

Carrion Crown Session Summary 05/12/2013

Attendance

Bruce wakes moderately early in the morning to realize that he and *Georgina* are in Round Rock. How did that happen? No matter – there will be actual physical attendance at the game today!

Chris notes that he has spent time down in San Antonio. Gas down there is cheap, only slightly more than \$3.40! Not like the overpriced gas in Round Rock. *Ernest* has no comment. Neither do *Paul* nor *Matt*, because they are focused upon actually playing the game. *Tim* shows up with a large pile of *Bruce*'s misdirected mail... which *Georgina* falls upon with great enthusiasm, converting a pile of envelopes into a neatly-arranged stack of papers.

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Level</i>
Oswald Bainbridge	Bruce	Grizzled Crossbowman	Fighter	1
Vladimir Vampijérovic	Matt	Pale-skinned Stranger	Hungry Ghost Monk	1
Nigel Snodgrass	Patrick	Emo-Gothic figure	Dirge Bard	1
Doctor Jegen Vaus	Tim	Elvish Eurotrash in leather pants	Alchemist	1
Sredni Vashtar's Girl	Ernest	Troubled Vudran Girl	Witch	1
Icobus Basilisk	Chris	Pale, poor nobleman	Oracle	1

Good Times in the Outward Inn

The characters are spending some quality time in the Outward Inn, discussing the outcomes of their various investigations into the local hauntings and burnings. *Nigel Snodgrass* fills the inn with the soothing sounds of his dirge-like melodies. It is into this peaceful setting that a flight of awful stirges flap down to attack!

Sredni Vashtar's Girl sets down the bowl of the Vudran innkeeper's excellent curry she was happily eating, pulls out her punching dagger, and waits for one of the

creatures to draw within range. Two stirges land on *Vladimir*, subjecting him to the cosmic oddity of being a vampire whose blood is being drained. One stirge swoops down and latches on to *Oswald Bainbridge*, piercing his leg and inserting its barbed stinger into his leg. He howls as he loses a point of CON, “Aiee! It’s just like being in a relationship!” Oswald draws out his shortsword and stabs the thing, staggering it.

Another stirge attacks *Doctor Vaus*. The good doctor shrieks, panics, draws his longsword, tries to stab the stirge attached to his body, and promptly stabs himself in the leg. He falls, stricken. *Icobus Basilisk* announces, “The doctor has panicked and nearly slain himself!” He leaps across the room, mace swinging, and dispatches the stirge attached to Vaus with a single mighty strike.

Sredni Vashtar’s Girl notes that the most available target is the feebly near-dead stirge attached to Oswald. She tentatively jabs at it with her dagger, inflicting no real damage.

Icobus Basilisk notices that the stirges’ wingbeats are synchronized to the grim dirge that Nigel Snodgrass is playing. Oswald is too busy stabbing his stirge to death to notice. Vladimir dispenses with weapons, preferring to simply twist the head off one of his stirges with his bare hands.

Doctor Vaus cries out, “Nigel! Stop playing that damned instrument!” in a weak croak, his voice evoking the wounds he has taken.

The bard complies, asking, “Don’t you like *The Stirge-Drawing Dirge*? It’s really quite popular in my homeland.” The stirges seem confused, prompting Icobus to eliminate another one and then cast a *Cure Light Wounds* on Doctor Vaus.

Sredni Vashtar’s Girl attempts to draw out the severed stirge proboscis from Oswald’s leg, but she does a miserable job of it. Oswald howls out, “Oww! Monk spit and grass!” He starts to show signs of disease, the dreaded stirge fever.

Sredni Vashtar’s Girl pats him on the shoulder and assures the others, “It is clearly the will of the gods that he passes.” Oswald, very much alive, just looks irritated. Icobus finally pulls the thing out and then asks for free drinks from the proprietor on the basis that the characters were just attacked by stirges. She agrees and provides some local beer.

Treasure Distribution

The characters turn to distributing the various bits of loot Vladimir pulled out of *Professor Lorremor's* false crypt. Sredni Vashtar's Girl is quite upset at the notion that only Oswald has a use for the many magical crossbow bolts he had stocked up. Vladimir notes that he would prefer to not have any of the vials of holy water (they go mostly to Doctor Vaus), and has no need for potions of *Cure Light Wounds*. He also indicates that he can see in the dark, so doesn't need a sunrod.

Icobus asks, "Good sir, what race are you that you do not want holy water and can see in darkness?"

Vladimir cautiously answers, "I gain many abilities from my specialized monk training." Icobus notes that Vladimir did not specifically indicate that he learned to see in the dark from being a monk. He also notes that Vladimir seems to not want to go down this line of questioning too far.

The characters also pass around the four *haunt siphons* they picked up. Icobus notes, "Yes, having four people independently making choices on how to use these will be much better. Much more interesting, at least!"

Haunt Siphon

Aura faint necromancy; **CL** 3rd; **Slot** none; **Price** 400 gp; **Weight** 1 lb.

