

## GAME SESSION 85: BAD SLEEP - 12

(played January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Martin, Yvon, Jean-Guy, Sylvain. Austizel played by Sylvain, Macrazbunare by Martin)

*June 19th, 748, 10 pm (day 4)*

They heroes face seven ghosts, all former friends of Van Richten. They are now controlled by Mme Radanovich. Ottélie Farringer is in the center of the group, kneeling and with arms bound.

The voice cackles and she shouts “Attack, my pets! Destroy them!”

The echo of the crone’s voice still reverberates in the room when the battle starts!

Geddar runs toward Petrak and hit him with his mighty axe (-18).

Samuel moves toward Austizel and put his hand on Austizel’s face : his flesh melts! Austizel’s mouth is sealed shut!

*DM note: this Shape Flesh ability usually takes one minute (which I changed to one round, but with a lower DC).*

Van Richten tries to parley with his former friends but most ghosts ignore his attempt. Erasmus answers that they are controlled and can’t do a thing to resist this control.

Exigu throws three arrows at Samuel, and luckily all do reach their incorporeal target.

Ingrid’s shape flicker between young beauty and beaten pulp. She seems unsure at what to do.

The players see a hole being opened in the roof! As if the ghosts were not enough, there are also ghouls and zombies on the roof!

*DM note: not much of a threat compared to the ghosts, but a way to increase pressure ;)*

Erasmus is in full ghost vampire mode. He attacks Petrak but misses.

Austizel moves away and use a dagger to open his mouth (so he can cast spells). He takes damage as well as charisma damage.

Alannthir casts a spell at Varadan, *Baleful Polymorph*. Varadan resists the effect.

Petrak casts *magic circle against evil* on himself, hoping it will disrupt the control over the ghost. But this part of the spell doesn’t change Geddar and Erasmus’s behavior.

Varadan moves and attacks Erasmus.

Claudia Deshanes casts a *ray of exhaustion* at Varadan, who again resists the effect.

Tora attacks Samuel. Macrazbunare casts *magic missile*.

A zombie falls from the roof hole and enters. They see ghouls coming from the elevator shaft.

Dr Harmon Rusheider runs toward Petrak. An aura of cold surrounds him (this former Van Richten friend was killed by a *cone of cold*). Rusheider touches Petrak. Disdainfully, he says “Your mind is so weak” and the attack drains Petrak’s intelligence.

As the heroes fight the ghosts, two more ghosts appear in the room. One is a young teen vistani, that they identify as Radovan Radanavich (the young teenager that Van Richten could not heal in year 706, starting this whole thing). His eyes are haggard.

The other ghost is a very old crone dressed in vistani garb. Madame Radanavich! At first sight, the heroes know that this creature is one of the most evil creature they met. Her shape is radiating with power like heat from a camp fire.

She has Ottelie’s hairs in one hand, a black dagger in the other.

“This foolish spirit thought she could resist me! Ah! How mistaken she was! Now, Van Richten, watch your beloved Ottelie being eradicated forever!”



She pulls the ghostly dagger and slits Ottelie’s throat! Ottelie dies while looking at Van Richten in the eyes, with courage. Ghostly blood flows from her throat and she vanishes ...

Van Richten hurls in rage! He drops the crossbow that was in his hands.

Petrak is hurt again by Geddar, and Austizel’s mouth is again melted shut by Samuel!

Van Richten runs toward Mme Radanovich and his hands closes on Mme Radanavich’s neck, who seem very tangible to him. She continues laughing at his face. “You’re a fool! I will have my revenge!”

The battle goes on. At one point, another ghost appears! Karl the gardener! Being already overworked, the heroes are relieved to see Karl is not fighting the heroes but instead protecting Tora from something he appear to expect from Mme Radanavich.

Moments later, Joseph Bierce, Elise and Gretta, Casimir and Thane (Casimir’s dog) also appear! They all protect one hero.

Erasmus hits Varadan, and Varadan’s blood flow in Erasmus’s mouth, healing him!

Austizel again uses his dagger to open his mouth.

Then Alanthir runs toward the middle of the room and let out a chilling *wail!* Macrazbunare, Exigu and Petrak dies! (*these PCs missed both fear and then death save*).

The manor seems to shake a little, like if reacting to this slaughter...

*DM note : ooops, half of the party dead. TPK on the way! I knew that was going to be difficult but didn't expect this badluck... I had planed two scenarios if that was going to happen. Scenario #2 was that they opened their eyes on Juste's theater scene. But I didn't need this, as scenario #1 worked. Here it goes ...*

The heroes shift their strategy: forget the other ghosts, lets finish Mme Radanavich first, with the hope the other ghosts will leave when she is killed. Varadan runs to the old crone and attack her. Claudia Deshanes throws a *magic missile* at him. Élise Bierce moves near Varadan and act as his protector.

Then Casimir, who was protecting Exigu, says “I give you my life so you can continue” and he vanishes! Exigu opens his eyes!

More zombies and ghouls enter the room. Two zombies run toward the prone Macrazbunare body!

Rusheider drains Tora's intelligence. “You are feeble minded”, Rusheider sneers. (*which is now down to 5 ;)* )

Just moment before she was going to launch a magic ability, they see a last ghost enter the battle! A young woman unclutching Van Richten's hands and pushing him away. It is Van Richten's sister, Maria! The heroes recognize her from a portrait in the house.

She says angrily at Mme Radanavich “You can't have him, not as long as I'm here!”

Van Richten is pushed back and his surprise overcome his anger.

Mme Radanavich has a look of hate in her face when she looks at Maria. “You? No! I won't let you save him! I will have my revenge!”

Mme Radanavich launches a magical wave of grey ghosts that strikes everybody in the room. It appears as a wave of insubstantial spirits, moving from her in a quickly expanding circle.



<https://www.saatchiart.com/art/Painting-BETWEEN-THE-BLACK-AND-DIVINE-1-DARK-BEAUTY-ABOUT-DIVINITY-CREATION-BLACK-HOLE-COSMIC-LIGHT-LIGHTSPACE-BY-O-KLOSKA/58551/4031762/view>

The day ghosts try to protect their chosen hero from this attack. Maria shields Van Richten.

*DM note : an eerie ability I made up. In the adventure, it was lightning. Same damage (10d6)*

Karl moves to Petrak and “gives his life” and vanishes. Petrak opens his eyes.

Van Richten is now very calm. He speaks to the vistani crone “I will not let you fill my heart with hatred again. I refuse to let you this victory. I renounced my hatred and revoked my curse years ago. You are not my sworn enemy, you are nothing to me but a victim of your own hatred”

“How dare you!” shouts Mme Radanavich, “I have already suffered too much! Too late to save yourself or your friends! I will win!”

“No more!”, Van Richten shrieks. “No more killing! You are dead while we are alive! I do not allow you to hurt us!”

“No fear”, Van Richten murmurs. He falls to his knees. “I have no fear. I understand completely now. You have no power over me, witch. I am HOME! No one has power here.”

And he shouts “No one but me!”

The zombies and the ghouls suddenly look at Van Richten in fear, as if only they saw something. They move away from him.

Thane the dog, that Macrazbunare protected from Karl, gives his life to Macrazbunare and vanishes. The druid opens his eyes to see two zombies were going to attack his skull to eat his brain!

Alannthir casts another *Baleful polymorph*, again Varadan resists.

Petrak casts *spiritual weapon* and the force spell attacks Mme Radanavich. Varadan also hits the hateful crone.

The Manor suddenly becomes very agitated and it shakes wildly! But the heroes do not feel this effect! But they see the ghouls and the zombies stagger! As if the manor was shaking off dirt, through the windows, they see zombies falling from the roof to the ground!

But Mme Radanavich launches a second wave of the grey ghosts! Again, the remaining day ghosts try to protect their heroes. But Petrak isn't protected and falls unconscious!

Geddar attacks Tora. Samuel hits Tora, who falls to the ground! (-2 hp).

Macrazbunare cures Petrak.

Van Richten, still on his knees, closes his eyes. “Ghosts!”, he shouts, “Be gone! Leave my house! Rest in peace, and I hope that nobody ever troubles your rest!”

The evil ghosts vanish without a word, and the day ghosts look at Van Richten with gratitude before vanishing too...

Then the house shakes again, and the zombies and the ghouls start to scream! To the heroes' surprise, the undead are being drawn *through* the wooden attic floor, not like in a quicksand, but like if they were drawn *in* the very boards : they hear the bones crunching and ichor and flesh spurts from their legs as they writhe and claw helplessly in the air. After a moment, the sickening noises end, and all that remain from the undead are disgusting puddles of blood and fluids...

Only Madame Radanavich and Radovan remains! She shrieks from rage!

Austizel hits her with a magic missile, and Petrak with his spiritual weapon. Varadan hits her hard too!

But the crone ignores them and runs to Van Richten. He doesn't look scared. She strikes him and he falls to the ground! But she looks like she feels something is wrong and doesn't appear satisfied from killing him.

Austizel hits the crone and her son with a *lightning bolt*, while using the power of the Harrowstone *warden badge* (3/day, ignores the incorporeal random).

They resume their attack on the crone and a *spiritual weapon* finishes her! She vanishes in a scream of rage!

Then they focus on Radovan and destroy him too.

The room is suddenly eerie silent. Even the storm outside seems to quickly fades...

They look at Van Richten and find no vital sign on his body.

Then a ghostly Van Richten appears! He looks a little confused, and looks around.

"Friends, I do not understand all that is going on with me. But I know I have to stay here now. It is my house, it is my fate. My swan song. I accept it. I deeply thank you for their help, but now I ask you to leave. ..."

"Take care of the twins...", he adds.

Petrak asks if he wants them to raise his body from the dead? He answers negatively. "I do not understand everything, but I know I have to stay here".

They tell him they will bury him in the family parcel in Rivalis. He agrees.

They question him more, but he doesn't say much more. When the heroes stop talking to him, he quickly vanishes.

*DM note : the players were then incredulous that Van Richten was gone for good. I had to show them the cover of the boxed set "Bleak House, the Death of Van Richten" ;). That was an emotional moment, the players were sad!*

*If you are familiar with the Boxed set, you will see I changed a lot.*

*1) The role of the "day" ghosts in the adventure was to neutralize the "night" ghosts. So the day ghosts would fight the night ghosts and annihilate one another. There were no stats planned for*

*either set of ghosts. But I thought that was cheesy, and didn't work realistically in the D&D world.*

*But also, as written in the Boxed Set, it feels like the PCs had nothing to do but munch pop corn while watching the chosen end. I wanted them to feel they did something.*

*So I gave stats to everybody, and planned a more realistic fight.*

*See the night ghosts basic description in session 82.*

*The "good" ghosts were low hit points ghosts, but they were able to protect a PC and neutralize a magic spell from Mme Radanavich half of the time. Also, if needed (my TPK scenario #1), they could "give their life" to a PC during the battle and raise him from the dead.*

*Of course, I needed a well detailed plan for the battle (having 9 evil NPCs to handle, plus 8 "good" ghosts, plus Van Richten, plus the House and the ghouls and the zombies), so the DM work didn't slow the battle.*

*I had a battle sheet with all NPC initiative order already planned (only the PCs' to add), and that also worked well to quicken the game (if anyone wants them, let me know ☺)*

*2) The battle "plan" :*

*Round 1 – fight with the night ghosts. End of round one : Mme R appear and kills Ottélie.*

*Round 2 – VR attacks Mme R. The day ghosts appear and are helpful. End of round two : Mme R blasts the room with her wave of ghosts. Maria VR appears and separates VR from Mme R.*

*Round 3 – VR calms down and refuses to let go to anger. This enrages Mme R.*

*Round 4+ – VR takes control and frees all ghosts. The House eliminates the ghouls and the zombies. So it is now a battle only with Mme R + Radovan. Mme R kills VR. The PCs finishes the Radanavich. VR appear as a ghost.*

*The gamble on my part was that the PCs would last until round 4, until they could fight Mme R alone.*

*3) The ending. As I said before, I wasn't fond of the random part for the end. So as you saw, I merged the best parts (IMHO) of the four scenarios to melt into one cinematic and hopefully cool end.*

*Without them noticing when it happened, the heroes are now in an old dusty house, filled with crates and old furniture... The roof is whole. They are back to present day they think.*

*They are eager to leave this place and find their horses at the carriage house. They are a little thin from hunger but they never were short of water. They let the horses eat and they go to Rivalis (30 minutes ride).*

*At 11h30 pm, they are at the Traveler's End Inn. They sleep the night.*

*June 20th, 748, 8 am*

They arrange the funerals of Van Richten at the cemetery. The cemetery keeper, Erdar Eaglecut, tells them to meet with the family notary, Mr Oriorin, an old halfling. They ask him if their name is on the testament (not for the money, but if Van Richten left them a task to do). Oriorin tells them it will take a week to unearth the document, and proof check it. They agree that should there be anything he will write the heroes in Mordent, where the twins are too.

The heroes send a message to Ivana Boritsi about Van Richten's death. They explain he died while trapped in a plane by his old enemy, Madame Radanavich, and add a few more details to satisfy her. They send it through the local Boritsi Trading Co. office.



### *Special report to the Boritsi Trading Co.*

*From June 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup>, Van Richten and our group were trapped in the Richten Haus, about 30 minutes at the north east of Rivalis, by the power of Madame Radanovitch although we meet her as a ghost only the last night of that period.*

*On that night, in the attic of the Richten Haus, we all were confronted to Madame Radanovich and eight ghosts that were controlled by her. All those ghosts were former friends of Van Richten. They all have their spectral weapons drawn, and their eyes gleam with malevolence ready to kill us.*

*Those controlled ghosts were Alannthir, Ingrid once his wife, Ottélie Farringer, Geddar, Samuel, Erasmus once his son, Claudia Deshanes, Dr. Harmon Rusheider. Also Madame Radanavich was there with his son Radovan, the one that Van Richten could not save.*

*The battle was hard and at the end, before we killed the ghostly Madame Radanovitch, she killed Van Richten.*

*When the battle stopped, we saw Van Richten as a ghost near his mortal body. He told us he doesn't want to be raised and he wants to stay forever in his house.*

*So we bring his body back to Rivalis where we buried it in the local cemetery with the proper rituals. The possessions of Van Richten were given to notary Oriorin.*

*More of this sad episode on our fourth report.*



Exigu buys a +1 bow, and they sell a rapier +1/+3 vs human (profit of 6 000 gp).

A little before noon, they bury Van Richten with the proper rituals, led by Petrak and the local anchorite priest, Brom Grevotsk. The possessions of Van Richten are given to notary Oriorin.

The heroes say a few good things about the passed scolar and mentor. They are surprised that word of mouth worked and a group gathered for the funerals, of which a saddened Gayle Tallgallows. To her, they give more details of the final days of van Richten.



After the funerals, they break the *ghost trap*. The ghost of Davvyd appears! He is confused, and doesn't appear to remember much of what happened at Van Richten's estate. He asks for the current year and say he died 7 years ago. The heroes's explications only appear to confuse him and he vanishes ...

At night, the topic of the day at the inn is the death of the famous hero. People drink to his resting in peace.

*June 21th, 748*

Travel from Rivalis to Ludendorf. They stay at the Breaking Wave Inn.

*June 22th, 748*

They take a boat they already boarded, the *Black Pelican*, with Captain Howe. He is going directly to Mordentshire, without stopping at Port-a-Lucine (-60 gp fee).

*June 23th, 748, 7 pm*

They arrive in Mordentshire and go to Daniel Foxgrove's house. They find him in conversation with Lord Jules Weathermay. Soon, the twins are there too.



The heroes bring them the sad news. Everybody has watery eyes. They speak highly of their passed friend. They ask a servant to fetch Miss Polk, the old lady tending Van Richten's estate, and tell her the sad news too. The old lady is shaken.

The twins are however quickly in their usual enquiry mode and they ask a lot of questions about the last days of Van Richten, Mme Radanavich's plans, the estate in the mists and the exact words Van Richten said while he was a ghost. They wonder if they should visit the estate to try to talk to him.

The twins wonder if Van Richten is in peace? They say they will pay the local priest to make some divination spells about it.

Later in the evening, Laurie shows them the brooch she is wearing : the blaustein gem sparkles! Laurie says that Raoul Morrel in Blaustein wrote him many letters and they are intriguing. He found out that Laurie is now the owner of a Blaustein gem and is flattered that such a rare gem now belongs to a distinguished lady. The heroes warn her not to go there alone. She answers that she isn't that foolish, and that she would make the trip only with Andrez Weissritter or with the heroes.

It is a long evening where Daniel opens his finest bottles. The heroes go to sleep shortly after the twins.

*June 24th, 748, am*

Early morning, the heroes find Jules and Daniel are still in the salon, still discussing.

The heroes say their *au revoir* and leave early. They stop at James Martigan's church to say hello and bring him the sad news. Tara is not there, probably still sleeping.

They travel to Levkarest.

*June 27th, 748, 7 pm*

They stop and get rooms at the Defraya Manor Inn. In the dining room, they listen for rumours and to learn what is the talk of the town. Many talk about art and galleries, of a specific artist, and a few about the woman vanishing.

"Ezra punishes the unfaithful, and those women surely deserved it", says one man. A woman replies "The church's top clergy hides something sinister, I do not trust this masked priest." He is speaking about Severin?

They also learn that many dark haired woman have discolored their hairs, or cut them short, to differentiate them from the victims' look.

Later they hear one patron saying "The Cathedral was built on an old forgotten cemetery and it is cursed!"

Another, a bit drunk, says of the vanished women "may be they were looking too much like the Black Widow, you know?" but his friends tell him to stop talking about *that...*

They go to sleep, with a watch guard turn.

