

## Curse of the Crimson Throne Session Summary – 2/15/09

### *Attendance*

*Bruce* (Valash Not-Gurelle, the demented half-elf sorcerer) appears only for lunch, because his precious sense of normalcy is threatened by the gaming group. He claims he needs to spend the afternoon finding and discarding “rotting things” in his house. “What, hooker bits?” we ask. To help, Paul tells him that Valash has been discovered by Laori, the hot blue-haired elf follower of Zon-Kuthon, who debriefed him about his dreams and now has been acting out all of his darkest, sickest fantasies. “Luckily, she’s a healer.” Bruce flees.

*Chris* (Malcolm Zirkus, the mighty Korvosan Guard) tries to provoke Bruce into gaming with quips like “Stay, money-spank!” These prove unfruitful.

*Brandie* (gamer groupie) is a ninja! Or so she tells us. This is largely based on her wearing a sweatshirt (?). This causes us all to reminisce about the American Ninja movies. She heard two guys at work say “2d6” this week and she’s upset that she understood what they were saying. “I don’t even play this game!” she laments.

*Paul* (the DM) tells Brandie that gaming is like an orgy. Watching is a form of participating. She protests, but knows it’s true.

*Patrick* (Thorndyke, the Sable Company marine) cackles evilly at this, and twirls part of his copious beard and moustache assembly.

*Ernest* (Annata Vieri, the priest of Sarenrae the Dawnflower) types madly.

*Georgina* (another gamer groupie) arrives later on. She laments the hard life of a master hooper, “I’ve been wiggling my butt for three hours and I can’t wiggle it no more!” We all know better.

### *The Dark Knight Returns*

The curtain rises with the three of us still in the Maze below Palace Arkona in Old Korvosa. Sadly, though we leveled at the end of last session that doesn’t recover any of our spells or hit points. We pick our way past the now dead dark sphinx and fox rakshasa and through a door into a big throne room.

A great green throne sits above a dais, flanked by two statues of a lion-headed man, each holding chains and manacles. Hanging from one of them is *Vencarlo Orisini* – gentleman, fencer, lover, and masked vigilante! *Annata* runs to him. “Vencarlo!” she cries, and cradles his unconscious form while she checks him over. He’s badly wounded and exhausted and starved. The guys find a key to his shackles under a pillow on the throne and unlock him. She casts *lesser restoration* to remove his exhaustion and heals him of his wounds (also channeling energy to make sure he’s not a rakshasa impostor this time). He awakens and says blearily, “You got my note.” We get him upright and present him with his Blackjack garb. He puts on his gear. “Let’s get out of here.” We concur.

We go back out through the maze and out into the central cavern and down to where the water is. We pick up the seneschal, *Neolandus Kalepopolis*, who has managed to not get talked into letting the snake-headed rakshasa captive loose, and all head for the escape barge. A huge reefclaw surfaces as we walk onto the pier and trundles to the attack. “*Meatclaw!!!*” yells *Annata* in surprise. “I thought that was a worthless rumor!”

*Malcolm* calls out his battle cry, “Them’s good eatin!!!” and flails away at the giant reefclaw. It grabs *Thorndyke* up in one of its poisoned claws. *Vencarlo*, looking quite swashbuckling in his Blackjack gear, crits it with his rapier. *Annata* calls down the blessing of the Dawnflower upon the group.

*Malcolm* crashes upon it again and again with his flail, doing 37 points of damage. “37? Try not to suck any dick on your way to the parking lot!” says *Paul*. *Ernest* is the only one who gets the Clerks reference. It’s made worse when the reefclaw rolls a 37 on its grapple check with *Thorndyke* moments later. He gets squeezed. Everyone chops at the thing, and then *Malcolm* cracks its shell with a massive overhand swipe. *Thorndyke* stabs his rapier into its eye and straight into its tiny little brain, and it falls! It begins to flail around in a death frenzy.

