

Carrion Crown Session Summary 07/07/2013

Attendance

Ernest shows up bearing a tremendous array of surprisingly tasty-looking food from McDonalds. He tucks into his fries with obvious gusto, a level of enthusiasm that few are able to fully understand.

Paul also shows up bearing food from McDonald's, though he describes it more as a "last resort". He is somewhat appeased by the fact that the drive-through folks provided him with three (three!) so-called "flavor packets". This proves not nearly enough, so *Chris* provides him with a jar of ketchup the size of his head to make up the flavor deficit.

This prompts Ernest to explain that his Fourth of July featured a cookout with eleven Ukrainians. The event went well, only eight of them left at the end.

Bruce and *Georgina* celebrate Paul's lunch with a series of bridge rolls. Paul notes that he almost got hit by a phaser blast, but nobody fell over a railing.

Matt sits silently, eating his lunch with great concentration. He appears to be having a mystical experience with lunch. A transcendent experience.

Tim sends his regrets, noting that he has other things going on in his life. There is some speculation as to what kind of other things.

<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

In the Swamps of Morast

The characters have been investigating the truth of the allegations that the Beast of Lepidstadt murdered several villagers in the town of Morast. They have investigated the burying ground and interviewed the village elder *Lazny* and believe that the murders were committed by another monstrous figure that was wounded and then dragged into the swamps by a local blood caiman.

Time is a factor, so the characters decide to work through the night dredging the swamp for the body dragged off by the caiman. They bring some of the villagers in to the project, but they end up finding nothing that looks like an eight-foot giant. Knowing that absolute proof isn't needed for a trial, they settle for creating doubt in the minds of *Lazny* and the other villagers that *The Beast* was actually responsible for the crime. From the evidence at the graveyard, the characters assemble a theory about a murderous alchemist lurking in the graveyard, using mutagen potions to turn into a bestial shape, and performing awful deeds with dead bodies until he was killed by a caiman.

Nigel Snodgrass spends some time convincing (and perhaps bribing) *Lazny* to soften his testimony against the Beast.

Ride! Ride like the Wind! We must Be in Court!

The trial begins promptly at 10 am. The characters ride madly to return to Lepidstadt in time. They explain their findings and theories to the lawyer *Gustav Caple*. He is grateful for their help, though he thinks that more solid evidence will be necessary to prevent the Beast's execution.

Gustav is also able to tell the characters about the three judges on the trial. *Chief Justice Kard* leads the panel. *Judge Aldar* is a hardliner, one who strikes fear into criminals with his merciless justice – he is a former general, infamous for impaling fourscore deserters who fled from battle. The characters already know *Judge Derrimed*, certainly the most merciful of the three.

The characters decide to present themselves as witnesses, describing the things they found at the Morast graveyard. The characters first present their evidence to the court clerks before the court opens for the day. The clerks are a collection of five graying, bookish elders. The *Holy Sister of Justice* is a florid-faced priestess charged

with ensuring that nobody uses magic in the courthouse. *Sredni Vashtar* watches the proceedings with interest. He insists that his *Girl* place him in a prime location in the viewing stands. *Vladimir* joins her to keep an eye on the crowd.

The Chief Judge brings the proceedings to order. The prosecutor leads off, doing a fine job of riling the crowd with a description of the Beast's various crimes. The characters note one woman in the crowd. She is in a wheelchair, but the locals defer to her and ensure that she is not crowded. *Nigel Snodgrass* thinks that she is *Ilsid Kindler*, an important author of gothic romances and her adventures fighting the forces of evil. *Icobus Basilisk* makes a point of asking her if she would join the characters for lunch.

Gustav Caple starts his statements on behalf of the defense. He is simply terrible: he stutters, his speech wanders, and the crowd jeers at him all through. The characters' dismay knows no bounds.

The prosecutor brings three villagers from Morast to testify, two young women and the elder Lazny. The women testify that the Beast took villagers to the swamps to murder them until the villagers set a trap for it and drove it to the swamp. Lazny describes what happened in the swamp, but his testimony is not as strong as the prosecutor hoped: the characters' work in investigating the old burying ground clearly has had an impact upon him.

Oswald Bainbridge takes the stand for the defense. He describes what the characters found on the burying ground, but does not do a compelling job of it. The judge orders him off the stand, clearly unimpressed.

