

Carrion Crown Session Summary 06/23/2013

Attendance

Bruce feels very virtual today. It isn't supposed to be like this, but a fender-bender Friday has sapped his willingness to make long road trips until mechanics provide assurance that his car will survive them. Oh yes, and he'd like to get his bumper back into shape as well.

Chris indicates that due to *Bruce's* physical absence he is going to miss out on *Watermelon-Flavored Oreos*. *Bruce* is shattered. *Matt* is not convinced – he urges *Bruce* to upgrade his acting skills. Seriously upgrade his acting skills. Then he fondly woolgathers his experiences with pumpkin- and candy corn-flavored Oreos.

Tim arrives, leaving *Matt* thinking that he has fallen in to a weird parallel universe in which he and *Tim* arrive on time while *Paul* and *Ernest* are late. At that moment *Patrick* arrives, completely convincing both *Matt* and *Tim* on the parallel universe thing. The only flaw is that *Bruce* hasn't grown a villainous moustache.

Ernest shows up a bit later, just in time to pull the characters' bacon out of the fire...

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Level</i>
Oswald Bainbridge	Bruce	Grizzled Crossbowman	Fighter	3
Vladimir Vampijérovic	Matt	Pale-skinned Stranger	Hungry Ghost Monk	3
Nigel Snodgrass	Patrick	Emo-Gothic figure	Dirge Bard	3
Doctor Jegen Vaus	Tim	Elvish Eurotrash in leather pants	Alchemist	3
Sredni Vashtar's Girl	Ernest	Troubled Vudran Girl	Witch	3
Icobus Basilisk	Chris	Pale, poor nobleman	Oracle	3

Some Visions and Prophecies

Vasoriyana had previously told the characters that *Professor Lorremor* had been killed by the agents of the *Whispering Brotherhood*. Also, *Corporal Oswald Bainbridge* saw a vision when he touched the gargoyle that actually crushed the Professor, a vision of the Professor being harried and attacked by lambent-eyed creatures with bat wings. The creatures were directed by a figure wearing a cloak of bones. Since then, Professor Lorremor's ghost has charged Bainbridge with the task to find his murderer.

Translating the Book of the Scarab

Doctor Jegen Vaus examines the locked book with a scarab on it. He very carefully works to open the lock, eventually succeeding. The journal appears to be written in Varisian, but in a devilishly clever code.

The characters spend as little time in town as they can. *Sredni Vashtar's Girl* is able to decode Professor Lorremor's journal during their stay. The book describes the knowledge and rituals of the *Esoteric Order of the Palatine Eye*. Several characters know that the Esoteric Order is a secret society whose members have deep interest in matters both political and arcane. There are no actual spells in the book, just various musings upon arcane matters including detailed descriptions of a variety of ancient ceremonies. It is disappointingly lacking in sinister end-of-world content. It is quite strange, because it doesn't seem to fit with the themes of the other books in the Professor's collection at all. Several characters try *Detect Magic* castings in the hopes that there is some *Illusory Script* hiding the real contents. They are all disappointed.

With the book still a mystery, the group heads out to the north after only a day.

On the Mountain Road

The characters depart the town of Ravengro, heading towards Lepidstat. They intend to hand Professor Lorremor's box of forbidden books over to *Judge Embreth Derrimed*. Per his will, she is in turn supposed to give each of them 100 platinum coins from his fortune.

They intend to travel along the Mountain Road, but must travel around Lake Lias to reach it. The characters decide to take the Western route, passing near the Bleakwall

constructed long ago to keep the orcs out. *Icobus Basilisk* marvels that the orcs continue to choose to try their luck with the wall rather than going north a few miles and sneaking through the mountains. Oswald Bainbridge assures him first that the mountains aren't that easy to hike through, and second that orcs are notorious for conceptual laziness.

An Awful Screaming in the Night

In the dark of the night an awful screaming interrupts the characters' sleep. Oswald Bainbridge and *Icobus Basilisk* are on watch. Oswald is strongly affected by the screaming. He is convinced that the lambent-eyed watchers are coming for him, so he flees out of the camp to the south. A moment later Doctor Vaus also flees the caravan; he runs to the northwest.

Vladimir sees something winged overflying the camp, apparently targeting Doctor Vaus. He runs after the alchemist, intent upon tackling him. Vaus outdistances him, running across the moors like a deranged flightless bird, the tails of his night-shirt flapping behind him. Vladimir manages to get a good look at the flying thing. It looks like a winged hairless demonic dog. He speculates upon what awful processes might have produced such a creature; nothing that comes to mind reassures him.

