

DCC: World of Iriolis

Our Group

Player	Character	Description	Class
Bruce	Gallfred Weasel	Guild Beggar	Thief
Chris	Old Man Fish	Locksmith	Ranger
Ernest	Hemp	Weaver	Warrior
Matt	Mordecai	Gravedigger	Wizard
Patrick	Podrick	Squire	Warrior
Tim	Ned Wimbley	Beekeeper	Wizard

Ernest notes that he was really quite able to navigate through Japan in spite of his limited understanding of the language, though he did find himself developing some understanding of Japanese characters. At the time he resented this, though eventually he realized that this did help him navigate and was actually very helpful. *Paul* thinks he is being helpful by pointing out that Japanese is the only language in the world that expects a fluent person to know four character sets: kanji, katakana, hiragana, and English characters. *Bruce* wonders how helpful this actually is... Meanwhile, *Chris* is silently enjoying the prospect of translating Japanese words rendered into English characters into “squiggly #3”. And all of this pushes *Patrick* into post-traumatic flashbacks of the time he visited Chicago – they don’t speak the same way there.

Tim is lost to us, at least for the day, because he’s off heading towards Portland. Helpfully, Fox News has told him that this is functionally the same as traveling into the Fourth Circle of Hell.

Matt promises to show up a bit later. After all, he has a life to live and gadding about with his layabout friends isn’t going to make that happen.

Charming Fythorp

The characters are in the walled town of Fythorp, a place noted for its orchards, its salt mines (yeepl!), and its pleasant inn. The place is quite defensible, because the town is actually built upon an island connected to the mainland by a thin land bridge protected by a well-constructed motte-and-bailey castle. One of the larger municipal problems is that the nearby salt pit tends to make the ground water too saline to drink. Fortunately, the town is able to draw good water from Canter Lake. Also, the town has a surprisingly large dwarven population – most of the workers in the salt pits are dwarfs. They also run a smithy that can provide basic weapons and armor. The town also features the largest temple to *Alar*, the god of storms and the sea, that most of the characters have seen. There are also temples to *Jopha the Healer* and *Findire of the Staff* (a nature god). Finally, the town has a large amphitheater.

Unfortunately, a local feature of interest is the *Black Manse*, a threatening and abandoned place that was once occupied by the Leddy family. As fate would have it, *Gallfred Weasel* is distantly related to the

Leddy family, leading to a general public expectation that the characters will go spend a night in the place. And maybe survive long enough to actually live there...



Tenth Tenebrous – in High Winter

Gallfred Weasel spends his day relaxing in an inn with the opposite of a relaxing name – the *Ogre's Lair* (#6 on the map), a place with a sign that features an angry ogre with a swinging club. Ahem. The innkeeper is *Alabaster Beerbristle*, a fellow who absolutely refuses to acknowledge that he is a halfling. In spite of being quite short, he claims to be fully human.

Meanwhile, *Podrick* walks around town. He's wearing the Golden Buffalo sigil of the *Knights of Lushnia* and to his surprise this makes the people of the town very friendly towards him. He gets a lot of nice free items (apples, dried apples, salted apples, dried apple tarts, and so on). He asks about this and finds out that there was a famine following the extinguishing of either the second or third noble line that ruled the place (there is some disagreement), but during that time the Knights of Lushnia showed up to help. They maintained local order and forged agreements with nearby towns to bring in food and relieve the famine. *Sir Maccus Jageli* in particular distinguished himself as a local hero. Podrick in particular is pleased to find that he has joined an order that really does good in the world.

During his wanderings, Podrick encounters the local priest of Alar, *Atta Paseka*. Atta is an impressive fellow – a huge guy with a beard that seems to move under the effects of ocean breezes that nobody else can feel. He wants to know how long Podrick will be around. Podrick indicates that he and his retinue are just passing through but is curious if there is anything that he can do. Atta suggests that if he

can do anything about the snow, that would be nice (ha ha!). The townsfolk do salt their streets, which helps keep the ice down and as a side benefit also keeps down the poisonous plants. Apparently, plants that are poisonous to the touch are an ongoing problem.