We load up into the boat and float out through the sea cave. We determine it to be much more prudent than going out via Palace Arkona what with the “overwhelming” aura of evil on *Lord Arkona*. *Vencarlo* says he has friends in Harse and that would be a good place to regroup. We’ve heard of Harse before, it’s inhabited by hippies who grow the ganja. In the middle of this conversation, *Malcolm* suddenly begins to thrash and is

left completely paralyzed by the aftereffects of Meatclaw's poison. We leave Neolandus and Malcolm in Vencarlo's care and Thorndyke flies us to the city on his hippogriff *Herbie* to look after *Valash*.

### *Rousing the Rabble*

But *Valash* is nowhere to be found, in his scribe shop or otherwise. No note was left, but there's no sign of a struggle either. As we prepare to return to the barge and flee *Korvosa* for an undetermined amount of time, *Annata* is conflicted. She thinks for a minute, and then says "Hey Thorndyke... How do you feel about risking your life before we go?" Thorndyke is for it. *Annata* wearing her full robes of *Sarenrae* and Thorndyke in his Sable Company Marine uniform head to the Gold Market, the largest central market in *Korvosa*. There are still a fair number of people there despite the martial law in the city. *Annata* (after a quick casting of *eagle's splendor*) mounts the local apple-cart and raises her voice above the crowd. A transcription of her speech follows.

People of *Korvosa*!

Dark times are upon us. Our so-called Queen is flaunting the law as she tears our city apart. Her "physicians" were nothing more than imported saboteurs from *Cheliah* who spread plague and chaos in our streets. She has murdered our king and conspires with devils in her quest to weaken our people and our nation!

Was not our city founded by the bravery of Waydon Endrin and Field Marshal *Korvosa*? And have not the Sable Company and the *Korvosan Guard* served and protected our city for centuries? And now the Queen has, with her own hand, murdered Marcus Endrin and illegally dissolved the Sable Company. And also with flagrant disregard for our charter and the will of the people, she has supplanted the *Korvosan Guard* with her own pet mercenary force.

But we, the free people of *Korvosa*, will not be fooled. Our monarch serves by the will of the people; we are not slaves or subjects to be slain or dominated for

her convenience. She is subject to our laws, not their master. Her foreign influence and consorting with devils will not help her avoid seeing justice for her crimes.

And I say to you that the Goddess sees all these things. Remember her love for you; she will strengthen you while we endure the disgraces of this despot, until we can remove this Queen in favor of a true ruler of the people of Korvosa. Her anger burns hot against this usurper and the deception she would commit against our city, our home.

The Queen has her Chelish agents, her devils, her Grey Maidens, her evil priests... But we have a weapon more powerful than any in her whole arsenal. We have our will; our will to not bow to any order but our own, any institution but our own.

Brave men have dared much in the defense of Korvosa. And we have all suffered much. But no true Korvosan can rest until we are once again free!

The Grey Maidens had gathered during the speech and tried to push their way to the stage, but the crowd held them back, roused to a fever pitch by Annata's words. At this point they draw weapons on the crowd and a riot breaks out. Annata and Thorndyke fight their way through the crowd and Grey Maidens to escape. They buzz the crowd on Herbie as they leave, to ragged cheers and rebellious yells.

### *Slow Boat to Nowhere*

The next morning, we drift down the river on the barge. Vencarlo says he's getting too old to be Blackjack full time. He's not the first to wear the cowl, and thinks it's about time he found a successor. He offers the right to become the next incarnation of Blackjack to Annata! She is very honored, but thinks that Thorndyke is the best man for the job; she is willing to support him in this role. "I know I am a lot more vocal in support of Korvosa," she says, "but I know these two men care about her as deeply as I

do.” Everyone agrees, and Thorndyke is now the next Blackjack! (At least theoretically, should we actually make it back to Korvosa alive.) Annata tries to talk more with Vencarlo, but he is still recovering and is reluctant to talk until we’re safe in Harse.

When we reach Harse, we go to a place called Blackbird Ranch and meet Vencarlo’s friend *Jason Adriel*, a big bear of a man who lives there with his family – a wife, three sons, and two daughters. “Two daughters?” ask Thorndyke and Malcolm immediately. Annata rolls her eyes.

