

Carrion Crown Session Summary 02/02/2014

Attendance

Chris is busying himself with readying the table when *Bruce* pings in on the Google Hangout to report that while he's still in Richardson, he'll be showing up in Round Rock in just a moment. *Chris* observes that the technology to support that request is not quite in place yet, though maybe next year it will be. He notes that *Bruce* will be sad that he missed out on the donuts, theatrically gesturing at the two boxes of donuts he has procured for the group.

They then migrate to the subject of hummus and its lack of change in appearance through the entire digestive process. *Paul* appears in time to report that he cooked some tomatoes down "English style", by which he means he cooked them until they turned pink and mushy. But he also brought donuts! "English style" donuts! He adds them to the pile.

Patrick is not choosy: "Mmmm! Donuts!"

Ernest shows up a bit later with a cry of triumph! Everyone hopes that he didn't bring donuts. He assures them that he did not! He brought kolaches and red velvet cake! The pile of baked goods reaches epic proportions.

Matt appears to find everyone else staring at him with a sense of almost palpable expectation. *Chris* even turns the webcam around so *Bruce* can stare at him. He asks somewhat tenuously, "What's up?" Soon enough, he learns that he is one of the few folks remaining in the group who have not had a chance to receive the Official Turner Late Christmas Gift. Everyone wants to see his reaction as he tears open the paper...

Character	Player	Description	Class	Level
Oswald Bainbridge	Bruce	Grizzled Crossbowman	Fighter	9
Xurak Darkfire	Matt	Mysterious cloaked traveler	Half-Orc Necromancer	9
Nigel Snodgrass	Patrick	Emo-Gothic figure	Dirge Bard	9

Character	Player	Description	Class	Level
Doctor Jegen Vaus	Tim	Elvish Eurotrash in leather pants	Alchemist	8
Sredni Vashtar's Girl	Ernest	Troubled Vudran Girl	Witch	9
Icobus Basilisk	Chris	Pale, poor nobleman, now become orcish!	Oracle	9

Alaking Alonsters!

Last time, the characters decided that rather than moving forward, they would move backward to clear out a bunch of (surprisingly vicious) brain-edited fish-men. Having finished that task, the others watch as *Xurak Darkfire* starts fitting pieces of shattered fish-men together with the goal of creating some kind of stitched undead horror.

Oswald Bainbridge suggests, “Couldn’t we manage to keep the number of unnatural monstrosities in the group to a minimum? You’ve already got your octopus zombie, after all.”

Xurak pointedly ignores *Oswald*. *Xurak*’s octopus starts playing the “not touching you...” game with the crossbowman until *Oswald* starts waving around his Crossbow of Doom with a maddened look in his eye.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl notes that the characters have picked up an *Amulet of Mighty Fists*. She suggests that it would be best used by the various awful minions that the magicians in the group either summon (herself) or create (*Xurak*). Even *Oswald* doesn’t object.

The Brain-Harvesting Room

The characters continue deeper down the rock-lined tunnels, emerging in a glowing grotto. Unnatural fungi and lichens cling to the walls. In the center of the chamber is a mysterious machine. Two mi-go and one dimensional shambler stand around it. They appear to be working with a human body that has recently been brain-harvested and a complicated machine with a blood- and filth-stained aperture in the side. They drag the body out of a larger pile consisting of three skum bodies and one more human body. All of the piled bodies have also had the tops of their skulls cut off and their brains removed.

The otherworldly monsters are far enough away that the characters cannot closely see which humans have been de-brained. Unfortunately, they are close enough that they quickly become aware of the characters' presence. They start making evasive maneuvers while Sredni Vashtar's Girl takes a personal moment to create a *Spectral Hand*.

Oswald sets up and aims down the corridor, waiting to shoot the first mi-go or shambler to show itself. *Nigel Snodgrass* makes himself the group's favorite person by casting *Haste* on everyone. *Icobus Basilisk* thunders down the corridor, casting *Enlarge Person* upon himself as he goes.

