

questions to answer after last game

synopsis

Still looking for Laurel, the party discovers Coven catacombs underneath Ulm's Monument. They find the encoded spell tomes Detect Fey and Fey Extinction Event there, and kill the witches Annabelle, Beatrice, and Clementine. The party wonders about Rowan when she has déjà vu in the catacombs and the witches don't attack her. They find Laurel, and Detect Fey shows that Laurel and Casca are fairies. Laurel tells them that a Lady of the Coven, Astrid, is planning to kill all of Hollin's fairies with Fey Extinction Event and the Penance Stone.

in more detail

The party ended the last game at the Black Cabaret. Before they left, Cankerblossom thanked Beale for showing him Fairy Fire, and in exchange taught Beale Counterpoint:

Cankerblossom's Counterpoint spell: as a reaction, interrupt any spell that's a song, and replace it with your own spell, by beating the caster in a Performance ability check contest. See PH p. 174, Ability Checks, Contests.

The party hadn't found Laurel (the witch who's a fairy and doesn't know it) at the Black Cabaret so they were still looking for her. Aurelian and Aurora had told them that the only Coven clue they had was they thought that Ulm's Monument was maybe a Coven location. So, the party headed there. Travelogue from the Whipsaw / Black Cabaret was:

Thanks for Hughe's Urchin background, the party moves to Hughe's Monument twice as fast as you normally would. You travel west from the Whipsaw bar where the Black Cabaret was, on Quay Street, until you return to Market Street. The Mooncalf hostel where you talked with Kasskar in the afternoon, and Braddock's Shambles open-air market, are there at Market and Quay. Shops here tend to cater to sailors, like one that sells ivory artificial limbs for amputees.

You turn north on Market toward the City of the Dead. After a mile on Market you reach Foundling Gate in the ancient city wall, which the city outgrew a thousand years ago. After another mile and a half, you reach Red Gate in the newer (but still ancient) outer city wall between Braddock and the City of the Dead.

Ulm's monument and the monument that Hughe Lane maintains are both in the Red Gate courtyard, on the Braddock side. There's also a community brick oven there.

After their fight at the Cabaret, it would have been around 1:00 a.m., so they traveled in the dark and took a long rest when they reached Hughe's monument. Waking up in the morning and going outside, they found a large crowd of people waiting to bake their bread at the community oven.

They went across the courtyard to the monument of Ulm, and found:

Ulm's Monument is a stone building 1.5 stories high, with an ornate dome that rises another story. It has a front door facing the courtyard, which is heavy black iron, and has 12 iron panels with relief sculptures on them.

Since the courtyard was crowded, they elected not to try to break in through the front door. There were narrow more secluded alleys on the left and right of the monument, so they went around to the left and found another iron door and a couple windows. The windows were too dirty to see through.

Rowen picked the lock of the side door; the door opened in and it was blocked from opening. Hughe used STR to bash the door open about a foot, and looking in the foot-wide opening, they found that the door was blocked by a pile of skulls inside, going up to about head level. There was about 2 feet of clearance above the skulls, so Hughe gave Rowen a hand up and she squeezed through the 1 foot x 2 feet opening at the top of the door. Sitting on the giant pile of skulls inside, Rowan saw that there was an old, dust-covered casket on a platform in the center under the dome; and a 2x6 iron plate near it on the floor, which seemed to be the epicenter that all the skulls had been extracted out of.

Rowen opened one of the windows and the party also went into the skull-filled interior of the monument. They inspected the casket and there was a 1-inch layer of dust on it that suggested the casket hadn't been disturbed in a long time; they opted not to investigate. They looked up at the dome interior, which had an elaborate tessellated pattern in black and gold. Beale found a lot of calligraphy about Ulm inside the monument:

Ulm started the trading house that introduced both whaling and opium to Hollin. The young Ulm was a golden god of a harpooner, and he landed his harpoon Hosingen in the primordial bull whale Huhner. But Ulm couldn't finish Huhner off, and Hosingen is still in Huhner's side, waiting to be recovered by an even greater harpooner who can bring the immortal whale down.

