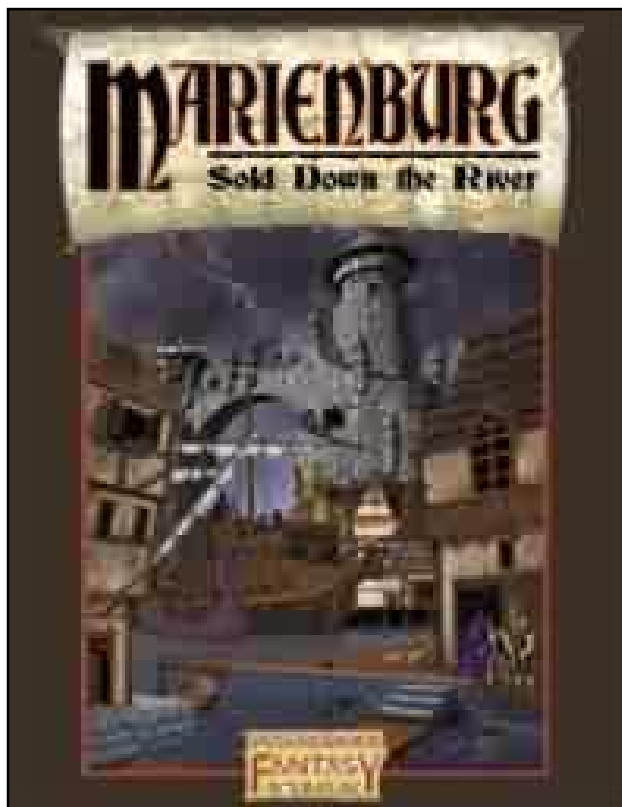


Bad Tidings

A Scenario For Warhammer Fantasy Roleplaying Game



Previously seen in issue #4 of Hogwash, this is a scenario set in the city of Marienburg, that serves as excellent introduction to *Marienburg: Sold Down the River*



Bad Tidings

A WFRP adventure by James Wallis

This adventure is set in the city of Marienburg, as described in the Warhammer FRP sourcebook Marienburg: Sold Down the River. It is a short stand-alone adventure which can be fitted between two longer scenarios, or which can overlap with an ongoing adventure to introduce the player characters to personalities and locations in the city.

The adventure is designed for PCs in their first or second career, and should be played before any characters start on Dying of the Light. The PCs are in Marienburg and looking for work, or possibly engaged on another contract or mission. Either way, they should have a small reputation in the city as potentially unscrupulous people who are available for hire.

Setting

Jt is almost the feast of Mitterfruhl or Mittherbst, depending on whether you want to set the adventure in the spring or autumn. One morning the city wakes to shocking news from the town criers: a warehouse guard has been killed and his body hideously dismembered, down in the Suiddock. A few coins to a crier will reveal the man was guarding a warehouse belonging to the van Scheldt family and his body was found on the dockside, chopped into pieces and gruesomely disfigured. The corpse was found at dawn, two hours after high tide – one of the three very high ‘spring’ tides that occur at three-day intervals around the spring and autumn equinoxes, due to a conjunction of the two moons.

The story causes some gossip in the city’s inns and meeting-places – murders aren’t common, even in a city the size of Marienburg – and speculation as well. Rational types dismiss it as a robbery gone wrong, while the more credulous or easily frightened are talking about cultists and sacrifices. Racists are blaming it on the Dwarfs, Sea-Elves, Imperials or Bretonnians. As usual, everybody’s talking but nobody really knows anything.

By the time that the PCs reach the docks – if they bother, and so far there’s no reason for them to – all the evidence has been removed. The facts of the case can be learned by asking at the Watch headquarters (if the PCs can provide a good reason for needing to know), or by buying a few drinks in the inns around the Suiddock.

The dead man was Claes Smits, a former soldier who had been working for the van Scheldts as a night-guard for ten years. He had a wife, who also worked nights as a baker. His body was found by the day-guard who was coming to relieve him: one Siemon Zagers, a former docker who had changed careers after breaking both his legs in an accident.

