



EDGE OF ANARCHY

CURSE OF THE CRIMSON THRONE: CHAPTER ONE

Korvosa, the Jewel of Varisia, has long sparkled on Varisia's southern shore. Established 300 years ago by Cheliox at the height of that empire's expansion, the city now commands its own destiny. A line of Korvosan kings and queens emerged to rule the city, establishing an infamous seat of power—the Crimson Throne. Rulers have sat upon the Crimson Throne for more than a century, and the city has flourished. Yet the monarchy always seems on the brink of disaster. The Crimson Throne is not a prize to be won—it is a curse. No monarch of Korvosa has died of old age, and none have produced an heir while ruling. Even though King Eodred II controls Korvosa more fully than any previous monarch, that control remains tenuous, and many secretly count the days until their latest king falls to what they call the Curse of the Crimson Throne.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The city of Korvosa began 300 years ago, in 4407 AR, when the Empire of Cheliox expanded north into Varisia. Here, the Chelaxians found a large tribe of Shoanti barbarians dwelling around an immense pyramid on the shores of a deep bay—a perfect site for a city. Much bloodshed eventually left the Shoanti defeated, driven back to the harsh Cinderlands, and the city that grew on the site was named after the field marshal who led his army to victory there. Yet even as Korvosa flourished and grew, surviving even the collapse of the Chelish empire, few bothered to ask why the Shoanti had dwelt here. None of Korvosa's citizens, from beggar to king, realized that the Shoanti were guardians, that deep inside the pyramid destined to become Castle Korvosa hid a great and terrible evil: the *Fangs of Kazavon*, relics of one of Golarion's most powerful and deadly dragons. For the past 300 years, Korvosa has grown, unaware that the city's foundation rests on a history of evil and cruelty.

Today, Korvosa's reigning King Eodred Arabasti II is feared by all the right people. His rule is steady, even if his insatiate appetites drain the city's coffers. His ability to navigate the rocks and shoals of Chelish diplomacy earned the city favorable trade agreements with the Old Empire, but rumors persisted of the king's womanizing habits and his spendthrift ways. Despite his fondness for a soft touch, he has to date produced no heir to the throne, the latest in a line of rulers affected by the Curse of the Crimson Throne. Edicts proclaim Eodred II the Saffron King, likening his reign to one of abundance, in which honey and spice flood the markets. The city's downtrodden have another name for Eodred, though—the Stirge King, a man whose squandering ways are slowly bleeding his city dry.

Whispers of Eodred II's taste for scandalously young companionship have dogged the king throughout his rule, and thus when he finally wed, it was no surprise that his bride was barely a third of his age. Queen Ileosa was a woman of breathtaking beauty, with red hair like the sunset, chaste alabaster skin, and features so fetching many claimed her mother must have been a nymph queen, as surely no mortal woman could give birth to a beauty such as she. Most of Korvosa's nobles worry of the dangers of placing a trophy wife within hands' reach of the Crimson Throne, but Ileosa's interest in the city seemed secondary to the life of luxury—and with the more-than-competent Seneschal Neolandus Kalepopolis guarding Castle Korvosa's interests, these noble families feel they have little to worry about.

They are about to learn how wrong they are.

Ileosa's Story

The queen was born Ileosa Arvanxi to one of Cheliox's more successful noble families. When she came of age, most expected her to marry into a more powerful Chelish

line, yet she scandalized her family by abandoning Cheliox and sailing to the city of Korvosa. For Ileosa was nothing if not ambitious—she didn't see herself as the wife of an important Chelish dignitary or noble, but as a queen.

She knew much of Eodred II's tastes and desires before she arrived, so that when she presented herself to him, he fell in love immediately. The two were wed after a scandalously short courtship, and, perhaps the most shocking move of all, Eodred turned out his entire harem in favor of his new queen. Barely 17 years old when she took Eodred II's side in 4704 AR, Queen Ileosa has managed a minor miracle in the past 4 years—she's single-handedly shifted the dislike and disapproval away from King Eodred to herself with her open distaste for Korvosa (a city she's been heard to call “a backwater colonial village” more than once).

Ileosa herself bears no true love for Eodred II—he has, to her, always been nothing but an endurance test, a necessary stepping stone on her path to becoming the ruler of Korvosa. While she loathes the city, she does not loathe its riches. Eodred II, in her eyes, was an old man, but it soon became apparent that he was not as old as she anticipated—his health remained good and no sign of the Crimson Throne's curse seemed evident there. As the months turned to years, Ileosa's patience wore thin, and her thoughts turned more and more to regicide. Yet the young queen was also a coward and unimaginative, a combination that kept these murderous thoughts nothing more than idle fancies.

That all changed a few months ago.

