

Carrion Crown Session Summary 11/10/2013

Attendance

Ernest and *Chris* start the day by discussing the probable age and genealogy of the roasted chickens and sushi found at HEB. *Bruce* is horrified by their assertions, noting that he has fond memories of eating HEB-produced foods.

Matt shows up fresh from his various cruise-ship-based adventures. *Chris* provides him with a breakdown of the doings of the Whispering Way from the last session: they may be crazy necromancers, but they do understand how to run a project. In return, *Matt* disappoints the group by informing them that the ship he was on did not collide with any islands off the Italian coast, nor did it suffer catastrophic plumbing-related disaster.

By the time *Paul* arrives, the conversation has moved on to the fact that today the entire series of *Matlock* is available at the special low price of \$110 on Amazon. Woot! Just remember – every episode of *Matlock* could be the last episode of *Matlock*!

All discuss how to handle Thanksgiving. Most folks have things going on for the holiday itself, so the idea of a Friday or Saturday gamer day sounds quite good. All agree in principle, though the difficult issue of the final status of Jerusalem remains to be discussed.

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Class</i>	<i>Level</i>
Oswald Bainbridge	Bruce	Grizzled Crossbowman	Fighter	7
Vladimir Vampijérovic	Matt	Pale-skinned Stranger	Hungry Ghost Monk	6
Zurax Darkfire	Matt	Mysterious cloaked traveler	Half-Orc Necromancer	7
Nigel Snodgrass	Patrick	Emo-Gothic figure	Dirge Bard	7
Doctor Jegen Vaus	Tim	Elvish Eurotrash in leather pants	Alchemist	7
Sredni Vashtar's Girl	Ernest	Troubled Vudran Girl	Witch	7

Icobus Basilisk	Chris	Pale, poor nobleman, now become orcish!	Oracle	7
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Equipment Upgrades & Planning

Oswald Bainbridge discovers (somewhat to his surprise) that nobody else has a good use for the *Breastplate +2* the group collected last session. He is happy to upgrade, trading in the *Breastplate+1* he had been wearing.

Everyone gears up and prepares to assault the great tower that the Whispering Way necromancers have fortified up. The plan is for the characters to sneak around to the back of the tower and wait for the *Prince's Wolves* to launch a diversion in the front. They will then use the *Rope of Climbing* and whatever else they have to scale the tower and attack.

Icobus Basilisk wonders, "What do you think the perception bonus of your typical skeleton is? After all, they've got no eyes."

Oswald suggests, "The burning ones have fire – that might help them see in the dark." Nobody likes Oswald's suggestion.

