

STAR*DRIVE SESSION SUMMARY

10/02/2011

Attendance

Ernest reappears, now a veteran of Fantastic Fest 2011. He is full of commentary about the many odd movies he has seen, both good and... not so good.

Bruce joins the group by remote control, a situation that allows *Chris* to simply bait him outright with leading comments like, “I was reading this article about Korean and Chinese wafer fabs, and I was hoping you could tell us about your thoughts...” Bruce grumbles that *Chris* isn’t even bothering to hide what he’s doing.

Patrick shows up with the comment, “I hurt my knee yesterday.”

Chris immediately replies, “That’s what *she* said!” *Paul* reflects that someday he will manage to teach *Chris* how these things are really supposed to work.

Tim admits (via email) that he won’t even put in a virtual appearance today. All are saddened.

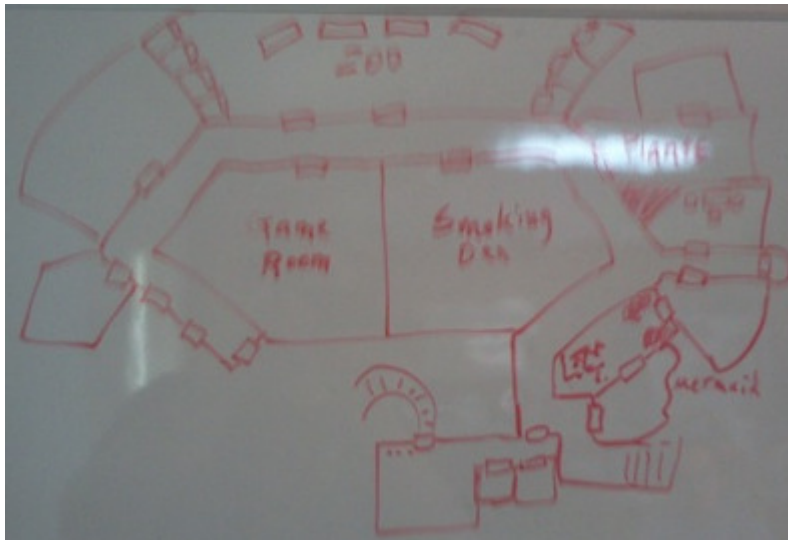
Ernest goes on to describe the movie *Melancholia*, a new film featuring *Kristen Dunst*. She plays a role in a family that is very rich, very white, and very Northeastern. Her character is a very depressed woman surrounded by family members who don’t have a lot of patience with her situation. *Ernest* notes that the filmmakers aren’t kidding around with the title: watching the film is like drinking a small, concentrated vial of depression. He suggests that *Bruce* should immediately seek it out.

<i>Player</i>	<i>Character</i>	<i>Deal</i>	<i>Status</i>
Bruce	Lambert Fulson	Rigunmor Guido Free Agent	Present
Bruce	Taveer	Mechalus Concord Engineer Tech Op	Possessed
Bruce	Banoor	Mechalus Verge Alliance Bioscientist	Present
Patrick	Martin St. John	Concord Naval Officer Tech Op	Present
Patrick	Lenny	T’sa Ambassador Free Agent	Present
Chris	Ten-zil Kem	VoidCorp Ambassador Diplomat (TO)	Present
Chris	Drest Talorgin	Pict Warchief Combat Spec	Present

<i>Player</i>	<i>Character</i>	<i>Deal</i>	<i>Status</i>
Ernest	Markus Oroszlan	Warlion Bartender Combat Spec	Present
Ernest	Ken Takashi	Concord Naval Officer Diplomat (TO)	Present
Tim	Gerard Peppin	Borealin Ambassador Mind Walker	Absent
Tim	Haggernak	Weren Concord Administrator Combat Spec	Absent

Into the Stoneburner Pyramid

The characters have managed to bring their ATV up to the entrance of the Stoneburner pyramid, recharge their powered armor, and wrench open the doorway. *Markus Oroszlan* warns everyone, “We go into this place and those dimensional shamblers are going to be on us like white on rice, so everyone be frosty!”



The characters enter a large chamber. The cracked remains of crystal globes lie on shelves and in hollows along the walls. Mysterious stone shapes in sizes up to two meters on a side lie scattered across the floor – some resemble massive allen wrenches or modern art. None have an easily definable purpose. Three chest-high ropes made of a combination of (probably-petrified) plant matter and hardened mucus hang attached to holes in the ceiling.

