

Stuart Turner's campaign

AN UNEARTHED KARGATHANE NETBOOK
FOR THE RAVENLOFT SETTING

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About Stu's Ravenloft Campaign

The version of Ravenloft presented in this campaign differs in a number of important ways from the world as published by TSR. In order to help the journal make more sense, I thought I should try to explain some of the more important aspects that have changed! As a result of the changes I've made, you should keep in mind that information mentioned in the Journal will **often** conflict with the published Ravenloft material. In (hopefully) all cases, this is not a result of ignorance on my part, but the result of an active decision to do something differently from the "Canon" version of Ravenloft.

The major things to note are listed below:

The Time Period:

The period of history that the domains of Ravenloft are based on vary enormously, and hence the levels of technology vary considerably. As a rough rule of thumb, most domains in this version of Ravenloft are somewhere between the Renaissance and early 19th Century (with some, such as Falkovnia, being more primitive). This means that firearms are available in a number of domains (Mordent, Dementlieu, and Lamordia for example), which are all taken from the *Mighty Fortress* sourcebook.

As a result of this modernisation of Ravenloft, armour is rarely worn (except by a soldier entering battle). A character walking the streets of Dementlieu in chainmail or plate armour would probably be laughed at by most, and would probably be feared and reviled in Barovia. (This is not meant to be historically accurate - it's just the way things are in this version of Ravenloft.)

The Characters:

All the characters (bar one) are natives of Ravenloft. This Ravenloft does not assume that the domains are full of adventurers from Toril or Oerth who've been sucked up by the

mists. In fact, these sorts of people are a rarity at best, so virtually everyone the PCs meet are natives as well.

There are (almost) no demihumans in this Ravenloft. I won't go into the reasons here, but basically all demihuman references in Ravenloft supplements are changed to "human" for the purposes of this campaign. (Some exceptions exist, such as... hey, I can't let the players know that!) Obviously, this means that all PCs are human.

The characters were all initially designed as being "ordinary people." That is, they are not "adventurers" that have decided to travel the lands looking for fame, fortune and glory. Instead, they are ordinary people (a doctor, a homeless urchin, a village priest, and a young nobleman) who become victims of circumstance and are thrust into the darkest parts of the world out of necessity rather than desire.

We've used highly malleable rules for character creation. Our view is that if we want a character to be able to do something, and it fits that character, and it adds to the story, then let it happen regardless of the character class. (With possible tradeoffs for balance.)

As a result, this campaign contains multi-classed humans, priests with psychic powers, and other oddities.

Some other significant changes:

- The timetable for the Grand Conjunction and Grim Harvest presented in official Ravenloft Products is not used in this campaign. Some elements of these events have been excluded completely, while other new ones have been included.
- As at 735, Van Richten has not yet started writing his *Guides*. In fact, he's only just lost his wife and son.
- Some of the changes made during the Grand Conjunction have already "occurred" at the beginning of this campaign. (No specifics here, as I can't give stuff away to my players. Those of you in the know will notice.....)
- I often steal names for NPCs from Ravenloft products without using the original description of the character. So if (say) Andre Duvall is mentioned in the Journal, don't necessarily expect him to be the same as the NPC described in the *RLMCII*!

Caine Shadowborn

Caine Shadowborn was born to Byron and Katherine on the 13th October, 712, in the grounds of the Shadowborn Estate in Mordent. The Shadowborn family had ruled the estate and much other land in Mordent for as long as anyone could remember. Though their holdings could not match the wealthy Weathermay's, they still remained one of the most respected noble families in Mordent.

Caine always felt that his father, Byron, had a very fixed idea of the role that Caine would fill when he grew up. Despite Caine's own aims and desires, Byron forced this role of "Lord of the Manor" on him endlessly. Hence, Caine grew apart from his father at an early age, especially when he began to show an aversion to the firearms Byron regularly used on the Hunt.

The Hunt was a regular event among the rich nobles of Mordent, led by Jules Weathermay. Caine often felt his father and the other nobles were talking about him behind his back during these events - rumours that he would be unable to fill his father's shoes, of the end of the Shadowborn nobles.

Byron's rigid face often seemed loveless to Caine, and though he was able to recognize a good business opportunity, Caine often felt that his mother was the key to the financial success of the family's operations. A bookish woman, she too rarely showed emotion, and was too rarely recognized by her husband or other business people for her efforts.

In 734, however, Caine's life changed. While staring out to sea from the cliffs of Mordent one evening, a light pierced the dusk and swept over the coast. A lighthouse could just be made out in the distance, perched on a craggy collection of rocks. But as quickly as the light swept over his soul, it disappeared in the hazy mist of night.

Since that encounter, his dreams were filled with messages of hope and light. Somehow, he felt fulfilled by this knowledge, and with the knowledge came revelation... Rumours were commonplace in Mordent of creatures of the night, particularly with respect to the ancient House on Gryphon Hill. Caine's dreams showed him that these rumours were based entirely on truth. The darkness was out there - and waiting. Yet the light of the sun can combat these creatures, and the light of the moon serves as a proxy, lighting the way until the sun can again burn the flesh of the darkness.

After the dreams began, Caine spent much time on the cliffs looking out on the Sea of Sorrows, searching for the elusive symbol of his faith. Sadly, he could not locate the lighthouse a second time, but its beacon burned in his mind as a symbol of hope.

Then, late in 734, tragedy struck. Early in the morning Caine was woken by knocking at his door, his mother calling to him. Stumbling in the dim light, he followed Katherine down to the master bedroom, where the bed lay empty, the only sound the rustle of the curtains as they billowed out the open window of the second storey room.

A search began that morning for Byron, with the help of many local nobles. The weather was not kind, driving rain hampering efforts to find tracks of any kind. Even the hounds used in the Hunt were of no use. After a week, Byron's fate was consigned to one of the many rumoured beasts that supposedly roamed the misty moors, and Caine became the last Lord of the Shadowborn.

Reluctantly, Caine took up the position, and with his mother began to run the family business. Only a few short days into his role, however, a visitor came to the Estate and introduced himself as Rudolph Van Richten. A quiet, unimposing man, Van Richten was looking to lease a store in Mordentshire to set up a small practice as a Doctor, after moving from Darkon for personal reasons.

Eager to help, Caine went into his father's study to obtain the necessary paperwork. In searching through the drawers of his father's desk, however, he came upon something he did not expect....

This is to certify that:

Caine Shadowborn

was adopted by:

Byron and Katherine Shadowborn

this day the:

15th November, 712

from the Levkarest Home for Abandoned Children

After a hurried meeting with Van Richten, Caine went to confront his mother with the evidence, and she reluctantly confirmed what the certificate said. While angry, this

information explained a lot to Caine - his distance from his father, the fact that he was an only child, and more. He decided he needed to know more, so began packing to leave for Borca in the coming days.

He took *Anathema*, a slim silver longsword that had hung in the Shadowborn foyer for years, and *Veritas*, an iron dagger that had similarly hung in the ballroom. To his father's disgust, Caine had spent much of his time practicing with these ancient weapons, rather than the fashionable rapier and pistol.

To a long lost brother,

It was only months ago that I learnt of my adoption. Though I love my adopted parents, I yearned to know of my past, and so I began the journey here.

So now I discover I have a twin brother! The news was wonderful and made my trip here worthwhile. Yet I have no way of reaching you. I leave this letter in the hope that you, too, have learnt of your true past and wish to know more.

I am about to begin a new life in Pont-a-Museau, where I shall set up a watchmaking business. I will be living at No. 14 Rue du Est Bord.

I realise this may never reach you, but if it does, please try to contact me.

Yours in anticipation,

Ivanov Radolich

In Borca, more surprises awaited him. Though the orphanage would not provide information on who his real parents were, they did tell him he was one of twins. Through an amazing coincidence, his tin had visited the Home not two weeks before, also looking to discover more of his heritage. Fate was smiling on Caine, for Ivanov had left a letter should his brother also come looking for him...

Buoyed by this finding, he journeyed onwards to Richemulot and the bridged city of Pont-a-Museau. However, his suspicious nature kept him away from the address of his brother to begin with, preferring to watch from a distance and see what his brother was like before introducing himself. Strangely, no activity could be seen in or around the house for two days.

Concerned at what this might mean, Caine finally approached the house on the afternoon of 10th January, 735, to find the door unlocked....

Ilyich

Ilyich grew up cold and alone on the streets of Vallaki. Remembering nothing of his parents, and with no family that he knew of, Ilyich was forced to fend for himself from a very early age. With two other street urchins, he eked out a living from foolish merchants, the occasional wealthy traveller, and any farmer stupid enough to leave their house unattended during the day.

As Ilyich grew, however, he began to wonder about his heritage. What *had* become of his parents? His earliest memory was of being pulled through a forest, as if fleeing something. Trees and forests seemed to fill these early recollections, so Ilyich often found himself at home there, even sometimes referring to himself as "Ilyich Forestchild".

As winter descended on Vallaki in 734, though, a vivid dream came to him. He was standing in a clearing on the slopes of Mount Baratok, in the middle of which stood a single, large tree. Underneath stood a woman with long, lustrous black hair. She beckoned to him, and as he approached the woman held out her hand revealing a number of shining gold coins.

The woman winced, and in her palm a pool of red liquid began to form, as if the coins themselves were bleeding! As the blood filled her hand it became darker, turning to black while the woman's face contorted in pain. The black liquid slowly seeped between the fingers of her hand, until a single drop fell. Its inky blackness absorbed all light, and it was all Ilyich could focus on until it splattered over a single black feather lying on the ground.

Ilyich looked up to see the woman crying and shaking her head. She seemed about to say something when he woke with a start on the pile of straw that served as a bed.

Stunned by the power of the dream, Ilyich decided to venture to the clearing and examine the spot. In the exact spot where the black feather lay was a small piece of cloth sticking from the earth, which was soon discovered to be a small pouch. Along with some coins

was a receipt of some kind, from a Pawn Shop in Pont-a-Museau for a black, red and gold knife. The receipt was dated 14 years ago.

Inspired by this, and glad for a reason to leave the poor village of Vallaki, Ilyich made plans to travel to Richemulot, and in doing so met up with Angus McGregor, a loud merchant who claimed to be from Forfar.

His arrival in Pont-a-Museau was met with disappointment, however. The Pawn Shop had long been abandoned by its owner, and sat in ruin. Waiting until night, Ilyich decided to take a closer look inside the building, and found records of the sale of a black, red and gold dagger to the resident of No. 14 Rue du Est Bord.

The following afternoon Ilyich made his way to the house on the East Bank of the Musarde river, and utilised the skills he'd learnt as a child to enter the two-storey building through the roof into the attic. Much furniture was stored up here, mostly covered with cloths, but one uncovered item caught his attention: a display cabinet filled with blades of various types.

Eagerly he searched for a blade of the type described on the receipt, but found nothing except a single empty space in the display case.

Below that space, a small label read "A Ba'al Verzi Dagger."

Yelling from downstairs interrupted his thoughts, quickly followed by the breaking of glass and other noises. Ilyich ventured down the ladder onto the second floor to discover what was going on...

Isaiah Wilcox

Isaiah is a man of faith, worshipping God above all things. God had been kind to Isaiah, and he had all that he could want. Until he lost it all.

Although Isaiah doesn't speak much of his past, it obviously causes him great trauma. He was drawn into Ravenloft from the world of Gothic Earth on the anniversary of an event best left in the past. Lost and confused, he wandered a shadowy road before coming upon a small Vistani encampment.

It was only as Isaiah approached that he realised something was wrong. Before he'd drawn close enough to the camp to draw attention to himself, a wave of blackness

descended on the people therein, with an unearthly screeching filling the air. A mass of bats causing havoc.

As fought to keep the scratching claws off his face, Isaiah drew his snaplock pistol, and fired it into the air. The swarm of black creatures lifted like a veil from the scene, revealing a few Vistani men looking at Isaiah in surprise, and a young woman crouching next to the fire. Though Isaiah now felt it safe to approach and introduce himself, he did note a single bat still hanging from the eave of one *vardo*, its eyes showing red pinpoints of light.

He met Yvonne, the youngest member of the tribe, who asked him to join them at their campfire. After thanking him for scaring away the bats, Yvonne talked to Isaiah of his past. Clearly shocked by his loss, she offered to do a Tarokka reading for him.

When the card representing his future was the 6 of Glyphs (The Anarchist), she gasped in surprise. At the same moment, the door to one of the *vardos* opened, and two men immaculately dressed in suits walked out, holding an aging Vistani man between them. Their condescending sneer fell on the members of the camp, as Isaiah rose to oppose them.

Isaiah waved his snaplock at the two sophisticated, pale individuals, but neither seemed to care. As they led the gypsy away, Isaiah shot one of them in the shoulder. Then, in a moment of horrific realisation as to just how far he was from home, Isaiah saw the wound close up just seconds after the skin had been punctured. The imposing figure walked on, undaunted by the blow.

Moments later, they were gone, leaving only the banging door of the *vardo* to remind them that anything had changed. Yvonne looked at the Tarokka cards she'd layed out, then looked back at Isaiah. "I think you are involved in this," she said, "and you need to know the importance of the hexad.

"That man who was taken was the oldest in this tribe - his name is Hyskosa. Recently he foresaw the coming of darkness to this place, a darkness that could kill us all." With that, she went to the *vardo*, and returned with a single piece of paper, on which was penned a number of verses in elaborate script. He read the verses, understanding nothing of their content, but glad to find a purpose for his life. He vowed to Yvonne to find Hyskosa, and return him to their tribe.

Yvonne offered Isaiah a symbol of their thanks - a small ceramic crescent moon on a long leather thong. She explained that he would be trusted by all Vistani who see this sign. Not knowing where he was, or what to do, Isaiah spent the following days on the road with the Vistani. On travelling through Pont-a-Museau, however, he felt something different. While travelling the road along the bank of the Musarde he saw a house looming up in front of him. He felt somehow drawn to it, and he stopped his horse to peer into its windows.

With a start, he realised that he should catch up with the Vistani, but looking around he could see nothing of them. Had he really stared at the house for that long? Confusion set in for just a moment, before he felt a tap on his shoulder, and turned to see who was seeking his attention...

Heinrich Wiederlieben

Heinrich Wiederlieben grew up in a small village outside Harmonia, in the southern domain of Kartakass. The son of the village doctor, he quickly took an interest in things medical, and during his teenage years began studying medicine with other doctors in Harmonia.

It was there that he had his first taste of love - and of death. Not long after meeting Katarina (a fellow student), he learned his mother had become desperately ill. In the coming months, he and his father did everything they could to discover the source of her illness, seeking advice from the most learned scholars they knew. No cure could be found, however.

His mother's death brought the end of their family. While Heinrich's father descended into a drunken stupor, frustrated at his own inability to help, Heinrich could only ponder on what had caused his mother's death. Then, in an act of senseless curiosity, Heinrich committed an act that scandalized the small town. Late one night, he performed a complete autopsy on his mother's corpse in a final attempt to discover what her ailment was. But he was discovered.

Heinrich lost everything - Katarina, his father, his friends. Returning to Harmonia, he found that word has spread fast, and no doctor would take him as a student. Like his

father before him, he turned to drink, and began gambling and whoring his way around Kartakass.

Though he barely remembers how it happened, he was eventually taken in by Gerhard Beckmann, a respected member of the medical profession. He and his wife Annelise became Heinrich's new family, and he began to again learn the ways of medicine under Gerhard's tutelage.

I write in haste for I fear for my life.

For some weeks now, I have felt as if something is following me. I fear it is something from my past, something which I had chosen to forget.

Should the worst happen, Annelise, I want you to know that I love you with all my heart.

Had I a choice, I would never have imposed this on you.

Years ago, I carried out some research far to the north in Richemulot. This is secreted away behind a loose brick in the chimney. I was set on this path by a Dr. Mor

Recently, however, events turned sour in the Beckmann household. For some weeks Gerhard had seemed edgy, as if afraid of something that might be around the corner. The reason became apparent when, in the middle of the night, Gerhard was taken from his study, leaving nothing but a half-written note splashed with blood. A struggle had obviously occurred, though it must have been short for neither Annelise nor Heinrich had heard more than the banging of the shutters in the wind.

Annelise knew of nothing that Gerhard had done that might have been responsible for this, as he had spoken little of his past. Unsure of where to turn, Heinrich examined the research he referred to in his letter, which detailed the use and harnessing of electricity for medical purposes. The notes were apparently made in the year 709, in Richemulot. Distraught that his mentor and father-figure had disappeared, Heinrich decided to set out looking for Gerhard. Gerhard had said that he feared something from his past, so he decided to start with the only clue he had - the address of Heinrich's residence in Richemulot, 26 years ago.

So this is how, on the 10th of January, 735, Heinrich Wiederlieben arrived at 14 Rue du Est Bord in Pont-a-Museau, along with three other individuals in search of answers....

Gaston la Magnifique d'Henire

The second son of a well-to-do mercantile family in Port-a-Lucine, Gaston grew up in the shadow of his elder brother Léon. Léon was destined to take over the reigns of the business. As he grew older Gaston was content to let Léon steer him towards hedonistic pursuits while Léon tightened his grip on the business. Intelligent but unambitious Gaston was happy to play along, as he was well kept by Léon, now siphoning the power of the business from their demanding father who continued to drink excessively.

Meanwhile, Gaston flirted in society but became disheartened with the plight of the poor. He genuinely, but somewhat patronisingly decided to cheer up the people, dabbling in stage magic and entering the "Société de Legerdemain", where he studied this little known art with the famed contortionist Patric Cardenas.

Surprisingly, he found his calling in entertaining crowds with his flashy style of "magic", and was a hit with the aristocracy and the common folk. It was at this time he was most happy, coining his appellation "La Magnifique", and meeting the girl who would catch his heart.

Sophie Gaspard was one of the countless urchins of the city and who would likely have turned into a petty criminal if Gaston had not encouraged her into entertainment. Being deft and of natural beauty, she was latched onto by Gaston as his assistant for his shows. Though her bright personality captured him much more than the shallow materialism of society ladies, he could never bring himself to court her due to her background.

Torn by his feelings, Gaston left to travel - ostensibly on business - when he met up with Caine Shadowborn in the Drowned Rat, an inn in Pont-a-Museau. For no reason other than a desire for excitement, Gaston decided to join the group on their travels....

Maximillian Drakeheart

Maximillian was born the bastard son of Jeremias Dachine, Baron of Nartok. The Baron was unable to reveal the true parentage of Maximillian for fear of losing the confidence of the people, but instead raised the boy in the keep as an orphan. When Max was ten, the Baron had his second son, Lowellyn, who would inherit the Barony on Jeremias' death. As a boy, Max was trained in the art of combat by the soldiers stationed in Nartok. Fear of invasion from Falkovnia was ever present, so the skills of the Nartok army and militia were always in peak shape, allowing Max to become a skilled military man. Meanwhile, Lowellyn's interested lay more in religion, and he sought instruction from the Eternal Order. The Baron was not happy with this situation, considering a place in the church below the station of one such as Lowellyn.

As the boys became young men, Max rose quickly among the ranks of the army and became a skilled military tactician. By the time he was 35, Max was Captain of the Nartok army, and was widely respected by the people and his men.

Baron Jeremias maintained a close friendship with Max, though none new of their true blood connection. Jeremias' dissatisfaction with Lowellyn's choice of paths grew stronger, however, to the point where the Baron decided that he would reveal to King Azalin Max's true heritage, to allow Max to inherit the Barony when Jeremias died. He planned to do so at the Grand Ball in Castle Avernus at the start of the year 732.

As Baron Jeremias Dachine rode his carriage towards Castle Avernus, a pain gripped his heart, and he died before arriving at the Castle gates.

Lowellyn Dachine immediately inherited the Barony of Nartok, using his religious fervour to control the people. It was soon after this that two strangers arrived in Nartok - a svelte young lady named Cassandra, and an aging man with long grey hair and dark skin.

Cassandra and Lowellyn became close, although Cassandra was only known to those within the court. The old man became a confidant of Maximillian, teaching him ways of combat that Max had never considered before. The old man refused to tell Max his name, and Max instead simply referred to him as the Master.

One year after Lowellyn began his rule of the Barony, Max and his men were sent on a mission to Lamordia. Their spies in Falkovnia had apparently uncovered a plan to attack Neufurchtenburg in the near future, and the Nartok military were to help defend the city. Eager for any chance to put Vlad Drakov's men in their place, Max led his forces along the slopes of the Sleeping Beast to the small town where, as expected, the Falkovnians attacked.

Max called his troops to arms, expecting them to charge forward at the armoured Falkovnians - but instead turned to find his men massacring the Lamordians before they had the opportunity to turn their *smokepowder* weapons on the Darkonian military. He had been betrayed by his own men! Unable to think, Max turned and fled the scene, only to find himself confronted by a Captain of the Falkovnian Talons. He was helmeted, and Max fought to the best of his ability, but the unknown soldier was too much to cope with. Max had no choice but to flee the battlefield, his body sorely wounded and his spirit broken.

He wandered the wilderness of the Sleeping Beast for some days, before he heard a familiar accented voice. The Master was here! The old man healed his physical wounds, and noted that Max could never return home. The betrayal had apparently been planned by Lowellyn, who was blaming Max for betraying the nation of Darkon by leading his army alongside the Falkovnians!

Max spent the next years travelling with the Master, unlearning the combat skills he had gained in the Darkonian army while acquiring a new way of fighting from the old man. Max learnt to use his hands and feet rather than a physical object to best opponents. He became closer to nature, raising a falcon to be a constant companion, which he called 'Skimmer'. He also began to uncover the powers of his mind, realising he could use this to affect the environment around him.

After more than a year of study, Max began to have strange dreams. He would find himself in the body of his falcon, flying high above the landscape. Each time this has happened, he saw a bunch of people, the same every time. He saw the full moon shine red, the streets of Dementlieu alive with fire, the liberation of a lighthouse...

Then came the most vivid dream. Flying higher than ever before, he felt he could see forever though moonlight was the only illumination. Then, a dark blade descended,

seeming to slice the land in two - while one side remained intact, the other broke apart, revealing flames underneath the soil. And strangely, from within the flame, he felt someone was watching him.

He woke up to find the Master gone, but he had a renewed sense of purpose. Those people were out there - waiting for him.

DM's Comments:

David's character to replace Ilyich is not standard in any sense of the word. He doesn't fit any standard character class, and was pieced together with the range of abilities Dave was interested in, mainly a little martial arts and a little psionics. I'm not sure I'd call this character a particularly appropriate one for a gothic setting, but his background is both a setup for much of the last section of the campaign (those of you with the Death series will know why), and his claustrophobia gets used quite a bit throughout the campaign.

Stu

Nabrolina

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

Monday, 10th January

I completed the search of the house with no sign of Ivanov. With the setting of the Sun I settled in the kitchen to read his diary. It is clear that he had left hurriedly - but what forced him to do such a thing? I fear he is in great danger. I intend to search the basement tomorrow - the new construction may provide further clues.

As I sat reading I heard a tapping noise from the window behind. Whirling round I saw to my horror, crows tapping on the window, a malevolent gleam in their eyes - and hundreds more on the river bank! Then, a cloaked woman appears as if from nowhere and glowers at me. She seems afraid yet determined. Her face is not visible, yet her hair is lustrous golden-red, but her hands are shrivelled. I stand and challenge her. We exchange harsh words and I draw my blade. The time has come for me to face the scions of Darkness.

Suddenly - at the command of the woman - the crows burst through the window and attack me. I invoke Sol Invictus, and as I beat back the birds, she is gone. The crows flee from whence they came. As I stand, seeking her, the others come into the house. It is a tense moment.

They identify themselves as Dr Heinrich Weiderleben of Kartakass, Isaiah Wilcox and Ilyich of Barovia. The former says he comes seeking a Dr Moore - later revealed to be Dr Mordenheim of Lamordia. Ilyich says the woman commanded him to come - a young lad, I trust him not - there is something about him - a carelessness and lack of restraint which sets me ill at ease. Isaiah reveals little yet seems a valuable ally against the darkness and a man of faith. We resolve to return at dawn.

Tuesday, 11th January

We return at dawn as agreed, save that Ilyich was there already! I was angry yet could do little. He says that he hears voices in his mind - true or no, evil is at work. We agree that the basement holds the key. After the Doktor had returned with a sledgehammer we

destroyed the wall to find a horrific sight. Mad messages about crows were scrawled on the walls and there was an open coffin full of dirt. Garlic guarded a rat hole and the top left corner of the ruined wall was filled with fresh mortar. It was obviously the den of a vampire. It was revealed later that Louis had done this - forcing Navrolina (the woman in red hair and his mistress) to starve on rats. She was, however, released and quite mad. I fear she has taken Ivanov. Isaiah destroyed the coffin with holy (?) rituals.

The Doktor and I left to see the landlord, Louis Corneille IV. He lived in a rich mansion. He was not there at the time and we were told he would return at night. This was but one of many clues to his true identity, which we only discovered much later - a vampire! I left to investigate in the city whilst I asked the Doktor to return to the house and find wooden stakes. We would need them before the night had failed.

We returned - all of us - to the manor of Louis at night. After being led to a waiting room by the butler, we saw a painting of him and Navrolina. She had apparently died of a 'wasting disease'. We found a letter from Jacqueline Renier warning him to control his minion - Navrolina. Whatever Jacqueline is, she is beyond us, for if Louis fears her, she is fearsome indeed. After a heated discussion we returned to the house.

We resolved to wait in the basement, though Ilyich desired to go to the main bedroom. During the night, we heard noises from above and rushing to the bedroom we found crows and were attacked by Navrolina - who seemed stronger - having fed. In a short battle Isaiah was sorely wounded, but she fled. We gave chase and we found a secret door leading down. A mad fury was upon me as I gave chase. Then a sickness must have fallen upon Ilyich for he protected her! I attempted to deal with him, but we were outmatched and she fled once more.

Eventually the battle settled in a foul laboratory. There we fought. She summoned the crows - but fought them also! Isaiah lost his eye to the carrion birds whilst Heinrich brought a strange glove of steel and sought to strike Navrolina - but was smitten by his own power and fell to the earth. Fires claimed the bookshelves as we strove against each other. Ilyich joined the struggle once he retrieved his dagger from Navrolina - apparently what he sought. Alas, she was too quick and I fear I did not mark her.

We were wounded and in desperate peril when Louis entered and vanquished Navrolina with a single blow. Wailing, she dissolved into mist. A shot from Isaiah's firearm had no

effect on Louis. He was obviously a creature of dark power. Despite his resistance, I was determined to end her menace. We travelled to the graveyard and there I drove a stake through her black heart ending her miserable existence. May she rest in peace. The others returned to the house to rest and I to my lodgings to seek healing and succour.

Wednesday, 12th January

We had vanquished an evil, yet the mysteries remain. Louis is obviously a task for later days, but his very existence is an affront to all that is sacred and true. Further, Ivanov was still missing. I have few clues - his store and neighbours knew nothing. Perhaps his customers will prove fruitful. The Doktor wishes to find Dr Mordenheim but on return to the house we found a secret entrance to the sewers of Port-a-Museau. So, in the morning, we enter ...

Navrolina - DM's Comments

The write-up of this adventure in Caine's journal suffers a little due to it being in the early stages of the campaign - later journals are more complete.

This adventure was basically designed around getting the four characters to work together out of a common interest - i.e. each has something to find or learn at this address. It *is* a monumental coincidence that they all happen to meet at this place, but events later in the campaign suggest that this was "meant" to happen... At any rate, the history of each character (see the individual profiles) means that none of them had any real reason to return home - they all sought answers about their lives.

The basic story behind this adventure is Louis Corneille IV (a wealthy landowner in Pont-a-Museau) and his relationship with Navrolina Kesepka, a young woman who began renting one of his larger houses. (Although residences are easily available in Richemulot, Louis provides furnished, more elegant homes that can be rented by those who don't want the hassle...)

Louis fell in love with Navrolina, and made her his vampire bride. Navrolina, however, couldn't handle the change to undeath, and soon went insane listening to the voices of crows in her head. (Louis controls/turns into crows instead of bats.) Navrolina soon

became uncontrolled, killing randomly and violently in the city until Jacqueline Renier (a friend of Louis) demanded that he put a stop to her actions.

Louis couldn't bring himself to destroy her, so he did it in a fashion that wouldn't involve dealing with her face to face. Being a novice vampire, Navrolina's lair was poorly thought out, and Louis bricked her into her own cellar, draping garlic around drainage outlets to prevent her travelling out as mist. There, she starved, living only on the occasional rat that crawled up from the sewer, until she was near death.

It was unfortunate that Ivanov Radalich (Caine's twin brother) moved in only a few days later. While attempting to put up wine racks in the cellar, he inadvertently broke a hole through to Navrolina's cell. She was free, but weak and completely insane. Overpowering Ivanov, she took him down to the secret cellar in the house, and chained him there, drinking from him daily to regain her strength. It was then that Caine, Heinrich, Isaiah, and Ilyich arrived at the house.

Some notes about things mentioned in the Journal, and the adventure in general:

- The voices that Ilyich heard were coming from the Ba'al Verzi dagger (which Navrolina had taken from the attic), and claimed to be his mother.
- Sol Invictus is Caine's name for casting Light.
- When waiting in Louis' mansion, I gave the players a letter in an envelope that was lying on a table. This was the letter from Jacqueline. Just as they finished reading it, I said that they heard footsteps approaching, making them panic while trying to stuff the letter back in the envelope and put it back where it was. It's a fun practical test for the PCs!
- How did they know it was a vampire? Caine has Forbidden Knowledge, so has some general ideas.
- Ilyich tried to protect Navrolina on the misunderstanding that *she* was his mother, not the voice in the dagger.
- The secret laboratory beneath the house is where Ivanov was chained up (he'd escaped by the time they arrived) and where Heinrich's mentor (Gerhard) conducted interesting experiments 26 years ago. Some texts on the wall were by Dr Mordenheim, giving Heinrich a further clue as to Gerhard's past.

- After Navrolina had been defeated, the characters were standing around wondering what to do about Louis - they knew him to be powerful, but not necessarily a vampire. Louis was condescending and confident, even shaking Ilyich's hand for his help in destroying Navrolina. When doing this, I had (under the table) held a bag of ice for about 10 minutes to make my hand as cold as possible, so when he shook their hands it became abundantly clear he wasn't entirely human....
(Unfortunately, one of the players didn't notice my hand was cold, so don't count on it working!)
- Throughout the adventure, scenes like in Alfred Hitchcock's "The Birds" kept occurring, as both Louis and Navrolina could control crows. They don't necessarily need to attack - just keep them around when a sense of foreboding is required (or even as a red herring).

Overall, this adventure ran pretty much as I wanted it to. The characters at this point were all very secretive from each other, creating a certain amount of mystery about each PC. (Given that that truth is that they nearly *all* have something to hide, this was good!)

Rebirth

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

Wednesday, 12th January

... Ilyich and I entered the sewers, following certain tracks. We were eventually led to an inn named the Drowned Rat. Although Ilyich did not notice in the gloom, one of the rats that passed us by was extremely large - two feet in length! I am glad we departed soon thereafter.

It was a low class establishment, but there we met a well-dressed fellow in the garb of a magician and performer. He introduced himself as Gaston, and was apparently (unsuccessfully) looking for employment. Whilst he chatted with Ilyich, I managed to glean from the inn-keep that Ivanov had come this way and travelled with a merchant named Barnabas Allcot to the north! My heart leapt, for the search resumed. With renewed haste, I urged Ilyich back to the house whilst I took Gaston into my employ and asked of him a difficult task to show his worth. This he performed admirably.

I managed to convey the importance of dispatch and we rode for the north before dark. We reached the border into the feudal realm of Falkovnia that night and stopped in the settlement of Silbervas. There we rested somewhat and Ilyich talked to his itinerant friend Angus McGregor.

Thursday, 13th January

We could not stay, however, and in the morn we continued our journey to the border of Dementlieu. There to our consternation we found the border closed by order of that foul tyrant Vlad Drakov. His perversion of the duties of the nobility and the oppression of his people is an abomination crying for redress, yet we regrettably must yield to his superior might. We stayed at a border settlement, awaiting a change in the situation. There was no news of Barnabas or Ivanov. They could have continued north, but a choice had to be made and we decided to proceed west.

Friday, 14th January

This was a day of frustration spent sitting in the camp. I begrudge every moment spent in idleness as the trail of Ivanov grows colder. I curse Drakov and his whims - may he rot in Hell. At the least the Herr Doktor seemed to be recuperating from his injuries in the battle with Navrolina.

Saturday, 15th January

Ilyich finally proves his worth. He had conspired to arrange for a secret crossing of the border. Early this day we entered Dementlieu and reached Chateaufaux.

Sunday, 16th January

We left for Port-a-Lucine in the morning, but the weather had turned on us. It had begun snowing and even Asfaloth was distressed. Our problems became more acute as distant howling meant that we were pursued by wolves. I was disturbed - wolves rarely hunted men like this save in extremis - or I fear - under the influence of the forces of Darkness. We spied a farmhouse off the road as the wolves came ever closer. As we approached a farmer came out and begged our help. I took the horses into the barn and Ilyich remained with me, whilst the others ran into the house. We had acted none to soon, for then we were assailed by three monstrous brutes. The Doktor had entered the house whilst Gaston and Isaiah battled near the door and I near the barn with Ilyich. Gaston released a blinding cloud of glittering particles blinding a wolf whilst I called upon Sol Invictus to perform similarly on another. I was loath to harm these beasts, who knew not what they did but acted from some unknown imperative. I was unfortunately forced to chastise Ilyich when he attempted to slay one despite its condition and my protests. The battle won, I carried him into the house, though I fear he now bears me some ill-will. So be it. The weather became very harsh and, fearing for the horses, I took vigil in the barn. Inside the Herr Doktor and Isaiah were involved in the birth. Ilyich lay incapacitated, but was later woken by Gaston, who promised to train him if he put aside his childish vengeance against me. Ilyich later joined me in the barn.

The farmer's name was Alistair and his wife's Anita. During a terrible childbirth a gloom settled over the house and we were told the child was stillborn. We later found out there

was in fact no child born but some sort of evil pregnancy and her breasts were marked by the feeding of a spirit born of anguished longing.

During the night, as the wind and snow battered the farm with its fury we received a pre-arranged signal from the house. I woke Ilyich and we proceeded to the house only to find none of the occupants had triggered it. As we searched the house it was clear dark forces were at work - books falling off shelves, the sounds of a mystic rattle and the wailing of the delirious Anita. We gathered at the behest of Isaiah at one place to confront the evil. I carried the prostrate Anita. Isaiah began his rituals to scourge the Darkness, but somehow he failed.

We found that the couple had had a previous child which was slain by wolves earlier. It was buried outside and had a rattle. This knowledge seemed to provoke a madness in Gaston and Isaiah who were determined to confront this evil which had resisted us at night. I could not allow such folly and with the assistance of Ilyich, Isaiah was subdued and we remained in the house till the coming of dawn. During the night wolves menaced the farm but there was no incident.

Monday, 17th January

Though the wolves remained, with the light I left with sword and torch and accompanied by Gaston and the recovered Isaiah. We were supported by the gunfire of the Herr Doktor in keeping the wolves at bay. We found the place where the child Barton was buried and dug in the hardened earth. However, we heard the gunshots cease and Anita flee the house. The wolves reappeared to assail us and her once more.

I rushed to defend the mad Anita whilst Isaiah dug with holy fury and Gaston stood watch over him. Isaiah finished his task only to find the coffin empty. At that spot he also suffered a mighty vision of wolves seizing the baby and carrying it off. We managed to keep the wolves at bay as we returned to the house to find the source of the evil in the upper reaches.

There we were confronted by an insubstantial form in the shape of a baby carrying a rattle but which radiated malignancy. I was late in getting there and noticed that Anita had pulled a firearm to defend her child even as it harmed her. She fired and shot Ilyich, his life's blood spilling onto the ground. The Herr Doktor immediately rushed to his side. The undead horror advanced on the rest of us. Isaiah invoked prayers of power against it

and I the power of Amaranth, but neither availed us. We turned our attention to the rattle and though it was difficult I brought Anathema down upon it and with it the 'child' dispersed to trouble us no more.

We found that after the death of the first child Anita had been overcome and kept the body of the baby in the attic. Her fierce devotion brought it back as one of the Unlife to plague her family. Though Ilyich is sorely wounded and we all need rest I do not wish to remain here longer - for it is a sad place and my quest for Ivanov beckons. Yet perhaps we should remain awhile to restore faith to this broken couple ...

Rebirth - DM's Comments

The actual *Rebirth* adventure is likely to appear, fully detailed (and slightly changed), in the Kargatane's new netbook *The Forgotten Children*. As a result, I won't go into the detail behind this adventure, but there are a few things worth noting.....

Drakov's closing of the borders *does* have a purpose, although the PCs didn't learn about it here. They'll find out a long time from now, in the episode *Fear Itself*.

At this point, Caine's search for his twin brother is the main driving force. Given that Ivanov had been held captive by Navrolina (a vampire) for some days, and this point Caine was convinced that his brother had been turned to darkness, and was probably one of the undead already. (This is also a sign of Caine's paranoia, a factor which becomes very significant later in the campaign.)

Caine's journal mentions that Isaiah had a vision when touching the coffin of the baby. This is a theme that develops for Isaiah over the length of the campaign - the gradual realisation that he has somehow gained some psychic powers that he has little control over. It's related to both the loss of one of his eyes in Navrolina, and his past...

Revolution - Part One

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

Tuesday, 18th January

We stay at the house with Alistair and Anita and try to help, though the mood is grim, and Ilyich is weak and injured. The urgency of our search for Ivanov presses upon me and we decide to leave tomorrow, though Ilyich and Gaston will follow after.

Wednesday, 19th January

We resume our journey to Port-a-Lucine though the weather is still harsh and set against us. We reach the town at night however, and I arrange for lodgings at my normal inn - a fine establishment in the noble quarter. On the way I saw much evidence of the misery and despair of the poor. As with Falkovnia and so many other places in this accursed land it is not enough that creatures walk the night and darkness wears a face, for the deprivations of our fellow men wreak greater evil. This is particularly so amongst the so-called 'nobility' - who forget that with the rights and privileges of their station comes a sacred trust and responsibility.

Isaiah shares my conviction in this regard but his sun shines more brightly. As we passed a small peasant revolutionary gathering he interrupted and gave an impassioned (if ill-advised) speech about the injustice of desperate plight of the common person. Although I sympathise, I know too well the consequence of such fervent, unchannelled emotion directed against those in power - more often than not the gallows and the block. These things need time and care.

The Herr Doktor and I hurriedly left, for such public sedition could only invite reprisal. We arrived at the Clair-de-Lune where we rested and I asked my friend the innkeeper to arrange for a ship to Lamordia and for news on the whereabouts of Ivanov Radolich and Barnabas.

Thursday, 20th January

In the morn came great news, for our chase - delayed at every opportunity as if the very fates were against us - had almost come to a successful conclusion. Ivanov was here! I travelled alone to The Fallen Spire. There I found that Ivanov and Barnabas had been there since Saturday the Fifteenth, and while Barnabas had left on the Monday (where I know not), Ivanov had remained to this day. He was apparently looking fine and healthy, though distressed upon his arrival. Proceeding to his room I found it deserted, though had he slept there that night. To come so close! I had not given up hope completely, however, and I resolved to remain here to solve the mystery.

Later I found the letter - that our family was being subject to foul ransom and that my father's disappearance was due to these kidnappers - the same who took Ivanov! Perhaps they make a trade of it. Despite all my best efforts, I have been drawn into the Great Game of Houses. Very well, they shall find me an implacable enemy with little use for the subtleties and veiled meanings. I shall bring the Sun into their Night.

I found the letter in Ivanov's room. Although I was feeling rather light-headed I finally realised that he was kidnapped because they thought he was I - the Last Lord of the Shadowborn. Ivanov was able to travel in the day-time and was looking well. I think this a sign that he has not been claimed by darkness and that he has escaped and that I may contact him soon.

I returned to the inn, to find Isaiah there, and we discussed another letter I received - an invitation to a noble party to celebrate a new author. Obviously my presence had been noticed. I resolved to go with the Herr Doktor - I did not trust my friend Isaiah to restrain himself, and we had some need of caution.

My instincts were correct. Such decadence and extravagance amidst such misery and squalor would more than likely had upset Isaiah beyond controlling, as they almost did myself. More disturbing was the book and its author - the Marques de Penible who had written "120 Days of Sodom" - a treatise dedicated to pain and suffering. His seductive

words drew many admirers but I saw him merely as darkness with a fairer face; one of those who would draw fear and pain to the breast and treat it with damned affection till it devoured the soul from within. If matters were not so pressing I would have dealt with him that night, though perhaps I judge too hastily.

The only consolation that night was meeting once again the delightful Lady Eloise, ballerina extraordinaire of the Theatre du Populaire. She is one of the few of her station in this land who do not turn my stomach with their callous hypocrisy. The talk during the night was also of revolution fomenting among the 'peasants' - though for some reason few seemed concerned. I returned to the inn, whilst the Herr Doktor had found the company of a young lady doubtless married to some lord (the Comte de Farrier himself I found out later - this connection could prove very valuable).

Friday, 21st January

In the morning we discussed what had occurred with Isaiah who had been up to his own activities in the night. He was set on joining the revolution and providing it the organisation and vision it lacked. Serge (the leader he met on Wednesday) was committed but as yet incapable of the finer details. I urged him to tread carefully and with stealth. It would be a disaster if the movement was crushed in its infancy by being clumsy and obvious.

Meanwhile, I decided had to return home to learn more. The letter I had found spoke of things of which I had no knowledge and only mother could enlighten me. I left with the Herr Doktor and the Lady Eloise. Interestingly on our way out we met Ilyich, who joined us also. We arrived in Chateaufaux later that day.

Saturday, 22nd January

We arrived at Shadowborn Manor by afternoon and I spoke with mother. She was glad to see me after such a long time, but I explained to her that I would often be absent for weeks at a time and that she was to take care of things in my absence.

What she told me however, chilled my blood. Though I was glad to hear we had been operating a soup kitchen in Dementlieu (though father had no knowledge of this) - a group of nobles had been desperate to purchase the warehouse site and recently resorted to threats and then kidnapping. That they dare take a Lord of Mordent! Though my father and I are distant and agree on few matters, this is an insult that cannot be ignored. Their day shall come, and if they harm him, I shall cleave their black hearts and send them screaming to their Hells. The Lady Eloise (and later confirmed by Isaiah and Ilyich) informed me that shutting down the soup kitchen would spark a revolt - one doomed to being crushed. I did not need their counsel. I would sooner fall on my sword than to submit to such as these.

Before we left on the next morning I talked with Dr Van Richten, who had just returned on a trip, to see if he had settled in.

Sunday, 23rd January

We left for Dementlieu, arriving there on Monday morning. I did not want my presence known so I told the others that I would enter Port-a-Lucine separately and keep contact via clandestine meetings. They too, were to find separate lodgings. The time for response to the kidnappers was drawing nigh, and we desperately needed more information.

Monday, 24th January

Isaiah had been continuing his plans in training the revolutionaries, whilst Ilyich delved into his peculiar little world. He had found that all the warehouses in the city had been bought by a syndicate of nobles - save the Soup Kitchen (owned by myself) and one other. It seemed that the warehouse was wanted for reasons other than shutting down the soup kitchen or for its strategic location - whatever that may be.

I had ensconced myself in the dock quarter, disguised as a hard-drinking sailor. I took the

opportunity to send my message to the guilty parties of whom I was aware.

Tuesday, 25th January

This night I was the subject of an assassination attempt. The bullet missed, but a well-placed shot from the Lady Eloise and a blow from the inimitable Ilyich subdued the villain. We drew him into the abandoned building where the lady - who was proving mightily resourceful - placed him under her hypnotic spell. We found the names of four of his contacts in the warehouses, and that a mysterious figure titled "The Brain" had ordered my death. How they found my location is a mystery. Nevertheless we used this as an opportunity for the prey to become the predators. We left him - with no memory of this - to leave thinking I was sorely wounded by him and that he had obtained important papers from me.

The plan was for Ilyich to follow him and watch all he does. The letters would reveal that I was planning to sell to a third party - one who seemed to be an agent of Vlad Drakov of Falkovnia, who had decided once more to take Dementlieu - but first by supporting an internal revolution. This apprehension would be supported by rumours to such an effect being spread (discreetly) by the Lady Eloise and Ilyich and most especially the Herr Doktor, who would re-acquaint himself with his lady friend, the wife of the Comte de Farrier. The purchaser would agree to continue the soup kitchen as well as supply men and arms for some purpose. It would be clear that having Vlad own the building would be disastrous to the nobles - as he was too powerful to influence, but also - for our purposes - essentially uncontactable for verification. If they held my father, the Lord Byron, they would certainly be aware that whilst he would sell to them, I would never do so. The meeting would take place in Mordentshire - where I and the "Falkovnian merchants" would purport to complete the deal. The only way for the nobles to stop this was to interrupt the meeting, take the deeds and chain of title from me and have the only other person authorised to do so - my father - complete the transaction with them. This would be a significant incentive to keep him alive. The letter would also reveal that whilst the peasant revolutionaries were far from ready (so as not to alarm them) they had reached a significant level of preparedness and if the nobles sparked a counter-revolution now,

there would be a bloody battle which they may lose.

Thus I would leave for Mordent to arrange the trap for those who arrive to disturb our "meeting". It will be held in six days time on Monday 31st January in an abandoned building near Mordentshire that has the benefit of being a place where they cannot send a significant force. The others would remain behind and arrive some one or two days before as necessary. The Herr Doktor would renew contact with the Comte's wife, and use her as both source of information and conduit (of rumour and disinformation) to the enemy; the Lady would similarly use her high-born friends; whilst Isaiah will deal with issues concerning the soup kitchen and peasantry. Ilyich will be our spy - he will follow not only the assassin, but any others identified - as well as spread the necessary rumours and warn us of their plans. He will be the last to arrive - having hopefully identified the contingent being sent, he will send a message to us, he will assail them from behind when the time has come. I almost burn with anticipation, but some say that vengeance is a dish best served cold ...