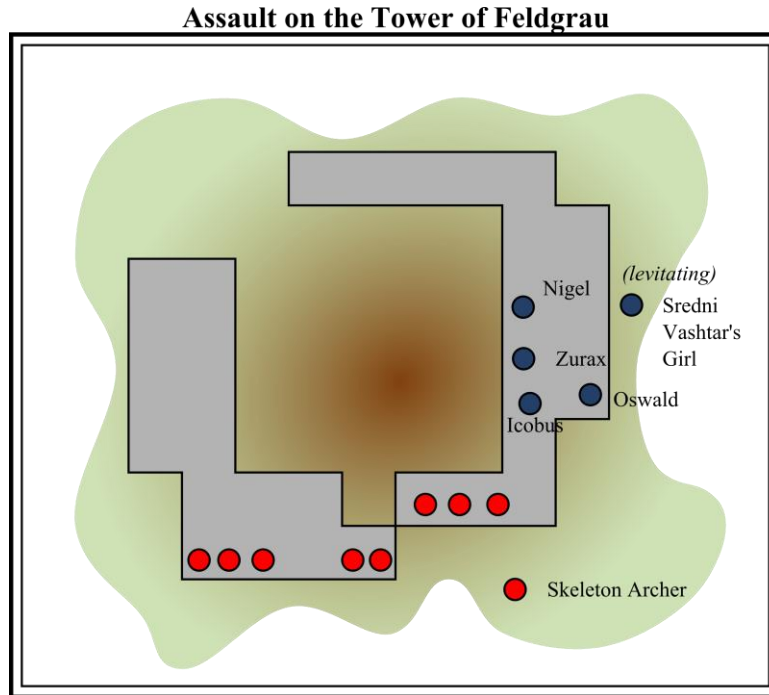
The Tower of Feldgrau

The Tower of Feldgrau was once an impressive building, looking over the town square from a slight rise. Only the ground floor and half of the second floor of the tower still remain. Rubble and catapult balls are scattered all around, reminders of the conflicts long ago that destroyed the town. The armory is a large stone building attached to the side of the tower, now gutted by fire.

The characters wait until the skeletons move away towards the front of the building. They can see the smoke from the buildings the Prince's Wolves are setting on fire. The skeletons start firing down into the courtyard.

The characters see eight skeletal archers up at the top of the tower. The skeletons are standing upon a small ledge around the tower perimeter that still remains intact, mostly. *Sredni Vashtar's Girl* uses *Levitation* to bring the *Rope of Climbing* to the top of the tower, allowing the others to follow on up. The characters charge across the narrow ledge straight into the skeleton's bows. It turns out that the skeletons are quite well

equipped and have Rapid Fire to boot! The characters are peppered with well-aimed arrow fire.



Zurax Darkfire unleashes his dark powers to take control of two of the skeletons. Icobus (who had moved to engage one of them) calls back, “That’s very impressive!” The others cluster around, waiting for space to open up on the battlefield.

Nigel Snodgrass unleashes a terrifying round of drumming, sending one skeleton fleeing for its miserable unlife. Icobus Basilisk decides that he’d prefer to not be shot full of arrows, so he places a *Fog Cloud* around himself. The other skeletons (who would apparently prefer to not be cut up by unseen adventurers) back off and fire arrows randomly into the cloud.

Zurax Darkfire pulls out his wand of *Magic Missile* and demonstrates that there are more effective ways to fight in a cloud of fog. He shoots a skeleton several times. It grins at him, bluish glow lingering in its empty eye sockets. He follows up with his wand of *Acid Arrow*, leaving the skeleton with melting bones. It’s grin becomes a bit less dire.

Oswald steps out of the *Fog Cloud* into a fusillade of arrows. He is grateful to his new armor, which keeps him from actually suffering damage. He draws a bead on the skeleton Zurax had damaged and shatters it into bits with two well-placed crossbow bolts.

The skeletons respond by forming a firing line and sending a wave of poorly-aimed arrows everywhere the characters are not.

Icobus decides that he's had enough of just sitting around, unable to move. He pulls out his halberd and wallops a skeleton twice, shattering it. He screams out, "I have value! I killed something!"

Zurax launches a *Disrupt Undead* at the next archer in line. Oswald follows up by targeting the creature's joints, destroying it. The skeleton's companion manages to score a hit upon him in return, though it inflicts only trivial harm.

He Looks Serious

Orrin Vrood, the chief Whispering Way necromancer, decides to take this moment to head up to the tower and investigate the source of the rain of shattered skeleton parts he's been seeing. He is escorted by two giant crawling hands each the size of an adult human.

Orrin Vrood starts out by unleashing a *Circle of Death* on the group. Sredni Vashtar's Girl recognizes that the spell will kill four of the members of the group so she invokes the Eclipse Harrow card to provide spell resistance, saving Nigel and Icobus. Both Oswald and Zurax are slain instantly... but before Oswald's body even hits the ground Sredni Vashtar's Girl uses another Harrow card to restore him to life. Everyone is wildly grateful for Harrow cards this session – they suddenly seem to have a million uses, as long as those uses are keeping your party members from suddenly dying.

Again full of vim and vigor, Oswald shoots Orrin Vrood twice. The necromancer clearly has some impressive defenses active – the bolts do not bite as deep as they should.

