

Carrion Crown Session Summary 03/30/2014

Attendance

Bruce introduces the others to an abstract strategy game. It is called MUP. MUP includes red squares, blue circles and green triangles. You may place a red square on top of a blue circle, but you may not place a blue circle on top of a red square. That is not MUP. The object of MUP is to understand MUP. The winner of the game is the first player to understand MUP, but the winner must explain his understanding of MUP to the other players to secure his victory. This explanation must be done only in terms of red squares, blue circles and green triangles. You are already playing MUP. You have always been playing MUP. Typical game length of MUP is five minutes to thirty years.

Chris decides to rescue the others by describing a trans-dimensional Lucky Charms commercial he saw recently. The Lucky Charms leprechaun explains to the viewers, “I’ve eaten my Lucky Charms, now they’re safe in my stomach!” Then some children show up and start cutting his innards out.

Georgina exclaims in delight, “He’s like an Irish piñata! And I really like abstract strategy games!”

Chris goes on to explain about the chipmunk dimension. Their favorite mode of travel is humans who walk backwards with chipmunks sticking out of their butts.

Paul explains that he is moving. Even his molecules are moving, thanks to that monster Werner Heisenberg! *Tim* is also moving, but in the more mundane sense.

Patrick just hopes that nobody else will start talking about MUP.

Ernest arrives just a bit too late to talk about MUP.

| <i>Character</i> | <i>Player</i> | <i>Description</i> | <i>Class</i> | <i>Level</i> |
|-------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Oswald Bainbridge | Bruce | Grizzled Crossbowman | Fighter | 11 |
| Xurak Darkfire | Matt | Mysterious cloaked traveler | Half-Orc Necromancer | 11 |
| Nigel Snodgrass | Patrick | Emo-Gothic figure | Dirge Bard | 11 |

| <i>Character</i> | <i>Player</i> | <i>Description</i> | <i>Class</i> | <i>Level</i> |
|------------------------------|---------------|---|--------------|--------------|
| Doctor Jegen Vaus / Ironface | Tim | Elvish Eurotrash in leather pants | Alchemist | 11 |
| Sredni Vashtar's Girl | Ernest | Troubled Vudran Girl | Witch | 11 |
| Icobus Basilisk | Chris | Pale, poor nobleman, now become orcish! | Oracle | 11 |

The Key is in the Abbey

The characters start in the Abbey of Saint Lemiran, putting an end to the witches who are creating the Bloodbrew Elixir. That elixir has been allowing younger vampires to free themselves of the dominance of their masters and creating all manner of troubles in Caliphas. This is desirable to the characters because they want allies among the older vampires.

The characters have also found a map indicating that the witches have been systematically searching the area for something. They also found the headless body of an annis hag. Perhaps the witches are searching for her head, so they can resurrect her...

An Interlude: The Annis Hag Corpse

Reasoning that the witches are trying to reassemble their annis hag patroness, the characters remove her arms to make a *Resurrection* attempt even harder.

An Interlude: Gassing the Basements

Zurak Darkfire casts a *Cloudkill* down the basement stairs just before the characters sit down to rest. He hopes that the heavy toxic gases will purge the place in advance of the characters' explorations.

The Cursed Paladin

The characters move carefully into the basement. They approach a closed door. The flickering of firelight is visible underneath the door. *Icobus Basilisk* checks it out with *Detect Magic*, then motions for the rest to approach.

The characters open the door to see a massive chamber lined with heavy columns. A man steps out from behind a pillar. He is dressed as a Paladin of Iomedae, except that the symbol of Iomedae on his breastplate has been scratched out and marked with the symbol of a bat.

Nigel Snodgrass challenges him, “Who are you? What are you doing down here?”

“I am Halloran Idriss. What is your name?”

“I am Nigel...”

Sredni Vashtar’s Girl offers, “We are not here to desecrate the bodies of any of the faithful of Iomedae.”

Halloran Idriss answers with sadness, “This place is already desecrated by those witches.”

