

Game 3: 2021.03.21 Sunday

synopsis

Game 3 - Cankerblossom - 2021.03.21

Seven strange women appear to the party and make insinuations about Vesper's brother Christopher. The party returns the changelings to their parents, and Aurora rewards Faile by telling her that Pale Moon and Kasskar can help her. Gwynnith and Vesper outperform Cankerblossom onstage at the Black Cabaret. Roland exposes the harpy Ursula there, and Gwynnith's sword unleashes an unexpected necrotic power when she kills Ursula. The electrum jeweler Hodges tells the party that he delivers items to Laurel at Ulm's Monument, where they discover Coven catacombs.

warm up

- Checked that everyone could see direct messages in Discord: check
- Checked that everyone leveled up to 4: check
- Clarification: in game 2 I went off on a tangent saying the Penance Stone was meteor iron, but it's not, it's just obsidian.
- Confirm that Faile took the Necklace of the Cool Appraising Stare from the harpy queen last time: check.
- +1 inspiration to Vesper for suggesting using cannons on the Eyrie. We couldn't remember which player first generally suggested blowing up the eyrie, but +1 inspiration is waiting for that person if we can remember.
- Of the things the characters needed to do after rescuing the changeling children, the party decided to take the one or two harpy bodies to Gregor first, then return the two children to their human parents, then close the loop with the Circle.

game

7 women accost Vesper

The party finished game 2 at the base of the Durning Hill in Lofton, with 2 rescued children, 2 dead harpies, and 3 dead devils. Discussing whether to bring 1 or 2 dead harpies to Gregor, whether to bring the 3 devils or just their served heads to Gregor, or whether dead devils burn up to ash (they don't, that was just a special effect of a critical kill on a devil), they saw 7 women standing on the edge of the trees, 1 old and 6 young, dressed in patrician clothing that was out of place in the forest. With his high insight, Roland felt that the women "didn't belong" there, even beyond their patrician clothing being out of place there. The women addressed Vesper:

- One of the disdainful young women says, “Vesper Cotton, what are you doing?”
- Another young woman says: “So...it seems that you caught your brother Christopher with his hand in the cookie jar. Or maybe Christopher’s tax preparation just needed a woman’s touch.”
- A third says: “It would be a shame if Christopher’s prospects were derailed because of an indiscretion, or say, if someone exposed Christopher by leaving an anonymous note in the Lion’s Mouth.”
- The first woman speaks again, saying: “A lot of irresponsible people put wild *witchcraft* accusations in the Lion’s Mouth. It sure would be a shame if someone called out Christopher, or his nice lady friend as witches.”
- Another says: “Time is short, Vesper Cotton. Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.”

The party expressed surprise that the women knew Vesper, and Rob said that Vesper did not know them, and all the players said they didn’t know them. The players seemed to interpret their comments as a threat against Christopher (e.g., Scott’s notes say “They threaten to disclose that Vesper’s brother, Christopher and her lady friend, are witches.”) Later in the game someone asked or suggested that the women were witches, but I clarified that the women never said they were witches.

After talking with Vesper, the women then stepped back into the forest and went away.

Gregor’s

The party then took the harpy and devil corpses to Gregor. They asked about Barley wasn’t at Gregor’s this time.

Gregor was thrilled to have the harpy bodies (although I don’t think we discussed the devil heads with Gregor). Gregor said that he was a non-profit, so couldn’t offer a ton of gold, but did give them:

- **250 gold**
- **Wand of Herblore**
- **Ungulates and Ruminants book**

Roland offered to do jobs for Gregor in the future.

Hollinsheds’

The party returned Luna Hollinshed to Mia and Luther Hollinshed. In thanks:

- **1,000 gp.**

- Luther Hollinshed says if there's anything that the Hollinshed trading house can do for them, Hollinshed House's resources are at your disposal.
 - For instance, Hollinshed House's ships regularly travel to every other city-state on the Bellem Sea, and you'd be welcome to travel anywhere on them as a guest.
- Mia takes Roland aside. She tells Roland that Hollinshed House has long traded in opium, and now they've distilled a new medicine from coca leaves. She hands Roland a small corked bottle of white powder and says that it will stimulate Roland's mind and heighten his powers of deduction (+1 Investigation to the bearer).

