

## Log: Welcome to Crossroads

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9/5/04

The group assembled today less Dimdar and Corey, who were learning to handle a ship from the fishermen.

Elayna, Bullseye and Phyro updated the rest of the group on their activities with Baylor and at the Pearl Tower. They recalled what they knew thus far about the Dark One and his plans:

- The Dark One is obviously a high-level arcane magic user of some sort.
- When you first saw Rook, he mentioned that the Dark One had gone to Crossroads to recruit a team for a mission. That team was expected back in a week's time.

It had been four days since the rescue of Charlotte Gore. The group discussed options. Going back to Bainard's Keep was rejected because they didn't want to risk facing Velana in her element without Dimdar and Corey. Groop suggested going to Crossroads to learn who the Dark One had hired, or possibly to get hired for the "mission" and thereby learn the Dark One's plan. In the end the gang opted to go to Crossroads and, since speed seemed to be important, they elected to test their deductions about the teleport room below the castle.

The first person to step on a teleport circle was Elayna, the cleric. As a native of Crossroads it was felt she would be most likely to recognize the city and confirm the hypothesis. Elayna stepped onto the middle circle in the room and vanished.

She materialized in another room much like the one under the castle, but with a slightly more pronounced dank smell. She found the exit, a ceiling trap door with a ladder leading up to it, and opened it to discover a wide underground corridor. She returned to the room and teleported back to the castle room.

The rest of the group then went through the teleporter with her. They climbed into the larger tunnel and began to explore. Elayna related to them that Crossroads has a network of underground tunnels built long ago as the town grew up. They are mostly used by criminals and rogues, or those who want to travel through the city unseen. She had never been in them before, though.

As the group rounded a corner, they were set upon by a trio of gricks. The little monstrosities inflicted minor wounds on Groop and Perdue before being slain. As the party recovered their breath a thin, reedy voice hailed them from behind.

The voice's owner was a short, skinny man with pale skin and a haggard look. He wore plain clothes and carried a short sword. His nose twitched as he talked. The man gave his name as Templeton and he commended the party on their fighting skills in a way that may or may not have been sarcastic in nature. Sensing his nature, Gilead engaged the man in conversation about the virtues of rats versus gricks. The man became open and more friendly as he listened to a (false) tale of how the group ended up in the tunnels. In exchange for some food and wine, he drew them a map of the nearest route to the surface.

Before they could reach the surface, they were accosted and flanked by four large, well-dressed, obviously muscular men who looked vaguely Italian. They informed the party that this was a restricted area and "invited" them to accompany them to see their boss. The party complied cautiously. The men led them through the tunnels to a secret door that opened into the basement of a building. There they were confronted by a fifth man of obvious authority and power. He

questioned them and received the same cover story they had given to Templeton, plus the true addition that Templeton had sent them this way. The man asked them to remove their weapons and store them in a cabinet so they could be taken to meet the Guildmaster.

The Guildmaster's name was Foulon. He greeted them in a gravelly voice vaguely like Marlon Brando's and inquired about their dealing with a stranger in a dark cloak. Gilead was distressed to find that when he entered a circle near the Guildmaster's desk he was compelled to tell the truth without evasion. One he learned that the party was not employed by the Dark One, Foulon became more open and friendly to the group. He informed them that the Dark One had been in the Guild house three days before interviewing men for a job he wanted done. Foulon became suspicious when he learned that the men's memories of the meetings had been erased and he banned the Dark One from the Guild house. The Dark One had been seen the next day set up in a corner table at an inn called the Battered Shield. The Guildmaster did not know whether the stranger had hired anyone yet. After a few more pleasantries, Foulon authorized the group to use his name when approaching Dodger, the innkeeper there.

Dodger turned out to be a gregarious dwarf, quick to laugh and quicker to drink. They had several ales in his company and a quiet conversation in a corner booth. Dodger remembered the Dark One, all right -- he had spent most of the day in that very booth, talking to local thugs and cutthroats about a job. Dodger didn't know the details of the job but one of the interviewees, Bob, was in the bar as they spoke.

Bob was, in point of fact, trying to talk one of Dodger's prostitutes into doing him (Bob) for free or on credit. Bullseye tried to accost him only to get backhanded hard and sent flying. The whore was disgusted by the display and fled, leaving Bob without prospects. A generous mug of beer put him in a better mood, and with the halfling out of sight Bob saw in Groop a kindred spirit, sort of. He remembered his meeting with the Dark One. The stranger wanted a team of stealth experts to steal a series of artifacts from Crossroads, Tiburon, Tavor, and Gore's Cliff. Bob didn't pass muster, apparently. He remembers a slight buzzing in his head at the end of the meeting, but his memory remained intact (ie, made his saving throw). Bob didn't know who had been hired. Gilead found a new whore and paid for her to take care of Bob.

On advice from Dodger, the group headed out to Phindal's Livery and Courier Service, the premier stable in town. They needed to replace the gricks they'd killed, which turned out to be minor guardians put in place by the Thieve's Guild. They also knew from Dodger that if a group needed mounts, Phindal would be the most likely source to buy or rent them. They went to the stable and met Phindal, a well-mannered centaur. He agreed to find three gricks and deliver them to the Guild in the morning for a minor fee of 2gp each. When asked about recent livestock rentals, Phindal said that he was renting some mounts to the Midnight Crew, a band of unsavory types who had been based in Crossroads for several months. The gang's leader, a rough-looking guy named Kroger, had paid in advance for three weeks' rent on four mounts to be picked up at dawn. Kroger could be found at the Sounds of Silence, a disreputable bar and inn in a bad part of the Adventurers' Quarter.

