

Curse of the Crimson Throne Session Summary 10/12/2008

Attendance

Chris (Malcolm Zirkus) asks, “How much does sushi cost, if I wanted to buy some sushi?”

Bruce (Valash Not-Gurelle) points out, “You have to ask that because you don’t know how much it costs!” *Chris* rolls his eyes, idly speculating upon how much it might cost to get himself a higher grade of friends. He pointedly refrains from mentioning this out loud, because he knows exactly what that would get him.

Ernest (Annata Vieri) offers, “I like sushi a lot! I know where you can get lots and lots of sushi, but I’ve never had to spend any money there – I always get other people to buy it for me. Sometimes I start out by telling other people my nickname from high school.”

Even *Paul* shudders at the thought of *Ernest* getting free sushi. He thinks, “There are some depths of depravity that even I prefer not to plumb.”

Patrick (Thorndyke) offers, “I like plums!”

Paul remonstrates, “I didn’t say that out loud! And it isn’t that kind of plum!”

Georgina shows up later, explaining, “I just had enough of hula-hooping. Hey, is someone handing out free plums?” *Paul* groans. Like *Chris*, he is imagining strategies for obtaining higher-grade friends. Or at least friends who don’t routinely cast him as a hapless straight man in session summaries.

<i>Character</i>	<i>Player</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Class & Level</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Valash Not-Gurelle	Bruce	Half-Elf	Sorcerer 2 (Air Elemental)	Half-blooded Chelaxian bastard
Annata Vieri	Ernest	Human	Cleric 2 (Holy Warrior)	Cleric of Sarenrae.
Malcolm Zirkus	Chris	Human	Fighter 2	Chelaxian, and proud of it!
Thorndyke	Patrick	Human	Ranger 2	Chelaxian, but not nearly so proud.

Into the Citadel

The grand Citadel Volshyenek, the headquarters of the City Guard, stands overlooking Midland. It is a stern reminder of order and discipline for the city of

Korvosa, a reminder that is needed more even now than ever. With the current troubles having caused almost the entire garrison to be deployed into the city, the characters arrive to find the place nearly deserted. They are shown into an audience with a very tired looking *Field Marshal Cressida Kroft*. She looks them over with the sort of military precision born of a thousand inspections of a hundred thousand unpromising recruits, raw from the turnip fields and the clay pits. She speaks in inspiring tones, “So, you’re the ones sent by the Queen. Heroes of your caliber are exactly what Korvosa needs now. You’ve been on the streets – you know what the city faces.”

Malcolm Zirkus offers, “Yes, we’ve faced both a homeless guy and an otyugh out there.”

She offers the characters as a posting as Agents of the Crown, albeit informal ones. The characters accept, especially after learning that they will be “well-compensated” for their services. She admits that several of her guards have abandoned their posts to look after friends or family and indicates that she expects them to hew to a higher standard for discipline and loyalty.

Valash Not-Gurelle reassures her, “Don’t worry! I’m estranged from my family and I have no friends!”

“Errr. Yes.” She seems dubious. Then she explains that *Verik Vankaskerkin* and his four henchmen have deserted, and are holed up in a butcher shop called *All the World’s Meat*. She wants him captured and returned alive for interrogation, but will accept it if the characters must kill him. She also wants to know why he deserted. Alive, he is worth 1000 gold. Dead, only 500. The characters accept.

Field Marshal Kroft offers the characters a billet at the Citadel for the evening, and promises to make arrangements for them to stay at the *Three Rings Tavern* in North Gate, very close to *All the World’s Meat*. They can use the place as a headquarters.

The Wounded Soldier

Over the evening, the characters check on *Grau Silbado*, the unwell soldier they helped to reach safety before. He is quite glad to see them, and seems to be recovering nicely. They are rather surprised to find that he is ranked as Watch Sergeant. He apologizes for making such an ass of himself. *Malcolm Zirkus* reassures him, “Don’t

worry, once I got really drunk and couldn't remember what I did for a whole week." Grau tells the characters that the Queen personally brought the Hellknights into the city, but this is mostly resulting in a lot of ham-fisted crackdowns and deaths.