We have dinner. Annata is happy to wear normal clothes for once. After dinner, we go down the cellar where Jason brews his own beer, relax, and talk turkey. Vencarlo reveals to Jason that we have the presumed-dead seneschal along. Neolandus tells us his story. He confronted the Queen about poisoning the king and she sicced Red Mantis assassins on him; he escaped the castle and convalesced at *Salvatore Scream’s* place. This much we knew already. But we also find out that he did some intel work after he recovered. There are some chambers under Castle Korvosa that held ancient power from before when the Shoanti had the area. The Queen had been poking around in there to see what kinds of treasures she could pawn. He thinks that Midnight’s Teeth – some kind of sacred relic of import to the Shoanti – were down there. He hypothesizes about this artifact. 800 years ago, the dragon *Kazavon* (servant of Zon-Kuthon) and the orcs of Belzen attacked civilization. He was quashed and some of his fangs became “Midnight’s Teeth.” The Queen’s new crown looks to the seneschal like the fangs of Kazavon are seated on her brow. That’s all he could get from the annals of Korvosa.

We share how we had met a Zon-Kuthonite, the S&M hottie *Laori*, looking for relics of Kazavon. Vencarlo offers that the Shoanti have long oral traditions. Their shamans might have some more info on Midnight’s Teeth. Especially the noted Skull Clan shaman “*Thousand Bones*.” Oh, yeah! We remember meeting him in Korvosa when we recovered one of his braves’ bits from the sewer and the necromancer *Rolf*.

After we met him, apparently he and his Shoanti abandoned the city and are hanging out east of Kaer Maga in the Kallow Mounds. He’s Skull Tribe, a kind of outcast tribe that tends grave sites. The Sun Tribe is preparing for war with Korvosa and have been agitating for it for a long time. They’re probably being opportunistic re: the

plague etc. We wonder about what is part of whose master plan, but come to no conclusions.

We determine we should go up through Kaer Maga and into the Cinderlands to find Thousand Bones and ask him about Kazavon. Vencarlo and Neolandus will keep on the move and stay in hiding. He'll contact us magically somehow. We all pledge ourselves to the liberation of Korvosa and the death of the Queen!

### *A History of Ashes*

We give the seneschal a set of +1 chain and shield since he's low on equipment, and scrape together 1600 gold for them. Then, we do a Harrow reading for luck and guidance. We each draw a card.

- Annata: The Bear (on a unicycle?!?). She gets a vision of a giant bestial monster swallowing her whole.
- Malcolm: The Beating. He gets a vision of beating his forehead against that of a Shoanti barbarian.
- Thorndyke: The Forge. He sees a lean, scraggly man with a screaming crossbow.

From the full reading, we gain 3 STR harrow points. These can be used to: reroll a STR check, become 1 size category larger for grapple etc, get +5 on all melee/natural weapons for a scene, or ignore hardness.

The reading reveals the Shoanti thought they could hide their evil stuff forever (in their cute little mound), but now it is revealed. The Queen becomes the Idiot, but is protected inside The Keep (Castle Korvosa). In the future, a false friend could betray us. The Cyclone shows destruction. The misaligned Mute Hag indicates loyalty and the lucidity of speech. If we stay loyal to the city, we can avert war.

Jason provides us with food and horses. He says the best way to get up the cliffs to the Cinderlands is to go through Kaer Maga. Annata asks Jason about how he knows Vencarlo – apparently they were adventuring comrades back in the day! They were the Blackbirds, and the rest of their party disappeared under Kaer Maga after a falling out

caused Jason and Vencarlo to retire. Apparently Kaer Maga is a whole city built inside an ancient Thassilonian ruin and has both humans and humanoids living in it. You have to go through subterranean tunnels to get up to it, and there are Pathwardens to show you the way. We chart our route, and it should take us through Janderhoff, city of the dwarves; Sirathu, a town with a young girl who is said to be an oracle; and thence to Kaer Maga.

### *Road Trip!*

We regear, and Thorndyke takes the ring of protection +2 and Malcolm takes the belt of health +4 from last time.