Zagers called the watch, but a few people saw the body before it could be carried away. Whether the PCs are talking to watchmen or dockers, it’ll take at least a guilder in bribes to be told who these people are – they’re in the same office or tavern – and another guilder to get them talking. They don’t look happy about remembering the details:

"Like nothing I’ve seen, it was. I’ve seen corpses before, and bloody ones too, but this... I pray to Haendryk I never see its like. Those limbs – both arms and a leg – it was like they’d been torn off. Not like with an axe or a sword, nor ripped with brute strength, but... cut. Like with shears." At this point the person wants to stop, and it’ll take another coin or drink to get them to resume: "The worst part was the skin. I saw a man pulled from the sea once. He’d been in there a week, and the fish and the scavengers had been at him. Worms and crabs and that. Claes’s skin was like that. Pockmarked. I lost my breakfast there and then." He looks like he might be about to lose it again, and has nothing more to tell.

A Commission

Less than a day after the mysterious killing, the PCs have a visit from Leo Gerber, a middle-aged man who introduces himself as one of the van Scheldts' trusted agents. He takes them to a private room and explains that Wessel van Scheldt, worried by the killing, wants to hire the PCs to find out who killed the guard, and to make sure it doesn't happen again. If they catch his drift. The fee is 60 guilders, plus 40 more if they can present proof of the murderer's guilt. If the PCs need to contact Leo, he will be at the van Scheldts' offices at the eastern end of the Suiddock.

All initial lines of exploration will be fruitless. Nobody in the docks knows anything that will help the PCs, but they will hear many wild rumours, ranging from Chaos fish-men to a conspiracy against the van Scheldt family. If they ask if there's anyone who might have seen something, someone will mention Willi, an old tramp who hangs around the docks and often keeps warehouse guards company. But he hasn't been seen since the killing.

The Body

Smits' body has been taken to the Temple of Morr in Ostmuur, where it will be kept for two days and then buried at sea. If the PCs can come up with a good reason to see it, or a decent donation to the Temple's appeal fund for a new roof, they will be granted access to it.

All characters viewing the corpse must make a T roll or vomit. It's a ghastly sight. Both arms and one leg are missing, sliced through as if by giant scissors. All over, the skin has had tiny bites taken out of it. Some are no bigger than acne scars; some are craters as wide as a guilder. The man's eyes are missing. The body stinks of the sea. Crushed on the sole of the man's shoe (I test to spot) are two or three tiny crabs, barely an inch across.

Beggars belief

The PCs will need to track Willi down. The Watch, if told that the old tramp may be implicated, will issue a general alert, find him, arrest him and torture him half to death, convinced that he is the killer. This will send Willi completely mad. Far better is for the PCs to use some detectives of their own: gangs of street-urchins such as the Captains are particularly good for

this sort of work. If the adventurers spread their search wide enough, they will eventually hear that Willi is sleeping in Tarnopol's Clock Tower, in Kruiersmuur.

If tracked down to his lair, which is strewn with empty wineskins, Willi will try to escape. Luckily for the PCs he is old and his body, ravaged by both time and cheap wine, cannot do more than scabble into a corner and cower. Questions or threats will do little good: he is already terrified and half insane from what he has seen. Only kindness and offers of alcohol will persuade him to talk of what he witnessed. Even then he stutters and shakes, and his words make little sense.

"C-cold night. Claes had a brazier lit and I was sat by whilst he did his rounds. Saw her. Little thing. Such a little thing. In a cloak with a red scarf around her neck. Didn't see me. Saw Claes, though. And – and – and she went to him, and it was big like a lobster and snipper-snap it went and Claes screamed and I screamed and – coming out of the sea! From the sea! And it eats and they eat and eat and eat and eat and eat..." He slumps in a heap, mumbling and burbling. Nothing else he says makes any sense.

Can't get the scarf

Any Rogue characters can make an Int test to see if the words 'red scarf' ring a bell – there's a thief in town with that name. If they ask around for more information, then any Rogue living in Marienburg will know point (1); members of the Watch will know (1) and (2), and any thief or fence based in the city for at least a year will know (1), (2) and (3). If the PCs ask around the seedy bars in the heart of Riddra Isle, it is only after a long evening of being stared at and treated with suspicion, or if a Thief or anyone affiliated with them asks a member of the League of Gentlemen Entrepreneurs, will they learn point (4).