When Luther discussed party members using Hollinshed ships to travel, he seemed to look particularly at Gwynnith. Scott said that Roland would call the coca powder "the Sherlock." :)

Shaws'

The party then took Flora back to her mother, Zoe Shaw. In return:

- Zoe guesses the Hollinsheds gave them 1,000, and says it would be her pleasure to give them *2,000* gp.
 - Also, jewels with drawing?
- Shaw House's resources are at your disposal.
 - If you want to sail to any of the other city-states, their ships regularly go there.
- She also reminds you that the Hollinsheds, the Shaws, and the Volsteads are all on the Company Board, so remember that you have three allies there if needed.

long rest

The party then wanted to long rest, and Roland in particular wanted to go someplace nice and celebrate rescuing the children; I think he was suggesting he wanted to splurge 10 or 20 gp. We settled on the Mooncalf as a good place to party with sailors and girls and then long rest. The party discussed blowing up the Eyrie with the sailors.

Gwynnith said she wanted to give some of her newfound money to her family, to get them a better house or send a sibling to school; and we discussed how much gold was worth in Hollin, and we said about 1 gp / day was enough for an everyday person in Hollin to live. She also said she wanted to leave her money with a bank or moneychanger, but I believe we didn't explicitly do this (can address in warmup for game 4). (Scott's notes say that the party did go to Gwynnith's house to drop her money off with her family.)

The Circle, Aurora

The party / Faile then went to close the loop with the Circle / Aurora.

In thanks, Aurora gave them:

- Aurora and Aurelian say that as fairies, they don't have much to give that humans would find valuable.
 - But, they can give the party two plants, love-in-idleness and wormwood, that only grow in the fairy domain in Lofton. Aurora believes that Chambers the Apothecary in Braddock has long been searching for them and will pay a good price for them.
 - Also, she says she has a thank you for Gregor - a live silvermote bug, which she asks Roland to take to him.
- Of course you also have the Circle's thanks and can call on the Circle for help.
- For Faile: Aurora thanks Faile specifically as her servant, and she would give Faile two things in thanks.
 - She grants Faile an extra power, the eldritch invocation Agonizing Blast, which adds Faile's CHA bonus to Eldritch Blast's damage.
 - More importantly, Aurora tells Faile that two people in Braddock can help her in her own search: Pale Moon at the Winter Wolf weapon shop, and the rogue trader Kasskar, who lives in a room at the Mooncalf.
- Given to Roland without any kind of container, a live Silvermote to forward to Gregor.

Vesper talks to the Admiralty

Vesper went to report to Admiralty logistics about the Eyrie. He told them there was a Clear and present danger to the harbor, and there appeared to be a portal to one of the demon realms very close to the city, which threatens the harbor. Cliffs next to Lofton could be used as a spot to hit with artillery fire.

The first person he talked to dismissed his claims that there was a demon portal in the city, and Vesper asked if there was e.g. a captain he could talk to. That first person suggested he talk to Captain Burns, or go right to the top, to the Board meeting the next day, to petition Parja, the Secretary of the Admiralty.

The party went to the commercial docks in Braddock, where Captain Burns often recruits adventurer types at the docks for special missions. Vesper found him and Burns says he's going to Hilde to find a lost captain. His ship was the Hedgepeth, and that the Hedgepeth is a real ship of the line with 70 cannons. (Note: the Hedgepeth is actually Burns's smaller ship from 17 years ago; will change name of current ship to Dervish and discuss in Game 4 warmup.)

Vesper asked if Burns's crew would like to practice firing, and that in the Lofton cliffs there were tunnels to nether realms that could probably do with closing. Burns was not phased by this at all - a tunnel to demon realms packed with harpies seemed to be just his normal everyday

routine. He suggested Vesper meet him back there the next morning and they would train the ships' cannons on the cliffside first thing the next morning.

When the party finished talking with Burns, Modalye left Greg the Owl in the Admiralty area to monitor the situation

Hodges

The party went to the borough of Rankin, to find the electrum jeweler Hodges.

There they found:

Merrick, the Keeper at the Chapel of Ajana, told the party that Hodges works in the back of a glass blowing shop in the borough of Rankin. In times gone by, Rankin was a small village that did dangerous or noxious work that wasn't allowed in Hollin. Hollin has since grown to encompass Rankin, but glass and leather are still made there. The shop is near Quay and Drew Streets, and you can get there by taking Quay east from Market Square in Braddock.

