any rate, a good deal of time remains before they reach Port-a-Lucine, and a murder mystery awaits them in the towns of Richemulot.

Ravenloft Campaign Log—Wed. Night Game—Log III (1)

After a harrowing flight from Gregorian DelShonar's undead, the six adventurers began following the river north, in the hopes that Port-a-Lucine would come more quickly than the last few days had gone. They began walking, keeping an eye on the gorge in the hopes that the mysterious Nathan Timothy, the steamboat captain that DelShonar had mentioned, may come along and offer them aid. (1)

After a few hours of weary trudging through the forest, a low whistle began to fill the group's ears. Turning back to the river, Daimonion spotted a white ship with a bright red paddle-wheel flowing slowly down the river. Cheering in joy, the swashbuckler directed Dario and the others to the sight, as the ship's steam whistle blew a resounding response. Looking closely, Dario noted a placard on the ship's side: The Crescent Moon. (2) Truly, this was the ship of which DelShonar had spoken.

A well-dressed man in a towering captain's hat came to the prow of the Crescent Moon and hailed the group with a flourishing bow, then asked them who they were and where they were heading. Daimonion quickly gave introductions, then told the man that they were traveling to Port-a-Lucine. The captain smiled and introduced himself as Nathan Timothy, then told the group that, while he was not heading as far up-river as Dementlieu, he could take them as far as the Richemuloise port town of Mortigny. He also informed the group that such passage would cost them a substantial amount of gold—more than they could afford, for the most part. Most of the group tried to negotiate the price down, but Timothy would have none of it.

However, the gold that Sik found in the destroyed town hall of Verbrek proved to be a windfall. The 200 mournepieces she found in the master bedroom covered the costs, but placed the rest of the group in her debt. (3) One of the mates tossed a rope to the waiting, tired adventurers, and the group boarded without difficulty.

The first day aboard the Crescent Moon proved to be a fairly dull experience. The ship's crew, aside from the gregarious Timothy, proved to be tight-lipped. (4) Daimonion spent most of his time on the foredeck, watching the river, while Tallorn, Dera and Dario all slept for most of the first night, attempting to recoup the massive blood loss that they had suffered against the mosquito-creatures they had fought, prior to meeting Gregorian DelShonar.

After several hours of travel, the group grew hungry. Having no food, after their flight from DelShonar, the corps asked the first mate where they could attain something to eat. Speaking only sparingly, he indicated the mess-hall, below deck. Shuffling back down below, all but Dera, who had some trail rations to spare, headed to the mess-hall, where a greasy, bald man with flaking skin stood stirring a massive cauldron. (5) Inside, a thick brown stew simmered, and he ladled out servings for the five.

Following the brief dinner, the majority of the group simply went back to their much-needed rest. However, their sleep was not as restful as most had hoped. All but Dera experienced horrific dreams. Before them set a massive feast of meat and red liquid in clear goblets, which they gorged themselves on lustily. However, as each eater looked up the table, they saw it filled with human body parts, all roasted and cooked, which they themselves fed upon. (6) At various times, each of them woke up, covered in a sheen of slick, wet sweat.

The next day brought nothing short of paranoia. After comparing their dreams, the group was shocked to find that all were so similar, yet they could only wonder why this had occurred. The day passed, similar to the first, but Dario, Sik, Rimo and Tallorn began to keep more watchful eyes on the all-but-silent crew, as well as watching their own actions. After another dinner, Rimo and Tallorn spent some time in private discussing what they could do about the dreams. Both agreed that some investigation was needed, and a time was set for the coming night.

Unbeknownst to them, both Sik and Dario each had their own plans for the evening. Well after midnight, Rimo and Tallorn found Sik outside their door. Quietly, they asked the lithe rogue what she was doing. Sik replied that she was attempting to speak with Captain Timothy, whom the crew told her only truly likes to navigate at night. Seeing this as a worthy plan, Rimo and Tallorn slowly made their way into the shadows with Sik, and climbed the stairs to the main deck.

Before them lay a sight that none could have anticipated. As the trio peeked over the rail, looking across the deck, a massive form of a half-wolf, half-human stood with two paws on the wheel, steering the ship upriver, into the light of a brilliant crescent moon. (7) Upon this creature's head sat the tall cap of a ship's captain—without a doubt, this horrible creature was that of their captain, Nathan Timothy. Wordlessly, they swiftly

made their way back downstairs, so that they could grasp what this hideous sight portended.

Meanwhile, Dario had made some investigations of his own. While Daimonion and Dera slept, he crept quietly down to the lower hold, to see what lay down below. Passing the kitchen, the young rogue slid down the hall to the end room, where a slight cool breeze swept around the door jambs. Deftly picking the lock, he swung open the door, only to be witness to his own horrific vision. Dozens of human corpses, all hanging from hooks, dressed and sliced like cattle, as if for some inhuman feast. Gasping in fear, he quickly closed the door and returned to his bunk, just as Rimo, Tallorn and Sik returned from their venture.

Swiftly, Dera and Daimonion were awakened. Information was shared amongst the group, which chilled all to the very marrow of their bones. None knew what could come of these discoveries. However, as time went on, all agreed that nothing could be done that night, and the group drifted into another sleep of vile, cannibalistic dreams.

The next morning, few out of the group were enamored of another round of the stew, especially after knowing from where it came. Sik even described a dream in which she pulled the entirety of an eye from a human face, and then proceeded to peel it in order to suck out the gelatin within. (8) Such disgusting visions revolted the group, only further disillusioning them from Timothy and his crew. Trying to avoid the stew, Sik and Dario asked the surly cook if he had something other than stew to eat. Eventually, they persuaded him to give up two raw potatoes, but Sik was unable to remember whether raw potato was poisonous or not, leaving both wondering. (9) After a few minutes of deliberation, the pair decided to risk it and began to eat. Rimo, meanwhile, asked the first mate's permission to fish from the side of boat. He was granted the luxury, but was unable to come up with any food of use.

However, during the day of rest, Dera and Tallorn had gained quite a bit of new-found strength. Their regenerative properties began working, and their blood was nearly all replaced. Captain Timothy, however, asked to see all six on the main deck during the day. After some discussion, the group decided to take Timothy up on his offer, despite their fears. However, Timothy only wished to tell them that the Crescent Moon had

made good time, and that they would reach the outskirts of Mortigny by the following afternoon. (10)

If any chance were to be made to escape, it would seriously be placed into question now. With only a day left, few knew what to do. Dario, however, had a plan already in mind. Taking Sik with him, late after midnight, the pair began searching the larger of the bunks, hoping to find some token of Timothy's to prove their story. Sik had little luck picking the locks on the doors, while Dario managed to make his way into one. Slowly padding across the room, he began rifling through a desk. However, as he pulled open the center drawer, a cloud of cloying, green gas began to fill the room. (11) With a single breath of the gas, Dario fell unconscious to the ground. Sik, hearing her comrade fall inert, covered her mouth, closed the door and pulled Dario back into their bunk. After Rimo and Tallorn's ministrations, Dario regained consciousness, yet remained stiff and pained for several days thereafter.