The characters decide that they'd best avoid Hellknights in the near future. Valash offers, "Yeah, those guys aren't the friends of the common man. They stop me ten times a day just because I'm a half-elf. Apparently long ears make me an 'entity of interest' around here." He spits. Elegantly. *Annata Vieri* rolls her eyes. Elegantly.

Grau ignores the half-elf (because you really can't expect anything better out of That Sort) as he shows the characters around. They note that he actually cleans up really nicely. Valash reflects that he would really be quite attractive, if only he weren't Chelaxian.

Malcolm Zirkus decides that he's going to reinforce his sanity by abandoning the other characters and getting a drink at the *Creaky Hammock*. He hopes especially that the creepy half-elf won't follow him, but in this he is disappointed. He drinks down his liquor and leaves, noting that Valash appears to be intent upon drinking himself to sleep.

The next morning, Valash Not-Gurelle staggers into the Citadel Volshyenek the with a horrifying tale of clowns and horse diuretics. The others choose not to listen. *Annata Vieri* rolls her eyes again. *She* spent the night talking to Grau about Sergeant Verik Vankaskerkin.

Annata learns that Verik rose through the ranks quite rapidly, leading many to conclude that he was aided by wealth, family or other connections. He originally came out of Riddleport, and talked sometimes of his brothers. One of them was recently caught collaborating with a goblin gang, attacking caravans and villages. Some adventurers recently caught him and dragged him off to Magnimar for trial.

Annata digs in a bit more, and finds that Grau originally grew up in Sandpoint, then escaped to Korvosa to escape his abusive father. He was tutored by *Orisini*, the best swordmaster in the city. Unfortunately, there was a complication in the form of *Sabina*, another student. The end of the triangle came when Grau engineered a duel between *Orisini* and *Sabina* that cost the duelmaster two of his fingers and *Sabina* a scar upon her cheek. *Sabina* left the school to take up the office of bodyguard to the Queen. After Grau was expelled from the school he joined the Korvosan Guard, rising to the rank of

Watch Sergeant when he was not in his cups. He still sees Sabina, but only in her official role.

Annata offers, “That’s really interesting. You’re over Sabina by now? Nice. You really must show me some of your swordplay, I’d really like to see it.” She completely doesn’t understand why Grau thinks that she is coming on to him. There are some advantages to having a cloistered, sheltered upbringing.

Checking out the Tavern

The characters are surprised to find that there is a regular breakfast crowd at the *Three Rings Tavern*: they show up in the morning and discover a passel of old ladies eating Gebbite pastries and drinking coffee. A grim half-Shoanti, half-orc guard watches over them. Valash Not-Gurelle whispers, “Look! He hates me, but not because I’m a half-elf! He hates me because I’m alive! I really respect him for that!”

Malcolm is completely convinced that Valash has a crush on the bouncer.

The characters spread out and talk to the old ladies. They learn that the group that has taken up residence in the butcher shop is called the *Cow-Hammer Boys*. They’re getting lots of good press for bringing in livestock early in the morning, butchering it and handing the meat out for the poor. One old man tells Valash that the Cow-Hammer Boys will also hire out as mercenaries: all you need do is show up and ask about, “The night’s special cuts.”

The next stop is the butcher shop. They find that the folks in the shop really are handing out meat for free to scruffy-looking locals. The characters send *Thorndyke* in alone to check it out. He comes back with a very questionable piece of meat that he is unable to identify. He reports that there are at least two men inside: a tall man with a unibrow and a wheezy looking guy in ill-fitting chainmail. He also tries asking about special cuts, and is told to wait until the crowd disperses.