*June 28th, 748, am*

They go to the Cathedral to meet Nicoletta Ladubay, Petrak's superior. They are again struck by the Church's size and beauty.



They are asked to go in a meeting room in the second floor, and Johann Severin is there too, with Nicoletta. They are pleased to meet the heroes again, and have gratitude that they will now start the enquiry.

Nicoletta "Thank you for taking care of this problem. The church did an investigation, but our means are limited: we do not want anyone in town to know that the clergy are investigating, not to panic people. You must never say that we have mandated you. Be extremely discreet!"



"Praesidius Levin Postaya wants to hear from this special inquiry. We all are very troubled by it, and the repercussions to the church. The number of penitents goes down every month, especially among women."



"Please report to me or Severin often, as the Praesidius will also often ask us about the investigation".

"The Cathedral was inaugurated in May 6<sup>th</sup>, 746, for the Feast of the First Epiphany. The mass started inside the building early as 740, but the final stone was set in May 746 and that is when it was officially inaugurated."

"The first vanishing happened in July 746. And there have been at least 19 since. For long it was a rare event, but now we are at 3 a month! All except two disappeared in the streets around the Cathedral. Two vanishing happened while the women were at home. We think most vanishing happened in a 500 meters radius, or a maximum of one kilometer from the Cathedral. Also, those happen at night."

Tora: "did you find any bodies? What happened?" Nicoletta "No, these woman vanish! No body was ever found. Once or twice a little blood in the street but we are unsure if it is related"

"All vanishing are young woman. They all have more or less the same look : long black hair; pale eyes, often blue. We have a list of 19 victims, but there might be more, as Levkarest is a religious center and we do not keep track of all visitors entering and leaving the town."

"It would be nice if you could solve the problem before the July 15<sup>th</sup>, an important worship day."

Tora : "we heard a rumour that the church is built on a cemetery?" "Nonsense. I think more of a maniac roaming the streets.", replies Johann. "Perhaps", Nicoletta quickly adds, "we don't know"

Petrak asks about Ivana. The priests are a little uneasy but Nicoletta says “She never publicly commented on the matter, we do not know what her thoughts on this are.”

“She is quite pious. She comes at the church 2 or 3 times a week, and on all important ceremonies. She never misses one. She is a generous donator to the church. She has her private bench.”

“The vanished woman all looked the same, but they had very different backgrounds, from prostitute to fresco painter to young priest apprentice.”

Nicoletta will give them a master key for the church, and a pass explaining they can have access anywhere, should they need to enter when it is closed. However, you cannot enter the Vaults or the Praesidius office. If you need to go there, arrange it with us. The pass is good for the Cathedral, the walled compound north of it and the “Annex”, where the young priests live.

“Do not abuse of this privilege!”

When Johann says that there are no links between the Ezra iconography and Ivana, Petrak notices Nicoletta rolling her eyes ...

## GAME SESSION 86: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE IN BORCA – 1

(played February 10th, 2019. Martin, Yvon, Jean-Guy. Austizel played by Yvon, Exigu by Jean-Guy, Macrazbunare by Martin)

*DM note – so at the last game here we started another cycle of adventures, after the long chase-after-the-Whispering-Way-evil-cult-to-stop-them (19 sessions), then the Bleak House asylum-entrapment then Richten Haus haunted house (12 sessions), I wanted to go somewhere else so my campaign isn't always the same style.*

*I always like when the players are in a large city, it's vibrant and full of life and possible dangers. I like to plan and DM these city adventures. I remember fondly the Evil Eye part in Karina and all the other times when they found themselves in that city. Also those fun adventures in Martira Bay. For the current cycle of adventures, I wanted to go back to a large city, and have a campaign with more intrigue than dungeon crawl.*

*So I planted the seeds of the Gargoyle of the Great Cathedral a long time ago (session 13 in 2005, we are at 86<sup>th</sup> 13 years real time later!), and decided to prompt the players to investigate this recently. They went to the Cathedral to petition for a raise dead for Kendra Lorremor, which the church agreed in exchange by a promise that the heroes would go back to investigate the vanishing women (session 73).*

*When planning this cycle, as usual when I plan that kind of cycle, I threw all the possible NPCs they could meet in Levkarest + dread possibilities on a sheet of paper, made some interesting links, and decided to weave a dense net of adventures around the women vanishings. So I made a plot involving the Gargoyle (the main adventure), of course, but I added as many red herrings and cool side treks as possible. After that adventure, they will know Levkarest more than Ivana herself.*

*As usual, I also mapped the city of Levkarest, Misericordia and the Cathedral, from all canon and fan made material, which gave me more adventure ideas.*

*I thank you all who collaborated on the FoS boards, you will see your ideas here and there, and you know who you are, Really, thank you, I love this message board.*

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*June 28th, 748, 11 am, Johann Severin office*

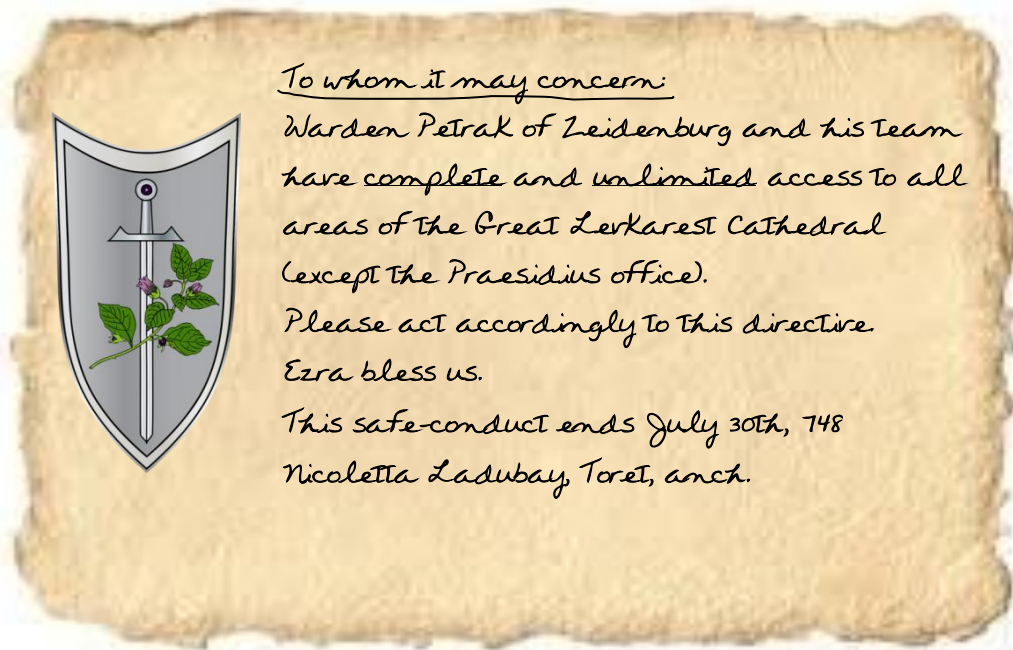
They ask if they can buy healing potions. Nicoletta says she will open the Church reserve for them.

They also ask if they could buy or trade wizard spells. To that, Nicoletta and Johann can't answer positively for sure: there are no magic school in Borca, and brother Dulocq (a well known priest/wizard) is now in Darkon. Johann know that a few anchorites also have low levels in wizardry, but that low level proficiency surely would not be of any help to the heroes.

“We suspect”, he adds with a certain smile, “that one or two are much more proficient than what they admit, but ... they won't tell us”.

The priests give the heroes a map of Levkarest, showing all street names and a few well known places. Johann drew on it a circle of 500 meters (1 500 feet) around the Great Cathedral, because it is where they believe most of the vanishings happened.

Nicoletta also gives the players their pass to open all doors in the Church, as well as a master key that opens every lock (but the Praesidius office and the Vaults).



Then Severin puts on the table another paper “here’s the list of vanished persons. I suggest we pass through the list to let you know what we found on them”

List of vanished woman

1 Juillet 746 Ninon Lebeau	7 Nov 747 Laëtitia Chevalier
2 Sept 746 Godeleine Bâtteux	8 Dec 747 Ophélie Crépin
3 Mars 747 Jeannine Crevier	9 10 Jan 748 (2) Roseline Bechard, Eulalie Chapelle
4 Mai 747 Radegonde Barbet	11 12 Mars 748 (2) Carla Dutertre, Ségolène Lefevre
5 Juillet 747 ? inconnue	13 14 15 Avril 748 (3) Isabelle Courreur, Julia Bouchard, Noémie Gilson
6 Sept 747 Marté Gallois	16 17 Mai 748 (2) Éléonore Roatta, Ariane Trémaux
	18 19 juin 748 (2) Rifla Moonclaw, Yelreth Sturetha

“There are 19 woman vanishing so far, and I repeat, there could be more”, Severin says, “remember that Levkarest is a major trade center, as well as a religious pole, so we could have missed a number of traveling women”.

And he details the known fact about these women: 1 was a fresco painter – her last job was at the Cathedral. Number 2 is an embroiderer who lived very close to the Cathedral. 3 is a house wife, very pious, 4 is a silk dyer apprentice, who just came to the Cathedral to give a gift for an answered prayer, 5 is unknown, from out of town, an Inn owner informed us of her vanishing. 6 was a clay turner who cursed a lot including inside the church. 7 was a housewife, 8 was a perfumer, 9 was a prostitute, 10 a maid servant very pious, 11 another prostitute who just died her hairs black, 12, 13 was a maid servant, 14 a prostitute, 15 a housewife, 16 a well known restaurant owner, 17 a baker, 18 another housewife and 19 was dear to us, as she was an apprentice anchorite from Nova Vaasa. She was living in the Annex until her disappearance 10 days ago.

There are two cases (15 - Noémie Gilson, 16 - Éléonore Roatta) where it is believed that the person has disappeared from her bedroom.

They thank Nicoletta and Severin and they are back inside the church’s nave. In the choir, the tall statue of Ezra dominates everything. They know that this statue shines by day and gleams softly by night.

The heroes decide to start with the last vanishing case, and they go to the Annex (a two floor large building where young anchorites have their room, on the other





side of the street from the Cathedral).



At the Annex entrance, they are greeted by a young man whose name is Thierry Levasseur. The heroes tell him that they would like to talk to friends of Yelveth Sturetha, the last woman vanishing. They agree to come back at 4 pm, so Levasseur has time to gather these friends.

They go back to the Defraya manor, where Austizel copy the spell *disguise self* in his spellbook, from MacRazbunare's spell book.

At four pm, they are back to the Annex, where Levasseur is waiting with three young girls, all wearing anchorites robes. They notice one of them also carry a chain mail and a sword. These are Albercia Jacquemond, Athelina Gaudin, and Helisabeth Riqueti (the one with a chain mail).

The heroes ask the grieving girls about their friends last hours, and if she did meet somebody new in the days before. They say the day she vanished, Yelveth took a walk to the Peace Park It is a place she often went.

They explain that Peace Park is a large park inside the town, near the Cathedral. It has animation (many clowns during the day, and street performers, as well as music). There are many families gathering there during the day and early at night, and it becomes a more adult only place from an hour after dusk until about ten, when most people leave the park. The place is well known for single person as a place to meet other people.

« I was supposed to go with her », adds a grieving Athelina.

So Yelveth went to the park to listen to music, as she loved to do. They do not know if she was meeting someone.

The heroes ask if by any chance that day she had with her a unique object so they could locate her (“no”), or a weapon? « No, she was of the pacific branch of Ezra », answers Helisabeth.

They thank the girls and tell them to contact them if they think of something new.

After, they ask Levasseur to see Yelveth's possessions. He brings a bag with clothing (anchorite robes), books (Dead Travel Fast serie of romance books), perfume and a few knick knacks. There is also paper for writing letters as well as received letters from Nova Vaasa. Varadan smells the perfume to remember it. They keep a robe for the smell “so the dog can track her”, they explain.

They walk back toward the Defraya manor. On the way there, they see a black and gold horse drawn carriage with the Boritsi coats of arms on it. Through a window, they see Nostalia looking at them with a hint of surprise on her face.

They try to discuss with the owners of the Defraya Manor. The elderly couple of former nobles still have a very aristocratic air to them, even if their noble clothes are a little worn out and if they do everything at the inn.

Varadan asks Mr Defraya about the vanishings and of his thoughts about it. "I heard many hypothesis", he said, "and some imply people of power. I would invite you to make your own enquiry". It is clear he doesn't want to talk about it. They do not insist.



During supper, Varadan hears a woman saying that she heard at the butcher shop that the ermordenungs kill every woman that looks like Ivana so she remains the only one with that pure look...

They also hear that the annual event "The Galleries walk the Park" will be hold in a few days. For a night, the galleries take some of their art to the Peace park for an open air gallery.

The heroes discuss the subject of Ivana's ermordenungs. What is their goal in life?

At 7 pm, they go to Peace Park. The park is large and there is a crowd. They hear violin music from an elevated stand, as well as music from a horse carousel. Families are ending their picnic or enjoying coffee or wine. They notice a few ermordenungs in the crowd.

In a quiet place of the park, they see from afar Johann Severin talking to an elegant woman (tall, dark hairs), and they appear to know each other well.

A few minutes before 8 pm, people start surrounding the music stand. The diva Miss Isslisa is presented. She sing a few songs and the head violinist tell the crowd that Miss Isslisa will be in concert at the Boritsi Music Hall in two days, with a prompt to buy tickets as soon as possible, "as they are going out fast".

During the concert, Johann and the woman stayed on the bench, which was close enough to hear the music and the diva's singing.

Then Austizel notice in the crowd Nostalia Romaine and Clothilda Taroyan, with a third woman ermordenung. They are watching the heroes and obviously talking about them...

The heroes walk forward to meet them. Nostalia has a stunning look, in a revealing white dress, while Clothilda is again dressed in green, her usual choice of colour.





The girls present the third woman as Cassandra Gide, without saying more, and she shakes hand with the heroes (with gloves).

Nostalia tells them she was informing Clothilda of the death of Van Richten (the heroes wrote a report to Nostalia from Rivalis). That news surprised them a lot.

Clothilda asks “do you think he could be coming back?”, and Petrak says they do not think so: “no, his spirit told us he didn’t want to be raised from the dead”.

Nostalia ask the heroes if they have their tickets to the Miss Isslisa concert. They say no. Nostalia tells them she will find tickets for them. “At which Inn are you?”, she asks.

“The Defraya Manor”, they reply.

To which the girls’ expression change to disdain. “You should not stay there”, Nostalia says, “the kitchen is notoriously *unclean*. You should go to the Delignan Inn, I could have the doors opening there for you, or at least at the Rosebud Thorn Inn”.

*DM note: the Delignan Inn is a noble-only Inn, where a new customer needs to be introduced by a known local noble.*

The heroes politely decline and say they will stay at the Defraya Manor.

“Oooh, if you like eating cockroaches”, she sneers.

“We now have to go”, she says, “if you need to see me, come see me at my place”, and she points toward a very nice white manor on Crimson Rd, overlooking the water canal. “It was a pleasure seeing you”. The three girls walk in the manor direction.

The heroes realise with dread that Nostalia’s manor is within the 500 meters circle from the Cathedral...

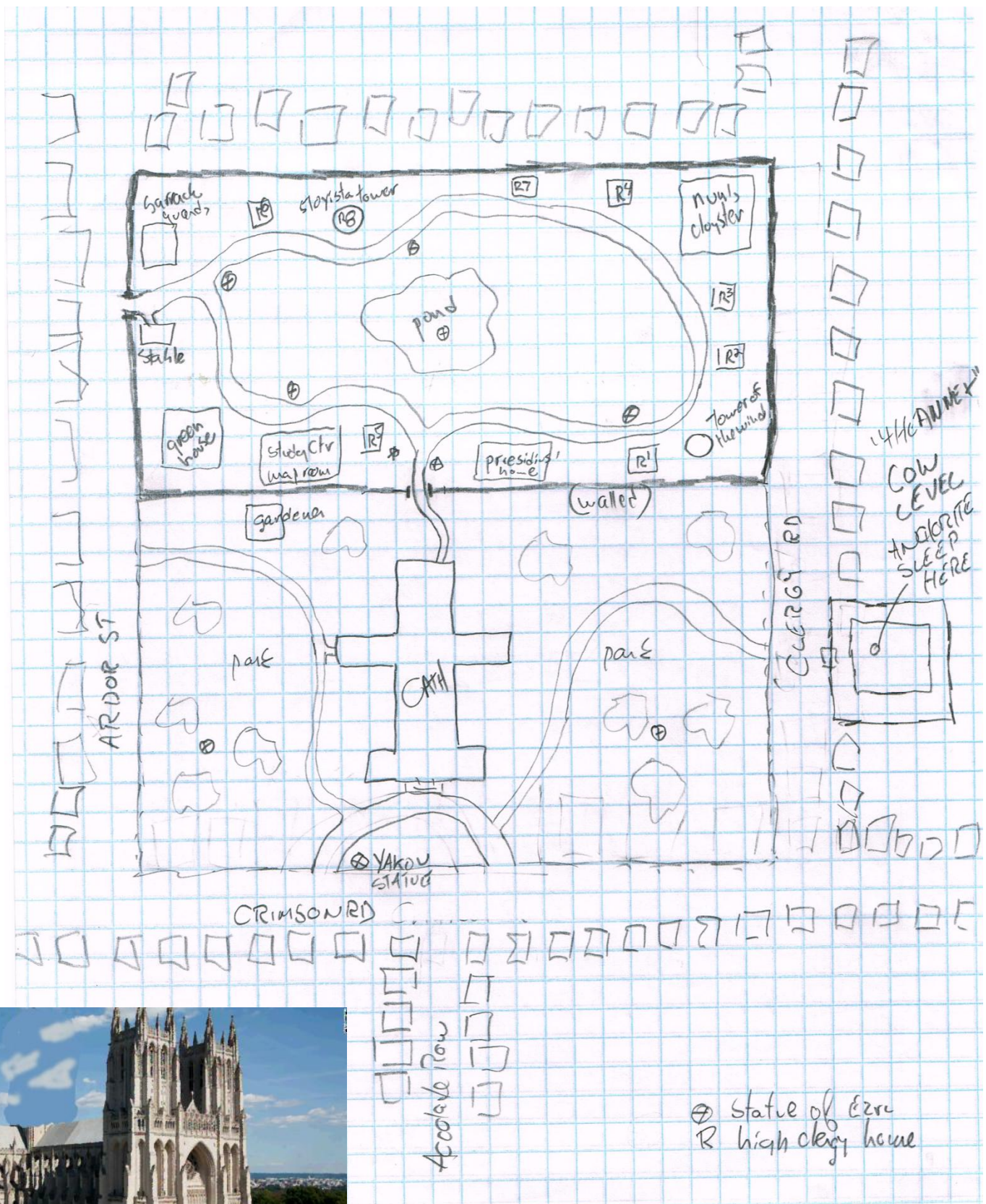
At 9pm, they look to the bench where Severin was seated. He isn’t there anymore but the woman still is. She talks briefly to another man, but it appears as a brief polite talk.



