

GAME SESSION SIXTY SEVEN: WHISPERED SECRETS UNFOLDING - 13

(played Feb 8th, 2015. Martin plays Varadan, Sylvain plays Macrazbunare and Yvon plays Austizel)

After Martin's presentation, we accept Pathfinder's quicker rules to learn arcane spells.

Day one in strange land, 9h pm

It is very cold in the chapel, even with the fire. They are somewhat disconcerted with the images and statues inside the church, like if this religion was glorifying torture ?

(DM note: my take on their interpretation of the catholic religion images inside the church ;))

They decide to learn the *tongues* spell from Vrood's spellbook.

They will have a guard on duty at all time, fearing soldiers could invade the village during the night. One of them is staying in the church bell tower, watching outside.

The night is quiet and snowy.

Day two in strange land, morning

They see many villagers gathering at the mayor's place early in the morning. Shortly after that, they see five men leaving the village with sleighs. They leave in Akuvskaya's direction.

Nadja arrives at the chapel with two other women. They bring warm food to the heroes. They all make strange signs when they enter the chapel (a move with the hand, from chin to navel, then to both shoulders). In her strange language, Nadja explains something obviously sad about her destroyed village, Akuvskaya, but they do not understand anything.

With sign languages, involving the sun's position in the sky, Exigu asks when are the men coming back. She understands what he means and her answer mean "very late today". The women leaves the chapel.

They learn their spells for the day and *identify* a few item from the Whispering Ways' equipment.

Austizel cast *tongues* on Varadan. They go talk with Nadja, who is very surprised that finally one of them is able to speak with her. Varadan explains they come from very far away and that he is using a power making him able to understand her for a limited time only. Oddly, she doesn't seem surprised by this fact.

This morning, five villagers left the village to go to Akuvskaya to bring back the corpses of the villagers to bury them in Moskovkaya's cemetery. Never a good idea to leave the dead improperly set to rest in peace, you know...



My village was destroyed because the Mad monk's soldiers came and asked us to leave for a month. We were surprised because usually the soldiers were usually very friendly and we never had a problem with them. Now they seemed different. They were probably following the Mad Monk's orders. So the villagers refused and quickly they started to fire! We were defenceless! It was a massacre!

This Mad Monk is so evil! You know of him, right? Yes? Circus, you must have heard of ... Rasputin!

(insert a little player surprise here ;))

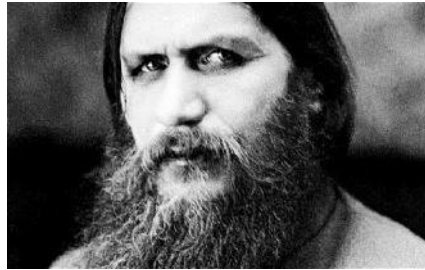
This Rasputin, the Mad Monk, is responsible for the decadency of the royal family! They became bad country leaders and there were famine! The Reds exploited this anger and fought the royal troops. They were successful and they took the power a few month ago in October when they captured the Romanovs, the royal family...

But the war isn't finished. The war between the Reds and the Loyalists is still going on and the Loyalists resist in some part of the country.

But the war is all over the world! All the countries are at war, these are horrible time!

What of the Mad Monk in all of this? You do not know him, Circus, so I will tell you more of him and why we are in terror of him.

Look at these images from a newspaper. That is what he looks like. Everybody in the country knows him.



Born in the Siberian village of Pokrovskoye, Rasputin traveled the country as a mystic known as a strannik - a religious pilgrim. Rasputin's alluring charisma and piercing eyes brought him fame, and throughout his life, he was credited with strange powers of clairvoyance and faith healing. These "miraculous" powers brought him to the attention of Russia's royal family, where he was tasked with healing the son of the Tsar, Tsarevich Alexei.



Rasputin's reputed ability to heal Alexei granted him vast influence over the Imperial family, particularly Tsarina Alexandra. There were even rumors of Rasputin and the Tsarina... you know what I mean!

And so Rasputin's influence grew, and the Romanovs became more and more distanced from their people and made bad decisions. Other people say nobody could have done anything about the famines, but who knows? The people were hungry, and angry. The Reds used this anger.

Meanwhile Rasputin had jealous rivals at the court, who rejected the notion of a peasant wielding such inordinate control over all kinds of matters of state.

And so it came to pass that treacherous noblemen disguised as friends lured Rasputin to Yusupov Palace in St. Petersburg, fed the monk poisoned cakes, then shot, stabbed, beat, and drowned the strannik in the icy Neva River! He could not be killed, they said.

Yet when his frozen body was recovered encased in a thick block of ice, water filled his lungs as if he had died breathing, and his bonds were broken!

Months after his supposed death, Rasputin's body was exhumed for cremation, but when set alight, Rasputin's corpse sat up in the fire, as if the monk were still alive!

At this point, Nadja's cousin find another old newspaper and she handed it to Nadja.

Ah yes, we even saw a picture of him dead, before they threw him in the water. Look!

But he is back! He came back in this area and led a an army of Cossacks fanatics, that fought evenly the Reds or the Crown Loyalists! His small army was said to be extremely ruthless and deadly.



Rasputin came to us in Akuvskaya three months ago! He said to us that the Akuvskaya monastery was now under his control and it was forbidden for us to go there.

So he took over the prison camp of Akuvskaya - a Siberian prison camp built by the Romanovs, among the ruins of the ancient Akuvskaya monastery. Before that, that monastery was abandoned for nearly a century.

It was abandoned for centuries, until the Imperial Russian government commandeered it for use as a prison camp for criminals and deserters during the Great War. Russia's new Bolshevik government then appropriated the camp to hold Imperial loyalists following the October Revolution.

And most recently, Rasputin's forces overran this prison, and cleared the area of Reds and Crown Loyalists.

But his Cossacks were friendly with us all this time, leaving us alone, even helping us when they could. What we learned from them: although his rivals believed they had assassinated him in 1916, the canny Rasputin actually faked his death and went into hiding! There is also the rumour that a part of the Royal Family, captured by the Reds, was guarded in Akuvskaya prison. Maybe that is why Rasputin fought to gain control of the prison.

He brought with him an esoteric professor to this camp. It is said there were strange experiments and lights around the prison camp. This searcher's name is Nicola Tesla!

But there are many strange things happenings in the area. Yesterday morning, Roman said to us he saw the day before a green fish man walking toward monasteri Akuvskaya! We didn't believe him, but now you say this monster is real?

They heroes asks about if a foreign woman (Kendra) was seen in the area, but Nadja said she wasn't seen. They remember Kendra was roped when she was hurled in the gate, and they fear she is frozen dead if she wasn't recovered...

The area around the monasteri is now forbidden to us by Rasputin, but my hermit cousin lives in this remote area. Father Sergius comes down from his mountain 4 or 5 times a year, to celebrate our religious holidays in Akuvskaya. He is well hidden in the mountain, Rasputin doesn't know of his presence. He may know more about the camp. Do you want me to lead you there?

They agree and will follow Nadja to meet Father Sergius. They leave at 11 am.

At 3 pm, they meet the villagers coming back from Akuvskaya with the burned corpses. They talk with them with *tongues*. Nothing seemed to have been moved after the heroes and Nadja left the burned village yesterday.

They ask these villagers to show them how the rifles work. They understand the villagers took all the weapons they could from Rasputin's soldiers and they hid these under the corpses. They remember that Nadja told them earlier it was forbidden to possess a firearm by anyone but the village burgomaster. This takes a moment but the heroes now learn the basics of using these weapons. Mosin-Nagant long firearms have either 2 shots (two cartridges manually inserted), or you can also use a clipper with seven cartridges, so you do not waste time reloading. There is also one revolver, with a barrel loading of 7 shots. The villagers tell them firearms are not that rare, with all those dead soldiers from the wars, but ammunition is.

At 5 pm, the sun slowly sets. The crows starts squawking noisily. Macrazbunare transforms into a crow abut he doesn't get a lot of useful information from the birds.

It is dark now. They resume their walk toward Akuvskaya. At 6h30 pm, they smell the odor of decay and death in the wind... then soon they are under attack by a swarm of dead crows!

The disgusting swarm of broken flapping wings, feathers and bones engulf Macrazbunare and his wolf. The birds aim viciously for their eyes! Macrazbunare exits the swarm as soon as he can, nauseated. Exigu throws arrows at it, and Austizel a *lightning bolt*. Petrak cast *Searing Light*, and Tora hist the swarm with a *smite evil*. It is a tough opponent, still there after all these blows. The swarm engulf Petrak and Varadan. More arrows from Exigu and another *lightning bolt* from Austizel, and the dead crows all fall to the ground in a disgusting carpet of dead birds... Luckily, no one's eyes were injured.

It is snowing more and more, slowing their advance toward the burning village ... Visibility is much less than a hundred feet, with their light.

They finally arrive at 9h00 pm, and Nadja leads them to the smoked fish house. She proceeds to cook a fish soup with the dried fish.

They go to sleep at 10h30 pm.



Day three in Siberia, 8 am

It is still snowing, although much less than yesterday night. Visibility is about a thousand feet.

Quickly, the pine forest changes to a succession of hills and snow, with only patches of trees here and there. Many crows fly over the area. Nadja leads them through this maze of snowy valleys.