They opened the steel plate on the floor and found narrow stone stairs going down; beneath was a basement with caskets of more junior members of Ulm's family.

In one wall, there was a crudely broken, man-sized hole in the wall, leading to a long tunnel beyond, lined with neatly stacked skulls.

As a chronicler of Hollin's graves, Beale knows in olden days, there was a salt mine under Hollin, but when Hollin's cemeteries filled up, the salt mine was converted to an ossuary and tons of old skeletons from the cemeteries were moved there. Possibly that's where you are.

They can follow a tunnel like 1/4 mile long lined with tall organized stacks of skulls and bones the whole time.

On entering the tunnel, Rowen told the party that she felt a sense of deju vu.

They went down the skull-lined tunnel about a quarter of a mile until they found a door on the right. Looking in, it seemed to be a bedroom or barracks with two bunk beds (4 beds total), and some bear skins with blankets on them on the floor. Only other things here seemed to be incidentals like end tables with glasses of water.

They continued down the tunnel. In another quarter-mile they found another room, on the left, and entered. Inside, they found a forge with some unfinished jewelry (worth 100 gp), and two short swords:

The Shank of Banishment is obsidian, chipped into a wedge. A fine, cruel-looking edge has been chipped out along one side for slashing, and there's a fine point at the end for stabbing. There's no hilt. It functions as a +1 short sword that crits on a 19-20. Once a day, on hitting a target, the bearer can cast Banishment on the target as a bonus action.

The Blade of Inflict Wounds is granite, chipped into a wedge. A fine, cruel-looking edge has been chipped out along one side for slashing, and there's a fine point at the end for stabbing. There's no hilt. It functions as a +1 short sword that crits on a 19-20. Once a day, when you damage a target with the Blade you can also cast 3rd level Inflict Wounds on your target as a bonus action.

(In my original writeup these were daggers but short sword was Hughe and Rowan's preferred weapon.)

The jewelry seems to be reminiscent of the Ring and Girdle that the party took off of the Duchesses.

Here, Hughe asked Rowan if this place or the weapons seemed familiar to her, and she said yes.

They continued down the hall, which turned right. Soon they found yet another room on the right, apparently a spell lab. Inside they found a bunch of material spell components, including a 1500 gp circlet. They also found, on one desk:

- Scrolls
 - Scroll of Hex.
 - Scroll of Mind Wipe. Causes total and permanent amnesia in the target.
- Spell tomes
 - Spell tome of Black Lung. Make a ranged spell attack. On success, the target can't breath and is incapacitated for 60 seconds. The spell ends if the target makes a CON save.
 - Spell tome of Death Spiral: Pick a point you see within a range of 120 feet. Any target within a 60 foot radius of the point fails all Death Saves for 60 seconds.

For the tomes:

Hollin spell tomes are typically bound books with 1 or 2 pages being the actual spell, and the rest of the book logging the research and experiments performed developing the spell, and the ongoing history, lore, and apocrypha of the spell. Often loose notes are glued or stapled into the tome like a scrapbook. Developing some spells requires a wizard's entire career, or multiple wizards' careers, so the books can grow to hundreds or even thousands of yellowed pages.

On a second desk, they found:

It looks like someone was using this desk as a workstation to copy spells from tomes to scrolls. Among the loose scraps of paper and quills and ink, you see two scrolls, three tomes, and a curious little circular device.

They asked about the circular device first. It consisted of a large disc with the alphabet around the circumference, and a smaller inner disc that could be rotated relative to the first. The smaller disc also had the letters around the circumference, so it was clear that by rotating the inner disk, you could encode text by replacing letters on the outer disk with the corresponding letter on the inner disk.

In the two scrolls and three tomes:

- scrolls
 - Two scrolls of Detect Fey.
- three encoded spell tomes

They talked briefly about how to decode the spell tomes. They had the dial but they needed a codeword that would determine the offsets to use on the device. They guessed (I think) "Laurel" and the names of the three kidnapped children, "Flora," "Luna," and "Violet," but none of those

worked. They realized though that if one of the encoded tomes was Detect Fey, then they would have both plaintext and encoded text for Detect Fey, and they could use that to deduce the codeword. Casca took the books aside and soon found the codeword.

