

Hurssia

Weekend Game: 1-2 June 2014

Player Characters

- Chryssiana (INdran)
- Galar (Chris)
- Jessica (Neil)
- Kael (Jake)
- Kurngrim (Claire)
- Radigund (Buff)
- Randall (Marc)
- Skarra (Neil)
- Whiteflight (Malcolm)

That which had gone before...

Commissioned by Emperor Luknar to discover the truth behind rumours of the Green Lady's return, the party of Randall, Skarra, Chryssiana, Kael and Whiteflight met with an entity claiming to be the Green Lady's husband. They were given a vial that would apparently transport them to the Green Lady and, on arrival, they would be granted an audience with her.

After some discussion, our heroes broke the vial only to find themselves transported into Ravenloft. It was here they met Jessica: a half-elven native of the realm who was looking to escape Ravenloft through a magical portal. She agreed to lead the party to this escape route as long as they agree to protect her en route.

Sensible of their original mission, the group chose to believe that they hadn't been tricked into Ravenloft and that the Green Lady could indeed be found in the vicinity. Soon they discovered a castle made of bone, and became convinced that the Green Lady was within. However, their attempts to enter by negotiation, trickery and force were all in vain.

At this point a large force of horsemen and archers appeared to assail the castle. Caught between the magically sealed castle this new threat the party were forced to fight the army, and used their powerful magic to drive it back into the nearby woodland. Now they ponder their next move.

20 Deepwinter 1166

Meanwhile, back in Nyr'Danr the Lord Wizard, Duke Quintith, summons Kurngrim and Radigund. He tells them that he has been able to scry on the rest of the party, and explains their predicament. He intends to send them to Ravenloft on a rescue mission. They need to protect the other party members, and also keep Jessica safe as she is the only one who is capable of leading them back to Hurssia. The pair are transported into the forest close to the bone castle, where they are immediately surrounded by the enemy army.

The rest of the party regroup just outside the castle and behind a magically conjured stone wall. Whiteflight thinks that the army could feasibly be on their side and help them breach the castle. He hopes his delightful smile and winning ways will persuade them to his cause. However, as he raises his arms in sign of supplication and walks to the forest he is stopped by Jessica. She says that she recognises the symbol of the falcon branded into the foreheads of the soldiers. These are Falkovnians: servants of the evil lord Vlad Dracov who rules this domain. They are assuredly *not* allies and would quickly slaughter them all if they could.

Kael (who has been flying around the castle disguised as a dragon) lands and informs the rest of the group that he has seen a large green dragon that could well be the Green Lady inside the castle. She appears to be a prisoner, rather than ruler of the castle. Conversation immediately turns onto how they can breach the castle.

Whiteflight realises that they aren't dealing with magical or mechanical defences. The castle is a domain of Ravenloft, and its walls are the border. The lord of this small domain (whoever that is) has closed the walls against the party. Jessica is adamant that once a domain lord closes the borders of his domain then there is nothing that can be done to breach it. There is absolutely no way into the castle. The party should abandon this plan, and go with her immediately to the portal that will take them all to Hurssia.

Kurngrim and Radigund eventually make a break from the Falkovnians and sprint the half mile toward the castle and the rest of the party. Realising what is happening Galar attempts to use magic to protect their retreat, although both are peppered with arrows by the time they arrive. They explain the role of Qunitith in their arrival.

Skarra suggests that the only way to find out what's going on inside the castle would be to talk to the Green Lady directly. However, without access to any magic that will bypass the barrier the only way would seem to be to pray to the demigod. Although he can't imagine anyone would willingly do that. Randall immediately volunteers.

The Tursen duke prays to the once-ruler of his now fractured country. This works and a dialogue is opened between the two. The Green Lady confirms that she is being held in the castle against her will. Randall immediately asks how he can free her, which puzzles the Green Lady slightly. Why would he do such a thing? Randall says that Turse is in a terrible state and needs a strong leader to unite it. The Green lady did the job once and presumably can do so again...

She thinks this is a good idea and becomes more chatty. Of the activity of her cult in Kursaval, she reveals that it has been operating without her direct input. It is scattered, and now contains a collection of disparate cultists working toward their own ends. Now the cultists in Kursaval have been dealt with, she no longer has any further connection with them.