She walks out of the park and they follow her from a distance (as she has the vanishing women profile) to her home in Teshher St. Her home is outside the 500 meters range. They leave this street.

They walk the streets in the 500 meter circle from the Cathedral. They notice there are many dark alleys between buildings.

At one place, they find Tinfelia’s Tavern, where many prostitutes seem to be hanging. Not far from there, they find a short street called Chipies’ lane. It is filled with brothels. There are many girls in the street, as well a few clients, often wearing a cloak to hide their face. They also notice a few drug dealers.



⊕ Statue of Ezra  
 R high clergy house

Tora talks with prostitutes, and after waving their offer “to go inside and have fun”, asks about Carla Dutertre, one of the prostitute on the vanished list. It seems Carla owned money to many people, including the prostitutes they are talking to.

They then enquire about Roseline Béchar. One of the girls says Roseline was perhaps one of most beautiful girl to offer their ware on Chippies Lane – a tall girl, classy, dark hairs, and striking blue eyes. “Roseline wasn’t from Levkarest, and she once told me she was from Karina. She clearly had trouble there and was looking to make enough money to do something else”.

Then one of the prostitutes can’t keep her anger in check and she explodes “but we all know who kills these women, do we? It’s that bastard Ivan, the Black Widow’s cousin!”

Many prostitutes walk away, as if they do not want to get involved in this discussion.

“Everytime he comes around”, she continues angrily, “he beats the women, and once he even killed one. And there is nothing we can say or do about it... The bastard!”

The other girls silently approve. “Kill him and you will get laid every night for a year for free”, says one.

It is very late and they go back to Defraya Manor to sleep.

*June 29th, 748, morning*

In the morning, before breakfast, Varadan enters the kitchen with the excuse to tell the cook of a special order. Mr Defraya listens to him patiently as Varadan (the werewolf) describes a meat-heavy dish he’d like to have.

Meanwhile, Varadan notices the kitchen is pristine clean. He tells Mr Defraya “I’m relieved, Nostalia Romaine told me the kitchen here was full of cockroaches”.

Mr Defraya slowly sighs but says nothing.

At Varadan’s continued questions, he explains “Listen, our house was once of the elite noble house of Levkarest, but we fell in disgrace about ten years ago. We do not know what we did wrong. Perhaps it is linked to their birthday parties? As you know, both cousins were born the same day, and each year they throw a birthday party on that same day, Ivana in Misericordia, Ivan in Degravo. It is physically impossible to do both. Which party do you choose to go if you get an invitation from both? Perhaps trying alternation, one different place each year, wasn’t a good idea...”

“But we are still alive, and that makes us think life is good.”

Then they hear a rumor that another woman vanished last night! They quickly go to the Cathedral and hear the following: Océane Beaumont is a candle maker. She delivered last night a batch of candles (with Ezra’s shield printed on it) at the Cathedral, with the help of porters. Then she stayed on to pray, may be half an hour more. They understand her husband (Eugène Beaumont) is the one that reported the vanishing. He is a meat butcher at a well known meat shop on Crimson Rd. He looks a rude man, with bloody apron. “She wasn’t there this morning when I awoke”. He looks (and smells) like he did spend the night drinking.



Meanwhile, in front of the Grand Cathedral, they notice the statue of Yakov is being cleaned of mildew and accumulated dust.

They walk between his house and the Cathedral, but find nothing. They go at the butcher shop (“the Busy Pig”), where they find the whole team of butchers spent last night drinking for one’s anniversary. One adds that Beaumont was sleeping in the tavern at 9pm, when they switched to another place (and with hints that makes them understand the butchers went to Chippiies Lane). Beaumont could not be awoken so they left him there. At the tavern, the Greedy Centipede, they learn that the morning crew awoke Beaumont at 7 am.



So Beaumont lied, he wasn’t at the house during the night. Why?

To go back to Beaumont’s house (it is within the 500 meters range) and they enter it with the butcher. In the room, the bed is still properly made. There are no traces in the kitchen that someone ate there last night. So Océane probably didn’t come home at all after her delivery.

They walk again the road between the Beaumont house and the Cathedral, and they enter in every alley in between. In one alley, they find a wax candle in the dirt! It bears the Ezra shield! They look at the traces in the dirt: a women entered the alley, and then trampled on for a moment. The traces do not exit the alley.

Varadan smells the track and can say these are Océane’s. Tora tries *ghostsight*; nothing, then they cast *See Ethereal Resonance*; nothing. But they know a simple murder or kidnapping would not leave much traces in the ether, only major events with a lot of negative emotions do.

They go on the roof and find nothing more.

They go back to the church to report this information to Nicoletta. They enquire about the candles. “We sell them here, but they are somewhat expensive, so do not expect to find one of these in every home”.

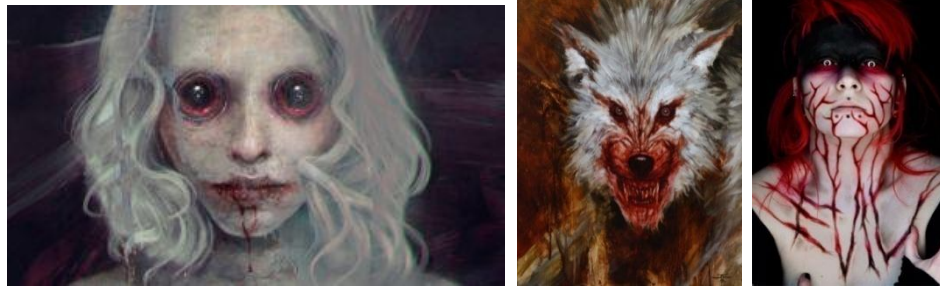
They plan to cast *locate object*. They first walk to make sure the Cathedral (with its lot of branded candles) is outside the reach of the spell, and cast it. They have five directions. They pinpoints all five: two houses, Nostalia’s manor, an art gallery on Gallery Row and a fifth one, more south. The spell ends and that last location remain imprecise.

They inspect the first two houses. The first is empty. Exigu opens its lock and enter. In this house, he finds a shrine to Ezra with a wax candle. The second house’s chimney is smoking, so it is probably not empty. Exigu stealthily looks at a window and sees another shrine with candle.

They forget Nostalia’s manor for the moment, and they go back to the gallery. It is called Spaima. It is different from the others: there is no showcase in the front to show a sample of what’s inside. Tora notices the letters on the name of the Gallery have small rivulets of red, like if they were written in blood...

*DM note: the horrible Dezuni’s gallery, from the cut material of Gaz 4 (“Dread Possibility: Anything for the Muse”). Let’s see how deep the players will enter its mystery...*

Exigu opens a lock on a door in the alley. They enter the gallery, to find disturbing debauchery in art: all the canvas have something depicting blood... No wonder they do not have a showcase on the street!



Varadan enters another room, where the same man and the same woman are the subject of a dozen paintings. Who are they?

They decide to cast *detect magic* inside the gallery. They see a spell on the main front door (faint abjuration). “Like the *alarm* spell”, they think. But more troubling is that the same magical aura is also on the alley door they opened... They decide to leave quickly!

They leave toward the canal, while Exigu remains in the street to watch. He sees a man and a woman ermordenungs at the windows on the second floor, looking around the house. The woman looks in the direction the heroes fled. Have they seen the heroes? The man opens the front door of the gallery, and walks around the building, like if searching for something. Then he enters back in the gallery while leaving the front door opened.

*Noon*

The heroes go back to the Grand Cathedral to talk to Nicoletta. They ask about the Spaima gallery. “It is owned by Elgin and Rozalina Dezuni, a very odd couple. Their art is extremely peculiar, always very provocative.”

“Are they religious?”, Petrak asks. “No, I do not think so, we rarely see them in church”, she answers. The heroes wonder what the use is for them of an Ezra candle.

They remember that Garrett Tallgallows is a knowledgeable person in Levkarest and they try looking for him, without success. They go in the slum district, and ask a halfling about Garrett. “Probably asleep, he is never seen before 5 pm”, the halfling answers before resuming his route.

They go at the Peace Park and watch the Spaima gallery from there.

At one point, they see Nostalia Romaine walking toward them! Her light black dress makes everyman look at her.

“Gentlemen, it’s a pleasure to see you again. I wanted to see you. Ivana is worrying "as she saw a large monster at her window" last night, and she feels she needs protection. Unfortunately, the Jongleur is away for a month "for family business”, as he does once in a while. So Ivana is asking you for protection.”

“A carriage will pick you up tonight at 6 pm in front of the Cathedral. Questions?”



The stunned heroes are speechless at first.

Then Petrak ask her about the Dezuni couple. “they are special, an odd ... couple”, she answers. The heroes feel she is bitter about it. Perhaps the Dezuni have something that isn’t possible for her... She leaves them and walks back toward her manor...

At the end of the day, they inform Nicoletta of their invitation to Misericordia. She is surprised but replies nothing.

At 6 pm sharp, the black and gold carriage bearing the Boritsi coats of arms (the Ezra shield, and a harpy, known symbol of *ferocity under retaliation*) stops in front of the Cathedral. They enter in it, and without a word, the driver brings them across town to the ferry, to the small city of Caina on the other side of the Luna river, then to Misericordia’s entrance.



At the entrance gate (with the same Boritsi coat of arms), they meet Lucretio Napoli (ermordenung). He introduces himself as the chief of the guards. He asks the heroes for their names and compares it to a list in a notebook.

“Miss Boritsi is waiting for you. We guard the estate, but normally I do not cover the security *inside* the manor, it is the Jongleur’s task. But he is not here at the moment. If you need, you can whistle for us if you need reinforcements inside, we’ll see what we can do.” He looks uncomfortable with the situation.



The gate opens and the carriage moves toward the front entry. The driver, who hasn’t said a word during the whole trip, opens the door in silence. He then walks to the entrance and rings a bell, three times, while the heroes exit the carriage. He then embarks the carriage and leaves to the carriage house.



The heroes are left to wait alone to the front of the grand manor.

They see a few antique pagan gods statues in the lawn outside (men with head of a dog or a bull).

After a good 3-4 minutes wait, they are surprised to see Ivana herself opens the door. She wears a white dress, sober hair, little jewelry, and a deep red lipstick.

“Come in”, she says softly.

She leads the heroes to a comfortable salon, where a table with snacks awaits (choice of cheeses, delicatessen, bread, tomato salad with bread and olives, wine and cider). She sits on a couch and waves the heroes to sit.

She is charming and looks like an innocent rich girl, perhaps a little spoiled.



“I gave the servants their night off”, she says. “We are alone.”

*DM note : the players’s face when they understood they were alone with Ivana in her castle!*

“But before they leave I asked them to prepare a cold dinner. Please serve yourself.”

She takes a plate and tosses in salad and cheese, and pours herself a glass of red wine. The heroes do the same. They find the food to be exquisite.

“Thank you for kindly accepting my invitation. I read your reports, and I knew that I could count on you for this ... unusual request”

“Do not worry, I’m known to be very generous with people who are loyal to me.”

“My personal protector, the Jongleur, is traveling for family reasons. And I can’t count on Napoli for this task, he and his men have little experience in the supernatural.”

“You do. I know it.”

“Yesterday and three days ago I was awakened by a noise at my window. On the second floor. Yesterday I looked through the blinds and saw a *monster*. It was dark and I did not see well, but there was a *monster* at my window.”

She describes it as black (or was it the darkness?), very tall, humanoid, large yellow eyes. It flies with wings.

“Catch, destroy or defeat this creature! I do not want to feel threatened by it anymore.”

“Be my body guards from 6 pm to 6 am. During the day, you do what you want. At 6pm, I’ll be here, or in Levkarest for an event, and will let you know where to reach me.”

“Know that after all events, I’m heading back to Misericordia. So will you. I mostly never sleep in Levkarest, it stinks.”

Let me show you around. And she pours herself a glass of wine, and glass in hand, she elegantly shows them the first floor of the Misericordia estate. There are guest rooms, the large ballroom (a place they’ve already seen) and a multitude of small comfortable salons. Everything smells of money, lots of it.

At one point, they pass through a room where paintings are exhibited. “That painting over there? It was made by a fine young artist, a true prodigy. But sadly he wasn’t very good with money. Tsk, such a terrible end, but still one must always pay their debts no matter who they be... don’t you agree? Its value has tripled since.”

In a corner, a dressing room and a hairdressing chair. Then a luxurious bathroom. In this room, she shows them a staircase going up. “That is where my bedroom is”, but she doesn’t show it to the heroes. “Normally, you won’t need to get there.”

*DM note: she lied, her bedroom is elsewhere. The first night, she wants to see if she can trust the heroes not to rampage her manor ☺*



“When outside for the watch, do not check only this window, or onlookers could understand this is my bedroom.”

“Do you like this wine? It’s from an Invidian winery. My cellar is very well stocked, not like the horrible vinegary wines my cousin is drinking at his estate. These would kill anyone.”

At 9pm, she leaves the heroes for the night. “If you need me, I’m up there. Good night”

The heroes position themselves outside, all around Misericordia, for a night watch.

Nothing happens.

*June 30th, 748, morning*

At 5h30, they see a large carriage coming to the gate, and from it exit six maids. They enter the manor.

At 6am, the heroes take a guest room and they sleep.

8am : Petrak learns his divine spells.

At 8h30, there is a knock at the door. A stern woman is there. “My name is Anne-Claire Valloton, I’m chief stewardess for Misericordia and Ivana’s personal assistant. Here’s coffee and croissants for breakfast. I was told to tell you the carriage is at your availability should you need to go back to Levkarest during the day.”

Varadan asks if it was possible to get some ham for breakfast.

They do nothing but sleep during the day. Another snack is brought around 2 pm, this time with ham.

At 6, Valloton comes a last time to tell them that dinner is served in the ballroom. They follow her and see that Ivana is already seated. She greets them. Her black dress is irresistible and the lipstick on her full lips is very appealing.

The servants bring them a lamb stew. It is excellent.

“We are going to the concert tonight”, Ivana says. She is charming and makes conversation with the heroes. She is especially kind to Varadan, even if Varadan tells her the music they will hear tonight isn’t his preferred kind. She tries to convince him of the beauty of the opera music.

At one point, Nostalia enters the room, and salutes the heroes.

Nostalia, at Ivana: “Excuse me my Lady but these require your attention.”

Ivana smiles at the heroes, “Please excuse me for a moment”

Ivana reads through the papers, a frown slowly appearing.

Ivana says to Nostalia “This is not acceptable. Such a lack of clarity. I have warned them of my distaste for poor writing.”

Nostalia takes the papers back. “Shall pass on your displeasure?”



Ivana sighs. “No, they have been already warned. I do not require their services further, so their employment with my trading company is to be ... terminated.”

Nostalia nods and leaves the room.

*DM note: the face of the players was worth a million, as they had been critiqued before by Nostalia for their imprecise reports. Excellent suggestion by DustBunny!*

Ivana is smiling again. “My apologies. A minor matter of lacklustre hirelings which had to be dealt with. Now about Van Richten’s passing, that was a real surprise. I have to admit I will miss him, he had great conversation and always had the most amazing tales to tell...”

She has finished diner, and she puts back rouge lipstick on her lips.

“The church is again asking me for money, this time for an organ. Ever heard one? I do not like organs, I heard it’s very noisy in a church, I prefer violin-based music, or a choir, don’t you? I heard it can be terrifyingly loud, why ever think of doing that in a church? Such a lack of god taste...”

But Varadan argues that it can be played softly, and that could be very beautiful. She seems to considering the idea.

It’s time to get in the carriage. Ivana, Nostalia and Valloton will get in the carriage, and the heroes will be on horses.

They arrive at the Boritsi Music Hall at 7h30 pm, and the driver is able to split the crowd in front and park the carriage at the front door. The Boritsi coat of arm possibly explains that feat. He opens the door for the ladies and takes the horses’s harness.

The heroes enter the Music Hall. Ivana is the shining star that everybody wants to talk to. Men and women. They also see some people very nervous of having to talk to her. One man comes to her and stutters. She waves him off.

People enter the concert hall, leaving Ivana alone in the hall with the heroes. At one point, she waves the other heroes off, except Petrak “Could you go and check that everything is alright for my entrance in the concert room?”. The heroes enter the concert room and inspect it.

She then turns to Petrak with a stern look. She gives him a piece of paper, that he recognizes as the first report they made for Nostalia.