At Quay and Drew, the party sees a one-story building with an open overhead door in the front, with glass blowers working inside. If the party asks for Hodges, a glass blower points you to a door in the back the shop.

And then:

If you knock on that door, it opens and you see a very large Andre-the-Giant-type man inside, crouching down to look through the door at you. He's wearing a ginormous work apron that's been sewn together from two or three normal aprons. His eyes narrow and he looks you over hard for several seconds, and then he just says "I don't know you."

On of the characters pushed their way right in, although I can't remember which.

They introduced themselves and started to question Hodges, and I suggested they roll Persuasion. I believe that was Gwynnith with help from Faile, and that they rolled exactly 20, which was enough for them to learn:

- DC 15 (Medium)
 - Hodges made the Talisman of Ajana, the Ward of Ajana, and the Ring of Greater Pulchritude.
 - Hodges delivered those to a buyer outside of Ulm's Monument at Foundling Gate, between Braddock and the City of the Dead. The buyer is a woman named Laurel.
- DC 20 (Hard)

- The buyer Laurel is a witch from the Hollin Coven.

One of the party questioned the morality of Hodges making items for the Coven, but his attitude was “electrum items don’t kill people, people with electrum items kill people.” They asked what the value of the Ring of Greater Pulchritude was, and Hodges said it was a very powerful item, so maybe 10,000 gp. I think we also discussed how Hodges’s work tables were essentially like Skyrim enchanting tables.

We discussed at some point in the game, not necessarily at this point, that Aurora should have told the party that Laurel was pale with red hair.

Vesper talks with Christopher

Scott’s notes say “Vesper speaks with his brother about the allegations of witchcraft.”

Black Cabaret

The party decided to head to the Black Cabaret next, which Aurora had said Laurel and Astrid frequent. We discussed how Aurora hadn’t told them where it was, and they found by asking a barkeeper that the Cabaret moves to a new seedy location every few nights. We discussed how places the Mooncalf or the three bars with underground bareknuckle boxing (the Whipsaw, Kill-courtesy, and Stuck Pig) had the right kind of seediness for the Cabaret. We also discussed how Roland had noticed two things that might be a hint of where the Cabaret was now - the two men in the horse costume by the Braddock docks and the man carrying an upright piano on his back by Gregor’s (which was also by the Braddock docks.) They concluded the Cabaret could be at the Whipsaw, which was in that area.

Roland put on a disguise using his disguise kit, and Gwynnith and Faile disguised themselves with the Ring and Necklace. I believe Karen said that Gwynnith’s disguise was suggestive. They went to the Whipsaw, and to the basement, and they saw:

When the party arrives at the Whipsaw and goes to the basement, the revels are already underway. The floor is packed with people eating, drinking, and laughing, and chorus girls mixing with the crowd when they aren’t performing.

The Cabaret is a theatre of the absurd. Right now there are two men in a horse costume onstage, and there’s a farce in progress where clowns are putting different things in the horse’s mouth, and then surprises come out the horse’s rear. For instance, when the clowns put an egg into the mouth, a flapping live chicken comes out the back.

And:

As you enter the room, you see the Cabaret's emcee there, Cankerblossom. He's essentially a Russell Brand with a top hat and a long black victorian coat with buttons all the way down the front.

Rob had said earlier that Vesper was switching to his more formal naval uniform for the night out, and since Cankerblossom and Vesper were both wearing similarly long coats with buttons, Cankerblossom nodded to Vesper as he came in.

One of the characters did a Perception roll and noticed a beautiful woman at a table near the stage, wearing an electrum broach and being wooed by a few men.

Cankerblossom told Gwynnith and Vesper that he would help them if they beat him in a Performance contest onstage, which they agreed to. After the horse guys came off the stage, Cankerblossom introduced them with a flourish, and they performed together, with Gwynnith playing the flute:

Karen describes Gwynnith's performance on the flute: a little flirty but lively, a little raunchy, a little teasing, a drinking song.

and Vesper singing a song that Rob described as:

Vesper sings a naval song about sailing the open seas and a naval song about Burn's ship of the line, and glory to the Hollin navy. Spreading our culture far and wide.