Annata talks a lot with Vencarlo. He is still reserved. She has enough self-possession to not just totally fall all over him and declare her undying love, but she sure wants to. Malcolm and Thorndyke hypothesize that he's "gay as a two-dollar bill" (outside Annata's hearing). She wishes Vencarlo a wistful farewell as they part.

After some uneventful travel, we reach the adamantine walls of Janderhoff. The dwarves let us trade with them through human-sized portals but don't actually let us into the city. We trade them 2 +1 kukris, 2 +1 steel shields, and 3 +1 suits of chainmail, and a bunch of Grey Maiden full plate in exchange for two sets of +1 full plate, a +1 heavy flail, and a +1 shortsword.

Then we travel to Sirathu. They are closed off to outsiders and do the typical "shutter the windows as the strangers ride into town" routine. We find one kid playing in the street. Annata soothes him and Malcolm introduces us. We ask about seeing the oracle, or the mayor. The kid indicates a building to us and we go hassle the mayor. The mayor says, "There's no oracle here! And no inn. You can camp by the fountain, I guess." Malcolm replies, "Oh, OK. We'll be staying for a couple weeks or so," just to bug the guy. The "miracle" fountain from the oracle legend exists, and its water is lovely and refreshing, clearly blessed in some way.

After a while a kid comes to see us, obviously the child oracle we'd heard of. In a voice like the little girl from the Pepsi commercials, she says, "If you're not successful with your mission in two months, Korvosa will become a ghost town." We nod sagely. "Hmm, I guess we shouldn't camp here for two weeks then," allows Malcolm.

### *Like Seattle, But With More Ethnic People*

And then we're off to Kaer Maga! It's built inside a giant tower perched atop the huge cliffs which separate the lowlands from the Cinderlands. A giant archway comes down to ground level and a winding path goes from its base into the cliffs. A bunch of merchants are waiting for their turn with the Pathwardens. Annata works the crowd a little, but they seem like mostly freaks – generally people doing illicit trade, and then there's the folks with their lips sewn shut so they don't utter an unsavory word. Some Osirians, some Vudrans... Dogs and cats, living together... Mass hysteria!

It's only a short wait until we get a Pathwarden for our group. We pass through natural caverns and bits of ancient cities, at some points we have to move silently... Hours later, we emerge from the darkness into Kaer Maga. There's a huge breach in the wall of the tower that serves as an entry, and then lots of dug/built residences go vertically up the interior.

We find a guide, a boy named *Gaav*. He wants to become a Pathfinder someday. He shows us to an inn entertainingly called the Solid Alibi. We decide to look up Laori and Salvatore Scream to see if they have Valash with them. Our reasoning is that a blue haired crazy chain S&M elf lady isn't very low profile, even around here. We ask around and spread some money to find the Brotherhood of the Bones, and get pointed to their hideout in a sketchy part of town.

When we enter, there's a pool of clear water and an altar to Zon-Kuthon. A deathly pale woman wrapped in chains comes at our hail. Her name is *Asyra*. She's quite unhelpful. She says Laori is "off on a mission". She won't clarify if that's the mission to Korvosa or something subsequent. She claims to not have seen Salvatore or Valash. After a bit of this witty repartee, we bail.

"We should get some maps," says Malcolm. "Or a guide," says Annata, "I know you speak the lingo, but a guide might know the lay of the land." Thorndyke says, "A guide could be knowledgeable, but also might be untrustworthy." "How about we go for both?" proposes Malcolm. "A knowledgeable *and* untrustworthy guide? I figured that's how it might pan out, but it's interesting to have that as a goal." "No no, both a guide *and* maps!" clarifies Malcolm. We agree this makes more sense.



## *Off The Reservation*

We hire Moon Clan Shoanti guide. They're famous as archers. Every time he turns his back, Malcolm "checks him out up and down," allegedly looking for traitor tattoos or something. We're doubtful that's really his motive.