Xurak Darkfire surrounds the outsiders with a *Wall of Fire* then sends his zombie octopus to squeeze its way through a corridor that is really too small for its bulk. Sredni Vashtar's Girl follows up with a *Confusion* spell.

A cone-shaped mist shoots out of the *Wall of Fire*, freezing all that it touches. Icobus, Sredni Vashtar's Girl, Xurak, his octopus, and Nigel are all chilled. The cone obliterates the *Wall of Fire* where the two touch, ruining the characters' plan to keep the mi-go trapped behind flames. The characters are able to see a mi-go standing in the gap, holding a twisted rod crafted of an odd alloy of metal and crystal.

The dimensional shambler steps through dimensions to assault Oswald. It claws him but does not manage to grab him. Given that if it did grab him it could plane shift him somewhere horrible, he's quite glad that it did not.

Nigel clobbers the dimensional shambler with his special mace *Raven's Head*. This serves to stun it enough that it can't feel the agony as Oswald's crossbow bolts rip it into fragmented bits. Shattered pieces of dimensional shambler spray across the stony floor.

Icobus stomps up to the mi-go with the alien weapon and smashes it solidly with his adamantite Warhammer. He observes that no blood comes out of the creature's sloshy, funguslike body. The zombie octopus lumbers up at the thing and slams it against a wall. The mi-go seems dizzy, but manages to dodge out of the way of Xurak's *Acid Arrow* all the same.

The mi-go scrambles back and unleashes its ice gun again. The characters mostly dodge out of the way. The characters start to realize that the strange sounds Icobus makes when he is in a fight sound a lot like the chittering and clacking of the mi-go.

Nigel exclaims, “The language Icobus falls into isn’t quite the same – they’re linguistic cognates! Like Spanish and Portuguese!”

Oswald is not impressed, “So, it’s like he’s a Portuguese mi-go? And that makes it all better?” The others are briefly concerned that Oswald might turn his crossbow upon Icobus. They are relieved to see that he decides otherwise.

The characters fall upon the armed mi-go and destroy it. The one remaining mi-go is in the corner, examining its knees – clearly afflicted by Sredni Vashtar’s Girl’s *Confusion* spell. Oswald moves carefully into position, preparing to ventilate it. Icobus moves closer. He wants to see if it has another ice gun. He gets one short moment to examine it before Oswald spatters it with crossbow bolts. The mi-go twitches, falls, and twitches again.

Sredni Vashtar’s Girl picks up the ice gun and tries to determine how to activate it. Everyone else moves away from her, expecting that she will actually succeed in freezing herself into an ice cube. To everyone’s surprise, and with the help of Nigel’s bardic lore, she finally figures it out without icing anyone. At least, anyone who will be missed. The ice gun has fifteen shots remaining.

The body pile behind the Body-Mulcher Machine is quite large – 70 or more, including three men from the village (one of them the Mayor) and a strange humanoid with bulbous eyes and pale, translucent skin. All of them are ready to be fed through the nearby machine and converted into fertilizer for the life-giving fungus. Sredni Vashtar’s Girl notes, “The outlanders use every part of the human!”

The characters discuss the actual application of some of the machines. Sredni Vashtar’s Girl thinks the mi-go carefully removed the brains in another room, and just used this room to make fertilizer out of the bodies.

There is a double-portal at the end of the room. The characters peer through and think they are looking into the inside of the dome they saw as they approached through the lake.

The Laboratory Dome

Icobus peers into the chamber beyond the portals. The sights inside the dome are mind-numbing. The center of the dome is a massive operating table. The edges of the

dome are transparent, providing a view to the dark waters beyond. An image of a dark grey planet orbiting a red, burning sun hangs within the solid crown of the dome. Four mi-go are hard at work. Two are busy with inappropriate experiments on the equipment around the edges of the dome and two are working on a human male strapped upon a table and attached to many machines. The characters do not recognize the man on the table.