The final day arrived, and none too soon. The Crescent Moon slowly drifted into a small dock, about 5 leagues distant from Mortigny. As the crew prepared to tie the ship in, Timothy addressed the adventurers. With a knowing smile, he wished them a good journey. Dario, Rimo and Sik all addressed him as the vile creature he was, but the captain merely laughed and posed them with their few options. Grinning openly, he wrapped his arm around Rimo's shoulders, then winced as his arm quickly tore into its wolf-form, then flashed back just as quickly. (12) Harrowed and confused by the whole ordeal, the adventurers swiftly made their way off the boat and back onto dry land.

Still gaining their bearings from their voyage with Timothy, the group was surprised to find a young man along the path they were traveling, dressed in the garb of a huntsman. They hailed the fellow, who introduced himself as Stuart Joshi, a constable-in-training of Mortigny. Upon their asking, he told them of a possible job that might be found within his hometown—one which required the utmost secrecy. If they were interested, the adventurers were to specifically go to the home of one Sir Balric Traven, the mayor of Mortigny, and speak to no one on the way. As they agreed to this, Joshi left the adventurers on the road, as they headed towards the city. (13)

Sik, however, had other ideas. She quickly made her way to one of the local drinking houses, while the others dealt with Traven. After a brief stay in the mayor's

study, while he took supper, they met with Traven, a hawkish, tall man, who had much to tell them.

Apparently, the town of Mortigny was beset by murders of a most mysterious sort. Four people had died—3 in outlying regions, 1 in the city itself—of wounds that could only be described as animalistic. Normally, such things could be taken care of—adventurers were hired, and the killings seemed to abate for a while. However, nothing had changed. The groups of mercenaries, one headed by a Barovian knight named Robert Radanavic and another headed by a Darkonian nobleman named Reginald Jordan III, had both had no luck with the killings; not even leads. However, because of the group's fees, the Mortigny town budget was running slim, and results must be attained posthaste. The group's job, should they accept, would be to continue the investigations, as well as attempt to understand why the two other groups had been having so little success in their investigations.

When asked about the bodies, Traven referred to one Dr. Jonathan Garnet, who served as a physician and coroner for the town, who was holding the latest victim's body for examination. Also, Traven referred them to one Warden Cartwright, an anchorite of the goddess Ezra, who may be able to assist them if the source of the killings turned out to be something supernatural. Finally, the mayor offered them free room and board at a local tavern, the Green Griffon, where both mercenary groups were staying.

Wishing the adventurers good luck, he escorted them to the door. From there, they met up with Sik and arrived at the door to the Green Griffon. Upon the opening of that door, their lives would change forever. (14)

GM's Notes:

1—I really wasn't sure about using Nathan Timothy in any shape or form. Strangely enough, I'm not very fond of lycanthropes in my games, and having a former darklord mixing it up with the PCs so early on really worried me. I only ran this adventure with the Wednesday group, thinking that if it went badly, I wouldn't have to worry about it on Thursday, but it turned out a lot better than I thought...but you can read that for yourself.

2—I honestly could not remember what the name of Nathan Timothy's ship was. As such, I chose one that made perfect sense for the lycanthrope.

3—Being in debt to a character like Sik is never a good sign. Her true nature will come out more fully in the next session.

4—Sometimes silence is the creepiest thing in the world. Anytime anyone in the group would ask one of Timothy's crew a question, I would sit there, stonefaced. Pretty soon, they were just becoming more and more disturbed by the people around them. It was pretty fantastic...

5—I wanted this guy to foreshadow the horrors of what they'd be dealing with, simply by his look. If you've ever seen Disney's version of "The Three Musketeers" (with Tim Curry and Rebecca De Mornay!), the executioner/prison guard fellow was the exact type I was thinking of, when making this chef. Very disgusting, and very suited to his meal.

6—I got this idea from the Tcho-Tchos, from the Call of Cthulhu game. If you're not familiar with them, they're a tribal people from around Cambodia, who believe that they gain great strength by eating people. They make a special serum, which they put in food, that is made from human ganglia paste. This serum gives the eater hideous dreams and can drive them insane...as such, everyone got a Sanity check from eating the stew.

7—I must say, this scene worked perfectly. The three timid adventurers peering over the rail, the crescent moon hanging low in the sky, and the dire form of Timothy piloting the ship...absolutely fantastic. The look on Sik's player's face was nothing short of a full jaw-drop. Great stuff.

8—For some reason, Sik kept eating the stew. Needless to say, she failed this Sanity check.

9—This would be a Natural 1 on a Survival check. Mind-boggling, it is.

10—I decided to shorten the voyage, as the night was growing rather long. You see, we play on Wednesday nights, starting at 9:30. I have a Biology class at 8 am, the next day. As such, having the late nights just kills me, in terms of sleep. I really wanted to wrap this up as quickly as possible, despite the success of the game.

11—Oooh, this was nasty for Dario, who was already hurting in terms of Constitution damage. Here, he failed both Fortitude saves, getting knocked unconscious first, then taking 2d6 Dex damage. I rolled fairly high on the Dex damage, which really put a hurting on his skills, being a rogue. Not fun for him.

12—Just a nice little parting shot. This kept the party in line, and scared the bloody hell out of them. Very amusing.

13—Let it be known that, in all of my years of DMing, I have one major issue that I cannot overcome. This issue: that of names. I never seem to be able to come up with good names on the spot and my names always seem to be ill-suited to the people at hand. The names here, I've ripped off of various sources. Joshi was taken from the Call of Cthulhu book, as S.T. Joshi was Lovecraft's biographer. Balric Traven, on the other hand, is taken from the Ravenloft DMG—however, this Traven is not a vampiric necromancer, like his DMG compatriot. He's just a mayor who's a little frazzled and looking for some help.

14—Overall, I thought this session went surprisingly well. I was highly pleased by it, and much looking forward to the next. The party's dealings with Radanavic and Jordan really would define them as characters, as well as bring them together as an investigative group. However, as I said, the next session would change them forever...but that's a story for next time.

Ravenloft Campaign Log—Wed. Night Group—Log IV

The Green Griffon of Mortigny was not normally a very busy inn. (1) Travelers and merchants used it as a waystop, to be sure, but aside from those occasional wanderers, the inn was only home to a small crowd of regular patrons. However, as our adventurers arrived, the tables of the Green Griffon were bustling with relative newcomers.

At a long table, six people sat drinking and conversing. A tall, stout man with a sharpened longsword by his side sat at the head of the table, with an oriental man wearing sashes sitting close by. Near them were a gaunt elf man and a plate-clad dwarf, who bore an ostentatious symbol of a bronze spear bound in iron around his neck. (2) At the far end of the table, a bubbly strawberry blonde in leather flirted with a charming young man, who had a rapier by his side and a massive plume in his cavalier-style cap.

In a somewhat darker corner, even more newcomers sat. A pale man with a long black ponytail and goatee sat, facing the room, idly playing a hand drum. (3) Beside him, looking worried, a petite young woman sipped nonchalantly from a glass of wine. On the other side of their circular table, a massive man with a two-handed blade strapped to his back drank deep of a stein of ale, while a white-clad elf sat next to him, trying to make conversation.