Before I leave I will also send messages for my brother Ivanov. There has been no sign of him. I must tell him he is welcome at Shadowborn Manor. Nevertheless I do not trust his disappearance. I will provide my mother and certain few trusted guards knowledge of him and the means to distinguish us by code phrase.

Revolution Part One - DM's Comments

When I started this session, I was actually very worried that I hadn't prepared enough. In the end, however, it proved to be one of the more interesting sessions we've had in the campaign.

There are a few threads running through this session:

The Marquis de Penibles: Modelled off the Maquis de Sade, this guy is just making his break into the Dementlieu art scene. The book "120 Days of Sodom" is about how experiencing pain in all its forms allows one to truly appreciate their existence, and the

finer things in life. It goes into quite gruesome detail about various types of pain, and the beneficial affects thereof.

While any rational individual would dismiss this novel as the work of a seriously ill person, Dementlieu society is going through a very risqué period at the moment, and the sexual overtones in the book have proven appealing to the Advisor on the Arts (Jean-Pierre Mont-Michel Theroux), who sponsoring the "launch" of this book.

In true "Emporer's New Clothes" fashion, no one in the aristocracy is game to criticize the work for fear of looking like they don't understand the true meaning of the book (or worse, appear unfashionable!). Hence, as the Maquis speaks about the book, there is much considered nodding of heads and agreeance in the audience.

So what is this guy up to? More about this is revealed in Part 2 of Revolution. And what has caused him to believe this sort of thing? The reason for that starts to become clear some months from now, in *Fear Itself*.

Caine's Father: As noted in the intro about Caine, his father disappeared some weeks ago from his upstairs bedroom. The main intent of this adventure was to begin to resolve what had happened to him.

Ivanov's kidnap was the first clue - whoever was out to get the Shadowborn family mistook him for Caine. The letter effectively stated that Caine's mother (Katherine) had to sell the Soup Kitchen or both would die. Caine's trip back to Mordent showed that Katherine had been receiving veiled threats for some time before Byron Shadowborn's disappearance, but she hadn't revealed these at the time, as she was operating the Kitchen in secret.

As noted in Caine's journal, an area of the warehouse was being bought out by a bunch of nobles. Some of you will recognise this as a sign that the Brain has just arrived in Port-a-Lucine, and is starting to work against the Lord....

The Revolution: This was originally intended to just be a bit of background to the main events of the adventure - just to show that the peasants were unhappy with the current situation. However, Isaiah got right into this aspect of the adventure, and started getting very keen. As noted by the title of this session, the Revolution becomes quite significant.

Interestingly, this session involved no combat except for the very brief attack of the assassin at the end, yet the players commented that they liked it a lot despite the lack of confrontation (although it was a bit slow to begin with).

After the attack, and the discovery that "The Brain" had sent this person, the players then spent over an hour hatching the elaborate plot that Caine details in his journal.

Essentially, they were mocking up a sale to a fictitious "Gunnar Sondstrom", so as to force the Brain's agents to interrupt and steal the deeds to the site. Alternatively, it would force them to release his Father, so that Caine did not have the right to sell the property (since he would no longer be Lord Shadowborn).

Unfortunately, not knowing their opponent, they have underestimated the Brain this time...

Revolution - Part Two

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

... Ilyich followed the assassin to the warehouse as planned. He was seen upon entry, however, and a melee ensued which forced him to flee.

Wednesday, 26th January

On the morn we awoke to the news that the inn at which I had stayed previously had burned to the ground. We were discussing our next steps when a young street urchin named Rene recognised me and gave me a letter, ostensibly from Jean-Pierre Theroux supporting my stand. I was disturbed that my movements could be tracked so easily when we had taken such care to disguise them.

I had an argument with Isaiah, whose revolutionary fervour has overwhelmed what good judgment he once possessed. As I left for Mordent to lay the groundwork for the approaching confrontation, whil he went to the Vistani. There he heard of the tale of the Dukkar - the male fortune-teller - who would bring misfortune and woe with him.

Also this day, we heard that Lavarch - the owner of the other warehouse - had been killed. The good Herr Doktor investigated the death to find that it was a reaction to a narcotic substance in his body.

Thursday, 27th January

We learnt today that Lavarch's warehouse was sold, but to whom and for what purpose we are, as ever, ignorant. The Lady Eloise learnt further that people had been disappearing lately from the lower classes - in particular prostitutes.

Friday, 28th January

A prostitute is found dead, in a horrific, grisly manner which would have had her in pain for many days. The demon that did this is evil almost beyond my comprehension, and I burn for the day that I may bring Justice to him. Our efforts to find the odious Marquis de Penible prove fruitless.

I have arrived in Mordent. I greet mother warmly and immediately begin our preparations. Tomorrow is the night of the full moon - a good omen.

This night I spent sleeping in the ruined chapel near my home. I dreamt of the lighthouse - pure, white, tall and majestic on a rocky island. It is calm and serene, the sun shining its benediction upon me. However soon a veil begins to draw around the tower and obscures the light. A feeling of brooding malevolence comes over me. I hear the flapping of wings behind me, approaching quickly... when I wake, knowing not what it was.

Saturday, 29th January

Isaiah and Heinrich leave for Mordent, whilst Ilyich and Eloise make further enquires, which get nowhere. They leave later this day.

Monday, 31st January

We spend the day in tense anticipation. At night, however, we put our plan into action. A number of men arrive, including a fake "Gunnar Sondstrom" - who was after all our own invention. We fought and prevailed, but it had been too easy. Our suspicions were confirmed by a sarcastic letter found from "The Brain". Blast and confound the man! How could he pierce our designs with such seeming ease?

Tuesday, 1st February

We left to return to Port-a-Lucine. We needed fresh ideas, for events were certainly not under our control, and my father and Ivanov were still probably in great danger.

Wednesday, 2nd February

This night a dinner party is being held, where my father the Lord Byron will be in attendance. Though I was not invited, Heinrich and Eloise have (through their connections with the Ferrier family). The Maquis was also present! There he told of the "Table of Life", rumoured to be kept in Nova Vaasa, protected by a secret order of monks. He also discussed his intentions regarding his next infernal work, called "Juliette, or the Misfortunes of Virtue".

After the party, an extraordinary event occurred. The Lady Eloise - who had not turned up to the dinner party - entered the revolutionary headquarters and slew Serge! Obviously the enemy had decided to move against the nascent revolutionary movement. After overpowering Eloise, Isaiah found that she had been the subject of some other will and that she had been the reason that all our designs had been so transparent.

This night it also came to my attention that my father, far from being a prisoner, was more in the nature of a welcome guest (though the manner of his disappearance leaves this somewhat to doubt), and that he was organising the sale of the land. Heinrich had learned the location where the deal was to be completed at the dinner party, and there I found him. Far from cheerful reunion we had a bitter argument. He has disinherited me and stripped me off my rank, but I told him that I would return and see justice done, and that I was the last and only true remaining Shadowborn.

However, events were outpacing us once again. The peasant rabble in response to the slaying had moved to meet the army. Isaiah had joined them as they marched on the palace, whilst the rest of us went to the warehouse. The crowd was met by the enigmatic Dominic d'Honaire, who attempted to subdue the situation. His voice had a hypnotic

allure to it. It was at this point we heard bells from the ruined cathedral and heard a piercing scream. We saw a mad figure of darkness on a turret with three others hanging off - one of which was my twin brother Ivanov! As the peasantry was butchered by the soldiers I blew my horn to announce our coming. I recognised the madman as the Marquis de Penible. Raising Anathema, my heart blazing with righteous wrath, I ran to confront this scion of Evil.

Upon entering his sanctum of darkness, we were greeted by scene of horror - men and women connected to various hideous devices of torment and anguish. The very air spoke of pain and suffering. Ilyich and I battled the fiend whilst the Doktor tended the unfortunates attached to the walls. We pressed him sorely and managed to avoid his traps and set him ablaze to purge his body and soul, but he fell down a tower into an underground well. Ilyich and I, dismayed that he may escape, dived after, but he was lost - perhaps dead, but in my heart I know that somewhere there beats a heart of vile darkness, scheming of revenge.

The city had become a blazing inferno, as the people rioted, setting buildings ablaze, looting and stealing. We had to kill eleven fools who assailed us. Along with many others, we decided to leave the city.

Revolution Part Two - DM's Comments

Once again, a number of threads were running through this adventure, and there are quite a few points to make:

Isaiah's visit to the Vistani came about because weapons were being supplied to the peasants by them. Because Isaiah has "the sight", the Vistani *raunie* was quick to question him on whether he had Vistani blood, hence the reference to the Dukkar. Caine's dream of the lighthouse and the flapping wings will probably tip off some people as to what's being referred to. It becomes significant some time down the track, in "Monette".

The Marquis de Penible thread gets wound up temporarily here, with his remarkably ambiguous "death" allowing an easy return later on (in *Fear Itself Part 1*). For the purposes of this story, however, the main connection is that the Marquis was involved with the Brain and the pro-revolutionary movement. This was how the Marquis ended up with Ivanov (Caine's brother) after the Brain realised that it actually **wasn't** the son of Byron Shadowborn.

The fact that only 2 of the PCs had been invited to the dinner party created the usual "split party" problem, where I didn't want to bore the other half of the players to death. To solve this, I took an idea from a Dragon magazine that came out a while ago, and created some temporary NPC dinner guests for the others to play during the party! This included Lord and Lady Bainbridge of Mordent, and Monsieur Utienne. Each included a two-line description of their personality, and they then had free reign! It mad for a very interesting half hour...

Eloise's absence from the dinner party was the main issue at hand, however. As Caine reveals, Eloise (who was being played as a one-off PC by a guest player) was being controlled by Dominic, which explained why the others in this adventure (such as Jean-Pierre) always seemed to know where they were. To do this effectively, I didn't even tell Eloise's **player** that this was the case - I just assumed that whenever she had a spare moment, she was off telling Jean-Pierre where they were.

Her assassination of the leader of the Revolution was Dominic's attempt to quell the rising anger among the peasantry. However, he didn't count on Isaiah being present to lead them onwards to the Palace, so his plan had somewhat backfired. Still, the peasants were very unprepared, and the aristocracy supporting the revolution (to install themselves in positions of power) were caught unawares by the event, so the military easily crushed the rebellion.

This was fairly significant for Isaiah, who in searching for something to believe in after losing everyone (see his history), has only led hundreds to their deaths.

Caine is now no longer Lord of the Shadowborn, now that his father has returned. Byron is now, obviously, under the control of the Brain, which explains why he suddenly appears in public announcing his intention to sell out.

Gaston was not present for the duration of this adventure, and was assumed to be going other things, like visiting Sophie Gaspard, his one true love. However, when the revolution started, Gaston is assumed to have fled the fires and gunfire, knowing nothing of the fate of Sophie....

The most important thing about this adventure as a whole, however, was the feeling that their enemies (whoever they were, because the players never really worked that out) were always one step ahead of them, and knew everything about the PC's motions. Keeping "The Brain" as a secret is also crucial - my players still have no idea, though their theories are often amusing to listen to :-)

Funhouse

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

Thursday, 3rd February

The rioting continued into the morning. We made preparations for our departure. I wrote a letter to Mother. Ilyich met with Rene. Isaiah gave the revolutionaries his final advice - it was a disaster, but not a total one. I also spoke with Ivanov - he had escaped from Navrolina and travelled with Barnabas but was kidnapped in Port-a-Lucine and later given to the Marquis when Byron revealed he was not Caine. He otherwise knew little and intended to return to his home.

The Lord-Governor's Palace in Port-a-Lucine had been burned down in the troubles, and a number had died - including Comte de Ferrier and Helene DuSuis - those we believe were with the revolutionaries. Jean-Pierre - who we believe at least partly responsible for the mind control of Eloise - played his own game, as yet unrevealed. I returned to the city to give Rene's letter to Guignol.

Friday, 4th February

On this day we left for Mordent. We arrived at night. We intend to travel to Lamordia to track down Dr Mordenheim for some reason known only to the Herr Doktor. For myself I appreciate the chance to leave Dementlieu and Mordent behind, now that my family situation has been temporarily settled.

Saturday, 5th February

This day we organised for sea travel to Ludendorf.

Sunday, 6th February

We leave for Ludendorf today. The weather is foul - biting cold. It was revealed to us today that unlike Heinrich, Ilyich and myself, Isaiah has come to these accursed lands from somewhere else. One day he was travelling when he was surrounded by the mysterious mists and trapped here. I have heard of such tales before, but never heard of anyone making the opposite journey ...

Monday, 7th February

This afternoon we passed near the infamous Isle of Agony without event, arriving at Ludendorf at night. We found lodgings. Apparently tomorrow will be a day of mourning. The Baron von Aubrecker's son Rudolph died a year ago today at the age of eighteen. His body was never found however - he 'died' in a shipwreck.

Tuesday, 8th February

This was a day of mourning - and we spent it resting save for a period when we couldn't find Heinrich.

Wednesday, 9th February

Today we travelled to Schloss Mordenheim. We talked with the Doktor, Heinrich asking about a man who had apparently worked with Dr Mordenheim at some stage in the past. It appears that this is Heinrich's mentor, who recently disappeared. We left for town whilst Heinrich remained, returning in the evening. He says we must look for Gerhard Beckmen, his old mentor. Apparently he had created some sort of 'abomination' for Dr Mordenheim, resulting in his dismissal. While Mordenheim knew nothing of Gerhard's whereabouts, he knew that his creation had ended up in a freak show in Ludendorf.

Thursday, 10th February

This morning we went looking for the owners of the old Freak Show and the 'Patchwork Bride'. The husband owner died some two weeks ago, and other employees have been

having 'accidents' - including the wife who died before our eyes. We heard chittering laughter but were unable to locate the source.

Using keys given to us by the wife, we entered the old Freak Show building. There were a number of traps and when dealing with these we heard the same malicious, chittering laughter. I assumed these were 'goblyns' - known as 'beasties' in their home of Tepest. After passing the barrel trap we entered the 'ball room' and fought and slew three snakes.

Later Heinrich and I fell through a trapdoor into a web of a monstrous spider. The lantern fell to the ground and spread flame onto the ground. Desperately struggling in the webs, I caused flame to burn the them. In the flames we managed to battle and later escape the spiders with the help of Ilyich and Isaiah.

Pressing on we fought a final battle against some sort of 'cat-woman' and waves of strange monkey-dogs known as 'gremishkas'. In this fight both Isaiah and I were knocked unconscious by the vicious beasts, but we prevailed.

The Patchwork Bride appeared to be the final display in the exhibit, though the door and glass had been broken many years ago. We had learned from the owners that the Funhouse had closed down because the seemingly placid "Patchwork Bride" had attacked a small girl. The resulting furore in the town had forced the closure of the attraction....

We found a book in the Patchwork Bride's quarters, which she had apparently sketched in to pass the time in the Funhouse. One recurring image was off a large estate, with a distinct architectural style.. Maybe this is a place from her past?

Thursday, 17th February

We spent the next week recuperating from our wounds. In retrospect we should not have continued to such a precarious situation. We managed to identify the place shown in the book as an abandoned estate near Neufurchtenburg in southern Lamordia.

Funhouse - DM's Comments

Note: These are only really adventure summaries - to turn these ideas into your own adventures, I'd recommend fleshing them out significantly, particularly in relation to the NPC backgrounds. I've only provided snapshots of these NPCs so that you can adjust them to best fit your campaign....

This adventure came about largely because of a desire for some old-fashioned combat in the campaign :) The adventures to date had been largely combat free, and seeing we had some relatively new players in the group, it was suggested that some Ravenloft-style dice-rolling wouldn't go astray.

I quickly realised how difficult it is to come up with a biffy sort of adventure in a civilised setting like Ravenloft! Anyway, the end result was Funhouse, the first step along the trail of the Patchwork Bride. (For more details on the Patchwork Bride, check out the Book of Souls, where she is fully detailed.)

The PCs are basically just going into the Funhouse to find out what they can about the Patchwork Bride, who was an exhibit there some 20 years ago. However, at the same time, one of the other exhibits has returned to take revenge on it's captors - a Paka (from the 3rd Monstrous Compendium), who was on show as the "Catgirl" all those years ago. She's commanding the Gremishka that still remain in the ruined building, getting them to set up traps for all of the people who worked at the Funhouse. Hence, the Funhouse is now full of traps set to protect herself from intruders.

The part I liked most about this was that you get to forebode what the PCs will be coming up against in the Funhouse. When they see an empty exhibit with a faded, carved sign saying "Falkovnian Wolf Spider", they just *know* that they'll be coming up against something like that later on.....

Otherwise, there wasn't much to this apart from setting up a whole bunch of funhouse-style rooms, and populating with leftover freakshow-type beasts. Coming up with the names is also fun - "Sri-Rajan Monkey-Dog" for the gremishkas, "The Amazing Boar-Man" for a broken one, etc, etc.....

With regards to mood, I think the "scary clown" sort of atmosphere is what you're after. Anyone who's seen Poltergeist, or read "It" (Stephen King), will know what I mean!

Night of the Walking Dead

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

Thursday, 17th February - continued

We set out on this day for the estates along the road. The weather was freezing cold. Approaching a river we found a moor barge. Whilst on the barge we were attacked by a crocodile and after a desperate battle in which I was nearly dragged into the 'death roll' characteristic of such creatures, we slew the beast.

Friday, 18th February

We entered the swamp, which was much warmer than the surrounding area, but were unable to find a way out. An ominous storm had built up on the horizon. Once again we spent the night on a small swamp island.

Saturday, 19th February

We remain lost in the swamp. The storm is getting somewhat closer. That afternoon we saw a light in the distance. Following this light we came to a hut on stilts. A rope ladder rolled out - we were obviously expected. We hailed the hut and entered. We received no response, whereupon we entered the hut.

We found a strange sight, but strangely comforting. We saw a young man in a room surrounded by twelve lanterns. His name was Luc and he spouted nonsense poetry which Isaiah was familiar with for some reason. It had something to do with the Vistani - perhaps he is the Dukkar.

We stayed the night, but nothing occurred.

Sunday, 20th February

We left the morning, taking Luc with us. Eventually the swamp thins out and we make our way out, but we could not see the mountains in the distance - we are obviously in a different land!

The storm is much closer now. We arrive at the nearby village at a funeral. Unbelievably there was something moving within the coffin. There seemed to be a great haste to bury it but we could not allow such a travesty to pass! We intervened and found one of the living dead within. I brought Anathema upon it and slew the foul undead, which we later burnt.

We later found that we are in Marais D'Tarascon in the domain of Souragne. We talk to the priest and he recognised Luc as Luc Tarascon. At the church we discussed the problems of Marais. The deaths started about three weeks ago - and all those who died in this period have disappeared from the graveyard. The populace worship some sort of nature deity, who is the enemy of the evil "Lord of the Dead". We also spoke with other villagers - Marcel Tarascon is rumoured to have died recently.

Monday, 21st February

Today clouds cover the sky and there are flashes of lightning but no thunder or rain - yet. It is the calm before the storm - a storm we know is coming.

There was nobody at the Tarascon estate. We rode to the plantation and manor house - but found them similarly deserted. We returned to the village where we talked to the Constable who suspects a vampyre is on the loose. There was another disappearance last night - a barmaid.

We then proceeded to the cemetery and the Tarascon crypt. Marcel had died - his flesh rended - brought by Jean. Luc joined soon after. There is a mystery man named 'Chicken Bone' in the swamp. Luc, Jean and the priest took Marcel's body into the swamp in the hope that the hermit could do something to save his life. Chicken Bone conducted a ritual

over the body, and they left the swamp. It was at this point that Luc began speaking only the poetic prophecy. Chicken Bone did not name his price.

Leaving the cemetery we went to the inn. The storm is increasing in power - though there is no rain, we can hear the ominous rumbling of distant thunder. Whilst at the inn we smelt a foul stench which causes the death of a patron. I run outside, knowing that creatures of Death often carry such ill with them. I see nothing but something tells me evil is afoot. We hurried to the cemetery and saw a pair of ravenous ghouls - undead eaters of flesh who are lightning quick and whose claws and teeth carry disease and the paralysing fear of death. I summoned the holy wrath of Amaranth and we managed to slay the fleeing fiends.

Tuesday, 22nd February

We needed more information. We resolved to see 'Chicken Bone' - so we entered the swamp with the village priest. On our way to the boat we heard a female scream. We saw out of the corner of our eyes a black-cloaked murderer (who escaped after a determined chase). The body was the innkeeper's daughter.

We later entered the swamp. We sensed that events were coming to a head, which we were currently ill-equipped to deal with. We talked with Chicken Bone. He told us that the ritual conducted on Marcel had failed, and as a result Marcel is now one of the Unlife - and it is our task to give him eternal peace.

On the way back we saw a campfire in the darkness. Approaching we saw a Vistani van and camp on a secure island. We talked and feasted with them, and they gave us some cryptic clues to our dilemma. During the night, however, the mists rolled in and in the morning the Vistani were gone - leaving no trace of their presence.

Wednesday, 23rd February

We returned to the village. The storm was getting stronger. Using keys obtained from the Constable we raided the town-house Tarascon. It seemed recently abandoned but upstairs we were attacked by the black-cloaked individual, whom we later discovered to be Jean. In a fierce battle I slew him and to the objection of all others immediately cremated his body, for I feared he would become another vessel of darkness. I gave him his last rites, may he rest in peace. On him (before this) we found a copy of the Hyskosa's scroll.

We rushed to the plantation where we found a horrifying scene - three ghouls feasting on a head. The Lord of the Dead had certainly reached from his realm beyond to grip this village. Although sickened and horrified we put an end to their blasphemous existence. We returned to the village.

Thursday, 24th February

We were in the inn when the storm finally broke, venting its fury on the harrowed village. The rain gave a foul stench as a man entered the inn with the fateful warning - that the dead were finally marching upon the village. The final battle had come - we charged into the street and into the heart of Darkness - the cemetery. We entered the enclosed mausoleum where we fought skeletons and zombies - though I sent them fleeing with the power of Amaranth. In the sanctum of evil we find Marcel and his undead lieutenants. In a fierce battle of life and death - both Ilyich and I were paralysed by the touch of death but then, unbelievably, a hole opens in the storm revealing a blood red moon. The Unlife stood mesmerised and this enabled Ilyich to break his paralysis. He slew Marcel during this time and the newly dead Luc (who succumbed to a word of death from Marcel) flees. The storm returned and we slew the remaining walking dead. Isaiah was nearly slain and requires extensive rest, and I feel a strange weakness of supernatural origin. I intend to see Chicken Bone to deal with this malady and for more information on the preceding events ...

Night of the Walking Dead - DM's Comments

Obviously, this adventure was largely a straight application of TSR's *Night of the Walking Dead* adventure, the first in the Grand Conjunction series of adventures (which is, of course, available for free download from the TSR Website). While Caine's account of events is fairly brief, there are a few things that can be easily used to improve this adventure using material that has appeared since the release of this adventure.

This adventure is notable in that this is one of the few times that I will use the "mists" as a transport device in the entire campaign. While the concept of the mists is great for bringing characters into RL from another world, I find it a little jarring when used to carry people between domains frequently, mainly because it robs the PCs of much of their sense of free will. So, while they intended to head south to look for the Patchwork Bride in the abandoned estate near Neufurchtenburg, their trip through the swamp carried them to Souragne instead.

So, on to the things I changed about this adventure:

- Firstly, all magic items were removed. (Two magical short swords lying in the swamp? I don't think so....)
- The background was also changed a little. In this campaign, Marcel was an amateur Voodan practitioner, who was sold the Hyskosa scroll by someone from Port d'Elhour (more about this in *Viola*, the next adventure). Shortly after receiving it, he and Luc ventured into the swamp so he could practice his art, where he was attacked and killed by zombies (as detailed in NotWD). However, instead of being taken to Brucian (who really shouldn't be able to Raise Dead, IMHO), they took him to Chicken Bone (of the the *2nd RL Monstrous Compendium Appendix*) who performed the required ritual on him. Of course, it didn't work, and he became a Zombie Lord.
- I moved the Vistani fortune telling further into the adventure. This changes its purpose from a general "warning of doom" to something that must actually provide useful hints to the players about what is going on. To do this, I used the Diksha Dice included in the *Forbidden Lore* boxed set. While this is difficult

(given the completely random nature of the reading), I used only a couple of the dice to actually determine anything, and the rest were interpreted in a manner consistent with events thus far. The most important in my case was the location die - I used it to determine where the final confrontation with Marcel would take place. The Tomb indicated the crypt (as per the module), the Town represented the Tarason Townhouse, the Road represented the estate, etc... As it was, I got the Cave, so I simply made the crypt an underground one in order to fulfill the reading! Other elements in my reading included the "Innocent" being cursed by "Curiosity" to cause these events.

These two main changes (the reading and Chicken Bone) improve the adventure significantly, IMHO. Chicken Bone, while he doesn't play a significant role in the adventure, has now been introduced to the players for use in later adventures (as he does in *Viola*). (Adventurous PCs may even want to take any slain characters to him for an attempted Raise!) The background changes are only really there to fit my campaign, and so aren't that important.

The combat at the end of this adventure is quite difficult, and resulted in the party coming the closest to complete destruction yet (or, indeed, ever) in the campaign.

In retrospect, there are things I would have liked to improve on in this adventure. Mainly, I think the zombies should really be scarier - when they can be cut down by a couple of sword blows, they don't really become the unstoppable force that zombies are in the sort of movies this adventure is trying to mimic. Ways to do this have been discussed recently on the Ravenloft Mailing List, and I'd suggest doing *something* to make zombies more difficult to kill. Weight of numbers is an easy option, but one I don't find amazingly satisfying.

In the scheme of my campaign, this adventure is basically an introduction to the fact that bigger things are afoot. Isaiah is aware of the prophecy, having received the scroll from Hyskosa's daughter, and this adventure is the first sign of anything coming from that. In fact, the following two adventures largely build on that concept of "bigger things happening" - you could say that these three adventures are effectively a teaser for the larger plots that span the campaign.....

Viola

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

Friday, 25th February

The storm had passed, and the worst seemed over. However, the village had been ravaged and many had died to sate Marcel's unholy hunger. As often happens in such traumatic situations, the events of the day had begun to give way to rumour and exaggeration.

We were all wounded in some fashion, but Heinrich especially seemed sick. He was examined by a local herbalist who discovered something unusual - a large 'T' shaped scar on the back of his neck. It seemed old, but must have been a significant wound at the time. We could not determine its significance, but I fear a malign influence at some point in his life.

With the coming of dawn we decided to rest.

During the night I dreamed once more. I was standing in the darkness, in what was obviously a ship of some kind. Suddenly, I feel a light flash over my face - and my heart leaps, for it is obviously a sign of The Lighthouse - but then I hear the flapping of wings behind me and I know my nemesis approaches. Then I woke - but it haunts me still ...

When I woke I found that I had contracted a contagion of some sort. I know that this is directly attributable to the foulness of Marcel and his minions. I sought the help of the herbal-woman and was given a poultice, but I feel something more substantial is required. I spoke with Isaiah, but it seems the events have sickened him also and he has entered some sort of fevered delirium.

Saturday, 26th February

My suspicions proved correct, and the sickness has progressed. I feel the weakness in my marrow. That night we went to see Mordu - the native with an overactive imagination who spoke of the voudun. He revealed that he had often sold such dark information to Marcel and that he had a contact in Port d'Elhour - the largest settlement in this accursed domain. He had sold an especially expensive piece shortly before Marcel's death. We were to see Nagouran, a member of a societe - practitioners of voudun.

Sunday, 27th February

I feel the cold hand of death reach for me beyond the grave. Time grows short, and though I am reluctant to do so, I go to see Chicken Bone.

Ilyich and I took a raft through the marsh to see him. He was not there, but we entered his hut and waited for him to arrive. We waited for some time, and eventually he came, seemingly exhausted. He tells us that the disease will require an immense effort and that we must return in five days. I fear that it will have claimed me well before then, but he is confident I will not succumb, and though the body wilts, my spirit is strong. I will endure. We return in the darkness, but I am disturbed by the fact that all aid will require the payment of an unspecified 'price'.

Monday, 28th February

I am pleasantly surprised that the foulness has not furthered its grip, but I stay ill. We rest.

Tuesday, 1st March

This day we searched the former dwelling of Marcel D'Tarascon. In his room we found white powder - flour - a maraca like object and two drums - one small and one large. We showed these to Mordu, and he said they are items sacred to voudun, used for summoning the loa.

With this, we leave for Port d'Elhour. On the way we hear a noise - very soft, but it sounds like chanting. The carriage starts to accelerate and veer wildly. The chanting came from the swamp - where beats the heart of darkness. The carriage crashed and we were thrown about, but other than bruises and the like we were unhurt. We found a mysterious drawing on the bottom of the carriage, marked with some sort of white paste derived from flour.

We make our way to the "Two Hares Inn", and are heartened to once again meet the fabulous Gaston. He had arrived here by ship - the "Sorrow Breaker" currently moored in the port district.

We went then to look for Nagouran, and found his house in the slave district. We were met by his wife who stated that he refuses to see Mordu any longer, and that he was now in hiding. She initially refused to let us know where he was, but we showed her the 'petra' symbol and she relented. She told us that Nagouran was a practitioner of 'petra' voodoo magics but has since repented and is now paying the price. He is with the 'societe' - a group of good mages. We thank her for her time and leave. That night Gaston gives a show in the inn.

Wednesday, 2nd March

The rain that assailed us last night has cleared, and I find that my condition has stabilised, though I it shows no signs of actually abating. Nevertheless I now believe that I will survive to meet with Chicken Bone and have him effect a cure.

We proceed to see the Houngan of the Societe. We are told by him that Nagouran is being 'ridden' by Dumbala - one of the greatest of the 'loa'. We show him the 'veve' (symbol) and tell him our story to date. Although I am loathe to trust one such as he, it seems we have little choice. He informs us that it is indeed of the 'petra' - and a symbol of evil omen.

We are taken to see Nagouran, who is sweating and shaking. Then he speaks to us as from beyond. We are told that dark times are coming, that we shall all be tested. We are told that he has been like this for two weeks. I ask for aid from the Houngan for my illness and am told I must return the next day.

Thursday, 3rd March

We return so that the Societe may perform the healing ceremony. We are led to an underground chamber which is obviously important to their religion. There are drums and other instruments, and the now familiar flour. They draw the symbol, calling upon the loa - including the dark Baron Samedi, lord of death but also healing. The music is similar to what we heard on our journey hither and also heard by Heinrich during our encounter with Marcel D'Tarascon. The Houngan begins to shake and tremble, and then his eyes roll back - he has obviously been 'mounted' by one of the loa. He eats and drinks and moves possessed for some two hours. It is clear how taxing such an experience is - to be close to the divine ... and the infernal. As the ceremony reaches its climax he states that the darkness within me is too strong and he collapses. It seems that again I must deal with the enigmatic Chicken Bone.

Later, Gaston and Ilyich leave to gather information. Gaston informs me that Ilyich is getting involved in some sort of political struggle, and is more than likely delving deeper into matters beyond his control. It appears that a mysterious lord named Anton wishes us to procure a rare viola.

Friday, 4th March

This is the day appointed for my meeting with Chicken Bone. I approach with hesitation despite the aching of my bones and knowledge that a foreign darkness eats at my soul. The price he demands may be more than I am willing to give. Nevertheless we proceed and arrive without incident.

He greets us and we begin the ceremony. We note that his 'veve' is even more evil-

aspected than that of the Houngan. After drawing the symbol he sacrifices a chicken and the blood spreads throughout the flour of the 'veve' until it is all red. Then he is 'mounted'. He starts to rave and it is clear he is gripped by the Baron Samedi. His actions are those of a madman for some six hours when he too collapses. He was in the grip of many loa, but the Baron was the last to speak and then a stream of black insects emerged from his mouth and flew at me. I flinched but as they approached they turned white and disappeared. The wounds remain but I feel as if I am healed.

The price is that that one in this land wants an item that he must not possess - the Instantavari Viola. I must find it and give it to Chicken Bone. It seems innocuous enough, but trust has become an ever scarcer commodity of late. We stay the night at the hut.

Saturday, 5th March

Chicken Bone had not recovered by morning, so we left after leaving him a note. We return to the town and begin seeking information. Our research had revealed that the viola was of Vistani make and one of only four or five made. They have been missing for a long time, but may be told by their beautiful sound and a significant mark.

When I arrived at the Societe to speak with the Houngan I began to hear the drums again. The 'Cochon Gris' - practitioners of the 'petra' voudun - have assailed us! The roof of the Societe begins to shake and collapse. I run outside and manage to catch one of them. I release him to the tender mercies of the Societe.

That night, Gaston reveals that a man named Eric has asked him for travel out of this place, and that he will provide musical entertainment in order that he may do so. So, we proceed to his house. I stay outside with Ilyich fearing the worst. We then hear a door slam and a window shatter. From what I was told later, Eric brought out a magnificent viola and began to play rapturous music. Arms had come out of strange patches of grey nothingness in the walls and were flailing about. They were garbed Vistani style and seemed full of hate and vengeance. However, they were subdued after the music reached

a fever pitch.

During this time, Isaiah had apparently been overcome by an ecstasy: "Defend with your prize, though you'll get no relief, 'til the House of the Dead, it is buried beneath". We examined the viola - and it was indeed the Instanctavari. We questioned Eric. He tells us that he is indeed of that family and that he has been cursed. His father, also Eric, murdered Guisanne, maker of the violas. His father was then cast out and has every night to endure the wrath of the Vistani, his only succour the music of the viola. The hands are those of the dead of his tribe.

Sunday, 6th March

This day we split up to pursue what leads we have. Isaiah goes with Eric to the "Sorrow Breaker". The captain is happy to let us travel with him.

Heinrich and I go to the Societe to see what the captive has to say. They have, of course, had to flee to a different place. The prisoner was being mounted by the loa. He was covered with scratches - he had obviously borne their anger for his contumely. He informed us of the location of the Couchan Gris stronghold just outside the swamp.

Ilyich and Gaston - the latter in a sailor disguise as opposed to his usual ostentatious finery - waited at the Black Carriage Inn. They were met by a shabbily dressed woman who passed them a note and then left.

We decide to go to Chicken Bone, since we now possess the viola and must pay the price he demanded.

Monday, 7th March

We enter the swamp with Eric but become lost once more. Eric plays the viola and soon the swamp begins to thin out and we arrive in an unfamiliar area with solid land. This seems to be some sort of island with trees. Beyond the trees there is a large plain and in

the middle a huge plantation surrounded by a massive fence of iron. A house stands in the middle and there are people in the fields. To the chagrin of my companions I take out Herald and raise a clarion call to mark our arrival. There is no sound or reaction from the workers to acknowledge our presence.

We move around the fence and arrive at the front gate. As we approach it opens of its own accord. There is a paved road leading to the house which has been raised above the presumably marshy soil. A woman points the way in. Despite the idyllic surroundings I feel a strong sense of foreboding and danger. There is darkness here and it lurks below the surface. This is almost certainly the "House of the Dead".

The workers outside are obviously under some affliction. They seem almost as thralls and automatons. We pass them into the house - which is ornately furnished and a table is set out for dinner. Heinrich and Ilyich sit as an immaculately dressed man descends the stairs. He introduces himself as Anton and welcomes us, stating that we shall dine soon.

In response to our queries he says that this is a place of sanctuary for those who have been afflicted by a poison which 'zombifies' them. He scoffs at the suggestion of voodoo but the unfortunate victims believe themselves undead and the condition is incurable. It is his task to give them a home. He confirms that this is the "House of the Dead". We eat dinner (I reluctantly) and are assigned our separate rooms with fresh clothing. However, we decide to bury the viola before nightfall.

As we venture outside, the workers in the fields stop their activity and look at us. This is the first recognition of us. Isaiah and Ilyich, Heinrich, Gaston and Eric proceed to go under the house when they start to hear knocking sounds. At this time I re-enter the house looking for Anton, whom I am sure is the source of the evil.

Suddenly the workers attack with their implements as the hands of the Vistani return for revenge on Eric! It is revealed that Eric himself is the murderer as we begin our desperate defence and quest to bury the viola and place the curse in abeyance. I rush upstairs to find

no sign of him until I reach a window and see him walking up the pathway to the house with a wrathful visage. He raises his arms and speaks a word of evil and the dead begin to rise from the ground! I rush down to meet him and present my faith and some retreat from whence they came, but the darkness is too great and the rest proceed forward. We are grateful when Gaston performs his familiar trick of placing fat on the ground which extends itself into an area of grease. It bars their clumsy progress. During the confrontation we see the dreadful Anton point at us and see the dreaded powder streak towards various of us. He is truly the Lord of the Dead.

We refuse to abandon the viola to the Lord, remembering the words of Chicken Bone and flee to the fence and beyond into the woods.

Alas! Our thoughtlessness catches up with us as we find the corpse of Eric, rent as by claws. We had forgotten his curse, and although he was a murderer I felt that he wished to repent his evil. Ilyich and I resolve to commit an act of defiance. We return to the gate and sprint into the plantation intending to set fire to his abode. Yet as soon as we set foot inside our folly is apparent. The gate behind us slams shut and the workers turn to face us with the expressionless hate. Anton emerges at the doorstep and points at both of us in succession. Ilyich collapses, though I resist the plague. In desperation I tie him to a rope and have the others haul him over the fence, and then climb over myself. It is a bitter lesson we are forced to learn - but some evils are too great to combat, for now.

We carry the unconscious Ilyich after I place some "belladonna" (which I know as wolfsbane and carry it for that reason) into his mouth as a cure. It seems to arrest his decline. We find Chicken Bone and give him the viola. He assures us that Ilyich will recover.

Tuesday, 8th March

We leave the swamp. Ilyich seems to be improving. We warn the gendarmerie and the priests about the Cochon Gris. We do not feel able to effect the attack on that place

ourselves.

Wednesday, 9th March

This day the forces attacked the Couchan Gris. They were apparently in the middle of a dark ritual summoning dark entities. In a pitched battle, some of them were arrested or killed, but the main enemy - a scarred villain - escaped. The place was searched and a letter was found - the same handwriting as the prophecy of the Vistani that Isaiah has. It seemed to direct the Cochon Gris to provide Hyskosa's prophecy to Marcel Tarascon. This would explain how the prophecy got into Marcel's hands, but who wanted him to have it?

Thursday, 10th March

This day we leave for Mordent on the Sorrow's Breaker. The sea is calm, but on the first night at sea we note a 'veve' on the side of the ship and ask ourselves how we could be so stupid ...

Viola - DM's Comments

Viola is actually a rehash of an adventure I ran in my previous (abortive) Ravenloft campaign. Originally inspired by the short story *The Music of Eric Zahn*, by H.P. Lovecraft, this really turned out to be all about voodoo (or Ravenloft's version of it). The basic story here is the fight over the ownership of a cursed Instanctivari viola. Unique among the rare violas, this one has the power to control the dead, which explains the amount of interest in acquiring the item.

Firstly we have Eric, the lone Vistani currently in possession of the item. Eric was cursed by his brother, Guisanne, when out of jealousy for Guisanne's exquisite musical creations, he bludgeoned him to death just outside the light of their campfire. Guisanne uttered the curse as he lay on the ground, watching Eric hold his viola above him:

*Defend with your prize,
Thought you'll get no relief,
'til the House of the Dead,
It is buried beneath.*

Eric needs the viola to fight off the dead of his tribe that come to attack him every night of his life. Rotting arms of corpses will reach from the ground, or even break through walls if he is inside, grasping for revenge.

Secondly, Chicken Bone asks Caine for the viola as payment for being healed from the Contagion he contracted in *Night of the Walking Dead*. Why does Chicken Bone want it? I've got no idea, but it does make things difficult for Caine...

Thirdly, Anton Misroi has heard of the viola's presence in the domain, and is eager to own any death-related item of power. (Besides, no-one except for him should have power over the dead anyway!) Early in the adventure, Ilyich received a letter from Anton asking him to look for the viola - being a sneaky bugger, Ilyich didn't tell any of the other PCs this until well into the adventure.

On top of all this, the Cochon Gris of Port d'Elhour have decided they don't want the PCs to know about their involvement with delivering the prophecy to Marcel Tarascon, so are making a nuisance of themselves.

The main choice for the PCs in this adventure was what to do with the viola. Obviously, they don't want Anton to get it (at least, not after he started attacking them), but the difficulty comes with Eric. Do they save him from his curse by burying the instrument beneath Anton's house? This means Caine can't make his payment to Chicken Bone, and may suffer nasty consequences. Alternatively, do they let a repentant man die by taking away the one item that saves him from death, just in order to pay Chicken Bone's price? Unfortunately, this issue got lost a bit in the combat that ensued at Anton's estate. After burying the viola (and probably thinking they'd saved Eric), they then dug it straight back up again to take to Chicken Bone, which of course meant that Eric was taken down by a bunch of hungry Vistani corpses some distance away.....

This adventure also proved a useful lesson to the players in this campaign. DMs will know that Anton is too powerful for characters of this level (about 2nd), and the events at his estate were designed to be well beyond their combat abilities. When two PCs returned

to the estate, I was *this* close to letting one of them die to demonstrate that some enemies were beyond the party's power. Instead, I just gave Anton an easy win, and gave one of them a near death experience :)

Other small funky tidbits from this adventure:

- It is in this adventure that Caine first notices the T-shaped scar on the back of Heinrich's neck. This is a lead-in to Heinrich's backstory and future adventures, and doesn't really get answered until the *Castles Forlorn* adventure a long way down the track....
- I did quite a bit of reading about Voodoo before running this adventure. The ceremonies, the "mounting" of the priests by spirits, the *vévés*, and the various names I used are all taken from real-world voodoo beliefs. While I make no claim to have used them accurately, they add a lot of flavour when you're able to name-drop a loa or two into various conversations!
- The use of *vévés* on things like the carriage was effectively stolen from an X-Files episode titled (I think) *Fresh Bones*. It has quite a lot of ideas for voodoo-based adventures.
- The cloud of black insects that streamed from Chicken Bone's mouth was stolen from Stephen King's *The Green Mile*.
- Whenever the Cochon Gris magic began to take effect, the PCs heard the distant beating of drums, seemingly from the swamp. If you've got some appropriately tribal music anywhere, use this in your game to indicate the use of *petra* magic. I used a snippet from Mike Oldfield's *Amarok*, beginning at about 45:00.
- There was intended to be another battle at the end of this adventure with the Cochon Gris, where the PCs would discover the letter from ??????? which told them to give the Hexad to Marcel Tarason. It was to involve the PCs arriving in the middle of one of their ceremonies, where they were sacrificing a cow, it's blood colouring a dark *petra vévé* on the floor. The Cochon Gris was being led by the scarred Allondrin (of *Dance of the Dead*).
- I had one of those wonderfully enjoyable DM moments when the players realised, having set sail from Port d'Elhour, that a *vévé* had been painted onto the side of their boat! It seems the Cochon Gris would still get their revenge in *Monette*.....

I should point out that this version of Souragne differs a bit from the official one. This is mainly because this was run before *Domains of Dread* came out, so I was largely improvising with regards to Anton's abilities and situation (drawing on *Dance of the Dead*).

Monette

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

We try to convince the captain to assist us in removing the veve, and after Heinrich offers to pay him, he agrees. Unfortunately our efforts are for naught and we fail. A subsequent search of the ship and the lifeboat reveals nothing.

In the distance we see lightning flash on the horizon and know that a storm approaches. We are about to pay for our folly.

Friday, 11th March

By noon we see a large bank of clouds to starboard. The captain thinks we may ride this one out though it looks 'bad'. I think we know better - it will come for us and any efforts otherwise will be unavailing.

By dusk we can hear the thunder and it begins to rain. The ship groans in agony as the wind becomes a howling gale, causing massive waves to batter the ship and water to slosh over the deck. The storm increases in intensity and the ship is struck by lightning! The mast is cracked and falls. Ilyich is saved only by some acrobatic manoeuvring. There is chaos aboard the ship - Heinrich rushes after Ilyich to the lifeboat whilst I observe ball lightning approach us. The ship is doomed and I too realise we must flee.

Suddenly out of the night I see a ship coming straight for us! It misses narrowly and passes on. I did manage to see that it was named the "Relentless", however. Then another sight even more amazing - a flash of light crosses the ship! My heart leaps as I feel that the Lighthouse that has haunted my dreams is nearby. Then there is a massive wave and a crew member is washed overboard.

The time that followed was one of battle against the elements as we tried to abandon ship. An unlucky few were washed overboard and periodically light from the Lighthouse would cross the ship - though we could not locate its source. I took Herald and blew it to gather the crew in one place as suddenly we hear the ship being battered by rocks.

By this time Ilyich had entered the lifeboat but turned on us and refused Heinrich and others passage, demanding payment lest he cut the lifeboat free of the ship. Desperately others jumped off the ship - some with barrels - to seek what shelter there was in the cruel sea and jagged rocks. I left before the captain and begun to swim to what I thought was shore. I swim for a long time in my awkward style and was forced to let go of the majority of my possessions, though I kept Anathema, Veritas and Herald. Then I recall no more.

Saturday, 12th March

I wake on rocks in the morning. I think I am on an island of some sort. The storm has gone. Looking out to sea, I saw no people, but what was obviously the Sorrow's Breaker battered on the reef. Further along, there is another ship - presumably the Relentless. Hoping that my companions have also managed to reach the shore, I blow Herald. After a short time they respond and we meet. Gaston is unconscious and they are all in great pain. Only four of the twenty crew are with them and we have no food and little of our possessions.

Ilyich swims to what we think is the Relentless to find no food and that it is (or was) in fact "Sunset Empires". During that time I walked up to the highest local vantage point to view our surroundings. We are on a large wooded island. I spot a nearby stream and other shipwrecks on the reef, but no signs of habitation. The highest point on the island is two days walk away.