Icobus heads in a different direction, hoping to catch up with Oswald. Both of them are slowed by armor, giving their chase a rather lumbering quality. *Icobus* kicks off a sunrod to light his way.

Nigel Snodgrass sees the demon dog swoop down to attack Vladimir. He cuts at it with his longsword, drawing blood once and again. The thing doesn't seem very hurt – it is clearly tougher than it looks, and it looks plenty tough. Nigel casts *Light* and starts beating his drum to inspire courage. The others, though they appreciate the bonuses quite a bit, wonder why Nigel doesn't find his courage in a hip flask like everyone else.

The creature wheels around and snaps at Doctor Vaus. When its teeth cut his flesh, he is overcome with fear. He cowers, unable to take any action beyond vainly attempting to swat it away. He does, however, retain enough awareness to realize that the characters face a *yeth hound*. It bites him again. He doesn't even manage to scream out, "Yeth hound! Yeth hound!"

Vladimir struggles through difficult terrain to get into range of the hound for a shuriken throw. Sadly, his throw goes wide. He starts to realize that he and Doctor Vaus are almost alone in facing the creature, as the whole group has become tremendously dispersed by now.

Vladimir is very glad when Nigel comes up in range and tries a *Cause Fear* on the hound. He is less glad when the hound resists the spell. The hound tries another bite at Doctor Vaus, whose frantic thrashing is not enough to keep it away. The hound latches on to Doctor Vaus' torso and tries to pull out his liver. Doctor Vaus passes into troubled unconsciousness. Vladimir flings a silver shuriken at the hound to drive it away from the fallen alchemist. The metal bites into the creature's shoulder, causing it to yip in anger.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl wakes up to hear a lot of screaming and howling. She emerges from her tent to see a yeth hound killing Doctor Vaus. She casts *Blindness* at it, striking it blind! All it can see is a hazy red vision of crazed weasels ripping at its eyes. The yeth hound flees for its life! It flies into the sky and out of sight.

After a while, Oswald comes back into camp. He goes straight to the brandy – that's where his courage is! Meanwhile, Nigel heals Doctor Vaus. Oswald offers that the yeth hound will probably die of starvation, being blind, but *Sredni Vashtar's Girl* assures him that with its keen scent, it can set up on the edge of some hamlet and still successfully become a legendary monster that takes livestock and small children from time to time.

The Local Farmerfolk

The next day the characters encounter four farmers walking along the path. They fall into conversation, in part because the characters wanted to know if the farmers had recently lost one of their pet yeth hounds. The farmers ask if the characters are interested in pumpkins ("After that girl was stabbed and bled to death in the fields two years ago, the crop has always been good. The taste takes some getting used to.") Nigel turns out to be quite familiar with blood pumpkins, and very fond of blood pumpkin pie. He buys several for later.

Tamrivena

The town of Tamrivena is the first significant town the characters reach. The place is a fortress town, built strongly to resist the depredations of the orcs and ogres to the West. At some point in the past, the Wall Guard stationed there changed from a garrison into an occupying force. They now spend a lot of time and effort interrogating both locals and visitors, eager to find any sign of lawbreaking. The town in general is quite intolerant of orcs, ogres, Sczarni, Taldans, Kellids and several other types of folk.

The local headquarters of the Wall Guard is *Fort Palestone*, constructed of white granite. It and Soldier's Rest are built upon a river island adjacent to the town. Vladimir learns that the *Captain Balton Rosswrackin* of the Wall Guard has a long-standing hatred of orcs. He spent time as a slave to an orcish tribe and the experience scarred him both physically and mentally.

Vladimir also tries shopping for a temple sword. He finds that there is not only an ordinary temple sword available, but also a masterwork temple sword and even a *Temple Sword +1*. It is really too bad that he doesn't have money to afford anything beyond the base model.

The characters spend a day hanging around taverns and shops in Tamrivena, learning local rumors and stories. Nigel is able to learn about a wandering snake-oil salesman named *Doctor Emir Everetts*. He has been chased out of almost every town in Canterwall, but recently he has stopped following his normal patter to tell of empty fields that once were towns, and dark wolves that follow his wagon at night.