(1) 'Red Scarf' is a female cat-burglar who specialises in robbing merchants' houses. There is a reward for her capture.

(2) 'Red Scarf' usually operates after dark. She usually only steals two or three items, but always of high value. The scarf is her trademark: she leaves one at the scene of her thefts.

(3) She is young, but not a native Marienburger. Nobody knows where she lives, but it may be in the Vlakland district. And she hasn't been heard of for about three months.

(4) She keeps a room in the van de Ploeg boarding-house in Vlakland, but she hasn't been there for weeks.

Nobody else can reveal any more information at this stage,

Room with a view

To get into the boarding house – a poor place occupied mostly by families of immigrant workers – the PCs will either have to break in or bribe the caretaker with a couple of small coins. Red Scarf's room is sparsely decorated, and doesn't seem to have been occupied for some time: there is mouldy fruit on the table and the cupboard has clearly been emptied. A search will find eight items – silver cups, ornate hairbrushes, etc. – which any Rogue can guess (Int test) are stolen goods, which the thief is holding until the hue and cry about them dies down and they can be fenced. They're worth about 60 guilders in total, but every time one is sold there's a 5% chance that the purchaser will recognise it as stolen.

Also on the table is a plate-sized statuette of a crab, carved from a black rock that seems to almost glow. Anyone with the skill Demon Lore or who has encountered the substance before will recognise it as warpstone. Red Scarf stole the statuette from a house which was actually the meeting place of an obscure Chaos cult, the Reavers of the Sea (not detailed here because without their idol – the statue – they will disband). The statue has caused Red Scarf's mutation, her dreams and her need to kill at each high tide. If any PC takes it with them, they will begin to suffer the same ill effects within ten weeks.

Lying on the table under a plate is a scrap of parchment with one word on it: 'Caddiz'. No matter how hard they try at this stage, the PCs will not be able to discover what it means, apart from a type of river-fly and a small port in Estalia. The trail seems to go cold.

Mother Geertruida

At some time during their investigation the PCs will run into Mother Geertruida and her son Jasper. The two are religious fanatics who spend most of their time in the square outside the Stadsraad (government building), where they preach the worship of Ulric and harangue passers-by for their heathen beliefs.

Mother Geertruida's normal routine is to peer deeply into the face of random passer-by: "I can read your mind! I can see it in your eyes! I can smell your thoughts and they are of darkness and sin! Do not deny

it! You harbour wickedness in your heart. Envy! Greed! Depravity! You lust after that woman, don't you?" – indicating any attractive woman in the area. "Do not deny it! You have the weakness of man! Look to the greatest one to forgive you and strengthen you! Pledge yourself to the archetype of humanity! Give your worship to great Ulric and he will put stone in your heart and make you stand upright! Like a real man! Do not deny it!" Her son stands mutely beside her, clutching a prayer-book.

This time, the old woman's speech is different. Instead of attacking one person, she is preaching to a crowd. "I have seen it! The evil one! The one of Chaos! It is among us, sent by its blasphemous gods to bring us low! It hides now, in among the alleys and the dark places, but when this city's wickedness has grown high enough, it will make itself known and will destroy us all – as it destroyed that watchman, and countless others. For I have seen it, the night of the spring tide. It was as a woman, but its arms were the claws of great crabs, and it cackled and burbled as it ran. Is this not an omen of Chaos? Do not deny it!"

Any PC who is a Witch-hunter or a Templar, or who has the skill Demon Lore, can make an Int roll to recognise Mother Geertruida's description as a Daemonette of Slaanesh (described in Apocrypha Now). And it seems possible that the corpse's limbs could have been snapped off by some kind of huge crab-claw. Unfortunately for the PCs, that isn't what Mother Geertruida saw. She caught a glimpse of Red Scarf's afflicted limb and, aided by her religious zeal and her knowledge of things Chaotic, believes it was a Daemonette. If there are any Daemonettes loose in Marienburg, they're nothing to do with this adventure...