The Green Lady still has a grudge against Aragorn, and says that the old necromancer was the one responsible for imprisoning her in the castle. The domain lord here is an entity called Edlianus (the chap with the big axe who nearly killed Randall earlier). She fears Aragorn's future plans. She says that Aragorn's plan to release the dragon god Lodus as a grand gesture when he dies is very, very bad for Hurssia. Lodus was awake angry and with embark upon a terrible revenge against the humans and elves of Hurssia who have hunted his children to near extinction. It's curious that Emperor Luknar would support the return of Lodus

considering all he rules is likely to be destroyed during the return – as well as thousands of his subjects killed.

The Green Lady advises killing Aragorn or disrupting his link with Lodus before Aragorn dies. Doing this will not be easy. But the Green Lady offers her services as an ally in such a confrontation: Randall is able to release her. She wants Randall as a servant and is prepared to offer him mighty magical powers in return for his soul. After some little thought, Randall agrees to this arrangement.

Randall then wakes from his reverie and makes a report on (nearly) all of this to his companions, and says that he intends to keep up a 'pretence' of devotion to try and elicit more information from the Green Lady. Jessica is surprising adamant in her opinion that the Green Lady should never be released. Whiteflight has heard of the name Edlianus and believes it could be the name of one of Aragorn's children, dating from a time before he was an evil dictator.

A lengthy conversation ensues on the best course of action.

By this point, a mist has begun to rise from the ground that Jessica believes is Vlad Dracov's attempt to close the borders of Falkovnia. As they are currently caught between three domains (the castle, Falkovnia and the Shadow Rift) they may have a chance to move along the border and escape. They need to get to the domain of Valachan, where portals are available in a castle just off the coast.

Jessica is challenged by the party as to her goals and her character. She admits that the army that besets them is actually trying to apprehend her. She reveals a box that she is carrying. She says that the box is a magical trap that contains her imprisoned husband and some of his companions. It found its way into Ravenloft and she has just stolen it back from Vlad Dracov. She intends to return it to Hurssia and free her husband.

With little else to discover, and no way into the castle, the party move off along the shadow rift in a direction that Jessica hopes is in the direction of Borca. Jessica reiterates that they need to leave Falkovnia as quickly as possible. Other domains are equally dangerous, but at least in them they are not being hunted by the domain lord.

As they need to move quickly, and Valachan is many hundreds of miles away, Skarra hits upon a plan of ferrying the party using his *Transport via Plants* spell. Although very taxing, they should be able to cross one domain per day as long as Jessica can point them in the right direction. Using this method they quickly cross to the edge of Falkovnia and walk across the border into Borca late in the evening. Then Whiteflight conjures a *secure shelter* so they can safely spend the night.

Halfway through the night, the party is attacked by a pair of wandering dire bears. Skarra's plan to conjure a pride of dire lions to see off the enemy is not a good one as the powers of Ravenloft take control of the summoned creatures. However, the party still prevails in the fight that ensues.

21 Deepwinter 1166

The party cross the wilds of Borca using spells and manage to avoid any problems. En route Jessica reveals more about the box to Chryssiana. She explains that the trap she mentioned was set by Mallus, and she is worried about the state of her husband Sebrian and his companions. She is asked directly if Sebrian is a necromancer, but doesn't confirm that fact directly. She evidently loves him deeply.

Jessica also says that she has promised to return the box to certain parties in Ardinia in return for the release of her friends Elrood and Serabok who are currently being held prisoner. She wants to rescue Sebrian, Thorin, Delator and Drake from the box first before handing it over. As bishop of the church of magic, she hopes Chryssiana has the will and the expertise to help her.

Chryssiana agrees to help Jessica: as long as she allows the church of Tarrak to properly study the box, then she'll do all she can to free the people trapped within it. However, if the box proves to be evil, then Chryssiana reserves the right to keep to destroy the box. Jessica says that in such an eventuality she would expect Chryssiana's help to rescue Serabok and Elrood. She agrees to this.

Randall continues to pray to the Green Lady – ostensibly to keep up the pretence of his devotion. The Green Lady is suspicious that Randall appears to be high-tailing it out of the Domain of Dread. However, the duke explains that his current companions could never be convinced that releasing the Green Lady is a good thing. He intends to return to Hurssia and then commission a proper rescue mission by trusted (or duped) retainers who will see the task through.