Icobus Basilisk takes the stand afterwards. He presents the skin mask and casts doubt upon the idea that the Beast would have been able to do such work. He is much more impressive, and seems to have slightly swayed the judges.

Nigel Snodgrass takes the stand third and starts describing the alchemical goods the characters found. He asks why the Beast would have needed potions to do the deeds he was accused of, and describes how alchemical arts can transform practitioners into a bestial shape for a time. He is also extremely convincing, continuing to sway the judges.

After the court closes for the day, Gustav Caple assures the characters that the judges are less inclined to convict than before – but the trial still has two days to go.

Lunch with the Author

After the courthouse empties, the characters have lunch with Ilsid Kindler. Her best-known work is *In the Council of Corpses*, a historical novel chronicling the death of King Ardurus Deerholt and the fall of Ustalav to the *Whispering Tyrant* some three hundred years ago. Sredni Vashtar's Girl makes the first approach, and she is convinced that the old woman is just reading out the contents of her souls and her life with one long, piercing gaze.

At lunch, she notes that the characters' efforts clearly had an impact upon the judges, but they will need to have much more effect if they want to get an acquittal. However, the crowds might end the matter long before the court can.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl agrees, "Yes, the locals had a Helm of Bees outside the courthouse!"

The characters ask her some questions about the former *Count Caromarc*. He was forced from his office some years ago by the council. He has reached some reasonable accommodation with the new Palatinate structure of the government. He now spends much of his time in Schloss Caromarc, delving into the deeper mysteries of the world.

The Hergstag Witnesses

The course for the next day in court is a series of murders in the religious community (now abandoned) of Hergstag, some ten miles to the north. The characters very swiftly head there in *Doctor Vaus'* carriage. The site is located inside the Dipplemere Swamp and has been abandoned for the last seven months. Three former residents, sisters named *Gero*, *Starl* and *Flit*, now own (and live at) a mill on the outskirts of Lepidstadt. The characters start by talking to them.

The sisters are none too happy to speak to the characters. "Aren't you the people who are defending the creature?" Icobus assures them that they will take whatever evidence the court finds.

Starl exclaims, "I will never forget the big grin on that thing's face as it placed the body of a dead child at our door! I will never forget its cruel laughter! We drove it off, but

could never catch it. And then the spirits of the dead children were too much for use to bear so we abandoned the place.”

The Beast’s story is somewhat different: he told the characters (and several other folks) that the child-killing ghostly killed his friend *Elsa*. He took her body to a house, not knowing what else to do. The characters relate this version to the sisters, but they are hardly convinced. They note that when children are being killed, of course you’ll end up with child ghosts around, and those ghosts might be child-killers as well.

Hergstag – Overgrown with Brush, Overrun with Burning Spirits

The characters continue on their way to Hergstag. The place is clearly overgrown and abandoned. The ground is swampy, the houses are abandoned and falling to ruin, the fields are overgrown with a mix of weeds and unharvested crops. The characters leave the carriage and walk into the village.

As Icobus walks through the tall grass, he steps right into a bear trap. Everyone moves very carefully towards him as they move to remove him from the trap. It takes Oswald Bainbridge several tries (three to be precise) to get the trap open. The trap is clearly months old, from before the villagers left.

Oswald looks around and locates several pathways through the village. None have been used for quite a while. He urges the others to stay on the paths, as there are patches of quicksand in the area. The characters move towards the temple. Along the way, the characters see a shadowy creature moving between buildings and hear a child’s voice cry out for help. Vladimir casts *Detect Undead* and confirms that is one strong undead in the area.

The characters approach very carefully. They find a small child, perhaps a boy, covered in shadows and fire. It definitely looks incorporeal. And unnatural.

Icobus moves forward and strikes with his mace, to no effect. Oswald’s crossbow shot follows up with similar minimal impact. Then the spirit steps into the adjacent house. Vladimir dives into the house through a window and sees a burning child inside. Awesome!

Icobus and Oswald move towards the house, readying more appropriate weapons. The spirit, a *rune child* (or possibly a *ruin child*), takes a swing at Vladimir, who dodges handily out of the way. Vladimir shouts towards the others, “Find the fetters! Find the fetters!”

Icobus borrows Sredni Vashtar’s Girl’s magic *Undead Bane* dagger and runs in through the door. Oswald chops at the spirit with the *Lopper’s Hand Axe* and finds his blade

noticeably less effective than it was against the *Lopper*. He dodges away from the spirit's return strike.