At 1 pm, they see many dead bodies, frozen in the snow. "Pole smerti", murmurs Nadja. Nearly a hundred men died here in a fight. They have white or red uniforms. The heroes make a detour in order not to pass through the field of dead soldiers.

At 3 pm, Nadja announces a "Okhotnich Llagerria!", but the heroes do not understand. Soon, she points at a hunting camp, but it was burned to the grounds. They go take a look at it. It was burned two days ago, and two skeletal remains are seen in the ruins. They resume their travel.

At 4 pm, they pass near another group of dead soldiers, with white uniforms. It looks like these fell into an ambush... Their eyes were punctured with knives and their tongue cut. Their bodies were looted and abandoned there, to be eaten by wolves. They were slain weeks ago.



They cast *tongues* and speak with Nadja. She says the white uniforms are usually Crown loyalists, and red uniforms are either bolcheviks (the Reds) or Rasputin's (who uses the same). She says many battles happened around here in the last year.

Those soldiers that had their eyes punctured and tongue cut out were probably attacked by Rasputin's cossacks, who have a savage reputation when in battle.

They resume their travel. It is slower because of the snow and they will have to sleep outside. They find a patch of pine trees about 200 feet from the road and make a camp in the middle of it. They gather wood for a fire for the whole night and pine branches for warmth.

They start sleeping at 7 pm. It is snowing a lot. Soon, the wind starts too. They are glad to have established their camp, as it is now blizzard conditions outside.

At 10h15 pm, Petrak is on guard. He finds the fire is behaving strangely. Even when adding wood, the fire slowly reduce and gives less and less warmth. He awakes Varadan and they go in the wood to gather some more wood, as is it clear the wood stack they made won't last the night.

They go at a nearby fell tree, and chop more wood. Even when actively cutting wood, and warmly dressed, they feel weakened by the extreme cold, which seem much colder than it should be? They go back to the camp to see the fire extinguished! There are no warm embers, as it should be expected! The fireplace is as cold as it is outside...

They wake up the others. Petrak casts *produce flame* to start the fire anew. It works well and soon the wood is burning well and giving warmth... but Petrak and Varadan are still very cold and getting frostbite!

Austizel casts *dancing light* and makes it wander around the camp - they see nothing but pine trees and shadows ... He then has the idea to make it hover *above* them ... and he sees seven incorporeal spirit shapes floating above them!

The haunted glow of their icy blue eyes reflects the light of the light spell. Their gaze is of despair of dying frozen in the snow...

They identify these as snow wraiths! They know these are incorporeal beings, and that all attacks have a 50 % miss chance, except some force spells such as *magic missiles*.



(DM note: yes, those are Ravenloft's Arayashka ! Picture from Game of Thrones, eerie gaze effect added by me.)

The wraiths attacks! One of them attacks Austizel, who feels his strength drained with the attack! He replies with an empowered *magic missile* (-28 hp, and it doesn't fall!). Then another wraith attacks Macrazbunare and Varadan, who also feel their strength drained. Varadan strikes with a magical dagger. Two wights attacks Tora. Macrazbunare send *magic missile* at one of them. Another wight strikes at Austizel. Exigu attacks with Aldern's war razor. Tora misses the incorporeal beings, and Petrak misses his turning attempt! The last wraith strikes from above at Austizel. The next round sees many hits from the wraith, and many misses from the heroes. But the spells hit the spirit hard: Austizel and Macrazbunare's *magic missiles*, and Petrak add a *prayer* spell to help.

A third *magic missile* from Austizel finally slays one of the snow wraiths! Tora strikes another and it is also destroyed. Petrak casts *spiritual weapon*, another force spell. Austizel casts *lightning bolt* at a group of three snow wraiths, using the Harrowstone warden's badge (metamagic, hits incorporeal all the time). Varadan kills another, then Tora, then Petrak. Macazbunare kills the last one with *Scorching Ray*.

They restart the fire and cure their wounds. Back to sleep... Exigu will stay awake all night to provide *healing* for the others. The next morning he is fatigued from lack of sleep.

Day four in Siberia, 8 am

6h30 am. They wake up and learn spells.

They make a sleigh for Exigu using pine branches. Tora calls his paladin's mount but it stubbornly refuses to pull the sleigh...

So Tora himself hauls the sleigh.

At 2 pm, Nadja points to a place on top of the mountain, and say something they do not understand. She shows them how to mask their traces using pine branches.

They get up about a thousand feet, to see a hole in the hill. This hole is well hidden and it isn't visible from the bottom of the hill.

They meet Nadja's cousin, father Sergius. He is very curious to speak with them. They cast *tongues*.

We come from vey far, and we will use temporary power to be able to speak with you, but those won't last very long. He doesn't seems surprised.

Europa? Amerik? he asks. The players waves negatively.

Nadja explains what the players did in Akuvskaya village and that they want to get inside the camp to eliminate Rasputin as well as to find their disappeared woman friend. Sergius seems to appreciate this.

The heroes also explain Rasputin is probably possessed by an evil wizard (Bar-Taphon), a wizard they would like to see eliminated.

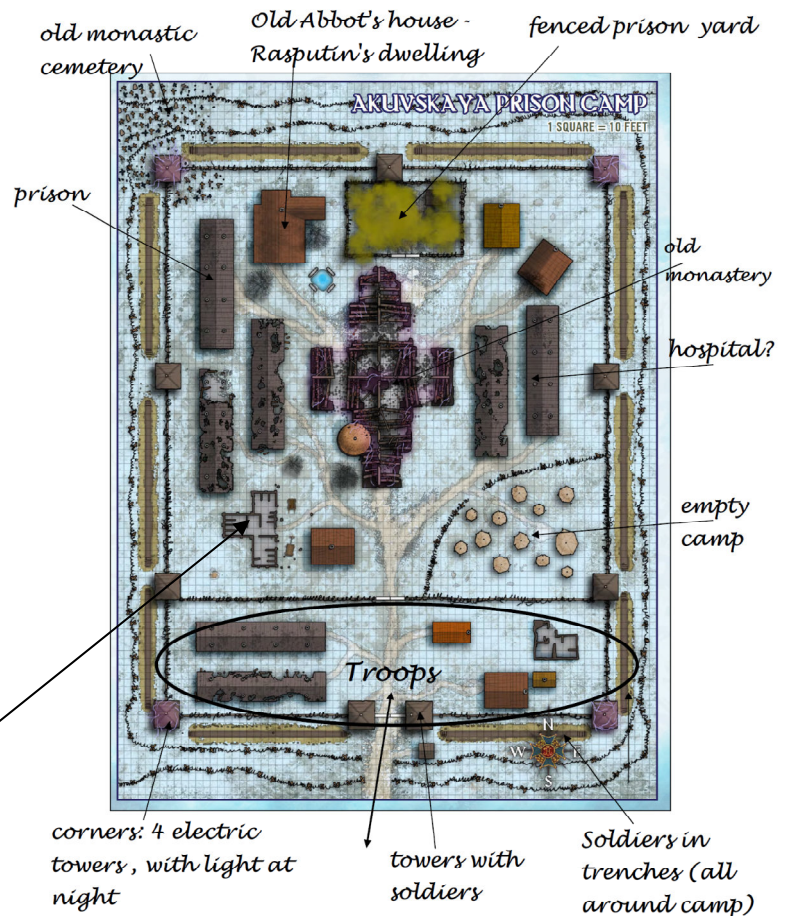
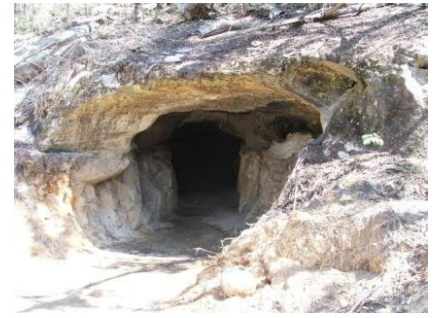
Sergius says Rasputine is very evil, and is with evil people. Most of the soldiers at the camp are paid mercenary. He watches the camp from the top of this hill. He hasn't seen Rasputin for a few days now. He thinks that what is going on at the prison camp is very wrong. He saw many strange lights from the corner camp towers, but more strangely is sometimes at night there is another church of light *over* the monastery ruins, perhaps like an image of what the monastery looked like before it was in ruins...

He draws a good map of the camp, explaining what he thinks are the basic functions of each building.

He says the building that was an hospital is now used for something more sinister, as there are cries of pain often coming from it ...

The heroes asks about a fish man? Yes, he finds this place very cold, and isn't outside often. He is in Rasputin's house, or the monastir, or the hospital. The fish man arrived with a woman prisoner, that looked nearly dead from the cold. She is in the prison.

He finally says he knows of a tunnel to enter the prison camp. Something built by the Romanovs, but unused by the Reds or Rasputin's. He thinks it is because they do not know of its existence... It leads to a burned house, where nobody ever goes. He will show its location to the heroes.



GAME SESSION SIXTY EIGHT: WHISPERED SECRETS UNFOLDING - 14

(played Feb 22th, 2015. Martin plays Varadan, Sylvain plays Macrazbunare and Yvon plays Austizel)

Day four in strange land, 4h pm

Rasputin must die... again, Father Sergius says.