Sredni Vashtar’s Girl reassures him, “We are here to destroy them.”

“That is good for the world, but it is too late for me. Holy symbols are anathema to me. I have been transformed into a cursed undead, and the witches control me with their magics.”

Halloran goes on to explain that the witches are seeking for the skull of *Oothi*, an annis hag slain by crusaders of Iomedae. Before she was slain, she transformed her flesh into a swarm of spiders that still infests the monastery. His task has been to search for the skull. He has been searching, but not hard – the witches control him, as does the vampire who originally created him, but they do not have the time to constantly supervise him and force him to search efficiently.

Halloran is able to tell the characters that the witch *Eisa* has become a vampire herself. She is free-willed, and very dangerous. He explains the layout of the dungeons and the locations of some of the defenders, including golems made from wood and a horrible undead knight who constantly drips with blood. Halloran doesn’t know exactly where *Eisa’s* coffin is located, but he has some guesses.

The witches have made Halloran kill (and feed upon) their charmed guards, to further degrade him. He explains that he is ordered to defend himself, so even though his utmost desire is simply to die he will be forced to fight back. The characters assure him that his compulsion should end when the witch who rules him is destroyed. They tell him

to resume his “search” for the skull while they go deal with the witch. He cautions them that she likes to summon fog and then hide in it.

The Dangers of Fighting Blood Knights

Nigel is able to identify one of Eisa’s defenders as a *blood knight*, a cursed warrior who stalks the world spreading destruction. A blood knight is largely a suit of armor filled with nothing but blood that endlessly drips out of the armor joints. Its blood is poisonous, and it has the ability to spray blood at its foes.

Icobus Basilisk notes that he has some alchemical blood-block, intended to coagulate blood. The characters discuss ways to apply it to the blood knight, and what might happen to the creature afterwards.

How About Wood Golems?

Wood golems are mostly immune to magic, except for fire spells (which work normally) and various wood spells (which have a variety of interesting effects). Cold spells are a bad idea: they make wood golems more powerful. They can strike with their fists and shoot sprays of razor-sharp splinters.

Oswald Bainbridge notes that he has silver crossbow bolts, but nothing made of adamantine.

The Mortuary of Saint Lemiran

Based upon the information Halloran provides, Icobus Basilisk is able to find a secret door into the witch Eisa’s sanctum. The characters’ plan is to sneak into the chamber, then try to find Eisa’s hidden coffin.

The characters emerge through the secret door into a mortuary. An eagle-headed mural of Saint Lemiran decorates one wall. Oswald looks for tracks and concludes that whatever has been walking through the area has been doing it in *Gaseous Form*. He proceeds to describe the doings of the gaseous locals, Aragorn-style. The others ignore him.

The stone door out of the mortuary is defended by magic – Zurak Darkfire identifies it as a *Symbol of Fear*. The characters decide to leave the door alone.

The characters are able to find another secret door out of the mortuary. They believe that the area beyond will be a huge hall occupied by the blood knight and Eisa the vampiric witch. They prepare carefully with *Death Wards*, *Haste* and so on.

Eisa's Throne Room

The characters enter into a hellish throne room lit by two massive braziers erupting with greenish flame. A huge pentagram inscribed with blood decorates the floor. To cap the presentation, Eisa the witch, wearing her massive platform shoes, reclines upon a massive stone throne. She is drinking bloodbrew elixir and working on a scroll.

A massive armored figure wielding two bastard swords stands in the shadows. His helm and armor are decorated with a very threatening array of spikes and horns. Oswald looks at him and observes, "He's really, really tall." Icobus Basilisk rolls his eyes.

Eisa casts *Solid Fog*, engulfing the room. Oswald realizes that the fog will block missile attacks and utters a mournful howl – perhaps he will need to unlimber his trident! Sredni Vashtar's Girl promptly responds with *Dispel Magic*. The fog is unaffected. Icobus Basilisk also tries to *Dispel*, with similar results. Zurak Darkfire also tries, and his spell is enough to banish the fog.