Nigel decides that Orrin Vrood is having too good a day by half. He damps him down a bit with some *Crushing Despair*. Vrood's face falls – he is sooo unhappy now.

The two undead hands come clambering up at the characters. They are covered with pus-filled boils and an unerring tracking sense for any creatures whose blood they have tasted.

Icobus finds himself in the perfect place to address the situation. He strikes the tower wall with his adamantine hammer and collapses it, sending Orrin Vrood and both of his undead giant hands tumbling down under a wave of debris and shattered stone.

The characters decide to hold off on the celebration when the rubble starts to shift and move. A moment later, Orrin Vrood floats free using *Telekinesis* to push rubble out of the way. Oswald responds by shooting him square in the chest, blowing him back to the ground. Icobus follows by casting *Dispel Magic* upon him, but Vrood's spells are too strong for him to overcome. Sredni Vashtar's Girl casts another *Dispel Magic* and eliminates Vrood's *Shield* spell.

Orrin Vrood gestures and strikes Oswald with waves of evil power! Oswald grits his teeth and resists the effect! For just a moment he felt panicked and sickened, but then he feels nothing but rage. He proclaims, "I shall shoot a crossbow bolt through every one of Vrood's major organs, in alphabetic order!" Unfortunately, he is still a bit shuddery after his encounter with evil magic and only manages a single off-balance hit on the necromancer.

Nigel casts *Grease* on Orrin Vrood's quarterstaff. The weapon slips from the magician's grasp. Icobus follows up with another *Dispel Magic*, eliminating the necromancer's *Protection from Good*.

Orrin Vrood latches on to Sredni Vashtar's Girl and inflicts his *Eyebite* upon her, but her spell resistance stops the effect. She flees into the mist anyway, momentarily forgetting about her Spell Resistance. Vrood shoots a ray of *Enervation* at Oswald, but the *Crushing Despair* throws his aim off just enough. Oswald responds with more barrages of crossbow bolts, hitting him five times. Vrood looks quite badly injured. Oswald calls over at him, "Every major organ! Every! Major! Organ! In alphabetical order!"

Orrin Vrood decides he's had enough of being shot with crossbow bolts. He fixes his *Eyebite* upon Oswald, but Oswald resists the effect thanks to Sredni Vashtar Girl's Fortune hex. Vrood tries an *Enervation* as a follow up, inflicting a negative level upon Oswald.

Icobus Basilisk casts a *Spiritual Hammer* and sets it to striking Vrood. Nigel draws out his shortbow and makes a clean hit upon the Necromancer, almost shattering the remains of Vrood's *Stoneskin*.

And then out of the dust and mist Sredni Vashtar's Girl floats up and strikes Orrin Vrood with a *Lightning Bolt*. Vrood is electrocuted! His *Fly* spell lowers him gently to the ground. As he drifts down, foam spits out of his mouth and his lower jaw dissolves.

Knowing that Vrood's undead giant hands are still active underneath all the rubble, the characters waste no time in looting his body. They recover:

- *Lesser Silent Metamagic Rod*
- Wand of *Animate Dead* (10 charges)
- *Quarterstaff +1*
- *Amulet of Natural Armor +1*
- *Cloak of resistance +2*
- *Ring of Protection +1*
- A spellbook that carries the distinctive scent of undeadly eeeevil
- Spell component pouch
- Whispering Way amulet

The characters do not waste much time thinking about whether or not the giant undead hands might be carrying loot. They do note that Orrin Vrood was not carrying the *Heart of the Pack Lord* – perhaps it is below in the tower?

Careful Exploration of the Tower of Feldgrau

Nigel turns himself *Invisible* and sneaks down to search the tower while Sredni Vashtar's Girl flies cover. The others start exfiltrating from the tower to avoid drawing the attention of more necromancers. Nigel (who has a -2 Perception and might have missed the giant display case labeled "The Authentic Heart of the Pack Lord") reports seeing nothing. Sredni Vashtar scuttles down after him, just in case. The weasel returns to report that there is no display case, but there is a large locked chest and a satchel.