Banoor knows that the ancient Stoneburners were giant crustacean-mollusk creatures. He suspects that the huge stone dishes along the floor were once beds or couches. They might once have had cushions in them, but those have long since rotted

away. He doesn't see anything that looks immediately dangerous, but cautions the others to be cautious.

Markus Oroszlan points out that the single most valuable artifact behind the Verge Alliance war effort was a psychic donut communications device that came out of a Stoneburner ruin, so he suggests that a certain amount of (well-documented) psychic experimentation is important. With that, he goes and slaps one of the ropes, commenting, "It just seems like the crustacean equivalent of a doorknob." Banoor is totally expecting it to strangle him, and is somewhat relieved when it doesn't.

Drest Talorgin asks, "Should we just release the blix to start fixing things?"

Banoor offers, "They're a lot more likely to recognize things in here! If only we could communicate with them."

Markus shuts down the debate, "That would just be a no.

Investigate Carefully – We Are Working for Science!

The characters move into the next room, a smaller area than the first with only a couple of the bowl-chairs as features. Banoor verifies that he is recording audio and video of everything with his sensor gauntlet. Drest dryly notes, "It's nice to know that future generations will be able to tell exactly how we died." Banoor answers him, "Everything for science!"

The next door leads to a sand-lined corridor that takes a curving path downward. Several doors emerge off the corridor. The characters pick one and push it open. Condensation and leakage from above have formed an array of stalagmite and stalactite features through the room. Markus examines the features and dubs them, "The Mermaid" for Banoor's recording.

The area features several of the now-familiar bowl-chairs and flat table-areas. A variety of tools are lying on the tables, some of them apparently quite sharp. None of them are of great obvious interest, at least from the point of view of finding technologies useful in winning an interstellar war.

Another chamber includes the aeons-old remnants of plant matter, maybe ancient wood. The other side of the room features several bales of dried plant material, apparently something native to Yellow Sky, except for the fact that they don't resemble anything in the current botanical database for the planet. Banoor takes some samples.

Lenny speculates that this might be the larder, or the kitchen – the plant material could be food, or the Stoneburner equivalent of tobacco.

The Stained Chamber

The characters move into a wedge-shaped room. Markus comments, “This room smells sweet and acrid!”

Banoor moves into high gear. He shouts out, “Alarm! Alarm! That’s an indicator that your suit is failing! Get over here so I can shoot you full of counter-toxins and get that suit sealed up again!”

It turns out that Markus is just reading the outputs on his sensors. Nobody can smell anything except the insides of their environment suits.

The characters find a small covered tray with several compartments. The compartments contain different types of plant matter and an array of ceramic tubes (some hollow, some filled with colorful goo). Banoor takes the tray as a sample. The prevailing theory is that this is a Stoneburner cafeteria, or that the characters are looking at Stoneburner MRE’s.

Markus pokes his suit finger into the substance inside one of the tubes. He notes that it starts to eat through his glove. Banoor is right there with an aerosol anti-corrosive spray. More careful analysis of the substance suggests that it is related to the leaves, but highly acidic. Inserting a leaf into the acidic gel causes a puff of acidic gas that matches the atmospheric profile in the room.

Drest Talorgin suggests, “This could be a Stoneburner head shop. It’s a pity that Ten-zil Kem and Gerard Peppin aren’t here to try it.”

Banoor notes, “I think it would be the last drug they ever tried.”

Several More Rooms – How Big Is This Place, Anyway?

The next chamber includes a mix of slab tables and bowl chairs, plus several large tublike structures filled with plant matter that scans as simpler than the materials in the storage room and the (probable) kitchen. Banoor finds a box buried under the plant matter in one tub. Lenny reaches in to bring it out while Banoor watches to see the effect of the plant matter on his glove.

The box contains hundreds of small pieces of semi-transparent red and blue crystal. Each one contains a matrix of cracks running through it, clearly artificially manipulated. Each has an identical pattern at the center (blue = blue, red = red, but red != blue), but their external morphology is completely different. The surrounding plant matter suggests that the box is over 2 million years old. The other characters just wish that Banoor would stop using terms like “external morphology.”

The characters return to the hallway and continue along. They find a vertical shaft, perhaps 10-15 meters deep. There is what looks like a winching mechanism below them. The characters turn around to look for other, more interesting things to explore.

The northwest chamber on the level contains lots of plants – on the floor, hanging in stone baskets from the ceiling, and so on. They seem similar to the other plant residues, so the characters take samples. The sensor gauntlets pick up electromagnetic radiation that appears to be substituting for the (weak) sunlight. There is no obvious source for the radiation. Lenny and Markus find some ancient gardening tools.