She reported:

- First spell tome is Detect Fey.
- Second spell tome is “Fey Extinction Event”
- I believe the third spell tome was not discussed at the game.

Casca set the Fey Extinction Event tome on fire immediately, although I mentioned that there could already be scrolls of Fey Extinction Event out there, already copied from the tome.

At this point, Huge had been watching the hall outside the door and he saw three witches approaching - once ancient and two less ancient. Wendy named them Annabelle, Beatrice, and Clementine.

The party hid behind cover in the spell lab, and surprised the witches when they came in. They almost brought Annabelle down in the surprise round. Annabelle ran back into the hall to get help, but the party killed her before she could reach help. In a few rounds they killed the three, although the witches did get off two Banishment spells that temporarily sent Hughe and Casca to demiplanes.

- Keith described his as: featureless - a gray fog was floating in.
- Casca described hers as: cool and sparkly, not unpleasant.

Beale got off one particularly deadly shot, which James described as: “Beale plunges his longsword directly into her cold witch heart, and she goes down with a terrifying witch scream!”

After the fight Rowan said she hadn't been damaged at all, and Beale pointedly observed that the witches hadn't attacked her at all. The party now started to wonder aloud what was happening with Rowan, and Casca confronted Rowan by asking if she was Laurel. Rowan said no, although she did have red hair like Laurel was supposed to have and Casca pointed out that “Rowan” was a nature name (like fairies have). Hughe felt that something was going on between Rowan and the witches but was confident that Rowan was an ally to the party.

TODO(dennis): what items were on three witches?

The party (**Casca I think?**) now cast invisibility on Rowan, and she snuck further up the tunnel. She came to an intersection that was left (just a tunnel going down further), straight (an apothecary room), and right (a room that sounds like it had a religious service going on in it, with one person talking).

Looking in the apothecary room, Casca saw a girl with pale skin and red hair - Laurel - preparing some potions, maybe for the service that was going on. She reported back what she saw, and the party decided to kidnap Laurel.

The whole party now went forward to the intersection / apothecary room. From the religious service room on the right, they could now hear a little more from the service, which seemed to be a black communion, and the speaker was saying that witches did Ajana's evil because Ajana couldn't be seen doing it, and that the witches found confused souls in Hollin and guided them to hell. Casca went forward and silenced/charmed Laurel and they dragged her out of the catacombs, back out the monument of Ulm, and into the back-back-alley behind Ulm's Monument.

There they charmed and interrogated Laurel. Casca cast Detect Fey, which showed that Laurel and Casca were both fairies. We discussed briefly how, although Detect Fey seemed to show that Casca was a fairy, the fairies that Casca had encountered (e.g., Aurora, Aurelian, Barley) didn't seem to recognize her as a fairy.

Casca asked Laurel about the relationships between the Coven, the fairy Circle, the harpy Wake, and the Company. Laurel said the Coven and Circle were at eternal war because the fairies find confused souls in Hollin to guide to heaven, whereas the witches find confused souls in Hollin to guide to hell; and now that war is reaching an apparent final turning point because Ishild has discovered the Detect Fey and Fey Extinction Event spells. She said the relationship between the Company and the coven was tangential; the coven is kidnapping babies because they're changelings, not because they're Company babies, although three Company babies were changelings because the Circle is systematically trying to infiltrate the Company.

Laurel told them that a Lady of the Coven, Astrid, has the Penance Stone and she's going to use the evil accumulated in it to cast Detect Fey and then Fey Extinction Event to kill all the fairies in Hollin - in three days, from Apogee, the top of left-hand granite cliff in Lofton, high above Lofton Castle.

Laurel wasn't immediately convinced that she should side with the party/fairies instead of the coven, but the party pointed out that as a fairy she'd be killed when Astrid casts Fey Extinction Event, so she seemed to come over to the party's side.