They go check on the prison camp from their promontory position. They see about 80 soldiers around the camp, watching and guarding. The camp is surrounded by difficult terrain (barbed wires, wood and rubble), then trenches with guards, then metallic fences 20 feet high. Sergius warns the heroes not to touch the fences, for they cause electric shocks! How could that be?, think the heroes.

There are eight observation towers, with guards seen in each of them. Those at the four corners are strange, for they have a barrel-like shape turning on itself quickly, and levitating over the tower, sending electric sparks around!

Sergius explains at night he could see the four towers linked with electricity, and then, at times, the ghost monastery could be seen. He says it's like a ghost image of a monastery made of light, superposing over the ruins of the monastery inside the prison camp...

They see at 6 pm impressive light projectors in action, focusing on the area around the camp, but sometimes inside the camp as well. At 7pm, the trenches are lighted with strange eerie lights.

At 8h30 pm, they see a priest-like person walking in the camp, escorted by two guards with firearms. Those guards walk like zombies ... They come from a house without any smoke, and then go to the prison (where wood fire smoke is coming from). There are four areas where fireplace smoke comes from : the prison, the hospital, the Old Abbott's house as well as the guards barracks.



At 10h30, the priest is seen talking to a small group of guards, about ten minutes.

At 11h00 pm starts a strange ballet : the guards enter a barrack by group of 20. They stay inside about 2 minutes, then they go back to the barracks or the trenches, one group after the other. They count eight groups of 20 soldiers each... What is going on? Renewed control?

Day five in strange land, midnight

Just after midnight, they see powerful lightning bolts crisscrossing between the towers and the ruined monastery dome. From then on, once in a while, a projector's light reaches the monastery and the heroes can see for themselves the "ghost" monastery superposing over the ruins. This

eerie monastery is indeed made of light, but it is of an eerie purple and ice blue colour... It is very sinister! Also, during that split second where the monastery appear, they hear shrieks of pain from a dozen persons coming from the monastery, then silence when the projector's light move elsewhere...

At 1h45, they see the priest coming out of the prison and walking to the hospital.

At 3h45, the priest leaves the hospital building for the house where it came from earlier during the night.

The sun rises, and the projectors are shut.

Some of the heroes learn their spells in Sergius's cavern, while others keep watching the camp.

11ham, they see guards coming back, and they go at the prison for a few minutes, then back to their barracks.

At 5pm, the heroes get to the tunnel entrance, shown by Sergius. It is hidden inside a small evergreen trees patch.

The tunnel are cold and humid at first, but they it gets warmer after a place where the heroes had to squeeze to pass into a 2 foot opening. Then after more natural tunels, they see a sturdy wooden door! It seems it didn't move for a long time.

They open it. They come into a plastered circular room, a crypt! The dates on the plaques shows the persons buried within died within the years 1550 to 1725, a long time ago (they know current local year is 1918!). All crypt bear men's names.

While they are checking these dates, the plaster is destroyed in a few places around them, when undead creatures erupt and attack! There are four skeletons, led by a priest-like mummy!

It shouts with a gravelly voice "oskvernili eto mesto, vy umrete!" ("you desecrate this place, you will die!"). It then casts quickly and says one word, "umirayet!" (die!). Austizel identifies the spell as *slay living*, but he can't tell the others as his heart stops beating! He falls on the ground, dead!

The heroes attack, focusing on the mummy. Tora hist the undead priest. Petrak cast *prayer*. the skeleton moves to place themselves between the mummy and the heroes. Varadan hits a skeleton. Macrazbunare sends a *Scorching Ray* at the mummy.

The mummy cast another "umirayet!" spell at Tora (gulp!) but Tora succeeds trying to resist death. He hits the mummy with *smithe evil*. Petrak cast *Produce flame* at the mummy, and Macrazbunare does the same.

The mummy casts *Hold Person* on Tora, but it doesn't work. Petrak and Macrazbunare hits the undead priest again with *Produce Flame*, and the mummy is destroyed, as well as the remaining skeletons ... They all fall to the ground like dust!

They cast *detect magic* on the mummy's remains, and they find a magical brooch (faint abjuration).

They heal themselves and they resume their exploration of the underground level. They see there are about 30 crypts, all with sinister bones scratching rock noise within! They think the crypt is right under the monastery.

They reach a small room where a metallic ladder leads up 30 feet to a wooden trap, with ice around it. Exigu listens and hear only the noise of wind.

They let Austizel's body in this room, and they climb the ladder. It takes a few minutes to unstuck it, but the trap is finally open. They players find themselves exactly where Father Sergius said, the ruins of a burned building. Only the walls remains.

Macrazbunare casts *pass without trace* on them.

They walk toward the prison, trying to remain unseen. They guards in the towers are watching in the other direction (outside the camp), and luckily, they cross nobody's path inside the camp.

Exigu opens the padlock on the door. Inside, it is extremely stinky from human sweat and other dejections. They see about ten dirty bunk beds, with each one or two people attached on it. They notice quickly these people are crazy, drooling and watching them with very few reaction.

However, someone seems to have notices their entrance, and shouts "Vot! Vot!". They go cautiously in this direction and see a man waving at them furiously. On the next bunk bed, they see Kendra! She has a gag and her arms are attached behind her back. She recognize the heroes and starts shouting with joy behind her gag.

The heroes remove her gag, and she is extremely relieved to be delivered. But the heroes first talk to her before releasing her completely, fearing she could have been turned into a vampire or something.

They learn from her there is not only one priest walking the camp at night, but three! Kendra thinks they are nosferatu. They come each night to suck the prisoners, a little at a time, to keep them alive as long as possible. They chek: she has no teeth marks on the neck! She says the other prisoners are all crazy, except the other man near her (the one who did shout to them when they came inside). This man is now silent, observing Kendra speaks to the heroes in a language he obviously can't understand.

"He protected me from other prisoners who wanted to assault me", Kendra says, "His name is Dmitri".

The heroes free Kendra and Dmitri, who says something in his tongue, obviously some kind of thanks ("moi druz'ya, kotorykh ya dolzhen tebe svoyu zhizn" ("friend, I owe you my life")) . Macrazbunare cast another *pass without trace* on Kendra and Dmitri, and they exit the prison. They walk back to the trap in the burned building.

At 6h30 pm, they exit the tunnel, carrying poor Austizel. Meanwhile, Kendra explains that the fishman found her in the now, half frozen. "He did cast a spell to protect me from the cold and they walked all night toward the monastery... I was supposed to be a gift to his master...", she adds icily. But she never saw this Rasputin in person. Also, clearly, the fishman thought little of the team with him in Hunadora.



Dmitri stayed silent until then, and asks "Vy idti ubivat' Rasputin?" when he hears Kendra mention Rasputin. Kendra says Dmitri is asking if the heroes will hunt and kill this Rasputin? The heroes answers positively and Dmitri let them know he is on their side.

On the way to Sergius's hidden cavern, they see Father Sergius. They notice he isn't making any traces in the snow either!

In the cavern, Sergius, Nadja and Dmitri talk a lot and become friend.

Tora secretly casts *detect undead* on Dmitri and Kendra; nothing.

Just before sleep, the heroes discuss too. Where are we supposed to put the blood to come back to their own world? It was supposed to be in the monastery, but which? Can we fight three nosferatu at once?

Day six in strange land, midnight

At 5h30 am, a hero notices Father Sergius exiting the cavern.

The heroes learn spells. Father Sergius announces he will try to raise Austizel from the dead, and puts the elf's body on a blanket in the snow. With "the power of the sun", Austizel finally opens his eyes! Petrak estimates it took Sergius about ten times more than a normal *raise dead*. They thank Sergius.

Dmitri wants to speak to Petrak, who casts a spell to be understood. Dmitri tells him he is a "spy of the Crown. Him and a few more men has infiltrated the camp. He do not know what happened to the other men, but think they are still hidden within the guards. He doesn't know if he can do anything against supernatural creatures. He knows there are two cathedrals (or monasteri), and Rasputin is in the one made of light. He learned that to open this "cathedral of light", one has "to recalibrate the world anchors", who are a creation of the famous inventor Nicola Tesla. Doing this will stabilize the cathedral of light, and then the door can be opened. Otherwise, it is impossible to enter this place. Just before getting caught, he learned that the information to calibrate these "anchors" are in Tesla's notes inside Rasputin's house. In the troops, there are more Crown fidels, who will reveal themselves if the heroes or Dmitri needs it. Their long term goal is also to destroy Rasputin.

GAME SESSION SIXTY NINE: WHISPERED SECRETS UNFOLDING - 15

(played May 3rd, 2015)

This game will be twisted by the untimely fact Varadan just went up a level, and gets his final level in the *Moonchild* PrC ! We are in the final stages of *Improved control shape*, where a DC 30 Control Shape Check is needed every 1d6 hours for 1d4+1 days...

Day six in strange new land, 8h30

Suddenly, this morning, Varadan feels the call of the wild, he is confused and feels the need to get in monstrous hybrid shape, but he fights this and stays in human shape...

The group takes the whole day to wait for the next morning, where they plan to enter again the prison camp.

Kendra learns *Scorching Ray*, Austizel *True Strike* and *Scorching Ray*, and MacRazbunbare *Color Spray* and *Feather Fall*.

Varadan fights the transformation urge at 3h50, 6h30...