As the characters enter the chamber the mi-go finish their preparations upon the man on the table. One mi-go steps away as the other manipulates a control. Suddenly the man's head explodes! It explodes into a forest of tentacles! A thrashing, bashing, clashing forest of tentacles!

Nigel casts *Haste* upon everyone and starts his drumming dirge. Sredni Vashtar's Girl turns *Invisible* and moves through the portal. And Xurak casts *Dimension Door* to move most of the group to the other side of the dome. Oswald takes advantage of his surprising new position to pepper a mi-go scientist with crossbow bolts. And Icobus casts *Enlarge* and storms straight at two mi-go.

The mi-go move to flank Icobus and Oswald. They go after them like Cuisinarts from the Planet Yuggoth, buzzing and chopping and carving as they approach. Icobus falls afoul of their attacks and suffers a spray of deep wounds.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl finally finishes casting her *Summon Monster* spell. She summons a celestial bison that promptly tramples a mi-go! The mi-go gets bowled over and flung aside like an unnatural rag doll.

Oswald ducks underneath a mi-go's pincer slash and shoots one of his assailants several times. To everyone's surprise (including the mi-go), he does not kill it. It shows the color of joy, "I have survived!" The color of joy is apparently a sort of greenish-purple.

Icobus whirls his halberd around at the single mi-go still fighting him, slashing it into three pieces. His backswing takes the second mi-go facing Oswald. The thing chatters at him in irritation – apparently being cut apart is seen as quite an imposition in mi-go society.

The mi-go take their vengeance upon Oswald. Two of them flank him and claw him four times. They shred him horribly, leaving him badly wounded. Oswald staggers, spits blood, and does his best to focus upon his attackers.

A second later, the summoned celestial bison thunders by, trampling a mi-go into the ground. Sredni Vashtar's Girl announces its charge by singing one of the traditional songs of her people:

Let me nibble on your buds!

Let me stomple your albino!

Let me graze into your veldt!

I'm your...

Love rhino!

The mi-go staggers to its feet only to get slammed by the zombie "Love Octopus". It collapses.

The Dark Spawn Awakens!

Oswald ends the last mi-go. As he does, all the equipment in the chamber activates. The air fills with clagging, clanging, cacophonous alarms! Lights flash and flicker! A hoofed, tree-like abomination rises from the Rider's ruined corpse and bloats to its full, monstrous size. It is the *Dark Spawn of Shub-Niggurath!* It immediately attacks everyone in the room!

Sredni Vashtar (the weasel) squeaks in Aklo, "The black goat of the woods with a thousand young approaches!" Nobody pays attention to the weasel. They are far more concerned about the fact that the dark spawn is approaching.

Icobus curses in Aklo and swings his halberd at the dark spawn. His attacks glance off its fantastically tough hide. It responds with four tentacle strikes, crushing him to the floor. His huge carcass falls to the ground. Oswald sees Icobus fall at his feet and promptly feeds a *Cure Serious Wounds* potion to him, leaving him only incapacitated.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl shudders at the unnatural influence of the dark young. She decides that the creature is far too tough to simply attack directly, so she looks for some other approach to destroy it. It ignores her *misfortune hex* completely.

Xurak performs *Bolster Undead* upon his octopus and orders it to attack with tentacles. The two creatures have equally long reach, so they end up fighting each other slap-wise from opposite sides of the dome.

Oswald tries shooting the dark young with his crossbow. He hits solidly four times, but the creature shrugs off the attack. Oswald grumbles about outsider monsters that are pretty close to immune to piercing attacks. Considering that he is still able to get his bolts through the thing's hide, the others think he shouldn't complain nearly so much.