We decide to set up camp, but in the afternoon we hear a man's desperate scream. We charge up the shoreline. We see a man lying on the rocks - injured but alive. A few minutes later we come upon the sailor Jake - who is dead by drowning. Shortly after we

make the gruesome discovery of the corpse of Curtis - face down on the rocks. There are claw marks all over his face and chest and it seems a huge beast has taken him. There are many footprints around of a man. We fear they may be those of a man-wolf, though they could plausibly be those of Curtis himself. The creature that attacked Curtis had obviously fed on him. The moon phase was that of the waning crescent.

That night as we decided to deal with the dead, there arose a confrontation between Heinrich and Isaiah. A madness seemed to infect all of us. Heinrich wished to perform and autopsy and Isaiah was implacably opposed. I decided to intervene - we needed to know and I could not stomach Isaiah's religious tyranny. We came to blows, even as Gaston entered the fray with his trick of grease. As I was being dragged off by some burly sailors, Ilyich ended the struggle by felling Isaiah with a well placed blow to the head. Later we agree to have the bodies buried. Isaiah, stealthily followed by Ilyich, climbs a hill and buries them. During the night, however, I accompany Heinrich there to have the autopsies completed.

Sunday, 13th March

We spent this day hunting and foraging. At night - which was otherwise uneventful - I saw a light sweep the sea. The source is obviously on this island. Is it possible this is the true Lighthouse? If so, what wondrous revelations lie there? And what of the fearsome flying beast that guards it?

Monday, 14th March

We climb the hill and travel towards the high spot I viewed earlier. On the way, one of us trips over a decaying body. It is over a week dead and dressed like a privateer. It has been crushed and beaten.

Later that day we see a small clearing in the trees, and in it a small lean-to. It is the first sign of inhabitation and we approach eagerly if warily - for who knows what sort of person would live in such evil surroundings?

As we approached we see a man emerge from the structure - he is dressed shabbily and has a large, unkempt beard. He was shipwrecked here some three months ago. All his crew-mates have since died - taken by "the Beast". He states that he is "Alfred Knox" from Mordent, but has never heard of my family - an almost certain sign of mendacity. He has been staying in this clearing because it is blessed and safe from the beast. The clearing seems distinguished by the strange little flowers that grow only here.

The journal Alfred found:

25th November, 1872

I fear we have made a dreadful mistake. Last night in the fog we saw a beacon. Fearing another ship in distress, I ordered the helm to come about and make best speed to rendezvous.

Now, we draw nearer to an island that is not on our charts. The navigator curses his inability to fix our position. I curse too, but it is myself that I blame for all our failings.

26th November, 1872

What more can go wrong? The ship has run aground on a shoal and torn open the hull. Our best man says that he may be able to fix it in a week or ten days.

1st December, 1872

Last night marked the sixth attack of the beast. Half of our crew is dead and I suspect that most of the others are on the brink of madness. I now wish I had been more diligent in my studies of matters spiritual. Then I might have known what to do when the devil arrives in your midst.

13th December, 1872

Only myself and the second mate are left alive. We have agreed that we will not let the evil that rules this place taste of our blood. I can only pray that God will forgive us for what we are about to do, but we dare not fall victim to this unholiness.

At least the end will be quick.

Captain Briggs,

Mary Celeste

Alfred shows us a journal he found on one of the shipwrecks. Its contents are strange - the dates are unrecognisable, but somewhat familiar to Isaiah - perhaps it came from the same world!

Tuesday, 15th March

We spent this day hunting and foraging once more. Heinrich manages to fix his scientific device which he calls a "battery". Later that day we note that one of the crew - Slim - has not returned. We send out a search party. Half an hour later we find his body on the beach - throat raked and chunks taken out as if bitten. We note there is reddish fur around. There are no tracks. I fear that the beast is the very same flying creature of my dreams. We returned to the clearing for the night.

Wednesday, 16th March

We leave the next day. One of the wrecks on the shore is relatively intact and the crew go down there in order to get it fixed. We could then leave this accursed place. I however, burn to find the Lighthouse and we proceed to the vantage point.

When we reach it I see the lighthouse below us. It has a putrid grey colour and there is a small house at its base. Surely this cannot be the shining structure of hope and beauty of my dreams? Crestfallen, we must still approach it.

We camp that night and under the dim light of the moon Ilyich and Gaston see a black shape cross the night sky. Ilyich wakes the rest of us and we see the shape head towards

the shipwreck the sailors were working on. Surely they were not so foolish as to work at night? I blow Herald as a warning but we see no more.

Thursday, 17th March

The next morning we look, but see no one at the boat site. We proceed towards the Lighthouse. After a few hours walking we see a cave in the hillside and in front of it a skeleton with crushed bones. It is very old. I peer into the cave-mouth and am almost overcome by a feeling of danger and darkness emanating from within. Avoiding this place, we continued onwards.

We arrive to find the lighthouse old and somewhat uncared for and covered in moss. There are no docks. After a little while we are greeted by a man. He is middle aged and dressed in a fine captain's suit. He is the lighthouse keeper and names himself Monette from Dementlieu. He knows nothing of "The Beast" but he's been having problems with the lighthouse. He tells us that his boat is on the other end of the island. Heinrich offers to assist with the lighthouse mechanics if he will give us travel to the mainland.

I climb up to the balcony of the lighthouse and note from where the lighthouse was we should never have seen its light. I could not solve this dilemma, save that I felt that all was not what it seemed about Monette and the Lighthouse. That night I stayed in the Lighthouse with Ilyich, whilst the others rested in the house.

About midnight we see Heinrich with us, and he points to Monette leaving below. Gaston and Isaiah were following him, trying to remain hidden. I fear that we have located the Beast and that Gaston and Isaiah were ill-equipped to face it unaided. We rushed down the stairs. We had lost sight of our companions but then heard the shrill sound of Gaston's whistle and then the sound that I had heard twice before - the flapping of the wings of darkness from behind. I turned and we saw a fearsome horror that seemed to have flown from the very Gates of Hell - it had features of both man and bat and a maw full of sharp teeth. Its glittering eyes gleamed red with malice and as my heart skipped a beat, Ilyich and Heinrich fled into the darkness, leaving me alone. Raising Anathema and with a cry

to the wind, I landed a great blow to its guts and heard it give a keening wail of pain and surprise in response.

However, it was far from defeated and responded in kind, as it landed its claws and teeth upon me. It was an epic battle as we traded blows and Isaiah and Gaston, and later Ilyich and Heinrich rushed to my assistance. I with my sword and Sol Invictus and they with cane and gun, glittering dust and flying glove, knife in the dark and bolt of science. It fled to the lighthouse, sorely wounded. We rushed after it - Ilyich climbing the walls. There it made its last stand - as it grabbed the vulnerable Ilyich, but suddenly it was paralysed by one of Heinrich's scientific tricks and I drove Anathema through its heart, and it lay still. As the corpse cooled it shimmered in the night air and became Monette, as we feared.

Then the lighthouse began to tremble under our feet. We rushed to the side and then down to see the dirty grey began to slough off its sides and become the familiar white. We rushed into the house - undergoing a similar transformation - to have the door slam shut behind us. The floor begins to writhe and buckle as a mass of gleaming white stone emerges. It is clearly an altar of some sort - shaped as a cross - the symbol of Isaiah's religion. Around its base there appears the beautiful blue and red Amarantha flowers, sacred to my Goddess. Both Isaiah and I kneel in reverence as we begin to hear the hum of voices. They were close and distant, one and many. We recognised many of them - The Lord Byron Shadowborn my father, Anita DeForet, Angus McGregor, Joshua son of Isaiah, the Comte de Farrier and others. And their words reverberated through our minds,

"Beware, for the path you are on is a dark one. You have looked beneath the veil, and once the veil is penetrated, the hole will never be found again. Returning to the life you knew is now impossible.

But to face what you will, strength is needed. The strength to know what is risk, and what is folly. The strength to wait for a better day. The wisdom to recognise a plan foiled, and regard that as a triumph. This care is needed, for these lives are important ..."

There followed a strange collage of images. We saw Heinrich unconscious at the feet of Navrolina, Ilyich bleeding after being shot by Anita, Isaiah and I near death at the hands of the gremishkas in the "Funhouse", Heinrich and Isaiah laid low by the minions of Marcel D'Tarascon, and Ilyich being dragged limply over the high metal fence surrounding the House of the Dead. It was every time one of us had nearly come to grief since we had become a group of fellow travellers.

"For the darkness is powerful in this land. You will never succeed in defeating it. But success against the darkness does not mean its destruction. A thorn in the foot will slow the greatest of beasts, but those who fall before it will be quickly forgotten. Plans are afoot amongst those imprisoned here, and this must be stopped. Be the thorn ...

Your choices will be many, for the roads to evil are broad and enticing. These choices will be your friend and also your enemy."

My father appears before me, "Would you again let one of darkness aid you in your hour of need?" And once again we are fighting Navrolina in the basement of 14 Rue du Est Bord. Louis Corneille enters and this time I reject his aid in anguished remorse ...

Heinrich's father appears before him, "Would you again destroy what remained of your family for your own desperate curiosity?" And we see Heinrich standing over his mother's withered corpse. Raising his scalpel, he reaches forward and makes his first incision. His father enters the room, eyes wide and yells "What have you done ?" ...

We see Serge speak to Isaiah, "Would you again lead innocents to their deaths, with only your faith as a guide?" And once more we march with the peasantry of Dementlieu onto the Lord-Governor's Palace. And lead them he did ...

Anton spoke to all but myself, "Would you again let a repentant man die?" Given the chance, Gaston and Ilyich rebury the viola, letting Eric live ...

A woman we do not recognise stands before Ilyich, "Would you give in to your desires, no matter the result?" Holding the Instanctavari Viola, he accepted Anton's offer of a reward, handing the Viola over to the Lord of the Dead ...

After a moment's respite, our senses were once more assaulted by images. In the Richemulot basement, we see Louis looking with quiet contempt at the bodies scattered about him. I see myself - a withered corpse - lying by the wall, a look of horror writ on my pale face. Isaiah staring blindly with his eyeless sockets into his afterlife, and Heinrich and Ilyich strewn near the staked body of Navrolina. We are overcome by despair and of lost destiny, the hope smothered by folly, of this world ... and of others ...

We are again battling Monette, but now we have another soldier in the battle against darkness. Eric fights by our side, wielding his dagger with expert ease by Ilyich and lands the killing blow. Yet to the side I see myself, a hunched figure in my black cloak, holding the shining Anathema with stricken hands ...

Ilyich stands in a field, with other like him. Digging. Struggling, he lifts his head. He had a name once. For a moment his feeble mind brightens at the memory ... Dig ...

"Be aware of your fears, for they are the greatest enemy.

Your knowledge is your strength, Heinrich. But what if it were lost ..." Heinrich sees himself wake and for a brief moment, as he looked around the room, he had no idea of who he was ...

"Those who have lost everything, often wish for its return. But be careful what you wish for, Isaiah ..." Isaiah sees a small boy, with blonde hair, "She is closer than you think, father. She must be saved ..."

"Some fear those who have control." We see Gaston, but the eyes are not his own. Another seems to look through them ...

"Others fear the loss of control." I wake and try to move - but cannot. Forcing my bleary eyes open, I look down to see my arms folded and bound by a white jacket ...

"Most potent is the fear of one's greatest desire ..." Ilyich is holding out his hand, in which there lies a number of gold coins. As he looks at them, a thin trail of blood seeps out from underneath. As we watch, the coins appear to bleed over his hand and begin to drip between his fingers. So dark it is almost black, the blood falls to the ground, where it lands upon a black feather that lies there ...

"For you will have to face your fears, in your efforts to save those in danger."

Gaston looks over the burning city of Port-a-Lucine, as if searching for someone ... I see a short, balding middle-aged man - Dr Van Richten ... He lies asleep in bed, but it is not one of peace. He tosses and turns and his mouth is occasionally gaped wide in unvoiced screams ... Heinrich sees a man, broken and weak, lying on a cold stone floor. It is Gerhard ... Isaiah sees a Vistani man, again on a cold stone floor, but this time chained in place. As Isaiah calls out, he lifts his head, as if hearing a distant voice. It is the Hyskeosa, and a dark, cloaked figure passes in front of the man, hiding him from view ... Ilyich sees ... himself ...

"Do not throw your lives in the path of evil, in an attempt to destroy it. Martyrdom will not prevent the plans of those in power. Remember to look for allies in all those you meet. Remember that aid, from even the grimmest of sources, can be used to your advantage. Remember that your desires can lead to your destruction. Remember all this, for we may not speak again. Remember, for the time of the Grand Conjunction comes."

And with that it was gone. We remembered no more to find ourselves to find ourselves in a new place, the thin tendrils of mist circling about us ...

Monette - DM's Comments

If this series of adventures was being written by JMS (the creator of *Babylon 5*), he'd call this one a **wham** episode. That is, this apparently fairly ordinary and unexciting adventure finishes up with a scene that has a massive impact on the rest of the campaign. If you've just read the Journal of this session, you might be thinking that I was out of my tree to be having something as weird as the final series of visions happen in a Ravenloft campaign, given everything I've said in the past about how low-magic Ravenloft should be. It's main purpose, however, was to serve as a turning point in the campaign. This need came from a number of things:

- While the campaign did have ongoing threads already (such as Heinrich's search for Gerhard), there was no real sense of an overall goal for the campaign. I wanted to instill a sense that "bigger things" were going on.
- After six adventures, I had a decent handle on the various characters by now, and had lots of ideas about what the future of the campaign would hold for them. In the best traditions of prophecy and unavoidable fate, I wanted to give them some idea of what was ahead for their PCs.
- Ilyich's player, David, had informed me that he was interested in changing characters. As it happened, the chance to "write out" Ilyich was coming up in the next adventure, so that suited me perfectly. To create a sense of foreboding, Ilyich received the grimmest visions at the Lighthouse.
- To remind the players (as much as the characters) that "winning" doesn't mean destroying the evil.

At this point, many of the visions really didn't mean anything to the PCs - for example, Heinrich had no idea why he might not know who he is (though it *is* related to the T-shaped scar on the back of his neck), and Caine had no reason to think he might end up in a straitjacket. A number of these visions don't come to pass until close to the end of the campaign. Essentially, though, each PC was shown some sort of trial or personal trauma they will face, and someone that is depending on them for rescue. The exception is Ilyich, who needs to save himself more than anyone....

This adventure also enabled me to weave Caine's religion, the holy symbol of which is a Lighthouse, into the campaign. From the moment Nick (Caine's player) started to try and sell me the Lighthouse concept, I thought of Monette from *Darklords* and decided that it would fit perfectly. Caine's dream of the lighthouse back in *Revolution Part 2* was a hint at this moment, when Caine would "come home" to the lighthouse.

My rationale for the "visions" is a bit ordinary, but it served my purposes. Basically, I assumed that upon the destruction of Monette, the collapsing of his domain momentarily thinned the borders between Ravenloft and Caine's deity (whoever that might be), allowing this vision to be sent. Isaiah's God can also be assumed to be a joint deliverer of this message (hence the cross-shaped altar).

If you think that I've underused Monette as a domain lord, and that I let him go "cheaply", you're probably right - Lords shouldn't be that easy to defeat. Monette is very much a one-shot Lord, though, and keeping him around wouldn't have helped the campaign in any way. Also, after the relatively sobering *Viola* adventure, a healthy win was needed, I think.

Other things to note about this adventure include:

- The token appearance of the *Relentless*, Pieter van Riese's ghostly ship of the Sea of Sorrows.
- The journal from the Marie Celeste. The text is taken almost straight from the journal entry in *Darklords*, but I thought L'île de la Tempete and this classic mystery disappearance meshed very well. We know the mists can create replicas of the places it takes, explaining why the real Marie Celeste remained on Gothic Earth without any crew.
- Alfred Knox was living in a patch of skullcap, which is poisonous to werewolves. The players didn't cotton on to what was keeping him safe, however.
- Ilyich demanding money during the shipwreck scene is a result of him owning the Ba'al Verzi Dagger - the greed and mercenary nature of the Ba'al Verzi is slowly insinuating itself into Ilyich's personality. This comes to a head in the next adventure.
- Although it's not detailed in Caine's diary, I quite liked the scene where Isaiah and Gaston first see Monette transforming. They followed him out of the lighthouse

and onto the beach, where Monette began to stumble and started to transform. However, the sweeping beam of the lighthouse meant they only saw images of Monette every 5 seconds or so, providing a series of still-frame visions of his transformation. Hard to describe in words, but if I could film it, I'm sure it'd look cool :)

On a different tack, it was in this adventure that the players truly began to realise the extent of the DM's inability to reconcile distance and time in any remotely realistic fashion. To other spacially-challenged DMs, I say, "Don't give up - the distance a wererat flies in an hour has no impact on its ability to inflict lycanthropy on the PCs."

The next adventure is *The Return of the Ba'al Verzi*, which marks the demise of one of the PCs and the return of a powerful secret society to the Core.

Return of the Ba'al Verzi

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

Friday, 18th March

... It was sunset, and we found ourselves standing in a river in a strange place. As Ilyich surveyed his surroundings, he suddenly started convulsing and collapsed thrashing in the waters, to fall still, unconscious. Isaiah moved quickly to drag the prostrate Ilyich out of the river, laying him on the bank.

We saw a small village nearby, and the cliff just beyond it was dominated by an ominous fortress some thousand feet up on a mountain top. The ground is wreathed in mist, which made it seem as though the castle floats upon the air. The village is small and mean - it possesses a quality of destitution unlike anything we have witnessed before - even the squalor of Richemulot. Nevertheless with night coming we proceeded with our fallen colleague and entered the local resting house - the "Blood o' the Vine Inn".

We were met by the innkeeper, a Bray Martikova who informs us we are in the realm of Barovia ruled by "the devil Strahd von Zarovich" who dwells in the Castle Ravenloft we saw previously. He is a cruel, iron fisted tyrant, but rather remote. Entering his castle uninvited is said to be punishable by death. After eating we proceeded upstairs.

Ilyich has been tossing and turning in his slumber. He was mumbling feverishly when he woke suddenly and spoke. He told us that the dagger has been speaking to him once more, but that the voices are louder and more insistent than before. I took the dagger - which Ilyich passes only very reluctantly - and was instantly assailed by these self-same voices. There is one female, pleading voice which wishes I return the dagger to Ilyich, but she is gradually overwhelmed by a evil cacophony, a howling chorus singing a paean to their gods of Darkness. Shuddering, I gave Ilyich his dagger.

Ilyich related to us the story of the dagger. He once dreamt of a woman standing beneath a large tree. Ilyich claimed that she looked familiar, but was unable to identify her. In the dream, he approached the woman, who held out her hand to him. Opening her fist, she revealed three gold coins resting on her palm, which she held out to him. Moving forward to take the coins, Ilyich paused when blood began to ooze from beneath the coins, filling her palm with red. The liquid began to spill between her fingers, turning black as it fell towards the ground, where it splattered across a single black feather that lay on the bare earth. The woman was crying, her face showing pain, when he had awoken from the dream, shaken. Recognising the tree he had seen in the dream, he headed to that spot and searched the ground where the feather had been, where he found a clue that had led him to Richemulot - where he had found this accursed weapon in the hands of Navrolina.

Since then, he had heard occasional voices from the dagger. One was the female I had heard briefly when I held the dagger, who claims to be Ilyich's mothers. The others were unidentifiable, but once we entered this realm they became louder and louder until Ilyich could take it no more, and fell unconscious. Disturbed, we returned to our quarters, unsure of what to do about Ilyich's odd circumstance...

Saturday, 19th March

Things have turned for the worse. This morning, we were awoken by a terrible scream from Gaston's room. We ran in to find Gaston lying in a pool of blood, Ilyich standing over him with a blood stained dagger, shocked and dismayed. Heinrich rushed to Gaston's aid and attended to his wounds. I restrained Ilyich, but he did not resist, seemingly shocked by his own actions. I invoked a ward against darkness and attempted to take the dagger but I am unable to do so - the voices seem to bore into the centre of my head! Our fears are confirmed - the dagger is obviously an object of evil, a tool of the land. The inn-keep and his wife rushed in and became hysterical. We attempted to calm them down and allay their fears. After tying Ilyich up we returned to our troubled sleep.

On waking we met Svetlana - a maid at the inn. We breakfasted with her and she

informed us that she remembers having read a history book that mentions such daggers. She thought the church may have a copy. We proceeded to the church in her company without delay.

The local priest is named Klaus Liebnik. He greeted us, and Ilyich asked him about the dagger. Klaus rummaged through the church's old tomes, and soon enough found a book that he thought may be helpful. It told of the conquering von Zarovich family which brought the warring lands of Barovia together under their rule. An army led by Strahd conquered Barovia in 347. Is this the same Strahd? It seems to be so - yet that means he must have lived over four hundred years! I fear that his name is richly deserved, but also that he is a man of fearsome power to hold death at bay for so long. He has ruled from Castle Ravenloft ever since.

The book continued to relate the story of enemies who pursued the von Zarovich family - the Ba'al Verzi assassins, a band of black-hearted villains who would kill anybody for a price and who were said to have legendary powers of stealth. Their colours were gold - to signify the price of their deed; red - the blood of their victims; and black - for the darkness of their acts. It is rumoured that no Ba'al Verzi has ever been caught. They disappeared shortly after their arrival - and obviously failed as far as Strahd was concerned.

Ilyich told Klaus of the voices, and that the female voice is his mother. Delving into his archives we found that his parents were Lisbeth and Vasili Geistlinger. Klaus told of Lisbeth's murder and Vasili's subsequent disappearance many years ago, when Ilyich would have been but a toddler. We went to the crypt to find her grave - and it is with those of the von Zarovich family! Lisbeth was of the same clan as the devil Strahd! We left Ilyich alone for a time in the crypt to be with his lost mother. When he returned to us he told us that his mother spoke to him and that she is not ready to come here yet.

Later, we visited Hans von Zarovich, Lisbeth's brother. He told us what he knew of Lisbeth and Vasili, which was disappointingly little. Vasili did not attend the funeral of

Lisbeth, and was later determined to have fled Barovia (apparently to pawn the dagger in Richemulot). Hans is shocked and frightened to hear Lisbeth's voice in the dagger once Ilyich lets him touch it.

That night we dined at the inn with Svetlana and Hans. Svetlana mentioned to us that she knows a Daniela from the village of Vallaki nearby that may be able to help - she is apparently some sort of "mystic". We are received a strange invitation to visit the Burgomeister Kolyan Indrirovich who invited us to lunch with him the next day. Svetlana claims that Strahd often communicates via Kolyan and the Vistani - a camp of which is situated nearby.

Sunday, 20th March

Having accepted the invitation, our suspicions were confirmed - Kolyan bore a message for Ilyich from the Count Strahd von Zarovich. This is supposedly the first message Kolyan has received for a year. Whatever the truth, it is clear that Kolyan fears us, but fears Strahd far more. Strahd has asked that Ilyich be invited to stay with Kolyan.

Ilyich said that he will think on it. We proceeded to the church hereupon Klaus detailed Ilyich's family tree to him, including details of another of Lisbeth's brothers in Vallaki. We then went on to the Vistani camp. I went only with reluctance - there is something about them, a reticence and a hubris that disturbs me greatly. They, however, offered us no help.

We later met a merchant who offered us transport to Vallaki - I think we shall take up his offer tomorrow.

Monday, 21st March

We arrived in Vallaki, which turns out to be a small fishing villagewest of the Village of Barovia, and compared to Barovia positively prosperous. Svetlana led us to Daniella's house - they seem to think they could help us.

After introductions, we entered Daniella's home and sat about a large table with the dagger in the middle. I was concerned with developments - not that I didn't trust Daniella - but that when dealing with forces such as these, one must be prepared for them to strike back, so I watched her closely. Daniella "channeled" (as she described it) Lisbeth. Speaking from Daniella's mouth, she told us that Vasili murdered her and that he is one of "them" - the Ba'al Verzi - and that they intend to return. She was murdered because she found out about "The Madrigorian" - a tome written by madmen throughout the ages holding secrets and truths of great value. We were told the "truth lives with the family" - obviously a reference to the von Zarovichs.

Daniella then changed subtly, assuming a darker mien and attempted to grab the dagger. Instantly I reacted and grabbed her arm before she could perform some evil. It was obvious she is in the grip of the darker forces within the dagger. She was quickly disarmed, however, and the dagger returned to Ilyich.

Tuesday, 22nd March

We tracked down Lisbeth's other brother, Miroslav, who after some prodding did recall something Lisbeth had given him before her death. Apparently she had said that she would arrange another to pick it up, but it would seem her death occurred before she could pass on the knowledge. It was a package containing a book, entitled "The Madrigorian" - and inside was a single black feather. We cannot read the contents, but Svetlana told us that Bray can. We returned to Barovia.

Wednesday, 23rd March

The pages of the Madrigorian that Bray translated:

What agreements, if not with the Great Ones, will stand longest? The Daemon is said to have faith in the wanderer Eva, but for whose convenience does this arrangement exist? And, if pressured, which would have the strength to break it? Mere mortals cannot understand these binds between creator and watcher.

The Great Ones have revealed Creation to me, and in creation is death.

The land born of the act of a Beal Werzi, will be rent by their return. The land created at the end of war, will return to battle. The land born of love will die of hatred. The betrayer, the Daemon, will be betrayed.

When the Beal Werzi return, so surely shall the Great Ones, and war, pestilence and death shall rise.

Having returned, we gave the book to Bray who indeed was able to read it. What we read disturbed us - for it spoke of the land being rent, and made ominous references to both Strahd and the Ba'al Verzi - both great evils. Bray also chose this time to reveal to us the meaning of the black feather in the book (and presumably from Ilyich's dream). He explained to us that over the years a secret society represented by the black feather had grown up in opposition to Strahd and that both Svetlana and Daniella were members. They fear to let Ilyich know because of his familial connections, though - as we were soon to discover, this would not be a concern of ours for long.

Ilyich said that the voice of his mother had changed much since we had found The Madrigorian. She no longer seemed to have the purpose that she did, instead becoming fearful of the other voices of the dagger, wanting to escape. It now seems clear why she did not want to return to the crypt when Ilyich first attempted to - her task had not yet been completed. But now, with the Madrigorian in the hands of the Keepers of the Black Feather, it seems she is ready to be laid to rest.

The time had come to go the crypt and we did so. We entered at night and Isaiah started to draw Lisbeth's spirit from the dagger, exorcising her spirit from the vessel that held it, as we stood over her body's resting place. Isaiah stood alone over her crypt with the dagger and performed a ceremony to invoke her spirit and lay it to rest. We could see her form, translucent, yet recognizable as one of Ilyich's line appearing above the dagger. She seemed calm, and had begun to move towards Isaiah, her hands open in a gesture of thanks, when Isaiah shuddered, his legs giving way from under him. However, exultation turned to dismay as her spirit become confused at Isaiah's reaction. A blackness had started to spew forth from the dagger, apparently also freed by Isaiah's ceremony - the

evil had been let loose also. In response I raised Sol Invictus and attempted to turn her spirit - she recoiled in fear and shock, and moved away from the frozen form of Isaiah. I had failed to notice, however, that Ilyich had picked up the dreaded dagger from her coffin, and now stood behind her. As he raised his dagger above his head, the black mist that had been seeping around the floor of the crypt began to rise and take shape beside him, also raising a shadowy arm above a figure that looked remarkably like Ilyich, but older and angrier. Could this have been the spirit of Vasili, also trapped within the dagger?

As one, the two blades, one shining and one shadowy, plunged into the breast of Lisbeth. As the dagger struck, she let forth a piercing wail and was gone, whilst Ilyich and the shadowy mist merged to become one. Ilyich fled the crypt, the rest of us dumbstruck by what we had just witnessed. He has obviously succumbed to the evil, but there must be some part of his soul that resists, for his distress was writ large on his features as he ran from the crypt. After a moment, we gave chase, but were horrified to be blocked by creatures of living death - shambling dead and skeletons. Desperate to follow Ilyich, we defeated these, but Ilyich was lost. We were only able to watch as he boarded an carriage of deepest black, led to horses equally as ebon, which left the graveyard and headed up the Old Svalich Road. While we could not see exactly where it went, we did not have to think hard to know where it headed.

It would seem that the Ba'al Verzi have returned to Barovia.

Return of the Ba'al Verzi - DM's Comments

From my point of view, this adventure was both one of the high and low points of the whole campaign. On the up side, it's probably my favourite original idea in the whole campaign (since I love the concept of the Ba'al Verzi, and I think the story around Ilyich's family is great), but on the downside this is the worst bit of DM railroading I've ever done.

Firstly, the real story around Lisbeth and Vasili. Lisbeth was, as mentioned in Caine's journal, a member of the Keepers of the Black Feather. In her work against Strahd, she came across a volume of the Madrigorian, which she hoped might provide some useful information against Strahd. Unfortunately, Strahd had begun to become suspicious of Lisbeth, and so had begun corrupting Vasili (her husband) by giving him the Ba'al Verzi dagger. (That is, **the** Ba'al Verzi dagger that was used to kill Sergei.) Overcome by the spirits that already haunted the dagger (Sergei's included), Vasili one day gave in to the voices and killed Lisbeth. Ilyich's dream about Lisbeth (see Ilyich's background) refers to this act symbolised by the colours of the Ba'al Verzi falling on a Black Feather.

Ideally, this would have suited Strahd's plan perfectly, and Vasili would have begun to head up a new chapter of the assassin's guild, working solely for Strahd. But instead he fled Barovia, sold the dagger in Richemulot, and disappeared.

Enter Ilyich, who found the dagger in Richemulot. On his return to Barovia, the spirits and his mother both became more powerful, competing for Ilyich's attention. Lisbeth succeeded in getting them to track down the Madrigorian, but once she was at peace, the Ba'al Verzi spirits became too powerful for Ilyich to bear, and he gave in to their will.

The best thing about this story is how perfectly it all fits with the Ba'al Verzi legends. A Ba'al Verzi supposedly must first kill someone close to them - in Vasili's case, his wife, and in Ilyich's case his mother. I also like the idea of Strahd heading up the Ba'al Verzi, since (in at least some sense) he is one of the Ba'al Verzi himself, having killed Sergei with the dagger.

So why did Ilyich leave the campaign? As mentioned in the DM Comments for Monette, David Devjak (Ilyich's player) had decided some adventures beforehand that he wanted to play another character. We'd already developed his new character by now, but no other players knew that David had made this decision. So although David didn't know *how* Ilyich was going to leave the campaign, he knew that this was going to be his last adventure - so when the opportunity came to kill his mother with the Ba'al Verzi dagger, he took it!

Until the very end of the campaign (two whole years away), the other players all thought that Ilyich had died simply due to a bad choice by David, rather than by a carefully

planned exit! It was a lot of fun, and had the players wondering for some time whether Ilyich was actually going to come back in the next adventure.

Unfortunately, engineering this end for Ilyich also meant that the adventure was a bit railroaded towards the end, with me having to positively prod the players to take the dagger back to the crypt so that Lisbeth's spirit could escape. In retrospect, there are a lot of things I should have done differently in this adventure, but thankfully I think it turned out OK.

This adventure also sees the beginning of the Madrigorian thread (as described in *Van Richten's Guide to Fiends*), which would continue throughout the entire campaign. The verses were deliberately cryptic (as any Madrigorian passage should be), but are basically meant to add to the sense of "bigger things going on" which was started in *Monette*. The first two paragraphs also specifically refer to the relationship between the Vistani (the Watchers) and Strahd (the Daemon). This issue is examined later in *The Ties that Bind*. The rest fortells the general arrival of chaos in the Core, including the coming of fiends (Great Ones) and war.

Other smaller trivial things to note about this adventure:

- Gaston was attacked at the start of this adventure because his player (Andrew) wasn't able to attend - so this was an easy way to both write Gaston out of the adventure, as well as indicate that the dagger was taking control of Ilyich!
- The Burgomaster had invited Ilyich to stay in Barovia because Strahd was aware of the return of the Ba'al Verzi dagger, and wanted to try again to establish this society of assassins.
- Strahd is keen to bring back the Ba'al Verzi because he knows that a time of darkness is coming, and that he'll need a network of spies and informants to help him through this time. Normally the Vistani would suffice, but perhaps all is not well between Strahd and Madame Eva.....
- The return of the Ba'al Verzi has a significant impact on the rest of the campaign, which will first be seen in *The Ties that Bind* (about four adventures after this one).
- Those with the original *Realm of Terror* boxed set will note that Lisbeth and Vasili come straight from the Von Zarovich family tree in that book.

Drakov's Gambit

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

We returned to the Von Zarovich crypt in despair and searched more thoroughly but find nothing. We had a heated discussion - Isaiah's spirit is sorely wounded by the touch of the spirit. We returned to the inn to rest, and discussed the events of the night with Svetlana. She holds little hope for Ilyich.

Thursday, 24th March

We spent this day recuperating and waiting. Isaiah spoke with Klaus. As we discussed our options that night, we heard a knock at the door. It was Hans von Zarovich, followed by a sweating Bray Martikova. Hans was very ill, complaining of stomach pains. Heinrich diagnoses him with food poisoning - which he suspects to be from bad meat sold recently. No news of Ilyich.

Friday, 25th March

We decided that we needed to communicate with Strahd regarding our friend Ilyich. We went to Kolyan the Burgomeister, but he said he is unable to help us - that Strahd only ever contacts him, and not the other way around. We decided, reluctantly, to try the Vistani camp. As we approached, they look at us eerily. We were met by one - a young woman - who said there is a means to contact Lord Strahd, but that Madame Eva will not see us.

She then noticed the wristband worn by Isaiah which appears to mark him as a friend of the Vistani. She peered at Isaiah, as if reading his mind, and asked him if he was of Vistani blood. She must have known that Isaiah has the sight, as she was relieved to know that he is not of the Vistani, for the only male Vistani to wield the sight is the

fateful Dukkar.

After obtaining Isaiah's consent, she touched him and he was wracked by another of his visions. On his recovery a few moments later he told us that he saw Ilyich approaching Castle Ravenloft in the carriage and a war of passions written on his face. Then he saw Ilyich plunge the Ba'al Verzi dagger into his guts, and a look of innocence and peace creep over his features.

Thus we believe Ilyich to be mortally wounded or worse. We left the camp disturbed. On our departure we were met by a strange man out of the woods who says he has been watching us and intends to join our group. He says he has dreamt of us and our exploits - and from what he says his dreams are indeed wondrously accurate. He calls himself Maximillian, and is obviously a woodsman of some sort, and much older than all of us. To prove his abilities we fight without weapons, and he bests me easily. A worthy companion - if we can trust him - so we allow him to travel awhile with us. He then makes a piercing bird's shriek and is joined by a falcon - "Skimmer".

Apparently Max is fleeing his home realm of Darkon, having been falsely accused of murder. Something about him is vaguely familiar to me, but I cannot place it. When we retired for the night Max slept alone in the loft of the stable.

Saturday, 26th March

When we woke I noticed that Maximilian seems abnormally pale. The others do not seem to notice - even the Herr Doktor - but my eyes do not deceive me. I informed the others that I believe it to be the "White Fever" - a disease rampant in Valachan. Some scholars have speculated that it is a result of being fed upon by the ultimate creature of the night - the vampire. The others scoff at my paranoia but I feel it is quite possible that the assailant is Strahd himself! What else can explain it - he has lived many mortal lifespans, and is a figure of power and dread who is rarely seen and never during the day. Further we met with his two principal sources of contact yesterday.

Max insists on sleeping outside, but with our protection from now on, though he does not credit my theories. (I admit they are somewhat far-fetched myself, but our experiences have taught me to be cautious.)

We meet with the butcher who admits his meat was bad and apologises, but says that meat is always a risk in a small village like this.

The night passes uneventfully and still no news of Ilyich.

Sunday, 27th March

During the night a chill passed through my spine. It was the full moon and as we changed guard, I came to relive Isaiah. It must have been the influence of the Moon Heart but as Isaiah stood in relief against the moon I saw that his ears had become furry and pointed. I remembered our battle with Monette and through the lore of Darkness that those wounded by such a creature may be cursed with the same condition. I fear for our friend and inform Heinrich.

The day is otherwise uneventful. Last night was the last night of the full moon.

Monday, 28th March

We decide that a nightwatch is no longer necessary. We went to the Vistani for a last attempt at contacting Strahd. They will not aid us and my temper gets the better of me as I remonstrate with Max. Nevertheless even I admit that our friend is lost and that we must go.

Beware Strahd von Zarovich, for we shall return and take you with fire and sword and reclaim our friend - or give him peace.

Tuesday, 29th March

We decide to travel to the "abandoned estate" in Lamordia - our objective before the marshes of Souragne claimed us. The Patchwork Bride had been drawing pictures of the building in the Funhouse of Ludendorf, so we can only assume that some element of her past relates to the building. Maybe we can learn more there.

We travelled to Vallaki with an irritating bard named Andre Duvall. We end the day in Krezk.

Wednesday, 30th March

We reach Sturben in Borca. We are informed that a plague has gripped Lechburg, so we travel to the realm of Falkovnia under the grip of that tyrant Drakov.

Friday, 1st April

We reach Silbervas - a poor, disease infested and over-trodden settlement, like so many others in this land of the damned.

Saturday, 2nd April

We rejoice to go our separate ways from Andre the Pretentious. We are in Lekar, capital of Falkovnia and we notice that there are far fewer Talons than one would expect. We have little desire to remain and investigate, however.

Sunday, 3rd April

We cross the river via the ferry, and after our crossing I baited a guard, though it is stupid and childish. After I had finished amusing myself we travelled on the road to Neufurchtenburg and continued to the abandoned mansion. When we arrive we notice that it has been unused for some time. The fields are overgrown and unkempt. the barn is nearly collapsed and the windmill in substantial disrepair.

We argued about battle order, as the simmering distrust between Max and I comes to a head. Max apparently dislikes enclosed spaces intensely. Although initially reluctant, Max is persuaded by Isaiah and Heinrich that he should take the front - before a confrontation I prefer to prepare by communing with the Goddess.

As our initial search of the outside was complete and the sun was setting we decided to camp outside.

Monday, 4th April

The night passed uneventfully and we returned to examine the insides of the estate. On exploring some of the rooms I heard voices and the sounds of metal scraping coming from below. There are definitely inhabitants here who are aware of our presence. We decide to lay a trap, but after half an hour continue exploring - the others heard nothing.

Finally we found a trapdoor down and proceeded into the cellars under the walls. Max was apprehensive, so I led them down. As we proceeded I heard a growling from some wild beast (or worse). We were following passages when we were suddenly assailed by Talons who have trapped us! I withdraw as they call out their challenge - they obviously thought this place was hidden and did not expect visitors.

The battle was short but brutal - although they were somewhat skilled I managed to slay five of six. Max had been overcome by a fit of some sort and fled the room, whilst Isaiah's firearm had once again proved treacherous. We managed to capture the last Talon and interrogate him. He led us to the massive cache of weaponry hidden here. Apparently Drakov plans a surprise raid into Dementlieu with this as base!

The Talon told us that Darkov had secured control over this building and much of the southeast corner of Lamordia after he threatened Aubrecker after a show of force on Neufurchtenburg some years ago - after been aided by a force sent from Darkon.

Surprisingly, Max informs us that he led that attack to aid Lamordia against the

Falkovnians, but his men mutinied, casting him out. That was the last day he ever spoke to his kinsmen.

The captive also told us of the day that a "woman" slew five men in the house. She was immense and bloated - obviously the "Patchwork Bride" we are looking for. The soldier led us to a sick man they were keeping captive - a man named Emil Bollenbach. He, like Heinrich, was looking for Gerhard Beckmann.

Emil was also Gerhard's student some years before Heinrich, and they were conducting experiments in "surpassing death". Emil, however, decided that Gerhard was getting too extreme with this experiments, and left the doctor to his work. For some reason, it would appear that Emil is now seeking the Gerhard out himself.

Not two days ago, Emil had visited Gerhard's elderly mother in Neufurchtenburg, who had revealed much about his past. Gerhard was jilted at the altar. About 25 years ago, he studied under the auspices of Dr. Mordenheim, after which Gerhard spent time in Richemulot working on his own project - this would appear to be the building where I met Heinrich, Isaiah and Ilyich not four months ago. He then apparently moved back north choosing to stay on this abandoned estate for reasons unknown to his mother. He went north to Ludendorf for a few days but returned very distressed, though his mother did not know why. She has not seen him since he left that day, 25 years ago.

By the description that the Talon gave us, it would seem that about one month ago the "Patchwork Bride" - Gerhard's creation - returned and killed the men posted here. Apparently Gerhard had managed to write a message on the wall saying "Kidnapped - she's going south." That is where we must go - and also to inform Dementlieu of the imminent threat to their land from Falkovnian forces.

Suddenly we heard men arriving above - the relief force. We hurried to make exit from the cellar, when we also heard growling noises and something monstrous breaking walls. Stnading silent below, not wanting to involve ourselves, we listened as the two sides met

above us, and the men screamed in horror as they were attacked and killed by this beast. We resolved a plan to have the beast - which we believed to be the "Patchwork Bride" - come down here, chase the suprisingly speedy Max through the tunnels while we escaped above.

Approaching the only trapdoor exit from the cellar, we could see that it had been slammed shut from above. Thick drips of blood were falling from the edge of the trapdoor. We hesitatingly prodded the wooden cover to find it weighted down - a body from the massacre above had fallen on the door.

We heaved the trapdoor open, banging it to attract the beast's notice. Stepping back into the darkness of the tunnels, we saw a massive hairy arm descend into the passage. We fire a volley of shots and Isaiah's pistol jams once more! Finally I blind it with Sol Invictus. Max and I climb up - it is a bear which has gone rabid - somewhat of a relief after our previous assumption. We resolve to put the poor thing out of its misery, and in it's current condition we are able to do so.

Searching the rest of the estate we found an old, dusty room that appeared to have been used as some sort of classroom! Gerhard's notes on "Elise Mordenheim's" progress were here, documenting the apparent education of a small child. This must be the remnants of Gerhard's residence here all those years ago, after his work in Richemulot was complete.

We must hurry south. As we speak I notice that Emil is watching us in an almost clinical fashion ... something within tells me we cannot trust him ...

Drakov's Gambit - DM's Comments

This adventure is mainly about a couple of things - firstly, getting the new character (Maximillian Drakeheart) introduced into the campaign, and getting the core of the campaign moving again after the brief sojourn into Souragne and surrounding seas. There's lots of exposition to get some threads (the Patchwork Bride and the war with

Drakov) going, and the beginning of a few new threads (like Caine's paranoia and Emil Bollenbach).

The best element of this session was the fact that we proved that the scariest enemy is the unseen one. From the time that the characters started to hear the massacre of the Talon guards above ground, they were in panic mode wondering how they'd get out, since they were assuming it was the Patchwork Bride. The discovery of the bear was essentially a big relief for the players!

Maximillian, the character replacing Ilyich after his untimely demise, is quite an unusual one. He doesn't really fit many of the horror stereotypes, but his history is deeply woven into the campaign background (in fact, many of you may be able to tell where this character is headed simply by reading his description and background). The player, Dave, had been working on him for some time, since he knew that Ilyich was going to leave the campaign. Introducing him, however, was hard to do without the obligatory "visions" to create a reason for them working together. Cheesey, I know - but at least *Monette* had set the stage for such things, creating a precedent.

Drakov's effective annexing of south-eastern Lamordia seems to make a lot of sense to me. Neufurchtenburg has always looked so isolated on the other side of the Sleeping Beast! Before anyone starts pointing out that domains can't change size, I'm completely aware of that. While the *domain* borders haven't shifted at all, there's nothing to stop a bunch of soldiers moving into town and exerting control, if Aubrecker has agreed. Adam could close the borders, but frankly - would he care?

This move is basically the lead in to the beginning of Drakov's war, which will be a central element of a number of sessions to come such as *Gaslighting* and *Fatherland*, much further down the track. The most immediate threat, however is the potential attack on Dementlieu, which is addressed in the next session.

The Emil Bollenbach of this campaign is not the same Emil Bollenbach from *Chilling Tales*, although some small elements of him still exist (such as his nervous tick). Frankly, his name was just too cool to pass up! He will play an important, continuing role in the campaign though - he is tightly connected to Heinrich's story, which really starts to become clear in about 6 adventure's time.

A very important element of this adventure was the decline of Caine Shadowborn. Throughout his journal, it's worth noting how often he keeps noting his suspicions of both NPCs and other characters. You'll find out what's happening to Caine in the next session to be written up - *Fear Itself*. Oh, and that food poisoning incident? That was just a bit of rancid sausage.

Fear Itself - Part One

A Letter from Isaiah

7 April, 735

Port-a-Lucine, Dementlieu

My Dearest Michelle,

The events of the preceding days have held some of our darkest hours.

Two days ago, we returned to Port-a-Lucine from Lamordia having discovered news of an intended attack by the armies of Falkovnia, led by the tyrant Vlad Drakov. Despite my previous failures to the peasant folk here during the abortive rebellion, I find myself forced to aid the regime to protect the land of Dementlieu. Caine and Maximillian had both assured me that no matter how bad their lives under the aristocracy of Dementlieu, it would pale in comparison to the iron fist of Drakov.

Upon our arrival and quiet entry through the gates of the city, we sought shelter in a local inn, the "Fallen Steeple", and sent an request for an audience with the Lord-Governor with the utmost urgency. Also staying the inn was a scholarly and travel-weary fellow by the name of Van Richten, who Caine appeared to know. I sensed a great burden lying upon his soul and he confessed his recent susceptibility to a spate of bad dreams. Heinrich's analysis of the dream, of Van Richten riding through a dark forest, as being a sign of a greatly troubled subconscious. More disturbing was that Van Richten recognised Caine immediately as also being in the dream, but was unable to elucidate on the reason.