*DM note: I actually gave the paper to Petrak’s player*

“April 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 5<sup>th</sup>. Read me the first line just after this date.”, she asks.

2 au 5 avril  
Ship from Martira Bay to Mordentshire.  
Two spies, possibly from Lady Kazandra, watch us as we board the ship. Lady Kazandra

“Ship from Martira Bay to Mordentshire”, Petrak reads. He gasps, knowing the werewolf investigation and killing with Yvonne Depardieu is missing.

“You do not mention something that important?”, she tells Petrak, cold eyed. “You killed the daughter of Natalia Vorishkova, and left that out of the report...”

She crumples the paper and throws it on the floor. “Do you seriously think that this action in front of 60 persons would not reach our ears? Do not hide anything to me, if you want our collaboration to last. Our relation is based on trust. If I can’t trust you, you are worthless to me”.

She let that sink to a speechless Petrak, and she takes back her innocent look and says with a smile “Let’s go hear this marvelous diva. Don’t you think the same?”

She walks in the music room, and stops at the many people wishing to congratulate her on her success, good taste, as well as her dress, her beauty and charm.

She reaches the first row, where Nostalia is standing. Nostalia tells half of the heroes to take a seat front row. Varadan is seated beside Ivana, and Tora on her other side. A few heroes will stay in the back of the music hall to keep an eye on the room.

The concert is unique, and the voice of the diva carries many types of emotions. At one point, many people in the room cry, including Ivana.

During the whole concert, she explains the meaning of the songs to Varadan, often whispering her comments in his ears or touching his arm. She is clearly flirting with Varadan. She totally ignores Tora.

Meanwhile, in the back, Exigu spots a mean looking man that isn’t watching the show but watching Ivana and her court. He watches the heroes seated in the front row too.

The concert ends and the man leaves quickly, during the final applause. Exigu follows him outside. He sees the man entering an alley to meet other brutes.



While he is wondering what to do next, he spots Garrett Tallgallows the halfling. He is happy to see Exigu. Exigu asks him about the man in the alley. Garrett takes a look and identifies him as Brendig Lasonde, a thug known to work for Ivan Dilisnya. Garrett asks them what are they doing with Ivana, but it’s time to leave and Exigu will talk to him later.

In the music hall, after the concert, Ivana entertains her sycophants and introduces Varadan to everybody, as “her new body guard”.

Tora sees some people making knowing glances or winks in the back of Ivana and Varadan.

They all exit the Music Hall. After small talk, Nostalia leaves the group and walk toward her home. The heroes get back to their horses, except Varadan who is invited *inside* the carriage.

10 pm, they leave for Misericordia ...

*DM note, made me think of :*

*I saw her today at the reception, a glass of wine in her hand  
I knew she would meet her connection, at her feet was her footloose man  
And she was practiced in the art of deception, I could tell by her blood-stained hands....*

## GAME SESSION 87: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE IN BORCA – 2

(played March 24th, 2019. Martin, Yvon, Jean-Guy. Austizel played by Yvon, Exigu by Jean-Guy, Macrazbunare by Martin)

*\*cut scene sent by email after session 86\**

Meanwhile, in the Great Cathedral, Praesidius office. Late at night.

Johann Severin and the Praesidius Levin Postoya are seated, a large wooden desk between them

The Praesidius punches the heavy desk with his fist, twice. He shouts: “What are you telling me, Johann? They spent the whole last day in Misericordia? And they are going back there tonight ... after watching a *music concert*? How do you expect the vanishings investigation to succeed, if they spend all their time *entertaining* Ivana Boritsi?”

Seated in front of the desk, Johann is looking at his feet, while the Praesidius keeps on talking for a long time on the urgency of this investigation. “They have an obligation toward the Church. Ladubay should have properly indented\* them, it would have been easier. (...)”

It is followed by a silence.

“My Lord, we do not know what they are doing at Misericordia, but I will ask them to come back in Levkarest for the investigation. I suspect it is linked to the Jongleur who is out of town”, Johann says.

“Be careful. Indeed we do not know what she has in plan for them”, Levin said. “So do not do anything to make her angry. I do not have to remind you that our founder Yakov’s birthday is in two weeks. And this year is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his passing, a grand celebration is planned, as you know. We do not know what she thinks of it, And we do not know if *it* will happen this year”.

“Well understood, my Lord”, answers Severin, “nothing drastic will be done”.

“They asked for healing potions?”, Postoya continues, “well, give them also a bag of those pills that makes one sleepless for days, or tell them to split their group in two. I don’t know, Johann, just find a way!”

Understanding the meeting is over, Johann walks to the door. There he stops and says at the Praesidius “May Ezra protect you, my Lord”.

Postoya answers back “May Ezra protect us *all*, Johann”.

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\* Added information : Indenture - legal custom in Borca - the contract is written twice, on each half of a page. Then both sides are signed by the parties, and it is then torn in half in the middle. Each part has a copy, with its line of "teeth" (the tear). In case of conflict, the authentication is done with the tear, which must be the same to restore the entire sheet.

The people of Borca have many contracts with other people, according to their importance.

To treat someone as "toothless " is to say that this person is so worthless that he does not even have a single contract binding him with anyone else.

The Praesidius is in fact saying that Nicoletta should have put her agreement with the heroes into a formal contract.

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*Also, there were discussions by email before the next session with Varadan's player, about Ivana's flirt with Varadan.*

Through emails, I've advanced the story with Varadan's player, tested a few hypothesis, and told him what Ivana would try to do at the start of next session (try to bring him into her room for ooh la la). He agreed to go along with it. He knows it is an extremely dangerous situation! But Jean-Guy is a cool guy who likes bold moves and taking risks.

In this, he plays for Varadan the "I'm honest, I do not want to get personal advantages out of this. She's very powerful, beautiful, complex, and I'm curious to know her more" card.

*Varadan's player : Varadan, is a little torn between "run for your life, you fool" and "cool lady, she can be useful, eventually". Varadan understands that she just has to snap her fingers and he's dead ... but ... her power is attractive, he cannot deny it. She could be a very powerful ally. At the same time, he knows the Black Widow rumors ... and he has witnessed her staging at the dinner (about writers of poor reports). He also knows that she has so much experience that she will not be fooled by an eighth-level monk ... but it's a great opportunity to learn a little more about this person. So, Varadan's approach is to be honest (she can do all the "Sense Motive" she wants, nothing will show... well, that's what he thinks, possibly a little naively) . He shows that he respects her power and her role, but at the same time, even mighty people may need friends ... He does not do brown nosing, but he is not arrogant either, he tries to walk on the line between the two. If he does not agree with her on insignificant points, he expresses his opinion, maybe she'll find it interesting to see someone standing in front of her, not just a "yes- man "...*

**As a DM, I wasn't sure he would go for it! So I have to rethink what Ivana's plans are. I think that her views with this flirt could be:**

- 1) Heh, girls just want to have fun?**
- 2) + the party is powerful, let's make sure one of them is a puppy loyal to me**
- 3) + she is using him but do not plan to fall in love with him. But has love intrigue things ever worked as planned?**

Back to the story, as played by emails between me and Varadan's player :

On one side of the carriage, Varadan is seated with Anne-Claire Valloton (the chief of staff and personal assistant of Ivana), who looks outside, looking neutral. She does not intervene in the conversation, except when Ivana asks for her opinion: "Oh, that's interesting, is it not, Anne-Claire?" She answers what Ivana wants to hear in a few words as possible (or nods).

On her side of the carriage, Ivana is seated, a little slump in the thick cushions on her bench.

Ivana : Tell me more about you, I do not know you,...

Varadan : Oh, there is not much to say. I had a fairly quiet and ordinary life, apart from one rather dark episode ... I am an orphan who did not know his parents and who grew up in a monastery in the forest north of Zeidenburg. I was happy at the monastery, I had good friends and a mentor who took good care of me. I had a certain facility for magic ... I think I could have become a kind of wizard, if I wanted to, but things went different for me. When this damned Von Zarovich invaded Gundar, his army razed my monastery when I was not there. When I returned, the monastery was in fire, with bloody corpses around. Some of my best friends had disappeared and the others were all dead. I never saw again a single living person from the monastery. I buried my mentor ... it was very hard. This is where I became an adventurer, since I had nowhere that I could call a home. Without my mentor I abandoned the idea of magic and I focused on my abilities as a monk, as a tribute to him. I never forgot it. I know I will never be able to get revenge on Strahd, he's too powerful, and probably I'll never get close enough to him\*. But, on the other hand, if ever I could find the military commander who led the barbaric attack on my monastery, then I could take my revenge ... In the meantime, I sharpen my skills and I help widows and orphans ... and the nice ladies in distress (wink).

\* DM note : if we forget the Vasili Von Holtz encounter ;)

Ivana winks back and say : that story is horrible! Must have been terrible for you. Poor little orphan, now lost in the wide world... But he became a nice grown man now, don't you think, Anne-Claire?

AC Valloton : Yes, Milady, indeed. Then she looks again outside, looking like she wished to be somewhere else.

Varadan, trying to make Ivana talk : Have you ever experienced something like this? I hope not!

Ivana : Oh, no! Nothing that tragic! (it is followed by a long hysterical laughter from Ivana, with perhaps some hints of craziness?) The only thing that comes to mind is when my mother seduced my fiancé, Pieter. She tried to make me believe he seduced her, but I know she tricked him into believing she was me. I was young and inexperienced, but I couldn't let that offense go unpunished, you understand? It was only short after that I took over the reign of Borca from my mother. And poor Pieter didn't live to see that. (sigh) It's a pity men can be so untrustworthy...

Ivana, changing subject : Speaking of Von Zarovich, I have heard that our neighbour Strahd is off chasing skirts again. (sigh) You really think a man of his age would have better things to do? Do you know anything about it? Do you know who it would be? I hear the Vardo Traders are searching for this woman?

Varadan : While in Gundarak, now Barovia, I heard vague rumours that he was searching for his lost love or something like that. Love has no time limit... it flows on and on, it doesn't care about age or time! If he can't find her, and is probably too busy with ruining Gundarak, the bastard, it makes sense he would commission the Vardo Traders, they do have a good reputation about finding anything... for a price. I don't think money is a problem for Strahd... (laugh)

Ivana, thinking : The Vardo Traders are extremely enigmatic. I know for sure that Miss Montarri is extremely wealthy. She can't be doing all those dangerous jobs only for money, as she has enough already for ten lifetimes of luxury... We keep an eye on them when they are in Borca, but their motivations still elude us...

Then the carriage arrives in Misericordia ...



*June 30th, 748, night*

For the others: they ride along the carriage, some in front, some in rear as guards escorts.

As the carriage arrives in Misericordia, at 10h30 pm, they have a nod from Lucretio Napioli, the man in charge of the guards at Misericordia. He tries to look inside the carriage with curiosity.

The carriage stops, and they see Ivana exits, with Varadan at her hand. They enter the house.

The others decide to guard the house as it was discussed with Ivana. They wonder if Varadan is in trouble or not...

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For Varadan :

Ivana takes Varadan' hand and leads him to the kitchen, where she picks a bottle of champagne in an ice box. She asks Varadan to take two flute crystal glass. Then she leads him through a back door in the garden. They walks to a secluded area where there is a heated pool. It is surrounded by roses and statues of pagan gods, and then by trees isolating the place.



She asks Varadan to open the bottle and he pours two glasses of wine.

Meanwhile, on the other end of the pool, in the dark, Ivana removes all clothes and gets into the water ... And she calls for Varadan to join her.

She is very flirty and joyous. They laugh a lot of various jokes and teasing, and they enjoy the moment. Under the stars, the heated pool is magical. Ivana seems very happy. When the bottle of wine is eventually finished, Ivana pouts, and suggest there are more in her room...

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During his patrol, Exigu hears some noise around the pool and decide to take a look. He hears Ivana and Varadan talking and laughing. He decides not to watch. But he stays around in case Varadan gets in danger.

After about an hour, he sees Varadan and Ivana go back to the manor, hand in hand.

The others discuss about the best plan to carry their gard mission with Ivana and investigate the women murdered in town. They try to see how they could guard Ivana with three heroes, and have the others sleep during this time to regain spells during the night, or investigate in town.

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For Varadan :

She exits the pool and in a small cabin she gets two luxurious white pool gowns, takes one and gives one to Varadan. Again, she takes Varadan by the hand and leads him to the manor, where she goes on the second floor to her room. They open another bottle of bubbly wine and they go in bed to make what consenting adults do.

After, they sleep.

Later, Varadan finds odd that she never kissed him, and when Varadan tried to kiss her mouth, she moved her head so he kissed her cheek instead.

Also, the luxurious lipstick she always wears hides the fact that her lips real color is a sick kind of blue ...

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*July 1st, 748, night*

At two am, Varadan is awoken by a soft door closing noise. He is alone in her bedroom. He realizes there is a secret door in the room.

During the night, the heroes outside see Lucretio's men patrolling inside the property, along the walls surrounding the garden. They have a bullseye lamp, and they appear to be checking the walls carefully. The inside walls are painted matt black and a scratch or a trace of passage would be easily seen.

*6 am*

The heroes find Varadan at the breakfast table. They enquire on his night but he says "let's talk elsewhere, there are too many ears around".

They rest 8 hours to get their spells.

At noon, Madame Valloton knocks and hands a wrapped gift for Varadan, « from Milady ». He unwraps it and finds a very expensive barber kit in a red velvet box (worth at least 50 gp). What surprises him is that it is made of ... silver! (« I am a lycanthrope, does she knows? », he thinks).

They get on horses and ride to Levkarest. On the way, they talk to Varadan. He tells them of the discussion in the carriage yesterday night : that she killed her mother and her fiancé, then inherited from the Boritsi Trading Company. Her lips are sick blue but she hides it under lipstick. They remember that she often adds a new coat of lipstick. She never kissed me and didn't want me to kiss her mouth.

At 3pm, they are at the Cathedral and ask for Nicoletta. They get in a private salon.

They tell her about their mission at Misericordia, and she does not reply a word. She seems concerned for the heroes.

Petraks asks her "Ivana said she saw a winged creature? We guarded her house two days and saw nothing. Is it true? Is it a dream? A demon?" but Nicoletta can't help the heroes on this matter.

They ask her if Ivana has a part in the vanishing women and thus an opinion on the enquiry? Nicoletta says that the church do not know what Lady Ivana thinks of the vanishing women cases. The heroes say they will enquire on this with Ivana but Nicoletta says “be careful, there are rumors that she is perhaps involved or commissioning the vanishings for an unknown dark purpose.”

Petrak “do you think Ivana is keeping us near her so we are unable to inquire the vanishings?”

Nicoletta shrugs her shoulders, but her gaze at Petrak is concerned. “Be careful”

They want to talk to Garrett Tallgallows and speak to a halfling on the road. He tells them that Garrett can often be found at the Dark Maiden Inn, a gambling hall.

They go there and sip a beer with Garrett, a friend of Exigu. “Yes, what you heard is true. Lady Ivana does come to this place once in a while to gamble and drink!”

They talk about the vanishing “Well, Levkarest surely has a crazy killer problem.”

At one point, they talk about the Cathedral. “The Cathedral was finished in 746, but before that the Ezra church used another large church building, located near here. The local church of Hala made publicly know they made a generous offer to buy this building and turn it into an hospital for the poors. But what I heard is that the Ezra clergy refuses to sell. I wonder why?”

At 4pm, they leave the tavern and walk toward the old Ezra church on Cadgers Court St. Its size is impressive, about 120 feet long, but it is very small compared to the new Cathedral. Indeed, it looks abandoned and all windows are closed with wooden planks. Exigu unlocks a side door, while remaining hidden from the street. Varadan notices someone is watching them. The young man open a box and let a pigeon fly away : a message! Then the man tries a *hold person* spell on Varadan but it fails.

He then put his two hands up, opened, in a peace jesture. “Please tell your friend to exit the church, now!” He wears an Ezra shield medallion.

They show him the authorisation to enquire for the church, the paper signed by Nicoletta Ladubay. He doesn’t look impressed “Ladubay has no authority here, tell your friend to exit. The others ... are coming”, he says, trying hard to look menacing. “You have violated a sanctuary, leave this place”

They ask for his name and he answers Alixandre Serre. “There are only boxes in the church, nothing for you there”

Meanwhile, Exigu, inside, sees an old and dusty church, filled with crates and wooden boxes. But there are many traces in the dust.

Fifteen minutes later, a carriage arrives. Eight person exits, wearing a grey cloak with an Ezra sword in filigran. Their face is kept hidden by the cloak. One of them tells them to leave “and do not try again to enter, there are nasty glyphs against thieves and intruders.”

The heroes again show their pass. The same man answers “Nicoletta Ladubay has no authority here. We know of your enquiry for the church but there is nothing for you here. Leave!”

They leave this place and go back to the Cathedral, to see Nicoletta Ladubay. They tell her of their inquiry at the old church. “I know Alixandre Serre, but I did not know he was with *them*. It’s now a warehouse, isn’t it? I am in charge of buildings but the charge over this specific building was removed from my responsibilities a year ago. Top order, from the Praesidius himself. I asked for the reason of this but I was answered not to ask questions about this place. I can’t tell you more as I do not know more myself.”

“Its cellar contained the tombs of the two former Praesidius and the two former Praedisias since Yakov Dilisnya. All of this has been moved to the cellar of the new Cathedral. I wonder if there is something that wasn’t moved to the new Cathedral and is still there... or if something else was moved there afterward?”

At one point, they are disturbed by Ivana’s stern carriage driver. “Milady is now in the church praying. But she tells you to be at the Veritas Wine and Art Gallery around 6. Be there!” and he leaves.