22 Deepwinter 1166

The party travel across the domain of Verbrek. However, they get lost en route and are not sure of their present location when they camp for evening. Skarra and Chryssiana are concerned about Green Lady's words to Randall. Although she is not to be trusted, they can see how the release of Lodus could be a bad thing, and Skarra is becoming increasingly suspicious of Luknar. They agree to consult their respective gods once they return to Hurssia.

23 Deepwinter 1166

The party head south to the coast where Jessica is able to get her bearings. They are in Sithicus (not somewhere Jessica ever wanted to venture to again). She can now give Skarra sufficient information to reach the domain border, and the party cross into Valachen and camp for the night.

Jessica now explains the task ahead of them. The portal they are seeking is not of a conventional sort. The castle to which she is leading the party is invested with a peculiar breed of wraith. When killed these entities transport their attackers back to Hurssia. Jessica used them to escape Ravenloft before. She travelled to the island with a band of companions. They arrived at dusk and entered the castle only be immediately attacked. Only Jessica survived.

She says that the wraiths are only subject to attacks from magic weapons or from spells. She had a magic weapon the last time she assailed the castle, although she no longer has it now. She suggests arriving at the island in day light, entering the castle and taking up a fortified position. As soon as dusk falls the wraiths will come and the party will have to be ready.

Jessica's words are met with a combination of consternation and suspicion from her companions. Whiteflight is particularly suspicious that she is not telling the party everything that she knows.

24 Deepwinter 1166

Using Skarra's magic the party arrives on the barren island. Ruined boats can be found pulled up on the beach, and Jessica recognises the one that brought her to this place two years ago. She faces the crumbling castle with resolve, and quickly gain entrance. As the daylight begins to fail they explore the castle, discovering (and looting) the bodies that they find – including those of Jessica's old companions. She does not raise any objections, and Chryssiana takes possession of most of the magical items they find.

Eventually the party reach a large room that could once have been audience chamber – broken furniture and detritus litter the place. There is room to manoeuvre in here. It is a good place to make a stand. Skarra hands out his spare magical weapons to Kurngrim and Jessica. Everyone is sufficiently tooled up to meet the challenge. Skarra activates his *figure of wondrous power* (an obsidian dog) that can see invisible foes. He hopes it will be useful lookout.

With minutes of daylight remaining Whiteflight and Galar decide to check one more room: an adjacent chamber with broken stairs rising to the upper levels. In doing so they disturb two wraiths, one of which drains much of Whiteflight's essence before they can flee. Retreating to the main chamber Whiteflight begs for restorative magic from Chryssiana while Galar and Randall unleash excessive amounts of fiery death into the tower.

As the heat from the initial *fireballs* begins to dissipate an enraged Kurngrim rushes the foes to engage them in combat. As Kael follows her, Skarra notices something disturbing: Galar has vanished. It's evident that he struck the killing blow on one of the wraiths. It seems Jessica was misinformed: it's not enough to kill one wraith. Each member of the party has to kill a wraith themselves: even the weakest of them. New tactics are evidently called for, but it's too late to call a warning. Kurngrim instantly dispatches the second wraith, sending herself to safety. Now they are seven.

The remaining party regroups in the main chamber. Skarra and Chryssiana do what they can to cast protective spells on everyone, but the most useful are of limited duration and it is extremely tricky to balance multiple castings in advance of an attack that could happen at any time. Skarra is particularly fatigued from the using his magic to get the group to the island in the first place.

It is thirty minutes before the wraiths attack again. Fortunately the obsidian dog barks a warning. Both Chryssiana and Skarra hold back allowing their companions to face the barrage. They are worried that Kael will be next to go, but in the end the Randall and

Radigund manage to overcome a wraith each – with a *magic missile* spell and her magic dagger respectively.

The remaining five are soon met by two more wraiths. Kael kills one with ease and vanishes. Whiteflight is now increasingly desperate and jittery, and ignores Chryssiana's insistence that Jessica should be allowed to go next. The bard manages to take down the last wraith leaving a three-strong group.