That night, I agreed to be separated from the party for our own protection, a substantial reward having been issued for my capture after the revolution only months ago. I used the opportunity to consult Armand, the revolutionary who has assumed command of the

underground resistance against the government of Dementlieu. Armand told tales of public executions using a recently constructed Guillotine in the main square, with rewards given to those who turn in their fellow comrades over to the state for seditious actions against the establishment. This crusade against the rebels is being called *la punition*. Many have been captured, including most of the nobility who were sympathetic to the cause. More troubling was that the retributions were being ruthlessly administered by Helene de Suis, new Advisor for Security, who previously pretended to aid the rebellion for what I can only guess were her own selfish ends.

I returned to the others in the morning to find that they had been summoned before the Lord-Governor. More worrying, however, was that Caine had succumbed to a deep coma from which both Heinrich and I were unable to arouse him. Van Richten was particularly shocked, saying that the dream had changed again; although he could not remember all the details. All he could say for certain was that, in the dream, Caine was killed in single combat against a creature of the darkest evil.

Whilst the rest of the party travelled to Dominic d'Honaire's estate (the new seat of government following the destruction of the palace during the revolution) to meet the Lord-Governor, Armand led me to the abandoned Cathedral in the centre of the city. There he showed me the a thing of great beauty within the catacombs of the ruined structure; a pane of stained glass depicting a stunning Lady in White, bent at the waist and crying into her hands. Her tears flowed into a peaceful brook. I was greatly moved by the scene. I also felt that it was a object of good, items which I thought had long been forsaken by this Land. Armand explained that the revolutionaries often come here to firm their resolve for the rebellion, and to find a path of light in this, the time of their persecution. Unexpectedly, a cane was found standing beside the glass, the grip of which had been fashioned into the likeness of the Crying Lady. As I held it, I did fancy that I could feel a wetness touch my palm. On Armand's blessing, he did offer me the cane, and I did take it.

For a moment, as I held the cane to my chest, I could have sworn I heard your voice,

Michelle. It startled me, and I looked up through eyes swelling with tears at the pane of glass, when I thought I saw the delicate mouth move and speak. "Cry no more, for I will cry for you. Search no more, for you have found me. Fear no more, for I will lead you from harm." I do not know what it means, but it offers me calm in the sea of tension around me.

Paradoxically, although it pains me to admit it to you, as I left the Cathedral I felt a great anger well up within me towards the bureaucracy of this town. I felt spurned to action, even if it might mean the end of my life and those who chose to follow me (despite my previous affirmation that the pointless slaughter of the first rebellion must never occur again). However, after a few moments the feeling passed leaving me a little ashamed at my momentary rush of blood.

Armand informed me that Marie deFerrier, the wife of the first aristocrat to flock to the revolutionary banner, had been targeted for execution and a reward offered. Armand assured me that she was being cared for in one of the revolutionaries' safehouses. I instructed Armand to discover what he could about Alexis Wilhaven, a letter to whom had been sent by the traitorous Helene de Suis and intercepted during the revolution.

The others returned from d'Honaire's Estate to tell of their meeting with Marcel Guignol, the Lord-Governor. The Estate itself had proved to be one of grand and decadent opulence, encompassing a great area and consisting of many rooms. Before the advisors to the Governor, and the Guignol himself the party did reveal the plans of the impending invasion by Falcovnia. Action to protect the city was decided upon - the Falkovnian's would be met at the hills outside the city with the full firepower of Dementlieu's arsenal. If past experience were to be any guide, the Falkovnians would be cut to ribbons by Dementlieu's superior artillery. It would appear that it is the saving grace of Dementlieu that its meagre forces are backed up by firearms and cannons, weapons that Drakov does not appear to use.

That night, I found myself in a strange dream with Van Richten and the others. In the

morning, I dismissed it as a nightmare; although it was strange that the others had the same dream. All I could remember clearly, was that Caine was there, saying that he was repeating the dream over and over. He then warned me of possible treachery by Emil Bollenbach, Heinrich's fellow student of Doctor Mordenheim. It would appear that Emil has the same sort of scar on the back of his neck as Heinrich does. I undertook to watch Emil closely, for I trust Caine's instincts on such matters. Upon waking, however, Emil did run into Heinrich's room with total amnesia. The effect soon passed but, badly shaken, Emil decided to leave the city and head South before the impending invasion.

Van Richten told a tale of how the Opera he went to see the previous night had been cancelled due to the unfortunate death of a stagehand during the first act. He had become entangled in the guy ropes above the stage and fell to be strangled while the audience watched. As we left to investigate, we were told the tale of how the owner of the Opera du Populaire, Andre Firmin, had been receiving threats from a mysterious "O.G." (later discovered to be an acronym for "Opera Ghost") for money. Three days ago the diva went missing and misfortune compounded last night when her understudy, Juliette Geneve, also disappeared. Firmin explained that the Opera Ghost is believed to be the original owner of the theatre who was unjustly lynched for the murder of the leading lady.

Investigation revealed that it was entirely possible that the stage-hand was murdered. Did he witness the abduction of the understudy, or was the "Opera Ghost" just trying to enforce his extortion demands with innocent blood? Either way, an entrance to the catacombs beneath the Opera was found near to Juliette's room, and we proceeded downward into the depths of the city. We soon discovered a large underground river which flows beneath Port-a-Lucine to the sea, and a small boat with which to cross to the other side. Upon reaching the inner catacomb across the river, we were approached by a dark figure leading a woman dressed in muddy and blood-soaked white. The woman, who matched the description of Juliette, was attached to several chains, connected to an elaborate box held by the dark figure by a series of gruesome hooks. From her gait and exhausted appearance, we could tell that she was struggling against great pain, inflicted

by an instrument designed to wound and maim rather than kill.

The figure through back his hood and we recognised him instantly! The Marquis de Penible, a vicious and sadistic nobleman who we thought had been killed in the catacombs under the cathedral during the revolution! He bore horrible scars due to the burns he had received during our destruction of his bizarre experiments with pain. He mocked us for being weak and not understanding how pain can make one stronger, as we edged forward to rescue Juliette, dropped the box almost tearing the skin off the hapless understudy. In our brief but frenzied battle with the Marquis (a battle in which we sorely missed Caine's sword) he did appear to grow razors out of his hands! Just before we finally brought him down, an eerie moan did echo from deep within the catacomb. Before we could finish off the vile Marquis, a shimmering apparition did appear from behind him to drop an ethereal Punjab Lasso over our shocked and terrified opponent. Despite his desperate struggles, the Marquis was slowly hoisted off the floor, and dragged back deep into the dank tunnel. The last we heard was a final, gut-wrenching scream as the Marquis gave his last ditch effort to get free and then he disappeared.

We tended to Juliette's wounds which, although superficial, were causing her great pain. Both Gaston and Max helped to get her into the boat. Heinrich recalled that the Marquis had intended to write a second book when we had talked to him prior to the revolution; ironically entitled "Juliette, or the Misfortunes of Virtue". Apparently, his degenerate morality had almost succeeded in writing Juliette's final chapter. As we were leaving, Heinrich stepped down to take the box which no longer appeared to be attached to any chains. Despite my objections that an object used for such horrific purposes should be left alone, Heinrich's fascination with the intricate patterns and cuttings on the box rendered my complaints ineffective.

And so it is, Michelle, that we have returned to the inn to prepare for the next days events to unfold. Having seen the end of the Marquis has brought the others and I strangely little consolation. Caine is still in a coma and the rebellion is as tormented as ever. And even though I know that, despite our separation, I sometimes see you when I sleep, the

possibility of dreaming Caine's nightmare tonight is something that I dread...

For I know that I could bound myself in a nutshell, and grant myself the king of infinite space, were it not that I would have bad dreams.

Yours forever,

Isaiah

Fear Itself - Part One - DM's Comments

There are three parts to the *Fear Itself* chapter of the campaign (although the actual game was only played over two sessions). The first one is what you've just read - Isaiah's letter to Michelle about the Marquis de Penible, and the buildup to the attack from Falkovnia. The second is again written from Isaiah's point of view, and details the events within Port-a-Lucine as the attack looms. The third part is from Caine's point of view, and deals with the dreams that the characters are experiencing at night.

As you can tell, there's a lot going on at once here. We have Caine's and Van Richten's dreams going on, the impending attack by Falkovnia, the reappearance of the Marquis, Isaiah's religious group growing, and the recriminations from the revolution putting Isaiah and Marie deFerrier in danger.

You'll hear more about Van Richten's dreams (and what's happening to Caine) in the third part, but for the moment suffice it to say that Van Richten is about to come to a realisation about the truth of his past. It's worth noting Caine's comment that Emil has the same scar as Heinrich on the back of his neck, and Emil's amnesia spell - these will become more relevant a few adventures from now.

The upcoming war was a useful tool in these sessions. Even though nothing is happening directly as a result, it set a tone of urgency to the whole proceedings, knowing that an attack on the city could be expected any day now. The attack was expected to come from the north, directly at Port-a-Lucine (from the base in Lamordia discovered in *Drakov's*

Gambit), so the usual initial defences of Chateaufaux aren't in place. The attack will be seen in Part 2 of this episode.

The reason the PCs were able to so readily approach the Council of Advisors and get an audience was the involvement of Maximillian, who was previously known to them via his status in Nartok. While Isaiah's letter doesn't detail it, there was a scene with Max and the others trying to convince Josephine Chantreaux (see the *Faces of Deception* article in the *Book of Sorrows*) that they were telling the truth (especially since Josephine believed Max had betrayed Darkon to the Falkovnians in the past - see Max's background).

This session also begins to feed Isaiah's growing religious power in Port-a-Lucine.

Armand, Isaiah's protege from the Revolution, has taken Isaiah's cause onto himself and continued to preach in Isaiah's absence. The ruined cathedral in Port-a-Lucine (from the maps in the original *Realm of Terror* boxed set) is serving as the base of this. Isaiah's growing support base amongst the peasantry will be revisited in later adventures when the PCs return to Dementlieu.

Isaiah's rush of anger as he left the cathedral is not a strange coincidence. It signifies an influence he'll only discover some time from now...

La Punition, the program of retribution being run by Helene du Suis, will be dealt with more in part 2 of this session. But to give you an idea of what happens - you can't have a French revolutionary setting without at least *one* scene with a horde of people and a guillotine, can you!

Isaiah's search for Alexis Wilhaven (those of you who know about the Brain will know who this is) will come to fruition in the next adventure.

The Marquis de Penible effectively provided the "meat" of this particular adventure. While it's definitely a "B" story in terms of the overall *Fear Itself* episode, it provided the main action-related sequence during this session - and it's always fun to recycle a previous enemy. When the Marquis fell from the cathedral tower with a burning face into the underground river, I knew I had my Phantom of the Opera figure for the campaign, so this brief interlude is designed to provide that.

The story around this is rudimentary, and the "box" was introduced as a relatively last-minute decision to spice up the character. In retrospect, I wonder about the wisdom of this. The horror of a figure modelled on the Marquis de Sade is that he is *human*, not

because of some supernatural influence - but I let this one go anyway, and used this "box" as an explanation for his fascination with pain. As it turns out, however, the "box" became one of the major threads of the campaign (and one of my favourites), particularly for Heinrich, the character who picked it up.

The "box" is obviously inspired by *Hellraiser*, but it ends up being fitted into the AD&D cosmology quite well by the end of it. Of course, you won't learn about all this until near the end of the campaign! Be happy for now to know that it has fiendish origins.

Of course, the Marquis' "death" was once again very ambiguous (the only kind for a good villain). He will make an appearance in the campaign again, but not necessarily in the way you'd expect.

Fear Itself - Part Two

A Letter from Isaiah

10 April, 735

Van Richten's Cottage, Mordent

Michelle, My Love,

The Lord has seen fit to deliver us as the instruments of his justice. We have been delivered with an unexpected opportunity, and as the others argue about the appropriate course of action, I know with surety what course we should pursue...

After witnessing the death of the Marquis de Penible, we retired to the Fallen Steeple to recover from the ordeal. Whilst we waited, I received word from Armand that he had found Alexis Wilhaven, the man who wrote a letter during the Revolution detailing his involvement with the Brain. He was being held at the Saulbridge Sanatorium, presumably as an inmate; curious for a man who was clearly an agent for the manipulation of the court of Dementlieu. We resolved to visit Alexis on the morrow, which hopefully would see an improvement in Caine's persistent comatose condition.

Alas, we could not have been more wrong. That night we were drawn again into Caine's nightmare. Feverishly riding through the dark forest, we came upon a Vistani camp...one that I recognised. On the outskirts, I found Yvonne's trailer, however, she did not recognise me, despite the fact that I wore her symbol on my arm. I was able to surmise that somehow this was prior to Hyskosa's abduction, a consequence of being in the dreamworld. Before I could talk to Hyskosa however, the camp was attacked by creatures of the night and Van Richten was cut down. The dream shattered...

We awoke in the Steeple, the others having had the same dream. Van Richten did not emerge unscathed, he too having slipped into a deep coma as had Caine. Unable to rouse

either, and also powerless to re-enter the dreamstate, we resolved to continue our investigations in the city and wait for the dream to come to us. Perhaps Caine was right to warn us to be wary of Emil, the dreams only began when he joined our travels.

The Saulbridge sanatorium was not an uplifting place. The grounds were open yet cold in the gloomy morn. The approaching path was lined by tortured leafless oaks, the building a stark, faded whitewashed monolith covered with bars and solid doors. We were allowed into the buildings reception area, which was overseen by a huge portrait of Germaine d'Honaire, great grandfather of the advisor to the Lord-Governor , Dominic d'Honaire. The unnatural quiet of the place was occasionally punctuated by a lone piercing cry, echoing tormentedly down the long corridor which led to the patients' cells. We were greeted by the chief resident of the facility, François Mousel, who oversaw treatment at the sanatorium. We were immediately taken by his professionalism. He answered our queries regarding the elusive Alexis Wilhaven, revealing that he was indeed a patient at the facility and agreed to allow us a brief interview.

Alexis was not at all like we expected. Haggard and drawn, rocking slowly back and forth, he was bound in a restricting jacket and huddled in the corner of a piercingly white room. François informed us that he had been like this since his admission, brought in after he was found wandering the dock area. He had been completely unresponsive to treatment. The good doctor Heinrich inspected Alexis, but could find no sign of physical ailment; however his previous studies did mention similar conditions caused by extreme mental trauma. From where I was standing, I could feel almost palpable waves of torn consciousness flowing out of him. The others, however did not seem to as aware of this as I. Before I realised exactly what I was doing, I had removed my gloves and grabbed Alexis by the hand...

...and found myself pushing through layers of darkness. The thickness shrouded him like woollen blankets, numbing him to the outside world. I continued to coax him through the mental insulation, asking for him to respond... and through it all, my mind remained focused on the events of the Revolution... the Brain... the cathedral... the battle for the

palace... the docks where Alexis was found...

..and I found myself woken by the cries of a madman. Alexis had broken his restraints and grabbed me by the shoulders shaking me forcefully. As the others dragged him off me , he began to scream incoherently, but not before we had heard his cries

"It's Rudolph! It's Rudolph!".

* * * * *

Outside the cell we discussed the words of Alexis. Alexis had fallen back into his catatonia, but François offered to hypnotise him should he become conscious again. Could he have meant Rudolph Van Richten, or is there another Rudolph we do not yet know? It is hard to imagine Van Richten as being this harbinger of evil in any case, being a good man currently trapped within a nightmare. Perhaps it was just the ravings of a madman, but I feel as though we have discovered another piece of the puzzle as to the true identity of the Brain.

Tired from the days events we returned to the Steeple to find no change in Caine's or Van Richten's condition. We retired to our rooms, we apprehensively awaited the next dream. The nightmare was exhausting. We awoke unrefreshed, with no change in Van Richten or Caine.

Not knowing if our companions would ever awake from this unnatural slumber, I decided I had to try something to aid them. If I have learnt nothing else in my recent experience, it is that I am not the man I used to be. Touching Van Richten's forehead with my bare hand, I tried to feel his trauma, and relieve him of his burden.

While I do not remember clearly, I am told that only moments after doing so I groaned, and then collapsed onto the floor in a similarly deep slumber. I *do* remember, however, that it was you, Michelle that I saw. The Lord saw fit to torment me to relive the ride back to Riverford. You and Joshua were just as I remember, approaching the bridge over

Stony Creek, the coming storm, Joshua and the miniature crossbow, the jarring jolt as the carriage hit a hole, the look of shock as the firearm discharged out the window, the brief yelp of pain from the driver's position, the swirling landscape as the carriage fell under the pull of runaway horses...

When I awoke, I was told I had been unawakeable for nearly an hour. My attempt appeared to have been successful, though - Van Richten had woken shortly after my collapse to the floor. It would appear that I do have the ability to help lessen the trauma of others - but the cost to myself could be high indeed.

With the dreams becoming more vivid, and believing that time may be running out for Caine, we decided to seek the help of François Mousel in rousing him. On his arrival, however, he admitted that there was little he could do, although he would discuss the matter with his expert staff. Heinrich agreed to accompany François back to the asylum. Whilst he was gone, we arranged with Armande to take care of Caine; who was obviously in an unfit state to travel.

Heinrich was late to return, and with good reason. As they were walking to the sanatorium, they came across a disturbance in the vicinity of the resistance's safe-house. Marie de Ferrier was being chased by the gendarme, the local officers responsible for upholding the decrees of autocracy. She ran to Heinrich and asked for protection, revealing that she had been turned in by the so-called "friends" she thought she was hiding with. They fled to the sanatorium, evading the gendarme, where François agreed to hide her. No sooner had Heinrich completed his story, however than an urchin, sent from Armande, informed us that Marie had been turned over by François to Dominic! Our trust had been misplaced, for it seems François is the cousin of Dominic d'Honaire! Marie had been scheduled for execution that evening by guillotine, before a packed town square!!

The time for caution had passed! Madame de Ferrier and her husband had helped us during the revolution at great personal risk and we could not abandon her now. It was

then that Maximillian suggested an audacious plan that would provide Marie with a slim, and perhaps her only, hope...

The evening of the execution saw a large crowd to witness the spilling of de Ferrier's blood, with a nearby balcony decked out in finery for the official party. The carriage of Helene deSuis pushed through the crowd to the foot of the dais; the pale, svelte woman making her way to stand by the large hooded executioner. Out of her carriage came the dishevelled visage of a once noble lady, the Madame de Ferrier being escorted up the stairs by two officers of the gendarme. To her credit, she maintained her composure although the slump in her shoulders showed that she was resigned to her fate. As she made her way to the block, we looked to Max for the signal; it was now or never. With a nod, he set the plan in motion...

Creating a light disturbance, a handful of Armande's men allowed us the distraction we needed to make our way to the dais. Max vaulted the stairs, with Heinrich and I close behind. Taken by surprise, the gendarme briefly neglected their charge, allowing Heinrich to wrest away the stunned Marie. The crowd, seeing the disturbance, began to cry out and surge forward, obstructing the approach of the other gendarme. On the dais, Max felled one of the approaching soldiers and grabbed Helene; threatening to break her neck should they continue to advance. Under the cover of my gun, they were well aware that the life of their most senior officer was in our hands. We began backing down the stairs when, ignoring caution, the executioner charged us. With suppressed dexterity, Max threw Helene off the balcony to land before me and with the help of Gaston's parlour tricks was able to fell the man with two quick blows. As he slumped, his hood dislodged to reveal a tattoo in the man's forehead... a Falkovnian!!

I made my way dragging the yelling Helene towards her carriage, where Heinrich had over-powered the driver. The gendarme however had made progress suppressing the crowd, and it looked as though we would not have enough time to ensure our escape. Just as the situation looked lost, a muffled boom was heard from outside the city's walls, followed by the sob and club of distant gunfire. Falkovnia was attacking!! The crowd

panicked and began running for the relative safety of their homes. In the confusion, the gendarme were unable to seal the street, leaving us an avenue of escape. It was then that the situation went horribly wrong.

Trying to make his way to the carriage, Gaston could be seen passing the dais. As the crowd panicked and ran, a line of fire opened between he and a gendarme with his musket drawn. Fate mingled with shock Gaston's eyes as he realised there was no escape. The gendarme aimed and depressed the trigger. The resulting shot tore through Gastone's right chest, blowing him back against the dais and dropping him to the ground. Max yelled and jumped from the dais to our fallen comrade. Although it must have only taken two or three seconds, the moments seemed to draw into hours. When time restarted, the gendarme was swept away with the crowd.

Grabbing the reins of duSuis's carriage, I swung into the driver's seat. Max, carrying Gaston's limp body over his shoulder, pushed through the crowd to us and allowed Heinrich to attend to the wound, while he restrained Helene. Turning to the crowd, I yelled "For freedom and Dementlieu!" before cracking the whip and driving the horses towards the city gates. Bearing the duSuis seal on the side of the carriage, and with attention focussed on the battle at the hills on the other side of the city, we met little resistance as we fled. From a rise on the other side of the city, we saw the Falkovnian army in full retreat, the tyrant Drakov obviously expected little or no resistance.

Van Richten guided us to his cottage in Mordentshire, where we now take this time to rest and ponder what we shall do with Helene duSuis, hoping amongst other things, to interrogate her as to the identity of the executioner. We speculate that a Falkovnian defector may explain why Drakov closed the borders some months ago when we tried to enter Dementlieu, perhaps to catch this man instead of stopping the spread of an alleged plague. But what information is so important as to arouse the attention of both Drakov and the court of Dementlieu? As for Helene herself, my opinion is clear. She is directly responsible for the deaths of hundreds of innocents in Port-a-Lucine, and it was by her actions and deception that the revolution ruthlessly crushed. She should be sent to stand

for judgement of her crimes, and know the torment she has caused, and if necessary, I myself will be the ferryman.

Irrespective of this, Heinrich is keen to continue the search for the Patchwork Bride and I find myself wondering when we shall have the opportunity to return to Port-a-Lucine. I only hope that the people will be able to endure until we can return. Meanwhile, we are concerned for Caine. We had to leave him at the Cathedral in the rush to flee Port-a-Lucine, and hope that Armand can look after him in his condition. We go to sleep tonight wondering if the dreams that haunted us in Dementlieu will have chased us this far.

Michelle, these are times of great darkness in a land burdened by the cries of its own people. And still the Lord sees fit to torment me. Each day, I feel myself growing stronger with abilities He has seen fit to condemn me with, powers which are useless as they come too late. Worse, he shows me people in need of help and asking for guidance...ah, how can one who has no hope for himself have hope enough for an entire land!! My spirit is already shattered, and I fear that it is your face, not His word, that pushes me on...

Yours forever,

Isaiah

Fear Itself - Part Two - DM's Comments

As mentioned in the Part 1 DM Comments for this adventure, there are three parts to this session. This part of the story covers the second half of what happened in the waking world, while Caine was experiencing the dream-memories of Van Richten (detailed in Part 3).

While Part 1 focused on the Marquis de Penible, while setting up some of the elements of this session, this one moved firmly back into Brain territory. The PCs learn a little more about the scheming Brain here, most notably that his former servant Alexis Wilhaven has been left a hollow shell. Wilhaven's screams of "It's Rudolph" were actually quite timely in the campaign, given that Rudolph Van Richten provided some confusion to the PCs. Obviously, in a scene like this, it's important to actually act out the scene by vigorously grabbing the player, and screaming "It's Rudolph" into his face while you shake them back and forth. This is even better if you suddenly do this after 5 minutes of gently rocking in your chair like a Lost One while they ask myriad of questions! Nothing like that to wake up the players...

Those who know about the Brain will know who "Rudolph" is. Interestingly, the PCs had actually come across the name of Rudolph von Aubrecker in the *Funhouse* adventure (during the day of mourning for Aubrecker's son), and the name Rudolph even made it into Caine's journal! In addition, when Heinrich spoke with Mordenheim in the same adventure, he had mentioned that Alexis Wilhaven had stopped working for him a year earlier. However, for the duration of the campaign neither connection was made with the situation in Dementlieu, so it was to be a long time before the PCs learnt the truth.

The abduction of Helene duSuis, and the rescue of Madame Ferrier, were two parts of the adventure I had not planned at all. While I had ideas that a scene with a guillotine and crowd would be cool, it was entirely the player's plan to stage the rescue scene. This was a lot of fun, and was probably the first major success for the players after a string of bad news and discoveries, so the timing was good.

The attack of Falkovnia added an interesting flavour of tension as the players tried to flee the city. The attack had been staged quickly by Drakov on learning that his secret base in Lamordia had been found out, in the hope that Dementlieu wouldn't have had time to establish its defence. (Especially from the north, where Dementlieu has traditionally never had to worry about defence.) The player's swift action in Part 1 gave Josephine Chantreaux plenty of time to prepare. As usual, Drakov's primitive forms of attack proved no match for Dementlieu's firearms, which is why the attack was so unsuccessful. In addition, the Falkovnian defector acting as executioner had revealed crucial information about Drakov's tactics to the government of Dementlieu.

Isaiah's abilities grow with this adventure, with his first real demonstration of his ability to empathically relieve others of their suffering, which allowed Van Richten to exit his coma. The cost to himself, however, is great (and would become greater later in the campaign).

Isaiah's comments about Helene, and the anger he feels, is very indicative of the theme that follows Isaiah throughout the campaign. His righteous anger is directed at Helene for the deaths of those involved in the revolution, both during the fighting and the subsequent recriminations. However, much of his anger is due to the fact that he also sees himself as partly responsible, due to leading the masses to the Lord-Governor's palace, effectively leading them to defeat. In fact, at the time of the revolution, he was on the *same side* as Helene (i.e. against the government). This theme would continue later in the campaign, with Isaiah seeing similarities between himself and the Brain, Strahd and Azalin....

Gaston's near-death at the guillotine is a turning point for his character. In the blackness of his unconsciousness, something has awoken. Something that he'd forgotten about a long, long time ago.

The players now have a few problems. They're holding Helene captive in Mordent, they have Madame Ferrier with them looking for a home, and they've left Caine behind in Dementlieu. Their first night out of Dementlieu, however, would reveal all too much about Caine's fate...

Fear Itself - Part Three

**From the Patient Records of François Mousel,
at the Port-a-Lucine Saulbridge Sanatorium**

12 April, 735

Subject: Caine Shadowborn

In the two days since Caine Shadowborn was brought here anonymously, we have seen few signs of improvement. The subject still violently expresses extreme paranoia towards any who approach. I have decided to keep the subject in the isolation room for another three days.

16 April, 735

Subject: Caine Shadowborn

Some improvement. Subject has been removed to a normal cell, and treated for self-inflicted wounds (mostly bruises and abrasions). Paranoia still evident, and occasionally displayed in vocal outbursts. In the subject's quieter moments, he can be heard murmuring names, some of whom I recall from a recent visit to see Alexis Wilhaven. Perhaps they are friends? Nevertheless, I cannot seem to contact Isaiah or Heinrich - they appear to have fled the city during the Falkovnian attack. The Shadowborn family of Mordent has been contacted, but Lord Shadowborn refuses to provide assistance. Luckily, it would seem that the Council of Advisers has seen fit to contribute towards this patient's care.

25 April, 735

Subject: Caine Shadowborn

Subject is has calmed sufficiently to allow hypnosis. His account of recent events would seem to indicate excessive paranoia resulting in a coma-like dreamstate, during which his own paranoid fantasies were allowed to grow into a comprehensive confirmation of his waking suspicions. I expect the subject will require many weeks of treatment to disassociate these feelings.

5 June, 735

Subject: Caine Shadowborn

The subject is almost fully recovered, although we have failed to completely separate the patient's true memories from the delusional beliefs of monsters macabre and the walking dead. Still, the patient's journal has proved revelatory, particularly in recent passages where he recounts his own memory of his experiences during his paranoid breakdown. A copy is attached.

Caine's Journal

Van Richten confided the details of his troubled dreams to me when we met him in Port-a-Lucine after informing Lord-Governor Guignol of Drakov's plot. It seemed that he passed his disquiet onto me, but I see now that the seeds of my travail were sown much earlier. It seemed that we also shared a common quest and goal, to battle the darkness. That night I heard Rudolph calling to me in my dreams. I followed him, though I do not know how, and found myself in his surgery, with the Van Richten standing on the other side of the operating table.

Suddenly an ancient Vistani woman burst into the room with two men, carrying the body of a Vistani boy. The body was broken and battered, the woman's face stricken with grief. The doctor examined the boy and pronounced him dead. The woman face contorted with rage and loss and screamed at him, vowing vengeance...

Then the scene shifted and I was riding through a forest with the doctor in the dark of night. Rudolph explained that the Vistani had kidnapped his son, Erasmus, as retribution for the death of the Vistani child. He was sure that he had found the trail and was determined to track them down...

Then the scene shifted again, and we were riding through the Vistani camp at night. The doctor dismounted and snuck his way into the camp, to search for his son. We searched and searched, when the old woman burst from a nearby *vardo* and told the doctor that they had sold Erasmus to Baron Metus of Rivalis, in Darkon realm. Consumed with an unholy fury, Van Richten turned and rode home...

In Rivalis, we approached the manor of Metus. We were met by Metus at the door, a tall slim nobleman whose lithe movements conveyed a strange sense of malevolence. He

announced that Erasmus was already dead. At this point the good doctor lost all reason and flung himself at the elegant nobleman with the smirking grin. I leapt to support my friend. Rudolph was knocked aside quickly, while Metus and I traded sword thrust with parry and riposte. However, he seemed to be toying with me. He was an expert swordsman and blocked my every move, thwarting my every effort with ease. As I fought with a sinking heart, I was almost caught with surprise when his blade slid between my ribs, to spill my heart's blood...

I remember trying to yell, but feeling like my mouth and nose were filled with water, as if drowning. I felt like I wanted to wake up, but just.... couldn't. The darkness of my days seemed to have invaded my nights, leaving me helpless.

The dreams continued time after time, always the same, yet always with purposeful, remorseless variation. In calmer moments I was able to speak to Van Richten, who explained that he, too was experiencing the dreams. He said he felt as though truth was being revealed to him every time something in the dreams changed. Previously, he had not recalled anything about this Baron Metus being involved with the death of his son, but despite the revelation he felt that there was something else he could not recall - something profoundly important and disturbing.

At other stages of the dreams, I realised why I felt apprehension about the presence of the mysterious Emil at the abandoned estate to the north. He has a scar similar to Heinrich's on the back of his neck. Distrusting the others, I confided this fact only to Isaiah.

The dreams changed with very deliberate purpose. While initially the Vistani boy had been brought in dead, in later dreams he was mortally wounded. Even later, Van Richten appeared to have been uncertain about how to treat the boy, and he died on the Doctor's table. In every case, Madame Radanavich left angrily, swearing that Van Richten would pay for his death.

As we rode through the forest to the Vistani camp, the dreams changed to show a fire-eyed enemy in the surrounding forest, and Van Richten carrying the body of the Vistani boy on the back of his horse. Our encounters with the Vistani campsite grew gradually more vicious, as Madame Radanavich revealed the truth about Baron Metus.

Each time we approached Baron Metus, the death of Van Richten's son became more visible and terrible, the truth about Erasmus' vampiric state becoming clear to us each

time. Each time we cycled through the dreams, Van Richten became more and more upset, fearing what was being revealed to him. While his initial dreams has shown him as a victim of external forces, powerless to prevent the death of his son, I began to learn that Van Richten had played a much more important role in this tragedy. The damnable truth would not be revealed, however, until the final dream.

I was in the surgery once more with my companions and the doctor. The old Vistani woman brought the boy in. The boy was seriously ill, though not yet on death's doorstep. Heinrich and Rudolph examined the lad and stated that he could be healed. Unfortunately in his haste, Van Richten applied the incorrect salve to an open wound. Soon the boy was obviously in agony and struggling to breathe. His face and neck went blue, his eyes bulged and he died, blood dripping from his slack mouth. The Vistani woman - Madame Radanavich - glared at Rudolph with impotent fury. The doctor blanched and started stammering in fear, "Please don't hurt me! Take whatever you wish from my house, but please don't hurt me!"...

We were in the forest. The Vistani took the doctor's word literally and had kidnapped his son. The dead boy lay on the back of Rudolph's horse. However as we rode, the horses became skittish, fearing something in the forest. Soon we can see a figure silhouetted in the forest with two pits of fire for eyes. It spoke to Van Richten in a rasping voice, asking him whether he sought revenge on the Vistani. Rudolph, who seemed almost bereft of reason, replied that he would do anything to gain the return of his son.

Inside I was screaming for Rudolph to tell this creature to go, that it was obviously a scion of evil, but nothing came out and I watch the following events unfold with horrified fascination. The man shrouded in darkness suggested murder, but thankfully the doctor was not lost completely and he balked. The figure then asked a seemingly harmless request, "I seek something from the Vistani also - nothing but a simple scroll. If I aid you, will you seek it out for me?" Van Richten agreed, only to turn and find that the Vistani boy on the horse had started to rouse and was moving once more.

I almost wept as I saw this travesty of nature. Van Richten turned in wild surmise, almost elated, hoping beyond hope that the boy had returned to life, when a wave of sorrow passed over him and he realised what his heart told him, that he had dealt with evil and that the boy was dead. Soon the boy was joined by other figures stepping from outside

the trees within the forest. However, this feeling was fleeting and he hardened himself, though there gleamed a certain wildness in his eyes, of desperation and anguished remorse...

We approached the camp once more, wreathed in the stink of death. We seemed helpless, drawn along this quest that had strayed into darkness. The Vistani saw us coming and begun chanting ancient wards and charms, drawing a circle in the ground. Isaiah noticed a smaller camp in the back and saw Yvonne, the young Vistani who gifted him with the hexad. Hyskosa must have been here.

Madame Radanavich stood at the edge of the circle. After an angry exchange replete with bitterness, she declared in a ringing voice, "We sold your child to Baron Metus of Rivalin." With clenched teeth and an icy rage, terrible to behold, Van Richten responded, "Then I curse you all! May the walking dead take you all, as you have taken my son!" Saying that he waves the dead forward, but they seem barred by the protective circle ... until the Vistani boy broke the circle, his eyes an unholy green, his face a hideous grin. The dead move through the camp and the Vistani are slaughtered, and this time I wept, my soul shrivelling in horror...

It was then that Madame Radanavich, the last living person in the camp, beyond tears, said in a terrible, quiet voice, "I curse you, Rudolph Van Richten, with all the power of my people. May you live always amongst monsters, and see all you love fall beneath their claws, starting with your son! I tell you this - Baron Metus is a vampyre!" Van Richten wailed and rode off, leaving the devastated camp behind him, and we followed, unwilling spectators in this tragedy. The only blessing was that Isaiah had ensured that Hyskosa was safe, and Yvonne's ward had held true. Whatever that firey-eyed beast had been, it had been unable to obtain the scroll that it was after.

Once more we are at Metus' estate, under a blood red moon. We heard a noise and we saw the pale Erasmus come through the back gate. There, sobbing dark tears of blood, he begged that his father kill him and end his cursed existence. Sobbing, the doctor raises a stake and hammers it into his son's heart, and sobbing returned home... Arriving at Richten Haus, we entered to find the doctor's wife laying on the stairs, drenched in her own blood, still wet. A note pinned to her dress read, "A son for a son, a companion for a companion."

Then Baron Metus sauntered down the stairs wielding his rapier, looking for all the while like an man of honour and nobility, but in a combined scream of rage we charged him. Yet even as I fought I knew the end was inevitable. I fought well and skilfully, and when Max disarmed him, I struck what should have been the dying blow, when he grabbed my weapon, and with a smile of contempt he wrenched it from my hands, and bent it in half! I staggered in shock when his hand slashed across my neck, and the cloak of death came to smother me in darkness...

I woke screaming in my room. I can still hear the footsteps approach, my muscles becoming tense and the overwhelming feeling that the end was nigh, and the long night had come to darken the land forever. The others raced into my room, visibly shaken. I felt a tide of unreasoning panic well within me, and fear grip my heart. I raced to the corner and huddled there as would a child, babbling incoherently. My companions look confused and dismayed...

Time seemed to slow down as Gaston announced, "There are more working against you than you realise." His eyes rolled back into his head, and when they returned they had become the foul green we had seen at the lighthouse. He raised his gun ... when I heard Isaiah - stern, dependable Isaiah - cry in pain. He doubled over on the ground, his muscles twisting and contorting beneath his skin. Reddish hair sprouted from his arms and a snout began to form, just as I had feared after our encounter with Monette ... when I saw Max's calm face turn towards me, seeming pale once more. Then his eyes turned blood red, and his jaw opened, revealing pointed teeth as he reached for my neck ... Heinrich raised his gloved hand and pointed at me. A familiar crackling filled the air as he spoke in a tone of high authority, declaring his final judgment, "This game has been played for long enough. Your time is at an end, 'Lord' Caine of the Shadowborn." A blinding flash erupted from his hand, and there was an ear-shattering crack of thunder. Heat and light consumed my body ...

And I woke screaming and screaming and screaming before slipping into the darkness within ...

Fear Itself - Part Three - DM's Comments

This is the third part of the *Fear Itself* adventure, which was running concurrently with the first two parts. Basically, after each day's events in the waking world, we played out one of Van Richten's dream sequences in the Nightmare Lands. The alternating themes and threads made for an interesting couple of sessions.

Nick, Caine's player, wasn't actually present for this session, unfortunately. (Which is why he conveniently became unconscious after the first dream.) Nick was actually taking a nine month overseas holiday, which meant I had to write his character out of the campaign for a short time. This is why the topic of Caine's paranoia has come to a head - the character's stay in the Saulbridge Sanitorium was designed to be for the length of Nick's absence from the gaming table ;-)

Caine's paranoia, however, was being set up long before this session. Although something that Nick had not explicitly designed in the character, it was something that I noticed fairly early in our sessions - Caine would pick up on *any* little hint that something might not be what it looks like, and begin assuming all sorts of evil intentions. After a while, I began to actually feed this paranoia. Notable examples include Caine's paranoia about Max being a vampire in *The Return of the Ba'al Verzi*, and him thinking that he saw Isaiah shapeshifting in that same adventure. Similarly in *Drakov's Gambit*, Caine thought he heard noises and saw things that the other PCs did not notice. All of this was simply Caine's paranoia getting the better of him.

The dream sequence in this adventure was about Caine gradually magnifying his paranoia about his companions to the point of madness. Triggering this was the realisation that Van Richten, a friend that he had viewed as purely a victim of the horrors around him, had actually followed his own dark path. Caine's paranoia about others was then magnified, resulting in his madness.

Van Richten's entire story here was obviously stolen from David Wise's excellent short story "The Crucible of Dr. Rudolph Van Richten", in *Tales of Ravenloft*. I've only made a few changes to that story, in particular:

- Van Richten accidentally causes the death of Madame Radanavich's son (and he blames himself for doing so).

- The voice from the zombie in the forest (Azalin) asks Van Richten to retrieve a scroll from the Vistani. This is Azalin seeking Hyskosa's hexad. He fails here, but later retrieves it directly from Hyskosa's caravan (in Isaiah's solo adventure).
- Hyskosa's tribe is also camping with the Radanavich family, but escapes destruction. (Isaiah recognised Yvonne from the caravan, but she did not recognise him, since the dream was from before they met.)
- I've extrapolated information about the death of Van Richten's wife at the hands of Baron Metus.

Van Richten's story is so interesting that I was desperate to convey it to the players, and this seemed the most interesting way to do it. In this campaign, this is also the event that triggers Van Richten to actually begin investigating these paranormal events and supernatural creatures, leading to the writing of his famous Guides.

These dreams are also full of premonitions and realisations of previous visions:

- Caine's paranoia, and internment at the Sanitorium, is a realisation of the vision at the Lighthouse, in *Monette*.
- Caine's saving of Van Richten was also prophesied in the vision at the Lighthouse (but is this when Caine *truly* saves Van Richten?)
- Caine's paranoid fantasy about Gaston (the green eyes) is a repeat of the vision at the Lighthouse.
- The actions of Heinrich at the end of Caine's dream is a prelude to where that character is heading, particularly with the type of powers he is to acquire.
- The firey eyes of the zombie in the forest (from Van Richten's dream) is yet another occurrence of the firey eye motif which runs through all of the adventures. It all points towards Azalin, yet the players and characters have no reason to understand that at this point.
- Caine's observation about the scar on Emil's neck (similar to Heinrich's) will reveal itself soon enough.

On top of all that, why was the Dementlieu Council of Advisers willing to pay for Caine's treatment?

So, at this point, the other characters are in Mordent, wondering what has happened to Caine. However, as Francois Mousel of the Saulbridge Sanitorium points out, they do not

come after Caine for the next two months. Why is that? All is revealed in the next session, *Touch of Death* (but it's not what you think).

Touch of Death

Unfortunately, there is no journal entry for this session, due to Caine's confinement to the Saulbridge Sanitarium for the duration of this adventure. A description of the episode, including DM comments, is below.

At this point of the campaign, I was faced with a small dilemma. To continue the events of Hyskosa's Hexad, I needed to run the adventure *Touch of Death*, but I *really* didn't want to use the plot device of the mists to whisk the player's away to an Island of Terror so soon after having used it in *Night of the Walking Dead*.

The solution ended up using one of my favourite domains of all time in Ravenloft - Scaena.

The end of the previous session, Fear Itself, concluded in Van Richten's cottage in Mordentshire. At the end of that session, I ran a very short encounter where the players spotted a minor NPC (a young urchin) whom they thought was spying on them. They gave chase, into the back door of an unknown building. Suddenly, they found themselves on a stage, and were overcome by "fumes from the leaking gas lights". After being woken by the theatre owner, they were ushered out and assured the boy was not there...
...but of course, that was not what actually occurred.

Before the next session, I told the players that the next game would be played as a stand-alone. I explained that this adventure was crucial to the story arc of the campaign, but didn't fit well with the current characters - so we'd effectively treat it as a "cut scene" from the campaign. Pre-prepared characters were then provided - typical English explorer Lord Carnarvon types, with names like "Lord Bainbridge", and "Percival Whitney Esq." The version of *Touch of Death* was largely unchanged in content. The main change was that the characters started in the prime world from which Har'Akir comes, where the characters were exploring the ancient tombs and pyramids of the pharaohs. Of course, they are pulled into Ravenloft when a sandstone roof begins collapsing on them, and they found themselves involved in the plots and schemes of Isu and Senmet.

The one significant change was to Isu's motivation. Instead of simply completing her evil acts of her own volition, I altered her diary to suggest that a "mysterious note" had suggested that she go ahead with the rituals to raise Senmet. This note was found by the

PCs, and had the same fiery eye imprint that they found just after *Night of the Walking Dead*, with the same handwriting as said note. This is designed to imply that someone is instigating the events of the hexad - although it is not known why or by who.

Of course, this wasn't actually a cut scene, and they weren't playing different characters. *Touch of Death* was one of Lemot Sedium Juste's latest works, using Isaiah, Max, Heinrich and Gaston as its heroes. Because this adventure was regarded as a cut scene, however, the players hadn't taken this session as seriously as some others, giving Juste reason to be angry at them for "ruining" his wonderful production.

The revelation that they were still on stage, and that they had a very angry playwright wanting a word with them, left them a little surprised!

What followed was a series of discussions and arguments with Lemot Sedium Juste, who demonstrated his power over the PCs with several scenes which forbode several upcoming events in the campaign.

Scene 1: Sins of the Father

This is the scene from the novel *King of the Dead* where the Azal'Lan executes his son (Irik Zal'Honan) in front of his people for treason. The PCs have no way to understand the relevance of this scene at this point in the campaign (except for noting the similarity between Azal'Lan and Azalin), but it points towards the reason for this entire series of events to be occurring in my version of the Grand Conjunction/Grim Harvest.

Scene 2: Inheritance

This scene was set in Castle Avernus, during one of Azalin's debauched balls. The players were all guests at the ball in the scene, and some wandered the halls and came across hints of the decadent activities of the ball. After a short time, Azalin appeared on a balcony to make an announcement to the crowd - Jeremias Dachine (Maximillian's father) had suffered an untimely death on his way to the ball, and that his son - Lowellyn Dachine - would be installed as Baron of Nartok. This is a critical event from Max's past, particularly if you're aware of Lowellyn's role in the adventure *Death Ascendant*. This scene was used to forebode the presence of the PCs at one of Azalin's balls (much later in the campaign), and to emphasise the significance of that particular piece of Max's history.

Scene 3: The Madrigorian

This simple, short scene showed a young woman in a room with only a desk, an ornate quill, and ink. Sweating, she seems to be trying to resist something - but eventually gives in, rushes to the table, and starts writing. The woman is Bethany Madrigore, and she is beginning to write one of the pages of the infamous Madrigorian.

The fragment of the Madrigorian witnessed in the scene:

The Six were bound to come in time, for the Great Ones have decided it. However, there are those that would use the Six for their own ends.

Thus, the coming of the Six is not the fault of the seer, but he who has the seer wields the Six as he would do a weapon. As the Six come to pass, much will change.

With the first, murderers long dead will return to serve.

With the second, the watchers will betray the creator, and their ways will diverge for the first time.

The players looked over her shoulder, and could see what she was beginning to write (see box to the right). Although she continued to write, the scene ended before they could see the complete page. The characters will discover more of this entry from the Madrigorian in a later session (Castles Forlorn).

I love foreboding (as you might have guessed), so had a great time writing this. Although the players won't work this out until much later, the "Six" refers to the six signs of the hexad. What the first two paragraphs state is that the hexad is being manipulated by someone (as evidenced by the notes added to my versions of *Night of the Walking Dead* and *Touch of Death*). The second two begin to talk of *other* signs that will occur with each of the hexad signs. The first is the return of the Ba'al Verzi assassins - but the second won't be discovered for a few sessions yet.

The remainder of the session dealt with the attempts to escape from Scaena, and Juste's attempts to prevent it. This, of course, included Juste's standard repertoire of simulating the destruction of the theatre, and revealing only at the last minute that it's an illusion,

along with many debates on the reality or otherwise of the PC's existence. Eventually, however, they escaped back into Mordentshire....