With no fog in the way, the characters are able to see Eisa (not yet changed to *Gaseous Form*) and the blood knight stomping into the chamber. Nigel casts *Hold Person*, freezing Eisa in place. Zurak sends his zombie octopus to engage the blood knight. The blood knight momentarily disappears under a forest of bludgeoning tentacles.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl realizes that Eisa is held. She moves over to the vampire and stakes her. Eisa disintegrates into a pile of dust.

Icobus Basilisk uses *surprising charge* to engage the blood knight and then attempts to disarm the creature. The blood knight's two bastard swords skitter away across the floor. Oswald follows up with two *Undead Bane* crossbow bolts into the creature's chestplate.

The blood knight responds by exploding with blood! Everyone is engulfed except for Sredni Vashtar's Girl (up by the throne) and Zurak (who is at the door). Icobus Basilisk swallows a good quantity of blood and loses 1 CON. The blood is slippery,

forcing Reflex saves for any use of a weapon (or it will slip from the character's blood-slicked grasp).

The zombie octopus lashes out at the blood knight again. There is a second shower of blood, this time accompanied by fragments of metal armor. The octopus moves away, leaving nothing but a twisted and broken suit of armor in the middle of a massive puddle of blood.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl proceeds to strip-search Eisa. Icobus watches, making so-called helpful suggestions. Sredni Vashtar's Girl observes that Icobus is still completely covered in blood, and should be paying attention to his own problems. Zurak is busy collecting samples of the blood. Eisa and her blood knight are carrying:

- 4 doses of Bloodbrew Elixir
- 2 *Elemental Gems*, one of earth and one of fire
- 2 potions of *Bull's Strength*
- 2 potions of *Eagle's Splendor*
- 2 potions of *Inflict Serious Wounds*
- 1 scroll of *Planar Ally*
- A Wand of *Ray of Exhaustion* (22 charges)
- A Wand of *Enervation* (16 charges)
- A *Staff of Cackling Wrath*
- A *Headband of Vast Intelligence +4* (Knowledge skills are history and religion)
- A *Lesser Extend Metamagic Rod*
- A *Ring of Protection +4*
- A *Witching Gown* (containing Vampiric Touch)
- 715 gold pieces
- Spell component pouch
- *Full Plate +1*
- *Bastard Sword +2*
- *Bastard Sword +1*
- *Brooch of Shielding*
- *Cloak of Resistance +2*

- *Ring of Protection +1*

Eisa's Coffin

The characters find Eisa's stone sarcophagus beyond a door in a small chamber lit by many candles. Icobus hauls out his adamantite hammer and breaks it into pieces.

The Paladin's Redemption

With Eisa destroyed, Halloran Idriss is freed of his compulsions. The characters offer to bring him back to the church of Iomedae in Caliphas, to see if he can be redeemed. He is happy to agree and heads off to prepare his coffin for transport while the characters clear the rest of the monastery.

We Gotta Wash This Stuff Off... Hey, What's That?

The characters, led by Zurak Darkfire, head out to the well to get water to wash off all the blood. Almost by accident, they find the skull of the annis hag down in the well. Apparently that was the one place the witches never looked. It's not quite as lazy as it sounds: the skull was protected by a *Nondetection* spell and underneath 15 feet of water.

The characters decide to fling half of the annis hag bones over the cliff into the lake. They will take the other half along with them and distribute them along their path.

As soon as the characters pull the last of the bones out of the monastery the whole place collapses. The storehouse survives – it contains casks of fine aged wine from the *Countess Carmilla Calibasan's* estate. There are seven casks, each worth 500 gold. The characters crack open one cask on Icobus' suggestion. They are less enthusiastic about his idea to spend the next month getting stinking drunk, though Oswald does fill all his waterskins with wine.

Return to Caliphas

The characters return to Caliphas with a cart loaded with casks of wine and a coffin. They return to the Dawn Grace Memorial, where the 12,000-some names of those citizens who died to cast off the rule of the *Whispering Tyrant* are recorded. The

Memorial is the one significant site of Iomedae worship in the city. The characters talk to the priest *Endrennin Korvakis*.