Both Skarra and Chryssiana agree that the comparatively fragile Jessica should be the next one to leave. She must not be left in the castle alone. Both do their best to protect her when the wraiths attack and again, and she is able to kill one and escape. Now Chryssiana and Skarra politely bicker over which one of them should make the greater sacrifice and allow the other to escape. Skarra says that it matters not which goes first as the other will surely soon follow. Chryssiana blasts at a wraith with a lightning bolt, killing it and returning to Hurssia.

Now with only the badly damaged obsidian dog for company, Skarra renews his protective magic and waits for the onslaught. He does not have to wait long. He is almost overwhelmed by his foes and forced to use his healing magic to disrupt the wraiths. Almost devoid of magic, Skarra destroys a wraith with his *cure moderate wounds* spell and escapes the Domain of Dread.

* * * * *

Our heroes return to Hurssia in the order they left Ravenloft, although each was subject to a *plane shift* spell and do not arrive in the same location. Galar appears several hundred feet in the air above the Gon'Wrath Moor in the far east of Kursaval. He quickly casts *fly* on himself to arrest his descent. Landing, he waits for more of his friends to plummet from the sky. After half an hour of waiting he decides to cut his losses and *teleports* to Nyr'Danr to make a full report to Duke Quintith.

The raging Kurngrim appears safely in Duke Randall's castle in his duchy in West Turse. Unfortunately she isn't able to come out of her frothing berserker fury in time to stop herself from decapitating Randall's palace guards. Eventually coming to what passes for her senses (and concerned by the loss of her magic mace) she continues to cut a swathe through the castle and heads down into the town. Baffled by the way the good townsfolk flee from her, she enters a surprisingly empty inn and settles down to have a drink and nurse her wounds. The guards regroup and after more fatalities she eventually agrees to surrender. A grievously wounded Kurngrim is bound and marched to castle dungeons. No-one realises that protective magic cast by Skarra in Ravenloft is about to expire and Kurngrim has about ten minutes to live.

Randall arrives back at his castle around this time and is quickly told what happened. He is furious. When he finds out that Kurngrim has collapsed in her cell he orders that she be healed (although not back to consciousness).

Radigund finds herself plummeting onto the Gon'Wrath Moor as Galar did before her. However, without the ability to cast magic she is dependent upon aiming for somewhere soft and using her *ring of the ram* to arrest her descent. It is a rough landing, but she walks away from it. Accosting a passing gnome she gets directions to a nearby village. En route she notices Kael plummeting from the sky. He makes no attempt to slow his descent and hits the

ground with the force of small meteor. However, he is alive! The pair soon find Whiteflight who has materialised at ground level in a bog, and drag him to safety. Radigund and Whiteflight notice they are missing the magic weapons they used to kill the wraiths have gone.

Jessica is not as lucky as Whiteflight. She is falling over a forest and things look bleak. Cashing in every ounce of karma she possesses, Jessica lands in the back of hay wagon. She has no idea where she is, and does not speak the local tongue.

Chryssiana also appears above a forest – although it may not be the same one. Casting *fly* she heads down to a peasant's dwelling and tries to find out where she is. However, the peasant thinks she's a passing witch and won't let her in. After her further attempts to make friends only serve to terrify, she uses *word of recall* to return to her inner sanctum. It is here she prays to her god, Tarrak.

Tarrak is non-committal about the Lodus question. However, he does confirm that Lodus is the most powerful god and at the top of the tree. Tarrak predicts that Lodus's rage when he returns will be terrible, and he will exact a terrible vengeance on humans and elves. Chryssiana is concerned. Evidently the Green Lady was telling the truth. Chryssiana cannot regain her *lightning bolt* spell. It seems that because she used it to kill a wraith, it is gone forever.

Finally, Skarra appears on top of a mountain without injury. Using the last of his magic to heal himself and protect him from the elements, he wildshapes into a mountain goat and begins to pick his way down the mountain to safety.

Back in Turse, Randall questions Kurngrim. She is moderately contrite, but seems more concerned that Randall's men have taken her weapons and not given them back. Randall says that he is handing Kurngrim over to Quintith and is going to demand some serious restitution for what has happened today.