Knowing that there is a chest and no necromancers to cause trouble, the characters head down to see what it contains. It is quite heavy, but between them Girl and Nigel manage to carry it out of the tower along with the satchel.

What's in the Satchel?

The satchel contains several pages of cryptic notes, a map of Ustalav with coordinates and a carved bone tube. The tube contains a poem. And the poem appears to be a description of how to create a powerful undead monstrosity using the Heart of the Pack Lord, most likely the *Whispering Tyrant* currently trapped in Virlych (or a reasonable facsimile thereof).

The Text of the Poem

Upon the ashen pathways tread
Softly, as the whispered dead.
As mortal flesh doth rot and fail
To leech and maggot, ebbing frail.
Unhallowed words cannot be spoken,
With whispered oath, death lies broken.
Shed fear, shed life, shed pain, shed time,
Eternity seized shall soon be thine.
First spirit torn from Grave-Lady's grasp
Be rent and sown as soured ash.
Soft the spiral song reverses,
Judgment lost, damnation surges.
Keeper of the damned's soul take,
With packlord's heart the beast shall wake
And flesh be wrought in disarray—
Stillborn cocoon, to blessed decay.
A hundred slain lie innocent,
Grind bone and marrow to cement.
Craft now a skull of splintered graves,
Unmake life, unmake the slave.
Where history churns dream to blister,
Necrophagous secrets whisper
Through chronicles of Raven's tongue—

A legacy of fear unspun.
Blood spilt atop the Iron Thorn
Invokes that which cannot be born.
Arise the Tyrant now unbound,
Bearer of the Carrion Crown!

And the Chest?

- 2000 gold pieces worth of onyx gemstones
- 50 pounds of silver dust
- Scroll of Control Undead

Sredni Vashtar's Girl looks over the collection and notes, "At least we've disrupted their logistics chain. Sooner or later they'll start running out of undead."

Carrion Hill – A Side Trip

Zurax Darkfire is still dead, so the characters head thirty miles south to Carrion Hill to find someone capable of casting *Raise Dead*. They find some cultists who don't want to ask many questions and who are very eager to be paid in onyx gemstones and silver dust. The characters decide to not ask too closely why the cultists are so eager to accept onyx and silver. *Raise Dead* is pretty expensive and *Restoration* is only barely less so, so the characters end up selling several additional items from their recent hauls.

There is a general treasure distribution of 3927 gold to everyone.

Oswald Bainbridge makes a point of replenishing his stocks of regular and silver-tipped crossbow bolts. He also buys a *Cloak of Resistance +1*.

The characters divide up some of their other magical loot. Oswald gains an *Amulet of Natural Armor +1*. Nigel Snodgrass picks up a *Ring of Protection +1*. Icobus Basilisk takes the *Cloak of Resistance +2*.

The Fate of Duristan

The characters determine that their former companion *Duristan* has succumbed to the werewolf curse and is now irredeemably chaotic evil. They hold a brief trial, with Icobus Basilisk serving as judge because he is the closest to a nobleman they have available. Duristan is found guilty. Unfortunately, when the characters come around the

following morning to pick him up and carry out the sentence they find that he has developed the dreaded smash-head sickness and died. Icobus (wiping off his adamantine hammer) claims to not know anything about what happened.

Interpreting the Notes

Sredni Vashtar's Girl spends some time deciphering the mysterious notes in Orrin Vrood's satchel. Most of them are messages to him from his superior within the Whispering Way instructing him to:

- Steal the Heart of the Shudderwood Packlord
- Construct a skull from the bones and corpses at the mass grave of Feldgrau
- Send the Sea Sage Effigy to the town of Thrushmoore in trade for some other object
- Build an army of undead for unspecified later use.

For all that he is now dead, it looks like Vrood did a pretty good job of meeting these expectations.

