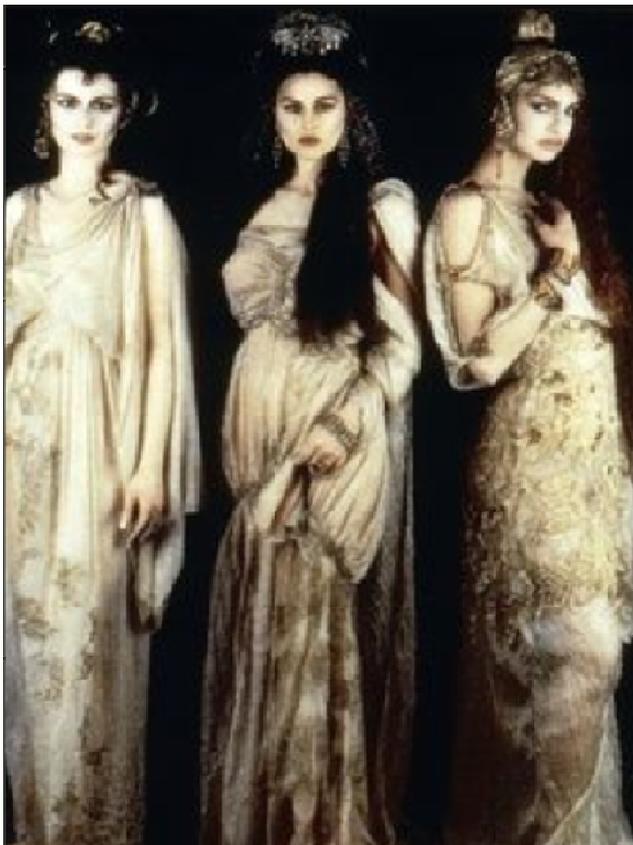


Chapter 2 - Part 3 The slayings in Herkstag

The party head out to investigate the next crime - The killing of 6 children in herkstag
The witnesses for the prosecution now live in a small windmill on the outskirts of Lepidstadt.



"It was terrible I tell thee. The children of the village all vanished one by one, only to return as hideous wee ghosts. Haunting the village did they, but then one day the true culprit could be seen - that terrible beast of Lepidstadt, came in the village bearing wee Ellsa in his arms - laughing all the while was he. We set upon the thing with vigour, but it escaped us all. But those poor innocents, they continue to haunt the village - not content are they till their murderer be dealt with."

"Fine tis true, there was another thing. Of the six children that died, little Karin did die after the beast was driven away. Two days hence in fact, her father heard her screaming but by the time he reached her she was dead, without a mark on her and with no signs of entry to the building."

The party head to herkstag

The farmland has fallen to ruin, and even the well-trodden pathways are obscured now by grass fallen branches. The crops have all gone to seed and the high corn grows everywhere, obscuring all but the most obvious landmarks such as the houses and chapel. Moving about town is more about wading through corn, anything could be hidden beneath it. North of town is a deep bog.



The party approach the house where the murders are said to have occurred. It appears to be in better condition than others in the village. Its door is shut and barred. Thallan 'knocks' open the window. Wingnut and Tamos climb through, Wingnut goes to open the front door while Tamos wanders upstairs. Only to be attacked by a ghost.

It tears chunks out of Tamos...



But is eventually taken down...

An abandoned chapel is next, within are two more ghosts which are taken down but not without Tamos and Alise both sustaining horrific wounds.



In the corner, Alise notices a small emblem, an engraving of an insect, behind the altar. On closer inspection the stone engraving is in fact a button.



She strides over and presses it.
A wall slides back to reveal a way down.

To the northwest the corridor has caved in upon itself. A desk and shelves lay disused. A blood marked book lays open on the desk. Thick fibrous silk (like that of a butterfly's cocoon) is wrapped around the legs of the desk, and thin strands of it cover everything in sight. To the north ... a scraping and wet sound.

Heh. Always finding the dank caves Alise



On closer inspection, The book depicts the human body with siphons sticking out of the flesh. Hurried scribble marks the margins. Words like "blood sipping" and "sacrifice for the gossamer" are particularly dark, but there is no shortage of macabre descriptions.



Further in, webs cocooning small creatures fill the side rooms ... Wingnut pulls forth a torch and lights it, with barely concealed glee he begins to torch the cocoons. Having cleared 3 rooms in this manner the group turn their attention to a section of wall, decayed to the point it could easily be pulled apart. Alise pulls forth her Adamantine sword, the perfect tool for the job.