The free meat is handed out swiftly: all is gone within two hours. The characters return soon after that. The two men inside close the door and ask, “Who do you want to disappear?” Their price is fifty gold per head. They assure the characters that nobody will ever find the body, which leads the characters to understand where the “free meat” is actually coming from. Thorndyke changes the subject by offering himself for hire, then

flexing his 17 STR muscles. They express some interest, but are still more interested in getting the characters to hire them.

The characters finally hire the killers to dispose of *Araash of Alder Reach*, claiming that he lives in Valash's shop. Valash goes on and on about how Araash is actually his father, enough to make the other characters uneasy. They're even uneasier when Valash points out, "This'll be the best fifty gold I've ever spent!"

The Scene at the Scribe's Shop

The characters prep Valash's shop before the Cow-Hammer Boys show up. They find a side of pork to disguise as a sleeping elf, with Valash using his new *Mage Hand* trick to make the so-called body move. Valash hides up in the attic, with the others hiding in closets and whatnot.

Late that night, two bravos in chainmail storm through the door. They thump across the shop straight to the "body". That's Annata's cue to spring up, toss her hair invitingly, and order them, "Stop! Stop in the name of Sarenrae!"

The thugs whirl and stab at everything they can see, which encompasses Annata and Thorndyke. The characters respond with saps. Nobody gets hurt.

Malcolm decides to change the tone of the encounter: he swings his heavy flail at one of them, only to see the thug evade.

Valash doesn't bother with the fancy oratory: he simply zaps one thug with a *Ray of Enfeeblement*, halving the man's strength in a stroke. Thorndyke is also more on action than elocution: he saps the other thug, knocking him down.

Annata lashes out at the weakened thug's blade, hoping to disarm him. The thug rather feebly moves his weapon to the side, keeping hold of it.

By this time, the thug realizes that there is a magician in the fight. He stomps over to Valash and cuts him badly. Valash howls, "Somebody please *do* something!" Thorndyke cracks the man on the temple and sends him to the ground. Then the characters loot the both of them.

- 2 sets of chainmail
- 2 heavy steel shields
- 2 longswords
- 2 light crossbows

- 20 crossbow bolts
- 40 gold pieces.

Malcolm takes one of the crossbows and ten bolts. Valash takes the money as a partial refund on his fifty gold payment.

Thorndyke ties up the two thugs and removes their masks, discovering to nobody's surprise that they are the unibrow and weasel guys from the butcher shop. Malcolm interrogates them and determines that they are two of the former City Guard and that Vankaskerkin is back at the butcher shop with two more men. They don't know what happened to the original owners: the shop was closed when they deserted. Both of them strongly deny that the free meat is taken from their victims. They claim that the meat comes from cattle and pigs brought in every the morning, but they don't know where the animals come from: Verik pays for it all. They give away the meat to earn the goodwill of the people. They deserted because Verik said the Queen ("That filthy good-for-nothing whore!") will destroy the city. They're certain that once she is deposed they will be able to get back into the Guard thanks to the goodwill of the people.

The characters frog walk the deserters back to the Citadel. The troops at the Citadel are very interested in taking custody of them, explaining that they are *Baldrago* and *Malder*, two of the original deserters.

Annata Vieri attempts to get a description of Verik from some of the Citadel guards. One of the female guards offers, "He's perfectly formed, with piercing blue eyes. Once I saw him washing. His skin was perfect! Ooooh!"

Annata groans, "So, did he have any distinguishing marks, you strumpet?" The female guard just flutters and fans herself.

The Trojan Horse Plan

Thorndyke and Malcolm swiftly disguise themselves as Baldrago and Malder. They bring along Valash, disguised as a dead body. Annata follows along very quietly. They return to the butcher shop, finding the front room empty. Thorndyke listens around, hears nothing, and calls out, "Hey, guys! We're back! Boy, this guy was loaded!" This has the desired outcome: the back doors open up and the two remaining Cow-Hammer Boys come through.

One of the Cow-Hammer Boys is a broad-shouldered man with long sideburns. The other is thin and jittery with a sallow complexion. “You need help? Just bring him in to the butcher floor!”

