

Curse of the Crimson Throne Session Summary 11/23/2008

Attendance

Paul wails, “I have no dice! No dice at all! Whatever shall I do?”

Ernest (Annata Vieri) grunts, “Have dice here. Lots of dice. Whole big bag of dice. Lots of dice means dominant male. Nobody have more dice than me! Nobody! HUUUUURGH!”

Georgina conspicuously ignores the dice-related chest-thumping as she enthuses, “Ooh! This tea smells so very, very good! So tasty!”

Ernest responds, “Lick it!” Nobody else is sure why. Perhaps even Ernest isn’t sure why. Half the table shudders. Some suspect that the chemical fumes from his dice might have affected his brain.

Bruce (Valash Not-Gurelle) glances out the window and offers, “Nice new fencing! When’d you get it?”

Chris (Malcolm Zirkus) grumbles, “Three months ago. Three months! And you complimented my new fencing last week! Don’t you remember that?”

Bruce giggles at something only he can see, then walks straight into a wall. The others are dead certain that chemical fumes have affected his brain, though clearly not fumes emitted by a large quantity of dice.

Patrick (Thorndyke) walks in, looks around, and mourns, “Why is it always like this when I arrive? Can’t we have a nice family-oriented gaming session just once? Something involving *Jackass* and anal beads.” Bruce twitches. He looks around desperately for something to clean that memory out of his cranium.

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Class & Level</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Valash Not-Gurelle	Bruce	Half-Elf	Sorcerer 5 (Air Elemental)	Half-blooded Chelaxian bastard
Annata Vieri	Ernest	Human	Cleric 5 (Holy Warrior)	Cleric of Sarenrae.
Malcolm Zirkus	Chris	Human	Fighter 5	Chelaxian, and proud of it!
Thorndyke	Patrick	Human	Ranger 5	Chelaxian, but not nearly so proud.

Under the Sea... Under the Sea

Thorndyke offers, “Before we plunge into the cloudy waters of the Jeggare River, I can cast *Hide from Animals* on two party members. Shall I protect the fragile members of the group?” All agree, so he casts his spells upon *Valash Not-Gurette* and *Malcolm Zirkus*. Then everyone drinks their potions of *Water Breathing* and prepares to submerge. The fact that nobody in the group has the Swimming skill doesn’t really upset them. The fact that dangerous reefclaws, jigsaw sharks, devilfish and whatnot might be lurking in the waters probably should concern the characters, but it doesn’t worry them either.

Thorndyke notices that nobody else is engaging in survival-oriented activity, so he spends 10 gold to hire some urchins to chum the river some distance from the characters’ expected dive location. Then he hires a boat to take the characters out to the middle of the river. He instructs the boatman to drop a line down to the bottom and stay on station. Everyone else is extremely impressed that a fellow who looks like he sleeps under a bridge has such organizational acumen. He gently reminds them that this sort of thing is what an urban Ranger *does*.

Eighty feet down, the characters see a wreck. The hull has split in two over a large rock, with the bow of the vessel torn away. The masts are shattered and the decks are in ruins. The name *Direption* is painted upon the bows. The characters note that the bow stands at an angle to allow a clear view into the forward hull, while access to the stern portion of the vessel is only possible through the top cargo hatch.

They’re Aberrations, Not Animals

The characters, liberally guided by *Light* spells, investigate the forecastle. They are immediately attacked by a half-dozen reefclaws. Valash Not-Gurette whines, “Hey! I thought these things were supposed to be solitary.”

Thorndyke corrects him, “No, those are the devilfish. These things love company.”

Valash mourns, “Oh well. At least you’re a ranger and you can use your Animal Empathy trick on them!”

Thorndyke points out again, “Actually, these things are aberrations. I have no special powers over them.”

Valash grumbles. Thorndyke tries to redeem himself by pointing out, “Six reefclaws is really a very large school of reefclaws.” Valash is not impressed.

Annata Vieri moves to cover Valash from attack. Valash is very, very grateful.

Thorndyke advances upon a reefclaw. It raises its claws as if it were a crayfish facing down a kitten. He stabs it once.

Valash casts *Enlarge Person* on Malcolm and steps back into cover as the reefclaws swarm forward. Malcolm meets the charge with a mighty swing of his axe, exterminating four reefclaws all at once. One of the reefclaws spasms in violence as Malcolm cuts it in half, leaving him with a vicious claws-mark and numbing from the creature’s poison. The characters withdraw from the room before the remaining reefclaws can fall into their death spasms.