They have time until then and they go to the Dark Maiden again to talk to Garrett. “The old church? I saw Severin a few times around it. He had a hiding cloak but I recognized his hobbling walk. I do not know what is hidden there but it has value for them. All the times people went too close, or became too curious, the same team of grey cloaks told them to leave”

They talk again about the vanishings. “You know, I heard that a vampire lives hidden in the cellar of the Cathedral, that could explain many things”

At 5h30 pm, they arrive at the Gallery. Nostalia intercepts Varadan and she dresses him with fancy and expansive clothes!

They meet Ivana, and she is very happy to see Varadan (and nearly ignores the others) “Oooh, you are so elegant tonight, this clothes fits you like a glove”. Varadan is indeed surprised to find the clothes are very well adjusted for him. Ivana wears a sexy black dress and all the men in the room look at her sideways when they see she isn’t looking.

The gallery hosts an exhibition by Siegfried Danzing, the painter that did half of the beautiful paintings inside the Cathedral. He looks old, more than 80 years old. Also, clearly at one point in his life, he abused alcohol. He wears a large silver medallion with the Ezra shield. He looks very humble and is very shy when Ivana compliments him.



The heroes remember this painter did the icon (“icon of Danzig”) that is supposedly kept in Ivana’s bedroom, the one that Lollar Boritsi asked them to retrieve (session 14). But Varadan doesn’t remember seeing any icon in her bedroom...

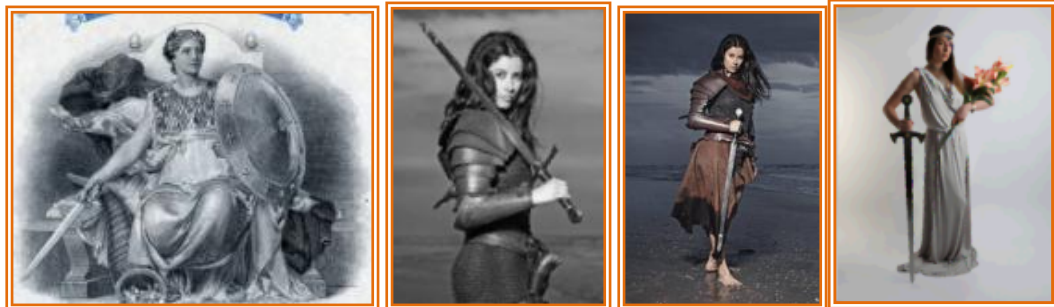
All this time, Ivana parades Varadan in front of the guests.

Speaking of the devil, minutes later Lollar Boristi appears in the gallery, with anchorite friends. He salutes his aunt, but has a hard time hiding his disgust of her. Varadan is still kept close to Ivana, so Lollar talks with the other heroes and tells “I know you are now stationed in Misericordia. I ask again for the Danzig Icon. We just would like to study it a few hours then bring it back, she won't notice”, he says. Again, they refuse.



Angrily, he was going to leave when they asked him about the old church and the reason of the refusal to sell it to Hala's church. “I do not know. But if you go there, take a look at the church art, Ezra is not really looking like my wh..., my aunt” with a disgusted side glance at Varadan. “And the new art for the Cathedral? A copy of her! Why did they have to put her sinful face as Ezra? The hell it is for me to pray everyday in this place!” He leaves.

Having seen the exposition at the gallery, they are now able to pinpoint which of the Cathedral paintings are Danzig's. Some of his paintings have Ezra wearing a sword or fighting the dark with some kind of light weapon. Some are Ezra as a peaceful icon. He painted her as a healer and a guardian, humanity's lone compassionate protector, actively opposing the Legions of the Night.



Around 8pm, Ivana, her close friends and the heroes leave the gallery for a nearby restaurant, Mava. They talk art during diner, and the heroes learn that more people than just the church leaders are buried in the crypt : the sculptor Nikolai Pyotrovich, the Cathedral architect Gaudini (both dead) and a place is also kept for Danzig. They also learn that the last sculpture of Pyotrovich was a gargoyle, and he died soon after finishing it.

Ivana : “The cathedral's interior is quite impressive don't you think? It was quite expensive to built, as you understand, but I do believe it was worth it, yes? Though some sculptures by Pyotrovich have something to be desired. Gargoyles? Really, couldn't he have something more...inspiring? It so old fashioned!”

Varadan notices that she is drinking a lot of white wine, but she doesn't look drunk at all. Is he immune to alcohol? Varadan remembers that some classify alcohol as a poison ...

10h30, they go back to Misericordia, Nostalia, Ivana and Varadan in the carriage. Arrived there, Ivana again takes Varadan to her bedroom. Varadan checks it carefully but sees nothing that could look like an icon painted by Danzig.

He asks her what she thinks of the women vanishing.

Ivana : “I do not feel threatened, as the vanishing only happens with the dreadful plebs. But if they catch the killer, and hang him, or *her*, I would not have a problem seeing that person dead. He deserves it.”

Varadan : there are rumors of vampires under the Cathedral cellar?

Ivana : “Nonsense, my sweet apple pie. But tell me, dear, what do you think they keep in the old church?”

Varadan : “I do not know. I heard rumors that you are involved in the vanishings, ah ah ah, that you would be jealous of some of these women!”

Ivana, biting her lips, slightly annoyed “Why would I be jealous of those ugly cow girls? Know that over the years, I’ve often been often falsely accused of many things I never did. I’ve even heard of silly rumors that I would keep my young looks by drinking the blood of these women! That’s rubbish. Stories about me abound. But it doesn’t make sense at all! The *vanishings* started only a year ago, but I’ve had this good look since years before ... (sigh) The plebs are always jealous, that’s all ...”

And she changes the subject by removing their clothes... After another wild time, then they sleep.

Half an hour after, Varadan awakes and look at Ivana, sleeping. He is shocked to see her face puffy, and grey! A maze of dark veins marks her face. Her tongue is swollen too, dark blue, and nearly protrudes from her mouth! She looks like she was poisoned with something very nasty. But he notices her slow breathing, so he decides not to make a move and he closes his eyes.

Minutes later, she gets up and leaves the room through the secret door... He gets asleep again.

*July 2nd, 748*

For the other heroes outside, the night is uneventful.

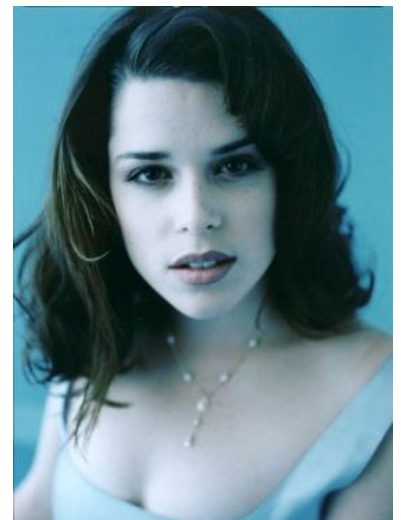
In the morning, the stern Madame Valloton informs them that “Nostalia has a reservation for you at restaurant Mava at 3 pm”.

They go there in time, and finds she is waiting for them in a private salon. She wears a thin blue robe and pearls.

She wants to know how they are feeling “with their new tasks in Mrs Ivana’s entourage”. They answer positively.

Then she asks about the vanishings enquiry. They ask her about the old church (she knows nothing).

They ask her about the Dezuni couple, telling her they had a lead to them. She answers that they host debauchery parties, may be 5 or six times a years. But she isn’t sure that they are linked to the vanishing of the women, “they are not really into young girls...”





Then she sips her coffee and turns serious. “I wanted to discuss something important with you today”. She informs them that Lady Ivana is very pleased of their services to her, and that she asked Nostalia to discuss with them how they could be rewarded.

“Ivana mentioned a barony in Borca? That would send you quickly in the highest spheres of the world! “

Tora says that they are not attached to only one place, they are more nomads than sedentary and he thinks they would make very bad land owners.

She smiles, and then says “I understand. We expected this answer. How about a controller job at the Boritsi Trading Company? You could travel the world, as you do now, do your things, and also work as an inspector for Lady Ivana when you travel near an outpost of the BTC.”

They were thinking how devilish she is when suddenly Ivan crashes in the room! He is a 70 year old man, dressed silly as a buffoon. He makes false-looking funny moves and laughs like a buffoon would do. Something obviously heavy is inside Ivan’s vest (like a big scrollcase?).

Nostalia looks annoyed at his sudden appearance.

*DM: put your PC on the map!*

“I’ve been told you were here!”, Ivan says while looking the heroes, then at Nostalia, “Nostalia, always a pleasure to be able to see your lovely face.” At the heroes “So happy to meet you again. I was practicing for a new role nearby so I decided to stop by. My best role ever! Happy to see those brave protectors of my lovely cousine ... and to have wine with them!”

He pops a bottle from his vest, like a cheap magic trick. He says he brought a very good vintage of a famous Invidian Château and opens it at the table (Ambered Wine, Haptmeyer Estate, vintage 720).

Nostalia gets up from the table and she goes to the corner and grab a pitcher of water and suggest that Ivan will surely asks the heroes “to drink water before tasting the wine, to cleanse their palate?” Ivan nods, a little annoyed.

Exigu spots Nostalia secretly put a powder in the pitcher, but thinks it’s surely for the best, and says nothing.

They drink the water while Ivan carefully pours glasses of his old wine. Nostalia and the heroes drink the wine. But Tora refuses, saying he doesn’t drink wine. Ivan is very offended and nearly yells “I insist!” but Tora doesn’t drink. After a moment, Ivan shrugs and drinks his wine.

Nostalia teases Ivan over the exquisite taste of this bottle "isn't it excellent, Sir Ivan? Can you show us the full extent of your wine knowledge and tell us ignorants what subtleties we should be finding as we taste the wine?". Ivan is obviously angry but keeps it in check.



He makes small talk on the vintage 720 (“a stunning vintage, never been as good after”) and the next shows in town. “Have you seen Maria Diosa, the diva of the Port-a-Lucine Opera House?” He refers to Maria's performances as “stunning! What a great voice, and what a great actress too. It's very uncommon that people can sing and act well, no?”

At one point, Nostalia excuses herself and leaves for the restrooms, leaving the heroes alone with Ivan in the private room...

Then, Ivan's attitude quickly change to imposing, and menacing. Ivan tells them the wine they just drank was tainted with *Borrowed Time*, with a description : “this poison of mine is, yes, a f... death sentence. But the only difference with a deadly snake's poison, hence its name, is that **I** decide when you die. Everyday my men will deliver you a dose of the antidote, called *Mercy*. Just don't be too difficult to be found early at night!”

He tells them he knows they are close to her cousin Ivana these days so they will get the final antidote only when they will bring him the secret he starves for! “What is the secret of her eternal youth? What is she doing to stay young? What ritual, what cream she puts on her face!” He yells : **“I want to know!”**

Then he gets silent. He loudly sniffs and tastes the wine in silence. Some heroes notice he doesn't take any pleasure from the wine.

Nostalia is back and Ivan shortly leaves after. “I have to go back to the play practice. Gentlemen, it was a pleasure to meet you, again.” He leaves after saluting Nostalia like a courtier would.

Nostalia then asks them if Ivan menaced them? She tells they thought he would soon do such a thing, as he often do. In the pitcher of water, Nostalia added a protection against ingested poison, she said, so they are NOT under the curse of *Borrowed Time*.

She discusses with the heroes about this situation – Ivan still thinking his plan worked. She suggests the heroes play along and make Ivan believe they are poisoned and under his control...

“Also, Ivana told me he doesn't taste anything anymore, so that is why I asked him about the taste of the wine!”, she said with an evil smile.

The heroes say they should do a *detect poison* spell. Nostalia gets up and says she now has to leave.

When she is gone, Varadan tells the other about Ivana's face at night. So Ivan may be right, maybe there is a recipe for her eternal youth? Is it the Death Stone?

4 pm They go meet Nicoletta. She has discovered that Severin has a cloak very similar to the grey cloak the heroes described her, the one the eight from the carriage wore at the old church.

Petrak tells they should investigate the crypt. They wonder if the entrance slab is well closed, do they need to go down there? But they remember the vampire rumors, and know a vampire would pass through the tiniest of cracks.

Nicoletta tells them there are two basement levels – the first is the Belly, with artisans rooms, novice salons and small shrines. Lower than that is the crypt. Its entrance is through a skull and bones slab on the ground floor, in front of the large Ezra statue, in the choir.

They ask her to visit the crypt. She asks the church's stone worker, Ferrand Moitessier, opens the seal and then opens the slab gate to the crypt. He says the seal cement is still intact, as he closed it nearly two years ago.



It opens to a flight of stairs going down... It is going down 45'. Down there, all is white marble, a shrine with a statue of Ezra praying.

Past the shrine, the walls are made of cut stone. They see the tombs of high level priests, and all previous Praesidius and church founder : Yakov Dilisnya (né 641- died 698) Praesidius from 666 to 698. He ordered the construction of the Great Cathedral in 689) “He was poisoned by Camille Boritsi”, sneers Nicoletta.

Then Praesidia Donella Borovsky (698-716), Praesidia Kristyn Stoyista (716-735), Praesidius Alexei Raskolka (735-746) and an empty place for the current Praesidius Levin Postoya 746 (who is still quite young at 55)

There is also the tomb of the Cathedral architect - Antoine Gaudini (655-726), a tomb for the son of Cathedral architect – François Gaudini (who finished the work, He is not dead, only about 45 years old), a place for the tomb of Seigfreid Danzig, main painter of the paintings inside the Cathédral (not dead) and the tomb of the main sculptor, Nikolai Pyotrovich (who made the Gargoyle), with an unfinished but beautiful Ezra statue in the middle, weeping for him.

They also find many anchorites ossuary, who died a long time ago. They were moved here twenty years ago when this section was opened under the new Cathedral.



Near the tomb of the Sculptor, Tora try his *ghost sight*, and sees the ethereal ghost of an aged man, cowering in fear from something unseen ...

## GAME SESSION 88: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE IN BORCA – 3

(played April 7th, 2019. Austizel played by Martin)

*July 2nd, 748, 5h30 pm*

When they exit the crypt, Nicoletta gives the heroes healing potions they asked for.

They walk through the church and inspect Pyotrovich's statues. Inside and outside, all statues depicts the Legions of the Night. They cluster at 20' and 120' inside the Cathedral, as well as outside at 120'. They are all recoiling in fear from the main Ezra statue in the choir... (there are snakes, monsters, vampires, specters, thieves, curmudgeon merchants, and regular gargoyles too...). Nicoletta tells them that one of the statue depict an evil factory owner, getting rich over children labour, that Pyotrovich made after his own face.



At 5 pm, they are asked at the church entrance. They meet an agent of Ivan (Brendig Lasonde, wearing a shield with a lion). He is with six scary looking men in leather armor.

“Here”, he says, “there is your daily ration of Mercy. That should motivate you. See you tomorrow, gits”.

They open the bag to see only four doses of Mercy daily antidote (they are five to have drunk the wine), a cruel teasing.

When they are gone, Macrazbunare asks the other “if we should attack them or not.”

Moments later, they see Ivana, Nostalia and Cassandra Gide walking toward the Cathedral. They say they were at Nostalia’s home, drinking wine.

The heroes ask the girls if they would like the antidotes. Nostalia says “yes, we should analyse these to find its composition”

Macrazbunare asks if they have a laboratory and Nostalia answers that there is one available.

Ivana takes Varadan’s arm and they walk with Cassandra, talking about paintings they saw.

Nostalia walks with Macrazbunare. She asks him “You came to Misericordia’s ball last November. At one point, you spoke to ambassador Talena Von Zarovich. Tell me, I’m curious, where did you first meet her?”





Macrazbunare “I’ve seen her first time at the ball. I’ve read a book about Van Zarovich’s family tree. A book that woman wrote. I think it was cursed or that there was some magic to reveal her who is writing the book? When I met her, she knew I did read the book... Do you want it?”

Nostalia nods and Macrazbunare gives her the book. She promises to read it soon and give it back to Macrazbunare.

“Talena Von Zarovich is an enigma for us”, Nostalia says’ “ we do not know where she lives in Barovia, and she always come to Borca without an escort or body guards.”

They stop at Mava, again for the private salon they already visited. The staff at Mava is servile. “Mr d’Auberville is already arrived”, one of them says. Ivana shakes from disgust and says to Varadan “I do not trust this person, this minor *nobliau* from a forgotten parcel. He is one of my barons. You and Macrazbunare will come with me, the others will wait outside with Nostalia.”

Ivana enters the salon, followed by Varadan and Macrazbunare. The heroes recognize the man waiting at the table, from seeing him at Misericordia’s ball. The un-delicate character in noble clothes bulges out of his gaudy aristocratic clothing, which is covered with sweat stains. His big, beefy hands have sharp, gnarly nails. His sickly yellowish eyes are looking at Ivana and the heroes. He smiles a shark smile.



The heroes wonder if he file nailed his tooth?

D’Auberville salutes Ivana properly, and quickly says the reason of his requested meeting with her : he says Ivan wrote him a letter to tax his property.

Ivana becomes very angry, and drinks a tall glass of white wine before replying. “Aerik, your mansion and property are not in Dorvinia, but in Borca, isn’t it? So that should settle the matter, no?” .

She says she will quickly write a firm letter to Ivan to straighten out the question and make him stop trying to get land taxes revenues from d’Auberville, “but imperatively, do not send him even a copper.”

D’Auberville is all tooth smiling at her, as if the meeting went to his expectation.

Near the end of the discussion, Ivana asks “and how is the health of Lady Acquilina Yvoire?”

“Acquilina D’Auberville-Yvoire?”, he replies, insisting on d’Auberville. “My wife is well”. Both heroes notice his obviously false reassuring tone.

“I have plans for her”, Ivana says dryly, “make sure she is fine, and stays ... healthy.”, and she nods at him then leaves the room.