DESCRIPTION

These glass vials are held within stylized cold-iron casings etched with strange runes, necromantic designs, or other eldritch markings. Within the vial roils a small wisp of white vapor, churning as if caught in a miniature vortex of air.

To capture a haunt's energies within a haunt siphon, you need only twist the metal casing to open the vial in the same round that the haunt manifests (a standard action)—this can be before or after the haunt has acted. You must be within the haunt's area of influence to use a haunt siphon. When you activate a haunt siphon, it deals 3d6 points of positive energy damage to a single haunt. If it deals enough damage to the haunt to reduce the haunt's hit points to 0, the mist inside the haunt siphon glows green—if it does not reduce the haunt to 0 hit

points, the haunt siphon is still expended and becomes nonmagical. It may take multiple haunt siphons to destroy powerful haunts. A haunt that is neutralized by a haunt siphon takes a –5 penalty on its caster level check to manifest again after its reset time passes.

A haunt siphon that neutralizes a haunt can no longer be used to harm haunts, but it can be used as a grenade like splash weapon that deals 1d6 points of negative energy damage with a direct hit. Every creature within 5 feet of the point where the haunt siphon hits takes 1 point of negative energy damage from the splash.

CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS

Craft Wondrous Item, *gentle repose*; **Cost** 200 gp

Spirit Planchette

Aura moderate divination; **CL** 9th; **Slot** none; **Price** 4,000 gp (brass planchette), 10,000 gp (cold iron planchette), 18,000 gp (silver planchette); **Weight** 5 lbs.

DESCRIPTION

A spirit planchette is typically found in a wooden case along with a thin wooden board printed with numerous letters and numbers. Nonmagical versions of these divination tools can be purchased in curiosity shops (typically costing 25 gp); while these items can be used as alternative components for *augury* spells, only magical spirit planchettes allow users to communicate with the other side. Three types of spirit planchettes exist—brass, cold iron, and silver. Each in turn allows an increasingly potent form of divination effect to be utilized. A spirit planchette requires a board to move upon, but this “board” can be made up of letters scribed upon any smooth surface—it need not be a prepared board for a spirit planchette to work.

To use a spirit planchette, you must rest your fingers lightly upon the planchette’s surface and then concentrate on the planchette (as if maintaining a spell with a duration of concentration) for 2d6 rounds while the planchette attunes itself to the ambient spirits of the area. After this time, the planchette begins to slowly slide in random patterns across the board—at this point, questions may be asked of the spirits by any of the individuals involved in the séance. The

consequences of each question asked of the spirits depends upon what type of planchette is used for the divination, as summarized on the table below.

The spirits reply in a language understood by the character who asked the question, but resent such contact and give only brief answers to the questions. All questions are answered with “yes,” “no,” or “maybe,” or by spelling out a single word from the letters arranged on the board. The spirits answer each question either in the same round the question is asked (in the case of a yes, no, or maybe answer) or at a rate of one letter per round (in the case of a single word being spelled out). A spirit planchette may be used once per day—the maximum number of questions you can ask with it depends on the type of planchette being used (as detailed on the table below).

Communication with spirits can be a dangerous task, for many spirits are jealous or hateful of the living. Every time a spirit planchette is used, the user must succeed on a Will save to avoid being temporarily possessed and harmed by the angry spirits. In some areas where the spirits are particularly violent or hateful (such as in Harrowstone), this Will save takes a –2 penalty. The DC of this save depends on the type of spirit planchette being used. Anyone who fails the Will save becomes confused for a number of rounds (depending on the type of planchette being used), and no answer is received. The spirits in the area are not omniscient—the GM should decide whether or not the spirits would actually know the answer to the question asked, and if they do not, the answer granted is automatically “maybe.” If the GM determines that the spirits are knowledgeable about the answer, roll d% to determine whether the spirits speak truthfully or whether they lie.

Planchette type	Questions per Use	Will save DC	Confusion Duration	True Answer	Lie
Brass	1	11	1 round	01–60	61–100
Cold iron	3	15	2 rounds	01–75	76–100
Silver	5	19	3 rounds	01–90	91–100

CONSTRUCTION REQUIREMENTS

Craft Wondrous Item, *contact other plane*, **Cost** 2,000 gp (brass spirit planchette), 5,000 gp (cold iron spirit planchette), 9,000 gp (silver spirit planchette)

Séance Time

The characters decide that it is time to consult the spirits. Icobus, Oswald and Vladimir all sit down and place their fingers upon it. Doctor Vaus observes the experiment and records the result.

Icobus asks, “Where did the stirges come from?” The planchette slowly moves, spelling out P-I-P-E-R.

Doctor Vaus proclaims, “Aha! The Piper of Ilmarsh! It must be so!”

Sickness in the Morning

The next morning all of the characters who were bitten by stirges are feeling terrible. Their wounds are red and inflamed and they are all feverish. Sredni Vashtar’s Girl makes Oswald some nasty tea. “Drink this, it is oolong!” Oswald shudders at the flavor – perhaps dying of stirge fever would be preferable.