Day seven in strange new land

... 10 minutes after midnight, 3h50, 8h10... all successfully.

At 7am, the casters learn their spells.

They are on the move at 8h15. They cast *pass without trace*.

In the underground crypt corridor, where they fought a mummy, they now hear a ghastly noise: there are multiple noises of claws and bones scratching behind the crypt slabs... Things have awoken... They notice a few slabs have moved a little, but they are not close to fall in the corridor to free their content. They continue.

They climb the metal ladder and exit inside the camp, in the burned house. They stealthily investigate the blackened remains of a long wooden barracks building. All that remains is the burnt black tangles of their frames and rusted stoves and bedsprings piled among the ruins.

Hiding behind the buildings from the guards in the outside tower, they pass in front of the prison, and notice a second chain and a second lock have been added to the door (where they freed Kendra and Dmitri). Going toward the Abbot's house, they see a well. Ancient stone arches enshrining weatherworn statues of veiled women and saintly men frame a steaming natural spring, its waters unfrozen in the biting cold!?

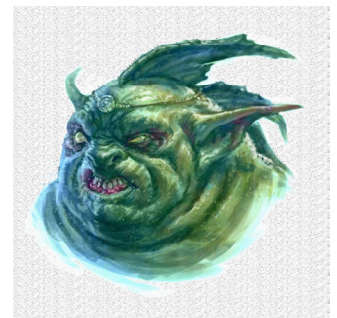
They ignore it and move to the Abbott's house : a solidly built stone house, its roof covered in snow. Originally built for the monastery's abbot, this house is one of the oldest buildings on the monastery grounds. Many traces enter and exits the house. Exigu hears the noise of a whistling kettle through the door. Varadan tries scent and smells human feet on the doorstep.

Then he sees a woman's head in the well, a woman with dark hairs! She is watching the heroes. When she notices Varadan's gaze at her, she retreats inside the well. They ignore her for the moment, but ask Dimtri to keep a watch outside while they enter the Abbott's house.

Back at the Abott's house, Tora opens the door and sees Zhabh-boath, a cup of warm liquid in hand! Seeing the heroes, surprised, he drops it on the floor!

Exigu enters and sends an arrow at the fishman (miss). Austizel also enters and cast *magic missile* (-11). Kendra enters the house and is shocked to see her cruel captor, grinning at her. Macrazbunare also cast *magic missile* (-12). Petrak casts *Prayer*.

Zhabh-boath summons a large tiger, with hideous purplish tentacles on its flank! The tiger attacks the nearest one to its master, Varadan, with both claws (-14/-9) and bite (miss). The tiger is also positioned between the heroes and the fish man. Varadan thinks it's a good time to check his hybrid powers and transforms into a werewolf!



But Tora watches the transformation with horror, and is shaken for the rest of the battle.

Austizel, Kendra and Macrazbunare cast *magic missile* at the fish man (-17, -9, -13). Exigu enters and sends three arrows (-6 and two miss). Petrak casts *divine favor*.

Zhabh-boath casts *flame strike* at Austizel and Exigu (44 hp!). Both fall on the ground, unconscious. Also, they experience a vision of madness, of the immensity and tentacled aberrations that waits in the outer darkness. Austizel shakes it but Exigu is confused!

The tiger hits Varadan with its bite, but Varadan replies with a successful *stunning fist*! Tora hits a critical hit in the Tiger (-26).

Exigu is confused and walk away outside ...

Kendra cast another *magic missile* at the fish man (-8), and Macrazbunare summons a dire wolf, who attacks Zhabh-boath. It trips the priest!

Petrak charges the tiger and hits it hard (-24).

Zhabh-boath gets up and casts a draining spell at the wolf, which gets confused.

Varadan and Tora hits the tiger. Kendra gives an healing potion at Austizel.

Macrazbunare casts *scorching ray* at the fish man, but without effect! Petrak hits the tiger, who falls and disappear!

Zhabh-boath and casts *Chaos Hammer* at Varadan, Petrak and Tora. Tora is slowed. Varadan is babbling, confused! Tora casts *lay on hands* on himself.

Exigu, confused, throws two arrows at Dmitri! Kendra casts *mirror image* on her.

Petrak charges and hit Zhabh-boath, but to their horror, the fish man casts *heal* on himself!

Varadan is confused and walks away. Kendra uses her *wand of magic missile* at Zhabh-boath. Macrazbunare casts *magic missile* too. The dire wolf attacks the fish man and succeeds its trip attack.

Petrak attacks Zhabh-boath (-15). Zhabh-boath gets up and attacks Petrak, sneering in disdain.

Varadan is confused again, and stays where he is. Austizel casts the evil priest an *Empowered Magic Missile* (-19), and Kendra hits him again with her *wand of Magic Missile* (-8). Macrazbunare heals Exigu with *Cure Moderate* (+14).

The dire wolf hits Zhabh-boath (-18) and again succeeds its trip. Petrak uses this opportunity to attack the priest (-20), who falls dead!

The heroes heal themselves. They speak with Dmitri, who was on watch outside during the battle. He understands what happened to Exigu (confusion) but was very close to shoot him if he moved as if to bend his bow toward him again! Dmitri also says he saw a woman in the fountain, who waved at him to come closer ...

They check for Zhabh-boath's body. He had two medallions around his neck, one of the Whispering Way and one of a sun-like icon, with strange sun rays (tentacles?). They also find on the fishman's body 2 magical potions.

They explore the Abbot's house. When the heroes entered, Zhabh-boath was exiting a kitchen. A warm stove and piles of dusty crockery and silverware crammed onto simple wooden shelves are the only notable features of this kitchen. To the east, a small storeroom contains two cords of firewood, neatly stacked along each wall.

In the next room, they find a dining room where thick velvet curtains hang from the walls. A large table dominates the center of the room, around which are eight finely upholstered chairs. On one side, the chairs have been moved to a corner to leave room for a sleeping bag.

The next room is a bedroom. A simple bed and nightstand stand near a cold fireplace, across from an ornately carved wooden desk below a window with closed curtains. The room does not appear to have been disturbed for days. An opened book stands on a nightstand. Petrak, still under Comprehend Language, takes the book and understands quickly that it's a religious book of the same religion from the chapel where they slept in Moscovskaya.

The desk's drawer is locked. Exigu open it to find a notebook. *Detect Magic* is negative. Browsing quickly through it, it seems very complex but the words "World Anchor" are in it, often. Petrak keeps it.

Moving quickly to the last room, they find a library. Its walls are crowded with bookshelves holding esoteric tomes. Curtains are drawn tight over the windows to keep out the intrusion of sunlight. The bookshelves contain Rasputin's personal esoteric library. One of them is magical : a *greater book of extended summoning*. Petrak again takes the book.

The other old books are written in a language they do not understand: Aurora Consurgens, the Book of Eibon, De Praestigiis Daemonum, Dictionnaire Infernal, Key of Solomon, and Liber Ignium. There are two modern books: The Book of Lies (by A. Crowley) and Le Livre des Médiums.

9 h 00

On retourne dans le tunnel. They decide to spend time here and rest. Kendra climbs one level (to the 5th) and learns a spell from the heroes's spell book, *Lightning Bolt* and *Dispel Magic* while Austizel learns *Comprehend language and Protection from Energy* and Macrazbunare learns *Spider Climb* and *Comprehend Language*.

Petrak reads the note book. It is Nikola Tesla's notebooks! These are detailed blueprints for the "World Anchors" machines! The machine consists of four machines inside each tower as well as one inside the ruined monastery. the whole thing is a machine to communicate with other words. It explains how to built this complex machinery, but this is impossible to understand to Petrak ...

Petrak needs to spend more time to get more information from the notebooks.

Zhabh-boath's potion is identified as being *cat's grace*.

At 5h30 pm, Varadan feels the sudden urge to transform, and is unable to resist! He stands pitifully in hybrid form, unable to change back to human for a few minutes. Tora and Austizel watched this transformation with fear and horror! Austizel is frozen while Tora is again shaken.

Tora is obsessed by Varadan's transformation and keeps talking about it... He is deranged by the sight and the sounds of the transformation, the growth of fur, the noise of bones popping from their articulation when they grow and reshape ...

They know Tora and Austizel get a better chance of avoiding this horror effect each time they are seeing Varadan transform, so at 8h30, Varadan voluntarily transform into hybrid form. Austizel resists panicking, but Tora fails and turns into rage et attacks Varadan! Austizel casts *shackle* to bind Tora.

Tora eventually gets quieter, but he is still shaken... He goes to sleep but he sleep if filled with nightmares. It isn't a restful sleep... Tora is matched with Dmitri for his guard duty during the night... At least, Dmitri can't understand when Tora speaks of Varadan's hideous shape...

Day eight in strange new land

Varadan fights the transformation 3 more times until the next exploration phase. Last one at 7h10 am ...

After they learned spells, Petrak casts *Epiphany* at Tora, who feels better and is relieved from his obsession. But he still look fearfully at Varadan, hoping next time he will be able to keep calm during the transformation... Tora also gets *Lesser Restoration* to eliminate the fatigue of his night's unrest and nightmares.

They are back to the prison camp exploration. They get to a warehouse It is locked from the inside. Austizel casts *knock* and they hear a wooden bar falling on the ground, inside. They open the large wooden door : a warehouse of about 50 feet by 50, filled with crates, boxes and barrels. The piles vary between 5 and 9 feet high. It is very dusty and filled with spider webs. They hear rat noises in the back.