The poem speaks to most of these instructions. It also mentions the tower of Gallowspire, a massive iron and bone tower built in the city of Adorak. It was constructed by the Whispering Tyrant and now serves as his prison. It remains a forbidding place full of evil magic.

Back to Feldgrau

The characters make a pointless trip back up to Feldgrau to find that all the necromancers are gone, along with their new-built undead army.

Before they leave, the characters stop by in the Feldgrau Inn, where they watch the innkeeper ghost hang himself. The characters try talking to him. To no surprise, he explains that he is hanging himself because the troops slaughtered all of the townsfolk. He was the one who made the deal with the conquerors. It was his greed and ambition that caused the destruction of the town. He cannot rest.

All of Sredni Vashtar's Girl's blandishments do not persuade the innkeeper to say any more, but one sad, emotive look from Nigel Snodgrass opens his heart. "A new peril has come to Feldgrau, evil souls who mean to bring back the core of evil! Orrin Vrood is

the name of their leader! If you brought me his head I could rip out his memories and expose them!”

This would be the moment when the characters discover that Icobus is carrying around a bag full of the heads of dead necromancers. The others choose to not question Icobus too closely upon his motivations.

In exchange for his help, the ghostly innkeeper wants the characters to provide a proper burial for the townsfolk. The characters agree to do so.

The ghost performs a dark séance. The characters see Vrood sending a letter describing his progress to his master, then they see him place two objects into a chest: a heart in a bottle and a fragile skull made from bone fragments. He places the effigy of the Sea Sage into a third chest. Riders take the chest with the effigy down the road south, heading to Thrushmoore.

The characters spend some time performing appropriate burial rites over the mass grave and all other bodies they are able to find.

The Road to Thrushmoore

The characters return to their wagon to find that *Doctor Vaus*’ cart is gone. The wagon driver explains that the last he saw of the alchemist, the fellow was wearing his *Ironface* mask and loping out into the wilderness, animal-style. The others wonder, “What does the Vaus say? Haffi-haffi-haffi-ho! Haffi-haffi-haffi-ho!”

The characters travel down roads and paths to Lantern Lake, then skirt the shores and head south to Thrushmoore. Along the way the characters draw new Harrow cards. Oswald draws the *Tangled Briar* (shield, LE) – able to give him an extra standard or move action, or to use the spell *Command* (DC 10 + character level).

Nigel Sees Some Remarkable Sights

The first two nights of the journey are uneventful. On the third evening the characters camp on the shore of Lantern Lake. Nigel goes down to the lake for a swim. He hears women laughing and talking and sneaks up to see who is there. He sees the most beautiful elven women he has ever seen. They are so beautiful that he is forced to make a Fortitude save to avoid being blinded permanently. He deduces that they are nymphs.

Nigel comes out of the bushes. They look at him with surprise and shock. He makes two more Fortitude saves. He removes his shirt in slow motion to display his detailed musculature.

The nymphs shriek in alarm, “A man!”

Nigel reassures them, “Don’t worry, I see something that beautiful every time I get dressed in the morning. May I join you?”

One of the nymphs tells him, “Now that you have seen us, we must flee for our modesty! Only if you catch us can you do what you will!” The two nymphs dash off into the forest.

Nigel follows after them and quickly catches up with one of them. He suspects that she might have wanted to get caught...

Nigel returns to the group after an extended absence. He is carrying a new talisman, a lock of a nymph’s hair. As long as he possesses it, he gains two benefits:

- +4 Insight bonus on Will saving throws, Craft checks and Perform checks.
- A Bard who has a nymph for a muse can use Bardic Performance for an additional number of rounds per day equal to her CHA modifier (7 in this case).

Another Bathing Beauty, Sort Of

The next day the characters encounter another woman bathing in the lake. This one is about eleven feet tall with green skin. Her body is slimy and hairless. Her eyes are black and bulbous. Nigel tells the others, “Hey, I got this.” They suggest that his incredible personal attributes are probably not appropriate in this case.