The characters explain that they have purged the Monastery of Saint Lemiran of evil. Endrennin is quite glad to hear it: he and the local church of Iomedae had been attempting to organize forces to do that for some time. They also tell him of the sad story of Halloran Idriss, and his desire for atonement. The priests of Iomedae are willing to assist him in his quest.

Halloran gets *Atonement* cast upon him. This puts him back to Lawful Good, but leaves him as a vampire. He goes out and exposes himself to the sun, vanishing into a purified cloud of ash. For helping Halloran achieve redemption, each of the characters gains a Harrow card, and the entire party gains the *Crows* card:

The Crows: +2 initiative, armor class and reflex saves to the entire party for one battle.

Oswald gains the *Hidden Truth* (LG Book):

Books (Int): You can spend a books card to recall a spell you have already cast or to gain another use of a special ability that is otherwise limited. This should only be used on spells and abilities possessed by your character that recharge on a daily basis.

Lawful Good: You may smite evil, as the paladin ability, gaining the benefit it's until the start of your next turn. If you have levels in paladin greater than half your total Hit Dice, use your paladin level to determine bonus damage; otherwise, your bonus damage equals half your character level, rounded down (minimum 1).

The characters return to their inn and spend a couple of hours dividing up some of the more desirable items from the monastery and redistributing some of the “castoff” items thus created.

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Icobus Basilisk | <i>Full Plate +1</i> |
| Zurak | <i>Staff of Cackling Wrath</i> Oswald's old <i>Ring of Protection</i> +2 <i>Fire Elemental Gem</i> |
| Sredni Vashtar's Girl | <i>Lesser Extend Metamagic Rod</i> |

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| | <i>Wand of Enervation</i> |
| Oswald Bainbridge | <i>Bastard Sword +2</i> <i>Ring of Protection +4</i> |
| Nigel Snodgrass | <i>Air Elemental Gem</i> |

Icobus Basilisk puts on his *Hat of Disguise* and heads out to get his armor refitted. 100 gold pieces, if you please, sir! I am certain that you are human, and not a disguised orc!

Stitch Gets His Comeuppance

The characters bring the staked vampire *Stitch* back to *Luvik Siervage*. Luvik thanks the characters, then sentences *Stitch* to death. He wraps the convicted vampire in enchanted chains to prevent him from changing shape and then has him suspended in front of his house.

Mosca Arcminos studies the information the characters brought back about the Carrion Crown elixir. He determines that it is probably made for the *Count Lucinian Galdana*. Even more, the goal is not merely to transform him into a lich. He is to be remade into the most powerful lich the world has ever known, a vessel for the Whispering Tyrant himself. *Mosca Arcminos* has no desire to participate in any such madness. He believes that the Whispering Way cultists have fled to their stronghold of *Renchurch* in the land of *Virlych*.

The Missing Count

The characters search for Count Galdana. They find that his apartments at the Majesty Hotel are empty, with clear signs of a struggle. Oswald examines the site and proclaims, “The Whispering Way must have taken him! They took him to *Renchurch*! The signs are all here!”

And with this, the characters end the fifth volume in the *Carrion Crown*. On to the *Spires of Gallowspire*!

Ownership of the Monastery

The characters learn from the priests of *Iomedae* that their efforts to reclaim the Abbey of Saint Lemiran have been complicated by the fact that the lands it stood upon

are owned by the *Countess Carmilla Calabasas* (the characters found quite a bit of her wine on the site). She has thus far been unwilling to sell the lands to the church of Iomedae.

The characters attempt to meet directly with her and swiftly discover that she employs a large number of underlings specifically employed to keep people like the characters away from her. They attempt to offer a couple of drops of *sunfire potion* to her in exchange for the abbey. They eventually get a response offering 10,000 gold for the potion, but not the abbey lands.