Malcolm confidently walks down the hall with Valash flung over his shoulder. He notices that the man with the sideburns is licking his lips and brandishing a butcher knife. He walks on into the killing floor. The place is a grim hell of blood and entrails, and smells of death and horror.

Sideburns says, “Hang him by the hook over there!”

Malcolm shrugs, puts Valash down, and draws out his blade.

This is Annata’s signal. She bursts into the room, purses her flawless red lips and calls out, “The justice of the Dawnflower will smite you!” She casts *Bless*.

Sideburns moves forward with a cow-hammer and exchanges blows with Thorndyke. Valash steps back and casts *Enlarge Person* on Malcolm, who makes a mighty swing at Sideburns. Sideburns deftly steps out of the way, right into Annata’s scimitar swing.

Thorndyke slashes at the sallow-faced thug, staggering him. The man’s nerve breaks. He runs for the door out to the stockyards. Valash lashes out with an elemental ray, downing him.

The flash of electricity distracts Sideburns. Malcolm takes advantage of this to crush his skull like an empty eggshell. The man drops stone dead. Annata offers, “I would have felt bad about killing him until I realized that they were serial killers.” The others tie up the sallow-faced goon and move on. Their gear includes:

- 2 sets of chainmail
- 2 heavy steel shields
- 1 longsword
- 1 cow-hammer
- 2 light crossbows
- 20 crossbow bolts
- 40 gold pieces.

Malcolm looks around through the rest of the ground floor. He finds the meat locker, already stocked with tomorrow's meats. He can identify beef and pork cuts, plus a half-dozen less recognizable cuts.

Verik's Office

The characters move on up the stairs, through a break area and a cluttered office. The characters find Verik standing in the office, wearing his guard uniform and armed with a spear. He demands, "How did you get in here?"

Annata shoots back, "We came through the bodies of your murdering buddies! Surrender or it will go badly for you!" Malcolm reinforces her words by slamming his flail on the floorboards.

Verik snarls, "You're wrong! You are the murderers! You and the hideous malformed bitch you exalt as Queen! I abjure you and your false loyalty! You shall fashion the destruction and downfall of all that we love!"

Valash simply casts *Enlarge Person* on Malcolm. "I'm going to make you big!"

Malcolm groans, "Not now! You half-elves only have one thing on your minds!" He steps forward and slams Verik in the head. Teeth strike the wall.

Annata desperately looks around for some soap with which to wash out her ears. Not seeing any, she proclaims, "Light of Lunia!" and glows brightly.

Thorndyke moves up in the light and knocks Verik on the head. He slumps down. Then the characters tie him up and search the room, finding:

- A silver dagger pinning a note to the desk.
- 20 *Arrows +1*.
- A masterwork (+2 STR) composite longbow.
- A potion of *Cure Moderate Wounds*.
- Masterwork chainmail
- A masterwork spear

The note details some of the shop's business, suggesting that Verik was laying out real money to buy up to three cows and four pigs per day to donate to the locals, perhaps upwards of 150 gold per day. Annata Vieri takes the longbow and the arrows, hoping to "adjust" it later on so she can use it.

Interrogating Verik

Satisfied that they have found everything of value in the room, the characters turn to interrogating Verik.

- *We've been sent by Field Marshal Kroft to bring you back.* Kroft is a puppet of the disgusting whore Queen!
- *That's awfully noble for a murderer.* I'm no murderer! It's no crime to give meat to the poor.
- *Your Cow-Hammer Boys were committing murders for 50 gold each!* That's a lie!
- *We hired them, and they showed up to kill our target.* Is that the false story you're going to use at the kangaroo trial?
- *So all of this is just to feed the poor?* Absolutely.
- *That's not the story they're telling, and we've got two of your guys as evidence.* I'm only here to help the poor, you filthy lackeys of the crypto-capitalist Establishment!