Oswald learns about *Zylnessa Theld*, one of the Councilors who rules the area. She is also a harrow-reader. She was invited to join the Council due to her wisdom: many of the wealthy people of the town had been consulting her for years.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl pulls out the *Spirit Planchette* to find out who is behind a string of murders in Tamrivena. The spirits tell her "Rosswrackin", apparently referring to the Wall Guard Captain. The group weighs the pros and cons of trying to intervene in the local guard captain's crime spree and decide it would be best left to the locals.

A Freak Is Slain

The characters continue on their way. On the road between Tamrivena and Cortaud they come upon the *Crooked Kin*, a traveling freak show. The troupe has a wide variety of oddities and strangeness, all overseen by the Ringmaster *Caleb Hess*. Other major attractions in the troupe include:

- *Lydia Giraud* the bearded lady;
- *Hap Tarvind* the Flea Man;
- *Liddy* and *Poppy* the pinhead sisters;
- *Zhar* the Limbless Exiled Prince of the Mwangi;
- *Sageer* the Four-Armed Vudrani Princess;
- The clowns, each with an extra limb: two with extra arms, and one with an extra leg;
- *Trollblood* the Giant Man (and a fire-eater as well – he’s a double threat!)

The characters find the troupe in distress, as one of the pinhead sisters wandered off and hasn’t been seen since. They offer a reward if the characters are able to find her. Vladimir is extremely distrustful of the carnies; he demands to see the reward first (a magical dagger) and goes on about how it’s a trap and they’re just waiting to eat their flesh. Sredni Vashtar is able to find the missing pinhead woman’s tracks. They lead a mile away into a shallow valley filled with a midge-infested marsh. The whole area is filled with reeds at least six feet high, making vision difficult. Then the tracks vanish underwater. Oswald is able to identify the path, leading to a clearing with a body and signs of a struggle. As the characters arrive they hear a screaming girl out in the swamp. Everyone storms off to find the source of the scream! Except for Sredni Vashtar’s Girl, who cautiously moves forward to examine the body.

The characters rush again... until they hear another set of screams. They run off in a different direction! Nigel realizes that the screams are not human. The screams come again, from a third location! Icobus and Oswald decide to join Sredni Vashtar’s Girl back with the body. Nigel and Vladimir continue to wander around in the moors, searching. Doctor Vaus is a little distance away from them. Sredni Vashtar’s Girl checks out the body and determines that it is *Elise*, the missing pinhead girl. She is dead.

It is at this moment that a massive spider with a face surrounded by a shaggy mane of fur rises up in front of Doctor Vaus. It latches on to him and flings him around like a rag doll. A *poisoned* rag doll. Doctor Vaus' scream cuts off quickly.

The characters converge. The shaggy-faced spider ambushes them, coming from nowhere. It grabs and bites Nigel, who weathers the experience better than Doctor Vaus did. Nigel stabs in response, striking past the spider-thing's carapace to draw out thick gouts of whitish ichor. Vladimir moves to cover with his new temple sword. As the shaggy spider moves back from Nigel's bright sword Vladimir is able to deliver a serious wound to its flank.

Enraged, the shaggy-faced spider wraps Nigel in three arms and bites him in the neck. Nigel stiffens as his skin starts to turn necrotic blue.

At this moment, the others rush to the rescue. Sredni Vashtar's Girl uses a spell to blind the spider with a vision of bloody weasels tearing out its eyes. Oswald yells at it and chops into its side with the *Lopper's Hand Axe*. Vladimir strikes it again! The spider screeches with inhuman suffering, and then vanishes again.

The characters swiftly find the stricken Doctor Vaus. Oswald feeds him an antitoxin to help fight the effects of the spider-thing's poison. Sredni Vashtar's Girl realigns Vaus' chakras to help his recovery. After a bit, Doctor Vaus spits out some ethereal poison and starts to look somewhat better.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl is able to confirm that the girl was killed by the shaggy-faced spider, a creature better known as a *phase spider*. The others do their best to respectfully pack up the girl's body and bring it back to the Crooked Kin sideshow.

Caleb Hess and Elise's sisters are clearly quite distressed to know that Elise is dead. Sredni Vashtar's Girl explains that she was probably lured into the swamp by the phase spider, which could make human-like sounds. Hess is good to his word, and gives over a *Humanoid Shape-Changer Bane Dagger +1* as a reward for returning Elise's body.