... to discover that they had unknowingly spent three months in the theatre. (This time gap was largely a plot device. Caine's player, Nick, had returned from overseas, yet I needed Caine to have had enough time in the Sanitarium to be cured. It was still cool, though.) Where to from here? Upon escaping from Scaena, Gaston starts suffering from bad dreams, while Heinrich continues to have blackouts - and visions of murder. Heinrich's trauma truly begins in "The Ties That Bind", the next session of the campaign.

The Ties that Bind - Part One

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

Tuesday, 14th June

This night I arrived from Saulbridge Sanatorium where I have spent much of the last two months. I remember little of that very evil time. If I press I am enveloped in a miasma of pain and horror - of demons that roam the lands and haunt my dreams, of agonies that battered my body and seared my mind, and of the darkness cold and lifeless. Today I have returned to my homeland, though I am barred from my home. I have returned to the old forests, the peaceful riverbanks and the bluff cliffs over the dauntless sea. As I sit in the ruined chapel of old, where I first received the dreams of the Goddess, I feel a peace I have not felt since my torment began. Yet it is not a lightness of spirit, but a clearness of mind - a peace which weighs upon my soul. I feel a kinship with the flame of the candle as it flickers in the darkness.

Tonight I walk the silences of my soul.

Wednesday, 15th June

This day I took accommodation in the town. I did not announce my presence, yet inevitably I was recognised by a few. On these I sprinkled the waters of forgetfulness, a blessing of the fey bestowed upon me by the Goddess. I went to see my mother and we talked, after a loyal guard assisted my entry. She was glad to see me, and I her, for she is very dear to me, but I could not see her long lest my father see and grow wrathful. Though I wander the lands pressed by an unforgiving destiny, I must return at some stage to face my father and divine my true heritage.

Sunday, 19th June

I am once again in the ruined chapel. I have walked the land at night, renewing my connection with it and myself. Tonight I have decided to face the darkness that engulfed me. Though I bear little love for the place that was my home and prison, it has taught me a bitter lesson. Like Isaiah I have been marked so that I may see more clearly, the shadows without, and the demons within. Knowing now why Van Richten is such a troubled man I feel a sense of catharsis, but this vies with shame for my weakness, and horror at what I have seen.

Last night I dreamed once more ... I am on the cliffs of Mordent looking out at the sea. A storm rages ahead, and the wind whips about me. I see a flash, and the clouds part for the merest instant, far, far out to sea ... to reveal a door to a place of warmth and light. Then it is gone, and I see ominous shapes silhouetted by flashes of lightning, coming this way. Above the din of the storm I hear noises ... chanting of vile rituals, the cackling of demons, screams of pain and see flashes of visions, of scenes of devastation, of fire and blood ... and I remember the Lighthouse. The time has come to continue the battle. I can sleep now, knowing my time will come. For a time I can rest, and heal my soul.

Tuesday, 28th June

I have spent the last days in quiet solitude.

But now, two weeks since my return, our fateful group was made whole once more - though of course Ilyich had fallen to the darkness and my heart began to quicken. The sight of Heinrich, Isaiah, Gaston and Maximilian lifted my spirits even as I felt the return of the oppressive sense of destiny that bound us together on the day we met ... so recently, so long ago. Thus I write again to chronicle our story, our trials and tribulations.

We talked, ate and drank and for a time enjoyed the simple pleasures. There was a lightness I had not felt almost since our journeys begun. Yet as the sun failed over the horizon, we talked of the past few months, and what lay ahead. In a time of uncertainty and fear, we knew only that we were in a time of great upheaval. We were caught in webs

beyond our kenning, and struggle as we might, each revelation seemed heir to yet more mysteries. Nevertheless, I reject the feeling that our actions are merely the prompts (and taunts!) of a profane master of puppets. As we talked, we shared a mood of grim determination to rage against the dying of the light.

We conferred into the night with Dr Van Richten. He had news of Port-a-Lucine after the failed Falkovnian offensive. There had been a chorus of condemnation from the lords in the area against the blood-drenched Drakov, though Baron von Aubrecker of Lamordia was notably silent.

We talked into the night. Heinrich revealed to me the interesting piece of information that Francois Mousel, cousin of Dominic D'Honaire and main physician of Dementlieu had funded my 'treatment' at Saulbridge.

Wednesday, 29th June

We were not ready to move yet and had decided to stay a while and gain a brief respite after our respective travails. Alas it was not to be. The good Doktor Weiderleben has suddenly had a macabre vision to which we listened with horrified fascination.

He seemed to be able to see through the eyes of another in a different place. He was looking at a person tied and bound. His eyes were wide with terror. It seemed to Heinrich as if he himself were wielding a scalpel as a weapon and conducting an interrogation. He asked the victim questions such as "Where are they?", "When did they leave town?" and "You saw the murders, didn't you?". Out the window Heinrich could see a glittering yellow clock-tower he doesn't recognise.

The victim only stammered in hysterical ignorance when the questioner flew into a murderous rage. Heinrich blanched as he told of the attack that left the person hideously wounded, and bleeding to death, moaning piteously.

Doctor Van Richten informed us that the clock-tower is a landmark in the city of Karina

in Invidia and that as the harvest is almost over, they are holding their annual famed wine festival. During this time the city plays host to visitors from many lands. Recently, however, before the beginning of the festival, fifteen people were found torn apart in a warehouse within the city. As a result, many who would normally attend have decided against it.

It seems to all of us that the Patchwork Bride is responsible and we decided to go without delay, through Richemulot and the Arkandale Valley. If what Heinrich saw was accurate, then it lies upon us to apprehend the murderer. The fires of justice burn within me still. We spend the rest of the day organising for travel. My mother must have heard of this, since that night I receive a letter from her bidding me a safe journey once more and generously enclosing a letter of credit to fund my travels.

Friday, 1st July

Having left yesterday, and riding as quickly as we might, we arrived late in Delouise, a small town in Arkandale near the Richemulot border. There we were to wait for the riverboat 'Virago' which was to arrive in two days. We stabled our horses and entered to local inn.

Once inside we were approached by a beautiful young woman in a long, elegant, red dress and red satin gloves. She had long braided brown hair which cascaded over her shoulders and entrancing dark eyes. She introduced herself as Miss Nostalia Romane from Levkarest, Borca and stated that she was travelling alone.

She seemed interested in speaking with me in particular. I was almost smitten by her already, so I readily agreed to her suggestion to take a walk outside. After a little time as we walked in the forest we heard the playing of a violin outside the town.

We came to a small clearing in which there was a *vardo*, a Vistani carriage, with metalwork hanging off it. There was a small fire burning in the centre and a swarthy man with greying hair sitting on a log playing a violin. He appeared to be a blacksmith.

We listened as he played music passionate and heartfelt. He had not noticed us standing there quietly, but when his eyes met mine, he stopped and we introduced ourselves. He was Raoul, a Vistani blacksmith as we had surmised, and had a child, Nico, though he no longer had a wife. Raoul showed us his carriage and his wares. Nico was asleep. Nostalia's eyes lit up when she first heard the child, but her face crinkled in concern upon seeing him. Nico was obviously extremely sick and malnourished.

We told Raoul that we had in our company a doctor of some skill - Heinrich - and we would be happy to bring him here. Since the need is so dire, we go without delay and return with both Heinrich and Isaiah. Raoul related his story as the Herr Doktor examined the child.

Raoul's wife Layla had died during the birthing of Nico some two months ago. However, soon after her death, her disembodied spirit began returning at midnight every day to 'suckle' her child while Raoul is powerless to do all but play for her. Like Eric, whom we met some months ago, Raoul possesses an *Instanctivari viola*.

We decided to wait with him until midnight and see what we may do to set her soul at peace. While Gaston remained in Delouise, Max had arrived and while Heinrich, Isaiah and I remained in the carriage with Raoul, he waited underneath the *vardo*. At midnight, as I looked out into the forest I was still astonished to see that Raoul's words were truth.

A young woman seemed to walk out from amongst the trees. She wore brightly coloured skirts and many anklets. With her delicate auburn hair cascading down past her shoulders and her firmly muscled midriff she was achingly beautiful. I noticed however that the rain seemed to pass right through her and that she was a shade, an apparition and not solid. We could only gaze adoringly as she approached the *vardo*, and entered through the door.

As she had done that, Heinrich, Isaiah and Max had managed to shake the fog from their

minds to act whilst I watched in dumb fascination. Max had entered from outside and attempted to restrain the increasingly solid Layla, while Isaiah grabbed the child in order to protect it. All three urge Layla to depart, for though she loves her child, she was killing it.

She ignored their pleas however and continued to advance. From behind Max struck her down while Heinrich had run outside to smash the back window of the *vardo*. Max struck me to wake me from my stupor and succeeded, when she turns around and strikes him in return, fierce anger writ large on her face. Max immediately began shivering as though he was in the grip of a terrible cold ... a cold from beyond the grave. As I attempted to protect him, I too was struck and suffered his fate.

At was at this point that Isaiah, familiar with the ways of the Vistani, and more sympathetic to them, ran outside with Raoul, for he had noticed something. Raoul had obviously not burnt all of Layla's possessions as was traditional in their society. The violin bow was brown in colour rather than the traditional white. It was obvious to Isaiah that Raoul had used hair from his wife to string the bow.

The angry Layla followed them outside, a terrible sight to behold. Working quickly Isaiah grimly faced her and drew a line of ash from the fire along the ground with this cane as he appealed to his God. She tried to cross but failed, writhing in insubstantial agony. Taking advantage of her weakness they threw bow and violin in the fire and as it burnt she dissipated, becoming fine mist melting into the night. Though exhausted, the Reverend completed his task by consecrating the fire.

At was at this point that Gaston had arrived with Heinrich - who had obviously gone to the village to seek his assistance. Both were brandishing their firearms. With the battle over they moved to warm both Max and I by the fire. Fortunately the chill passed. We became warm while Raoul explained why he did not burn the bow. Layla was from a different tribe and had he had a long difficult courtship. He snuck into her camp one day, stealing a few locks of her hair and stringing his bow with it. He then played every night

for a year with thoughts only of love for her. We are moved by his story and saddened by his plight, though at least the menace is past and his wife is at rest. We returned to the village.

Saturday, 2nd July

This morning I go to see Nostalia once again. She introduces me to another couple waiting for the ship - a Michael and Charlotte Ratcliffe of Mordent. We talk and while away the time until the Virago arrives at night. Gaston books passage for us and Nostalia with the captain, a Nathan Timothy.

Sunday, 3rd July

All the passengers boarded this morning and we set off for our river journey to Invidia. Our start was delayed a little by a man who arrived on horseback just as the final preparations were being made.

The Virago is a beautiful long white boat, sumptuously decorated and with excellent service. Although we take time out to enjoy the luxury and rest, we decide to mingle with the guests, many of which will be attending the wine festival. I, of course, spent much of my time with the lovely Nostalia.

At dinner, Gaston heard talk that the late arrival was the captain's son, Matthew, coming to report that the captain's daughter, and his sister, Esther, had been murdered in Saint Rouges in Richemulot. Apparently she was the victim of a frenzied knife attack in her own home. There was no sign of forced entry into the house. Indeed, it was rumoured that Matthew was himself the murderer. The fact that the captain was not at dinner with the passengers lent credence to the rumour, or at least pointed to the fact that something was wrong.

Gaston a little later asked the captain permission to perform for the passengers and was told gruffly "Do what you will." Gaston outdid himself this night, although I'm sure that such an assembly of potential patrons would have enhanced his enthusiasm. As we

watched the spectacular performance, a man came past offering white roses for sale. He went initially to Michael Ratcliffe, who rebuffed him. I decided to buy one for Nostalia, who upon receiving it, managed to cut herself on a thorn. Strangely, she would not let me tend to her wound, nor would take off her glove for that purpose. Gaston came to our table and offered Charlotte Ratcliff flowers from his own pocket with a flourish, which he made disappear as quickly as the appeared to thunderous applause. While Charlotte blushed, pleased, I noticed that Michael's face had darkened imperceptibly.

With Gaston and other entertainment, the night passed very pleasantly. I learned that the Ratcliffes went to the wine festival every year. Though they affected noble bearing, they were obviously bourgeois nouveau riche. The Lady Nostalia was a manager of events for high society in Levkarest, dealing with the nobility and the rich and was of semi-aristocratic birth. As a noble myself I took notice of such things, but held only contempt for those who took social station to be a judge of character. The nobility were capable of wickedness and debauchery far in excess of the common townsfolk or peasantry - witness the Marquis de Penible.

Monday, 4th July

Our journey continued today through the untamed wilds of Arkandale. We passed through an awesome gorge and forests of stunning vitality and beauty. I felt renewed and invigorated by the entire experience, one I shared with Nostalia. She was reluctant, however, to share much of herself. Yet beneath the polish and poise I sense deeper currents of passion and feeling.

As the day passed, the mountains began to flatten out and I knew we approached our destination, the village of Curriculo. Max sent Skimmer to scout ahead, and returned with troubling news - that there were many large things moving through the forest towards the village.

The Virago was approaching the dock area of the village. As it did so we observed a large dog-like creature emerge from the forest to leap into the village with snarling fury. Soon

we heard screams from the village - wolves had laid siege to the village! Such behaviour was extremely unusual for such animals, but only then did I realise that the feel of the place - youthful, vibrant, and wild - held an undercurrent of savagery and atavism. Once again it was time to do battle. Lifting Herald to my lips I let loose a clarion call to alert the village and the passengers.

It was hard to watch as the villagers ran madly towards the dock, fleeing the carnage we imagined in the village. One of those fleeing was dragging his blood-soaked foot. At the same time, however, as night began to fall, we heard angry voices coming from the captain's cabin, as Isaiah and Gaston rushed to warn him of the attack. They heard Matthew speaking to his father:

"Alfred is right. We don't belong amongst them, yet you continue the charade! Father, Alfred shall take what you claim!"

As a result of this internecine feuding the *Virago* had not slowed for the dock. People fled madly from the village into the forest, being followed by wolves and things. Some were caught and we saw the beasts feast upon the remains. Now we saw wolves approaching the villagers stranded on the docks, stalking their prey, seemingly feeding off their fear.

Upstairs, Gaston and Isaiah heard a squelching and breaking of bone from within the captain's cabin. They burst inside to see Nathan laying against the wheel of the *Virago*, wounded by deep gashes across his chest ... and facing him was a horror seven foot tall wielding a dagger, with arms and legs like a man, but the fur, visage, teeth, and claws of a wolf. Once again the legends from books have come to life and we faced the lycanthropos, the werewolf. Such creatures were reputed to be able to take the forms of both man and wolf, and melding the worst, most savage qualities of both. They were said to be vulnerable to silver and to shift according to the phases of the moon. It was also said that those wounded by them, especially if bitten, could later wake to find themselves with no memory, but having just gone on a murderous rampage ... inevitably succumbing to the beast.

Isaiah cracked his whip and managed to disarm the beast, but it nevertheless lashed out, striking Nathan in the neck. The beast seemed to be Matthew, rending his father. It continually struck Nathan, causing the wheel to shift wildly. Outside the Virago continued to career wildly towards the dock as we braced for impact. As the wolves approached the villagers on the dock, Heinrich took out a soft greyish ball and set it alight with one of his scientific artifacts. Having set it alight he tosses it towards the wolves.

The boat slammed into the end of the dock. The wolves having seen this began to sprint towards their prey, who leap for the safety offered by the Virago. Three of them landed safely, whilst one was caught by a slaving wolf and another fell into the water, having been saved by the fact one wolf was kept at bay after being scorched by Heinrich's flaming sphere. The impact of the collision causes a great crash, as the boat smashes the end of the dock into kindling. The screams from the village continued unabated.

The Virago continued to go forward, its keel grinding along the ruins of the dock. A particularly large wolf, eyeing Max, Heinrich and I standing at the prow, makes a prodigious leap, landing in front of Max. Max, moving like lightning strikes the wolf, whilst I withdraw to draw on the power of my goddess and Heinrich shoots at a wolf on the docks, but yields on the fizzle of a slow burn which has too often plagued our gunfire. As I return to the fray, I see Max raked along his abdomen, but I bring Anathema down upon the beast and cleave its skull in twain. Hearing the screams from above I decide to run upstairs, leaving Max and Heinrich to deal with any other wolves that may menace the ship. As I left, the dead wolf slowly shifted to reveal a dead human, a conclusive sign that we indeed faced the legendary werewolves.

Upstairs Gaston and Isaiah were having a hard time of it. They had managed to injure the beast somewhat, Gaston having performed his astonishing disembodied glove trick and then attempting to hypnotise it whilst striking with his dagger. Isaiah had noticed that the dagger he pulled from the beast's grip was black, gold and red ... another foul Ba'al Verzi

implement of evil. Seeing the beast, I struck with silver Anathema, causing it to growl in agony and then collapse, disembowelled. As its life's blood pooled on the wooden floor, it shifted back to human form and was indeed revealed to be Matthew Timothy. I briefly wondered about his father but the press of events was too great for the moment.

We left Heinrich to care for the captain and the other wounded, Max to take care of the villagers that had jumped on the boat, Isaiah to calm the passengers and myself to take the Ba'al Verzi dagger, which unlike that possessed by Ilyich had a soft, newly made grip with red runes. I decided to leave it in Gaston's safe-keeping whilst I looked for Nostalia. She was not in her room. I noticed, however, that she had put her rose in a vase and that it now had red streaks through it.

Gaston, after pocketing the dagger, went in search of Arabella Timothy, the wife of Nathan and the step-mother of Matthew, his real wife having died some years ago. He brought her to the captain's room, where we had placed Nathan in Heinrich's care. He was unconscious. When she arrived Gaston told her what had happened. She told Heinrich and him that Alfred was an estranged son of Nathan.

Suddenly Nathan woke and shouted "No ... no!" before he starting sliding towards the back of the boat. Heinrich grabbed Nathan, but could not hold him against the mysterious force that was pushing him against the back of the boat. Then, Nathan loosed an ear-splitting scream, and slumped unconscious. There seemed to be a strange feeling of release in the air.

Meanwhile, I had found Nostalia in the ballroom, a little shaken and confused, like most of the passengers, but in sound condition. I then returned to meet and discuss the events of the night with the others. Heinrich examined the wounds suffered by Max and Isaiah during the battle, and then also the Ba'al Verzi dagger. He informed us that the grip was made of human skin. Testing Nathan for a reaction to silver while he is unconscious with a coin, but there was nothing. We noted that the incident in his room occurred at approximately the same time at the Virago crossed the border from Arkandale into

Invidia. Before sending instructions that the boat be stopped for the night, we had Gaston break the dagger and toss it into the middle of the river. We went to sleep, though we set a watch.

Tuesday, 5th July

We spoke with Arabella in the morning to learn that Nathan was still unconscious. We decide to do some further investigation. Heinrich located the captain's diary and read it. It appears that Nathan believed that Matthew had murdered Esther after she had informed her father that Alfred might move on him. Matthew naturally tended to side with Alfred. The birth mother of both Matthew and Alfred, Prucilla, died in the year 713. I cannot help but believe that what we witnessed was a struggle within a family of werewolf lords. The Goddess aid us if I am correct, the tomes I had read mentioned them only as solitary predators. We learnt also that Nathan has three other children - William, Clifford and Virginia.

We search Matthew's room for more clues. There are few possessions, but we find a note which appeared to be a set of instructions: "The first victim must be a family member, then it will gain power..." This is an obvious reference to the Ba'al Verzi. The family member must be Esther or Nathan. Ilyich had slain his mother before being claimed by the evil. We are troubled by the reach of the Ba'al Verzi.

While we pursued our investigations, Gaston had been organising entertainment to cheer up the shocked passengers. We try an extended test on Nathan by leaving a silver coin in his hand. Returning some time later it had left a welt. Our suspicions have been confirmed - Nathan is not only a werewolf, but a patriarch of a werewolf clan. Yet we could not slay him in cold blood. It appears he is a bulwark against another faction led by his son Alfred who are the greater evil. Alas that our choices are so often only the choice between the lesser of two evils.

The Virago is well and truly in Invidia now, winding towards Karina. Once again, however, the peace is disturbed by events on the banks of the river. We hear the sounds

of branches breaking and snapping along one bank. Looking we see a horseman emerge from the forest, his horse's nostrils flaring and sweating heavily - it has obviously been ridden very hard. There are also sounds of barking dogs. This is obviously a hunting trip - we can just see a deer desperately fleeing the hounds. Moments later a man of regal bearing comes out of the forest astride a fine black horse. He is soon followed by some six other young horsemen on the hunt. They ride on after the deer.

That evening, to be the last on the Virago, Gaston hosts another show, after which musicians play so the guests may dance. I dance with Nostalia. Nathan Timothy remains in torpor.

Wednesday, 6th July

We reach the small, walled city of Karina that morning. It is the seat of government in Invidia, which has among other things a substantial wine and timber industry. As soon as we entered the city, 'Goldfinger' (the city's clocktower) is immediately obvious. It chimed midday as we glided towards the docks. Heinrich told us that by his judgment his vision took place somewhere south of the building.

After docking we disembarked. We immediately went looking for the person selling those white roses on the Virago since we passed another passenger bearing such a rose with red streaks. Having found him, we were informed that he thinks they are from Borca and that they have sold well to date. Max decided to buy one of them.

We then went to the wine garden to finally take part in the festivities and arrange for accommodation. There were many revellers there, a few of whom wore masks. Nostalia and I decided to stay in the elegant "Silver Stair" which specialised in glum wines, whilst the others stayed in the "Laughing Maiden". We dispersed, Nostalia and I were joined by the Ratcliffes - whilst the others decided to investigate the murders. There had been twenty-six people murdered recently in the warehouse district.

Heinrich, Max, Isaiah and Gaston went to the warehouse district. As they walked,

somebody shouted in alarm to look out. Two horses leading a cart reared and tipped the cart. This tipped the barrels of what were presumably wine onto the docks area, towards where two small children were playing. One was struck, breaking his leg. More barrels rolled towards them.

On seeing this, the group acted quickly. Max ran between the children and the falling barrels, whilst Isaiah grabbed the bar which holds the cart horses together, though they ran madly, dragging him along with them. Heinrich had tried to effect one of the horses with an iron needle - something he had done on Monette before, but failed this time. As a measure of desperation Isaiah tried to mount one of the horses, but fell and the horses ran off the docks into the water.

Gaston then noticed a child dressed in black velvet with a white lace collar staring at him and grinning maliciously. Gaston attempted to approach and speak with the boy, but he fled and disappeared into the crowd. The driver of the cart had no idea what spooked the horses.

Taking time to regroup, they travelled to the warehouse of the Kantaras, where the murders had occurred. The doors and windows were boarded up, and there seemed to be nobody about the place. Going into an alley Max ripped a board off a window. The inside was very dark, but they noticed the floor was discoloured in many places - blood, in all likelihood.

They went to a local guardhouse to speak to the watch, passing a Falkovnian enclave on the way. They were told that not all victims had been identified, but that the fifteen found dead were variously beaten, clawed or feasted upon. This was less than the twenty-six recently reported. The Kantara family had left the warehouse empty over the winter. When they came to open it they found that a window had been broken. One man was sent to fetch the guard, but by the time they returned it was a scene of carnage. All the dead appeared to be workers for the Kantaran winery. The Kantaran family ran the "Shield and Boar". The guard who notified the watch was later found in another warehouse, badly cut

up and blinded. The man experience had driven the man insane - he had obviously been the victim of a hideous attack, and was now residing in a hospice. My companions were, of course, were immediately reminded of Heinrich's vision. The foul assailant obviously wished to know more of the murders for some reason.

They proceeded back to the wine garden, where they inform me of their investigations and requested that I join them in investigating the warehouse the guard was found in. We manage to convince the guards to permit us entry and speak with Maria Kantara. Heinrich looked about to see whether his vision took place here - he thought it probably was.

We left to join the night-time revels. I rejoin Nostalia, who had lost her rose. There were many people about, from many lands. She tells me that she must leave tomorrow for her home in Levkarest, but asks that I visit her there should I pass by. I am saddened but we dance and then take a moonlight walk, before she retires for the night.

Later that night we went to the warehouse in which the unfortunate Kantaran workers were found. The only thing a thorough search revealed was a small piece of white lace ripped off a dress. It must have been the Patchwork Bride, but mysteries remained - who inflicted the claw and bite marks, such as wild beats (or worse) would inflict? What was the Patchwork Bride doing here, and how did she arrive unhidden?

Thursday, 7th July

In the morn, I see Nostalia off to her home. We then proceeded to the hospice to speak with the unfortunate guard. On our way we passed the "House of Mists". The resident Vistani fortune-teller spied Isaiah and grabbed him by the arm, saying "We need the help of you and your friends". Inviting us inside, he warns that there is a great danger in Karina, and requested that we see his people that night. We agreed.

At the hospice, we arrive to see the guard. We are horrified to see the result of such unadulterated evil. He has no eyes, though mercifully they are bandaged, and his lips

have been cut away revealing a hideous grin. It is no wonder that the man's mind has been shattered. We attempt to communicate with him, but manage to glean only that the attacker matched the description of Emil Bollenbach. Heinrich confirms that man's injuries were probably inflicted by a scalpel ... as wielded by the attacker in his vision.

We return to the wine garden, saddened. There we spot the Ratcliffes. Michael mentions that there is a game tomorrow night, in the Falkovnian quarter. Gaston and Heinrich agree to go, "as gambling men".

We then visit the flower store and show them an example of the white flower, which we are told is a rare flower named the 'Falkovnian Pale Rose' due to its origin. It is notoriously difficult to cultivate.

At dusk we travelled to the Vistani camp in the Vulpwood. After the events of the past few days we are somewhat disconcerted to hear distant howls and to see shadows running in the forests ahead. We came to a clearing with a familiar feel - a Vistani encampment with six *vardos*, like the one outside the village of Barovia. The fortune teller approaches us, though looking bedraggled, unshaven and in a brown robe, unlike the usual coloured gaudiness. He invites us to sit on logs around the fire.

A *vardo* door opens and an extremely old woman walks out, though her hair is not grey. We are astonished to find that it is the legendary Madame Eva herself! Although we have seen her before in Barovia, she had not spoken. I could feel her power, and although I had always been uneasy around her people, she commanded respect. She asked us to eat and drink, providing fragrant tea and stew, superb fare for which the Vistani are justly famed.

After dinner, the Vistani brought out violins and started clapping and dancing. Whatever else may be said about them, and even the ineffable air of melancholy which seemed to hang about them, the Vistani were a people who valued celebration and laughter. A girl started dancing and the fire seemed to dance with her. She stopped spinning a few minutes later and looked at Isaiah. Together they dance.

Shortly afterwards Eva knocks on a door, and a Vistani woman in a tiered skirt comes out and greets us. She said in commanding tone "it is time for the doroq." The violins stop and a hush comes over the assembled crowd. Eva then began to speak in the Vistani patina, telling of their story. Another Vistani translated the story for us.

As a young girl Gabrielle Adarre was warned by her mother Isabella that she may never have children: "A man, a babe, a home - these things can never be for you, Gabrielle, for tragedy will be the only result." The bitter pair wandered the land for many years, and all that time Gabrielle pressed her mother to know more of her mysterious father and of her future, though Isabella forbade it. And so Gabrielle learned nothing more until her nineteenth year, on the eve of her mother's death.

While travelling in Arkandale, Isabella allowed Gabrielle to set the warding circle around their camp. They had argued that day, as they had many other days, and Gabrielle had once again failed. Tired and seething with anger, Gabrielle wove the protective charms hastily. As the light of the rising moon bathed the camp in ghostly radiance, a horror, a loup garou, leaped from the shadows and breached the ward.

Before she could ready herself, the fiend knocked Isabella to the ground, and ripped a great gash in her leg with its jaws. Crawling away frantically, Isabella turned a baleful eye upon the creature, blasting it with the full force of her hate and malice. It fell dazed to the ground as the enchantment tightened its grip. As the blood pulsed from her torn leg, Isabella called to her daughter for aid, but Gabrielle saw only an opportunity.

"Tell me of my father," Gabrielle bargained, "and I will save your life." Isabelle was furious. "The charm will not hold the wolf for long! His strength will return, and he will slaughter us both!" But Gabrielle would not be swayed, and as Isabelle's vision began to blur, she told her daughter of her past. Though her life's blood spilled onto the ground below, Isabella's voice was calm and strong in the cool night air.

"I was captured as a child and sold as a slave in Falkovnia. My master was a sadistic monster. For amusement each night he would gather a group of slaves and impale them before his castle. Their dying screams would mingle with the chamber music and polite conversation. But because of my beauty and Vistani gifts, I survived. Many nights I wished he had slain me like the others. Years later, when I finally escaped, I was two months pregnant with you.

"I have told you enough of your father. Bring my potions before the beast kills us both." Gabrielle was stunned, her romantic dreams of her mysterious father rent like rotten cloth. She stumbled away from her mother into the vardo. There she packed her mother's prized tarokka and potions into a sack, whilst the wolf convulsed in its ensorcelled state, helplessly held by the power of the evil eye. Gabrielle returned to her mother and said. "I don't believe your lies, mother. I'm leaving to find my father." Gabrielle turned and fled into the darkness.

Her mother pleaded frantically for her daughter to return, but the beast stirred and soon the screams came. Before she fell before the claws of the beast, Isabella uttered a curse that echoed though the forest: "The Mists take you, traitor. May you know your child's betrayal and realise too late the depths of its evil!" As she ran amongst the trees a strange mist closed about Gabrielle, and she was gone.

Gabrielle found herself in the wilds of Invidia. She soon fell afoul of a guard patrol and was brought in chains before the Lord Bakholis in Castle Loupet. Proud and confident, Bakholis sought to enslave Gabrielle, as the Falkovnian lord had enslaved her mother. But the witch was strong, and inflicted the evil eye upon Bakholis, who fell just as the wolf. Thinking that her mother's curse had gone with the mists, Gabrielle stepped forward with her dagger, and as Bakholis writhed, slit his throat. Yet her victory was short lived, for soon she found she could not pass the borders of Invidia, her dominion, and her prison.

Years passed and though the bitterness welled within her, Gabrielle became accustomed

to her imprisonment. She took many lovers from the small town of Karina, but the passage of time could not erase the memory of the curse laid by her mother. Gabrielle was careful to use the medicinal arts taught by her mother to prevent her bearing child. She treated her lovers as thralls and with disdain, enslaving them with the power of her eye and discarding them when she grew tired or bored. None were able to comfort her terrible, aching loneliness.

One day a dark traveller appeared at the gates of Castle Loupet. From the moment he locked eyes with Gabrielle in the great hall, her heart, which had never been touched, melted under his hypnotic gaze. She soon invited the handsome stranger into her boudoir. Before they had mounted the stairs, however, the couple were confronted by Matton Blanchard, the lover that Gabrielle had just discarded. Matton was the only one who had felt genuine affection for Gabrielle, for unbeknownst to her, he had not succumbed to the power of the eye. Now hurt and jealous he hurled himself at the stranger. The seeming gentleman caught him and hurled him to the ground with terrific force. Gabrielle, meanwhile, overcame her surprise and stunned her former lover with her gaze. Leaving him convulsing on the floor, they climbed from the great hall into her private chambers.

In the privacy of her bedroom, Gabrielle gave succumbed to the infernal power of the stranger. Even when the stranger disrobed to reveal a pair of black, bat-like wings unfold into a canopy of darkness, she thought it hardly strange. She welcomed him into her embrace ... and she screamed as she was violated by this spawn of darkness. When it was over, he told her, "You will remember me only as the handsome stranger," before leaving. His voice carried the weight of compulsion. And then he was gone.

Then, The Vistani turned and spoke directly to us, piercing us with her gaze.

"From that monstrous union, an abomination was born, a creature in the guise of a child, known to us as the Dukkar. It is this creature we have come to defeat. Its very presence gnaws at us like a cancer, as it is a gaping wound in our Sight. We ask that you assist us in our endeavour. As giorgio you may walk about Karina unnoticed, and learn of its lair.

For this information we would be grateful."

As Eva speaks Isaiah started to feel faint.

This story explained much to us, and we connected it to what we knew. The Vistani have been told not to act against the dukkar, who is revealed to us as the child seen by Gaston. The dukkar is not bound to the land yet. The borders in the land are shifting and that this is being willed by certain powers. Instantly some of the more recent events made more sense - the Falkovnian offensives against nearby lands and the mysterious events surrounding Nathan Timothy.

The dukkar must be stopped, for as he moves across the land, he will breach borders and that this will unleash a wave of evil. The only way to prevent this is to tie him to the land.

Isaiah asks of the Ba'al Verzi. Eva told us that she fears that Ilyich rules them, and through him, the devil Strahd. This is so since the dagger borne by Ilyich was the original Ba'al Verzi dagger - which belonged to Strahd himself. The ancient murderers will spread throughout the land.

We were instructed to return to Karina and find an outcast Vistani named Scar Tabor, as well as Gabrielle and the child dukkar. Gabrielle is a virtual hermit in Castle Loupe. Scar can be found in "The Pale Rose" - an inn in the Maze. The Maze is the seedy neighbourhood which houses the vermin and unfortunate of Karina such as criminals, prostitutes, gamblers. Scar Tabor is apparently the underground ruler of that place. We are to arrange a meeting at night in the Falkovnian quarter - where the fights and gambling is. The password is "Verbrek lives". Verbrek is a nearby domain which is heavily wooded and has very few if any people. It is said to be the home of many wild beasts. Interestingly it borders Arkandale.

We give our leave and return to Karina, heavily in thought.

The Ties that Bind - Part One - DM's Comments

With this session, we return to the journal of Caine Shadowborn upon his arrival back in Mordent after being treated for his madness (paranoia) in the Saulbridge Sanitarium. Caine's player, Nick, took the opportunity of this life-changing event to refocus the nature of his character from an extremely paranoid monster-hunter to a more thoughtful, considered enemy of evil.

At the start of this session, the characters were enjoying one of the first significant breaks in the hectic campaign to date. Two separate events disrupt the peace, however.

The first is not described in Caine's journal, being a dream of Gaston's. He dreams of being shot in Port-a-Lucine during the rescue of Marie de Ferrier. As he blacks out in the dream, he feels as if he's drowning in deep, black water. Though he tries to recover, the only thing he can feel is the pressure of someone else seemingly climbing over him as he sinks - as if something is using him as a stepping stone, pushing him down into the blackness. This dream relates to Gaston's vision at the lighthouse - something from Gaston's past has been awoken by his near-death experience.

The second is Heinrich's violent and vivid vision. This occurred in the same way that Heinrich's other recent lapses had occurred, when he woke up seemingly with amnesia. This time, however, he awoke looking through the eyes of some apparently murderous individual that would later turn out to be Emil Bollenbach. This is obviously related to the scar in the back of his neck (which Emil also has), but exactly why won't be discovered for a few sessions yet.

The PCs also hear of the murders in Karina, and (correctly) assume that it is the work of the Patchwork Bride. All of this is a direct lead-in to my slightly-modified version of *The Evil Eye*, set in Karina. Most of the elements of this adventure are used in this and the following session, but with various additional elements which are noted below.

- **Nostalia Romane:** Those of you who know about Ivana's emordenung will know about this deadly NPC! I introduced Nostalia as a potential (tragic) love interest for party members - as it turned out, Caine would be the subject of her attentions. She makes a few appearances in the rest of the campaign. You'll note that her surname is different from canon - that's just a personal preference.

- **Virago:** I much prefer a larger riverboat to the small craft that was given to Nathan Timothy in *The Evil Eye*, so that's why this is a passenger-bearing craft.
- **Arkandale:** At the start of this adventure, Arkandale still exists. One of the purposes of this session is to start weaving in the changes of the Grand Conjunction into the campaign - and hence, we get to witness Nathan Timothy losing his domain. The characters, of course, do not completely understand the relevance of domain borders, but this is the first of several clues to their significance. Alfred Timothy's capturing of Arkandale may seem a little less than spectacular, but his success is related to the involvement of the Ba'al Verzi assassins. This is also the first indication that the borders of Ravenloft are weakening as the Grand Conjunction approaches.
- **The Ba'al Verzi:** Here we see the first appearance of the Ba'al Verzi since their return some sessions ago - and so it would appear that Strahd is somehow supporting or condoning Alfred's attack on Arkandale. This is far from the only time we'll be seeing the Ba'al Verzi in the remainder of the campaign - as can be seen by Matthew's murder of a family member, and the new dagger, the Ba'al Verzi are in recruitment mode!
- **The White Roses:** Many of you will recognise these as Bloodroses. Their appearance is the beginning of another thread that will not see completion until almost the end of the campaign - simply know that *someone* is handing out these roses, and stealing them back, for a very specific purpose.
- **Emil and the Patchwork Bride:** Just to clarify the notes of Caine's, Emil attacked the guard who had witnessed the most about the Patchwork Bride murders - hence, given what Emil asked him, would indicate that Emil is also chasing the Patchwork Bride. We'll find out why in a few sessions.

In general, this session went pretty much as I'd planned it. It incorporates a lot of existing threads (Emil, the Bride, the Ba'al Verzi) and introduces quite a few more (the roses, Nostalia, and the domain borders), so I'm just thankful that it ended up making any sense at all! The resolution of *The Evil Eye* continues in the next session, with a few twists to make it fit the overall campaign....

Oh - if you're wondering why I changed the title of this session from *The Evil Eye*, it was basically because of the range of other threads involved. The "Ties that Bind" refers to a range of relationships that are strained in the two sessions - Nathan's tie to the land, Nathan's tie to his family, the Vistani vows to Strahd (more evident in Part 2), and Heinrich's apparent tie to Emil. Even more become evident in Part 2, when it starts to focus on Malocchio and the need to bind him to the land.....

The Ties that Bind - Part Two

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

Friday, 8th July

In the morning we returned to the botanist to inquire about the rose. He informed us that it had been stolen. I ground my teeth in frustration. Yet again I feel that we are being manipulated.

We then parted ways - Heinrich and Gaston joined Michael Ratcliffe to go gambling, whilst Maximillian, Isaiah and I entered the Falkovnian Quarter to look for Scar Tabor. As Heinrich, Gaston and Michael walked down Bog Street, a man wreathed in black with a wide brimmed hat left behind a piece of paper around a severed finger and a Falkovnian ring. Written in blood on the paper were the words:

The Darkness is mine.

The Anger is mine.

The Vengeance is mine.

The man disappeared before they could react, and they proceeded to Michael Ratcliffe's planned gambling destination, albeit with an enhanced sense of wariness.

Meanwhile, Maximillian, Isaiah and I made our way to the building where we were told we could find Scar Tabor. The gates were guarded by Falkovnian militia. As we passed them I felt my rage rise - surely Drakov is the foulest of the tyrants. It is in this mood we entered the area, and were led to a massive pit in which great mastiffs were pitted in savage combat to sate the bloodlust of the crowd. I looked at Max and I knew he was of a similar mood, and that such 'entertainments' were an affront almost too great to bear.

Indeed, barely moments later Max was being pushed around by one of the more burly patrons - though surprisingly those watching seemed almost uniformly to be large, dangerous men with an unwholesome taste in blood-sports. I turned to face this man, and though I wished to strike him, called upon the Goddess to calm him. He departed, and the crowd parted to allow Max and I to pass.

Max, however, was unwilling to let the matter rest there, and openly offered to fight the dogs himself. The place had been filling up, when Commander Regis of the Falkovnian Guard arrived to greet Michael Ratcliffe, who had arrived here with Gaston and Heinrich. It would seem that their gambling activities happened to be in the same place as Scar Tabor! Gaston and Heinrich showed the ring and finger they had found to the commander, who stated that that was not such an uncommon event in Invidia. Regis stated that a killer stalked the warehouse district, though no-one had been able to find him. Every time he struck, the slayer left a message - always in the same style, though the words differed. It was always three short sentences. The last time it had said:

I live in your city.

I lurk in your nightmares.

I strike in your sleep.

This has been occurring for some years now.

It was then that Scar Tabor made his arrival. He was a man almost certainly older than he looked, with long black hair in a braid, of average height and slight build, with the olive skin of the Vistani. Max's offer to fight the dogs was greeted with hoots of derision and many cat calls, so we thought it an opportune time to deal with Tabor and leave this accursed place.

Isaiah, Max and I greeted him and he invited us to sit. A Vistani outcast, he nurses a passionate hatred for them, showing us an angry red scar on his hand. We ask him to tell us of the locations of both Gabrielle Aderre and the child dukkar. He was not interested

in the fact the child was the dukkar, but the very fact of his existence was creating trouble for his business operations (such as they were) since he has spooked some of his men. Tabor also informs us that he had seen Emil in the warehouse district some time ago, and in particular the warehouse in which the murders took place.

We pass money to Tabor, to loosen his tongue further. His men had been watching the warehouse. It had had a window broken. The men saw sixteen people enter via a boat. Only one left, screaming and yelling for the watch. Two figures were seen to leave afterwards, one large one dressed in white (the Patchwork Bride!) and one smaller man being dragged afterwards (Gerhard certainly). These two fled to the docks. The next morning the "Gorge Runner" was missing. Emil was asking questions afterwards - confirming our suspicions that he had nothing to do with these murders, and hence his interrogation of the guard. He also stole a boat - the "Midnight Wave".

Suddenly a silence fell upon the inn, save for the snarling of the fighting dogs, everyone looking at the large man who had entered, with a casual imperiousness and wearing fine black clothing. We recognised him as the huntsman on the river after the Virago had entered into Invidia. Scar Tabor informed us that he is Matton Blanchard, an old lover of Gabrielle Aderre.

As the low buzz of conversation resumed Scar told us that Aderre had moved to an old estate nearer the city so that she may more easily influence the festival. During this time he kept an eye on Blanchard. When Blanchard returned his gaze, Blanchard downed his drink in one hit and walked to our table. Blanchard informed us that he wished to speak to Tabor privately, and that he had come for information. We return to the fights, whilst Gaston and Heinrich leave with Ratcliffe and Regis to gamble in a private room.

The growling had become more urgent, more primal as the fight had sunk to a new low of viciousness. A man gets up on the railing of the pit and jumps in. I push through the crowd to observe, when a man grabs me and pulls me back. He was very strong and his grip had left four claw marks on my wrist. Suddenly my feeling of this place was

confirmed. We were in a den of evil, and in great danger. A minute later, the man who had jumped into the pit had climbed out, grinning hugely and covered in blood. Both dogs were dead. He had been unarmed.

I informed Max and Isaiah of my suspicions. We had a brief discussion, and then went to the man who had gripped my wrist and surrounded him. Isaiah began to speak, offering him a tankard of ale. He was to attempt to convince him to leave so we may deal with him in private, by using his extraordinary powers of persuasion, but he failed. Meanwhile the next fight was to begin - a huge angry mastiff and a cage covered by a black curtain. Behind the curtains I manage to see a pale leg - it is a frightened woman wielding a dagger. We, the all of us, are instantly inflamed, a dark rage rising within us. I push to the front of the crowd.

I feel an arm on my shoulder, and turn furiously, ready to strike, when I see that it is Blanchard. He states that he too is looking for Aderre and wishes us to join forces and go to "Cliff House" together. However, I must deal with the travesty before me, and Max and Isaiah are immediately behind. Max catapults off my back into the pit to face the dumb beast, putting the woman behind him. I was wary of the growling I had heard in those I had pressed out of the way. I sensed that the mood in the place had become even more savage - almost to fever pitch.

Three men in the crowd have had enough and it is obvious I must fight. As was usual I withdrew to commune with the Goddess and seek her blessing before I shed blood. During this time I barely sensed that the men had started to grow fang and claw, and revealed themselves. I was gratified to find that Blanchard stood by me, blade with blade. Meanwhile, Isaiah had climbed onto a rafter which hung over the pit.

Suddenly we heard the voice of Michael Ratcliffe bellow over the din - "Wait!" Half the crowd turns to listen and see a very large man with long unkempt hair emerge to jump into the pit as two further cages are placed there. I turn in surprise to see Matton Blanchard had also shifted form to that of a wolf. I groan inwardly, too often I have had

to ally with one evil to defeat another. Nevertheless I could not spurn his aid now, and perhaps not all of their kind have been claimed by darkness. As battle was joined I let my foes taste the bitter sting of silver and slay one in a flurry of blows.

The man who had jumped in the pit also began to shift forms, whilst the curtains off the cages were removed to reveal Gaston and Heinrich! They had been drugged in the "private room", and were slow to get moving. The crowd was almost literally baying in savage glee at the spectacle. A furious battle followed. In the pit Heinrich managed to paralyse the wolfman whilst Gaston administered the coup-de-grace and Max jumped out once again with one of his prodigious leaps. Matton slayed the werebeast facing him while Isaiah had entangled another with his whip. Max spied the black figure in the wide brimmed hat attempting to slay Ratcliffe in the commotion. Warning Ratcliffe with a shout, the assassin ran off in a whirl with Max chasing. Max chased him through the inn but lost him once the figure jumped out a window into the streets. Matton suggested a withdrawal, but I was still in a rage and with great strokes of Anathema, sent another beast screaming to the afterlife.

At this point I agreed that we should leave. We eyed the crowd warily, but though they could overwhelm us, it seemed that to them we had won their respect the only way possible, by combat. We took the frightened woman with us. As we leave Heinrich and Gaston told us that they had been playing cards when they drank drugged wine. As they drifted off into a stupor they were informed by Ratcliffe that they were about to be the prey in a game which was part of an annual event for his kind. Such 'games' are an atrocity that by all rights should be expunged. Should we cross paths with Michael Ratcliffe once more . . . the story will be different. The unfortunate girl is named Katrina and was waylaid on the docks last night. Matton tells us that he is of a different kind to Ratcliffe and the others, and that their kinds are enemies. He is in love with Gabrielle Aderre and wishes to find her once more. After the day's activities, we rest for the night.