Hemp the Weaver and *Old Man Fish* show up in the conversation about now. Hemp admits that he's not part of the Knights of Lushnia (merely a member of Podrick's entourage) – though maybe someday. Atta offers to take the characters out drinking: he tells the characters that apple brandy is a specialty of the town, and that he looks forward to drinking the newcomers under the table. Podrick and Hemp readily agree.

With introductions over, Hemp asks about the Black Manse. Atta tells him that it is a cursed place. The last family to live there all died in the same night. "The thing is a lot of families have died there. This town has a bad habit of losing their noble families."

Hemp asks, "How do they die? Is it always inside the house?"

"It's not always in the house, but not always. Sometimes murder, sometimes disease, you know. But let's start drinking!"

A Hard Night of Drinking

Everyone heads back to the Ogre's Lair to start drinking and talking...

After the old Leddy Matriarch died, *Lady Ilsa Leddy* declared herself the "Mad Prince" and ruled for 50 years of increasing irrationality. Finally, she had a giant sarcophagus constructed and had herself encased in it. And then all the people within the house burned – but the house was not destroyed. That happened over a decade ago. There is supposed to be a Seneschal who still lives in the Black Manse, but he's far along in years and has only been seen rarely. The town proper has been ruled over by "that damned Mayor" in the meantime. Recently, though, the mayor has been picking fights with the fishermen. Atta considers the fishermen to be his constituency and takes the mayor's interference personally. For his part, the Mayor's power base are the apple farmers and pickers – who also comprise the local militia, and who use the same basic tool for both apple-picking and military service, a sort of bladed bill.

Atta also notes that there is a community of junkies who live down in the salt pit and make some sort of weird drug there. Both Podrick and Hemp are surprised by the knowledge that you can get high from high blood pressure.

By this time, everyone is getting pretty drunk. *Old Man Fish* gets into an argument with someone who looks a lot like Podrick, apparently on the subject of who the best Prime Minister of England was:

Old Man Fish: "Lord Palmerston!"

Podrick: "Pitt the Elder!"

Old Man Fish: "Okay, you asked for it, Podrick!"

And then Podrick decks Old Man Fish, with half the tavern egging the two of them on.

Hemp, in contrast, spends a lot of time talking to the locals. He finds out that the addicts in the bottom of the salt pit have found the body of some kind of dead (or at least sleeping) god – and it is from the god’s secretions that they make their drugs.

The Next Dawn

Gallfred continues to spend all his time resting in his room. Because he’s unwilling to take off the *cloak of Cheret the Lost* the local staff forgets that he’s there in spite of the fact that he paid in advance for ten days. He ends up with a roommate that he hadn’t expected and is responsible for rumors that the second floor of the inn is haunted.

Hemp talks to *Morgan*, who has been changed since her encounters with the *Hound of Herat*. He has brunch with her. She spends the time talking a lot about Fate and how everyone must submit to their own Fate: “Fate is predestined, and we must all be alert for the signs that mark out our Fate.”

“I had a vision of my own last night, that Podrick and Fish would get into a fight. And they did!”

“It might be a sign that they will kill each other.”

“Or just a lover’s spat.”

“Oh! I didn’t know.”

“They’ve been trying to keep it on the QT. We get a lot of locals flirting with Podrick, and we don’t want to lose that benefit.”

Morgan continues on in more esoteric veins, talking about destiny and predictions. Hemp tries to find out if he’s actually talking to the woman, or to some kind of extraplanar entity that is either possessing her or channeling through her. He verifies that she remembers her past, has her own memories.

Hemp asks, “You do seem to be different after your experiences. Do you actually talk to the spirits?”

Morgan answers, “I became one with the Lost Goddess, but we are separate now. Cheret the Lost!”