Our guide leads us to the Kallow Mounds. On the second night, Annata and the barbarian are on watch when there's a rumbling from under the ground. Annata notices it early and leaps up, yelling "Awake! Something's coming! May the Dawnflower preserve us!" She casts *prayer* and *light of venya*. A huge tank-sized creature leaps high up out of the earth and comes down on her, ripping with all four claws. Only one hits her, luckily. "LAND SHARK!!!" screams our guide like a little girl. "Ya think!?!?" shouts Annata.

Malcolm and Thorndyke awaken with a start and grab up their weapons. Thorndyke gets bitten badly trying to close with the beast. Annata calls down the power of the Dawnflower onto herself with *divine power*. The bulette claws her, but the bit of magic the dwarves of Janderhoff put into her armor protects her. Our guide, *Arca*, (he just now gets promoted to having a name) shoots the beast twice.

Malcolm gets into the action, hitting the land shark twice and critting it. It notices that and turns on him! "Next round I'm going to machine-gun a hole in its shell, climb on top of it, and toss in a grenade!" he claims. Thorndyke cuts into it too, and then Annata finishes it off with two energized scimitar strikes.

Malcolm wants to take a claw as a trophy, until he realizes one claw is as large as he is. Annata wonders if a bunch of land shark meat would be a good gift for the Shoanti. We cut out a hefty offering and proceed. We come across cairns with skulls on the top of them, which mark the territory of the "Slurm-quah," or Skull Clan. We come across a squad of four Shoanti Boneslayers who parlay with us. They recognize us as the people who helped retrieve the brave *Gayikin*'s body in Korvosa. We try to stop from snickering. No one ever told us his name was "Gayikin." Probably for the best.

The chieftain of the Kallow Mounds is named *One Life*, and there's also *Ashdancer* the local shaman. We exchange barbarian pleasantries. We tell them all about our adventures, complete with C-3PO sound effects.

Eventually, Thousand Bones is ready to see us. He smiles and welcomes the three heroes. The Shoanti gather around and chat curiously about us. Annata assumes most of the conversation is about ways to prepare horse urine; as a city girl she has a reasonably dim view of Shoanti culture. We talk briefly and he gives us a guest yurt to stay in. “We’ll talk tonight at the Bone Council Fire.”

### **Rumble in the Jungle**

While waiting, some “Squeal-quah,” or Sun Clan, braves show up with the body of a Shoanti hero for burial. Upon hearing there’s “gringos” in town, one of the Shoanti comes over and barges in. He’s a two handed fighter who fights with an earthbreaker in one hand and a klar in the other! We’re very impressed by that; the guy is ripped like Schwarzenegger in Conan the Destroyer. He’s quite angry for some reason. He (*Krojin*) argues with Thousand Bones a bunch about us being here.

Krojin challenges Malcolm to “sredna,” where two people stand forehead to forehead and then a leather cord is tied around their ears and the back of their heads, and when the match starts they back away from each other, incurring great pain. He accepts on the grounds that it sounds more painful than knivesies, even. The braves bind Malcolm and Krojin together, and they stay forehead to forehead for three rounds, gnashing their teeth and intimidating each other. Malcolm’s vision from the Harrow reading is on point for this one.

They both scream and gnash. Malcolm wins 3 of 3 Intimidate checks. “So fierce!!!” says Annata. Krojin starts pulling on the cord, but Malcolm resists and pulls back. He’s doing quite well. “He is so good at tugging on another man’s ears!” Annata says to Thorndyke. Thorndyke smacks his palm to his forehead. They vie for supremacy for another couple rounds. Malcolm is doing well; he seems stronger than the barbarian but may give out quicker due to a lower fortitude. “Put the squeal in Squeal-Quah!” cries Annata. The crowd is eager and cheering. Malcolm pulls again and Krojin gives in, bowing his head to let the cord twang over the back of his skull! Annata hops up and down, cheering. Krojin “Eats-What-He-Kills” rolls around in the dirt to get his mind right, and ends up complimenting Malcolm. “I never knew they had hobbies besides rape and arson,” reflects Annata.