“What a creep”, Ivana murmurs to Varadan.

She walks to Nostalia and murmurs her the content of the discussion. Nostalia nods, and says “why don’t you send them”, looking at the heroes. “Great idea”, Ivana says.

They eat in the main room of Mava restaurant. Most other patrons hush when they enter the restaurant and see Ivana is there with her court. The only persons in the whole restaurant talking loud are at Ivana’s table.

Then they walk to visit the Agape Gallery, where the main exposition is a painting by Baron Metus. It is extremely expensive (six digits!).

Before leaving the gallery, Ivana says to Nostalia “write to Ivan on my behalf to express my anger, strongly. And send a letter to all landowners of the Borca Dorvinia frontier. Tell them not to send even a copper to Ivan, or they’ll know my wrath.”



At 9 pm, they are back to Misericordia (Varadan in the carriage, the others on horses as escort).

There, the heroes set for their watch while Ivana drags Varadan inside the Manor again.

But this time, after picking some wine in the kitchen, Ivana brings her to the bedroom, then she opens a secret door (one that Varadan heard closing) and she waves for him to follow him through a dedal of corridors and rooms.

At one point, they are in a room with black and white tiles on the floor. There are paintings on the walls (forest landscape). She urges him to “walk into my steps, that would be my ... advice ... hum... to you” (which he does).

They pass in front of a closed room which Ivana says this is the Jongleur’s room.

They arrive to a large bedroom full of curios and things. A bed large enough for eight people fills the room. She lights some candles.

In a corner he sees a beautifully painted ivory curio on an altar that consists of three panels folded that resembles Ezra’s sword and shield. Varadan recognize Danzig’s style. The icon!

But Ivana is back to him and pours him a tall glass of wine. “I know there is a beast in you, why don’t you show me? Give me a thrill...” (Varadan will hold this detail from his friends)

Meanwhile, the others outside notice that there is light at a window that was in the dark the other nights.

At one point during the night, the heroes outside hears the noise of something with flapping wings hovering over Misericordia ... They try to have a better look but the noise quickly fades away.

*July 3rd, 748, am*

At 8 am, Varadan awakes and again notices Ivana's face has swollen... He gets up and goes to the bathroom, and waits there a few minutes. When he comes back, she is not there.

Varadan walks back toward the false bedroom, and notices there are many masks inside the Jongleur's room. One looks disturbingly like the mask they wore on Dominia!

He explores the level and finds a secret alcove with a staircase going down. He finds it is getting lower the the main floor, to an underground level. He doesn't go further and walks back up. IN this corridor, he sees at least three more secret openings. They are all very well hidden. There are many concourses hidden within the walls, that you can't find unless mapping the place with precise measure tools.

They have lunch at 2 pm with Ivana. Varadan asks him "where does the Jongleur comes from?" and Ivana answers that she does not know. "He came to Misericordia 15 years ago and then showed me a proof of loyalty. I've kept him since then as my bodyguard. Why, are you jealous, my dear?"

The heroes have breakfast and then ride to Misericordia, and visit Pyotrovich's workshop. It is locked but Exigu opens it.

They search for blood but there is none. *Ghost sight* reveals nothing. Petrak casts *ethereal resonance* and suddenly has a feeling of well being. He feels a deep religious fervor in the place, and it turns into a fever, then Petrak has visions of statues talking to him ...

Then they see a man at the workshop door, who asks "are you part of Pyotrovich's family?"

The heroes answer negatively and show the man the pass signed by Nicoletta. He explains he is a neighbor. They talk about the sculptor. "At the end, he was eating few and sleeping less and less. We heard his chisel working during the night and day, while his assistants were there only during the day. Before being commissioned by the church, he was not really religious. His sculptor talent was amazing. He insisted that he could make all the statues himself, and soon he proved he could do it. His output of work was tremendous. He worked 10 years on these! And he died when the last one was finished. When they found him dead, it appears he was dead since a week. There were no traces of anything; I believe he died of exhaustion."

They go back to the Cathedral to talk to Nicoletta. "So you heard a creature flying over Misericordia? So her story was true, then!"

They go on the Cathedral roof to see the last statue made by Pyotrovich. It is a winged gargoyle, crouched over a corner. Exigu walks on the angled roof, while tied to a rope. (balance checks)

All statues on the roof depict winged creatures. Exigu examine the last statue but sees nothing strange.



Macrazbunare goes outside in eagle form, and casts *insight*. He spots faint traces on the rock, near its talons, like if the statue has moved, or was moved?

4h30 pm

Back inside the Cathedral, they wonder what is the gargoyle's role in the church? Is it good or evil? What does it do with the vanished women?

They share the information they know about gargoyles. (knowledge arcane DC 30 : monstrous humanoid traits and the earth subtype. Gargoyles can perch indefinitely without moving, easily passing themselves off as grotesque statues until victims come near. A gargoyle possesses only a dim intelligence, but it speaks Terran and Common. A gargoyle's stony hide deflects most minor blows, but magic weapons can pierce its defenses. Several subraces of gargoyle exist, including the aquatic kapoacanth.)



They wonder if it does work for someone? For Ivan? The Praesidius? Severin? They notice both Praesidius and Severin have a window in their office where one could look at the statue. Does it bring the girls at the old abandoned church? Varadan think it was created with a great Ezra fervor, so perhaps the statue has the same fervor?

Nicoletta says she will watch the statue tonight, to see if it is moving. She will use a bullseye torch to watch every half hour or so. They thank her for her help, and say they now have to go back to Misericordia.

Then they see Severin in a corridor. He asks if they have findings about the vanishings investigation. He is stunned when the heroes tell him about the gargoyle. They talk about it for a moment, and then he says “*Someone* told me you were interested to visit the old church? I could arrange something, but I'm quite convinced your gargoyle has nothing to do with this place”

When they are at the stable to get their horses, a horse groom hands them a bag. “Someone just brought it for you”. In it, they find five doses of *Mercy*.

5h45 pm, they arrive at Misericordia. They learn that Bevel Boritsi (Ivana's nephew) will be there for diner. During the meal, Ivana and Bevel discuss business with the Boritsi Trading Company. Bevel is polite and also asks the heroes some questions about their background and general interests. During the meal, he doesn't mention anything related to the Weathermay-Foxgrove twins (see session 14).



Ivana is not flirting with Varadan during the diner, treating him like any other hero at the table. At 8 pm, Ivana announces that she needs to talk to her nephew about private business matters, and that the heroes have other tasks to do.

Seeing she doesn't seem to be needing him close, Varadan joins the other and goes for the night watch...

*July 4th, 748, 6 am*

The night was quiet and uneventful. The heroes enter the Manor and gets to their room to sleep.

## GAME SESSION 89: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE IN BORCA – 4

(played Oct 6th, 2019. Austizel played by Sylvain, Petrak played by Jean-François)

During the night, in the Cathedral, Nicoletta is watching the statue. Every half an hour, she puts a beacon of her bullseye lamp on the statue, but nothing moves.

*DM note : feeling watched, the Gargoyle uses its merge through stone ability and flees inside the cathedral walls, leaving a shell of empty stone in its place.*

At Misericordia, the players sleep until 2 pm, and the casters learn their spells.

At 2h30, they hear a woman's voice, extremely angry and loud "How did they?"

Exigu gets closer and uses his listening skills. He hears Ivana in discussion with Bevel. He can't hear everything but her angry shoutings. "How did they got the nerves to do that ? ... Arriving here unannounced! This an official visit, no? ... Why didn't Ivan took care of it ? ... *I had other plans for tonight!*" She appears extremely upset.

He then hears Bevel : "We should meet them, and see what they want..."

The heroes leave Misericordia and arrive at the Cathedral sometimes before 3h30 pm.

Nicoletta: The statue didn't move while I was on watch.

Macrasbunare : we will put a magical mark on it, to follow it.

Varadan : is there a special delegation in town?

Nicoletta : yes, from Falkovnia! The officials are at Marsav Hall. Their soldiers escort did make trouble in a pub around noon, the militia had to quiet them.

Exigu notices that the statue has subtly changed. It isn't exactly in the same position as yesterday...

Macrazbunare the druid turns into an eagle and plans to cast *arcane mark* on the statue. He flies over it but notices that the unseen part of the statue is strange, like a hollow chocolate character that has somehow melted, then turned hard again. This is on the statue side unseen from the window.

Macrazbunare flies back to his friends, and using a sheet of paper with all the letters from A to Z on it, he makes words with his beak and explains what he just saw.

*DM note: Stranger Thing-esque*

They cast *detect magic* on the statue: negative.

Macrazbunare goes back in eagle form. He scratches it, and it feels like rock. He casts his spell. He then uses his beak to hit the statue, and it feels hollow!

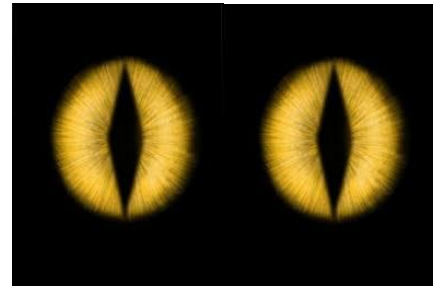
Macrazbunare : Is the thing gone? Is this just a hiding place? If so, what is this creature?

Exigu ties a rope around his waist and goes toward the statue on the roof. He breaks it with a hammer and a pike : it is indeed hollow. The stone is about a quarter of an inch to half an inch.

Nicoletta : it wasn't like that when they installed it there. This thing was weighting 600 to 700 pounds!

4 pm. They ask Nicoletta to go in the crypt again. With the help of Ferrand again, they get to the sculptor's tomb. Tora, with his *ghostsight* again, sees an aged bearded man, cowering in fear from something unseen.

Petrak casts *ethereal resonance*. What he sees is strange : Ezra as a human person, and as the lover of the sculptor! He sees many religious Ezra symbols, then the vision ends when two beastly yellow eyes open...



4h45 pm When they exit the crypt, and access the choir, they notice Ivana is at her private pew (with soft red velvet cushioning), praying. Hearing the noise of the stone slab, she waves at the heroes from the distance.

Then her stern carriage driver comes to them and disdainfully sneers “stay around”.

Then Exigu sees Nicoletta in discussion with Ferrand the mason. She looks surprised of something he just told her. He points in the direction of the second floor gallery. Exigu looks, and while turning his head in the direction, he sees Severin secretly watching Ivana from the shadows... His face showed a wicked look, like desire ? Where Ferrand was pointing, Exigu sees nothing special.

But then he sees Nicoletta waving at him, and telling him to come to her. He gathers the other heroes and they join her and Ferrand again.

“Listen to this, I think this is strange”, Nicoletta said. Then she prompted Ferrand to speak,

“It happened twice, and the second time was this morning. Yesterday, late at night, I saw a crack on a column on the second floor. After judging it wasn't a structural problem, I made a mental note to repair the plaster the next morning, which is today. I arrived before most of my men this morning, to find the plaster has been repaired! Perfectly! The first time it happened was a week ago. I saw a crack on the ground floor stone, and days later it was repaired. I asked my workers, but nobody told me they did it. I shrugged the first time, but now it's the second time, I don't know what to think of it...”.

They thank him, then Tora asks Nicoletta to relay a message to Severin : they would like to visit the old church tomorrow afternoon, as he suggested yesterday.

They go back on the church parvis, to wait for Ivana. When he sees them, the carriage driver spits on the ground. They ignore him.

Moments later, they hear a man talking about another woman disappearance last night! It is a prostitute, and that woman has the usual esthetic profile. Her friends signaled her disappearance early afternoon : she didn't come back to her boarding room.

They still have time until six, when they start their guard duty, so they go to Chipies Lane where the prostitute district is located.



All the girls wear black. A group of women quickly gather around the heroes when they start asking questions. The vanished woman's name is Anaïs Côté. "She never thought it could happen to her, and she refused to die her hair, like many did!", says a sorrowful girl.

One of the girls starts insulting Ivan, that he is mean with them and is probably the killer. Quickly, another girl says "I'm not sure, Sarah, it seems crazy Moïse saw something..."

She brings the group to an old man lying in the street, a vagrant. She is very careful when she wakes him up.

Tora asks another girl why is she treating him with care. "It's not his fault, it's something in his head. But he is a gentle soul, never did hurt anyone".

After a few minutes, he is seated, eyes opens. The girls ask him what he saw last night.

"Oh, that", he says, "I'm not sure, it was dark. I think I saw a monster, as big as an elephant, or as I believe an elephant is big as I never saw one." (impish smile) "It was greenish or black, don't know for sure as it was dark. Great wings on its back. It went flying in the alley in the back of the boarding house."

The heroes question him, and he estimates its size at about 8 feet diameter. He draws something in the sand :

Now it's time to go back to meet Ivana at the church. Tora thanks the girls for their help.

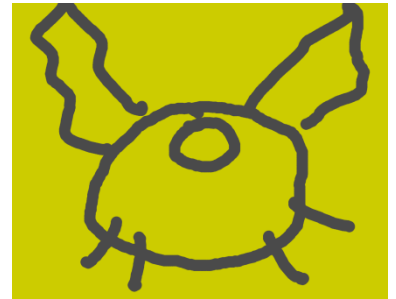
They walk for the Cathedral's parvis, and see Ivana talking with Nostalia and Clothilda and another girl they remember seeing at the ball last November : Hellena Boritsi. She is dressed like someone who likes to hike in the forests. "I was going to leave", and she salutes the other girls and then the heroes.

The trio of friends enter the carriage, but it takes a while because Ivana talks with a group of admirers.

Then the heroes see Brendig Lasonde, Ivan's man. He shows them a bag and waves at them to come to him. "So! What does the wh... puts on her face? Have you found something?" Varadan insults him by asking "are you talking about your mother?" Then he adds "we do not know, we can't learn anything, we are just guards". With an understanding smile, Lasonde says "I see. That is probably your last dose", and he hands them the bag with five vials. Later, the heroes give it to Nostalia.

The heroes get on their horses and follow the carriage. It doesn't go to Misericordia, but to Marsav Hall, north of Levkarest. They pass the high walls surrounding it to find a palace. Marsav Hall is the official seat of the Borcan government. Its expansive and well maintained grounds include the Hall of Records (where Clothilda has her office), a couple militia barracks, a Government building, and a large mansion for Ivana's brother, Conte Sulo Boritsi.

A large tent is seen on a green field. One one side is a temporary camp where people with Falkovnian flags stands.



The carriage goes in the direction of the tent. Quickly, Ivana opens the carriage door, exits and swings its door close. She walks alone toward the tent, with an angry attitude.

Clothilda tells the heroes to stay behind and react if the situation needs it. They go inside the large tent, to see two tables facing each other with twenty feet in between. Ivana is seated alone at one table while three men and a veiled woman were waiting at the other table. The heroes go behind Ivana, standing up, while Nostalia and Clothilda sits by Ivana's side.

The first man is very tall and thin, but very muscular at the same time. His long face shows many battle scars. He salutes "the gracious Lady Ivana Boritsi" while Ivana barely nods at him.

Not upset from this coldness, he continues. "My name is Jardan Kovedknochen, Ministry of Trade Colony Program. With me is Marcos Vedarrak from intergouvernemental relations – our best diplomat!" (the heroes remember seeing him at the Karina dog fights, and at the Misericordia Ball).

Marcos Vedarrak is near 40 years old. He is of average height but strongly built, with broad shoulders from years spent in training with weapons. His broad face is rather battered from years in the field and his Roman nose has been broken at least twice, but his pale blue eyes and commanding presence give warning that he is a man of intelligence and ability.

Vedarrak salutes Ivana by bowing his head and she replies to him. He doesn't show any sign that he once had a talk with the heroes (at Misericordia's ball).

The tall man with a monocle is presented as Dr Vjorn Horstman, from the Ministry of Science. He is disdainful and won't talk much, except at the end of the discussion. He is obviously not the fighter type. One of his eye is dead, ... milky white. When Exigu (an halfling) and Austizel (an elf) comes near, he says a word in Kovedknochen's ear, but the heroes read his lip as they know that word : Imstichen! Kovedknochen nods.

*DM note : fodder for impalement! (see session 16 when the heroes visited Falkovnia for the first time)*

The woman is their only guard escort, he explains. She is presented as Antunia Papiecù. She nods graciously. Her robe hides a heavy armor, probably a chain mail. The robe hides at least two long weapons. During the meeting, while Horstman and Vedarrak watch Ivana's reaction to Kovedknochen's speech, she closely watches the heroes, not aggressively but there is a hint of curiosity in her eyes. She seems to dislike the bright sun outside and sometimes adjust her veil over her eyes.



Black images from Dishonored2 video game

*DM note : top Falkovnian officials, as you may know (See Falkovnia Gazetter p 99). The diplomat Marcos Vedarrak is Nathan of the FoS creation (Book of Sacrifices netbook) and Antunia is my puppy (see Qtr18). I plant now the seed of this mini adventure for later. Antunia is watching the heroes as she needs heroes to destroy the Tar Mummy Project.*

*This meeting is something I thought of recently. Drakov hopes to split Borca from its traditional alliance with Richemulot, Dementlieu, and Mordent, and he has sent Horstman for the job. You'll see it is as heavy handed as Drakov is a bad military leader ;)*

After presenting his side, Kovedknochen smiles at Ivana and looks at the other people on Borca's side, as if waiting for Ivana to introduce them. But Ivana stays silent.

"We are here today on behalf of our Great Leader Drakov. We have a generous offer for Borca, A ... very generous offer!", Kovedknochen starts his long speech.

Ivana listens patiently, but her gaze shows anger kept in check.

"I know recent history hasn't been always easy between Falkovnia and Borca, but my lord Drakov now wishes to change that. And ... it is a great opportunity for you!"