Hemp wonders who that is, until he remembers some of the ravings of Gallfred. Aha, Gallfred! He’d almost forgotten that he existed!

Old Man Fish spends his morning healing up. Then he goes to the temple of Findire of the Staff. The temple is located at and under the largest tree in the town – and given the salinity of the soil, keeping a tree that large, alive and healthy must be magic! He meets *Father Michael*, an older priest (in his 60’s). His breath reeks of booze and his robes are stained. His hair is white and scraggly, and his eyes are watery and sad.

Father Michael asks Old Man Fish, “You seek the blessing of Findire? Though, in truth, he has become quite weak in these parts. If you wish to commune with nature, do it now while you still can.” The

combination of salt and invasive plants have had a corrosive effect upon the nature god's powers. Old Man Fish speaks quietly with Father Michael, then steps away to conduct his own meditation. Few people visit the shrine, he is mostly left to his own devices.

Podrick tries to spend a quiet morning drinking tea in the common room of the Ogre's Lair. But this isn't entirely how things go: the young and (mostly) attractive staff of the inn keep on bothering him, telling him about how they are "frightened" by the "ghost" on the second floor, and they need him to "reassure" them, typically in the broom closet. Apparently, Knights of Lushnia have a lot of cachet locally. Podrick thinks about whether he wants to actually move to Fythorp, a place that is certainly in the top five of "least crappy towns the group has visited".

Old Man Fish, in contrast, is eager to start exploring the Black Manse. He persuades Podrick and Hemp the Weaver to take a day's journey out to look at the place.

The Manse is a half-day's walk away, so in the meantime Old Man Fish and Hemp go to the Shrine of Jopha to ask the healers there about any strange injuries they have needed to cure on folks who come back from the Black Manse.

The local priestess of Jopha has a strange demeanor: dusky red skin and horns. Old Man Fish does his best to avoid instinctively shrieking out, "Devil creature!" and shooting her full of arrows.

She introduces herself as *Sybbyl Talonthrone*. She admits that she was once touched by evil, that she was taken by one of the many sorcerous cults that litter the landscape. But they are all gone now, and her faith remains strong. And if they were to reappear, the characters could recognize them by their sign of the *withered talon* – each of them has a withered talon upon their left hand.

Hemp asks her about the Black Manse. She advises not going there, as it is a place of evil. The woman who once lived there became more and more mad, drawing the magics of Chaos to the place.

Asked about the addicts in the salt pit, she explains that they are essentially harmless. They have been touched by a chthonic power and seem to have no overriding ambition beyond making and using their drugs. They trade their drugs with the townsfolk in exchange for equipment and supplies. The townsfolk who use the drugs report strange dreams when they sleep, sometimes wondrous dreams but sometimes pathetic dreams. As far as she knows, they have no connection to the Black Manse and were not involved with the Mad Prince's descent into madness.

Old Man Fish asks, "Do people ever just walk by the old Leddy mansion and comment on the vampires and the zombies?"

Sybbyl offers, "Well, it's a half day away from town and near a swamp, so really nobody goes out of their way to walk past the place. I guess the lizard men in the swamp might, but they usually keep to themselves. Though if someone were to be in a suitably vulnerable state around the swamp the lizard men might just do away with them for their own purposes. But that's fairly uncommon."

Podrick prays at the shrine to Jopha and gains back +1 LUCK.

Hemp the Weaver tries inviting Sybbyl to drink at the Ogre's Lair. She declines, even after he tells her about the ghost on the second floor. She suggests that she might be able to send it away if it's actually bothering anyone.

Hemp's Fantastic Evening

Hemp the Weaver goes off to drink and carouse. He feels great! Granted, he was already feeling pretty good, so this doesn't do that much extra for him. And he's already got LUCK in excess of his normal total, so he doesn't even gain that. But he does hear a rumor: it is only six days until the *Celebration of Temptation's Embrace*. Unfortunately, the shipment of giant beavers for the celebration has yet to arrive. The thick snows must have delayed them! Or maybe goblinoids! They're normally shipped from the North, then carried across the lake. The locals are upset about this, because you really *have* to have giant beavers for Temptation's Embrace. They're so much smellier when you rub a stick upon their scent glands. During the festival, the young men of the town rub sticks upon the beavers' scent glands and then chase young women around with them. If a young man manages to get beaver scent upon a lady, she must give him a kiss! And you know what they say: winter kisses lead to spring weddings!