Such was the sight that greeted Dera, Daimonion, Rimo, Dario and Tallorn as they entered. Sik, somewhere along the way, had disappeared, but none really seemed to notice her absence. (4) After ordering drinks and rooms, the group split off, in the hopes to find more information on these newcomers.

Daimonion and Dario immediately made their way over to the circular table, where the mysterious drummer and his comrades relaxed. After greeting the four, Daimonion asked them their names. The drummer set down his drum and set about introducing himself—he was Robert Radanavic, a Knight of the Radiant Beacon from Barovia. (5) The slight girl with him was Lucca Sergial, his consort and an alchemist. Accompanying them were their longtime friends, Gareth Ruhkheim, a warrior from Lamordia, and Pinochet Starborn, a Sithican elf who was raised in the monastery where Radanavic was trained. Sadly, Radanavic told the pair that they had a fifth member to their ensemble, one of those unfortunate souls known to the populace as ‘calibans’, but

Gug was imprisoned when they entered Mortigny, as the people feared the hulking brute. (6).

Daimonion immediately took a shine to the saddened Radanavic, and talked at length with him about their travels. Dario, too, enjoyed the company, particularly that of Pinochet, after finding out that the young elf was a priest of The Nameless One, which was, apparently, a popular faith in Barovia. (7) After a short while, the name of Gregorian DelShonar came up and Radanavic's eyes rose in alarm. He had faced the doctor in combat before, and knew that his actions towards the group were most malicious. He told Daimonion that word would be sent, as soon as possible, to his Knighthood, so that some rectification might be made.

Meanwhile, as Tallorn drank at the bar, Dera and Rimo made their way over to the other table. The pair approached the stout man and made their introductions. Smiling broadly and raising his ale tankard, he hailed their greeting and introduced himself as Reginald Jordan III, a Darkonian native who was lately a wanderer. He then introduced his compatriots: the lithe oriental man was Yan-Bok-Chan, the elf was Roderick Graganthor, the dwarf was Kragar Stormspire, the blonde was Selena Van Bierk, and the man with the plumed hat was Nathaniel de la Cartier. With a lustful eye, Rimo turned to Selena, who gave up flirting with Nathaniel to check out the newcomer. Immediately, they hit it off, conversing at length. However, Dera was not so lucky in her questioning. Despite Mayor Traven's warnings, she immediately misspoke and dropped her cover as a caravan guard looking for work. Jordan picked up on this catch, growing angry. He questioned her violently, leaving Dera barely attempting to cover her tracks. Rimo jumped up from where he was flirting with Selena, and attempted to draw Jordan's ire away by offering a drink. Eventually, the stout man was calmed, but only at great length and even greater suspicion. (8)

At this point, after Jordan was, at least temporarily, placated, Sik arrived in the Green Griffon. (9) Immediately noticing Roderick's elven heritage, she sidled up to him and began conversing at length as to his homeland and where he was from. Smiling subtly, she plied him for information, which—thanks to her attentions—he was more than happy to provide. Dario, somewhat jealously, stood up in indignation and casually dropped by the pair to insinuate romance between himself and the attractive Sik. While

Roderick was somewhat startled by this, Sik quickly allayed his fears. Rimo, on the other hand, spent much of his time chatting up Selena, whom he had taken quite the shine to. After some coercing, Selena convinced Rimo to head out to one of the local ale-houses with her, where they talked at length about his past. Intoxicated and more-than-a-little aroused, Rimo escorted Selena back to her room, where they spent the evening in revelry. (10)

The next day came swiftly, and Dario and Daimonion were quick to begin their investigations. Before the others had risen, they made their way down to the home of one Dr. Jonathan Garnet, Mortigny's household doctor and coroner. Dr. Garnet seemed to be quite helpful, inviting the pair into his home and taking them downstairs to where he had been holding the fourth victim for observation before her funeral. Immediately, Daimonion began examining the body. After several minutes of inspecting the claw-like slashes across the body, the young swashbuckler realized several key facts: not only were there no parts of the body missing, which an animal might eat, but the marks left in the body were quite refined, having none of the tell-tale jagged edges which an animal's claw would usually provide. As such, the killer was not an animal. (11)

Quizzically, Dario asked Dr. Garnet if he knew what form of weapon might make these sorts of marks. Somewhat confused, Garnet referred Dario to Godfrey Adhemar, Mortigny's resident weaponsmith extraordinaire. (12) Figuring that such a man would have the best leads to go on, Dario and Daimonion set back out the door. However, their progress was somewhat interrupted by the arrival of Dera, Tallorn and Rimo at Garnet's door. There, the trio chatted about their recent endeavors.

Tallorn, still aching from his travels, had begged his companions to escort him to the local temple of Ezra, so that he might be healed of his wounds. As Mayor Traven had told them, Warden Cartwright was ready to help him, but required a donation for the taxing spell of "restoration". Sighing, the pained ranger turned to the door. His compatriots began following, but then Tallorn turned back, drawing his short sword. Extending his pock-marked blade in both hands, he proclaimed to the Warden that in his fight against evil, his blade had served him well. While he had no money, he wished to continue his fight and would gladly give up one of his only possessions to do so. Touched by Tallorn's brave words, Warden Cartwright smiled and closed his eyes. He

bade Tallorn sit down and relax, as healing energy washed from the warden's hands and into the ranger's body. (13) Thanking Warden Cartwright profusely, Tallorn and his compatriots left, meeting up with Dario and Daimonion on Garnet's doorstep.

From there, Dario and Daimonion took their leave, bound for Adhemar's shop on the other side of town. Amidst the clattering sounds of the working forge, a small bell rang as the pair entered. A burly man with a handlebar mustache and a thick leather apron came to the counter, shaking their hands profusely and introducing himself. Daimonion then explained to Adhemar about the wounds suffered by the fourth victim, asking if there was such a weapon that could inflict wounds of that type. Confused somewhat, the burly blacksmith began rifling through his stock in search of such a tri-fold blade. Shaking his head, he rose again empty-handed. The pair were about to leave when Adhemar recalled a lead that may help them. It appeared that an elven sage from Darkon was staying in town for a few days, since the roads had been closed off by the killings. This sage, Amastasia Quillathe by name, was an expert in exotic weaponry from the far-off island of Sri Raji. (14) While it was a long shot, perhaps this Quillathe might know something that might be of use. Thanking Adhemar again, Dario and Daimonion set out for Amastasia Quillathe's apartment.