Doctor Vaus strings up the one un-burned stirge on the dissection table attached to the side of his wagon. He determines that they are like a combination of mammal and insect, bat and mosquito. He proclaims, “Bat-squito! It’s like a SyFy movie of the week!” The specimen he is working on is loaded down with stirge eggs, none of them still viable. This in no way restrains him from harvesting them and attempting to devise uses for them, from the occult to the culinary.

Nigel, Vladimir and Icobus head into town. They intend to do some research at the temple and the town hall, and to possibly find a priest to send back to look at Oswald.

Vladimir tries to figure out which of the townsfolk were related to the dead prison guards. He finds that most of the townsfolk are related to the guards, as the whole town was built to support the Harrowstone prison.

A Fever Dream

Oswald lies in bed in Professor Lorrimer’s house. He notices that there are iron bars built into the window. He doesn’t remember those from before. Then he sees a large

“O” drawn in blood above the bed. The window view looks wrong of a sudden. He sees a mist-shrouded hill with the flickering lights of a town in the distance. More letters appear in blood upon the wall, continuing through his name: O-S-W ... There is a filthy pot half-full of worm-infested gruel on the floor. Oswald empties his stomach into it, making it even less appetizing. O-S-W-A...

Oswald staggers to the door and hammers upon it, bloodying his hands. O-S-W-A-L...

Just before the last letter of his name is written, he wakes feverish, back in his room. The letters are real, printed on the wall! The Girl brings more oolong tea, finding him sitting in his bed with a loaded crossbow and his name scrawled in blood on the wall. Oswald refuses to drink the tea.

In the Professor's Library

Sredni Vashtar's Girl and Doctor Vaus retire to Professor Lorremor's library to research area cults and the Professor's investigations into them.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl notes, “Oswald is being a naughty monkey.”

Doctor Vaus replies, “When is he not?”

They turn to their investigation. They learn quite a bit about a variety of strange and forbidden cults, but nothing that is particularly useful in the near term. “Did you know there is a cult of savages in the distant Ghashoolman Jungle who sever their captives' ears, feeding them the preserved meat over three years before sacrificing them?” “That is fascinating, but useless to us.”

Sredni Vashtar's Girl does find some description of the *Whispering Way*, much of which is captured in the previous session summary. She also learns that they have rituals to create liches and to liberate the Whispering Tyrant. Their symbol is a gagged skull. Those who learn too much about their ways are often mutilated and killed, their jaws and tongues severed to prevent others from using *Speak with Dead* and necromantic magic to learn what they knew. There is no orthodoxy to the Whispering Way –there are many routes to lichdom there are many factions within the Whispering Way. The one common theme among Whispering Way enthusiasts is that they want to live forever and do as they please, which makes it quite difficult for them to establish common doctrine. They are

popular in Geb and in Kaer Maga. She writes a 24-page dissertation on the topic for the University of Lepidstadt.

Sredni Vashtar's opinion on the devotees of the Whispering Way is, "Those souls are souls that belong in the afterlife. It is forbidden to bypass the true cycle of life." The Girl nods in assent.

The Temple and the Town

Nigel Snodgrass and Icobus go to the temple to Pharasma to ask questions of the priests. One of the acolytes comes in, quite disturbed. "Someone has vandalized the statue again! The statue of Warden Hawkrin!" There is another letter written across the base: V-E. It is fairly clear to them that the vandal intends to spell out "Vesorian", wife of the dead Warden.

Nigel finds a document on the Piper of Ilmarsh written by a scholar who believed that it was possible to cure the mind through some kind of far-fetched "talking cure" rather than through sensible magic. Nobody ever learned the true name of the Piper of Ilmarsh. He would feed lich dust to his victims and then play dirges upon his flute as they lay paralyzed, food for his pet stirges. He claimed that in his dreams he traveled to strange worlds and unnatural lands where he would speak with forbidden, inhuman gods.

The doctor gave no credence to these tales, but did note that the Piper had a strange way of blending in to his surroundings, to the extent that several times the guards were unable to find him in his own cell (though he was there the whole time). The Piper was allowed to keep his pipe as a "therapeutic measure," which strikes them as particularly retarded. He always seemed fairly harmless after his capture, and was allowed to remain in the upper-floor low-security area.

Nigel concludes, "The men running the prison were idiots. The Piper could well have escaped the fire and just taken up living in the town. He could be here today, living peacefully."

Several characters know that lich dust is a poison with a DC 17 Fortitude save. It drains 1d6 STR per minute for six minutes, which is enough to paralyze most folks who don't have a good Fortitude save. It is relatively common, though if the name is an indicator of the key ingredient it is quite hard to see how it could be.

Icobus stops by the *Laughing Demon Inn*, run by the cheerful *Jhokar Elkarid*, who holds with the belief that, “The best way to meet the horrors of the world is with a hearty joke!” The story around town is that he serves more than the usual amount of “corpse stew” after unpopular merchants leave town.

Once Icobus is done with the *Laughing Demon* innkeep he heads over to talk to *Jormindra* the apothecary. She seems to be warming up to him, noting that beyond simple alchemical goods she provides some additional things (zzzzzip...). She can make alchemical potions, including potions of *Cure Light Wounds*, *Comprehend Languages*, and so on. Her most popular potion is of *Youthful Appearance*, purchased by many of the better-off women of the town (50 gold a shot!).