He waits for Ivana's reaction, but there is none. He continues.

"Falkovnia already has an alliance with Lamordia, and we think it would be perfect if we extend that alliance south east with Borca. On this map, you see it would make the best possible alliance, no? We could control all the north-south trade west of the Shadow Rift. Think about how great that Power Axis could do! Imagine if we could control *all* that trade, imagine *all* the added taxes!"

Absolutely no reaction from Ivana. She keeps her face stone cold.

"But that would mean Borca should exit the treaty of the Four Leagues. That never did you any good, anyway, isn't it? While an alliance with Falkovnia would be more helpful for trade. Think of all the added profits for the Boritsi Trading Company!"

He waits for a reaction, but Ivana just waves at him to go on.

"Think about an alliance with Falkovnia, a great military trained country. Say it can work, and nobody could threaten you when our protection is known!"

She yawns, hiding her mouth with her hand.

"And... as an added bonus, we could open an enclave in Levkarest, yes, like we did in Karina!"

Ivana raises an eyebrow. Her face shows a "really, they go there?" expression. The heroes notice Vedarrak is slightly wincing.

"Yes, we could start with a small enclave in Levkarest, with less than 50 persons. It could be a test. Temporary! We could try it six month and see how it goes? You know we could really clean that place you call the slums! Awful place! And think of ..."

Ivana interrupts him and talk for the first time. "Are you suggesting we do not have control on the city? That ... we do a bad job at this?"

Kovedknochen stammers for a long moment, and Horstman interrupts "No not at all our intention, madame. We think Borca has a strong government." (it is obvious he doesn't believe what he said)



Kovedknochen looks at his sheet of paper for a moment and clearly, he has made all the points he wanted to say. He starts again with other words, but Ivana quickly interrupts him “Thank you, we already heard that, I think it means the meeting is over. We will answer you shortly through an official communication. Now since you came unannounced, which isn’t polite, I ask you to leave Borca at the earliest tomorrow.”

Horstman looks insulted that Ivana ends the meeting like this. “But ...”, he starts.

Ivana Boritsi gets up, closes her arms, fiercely looks at them and says “You can tell your *Great Leader* that we will *never* exit the Treaty of Four Nations. Do not invade any nation from the Treaty, or we will react. *Strongly*. The last times you tried to invade us, you took us by surprise. And it didn’t went well for your side, no?”

“Now, we are prepared to meet you properly”, she adds.

She turns around, and leaves the tent. The heroes can see she is furious.

Just before Ivana left, Horstman was going to say something when Vedarrak made a sign at him that it would not change anything.

The heroes see Ivana walk toward Sulo’s house. The four Falkovnians go back to their temporary camp and the men start talking while Antunia stays a few yards away.

When they are far, Nostalia laughs “wow, *that* was a great exercise in diplomacy!”

Clothilda shares that these men are sadistic scoundrels, except Vedarrak. “He is not like them, He is a good diplomat with good common sense, a decent person. He should have been the one talking, not that dreadful parrot of Drakov. It would have been less dreadful.”

After 15 minutes, Ivana walks back to the tent. “I need a strong drink, let’s go to the Dark Maiden”, and she waves at her waiting carriage.

While the carriage is coming, Clothilda says she has things to finish at the Hall of Records, and that she will join them in an hour. Ivana nods.

The carriage delivers Ivana, Nostalia and the heroes at the Dark Maiden around 8pm. It is packed, but the owner empties a table for Ivana and her companions. He even puts a white clothe on it (the only table with one). They call for drinks.

Ivana “Why did they come here? Why did they come here to sell this inadmissible plan? Did they hear I just turned senile and they wanted to fool me?”

Nostalia “Drakov surely instructed them to come here and sell us his ideas. They had no choice but to come. It was clear in Vedarrak’s face that he knew you would say no”

Ivana “Why was Horstman there?! He is the Minister of Science, and he said nearly nothing.”

Exigu suggest that his interest was perhaps elsewhere that the meeting, and that he was there to watch.



The drinks arrive and the party starts at the table. Clothilda arrives half an hour after and joins the table.

They eat hearty tavern food, anything but the usual fancy meals they had with Ivana so far. The food is however surprisingly good. Exigu doesn't eat, fearing it is poisoned. In the restroom, Macrazbunare casts *detect poison* – nothing poisonous on the table, but the three girls are !

After the meal, the tables are set on one side while everybody gets up. There is an orchestra on the side, playing lively music. People dance and play games of dice or cards. The girls mingle with the crowd. Everybody has a good time, rich and poor. The low class population obviously loves Ivana. Nobody pays for their drink, a treat on Ivana's tab!

For a moment between themselves, Varadan says to the other heroes "by the way, at the church, we were impolite and haughty with Ivan's thug. I think he understood we do not care much about *Borrowed Time*."

They wonder why Ivana doesn't assassinate Ivan? "There must be an equilibrium between those two that we do not know...", Macrazbunare thinks.

Clothilda joins the band and starts singing. She has a lovely deep jazzy voice. Most men shivers at her singing.

Later, around 10 pm, a couple of ermordenungs arrive. Nostalia says to Macrazbunare "Those two are the Dezuni. You asked me questions about them the other day. Do you wish to meet them in person?" But Macrazbunare refuses the opportunity.

Ivana talks with the Dezuni and seems happy to see them.

Later this evening, the Dezuni couple introduce themselves to Varadan while he is alone in the crowd. She asks: "Hello beautiful. We are artists, and we are always searching for good looking models. Would you like to model for us? The pay is good for a few hours of doing not much!"



Varadan refuses, they insist, and Varadan tells them he is now busy working for Ivana.

"Huh, are you Varadan?", Lady Dezuni asks. He nods. They are shocked. They say "Oh, sorry, please forget it" and they quickly leave him.

Varadan talks about that with Nostalia. She smiles. "They clearly did not know who you were, or they would have left you alone"

11 pm. Ivana yawns. "Now children, let's go home", she says.

Meanwhile, during the evening, Exigu goes outside for a walk, in search for clues about the vanishings. He walks to Chipies Lane and back. He sees nothing strange. But on the way, he sees an Inn half filled with loud Falkovnians!

When they are about to leave, Varadan tells Ivana of the Falkovnians nearby. “Oh, let them be. They have until tomorrow to leave. But too bad they didn’t come to the Dark Maiden with trouble in mind, that would have been fun...”

She gets in the carriage, alone. The heroes get on horses and three of them are in front, three following the carriage.

That night, on the isolated road between Caina and Misericordia, Exigu and Tora suddenly hear the sound of something big falling from the sky. A second later, the black carriage explodes with a loud exploding sound! Something just hit it from the sky! Like a huge cannon ball!

When the cloud of splinters dissipates, they see a large thing, like a 7’ stone ball. It has split the carriage in two when it fell on the carriage driver bench (who is probably dead).

The four horses from the carriage flee in panic while carrying the broken front of the carriage. All horses except Varadan and Petrak’s panic too.

The cannonball thing unfolds as the gargoyle! It stands in the broken carriage, Ivana at its feet. She screams in panic! Oil torches start to spill around and the carriage is partly surrounded by fire.

Varadan moves his horse to get close to the broken carriage, but he is helpless to prevent the monster snatching Ivana and flying in the air.

Meanwhile the others regroup and follow the Gargoyle. They cast *haste* to help the pursuit.

The thing is getting higher and higher, slowly. The heroes are able to follow.

*DM note: a Fly move of 40 is slow! It used some of its move to get higher from the ground, so it was increasing its height by 10 feet every round, and away 60 feet every round. They did cast haste so they were able to follow and still make an action!!*

They hurl spells at the monster, *Spiritual Hammer*, *Shackle*, *magic missiles*, but all spell fails!

Macrazbunare then casts *faerie fire*, but on Ivana, so they could track the beast in the night sky.

He then notices Ivana’s body is limp!?

At one point, Petrak cast *Greater Magical Weapon* on a flight of arrows, and everybody with a bow takes some. They start hurling arrows at the thing.

Macrazbunare turns into a giant bat, casts *magic fang*, and attacks the gargoyle. It attacks with a gaze attack, but Macrazbunare is not affected. From now on, he will follow eyes closed, using his bat’s echolocation senses instead. The gargoyle tries another gaze attack and it misses again (of course). The gargoyle will switch to fist attacks against the bat, but it slows its move...

Macrazbunare also notices that Ivana’s eyes are closed as she appears to be praying with a deep concentration? He thinks she is the target of a fascinate-like spell effect!

So with the *haste*, the heroes are able to follow the creature and attack the gargoyle, mostly with arrows at long range, and Macrazbunare as a bat.



At one point, Ivana shakes off the effect, and starts attacking the gargoyle with a dagger.

The pursuit last forever. Then, the last round before the end of the *haste* spell, a last arrow provokes the fall of the gargoyle! It crashes on the ground, still snatching Ivana in its clutches! It falls to the soft ground with a low *thud* noise!

The first hero reaching the crater sees Ivana sitting in the dust of the crater. She is in shock! “Did that really happen?”

But that hero also notices that there are no traces of the gargoyle! There is no cadaver on the ground, no blocks of stone or even stone particles, it just vanished!

*DM note : Aaargh! Of course, I couldn't let it end that way! OK, the players did very well and were creative so I let them their victory... but the thing is not gone, I have an end scenario to unfold ☺ Think it merged in the ground or has something in the church that rejuvenates it. Next time, I snatch her on the street, in a city it will be tougher to follow! I plan for the Gargoyle to be quiet for a few days, so she feels safe, then snatch!*

They cure her wounds.

Ivana shares that just before she suddenly had to pray compulsively, the thing spoke to her in her head “Let me finish my work. Ezra will make me beautiful. I want to stop scaring people”!

They are standing in a open agricultural field. They do not wait there long, fearing another attack.

Gathering the panicked horses would take too much time. They walk toward Misericordia (half a mile) while watching in every direction to prevent another surprise attack.

Near Misericordia, they see the horses waiting for them. The carriage horses are still attached to the destroyed front of the carriage. The driver has been squashed but most of his body still hangs to it.

“Too bad, he was a good driver”, says Ivana, but the heroes do not hear any hint of sadness in her voice...

\*cut scene scent before game 90\*

Days before, when Ivana saw a monster at her window ...

It was flying above the isolated manor, impervious to the majesty of it. The numerous guards posted at the entrance weren't a menace, it judged. It was easy to avoid being seen. So it flew toward the window it knew was *her's*.

There was lighting inside, despite the late hour. “I should avoid being seen”, it again thought.

It grabbed the window's edge for stability and to tried to see inside the room. But the inside wooden blinds were closed. It stood there for a moment, thinking “Ezra, bless me”.

Suddenly, the blinds were widely opened, and a rush of light came to its face, blinding it for a split second. But then it saw she was there, in front of it! Such a beauty! Perfection! But then it noticed the wild fear in her eyes. A rush of conflicting emotions surged through its body.

Quickly, it moved back from the window back to the darkness. It fled in the night, pitiful tears on its stone face.

## GAME SESSION 90: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE IN BORCA – 5

(played Nov 3rd, 2019. Austizel played by Sylvain)

*July 4th, 748, 11h45 pm*

They get at the Misericordia gate. Seeing Ivana in blood, a stunned Lucretio Napioli asks “what ... happened?” but she quickly mutes him. “No question”, she says. He does as she says, but his eyes mutely question the heroes.

“Make sure to recover the carriage on the road”, she tells him, “both parts.”

*July 5th, 748, midnight*

She goes inside and Varadan, not sure of what to do, follows her. She goes in the kitchen and takes a bottle of brandy with two glasses.

Tora, Exigu and Austizel stay outside to watch the manor, while Macrazbunare and Petrak sleep to recover their spells. The heroes outside discuss: Is Ivana really the dark master of Borca? If not, what is?

Inside, Ivana is in shock. She explains Varadan that she never lived something like that. “I’ve never been in battle. The borcan usual way to solve a problem is a dagger in the back, or poison”.

“Severin?”, she says, after Varadan asked her about him, “I do not know, I think he is another of my secret admirers. Wait, do you think he is the one that sent me that *thing?*”, she asks.

Varadan continues and asks her about the old Ezra church.

Ivana - “No idea why they would not sell it. They do not want to sell it to Hala for an hospital, or to a group of merchants looking for warehouse space. I saw that last offer, that was very generous. But still they refused...”

Varadan informs her that this building is not the responsibility of Nicoletta Ladubay, who is normally in charge of all church buildings, but in fact a direct responsibility of Severin and the Praesidius.

“Ah?”, she answers, surprised, “I didn’t know that. Now you made me very curious to find what they are doing with this old building...”

Then, looking again at her ruined dress, she leads Varadan to her private bathroom to get cleaned. She leads him again through the black and white tiled room and again tells him to walk in her path. Varadan notices the pattern has changed from last time...

*DM note : bluff from Ivana to protect her private sanctum.*

She undresses and cleans herself from the blood. Varadan helps. Then she leads him through a few secret doors, through a laboratory (many vials and cages with live animals) and a vast warehouse-like room in the attic. "All the objects in this place is worthy enough to feed a family for at least a year", Varadan thinks. She goes to a ladder and opens a trap in the ceiling, and they find themselves on the roof, where there is a private walk.

Ivana is nostalgic and a little sad "You have no idea how many times I came here to cry and curse the sky. The first time was when my mother seduced Pieter, my first fiancé". She suddenly laughs a chillingly hysteric laughter...

While they walk on the Widow's walk, drinking brandy by the bottle, Varadan learns from her that when Ivana fell in love with Pieter in 709, Camille disguised herself as Ivana and seduced him, then claimed that it was he who had seduced her. "I do not know why she did this, was she jealous? Or perhaps my mother was possibly mad or jealous that her daughter should find that which had eluded her for so many years? Love! She often said that *all men were evil.*" Ivana took her lesson to heart, and later Pieter died. "Perhaps his soup was a little too spiced that day", she says, followed by another bout of hysteric laughter.

On the ground, the other heroes on watch are a little alarmed to see her walking on the roof with so little protection from an attack from the air...

Varadan tells her they think that the Gargoyle is possibly the creation from the obsession of the sculptor, and that all vanished women had more or less the same look as Ivana. She do not answer.

At that point, she is a little drunk from the alcohol and walks tipsily. Using that opportunity, Varadan moves the conversation toward her famous beauty and asks her how does she keeps this young look.

Ivana looks at Varadan with narrowed eyes, and after a long moment answers "I imagine I have good genes", and she changes the subject of the conversation toward the Falkovnian meeting. Varadan realizes that she isn't drunk anymore...

Varadan asks her why did her brother Sulo wasn't at the meeting with Falkovnians. "They requested to meet me, and at that time, I did not know what they wanted to discuss", she replies, a little coldly. Varadan stays silent.

Looking at the horizon in silence, after which she says to Varadan "yesterday night, after this meeting with Falkovnians, Clothilda stayed behind for urgent work, she said, about half an hour. I'd like to know what really did. Investigate this in secret!"

They go back inside and get to her real bedroom, but she says "the thing knew that this was my bedroom, so we'll use the other one tonight". They go there and sleep.



At 2 pm, the heroes learn their spells. They ask to see Ivana. They find her outside inspecting a carriage. It is also lacquered black and gold, but lacks a roof. "I hope it won't rain in the next days", she says.

She asks a guard to install four oil lights on the carriage, pointed outward.

In the distance, near the stable, they see both parts of the old carriage, burning.

Petrak tells her that they could do an *arcane mark* spell on her, so they could always find out the direction where she is, and also possibly a *status* spell, to monitor her health. She refuses both with a tight smile.

Petrak tells her they could also do an *arcane mark* spell on an object, that she could discard when she doesn't want to be tracked. She accepts this.

She asks "why all this preparation, do you think the beast is still alive? I thought you killed it?"

Petrak "we do know for sure..."

They ask her if they could start their guard duty tonight at 8pm instead of 6pm. "Accepted. I will be at the Boritsi Music Hall"

Ivana to Varadan "do not forget what I asked you yesterday, love"

The heroes leave Misericordia. They stop at the impact site, where the Gargoyle fell. There is no trace of the thing, as if it disintegrated on impact.

They go to the Cathedral to meet Nicoletta Ladubay. There they find one of the statues inside the Cathedral started crying blood around noon! They notice Severin, Nicoletta and Lollar in the crowd watching the statue. It is a "wicked merchant" statue.

Severin sees the heroes and tells them angrily "the investigation isn't progressing, what are you doing!"

They move to a more quiet space, with Nicoletta and Severin, and they tell about the attack of last night. Quickly, a concerned Severin asks "Is she ok?"

Tora explains they think it could come back. They go check the Gargoyle on the roof. The statue is still an empty shell, nothing changed from yesterday.

Nicoletta asks how they explain the statue crying blood. Petrak offers that there is perhaps a link between the gargoyles and that it cries because of the death of the other gargoyle?

Nicoletta says the crying statue is special, as the sculptor used his own face as a model for that statue... The heroes go watch it closely, but their investigation shows nothing more but blood tears coming out of the statue's eyes...

They ask Nicoletta if they could go back to the crypt. She fetches Ferrand Moitessier, and he opens the slab to the crypt. Meanwhile, he tells them one of worker saw a face appear on a wall this morning. It stayed a few seconds, then it moved back inside the wall...

They go back to the sculptor's tomb. The image Tora sees using his *ghostsight* ability is the same – the sculptor recoils in fear from something unseen...

They ask Severin if they could see the old church as discussed yesterday.

Severin “You will lose your time, but if you insist...”

Tora “we want to see it”

Severin nods, a strange smile on his face. They leave Nicoletta at the church (“I’m not *invited*”, she says sourly) and they go with Severin to the old building. There, Alixandre Serre has already opened the locked door.