The elven sage's apartment was filled with books, which splayed out of boxes all across the room. A strange scent filled the air, one of burning herbs or incense, as Dario and Daimonion entered his home. Quillathe's red-rimmed eyes stared blankly at the pair, as they made their inquiries. (15) As Daimonion finished his diatribe, the elf closed his eyes and lolled his head back onto his shoulders. Dario and Daimonion looked quizzically at each other, before Quillathe jumped up and began pulling books off of his shelf. Eventually, he found the one he was searching for and pulled it down, flipping through pages. At last, he came to the page he wanted and held it up for the pair to see. A curved form of a half-gauntlet, with three bladed spikes protruding from the back of the hand over the fingers sat in full illustration on the page. Explaining, Quillathe referred this weapon as a 'bagh nakh', better known as a 'catpaw' to those not of Sri Raji. Quite simply, the weapon was one used only rarely by assassins, when they wanted to make their killings look like an animal had performed the murder. At last enlightened,

Dario and Daimonion thanked the bleary-eyed sage and hurried back to the Green Griffon to share the news with their companions.

The evening passed quickly as our heroes exchanged their information and began thinking of suspects. By 10 in the evening, much was on their minds, but some of the group members under investigation were not to be seen. Both Yan-Bok-Chan and Lucca Sergial were gone, their whereabouts unknown. Shrugging off this simple point, the group settled down for the evening. Romance was blossoming between Selena and Rimo, as well as between Roderick and Sik, which left them quite satisfied.

However, as they enjoyed their evening, a peasant burst through the door screaming. Another victim had been found, just outside of the town boundaries. While Rimo and Selena were already in bed, just as with Sik and Roderick, the others immediately leaped to their feet and made their way to the scene of the crime. Grim-faced, Radanavic expressed his concern over Lucca, as she still had not returned. Jordan, however, seemed almost nonchalant as he observed the killing, believing that the animal behind it was just waiting to be caught.

After inspecting the corpse, the group returned to the Green Griffon. Yan was already there, though, while Lucca remained missing. The majority of the group headed to sleep, while Tallorn and Dera stayed awake with Radanavic, as he asked them to wait for Lucca with him.

Dario slept fitfully, at best. It may have been for the best that way, though, as his sharp hearing picked up soft footfalls in the hallway outside. Nervous, he made sounds as if he was still awake, and the footfalls soon faded away. Daimonion, however, immersed himself in a deep slumber. Quietly, a dark-clad figure picked the lock on her door and swung it open. However, the figure had not counted on the creaky hinges of the room door. As it opened the door, with a loaded pistol drawn, Daimonion leaped awake and drew his rapier. Alarmed, the figure fired a single shot into Daimonion's shoulder, then leapt through the shuttered window to the street below. The swashbuckler cried out in pain, bleeding profusely, and watched the mysterious figure disappear into the night.

(16)

Hearing the gunshot, Tallorn, Dera and Radanavic leapt to their feet. Radanavic drew forth a massive halberd which he held in both hands as they ran upstairs. Jordan

and his friends joined them, along with Pinochet and Gareth. The group did their best to calm and heal Daimonion, but much was unsettled. Counting heads, they found that while Selena and Roderick were with Jordan, Nathaniel was not. Lucca, too, had still not reappeared. What was worse, both Rimo and Sik were missing. Immediately, questions began flying. As constables appeared on the scene, Nathaniel rose up the stairs with them. Daimonion and Tallorn immediately questioned him as to where Rimo and Sik might be, but Nathaniel merely said that they had decided to go drinking at a local alehouse and had stayed out later than he. Suspicious, Daimonion looked long at the cavalier, seeing if he had any weapons. Aside from his standard rapier, though, Daimonion noticed nothing out of the ordinary. (17)

Sliding past the group, Nathaniel positioned himself between Jordan and Pinochet. As the group argued, he slowly reached into his back-holster. With a swift motion, he grasped Pinochet by the throat, holding his reloaded pistol at the half-elf's throat. Smiling slyly, he told Radanavic and the heroes to put their weapons down as he and his friends gathered their things. All was obvious now—Jordan and his comrades were behind it all.

At a loss of what to do, Dera slipped into a low incantation. Immediately, the sound of several gunshots echoed down the hall. While the constables and Jordan reacted with alarm, de la Cartier steeled his grip on Pinochet, pushing his pistol barrel into the cleric's temple. Radanavic slowly lowered his halberd, as two shadows rose from the stairs.

A single shot rang out as Nathaniel de la Cartier's skull burst forth in a shower of gore. At the end of the hallway, Lucca Sergial held a smoking pistol with a determined look, while Pinochet scrambled back, breathing heavily. (18) A tall man behind her with a shorn head stepped in front of her, his eyes glowing with power. Immediately, Jordan and all his allies stood frozen in place by some unseen power. From there, the constables quickly manacled Jordan, Yan, Kragar, Selena and Roderick.

Worried about the fates of their comrades, Tallorn, Dario and the others ran to Selena's and Roderick's room. There, bound and gagged, their friends lay. As they were released, Sik grabbed up her crossbow and ran downstairs. As Roderick stood held by the unseen power of the mysterious man, Sik smiled sultrily and aimed her crossbow at

the base of Roderick's skull. Helpless, the mage fell, to the horror of the constables, who were waiting to carry him away. Dark power washed through Sik and she reveled in its touch. (19)

The innkeep assembled the remaining heroes downstairs, hoping to alleviate their fears. Radanavic's eyes were narrowed as he slowly trod down the stairs with Tallorn and Dario. Lucca came last, with her mysterious friend, and addressed her consort. With sadness in her eyes, she told the knight that, simply, their romance was over. With a final forlorn gaze, Robert watched the pair silently walk into the night. (20)

At the constabulary, a full confession was elicited from Reginald Jordan and his so-called adventurers. Quite simply, they would kill a few peasants in a similar manner, using the bagh nakh, and then appear on the scene as investigators, ready to solve their own killings. After milking a town for as much cash as possible, they'd come up with a bloody animal pelt, claim their rewards and move on. Our heroes, too close to the truth, became an obstacle, which needed to be removed.

With the uneasy night behind them, dawn rose on a now-peaceful Mortigny. Drained from their investigations and the confrontation, the six adventurers made their way to bed again, hoping that rest might finally be found.

GM's Notes:

- 1) Again, I can't name things. I hate it, I hate it, I hate it. If someone could send me a big list of names, I'd really appreciate it.
- 2) Ah, yes—the faith of the Lawgiver. Since Sik is actually from Faerun, I played this up that he actually was Bane. Needless to say, Sik was disturbed.
- 3) One of my favorite illegal characters of all time—the Paladin-Bard Robert Radanavic. Originally, his faith was going to (unknowingly) be that of Hastur, but I thought that it might be a bit much. I play conga myself, so I'd love to be able to *play* my Perform checks. I even had song lyrics written up...
- 4) Sik went to a few of the local ale-houses to try to milk the patrons for info. It didn't work so well, as they thought she was a 12 year old boy (Sik is extremely petite). As such, she 'disappeared' for a while.
- 5) Again, a faith I made up based on a disguised cult of Hastur. He and Lucca will both figure prominently in my novel...that is, if I ever get it written. While I love borrowing from other sources, this time, I borrowed from myself!
- 6) Another character I'd love to play, just for style. Gug, the half-orc sorcerer. The way I figure it, he'd have an immensely low Intelligence, with a disturbingly high Charisma. Essentially, he'd be casting fireballs into melee, then wondering why people got mad at him for it. "Gug's Boom work! You got in way this time. You not get in way next time!"
- 7) Hastur, Hastur, Hastur! Boy, I need a conga line for this... ;)
- 8) A few sessions after this one, I had a nice long talk with Dera's player about subtlety and how important it can be. Needless to say, this was not one of his most tactful moments. Also, this raised Jordan's suspicions quite highly, which led to the events later on.
- 9) More on Sik's background. She's CE and was raised by drow, so she's looking to make her way back to Faerun and enslave some males along the way. As such, she gravitated right to Roderick to manipulate him, which makes the later events much funnier...well, sort of.
- 10) Think 'boot-scene' from Star Trek. Rimo's player learned a harsh lesson on reasons not to sleep with people in my games.