The Crooked Kin residents prepare a feast to celebrate Elise's life and invite the characters to participate. The characters have some opportunity to speak to many of the members of the troupe. To no great surprise they find that the Vudrani woman is actually

from Galt, the exiled Mwangi Prince is actually from Cheliah (where he also worked as a freak) and so on.

Caleb Hess explains that, “With the Trial of the Beast going on, there are lots of people heading to Lepidstadt!” The Beast was killing lots of people around the city, but the constabulary finally captured it. It was a monster, sewn together from the bodies of dead men. Rather than simply killing it, the city elders are putting it on trial!

Icobus Basilisk wonders at the rationale of placing an unthinking monster on trial. “Next week, we’re going to try a cow for embezzling!”

The Beast’s murders had terrorized Lepidstadt for several years. Many were children or young people, torn to pieces.

The characters agree to travel with the Crooked Kin on their way to Lepidstadt.

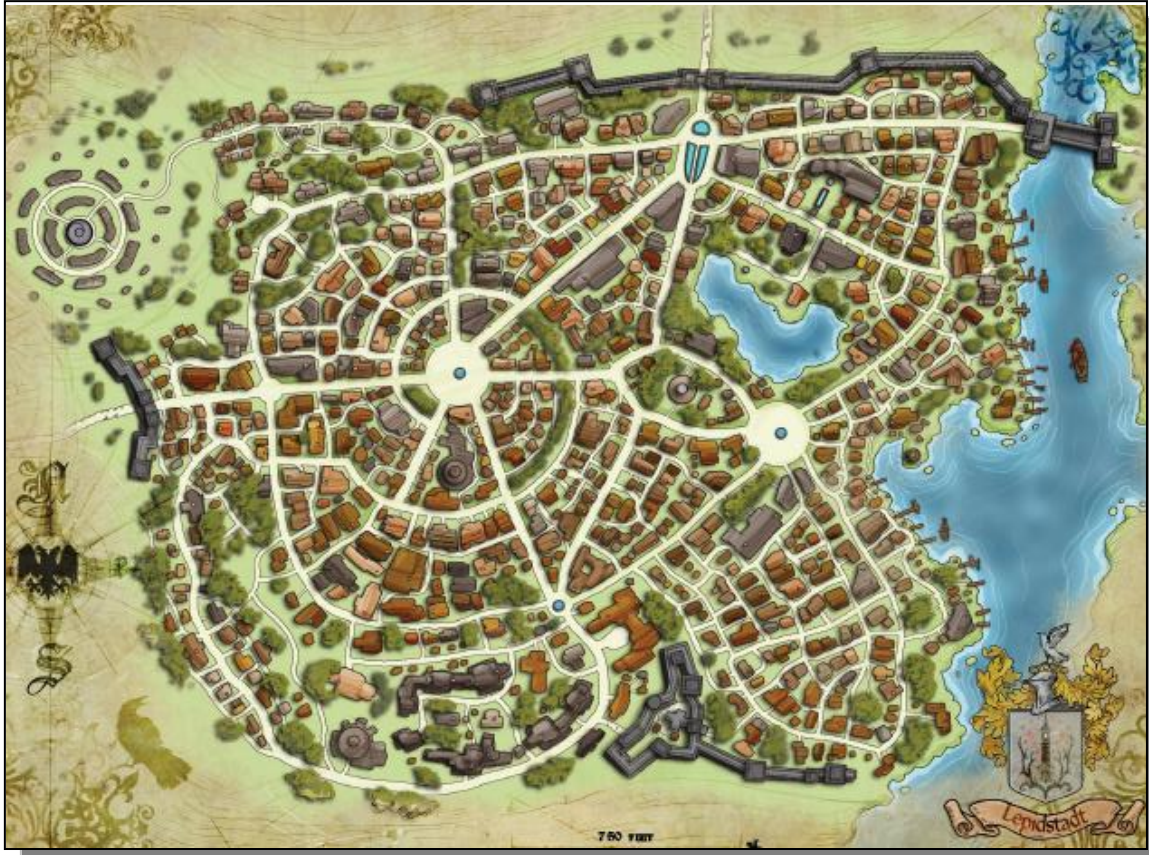
Cortaud

The characters approach Cortaud in the next day or so. The area around Cortaud is agricultural, dotted with the towers and keeps of various noble families. Some of them are in good shape, others are plainly in disrepair. The town is in a winding river valley, dominated by a gray Pharasman cathedral. The common people live up on the slopes while the folk of quality build their homes on the river. Two ancient wells stand at the Eastern end of the town. One appears to be used frequently. The other is sealed with heavy, rusted iron chains.