Podrick doesn't approve of any of this: he knows that the holiday is a celebration of *Camue the Enchantress*, one of those damned Chaos gods. Also, goddess of Love.

Day Trip to the Black Manse

It is Twelfth Tenebrous and Hemp, Old Man Fish, and Podrick head out on a day trip to the Black Manse. Gallfred Weasel is still recovering in his room at the Ogre's Lair. *Mordecai* shows up at the last minute to join them!

By midday, they reach the Black Manse without significant event. The manse is built right upon a swampy weir and threatens to sink down beneath the water at any moment. The simplest way to reach the house is through a grim-looking gate house and over a short path. The whole place is rain-soaked and depressing. There are no signs of habitation at all.

Old Man Fish looks around the perimeter. He finds a few lizard man tracks, but nothing that leads to or from the manse. He sees no indication that the Seneschal (if he still lives) has left the manse in a long time.

Knowing that the Black Manse is (or was) a nexus of Chaotic magic, *Mordecai* attempts to sense magic. This requires that he approach the structure, at least close enough that he can make out specific details about the moat-house. He concludes that the place is completely haunted. It is weighted down by the sins of its past. He gets a vision of a coffer or coffin in murky waters, and of something lurking in the water below. He gets a sense that prior incarnations of not only Gallfred Weasel, but everyone else's previous selves are somehow linked to the site, and maybe responsible for the horrors of the manse. He hears a great bell tolling and feels that a Devil is coming at midnight.

Then Podrick spots a withered old man standing in darkness within the doors of the mansion. His sodden cloak bears the sigil of House Leddy, and he leans upon a walking stick. As Podrick watches, the

old man moves further into the house and out of sight. The windows of the house are blocked with stone and plaster.

Old Man Fish looks around the landscape near the house, seeking poisonous plants. He is able to find quite a few of them.

Hemp, Podrick, and Mordecai start making an inventory of supplies for investigating the house: crowbars, rope, gloves, and cloaks to ward off poison splash traps. The two (more) Lawful characters are generally horrified by the house, while Mordecai kind of thinks that he might want to live there. He's also the only one who wants to stay around to watch the place after dark.

Then the characters head back to town. They're eager for new knowledge (or at least Old Man Fish is), so they take a different route back. Along the way, they encounter a group of six lizard men fighting against two minotaurs. The characters notice that the minotaurs are heavily burdened by the corpses of a dozen lizard men. It is pretty clear that the minotaurs have been out hunting, and that the lizard men would like to get revenge.

Podrick picks sides quickly: he charges one of the minotaurs, hurting its arm and pinning it with his spear. In return, the minotaur gores him. Hemp shoots the minotaur with the *blazefire bow*, setting the creature on fire. Podrick follows up with a spear strike to the neck, killing the creature.

Meanwhile, the second minotaur slaughters another lizard man, flinging the body some twenty feet out into the water. Mordecai notes that the minotaurs are both carrying a lot of corpses. He casts *gourd puppetry* and converts one dead lizardman into an undead monster. Dead lizard man arms start trying to claw the minotaur's face off. The minotaur isn't pleased but isn't particularly hurt. And it proceeds to kill another lizard man.

Hemp tries to help the lizard men but misses his intended target and kills a lizard man instead leaving only three still alive. Woops!

Mordecai sees that there is a giant minotaur available for animation. He manages to turn one of its arms into a *gourd puppet* that lumbers over towards the surviving minotaur. This distracts the minotaur enough that one of the lizard men is able to get a pretty solid hit in. Then Podrick steps in, overcome by battle rage, and kills the minotaur. Fortunately, he is not so overcome with rage that he turns on either the lizard men or the other characters.