11) Jinkies, gang! It's a groovy mystery! Never mind...I just always wanted to say that.

12) Again, I can't name things. These are two names from the First Crusade, which I've been studying for a long while (about 3 years now). I figured, what the hell.

13) Wow, I was really impressed with Tallorn's player with this kind of roleplaying. He got his healing, some extra XP and a GM's commendation for this one. Very touching and very sweet.

14) Sigh...are you noticing a pattern with my poor naming yet? These are names from the Player's Handbook. I really need a name list.

15) Yes, he was stoned. I was bored, so I gave the Rajian sage some character.

16) This was a big sticking point for me. Obviously, Jordan wasn't going to sit by and get captured, so taking a pre-emptive action came naturally. However, it raised a very odd question in my mind. Role-playing, as a game system, depends on a symbiosis between GM and player, in which each trusts the other. However, in assassinating a PC, I would essentially be denying them any chance of survival just for the sake of my story (keep in mind that sleeping characters essentially "take 0" on all checks, which means that de la Cartier would be able to sneak up on them with no trouble at all, coup de gracing them). As such, I ended up bending the rules for their favor—allowing them several, heavily-penalized Listen checks—just so that Daimonion would survive.

Looking back, I'm not sure it was the best way to do it, but I still can't think of a better way. The question thus remains, "Is it right to kill off a player on purpose, and if so, how?" After 11 years of GMing, I still don't have an answer.

17) Three words: Failed Spot Check. Had she made it, there would have been a much more violent end, I'm sure.

18) I've rolled a lot of instant kills in this campaign. This one was *three* consecutive Natural Twenties. Nathaniel de la Cartier never stood a chance.

19) Act of Ultimate Darkness on Sik's part...she wasn't happy that Roderick knocked her out and tied her up. As the first part of her curse, I gave her an extra d6 of sneak attack damage with her crossbow, but had her eyes flare red anytime she grew angry.

20) The bald man was Paulus of Ironwood Vale, the main character in my novel. He's been almost impossible to define in game-terms, but he's sort of a Rogue/Psion (savant) with some pretty impressive staff combat abilities. Maybe a Ranger/Psion, then? I have

no idea. At any rate, he and Lucca were long in love, despite her attachment to Robert. As such, they ride off into the night, leaving Robert to gather his thoughts alone.

Ravenloft Campaign Log—Thurs. Night Game—Introduction

GM's Note: Pretty much everything goes for this group, as does the Wednesday night group, as the storyline they're following is pretty much identical, with only some small changes based on character background and such.

Also you'll notice that this group is somewhat more "properly balanced" for standard D&D. This occurrence is more happenstance than actual planning, simply because every player chose their characters independently of the others. At any rate, they're happy and I'm happy with it as well. At least now, someone can turn undead!

And now, our cast:

Rosalyn Cervant (Sean)—a bewitching Half-Vistani with mysterious birth origins, she was raised by a traveling minstrel and learned the inherent power of song. Meeting a caliban in her travels changed Rosalyn's life, as the creature latched itself to her for reasons known to it alone. (Half-Vistani Bard 1)

This One (Andy)—With corpse-pallor skin and pure black eyes, the warrior referring to himself as "This One" speaks only the language Rokuma, indicating his native land to be the far-off island of Rokushima Taiyoo. No one knows what dishonor drove the creature from his homeland—not even the bard Rosalyn, to whom he has attached his fate. (Caliban Monk 1)

Ash Fenfip (Matt)—a native Barovian, Ash's love of nature led him directly to the path of the Druidic arts. However, Ash is somewhat tainted by a powerful enmity of his land's infamous lord, Strahd van Zarovich. Few know of this hate, though, and none know what may come of it. (Human Druid 1)

Charles Vandegrift (Darren)—a well-to-do young man from a land beyond the mists, Charles' quickness has long been his greatest asset. However, after a dire incident with some gypsies, Charles has held a powerful rage against the Vistani matched only by his devotion to the goddess Ezra, after he arrived in the Core. Whether this anger rubs off on Charles' relations with Rosalyn will soon be decided. (Human Rogue 1)

Thutmose (Brian)—A warrior-priest of Ra from the far-off sands of Har' Akir, Thutmose served as a cleric in the militias there. However, after a particularly violent sandstorm blew in, Thutmose was separated from his division in the desert wastes of his forsaken land. Driving his camel back through the whirling sands, Thutmose emerged in most peculiar place and seeks only to get home. (Human Cleric of Ra 1)

Zai (Meat)—From a land beyond those of the swirling Mists, Zai began his training as a powerful warrior who would soon blend the arcane arts with his prowess to add even more strength to his blade. However, the Dark Powers have a ready eye on all those who use the Art, and no one knows how Zai will react to true power when he finds it. (Human Fighter 1)

GM's Notes:

Only one crossdresser this time, as opposed to three in the other group...make what you will of that.

Unfortunately, while The One's backstory is quite poignant, it may never end up being revealed, unless he chooses to do so. I really hadn't planned for any side trips to Rokushima this year.

I've let The One take the Vow of Poverty feat from the Book of Exalted Deeds. The source of a lot of controversy, I realize that this feat is very powerful, but it fits perfectly with his character concept. I have yet to see the results in their fullest, but his actions may make up my opinion on the book as a whole.

Yes, his name is also Andy. Yes, that gets confusing.

Zai is looking to become a wizard, then a Spellsworn from the Complete Warrior. Not seeing any real problems with this, as the Eldritch Knight had few restrictions in the RL DMG, I allowed it.

Thutmose did learn Balok through the travelers that arrived in Har' Akir via the Mistway near Barovia. Since most of the players have Balok, this isn't much of a difficulty. However, This One only speaks Rokuma...a significant difficulty.

Ravenloft Campaign Log—Thurs. Night Group—Log I

(As usual, GM's notes follow the script) (1)

Rain fell with heavy drops upon the weary travelers, Rosalyn and This One. Making their way, on foot, from Invidia to Pont-a-Museau (2) was not usually a difficult task, but with the cold downpour trickling down their backs, the journey was swiftly becoming less and less pleasant. After a few hours of walking through the deluge, the pair simply decided to rest for the evening. While Rosalyn attempted to get some sleep, This One huddled in his cloak and kept a silent vigil. Slowly, a fog bank started to roll in...