On one of her weekly visits to Castle Korvosa's treasury (visits that required surreptitiously “borrowing” the key from the Castle's seneschal), the queen discovered a secret door. Believing she'd found a hidden treasury, she investigated the room beyond, only to be disappointed to find it empty save for an old stone coffer on a pedestal. She didn't recognize the Shoanti warning runes carved throughout the room, nor did her vain mind notice the feel of menace and evil in the air. She opened the coffer, and her life was changed forever. For inside that simple stone coffer rested the *Fangs of Kazavon*, and their evil had been waiting for this day. It was but the smallest fragment of Kazavon's spirit that burst from his fangs and infused the young queen, but even that small shard of cruelty and blind ambition was enough. Ileosa closed the coffer, resealed the secret door, and returned to her chambers in the castle above, her mind changed for the worse. Gone were any shreds of cowardice, replaced by ambition. Gone too were any fragments of self-doubt, replaced by a cruel imagination capable of envisioning all manner of depravations. Queen Ileosa died that fateful day, only to be reborn as something new—something wholly evil.

While plans for a personal guard of warrior women, the eradication of Korvosa's undesirable poor and ethnic

citizens, dramatic increases to the castle's wealth, and even a method to preserve her beauty and youth forever formed in her mind, none of them could begin as long as she was not in control. First and foremost, Eodred had to go. Ileosa needed him to die swiftly, yet that death needed to come from what appeared to be natural causes, or at least the anarchic cruelty of an outside source. She needed a period of mourning where she could capitalize upon Korvosa's well-wishes and pity to put her true plans into motion, and charges of regicide would endanger that. To aid in laying her plans, she allied with an order of assassins called the Red Mantis, asking them for aid in setting her plans in motion. Yet their codes against the assassination of monarchs left her in a lurch—if Eodred was to die, it had to be at her own hands.

So she turned to Venster Arabasti, the King's deformed stepbrother. Unable to gain the throne himself—since his birth to Queen Domina was never on the public records—Venster had long nurtured a deep streak of hidden jealousy for the successes of his younger brother Eodred II. For his part, Eodred II remained gracious, allowing his stepbrother to remain in Castle Korvosa for fear that Venster could not survive on his own. Eodred sees Venster as a submissive idiot, incapable of caring for himself or succeeding at anything in life. Venster, for his part, has rarely displayed any evidence to the contrary, and he rarely leaves his attic suite, spending most of his copious free time in futile hobbies such as playing cards. Now and then, as Eodred is seized with pity or boredom, he visits Venster and plays cards with him, even though the visits generally end in arguments and insults.

In Venster, Ileosa saw her opportunity. She seduced him, played upon his hidden jealousy, and convinced Venster to take part in Eodred's assassination. To this end, she gave Venster a specialized poison, a venom secured from her Red Mantis contacts (while they do not commit regicide, they have no compunction about supplying those who would). The poison closely mimicked the effects of a rapid form of leprosy, yet one that, being poison, resisted attempts to cure it as if it were a disease—one of many ingenious methods of murder developed by the Red Mantis. With Ileosa's aid, Venster coated the upper half of his playing cards with the poison, so when Eodred (among other things, a compulsive nail-biter) played, he unknowingly coated his fingers and nails in the stuff, ensuring a slow but steady exposure to the poison. It took little prodding from the young queen to convince Eodred to visit his brother, which exposed the king to her horrid toxin.

His usefulness nearing an end, Ileosa began to refuse Venster's requests for companionship, and the stepbrother recently tried to force her to comply by threatening to reveal to the seneschal the true nature of the king's

"illness." Himself relatively feeble, and his presence all but hidden from the public eye, it was an easy matter for Ileosa to murder him—she walled up his corpse in the castle dungeon, secure in the knowledge that Venster's only regular visitor lay upon his deathbed. Yet his disappearance was noticed—in this case, by Neolandus Kalepopolis, the castle seneschal. Unknown to Ileosa, Neolandus knew about the theft of the treasury key, and in secret watched the queen. He suspected she was up to something, and when Venster vanished, his suspicions were confirmed. Neolandus's mistake was in confronting the queen privately, giving her the benefit of the doubt. She responded by sending the Red Mantis after him—his role in the castle not quite protected by the Mantis's ban on regicide. Neolandus survived the assassination attempt, but only barely. The seneschal went into hiding among contacts in Old Korvosa, afraid and powerless to move against the queen as long as her Red Mantis allies remain strong in the region. Quietly, he began researching the queen's sudden change in spirit, yet he remains unable and unwilling to go public with his condemnations.

As this Adventure Path begins, Eodred still lives, but the venom has wreaked havoc on his health. He has spent the last several weeks in seclusion in Castle Korvosa, and despite the work of his staff, rumors of his ill health are spreading. Queen Ileosa has taken advantage of this time to become more of a ruler in the public eye, yet recently, flaws in her plans began to manifest.

Queen Ileosa worries about Neolandus. Her Red Mantis allies have promised her that Neolandus will die soon, yet he is not the only fly in her ointment. For her plans to progress, and she increased the dosage of Eodred's death sentence, secretly lacing the tea he drinks with poison. The king is about to die, and Korvosa is about to plunge over the edge into anarchy.