The characters and the lizard men really don't share any common languages. The lizard men are grateful for the help in slaying the minotaurs. After establishing that the characters aren't hostile, they offer some beads (maybe tradeable for drugs?) (worth 14gp as trade goods) and proceed to collect the bodies of their slaughtered kinfolk.

Mordecai claims a minotaur head and an arm for later necromantic purposes.

And then the characters make their way back to town, arriving by evening.

Hemp's Complicated Social Life

Later that evening, Hemp takes Morgan out on a sort of date. She continues talking about fate. She has concluded that the characters' fate is to go to the Black Manse and the longer they delay the more suffering there will be. Hemp tells her that Gallfred's obstinacy is the only obstacle. Morgan thinks she has some kinship with him, so she goes to talk to him.

She knocks on Gallfred's door. He has no idea who he is, and yet he sees a kinship with the woman at the door. She seems as lost as he is. She tells him that it is his fate to go to the Black Manse as soon as possible. "There is a strong chance that your identity might be totally subsumed by the Manse, but if that is what Fate has in store for you then your only choice is to go willingly or to try to fight it."

"If you are right, we should go to the manse. Okay, let's go tonight."

Strangely, the other characters aren't as willing to immediately travel to the manse having already spent all day traveling and fighting. They agree to go the next morning.

Mordecai Sells Out the Living... Eventually

Mordecai decides he'd like to visit the graveyard. It's a bit like going shopping for him. But as he is leaving the Ogre's Lair the innkeeper calls him. He urges him to wait for a while, because a foreign dignitary wants to speak to him – Lady *Skeam* wants to speak to him in her room. She is in a first-floor room at the back of the inn. It is guarded by two people wrapped tightly from head to toe, including their faces. Mordecai enters. The room is dark, with not even a single candle lit. As his eyes adjust, he sees that the Lady Skeam is a very large woman – perhaps too large to even move on her own.

Mordecai addresses her, "My Lady Skeam?"

"I intercepted the message you sent back to Sewich. I serve the Mystical King, and I am his representative in this area. Your interest in joining us interests me as well. Especially since the King's primary interest at this time is to gain the *Helm of Chistu*. I believe that your group has the best chance to find and claim the helm."

Mordecai cautions, "There is a companion of mine who wishes to cleanse it."

"This is not a great problem. Our agents have had troubles in part because they follow the Lords of Chaos. We need someone Lawful. Then, with the Helm the Mystical King will start his endgame to unlock the Powers of Death. His ambition is not just to take the Kingdom of Galand but all the lands beyond. And your reward would be to join the ranks of the eternally living dead as a lich."

"Do you care if the helm has been cleansed? We believe that it has a shadow taint."

"I don't know what this 'cleansing' involves. We need the helm for its connection to the Word of Death. But that is the King's interest. My desires are more temporal. The towns to the North have already been taken by our legions of undead. Soon, a contingent will arrive to take this town. They will arrive very soon, perhaps within a matter of days."

Mordecai is still not dissuaded. "I see. Tomorrow, we will go to the haunted mansion. One of my companions carries the blood of the Leddy family. I expect that we will be there for a day or two, but some of us wanted to attend the Festival of Temptation's Embrace. I'll try to persuade them to avoid this place."



"The timing is unimportant. The Duke has been distracted, we have made sure of that." It is clear that Lady Skeam and her allies have been responsible for a number of the troubles and situations that the characters have become involved in. Ever since the Oracle Tree told the group that they would fight the Mystical King they have been unknowingly undoing several of his plots.

Mordecai evaluates the temper of his companions. "Podrick may not be able to fight an army, but he will want to. Weasel can be persuaded with money."

"There is an imprisoned god of Death nearby. His temple and the Cult of the Carnifex were located underground and is long forgotten, but I can tell you where it is. You can find the Jewel of the Carnifex there and draw Death energy from it."