This One quickly attempted to wake his comrade. Just as swiftly as it came through their camp, though, the mysterious fog dissipated, leaving the pair in a precarious situation. The road, just recently beneath their feet, was gone. A veritable wall of trees surrounded them, as they struggled to look through the dense copses. Even more disconcerting, a pair of figures stood within the swiftly receding mists—figures that had not been there moments ago. Worriedly, Rosalyn drew steel.

Acting cautiously, the pair announced a greeting and peaceful remarks. One man, bore a broad-brimmed hat and a thin steel rapier, while the other bore the trappings of an established woodsman and held a scimitar and a dagger in his hands, which glinted silver in the hazy starlight. Somewhat confused, the dashing gentleman introduced himself as Charles, while the woodsman referred to himself as Ash.

Once the introductions were concluded, the quartet quickly began sizing up the situation. None of the four had any idea where they could be, which left the entire group notably disturbed. Suddenly, a peal of howling erupted from the woods around them. (3)

Wolves, Ash noted, cried their pain to the world with a single, horrific voice. It did not take long for the warriors to realize the terrible other-worldliness of this event, as they readied their weapons and began to make haste in the opposite direction.

Peering through the trees as they hurried along, Charles began to see shapes, flitting between the trees, half-hidden by the pouring rain. A low chant began developing, and the group sped up. The shapes, now recognizable as a near-legion of humanoids, were singing. Almost immediately, Rosalyn and Charles recognized the song—an old children’s rhyme in Patterna, the enigmatic language of the Vistani. Shouting to their comrades of the horrors of this situation, the group bolted towards a nearby clearing.

The clearing, however, did not hold their freedom. As the quartet arrived, a hideous sight immediately confronted them. Seven young children, all reeking of death and bearing hideous smiles, had linked their hands in the center of the clearing. Without a moment’s warning, they charged the four, hungry for violence. (4) Charles moved swiftly, putting his skill with a rapier to good use, while Rosalyn and Ash simply tried to hold their own. The flailing fists and feet of This One, though, proved to be most effective in beating back this undead scourge. Desperately swinging his sword and dagger, Ash felt his ribs begin to give way under the relentless pounding of the undead’s hellish claws.

At long last, the valiant warriors began to beat back their opponents and swiftly resumed their flight through the darkened wood. Finally, they found their way into a small hamlet, where lights still burned and smoke still rose from the chimneys. Slowing their breakneck pace, the four gazed upon the stillness of the four buildings and decided

upon entering the largest. All was still as Charles led the way into the hall. Light still glinted off of polished hardwood tables, but no human life remained. Quickly, Rosalyn noticed a grizzled old man, beard long with age, sitting facedown at a writing desk. Dead, yet not moving, his hand still clutched a quill poised at the end of a parchment. Examining that paper, the group was mystified by some strange words:

Such are the final words of Hyskosa, seer of time...

A town shall be razed, then rebuilt in a day

The One Who is Many shall raise them from clay.

The circle of slayer and prey will be sundered.

Yet death brings no rest for the world-weary hunter.

The four pillars of alabaster will fall,

But a demon's sheer will shall use three as his thrall.

Five that once stood shall splinter and quake,

As the hordes of the Pike-Lord leave death in their wake.

A house built on pain will tumble and fade

And a realm will still scream though the Black Knight has paid.

Truth be shown through eyes, though the Black Mists will rise.

Eth radk amn liwl noos igna shi izrep.

Sitting down to rest, Rosalyn and Charles began to hypothesize what these strange words could mean. While little made sense to either, Rosalyn was aware that alabaster was one of the symbols of the goddess Ezra, while Charles remembered his background in Borca, where he studied with one of the brothers in the Home Faith of Levkarest. (5) Taking these mysterious words as a warning, the pair began to wonder how soon they could make it to Borca.

Starving and sleep-deprived, the quartet began to search the house for some type of foodstuffs to fill their empty bellies. In a small kitchen upstairs, Rosalyn started gathering some old vegetables, a bit of dried meat and some water, in the hopes of making a stew. However, when she lit a fire, the flames leapt too high, and began singing the walls and ceiling. The others attempted to act quickly, but to no avail. Flames started spreading throughout the hall, and little could be done but beat a hasty retreat. (6)

Weary and desiring only to rest, the quartet left the smoldering ash of the largest building behind and attempted to seek refuge in one of the smaller buildings. Wary, Charles peered into a window, only to have the window-glass burst forth in front of him. Leaping through the window, a lank and lean figure bearing that same hideous grin accosted the rogue. Charles swiftly drew his rapier and squared off, as the door to the building swung open. A massive bald man, with flesh peeling off, stood in the doorway brandishing a hefty metal hammer. This One and Ash quickly flanked the creature, and beneath This One's lightning fists, it fell. Charles, however, had little luck against the loping monstrosity he faced. While neither foe had scored a hit, Charles felt luck slowly turning against him. It may have been so, if not for Ash's quick motions. With swift strikes from his scimitar and dagger, he felled the creature. (7)

Even more exhausted now than previously, the quartet quickly examined the other two buildings and, finding nothing out of the ordinary, settled down for an uneasy rest. (8) Lost in foreign land, injured and alone, all they could do is hope that the whole episode was only a dream. (9)

GM's Notes:

1—As you'll notice from the very beginning, Thutmose and Zai are nowhere to be found. Simply put, this is because both Brian and Meat joined after I had already started the game. You'll see their arrivals in the second session, which I hope to have ready shortly.

2—One of the biggest problems I knew I'd have (and always do) is trying to get the group to go in a direction that I want them to, without making it seem like I'm railroading them. As such, everyone's usually headed in different directions. Where the Wednesday group was headed to Port-a-Lucine, these two were headed to Pont-a-Museau. Keep in mind that this problem only gets worse.

3—The wolf trick worked just as well with this group as it did with the Wednesday group, but I'm noticing a distinct amount of difference between how much the people are actually scared. My Wednesday group is usually definitively frightened by the images I'm putting forth, while the Thursday group is more lackadaisical. I think this may have to do with the fact that the Wed. group mainly consists of people who haven't played much D&D before—everything's new to them. The Thurs. group consists of more veterans, so they might just be a little jaded to the horrors of the Mists.

4—Something I really didn't understand. I faced both groups against the same number of zombies with the same hit points. On Wednesday, I almost had a Total Party Kill, knocking two of them out and having two more retreat, which left two people to face 5 zombies at one point. On Thursday, only Ash was seriously injured and Toben's bodies were killed without much trouble at all. I honestly have no idea why this was. One would figure that 6 characters would stand a better chance than four. Bizarre.

5—Rosalyn passed her Bardic Knowledge check here with flying colors, so I let both her and Charles have a bit of info.

6—Ever wonder what a botched Profession: Cook roll looks like? That's what happened. Some failed Dex checks and Reflex saves later, and the entire house is up in flames.

7—I decided to use two undead here, rather than the single one I used on Wednesday, since this group wasn't as beaten up as the Wednesday group was. I figured I'd make them expend a little more of their resources before they got to rest. The encounter went pretty much as planned, with no one taking much in the way of damage, but it was painful enough to keep them on edge.