Inside, they look more closely at the painted iconography on the walls. That version of Ezra is quite different from the one currently seen at the new Cathedral (which is similar to Ivana’s image). The older version of Ezra is more of a handsome but stout woman, very motherly and protective... Very different!

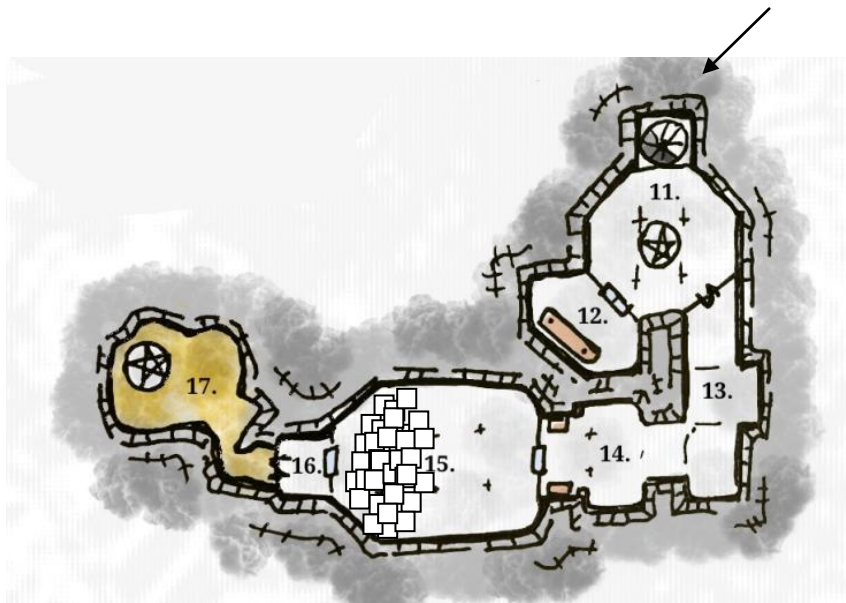
They ask Severin about it. He says it’s maybe for the Ezra missionary missions through the world, and that new version of Ezra is more appealing to the eye?

The old church building is used as general storage: warehouse/junk drawer. It's stuffed to the rafters with old pews, chipped statues, old prayer books, etc. Severin says that it is also used to stock food that will be given to the poors later in the year.

Severin moves to a tomb and quickly unlocks a mechanism and moves it on a well oiled pivot. Under it is a set of stairs going down! A sign inside says “mortal danger, do not trespass”. Alixandre is surprised, as he clearly never saw that thing move. Severin tells Alixandre to wait outside. “He isn’t knowing much”, Severin explains, “and it is better for him”

Severin explains there are 16 deadly glyphs to protect the place. Severin says he will get inside, neutralize the glyphs, and then the heroes should wait a minute and reopen it to safely walk the stairs. They do as he says. They get down to the old crypt level.





They see many emptied tombs, then an impassable pile of crates (room 15 on the map). But it's not the dead end it seems to be: Severin opens a secret door through the crates, to get to a room where art is stored (room 16). But Severin passes by it, ignoring the pricey art.

Then another secret door in a wall leads to a tomb (room 17)! They see a sealed tomb with a glass case. It emits a blue light. In it, the body of a man is seen...

"Please meet a very famous person", Severin says. "This is Yakov Dilisnya, yes, the very founder of the Ezra church..."

The heroes do not understand.



Severin explains: Camille Dilisnya was born to Lev Dilisnya and Anna Kurdzeil in northern Mordent in 662 and grew up there on the Dilisnya Estate. Lev had taught his daughter the art of poisoning and poisonmaking. Camille was further blessed with the ability to craft any poison she could imagine.

In 684 she was soon also recognized as its rightful ruler. His brother Yakov in particular is known to have done so. He founded the church, writing the core of the holy books.

Camille took three more husbands. Klaus Boritsi was married to her in 688. He fathered three children with her, Ivana Boritsi in 689, Sulo Boritsi in 694 and Anton Boritsi in 696. Klaus was gruesomely poisoned to death together along with his mistress in 697: Camille formulated a bizarre contact poison that merged his skin together with that of the chambermaid in question.

Stepan Taroyan was married in 697 BC. He quickly took a mistress and fled the country.

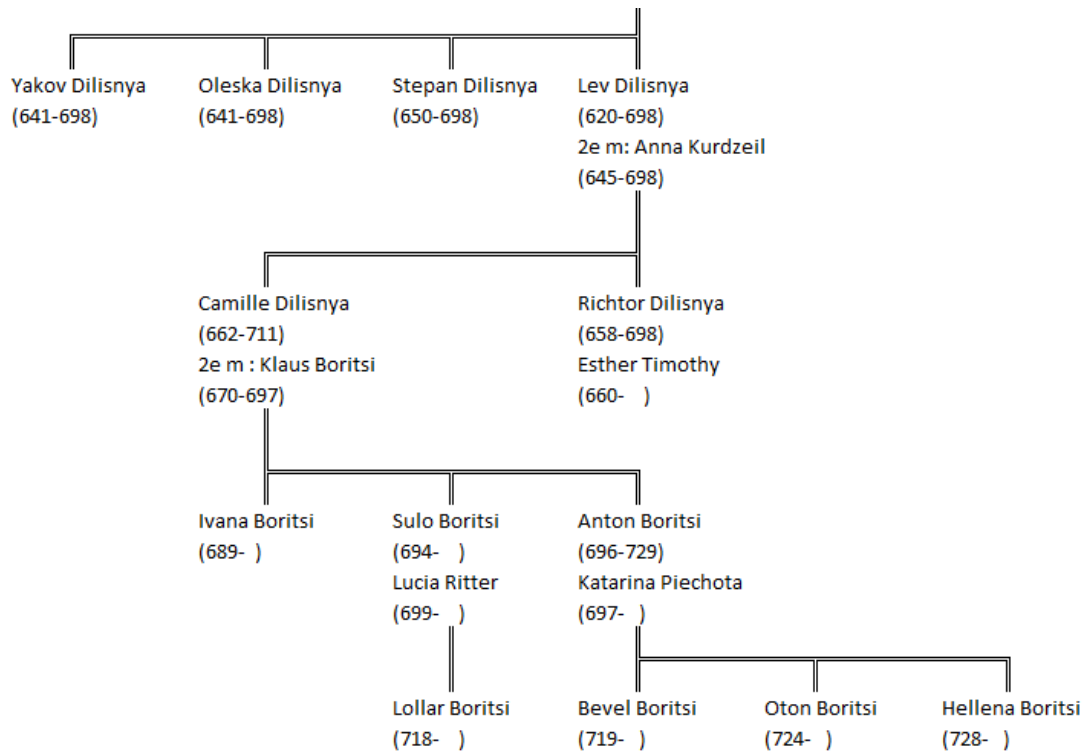
And Oleh Fortich was married in 698 BC. He wasted little time in attempting to kill Camille. He failed in this, claimed that he was acting at the instigation of her family, and was poisoned to death. But at his funeral, Camille proceeded to poison to death the nigh entirety of her branch of

the Dilisnyas, including her father Lev, her mother Anna, her brother Richtor, her half-sister Oleska and her half-brothers Stepan and Yakov.

This mass murders and in particular the murder of the praesidius and founder of the Church of Ezra threatened to provoke an insurrection. There were riots in the street until Camille calmed the situation by giving a fortune to the church for the construction of the Cathedral and erected a statue of Yakov in front of the Cathedral.

Camille privately warned the church that refusing her gifts would wreak dire punishments, and that the church should do all it can to calm the commoners.

So this branch of the Dilisnya family was nearly all destroyed in 698 :



“I am member of the Order of the Watchers... and we watch over him”, Severin says. He explains that after the poisoning of everybody by Camille in 698, including Yakov, the grieving priests moved Yakov’s body to the old church’s crypt to embalm him.

But to their surprise, they found Yakov’s body to be near dead, but not dead, without knowing why it happened or how. *Detect poison* on him showed positive, but whatever spells they tried to negate the poison or to bring him back to life failed. “He breathes very slowly, like once an hour or so. His body’s metabolism is very slow and he ages very slowly, like a year for every decade passed...”

A limited number of anchorites knew about it. The church kept that secret from Camille in fear of her wrath. Then later from Ivana, as it could change the balance of power in Borca if Yakov is back!

The secret was kept by a few priests, a few ones only knowing the full extent of the situation. They hid him in a secret part of the old church's crypt, and eventually built a glass case for him.

Eight years ago, during the construction of the Grand Cathedral, they moved the former Praesidius bodies from the old crypt (under the old church before the Cathedral) to the new crypt under the new Grand Cathedral.

But each time they tried to move Yakov, his permanent quiet sleeping face suddenly showed extreme discomfort. The short list of priests in the Watchers decided to keep him at the old crypt, until a solution or a new clue would be found.

Meanwhile, since 698, all the Praesidii being in the know, they all made sure Yakov was a grand central figure in the church history, well known, revered and loved by all as grand benefactor. Yakov's birthday on July 15<sup>th</sup> and this year is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death.

Severin asks Varadan "Now, what are you going to say to Ivana?"

Varadan "but if that is a secret, why do you tell us?"

Severin "we knew you would come back someday, so we decided to tell you first."

*DM note: a lie – Severin didn't ask the Praesidius for approval. But Severin is madly in love with Ivana and wants to put Varadan in a bad position, where he should possibly flee the town or be eliminated. Good guy making bad things for the love of a woman. He'll get in trouble for this!*

4h15 pm, they are back to the streets, and Severin leaves them. Now what do we do with this information?, they discuss.

Macrazbunare offers that the new church is maybe rejecting the new Ezra iconography, and that explains most of the events ?

They go back to the Cathedral and talk with Nicoletta. About the new iconography, she says that she never read or heard anything about a sudden change in the look of Ezra. She thinks that an artist once portrayed Ezra as she looks now, and that people liked it so it glued. Was it a homage to Ivana, an important church donor?

"I do not think she ever influenced this on purpose", she says.

They talk about the faces appearing in the walls. They ask her if somebody died during the church construction? "Yes, of course, that happened a few times. But all the dead bodies were recovered and I do not think there is a dead body *inside* the church"

They also wonder where the creature – whatever it is – does bring the vanished women...



5hpm. They go meet Garrett Tallgallows at the Dark Maiden tavern and discuss with him. Exigu, also a Halfling, talks about the Falkovnians that were in town yesterday.

Garrett “They left this morning, but I heard there was an incident near the frontier: one of their soldier battled many borcan soldiers and won.”. He will try to find more information later.

Exigu asks him if he knows what Clothilda did after the Falkovnian meeting. Garrett tells that he can find the answer to this question : “meet me again in 24 hours, and the cost is 200 gp”

Back in the street, Macrazbunare stops at a beauty shop to buy a pot of beauty cream.

They go to the sculptor’s workshop, and they check for secret doors or trap doors on the floor: none.

Exigu offers that if the creature has an ability to pass through stone, it can go anywhere... They wonder if there is a place in the Cathedral where a secret room could be hidden: the walls are 5 foot thick, and there is no room for a secret room larger than 5 feet, except in the underground level, or the crypt.

They go back to the crypt. *Ghostsight* again shows the ghost of the sculptor creeping from something hidden from him. That thing is out of view from Tora.

They cast *detect secret door* and explore part of the crypt : nothing.

7h pm. They decide to explore the compound for the first time. The compound is a walled area north of the Cathedral, where the church high clerics live. The stone walls are 20’ high, with ivy. The access is controlled by guards, but Ladubay’s pass opens the door for them.

They see the Praesidius home (a small manor, with 4 guards in front). Very few have access to this manor). Then many smaller homes for the high clergy : Toret Nicoletta Ladubay, Toret Johann Severin, Toret Sarlota Ostrava, Toret Oton Boritsi and Toret Elias Nowlen.

There is a 40’ high tower where Sentire Roger Tranter lives. Nearby is a Study Center and map room. This is where Sentire Roger Tranter works.

*DM note : the church hierarchy is :*

- 1) *Praesidius*
- 2) *Bastions (leaders of the recognized church branches, of which James Martigan in Mordent)*
- 3) *Sentires (local spiritual leaders, there are two in Levkarest)*
- 4) *Toret (of which Nicoletta Ladubay and Johann Severin)*
- 5) *Warden (Petra is one)*
- 6) *Anchorites without a title*

They also see a green house as well as a stable, a carriage house, and two barracks for the guards.

In a corner of the compound, they see a nun's cloister. From a guard, they learn that the 35 cloistered nuns mostly never leave. A rumor has it that it is a place where rich families of the core send their unruly teen girls.

Another tower 30' high is called the Tower of the Wind (observatory).

The middle of the compound is a large tended grass field (with many live peacocks), and lively animals statues (deers, rabbits, boar, ...) and a large pond. There is a large statue of Ezra rising victorious in the middle of the pond.

Now it's time to go to the Boritsi Music Hall. On the road, they see Brendig Lasonde leaning on a post, as if waiting for them. "Now, lads, have you found anything?", he asks. Macrazbunare gives him the beauty cream, he bought earlier, saying this is what she uses.

He takes it, puts it in a pocket, and tells them "you should watch Severin. He looves Ivana so much, we think he could be the suspect for your enquiry, no? If they all looked alike Ivana Boritsi ..."

After meeting him, they wonder if Lasonde is right about Severin ... Maybe Severin controls the Gargoyle?

In front of the Boritsi Music Hall, many people are there, talking in small groups. They see Ivana and Nostalia near the carriage driven by Lucretio. A little farther, Clothilda and Cassandra are there too, talking with other people. Ivana and Nostalia are happy to see the heroes. Ivana takes Varadan's arm and they enter the music hall.

Ivana, at Varadan's ear – Have you found something on my request? (Clothilda's whereabouts yesterday night)

Varadan – We started the enquiry, we paid someone to investigate, and ...

Ivana, wincing – I entrust you for something secret, and you give that enquiry to somebody else?

Varadan – I will have the answer tomorrow.

Ivana, changing subject – So you visited the old church, it was interesting?

Varadan, lying – We noticed the iconography has changed with the new church.

Ivana, again wincing - and ... that is why they wouldn't sell the church? Really?

Varadan - ...

Ivana, stern – let's take our seats, it will begin soon.

The heroes are surprised to see the artist coming on stage as none other than Antoinette Depardieu! (*DM note : see session 56, Natalia Vorishkova's daughter*). The concert has many



very complicated piano pieces, and after a while it is a little boring for the heroes. But Ivana and half of the crowd rise up at the end of the concert when it is time to applaud.

Nostalia announces that there will be a private meeting with the artist in the hall, after everybody has left. Meanwhile, they hear more about the Falkovnian skirmish near the border : one of the Falkovnian – a girl – attacked and quickly decimated eight Borcan militians, who were experienced fighters. It was the girl at the meeting, they think! Was it the real reason they came to Borca, to make a statement?

Nostalia says they received an official letter of protestation from the Falkovnian, saying the militians attacked first, and protesting this “aggression”. But witnesses say it’s the opposite that happened. Nostalia shrugs, and adds that the letter was written hours before the event happened ... “We’ll keep an eye on the border...”

Antoinette Depardieu appears and talks to Ivana. Ivana tells the pianist she loved the concert and wishes that Antoinette should be back to Levkarest as soon as she can for another concert. Antoinette is all smile with Ivana. Then, when it is time to leave, she finds a moment to be alone with the heroes and informs them that “my mother is very angry about you, be warned.”

“Also”, she adds with a sniff noise, “remember that she can find you quickly...”.

The heroes discuss a moment before going outside. True, they killed Natalia’s daughter (and Antoinette’s sister). Also, they remember they still have Nathan Timothy’s (Natalia’s lover) heart with them ... (*DM note : found in session 66 in the things used by the Whispering Way*).

Outside, they see Ivana, Nostalia, Clothilda and Cassandra near the carriage, talking.

The road is however strangely empty. Exigu spots Brendig Lasonde and six other guys, half hiding in the shadows, about 300 feet from the Music Hall.

They wonder why they are *that* visible, they could have been more hidden.

In their back, they see another thug of Ivan, near a back alley...

“What is the meaning of this?”, Ivana says, some concern in her voice.

Petrak casts *Status* on the heroes, and offers to include Ivana. She agrees.

Clothilda – why don’t we throw them all that we have in the face?

Nostalia hands three potion of *delay poison* to the heroes. Lucretio is unsure what to do.

Exigu suspects this is a plot by Ivan to kill Ivana? Maybe with the Falkovnians?

Clothilda goes in an alley and casts *invisibility*. Then they notice Cassandra has vanished too!

Macrazbunare’s wolf tells him another group of similar leather scenting humans is farther in the park.

Suddenly, they hear casting and then they see magic missiles fly at Lasonde from a point on the road, and Clothilda's voice shout "Lasonde, get the ..., you have no business around here!" The heroes notice that Clothilda did not reappear after casting ... (and there were five missiles).

Moments later, Austizel casts *ice storm* at the thugs. None of them fall from the blast, but they start retreating in the park direction, away from the street.

In the back, they hear the noise of something falling. Looking in that direction, the heroes see Cassandra in front of the thug's body on the ground.

Ivana gives Lucretio the order to move. He gets the horses to move. Macrazbunare lighten the park with *dancing lights*. They see the thugs fleeing away.

The carriage gets to a good speed and leaves the place ... Lucretio gets the cart to move at full speed. At one point, they notice Clothilda reappearing inside the carriage.

Ivana is furious. "This time Ivan went too far. We should perhaps think of ... eliminating him... Before, he was just an obnoxious and annoying person, but now that was threatening"

The heroes think Lasonde got more resistance than he expected tonight, and that is why he retreated quickly.

In Ivana's back, they see Clothilda and Nostalia smile at each other, and make high five, like if they are happy there was some action they love...