The characters (and the Crooked Kin) do not spend much time in town – just enough to replenish their supplies and cross over to the River Road to Lepidstadt.

The City of Lepidstadt

The city of Lepidstadt was constructed on top of an ancient Kellid religious site, the Spiral Cromlech. The remaining site is located at the edge of town and still serves as a site for ceremonies. The town is also the home of the renowned University of Lepidstadt, dedicated to teaching the mortal arts. Dueling is not actually considered to be one of these arts, in spite of the high regard that most of the students have for it.



Lepidstadt University is quite easy to find, as several characters have taken classes there. Finding Professor Crowell's office is also easy – Sredni Vashtar's Girl asks a passing student for directions. Along the way, the characters see that there are significant repairs under way on the Antiquities building. Nigel is able to find out that the Beast caused the damage: it broke in and stole a statue. The student knows that the authorities caught the Beast, but doesn't know what happened to the statue.

Professor Crowell and the Recent Troubles

Professor Crowell accepts the books the characters bring back to him. He is clearly quite sad to hear of Professor Lorrimer's death. He is also able to explain that the Beast stole the *Sea Sage Effigy* from the Antiquities building. It was from a strange religion that nobody could name. It seemed to honor an undersea spirit, with tentacles like an octopus or a squid. He thinks that the Beast was not so much angry as confused: when captured, it was barely able to explain its actions. Crowell gives the characters a

walking tour of the area. Icobus notices that the whole area is seriously damaged, except for the area right around where the Sea Sage Effigy was placed.

Icobus Basilisk notices that a nearby ground-floor window (undamaged) has been left open. He concludes that the Beast might have just been a diversion and that the actual thief simply crept in through a window and took the idol.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl shows Professor Crowell the rubbings she took of the carvings around the base of the Harrowstone Prison wall. He quickly identifies them as the remnants of a spell intended to capture a spirit named *Hawkrin*. The Professor thinks that whoever placed the spell would have been able to distill the captured spirit down into an ectoplasmic liquid and carry it off.

Then she tries showing him the (re-locked) *Journal of the Esoteric Order of the Palatine Eye*. As she does, Oswald becomes agitated and suggests that the characters have several things to do before dark and that they should go and do them now, rather than boring the good Professor with old books. For his part the Professor suggests that the characters should not be flashing it around.

Once the characters are out of the Professor's earshot, Oswald comments that he doesn't fully trust Professor Crowell. There are few people who would have had a good motive to kill Professor Lorrimer given the nature of his investigations, and Crowell is clearly one of those people. Sredni Vashtar's Girl scoffs, "He's only a Professor! He couldn't be any harm!"

Oswald grumbles, "In my experience, it is often those with the most learning who are most likely to betray their friends."

The Girl chuckles, "Yes, that's a common attitude among the untutored."

Doctor Vaus meets an Old Acquaintance

On the way to Judge Derrimor's townhouse the characters pass by the massive courthouse. The town's Punishing Man stands in the square outside it – a huge assembly of cut wood. Once guilt is determined, the criminal is placed inside and set on fire. Icobus is quite cheerful, "I like this town! They have good punishments! Strap him in the Helm of Bees!"

Doctor Vaus is quite surprised when an older woman shouts out at him, “You! How could you return to this city! You who were responsible for her death!” He realizes that she is the mother of the girl whom he loved and disappeared without a trace when she ran away to be with him. “You are just as much a criminal as the Beast! How could you seduce a girl a hundred years younger than you? You are a monster!”

Doctor Vaus finds himself wondering why the phase spider couldn’t have just killed him.

The Judge and the Trial

Judge Derrimed lives in a nice townhouse in the center of Lepidstadt. She is old enough that Doctor Vaus could date her legitimately using the $.5n+7$ rule. The characters give her the sad news that Professor Lorrimer has died. She confirms that they have completed the other requirements of the will, and then calls an attendant who brings in the 100 platinum coins promised to each of them.

It turns out that Judge Derrimed is one of the judges who will hear the trial of the captive Beast. She will not tell the characters much about the trial or the evidence, except that *Gustav Cable* is the defense attorney for the Beast. The judge fears that he is a bit over his head in this case, but nobody else was willing to risk their careers by taking the case. Most of the people of Lepidstadt are quite prejudiced against the Beast, though some do have other stories about the Beast’s kindness and willingness to help people. She is concerned that the Beast might not get a fair trial. She suggests that if the characters were to register with the Lepidstadt courthouse as volunteer defenders and do their best to assist attorney Cable in the three days before the trial is set to begin (and to not mention the judge’s part in this at all) she might be quite generous.