Saturday, 9th July

We were woken early this morning by the sound of celebrations outside - there was a wedding procession which was being marred by angry voices locked in argument. We heard a splash and then sounds of shock and dismay as someone called for a duel. We suspected the subtle manipulations of the witch Aderre. The inimitable Max and I rushed down to intervene, and with the aid of Isaiah we managed to calm the situation somewhat.

It seems that we have been constantly harried by the press of events, that the tide of darkness is rising and that we are almost helpless before it. Our minds have been cast back to the information we have, but it is all in riddles - the hexad, the Grand Conjunction, the Watcher and the Great Ones and more yet it is almost incomprehensible. All we have is the injunction from the Lighthouse to "be the thorn", yet the evil we see makes us almost wish to weep in helpless frustration. What we can accomplish must suffice in this accursed land. I only hope that one day I may journey to the Sunlit Lands and know peace, and that someday the Great Dawn will come to cleanse this land and save the innocent.

We journeyed to see Madame Eva once more for answers and aid. There, we were given custody of the "Sphere of Binding" which will bind the dukkar to the land and prevent him from leaving Invidia and thus from breaking the borders. Is this the "evil unbound" which the hexad speaks of? It seems clear that the 'watchers' are the Vistani, and that Strahd is both the 'Daemon' and the 'Creator'. Strahd has had a special relationship with the Vistani and Eva in particular - a pact - and he has told them they may not act against the dukkar. Thus, their actions now are the betrayal of the betrayer the Madrigorian spoke of. We continue to discuss the prophecies, but though some is clearer, in the main it is a mystery.

As we speak, Eva walks amongst us, touching us. As she touches Isaiah she frowns and closes her eyes. When she opens her eyes, she looks piercingly at him and says, "You know who the second dukkar is, but I cannot pierce the blackness in your mind." Isaiah

refuses to say, his face rapturous. Gaston then approaches him and using his pocket watch performs his trick of hypnotism.

The young dukkar is revealed to be the child dressed in black - but there is another. On his arrival in these lands, Isaiah is bound by the young Vistani woman Yvonne to save the first dukkar - Hyskosa! Hyskosa was taken from the Vistani by something dark and evil - a look of pain passes swiftly over Isaiah as he speaks - a man who is the embodiment of evil and suffering. Suddenly Isaiah is screaming in anguish - he has been gripped by another of his visions. He has stepped out of mists into a camp. There is screaming and shouting. He calls for God but is taunted by no response, his wife, his child Joshua . . .

We rest after this exhausting time. Back in the tavern we heard that in one of the gates the guard were fighting each other. Witnesses reported a child dressed in black in the area. The child dukkar is obviously sowing seeds of discord for some reason.

Sunday, 10th July

Now that we are equipped to deal with Aderre and her precocious progeny, we met Matton Blanchard and proceeded to Cliff House. It is a dilapidated two storey mansion, surrounded by sugar maples. It abuts long rows of vineyards which have been allowed to grow wild and unkempt. In its prime it would have been one of the most spectacular residences along the river. It was owned by the Haptmeyers, husband and wife, but they had an argument on the balcony and both fell into the river and rocks below. Since then it has been unoccupied.

Max and Gaston followed behind, whilst the rest of us strode forward to knock on the door. Suddenly we heard horses and from above the cawing of crows as they speed towards the estate. Curses upon such harbingers of doom. As we hurried to the house, there was a 'twang' and Isaiah was struck by a crossbow bolt in his leg - it had come from the house. There were more shots, I am missed, but Blanchard is struck. He nonchalantly pulled it out and continued to run - I am reminded of his true nature.

I reached the door first and smashed it open. There were two armed men wielding short blades. Instantly I struck one down, as two more appeared at the top of the stairs with cocked crossbows. Gaston and Max, having come from the back, met these two on the stairs, Gaston drawing his pistol. After we downed the second swordsman, the two on the stairs surrendered, telling us that Malocchio will know we are here and that he has imprisoned Gabrielle in the wine cellar. Malocchio must be the child dukkar.

Matton insisted on going to Gabrielle immediately, though a guard told us that she is not of stable mind and that there were two more guards downstairs. I went upstairs into Gabrielle's well-appointed room to wait for Malocchio, whilst the others followed Matton to the wine cellar.

I searched the room and found a locked chest which I smashed open. Inside I found gold and a box in a cloth bag which contained a Tarokka deck. These are the cards used by the Vistani and differ from the fortune-telling cards I found long ago in the ruined chapel in Mordentshire. The Tarokka seem a corrupted reflection of the Tarot, skewed and warped to darkness and arcane secrets.

Downstairs, the others found a guard's body slumped on the floor against a wall with a note in a familiar style:

You cannot hide from the shadows.

You cannot run from your fate.

You cannot escape from my justice.

The black slayer has struck again, and once again the theme of vengeance is clear. The other guard was found nearby, also dead. The door was still locked, though there was sobbing from inside. Matton walked up to the door and announced himself to Gabrielle. Gabrielle wailed for him to disappear, accusing him of the murder of her mother. He searched the guards for keys. They heard footsteps on the other side and saw hands grab

bars in the window slot.

From my upstairs vantage point I saw six wolves loping up to the door. I blew Herald to warn my companions of their danger and ran to join them. They all ran upstairs, save for Matton, and we met in the foyer room, waiting for them. Maybe some wolves have come for revenge? I placed myself on the stairs with the two surviving guards, Gaston, Isaiah and Heinrich behind me, while Max held the door. Isaiah began one of his holy chants, speaking in sonorous authority, and stepping forward he drew his cane along the ground near the door. The wolves paused some one hundred feet from the door.

I heard steps from behind, and turning saw a tall figure in black clothing, with dusky skin and back hair who looked like Malocchio grown up! His aura of menace and power, however, convinced me at least, that this is Malocchio himself. The wolves started to move, and battle was joined as I withdrew to call upon the Goddess, and Matton appeared with Gabrielle on the other side of the room. Matton's glare was one of pure hatred for Malocchio.

I felt the press of Malocchio's mind against mine and succumbed, but my protective ward against dark enchantments allowed me to act with a clear mind for a little time. Gaston did his familiar trick with grease in front of the door to thwart the wolves, though four of them jumped through the windows. Gaston spread fire oil, and Heinrich tossed his flaming sphere at the first wolf stricken in the grease, whilst the two guards with glazed eyes blocked my progress as I moved to slay the fiend Malocchio.

Gaston and Heinrich used fire and bullet, science and trick to battle the wolves, whilst I struck down one of the guards and Matton pushed past the wolves to strike at Malocchio. A large wolf began to menace Gabrielle, but then started to shake and whimper on the ground before her. Max battled another wolf, whilst Heinrich applied his electricity to his legs to jump over the last guard and myself and Isaiah called on the power of his God causing a wolf to back away from him. As Matton drew near Malocchio a wolf blocked his progress.

The confused melee continued as Heinrich paralysed a wolf, while Gabrielle and Malocchio stared at each other looking dazed and confused, and Max slays his foe. Matton looked at Gabrielle, unsure of what to do as the whimpering wolf before Gabrielle rose again, and I defeated the last guard with a blow to the head. One of Gaston's pistol shots struck a wolf in the head, causing a massive spray of blood and bone. The wolf before Gabrielle reared, and brought its paws down on her, putting her on the ground. Meanwhile, Malocchio drew his cloak about him, and abruptly became an inky blackness which wisped away like a failing shadow. Heinrich touched a wolf and it yelped in pain as its body stiffened and fur stood on end, with smoke coming from it. It fell dead.

Matton rushed to the aid of his love, and Gaston, taking the opportunity to bring some semblance of order repeated his trick with the golden dust. Matton and the wolf were blinded and confused, though Gabrielle seemed unaffected. I ran upstairs searching for the lost Malocchio, but failing that informed Heinrich that shortly my ward would fail and I would be under the influence of Malocchio. He tied me up and took my beloved weapons. Max dealt with the blind wolf while Gaston placed his gun against Gabrielle's temple, and then said they should take Gabrielle outside. Isaiah blocked their way with his cane when he was suddenly in the grip of a vision. He saw Gabrielle performing a Tarokka reading. Whispering Malocchio's name, she places cards face down. The centre card is that of the Beast, with the Ghost underneath for the past, the Soldier with three swords to the left for opposition, the Thief with seven coins to the right for allies and the Mists above for the future. The sight is blinding her eyes and she falls to the stone in pain - that is the price she pays for reading the Tarokka when not being fully of the blood.

Gaston and Gabrielle went into the solarium when a black shape flew across the room towards her. It was clearly not Malocchio but the midnight slasher! We heard in a woman's voice scream, "For mother and father!" as she flung herself, knife in hand, at Gabrielle.

Gaston, clearly under Gabrielle's thrall, shot twice. The first shot went wide, but the second was a great blow, lifting the slasher off her feet. He followed up with a new trick we had not seen - a violent coruscation of colour which washed over her, though seemingly with no effect. Meanwhile, Matton had become enraged, changing form. Grabbing the assassin, they rolled together across the room towards the balcony, as Heinrich shot the slasher and Max rushed forward. Matton tried to throw her off the cliff, but Max grabbed her at the last moment. Suddenly the fragile balcony collapsed under Matton, and he plunged to his death on the jagged rocks below. Max pulled the masked woman back and bound her.

Gabrielle was not coherent, babbling about the Vistani sending Malocchio to kill her. She appeared to be speaking in the past - saying that Malocchio, her child, is but four days old.

The assassin was revealed to be a young woman. She told us that she lost her way many years ago, when she vowed vengeance against Aderre and any who work against right. She blames Aderre for the deaths of her parents. Aderre apparently entranced her father and toyed with him, telling her mother of the infidelity, which led to their deaths on this very balcony - she is Angelina, daughter of the Haptmeyers. She has often attacked the Falkovnians, as they are butchers with no honour, whilst Ratcliffe is obviously a fiend. Although we cannot help but sympathise with her motives, she is obviously dangerously unhinged.

We discussed what had occurred and decided, incredible as it may seem, that by some dark means Malocchio really has grown to this stage in but four or five days. We suspect that he may have fled to Castle Loupet near Howling Ridge, where we must complete our task, one we stupidly failed to do here. How could we forget to bind Malocchio to the land at this crucial moment! There is the possibility he may return, however, so we stay for this night.

Gaston spoke to 'the Lady' Gabrielle alone, whilst Isaiah and Max searched the house.

Later Isaiah spoke to me, and drawing on his faith, banished the enchantment placed on me by Malocchio.

Monday, 11th July

During last night, Heinrich at one time suddenly woke and grabbed me - but didn't seem to know why, and then collapsed! When he came to, he said he had had a mental lapse, just as he had seen in the vision at the Lighthouse - he didn't know who he was, where he was or how he got there. Aside from that disturbing mystery, the house was silent and the night uneventful.

After waking we argued over the fate of Angelina. I took her aside to talk with her, when suddenly I was confronted by Malocchio! My actions belied me, and I found myself revealing all to Malocchio - the sphere, of Gaston and Gabrielle, and Isaiah's plan to use the sight to find him, as well as handing him Aderre's Tarokka! Only afterwards did I realise that Isaiah's efforts had been in vain - Malocchio's dominance had made me fool him into believing he had succeeded in dispelling the enchantment. He left in a whirl of black cloak and darkness. Angelina was stunned into silence and fear during this time, but calling upon the peace of Amaranth she calmed down. I untied her, though I took her weapons. The moral dilemma of her fate remained.

Isaiah took Malocchio's hair brush, and taking several strands of his hair he lays them across his palms, and with a flash of pain he closed his eyes and had another vision, which he recounted for us:

"He is sitting in a chair behind a large table in a large store room. A pair of black gloves lies on the table. His hands are clenched. Picking up a box he pulls out the Tarokka and places the cards on the table, his hands shaking in agony. He says "I have to stop them." And I see trails of blood on his hands and he drops the cards, spilling out. The first card face up is "The Mists".

Isaiah slumped, tired. Gabrielle informed us that the mists control the barriers, and that

there are those who can manipulate them. Malocchio fears being locked into the one place.

We left in a horse and carriage, taking the six horses stabled on the estate. I rode with Angelina to ensure her good conduct. We heard a fluttering in the trees, and saw the crows fly away - we had little doubt they were Malocchio's spies.

We rode into the Vulpwood to Castle Loupet. It seemed to be an ordinary castle, on the end of a path which has had few travellers in recent years. On the road ahead as we approached we saw large, sleek black shapes - massive wolves with red eyes which radiated a hungry menace. Giving Angelina her weapons, I dismounted and blew Herald once again to announce our presence. Gabrielle leaned out of the carriage as it moved forward, and gazed at the wolves, who seemed to recognise her. They paced away from the road and into the forest.

I returned to my horse as we travelled up to the gates of the stone structure. Dismounting once again, I opened the doors with Gabrielle's key, which emitted a loud creak, revealing a dank, cobblestone courtyard. She pointed the way forward when I was seized by an intense feeling of foreboding and withdrew to once again commune with the Goddess, whilst Max somersaulted into the courtyard. Opening a door, Max flipped across the room. We saw a wooden box and cards spread over a table, and a man on the edge of his chair pushing himself up off the ground. It seemed as if the vision Isaiah saw had only just occurred!

Acting with an astonishing burst of speed, Max moved forward to grapple the prostrate Malocchio. Isaiah threw the sphere stating "I bind you to the land." As he saw the sphere approaching, Malocchio frowned as it exploded with a blinded flash of light, and tendrils of electricity sparking crazily all over him, beyond any effect Heinrich had been able to create with his electrical gadgetry. Malocchio soon disappeared with his trademark inky blackness.

From outside we heard a commotion and the rearing and neighing of our steeds. We charged outside to see them menaced by three wolves. We instantly fight to save them. Isaiah striding forth shouting, "The master of the house is dead," caused one to start padding backwards, and Gaston used his flying glove to strike another. I engaged in combat with another, and was bitten but slew it in return. By now the wolves had mauled one horse to death. I slew another wolf and the other fled.

Having accomplished our task, and limited the threat posed by Malocchio, we rode back to Karina. We stopped to see Madame Eva, though Gabrielle was reluctant to go. She is supported by the fawning Gaston, obviously still captivated by her, earning him her sneer of contempt. On reaching the clearing, however, we found a scene of devastation. The campfire was out, and though some vans were gone, others were tipped over and charred ruins. There were dead horses on the ground, bitten and clawed - wolves for certain. Hearing a rustling in the trees, we turned to see Madame Eva who told us 'he' (Strahd) had found out their treachery and sent many wolves. Having broken their ancient pact, the agreement between watcher and creator was broken, and the Vistani were no longer safe. The peril is even greater because the Ba'al Verzi, who have returned, are his minions. Have the Ba'al Verzi truly replaced the Vistani as Strahd's chosen? And the peril of the first dukkar - Hyskosa - remains. The Vistani cannot see him, and he has gone farther than Malocchio and cannot be dealt with so easily. Turning, she left us to ponder our future, and that of the land.

The Ties that Bind - Part Two - DM's Comments

As mentioned in the DM Comments for Part One, this adventure is primarily based on the published adventure *The Evil Eye*. The changes made are primarily just to introduce elements of the ongoing threads in this campaign to the adventure, to maintain continuity. There were three particular scenes that I was really happy with in this session:

The Dog Fights: This is a fantastic scene if you can evoke that growing sense of dread from the players, by only revealing elements of the increasing savagery gradually. For example, at one point in the session the characters simply see one of the patrons jump

into the pit, and come out shortly afterwards to cheers from the crowd - they didn't actually *see* him transform, or tear apart the poor dog, but it's implied enough to get them uncomfortable.

The best part of this scene, however, was having two PCs go into a private room to gamble with Michael Ratcliffe. When running this scene, I only talked to them briefly (apart from the others) about starting their gambling game - but didn't let them know that they were being drugged. As the tension increased in the main room, and tempers began to flair, those players began to get frustrated at not getting a chance to join in, but the revelation that they were in the pit themselves, after having been drugged, was fantastic!

Malocchio Charming Caine: When Isaiah attempted to dispell Malocchio's charm, I rolled the save, and Caine had failed - but I told *both* players (Isaiah's and Caine's) that the attempt had worked. Effectively, Caine had "pretended" that it worked to Isaiah - but this way, neither of the players knew it wasn't true. The beauty of this is that Nick, Caine's player, acted more "natural" until he was confronted by Malocchio the following day - and that revelation was a great surprise to him!

Malocchio, Heinrich and "The Box": The players' failure to bind Malocchio in the first encounter is a pretty major error to make, and in game terms there had to be a "punishment". This came in the form of an encounter between Heinrich and Malocchio during the final confrontation in Castle Loupet (after he was bound). While the others focused on keeping the wolves at bay, Heinrich (at the back of the group) was briefly taken aside by Malocchio. Malocchio reached into Heinrich's backpack and removed the puzzlebox he picked up several sessions ago (in Fear Itself Part 1), and said in his best sinister and threatening tone, "You will pay for this. You will all pay for this." His gloved fingers then splayed across the puzzlebox, and clicked a small button - after which, he handed it back to Heinrich. This encounter was done aside from the group, and so it didn't even make it into Caine's journal. The rest of the group didn't learn of this event for some sessions to come...

Other major plot points covered in this session include:

- Confirmation that Emil was the one who tortured the guard in the warehouse district. It would appear that Emil is definitely chasing the Patchwork Bride, as are the PCs.

- Confirmation that the Patchwork Bride was most likely the one responsible for the murder of the people in the warehouse, and that she (and most likely Emil) have taken boats down-river towards Kartakass.
- The white rose from the boat had been stolen, so they didn't get a chance to discover why it was turning red. This thread (which is only hinted at here) will return in later sessions).
- Caine correctly judges the connection between Madame Eva and the "watchers" mentioned in the Madrigorian entry they discovered (back in "The Return of the Ba'al Verzi"), and that Strahd is the "creator". There is also a connection with the Madrigorian entry they saw being written in "Touch of Death". That line read "With the second, the watchers will betray the creator, and their ways will diverge for the first time." This refers to the breakdown of the relationship between the Vistani and Strahd, as a result of their effort to stop Malocchio. (Why does Strahd want Malocchio to retain his ability to weaken the domain borders? Well, it would seem that Strahd's Ba'al Verzi are making an effort to start breaking down borders, starting with Arkandale in "Part One" of this episode... As usual, more will be revealed later....)
So, it would appear that these Madrigorian prophecies are beginning to come true as well...
- Madame Eva's betrayal of Strahd has resulted in a savage attack on her encampment. She no longer resides in Barovia, but is a wanderer again... Madame Eva will be encountered again before the end of the campaign, as the battle against the Dukkar intensifies.
- Isaiah is still having visions (usually accompanied with pain), which sometimes revert to his wife and son...

While the whole issue of Malocchio and Aderre is not a major ongoing thread in this campaign, this session sets us up nicely for a very intense wrap-up of the Patchwork Bride thread in the next few sessions, now that the PCs have their next clues on the Bride's location. Lots of mysteries are about to be revealed, including the truth behind Heinrich's and Emil's strange "connection", Emil's murderous activities, and what the hell the scars on the back of their necks are...

The Collected Works of Gerhard Beckmann

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

Monday, 11th July

We returned to the town of Karina to find it covered with litter. The festival had ended and the guards were cleaning. We learned that Michael Ratcliffe (the organiser of the dog fights) has left - a task for later days. I talked with Angelina. She seems somewhat delusionary, worrying about the menace posed by Heinrich, saying he will kill hundreds. Although we had decided to let her be, I fear that her future is bleak. Tomorrow we will go to Kartakass, to follow the trail of Gerhard, Emil and the Patchwork Bride.

Tuesday, 12th July

We learnt this morning that the guard tortured by Emil died shortly after we left him. I was saddened to hear this, since I hoped to reclaim him, but perhaps it was for the best.

We found a boat named "The Inn's Song" which will take us to Skald. The boat presented quite a contrast to the elegance of the Virago, but it was all that was available. As we drift out from the docks, Karina seems a far cry from the festive place we came to, now quiet and almost sombre.

After a few hours Gaston, Isaiah and I feel our minds clear from the enchantments placed on us by Gabrielle and Malocchio. We suspect that this may be due to the fact we were probably crossing the borders of Invidia at the time. We no longer wondered whether the borders, seemingly mere political boundaries, had a greater significance. The events of recent days have revealed much about the nature of this land.

We played cards on the boat to relieve the tedium. Suddenly Heinrich winced and

grabbed his face. He let out a blood-curdling scream and blacked out. He woke a little later to tell us what he 'saw'. He was in a small cabin, looking out with eyes not his own. He saw a man tied to a chair, and saw 'his' hand holding a scalpel. He heard Emil's voice demand "Where did he go? You must know! He's the only one who knows what's happening to me!" The victim stammered in reply, "I don't know. They left the boat. I had to do what he said otherwise she'd kill me." Heinrich then saw the scalpel draw blood on the neck of the terrified captive, then move to the eye ... to begin cutting away the eyelid. The man began to scream and scream, when Emil looked into the mirror, and Heinrich felt he gazed into his own eyes as Emil said, "You can see it too! It's happening to you too!" And then Heinrich felt the blackness, the last thing he saw being the scalpel drawn across the man's throat, and blood gushing forth ... Heinrich had crushed his cards in his hands at the sight.

Later that day we were informed by the Captain that he had heard word from Arkandale. The people of Delouise had been attacked by wolves and those that survived had fled into Ste Ronges in Richemulot. So it seemed that Alfred Timothy had wrested lordship of the wolves from his father and begun his war on humanity.

Wednesday, 13th July

We arrived in Har-Thalen in the land of Sithicus. We stayed in the port to leave for Skald the next day. We learned that "Gorge Runner" (which we believe the Patchwork Bride sailed on) went straight through without stopping some two weeks ago and that the "Midnight Wave" (Emil's passage) stopped here some five days afterwards. We determined that that would have been about three days after the attack on the guard in the warehouse.

Saturday, 16th July

This night we arrived in Skald. Heinrich is not keen to have returned to his homeland, however he was silenced when we saw the "Gorge Runner" in dock. It appeared to have been damaged, and there were men working on repairing it. Questioning one of the workers we were told that the captain was dead. The boat dropped some people off more

than a week ago and that he ordered repairs be made. The boat then made a trip to Harmonia and back. After that another man came on board and the next morning the captain was found cut and slashed in a pool of his own blood and urine. Emil had struck once again.

Some ten years ago there was a spate of similar murders by a man known only as "Night Blade". They occurred mostly in Harmonia, but a few victims were found in Skald. Heinrich recalls that the perpetrator was caught and executed. He has become morose and withdrawn now.

We decide to lodge in the well-appointed "Old Kartakan Inn" which is on an island near a waterfall in quite beautiful natural surroundings. It is extremely large and sumptuously decorated, but I had a very ill feeling about it. The others overrode my misgivings, opting for little luxury after the trauma of the past few weeks.

Heinrich has had a troubled sleep this night. Once again he felt the blackness in his mind, a flood of memories and then he saw through the eyes of Emil. He was in the kitchen of Heinrich's mentor Gerhard. Annelise, Gerhard's wife, was sitting tied to a chair. Heinrich yelled for him to stop in an anguished voice. Emil's hand stopped before it would cut her and asked pleadingly, "How can I stop this?". Emil tried to turn his eyes away in a futile gesture. He continued, "I can't remember anything ... have these urges ..." as he rested his scalpel against her cheek.

Heinrich tried to convince Emil to stop when a blackness cloaked his mind and the blade fell from Emil's hand. Separated once again from Emil's thoughts, he shook himself free of the vision.

Heinrich then told us how he felt like he woke in a strange room he had never seen before. A strange person lay on another bed - Gaston, drunk as a lord. Heinrich rose and walked outside, and cleared his mind of the amnesia that seems to get stronger every time it afflicts him. He, like us, is increasingly disturbed and dismayed by this malady and

dark connection which seems to plague him. We cannot fathom the source or cause, but it may assist us in tracking down Emil, though for the first time we gain a hint that Emil's actions are not the purely unspeakable evil we thought, but that there is some sort of struggle within him between the darkness and the light - true as it was that the former was overwhelming the guttering flame of the latter.

Sunday, 17th July

We left for Harmonia at the crack of dawn, arriving at night and proceed straight to Gerhard's house. We are greeted by a distraught Annelise. We take her to the inn "The Harp and the Whistle".

She told us that Gerhard came to her today, but without the Patchwork Bride. He had come to get his implements. He looked horrible - bruised and scratched (especially around his neck) and weak.

We warned the city watch regarding the return of Emil and of his crimes and then returned to Gerhard's house to search it. We found that his finest surgical equipment was gone as were some drugs and salves. Heinrich took Gerhard's medical journals and flicking through them he found references to the Patchwork Bride. Annelise told us that Gerhard took both Heinrich and Emil as apprentices. Originally they were just simple folk, but after he operated on them, they both became brilliant scholars. Gerhard called the procedure 'grafting'. Heinrich told us that before he was Gerhard's apprentice his memories are very blurry. I could not tell whether he was obfuscating.

This raised many issues. It was the most likely explanation for what linked Heinrich to Emil, but what did it augur for Heinrich, who was apprentice some five years after Emil? Would he too become like Emil, given to he darkness? Wary of possible danger, in the form of either Emil or the Patchwork Bride, Heinrich escorted Annelise back to the inn, whilst we stayed there overnight.

Monday, 18th July

We were woken at dawn by a knock on the door. A teenage boy held a message for us from "the lady at the inn". Annelise's message stated that Emil had been spotted by the guards last night at the "Platform". After having a quick breakfast, we hurried to pick up Heinrich and then to pick up Emil's trail.

As we approached the large area near the platform, we saw the sun just rising over the mountains of Hazlan, and feel the renewal I always feel at dawn. We are greeted by a few guards outside the barricades, milling about in a confused fashion. Nearby there are two white sheets on the ground over dead bodies. They were guards killed just a few hours ago. The guards at the top of the cliff did not notice the carnage below and worked the mechanism to carry the murderer up. By the time they had seen who it was - Emil - he had run into the forest.

We were taken up the sixty feet to reach the platform. Emil's broken run had left a reasonably clear trail, leading to a cliff over the river with a sheer drop. Looking down I saw a person lying on the ground below. Standing above him was another man dressed in white holding something - presumably Emil holding a scalpel. We heard murmuring as we tied a rope to tree and began our descent, with myself going first.

As I descended, another figure in white appeared below. Larger than the others, and the white clothes stained grey with exposure, I was sure that this could be only thing - the Patchwork Bride! The prostrate figure was presumably, therefore, Gerhard. Emil was unaware of her approaching from behind. She had the veil and flowing dress and of course, the massive size we had heard others speak about. Emil turned just in time to see one massive fist strike him in the side of the head, and be slammed against the cliff side.

I hastened my descent, tripping and falling at the end, as she picked up Emil and began to strangle him. Perhaps it would have been more kind and just to leave her be, but I yelled at her to release him, which amazingly she did. Leaning over Gerhard, she picked him up, and began striding across the river, as Max joined me, having made light work of the

drop. About twenty feet into the river she is up to her neck, and then in the middle actually goes completely beneath the surface, but this did not shorten her pace, although it drenched Gerhard. She reached the cliff on the other side, and threw Gerhard over her shoulder and began to climb. Although she looked somewhat clumsy, she was a natural climber, negotiating the climb with strength and agility. By this time the others had come down and begun to fire at her on the cliff. Max and I crossed the river behind her and also began to climb. One of Heinrich's bullets hit, releasing a yellow ooze, although it had no effect on her progress.

Once she reached the top, with Max closely behind, Heinrich used his science to jump across the river. At the top two guards tried to stay her, whilst Max attacked from behind. Turning around, she landed a crushing blow on Max, knocking him back. Such strength! By this time I had reached the top myself and was running after her, hoping she wouldn't strike Max while he was down, but her natural walk was exceedingly fast.

The two guards pulled their pistols and fired wildly, their shots going astray. As she drew nearer they drew their rapiers, which against may as well have been knitting needles against one such as her. Realising this, one guard drops his weapon and flees in terror, but the other is hit by her with terrific force, flying through the air to land with a sickening thump. He died, his chest a bloody mess.

Max had risen again by now and we both gave chase, although both of us felt fear grip our hearts. As I reached her, I raised Sol Invictus and tried to blind her with the light of my faith, but failed and in return I was gifted with a shattered leg and fell, writhing in mute agony. Now only Max was left, throwing rocks at her in a futile gesture. Reaching another cliff she jumped off! Peering down after her, Max saw that she had grabbed a ledge on her way down, and continued her descent in the same spectacular fashion and then on to the road north to Skald. For now, our chase was over, but we were confident that she would leave an easy trail to follow. There was also, of course, the matter of Emil.

Emil had been sorely wounded, his face a purple mess, and in the voice of a dying man

said, "Help me stop this ... the urges ... not me ... Gerhard ... the operation ..." Heinrich stabilised his condition and now we were faced with the dilemma of whether he was responsible for his crimes. We regrouped, and decided that Emil should reside in a mental facility until our return - and that he should not be tried until then.

Tuesday, 19th July

We rest this day, for we are sorely wounded. I call upon Amaranth to heal my wounds and she answers. Alas that I cannot heal others save under the light of the full moon.

Wednesday, 20th July

We heard news from Skald today, news that we were dreading but expecting nonetheless. She had arrived at the gates of Skald yesterday evening, killing two guards, bursting through the gates and proceeded north, along the ride to Gundarak. We left in the morning for Skald and the Patchwork Bride, and stay in Skald this night.

Thursday, 21st July

We have left Skald and headed north into Gundarak. We pass fields, seeing the oppressed peasantry till the unforgiving earth. We have asked an old woman if she had seen the likes of one such as the Patchwork Bride. Shuddering in fear at the mention of her, she pointed up a disused track that forks from the main road to Teufeldorf. Following it up into the hills, we saw that it could be leading to only one place ... to the long abandoned Castle Tristenoira.

The Collected Works of Gerhard Beckmann - DM's Comments

The title of this session simply refers to the fact that the three major threads this session deals with (the Bride, Emil's murders and Heinrich's blackouts) all result from the actions of Gerhard Beckmann. This session is more of a bridging story, however, just to get us from the major events of *The Evil Eye* into the fantastic *Castles Forlorn*.

As a result, there's very little combat in this session - in fact, there's only the very brief encounter with the Bride, but that served exactly the purpose it needed to. Up until this point, the players and character had never once actually encountered the Patchwork Bride - they'd only heard stories and seen the results of her work. Since we were about to head into *Castles Forlorn* (where the Bride thread was to be wrapped up) the players needed to get a first-hand feel for the power they were going up against.

Hence, the brief encounter with the Bride on the cliffs above Harmonia are brief and brutal, just to remind them that the Bride could easily make short work of them...

In terms of exposition, however, the major revelation of this session was the reason behind Emil's and Heinrich's strange behaviour of late. Gerhard, years after creating the Bride, took on apprentices to study medicine. Instead of taking the brightest, however, he decided instead to try a technique to improve the intelligence of his young students. The procedure, which he called "grafting", is the cause of the T-shaped scars at the back of Heinrich's and Emil's neck.

This would seem to be the cause of Emil's murderous behaviour and Heinrich's blackouts (as predicted at the Lighthouse). More details of the procedure, and exactly why Emil and Heinrich are so affected, will come just after *Castles Forlorn*, in *Inheritances*.

Otherwise, there is little more to comment on for this adventure. Nightblade (the serial killer from years ago in Harmonia) will be discussed further in a few episodes, but not until the characters face the terror of Castle Tristenoira - where one of the characters will be lost...

If anyone is confused about the sequence of events behind Gerhard, the Bride and Emil (I know my players were!) here's a brief timeline of events regarding these three (without dates):

- Many years ago, Gerhard works with Dr Mordenheim as a student. He created the Bride, and educated her at the abandoned estate in southern Lamordia. On presenting her to Mordenheim, she was rejected. Gerhard fled south to Kartakass, and the Bride was put on exhibit in the Funhouse.
- Some years later, the Bride escapes from the Funhouse.
- Meanwhile, Gerhard takes students in Harmonia - Emil, and then many years later, Heinrich. He performs a "grafting" on each.

- Gerhard is abducted from his house by the Bride. Why? We don't know yet... They travel north, back to the abandoned estate where she was "raised". Heinrich begins searching for his abducted mentor.
- Emil Bollenbach, afflicted by blackouts, also begins seeking Gerhard.
- After being disturbed by Falkovnian soldiers, the Brides flees the estate and travels south, eventually finding refuge in a warehouse in Invidia.
- Emil and Gerhard find the estate, and learn that they need to head south.
- As the Festival approaches in Karina, the Bride is again disturbed in her hideout, and she murders many. They flee on a boat south again, back to Harmonia.
- Emil arrives in Karina. In questioning the guard regarding the Bride's violence in Karina, he becomes violent and disfigures him. He learns enough, however, to also head south to Harmonia.
- Heinrich and friends arrive in Karina, and learn of the various attacks. They follow south.

The final chapter in the saga of the Bride will be written in the coming sessions...

Castles Forlorn - Part One

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

Thursday, 21st July

We left Skald and headed north into Gundarak. We pass fields, seeing the oppressed peasantry till the unforgiving earth. We ask an old woman if she had seen the Patchwork Bride. She points in the distance ... to Castle Tristenoir.

The camp fire burns and the shadows dance about us, a seeming mocking dance in an unforgiving wilderness. Above us, the new dark castle, outlined against the light of the waning moon, an oppressive weight upon my soul. I have dedicated my life to the war against the darkness, to the triumph of the light, to that ineffable spark of life buried deep within our hearts. Yet at every turn it is a constant battle to protect this flickering flame against the ravages that would have it gutter and fail. At every turn we face the darkness - pain and humiliation, war and disease, hatred and despair - and every time that spark dims and the siren song of oblivion becomes that much more seductive. 'Come to me', it whispers in my dreams, 'come to me and forget'.

The warrior would say we had won today. A great evil had been destroyed, we had done what we can, we had known when to leave. The scholar would say we had learned much, and the adventurer would stand in awed bewilderment, scarcely able to credit their experience through the mists of time. Yet for me, I say that one darkness has replaced another. I say that I feel a weariness in my marrow and the chill of the night in my heart. I seek the light, but it seems far, far away. I reach for the goddess and feel but the faintest touch of her presence. I wish for solace, and find only my blade, my thorn.

Tomorrow we resume our journey. We feel the press of our destiny, yet we do not know where it leads. I write so that there may be a record of what we have done, that there were those who raged against the dying of the light. I write so that someday there will come the time when there will be those who read our story, and shiver in the night, only to be greeted by the blessing of the Sun.

For now I must be the thorn, with fire in my eyes and justice in my hand. But at night, when I walk the silences of my soul, and the demons come, I must embrace the spark, and remember to me.

Or I am lost.

Castle Tristenoira was on a bluff hilltop overlooking the Lake of Red Tears. As we approached this foreboding structure, we had noticed that large tracts of forest had been cleared. We knew that some sixty years ago tree fellers from native Gundarak had tried to clear a road, but that accidents and wild rumours had meant it was abandoned.

We rode past the hills dotted by the decaying stumps of trees long dead, under the leaden sky. The rain beat down steadily upon us, further depressing our mood. Isaiah had been ruminating on what had happened to Emil - after all, the same horrors could claim Heinrich. He conferred with Gaston and Heinrich, and we stopped by the road. Gaston stood in front of Heinrich and with the soothing tones of his voice, gradually fascinated Heinrich with his pocket watch. As Heinrich fell into a trance, Gaston commanded Heinrich to become peaceful should Gaston repeat the words 'Calmez-vous'. Waking Heinrich up, we remounted our horses.

As the castle approached, we focussed on the task ahead of us. We had accepted by now that battling the Patchwork Bride directly was suicidal. We discussed various options, but we eventually we decided to lay a trap on the castle wall abutting a cliff, so that she

would fall to her doom.

The day was drawing to a close, and although we could not see the sun, it was growing dark. The signs of logging had ceased and a mere ten yards off the road the dense forest had returned, the trees dark and twisted. On our left side we could see the last light of the day reflecting off the cliffs onto the lake, colouring it a blood red ... and as we passed, I saw a rippling in the middle of the lake as if something had stirred... Past the lake I saw the ruins of the village of Birnam. It had been destroyed many years ago, the houses gutted and no sign of movement or habitation.

Max called the faithful Skimmer to his side and asked him to scout the castle's environs for us. We watched him fly away until his form merged with the darkness of the castle. It was not long, however, until he returned. Once again Max communed silently with his friend and informed us that Skimmer had seen a light in the castle's guesthouse - a sure sign of habitation.

We left the road, which had risen out of the mud to become gravel and rock. We tied our horses to tree stumps, as Max charged Skimmer with their guardianship. Taking our equipment and supplies with us we returned to the road. Heinrich had lit his lantern to light our way, and as we approached we saw that the road began to fall away on either side into a deep ditch before the barbican, leaving only a narrow, gravelly track. Plants grew in profusion off the road - dark green, thorny bushes with pale white roses as flowers! These seemed much alike the Falkovnian Pale Roses we heard about on our fateful boat trip in Arkandale.

We arrived at the barbican, and even in the dim light thrown by Heinrich's lantern, we could see that it was of poor workmanship. The portcullis - twisted and rusted - was raised some three feet off the road, and the stones were jagged and uneven. Whoever lived here now did not maintain this place as a disciplined fighting force would.

Isaiah rolled under the portcullis, and the rest of us followed him. We found a dark room,

with another portcullis leading to the right, and a door to the left. The portcullis was of similar make and quality, and some four feet from the ground, though it bore the mark of recent use. From the room beyond the portcullis we heard a faint, rasping breathing and scratching.

Isaiah decided to investigate, and rolled under this second portcullis. From the darkness we heard only a scuffling from the back of the room, and Isaiah shouting 'Come back'. I could scarcely believe his rash stupidity, but any possible surprise was broken, and we had to act quickly. We also rolled under the portcullis into the room, and with the light, we saw a humanoid figure scurry up a ramp, and then jump off into a ditch. Max, the speediest amongst us, followed fastest, but all of us gave chase. As the creature fled, I could see that though it bore some passing resemblance to a man, it was not. It's bearing was hunched, and it's arms too long in proportion to the rest.

Max had run before it and jumped ahead of it into the ditch, with the seeming ease of an acrobat. He called out "We mean you no harm", but the creature stood frozen and panicked, looking at Max, then behind, before desperately hurrying into a crevice in the castle wall by the ditch. As it looked back I caught a glimpse of matted black hair and a face - brutish yet frightened.

I quickly unpack my rope and after tying it to the closest tree, we climb down into the ditch. During this time, Max had followed the creature into the hole. Suddenly we heard shouting from within the cave, and we drop only to be greeted by a terrified Max who had just emerged from the cave, talking incoherently of a man who is not a man, with fang and claw and putrid breath. We resolve to enter as a group this time, with light and caution, not the foolishness that had marked our approach to date.

We enter the dark crevice to find a short corridor which turned away to the right. Following the corridor around the corner we found the creature cowering at the end. It's skin was dark, almost burnt. It's shirt was torn and ripped, hanging loosely over it's heavily muscled torso. It had scratches over it's back. Curiously, it wore a heavy skirt of

some type, though it was wet and ragged, and covered with mud.

The creature looked at us and grimaced, its face a travesty of a human, and spoke in a low guttural voice. It, 'he', told us that he was of the Clan ApCray. Isaiah offered to feed him, and tossed some of our trail rations over. He snatched the food and consumed it quickly and noisily. After he had finished, Isaiah asked who had injured him. He told us that 'she' had injured him, and that she had a man with her. He then indicated that we should follow him.

The woman was almost certainly the Patchwork Bride, the man Gerhard. It seemed he was going to take us to her, so we could end this hunt once and for all. Yet first we wished to help this wretched beast. Both Heinrich and I offered to salve his wounds, but as we approached it flinched and withdrew. Sighing, we stepped back, and it pointed up towards the castle, saying that is where it slept. So doing, it was on its way, with a surprising agility. We followed it, climbing up the rope, entering the barbican, and going past the two portcullises. He led us to two still forms on the ground, both like him, heavily muscled, brutish 'men' wearing skirts. These, however, were clearly dead. One had had his stomach ripped open, his guts laying on the dirt next to him, the other his head dashed against the wall. Pointing towards the dark forest, he said 'ApCray', indicating that the others (presumably his clan) were in the forest, dispersed by the Patchwork Bride. He then fled into the forest to join his fellows.

We decided to explore the rest of the barbican. We found a room full of crude weapons - swords, axes, maces and the like, whilst upstairs we found the working mechanisms for both of the portcullises. We rigged these so that we could run out of the barbican such that they would shut just behind us. We found little else, though, so we returned to the ramp leading to the drawbridge of the castle proper.

We stood across the castle, just before the drawbridge. We saw the light that Skimmer had seen previously, a light many levels up in the castle's tower. The castle, unlike the barbican, was well made and had stood the test of time. Perhaps the ApCrays and their

like had built the barbican, but others had built the castle, many years before. We walked across the drawbridge and opened the large double doors barring our progress. They were not locked and opened easily. Inside there was a filthy room, with stairs going up and doors leading elsewhere. There were footprints in the mud on the floor. We decided to go upstairs to set the trap for the Patchwork Bride as soon as possible.

Climbing the stairs, we entered a room which had a polished suit of full plate armour, the like of which I had not seen for many years. There were a number of doors in this room also, one leading onto the parapet outside, and we were about to open this one when we heard clinking sounds coming from the corridor outside. We also heard the low hum of conversation. It was almost as if we heard the sounds of a normal dinner conversation, yet the castle seemed so far a miserable and forsaken place with only past glories, inhabited only by beats, fugitives, and perhaps worse. Isaiah stopped and closed his eyes, as the rest of us went outside to investigate.

It was Gaston who opened the door to the room, and instantly the sound, warmth and light of the room almost leapt out into the dark and lifeless corridor. Inside there was a hearty fireplace, and a large mahogany dining table in a well furnished room, with seven people dining. One of them, a woman, stood and invited us in. Gaston stated that we were visitors to the area who must have got lost. The lady said that all were welcome to the Lord's Tower - for her husband is the Lord, though he was not there at the time.

I felt very uneasy, over and above the incongruity of it all. There was something amiss here, I felt it in my bones as a chill, yet I could not place it. I entered with my comrades, and I must admit found the offer of a hot meal and warmth appealing in comparison to what we had the last day or two. Looking out the window into the castle's grounds, as I accepted the offer of a seat, I saw a cleared area with a single tree in the middle and a small building. The castle walls were gone, but otherwise it appeared similar. Was this a trick, an illusion, or were we in some other realm? Pondering the issues I looked at the diners. There was an elderly couple, a much younger couple and a mature man in addition to the lady and her maid. The lady introduced herself as Lady Isolt ApBlanc

from the land of Forfar, and was married to Lord Craig. The young couple were Marie and Stuart ApCray. They wore the same tartan as the beast we had seen, but theirs was much cleaner and well kept. Was there some connection between these people and the beasts we had seen?

It is at this point that the last of us - Isaiah - entered the room. As he entered a look of relief flashed across his countenance, yet he remained somewhat troubled. After he was introduced he told me that he had been hearing a voice calling his name, and that the voice had only disappeared once he entered this room. After this, he explains to the Lady Isolt and her guests that we were looking for the Patchwork Bride and Gerhard, though he did not, of course, provide their names or all we knew of them, just vague descriptions. They all shook their heads. I did not detect ill feeling or will from these, yet I still felt the chill in my marrow. Were we indeed in another realm? Indeed, as we found out, we were in the first of many.

Food was brought - blood sausage - and many of my companions, like myself, found it distasteful so merely politely poked at it. After some polite conversation, Isolt led us into the corridor which looked completely different to what we had seen. Looking out the window, where we expected to find the barbican we saw only forested land. Isolt explained that thirty years ago, in '1809' her husband came out of the wilderness to reclaim the ApBlanc holdings. Doing so he later built a castle on that spot to mark them. At the time only the possibility of the idea had infiltrated my consciousness, one I was not ready to credit for some time. But now I see clearly what had occurred, and we had arrived in the castles past, a period we called 'the first castle', just as the present became 'the third castle'.

The lady lead us back to the dining room, for some mulled wine, when the door to the drink cabinet flew open of its own accord and glass sprayed out. Isaiah attempted in vain to close the door with his cane even as a decanter flew out onto the dining table, smashing into shard of glass and splashing everything in its vicinity with liqueur. The guests and Isolt look slightly shocked, but also very calm, as if this was some horrible

experience which had become familiar to them. The Lady stood back and told us that this would cease shortly as the jar of sugar moved slowly across the table.

At this point Gaston asked all to move away from the table as he pulled a cachet of golden dust to perform his trick of gold. With a flourish he opened the pouch, and the dust sprinkled into the air, settling on the table and cutlery. It did not reveal any hidden forms. Perhaps this was the work of some evil spirit, possibly the poltergeist I had read about in Kartakas. Then the jar sped up and smashed into the wall with terrific force. Stunned by the suddenness of this, we could only watch as the sugar gradually fell to the ground, falling through a transparent form that had appeared on the ground. It was a dog, obviously dead, with blood flowing from many wounds. As the last of the sugar settled, the image faded.

Isolt told us that the dog, 'Petitcrieu', belonged to her first-born son Gilan. Both he and the dog were savaged by wolves near the village of Birnam. Her eyes betray her enduring sadness and melancholy at this, but on the outside remains the noble bearing and carriage of her station. Saying that she is tired she instructed her maid to find us suitable lodgings and bade us good night. The other guests also made preparations for sleep.

The maid, Katherine, led us into the corridor, and she told us that this was not the first time such an occurrence had occurred within the house. I was about to pursue this with her when I saw that both Max and Isaiah were distracted by something. I asked that she go ahead, whilst I turned to my comrades. They told me that they had heard the voice that Isaiah heard the last time, and that when Max attempted to contact Skimmer, he had failed. It was at this point I first gave real credence to the idea that we had been claimed by the mists of time, though I had no inkling of how fickle they would be.