With a little time to kill, the group visited Elayna's home temple for healing. At nightfall they made their way to the Sounds of Silence. At first they tried entering two at a time and blending with the crowd. Bullseye made small talk with a pretty halfling lass named Vonn. Gilead and Perdue accosted a dangerous-looking man who matched their description of Kroger but were rebuffed. Phyro tried to get information from the bartender but was clumsy about it and failed to learn anything. Groop won the admiration of the patrons with his talk and frequent toasts to battle, scars, glory, and the denigration of spell-slingers. Gilead and Perdue tried talking to Sykes, the owner, about hiring the Midnight Crew and were told to go to room 13 upstairs. They knocked on the room several times before Kroger appeared from the room next door. He listened to their pitch and said simply, "Not interested." Discouraged, the pair went back down and rounded up the party to leave. Their plan was to wait in ambush for the Crew at Phindal's.

Less than a block away from the Sounds of Silence, the monk and mage were struck from behind by arrows. The rest of the party gathered and found themselves engaging a huge barbarian in bone armor: Trask, the fighting muscle of the Midnight Crew. He flew into a blood rage and wounded the monk severely. Seeing no bow in Trask's hands, Gilead suspected another enemy in the shadows. She used Haste on as many of the group as possible and circled around the inn with the cleric behind her. At the back end of the alley she encountered Nedry, sneak thief and backstabbing rogue of the Crew.

In the street, the battle grew more grim. Kroger appeared whirling his two-bladed sword at blinding speed. Phyro felt the impact of three magic missiles and turned in time to spot a tiny figure on the roof of a building across the street: Vonn, the halfling. He cast a flaming sphere at her and failed. Above Phyro a spectral hand appeared and touched him, inflicting massive electrical damage and leaving the sorcerer comatose on the street. Kroger's blade bit into Groop and Perdue in turn while his high armor class protected him from their blows.

Nedry was the first to fall. Gilead's staff and Elayna's sword were too much for him in a frontal fight and he had nowhere to run. Bullseye climbed to the roof of the far building and harangued Vonn with thrown daggers. Her spectral hand vanished. Groop and Perdue made headway against Trask and Kroger but continued to take damage. Gilead cast a flaming sphere and Elayna pierced his back with an arrow, prompting Trask to turn and charge them down the alley. With one less enemy, Perdue and Groop were able to finish off Kroger through perseverance and ferocity. As the haste spell wore off, the dark monk fell.

Groop charged the other barbarian with the last energy of his rage. The barbarians met with a bloodcurdling scream of fury. Trask struck first and with a mighty blow sundered Groop's beloved axe. His victory was short lived, though, as a deadly kick from Perdue snapped the barbarian's neck.

In the street, Elayna hurried to help Phyro with a healing spell. The sorcerer recovered in time to see Vonn cast a fireball at the monk and rogue on the rooftop. Both were severely hurt but not stopped, and Phyro gained a sense of how the fireball spell is cast. Gilead distracted Vonn with a dancing lights spell as the monk closed in. He dealt a non-lethal blow that knocked the halfling unconscious.

Under questioning, Vonn admitted that the Dark One had hired them to steal a series of priceless artifacts: Montagne's cloak, Tiburon's shield, Gore's armor and Tavor's spell books. They had been given a chest like the ones the group had found with Rook and Lycast and instructions to teleport the artifacts to the Dark One using the chest. They were to steal the cloak the next night, with the schedule for the rest undefined as yet.

The city watch was happy to take custody of Vonn, who had 17 outstanding warrants on her as part of the Midnight Crew. The players earned a total reward of 20,000gp for the capture/killing of the Crew and the thanks and goodwill of the City Council. They also took several significant items from the Crew, including:

- Vonn's Ring of Protection +2, which Phyro seized.
- Vonn's Brooch of Missile Shielding, which protects from magic missile attacks, now adorns Gilead's cloak.
- Kroger's Bracers of Armor +4 and two-bladed sword are now in Perdue's possession.
- Groop replaced his destroyed axe with Trask's masterwork greataxe and took the dead man's rare bone armor for its monetary value.
- Phyro, from seeing Vonn cast a fireball spell and studying it, now has the ability to cast that spell himself.

The group spent the night at Dodger's, then returned to Gore's Cliff via the teleporter.

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This adventure was packed with high-level characters and a very bloody climactic fight. The Midnight Crew were 5th and 6th level characters with magic items and special abilities as good as the players' abilities or better. The gang fought cleverly and well and took advantage of their numbers and abilities to counter the threats. I can tell it was a good fight because when it ended you were pretty much out of spells and damn low on hit points, but everyone was alive.

Ellen and Kevin: it will not shock you to learn that because of the high-level encounters, almost everyone went up a level today. Dimdar and Corey are the only 4th levels left, and I'm deliberately holding Ian back from 7th level until you two catch up (he's 65 XP short of 7th level). When you get back, let's figure out how we can get you into the action again.