Another Visit to the Courthouse

The characters (after muzzling Doctor Vaus and Vladimir before they can say anything inappropriate, things like, “Show me the money!”) head back to the courthouse. They circle around to the back of the courthouse to avoid the huge mob that continues to seethe right around the front door. The characters notice that there are a couple of very fierce guards blocking the back door... guards who explain that signing up as volunteer

defenders requires going in through the front entrance. The back door only goes up to the viewing gallery.

Icobus innocently asks, “We would like to view the courtroom. How far is the drop from the viewing gallery to the courtroom floor?”

The guard is suspicious, “About ten feet...”

“Thank you very much! We’re going to go and view the courtroom now.” The characters enter the back way, and then drop down from the gallery to the floor below using the *Rope of Climbing*.

The Lepidstadt courtroom is very impressive, with three massive wooden chairs for the presiding judges and an iron Justice Chair for the accused, complete with a half-dozen attachment points for restraints. The characters move on, swiftly finding the Defender’s office and Gustav Cable, a heavy-set man with a stutter. Cable indicates that there is not much chance that the Beast will be found not guilty. The town is trying him on three crimes:

- Murder of 10 citizens in the village of Morast one year ago.
- The slaying of six children in the small religious farming community of Hergstag seven months ago
- The arson attack four months ago at the Sanctuary of Carb Isle, leaving Doctor Brada & several patients dead, and the doctor’s assistant Carl blinded.

Cable’s role is to present evidence, cross-examine witnesses, and try to show the Beast not guilty of any wrongdoing. If the characters can find evidence, he can present it. He explains that in general magic is forbidden in court – the court typically has a cleric present to assure the sanctity of the proceedings by casting *Detect Magic*. With no evidence to exonerate the Beast, Cable’s defense strategy now is to attack the statements of the prosecution witnesses.

The star witness for the murders in Morast is *Lazny*, one of the village elders. He was among the mob that drove the Beast away. There are three witnesses from Hergstag: *Gero*, *Starl* and *Flit*. They are in middle age and still live in the area, though Hergstag has been abandoned by all others since the murders. The blinded assistant Carl lives in a small cottage by the river. He will testify on the attack on the Sanctuary. Morast is seven

miles out of Lepidstadt, Hergstag is perhaps ten miles to the north, and the Sanctuary on Carb Isle is about three miles up the river.

The trial begins tomorrow and is expected to last for three days, with one day for each of the crimes. The murders in Morast will be first on the docket.

The Innocence of the Beast

The characters decide to talk to the Beast first. The characters go down into the basement of the courthouse where the Beast is bound by a dozen sets of masterwork manacles. The Beast is truly monstrous, a creature sewn together from pieces of multiple bodies not all of them human (he has owlbear parts). He sits despondent in his cell, his chains stretched taut and straining.

Icobus looks at the Beast and asks, “Why did they let him walk around free even before he started (allegedly) murdering people?”

The characters debate over the nature of the Beast. He could be a flesh golem, at least of a sort. Flesh golems are normally mindless, but there are rumors that using fresh, particularly strong-willed donors in the manufacture can result in a golem that is intelligent and retains memories of its previous life. He could also be various other types of construct.

Nigel attempts to talk to the Beast, introducing himself. The Beast roars, straining at his chains. Nigel tries to get the creature to calm down. The Beast roars, “Why? Why chain me? Why beat me? I do nothing!” The Beast seems to shift from rage to bewilderment.

Icobus tells the Beast, “Now, your name is Otto. Remember that, your name is Otto.” The Beast (Otto) seems to accept this.

Otto the Beast isn’t super bright, but as the group talks to him he claims to have never been to Morast and to have never met anyone named Lazny. He claims to have had a friend named Elsa in Hergstag. She was killed by a ghost who walks at night and steals the bodies of its victims. It kills children. He tried bringing her body to the villagers, but they drove him off. He says he was in the University, but doesn’t know how he got there. Before that, he was in the swamp.