Xurak reports that the dark young of Shub-Niggurath are among the most successful (in the horrible sense of "successful") of Shub-Niggurath's offspring. They are big, have lots of magical powers, can turn invisible, and are extremely hard to hurt. The characters are suitably impressed, both with the creature and with the depths of Xurak's knowledge. None of them dwells much upon the sort of college classes he took in Necromancer University to learn these things.

Icobus crawls away from the dark young to heal himself.

The dark young plasters a tentacle over its forehead and moans about its life, "My parents won't get me a car! My boyfriend is cheating on me!" Then it lights into the octopus. Xurak's necromancy and its own durable nature keep the zombie mostly unharmed under the weight of the dark young's assault.

Xurak orders his zombie octopus in to the attack. It is clear that the dark young's thick skin render it immune to tentacle strikes, so he sends the octopus in to bite. The dark young squeals as the octopus' beak pierces its skin! Fearing that the dark young might attempt to run, Xurak locks it down with a *Dimensional Anchor*.

Icobus looks up from healing himself to see something outside the dome. He sees glimpses of hooves, and tentacles, and goatlike eyes, moving around in the dark waters. He starts to fear that simply killing the dark young might not improve the situation.

For its part, the dark young has no issues with priority: it smashes the zombie octopus around with its tentacle hits, wham-wham-Wham-WHAM! Xurak does his best to reinforce his minion.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl notices a metal storage bin over on the wall near where the Rider was strapped down, a bin that might contain his possessions. She wonders if anything the Rider was carrying might help against the creature, then decides that unless

the Rider was carrying a tactical nuke that's pretty unlikely. Unless, of course, he was carrying the *Sea Sage Effigy!* She orders the celestial bison to continue hammering the dark young while she searches the bin. At the bottom of the bin she finds a small pouch containing a green marble idol with seven tentacles. She senses that it is magical.

Xurak casts *Bestow Curse* on the dark young. The creature shrugs off the magic as if it were not even there. The zombie octopus continues to chew on it, and Oswald manages to land a single shot into it with good effect: the dark young is critically injured!

Icobus steps up, now healed, with his silver longsword. He chops at the dark young twice, cutting the thing down where it stands.

Once Icobus destroys the dark young, Shub-Niggurath's connection to the material plane is weakened! Icobus and Sredni Vashtar's Girl happen to get a full, momentary glimpse of Shub-Niggurath herself in the waters beyond the dome, against a vista of unimaginable stars at inconceivable separation, before she is expelled from the reality.

Alien energy shudders through the dome! The material of the dome cracks as the mi-go equipment burns with exotic flames! Dark waters flow into the complex! The characters flee! They stop at the brain chamber to set up a quick relay to rescue as many disembodied brains as they can. They manage to pull thirteen canisters with brains out of the compound.

Back to the Surface

Horace Croon brings the characters back up to the surface slowly in the bathysphere, with all of their brain canisters attached to the outside of the hull. He is ecstatic over the news of the characters' victory! He takes them back to shore.

Before the characters return to Illmarsh they examine the magical objects they have recovered from the mi-go compound:

- *Shadow Mistmail*
- *Wounding Sickle +1*
- *Belt of Giant Strength +2*
- Whispering Way amulet
- Pouch of 150 platinum pieces

- Diamond worth 500 gold pieces
- *Amulet of Mighty Fists +1*
- A bone scroll case containing a letter with the seal of the Whispering Way

The letter urges the bearer to exchange the Sea Sage Effigy for the *Raven's Head*, which the Whispering Way needs to be able to complete the Carrion Crown. The Rider was to report to his companion in Calphas once he had the mace.

Icobus takes the belt and the amulet. Nigel takes the *Dusty Rose Ioun Stone* the group found earlier and the *Shadow Mistmail*. Sredni Vashtar's Girl takes the *Wounding Sickle*. Oswald gets a potion of *Cat's Grace*.

