

As you make your way into the cathedral, you see a stage set up in front of a large statue of what looks to be a human soldier. Flanking the statue are two large spherical stones, one red and one blue. You see a pale half-elf who stands emotionless on one side of the stage, the only other non-human in sight. Suddenly, the crowd goes silent. A tall, muscular man wearing elegant robes encrusted with rubies and sapphires takes the stage. The charisma he exudes is almost palpable. All eyes turn to him as he confidently addresses the crowd from a podium.

Praise be to Zarus! (Audience: "Praise be!" *clap*) Praise be indeed, for we are blessed today to witness the ultimate purification. Today our sister Lynn will ascend one step closer to perfection, which she was always meant to be. We should remember that no matter how flawed our origins, Zarus smiles upon all of us. He wishes us to shed our defects, and so he shall deliver to Lynn the perfect vessel. A vessel which will free her of chaos and bring us one step closer to perfect unity! [Audience starts clapping in unison]

- Mayor Morgana brings out a bowl of shimmering liquid metal and places it in front of Varrin.

A beautiful woman with black hair comes onto the stage. Unlike the countless spectators, her robe is mostly black and features depictions of birds stitched into the cloth, though there are still accents of red and blue. She carries a bowl which holds a shimmering metallic liquid and places it in front of the muscular man who addressed the crowd.

[Vaaneth notices something strange about Mayor Morgana but can't put her finger on it]

The man removes a red crystal ball from his robes and raises it above his head. He stands tall and there is a moment of dramatic silence before he proceeds to dip the orb into the bowl of liquid metal.

[Whiskey and Ballar: At this dramatic moment, you notice something strange in the rafters. Several squirrels stand on their hind legs on one of the cathedral's wooden trusses. Their eyes are transfixed upon the red orb held above the man's head]

Suddenly, a blinding beam of light emits from the orb and everything goes white in an instant. After a moment, the light subsides and you see a tall human woman in the spot where seconds ago stood a slender, emotionless half-elf. "Praise be to Zarus," she says. ["Praise be!" *clap*]

- Immediately after the clap, everyone starts walking away in unison (including Alyona), muttering things like "great ceremony!", "yeah, even better than yesterday."  
[Whiskey and Ballar don't see the squirrels anymore]

#### -----Feast-----

- Varinn approaches the party and invites them to the feast.

Mass Suggestion : DC16 wisdom save or else desire to go to feast

The citizens start filing through a grand hall located behind the cathedral's stage. The decor is stark and orderly, with red and blue accents which match everyone's attire. The tables are laden with food that is almost unnervingly perfect: fruits are arranged in flawless geometric patterns, bread is sliced to uniform thickness, and meat is carved with surgical precision. Despite the surreal situation, your mouths start to water. [Only Glow has ever seen anything close to this display of wealth]

- Asks the party what brought them to Zaridel
- Insists that Lynn is there voluntarily
- Lynn seems in a trance, but will snap out of it if she is given the necklace

Meet me in my quarters after the feast

- Varinn invites the party to stay in Zaridel for the night.
  - He says that 4 rooms have already been arranged for their lodging.
  - He acts extremely hospitable
  - Everybody at the feast takes a creepy amount of interest in the newcomers
- Places in Zaridel:
  - Plaza of Perfection
  - Cathedral of Zarus
  - The Veracious Spire
  - Grand Hall
  - Abodes of the Faithful
  - Marwin's Market
  - Argent Refineries
  - Farm Fields

#### -----Leaving Zaridel-----

- Back at Alyona's room
  - she seems not to be hypnotized anymore, but she is also resigned to her fate

Ever since I came here, things have just been... easier. Sometimes I feel like I'm just watching myself go through the motions, but it feels nice to be part of a community. Plus, there's always plenty to go around here.

- she is curious about her mother, but also resentful
- mentions that there have been a lot more new recruits lately after Varinn went to the lavender library
- No one stops the party from leaving. Instead, they are greeted by Varinn when escaping

"Leaving so soon? Lynn is, of course, free to go. We do not hold anyone here against their will. But the world outside is full of chaos and imperfection. Some who leave eventually find they miss the unity we provide. You are all welcome in Zaridel any time. Do be careful on the road."

#### -----Encounter-----

- A group of Shadar-Kai bandits attack the party on the road [Morgana wants the necklace because its Fey magic can be "inverted" to necrotic magic using sorcerer's silver].

As you make your way back towards Owen's Outpost, a strange quiet has fallen over the woods. The usual chorus of chirping insects and rustling leaves are notably absent. The air grows cold, and a shiver and a shiver runs down your spine.