A strange sound echoes about, like steel being thrust against a masonry wall.

Passing the torch to Tamos, Wingnut peeks around the corner ...



Carion Crown

Opened cocoons litter the floor, desiccated bodies with the dark stain of long-dried blood. This creature is a humongous, bloated parasite stirge that has grown to monstrous proportions. It's thick bulbous body is way too heavy to fly. About the creature lay desiccated bodies of people, still covered in gossamer silks from cocoons.



Alise chops her way through the wall, as she does so, the gaps in the masonry reveal what the creature is trying to get. A gossamer cocoon the size of a humanoid sways by several threads from the roof. Several other cocoons already lay broken on the floor. Spilling out from these are the hands and feet of people.



Alise charges in and tries to sunder the creatures proboscis. But fails.

The creature tries to stab at her with proboscis.

Wingnut takes up a flanking position and begins peppering it with shot. Tamos charges in and slashes with his polearm.

Alise scores a telling blow on the proboscis but fails to fully sever it, taking a horrific blow from the creature while doing so.

Wingnut lines up a shot and the entire body of the creature explodes, caking Tamos and Alise in gore.

From the cocoon comes a fox, heavily drugged. As it comes too, it changes more to a humanoid fox, and finally a humanoid with fox like features...

Koichi



Errrr... ummm... *ahem* ... G'Day?



The lady of graves liberators have come, blessings be upon you



Do you have a name?



Koichi



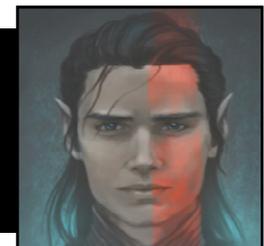
Need a hand up?



A hand offered in friendship should never be rejected



You are most welcome, water?



The conversation continues like this for some time... Eventually, the group leave the crypts and head for the surface.

Heading outside, as the sun begins to set, Wingnut spots something in the hedgerows ... With a yell he takes off towards it, vaulting through the undergrowth. Tamos is quick to follow, the others are not far behind.



This ghostly creature is little more than a dark shape with two flickering pinpoints of light where its eyes should be.

The race is on... Across the muddy marsh.

huff this smelling like a trap to you yet, Wing?



The wraith turns to fight, raking its claws into Tamos' flesh but receiving a blow or two in return. It flees again, calling undead children from the shadows to attack, even as it runs for the top of the hill.

The undead children close in but are quickly destroyed, mainly from a burst of energy channelled by Koichi.

The party head for the top of the hill,

A rotting scarecrow leans on a scythe at the top of this low hill. Its pumpkin face is carved with a leer and a sheep's jaw hangs flaccidly below.

in a large hole the wraith awaits...



Wingnut shimmies down, Alise quickly after ... Koichi remains above ...

The creature, badly wounded makes its final stand, fighting with unmatched fury ... But perishing all the same.

About it, the bodies of five children lie.

Koichi uses a spell and speaks to the creature, asking how it fell asleep.

The child answers, it seems the wraith did kill the children.

The true story has emerged.



The party return to Lepidstadt, bringing the bodies with them.

The bodies are taken to the local temple of Pharama where Alise discusses the situation with the sisters.

Koichi? If you are not too fatigued from our journey, I would appreciate that assistance you offered earlier.



dire pain requires greater gifts ...



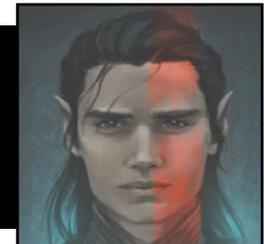
grins it will be attended in time then



withholding gifts leads to despair



whispers a momentary setback... in the meantime, let us attend...



Meanwhile, Alise requests an audience with the beast. Koichi also attends ...



Why did you bring the child back ?



Ellsa...Ellsa. I lived there, hermits tangle by the lake. And Ellsa was friend, but the children were killed by a ghost...one who stole their souls and walks at night. I found Ellsa, she was dead, so I brought her to the village but they chased me with fire and screams.



innocence is deeper than flesh

The beast is left be and the group return to the inn

Carion Crown

Wingnut orders a feast for all and sundry ... The loot from the day is apportioned.



Friends deal with honest arms and generous spirits ... the lady of the grave sends her servant to help, accept at your discretion. To travel with allies provides many blessings.

Oh! You wish to travel with us as a member of our company? Apologies, I misunderstood! Well, I would certainly welcome you! We'd better discuss after the proceedings and also get you up to speed.



The more the merrier! Have another beer.