While Icobus is in her shop, the Sheriff stops by to chat with her. Icobus can sense that Jormindra is exasperated by all the attention the Sheriff pays her. It is clear to Icobus that the Sheriff (for all that he is rather gruff, stern and gray) is really very fond of Jormindra. He weighs the merits of trying to play matchmaker with the risks of being given the *First Blood* treatment in the local gaol. He maintains his silence.

Icobus brings an acolyte back to Oswald to treat his stirge fever. Oswald agrees to pay the acolyte 10 gold to minister to him. He shows signs of recovery! Unfortunately, it now becomes obvious that Doctor Vaus has been stricken by the plague. “Guys...”

Sredni Vashtar’s Girl apologizes, “I am sorry, I did not realize that he was delirious. He was talking a lot and it didn’t make much sense, but that is just how academics seem to speak.” Doctor Vaus takes to bed.

Another Day of Research

While Oswald and Doctor Vaus spend the day recovering from stirge fever the others continue their researches.

Nigel goes back to the temple to learn about *Hean Feraman*, the “Splatter Man”. He was a celebrated scholar of anthroponomastics, the study of names, at the *Quarterfaux Archives* in Caliphas. He was also a powerful wizard. An encounter with a succubus twisted his mind and made him obsessed with using names to control people. Likewise, he became interested in what happens to people’s names after they die. He started

spelling people's names in blood for them to find, eventually arranging a complex trap or rigged events to make their deaths seem an accident. He was eventually caught and hauled off to Harrowstone to languish in their underground cells. Icobus notes, "I'll bet that Professor Lorremor was looking at his name spelled in blood when that gargoyle fell upon him." Everyone nods sagely.

Icobus asks the Sheriff about the dog that lives under under the town gazebo. He finds out that the dog is named *Old River* and is sort of the town dog. It was owned by a townspeople who died some ten years ago, and since then has been adopted by the town at large. It is very protective of the town children, herding them away from trouble when it can. It mostly lives outside, except when the weather is bad and one of the townsfolk allows it inside.

The Angry Old Man

From there, Icobus calls upon *Gibbs Hephannous*. The man lives in a shack down by the river, quite near to the Warden's Statue. He is now too old to farm and for that matter to keep his shack in good shape. The place is surrounded by a fence and a gate, but the fence is falling down and the gate no longer works (Icobus carefully picks it up and puts it aside when he passes through it).

Gibbs is angry when he answers the door. "I'm surprised you dared to come here alone! It thought all those circus freaks you travel with protect you."

"Oh no, I was assured by some folks in the town that you were an honest and law-abiding individual and that I should have no fear of talking to you." Icobus acts as sincere as he can. "I wanted to know what you know about Professor Lorremor."

"There's been all manner of strange things going on, and those prisoners up from the prison are all coming back. Soon enough, people will be going crazy and killing their own neighbors. The spirits of dead killers are coming back, people will be getting possessed and this town is going to burn! I've seen it in my dreams! That Professor was stirring all kinds of things up."

"Does anyone else look around the prison?"

"Oh, nobody goes up there. Nobody is that stupid. You just need to go near it to start feeling chills."

Icobus invites Gibbs to have dinner with him up at the *Laughing Demon*. To his surprise, Gibbs accepts the invitation.

Light Reading about Evil

Sredni Vashtar's Girl spends some time helping *Kendra Lorrimer* around the house, pausing in her work to ask about the mysterious purple chapbook covered by a scarab and an eye. Kendra does not have a key for that book, nor does she have the skills (or magical powers) to open it otherwise. Stymied for the moment, Sredni Vashtar's Girl moves on to reading other evil books. She learns that piping is in fact connected to some of the outer darkness aberration sightings and happenings. Sredni Vashtar reads eagerly as she flips pages for him. She reads about Zon-Kuthon, about recipes sacred to Urgathoa, and the later books in the *Twilight* series.

She tells the others about what she read over dinner ("And then at the end the vampire chews his lover's baby out of her and then they have vampiric sex so hard they tear apart the bed while the werewolf bonds with the baby and declares that he will be its lover later on. The book is intended for teenagers!") The others stare at her with disbelief. They conclude that young adult fiction has gone to some very strange, scary places.

The Evening's Events

Icobus and Sredni Vashtar's Girl go to have dinner with Gibbs while Nigel and Vladimir hide in the woods, keeping watch over the Warden's Statue.

Gibbs is very willing to tell the characters stories about the ruined Harrowstone prison. Near sundown, you can hear the ghost of the Warden's wife, sobbing and weeping. The executioner still guards the balcony on the west side of the building. On some nights a scythe can be seen patrolling the balcony on its own.

Icobus asks, "Is your town noted for an unusually large population of superintelligent psychotic rats?" Gibbs looks at him with confusion. Sredni Vashtar peers curiously at Icobus from the Girl's robe as she serves it chunks of meat from the corpse chowder. Sredni Vashtar smacks his little lips as he tears apart a particularly succulent tidbit. The Girl is vegetarian and the inn has nothing she can eat.