The Workshop

The north chamber looks like another gardening room. Banoor takes samples of ancient seeds and roots. He is very careful, gathering individual items and sprigs. Markus is less careful – he just dumps whole plants wholesale into a sack. Lenny notes that there are four of the crystal spheres in the chamber, all of them broken.

The characters find an array of small vials and bottles, all made of ceramic or stone. Lenny tries opening one and is rewarded with a jet of flame (he puts the stopper back on quickly, which stops the flame). He also determines that the bottles will break with relative ease. Banoor collects them all up for the sample box, except for the jet-of-flame bottle, which Lenny holds on to.

The Smoking Room

The characters enter a spacious room lit by a massive glowing globe hanging from the ceiling. A winch-like structure on one wall may have once been intended to change the globe position, but is long since corroded into junk. The floor is covered with gray mold. The room is lined with globe shelves, some of them with intact globes. A bowl-chair, a table and another hanging ceiling rope are arranged into a cluster near one

wall. There is a dimensional portal on the wall behind the chair. Near the chair is a stand with several varieties of the plant products on it. Another stand with several colored bottles of liquid sits nearby against the wall. Across from the bowl chair is a longer bowl-sofa that has what looks like an intact cushion on it. The characters presume that they have found a Stoneburner's private den.

Markus picks up a 2.25-meter pole and discovers that it is a sort of a cattle prod. He imagines that at one time it might have been useful in dealing with mollusk-octopoid cattle.

Banoor examines the gray fungus. He concludes that it is a fungus and is mostly dangerous for being slippery to step on. Markus keeps an eye on the mold for signs of disturbances as he moves towards the bowl-sofa. As he draws closer, he sees a red cloth draped across the bowl-seat. He picks it up to examine. It is quite large, sized for a giant ape (or similar) with six armholes. Drest comments, "Unbeknownst to all, the snuggie was invented by the Stoneburners."

Lenny approaches a crystal globe and tries thinking at it very hard. It starts to send information into his brain very quickly, information that he cannot understand. He drops the globe in shock. He compares the experience to watching *Balada Triste* in fast-forward. There are five remaining uncracked globes.

Markus tries investigating the pillow. As he touches it, he feels mysteriously serene. As he puts his head on it, he feels at peace for the first time in his life. He senses that he could get a really nice night's sleep on it. The others are concerned that he might get a whole lifetime's nice sleep, never waking up.

Lenny suggests that he should try out the six-armed snuggie too. Drest Talorgin takes him up on his offer – he puts the snuggie on and immediately feels very comfortable. Banoor comments that he is feeling this way *through an environment suit*. He urges Drest to remove it. Drest demonstrates that the snuggie's power over his mind isn't enough to prevent him from removing it.

Lenny examines the pipe with a face on it. The face is slightly simian, so probably not a Stoneburner face at all. He decides to load it with some of the plant goo – choosing red from the list of red, tan, auburn, brown, and black. Then he pours acid into the tube. The face contorts into a great big smile. The face does not respond to requests

to talk, but Banoor picks up more activity from Drest's cloak. Banoor scans the cloak and learns that the atmosphere around Drest is actually changing: the cloak is generating a small bubble of oxygenated air.

Lenny moves towards the black substance. The smoke is darker and face contorts into a demonic expression. This has no effect upon the atmosphere around Drest, leading the characters to think that the cloak simply took some time to learn his needs. More experimentation with the types of goo follows. The results are:

Red	Smiling
Black	Demonic
Tan	Blissed
Auburn	Glaring
Brown	Crazy Angry

The characters decide to make it happy before they take it along. They bag up the snuggie, the face-pipe and the cushion.

Banoor examines the containers. He discovers that even if he empties one out, he can manipulate a control to refill the bottle. There are eight of these.

- One creates a dense mist that might have had hallucinogenic effect on Stoneburners;
- One creates a sugary liquid;
- One creates water;
- Two create alcohol-bearing liquids;
- One produces a substance that would poison any human;
- One creates a substance that would have powerful neurogenic impact on a human; and
- One creates something actively biological, either a microorganism or an active nanite.

Markus and Drest both take shots of the alcoholic liquids after Banoor suggests that they have at least a 50% chance of surviving the experience. They report that Stoneburner taste in liquor isn't always similar to human tastes. One of them is actually fairly acceptable, good enough that Markus would be willing to charge money for it.