The turning of the tide

The next incident occurs on the day of the second spring tide. During the afternoon, as a PC walks past a fisherman's boat or stall, they will overhear a snatch of conversation: one man remarks to another that there seem to be a lot of crabs in the pots today, and they're frisky ones too. Then there's a scream as the one he's holding grabs his thumb. Morbid GMs may want to add a sound of snapping bones.

The PCs may well regard this as an omen and may be out in the city that night, waiting for something to happen. (If not, then they'll have to piece together the story from criers and gossip in the morning, like every-

one else.) About two in the morning, as the tide is at its fullest, a PC near the riverside (choose randomly) will hear an awful screaming from the opposite bank. It's too dark to see much of what's going on, but on an I test (Elves and Dwarfs get +20) they can make out two figures fighting on the other side. The taller one – probably a man – is gripped by the shorter one, which seems lop-sided and misshapen. As they watch, the taller figure falls to the ground. Then it's as if a blanket swarms out of the river to cover it. The other figure drops to its knees. The screaming cuts off.

If anyone has a way of observing more closely (e.g. a telescope), they see the following: a man in rough clothes is fighting a short, cloaked figure. The figure is wearing a red scarf. One of its arms, like a giant crab's claw, is fastened around his leg. As the PC watches, the claw closes and the leg snaps off. (The PC must make a Fear check or close their eyes at this point). The man falls. Something – it's still not clear what – moves up out of the water. It's mottled, with patches that move. The other figure drops to its knees, blocking the view. After about a minute it stands and runs off, away from the river. There is no one else around. After another minute, parts of the 'blanket' begin to break off and fall back into the river. If the PC has the skill Sailing, they can guess what they are – crabs, hundreds of them.

If the PCs go to investigate the body, it looks very similar to the first; missing one leg and one arm, and covered with tiny bites. There is no sign of the cloaked figure.

Next morning

The town is busy with the news: one killing is something but two smacks of cultists, conspiracies or something even darker. If the PCs tell the Watch what they have seen, they will be questioned thoroughly and informed that they are now suspects in the investigation. So much for helping the authorities.

Shortly before noon, word spreads about a witness who was much closer to the action: Anna Knuppel, a lady of the night who had been with the victim only minutes before he died. She's telling her story to crowds at the Pelican's Perch inn in the Suiddock, which is charging 1 Guilder on the door. The PCs can get the story from her, or from someone who's heard it from her for five shillings – this is Marienburg, after all, where only air and water are free, and water without salt costs extra.

Anna's story is this: the sailor (she can't name him) had just left her and was walking back to his ship when she heard him scream. She ran after him, to see him in the clutches of a giant crab which lunged out of the river and caught him up, snipped off his arm and leg and ate them, then tossed his body onto the riverside. At the first telling the crab-thing is ten feet wide, but after Anna's has a few drinks it's grown to the size of a ship.

She is lying, because she likes having people pay attention to her and buy her drinks, but the PCs have no way of proving it. More importantly, she's the person that the locals and the Watch believe – she's a Marienburger, and the PCs aren't. The story of the giant crab spreads across the city, and any talk of women with crab-claws will be ridiculed.

A number of priests set off to try to exorcise the monster from the harbour, and there are far fewer small boats about on the rivers and canals over the next few days. Otherwise, business continues as normal.

Job Off

A few hours later, the PCs will be contacted by Leo, either in person or via a letter left at their inn if they spend the day elsewhere. He says that as the murderer has been identified as a sea-beast, the killing of the sailor couldn't have been malicious and therefore their services are no longer needed. He will listen to their protests with an amused ear, and will finally agree that if they can provide incontrovertible proof that Claes was murdered, they will still be paid in full – but frankly he thinks they're wasting their time.