Nigel and Vladimir set out to watch the statue of Warden Hawkrin. In the middle of the night, someone who is not very stealthy or observant approaches the statue. They quickly identify the figure approaching the statue as Gibbs Hephannous. He has a bloody razor in one hand and a waterskin in the other. Vladimir realizes that Nigel has fallen asleep. He prods Nigel awake and the two of them watch as Gibbs paints an “S” on the statue with blood from the bag.

Vladimir tries casting *Detect Undead*. He feels that there is an undead aura present, a strong aura. Vladimir sneaks up behind the man and tries using a *haunt siphon*, but it has no effect. Then Gibbs (dressed in a nightshirt) whirls and slashes at him with a razor. Vladimir responds by kicking him in the chest, to the tune of Nigel’s inspiring drumming. Gibbs isn’t noticeably slowed down by the two kicks. He brandishes his razor, growling, “This won’t be as sweet as if you were a woman, but your blood will still be red and hot!” His voice is low and guttural, unlike his normal tone. He slashes Vladimir! Nigel comes around from behind and slashes Gibbs with a longsword in return. His strike bites deep, but Gibbs seems to not feel the injury.

Vladimir punches Gibbs twice, leaving the old man barely standing. Vladimir is convinced that Gibbs is possessed by a ghost. Nigel turns his blade and strikes Gibbs across the base of the skull with his pommel, knocking him clean cold. They bind up his deep bloody wound as best they can, tie him up with some rope, and carry him back to the Lorrinor house. Vladimir takes a few succulent blood-draughts from him as well, but only when he doesn’t think Nigel is watching.

Vladimir and Nigel tie Gibbs to a kitchen chair and call up the others. Icobus heals the man to bring him back to consciousness. “Hello, Gibbs!”

Gibbs appears to be back to his normal mind, “I knew you was going to ambush me! Had to come in while I was asleep!”

Vladimir protests, “You were possessed!”

“I’m not possessed! I’m right here in my own normal mind!”

Nigel asks, “Is this your war razor and your bag of blood?”

Gibbs continues to object, “What are you doing with my razor? And I’ve never seen that bag before! You people are crazy!”

Sredni Vashtar's Girl uses a couple of hexes (misfortune and evil eye) upon him and then casts *Charm Person* to improve his attitude towards her. Gibbs' pupils go to the size of dinner plates. He just stares at the Girl. "I was just asleep, I wasn't possessed."

"Is Mister Splatter still in there?"

"I don't know what you're talking about, but you're so fascinating. I know I'm just a retired old man, but are you married? I don't care if you're a witch."

Sredni Vashtar's Girl does her best to allay Gibbs' suspicions, persuade him that he shouldn't press charges against the others, and free him from his bonds. He seems fairly agreeable to her efforts, especially if there is a chance that she might follow him back to his shack and allow him to do unmentionable things to her body while she stares at the ceiling, possibly thinking of England.

By the next morning, Oswald has completely recovered from stirge fever and Doctor Vaus is much improved. Before Oswald wakes in the morning, Icobus sneaks in with the bag of blood and draws "I ♥ Unicorns" on the wall. When the two of them do wake up (and after the others have calmed Oswald down) they learn about the previous day's adventures with Gibbs.

The Sheriff Wants an Explanation

The characters head into town to talk to the Sheriff about the previous evening's activities. They run into him on the way – apparently he wants to talk to them as well. He relates that Gibbs Hephanous claims that some of them attacked him and abducted him and that the woman in their group is some kind of witch. Icobus Basilisk takes the lead in providing an alternate view of events, one that highlights the way that Gibbs Hephanous was painting bloody letters on the Warden's Statue while clad in his nightshirt. Nigel and Oswald do their best to back him up.

To their surprise, the Sheriff buys their story hook, line and sinker. They explain that they feel quite bad about it, because "Old people should be revered, not beaten in the night."

The Sheriff seems to have had a lot of experience in the town. He notes, "There's all kinds of things going on around here. From now on, leave the law-enforcement to the

law officers, don't hang around that statue at night, and don't go attacking people even if you think they're zombies."

The characters decide to try the *spirit planchette* to ask if anyone still survives from the fire. Sredni Vashtar's Girl asks the question, but ends up just babbling in Vudran.

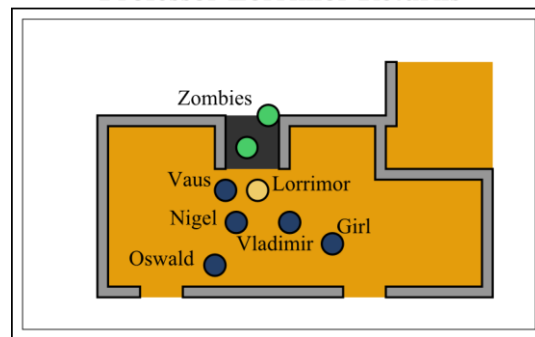
After that the characters spend some time in the Outwards Inn, glad-handing and trying to convince the townsfolk that they are trustworthy normal people.