"That's perfect, that's great. I'd like to become a lich."

The Witch's Twig

Gallfred finds that he is still carrying a *witch's twig*. He hands it to Mordecai, who identifies its properties:

witch's twig (from the witch at Kingspire) (+1 to spell checks, 3/day but binds you to the Elder Kin and can give you a patron taint)

Old Man Fish isn't afraid of being bound to the Elder Kin, and in fact might be interested in embracing that. Gallfred gives him the twig.

Bats! They Can Get in Your Hair!

As the group approaches the Black Manse, it is as if the building can sense Gallfred's approach. Storm clouds gather and a cold rain starts to fall. And it is then that the *vampiric bat swarm* attacks. Podrick is ready for them. He heads for the front door of the manse. When he reaches the door, the slow tolling of a funerary bell commences. He notes that the moat house portcullis is halfway down and runs right past it and into the moat house.

Everyone else sustains bat bites. Mordecai and Gallfred both contract a disease from them, but Hemp and Old Man Fish are mostly fine. Everyone runs for the moat house.

The Seneschal

When the characters reach the moat house, an old man in a soaked robe greets them with withered hand. "An auspicious hunt! Well done, masters, well done!" He gestures behind the characters. "The beast will make a fine addition to tonight's celebrations!"

The characters turn. The vampiric bats are gone, replaced by the body of a stag pierced through with multiple wounds.

Mordecai checks the body and takes a bit of fur (for summoning purposes). The Seneschal observes, "Ah, Master Sabian! Your jests always amuse me so much."

"You brought the storm with you, masters! It will be a wild night! But you must don your masks and be ready for the festival!"

Gallfred addresses the Seneschal, "Certainly! Show us to our rooms so we may get ready."

"Yes of course, Mistress Kethe!"

The Seneschal points out that the final unmasking will happen at midnight, in three hours. Hemp observed that the bell tolled nine times as the characters approached the gate house. He identifies the characters as:

Gallfred	Mistress Kethe
Mordecai	Master Sabian
Hemp	Mistress Ursula

Old Man Fish	Master Jost
Podrick	Master Josef

"You have all been gone far too long. You are excited by the wedding?"

Podrick: "who is to be wed?"

"The master and his long-promised bride."

The Seneschal assures the characters that their rooms are on the upper floor, as they no doubt remember. Then he tells them, "I have many preparations to make!" whereupon he grabs the stag's body by the horns and drags it away. He does have some trouble with it, suggesting that his strength might not be entirely supernatural.

A Storm-Wracked Bridge

The bridge to the main house is quite slick and dangerous. Gallfred leads the way. As he reaches the center, the storm increases in magnitude and a buffeting wind threatens to hurl him from the bridge. Hemp hears his name repeated again and again in the wind.

Hemp answers, "Yes?"

The wind doesn't answer him.

Then from underneath the bridge, something pulls itself out of the much and mire, a gaunt troll-like fiend with swamp-blackened skin clinging to its long bone. It is cadaverous and haunted, and attended by five equally gaunt and decayed men-at-arms. Its ardent eyes fall upon Hemp the Weaver, who understands that it is the *Gruesome Lover* and his honor guard five *men at arms*.

Gallfred hides.

Hemp calls back to the Seneschal, "What is this?"

The Seneschal answers, "Lady Ursula, do you not recognize your lover, Lord Tremaine?"

Hemp addresses the Gruesome Lover, "I am glad to see you, but I must go to my quarters and freshen up?"

The creature groans, "It has been so many years, yet I still yearn for you!"

"Perhaps after the wedding..."

Old Man Fish simply crosses over the bridge. So does Podrick. Nothing good happens to either of them. Also (apparently) nothing bad.

The Gruesome Lover comes up the ground next to the bridge, heading straight for Hemp the Weaver. He hugs Hemp to his chest and plunges into the icy stream.