Dialing D for Dimensional Shambler

Reasoning that the pull-cord controls the dimensional portal, the characters decide to pull it and see what comes through. Lenny volunteers to pull. Everyone else covers either the portal or the door with heavy weapons.

He pulls.

And a light over the bowl-chair comes on.

He pulls again.

And the light dims.

It turns out that the pull-cord is simply a light switch. Markus tries hitting it with the alien cattle prod and watches (disappointed) as the light sparks and goes out. It doesn't come back on again.

Markus tries flinging a sensor on a line through the dimensional portal. As soon as the sensor goes through the characters get no return back. But when he pulls the sensor back it comes out undamaged.

The Zoological Garden

The characters decide to refrain from further investigating the portal until they've seen everything else in the pyramid. The next chamber down the corridor is huge, containing a jungle of alien plants. Small flying lizard-things soar around chlorine-atmosphere palm trees. There are four holding chambers along the right wall, each containing an alien plant in stasis – the plants look similar, but are differently colored. Four more holding chambers to the left contain a small striped bear-like creature, a two-headed white rodentlike creature with long ears (with some bones near it, "Someone get the holy hand grenade"), a monkeylike creature with a tongue longer than the rest of its body, and a two-foot insect resembling a cross between a cricket and a stag beetle, a tree with pumpkin-sized fruits, and another similar tree but with another monkey-creature. Chambers in the center hold a plant with metal flowers growing out of a bush (metal wouldn't survive a chlorinated atmosphere, so this chamber probably has different atmosphere in it), a bush with berries in seven different colors, tall plants with sunflower-like growths loaded with seeds, and a plant with hypnotic purple blossoms. All the animals and plants in the chambers seem to be in stasis.

The characters move forward. There are additional chambers through the room. As they continue to walk they continue to be amazed by the sheer scale of the place. Finally, near the back of the room they find another portal similar to the one in the Smoking Lounge. Lenny and Markus catch one of the lizards, tie a rope to it, and fling it through the portal. It lives through the experience. Flinging a sensor gauntlet through the portal produces only confused readings.

The Game Room

The characters move on to another room with lots of stuff in it. There is a board attached to one wall. Nearby is a rack containing several wand-like devices and a bucket containing darts. There is a box full of more semi-translucent crystals on a table, and another table with an object that looks like a six-sided star with small depressions on each side. These crystals are not similar to the crystals in the last room: there are about twenty pairs of them, each with a different color. Markus tries to use a pair to transmit his thoughts. He is disappointed.

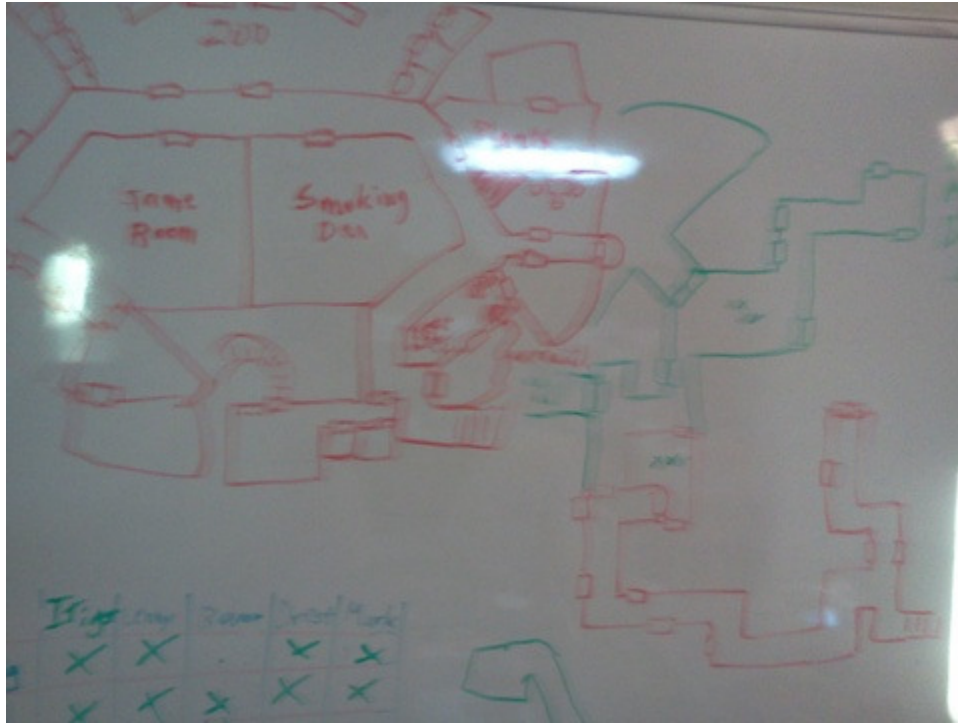
Lenny discovers that he can use one of the wands to fling a dart at the board on the wall. As he moves the dart around the board lights up, showing a variety of odd alien creatures. Lenny flings his dart at a bizarre winged cat-creature. His dart hits, causing the board to light up.