We enter the room which the maid had entered before us, to find that our entry disturbed great amounts of dust on the floor, with all the furniture in the room covered with white sheets stained by the hand of time, save for a painting half complete. Looking under the sheets, we saw easels, stools, couches and paints - this was obviously a room devoted to

painting, but just as clearly, had not been used for some time. Looking outside we saw the forest, but the castle now had walls. The castle was not as it was when we had entered, but not as it was with the dining room. We had entered the 'second castle'. The maid had disappeared, as had the rain.

Gaston listened at one of the doors and heard some noises, including voices. Isaiah opened the door, and we saw two armed men playing cards. They were dressed in heavy woollen clothing and had daggers in their belts, which they pulled out in alarm once they noticed us.

Isaiah asked "How goes the battle?". They laugh and say that the battle against the ApFittle scum is going well - indeed that they had just captured their leader, Andrew ApFittle, and were holding him for ransom. Then we heard a rumbling, as if the very earth was groaning, and a loud crack followed by a booming noise. The men (and us unfortunately) began to mill around in an excited and confused fashion as dust and small pebbles fell from the ceiling. It stopped almost as soon as it had come. They informed us that it had happened quite often recently, though it was something that never left a man comfortable. It was the year '1934', and though this tower, 'the guest tower', in their time, we recalled that in the present, the 'third castle' it did not, presumably as a result of the tremors.

The soldiers showed us to our rooms where we prepared for sleep after an exhausting night's labours. Our sleep was disturbed however by Heinrich waking Max up. Max saw Heinrich sitting on his bed holding his wrist. It looked as though Heinrich had not slept, though a number of hours had passed, and his wrist looked unharmed. Heinrich told Max that he had been tinkering with 'the box'. As Max was relating this to me, I saw a number of strange looks pass between my companions. They decided to tell me the story of the box as they knew it, for they had kept it from me for some time.

While I was unconscious and in the grip of my nightmares, my companions had tracked the vile Marquis de Penible to his lair - for he had survived our last encounter - and in

another temple to the glory of pain surrounded by his victims in a miasma of agony. After a fierce battle, the Marquis was dragged off by the Opera Ghost to the fires of Hell. In the aftermath Heinrich found this ornate black box covered with fell symbols. Over the protests of Isaiah, Heinrich decided to keep it for further study. I almost wept and gnashed my teeth in frustration. More than the Ba'al Verzi dagger, here was an object whose very fabric was spun of evil.

Heinrich sat silently, head bowed, looking into the centre of a small fire where the remnants of the box burned, as Max told the rest of the story. He clicked the box open last night, and once again the light appeared at the edges. Suddenly it opened into a place he had never been before - dark and misty, with chains between walls, floor and ceiling. As Heinrich moved forward he became aware of Juliette and the Marquis attached to chains with hooks, their faces masks of torment. Heinrich blanched in horror, and fear, and stepped back, when he was struck by a chain came out of the mists like a snake. Pulling his hand away, it tore at his wrist, and he fled screaming soundlessly, the box closing behind him. Once it collapsed upon itself, Heinrich threw it into the fire, where it burned. Somehow I doubted even then that such an evil could be defeated by so simple a means. Alas, I was right ...

We woke the next morning to find the trees had remained, and that we were still in the same time period, what we came to call the 'second castle'. We stopped briefly to break our fast, ready our weapons and speak our devotions. We then travelled downstairs and continued our search of the castle, for clues to the mystery. We found a disused bedroom, which had a locked door. However, as he had done before, with a flourish and a theatrical knock on the door, we heard a click and Gaston opened the door easily.

Inside we found the dress of Lady Isolt and a pendant which had marked upon it a silver arm, a symbol of the ancient god Diancecht, distantly connected to my goddess, and a god of healing. As I took the pendant and felt its goodness, I heard a distant tinkling

music which only I could hear. It seemed to be coming from the corridor, and placing the pendant about my neck I followed it out.

My companions followed me, as I seemed to be in some sort of reverie. I then saw mist coming out from beneath a door ahead of me. As I approached the door, the mists seemed to pulse, taking on a life of its own, and then suddenly withdraw underneath the door. All that was left was the smell of the forest after a spring shower, of life triumphant. I opened the door, hoping that this was a divine revelation in ... and found myself in another room with mist about my feet. As my companions joined me we looked in wonder as the mist seemed to pulse once more, and turning green, we found ourselves in the middle of a clearing in an ancient, vibrant forest, full of life, with no castle we could see anywhere. The mist then disappeared.

Though it should have been morning, the sun was setting, giving the forest a reddish cast. My attention was drawn in particular to the only object within the clearing, a magnificent oak tree. As I approached the tree, I was shocked to see a hand come around the trunk, a hand which was thin, split and oozing, with maggots crawling out of the wounds. I stopped, gasping in shock and horror, my image of this place rent like rotting cloth. The hand advanced so that we could see an arm, and then she stepped out from her concealment. She was a very old woman with matted hair.

The character of the forest had changed. The howling of wolves had replaced the trilling of birds, and the trees assumed a darker mien, whispering in the shadows of ancient sacrifices and hidden evils ... and her eyes, her eyes were empty sockets ... pits of blackness. We could not recognise her tartan. Then she spoke in a voice beyond the grave, a rasping, gurgling voice, "You must get him. He must pay for what he's done." Then she pointed in the distance, and we saw the mists had returned to the trees. Within the mists, we saw a figure take shape. It was a young woman with lustrous red hair, kneeling in the self-same clearing we were standing in, and we understood that it was the old woman in the past. She held a deer's antler and meditated. Soon from behind her a second figure took shape, a young man who crept upon her with malice in his heart. As

he was about to spring upon her, she turned reflexively and drove the point of the antler into his chest. The man emitted a blood-chilling howl of agony which shook the forest, but somehow managed yet to push her back, and overpowering her sunk his teeth into her neck and drank of her life's blood.

As he drank, he let her go, and she fell to the ground. He stepped back, in an ecstasy but soon his mien changed from one of joy to horror, as he twisted and fell in soundless torment, and writhed as if her blood were the deadliest poison. The woman struggled to raise herself somewhat of the ground and said in a voice eerily reminiscent of what we just heard, "I was going to heal you, to bring you back into the light, but now I curse you! With my dying breath, I beseech the gods to make you an eternal prisoner of this place, which you have stained with evil! Let murder burn in your veins with every setting of the sun, and may peace never come to you!"

We watched in horror as his veins began to swell and burst, boiling blood frothing from his wounds as the mists reclaimed us ... and we are back in the castle, with the mist about our legs. Swirling it disappeared through a corridor wall, leaving rivulets of fresh blood behind.

We had little time to absorb our experience, for we heard a servant come up the stairs and into our room. Asking what we wanted, after assuming we were local mercenaries, she took us to the map-room. Once there, and the servant had left us, we heard a voice whispering "Isaiah" and I understood that this time I could hear the voice that Isaiah had been hearing. Yet I was still startled when he turned and said in a voice resonant with anguish, "Michelle", and began clawing at the stone walls about us seeking her.

The room was mouldy and had obviously fallen into disuse. The shelves had warped, and many had fallen down. Looking out the window, we saw that we had returned to our time. Rather than attempt to leave however, we knew that we had to stay and unravel the mysteries of this place, and find the Patchwork Bride. Searching the library, I was amazed to find Volume Seven of the Madrigorian, that fateful collection of the ravings of

madmen. Inside we found another prophecy which spoke of the 'Six' - which we could not discern - but more importantly of the Ba'al Verzi and Strahd. The first two signs had already come to pass. The "murderers long dead" were clearly the Ba'al Verzi who had already returned to serve Strahd, "the Daemon". The "watchers" were the Vistani, and in their assault on Malocchio they had betrayed their agreement with the "creator", Strahd. The third sign, however, spoke of the "Man of Prey" whom we did not recognise, though it foreboded, perhaps, a death amongst us.

Also in the room was a note dated 27th Winterday 1933, which was obviously to be posted in the village of Birnam demanding reparations and a ransom from the ApFittles. This came from the middle castle, where Marc ApBlanc was waging the war against the ApFittles and had captured their leader.

Further searching in the room found an actual map, although it seemed different in some fashion. It had 'x's marked over it in the forest regions. Some of them had "Sanctuary?" written next to them. Within the map was a note which spoke of a ghost in a clearing and gardeners pulling up weeds in the courtyard.

We had spent too much time in the map-room, however, and decided that whilst we remained in the same time period as the Patchwork Bride, that we must act. Thus we proceeded to set our trap. We travelled up to the fourth floor of the castle. On the walls we found crude charcoal drawings of skulls and demon figures on the walls, probably made by the "ApCrays" that we had met below. One of the skulls, however, was the holy symbol of the god Arawn, god of the dead, and a dread figure. It is another sign that makes me think there are strong links between these beasts and the peoples of the castle environs earlier.

The castle walls are crenellated, and it was there that at a broken point in the wall we rigged a trap so that when the Patchwork Bride stepped into a lasso spread on the floor, one of us nearby would loose the rope which cause a massive weight to drag her to her doom, over a thousand feet to the rocks below. Of course the trap relied on us being able

to lure her into the lasso and trigger it at the right time. As we worked on its construction, we heard a noise come from below. Max attempted to commune with Skimmer and succeeded ... whilst we were in the same time period as the bird, of course.

The noises became louder, and as Max sent Skimmer to investigate, we heard heavy breathing, and something climbing up the nearby rubble in the wall breach. Then, suddenly, a trap door flew up and five of the ApCrays emerged, with hostile intent. Heinrich and Isaiah drew the wheel-lock pistols and fired, whilst Max and I engaged the three others with sword, fist and foot. Gaston was attempting to perform one of his tricks when one of the beasts struck him with a clawed hand, throwing him against the wall.

Max and I fought back to back. He swept his foot under one, but it managed to grab hold of the wall, saving itself from certain death, but in return another struck Max twice and reached forward, its mouth gaping unnaturally wide and bit him on the face. Watching that from the edges of my perception I was suddenly struck by what I had seen in the Funhouse, and by what I had read of Tepest. These were 'goblyns', hideous travesties of men, warped by evil and preying on the edges of civilisation.

Max managed to break the hold the goblin had upon him and returned with a flurry of blows. Isaiah fixed another with the power of his gaze, and with a word, the goblin fell, and tumbled over the wall, as I struck one across the chest, only to be struck by its claws, and then savaged by its jaw which had grown horrendously large and choked by its fetid breath. Struggling desperately I struck again with Anathema and felled it. Turning, bleeding from my face and chest, I cleaved the skull of one of those assailing Max, similarly wounded. The one hanging off the wall had pulled himself up, and stood briefly looked at us, blooded warriors, and then behind him and attempting to flee, was felled by a blow from Max.

Meanwhile, Heinrich had placed a glove on his hand and leaning over, we felt a charge in the air as one would feel during a violent thunderstorm, and touching a goblin ... there was a massive clap of thunder and flash of light as this tremendous discharge of lightning

sprang from his hand, devastating the goblin, burning the flesh, leaving only a charred remains. Heinrich stood in shock, as did we at this naked display of raw power. As Gaston tied and bound the downed goblin, Heinrich stammered that he meant to draw upon another scientific spell, but that he sank into a blackness in his mind, and saw fiery writing and diagrams and against his will ...

I was disturbed by the chain of events, though at that time I linked them to the activation of that damned box. We woke the goblin and questioned him, though his speech was atrocious. It told us he was "ApDuguid", another clan, though not of men. Gaston fixed our captive in his gaze, and hypnotised him, as he had Heinrich on our way here. He commanded the goblin to return to his leader in the forest and tell him not to send any more troops into the castle. After waking the creature, we released it and it loped off into the darkness.

We turned our attention back to Heinrich, and asked him of the box. He admitted that it had returned, taking it out of his backpack. He threw it off the wall to the cliff below, and we watched, knowing one and all the futility of the gesture. After a moment of silence, we resumed building our trap. Some ten minutes later we saw a stream of goblins leaving the castle below. It seems our plan was working.

We finished the trap by early afternoon, and decided to go to the tower to sleep and nurse our wounds. On the way, however, we heard a voice whisper "Isaiah" once more, but this time we could pinpoint the direction. Isaiah ran to the tower and wrenched open the door. Standing there, a few feet from him, was his wife, in a white dress, scratched and sodden, though like the dog Petitcrieu, she was insubstantial, ghostly. She spoke, "Come back to me ... come back." Isaiah walked to greet his wife, whom we thought was dead, in a land far away, but then she was gone. Isaiah, by now a mask of longing and anguish, screamed for her to return.

Isaiah calmed, but knelt, weeping quietly. The last he saw of her was one and a half years ago, by the edge of a river. She was coming back from a trip late at night, when her

carriage foundered at a bridge in a place named River's Ford. The horses panicked and the carriage crashed over the railing. By that stage one of the horses had died, the other was thrashing wildly in panic. Isaiah watched helplessly as his wife Michelle, and his son Joshua, were trapped within the carriage, as the railing collapsed entirely, and the carriage fell into the river. The carriage driver fell down and the body was later recovered. Both Michelle and Joshua was thrown free onto the rocks, and were being dragged away, unconscious. Isaiah told us that he jumped into the river, but could save only one ... his son. Her body was never recovered.

He paused and we waited in silence, respecting his grief. When he resumed he said that afterwards he believed that 'God' had caused the accident and hence he forsook his worship. On a year to the day since her 'death' he walked past the river, and saw a cloth from the dress she was wearing. Striding into the river to retrieve the cloth, he was surrounded by mists, and when he returned to the riverbank, he was no longer in his home world, but in the one.

"God has given me powers; but what good are they if I haven't got Michelle? My God mocks me! How can one who has no faith in himself, have faith in some other?"

We were torn from the tragic Isaiah by a harsh, slow voice from below, a voice we had heard little of, but one etched in our memories, "Gerhard!" ... the Patchwork Bride. The voice came from below the floor. Looking around the room we saw a small hole in the floor and looking down saw a small light flickering, and a table and rotten chair. There were strange items on the chair- knives, bottles, strong, cloth amongst them. And we saw her, in the same dress worn with wear and by the elements. She was shaking Gerhard, who was lying prostrate on the table. "Gerhard. Time has come to continue work."

Gerhard started to stir. He was obviously fatigued and overwrought. She picked up a framed picture.

"I need to continue Gerhard. It's almost done. I need to look like her." She moved to sit

on the table, which had been vacated by the rising Gerhard. As she turned we could see the picture in the photo, a young woman, with blonde hair, palely beautiful. Heinrich whispered to us that it was Elise, the wife of Dr Mordenheim.

"I won't be rejected this time." And so it was that her brutish concerns were thrown into sharp relief. She wished to be beautiful, to be accepted, to walk in the light, rather than be a 'monster', consigned to the darkness. Although we sympathised with her plight, we decided it was time to set our plan into motion. Max walked to the stairs - he was to taunt the Patchwork Bride, whilst Isaiah was in place to pull the rope, that would cause the weight to drag her down. However, as we moved to our assigned places, we looked outside and found that time had shifted once more, and the trap would have to wait. We saw a mercenary on the wall, and he came to greet us to take us to the Lord Marc ApBlanc. We had returned to the middle castle.

We had just managed to send him on his way with a concocted story, when we heard a door slam in the courtyard below. Looking down, we saw a group of soldiers dragging a struggling man out. This was obviously the execution of Andrew ApFittle. Perhaps the people of Birnam had refused Marc's demands. They placed Andrew up against a wall, and blind-folded him as ten archers stood twenty paces from him. A small crowd had gathered and hurled abuse the condemned man, but in the end he stood silent and proud. The lead soldier gave the count, and the archers fired, killing him instantly.

As if to register its anger at what had transpired, the earth shook and rumbled. There was a loud crack from one section of the wall, and the area where we had set the trap, alarmingly nearby, broke and fell into the cliff below.

The tremor did not last long, however, and soldiers and engineers came quickly to assess the damage. We took the opportunity to make our way down to the courtyard, where Isaiah was able to question some of the locals about the great oak. We learnt that four times a year Marc sent the ground-keepers out to pull out saplings that rise in the courtyard. Those four times of year happened to coincide with the holy days of the

calender as I knew it, the two solstices and the two equinoxes. It occurred to me then that the grove we had seen in the vision was probably the castle grounds now, the only thing still standing the oak.

Besides the oak, the outstanding feature of the castle grounds was the ornate tomb standing in the centre. Taking a closer look, we noted the names: Morholt ApBlanc, Gilan ApBlanc and ... Isolt ApBlanc, though there was no sign of Craig ApBlanc's resting place ... a sign that we understood only in retrospect. Talking once again with some of the castle people, we were told that after Isolt had died, Craig lived alone and died of old age. After that the castle fell into disuse. It was many years later that Marc came to claim the family land. The ApFittles of Birnam, however, were angered when Marc ordered castle walls built, signalling his intention that the ApBlancs rule once more. Marc gathered the clans and made war on the ApFittles, and now (in the middle castle) Birnam and Forfar were his. In claiming the land, Marc said that he was the grandson of Craig's missing daughter, Brangain.

We had moved indoors by this stage, for it had resumed raining and was becoming dark. Suddenly a wind seemed to come from nowhere and extinguish the lamp. A guard was attempting to relight it when a mug spun on the table of its own accord and landed on the floor, smashed into pieces. Then the door to the courtyard opened, revealing a fair haired young boy, translucent, a ghost, holding a twisted and bent dog, bleeding from many wounds rent in its flesh. It was Gilan, holding Petitcrieu, and his piercing eyes were focused on Isaiah as he said, "Make him better."

Then we saw Gilan twitch and a claw mark appeared on his body, and then another, as blood burst from his throat and then as his arms, legs and torso were ripped and torn. Isaiah stepped forward to help him, but his hands passed through without effect. We watched helplessly as Gilan fell to the ground stricken, and faded away. Isaiah looked a forlorn sight again, saying only that Gilan resembled Joshua closely. Joshua died some three months after his mother's death, after a long battle with the injuries from the tragic accident.

When the guard finally managed to relight the lamp we ventured out into the courtyard and towards the oak tree. On our way we noticed one of the stained glass windows overlooking the courtyard. It depicted a knight holding his own severed head with its eyes gouged and the caption "Mercy is blind." It sent a chill down our spines. Other stained glass windows depicted wolves baying at the moon, in three separate phases. Andrew ApFittle was still at the door near the great oak tree, riddled with arrows. It was a ghastly sight, and we could find no answers there, so we decided to investigate the mausoleum.

The first and greatest of the tombs was Isolt's. It was white marble. Its door was ajar, so we entered. Inside was an unadorned sarcophagus, "Isolt ApBlanc 1793 - 1839". The second tomb was that of Gilan, also white marble, reading "Gilan ApBlanc 1814 - 1826". It was decorated by a mural of an angelic fair-haired boy standing next to an animal, of which only the paws could be seen. The third tomb read "Morholt ApBlanc 1815 - 1833". After we entered we heard the disembodied voice of Michelle, "Isaiah .. I've been here so long .. now you can come back for me." A hand emerged from the sarcophagus, horribly pale, with water dripping. I decided to end the menace in the house of damned spirits, and presented the symbol of my Goddess just as Isaiah rushed forward to touch her. Just as I my abjuration reached it's height his hand touched hers, passing through and she faded away, leaving a sigh on the wind.

Looking outside, the walls had disappeared - we had returned to the first castle. We were left in the empty tomb of Morholt ApBlanc, decorated by the mural of an impressively muscled handsome young warrior, watched over by a small angel like woman wielding two spears. She must have represented his patron deity, Morrigan, goddess of war. Isaiah, was determined to find Michelle, however, and raised the lid of the sarcophagus ... and as he did saw we caught the stench of death. Inside a man in armour with his great sword lay in rest. Isaiah shut the sarcophagus, and we left and proceeded to the Lord's Tower.

The door to the tower also had a mural - a mailed hand holding a feather in its fist. Isaiah

barged in heedless, and we followed, to find ourselves in the cloakroom. We were greeted by a maid, who by our request, led us to the Lord Craig ApBlanc. On our way we saw the murals and stained glass windows, including wolves running under the full moon and a man holding a feather in his mailed fist and bagpipes in the other. Underneath it stated "Minstrel ApBlanc", an appellation we had heard of Craig before.

We were greeted by Craig. He was a young man, perhaps in his early twenties and he welcomed us to his abode. Gaston asked to see the library, whilst Max started a discussion on the history of the area. We learnt that this place was known as Forfar and it had a sacred grove of trees. We learnt also that Morholt, despite appearances, did not die in battle, but murdered in his bed by Duncan ApDuguid. The lord seemed preoccupied during our discussions, and became irritated at our questioning. Although Gaston was unfailingly polite, his evasiveness grated on the rest of us and losing his temper, he threw us out, and took Gaston to the library.

We left outside and stood near the majestic oak tree. As Gaston walked to the library, he heard a woman sobbing, followed by the sound of running and the crashing of glass. He did not know what had occurred, but outside we could see, for we saw a window burst, and a woman's form come flying out, long blonde hair trailing, to strike the ground with a sickening thump. It was Isolt, and her neck was at an unnatural angle, which spoke of death. As the sun set I strode forth to give her the blessing of the Goddess, so that she may have peace. I then took her inside up to the unfinished chapel she hoped one day to dedicate to Diancecht. It was then that a maid informed us that her daughter Brangain, last of her children, had been missing for many months.

The closest druid was in the town of Birnam, so we held a silent vigil there with the other mourners, for Isolt was well loved. She was laid out on a tartan of green and white, which Gaston informed us was of her birth clan, the ApVay, the same clan as the woman of the grove. In the library Gaston had found a treatise on "The Purification of Corrupt Flesh" by holy water which he gave to me - a valuable reference. He had also researched the history of the area and found that the young man who had killed the woman was a young

ApBlanc, though he did not find the name of either. He also found that many, many years ago in Birnam, there was a man, Rivalin, who went to battle and did not return with the victors, leaving his pregnant wife, Flora, behind. However, legends say that he returned in death and corrupted his wife, and when the villagers discovered this corruption a mob came and killed both her and her child, though they could not find him.

After the ceremony, the people began to file out of the chapel, though Craig had not arrived and could not be found. We decided to investigate the circumstances of the death of Isolt. She had jumped from the master bedroom. As we entered we saw that the door was banging and the curtains billowing from the wind through the broken window. Then, we saw a stream of mist come from the window, bringing the smell of the forest with it, and once again we found ourselves in the grove before the same great tree we believed to be the oak tree in the courtyard. Once more the rotten hand came around its trunk, and we see the woman take a clear vial from her pockets and drinking it is full formed and healed ... and then we found ourselves back in the room. We were confused by what we had seen, though I could only glean it was a sign regarding the use of holy water. Perhaps a vampyre stalked the castle grounds. At the time I did not credit such a theory, I decision I later revised.

We left the bedroom, and went below to where Isolt's body fell after he despairing leap. There we heard Michelle once more, "Isaiah", and saw her form laying on the ground where Isolt had lain. "We're getting close ... I've been following ..." and then she faded away, but it only contributed to my friend's burgeoning angst and hysteria. He was being overwhelmed by emotions still raw, and we could not tell whether the spirits meant ill or otherwise. Even I could see that each time we perceived her she was becoming more substantial.

It was night by then, and we had done and seen much, so we entered the castle to find a place to rest. Looking outside from our vantage, we see the castle had changed again. Max could feel Skimmer, and confirmed that we had returned to our own time. Then we felt a cold wind blow through the corridor and a translucent form step into our room. It

had rotten flesh and savage burn marks all over its body, and puncture marks on its neck, and it wore the green and white tartan of the ApVay.

We all rose, for we could feel its malevolence, and I presented the Lighthouse symbol of the Goddess and attempted to drive it forth. The wraith's visage portrayed a look of surprise, but then it hardened and placed its spectral hand over the symbol, holding it and screaming in unholy rage and pain. I start to shake as I feel its chill darkness swamp my light, but drawing upon the light of the goddess I hold to myself. Meanwhile Max attempted to strike the creature, but his hand passed through its insubstantial form as did Heinrich's, whilst Gaston had no effect presenting the silver arm pendant of Diancecht I had returned to him for study. It was Isaiah shouting "Give me back Michelle!" which finally drove him forth, and we breathed a sigh of relief, for its spirit was old and strong, and almost dark beyond description. Was this the Man of Prey? Was it him responsible for the shifts of time? We did not see answers to these questions until almost too late. We set a watch, and went to sleep. Before I retired, Heinrich had checked his belongings, and informed us that the box had returned.

During the night we were plagued by nightmares and visions. Gaston woke to find his arm around a woman with two small puncture marks in her neck - the mark of the vampyre - though her form was insubstantial. He recognised her as his love, Sophie, and then she was gone.

Isaiah and Max woke to hear a door nearby close. Looking around, they found that I had gone, though I could not remember it. Opening the door I had closed they ran into the hall and saw me standing at the edge of a corridor where there was a gaping hole in the wall. Afraid I might jump to my doom, as had Isolt, Max rushed forward to grab me. I woke with his touch and back away from the precipice and then we nearly faint in shock as the ghostly form we had seen earlier that night stepped from my form. Alas for our carelessness that we had not foreseen this! Once again we attempt to battle the spirit. Max struck it ineffectually, whilst Isaiah attempted the protective rite of his cane. The spirit grabbed his hand and cane, and we could see a battle of wills and spirits, but Isaiah stood

firm, as I did, and it screamed in anger and frustration. I called on the light of Sol Invictus, but it passed through it without effect, save that its attention had returned once more to me. Then, standing on the edge of the corridor, it glided towards me and passed through my form. I could feel its darkness invade my body, and I was stricken by the chill of the grave and beyond ... a darkness so vile and so close that I could not bear it that for the second time in my life I screamed and screamed and screamed ... my body was wracked with pain, but my spirit was the more sorely wounded, and even now I know that I bear scars I will carry for the rest of my days. I was marked that day ... my companions told me afterwards that I had aged ... and it was true, my hair was sprinkled with white, and my face lined with care, and my eyes ...

After it had marked me, the ghost had left, but another came, for we heard Michelle, clear and strong, "Isaiah, Isaiah, you can find Joshua too! Come with me ... we can help them". Then we could see her, almost solid, and holding Isaiah's hand, she backed into the wall behind her, taking her husband with her. She was crying and we recognised the figure on his cane, The Crying Lady. Then both were gone.

Castles Forlorn - Part One - DM's Comments

This is the first of three sessions that took place in the domain of Forlorn, using the excellent *Castles Forlorn* boxed set. It's one of my favourite Ravenloft products of all time for a variety of reasons, including the complex backstory, the very freeform plot, and the very original environment it takes place in.

Running these sessions did teach me one thing, though - running *Castles Forlorn* is hard. Very hard. The complex interrelationships between the NPCs, the timeshifts, and the various plots and threads that you need to keep separate between each castle make for a very challenging DM experience! It's all worth the effort, however, and for us, these three sessions became one of the group's favourite from the whole campaign.

To start off with, I'll make some comments about how I chose to use the information in the *Castles Forlorn* boxed set:

- As discussed in the boxed set, it's unwise to simply use the information therein without having a particular quest or task in mind. In this case, the castle is simply the setting for the PC's final show-down with the Patchwork Bride. If they choose to start picking up on threads relating to the Castle, that's great! But their primary goal was about the Bride.
- I chose the "DM determined" time shifts option, rather than using dice to decide. I prefer this because it allowed me to make dramatically appropriate time shifts, rather than have the dice interrupt a great moment. For example, the time shift just as the PCs prepared to trap the Bride ensured that the story of the Castle continued to unveil itself before the Bride issues resolved itself.
- The first encounter with the goblins deliberately understated the viciousness described for normal goblins. This was because I wanted to (a) make it clear that the goblins used to be humans (and hopefully engender a bit more sympathy), and (b) set the PCs up for a surprise when their true nastiness is revealed.
- It may seem that the residents of the castle too easily accept the presence of the PCs. If I had to rationalise that, it would be that the time shifting helps outsiders to appear like locals when they're shifting time periods - but practically, it's just to help the exposition in the early stages, and allow the PCs to learn about the history of the castle.
- Some of the scenes the boxed set presents are just fantastic - I love the scene of Isolt falling from her window, and of Andrew ApFittle being executed, in particular. If you're running this adventure, don't hold back with these! They are thoroughly entertaining ways to tell the story of the ApBlancs.

Essentially, though, this session really only used the cool time-shift effects of the Castle to help reveal the story. In the next sessions, they are used more - wait until the Bride starts time-shifting herself!

Meanwhile, of course, a bunch of other threads and stories have an impact on this session. Some of the minor threads include:

- **Max's Claustrophobia:** Up until now, this hasn't been a major issue. In the cave, however, when Max approached the goblin for the first time, his phobia greatly

exaggerated the creature. Max's phobia become more of an issue later on in the campaign.

- **The Box:** This session is the first time that the party actively begins discussing the consequences of Heinrich picking up the puzzlebox from the Marquis de Penible way back in *Fear Itself Part 1*. Heinrich has started to be obsessed with it, and is trying to open it. Their repeated attempts at destroying the box are obviously futile, and Heinrich will gain some interesting abilities over the coming sessions.
- **Heinrich's Magic:** Up until this point, Heinrich has primarily been considered a scientist within the game, although his rules are all based around the wizard. As such, his spells have all been chosen to have scientific and medical rationales. His use of Lightning Bolt in this session, however, is the first indication that Heinrich's abilities are not limited to his scientific theories. When using this ability, Heinrich is reaching into the "black hole" in his mind - the same gap that's been causing his recent temporary amnesia, and the blackness that was hinted at way back in *Monette*. Unsurprisingly, this is a result of the operation that increased his intelligence and resulted in the scar on the back of his neck. Exactly why has this happened? This is revealed in *Inheritances*, in a few session's time.
- **Michelle and Isaiah:** Isaiah's visions of Michelle, and his subsequent disappearance at the end of the session, were driven by the fact that the player (Martin) was about to head overseas to work for a few months - so I needed to write his character out of the game for a while. The fact that Michelle can contact him in this castle is no coincidence, however - Michelle (or the ghost of Michelle) is lost in time. Later in the campaign, Isaiah will need to search for her through time again in order to find her. For now, though, Isaiah is out of the campaign.
- **The Madrigorian:** The PCs find another piece of the Madrigorian in the Castle, which completes the prophetic words they saw being written in Scaena (*Touch of Death*). More details of this will be in later DM's comments...
- **The Patchwork Bride:** ...and, of course, they finally learn what the Bride wants. She simply wants Gerhard to keep "working" on her until she really *does* look like Elise Mordenheim - she can then go back to Dr. Mordenheim and win his love, as

she was created to do. This had just the impact I wanted on the PCs - they suddenly realised that the ravaging, evil beast they'd been chasing all this time was actually a somewhat sympathetic creature.

The one other notable event of this session was the aging of Caine at the hands of the ghost Tristen ApBlanc. Although only aging him 20 years, it adds a lot to the nature of his character, in my opinion, and was a very cool outcome...

Castles Forlorn - Part Two

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

Thursday, 21st July (continued)

Upon waking that morning we indulged in almost petty bickering, which stood as a surreal contrast to the events of the previous nights. Perhaps we were not prepared or even able to fully acknowledge what had occurred. Nevertheless we argued over the box. It appeared that Heinrich had developed strange protection from the box. He tried to cut himself with a needle he carried, and as he did so something beneath his skin seemed to ripple and flex, and the needle proved unable to penetrate. With Heinrich's permission, I unsheathed Anathema and struck a powerful blow at his arm, which in other circumstances would have severed his arm in a spray of blood, but only left a slight scratch and the sound of metal on metal.

We fell silent at that, and I sheathed my sword and lapsed unto a withdrawn solitude. It was not long, however, before we heard an anguished wail from the corridor. "Brangain!" It was the restless spirit of Isolt, looking for her daughter. I took the Diancecht amulet and ventured into the corridor. There, indeed, I saw the insubstantial form of Isolt, her hands held out. Her hands, unlike the rest of her looked solid. She did not seem to notice me and kept moving, occasionally calling for Brangain. We started to follow quietly, seeing where she may lead. Looking out a window as we passed through the corridors we noticed that we had returned to the middle castle of the harsh Marc ApBlanc. Then she walked through a mural depicting a man being healed by a holy woman. We followed her into the room.

We found a small desk against a wall in a room that had not been used for many years, perhaps not since Craig's rulership. Calling for Brangain once more, the spirit of Isolt sat down at the desk, and picking up a pen and quill, made motions of writing something -

motions, since there was no paper or parchment in sight. She was quietly sobbing to herself. After she had completed her phantom scripting, she folded the 'paper', opened the flip lid of the desk, and closed it, though in actuality nothing on the desk had moved. Rising, she left the room and proceeded down a spiral stairway. We followed her again, silent, at a respectable distance. Her sobbing had continued, muted, and she had ceased calling for Brangain. It appeared that this was a re-enactment of an event during life - something I had read that was common amongst the restless dead.

Stepping into the sewing room, also unused for years, she moved to the door and looking at the window at the end of the master bedroom, she began to run and hurled herself out ... and disappeared. She had shown us her last moments - for a purpose we felt. We therefore returned to the room in which she had written, and after Gaston had performed his trick with the lock, we looked inside the desk. Inside we found Isolt's suicide letter. In it she raged against her husband Craig, accusing him of the murder of Morholt. I read it in horror, for it seemed to mark him as a cursed creature of darkness - was he a vampyre, one who stalked the night? Yet we had seen him during daylight hours, though never at night. We discussed the implications it raised, for it failed to explain the powerful ghost who had assailed us but the night before. Did the ghost inhabit Craig's body, or was there some other explanation?

Our deliberations were cut short, however, by yelling and movement from below as the castle was stricken with yet another earth tremor. Was this the gods venting their displeasure at the castle's lord? Was there a connection with the waste-land of the modern day, and the hideous goblins? I was in the process of attempting to destroy the box. I had set it on the ground and was to strike it with holy Anathema, but somehow I managed only to strike it a glancing blow. We heard an ominous click and the box began to spin and whirr and light was emitted from its edges. Heinrich moved in a panicked rush to restore it to its inoperative condition and all was well. It was only at this time that Heinrich admitted that the thing had lain dormant until we chased the fiend Malocchio to his stronghold at Castle Lupe. Before we bound him to the land, he summoned Heinrich from the shadows with his fearsome will, and taking the box, he moved its parts, causing

it to click, with light glowing at its edges. There he taught Heinrich how to operate it, and so activating its powers he told Heinrich that he would be revenged upon us all. The thing had called to him ever since. It sang to him in his dreams, though he would resist. But sometimes the lure of the knowledge was too great. In frustration Heinrich once more hurled the box out the window.

The tremor was brief, and we realised that we needed more information. The curse of Castle Tristenoira was closely tied to the ApBlancs and we needed to know more. We went to the library to find answers, and though the door was locked we broke a window from the adjoining tower and climbed in, for Gaston was unable to perform his trick this time.

Our investigations bore fruit. We found the dates of the holy days and the importance of the holy grove and oak tree. We also found the will of Brangain and Sean ApBlanc. Sean appeared to be Brangain's son, and Marc's father. They showed that the property in Forfar had legally devolved onto Marc. The family tree revealed little for much of it was lost. The only previous ApBlanc was Flora, who had died hundreds of years before the birth of Craig ... or so we thought at the time. We thought that the ghost may have been the vengeful shade of the accursed Rivalin.

Leaving the library, we stepped down the stairs into the music room and then down into a dance hall via a trap-door in the floor. The dance hall though had been transformed in this time of war and had make-shift weapons racks on its walls. Hearing noises outside from the mess hall, we went down another flight of stairs into the unused fencing hall. As we walked, quietly, in the cloud-covered darkness though it was mid-morning, we mused on the fact that the earthquakes had started only after the commencement of the war against the ApFittles. We wandered the castle for a little while, searching for more answers. Much of it was unused. We found a bedroom used recently and a writing desk with nothing of interest; a wardrobe with many black dresses and cloth embedded with some sort of embalming fluid, smelling of death; and a games room with a chessboard until we came to a room which had been nailed shut. Our curiosity peaked, I broke the door down

and inside was a bedroom which had not been used for many years. The mattress had a very large red stain, though it was very old. We searched the bedside table, and found the diary of Duncan ApDuguid dated 1833, a year before the death of Isolt. It spoke of him being assailed by a spirit which he sent fleeing with holy water, for he was a holy warrior dedicated to Morrigan.

As I sat on the bed reading this, a shape took form before us. It was Morholt, but instead of legs, we saw his a massive wound in his abdomen and his guts having fallen out and trailing away into mist. He was apparently unaware of his condition. He challenged us as a warrior, but I spoke to him harshly, reading his mother's suicide letter. He grew incensed and went in search of his father, sword in hand. We followed him but he disappeared, and as the sun set we looked outside and found that we had returned to the first castle, and the dread Craig ApBlanc.

From upstairs we could hear music being played, and we go in search of it, to find some fifty people, including the Lord Craig, standing. It was Isolt's funeral, her coffin lying on the table as the sun's last rays shined upon her. Upon seeing us Craig was surprised, but made no sound. After the music ceased, he stepped forward and spoke to the gathering, "I have said all I have said to say. I only wish that this temple of Diancecht was complete so that she may rest in peace." With that the crowd moved to the dining feast and wake, while Craig came to speak to us. Surprisingly he was conciliatory, saying that this was not a time for anger and bidding us to stay the night. We were not fooled, however, and suspected his motives.

We talked briefly with some of the departing mourners and learnt that Lord Craig was having a difficult time coping with his grief, especially as recently Duncan had killed Morholt, his sword found in Morholt's room covered in his blood. Being a fearsome warrior, however, Duncan was able to slay some of Craig's guards and flee.

We proceeded to the feast with the others, and there engaged the locals in further conversation aiming at discovering more of the family's history. After the death of Flora,

the ApBlancs were not heard of for many, many years. The ApFittles had become rulers of Birnam and the local area, even when Craig returned in 1809 and built the first tower. He married Isolt in 1813. The grove that used to exist on this site had been burned since the early 1600s and cleared. There are druids in the forest who are very secretive, although it is known they hold the oak in reverence. Alone of the trees in the grove it did not burn. Most people discredited the rumours that the castle was haunted.

After the feast we decide to rest once more. Heinrich confirmed with melancholy in his voice that the box had returned, and we ruminated grimly over the fate of our companion Isaiah. We hoped that we would be able to unravel the mystery of this place and its restless inhabitants.

During the night, whilst Heinrich was reading, we were woken by noises out the window. Looking at the village we saw lights and people coming from the town bearing torches. With my keen eyesight I was able to see someone running before them frantically. It appeared to be a lynch mob, and though at that stage we were too dumb to know it, it was obviously Flora ApBlanc. We rushed down and saw a young girl running across a clearing wearing only her night shift carrying a bundle in her arms. We called for her to come to us and realised it was Flora, for she was insubstantial. She came to the oak and offered me her bundle, her child. As the mob arrived, she turned and looked at them, baring her neck so we could see it red and raw, and we saw a noose hanging from the tree. We try to cut the rope but it was in vain, for the rope too was insubstantial, and suddenly with a snap Flora was swinging from the rope, her neck broken, though there was no breeze and her hair was flowing.

As we watched, her eyes snapped open, bloodshot and looking at Max, "If there is pity in your hearts, then plant a sapling in the grove on a holy day and right what was wrong." With that she, the mob, and the baby in my arms disappeared. While we were saddened by what we had just witnessed, we felt that we had learned the most important piece of information yet.

We turned to find a young woman, one of the castle servants, looking strangely at us. We were already armed with the dates of the holy days, yet we had no idea of the current date. Max asks her and we determine that Samhain was but four days away.

Satisfied, and leaving a bewildered servant behind us, we were on our way back to our room, when once again mists came from seemingly nowhere, bringing with them the smell of the forest after a recent shower. We follow the mists as they moved through the castle, through the weapons room and down the spiral staircase into the underground. We had entered the dungeons, which were dusty. Max felt for Skimmer and after establishing contact informed us we were in the present. The mist went underneath a barred door with a small window. Looking around we could see that this area of the castle had seen recent use, as there were clawed foot-prints. Looking through the window of the door we saw a torture chamber equipped with racks and other foul devices. Gaston was unable to unlock the door, but Max amazed us once more with his command of his body. After concentrating briefly, he punched the door, cracking wood until he hit metal - the bars ran the length of the door. He managed nevertheless to reach through the wreckage and open the door from the other side.

We entered the room and found relatively fresh blood on some of the instruments, when the other door to the room flew open, and one of the barbaric goblins assails us. Max and I moved to engage the beast, when I felt a sharp pain in my back followed by the spreading of a warm sensation. Heinrich had used his knowledge of science, to strengthen my body. I felt strong, invulnerable, though disturbed at what had occurred. Gaston performed his trick with the flying glove, striking the goblin, as did Max and myself, and when Heinrich laid his shocking grasp upon the brute, he fell, twitching and bleeding. Beyond the door we see prison chambers, and not wishing to delay, I rushed onward, whilst Gaston pulled the keys of the goblin guard. In the third cell along, we found a woman lying against the wall. She was very ill and close to death. We could not tell her clan from her tartan.

Heinrich examined her. She had been scratched and bruised all over with rope burns and

other marks. She groaned weakly, telling us that her name was Marie and that she was a druid. I knelt before her and brought out the amulet of Diancecht. I called upon the blessing of my Goddess to rejuvenate this woman of faith. Ever since I had received the blessing of my Goddess I had been able to heal myself, but unlike the great clerics of old that I had read of in the most ancient of texts, I felt a barrier insurmountable when attempting to heal others, save on certain sacred night so of the full moon. This time, however, I felt the warmth and blessing of the Goddess flow through my arms and into the druid. I was gratified to see some of her wounds knit and the colour return to her cheeks. The amulet was truly a marvellous item, and I almost felt that it was infused with the blessing of Isolt.

Able to speak now, Marie informed us that she and a fellow druid, Maeve, were in a sanctuary in the forest. The druids acted as the last balance against the tide of evil that has swept the land. They were captured and Maeve paid the ultimate price. She was being tortured by the goblin. She told us that the goblins were humans long ago, but that during the Time of Terror the land became corrupted, and the people became goblins and much of the life corrupted with them.

The druids were the only people not twisted into this travesty and were hunted ruthlessly. Marie was being tortured for the location of her sanctuary, for the place was ruled by an evil ord who found their presence painful to him. Over a hundred years ago, the goblins began cutting trees to find the sanctuaries and they added the barbican to the castle as we had surmised. She told us that the Time of Terror began in the year 1934, which we realised was the same year we had journeyed to in the middle castle. The year was now 2122. She told us that saplings sprouted on the holy days in the grove in the castle, but that on those days the goblins stop their marauding and uproot each and every one. They were obviously under the command of the evil lord, the ghost. In this time we were told that Beltane was over two months away.

We searched the other cells and found a middle-aged man, also near death, lying on his back in a pool of fetid water. His neck had two marks encrusted with his blood. We had

no doubt now that a vampire stalked the castle, though we had no idea whether he was an opponent of the ghost or otherwise, and whether he was the lord. Was it Rivalin himself? As it turned out, our knowledge came too late to aid us. The man did not remember his name, but had an accent from Gundarak. Recalling what I had read earlier, I gave him a drink of holy water to purify his blood. We tried to talk to him, but he was largely incoherent, driven largely mad by his experience. We found that Marie, too, was bitten, though on the wrist and only once. Questioning the man, he told us of 'Badman Tristen', a solid man who wore a kilt. This was the vampire. Marie, too, had seen him and the mist as well!

She told us that the mist was an ancient druid named Rual, who was murdered in the castle grove. From that time onward, the grove had become a place of evil, abandoned by the druids. We decided to leave, taking the man and Marie with us, though the man collapsed shortly after. In our ascent, I was forced to carry the unfortunate, whilst Gaston, always the gallant, assisted the weak Marie. We decided to rest in the library, and so we walked up the spiral staircase and through the music room into the library. There were gaps in the shelves where we had taken books in the middle castle, although there were some books we had not seen which described the last days of the castle and the onset of the Time of Terror.

We settled in to rest, and whilst Heinrich and I were on watch, the ghostly form of Morholt re-appeared, angry and frustrated. He stopped before us and bellowed a challenge, but then stopped in surprise asking whether we were the same people he had seen hundreds of years earlier. We informed him that we were, and I refused to accept his challenge. He left, dropping a sliver of metal and piece of paper addressed to Isolt in 1833 from the Holy Mother of Diancecht, which detailed evidence placing Morholt's death at Duncan's door and linking it to a sliver from his sword.

Also within the library was a locked box, which was opened by Gaston. Inside we found a letter from Rivalin to Flora dated 17th Springday 1594. The letter spoke of a curse which had inflicted Rivalin, and how he had fed even on his wife. He begged her to flee -

some vestige of goodness perhaps - and if the child was a boy, to name him Tristan. Another mystery was unravelled. Flora's child had lived and was named Tristan, given to someone to escape the ravening mob.

The next morning we rose to check the trap we had laid for the Patchwork Bride. We were careful not to neglect the reason we had ventured here in the first place. On our way we were spotted by the Patchwork Bride who gave us chase. Our plan was ruined and we ran for our lives, but then we saw mists come from nowhere to claim her and then she was gone. We went below to the room we had found her earlier, and there was Gerhard, cowering in the corner. We took him with us to the library so he could tell us his story. Reading the history texts of the Time of Troubles we were disturbed to read that in the final days a huge disfigured woman in a white dress had emerged in the castle and had slain many guards before being driven off into the wilderness.

Gerhard was morose and withdrawn, especially when faced with what he must of felt was a measure of hostility on our part for his foolish adventurism with knowledge best left untouched. Nevertheless, he told his story and that of the Patchwork Bride, if slowly and haltingly.