And in Nyr'Danr, Galar is shown into see Quintith. He tells the Lord Wizard everything, and Quintith sends out agents to collect the rest of the party from around Hurssia and return them to the palace. Tomorrow they will have an interview with Emperor Luknar and Krentish.

25 Deepwinter 1166

In the morning, Skarra prays to Allaveer. He asks her about Lodus and gets much the same answers that Chryssiana received from Tarrak. Allaveer puts a different spin on it: she is all about balance, and after causing some 'disruption' a new balance will be found when Lodus returns. Although the status quo will be utterly shot in the meantime. The spell *cure moderate wounds* is now forever denied to Skarra. It was Mallus's price for escaping Ravenloft.

Eventually the party is reunited in Nyr'Danr. Kurngrim asks Skarra to intercede on her behalf with Duke Randall (as Randall still has Skarra's scimitar). Skarra chastises Kurngrim soundly for her actions. He does speak to Randall and offers to *reincarnate* the men that Kurngrim killed. Randall genuinely appreciates the offer and asks if Skarra will come to Terse and present the option to the families of the deceased. He agrees.

Chryssiana and Skarra discuss what they have discovered from Tarrak and Allaveer. Skarra remains suspicious of Luknar and suggests that the coming audience could be a way to assuage those suspicions – although they must do so subtly. Their conversation is cut short by Randall who is pestering Chryssiana for magical healing.

When Chryssiana casts a *restoration* spell on Randall, and the spell fails the party immediately realise that something fishy is going on. Whiteflight says that this confirms his earlier suspicions that Randall's devotion to the Green Lady is not a trick. A frank and forthright discussion ensues, which is cut short by the arrival of Krentish and the interview with the dragon-emperor.

Luknar (in human form) listens to what the party have to say. All (except Randall) agree that releasing the Green Lady is wrong. Skarra makes the case that – by her own admission – the Green Lady is trapped in Ravenloft. She cannot escape unless Aragorn wills it, and her interaction with any existing cults are minimal. She's better off where she is. Whiteflight suggests methods by which the cult of the Green Lady can be monitored.

More pressing (Skarra feels) is the matter of Lodus. Luknar, Krentish and Quintith admit that releasing Lodus would be a bad idea, but how to stop it? There's a link between Aragorn and Lodus. When Aragorn dies, Lodus will be automatically released. They need to find out what that link is and sever it before it is too late.

And what of the Green Lady? She's imprisoned at the moment, but Aragorn could free her at any point. Skarra says they need to find out how Aragorn imprisoned Lodus and use that method on the Green Lady herself. They have to make sure that she never comes back.

When Luknar comments that Lodus and the Green Lady would battle if they were both active at the same time, Skarra realises that this must be Aragorn's plan. This is his last parting shot against Hurssia for everything slight (real and imagined) that he has received. When he dies he plans to release Lodus and the Green Lady and have the world burn. Its destruction will be his funeral pyre. They cannot talk to Aragorn, they cannot reason with him: they have to find out more about him; unlock his secrets.

What do they know about Aragorn? Quintith says that he came from Nyr'Danr more than six hundred years ago. He studied magic in the city, and in Y'Goth, then he seems to have disappeared for a few years about the Year 530. He returned a few years later and tried to destroy the guild of wizardry, but failed. They put a reward on his head and Aragorn went on the run. At this point in Aragorn's history there was nothing exceptionally powerful about him – he was just your normal uber-powerful wizard. Then between 540 and 580 he started killing wizards on an industrial scale. Around 600 he disappeared. In 624 the Guild of Wizardry hired an assassin to kill him, and this was the point when Aragorn completely disappeared from the historical record. Until his return with an enormous army in 1155, of course... but where was he and what did he do in those intervening years.

When Aragorn's forces took over Nyr'Danr one of his first acts was to destroy the records of the Guild of Wizardry from this time. That tells Skarra that there was some piece of information held by the Guild at that time that Aragorn wanted suppressed – some weakness, or revelation that they can use against him. They have to find out that information. Perhaps they can trace the assassin that was sent after him?

Who, Skarra asks, was part of the guild in 624 and is still alive today? No humans of course, but it's possible that elves and dragon wizards have lived that long. They need to find this information and then use it before it's too late. Aragorn won't live forever, after all.