## The Primitive Screwheads Speak

Later, we speak with Thousand Bones, Ashdancer, and One Life. Ashdancer sprinkles wacky tobaccy into the fire. Thousand Bones says the other clans don't listen to his counsel about not waging war with Korvosa. He wants to prevent that, but also wants to know what we want. We explain about the Queen having forged a crown from Midnight's Teeth, and the dreams that we believe to have been sent by Kazavon.

He's heard two references to Midnight's Teeth from Sun Clan shamans. We'd have to seek out a Sun Shaman. "That doesn't sound easy," laments Thorndyke. We talk with Thousand Bones about how to get in tight with the Sun Clan.

He tells us some confusing story about *Skurrack* the traitor who dove into *Cindermaw*'s belly and was forgiven by the Sun Clan. That might work for us too. But we'd need a truthspeaker to witness this ritual of rebirth (which apparently consists of being eaten by some great critter named Cindermaw and then cutting our way out) at the Feeding Grounds of the Claneater. There's no truthspeaker in the Skull Clan, however, but there may be one in the Moon Clan. The Moon Clan gathers at the House of the Moon this time of year and our guide can take us there.

Annata declares, "My head hurts." She retires to the guest yurt, or "La Quinta" as it is called in the Shoanti tongue. Thousand Bones gifts the group with some spiffy magic items:

- 5 potions of cure serious wounds
- Wand of create water (44 charges)
- Wand of endure elements (23 charges)
- 3 pots of red Shoanti warpaint (fire resist 10)
- 2 pots of silver Shoanti warpaint (+2 deflect to AC)

We get underway in the morning. Malcolm buys a bag of oranges from the Shoanti standing by the side of the road as we ride out. Our guide tells us, "But of course the Moon Clan is also mistrustful of outsiders... To get one of their truthseekers to help you on your quest, first you would have to..." We tackle him and bind him and put him in a sack.

When we let him out after a couple hours, he continues, “The Loon-Quah, who you call the Moon Clan because you speak a civilized freaking language, like to go on Desnan vision quests because they love ponies and butterflies. One of our greatest ancestors went to the ‘Acropolis of the Thrall-Keeper’s’ on one of these and found a really cool Desnan artifact. If you were to follow *Tanjin*’s path and find the artifact and get the mark of the spherewalker from it, *then* the Moon Clan would listen to you.” We all agree that this whole deal sucks bulette balls. “It’s too bad that I’m too Good to suggest just snatching a Sun Clan shaman and torturing the information out of him...” says Annata hopefully to her comrades.

### **Ranger Twin Powers, Activate**

Arca guides us across the Cinderlands to the Acropolis of the Thrall-Keeper’s. After a couple days, a flight of five hippogriffs fly by. “What’s your slave name?” they taunt Thorndyke’s hippogriff Herbie. Thorndyke flies towards them and tries to use his wild empathy to make friends. “Squark!” he calls. The hippogriffs confer. “He makes a good point, but GET HIM!!!” They swoop around Thorndyke and Herbie in a cloud of slashing claws.

“Winds of the morning, carry our arrows to strike true.” Annata casts *blessed aim* and strings her bow. Arca and Thorndyke fell two of them. Annata shoots two shafts into another, which sinks slowly down to the ground. The hippogriffs swarm around Thorndyke and Herbie but are unable to hurt them much. Thorndyke slashes another out of the sky and the last one flees. We carefully approach the fallen one and Annata heals it from a distance. It flies away.

As we approach the Acropolis, the horizon begins to darken. Thorndyke says that an ember storm is brewing! We hustle for the entrance. A ruined tower is marked with a seven-pointed star and a set of stone doors which are ajar. We go in! We lead our horses carefully down the stairs. In the ash-filled room we reach at their foot, some of the ashes have been recently disturbed. By two humans or similarly sized critters, reports Thorndyke. We leave Arca with the horses and hippogriffs and head deeper into the ruin.

### *The Trail of Unicorn Tears Leads to the Burning House of Love*

We go into a room with narrow walkways around and across it, and a dropoff down to a large dark pool of water. We all sigh, knowing that no doubt a tentacle-beast lurks in that water. We go through a clever door that rises into the ceiling when you press the sihedron rune on it and find Asyra the chain-wrapped Zon-Kuthon worshipper and a guy in black with long white hair just hanging out. “Asyra! And the Shadow Count, I presume?” says Malcolm. “I am *Shadow Count Sial*. My divinations led us here. We wanted to check on your progress. Can we accompany you?” “Uh... Sure, why not, this has gotten pretty weird already,” confides Malcolm.