Sredni Vashtar’s Girl assures the giant woman that the characters are just passing through. As she gets closer to the giant, she can see that the woman’s body is covered with numerous deformities.

The giant woman grabs up her enormous hooked club. She tells them, “For seeing me, I demand that you turn over one of yours!” The characters have the bodies of two Kellid werewolves stored in boxes on the wagons – Zurax works to pretty one of them up with *Sculpt Corpse* and then turns him into a zombie so the characters can comply with her demand without raising too many ethical problems. Nigel does a whorish job of applying makeup to the unfortunate former Kellid with his Disguise skill.

While Nigel works, Zurax calls out, “Okay, we’ll pay your tribute!” As soon as Nigel is done, Zurax sends the zombie on its way to meet with destiny.

The greenish giantess tells the characters, “I will do one more thing for you before you leave. I will commune with my great patron Dagon!”

Zurax is dubious, “Okay...”

She tells them, “In Thrushmoore you will not find what you seek, you will only find clues.”

The characters thank her, get back in their wagon, and head on their way. Zurax comments, “Hooray for creative solutions to problems!”

The Town of Thrushmoore

The characters arrive in the town of Thrushmoore. The people of the town seem quite insular. The buildings are all narrow-beam architecture, close-spaced and deeply uninviting. There is a crude fort placed along the road leading into town, with two grumpy Drumish mercenaries armed with crossbows stationed to intercept travelers.

The characters are able to learn that two riders entered the town the day before. They swapped their horses at the livery stable. One of them headed south out of town towards Illmarsh. Nobody knows where the other one went. The locals explain that there is nothing beyond Illmarsh – nothing except swamps and marsh forest. It survives on fishing and logging and other unspecified forms of support. The House of Undiomedes used to run the place before their line died out. Now some kind of Mayor runs the place, backed by a Sheriff and a couple of half-trained deputies. They have a church to Gozreh down there, but it follows some odd beliefs, not like the normal church of Gozreh at all.

The locals caution against going to Illmarsh. One rather froggy-looking sort tells Icobus, “The people there are strange. We call them Musties for their unpleasant odor.”

The characters spend the night in Thrushmoore and depart for Illmarsh in the morning. Sredni Vashtar’s Girl lingers behind, attending to demands from her mustelid deity.

The Missing Rider Is Found!

Just after the characters leave town they see an old haywain. Its wooden sideboards are near to bursting under the weight of its load, and one of its wheels is

broken. The old man driving it clearly needs help getting a new wheel placed upon the axle.

Oswald and Icobus agree to help out: they lift up the wagon so he can put the wheel back on the axle. As they strain, a pair of ghouls burst forth to attack the flat-footed helpers. Oswald and Icobus both suffer ghoul bites. Oswald is diseased, but Icobus ends up paralyzed. The characters guess that they are dealing with the missing Whispering Way cultist.

Zurax points and announces, “Aha! I just knew it was a trap!” At that moment, the old man stabs him, nearly eviscerating him in the process. Zurax decides that the old man isn’t just a necromancer. Zurax starts to feel the characteristic burn of scorpion venom through the ruins of his intestines and concludes, “Assassin. Must be an assassin.”

Nigel casts *Scare* upon the two ghouls. One of them is terrified. The other one tears into Oswald, shredding his side and rendering him paralyzed. Nigel muses, “Either the spell didn’t work on that one, or he has a very unusual response to fear...”

Zurax barely has a chance to gasp before the assassin tears into him again. Nigel channels positive energy to heal the magician, then casts *Mirror Image* to obscure his own location.

Zurax reaches out and takes command of one of the ghouls. He orders it, “Don’t attack me or my friends!” The ghoul stops moving. Zurax commands again, “Now attack the assassin! Slay your friend!” The ghoul roars and strikes out at the assassin. Zurax takes this opportunity to cast *Invisibility* and slip away from the assassin’s blades.