Suddenly, a figure steps out from behind a gnarled, ancient oak, blocking your path. She is tall and gaunt, with skin the color of ash and eyes that shimmer with an unsettling, otherworldly violet. Her dark hair is woven with intricate braids, and she wears a black leather corset with the image of a raven embossed on the shoulder. [Vaaneth thinks it seems familiar]

Behind her, two equally gaunt figures emerge from the gloom, their faces obscured by deep hoods, but the same unsettling violet sheen catches the light in their eyes. A raven is perched on each of their shoulders.

The woman's voice cuts like steel, Well, well. Looks like the bees have left the hive. I knew I smelled Fey magic around here. Her gaze locks onto the necklace around Alyona's throat. That necklace needs to be... repurposed. Hand it over and no one gets hurt.

Your mouth goes dry as four more ashen skinned creatures with violet eyes appear behind you wielding swords and shields.
- One of them is secretly Morgana in shifted form [Vaaneth might notice]

Mayor Morgana HP: 38, AC: 15, Spell save DC = 15

  - Eldritch Blast +7 to hit, 1d10+4 Force
  - Scorching Ray +7 to hit, 2d6 Fire
  - Crown of Madness DC15 Wis save or forced to make melee on turn
  - Command DC 15 Wis or "grovel" makes prone

Ranged Warlock x 2 HP: 23, AC: 13, DC : 14

  - Eldritch Blast +6 to hit, 1d10+3 Force
  - Crown of Madness DC14 Wis save or forced to make melee on turn
  - Misty Step

Hexblade Guard x 4 HP: 27, AC: 16 (Scale Mail, Shield)

  - Longsword +5 to hit, 1d8+3 slashing damage
  - Eldritch Blast +5 to hit, 1d10+3 force damage
  - Hex (give disadvantage on wisdom and extra d6)
  - Misty Step
  - Shield

Alyona HP: 24, AC: 15, DC: 13

  - Thorn Whip, Faerie Fire, Healing Word, Spider Climb
- If anybody goes unconscious, the Druid Squirrel will cast Healing Spirit as 3rd level spell (appears as transparent squirrel) Heal 2d6 up to 6 times
- If the party gets too close to dying, Korveten will help from the trees with a Fireball or something.
- If Morgana is about to die, she turns invisible using The Empty Shape and flees.

#### -----Owens Outpost-----

The familiar, unadorned buildings of Owen's Outpost are a welcome sight after the ambush. You guide Alyona to the town's tavern, where you find her parents arguing

Alan For the last time Lianes, you shant leave town until we get word about Alyona.

Lianes

I don't see what the big deal is, Alan. I've been dying to see the new exhibit at the museum, and it's only a few days journey each way. I'll be

Alan

For the last bloody time, I don't care if the Emperor of Ferundia is an hour outside town, you're not leaving until we find out about our daughter.

Just then, they look up to see you have returned. So? Were you able to find Alyona?

"Is... is that really you? Your face... your ears... what did they do to you?"

**Reunion** [Address the fact that Alyona is now human]

- Alyona wants to get her original body back, but not sure how.
  - I have no idea how the orb works. Even if I did, I doubt Varinn would willingly hand it over, and stealing it would be suicide.
  - Suggest that maybe they could figure out what the orbs are and how they work at the Lavendar Library
- Years ago when I first visited Zaridel, the "ceremonies" were much less frequent. Varinn starting taking regular journeys to the library, and after that more and more of the ceremonies started incorporating that bowl of metal liquid, what he calls the **Blood of Zarus**. Then they were happening all the time, sometimes daily. Whatever Varinn's true motive, that strange metal seems to be accelerating it. We need to know what we're dealing with if we hope to reverse the process.

**Lori**

- A tall elf with the keen eyes and practical leather armor of a warden approaches your table. She carries a bow and quiver on her back. She introduces herself as Lori Faewood, Warden of the Verdant Refuge in the Gallant Grasslands.

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but I've come seeking help," she says, her voice strained with urgency. "I'm Lori Faewood, Warden of the Verdant Refuge. The Gallant Grasslands are dying. The fey music has fallen silent, and a creeping, black blight poisons the hills. Kaysa, the ancient fairy whose magic sustains the region, has vanished without a trace. Without Kaysa's magic to protect us, a dreadful pack of warlocks have taken over the land.

"My rangers are spread thin. I need a small, capable group to travel to the heart of the problem—Glimmerglade Grove—and find out what has happened to Kaysa. If her light is gone for good, the Grasslands will fall into shadow completely."

**Dav**

Before you can decide, another figure approaches: a massive Loxodon struggles to enter the taverns door. You recognize him from yesterday's fight along the road as either Dav or Gray, but you're not sure which.

"I'm looking for people who aren't afraid to fight Zarunites," the Loxodon says in a gruff, direct tone. "Varinn's thieves are tearing the sacred metal from our homeland, the Argent Expanse, and folks willing to stand up against them are hard to come by."