Professor Lorrimer Returns!

That night, back at home, the characters' evening is disturbed by a strong, regular pounding at the door. Nigel answers the door as the others quietly load crossbows and pick up weapons. It's his long-lost mentor, Professor Lorrimer! How good to see him! He looks kind of dead, though. He lunges at Nigel, knocking him out of the way. Two more zombies lurch forward behind him.

Vladimir hammers Lorrimer twice. His strikes are on target, but they have disappointing effect. Oswald shoots Lorrimer, to similar lack of effect. Sredni Vashtar's Girl draws upon the forces of dharma to apply a misfortune hex upon him. Lorrimer responds by hammering Vladimir down to the ground.

Professor Lorrimer Returns



Nigel starts singing to inspire courage while Doctor Vaus drinks his mutagen ("It does a body good!"). He becomes much more bestial in appearance and his face deforms, so he pulls out a gruesome iron mask to conceal the effect.

Icobus pulls out his sickle and commences reaping. Oswald gives up on his crossbow (placing it carefully to the side) and joins in with his glaive. Soon enough, the zombies are all destroyed.

The characters head quickly to the cemetery, passing through the town to see if there is a general zombie attack underway. They have a couple of close calls, but it seems like all is normal in town. At the cemetery it is clear that Lorremor's grave has been forced open from beneath. Looking around, Sredni Vashtar's Girl sees a gravestone with Nigel Snodgrass' name on it. She tries to show the others, but the markings are illegible when they look again.

The characters are able to identify that there are two other opened graves, both apparently relatively old graves (both at least a year old). Oswald notes, "So we got attacked by the Widow Bascombe and Old Man Farnworth." None of the zombies carries anything of real worth.

After the cemetery, the characters swing by the Sheriff's office and explain what happened. The Sheriff notes that the zombies attack is the first thing that has happened that he can't explain away as folks just causing trouble. The Sheriff indicates that he will call a meeting with the townsfolk tomorrow evening to discuss the recent happenings. After that, the characters persuade the Sheriff that Gibbs Hephannous should be taken into custody (at least to ensure that no more letters are painted on the Warden's Statue).

More Researching

The day before the meeting the characters go back to the temple to research the *Mosswater Marauder*. They learn that his name was *Ispin Onyxcudgel*. Only five years before his home town of Mosswater was overrun and destroyed by monsters, Ispin discovered his wife's infidelity. He shattered both her skull and his sanity with his hammer. He believed that if he could reconstruct her skull that he would be restored – but he could never find the one last fragment. He moved on to murdering other people, trying to find just that correct fragment to complete her skull. He murdered twenty people before he was captured and sent to Harrowstone.

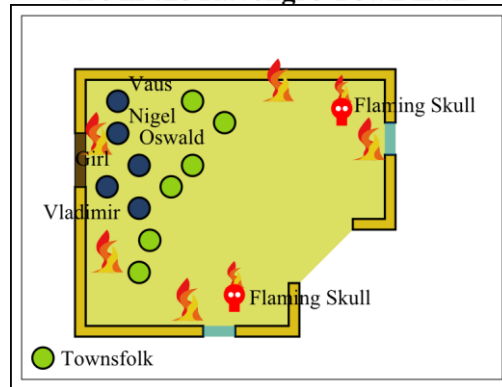
Oswald spends the day patrolling around the outside of the town. Near the prison he hears Lorremor's voice calling to him. He approaches a bit closer, and a bit closer, and then discovers that he's almost at the prison walls. How could he have gotten so close? He swiftly returns to the town.

The Town Meeting

That evening, the townsfolk turn out with pitchforks and torches. But only because it's harvest season and it's dark. The meeting begins at sunset and is standing room only – over sixty villagers are in the hall, and more are gathered in the antechamber and outside the building. It is here that the characters learn all those things that are happening that the townsfolk were previously unwilling to tell them.

Doctor Vaus is certain that this is the time when bad things will happen, so he takes up a position near the door. At least until the town council invites the characters to join them up on the raised stage.

Fire in the Ravengro Town Hall



The leader of the town council has only just started to describe the troubles that have befallen the town when the lanterns around the wall explode into red flames, setting the room on fire! The characters leap to fight the fire as the townsfolk run in panic. Several townsfolk are engulfed in flames and die!

Just as the characters have almost extinguished the flames, two *flaming skulls* crash in from the windows. Oswald unlimbers his glaive and shatters one of them. Doctor Vaus flings a vial of holy water at another one, obliterating it. Fragments of burning skull fall into a puddle of oil on the floor, engulfing two unfortunate villagers. The Sheriff and the Councillor do their best to calm the townsfolk, aided by Nigel's bard song. The surviving townsfolk flee out of the hall.

The fire spreads crazily fast, as if it is being fueled by something beyond the wood of the building alone. Nigel pulls out a *haunt siphon* and uses it. The power of the siphon lashes out, but is not sufficient to destroy the haunt that is driving the flame.