Nigel moves to the defensive and engages a ghoul as the assassin unleashes a series of devastating strikes against Zurax’s controlled ghoul. The other ghoul attacks Nigel, but hits only an image.

Zurax pushes negative energy into his servant ghoul and sends it back against the assassin. The ghoul lashes out and connects, paralyzing the assassin. Suddenly the fight looks much better! The ghoul lunges at the assassin, tears out his throat, and starts eating.

Nigel recognizes that he has no more images left, so he backs up and recasts *Mirror Image*. Oswald briefly recovers from his paralysis, shoots a ghoul three times and critically wounds the creature. The ghoul strikes back, paralyzing Oswald again. Icobus

recovers from his own paralysis, slams the ghoul in the head with his hammer and drops it like a sack of potatoes.

The characters are standing upon the battlefield, gasping from wounds and exertion. The air is full of the sounds of munching.

Zurax remonstrates, “Bad ghoul! Bad ghoul! No more eating!” He gets the ghoul away from the corpse long enough to search it. He finds:

- Empty potion bottle
- Three vials of scorpion venom
- *Mithril Chainmail Shirt +1*
- *Dagger +2*
- 2 masterwork daggers
- Disguise kit
- Small ceramic egg
- Thieves’ tools
- 20 platinum pieces

What Does the Ghoul Say?

Zurax interrogates the ghoul, but the creature’s answers are obvious at best. Its name is *Galois*. It really doesn’t know too much about its masters or its goals, beyond killing the people they want killed and eating the things it wants to eat. The ghouls were recruited locally from a cemetery and don’t know much about the riders. The characters are able to convince themselves that the assassin was one of the riders from Feldgrau.

Zurax tells the others that Galois could be very useful, but there is some risk that he will slip control in a day or so. Oswald is very much against having the ghoul as a traveling companion.

Zurax goes back to the ghoul. “Galois, you’ve been a wonderful, wonderful thrall. But we can’t bring you into town, or keep you as a member of the group.” Galois looks up at Zurax with a trusting, puppy-like expression. The others get the idea that Zurax is having trouble sending the ghoul off. He finally sends Galois back to his home cemetery, hopeful that Galois will be able to have a happy unlife there among the gravestones and the sepulchers.

The characters get back onto the road, knowing that half of them have ghoulish fever by now. The road to Illmarsh is in tremendously poor shape. The going is slow, and the journey takes two days. Half of the group loses CON and DEX from ghoulish fever over the course of the day.

A Mariner in Distress

A strong wind is blowing from the lake as the characters near Illmarsh. They see a single stone quay pointing out shore, a couple of miles from the town. Some fifty yards beyond it there is a single fishing vessel, manned by a single crewman. The man seems to be having great difficulty controlling the boat.

The characters run to the quay just in time to see the vessel run aground. The one sailor falls into the water. Zurax leaps into the lake and pulls him to the beach. The sailor is an old man with white hair. He wears a stained and burned leather apron-smock and a set of goggles with darkened lenses. Zurax exclaims, "You're lucky to be alive!"

"Lucky! Lucky! I would rather have died than to let my finest invention fall into the waves! I was out conducting experiments near the Turn Rocks! I must salvage my equipment before those local ruffians vandalize it! Before it sinks into the lake!"

The man is *Horace Croon*. He had hired some locals to crew the boat, but when the weather got bad they all dove overboard and abandoned him. He assures the characters that even though this happened in the middle of the lake he isn't worried about the locals as they are all very good swimmers. He has several very strange pieces of apparatus on the swiftly-sinking boat, the largest item looking like a large metal fish made of overlapping scales.

Oswald, Icobus and Nigel head to the wreck of the boat with rope in hand, intent on trying to rescue Horace Croon's equipment. They do what they can, then let him stomp off looking for his horse and cart.

The Town of Illmarsh

Most of the buildings in Illmarsh are primitive log structures, with only a few half-timbered ones. The town is surrounded by stinky swamps on three sides. The whole place has the scent of old, mildewed laundry left undried for too long. Compared to Illmarsh, Thrushmoore is a friendly, bustling metropolis with a healthy tourist trade.