Vladimir decides to start playing with fire: he calls down positive energy on the rune child. Sredni Vashtar's Girl blesses him with good fortune. And Icobus closes with magic dagger and magical ectoplasmic rod. Nigel starts up an inspiring dirge, then moves to flank and strikes with his *Longsword +1*.

Vladimir scares the child ghost by invoking the name of the Beast, distracting it enough to allow Nigel to land a respectable hit from behind. And then Icobus tags it with a *Cure Light Wounds* and obliterates it.

The characters investigate the house, looking for evidence that the burning ghostly child might have lived here once. They find little to help.

The Search for Brother Swarm

The characters continue on to the church, a small wooden building surrounded by gravestones. The graves of the murdered children *Elsa*, *Karen*, *Gard*, *Rachel*, and *Martin* are easy to find. Sredni Vashtar's Girl pulls out the *Spirit Planchette*. She asks, "Who killed the children?" The answer comes back BROTHER SWARM. Nobody thinks this is a promising response. The best possibility is that there was an evil priest in the community whose family name was Swarm.

Inside the church, Icobus spots another small burning child, this one a young girl. Icobus yells out, "Dead kid in the church! Everyone to alert!" Unlike the help-seeking boy, she is just standing in the church quietly humming, apparently unaware of the characters' presence. Icobus is convinced that she knows the characters are there and intends to kill them all.

Vladimir realizes that she is singing a Desnan hymn, so he starts singing "The Stars Are Always Above Us" (the only hymn he knows). This is enough to open up a conversation with the child, who apparently doesn't understand (or doesn't claim to understand) that she is a dangerous undead now. The characters spend a little time negotiating, and then fall to attacking. Vladimir takes the lead with the magical undead bane blade. The burning spirit strikes back at Nigel, draining away some of his CON. Sredni Vashtar's Girl starts blessing members of the party with good fortune, which they very much need because their best plan is to nickel-and-dime the spirit down.

With another specter out of the way, the characters go back to digging up her grave. Her body is not much more than bones, easy to carry. Beyond the graveyard the characters find a burnt out house near the shore of the lake. The characters search. Icobus finds a scorched book of Taldan poetry. The characters hear a faint voice, then find a timid little girl hiding beneath a tree... and surrounded by black fire.

The characters have a conversation with the burning spirit of Elsa. She knows the name of *Brother Swarm* and is very concerned about him. She says he lives at the hill with the scarecrow. He was killed by bees. The characters fear that if they kill him (the master wraith) the murdered children will just turn into full wraiths themselves and thus become much more dangerous. After some soul-searching, the characters surround the burning wraith that was Elsa and cut it to bits.

The characters head up the hill. They see a rotting scarecrow with a scythe. Its head is a rotting, leering pumpkin. A sheep's jaw hangs loosely beneath its mouth.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl mourns, "Oh goodness, they had to give it a scythe. They had to arm it."

Oswald asks, "Why did they give it a jaw?"

Icobus Basilisk explains, "It's so it works against the super-intelligent dire crows. To make the effect more realistic all the local farmers had to wear pumpkins on their heads when they were in the fields."

Oswald shoots the scarecrow from a distance. Nothing happens.

The characters approach. Just for safety, Icobus takes the scythe away from the scarecrow.

Meanwhile, Sredni Vashtar's Girl shouts at the heavens, "Brother Swarm! Brother Swarm!" Again, nothing happens.

Shall We Enter the Horrifying Cave?

The characters look around. They find a concealed cave entrance. Vladimir leads the way. He finds the skeletal remains of four children and a robed figure with grasping arms and huge, glowing red eyes. Vladimir greets it. It buzzes at him as ghostly hornets buzz around it.

As soon as Vladimir mentions that two of his children are gone, Brother Swarm attacks him, inflicting negative energy damage. Vladimir feels infused with new power. Everyone else stands around at the cave entrance. Eventually, Vladimir comes out with some

bones. Brother Swarm emerges a moment later, intent upon stopping the dhampir monk. The characters fall upon it with magical blades.