Thorndyke and Annata resolve to collect a few reefclaw claws before heading back to the surface: the creatures’ meat is quite tasty and the claws are a delicacy.

The characters go through the galley and other forward chambers. They do not even find the things they would normally expect, lending credence to the idea that this was not a plagued ship, but rather a deliberate attack.

The Afterquarters

The characters maneuver themselves through a hole in the aft of the *Direption*’s hull and drift right into the teeth of a huge jigsaw shark. Thorndyke swiftly casts *Charm Animal* upon it. The shark ignores the spell. It circles around, butting its head against the hold door. Thorndyke moves forward for a Handle Animal attempt.

Annata decides she wants to investigate the exterior of the hull. Valash casts *Spider Climb* on her and watches as she clambers along the hull like some kind of heavily armored sea monkey.

Then the door opens and a hideous creature emerges. *Yvicca* swims forward, clutching a ghastly double-tined fork. She clearly intends to turn the characters into sushi. Annata calls out from around the curve of the hull, “Sea-druid! Hag! Bitch!”

Thorndyke is still busy trying to make friends with the shark when the shark tries to bite off his head. *Malcolm Zirkus* leaps to the ranger’s defense, stabbing the creature

away. Valash contributes by engulfing the shark in an *Electric Burning Hands* spray. Yvicca responds by summoning another shark, then casting her *Dire Gaze* upon Malcolm. Malcolm shrugs it off, completely unaware that one possible outcome of her gaze is death. He stabs his spear cleanly through the jigsaw shark, ending it.

Annata mumbles something about the “flaming wheels of the Dawnflower’s war-chariot” and casts a *Spiritual Weapon* on Yvicca. A glowing scimitar of force slashes at the hag, who barely even notices. She makes some irregular spear attempts at Annata in return, accomplishing nothing.

Malcolm steps up and stabs at Yvicca, inflicting a shallow wound. The water fills with turgid clouds of polluted blood. Valash moves forward next to him and electrocutes the summoned shark with an *Elemental Ray*.

Yvicca roars in fury. She directs her anger at Annata, inflicting two cruel wounds on the cleric. Annata threshes back in pain, mixed with dismay that her new masterwork chain failed to ward away the hag’s blows.

Closely pressed by Malcolm’s and Thorndyke’s attacks, Yvicca flees. None of the characters are agile enough to chase her down.

The characters quickly search the hag’s lair, which turns out to be the devastated infirmary. Thorndyke finds a thin darkwood coffer pinned underneath an iron cot leg. It looks airtight, so the characters opt to open it later. The characters also find dozens of identical small distinctive boxes of bone and brass that look like they have thousands of souls trapped in their walls. Valash scoops them up into his bag.

The Captain’s Cabin.

There is one last door, apparently to the captain’s cabin. It is swollen shut, so Malcolm breaks it down. There is a drowned corpse tangled among the knotted linens inside. This is the only remnant of the crew the characters have been able to find. The body is wearing simple black robes and carrying a brass holy symbol of *Urgathoa*, the Goddess of Disease, the Pallid Princess, the Plagued Lady, and so on.

The characters record this interesting development, bring along the corpse, and head back to their boat. Their appearance takes the boatman a bit by surprise. The corpse takes him even more by surprise.

Investigating the Evidence

Annata asks the characters' spiritual advisor to *Identify* the boxes. She explains that they are a way to infuse disease into an object: the user places a diseased object (like a plagued rat) into the box along with the item to infuse (like a coin) and the box does the rest.

The darkwood chest proves to contain various papers, including the ship's registration and charter papers. It was originally chartered in Cheliox and was owned by an *R. Davalus*. The manifest claims that the ship was carrying "specimens". Some characters also remember that the head of the Queen's Physician's is named Davalus.

Annata gins up a *Speak With Dead* spell to have a quick chat with the dead priest of Urgathoa.

- *Who is behind this terrible mission? The Dawnflower commands the truth from you! I never knew my patron.*
- *Who else was on the vessel with you? Sarenrae's Bountiful Bosom will draw the answer from your corrupted soul! Red Mantis, and the bastard slipped away.*

The characters know that the *Red Mantis* is an order of elite assassins. They also know that further *Speak with Dead* spells will not be effective for a week, so they cart the body and one disease box over to the Temple of Sarenrae for storage. While at the temple, Annata talks to the High Priest about the characters' fears and suspicions about the Queen's Physicians. She urges the High Priest to keep quiet unless he wants the temple to be purged by Gray Sisters.