8—I honestly cannot remember if they kept the blacksmith's hammer or not. If not, they may have just lost a weapon that could save their proverbial asses in the later stages of the game. Besides, both Thutmose and Zai would be able to use such a weapon to its maximum efficacy—a boon to any good party.

9—While a trip to Scaena or The Nightmare Lands would be great fun, the scene is quite real (alack for the players!). Overall, I think this session went fairly well, even though I didn't quite garner the horror that I did from the Wednesday night game. Running through the same session twice is quite helpful, but often can get a bit tedious, unless the PCs do things that are very different....but, that'll come more into play next week.

Ravenloft Campaign Log—Thurs. Night Group—Log II

After a long night of sleep, the quartet slowly rose from where they slept in the blacksmith's hovel. (1) Sore and still fatigued from their nocturnal encounter with the mysterious undead, Rosalyn, Ash, and This One made a quick search through the two remaining huts, as the smoldering remains of the town hall still smoked in the background.

Slowly, they began to gather their meager possessions to head out. Traversing the woodland wilderness was no easy task for the group, but Ash used his natural expertise to guide them as much as he could. After a long walk, a slow buzz began to fill the ears of the travelers. Thought at first to be simply the sound of this long-forsaken forest, the adventurers ignored the noise until it began growing louder and closer to their position. (2)

As the trio made their way into a less-dense grove, a mysterious sight awaited them. A hulking bald man, wearing a bronze breastplate and bearing a shield in the shape of a large scarab, was maneuvering a strange brown beast in and out of the trees, swinging a mace wildly at a group of hideous creatures fluttering in and out of the underbrush. The creatures appeared as a hideous blend of bat and mosquito, with long clawed legs groping for the bald man's chest and throat.

Immediately, the heroes leapt to the attack. This One smashed creatures beneath his Herculean fists; Rosalyn fended off her own assailant with her rapier before finally running it through; Ash, with both scimitar and dagger drawn, became as a whirlwind of blades. However, Ash's daring attacks left his defenses slightly open, as one of the creatures attached itself to him, drawing forth his vital fluids. The druid swiftly felt his blood drain away, becoming light-headed and woozy. (3)

However, without much difficulty, the creatures were routed and the trio asked the mysterious warrior his name. Sheathing his mace, the bald man introduced himself as Thutmose, a warrior-priest of the god Ra. While the majority of the group was not familiar with the worship of Ra, Thutmose was quick to lecture them on Ra's brilliant glory. This One, for the most part, shrugged off Thutmose's ideals, as he was unable to understand the guttural form of Balok that Thutmose understood. (4)

Ash began looking quizzically at the beast Thutmose had been riding. While similar to a horse, this creature had massive feet, a huge mass of flesh protruding from its back, and a dire smell about it. (5) Seeing Ash's befuddlement, Thutmose referred to this creature as a "camel", which apparently were quite common in the land of Har' Akir, from where Thutmose claimed to be from. Again, none of the group had heard of such a land, but the aid of this warrior seemed to prove to be a useful commodity, so they quickly introduced him to their merry band.

The road grew on, as the travelers walked. Thutmose continued to preach the glories of Ra, but few of his new comrades paid much attention the priestly warrior. At long last, the sun began to set and the group decided to rest. A fire was built and watches were set. Thutmose began to tell the group of his history—once a cleric in the militias of his homeland, Thutmose became separated from his battalion during a vicious sandstorm. He had not been long in the swirling sands, when he found himself in another land with strange foliage and the vicious insects that he fought. It was only shortly thereafter when the group found him.

Eventually, sleep drifted over the group. Awake, Rosalyn began hearing the sounds of shambling footsteps in the forest. She quickly awoke This One, who heard nothing. Disconcerted, yet unworried, This One returned to his rest. However, the sounds persisted, and Rosalyn again woke up her companions.

At last, This One and Ash cleared their heads and began to see what Rosalyn had been hearing. Distended humanoid forms began encircling their campsite, ringing them closely in a noose of horrid dead flesh. Immediately, Ash slid into the shadows and attempted to out-flank the group. To his dismay, the undead fanned out and surrounded him.

As the ring around them tightened, This One leapt to the offense. (6) His swinging fists pummeled one of the undead in front of him, but the creature stood firm. As it turned to retaliate, This One garnered a full view of the creature's hideous nature. Its limbs were attached to its body with long surgical staples, while a series of sharp pins kept its bluish-gray lips sealed shut. However, as it turned, the pins snapped open with a flash of arcane energy and a horrid scream erupted from its lips. Pelted by this unholy sonic energy, This One fell to the earth unconscious. (7)

The undead began pushing the remaining trio forward. Thutmose, while irate at the very existence of the undead, allowed them to direct his motion. Ash, not as willing as Rosalyn or Thutmose, dropped to the ground as if in a faint, yet the undead merely picked up his arms and dragged him, along with the inert body of This One. (8)

After a harsh hour-long march, the group arrived in a shaded grove, where a two-story cabin stood silhouetted in the light of a crescent moon. Pointing silently towards the entrance, the creatures pushed the heroes towards the door, indicating for them to enter. The door swung open, and the two characters being dragged were deposited unceremoniously on the inside of the doorstep.

Inside, a figure in his mid-50s stood appraising them. He slowly rubbed a hand across his receding brown hair, and then directed his steel-gray eyes to each of them in turn. Gesturing and turning from the group, he told Ash to rise, as he wasn't fooling anyone any longer. Embarrassed, Ash rose to his feet and asked what was going on.

The gentleman introduced himself as one Dr. Gregorian DelShonar. Immediately, Rosalyn's ears picked up. (9) Among the various knowledge that she'd picked up over the years, the story of the mysterious DelShonar was one which most definitely intrigued her. She remembered that this doctor was a respected professor of the arcane sciences at the Great Academie of Pont-a-Museau, after working in medicine and alchemy under a then-medical-doctor Rudolph van Richten. After publishing a theory on robotics which was reviled in the intellectual community, DelShonar all but disappeared from the public eye.

Also at the table sat a young warrior with long hair. After some conversation, the quintet found out that this man, Zai by name, was not associated with DelShonar. (10) Rather, he too was marooned in this forsaken land and taken captive by the mad scholar.

Immediately, Rosalyn asked the doctor if she could have a copy of his renowned book, and DelShonar's eyes lit up. For a long while, the pair discussed the finer points of Gregorian's theory, until the doctor remembered his manners. Gesturing towards the kitchen behind them, a blasphemous sight awaited the adventurers. Huge automatons in the shape of men skittered forth from the kitchen, laden with platters and bowls. The largest of the four automatons set its platter in front of DelShonar, who then began

carving a succulent piece of peppered lamb in wine sauce. (11) With a series of hideous rattles and quakes, the creatures returned to their lair.

Thutmose could no longer contain himself. During the meal, he raised issue with DelShonar's lack of faith and his blasphemous activities. Unconcerned, DelShonar argued the young priest down and left Thutmose saying only "We shall see what comes of this..."