Gwynnith told the crowd that "our culture isn't all we're going to spread far and wide" which drew raucous applause and shots from the crowd.

With advantage from working together, the rolled 20 on Performance.

Cankerblossom then performed on the hurdy-gurdy, singing a song about how a four-legged horse can't dance a 3/4 time waltz. He rolled a 19 on Performance.

However, Cankerblossom then said it was 2 out of 3, and Gwynnith and Vesper also won the second round.

In congratulations, Cankerblossom taught Gwynnith his Counterpoint spell:

Counterpoint
1st-level abjuration
Casting Time: 1 reaction, which you take in response to a song
Range: 120 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: 1 round

As a reaction, interrupt any ability or spell that's a song, and replace it with your own spell, by beating the caster in a Performance ability check contest. See Ability Checks, Contests, Player's Handbook p. 174.

Lore. Counterpoint is Cankerblossom's invention, and he will sometimes teach it to others as a reward.

As a reward, Cankerblossom also told them that Astrid and Laurel weren't at the Cabaret that night, but that the woman with the electrum broach was Ursula, the 3rd harpy Duchess of the Wake; the sister of the two harpy Duchesses the party had killed at the Eyrie, Golnaz and Hercate.

Roland asked the waiter to go to Ursula's table and as a joke, spill some fine wine on the one of the men's shirts, and tipped him 10 gp which made him happy to do it. As the waiter did this, Roland used invisible mage hand to pickpocket the broach off the woman, which caused her to immediately transform into a grotesque harpy and send the Cabaret into chaos.

Gwynnith said she would immediately attack Ursula, and the party said they would join in; Cankerblossom played the Benny Hill theme on the hurdy-gurdy during the fight. We rolled initiative and Ursula came up first; Ursula tried to sing a harpy Luring Song, but Gwynnith immediately reacted with the Counterpoint spell that Cankerblossom had just taught her, and beat Ursula in the Performance contest. Gwynnith cast Command as her Counterpoint, which caused Ursula to sit down on her next turn.

Gwynnith's turn came next. She attacked Ursula with her sword and rolled like a 16. To her surprise:

A swirling black and green aura enveloped Gwynnith's sword, and jumped in an arc to her target, doing an extra 1d12 of necrotic damage. Gwynnith can feel the sword humming in her hands, and the swirling black-green arc to the target continues after Gwynnith's turn is done, making a crackling humming noise that fills the room.

Karen said she didn't expect that, and we briefly discussed how that was the sword her employers (Pale Moon and Carrick) had given her at the Winter Wolf.

The rest of the party did one round of attack, Ursula sat down on her turn, and then Gwynnith's black-green necrotic damage put Ursula down on her turn.

They interrogated Ursula, saying that if Ursula didn't tell them where Astrid and Laurel were, they would kill every harpy in the Eyrie. Ursula told them that Astrid would attack Hollin in 3 days using the Penance Stone, which had been absorbing the evil from "silent confessions" for hundreds of years, told the party to check Ulm's Monument, and asked repeatedly where her sister's bodies were. They decided not to leave Ursula with Cankerblossom, but decided to leave her with the Admiralty.

Ulm's Monument

Since Laurel and Astrid weren't at the Cabaret, they proceeded to Ulm's Monument, where Hodges had said he met Laurel to drop off electrum items.

They went to the monument, in Foundling Square, at night but didn't find anyone there.

You turn south on Market toward the City of the Dead. After a mile on Market you reach Hangman's Gate in the old city wall, which Hollin outgrew a thousand years ago. After another mile and a half, you reach Foundling Gate in the "new" city wall between Braddock and the City of the Dead.

Ulm's monument is in the Foundling Gate courtyard, on the Braddock side. There's also a community brick oven there, and the courtyard is usually crowded in the morning with folks waiting to bake their bread.

and:

Ulm's Monument is a stone building one and a half 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 twelve iron panels with relief sculptures on them. If you look closely at the reliefs, they seem to show whaling scenes.

They took a long rest, then came back in the morning and found 40 people or so waiting to bake bread in the community oven in the square. One of the party got in line and asked about a pale woman with red hair, but was told there wasn't a regular in the square / at the oven matching that description.