The Anguished Sister

As the characters leave the Temple of Sarenrae, they are approached by a distraught Varisian woman who begs them to "use their heroism" to find her missing brother. Valash Not-Gurelle makes some inappropriate comments about where he keeps his heroism. She ignores him, introducing herself as *Deyanira Mirakova*. Her brother *Ruan*, an ocarina player, was called to perform at a masque at Carowyn Manor several days ago. He has not been seen since, and she has been refused at the Manor. The place seemed abandoned when she stopped by, and had a strange smell to it. Thorndyke has

actually heard of Ruan Mirakova: he is renowned as a prodigy and a master ocarina player.

Annata reassures Deyanira, telling her that the characters will surely return her brother. Valash chirps up, “Or his remains!” Malcolm elbows the sorcerer into silence.

Warning the Field Marshal

Annata suggests to the others that *Field Marshal Kroft* has generally been reliable and honest, and indicates that she wants to brief her upon the characters’ intended course of action before they all enter the Carowyn charnel house. Valash Not-Gurelle points out that he is a professional scribe and can craft a letter with impact and sincerity to convey this information with much less personal risk. Annata is not convinced by this idea, but allows Valash to write his letter anyway. She delivers it to the Field Marshal personally, noting during her visit that Castle Volshyenek seems to have largely been taken over by Gray Maidens and Queen’s Physicians. The others take their pleasure by mocking the hapless scribe in his diligent efforts.

Malcolm expresses some concern that Valash’s insanity will be visible in his writing. Valash explains that even though he is insane, his madness does not show up in his words, only in his illustrations. Which, in this case, includes the illumination he has drawn around the margins of the letter.

The Field Marshal admits that the situation is, in fact, wildly out of hand with personal agents of the Queen running wild across the city and undermining the already tenuous authority of the Korvosan Guard. She urges the characters to find some incontrovertible evidence that Doctor Davalus is involved with either the Red Mantis or the Cult of Urgathoa. She points out that this may be harder than it seems: the bodies of slain Red Mantis are known to simply vanish. She admits also that the Red Mantis are not particularly subtle: they dress in shiny red leather armor with insect-like helms and wield very distinctive blades with inverted curved cutting edges. Some of their members have already been seen in the city, particularly in the wealthier quarters. They are known to be effective and organized. She cautions Annata to take care.

On the way out of the Castle, Annata walks by *Sergeant Grau's* duty station with the express plan of leading him on and playing hard-to-get. She leaves the poor fellow bemused and frustrated.

The Doom of House Carowyn

Carowyn Manor is a stately gabled manor with a variety of interesting outbuildings including a gazebo. The whole place is festooned with cinderberry garlands and bright red drapes. The manor's sturdy doors of bloodsworn mahogany are securely locked. Thorndyke reports that there is a scent of foul undeath about the place.

Aided by a *Spider Climb* spell, Malcolm scales over an ivy-covered iron fence to check out the back of the house. He reports that there is a small pond and a lot of interesting landscaping. The pond is full of emberlake cherrigs, little salamanders that glow in the dark. There is also a small cottage for the servants.

Thorndyke reports that he just graduated from his first-year classes with the Sable Company and he now has a hippogriff pet. He uses the creature to shuttle the other characters into the back door, where they explore the servants' quarters and find nothing.

The Dining Room Massacre

The characters move on into the manor house. It does not take long for Malcolm to come upon a dining room disfigured by a massacre. The bodies are piled in the corners, dressed in exquisite costumes and masks that sometimes only partially conceal the horrible sores upon the dead faces. Eight of the dead sit at a long dinner table; four of them still move, still shoveling food into their lifeless mouths. As the characters approach, they rise and invite the characters to join their feast.

Annata invokes the power of the Dawnflower, obliterating one zombie outright and burning one almost to oblivion. Malcolm cuts down a second. The surviving two flee through the great double doors into the ballroom.

Thorndyke storms through into the great hall. He discovers that even more of the guests were murdered in here. Six former guests still go through a ghastly parody of a minuet in the center of the floor. He and Annata chase down the two escaping zombies and beat them to the floor.

As the zombies sense the characters they stop dancing. Slowly they turn to face the characters. Valash steps up and blasts them all with electricity. They stagger but do not fall. Annata screams something very strange about Dawnflowers and insults to life and sanctity, but she does not destroy any zombies. Malcolm doesn't scream anything, but he does destroy one. Valash obliterates another one with an *Elemental Ray*.