Brother Swarm tags Oswald, draining his CON down. Sredni Vashtar's Girl responds by striking Brother Swarm with misfortune. Vladimir goes to get some more bones. Brother Swarm turns around, so Icobus, Oswald and Nigel all clock it in the head, one after another. Brother Swarm drains some of Vladimir's CON during his trip into the ground, breaking the illusion of his invulnerability.

Vladimir turns upon the wraith, yelling at it, "If you want to make a deal with me, and if you want me to bring more children down here, you'd better just let me alone and stay out of my way!"

It's not clear if Brother Swarm believes Vladimir or not, but it does melt away into the stone. Vladimir finishes gathering up all the bones, then instructs the characters to whisper to them.

Unsure what to do next, Icobus sets the scarecrow on fire. Then Icobus starts very loudly trying to bluff the wraith. "That's sure an effective anti-undead spell!"

Nigel Snodgrass joins in, "Heck yes! We have found a wraith, we need to tell everyone!"

"Yes, it is too bad we are the only ones who know it is here!"

Nigel cannot be outdone: "I own a sign company! When we get back to town, I will put signs up everywhere!"

Sure enough, Brother Swarm comes back out and attacks Icobus. Icobus swings out with his wand of *Cure Light Wounds*. An overly enthusiastic Oswald storms in, chopping the wraith with his axe and almost taking out Icobus' foot in the bargain. The wraith thinks better of pressing the attack and fades away. Vladimir starts back to the wagon with all the bones, especially Elsa's bones.

Three Sisters Living in a Mill?

On the way back the characters discuss the motivations of the three sisters set to speak for the prosecution. The fact that they would be willing to overlook the fact that there were burning ghosts and a wraith wandering around their town in favor of speaking against the Beast suggests that they have something serious to hide. The characters decide to stop by their mill on the way back to town.

Of course, by the time the characters get to the mill it is about 03:00. The characters are filthy and tired from digging up bodies. Understandably, the sisters open the door with loaded crossbows already aimed and do not allow the characters inside.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl tells the three sisters, "We know who was killing those kids! It was Brother Swarm!"

The sisters look confused. They have no idea what Girl is talking about.

The characters question the fact that the three of them are unmarried. The sisters explain that they were married once, but their husbands were killed. By bear attacks. Because it is a dangerous world.

One sister insists, "But the Beast was seen with the girl's body!"

Several characters respond, "He was her friend!"

The sisters answer, "You people are crazy! We'll see you in court!" They slam the door.

Back in Court

The characters petition the court for a *Speak with Dead* to allow Elsa to speak. They are successful, and some of the additional evidence is also worth large bonuses to Diplomacy rolls for the defense.

The prosecution calls the three sisters to give their statements of what they saw the day in the village when Elsa was killed. Then the characters present their evidence:

- Sredni Vashtar's Girl talks about the history of child killings in Hergstag, long before the Beast arrived, and how the sequential killing sprees are consistent with undead behavior. The judge dismisses this as mere speculation.
- Icobus presents the story of going into the hilltop lair of Brother Swarm. He has the bodies of the four slain children, and makes the key point that there was a wraith on the hilltop.
- Vladimir reads a passage from the book of Taldan poetry to make the Beast cry. He demonstrates that the Beast cannot shed tears, but makes a grimace that could be confused with a grin.
- Nigel is charming as he arranges for *Speak with Dead* to be cast upon Elsa's bones. Elsa testifies that the Beast was her friend, would never hurt her, and that they read poetry together. ("And here, I have this book of poetry!")

The characters sense that the mood of the crowd has become very ugly. The characters have presented evidence that might cause the Beast to go free? Monstrous! He might not have killed those children, but he must have killed someone! Up in the viewing gallery, Oswald sees the ugly mood. Ilsid Kindler points out that the judges and the master at arms don't seem to either notice or care about the mood of the crowd, and certainly aren't doing anything to prevent the situation.

Protect the Beast

The characters make their own arrangements to escort the Beast back to his holding cell. They're not sure how they will manage to both keep him safe from the mob and travel out to Carb Isle to interview the blinded former assistant *Carl*.

The End of the Session

Everyone goes up to 4th level! Sadly, Oswald's hit point roll is only a 3. A quick consultation with the local priest of Pharasma determines that those characters who lost CON points to Brother Swarm will require a *Restoration* spell, expensive to start with and made worse by the need to provide 100 gold worth of diamond dust as a material component. The consensus is to wait until the party is more damaged before plunking down big money for healing.