At that point the party was a little stymied, but with a reminder that the monument was a building, not a statue, they decided to go inside.

They went into the alley along the left side of the monument:

There are more private alleys on the left and right sides of the monument. On the left side, there's another iron door and two dirty windows. If they clean the first window, you think there's a pile of skulls up against the window blocking their view. If they clean the second window, you can see into the monument interior, which seems to be largely filled up with skulls.

They easily picked the lock on the door on the left side, bashed it open about 1 foot, and found there was an opening above the skulls about 5 feet up inside the door. Gwynnith gave Roland a hand up and he climbed in. He took 10 minutes or so to clear away enough skulls to open the

door for the others. Karen and Scott commented out how it was a “skull ball pit” in “the world’s most horrific Chuck E. Cheese.”

They looked briefly at the casket here - it’s calligraphy said:

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.

The decided that Ulm was unrelated to the coven, so sidestepped the casket. The found a 2x6 iron trapdoor in the floor and went down; below, they found more caskets, and a hole in the wall, leading to an underground tunnel beyond.

Going through the hole in the Ulm’s Monument basement, the party enters a long, roughly straight tunnel which is clearly not part of Ulm’s Monument. The tunnel’s floor and roof are packed salt. The tunnel’s sides are lined with neatly stacked skulls and femurs, sometimes stacked in geometric patterns that seem overly flamboyant for human remains.

and they remembered:

Cemeteries in Braddock and Dunham filled up a few hundred years ago. So, a salt mine on what was then the edge of town was converted to an ossuary, and thousands of skeletons were moved from Braddock and Dunham to the mine. That’s probably where you are now.

About a quarter-mile down the tunnel, they found:

About a quarter-mile down the tunnel, they find a door on the right. Looking in, they see a room with two bunk beds (4 beds total), some bear skins with blankets on them on the floor, end tables with glasses of water, and some women’s incidentals here and there.

Several similar rooms branch off of this one, with forty beds and twenty bearskins total.

Another quarter-mile down the tunnel:

Another quarter-mile down the tunnel, they find a small room to the left. It contains a bellows, a fire pit, tongs, some casts, and some workbenches with a lot of tools on them.

Here they found:

There are some bits of partially-finished jewelry. The silver, gold, and jewels in them would be worth 100 gp or so.

There are also some finished items. There are a [breastplate](#) and ten crossbow bolts here, made of a strange metal alloy you don't recognize.

Modalye claimed the crossbow bolts; I believe the breastplate was not claimed by anyone.

At this point, the party sent Faile's familiar Aardist down the hall invisible to scout. Aardist found:

- In another quarter mile: Another door to the left.
- In a half mile, a "T" intersection:
 - A door straight ahead is slightly ajar.
 - A left tunnel goes one-hundred feet to a stair going up.
 - A right tunnel goes twenty feet to another door slightly ajar. You can hear speaking behind the door - a single speaker doing call-and-response with a crowd of many people. It sounds like some kind of ceremony.

They had Aardist keep station at the T intersection, while they moved a quarter mile to the door on the left. Inside they found:

- shelves
 - spell components, most importantly a jade circlet worth 1500
 - a "curious circular device"
- table 1
 - One desk has two Hollin spell tomes on it, Black Lung and Death Spiral. Black Lung basically suffocates and paralyzes a target, while Death Spiral makes targets fail death saves.
 - 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.

- table 2
 - Two Detect Fey spell scrolls.
 - Five encoded spell tomes.

Detect Fey is:

Detect Fey

1st-level divination

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: 1 hour

Any fairies within range are outlined in a blue glow, which is visible through barriers.

At higher levels. When you cast the spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the range increases to 100 feet at 2nd level, then 300, 1,000, 3,000, 10,000, 30,000, and up to 100,000 at 8th level. At 9th level, the range is infinite.

On the curious circular device:

The cipher disk is a circular device with a large outer disk and a smaller inner disk that rotate relative to each other, with the alphabet and the digits around the circumferences of both disks. For any relative rotation, it seems like you can encode text by replacing letters on the outer disk with the corresponding letter on the inner disk. It also seems that if you had a cypher word of say five letters, those five letters would give five rotations that you could loop over to create a more complex encoding - one that could only be decoded with the cypher word.