Malcolm steps in among the remaining three zombies and executes them.

Thorndyke yells, "there is more fighting in the room, over behind that partition!" He charges in and attacks the first thing he sees, which fortunately enough turns out to be a zombie. It doesn't take long for the characters to wipe out all the remaining zombies. The characters do a careful job of looting, fully aware that something in the room might be the source of the plague. While the others search, Annata checks the bodies. She reports that some of the bodies died not of plague but of crossbow bolts. The others take note and report in turn that they have found:

- Matching golden lion-and-lioness masks (worth little);
- A silver serving tray (worth something)
- A masterwork ocarina.

The ocarina gives the characters some hope that Ruan Mirakova might be in this room, but they find nothing to indicate that his body is among either the zombies or the bodies. The characters commence a systematic sweep-and-clear of the house. The characters come upon a variety of rooms with no sign of trouble, and then find another problem room.

The Recital Chamber

A single zombie dressed as a blue-winged angel plays a harp with no strings. Four dead guests sit motionless and watch. The characters end the zombie then check the four bodies.

The Kitchen

Two ex-servants pantomime the carving of a former guest dressed as a pig, using dull knives. Again, they are swiftly dispatched.

The Survivor in the Cellar!

Convinced that there are no more zombies upstairs, the characters head down into the cellar and pick their way through racks of wine bottles and hogsheads of ale. At the back of the cellar there is a small painter's studio. Valash is entranced – he immediately inventories the contents.

Malcolm reports finding a door barred from within. He and Thorndyke break it down. They find a storeroom with some painting supplies, several scandalous paintings of the (very attractive) lady of the house, and a trembling older gentleman who tries to hold the characters off with a dull paint-knife. The characters do their best to convince him that they're here to help him escape.

The man introduces himself as *Lord Carowyn*. He explains that the masque was under way when an uninvited person arrived, dressed as a *Harlot Harlequin*. She laughed and shot down the guests with her crossbow. Stricken guests collapsed instantly, leading him to believe that the bolts were poisoned with the bloodveil. He fled to the basement and locked himself in. All he has heard since then is the shuffling of undead feet and the cackling of the madwoman. He remembers Ruan the ocarina player being in the gallery on the second floor, but does not know his fate. He also does not know what happened to his wife.

Lord Carowyn is not willing to believe that *Queen Ileosa* might have something to do with the attack upon his manor, though he admits that she was not fond of him or his wife. He offers the thought that the Queen seemed to have some harsh feelings towards his wife in particular.

Extracting the Survivor

The characters escort Lord Carowyn out of the cellar. As they reach the ground floor a voice trills out from above, "Where are you going with my toy?" The characters swiftly push Lord Carowyn out of the way and clear for battle. The Harlot Harlequin's shrill laughter curls through the house, prompting the characters to make Will saves and steel themselves against fear.

The elvish Harlot Harlequin becomes visible on a balcony twenty feet up as she fires her crossbow. The bolt strikes Annata square in the shoulder, but the valiant

priestess does not cry out. Valash speculates, “That venom must be fast-acting – she has already succumbed and transformed into a mute zombie.”

Thorndyke draws out his crossbow and fires a bolt back at the Harlequin, who dodges easily. She calls out, “Zombies! Protect me!” Three zombies dressed in flashy metallic costumes who had been pantomiming appreciation of various nearby artworks leap to the attack.

Malcolm yells, “She has a crossbow of zombie control!” He massacres all the zombies. In his head, the Lucky Strikes are playing “Swing, Let’s Swing!”

She also clearly has a potion of *Invisibility*: she drinks it and vanishes away, then strikes back with a *Ray of Enfeeblement* at Malcolm.

Valash sees the Harlequin upstairs and fries her with an *Electric Scorching Ray*. She emits an irritated cloud of smoke and decides to take her vengeance by *Feather Falling* right in front of Valash and shooting him with her crossbow. He cringes away, avoiding the bolt. As the bolt passes him by, the crossbow emits a piercing scream that leaves Malcolm and Thorndyke shaken. Valash responds with another *Electric Scorching Ray* that leaves the Harlequin badly wounded.