Austizel tries *Detect Magic*. Négative. They decide to enter the warehouse and explore it. When they arrived at the middle, surprise, the front door is closed behind them and it is very dark inside! Only Petrak has a torch, and Tora a bullseye torch...

GAME SESSION SEVENTY (!) : WHISPERED SECRETS UNFOLDING - 16

(played Sept 20, 2015)

This game is again disturbed by Varadan's final stages of Moonchild...
--

Day eight in strange new land, 8h15

The door closes behind them! Silence in the crowded warehouse...

Kendra cast *mirror image*, and Petrak *prayer*. Varadan, Tora and Petrak lights a lantern or a torch. Macrazbunare casts *light* on the end of one of Exigu's arrow. Tora checks the area with his *ghost sight* supernatural power : nothing. Austizel casts *dancing light*.

DM note : as a reminder, I banned a few spells in my campaign, to keep a more mysterious and creepy ambiance. One of them is all permanent light spells. The darkness is too thick in Ravenloft for these spells ... ;)

Dmitri, who stayed behind, moves toward the door but he can't open it!

Suddenly, a wooden crate and a wooden barrel flies toward Tora and crashes hard on him!

Suddenly a priest like creature moves and stands in front of Dmitri! It is one of the three nosferatu chaplains! Kendra, who see him, cast *magic missile* at it.

Varadan hears Kendra and moves toward them, and tries to hit the creature, but he misses. Petrak moves and cast his *Ezra's shield*.

Exigu throws his light arrow to the ceiling. Macrazbunare moves toward Dmitri and cast *magic missile* at the creature.

Tora moves toward another area in the back of the warehouse and sees a creature, ceeeping low behind a wooden barrel. Another *magic missile* at the nosferatu from Austizel Nailu.

Then Dmitri has a crazed look and he fires his rifle at Varadan! He is charmed! At the same time, the second nosferatu tries to charms Tora, but he misses. The first tries the same of Varadan, who succeeds shaking off the charm. Varadan hits it.

Petrak tries to turn the creature but it fails. The creature grins maniacally at him. *More magic missiles* from Macrazbunare, Austizel and Kendra flies at the undead creatures.

Tora uses *smite evil* at the creatuer in front of him. Dmitri fires another round at Varadan, but misses.

The second nosferatu hits Tora hard! (-29), and Tora is staggered. Tora recognise the unholy powers of an anti-paladin!

Meanwhile, another wooden crates flies and hit Petrak, without any damage, the shield absorbing it.

The first nosferatu claws at Varadan, but seconds after, a *magic missile* from Kendra makes the creature turn into a swarm of spider, that skitters away ... The swarm seems harmless and moves toward an end of the warehouse. Kendra announces she will follow it to see where it goes.

Tora hits the nosferatu with *lay on hand's* positive energy.

Dmitri looks at everybody with confusion, it seems he isn't charmed anymore.



The second nosferatu snarls and casts *harm* at Petrak, who is left with one hit point! With perfect coordination, another nosferatu moves toward the priest and hit him. Petrak falls on the ground (-8)!

Tora hits the second nosferatu while Austizel casts *shackle* at the third one! The second nosferatu hits Tora, who falls unconscious on the ground! (-8)

In rage, the third nosferatu tries to shake off the shackle spell but he is unable to do so. The remaining heroes (Varadan, Exigu, Austizel) fight the second nosferatu, while Macrazbunare sends Petrak an healing spell through his wolf.

The second nosferatu hits Varadan with a critical (-23). The third nosferatu transforms into a rat swarm and avoids the *shackle* spell.

Meanwhile, Kendra follows the spider swarm and sees it enters a hole in the ground. Varadan hits the second nosferatu but an arrow from Exigu turns it into a swarm of bat, who starts flying toward the area where Kendra stands.

Many spells are thrown at the rat swarm : *magic missiles* and *scorching rays* (Macrazbunare) and two *lightning bolts* from Austizel. Success! The swarm turns incorporeal and moves toward Kendra.

Kendra shouts "damn! there are bars over a well!" She sees the bat and rat swarms also enters the well, following the first one. The fighters run toward Kendra and they coordinate to open the barred well. But there is a trap! When a bar is lifted up, a glass vial explodes and Tora and Petrak see their strength declining! (-2 str)

DM note : I thought of this trap as a good idea. Strength DC 30 is needed to bend the bars and the poison lowers their strength...

Macrazbunare uses an acid vial from Grine & Vorkstad alchemical shop (session 50). After the third try, they bend the bars large enough for Exigu to jump in the hole. He sees three coffins, where nosferatu shapes are sleeping. He puts a wooden stick in the heart of each creature. The undead creatures shrivels and look dried!

Meanwhile, Dmitri smehes open the warehouse's front door.

They bend the bars even more and lift the coffins through it, and puts them in the sun : the creatures turn to dust ...

Exigu searches the coffin area (nothing) and *detect magic* reveals nothing more.

From afar, they look at the guards but do not see a change in behavior.

They return to the abbot's house to rest the whole day.

During the day, Varadan has there unwanted transformations. At the second one, Tora is frightened! At the third one, he is in rage! He takes his sword! Austizel tries *shackle* spell again but misses! With the help of the others, Macrazbunare has to change into a snake to constrict him.

After a while, Tora gets calmer, but he looks shaken... It seems the difficulty to escape the horror effect of seeing Varadan transforming is getting more and more difficult for Tora ...

Austizel look outside to see if the gards reacts to all this noise (negative) but he sees the water fey, spying on them from her well. Seeing Austizel at the window, she sinks in the well.

DM note: basic DC 15 horror effect (seeing an involuntary transformation), that everybody else in the group fought. But Tora failed all DCs. I added 3 for each missed DC and after so many failures, the current DC (24) is quite high! So helping Tora is very difficult and he will require ... professional help. Which is perfect for my planning, as the next step of my campaign is Bleak House. Tora will be the perfect excuse to go to the sanitarium !

And the fey is a PF Rusalka.

Day nine in strange new land, morning

During the morning watch, Exigu hears a feminine voice in his head "come to me... outside ... come to me ...", but he resists the compulsion to exit. He wakes Petrak and tells him what just happened. They guess it is the fey in the well. They decide to change the watch and have two people on watch instead of only one.

Tora sleeps badly. Near 2h30 am, Varadan has another involuntary transformation.

At 4 am, Varadan sees Exigu suddenly standing up and walking toward the door! They succeed in tying him to prevent his exit toward the fey. "Bezumni Mir", says Dmitri ("Crazy world!")

At 10 am, Varadan has another transformation! Tora, still roped, panics! After a few minutes, he gets calmer, as long as Varadan is not nearby.

DM note: another missed save! DC is now 27! So he is shaken, doesn't fully rest when he sleeps (nightmares) and can't get closer to 10 feet from Varadan.

They explore a second warehouse (empty) and get back to the caverns to quietly study Nicolas Tesla's notebook on the World Anchor machine. Austizel, helped with Kedra, will study the books.

They understand the World Anchor is a machine composed of five towers. They understand the whole thing is like clockwork mechanism, where all parts are linked to the others, but of another kind they can't understand. This is a project Tesla made while commissioned by Rasputin. Four towers at each end of the prison camp, one in the ruined monastery in the center. The tower machines have metallic barrels in suspension over them, spinning quickly, and they are able to put small lightning bolts (?) and it uses this power to light (?) the compound and to put lightning bolts effects (?) on the camp fences. The machine in the monastery is different: it brings the chapel to another density (?). The notebook explains how to recalibrate a machine in the tower in order to change the density (?) of the ruined monastery, and bring the chapel of light (?) in the same density (?) as the other four machines.

DM note: the machine are Tesla's gizmo-electrical and my plane shifting explanations are left vague as the PCs never saw anything that modern before.

They feel they have chance to successfully manoeuvre the machine to bring back Rasputin's chapel in this world...

GAME SESSION SEVENTY-ONE : WHISPERED SECRETS UNFOLDING - 17

(played Nov 29, 2015)

The start of the game sees the end of Varadan's final stages of Moonchild. It's finished
Last Human Heart DC succeeded.

Also, just before this game I wrote to Tora's player:

Tora isn't feeling well ...

He is permanently shaken (adjust your stats).

He is obsessed by Varadan's transformation into a werewolf - the full horror of the hideous transformation of the body, bones and muscles that turn, noise of the bones coming out of joints to reconnect moments after, the rapid appearance of hair, this horrible muzzle elongating in the figure of Varadan, the black claws, the yellowish fangs, these horrible animal eyes...).

*He speaks often of this to the others and sleeps badly because he dreams of nothing else.
Takes -1 point constitution penalty*

He is now scared of Varadan and will NEVER approach within 10' of him, and ideally prefers to be at least 20'. If he has to be closer than 10' from Varadan: panic and the next action is to move away to be at least 10' from Varadan.

Proposed Role play: obviously, you cannot talk to other players to tell these effects on your stats (they just see your behavior) and you cannot ask for help or healing, others have to infer this!

Day nine in strange new land, noon

After reading the notebook, they discuss on how to enter the guarded towers. One or two guards are permanently on watch in each tower.