Doctor Vaus unleashes his *haunt siphon* and captures the haunt, at which point the characters and the townsfolk are easily able to extinguish the fires.

The characters gain three Trust Points and 800 experience points, plus one more Trust Point because they managed to save at least one townspeople from the fire. Doctor Vaus only loses two Trust Points for watching two townspeople die in front of him, but he feels like a hero for destroying an undead with a vial of holy water.

Night Falls

The night after the attack, Gibbs is confined in a cell. As the night goes on he becomes more and more agitated, howling out that everyone will die, that “She cannot protect you any longer!” and that “We will all rise!”

The characters investigate Gibbs’ shack but find nothing beyond his razor and bag of blood. They quickly determine that the Sheriff is even less aware of what is going on in town than the characters are. They resolve to try and get a good night’s sleep and then investigate the prison in the morning.

Harrowstone Prison

Sredni Vashtar’s Girl and Vladimir stay back to protect the Lorrimer household as the others go to investigate Harrowstone. Harrowstone Prison is located on a hill to the south of the city. A large gap in the surrounding wall makes the interior structure visible. The gate sags and hangs negligently open. The outer wall is 20’ high, but ivy covered and eroded so it is easy to climb. Part of the structure has collapsed into the earth and is inundated by water.

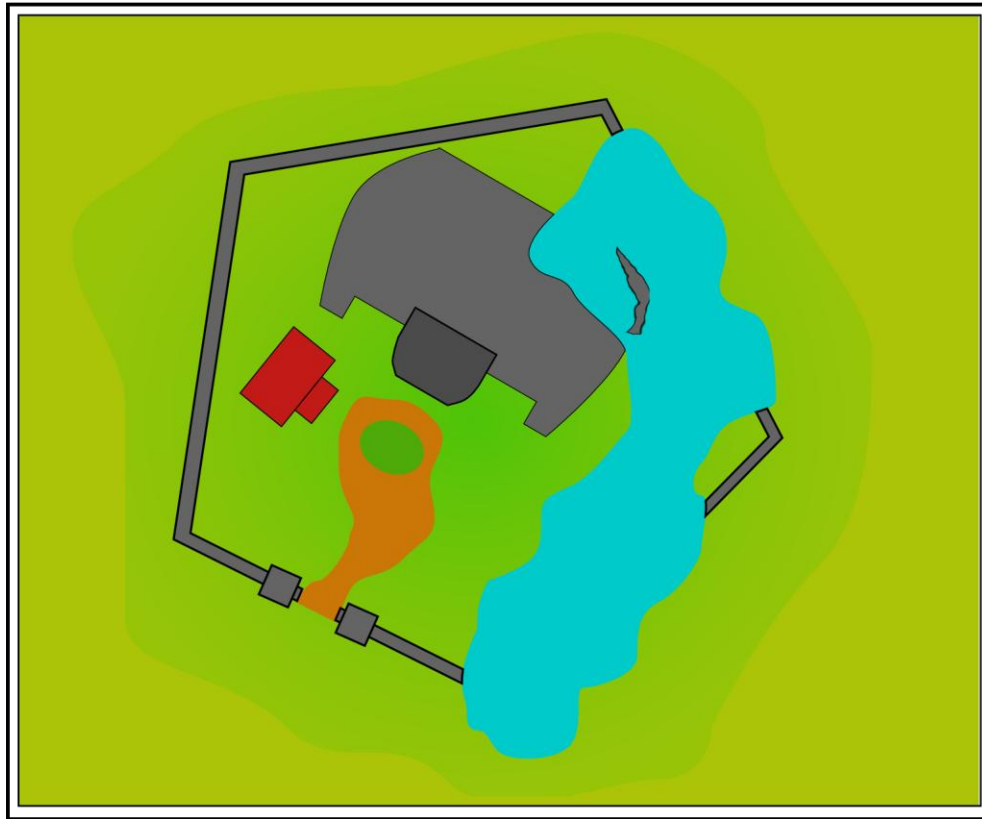
Icobus enters through the gate, followed by the others. He staggers, reporting an intense feeling of being trapped in an enclosed box and being on fire. But then it ends a moment later. None of the others feel the same effect as they pass the gates.

The prison is a massive structure with surrounding balconies. A small brick manor stands to the side, but Nigel reports that it is clearly unstable (in the sense that it might fall down if several people tromped around inside it). Icobus demonstrates that flinging a rock at it is not enough to make it collapse.

Vaus investigates the manor house. Within six minutes, it collapses on him. He escapes with a serious thump on the side.

The characters note that someone has taken some effort to clear the ivy and foliage away from the base of the prison building and carve Varisian runes along the base. The name of the Warden is prominent among them. They are coated in blood that looks relatively recent, but they do not seem to be magical now – whatever ritual they were used for is long done.

Harrowstone Prison



Oswald feels strongly pulled towards one corner of the prison building. He sees a gargoyle fallen on the corner. He can see flecks of blood upon the gargoyle and feels a strong urge to touch the statue. He reaches out and touches it. Immediately he is overcome by images of bat-winged creatures with lambent eyes, tearing and slicing at his flesh. A figure in a dark cloak and staff stands behind them, directing them to greater and greater perversions. Oswald hears the Professor's voice commanding him, "You must find my killer!"