Temple On

If, during the course of their investigations the PCs should mention the subject of mutants or demons to any Marienburger, they will receive a lengthy diatribe against idiot Emperors and the fools who would shelter Chaos beings. In the Cult of Shallya, says their informant, there's some mad priestess who "believes that mutants are to be cared for. I ask you! Drown them, I say. Let the crab-beast get them." They get a name as well: Sister Astrid. This may not be much of a lead, but it may quickly become all the PCs have to follow. And after all, priests are supposed to know about daemons

The Cult of Shallya is based in Kruiersmuur and during the day, when most people are busy trading and

working, it is quiet. Anyone asking to see Sister Astrid will be told to wait in a private meeting room (small and sparsely decorated, with some bare chairs and an icon on the wall). While they're waiting, any PC looking around can make an I test to spot the one anomalous thing in the room: a tiny crab, just inside the door, squashed flat.

A priestess arrives a few minutes later, and introduces herself as Sister Maartje. She explains that Sister Astrid has sadly left the Cult (for why, read *Dying of the Light*) but Maartje and she were close and she may be able to help them. Maartje will answer general questions truthfully and to the best of her ability, but will not be drawn on the subject of mutants. She does, in fact, know about Red Scarf who visited her the night before, and the young thief left her scarf behind – the nun has it in her pocket. And while Maartje is not as tolerant of mutants as Astrid, she does not fear them.

To get Maartje to talk about Red Scarf, she must feel that the PCs (a) have the young thief's best interests at heart; (b) are acting to prevent another tragedy (Red Scarf told her that she felt the urge to kill, but not that she already had); and (c) can be trusted. Any threats, irrational behaviour or violence and she will clam up. Information cannot be tortured out of her: she would rather die.

Finally, if the Sister is convinced it is the right thing to do, she will tell the PCs that she may know the woman they want. All Sister Maartje knows is that Red Scarf is a mutant with strange dreams of the sea. The priestess had urged the thief to flee into the Wasteland, but she claimed she couldn't – she had to be close to the sea for at least the next few days. "It was as if something was coming," Maartje says, "though what or when, she didn't know." She believes the woman is living in the Vlakland district, but isn't sure.

'Caddiz'

It is not until the day of the last spring tide, and quite late in that day as well, that the PCs find out the meaning of 'Caddiz' – most likely by asking in the sailors' taverns in the Vlakland or Suiddock. It's the name of an old river-boat, beached on the mud-flats beyond the city, where it's been for at least ten years, touched only by the tides. Nobody's sure who owns it.

This is where Red Scarf has been hiding out, to be away from people and closer to the sea. Tonight, with the final tide, she knows she must kill again, but after that she has no idea what will happen to her.

It's a cold night, and it's raining. By the time the PCs reach the boat the rising water is already a foot deep around it, and wading out across the mud looks almost impossible. If anyone tries, let them make Dex tests, but the noise will alert Red Scarf, who will slip over the far side of the boat, into the river and away. If the PCs watch from the bank, about 100 feet away – a full moon provides light – they will notice occasional movement on board. Finally, past midnight, a figure wearing a curiously misshapen cloak and red scarf comes on deck, jumps over the side of the boat, and does not resurface. Red Scarf's mutation has advanced so far that she can breathe under water.

Tidal race

It's next to impossible to track her, although if a PC has a brilliant idea then let them make a couple of Int rolls for it. However, the party can make an astute guess about where she's headed: up the Reik, past Elftown towards Schattinwaard. Running, they can make it to the first dock just in time to see her pull herself out of the river on the far bank, look around and drop back into the water.

A couple of minutes and two hundred yards further on she surfaces again, climbing onto a dock only 200 yards from the PCs. They are not alone: an old derelict staggers along the far end, and Red Scarf makes straight for him. He turns to run but she's already there, raising her clawed arm. There is a crunch, and the man drops. Thousands of tiny crabs swarm up out of the river and cover the corpse. The mutant crouches and prepares to feed.

If the PCs approach or make their presence known, she will return to the river and head further upstream to look for another victim. Missile fire may wound her, but the PCs' best bet is to get closer using the warehouses and crates on the dockside as cover, and ambush her, blocking her way to the river. Her instinct is to flee, but if attacked from all sides she will basically defend herself, using her claw to parry blows.