Good Times in Illmarsh

The characters return to Illmarsh. They find that the villagers are quite unwilling to even mention or acknowledge that anything unusual might have happened. They find that the Sheriff is still alive (for all that he might be associated with the cult of Dagon). Shortly after the characters destroyed the mi-go dome there was a tremendous crashing sound. Some of the locals looked and found that the whole Undiomedede House has collapsed. And those cultists of the *Recondite Order* who the characters did not kill have all fled. All in all, the locals very much hope that things will return to normal, for certain values of "normal".

The characters check in on some of their friends in Illmarsh. The half-elven apothecary *Jayleen Halrush* is still alive and in full possession of her brain. The couple whose daughter the characters recovered left town some time ago, and are presumably okay.

Laurel Sills at the *Wall-Eyed Kraken* isn't sure she wants to stay in town, but isn't sure how she can leave, except that she's got a *Long Spear +1* that she could sell. She and some of the less ethical characters discuss ways that she could parlay a mere magical long spear into ownership of a bar in Calphas. The conversation quickly goes to a place that isn't appropriate for the likes of Oswald to listen to.

By the end of the conversation, Laurel has agreed to leave town with the characters. And Icobus has decided to embark upon a campaign of intimidation and

extortion through Illmarsh, culminating in his announcement that he will be staying in the Mayor's former house.

The Brain Canisters

Most of the thirteen brains in canisters the characters recovered are skum, including the former leader. The humans in the remaining canisters are primarily insane fosterlings and refugees. They are hard to communicate with, except for *Mayor Early Greedle*. They are uniformly crazed and insane.

Horace Croon is able to determine that the leader's ill-advised summoning attempts at the Undiomed House attracted the attentions first of the Colour out of Space and second of the mi-go. The mi-go plan was to accelerate the arrival of Shub-Niggurath by breeding slugspawn and bringing the dark young to Golarion.

The characters leave all the canisters in the care of Horace Croon. They suggest that figuring out how to build a clockwork body for Mayor Greedle would be a really challenging project, just the sort of thing he could do to prove his credentials as an alchemist of the first rank. He agrees that it would be interesting to look into.

The characters do eventually try to explain to Mayor Greedle that he is a brain in a jar. He is in complete denial of the situation, refusing to believe anything they tell him. They are able to turn on vision, speech and hearing for him and install him as advisor to the new Mayor until such time as a more permanent solution is possible.

All About Caliphas

The City of Caliphas is ruled by the *Prince Aduard Ordranti III*. It is the capital of Ustalav and the most cosmopolitan city in the Kingdom. The characters find a pamphlet from the *Caliphas Board of Tourism* to tell them all about the city:

Constructed behind the treacherous shield of a natural breakwater, Caliphas flourishes as the nation's wealthiest, most accessible, and most cosmopolitan city. These factors—along with other, more mysterious persuasions—argued for the royal court's relocation to within the city's walls 30 years ago. Although a new capital, Caliphas is still an old city, and the grim statuary, soaring buttresses, sharp gables, and endless intimidating embellishments common to the nation's oldest cities adorn its

ominous structures. New industries also belch black clouds into the sky, mixing with the frequent fog to cloak some parts of the city in a wretched coat of ash. Yet numerous gardens, private menageries, and fenced parks dot the crowded cityscape, making Caliphas feel more alive than many Ustalavic cities—which often seem better suited as tombs for dead princes. The past decades have brought thousands of immigrants to the capital. While the nobleborn find and create luxurious housing with ease, their attendants have considerably more trouble. Such has led to not just overcrowding, increased squalor, and street violence in parts of the city, but to stranger crimes against which the overwhelmed constabulary has little defense, such as kidnapping, hidden slavery, underground fighting bouts, mysterious murders, and rumors of terrors lurking amid the city’s labyrinthine sewers.