Tora gets *tongues* and they speak with Dmitri on the army's hierarchy. Dmitri says there were the three chaplains, and then just a few higher ranked soldiers, but these had very low ranks. The heroes suggest that Dmitri go talk to the soldiers, but he refuses. "I'm identified as loyal to the Crown, while these are all revolutionaries. They will never listen to me and they will kill me!"

"Knowing their spirit", he adds, "I would not be surprised to see the army disorganising quickly without their leaders. In fact, other than Rasputin, the only superior still standing is the Hospital Director. If you call him an hospital, we suspect he is torturing instead of healing!"

They spy on the troops. They look confused. They laugh and drink vodka by the bottle. They fire in the air and shout "Viva Rasputin!". But there are still many guards at watch around the camp.

They move toward the hospital and pass in front of the ruined onion-domed chapel. Its front door is opened and the inside look in ruins, its ceiling partially collapsed. They do not enter in it.

Another building is the remains of a long wooden barrack. Its windows are broken and the building is filled with snow. They do not enter it either.

The hospital is a wooden barrack, better kept than the other barracks, with closed windows and smoke exiting from a chimney in the middle.

They get nearer and check its front door. It is unlocked. It is a cold waiting room, filled with seats. With his sharp senses, Varadan smells a very faint odor of blood and putrefaction.

They open another sealed door (to keep the heat inside) and see a butcher's room! Every wall in this room is splattered with gore, and eviscerated bodies are strung up with barbed wire, their flayed flesh stretched taut to expose raw muscle and their disemboweled entrails draped like limp clotheslines over the high rafters of this horrific chamber. Many cadavers are also on a dozen of hospital beds in this room.

In the center, a man with leather overcoat is dissecting a man's corpse on a table. He looks furious to be disturbed by the heroes. With disdain, he says (and Petrak understands) "Lousy! You know you have to knock before entering here! Do you bring me another wounded soldier?".

The heroes attack! Exigu hits with one arrow. Varadan attacks with his monk's fists. The Doctor says "this is not acceptable ! I will complain in high places, and it will not stop there!", then he casts and disappear! Macrazbunare correctly identifies the spell and announce the doctor turned invisible.

They search for him in the room, and they attack. During the battle, Tora retreats from an attack to stay away from Varadan. The Doctor attacks Varadan with his rapier (-26, critical hit), then two *magic missiles* from Macrazbunare and Kendra kills the doctor.

Suddenly, Kendra shouts in horror! One of the "cadaverer" on a bed is still alive and it starts squirming! It is magically kept alive by magic. Little can be done for it and Exigu mercifully kills it.

Detect magic on the doctor finds four aura : the rapier (moderate conjuration), two bottles and one amulet (faint transmutation). The bottles have a faint healing aura. The first bottle is identified as remove disease and the other is a trap! A blue gas engulfs the room and stays one minute. All feel weakened except Austizel and Kendra. A curse!

DM note : Flask of Curses This item looks like an ordinary beaker, bottle, container, decanter, flask, or jug. It may contain a liquid, or it may emit smoke. When the flask is first unstoppered, all within 30 feet must make a DC 17 Will save or be cursed, taking a -2 penalty on attack rolls, saving throws, and skill checks until a remove curse spell is cast upon them.

Tora hears voices on the other side of a door. The door to this room is locked. They open it and see two young teenage children huddling together in fear. The boy appears to be about 13 years old and is dressed in the tattered rags of a child-sized military uniform. He is sickly and pale. The girl is 17 years old with shoulder-length brown hair, wearing a lacy white dress that is now ragged and ruined.



When they see Tora, the boy steps protectively in front of the girl, and proudly says, in a regal voice "My yavlyayemsysya naslednikami Rossiyskoy imperii! Kto ty?"

DM note - thank you, google translate! (russian). "We are the heir of the russian empire. Who are you?"

Tora understands the boy is saying they are the heir of an empire, and that he is asking who are they. They have no magical item on them.

The siblings are dirty, malnourished, and on the precipice of shock. The boy look sick and is probably an hemophiliac.

Hearing all this, Dmitri arrives in the room and falls to his knees. He thanks the heroes for saving the heir to the Crown. "I have not failed my mission", he says... He quickly announce that he will take the teenagers to father Sergius's camp for their safety.

The teenage asks about their "benefactor holy friend" Rasputin, "is he around? We need his benevolent blessings! We were so relieved to learn that he survived this traitorous assassination attempt, marveling that his piety must have kept his spirit stitched to his body!" Dmitri respectfully tells them they are misguided and that he will explain later. They leave.

DM note - another historic twist I wanted to add for flavor and to get rid of Dmitri. Perhaps I'll use it later.

The heroes go to explore the ruined monastery. Many of the ruined monastery's walls have fallen. Inside, they climb through a stone staircase, to find three coffins at the top of this belfry. They are filled with rotten dirt and disgusting insects. From the dust on its covers, it wasn't disturbed for at least a year. Petrak thinks these are probably secondary coffins for the three nosferatu. The heroes break the closed windows to let light enter the room.

The staircase is also going down, but it has collapsed after 20 feet. They guess it was leading below to the crypt they already explored.

They get back to the ground floor and resume its exploration. In a corner, Tora sees a marble statue of a saintly shrouded woman, her form wrapped in rusted barbed wire. The statue also has burned marks. In the center of the room is a baptismal font.

Some of the others approach, the others stays near the entrance. Tora and Petrak feels an intense sadness at this sight, and feel it as unnecessary and pointless to make a statue suffer like this to desecrate it. They suffer from this unholy desecration, almost physically... Austizel do not feel this. Suddenly, fresh blood streams from the statue's eyes and the wounds where prongs of barbed wire rest on their stone bodies!

And the same happens to the heroes! They feel the pain of the barbed wires and see blood coming out of their own flesh! It is horribly painful! (-51 or -25 if save is made!).



DM note: great and deadly haunt! Lady of Sorrows Haunt, players affected as if by horrid wilting (Fortitude DC 22 half). Destruction: refilling the baptismal font with holy water and casting consecrate or hallow on the font permanently destroys the haunt.

They run outside!

They wonder if they need to destroy this haunt?

1pm

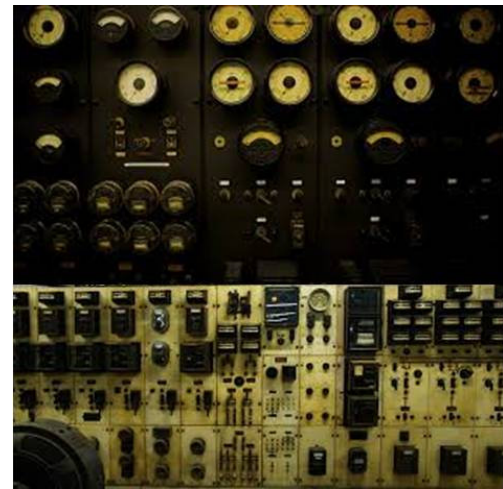
They see a tower currently has no guards!

They exit the camp, boldly walking through the soldiers camp! The soldiers are drinking, but some of them notice the heroes. "Hey, never saw you before!", understands Tora when one shouts at them. They ignore him.

They get to the tower with a rusted iron staircase. They feel the humming from the strange spinning barrel atop the tower. They look at the machine and its looks is extremely complex... There are many round things, with a needle inside moving often, while they are surrounded by many buttons and other things that seems to be mobile...

DM note : knowledge engineering, or arcana, or disable device.

They do not want to try now, as they need rest and to shake off the curses from the doctor's potion. They plan to go back inside the camp to sleep but they realize they are not cold while inside the tower, another strange effect of Tesla's machine. They raise the staircase and rest there.



At 5h30 pm, a group of guards shouts from below! They ignore them and after a few more shouts, they go away.

At 9pm, the other towers opens a projector light. The heroes tries and they succeed in opening it! With the projector, they watch the outside as the other towers do, but also inside the camp, once in a while. Nothing moves.

Day ten in strange new land, midnight

At midnight, the hum from the barrel changes, gaining in intensity. They move the projector toward the chapel and sees the church of light superposing over the ruins. While they do that, the buttons and what else on the machine changes by themselves, as if moved by an invisible operator. Watching these, Petrak is under the impression he understands it better now.

At 2am, the humming goes back to normal, and the projector inside the camp illuminates the ruined monastery only, not the church of light.

They cast remove curse on Tora, Varadan and Petrak.

At 8, Austizel, with the help of others, tries to recalibrate the machine, moving buttons, switches and dials... and purple lightning streaks from the four corner watchtowers to join above the ruined

monastery in the center of the prison camp as a curtain of arcane sparks erupts skyward from the perimeter fence. They feel the energy coming out of the spinning barrel over them.

The smoldering chapel erupts into strange flames burning backward through time, restoring its structure rather than destroying it.

After 5 minutes, the church of light appears solid!

The heroes climb down the staircase and walks toward the restored chapel. They are in awe because pulses of arcane energy flashes through the church's stained-glass windows, casting eerie silhouettes on the snowy ground around it.

But most disturbingly, soulpiercing shrieks sometimes cut through the air, echoing throughout the prison camp and into the empty wilderness beyond...

They run toward the entrance, to find a strange sight! Nailed to the cruciform crossbars of the church front doors is an emaciated corpse. It is stripped bare to the waist, its body marked with crude tattoos, and a long mustache droops over the macabre grin that only rigor mortis can bring.