Doctor Vaus notes that his dead lover *Emily* originally lived in Morast. She might have been among the ten people slain there. Then he tries the *Spirit Planchette* to ask, “Who is the Beast’s creator?” The spirits answer *Caromarc*, the name of the former noble house that ruled over Vieland. Their ancient house was *Schloss Caromarc*, located in the swamps about 25 miles from Lepidstadt. The castle was cleared by fire and is often struck by lightning from the storms that seem to hover over it almost all the time. The later members of the family were generally troubled by an excess of knowledge and an undersupply of moral fiber.

The Trail to Morast

The characters go to Morast first. They follow a narrow trail eight miles out of town. They find a miserable collection of about twenty wattle-and-daub hovels built on stilts over the swamp. The mosquitos and biting flies are truly awful, leading to a variety of home-made remedies to keep them away.

The characters approach the village, calling out to see if anyone is home. Some of the locals stare out of their huts. All of them share facial features – it seems like everyone in the village is related. After a bit of yelling and some threats, Lazny comes out to talk to them. He is a dirty-looking man with gray hair and yellowing skin. He is chewing on a wad of swamp-weed.

Lazny describes the string of attacks on his village. The early attacks were out in the swamps, but after a while the “Beast” attacked people in their own homes. The last attack, the villagers drove it away, following it out into the swamps to the village boneyard. As it reached the burying ground one of the local blood caimans attacked it, biting it on the shoulder. It screamed out a string of obscenities that even the most hardened Lepidstadt whore would blush to say, then the caiman dragged it under the water. Since then, its blood has contaminated the boneyard. The folks of Morast have since abandoned it. “But it must have lived through that, somehow, since it’s out terrorizing other towns.”

Lazny does remember the girl Doctor Vaus had been romancing. He remembers her as a sad case: her parents had forbidden the liaison so she fled into the wilderness. All they ever found were some bloody scraps of her dress.

The Boneyard

The old boneyard is a miserable swampy island in the swamp, dotted with hundreds of fetishes and decorations all around the trees. A large nest a dozen feet across is built up in the trees – Lazny notes that the nest is a new feature, it wasn't here the last time he visited.

The characters march onto the island and check out the nest. It is definitely of recent construction, probably the nest of a large winged, creature. Oswald boosts Nigel up. He peers over the edge, right into the face of a dead dwarf in a colorful coat. Nigel pulls the corpse out of the nest and hands it down to the others, then finds a masterwork shortsword. Doctor Vaus follows Nigel up and finds a wand (which he pockets and subsequently identifies as a wand of *Ghost Sound* with 22 charges). Icobus and Sredni Vashtar's Girl search the dwarf's body and find an *Oil of Keen Edge*, a silver hip flask of brandy, a package of body balm, and a purple coin purse containing 31 platinum coins and 22 gold coins.

And then the manticore comes back.

The manticore flies over and, seeing a bunch of humans messing with its nest, leads with a volley of spikes at Sredni Vashtar's Girl, who hides behind a tree to avoid all but one of them. Oswald responds with well-aimed crossbow shots that hit it in the chest, the hind claw and twice in the wings. The manticore responds by shooting him twice, nearly piercing him through each time. Icobus and Nigel both hit Oswald with *Cure Light Wounds*, keeping him in the fight. The manticore skewers Oswald twice more then turns tail and runs.

The characters search the nest and the area around. They find a ruined camp, and in the camp a mysterious vial containing the dried remains of a substance that smells slightly of carrots. Icobus finds a coracle hidden in the trees and brush on the north shore of the island. It contains an orb, a moldy leather bag with a traveling outfit inside, and a vile object that appears to be a detached human face. Doctor Vaus inspects it and discovers that it is the face of his slain girlfriend. As an elf, he shows almost no emotion, save for a single tear creeping down his face.

There is a rope hanging over one side of the coracle. Oswald pulls it up, finding a large sodden bag. It contains a variety of rusty implements appropriate for grave robbing

or secret murdering. With that as a hint, the characters find six graves that appear to have been tampered with: they are sinking into the earth as if the body had been removed. Oswald tries digging a couple of them up and verifies that the bodies are gone. Lazny is able to identify which villager was originally placed in each grave.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl explains her theory of the crime: that this wandering psycho made himself a suit out of victims'/corpses' skin, and that it was he that terrorized Morast and that the locals saw be slain by the caiman. She recommends a dredging of the swamp at that point to exhume the body to prove this.

The End of the Session

The session ends with the characters still tromping around the swamps near Morast. The next session will pick up with the blood caiman (and trying to find a giant skeleton in the swamps).