We Have Fine Wine!

Most of the characters take advantage of the fact that they have a “leftover” cask of fine wine sitting around to get tremendously drunk over several days. They also spend time in *Lauren’s* bar, where she has put some exotic liquors on her menu. In particular, she is selling Old Law Whiskey, a smooth single-malt whiskey that is a favorite of grizzled old soldiers everywhere. Oswald drinks himself under the table with it.

Sredni Vashtar’s Girl suggests that Lauren should be selling bottles of tequila with annis bones in it – that would be quite exotic, and another way to scatter the remains of Oothi.

While everyone else is getting drunk on odd liquors, Sredni Vashtar’s Girl uses *Flight* and *Invisibility* to steal Luvik Siervage’s magic manacles from atop his roof.

The Path to Renchurch

The road (so-called) to Renchurch is 200 miles long and barely worth the name. In brief, nobody sensible travels there. There is also a path up to Virlych on the Path River, except that there is no river traffic either.

Sredni Vashtar’s Girl knows quite a bit about Virlych, the Prison of the Whispering Tyrant. She explains to the others:

Virlych owes fealty to no lord, save the dreaded memory of the Whispering Tyrant, the arch-lich locked away beneath this accursed expanse. Tainted by foul magic and the curse of undeath, Virlych possesses no government, and only outcasts, sentinels from nearby Lastwall, and servants of the fallen lich dare the broken land and its haunted ruins.

The characters make their traveling preparations accordingly. They decide to *Teleport* to Ravengro and then march south to Renchurch, dramatically shortening the total travel time.

Traveling in Virlych is quite difficult even without hostile and monstrous locals. The rivers are polluted and reeking. The ground is scorched and fouled, supporting only twisted and gnarled vegetation. And the best of the locals are a tribe of ferocious orcs. Most humans in the district are either patrols from the Last Wall or opportunistic arcanists interested in poaching magical secrets from Renchurch, the Garden of Lead or Ghasterhall.

The Cursed Grove

Along the road, the characters find a clearing near the path. Several characters see the clearing as peaceful and surrounded by pretty trees. These are mostly the characters who failed their Will saves. The others see a witch-grove surrounded by menacing plant-monsters.

Oswald, Nigel and Zurak all walk towards the trees. The trees branches reach out towards them with a gentle wind. The pleasant hanging vines beneath the boughs brush up against them.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl reasons that the Zurak will have the best chance to help the others escape the trees. She casts *Break Enchantment* on him. Suddenly he realizes that the trees are evil and monstrous, and one of them is about to put a noose around his neck! There are six of them, all surrounding the group.

Zurak invokes a *Fireball* and badly scorches one of the hangman trees. Icobus Basilisk, his eyes not dazzled with illusions, places a *Wall of Fire* around the trees.

One of the trees grabs Nigel, looping vines around him. He takes some damage, but manages to slip out of their grasp. The vines catch hold of Zurak, leaving him struggling and trapped. A vine comes for Icobus, causing him to protest, "Why me? We were only minding our own business, casting fire spells!" Next to him, Sredni Vashtar's Girl is held by a cluster of vines.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl casts a *retribution hex* upon the hangman tree that is grappling her. The tree resists the effect! Zurak casts *Grease* and attempts to struggle free, but the tree has him tight.

Icobus Basilisk watches with satisfaction as the trees burn. He casts *Communal Protection from Fire* upon the group to ensure that his friends do not burn as well.

A smoldering vine pulls Sredni Vashtar's Girl into the *Wall of Fire*. She notes, "This doesn't hurt nearly as much as it should!"

One of the trees, already badly scorched by Zurak's *Fireball*, collapses into ash. The cumulative effect of the flames was just too much for it.

Icobus Basilisk rushes forward to pull Sredni Vashtar's Girl out of the flames. He pulls, but the vines are too strong.

Zurak launches *Contagious Flame* at three of the trees. They flare and burn! The plant monster holding Sredni Vashtar's Girl stops moving, burnt through.