Markus sticks his hand into a couple of the hollows in the six-sided star. He feels various unusual sensations (burning, slimy, and so on). He also finds some interesting levitating bowls. He takes those along, reasoning that he can use them as snack bowls in his bar.

Recharging and Mental Trances

Drest and Markus are running low on power, so the characters head back to the surface to recharge. Lenny brings along one of the crystal globes to try and make sense of what it is trying to tell him. After a while, he is able to get sensible images of what he thinks are Stoneburners. They have nautilus-like shells with foreparts that share insect and octopoid features. He suspects that he is watching something like a Stoneburner soap opera. Unfortunately, he's coming in in the middle of the story so he can't figure out what's going on.

The Last Chambers



The characters return to the Pyramid to explore the remaining chambers. The next chamber in the Pyramid looks like it might have been a lounge or a bathroom, or possibly a safari room. There is one more intact information globe, plus a variety of rotting furs or tapestries hanging from the walls and draped across the bowl-chairs.

After that, the characters pick their way through a couple of storage and janitorial closets. Markus comments, “For ancient supergeniuses, these guys might as well have been orcs.”

The others don’t pay attention to him. They’re busy examining the home memory-globe production facility.

Second Level of the Pyramid

The characters decide that the four blix should be allowed to run free through the first level of the pyramid while the characters head down the stairs on the southeast corner. They hope the blix will be able to fix the memory globe recorder.

Markus leads the way down the stairs, down the corridor, and into the biggest door he can find. The chamber proves to contain two dimensional horrors, resting on beds made up of whatever animal and plant debris they could scavenge.

The creatures look like titanic squamous roaches that carry their bodies on a forest of stalk-like legs, with a nest of worm-like heads adorned with a ghastly variety of teeth, suckers, tentacles and other, forbidden features.

Drest Talorgin takes the lead with his vibroblade. He strikes one of them twice, inflicting only glancing damage. The creature claws and bites at him, tearing shocking gashes into his armor but leaving him mostly unharmed. The other lashes at Markus, but fails to burrow its way through his armored shell.

Very quickly the situation develops to dimensional horrors chewing on Drest and Markus (to little effect) while they slash back (also to little effect). Banoor flavors the exchange by blazing away with a laser SMG to expressly zero effect.

Drest changes over to a chainsword and slashes one horror with low impact damage. He (and the horror) are both shocked to see the attack do a significant amount of damage. The horror responds by phasing into an alternate dimension. One moment it's there, the next the only thing left of it is a series of shifting wavy blurs as it vanishes.

Markus tries out the Stoneburner shocker stick on the second dimensional horror. Unlike the other energy attacks against it, this one persuades the horror to follow its companion into an alternate dimension.

Lenny searches the horrors' bedding. He finds additional translucent gemstones.

More Dimensional Horrors

The characters move to the next area and find two more dimensional horrors. Or possibly, the same two horrors: they all look alike to the characters. Either way, Markus whacks one of them with a shockstick.

The horrors clatter to the attack. One of them goes for Lenny, who manages to evade its attacks. He screeches for his little t'sa life in a way that makes everyone else glad for the automatic gain controls on their comlinks. The other latches on to Drest, who wears enough heavy armor to mostly avoid harm.

Drest strikes back with his chainsword, inflicting heavy damage on one of the creatures. The creature latches two claws onto him, bites him for trivial damage, then starts to dimension shift away with him. Lenny ignores the claws of the second horror in favor of trying to shoot away the horror stealing away with Drest.

Drest manages to wrench free of the horror just as it vanishes, leaving him safely behind. But the remaining horror claws and bites at Lenny, dropping him (albeit only from stun). Markus responds by slamming the horror three times with his staff, hurting it badly.

The dimensional horror decides that it doesn't like getting shocked over and over again, so it picks up Lenny and prepares to leave. Drest wrestles Lenny out of its grasp, leaving it to claw at him in frustration. Drest strikes back with his chainsword, phasing the creature out of reality.