They wonder what to do as it blocks the door. Suddenly the corpses's head rise and it gazes at Varadan... They see Varadan fall on the ground! Seconds later, Varadan's soul is ripped from its body and appears as a translucent copy of the victim and is suspended above the spot its body collapsed, crucified in midair to a translucent, "X" shaped structure, the soul held in place by translucent spikes or nails! The soul or Varadan seems to be suffering!

DM note: a tone downs Crucifixion Spirit from Tome of Horrors.

The heroes throw spell at this crucified soldier: *magic missiles* and *scorching ray*. Then it looks at Austizel, to whom happens the same thing as Varadan! Two heroes are helpless!

Exigu attacks it with his war razor. Varadan shakes off the effect and the others see his crucified soul painfully tearing itself from the translucent cross and enter back his body. He stands on the ground, confused and stun (for one round).

More *magic missiles* are thrown at the thing, and then it's Petrak's turn to fall under the creature horrific supernatural powers!

Austizel shakes off the effect but he feels weak, in addition of being momentarily stunned (loss of one level!). Varadan moves toward the thing but it forces Tora to retreat!

Tora is then affected by the deadly powers and falls, crucified. The horrible guardian creature is finally destroyed mainly with magic missiles, but meanwhile Austizel again falls back to the ground, crucified, as well as Exigu.

In the end, Austizel has lost two levels, Petrak two and Exigu one! What an horror!



GAME SESSION SEVENTY-TWO : WHISPERED SECRETS UNFOLDING - 18

(played Dec 13, 2015)

DM note : Tora gains level 8 (Pal5/Hunter of the Dead 3) and Austizel too (wiz 8).

Day ten in strange new land, 8h15 am

They decide to retreat and get healing. Before leaving, they remove the crucified corpse from the door (so they do not have to fight it back should it come back if they leave it there!). Tora removes two large square nails from the corpse's wrists. The corpse wears soldiers pants, not unlike the ones used by the revolutionaries. They cut its head and burn it, using wooden crates from the nosferatu warehouse. Petrak makes a prayer for its soul's rest.

They go back to the corner tower to stop the World Anchor machine and put back the church of light to another plane. Petrak is at the commands. At the first try, they feel the metallic barrel spinning quicker and an old crone's shout of dolor coming from the nearby mountains!

DM note: random effect of tampering with the machine!

At the second try, they feel the earth trembling for about ten seconds... At the third try, a rift appear in the sky and three creatures exit from it. They are bluish winged creature, looking like some kind of frost feys, armed with bows.

They creatures appear surprised to be there and, after just a few moments, they aggressively attack the soldiers camp! The soldiers shout and counterattack with their rifles. The battle lasts two rounds after which the winged creatures are dead. But about 6 soldiers died too. The soldiers angrily destroy the creature's body with their heavy boots. Soon, they are turned to bloodied pulp.

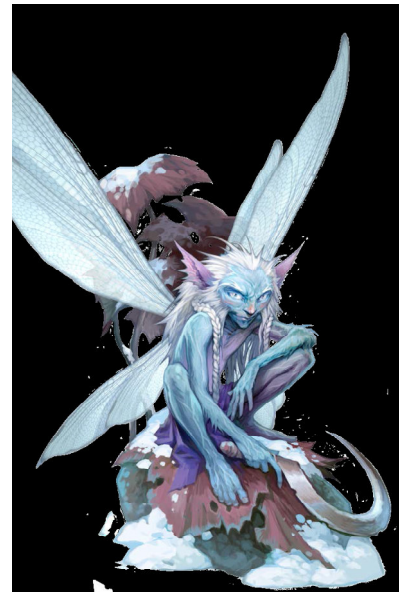
The heroes decide not to tamper again with the World Anchor machine! They climb down the tower, hide the metallic ladder and go to Sergius's cavern.

9h30, at Father Sergius's cavern. "Privet pridurki", he greets them.



With the use of *comprehend languages*, they tell Sergius about the crucified soldier encounter. He never heard of that kind of creature before. Sergius agrees to help the heroes and he will cast three *restauration* spells tomorrow at 6 am. But these spells will take 30 minutes each to cast, he says.

DM note: I made Sergius a GE Mystic, with GE rules. Oh, and he is a werebear too :) But the players think he is a druid.



Sergius tells them Dmitri left with another soldier and the children. Nadja left too, as she agreed to guide them back to Moscovskaya. He is surprised to hear the children are the heir of the Crown! Dmitri didn't tell him that.

Sergius heard the old woman's dolor shout earlier on, and it thought it was scary. He doesn't understand how it came to be, even with the heroes' explanations. It is too complicated for him.

They rest the whole day. Tora sits on top of the peak and watches the camp's activity. Around 2 pm, he sees eight soldiers unlock the door between the soldiers's camp and the more forbidden part. They relock the door after them. They circle around the church of light, and then they enter inside!

A little after 4 pm, the cathedral of light emits smoke !Then it starts burning, very quickly. The flames are very bright. The flames starts from the ground, all around the church, and the church went up in flames very quickly. After just a few minutes, it has vanished! The only thing standing there is the ruins of the old monastery! It reminds Tora of the reverse effect of when the church of light was brought there by the World Anchor.

He notes that he never saw the soldiers exiting the church of light...

At night, they notice only two projectors active, not four.

Day eleven in strange new land

Early in the morning, Tora, again on watch duty on the peak, gets the visit from a large white bear! But from the bear's behavior, he thinks this is Sergius. The bear sits besides Tora and also watches the camp for 15 minutes. Then it leaves.

At 6 am, Sergius (back in human form they think) prays on a carpet put on the snow. It takes him an hour and a half, but he casts three *restauration* spells at the heroes. Petrak learns his spells and cast another one at Austizel. They also *cast remove curse* on Macrazbunare.

They identify a few items from the Doctor : *amulet of natural armor* +1, and a *human bane rapier* +1.

They rest another day.

Around 2h30 pm, they see two horse driven carriages arriving at the camp. In it, about twenty soldiers and numerous crates of supplies. One of the crates carry vodka.

The new soldiers appear more disciplined. They wave off the offer to drink vodka and quickly they take a guard position.

Later, Tora sees one of these soldiers taking the lead and drilling the other soldiers. It seems he is able to restore discipline with many of the soldiers.

At night, four projectors are lighted, and there is no party around a fire camp like the night before.

They decide to take *tongues* for the next day, to talk with the soldiers.



Day twelve in strange new land

Macrazbunare reads Tesla's notebook.

At 5h30 am, Tora and Sergius (again in bear form) see three soldiers carrying another soldier, who look drunken. They put him along a wall, and they execute him! They understand they are making an example for discipline...

At 6h30, Sergius finishes the last *restauration* on Austizel.

They get back to the camp. Macrazbunare, in snow owl form, gets near a tower and cast *sleep* : the two guards presents are sleeping. They put the ladder and climb on the tower. They bind the sleeping guards and take their rifles (with 12 shots each).

In their heads, they hear a feminine voice "come in the water with me ..." but everybody succeeds fighting the suggestion. The fey in the well! Kendra look at them surprised, as she heard nothing in her head. It seems the fey only targets men?

Petrak tries to recalibrate the World Anchor machine ... At the first attempt, a firestorm erupts and it put a soldier barrack on fire! The second attempt provoke a localised earthquake and a tower falls! The third time, it succeeds! Purple lightning streaks from the four corner watchtowers to join above the ruined monastery. The smoldering monastery erupts into bright flames, restoring its structure. After two minutes, the "church of light" is there!

They hear shouts of pain coming from the church, and on the stained glass windows, they see reflexions of lightning strikes inside the church.

They climb down the tower and run toward the appeared church. They are relieved not to see another crucified corpse on the doors...

They enter the church. If the outside looks pristine and new, the inside is in ruins! In the narthex, a beautifully tiled mosaic floor of this chamber is broken with weblike cracks. Numerous alcoves run up the walls above them, holding statues (24 statues) of saints and martyrs, each with fresh blood dripping from its eyes!

They hear the noise of a barrel-like machine at the other end of the church.

The air smells stale, as if the room had been sealed for thousands of years...

To the north, a passage opens into another chamber beyond, where towering piles of wooden pews block the passage further into the cathedral (pile 20 feet high). Beyond it, they can't see, but they notice the reflections on the ceiling of many eerie purple lights.

Tora detects undead. Negative.

The next room is the nave. On the floor, the heads and limbs of several shattered statues litter the floor of the nave. Two spiral staircases lead upward into darkness.

Dozens of thick wooden pews are piled across the width of the nave, totally obstructing the view to the transept beyond.

Austizel cast *magic weapon* on Exigu's bow. Exigu cast *longstrider*. Kendra casts *mirror image*. Tora hears a voice on the other side of the pews, a man's voice, murmuring. He doesn't understand what it says. Macrazbunare, still in snow owl form, cast *cat's grace*, then *mirror image*. Petrak cast *magic circle against evil*.

They enter slowly. Tora and Petrak go toward one of the staircase to climb it.

Varadan gets on top of the pile of pews ... He sees eight soldiers at the bottom of the pile, on the other side. They watch the pile of pews but they look confused. At their feet, a dozen cadaverers!