The hangman tree holding onto Nigel finally squeezes him enough that he loses consciousness. He goes limp, even as the tree burns. Another tree manages to latch onto Icobus Basilisk, grappling him! A third grapples Oswald! Oswald chops with the *Lopper's Hand Axe*, chopping away at the tree.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl unleashes a *Lightning Bolt* at two of the trees. Fragments of evil wood shavings explode from their trunks! The tree grappling Oswald goes limp, though he doesn't know why. Contagious flames erupt from three of the trees, burning more trees!

The last of the trees finally falls. Icobus drops the *Wall of Fire* to see *Ironface* bashing his mask against the stump of the last hangman tree. The characters spend some time binding and healing their wounds.

The strange object at the center of the grove is made from bone, gemstones, wood and other unnamable materials. The characters understand from Sredni Vashtar's Girl's explanation that it is ancient magic. Any teleportation attempt within about twenty miles will end in this clearing. Which would have been quite a bit more hazardous a few minutes ago. The characters leave the gemstones along, reasoning that they are probably horribly trapped.

Cavern of the Crippled Linnorm

The characters continue onward through the haunted landscape of Virlych. The sky turns an awful purplish color and the winds moan with the voices of the damned. The characters proceed down into a valley between two mountain peaks. Off the path the characters see a track decorated with rotting ichor, leading up to a cave mouth. Oswald thinks the trail was made by a massive lizard-like creature with clawed forelimbs but no hind legs.

Zurak thinks that the trail might have been made by a linnorm, a primeval dragon that has foreclaws but no hindclaws.

The characters move up the slope cautiously. Icobus puts a *Death Ward* on everyone. Nigel casts *Invisibility* on the group. Unfortunately, dragonkind can *See Invisible* and Icobus isn't very stealthy in his full plate. The creature comes storming out of its cave. The characters are able to see that its tail has been cut off, but the wound has not healed – it is now a wretched, diseased mass.

The Linnorm howls at the characters. Icobus guesses that it might have a fiery breath weapon, so he places a *Community Protection from Fire* upon the characters. Nigel casts *Haste* and runs away from everyone else. The Linnorm breathes a line of magma at Icobus and Zurak, engulfing both of them. The *Protection* takes the bulk of the damage.

Oswald takes careful aim and peppers the Linnorm with crossbow bolts. He is dismayed to see the bolts shatter on the worm's armored hide. Icobus activates *diamondskin* and moves forward to engage the Linnorm. Nigel commences singing an inspiring dirge, a dirge with the theme, "You guys are so screwed..."

The Linnorm flies up into the air and charges Oswald... after regenerating all the meager damage Oswald did to it a moment before. It bites him square in the chest, tearing ragged wounds into which its burning poison flows. Oswald suffers 2 CON drain and gives thanks that Icobus' *Protection* takes the fire damage.

Icobus rushes in, takes a bite of his own and 4 CON drain, and pulls Oswald away from the creature and towards Zurak, all the while yelling, "Teleport! Teleport! Teleport!"

Swift Escape! To an Armed Camp...

Zurak readies a *Dimension Door*. Nigel runs to join the others. He casts a *Hold Monster* at the Linnorm, quickly discovering that the thing is immune to paralysis. And mind-affecting effects. And curses. And Shakespeare in the Park. Plus it has Spell Resistance and DR 15.

Zurak sees that everyone is next to him, casts his *Dimension Door*... and finds that there is another teleport attractor in the area. The characters end up in a barrow. There is a makeshift camp with a smoky fire and a patrol of knights all around. Fortunately, they seem to be of the Knights of Ozum. They are a chivalrous order dedicated to warding against the schemes of the undead. They specifically patrol Virlych against the possible return of the Whispering Tyrant. The characters are tremendously glad to see them, even though they had expected to see quite a different clearing after the *Dimension Door*.

The End of the Session

Everyone advances to 12th level while they shelter with the Knights of Ozum. Hit point roll of 7 for Oswald! Plus Critical Focus!