Throne Chamber of the Nautiloid King

The characters continue to explore until they find a massive mushroom-shaped chamber. The entry is blocked by massive black tapestries decorated with images of the nautiloid creatures Lenny saw in the images from the memory crystal, all done in silver and crystal. The far end of the chamber includes a massive bowl-chair done up as a throne.

The floor just before the throne has two holes in it, each about the size of an appendage. Banoor examines them with his sensor gauntlet. He is able to detect strange forms of energy inside.

As the characters explore the chamber, they get a clear sense that there is something invisible moving around the room. Banoor pinpoints it to a section of the room. He cracks a water ration to create a fog of vapor, enough to show a large outline but not enough to determine if it is alive or mechanism.

Banoor moves towards the thing, but it moves away from him. He comments, "Get the blix!"

Markus simply pushes his hands into the two holes. When he draws his arms out again, he is dimensionally shifted. From the point of view of everyone else, he simply vanishes.

A moment later, Markus comes in on the comlink. He's several levels below the audience chamber, in what might be a bedchamber decorated in black claws. He appeared out of one of the omnipresent dimensional portals.

While he waits for the others to catch up, Markus explores. He finds a wailing alien sarcophagus, prods it with his energy staff, and gets sprayed with chemicals inflicting awful wounds.

The others follow along, in time to find Markus in a puddle of chemicals. Banoor analyzes the chemicals, does his best to neutralize them, and administers first aid. He scans the sarcophagus and determines that there are probably additional security measures active.

Lenny volunteers to attempt to disarm the traps. The others stay out of line of fire. He gets it open to find a mummified Stoneburner under a sheet. As he moves closer to the sheet, he feels it start to affect his mind. He casts off the effect and pulls away the sheet to reveal the corpse. Most of what is left is the shell, which is actually in good shape. There are also several pieces of Stoneburner jewelry around the body, including rings and a kind of scepter. While the others leer at the various art objects, Banoor takes images of everything and tissue samples from the shell, the dust of the Stoneburner's softer parts, and so on. The shell alone is massive, massing perhaps 300 kg.

The characters take the jewelry and the scepter, but leave the shell alone. They try leaving through the dimensional portal, thinking of the throne room. Drest goes first. He ends up in a room one level above the others. Banoor ends up somewhere else very strange, then tries reversing course. He ends up in a room with various statues and a large preserved bear-like carcass with many holes in it. He reverses course and ends up back in the pantry.

After some trial and error, the characters figure out that the distance traveled through the alternate dimension determines where a character ends up. Traveling with physical contact is a way for the travelers to end up in the same location.

The Throne Room, Again

The characters go back to the Throne Room, where Markus brandishes the scepter and orders all to obey him. Rather to their surprise, Lenny and Banoor fall to their knees to worship him. Markus takes this behavior as his due and turns his attention to the invisible entity. It doesn't respond.

The characters discuss what the large, invisible entity is. Banoor offers the theory that it could be an invisible or dimensionally shifted Stoneburner. It could also be a

Stoneburner construct. Drest puts on his sonic goggles and determines that the entity is quadrupedal and approximately the size of a tiger. Four-legged doesn't match well with either Stoneburner or dimensional shambler.

The characters investigate the area near where the invisible creature is prowling. They find a thinner section of wall and quickly identify it as a door. Markus opens it, prompting the invisible stalker to attack him. The creature hits him twice, but isn't able to pierce his armor.

Drest is the only character able to really see the creature, so he attacks it while Markus continues to open the door. Markus gets the door open and holds his shockstick poised to block its approach. It strikes him right underneath the weapon. Banoor fires wildly at it, missing completely. Drest moves in with his chainsword and hits it. He feels that he has hit something very hard, not at all like hitting a living thing.

Markus flings the flask of pyrophoric material to the ground before him, hoping that the creature will burn. The creature hits him twice again, to no effect.

Lenny rushes past the flames, past the invisible tiger, and past Markus into the hidden room. He finds a room decorated garishly in peeling gold paint. He hides.

Markus finally manages to hit the creature with his shockstick. It lights up briefly, long enough to convince the others that its icky, insectoid shape is nothing at all like that of a tiger. It collapses, invisibly. Markus executes it with his Glassmaker blade. Then he proceeds to abuse the scepter's power again and again, until he finds out it doesn't work outside of the throne room.

The End of the Session

Each character gains six experience points.