At long last, DelShonar proclaimed their dinner to be over. He told the six that they had five minutes to leave, as the doctor would soon set a new group of undead upon them as a twisted form of 'test' for his new batch of creatures. Alarmed, they dashed for the door, mounted up, and began their flight through the forest.

Running headlong through the forest, the silence of the night was shattered by the group's frantic footsteps. Not long after, a hideous beating filled their ears. Looking over his shoulder, Zai noticed four skeletal forms winging their way on bony, batlike wings over the trees, gaining on them. Guiding his mount with his knees, the warrior loosed an arrow, striking one of the creatures. It hissed in pain, but regained his flight.

Thutmose felt his holy symbol of Ra grow warm against his chest, and immediately he knew what to do. (12) Calling an incantation to the Lord of Light, Thutmose began channeling Ra's power into the world. Two of the flying undead burst immediately into flame, as the four rode on, leaving only heaps of fetid ash falling to the ground. Crying again for Ra's aid, Thutmose channeled his god's divine power again. With a tremendous cry of prayer, the other two creatures screamed in pain, then disintegrated and fell to the forest floor.

At long last, the six reached a wide river. Searching frantically for a bridge, they had to settle for a small rope crossing, which barely looked like it could support one man at a time, much less a horse. This One and Rosalyn were the first to cross, doing so with little difficulty. Zai kept watch with his horse on the far side, and nocked an arrow for any of the undead that might come forth from the woods. Ash went next, and made his way across as delicately as possible.

Thutmose took hold of Zai's reins and gestured for the warrior to run. Zai began making his way across, but slipped on one of the rotting planks and plunged into the raging river below. Immediately, Thutmose leaped onto his camel. Following Zai

downstream and holding the reins to Zai's horse, the intrepid priest began tossing a rope down to his half-drowned comrade. After nearly a mile's run, the river-gorge tapered off into a ford, where, at long last, Thutmose dragged Zai back to the shore. The undead in the forest began growing closer, though, and time was of the essence.

For lack of options, Zai and Thutmose mounted up and spurred their mounts through the river's ford. Zai burst through onto the far shore in a spray of foaming water, but Thutmose's camel balked at the water, flinging the cleric from his saddle. (13) Undeterred, he re-mounted and forged again through the river. This time, though, the camel quickly made its way through the water, and Thutmose joined his comrades on the other side.

Making their way back to the far side of the bridge, the six quickly noticed the shadowy forms of undead lurking on the former side. Drawing his scimitar with a flash, Ash severed the bridge-ropes, sending the pass to the bottom of the river's bed. Ducking quickly into the woods on the other side, the six were finally able to make camp for the night and attempt to shake off the horrors they had so recently encountered. Who could say what lay ahead of them in the future?

GM's Notes:

- 1—Charles' player, Darren, was unable to make this session, due to his senior comprehensive exams the next day. I figured that such was a viable excuse, and had Charles fade into the background in this session.
- 2—Stirges, again. I love those things...they're a challenge at almost any level, I think.
- 3—I really don't get it. Same as before, this group had quite an easier time fighting the stirges, compared to the Wednesday group. Compared to having 4 people with major Con damage on Wednesday, only Ash was truly injured by the stirges.
- 4—Brian, Thutmose's player, is Darren's brother. Good men, they are.
- 5—Really, now, what would a Barovian druid know about camels?!
- 6—Apparently, Andy outright refused to be subject to a plot device. Now, which is the more meta-gaming: creating an obvious plot point as a GM, or breaking the 4th wall and purposely trying to avoid it because you realize it's a plot point?
- 7—This is what happens when you try to avoid one of my plot-points in Ravenloft. ;)
- 8—Natural 20 on Ash's Bluff check to fake his own death. I was amused by the concept, so I let him do it. At any rate, it didn't matter once they met DelShonar.
- 9—Rosalyn's turn to get a Natural 20, this time on her bardic knowledge roll. Wanting them to have some background info on DelShonar and his background, I gave them quite a bit of information that they might have picked up on otherwise. As such, they were somewhat ahead of the game in comparison to the Wednesday group. However, it remains to be seen whether they make use of it or not.
- 10—Another new character to join our motley crew. At least now, the group will be getting an effective arcane caster...at least once he starts taking mage levels.
- 11—Yes, this dish is as good as it sounds. Mmm...
- 12—Thutmose rolled really damned well on his turning checks. With a high Charisma and the greater turning ability from the Sun domain, I figured I'd bend the Ravenloft rules a little bit and let Ra's power destroy these creatures. Besides, they weren't really meant to be a true 'encounter', per se, as much as they were supposed to be a reason to keep running.
- 13—This was really rather amusing, as we had a bit of an argument on whether camels could ford water or not. As it turns out, camels are very apt swimmers and probably do

better than horses in terms of water. When Brian alerted me to that, after the session, I gave him some extra XP, just for the effort.

Such are the final words of Hyskosa, seer of time...

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The One Who is Many shall raise them from clay.

The circle of slayer and prey will be sundered.
Yet death brings no rest for the world-weary hunter.

The four pillars of alabaster will fall,
But a demon's sheer will shall use three as his thrall.

Five that once stood shall splinter and quake,
As the hordes of the Pike-Lord leave death in their wake.

A house built on pain will tumble and fade
And a realm will still scream though the Black Knight has paid.

Truth be shown through eyes, though the Black Mists will rise.
Eth radk amn liwl noos igna shí izrep.

A Theory on Arcane Robotics
By Dr. Gregorian DelShonar, A. S. D.

Prologue—

Through the dawning of the common era, mankind has only recently come into its own in the everlasting struggle to survive. While our own immense potential for logical thought has dragged us from the coze from whence we came, it is the application of that intellect—the creations of new of more efficient methods for assistance—with which we will prove our dominance both as species and as race.

However, while the use of machines has elevated mankind to the level of gods among the animals around us, limits have been found in how far a machine can take us. A bow only shoots as far as the archer has skill. A plow only turns up earth if there is a hand to guide it. Even the most sophisticated clockwork automatons work only with constant adjustment and repair from their creators.

It is in this that we also find the inherent flaw of mankind. Even the most brilliant minds, magical or scientific, suffer the frailty of our human form. Where a machine holds immense durability and strength—and can always be reforged and tempered—mankind is frail. Where a machine cannot think on its own, the human mind holds the secrets of life and the universe itself, locked within the sheltered portions of our psyche.

This problem, though it may not seem so, is one of control. How does one control an automaton indefinitely, when the life guiding it is finite? The answer to this is simpler than one may think: if a human mind were somehow linked to or imprinted onto the blank slate of a machine, both could work in union for nigh on an eternity!

Many will see this concept, I'm sure, as a child's dream. However, those who doubt my axioms and theory blatantly disregard one major field of study that could make this "child's dream" a reality—the arcane sciences. Through various arcane and technological processes detailed later in this study, I intend to prove that a link can not only be established, but maintained permanently, thereby bridging the gap between man and machine. The strength of steel, coupled with immortality itself, is but a hair's breadth away from being completely and totally unified with the power of the human mind.