Thorndyke flings himself off the balcony directly at the Harlequin. He crashes to the ground, bringing her down with him. He yells out in triumph in spite of his broken ankles. Malcolm takes it upon himself to peel her out of her Harlot Harlequin costume, just to make sure she’s not packing anything... else. He finds:

- A rat (possibly her familiar) that ends up trapped under a punchbowl;
- A potion of *Invisibility*;
- Two potions of *Remove Disease*;
- A *Wand of Cat’s Grace* (11 charges);
- Four alchemical smoke bombs;
- *Glamered Studded Leather Armor +1*;
- A *Light Crossbow +1*;
- A *Bolt of Screaming*;
- 30 normal crossbow bolts;
- A masterwork dagger;
- Two vials of alchemist’s fire;

- Flint and steel;
- Manacles;
- Sealing wax;
- 20 sewing needles;
- 150 gold pieces in stolen jewelry

Malcolm takes one of the potions of *Remove Disease*, the crossbow and the bolts. Thorndyke takes the *Glamered Studded Leather Armor* +1. Valash takes the wand.

As the characters are extracting Lord Carowyn to the hippogriff in the backyard, Annata makes certain that he's got no objections to having his house torched to contain the plague.

Wrapping Up the House

The characters find the unfortunate *Lady Olauren Carowyn* upstairs, still dressed as a Gaultan Queen but long transformed into a zombie, along with a second zombie dressed as a Kadiran Princess attending her. The characters do not find any sign of Ruan Mirakova. The characters spend some time walking the house calling out his name, looking for lost attics and secret hiding places.

Before the characters leave the manor, Malcolm Zirkus makes a point of gathering up six sets of fancy noble garments (each worth 75 gold pieces), a couple of the scandalous portraits of the late Lady Carowyn, and some nice bottles of wine.

Interrogating the Harlot Harlequin

The characters tie up the Harlequin and commence the interrogation. She seems quite eager for the process to begin. Annata asks most of the questions.

- *So, babe, who are you?* Me? I'm *Jolistina*, and I'm so depressed! To think that I was knocked out by people who don't even know who I am!
- *What's your problem?* I don't have any problems, aside from being tied up. Would you nice boys like to help me with that?
- *Why did you kill all those people?* I was bored.
- *Who gave you the concentrated bloodveil?* You're such a silly girl.

- *Get the rat. Hold it over the fire. Maybe you should tell us what you're here for?*
Sorry, nope.
- *Okay. Throw it in the fire.* Do what you want.
- *So, did the ocarina player get away?* I don't think you understood what I meant when I said I wasn't going to tell you anything.

Malcolm tries to intimidate and threaten her, but is quite frustrated when she earnestly intimates that she would really enjoy the things he is suggesting. The characters come to understand that she has the mental fortitude of the truly crazy. Finally Malcolm gets frustrated and knocks her out with his sap. The others package her up for transfer to Citadel Volshyenek.

It is later that the characters figure out that she is actually the semi-famous *Madwoman Jolistina*, who survived the attack of a devilfish and was turned evil and murderous by its taint. The others just cluck their tongues with regret, but Annata seems to have some interest in reforming her. Sadly, there appears to be no easy (magical) way to arrange this. Annata does make one last attempt to reach her before turning her over to the Field Marshal. Jolistina finally admits that her darling *Rolf* sent her to kill several rich bastards. The characters remember that Rolf is the renegade necromancer in the catacombs under the city. She's barely heard from him except for a brief visit the morning after the massacre. He'd asked her to capture any young Varisian males she found. She only found one of them, so she restrained him and turned him over to Rolf when he visited. He handed the captive over to the two big women in faceless silver helms and plate armor who accompanied him. He was so pleased with her work that he gave her two scrolls of *Animate Dead*.

The characters explore the possibility that Rolf is Doctor Davalus, but abandon that idea when she starts describing Rolf as disfigured by the many diseases he has exposed himself to.

Once Annata is finished talking to her, Malcolm steps up with his cosh. "Sleepy time!" WHACK!

Annata protests, "But she's already in a cell!"

Malcolm calmly answers, "Well, now she's unconscious in a cell."

What Horrible Fate Awaits Ruan?

The characters return Ruan's ocarina to Deyanira Mirakova and explain that as far as they can tell he was abducted by a horrible renegade necromancer. She asks that they continue to search for him. They assure her that they will: the necromancer has already crossed their paths once, and they are quite certain that they will eventually bring him to justice.

The End of the Session

The characters all advance up to 6th level. Everyone celebrates, including Valash who suddenly has access to 3rd level spells.