The men at arms scramble up the side of the bridge and fall upon the rest of the group (excepting Gallfred), though they are none too precise in their strikes. They are carrying lengths of rope and anchor stones, which make their intentions quite clear.

Mordecai realizes that he has been cut off from the bridge by one of the men at arms. He is indignant, "How dare you attack Master Sabian, because that's absolutely me!" He casts *magic missile*. The spell goes horribly wrong – the *black orb* turns on him, the pupil and iris of his remaining eye turns a chalky white, his face develops a deeply skeletal appearance, and the magical energy ends up lingering until the next

time (within 24 hours) that he rolls a 1 on any check.

Gallfred sees that everything is going badly. He hooks his grappling hook over a bit of bridge and sends a rope down to Hemp the Weaver, who manages to break loose from the Gruesome Lover and grabs hold of the rope.

Old Man Fish attempts to heal one of the men at arms, reasoning that this should be bad news for undead. Things don't go well – he ends up with frosty breath. Also, any time he casts a spell the area around is afflicted by an unpleasant swampy smell (this is a permanent effect).

Podrick approaches the main doors. They are huge and bronze and guarded by a demonic figure. Podrick announces, "I am Master Josef! Allow me entry! But I need to deal with this thing first." The doors unlatch, but Podrick only barely notices as he slashes through a man at arms and flings the carcass off the bridge.

While Hemp was down in the water, he noticed that there is a large box (DC 20 STR check to move it) on the bottom of the stream. He files this for later interest as he evades the Gruesome Lover's grasp.

Old Man Fish doesn't move quite fast enough, and a man at arms manages to get a loop of rope over his head. The undead soldier readies a sack of stones, clearly intending to fling it off the bridge. Then Old Man Fish retries his healing effect backed with a pile of LUCK points and completely obliterates the creature.

Mordecai casts *chill touch*. This is clearly a time for some anti-undead magic. The man at arms swings with a noose, but Mordecai evades him and freezes him into chunks of icy flesh. The man at arms falls to pieces in front of him.

Gallfred observes that he can get at the Gruesome Lover if he's willing to fall off the bridge. His blade goes straight into the creature and almost kills it. And then, remarkably, he manages to grab hold of the hanging rope and swing back onto the bridge. Inspired by that attack, Hemp (hanging to the rope further down) draws out his longsword and swings, but the rope is swinging too badly, and he misses. The creature grasps up at Gallfred, who slashes down with *Shadeslayer*. The blade cuts through the Gruesome Lover's wrist. Black tendrils race from the wound down to the Lover's undead heart, crushing it from within.

Old Man Fish heals Gallfred and Hemp. They feel better, but the swamp odors on the bridge become slightly worse.

Hemp tells the others about the box in the stream. Mordecai and Podrick drag it out, and Gallfred picks the lock... whereupon a swarm of horrific vermin pours out of it and attack him. He backs off and gets away from it in time. Old Man Fish is not nearly so fortunate, the swarm clambers all over him and starts to literally eat him alive, consuming 5 STA.

Gallfred comes in with a bag of salt. He douses Old Man Fish with it, saturating all his orifices and driving the vermin away. Old Man Fish vomits, but is otherwise okay.

The coffer contains (in addition to a variety of dead vermin husks) the *Lion Mask*. Hemp guesses that this is his mask because the wind whispered his name. While wearing the mask, he gains:

- +3 to all saving throws
- +7 Hit Points (+1d10)

The mask feels familiar to him, as if he has worn it before. He puts a Lady Ursula-esque wiggle into his walk. Also, being drowned in the muck felt very familiar, as if it had also happened before.

The End of the Session

The session ends with the characters at the (unlocked) gates of the Black Manse. Each character gains 7 XP. Mordecai goes up to Level 3 and gains *arcane affinity*. He casts it immediately and gains a keen understanding of Necromancy (the *death rays* spell [reskinned *scorching ray*], plus bonuses on two other necromantic spells at the cost of a penalty to one spell).