Valash Not-Gurelle looks around at the papers in the room and concludes that Verik might actually be a wild-eyed Idealist who is completely unaware of the crimes being committed by his subordinates. Annata starts to get the same impression from talking to him. At the same time, the characters recognize that there is no money in the office, making it very hard to understand how he was paying for the meat he was importing and then giving away for free.

Annata finds herself more and more sympathetic to Verik's proletarian goals, even if he isn't willing to explain either his sources of funding or who the ranchers that provide the animals are. At the same time, Valash explains to her, "By the way, you realize that esertion-day is an apital-cay offense-ray. Arik-vay is oing-gay to ang-hay."

Malcolm groans, "Please stop speaking in tongues. It makes my head hurt." He goes down to interrogate some of the murderous Cow-Hammer Boys, learning that they really never saw Verik leave his office though they did hear voices coming from the room from time to time. With this evidence, Thorndyke heads out to the roof and is able to find some footprints, possibly left by a woman, an elf or a very dainty man.

Even as the others are preparing to haul Verik off to the Citadel, Annata assures him, “I really support the important work you are doing! Even though you must be punished for your crimes, I’m going to see that your operation continues!” Malcolm takes the prisoners back to the Field Marshal and collects the promised 1000 gold pieces, while Annata and Valash keep an eye on the butcher shop. Annata sends a letter back with him explaining that she believes that Verik did not know about the crimes committed by his subordinates.

The next morning, Valash notices that the silver dagger taken from the table is now missing from his pack. Everyone else assumes that he is lying when he claims that it just vanished.

Once everyone is awake, Annata explains her theory on where the money came from: “It’s all Blackjack! He’s a romantic pirate and he robs from the rich and gives to the poor and he always returns when the city is in trouble and needs him and some people think he’s an elf because he’s been around forever!” The others nod carefully and go back to their breakfast.

The next morning, the characters give away the free meat as usual, carefully avoiding the “variety cuts” in the meat locker. Then they locate a couple of local boys to try and keep the operation going. Annata leaves a note in the upstairs window pleading to the unknown funder to continue providing money for the operation.

The Marshal and the Swordmaster

Field Marshal Kroft brings the characters into her office again. When the characters arrive, they find that she is not alone: the handsome and dashing *Vencarlo Orisini* is also present. He bows deeply as he is introduced. Field Marshal Kroft assures the characters that Vencarlo is a trusted advisor of hers. He asks Annata for her hand, then kisses it and offers her his chair. She is tremendously taken with him: he has style and character and respects women in a way totally foreign to the other members of the adventuring group.

Field Marshal Kroft explains that the Cheliox Ambassador *Darvain Giosompre* has long disdained the city of Korvosa, ready to recommend trade sanctions even before the current troubles. Vencarlo Orisini has learned that Giosompre’s intention is to persuade the rulers of Cheliox to impose punitive tariffs upon Korvosa and ruin the

economy, justifying the action on the basis of the current discontent. When the Korvosan economy fades, he will be able to enrich himself by purchasing various properties at low prices. He must be discredited, but killing him is not an option. Fortunately, he has his vices. In particular, he has long frequented the fleshpots at *Eel's End*.

The characters' mission is to speak to *Devargo Barvassi*, the master of Eel's End and the so-called *Spider King*. They must learn what manner of illicit pleasures Giosompre indulges in, enough to allow Kroft to blackmail him. She gives Annata a purse with 1000 gold pieces to help persuade him.

Field Marshal Kroft tells the characters that Eel's End is nominally a den of iniquity, but it is placed upon a collection of five ships moored along the Southeast corner of the Old Dock. Field Marshal Kroft notes that Devargo Barvassi pays his sin taxes on time and is far from the largest problem faced by the Korvosan authorities at the moment.