Gerhard was a bastard child in Lamordia, and had faced ridicule and abuse his entire life. After completing his studies, though rejected by the scholars of Ludendorf, he was invited to Schloss Mordenheim, where he became an apprentice to Dr. Mordenheim, learning of science and medicine. It was there that he learned the reality of the doctor's existence, and the broken body of his wife Elise von Brandthofen kept alive by a hideous contraption, a parody of life. When Heinrich had visited there earlier this year, he confirmed Gerhard's account.

Gerhard was disturbed by his discovery, and by Mordenheim's gloomy depression - for all his experiments were aimed at bring Elise to true life, and all had failed. After having

learnt what he could from the doctor, Gerhard left to pursue his own studies, and secretly, to succeed where the doctor, his mentor, had failed. Gerhard wished to ease the loneliness of the doctor's heart, knowing all too well the pain himself.

Gerhard travelled to Richemulot and settled at 14 Rue du Est Bord, Pont-a-Museau, the house where we had met on that fateful night. There he could conduct his experiments in private given the surfeit of space in that city. In the secret basement that he built, and that we were to see many years later, he managed to craft life of a sort - the Patchwork Bride. And although the house had provided the privacy he needed so far, to teach and raise one such as she, in her childlike state, would require somewhere much more remote. So he took her under cover of darkness to the south of Lamordia, to an abandoned estate near Neufurchtenberg - the estate where we first picked up his trail and where we unmasked the Falkovnian conspiracy.

It was here that Gerhard educated the Patchwork Bride and told her who she was - or in reality wasn't, for he had convinced her that she was Elise, the wife of Mordenheim. After he deemed the time ready, he took her to his old mentor, expecting congratulations and acceptance. It did not take Mordenheim long, however, before he flew into a rage and threw them out. Rejected again, and desolate in spirit he fled south leaving the Patchwork Bride to fend for herself. At was probably this rejection which convinced her that id she could be improved to look more like Elise, that Mordenheim would accept her.

Although we did not know what had occurred subsequently with certainty, we believe that she must have wondered, still a child in mind, till she was picked up and made the star exhibit at the Funhouse, which was closed after she ('the abomination') killed a child after it taunted her. She would probably have had to endure many such taunts. After that she was lost.

Gerhard finally settled in Harmonia, where he became a respected physician, and married his love Annelise. However in private he continued his experiments. He took a man named Emil Bollenbach as his apprentice, but soon found that Emil was not quite adept

enough to follow in his footsteps. He therefore decided to 'improve' him in a story we had heard before. Two years later he told Emil what he had done and Emil left, cursing him. Gerhard thought he had not quite perfected the technique, and thus attempted it once more years later on his newest apprentice Heinrich.

Gerhard's life seemed happy and content, able to indulge in his passions and accepted at last, but eleven years after fleeing Lamordia, the demons of his past had returned to haunt him. For many days something seemed to be watching him and he grew concerned, when one day the Patchwork Bride came and bloodily took him to complete his work. She had grown and become harsh in her years, and did not flinch at taking life, and nor did she treat Gerhard kindly. She took him to the abandoned estate once more so that he could finish his work, but there she found the Falkovnians. Fleeing south they arrived in Invidia, and settled in a disused warehouse, only to be disturbed once more when preparations for the wine festival had begun. Slaying the guards and workers there they fled once more, but by then we had their trail, and so did Emil, who wished to have Gerhard correct the damage done to him, with tragic consequences.

And so it was that their trail passed through Kartakass to here. It was a sorrowful tale and all were victims in a sense, but nevertheless we felt that 'Elise' had become a monster in truth, in spirit, and had to be laid to rest. We hoped also that Gerhard would finally learn wisdom. With that on our minds we went to sleep.

Castles Forlorn - Part Two - DM's Comments

There's ultimately not a lot to add in the way of DM comments for Part Two of this adventure - see my comments on Part One for my views on running the awesome *Castles Forlorn* boxed set.

This session was mainly about exposition - both about the history and intrigue of Tristenoira, and the final revelations around the background of the Patchwork Bride (19 sessions into the campaign!). The rescue of Gerhard is also a turning point in the

campaign for Heinrich, who has been looking for him ever since the very first adventure of the campaign.

Once again, the material in the *Castles Forlorn* boxed set provided some great scenes - the hanging of Flora and Isolt's ghostly replaying of her suicide both make for great drama.

Heinrich's box continues to attract the ire and frustration of the rest of the party. Heinrich now enjoys a better natural AC as a result of the chains underneath his skin now. The party also discovered for the first time the truth behind how the box got "triggered" for the first time - as punishment by Malocchio for their action against him back in *The Ties That Bind*.

The final part of *Castles Forlorn* wraps up the Patchwork Bride thread of the campaign once and for all (making it one of the first "threads" of the campaign to actually *get* wrapped up!), and also shows the chaos that the Bride creates now that she's started time-shifting herself....

Castles Forlorn - Part Three

Selected Passages From the Diary of Lord Caine Shadowborn

The Year 735

Thursday, 21st July (continued)

This was another overcast day. The castle courtyard almost becoming a morass of mud as the rain fell steadily. Time had shifted once again and we had returned to the middle castle. From the Lord's Tower we heard the sounds of metal against metal, though it was clearly not combat.

We went inside to investigate and find out what had happened with the Patchwork Bride. They informed us that with the execution of Andrew ApFittle, the last of the ApFittles, the war was over, but that she had arrived, disoriented and when met by guards went on rampage, slaughtering five of them. The castle was ruled by a climate of fear, for no-one could find Marc. Max told them that fire would keep her at bay, whilst Gerhard confirmed our suspicions that it would nothing of the sort.

A maid entered our room and said, "Marc would like to speak with you in his audience chamber." She seemed agitated. As we left to follow her, we heard the smashing of glass from the courtyard. Proceeding outside to investigate we saw that the guest tower now had a large window which had been smashed, and other sounds of commotion continuing. Leaving Gerhard, Marie and the other man we had rescued, we ran up the stairs, where the sounds of destruction were continuing. Then we heard the harsh voice of Isolt, yelling "Where is he?", then sobbing, then "Brangain!". We moved ahead cautiously, and saw the evanescent figure of Isolt, though her arms appeared corporeal.

Gaston stepped forward to placate her, telling her that he knew of her pain. She responded angrily, "Marc ApBlanc is not Brangain's, nor Sean's!", but with that she faded into the wall, and the sound of sobbing remained. We were fools not to understand the

import of what she said at the time, but events overtook us. The sounds of destruction had resumed and this time we suspected we were to confront the Patchwork Bride. Gaston was to give the picture of Elise to Max, who would lead her to the broken part of the wall, where Gaston would lay his grease on the ground. Once she approached, we were to enrage her, so she would rush, slip, and fall.

Then, we heard a strangled scream from upstairs and the sound of heavy footsteps. We moved upstairs to investigate, with Max cautiously moving in her direction, holding the painting before him. As we passed we saw a frilly lace cuff dangling of a railing, spattered in blood, and then a door smashed and ripped off its hinges.

Turning the corner, Max saw her standing and he called out to her, addressing her as Elise and flattering her, asking if she wished to return to her 'husband', Mordenheim. "You recognise me?" Max replied that he did. She wished to examine the painting, looking at it intently and moving slowly closer. Max then began to lead her slowly to the place of entrapment. As they maneuvered on the battlements, we saw that many people had gathered in the courtyard watching the scene with interest. As Max led her forward, to her doom, she looked peaceful and sorrowful, with a tear in her eye. However, from behind him, Max heard to his amazement, "I challenge you to a battle, sir!" Morholt had returned. Max regathered his composure with remarkable speed, and insisted that 'Elise' was a damsel in distress, to which Morholt replied that she was an abomination before the gods.

At this, predictably, the Patchwork Bride became enraged, and moved to engage Morholt, who was ready for battle. Invoking the gods, Morholt lifted his sword and struck, whilst Max beat a hasty retreat from the confrontation. Morholt's blow had no effect, but she in turn was unable to leave a mark, though her strike would have felled an ox. The battle continued in this futile fashion a while longer until Morholt retreated into the wall. Even so she proceeded to beat upon the wall with her hands, leaving fragments skin and blood on it, before sobbing once more. We had arrived at the scene in hiding, whilst Max attempted to comfort her from a safe distance. She accused Max of lying to her, of saying

she was still as she was, and strange brown, black tears streamed down her face. However, she continued to follow Max, staggering and barely looking. Halfway up the stairs to the fourth level of the castle where the wall had cracked, she stopped and continue to cry in great, choking sobs. At this time Max told her that Gerhard was up stairs, and then wisely ran like the wind, leaving the picture behind him.

She resumed walking, though still slowly. To quicken her pace further, Max yelled that men were attacking Gerhard, and at this she started striding forward in her familiar gait. We were ready upstairs. Heinrich had this intense look of concentration as I watched him. He looked up and for a moment he looked terrified but then he closed his eyes and embraced the blackness. Taking his scientific artefact and his gloves, though not touching his 'battery' which should power his effects, he started to mumble words under his breath. At this time she stepped onto the grease, reaching for the painting, slipped and fell. From behind her, Heinrich's chanting had grown to a crescendo, words terrible and dark spilling forth and we all felt the ominous build of power before the tremendous crack of thunder shattered the peace and a blinding white light engulfed her holding the painting and continued behind her.

However, in the aftermath, as we adjusted our eyes, and the rank stench of burning flesh assailed our nostrils, we saw her standing, shaking and now a burnt absolutely hideous thing, but one with a rising temper. We braced to battle for our lives, when the earth once more began to shake the castle, the grounds and us with it. Gaston fired his pistol, striking her in the chest and her unsteadiness increased. She fell back, and then there was a crack as the castle was shaken violently and the whole section of the wall started to break away, tumbling over a thousand feet below, taking her to her doom. Heinrich and Gaston barely manage to escape the wreckage, but our task was done. Reading the history of the Time of Terrors we had taken from the present with us, we found the text had changed to faithfully recorded our battle, indicating that as the time went on after the victory against the ApFittles the castle gradually came into disuse as people left.

Walking downstairs in the courtyard to greet Marc, we were greeted by the adulation of the castle folk for having ended this menace, though more than a few observed a respectful silence at the power obviously at our fingertips. A few soldiers led us to Marc's audience chamber, an opulent room with a dais and an ornate wooden throne of sorts. The floor was covered with plush carpet marked with the mailed hand holding the black feather, and trophy shields adorned the walls. A mural on the wall stated "Freedom to speak" over a depiction of nobles being led to the chopping block.

Marc was sitting on the throne and he had a regal bearing and imperious manner. He frowned for a moment upon seeing us, but then acknowledged that we had done him a great service. We asked him of his family history. He told us that after Craig had left, the ApFittles had taken the town, though not this place. His father was Sean, son of Brangain who had fled this place. Sean had lived in Gilcutty and had not returned, but Marc wished otherwise. When he returned to claim his inheritance, he found the tower in despair and ruins, but he restored it so that it was even greater. The ApFittles objected ... but they were dealt with, as we had seen.

Then, surprisingly, Gaston asked of the hauntings in open court. Just as surprisingly, Marc admitted that the rumours were probably true since he had been told many times of apparitions, though he had not seen them himself. After this banter, however, his impatience grew, and he asked us what we wanted, to which Gaston replied, "Recompense". Marc told us that we should stay the night, and that tomorrow we would be suitably rewarded. So saying we were dismissed and we returned to the Lord's Tower. On opening the door, we found that the grounds were clean ... for we had returned to the first castle. Samhain was tomorrow.

We heard footsteps on the stairs, and unable to hide we were greeted by Craig, who said in bewilderment, "You're still here? I didn't see you last night." He then gruffly asked us to leave as it is the morning. We disobeyed him, of course, and went to the library. As we passed through the dancing room, we saw a woman in white staring at the pictures - the Patchwork Bride unharmed - but we managed to avoid her attention and move on. In this

time she is not a menace to anybody, if indeed it was her, and not perhaps a restless spirit, like the rest tied to this accursed place.

As we travelled however we look outside and we have shifted in time again. Max confirmed this when he was able to commune with Skimmer once more. Standing in the room before the library was a mature man with lustrous black hair and a black, gold and white tartan illuminated by the rays of the setting sun. He looked at us and yelled, "Again!" Gaston demanded, "Hold, stranger", but he responded in anger, "How? You've brought her here again to destroy her twice!". So saying he abruptly turned and went up the stairs. He was not a ghost or spirit, and since the he bore the touch of the sun he was no vampire. We were confused by what he had said, but he presented a mystery, for his visage spoke of ApBlanc blood flowing through his veins. Is this Tristen?

We followed him, and as we stepped into the unfinished chapel to Diancecht, as the sun dipped below the horizon, we saw the man fall to the floor in great pain, emitting a horrible scream. It was upon hearing this that we recognised him - the man in the grove who murdered the woman Rual! I moved to strike the fiend and my sword dug in. In response he grimaced and I saw the pointed teeth that spoke of his heritage. here indeed was the vampyre, and one who could walk in the sun! I thought at that time he must be powerful indeed to do so and I was right. he had 'lived' more than five hundred years.

We were not able to ponder the mystery, however, for at that point his skin began to ripple and split, as blood burst boiling from all over his body and he writhed on the ground. We watched this in horror, as we had seen it before in the vision given us by Rual, but this time a shadow formed gradually over his body, aping the movements of the stricken body. Quickly I quaffed the last of my holy water, for I realised that the shadow form was the very ghost who had almost broken me on the precipice and was the lord of this pit of evil. Although we did not realise it at the time, for we should have recalled the curse of Rual, the vampyre and the ghost were one and the same, accursed and evil.

"Where is she ... You brought her here both times!" he demanded.

Gaston responded, "Why did you kill Rual?"

"She was about to destroy me ... and she did." We realised that these were but the opening exchanges in a battle, and as I did always I withdrew to seek the blessing of my goddess as my companions similarly prepared for battle. Angered by our presence and our non-responsiveness, he flew into a rage and attempted to strike me, but this time I was prepared and he was unable to penetrate the warding of the Goddess. I held up the symbol of Diancecht and called forth the Sol Invictus and he backed off, and as the light flowered, he was gone. We burned the remains of his body, covering it with alcohol. With a 'whump' it was dust.

It is then that we noted that we were standing in the second tower in the present, a tower which when we had arrived had collapsed. Reading the history book we found that the Patchwork Bride had returned to the castle two months after her defeat and that now there was no record of the tower falling, though the earthquakes continued. Most had fled after the second assault.

It appeared to us then that Tristen had been possessing all the ApBlanc lords through time, though only later did we realise the real truth. He had said that Rual poisoned him, and we realised the import of her quaffing the vial in our second vision in the grove ... she had drunk holy water before the final attack. Marie told us that there was no significant resident in the castle after the Time of Terror. Rual's curse had bound Tristan to the grove, but that still left many mysteries - how did we account for the fact that Isolt said that Marc was not Sean's son? We examined the wills again and this time thought that they may have been faked, perhaps by Marc.

We then continued our search of the castle, going up higher levels of the tower. We found a room that had recently been used, containing a large desk and cabinets, with papers and pens. Searching these we found notes, "...someone arrived in the castle a bit more than two months ago, killing some of my guards and sequestering herself in part of the castle

... she dragged another with her ..." and "... a few days later ... they are here again!" The last comment was written repeatedly in fury and disbelief. The first comment obviously referred to the Patchwork Bride and Gerhard, whilst the latter was our arrival. This was conclusive evidence that Tristen had witnessed our activities in more than one time period. Indeed, his writing bore a similarity with that of Marc's. The writing betrayed a lack of awareness with the time shifts that were occurring around him - something perhaps that we could, and eventually did, use against him. We read the diary whilst I guarded, for here we were vulnerable.

The first entry read, "It has been two hundred years that I have been trapped in this grove ... I will build a castle here and pretend to be one of my ancestors, perhaps Craig ApBlanc." Thus we had solved the mystery - the vampyre and the vengeful spirit were the same person, and Craig, and Marc also, were in fact the same unliving scion of darkness, doomed by his curse to haunt this land. There was very little describing the time between the first and middle castles. The druids investigated occasionally, with four willing to re-enter the grove, but he did not reveal himself, and they did not find him. They wished to reclaim the grove. In the meantime he was planning to return as a descendant of the missing Brangain ... although he did not know what happened to her. After the arrival of the Patchwork Bride in the middle castle, the mercenaries gradually left and the villagers and pets had started to change, and the road was destroyed. One remarkable occurrence was the arrival of a visitor in a black carriage. It stopped and waited, although it had no driver, but then left.

We learnt that the wolves had attacked and killed Gilan and his dog, confirming what we knew, and that Duncan ApDuguid's influence had grown strong over Morholt ... but there had been a horrible mistake, since they had switched rooms, and Tristan had killed his last son and not the meddling priest. I was shocked that such a being could sire children, for that went against all I had known of the undead. Our reading, extensive as it was, was cut short however, when I heard footsteps, and saw burnt feet descending down the stairs into our room, and the harsh voice, "Do you understand now?" We fled and heard only the ringing of hollow laughter behind us.

Upon reaching the bottom of the tower, we saw that it was clean and well maintained, and the walls had disappeared - we were once again in the first castle. Running into the courtyard we noticed that small saplings had sprung up everywhere and recalled that this was Samhain, one of the four holy days. We knew we had to protect these, so Heinrich, who was somewhat skilled in these things, forged a letter to the gardener, reversing the previous directions to uproot them and gave it to a maid. We then sat around the courtyard, settling in for our watch.

Then, the peace was broken by the sound of a young woman's scream, several levels up in the Lord's Tower. Max and I decided to maintain our vigil, whilst Heinrich and Gaston leaped up the stairs to investigate. They meet the shaking and pale maid hurrying down saying that a 'thing' with heavy steps came after her ... The Patchwork Bride had returned. Rushing down to inform us, Max and I decided that the only way to guard the saplings was to remain hidden, so we climbed the oak tree. Gaston and Heinrich went to see the gardener, so they could personally deliver the message purporting to be from 'Craig'. Then she emerged, and looking about her, saw the tombs and said, "He must be here somewhere" and walked over, bashing one open and walking in.

Meanwhile, Gaston and Heinrich went to the library and Craig's room to find him, though they could not. The library was locked and they saw many servants milling about in fear. They told the servants to hide in the cellar, whilst Gaston allowed himself into the library and from there into the study and searching the rest of the tower. There he found nothing of use, though he did find fine clothing, money and a child size suit of armour. Some of the boxes in the room were padlocked. He managed to pry them open, and found similar items, but searched further and found a loose floorboard over a large cavity with dried bloodstains, which he desecrated with garlic, protective rituals and smashing the windows, with sunlight - for I had told him that vampires often maintained tombs to 'sleep' during the daylight and that without these they were helpless.

In the meantime the Patchwork Bride had emerged from the tombs and heard the activity in the tower. Then a man emerged from the tower and ran down the road to leave. She had noticed and started to give chase, when I reluctantly called from the tree, grabbing her attention. Turning about her, I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw that she could not see where the noise had come from. Then, to my amazement, we heard this noise which seemed to emanate from far, far away of a children's' choir. Even the Patchwork Bride stopped to listen, giving some credence to the oft-used aphorism that music soothes the savage soul. In fact she had began to cry, and walking slowly, she lay herself against the tree, sobbing. We noticed gratefully that the noise from the tower had died down during this time. Our relief was short-lived, however, for though the music had stopped, she remained at the foot of the tree, sobbing for over four hours, holding a small picture. It was becoming very difficult to conceal our presence, for we could not move without risking exposure. Then, however, her anger had returned, and she began hitting the tree with tremendous blows. Max and I scrambled desperately to retain our positions, but in so doing she found us.

Her face contorted into a mask of rage and she growled, "It's you... You took Gerhard!" Max stammered something trying to maintain our previous subterfuge, convincing her that she was Elise, but she had more intelligence than we gave her credit for, "My name not Elise. Need Gerhard to make me Elise." She demanded that we come down and take her to Gerhard, and we dropped to the ground nervously. She now looked determined rather than wrathful, so Max went with her (since he could outrun her if necessary) and I stayed alone to guard the saplings. Upon entering the castle, however, Max saw Gerhard and Gaston being led by mercenaries with her gone - he, like them, had been taken to another period. At that, although I did not realise that that is what had occurred at the time, I heard a scream of rage and then the sounds of mass destruction as she vented her wrath. It was only moments before I heard other screams - of terror - emanating from the castle.

During this time, Gaston and Heinrich had started to venture downstairs when the castle started shaking again and the floors and walls had become filthy and unkempt - they had

returned to the present. They were then shocked and frightened to be greeted by a wrathful (and corporeal) Tristen emerging out of a room with its incisors bared, yet bathed in sunlight saying, "I have had enough of your meddling!" From outside they heard the noises of ravening goblins. Seeing this they ran down the stairs hysterically, screaming and yelling to warn us. They emerged into a room which had many goblins, whereupon Gaston withdrew a vial from his clothing, and dashed it upon the ground. His trick caused the room to fill with a noxious black gas. Taking this opportunity to flee, they ran into the foyer where they encountered human mercenaries, for they had shifted to the middle castle. They were told that Marc was looking for us to give us our reward. It was then that they met Max, who was just then returning to the castle.

They were led into the throne room, where they were presented with three bags. 'Marc' said, "I'm sure that you will find this satisfactory ... may she never return." Raising a glass, after my companions had been handed drinks, "Drink with me to her death." They all feigned to drink, fearing poison and knowing of his black heart and deeds, though Max had a small sip to savour its contents, which were apparently excellent. Heinrich told 'Marc' that after collecting our belongings, we would leave.

With that, they left and ventured into the kitchen, in the first castle. The time shifts seemed to heighten in frequency as if the castle knew that we approached some reckoning. There they found the Patchwork Bride, who glared murderously at Max. With his incredible skills at acrobatics, he ran and leapt out the window, as she pushed past Heinrich and Gaston seeking him.

At was at this point that I saw them. I had remained on guard for over four hours - with the smashing and destruction having continued for some time. I saw all companions emerge from the tower, Max at a sprint. It was then that I saw a woman coming from the forest running towards us. She was carrying a cloth bundle in her arms, and I knew it was Flora come once more. I took the babe and saw its ghostly face return my gaze, though I knew what it would grow to become. With this the babe and she faded away, but we

noticed that there was a sapling larger than the others beneath the tree, and as we watched, under the light of the half moon and the starry sky, it began to grow and touching each of us in turn with its leaves ...

...we appeared in the middle of a forest without the castle. Below us we could see the lights of Birnam. One building was engulfed in flames and with a crowd about it. They burst the doors open and entered, but soon they came surging out and charged towards us, hidden amongst the trees. Hearing a rustling in the branches we saw a woman running to us carrying a small burden - Flora.

"They're coming for us." she says to Rual, whom we see young and beautiful. Rual says, "I will take the child Flora," but was interrupted by Max, "The blood line of the child is tainted!"

The mob had come close, as Rual took the child, a boy with sweet features, and a resemblance to the ApBlanc's we had seen. Heinrich proposed that we may test its heritage with holy water - but then villagers had arrived, and they thirsted for blood. I strode forward and confronted them. I told them that I would test the child, taking a vial of water and showing it to them. This quietened them somewhat, but by no means completely. I did not wait, however, and taking my holy vestments and lighthouse symbol I started chanting. At the crescendo, Gaston, anticipating my needs, performed his trick of light, and golden dust bloomed in the air above the crowd, he were silenced in fear and awe.

Then I prepared to pour the water upon the child's forehead, and before a drop had reached it, I saw it flinch and squirm away. I bathed it in water, and it was not harmed, for it was not holy water. I was troubled, however, for it should not have moved for that reason. I reasoned that it must be tainted, and be intelligent also, for the only explanation was that it believed it to be holy water. The crowd had seen it flinch, however, and grew restive. It was then that Rual challenged me, "Where do you come from?" She looked at me with real anger. Flora, the crowd, and Rual focussed on me, though the villagers

backed away. Max had blended into the crowd, whilst Heinrich stepped forward to immobilise Flora. He failed, and after being stuck with his iron needle, she fled into the forest.

At this, half the crowd chased after her, the rest remaining to see what became of the 'demon child'. Rual did not know of Amaranth and doubted my authority. I granted her my symbol, and approaching the child with it, we all saw it flinch and cough in fear and pain. It was obviously already ridden with evil. Rual, slumped, defeated, and she asked how we may stop what we had seen come to pass. We told her that she must feed it holy water, and if it died, it was the will of the gods. She gestured for the crowd to leave, and surprisingly they left. Taking the child, she walked into the forest, saying that she will do what needs be done, and left the holy grove.

We found ourselves in daylight once more, near a castle, though it looked nothing like the castle we had seen for many days. There were no walls and there were many trees about us. The history book we had had disappeared. Max made contact with Skimmer, and we felt a heavy relief, though the cost was high and would take some time to assess. there was still no sign of our companion, Isaiah. The castle looked uninhabited, and all the windows had been smashed. It was then we heard a high pierced female scream from within - a scream that was obviously not of the Patchwork Bride. As I ran inside to investigate, I saw Gerhard lying against the castle wall exactly as we had seen him in the Lighthouse visions we had. He had obviously left the castle before us.

My companions had followed me, hearing another scream on our way. We saw a woman standing in a room, her long hair flowing as if in a breeze, though there was no breeze. Her body was transparent - a ghost - and she appeared to have something in her hands. Dressed as a druid, phantom blood was flowing from the bundle, and one of her hands also held a bloody knife. Screaming once more, her mouth opening impossibly wide, we gazed into its blackness and saw the depths of her horror and sorrow. We felt the anguish as an almost physical force against our souls, and my companions fled ... perhaps my own pain had numbed me to hers.

I approached her slowly, for I believed this to be Rual after she had slain the baby Tristen, spawn of darkness. Taking my symbol out, and the silver arm of Diancecht, I attempted to set her at rest, but she replied, "They're not my gods any more ... how could they force me to do this?" Moving closer, I saw that she was about to scream once more, when she focused on Diancecht's symbol and began to cry softly. When she stopped she seemed almost content. Seeing this I continued to approach, and I placed it about her neck. Then, however, it burned and began to sink into her breast. I left, disconsolate, for one darkness had replaced another. I came outside and told Max, whereupon he went inside and touching her felt a deathly cold. Going outside and returning with an oak branch from the tree was similarly fruitless.

We rested outside under the oak, which had remained, we talked with Gerhard. He told us that he could not feel 'her' (the Bride) and thought her gone, in the bowels of time. Then we moved to examine the white roses in the area when Gaston suddenly tripped and a green tendril grabbed his foot, dragging him closer to the bush. We saw the flowers blush with the familiar red as they fed on his blood, but Max's furious hacking broke the tendril and rescued Gaston. We were exhausted and decided to rest, especially after the shocks of our return.

Our sleep was not peaceful, however. As the sun set, a ghostly man emerged angrily from the building. He was dressed in battle armour, and we could see that it was Andrew ApFittle. He raised his pale sword, but after stopping to pick up Gerhard, I fled with my compatriots, running to the drawbridge and out. There we were assailed once more by the blood-sucking bushes and all but Max were tripped. Tired and overwrought as we were we grimly set about 'gardening', with Heinrich invoking his electric sphere. Leaving their vicinity we rested.

I could not sleep, however, and with the light of the campfire I write of the last events, and the darkness within my soul.

Castles Forlorn - Part Three - DM's Comments

This session was probably the most entertaining of the campaign up to this point - the combination of a fascinating castle and inhabitants, along with the resolution of a long-running thread in the campaign, resulted in a very interesting game.

In general, one of my favourite things about this part of the Castles Forlorn adventures was how the time-shifting began changing to match the pace and mood of the game. In parts 1 and 2 of the Castles Forlorn adventure, time-shifts in the castle had only occurred occasionally, usually giving the PCs a reasonable amount of time in each version of the castle. As this session progressed, the time-shifts became increasingly frequent and unpredictable - as Caine notes in his journal, they seemed to heighten "as if the castle knew that we approached some reckoning."

This is also the first (and only!) chance the PCs get to actually interact with the Patchwork Bride. The most pleasing aspect of this is that after many sessions of thinking of her as a destructive creature, they finally see her as a bit of a victim. When Dave (Max's player) was drawing the Bride towards her fate using the picture of Elise, he turned to me and said, "I don't really want to kill her anymore." That was exactly the sort of response I'd hoped for when they finally met the Bride. Of course, they went and killed her anyway, but after 19 sessions of chasing her all over the Core, I can't blame them... Many jokes were made by the players after this session about whether the Bride was *really* dead - or whether, like some bad slasher flick, the final shot in this particular episode is of the Bride's bloody hand reaching forth from the pile of rubble alongside Castle Tristenoira. This isn't the case - the Bride really is gone. (Although I do love "ambiguous" endings for NPCs!)

The Bride's subsequent appearances in other time periods was simply a device to keep the pressure on the PCs during the remainder of the session. It requires us to assume that not everyone time-shifts by the same amount (since the Bride must eventually time-shift back to the period where she gets destroyed), but that didn't seem like too much of a stretch given how twisted the scenario is in the first place!

Heinrich's magical abilities surface here again, despite him previously thinking that his abilities were driven by science. This is all connected with the fact that Gerhard has

performed some kind of operation on Heinrich many years ago, to enhance his intelligence. More about this is uncovered in a couple of session's time.

Given the significant success in defeating the Bride, I decided not to have a completely happy ending when they managed to have Tristen destroyed by Rual. Although their actions changed the nature of the domain of Forlorn significantly, it still became a domain - with Andrew ApFittle as the Darklord, and other ghosts (such as Rual) inhabiting its halls.

A small reference to a larger thread at the end of the session - the bloodroses near the castle were intended to be a reminder of the single bloodrose they had encountered back in *The Ties that Bind*. Over the coming few sessions, they'll begin to understand more about why this is significant.

Overall, the whole Castles Forlorn adventure was excellent, mostly because of the great material in the *Castles Forlorn* boxed set. It's a great location in which to set a few sessions - but as I noted in my first set of notes about this adventure, you really need to have your own story or mission to overlay onto the information in the boxed set. Without an underlying reason or need for the PCs to be in the castle, it could feel quite forced to trap them within until they resolve the mysteries!

Inheritances: Nightblade's Legacy

(As posted by Stu on the Kargatane message board)

What Happened:

After defeating the Patchwork Bride and leaving Castle Tristenoira, the PCs decided to take Gerhard Beckmann back to Harmonia. During the journey:

- * Heinrich once again woke with amnesia, feeling a blackness in his mind.
- * Gaston began to feel a pain in his gut – a recurring sharp pain on his left side.
- * On their return to Harmonia, Heinrich found himself and the other PCs being hailed as heroes, for having captured “Nightblade” (i.e. Emil Bollenbach).

Curious, the PCs decided to find out about Emil's progress in the asylum. By now, they knew that Gerhard had operated on Emil many years ago, “grafting” something to him through the back of the neck (similar to the operation conducted on Heinrich). The source of this “graft”, it turns out, was the body of a serial killer, Nightblade – and so part of Nightblade has lived on in Emil, causing blackouts and giving him an instinct for killing. (The key question is... who or what was “grafted” onto Heinrich?)

In talking to Emil, they discovered that he is still having visions – scenes of people moving in darkness, in pain and suffering. “It's not over yet,” he cries.

After some investigation, the PCs learnt that not all of Nightblade's victims from nine years ago were found. Through hypnosis of Emil, and by bringing out Nightblade's personality to talk, they were able to goad him into telling where his final victims were – in a deserted farmhouse some distance out of Harmonia.

The PCs travelled to the farmhouse, which showed all the signs of many years of decay. Their tentative investigation of the house uncovered a filthy place which also appeared to be carefully (but crudely) trapped. Floorboards caved unexpectedly, and ropes in the

rubbish would trigger collapses of fetid cupboard contents onto the PCs. Throughout this, it was apparent that someone – something – was moving through the walls, just out of sight.

In the basement, the PCs discovered a stone table, on which lay a scarred, blinded, haggard, emaciated woman, chained by the ankles and wrists down to the table, and exhibiting weeping sores where her flesh touched the chains and table. At the same time, the PCs saw an unnaturally long set of fingers disappear up the chimney. A quick grease spell from Gaston brought the creature sliding back down to the fireplace, at which time Caine immediately plunged his sword into the thing...

...only to discover his sword embedded in a young man, similarly scarred and emaciated. The webbing between his fingers had been cut away, and his tongue crudely split in two many years ago. After some effort chasing around the house attempting to trap the other person within, they began to realise the truth of the situation.

Nine years ago, the woman and two very young boys were captured by Nightblade, brought to the house, and tortured. When Nightblade was eventually captured, they were unaware of this – and in her damaged state of mind, the woman had ordered the boys to protect the house against Nightblade's return. Being young and impressionable, they had grown up with the ever-present fear of Nightblade returning to further torture them, and had come to view the woman as their mother. The PCs entering the house was a threat they had to protect themselves against.

Caine was devastated by the attack on the boy. Although he was not killed by the blow, Caine's rash action left him wondering whether he had been completely cured of his paranoia – or whether he still had the potential to see evil where it wasn't present. The PCs subsequently brought the woman and the boys back to Harmonia, but the state of their minds was such that it was unlikely they would ever leave the asylum again.

Emil's visions, however, did stop. Unfortunately, Gaston's pain in his side was getting worse....

DM's Comments

This and the next session are both headlined "Inheritances", because they deal with Gerhard Beckmann's manipulation of Emil and Heinrich, and the attributes they've inherited from the donors of their grafting. This session covers Emil's "inheritance", and marks the end of the Emil/Nightblade thread that had been running since "Drakov's Gambit".

The best thing about this session was the atmosphere. Despite being a fairly simple adventure with little combat, there was something about the mood we were all in that day that made the investigation of this abandoned farmhouse particularly moody and suspenseful. A lot of this comes down to the classic horror statement that what is unseen is far scarier than what you actually see... the distant sounds of movement around the house were far spookier than seeing a big hairy monsters clawing at you.

The crowning moment for me, as the DM, was to have Caine attack Nightblade's innocent victim as he fell back down into the fireplace. The shock on Caine's player's face when he realised what had happened was just one of the biggest pay-offs in my gaming life! The instigation of paranoia in Caine without using rules, or unfairly forcing anything on the player, was a great deal of fun.

Inspiration for this scenario was heavily drawn from an X-Files episode. I can't remember which one, but it involves a similar ramshackle farmhouse with a reclusive family, hidden from the rest of the world. Much of the mood and description within the session was inspired by that show (i.e. spears of light piercing the rotting walls of the house, etc).

Gonzoron: I was wrong.. I had guessed "Seven" (for the driving out to the middle of nowhere based on a captured maniac's clues)

Stu: Interestingly, I had been thinking of Seven when it came to the woman's condition in the house - I was thinking "Sloth".

Inheritances: In the House of Daegon

At the start of this session, as the PCs saw to the treatment of Nightblade's victims, Gaston was struck down by massive pain in his gut after he woke from a dream. The dream involved (yet again) the sensation of someone swimming up from the depths of an ocean, gasping for air and wanting to escape. (This is the same dream he's been having for many sessions.) Bedridden with pain, the doctors opted to operate – and discovered an odd growth alongside Gaston's intestine, consisting of an eye, a couple of teeth, and some hair. (This is heavily inspired by Stephen King's "The Dark Half".) Although this cured Gaston's current ailment, it's unfortunately only just opened the door to a whole new problem...

The players also discovered another oddity during their visits to the hospital where Gaston stayed... Gaston noticed that one of the aides had taken small amounts of blood from him in the night. On further observation, they found this person taking blood from a number of other patients, and storing it in small vials. They didn't discover anything further about this, but did connect it to the "bloodrose" from "The Ties that Bind." It appears that someone is collecting blood samples across the core...

This rest of this session was a key demonstration of two things that every DM should be aware of:

- * if the players don't take the course of action that you might expect, it can have very radical impacts on the future events of a campaign, and
- * never run a game when your players (and you!) are really, really, really tired.

Things didn't go anything like I expected in this session. The overall goals of this adventure (in terms of the ongoing threads of the campaign) were:

- * reveal the cause of Heinrich's blackouts, and explain who had been "grafted" to him by Gerhard.

* Have the third stanza of Hyskosa's Hexad come to pass ("In the House of Daegon, the sorcerer born, through life, unlife, unliving shall scorn")

The "Feast of Goblins" adventure wouldn't really fit into this campaign (being fairly combat heavy), so I decided against using that as the basis for the hexad. Instead, in my campaign, "Daegon" refers to a family from a small village outside of Skald that was known for being fairly dim-witted. Their son received a visit from the Gentleman Caller, who gifted him with a book that increased his intelligence significantly, and taught him the art of magic. Bearing the Daegon name, however, he discovered that he was still mocked as being stupid, and so became bitter and twisted. Eventually, four years ago, he attempted a summoning that collapsed in an explosion that killed him. His body was found by farmers and taken into town....

...where Gerhard Beckmann gained access to his corpse, and grafted part of Daegon's brain to our PC Heinrich. This explains Heinrich's growing magical powers, despite no training in the art, and his blackouts with inklings of power within.

DM's note

The problem in this session was going to be that Daegon had been raised by an emissary of Azalin, so as to trigger the next stanza of the Hexad. Daegon was intending to re-cast his summoning spell, and had been spending recent days/weeks building up to the casting, which was resulting in bad omens and signs around Skald. The PCs were supposed to investigate these omens, find clues that led them to the Daegon household (including information from Gerhard), and realise what had been done to Heinrich. Eventually, they were supposed to track down the raised Daegon as he was casting his summoning spell, resulting in a cool showdown as a gate to the abyss opened nearby, giving them a chance to dramatically shut out a demon from Ravenloft.

The first part of this worked OK – the PCs learned about the Daegon family, and through a variety of investigation work started heading out, at night, into the hills where Daegon’s hideout was. It was at this point that we were all very, very tired.

As they approached the hideout (i.e. still several hundred metres away or so), they heard strange noises and odd lights. They decided to stay put and see what happened. The noises got louder, they heard chanting, and they could smell something weird. They decided to stay put and see what happened. The more I described what was going on, the more they decided they should wait and see what happened.

So, eventually, I realised that nothing I said would get the PCs to approach the hideout. Which meant that Daegon’s summoning had gone ahead.... Which meant that a fiend had just entered Ravenloft. (A marilith, in this case.)

This session simply ended with two things... First, Heinrich being overcome as he felt another presence entering his mind. This is Daegon going into the depths of Heinrich’s consciousness....Heinrich is now able to cast as a full wizard now, being able to draw on the skills of Daegon. (This also fulfils the hexad – Daegon was living, then undead when he was raised, and then “unliving” in Heinrich’s head.) Secondly, the PCs saw a silhouette against the eerie glow from the hideout of a multi-armed woman – the marilith has arrived.

At the time, I was wondering what the hell this event would mean for the campaign. As it turned out, the summoning of the marilith ended up being an excellent addition to the ongoing story, fitting in particularly well with the next stage of Heinrich’s arc.

Nerapa: This marilith doesn't happen to be named, or know another marilith named "Baltoi," does she?

Stu: Hehe . No, she isn't Baltoi, and doesn't know her. This is a completely new fiend, summoned fresh from the Abyss.

One of my dilemmas after this adventure was.... exactly how do I demonstrate the ramifications of the PCs failing to go after Daegon? I ended up concluding that it was best to demonstrate that I was willing to have the PC's actions drastically affect the campaign world. Hence, this marilith has arrived in Ravenloft very, very angry at being stolen away from home. Very angry.

Her real name was never actually revealed through the course of the campaign... though at one point in the future (once she's calmed down a bit!) she does use an alias to effect her wicked plan to escape.

Stu : Since writing up this session, Nick (the guy originally writing Caine's journal) has given me his notes from the game and the relevant handouts! As a result, I've rediscovered some things that happened in this session I'd forgotten about...

One thing was that the group received a letter from Isaiah (who you may remember disappeared with his ghostly wife in the Castles Forlorn sessions). The letter is too long to type here, but the key information includes:

* Isaiah emerged from Castle Tristenoirra three weeks after he'd entered, without his wife (Michelle) and unable to find the other PCs.

* In the weeks after, he had many disturbing dreams, including ones about the death of his wife and son, and also about a man chained to the walls of a cell. (This is Hyskosa, who was prophesied at the Lighthouse to be someone Isaiah had to save.)

* One such dream was somewhere he did not know, a castle perched above a small village. The garden was decorated as if for a wedding, and he could see Michelle there with him. "You will find me here," she uttered, "in time."

* On return to Port-a-Lucine, he discovered that Drakov is opening ruling in Neufurchtenburg, creating tension in surrounding domains. Josephine Chantreaux has left Dementlieu, with no official word on her mission. (This is her setting up the treaty between the four domains.)

Stu :and another thing I realised on looking at the handouts relating to this adventure....

At the site of the Marilith summoning, they found a mysterious letter, penned in the same hand as the letters that seemed to prompt the events of "Night of the Walking Dead" and "Touch of Death". It is in this that the players first heard about a group they'll be dealing with more in the future...

The Ebon Fold.

Those of you familiar with Death Undaunted might begin to see where the various incidences of people taking blood samples is heading towards. At this point, however, the players have no reason to connect the two.

The Lesser of Two Evils (Part I)

As Heinrich began to explore the strange feeling of having another seated somewhere deep within his mind, the others investigated the site of the Marilith's summoning. Many books of an arcane nature were spread around the site – some depicting arcane rituals, while even another shows something that looks like Heinrich's mysterious "box" – it seems that Daegon had come across the device as well. The PCs also began to consider what it meant to have the 3rd stanza of the hexad come to pass

They began the walk back to Harmonia, but soon saw smoke rising from the town. As they approached, it was apparent that much destruction had occurred here – there were no guards at the gates (except for the terrified corpse lying on the ground), and a number of buildings were on fire. Few could coherently explain what happened, instead just talking about something attacking the town. Gaston and Max worked to put out fires, while Heinrich checked on Gerhard and his wife. Caine went to the hospital to find it burned to the ground, patients and the dead lying on the street as people attempt to calm them.

Having done what little they can, the heroes decided to leave for the north – perhaps back to Isaiah in Dementlieu. They found themselves walking with a hundreds of others fleeing Harmonia for Skald – a mass of people escaping the destruction of their town. On the way, they learn from a bedraggled man that something strange was happening in Halzgen, the small hamlet where Daegon came from. They headed there, arriving to find it eerily silent, not a stir in any house. Tracks on the road lead towards the Daegon family house, where Caine felt a growing sense of dread.

The Daegon's mother was there, muttering about being "twice blessed by the Great Ones". Heading out the back of the house, the PCs found a mound of bodies behind the house – everyone from the small town. Could this be the marilith's revenge on Daegon for summoning her here?

They head to Skald to find the city full of refugees. Unable to find anywhere cheaper, they stay at the Old Kartakan Inn. While Max and Caine retired a corner to contemplate the horrors of the past days, Heinrich and Gaston decided to indulge themselves in drinking and gambling to try and forget their sorrows. As the evening arrived, the atmosphere became increasingly rowdy and noisy.

A woman approached Caine as he ate. She knew he was one of the group who caught Nightblade, and asked him to deliver a message.... to Daclaud Heinfroth, an eminent doctor in Gundarak. Caine slipped her a note, asking to meet her outside.

Meanwhile, Gaston suddenly found a bloodstain on his money... coming from a small wound in his finger, though he couldn't be sure where he got it. Gaston and Heinrich carefully observed the rest of the crowd, and soon saw another many with a small amount of blood dripping from his hand.

Outside, Caine was approached by the woman – who introduced herself as Akriel. She confessed her love for Heinfroth, and the fear of her father finding out about her love.

After much observation, Max decided to follow a black-gloved man who had been near some of those with bleeding hands. He followed him outside into the night, but the individual seemed strangely nimble in the night, and Max lost him.

Eventually, the PCs retired for the evening. In the night, Caine woke to a feeling of dread, his sensitive ears detecting deep breathing outside their door. Quietly waking the others, they watched the handle of their door turn silently – then pause, and release. Moments later, furry paws burst through the walls, and the fight is on!

Caine, Gaston, Max and Heinrich all began defending themselves against the monstrous wolf-men, while hearing the sound of other attacks and horrified screams throughout other parts of the inn as well. While Caine's silver sword didn't seem to bite true, soon enough Heinrich began to draw on Daegon deep within his head, calling forth a

deafening lightning bolt that cuts a path through the enemy. They all decided to jump to safety out the window. They heard sounds of screaming women behind them, and deep laughing growls. Heading to the stables to get their horses, they found a carriage there that was not present earlier, with an old crest of black, red and gold. Grabbing their horses amongst the chaos, they fled again to the north...

DM's Comments

A couple of things to note about this session:

* This is obviously the classic scene from Feast of Goblyns. As you'll have noticed, despite not using the full adventure, I've taken many parts of it to make my own sessions! You'll see more of FoG in the next session.

* Yet another example of someone taking small samples of blood. The guy in the black gloves was using a small curved blade in his glove to take blood samples from people when he shook hands. This man, like the one stealing blood at the hospital in Harmonia, is one of the Ebon Fold.

* The carriage is only a small clue to the PCs of what's coming – the black, red and gold symbol should be enough of a hint for most.

* Throughout this session a new oddity began to bother the PCs. On two occasions, an anonymous individual tried to embarrass or implicate the PCs by grabbing one of the arcane books from their saddlebags. This troublemaking will increasingly frustrate the PCs over coming adventures – someone must be trying to annoy them.

* The Daegon mother's comment about the Great Ones is a reference to the two visits she'd had from demons – once with the Gentleman Caller, and again with the marilith. By the way, the marilith summoned the villagers to the house using the Kartakass land-based power.

Kosher Pickled Punk: Isn't that a rather short amount of time for a fiend to learn a ritual to gain a land based power?

Stu: I agree - it comes down to my DMing approach which involves being very loose with the rules for this sort of thing. Given that the demon's learning (or otherwise) of a ritual doesn't really impact the PCs in any immediate way, being very flexible with the rules is something that doesn't worry me much!

(I may have rationalised it at the time as happening as part of the summoning ritual, thinking about it.)

The end ?