<i>LN large city</i>	Corruption +4; Crime -3; Economy +4; Law +6; Lore +4; Society +1				
<i>Qualities</i>	notorious, prosperous, rumormongering citizens, strategic location, superstitious				
<i>Danger</i>	20				
Demographics					
Government	overlord				
Population	15,640 (14,950 humans, 350 dwarves, 220 elves, 120 other)				
Notable NPCs					
Prince Aduard Ordranti III (LN male human aristocrat 3/fighter 8)					
Countess Carmilla Caliphvaso (LE female human aristocrat 4/rogue 11)					
Diaudin (LN male human rogue 10)					
Luvick Siervage (LE male vampire aristocrat 2/fighter 15)					
Marketplace					
Base Value	13,600 gp	Purchase Limit	100,000	Spellcasting	5th
Minor Items	4d4	Medium Items	3d4	Major Items	2d4

The characters determine that Caliphas is perhaps 150 miles away from Illmarsh, along the coast of Avalon Bay and Lake Encarthan – at least a week’s travel with roads and a cart. The characters discuss hiring a boat out of Thrushmoor but decide to travel by

land because they already have a cart and doubt that a sufficiently large boat would be available in a smaller town.

The Road to Thrushmoore

Two days out of Illmarsh the characters encounter a man with a wagon full of coffins coming out of Thrushmoore. He seems pale and nervous when the characters hail him, taking them as a team of heavily armed mercenaries. Xurak takes the lead in talking to him. Icobus quietly casts *Detect Evil*.

Sredni Vashtar's Girl thinks that there is something wrong with the coffin merchant – perhaps he is being influenced, or threatened, or just crazy. As Xurak approaches the coffins, the man explodes at him, “Don't disturb the coffins! You mustn't disturb the dead! You mustn't get near them!”

Suspicious, Xurak casts *Detect Undead* and determines that there is a single undead in one of the four coffins. Sredni Vashtar's Girl puts the man to sleep with her hexes.

The characters discuss how to treat with the undead (possibly a vampire) inside the coffin. Oswald and Icobus unhitch the horses from the wagon very carefully.

The man does have some documents – lineage documents proclaiming the heritage of *Lady Usika*, who comes from a noble line dispossessed by peasant rebellion. There is also a sheath of papers that appear to be deeds to her confiscated holdings. From what the characters know, Lady Usika's line was dispossessed because they were one of those aristocratic families who badly mistreated the commoners. They were also dispossessed some fifty years ago: she is certainly some kind of vampire.

The characters place the wagon in the sun, put a sunshade over it, and open the coffin. Xurak then proceeds to ask her questions about life in Caliphas, threatening to burn her if she did not talk. From inside the coffin there is the sounds of spellcasting. Darkness pours out from the cracks in the wood. Mist comes out of the coffin, forming into a beautiful dark woman, raven-haired and pale. She wears a fancy gown in a style no longer current. She carries a parasol.

“The vampires rebelled against the Whispering Tyrant long before the humans did. He wished everyone to be undead, and if that were the case then what would we eat?”

“The Whispering Tyrant wishes to re-emerge, and we intend to stop him.”

“So what do you want? Introductions to the movers and shakers of Caliphas?”

“That would be helpful.”

“Let me tell you. There have been a series of murders in Caliphas. Someone is seeking out and destroying my kind. That is one reason why I have left the city. Perhaps what you need is a guide – I can suggest one.” The Lady Usika suggests that there is a *dhampir* in Caliphas who might help them. She suggests that they seek out *Quinley Basdell*, born to a woman bitten by a vampire midwife during pregnancy. His mother eventually rose as a vampire and has become quite influential.

Luvick Siervage is an ancient vampire who rules vampire-kind in Caliphas. He is actually older than the Whispering Tyrant, and can answer questions about the Tyrant – after all, that happened a brief 800 years ago. He and his people have been looking for the vampire killer. The murders have been done in a way that suggests deep knowledge of vampiric ways, that there must be a mole within the city.

She agrees to provide a letter of recommendation to Quinley Basdell once her servant wakes.

The End of the Session

Everyone goes to 10th level! Oswald’s hit point roll is 8!