But what gets his full attention is many coils of wires snake forth from 30' high mechanical cylinders standing in the apse beyond, their ends terminating in rows of strange machines arranged like standing stones along the walls of the chapel.

Between them, a massive copper plate approximately 40 feet in diameter covers the floor. It's encircled with glyphs that appear liquid, shifting and conjoining ... as if trying to resolve some arcane combination?

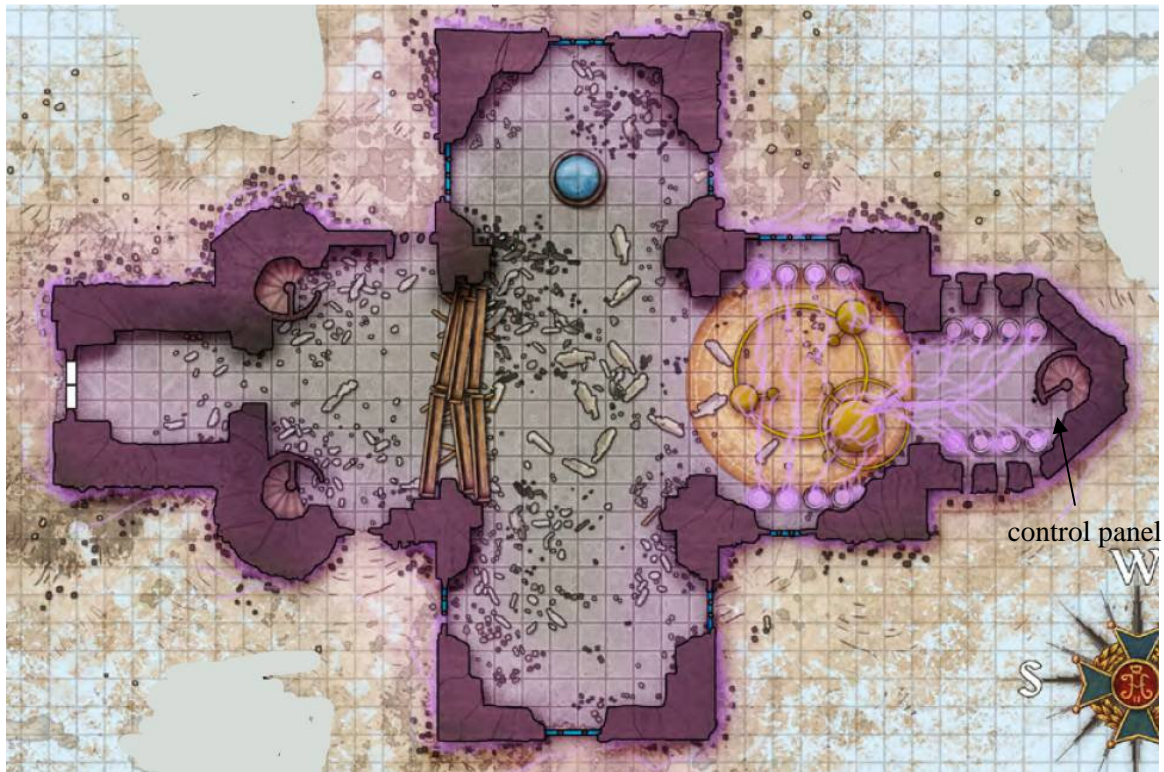
Tendrils of purple lightning pulse down insulated wiring to the presbytery's copper plate flooring, then arc up to a levitating form of a bearded man! Energy enters his body and pours from his mouth, eyes and hears! Rasputin!



Macrazbunare casts *detect magic* and gets about 40 auras, of all kinds except illusion and necromantic!

Varadan puts a rope to the top of the pews to help the other climb up. Exigu climb up. Kendra moves up and casts *mage armor*.

Austizel tries to climb up the pile of pews but is unable this time.



Exigu throws an arrow at one of the soldiers, who takes the full damage but doesn't seem to react... But at this point, Rasputin seems to notice their presence and with a ghastly voice, says "you were most foolish to come here, you will die like those poor peasants!"

And he casts a deadly tower of flame! (flame strike, 47 hp). Austizel falls unconscious! Kendra falls twenty feet below. Her mirror images disappear and her broken body clearly show she is dead!

Macrazbunare run at Austizel and cast an healing spell. Petrak move back from the staircases and come toward the battle. Tora follows.

In unison, the eight soldiers fire their rifle at Exigu! But they all miss.

Varadan gets a crossbow and takes cover. Austizel gives his bow to Tora. Exigu throws an arrow at Rasputin (-12).

Rasputin sneers with disdain "What? You do not like my cathedral? Faith and holiness do not need ceremonials to be sincere and deep!" Exigu throws him an arrow.

Rasputin casts again, *spectral hand*.

Macrazbunare exits the church of light by the front door and flies toward windows to the other side of the church, behind Rasputin. He sees a World Anchor control panel! He flies to a staircase.

Petrak cast more healing spell at Austizel (+ 27). The soldiers fire again at Exigu, and two bullets hits the halfling (-16). Tora climbs to the top of the pews. Exigu fires an arrow at the *spectral hand* but misses. Rasputin fires *inflict wound* through this *spectral hand* at Exigu (-25). He adds "Only the man who commits sins can meet God in repentance!"

Petrak cast *prayer*. The soldiers fire again at Exigu, and two bullets hits (-17). Exigu falls to the ground, dead! Tora throws arrows at Rasputin, one touches the target. Varadan throws crossbow bolt at the mad monk, but misses thrice... Austizel casts two magic missiles at the spectral hand (which does disappear) and two at Rasputin.

Rasputin rages "I will f.. you like I f..ed the tsarina and the whole of Russia!", and he casts a spell at Austizel, who is paralysed! (hold person). Petrak counters it quickly with a *remove paralysis*.

The eight soldiers now fire at Tora! Tora throws one arrow at Rasputin. Austizel cast *scorching ray* at the mad monk.

In the back, Macrazbunare takes human form and cast *invisibility* on himself. He enters the room and is in front of the control panel. At this moment, the lightning above, near the ceiling, coalesce and turns to a prismatic spray of different colours, who falls on Macrazbunare! The green colours hit Macrazbunare, who shakes off the poison. Macrazbunare tries to untune the machine : it works partially! It seems the energy level got down by 50 %, and even Rasputin felt it!

Petrak tries to climb the pile of pews but is unable to. Rasputin casts another hold person at Austizel (miss).

One soldier of the eight touches Tora, who concentrates his arrows on Rasputin. Austizel throws another *magic missile* at Rasputin. He replies "I'm not a holy man, I'm just a lamb in a herd that has lost its shepherd!", and hurls another deadly tower of flames at the heroes! Austizel falls unconscious (-4).

Before Macrazbunare tries again to untune the World Anchor, another prismatic spray, and Tora sees a form falling to the ground ... Macrazbunare is dead!

Petrak cures Austizel. Varadan was badly hurt by the second *flamestrike*, and he takes an healing potion. Austizel bravely climb again the pile of pews.

Tired of Tora's arrows, Rasputin says "know that God loves men who recognize their sins!" and he cast a spell : a blackish bolt is hurled at Tora, who falls unconscious (-2) !

Petrak cures Varadan. Austizel casts another flight of *magic missiles* at Rasputin, who falls to the ground! At last!

They heal Tora. Tora then uses *lay on hand* on himself. The eight soldiers stop firing at the heroes and look confused. "What are we doing here", they seem to ask.

Varadan runs toward the place where they saw Macrazbunare falls. The liquid-ish copper plate now seem solidified and he is able to walk over it without problem. Macrazbunare is lying face

down and when Varadan turns him, he sees his face is greenish, with a swollen black tongue. He was deadly poisoned by the ray.

Varadan brings back Macrazbunare's corpse. Austizel casts tongues and speaks with the soldiers. "You don't know what happened? You just fought with us and Rasputin a terrible evil menace!"

This confuses the soldiers even more and they say they want to leave this church ...

DM note: woah, that was an extreme battle, wasn't it?! I was very very close to TPK! Three dead, including Kendra, and two unconscious heroes!

Rasputin was just a level 11 oracle. Between you and me, I "killed" Rasputin and had him "die" at 35 hp remaining, because this was going way too bad for the heroes. It's the first time I do this, ever.

During the battle, as I was foreseeing a TPK, I was making a contingency plan to have them awoke to the sound of applaud, on Juste's theater...

I knew it was going to be tough, but I never expected that many casualties! First, I never expected a 20 foot high pile of pew (climb DC 10, or 5 with the rope) was that of a challenge! For some of them, it took them a few times to succeed, wasting precious time. After the battle, they asked what was the CR of the battle, I answered "Rasputin, between 10 and 13, the pile of pews, CR 20 !"

Second, I never thought they would chicken out and fight from the top of the pews. That "attack from a distance" mode clearly gave wizard Rasputin a great advantage! And it had the heroes kept on one line, which enhanced the effectiveness of area spells like flame strike.

In the adventure, playing on Rasputin's hard to kill reputation, he was to come back twice, the first time like if resurrection was cast, the second time like a raise dead. I can't do that in the next game or I'll have a confirmed TPK within minutes. At the start of next game, I'll probably have Rasputin raised like a half hit dice ghoul-like monster, with 50 % of remaining spells gone.