The characters enter the Illmarsh town square. The square is bordered by the wharfs on one side and various public buildings on the other, including:

- The *Bountiful Catch Inn*
- The *Hall of the Recondite Order of the Indomitable Sea*, the temple to Gozreh
- The Fishmarket
- A Tavern
- A General Store

The Hall of the Recondite Order is built in an archaic style not seen in the rest of the town. There is a statue on the portico of the church of a mermaid with a trident and a conch shell. The whole place doesn't look like any mainstream church of Gozreh, but the depiction of the mermaid is an obscure representation used by some coastal communities, or so Nigel assures the other characters.

They Have Strange Ways Here

The characters head straight to the Hall of the Recondite Order. Inside the hall there is a larger wooden statue of the mermaid, but holding a strange octopoid creature instead of a conch shell. Icobus notes that the hair on the statue looks less like hair and more like tentacles, and that her face has a distinct ichthyoid cast.

Four men are meditating in front of the statue. As the characters approach, they stand. "You look like strangers in our town."

Icobus tells them, "We are. We require healing, we need a cure for ghoulish fever."

A sallow-skinned local with a pocked face answers, "Although we are the devout of Gozreh, we have no healing on hand right now."

"Might that change later on?"

The local considers, "Perhaps. How much are you willing to pay?" Sensing the way the wind is blowing, Icobus proposes that double normal rates would be reasonable.

Caleb, the local Vicar of the Order, comes shuffling out at the mention of double payment. The characters discuss the town, newly-arrived necromancers, and healing with Caleb. He gives all indication that he would prefer that they just headed back out of town, but he's willing to put up with them for a little while. Icobus tells him that the characters will be staying at the inn overnight and will return in the morning for disease cures.

A Nice Bit of Lodging

The *Bountiful Catch* inn is a rough-and-ready place run by *Loob Dreely*. The characters venture there after making their arrangements with the Recondite Order and (reluctantly) agree to his exorbitant price of three gold per night. Nigel makes a point of checking the last two names in the guest register, but *Gaster Lucas* is the only name there – and it is quite old.

The characters go to the common room for dinner. They try to chat with some locals, with minimal success. It doesn't take long for the Sheriff to appear, flanked by two deputies. He asks them, "You want to tell us what you're doing in Illmarsh?"

Icobus answers, "Yes, we're looking for a necromancer."

The Sheriff is dubious, "There's no necromancers in Illmarsh."

"He wouldn't advertise. The last time we saw him he was boasting that he'd kill everyone in Illmarsh with his evil magics."

The sheriff seems even more unconvinced than before. Icobus persists, eventually persuading him to take them to speak to *Mayor Early Greedle*, a short roundish fellow with oily cheeks.

The Mayor reveals that the town has had a turn of bad luck – fishing has been bad for a while, for some weeks. There are lots of old ruins in the area, from the ancient barbarians who used to live around here, and the locals are openly speculating that something malign from one of them might be scaring off the fish. The Mayor doesn't believe that. He thinks that *Albor*, the Vizier of Gozreh, might have a hand in the problem. Albor's son is the Vicar Caleb, whom the characters met earlier in the day.

Beyond a lack of fish, the Mayor tells the characters that there are more problems in town. There have been over a dozen townsfolk vanished in the last few weeks, apparently at random. The Sheriff hasn't found anything. The Mayor needs some help, but he must proceed cautiously because the Order runs the town. He thinks that someone in the Order is responsible for the vanished locals.

Mayor Greedle asks that the group investigate, and urges them to start at the Hall of the Recondite Order. To make everything legal, he will deputize the characters. Oswald is enthusiastic about being deputized. As the conversation ends, Mayor Greely

mentions that he does know something about a rider from the north. The characters make plans to investigate the Hall of the Recondite Order that evening.

The End of the Session

The characters all go up to eighth level! Huzzah!