Into Eel's End

The characters walk towards Eel's End with Vencarlo Orisini, a man who still has great spirit and energy in his step in spite of his advancing years. He wears elegant high boots and leather gloves, oiled to protect his blade from rust. He is of old Chelish blood, and it shows. Valash hates him instantly. The other characters are immediately fond of him. He thanks them for the kindnesses they showed to his former student Grau – even though they parted on harsh terms, he bears the man no ill will and wishes to see him succeed.

Most of the characters hang upon Orisini's every word, eager to curry his favor or draw a smile from his aristocratic lips. He speaks fondly of the stories he has heard of their heroism. Annata Vieri bats her eyelashes at him. Valash Not-Gurelle lags behind the rest of the group, grumbling and muttering in Abyssal.

Orisini leads the characters to the edges of Old Korvosa and Eel's End, then turns upon his heels and is suddenly gone. The characters can see the five ships of Eel's End, each more gaily painted and lighted than the last. Signs upon each of them proclaim the pleasures available inside. Valash observes, "I can't decide which of them to visit first!"

Annata quickly finds herself alone as the other characters immediately disperse to indulge in various carnal pleasures. It takes her almost two hours to scrape together the

exhausted, intoxicated remnants of the group once again. She feels deeply out of place in Eel's End.

The *Eel's End* itself is a warship tied to the end of the pier. A complex picture of a spider bars access to the sterncastle. As the characters approach a stern enforcer in chain stops them. He instructs them that unless they are expected they are not welcome. Malcolm offers, "We *are* expected!"

Annata and Valash both help out Thorndyke as he tries threatening the characters' way past the gunsels. The guard looks nervous, realizes that he's all alone, and lets the characters enter. The Spider King is seated in the onetime captain's cabin, long since been converted into a throne room. The whole room is hung with spiderwebs. Fist-sized spiders scuttle across both the webs and the Spider King himself. The Spider King is a tall, fey human with dark hair. He wears black leather armor decorated with a spider motif and carries an array of blades on his left hand, their edges dripping with poison.

The Spider King is clearly displeased to see the characters. Annata explains the characters' mission, with Valash Not-Gurette supporting him. To sweeten the deal, she offers him 500 gold in tribute. The characters are quite relieved when he chuckles and notes that they amuse him. He thanks them for their generosity, then heads below "to gather up the information". He explains that the Ambassador was conducting an affair with an important aristocrat's wife back in Chelias, and that he stole several of the letters he received back from her. He had been selling them back to the Ambassador every few weeks, but is willing to give the remaining letters to the characters.

A Side Trip to Orisini's

No sooner have the characters left Eel's End but Annata exclaims, "Oh! But we must stop by Orisini's school to tell him of our glorious success!" The sun glints upon her eyes, causing them to flash with vitality and life. Valash doesn't even bother trying to conceal his disgust, but he goes along with the suggestion. The others fail to understand exactly what Valash has against the Chelish swordmaster. Thorndyke in particular is enthusiastic about signing up to practice against some of Orisini's students.

Orisini is a bit surprised to see the characters, but he welcomes them warmly, Annata in particular. One of his servants offers the characters refreshments while he

shows them around the school. Valash declines the tour: he sequesters himself in a side chamber to make copies of all of the Ambassador's letters.

Hearing that the other characters are talking to Orisini's students, Annata offers, "I'm really excited about seeing him in action!"

In the back of the room, Valash grumbles, "Oh, I bet you want to see that. I bet you do..."

Once Again, the Citadel

The characters turn over the letters to Field Marshal Kroft, who blushes upon seeing them. She thanks the characters for their help and gives them an additional 500 gold pieces. She confesses that she has no further work at this time, as the situation in Korvosa is coming back to normal. She tells the characters to remain in touch, in the event that she needs their services again in the future.

As the characters leave, Malcolm asks Valash, "So, by next week you'll have copies of those letters circulating through the barracks?"

Valash confirms, "Yes. But my version will be... illuminated. Ha ha haaa!"

The End of the Session

Everyone advances to 3rd level. Valash Not-Gurette rejoices as the forbidden powers of new spells course through his blood.