Another Star Trek style door leads deeper into the complex. “Boy, I’ve never adventured with someone watching. It’s like I keep second-guessing everything I do,” whispers Annata to Thorndyke. We see a medium room with a big pit in the middle which emanates an emerald light up to the ceiling. Thorndyke looks down it, but it’s hard to see anything due to the light. Annata makes shadow puppets on the ceiling, which works out admirably. Thorndyke drops a rock in, and it falls but its fall is slowed to a safe speed. “Ooo, drop shaft!” we gush.

In the next room stands a ten foot tall bronze statue with a half-snake half-human creature whose hands hold a quill and a jade-handled whip. Instead of a head it has a disk with a seven-pointed star, and six wings emanate from its back. A line of jade runes runs down its belly.

Malcolm and Thorndyke find a shallow drawer in the base of the statue. It as a big ol’ bronze disk with pie pieces in it that looks like it would fit over the light-hole in the previous room. Also, Thorndyke takes the whip. Asyra touches herself in jealousy.

When we put the disk over the hole, it makes patterns, but we’re unable to align the plates correctly. We root through some more tunnels. One room has six big bas-reliefs of different priests on the walls. Annata makes a Knowledge: Religion check and determines this religion is lost to the sands of time. “Heretics!” she declares happily.

Malcolm taunts the Shadow Count into casting *comprehend languages* to read the runes. “It’s changing! It’s a dire warning! Hmmm...” He continues to read for a long, long time. Finally he makes a Will save and breaks away. “Oh. Actually, it’s just

nonsense. But it *fascinated* me for a while.” Annata notes that a religion mainly based around nipple rings makes for easily distracted worshippers.

### **Ambush Bug II: The Ambushing!**

Next, we find a room with a lovely statue of a mermaid. Thorndyke pries gems out of her tail – 3175 gold worth! We head out to return to the light room and as Annata skips across the bridge, a bunch of Red Mantis assassins feather fall down from the ceiling to attack!

They get sneak attacks on Annata and Thorndyke. Asyra shoots spiked chains out of her web-shooters and slashes one of the Red Mantis! This is a big load off our minds, because we assumed they’d just turn on us at the first opportunity.

Malcolm pulls Annata back and switches places with her to face the Mantis. On these narrow ledges, they can only come at us one at a time, although they have us bookended at both ends. One cuts at him while the one behind waves its sawtoothed sabers around trying to fascinate Malcolm. It fails, but the other two do the same trick on Thorndyke and it works.

Annata says “Snap out of it!” and bashes the rim of her shield into his cranium, remembering that worked well the last time this happened. “I didn’t do anything!” Thorndyke yells reflexively as he recovers. The Shadow Count casts *hold monster* on one of the Red Mantis and it freezes in place.

The water below shifts massively, like a great tentacle beast is moving below it. Asyra coup de graces the held Red Mantis. We exchange more blows, and suddenly a huge tentacle lashes out and grabs a Red Mantis and hauls him down below the water for munchies. This does not surprise us.

The Shadow Count casts *slay living* on one of the Red Mantis, killing him instantly. Annata lays a *dimensional anchor* on the last Red Mantis. “You’re not going anywhere!” We retreat through a door as huge tentacles start feeling around. The Shadow Count orders Asyra to retreat. Once we see her in action, we’re pretty sure she’s a chain devil and not just a chick with questionable goth fashion sense.

The last Red Mantis follows us through the door as many big tentacles come out of the water. Malcolm and Asyra finish him off. It still dissolves (apparently their disappearing isn't a teleportation effect) and though Malcolm grabs at its gear, it disappears as well.

### *The End Of The Session*

Geez Louise that was a long one! We put in eight hours this time. We all level to 10 as we hide from the tentacles behind the blast doors.