As this happens, the river at the edge of the dock begins to seethe and boil (I test to notice), and after a few rounds of combat something like a great dark rock, thirty feet across and overgrown with seaweed, breaks the surface. It has eyestalks – and, rising up a moment later, two enormous claws, dwarfing the cranes on the dockside. It is a vast, incredibly ancient crab. Everybody must make a Fear test, and those who fail will try to get

as far from the river as possible.

If Red Scarf is alive, she will run to the edge of the dock, crying, "Master! I have seen you in my dreams!" One giant pincer descends, picks up her body with a strange gentleness (this will happen even if she is dead) and carries it in front of the beast's eye-stalks. The crab gazes at her for a long moment and then delicately, almost tenderly, bites her head off. The body drops onto the dockside. Evidently the crab was not here to claim the mutant as one of its own. It is here for something else

Cutting out the cancer

If the PCs attack it, the crab will barely notice; instead it will attempt to pick up and inspect each of the PCs in turn. Each round it gets two attacks: if successful it has grabbed a PC for 1D6 damage (it will not grab more than one PC per round), and will inspect it. If they're the wrong one (see below), they will be dropped – 60% chance of falling ten feet onto the dockside; 40% chance of landing in the water. If the PCs break off the fight and run, they would be well advised not travel by sea for the next few years, lest their ship sink.

The crab will not leave the river, but only two things will send it back to the deep. One is being blinded: if both its eyes each take 5W or more, it will submerge and go. The other is the warpstone idol from Red Scarf's room. If none of the PCs have ever handled it then after inspecting them all, the monster will submerge and disappear. If any of the PCs are carrying the idol with them, the crab will sense it during its inspection and will try to carry them away with it, back to the sea. The only way a character can save themselves from this is to throw the idol away: the crab will drop them and follow it, then sink and disappear.

If any of the PCs have handled the idol but don't currently have it, the crab will sense that. A mental image – more of an emotion than a picture – will form in their head: a sense of searching for something small but powerful. If the PC tries to send back an image – it doesn't have to be of the idol or its location – then they must make a WP roll to succeed. This can go three ways:

- If they fail, the crab will bite their head off (give them one final Dex roll to wriggle from its grasp and fall into the water).
- If they succeed and send an image of a place the crab can get to (i.e. not out of water), then the crab will replace them on the dockside and move away in the direction they indicated. If the idol isn't there, that char-

acter should stay away from the sea in future.

- If they succeed but indicate somewhere that the crab can't get to, then the PC will be placed on the dock, and the crab will move off. However, within a month that PC will begin to be plagued by dreams of deep water, and in three months will begin to mutate as Red Scarf did. In six months they will feel the irresistible urge to eat flesh beside the river... and the crab will return for its idol.

Picking up the pieces

Assuming they survive, the PCs now have two corpses: a mutilated vagrant and a mutant woman – surely the proof that Leo wanted. Of course, someone may have witnessed the giant crab, in which case nobody will believe the mutant was responsible for the killings, although the PCs may get some small reward for driving the great beast away.

That may not be a good thing. Somewhere in the city are the Reavers of the Sea, the cult who worshipped the crab, not happy about the loss of their idol. They may want revenge.

What was the crab anyway? A beast mutated by warpstone, or something greater – even a forgotten god? Trying to learn the nature of the threat could lead the PCs almost anywhere, from the Unseen Library (see *Dying of the Light*) to Baron Henryk's College of Navigation and Sea Magicks (see *Marienburg: Sold Down the River*).

And of course, one PC may be turning into sushi. Let's hope they didn't sell the idol to a dealer who's left town, or anything as silly as that. It could be the only thing that could reverse the infestation – or save them from having their head bitten off.

Experience points

Accepting the contract	5 EPs each
Viewing the 1st corpse	5 EPs each
Viewing the 2nd corpse	5 EPs each
Getting info from Willi	10 EPs each
Visiting Red Scarf's room	15 EPs each
Realising what the idol is made from	15 EPs for that PC
Getting information from Sister Maartje	10 EPs each
Working out what Caddiz is	10 EPs each
Getting rid of the crab	30 EPs for that PC