Nigel and Icobus help Oswald move the gargoyle. They find the remains of Professor Lorremor's head. They carefully bag the remains that he might be buried properly. Again.

The characters move towards the prison, moving up an exterior stairway to a balcony, a balcony that they realize must be the executioner's balcony. Doctor Vaus sees a pair of skeletal arms bearing a scythe float around the corner. He flings a firebomb at it, setting it on fire! He screams in delight, "Fire!"

Oswald tries shooting it with a crossbow. He claims that the winds are not good for crossbows, as his shot goes very wide. Icobus moves in and slashes with his blade, to no visible effect. The scythe whirls, striking Icobus in a broad swing. It seems to be trying to go for the neck, but Icobus has been too fast for it. Doctor Vaus flings holy water at it and is gladdened to see that the blade starts to burn and corrode. Oswald abandons his crossbow and moves in to strike the scythe with his glaive. He manages to hit it just hard enough to break the blade. It falls to the ground and immediately ages fifty years into rust and ruin.

There is a door on the balcony. It has weathered the years well and is securely locked. Doctor Vaus announces that he has lock-picking acid available – he uses it (without drawing it into his mouth first) to burn the lock through and give the characters access.

The characters cautiously move into the prison, finding a mess hall and an array of cells along a long hallway. Nigel and Oswald hear a faint sound, mournful flute music and the flapping of tiny wings. At the same time, things start to stir in the cells. It appears that when the place burned the prisoners inside were either left to starve, or died of smoke inhalation. Some of them are still trapped in their cells, but four of the cell doors are rusted through allowing the skeletons inside to emerge.

Skeletons claw at Nigel and Icobus. Nigel sustains a nasty scratch. The mournful dirge has a particular effect upon Nigel: he hears the same song he heard in his visions of the center of the universe. He sees the piper and finds himself transfixed, unable to move. The piper plays, surrounded by a flock of ghostly stirges.

Doctor Vaus sees Icobus standing motionless as a skeleton prepares to claw out his throat. He flings a vial of holy water at the skeleton, dissolving it into debris.

Nigel dodges back away from Oswald's poorly aimed glaive strike, then changes his performance over to countersong.

Two more skeletons move in to attack. Oswald swings his glaive at one of them, swinging so wide that the skeleton doesn't even realize it is under attack. Nigel dodges again and then uses his countersong to resist the Piper's music.

Icobus engages another skeleton. He swings his morningstar, but the skeleton evades. Ghostly stirges swarm around him, trying to get at his blood. He holds them off with the force of his will. He screams weird trilling and piping noises at them.

Doctor Vaus flings a vial of holy water at the skeleton in front of Nigel, destroying it utterly. He screams out, "This stuff is very expensive, but incredibly effective!"

Oswald ignores him as he (finally) cleaves a skeleton in half with his glaive.

Nigel continues his countersong, moving to slash at the one remaining skeleton. The skeleton gives him an awful scratch across the forearm.

The Piper directly attacks Icobus, sending his spectral stirges to draw his blood. Tiny puncture wounds open up across Icobus' body and start drawing out his blood. He falls to the ground. Doctor Vaus runs to his side and unstoppers a *haunt siphon*. The Piper takes damage, but is not destroyed! Doctor Vaus cries out, "More siphons! We must have more siphons!"

Oswald ignores him: he doesn't have a siphon anyway, and besides he has a skeleton to destroy. Crash! No more skeletons left!

Nigel tries the last *haunt siphon*, but doesn't inflict enough damage to destroy the Piper. Doctor Vaus grabs Icobus and pulls him out of the prison into the sunlight while Oswald rams a *Cure Light Wounds* potion down his throat to keep him alive.

With only Oswald inside the building, the Piper focuses his attention upon the crossbowman. Oswald freezes into immobility. He sees the ghostly Piper slowly approaching. He wishes he could say, "Guys, I can see him now! I'm perfectly poised to hit him with a *Ghost Touch* crossbow bolt. There's only one small problem – I cannot move."

Outside the building, the characters hear a loud buzzing sound. They look up to see a giant stirge, a creature the size of a moderately large dog, flying in towards them. It

seems to be attracted to Nigel's music. It lands in front of him, flapping its wings and bobbing up and down. He gasps out, "Someone come over here and do something about this thing! Stupid well-trained stirges."

Oswald suddenly recovers from his paralysis. He finds he can still see the Piper, so he pulls out his crossbow and shoots through the thing with a *Ghost Touch* bolt. The Piper emits a strangled cry and vanishes.

Nigel changes his song from countersong to inspire courage. The stirge responds by grappling with him and jabs him with its jabber. Nigel howls. Doctor Vaus drinks his mutagen potion, howls "IRONFACE!" and chops cleanly through the stirge with a two-handed grip.

The characters all agree that now is a good time to retreat back to town and research techniques for fighting haunts.

The End of the Session

Everyone goes to second level, having defeated one of the five major villains of the piece.