Adventure Summary

The campaign begins as the PCs are drawn together by a common thread—a cruel old criminal named Gaedren Lamm. Given the chance to bring him to justice or avenge themselves against him by a mysterious Varisian woman named Zellara, the PCs confront Gaedren in the old fishery that serves as his hideout. Therein, they find two surprises—a brooch stolen from Queen Ileosa and Zellara's severed head. Zellara's been dead for weeks, and now her Harrow deck serves as a receptacle for her ghost, creating a strange but helpful ally that follows the PCs through the majority of this Adventure Path.

When the PCs emerge from the fishery, they learn that King Eodred Arabasti II has died, and the city of Korvosa has plunged into chaos. After meeting with the grieving queen to return the stolen brooch, they are recruited by the Korvosan Guard to help bring the city back under

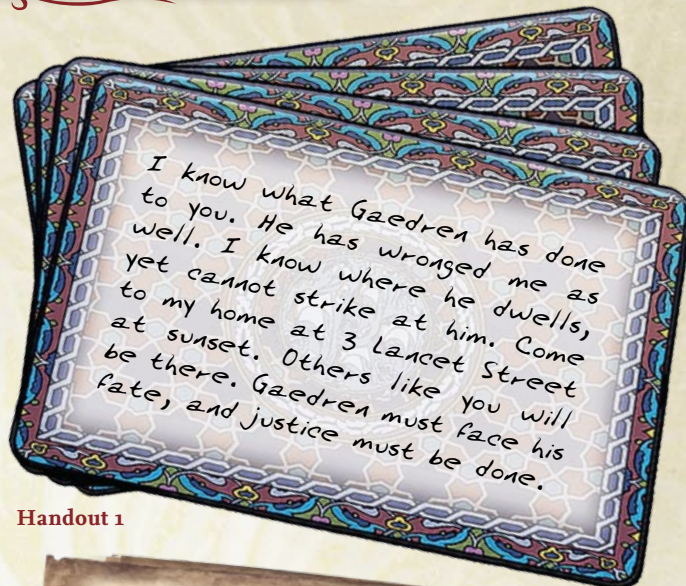
control. After dealing with guards gone rogue, handling a delicate political situation involving a local crime lord, and coping with all manner of chaos in the streets, the PCs are called upon to apprehend a woman named Trinia Sabor, who might just be the one who assassinated King Eodred II. After capturing her and turning her over to the Guard, the PCs must recover the missing body of a Shoanti warrior before his kin declare war on the city. The adventure ends as the PCs attend the supposed execution of Trinia Sabor, only to become caught up in the chaos of her unexpected rescue by one of Korvosa's most legendary heroes—a masked man named Blackjack.

PART ONE: HAUNTED FORTUNES

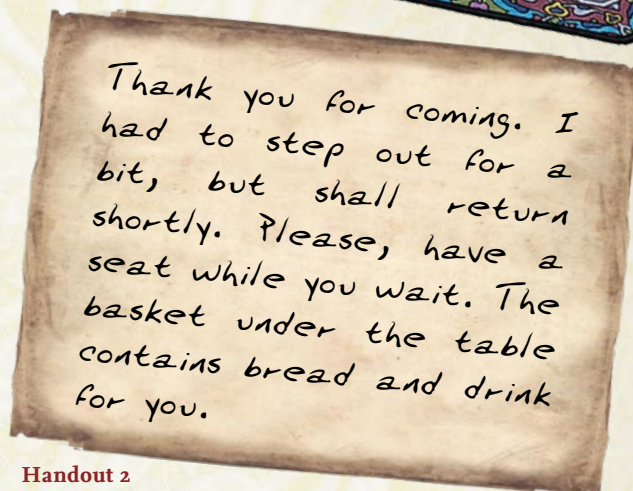
Curse of the Crimson Throne assumes that all of the PCs have a shared nemesis from the start: local crime lord and villain Gaedren Lamm, a deplorable crook well past his prime, yet possessed of a tenacious ability to stay one step ahead of the Korvosan Guard while maintaining complete control of his band of young pickpockets recruited from the city's street urchins and orphans. The *Curse of the Crimson Throne Player's Guide* lists several backgrounds players might choose for their characters—these traits grant small bonuses to their stats, but more importantly for the start of the campaign, they give the characters an in-game reason to come together. Each PC has been wronged in some manner by Gaedren Lamm, so each PC should have a built-in reason to reply to the mysterious Harrow card that appears in his life as this adventure begins.

The PCs aren't the only ones who have been wronged by Gaedren. Among his plentiful other victims is a Varisian woman named Zellara, a fortune teller who, a year ago, lost her only son to Lamm. After her Harrow deck (her only source of income and an heirloom handed down to her by her mother) was pickpocketed by one of Lamm's Little Lambs, Zellara's son Eran took it upon himself to get back the deck. He was murdered by Gaedren's thugs and his head and hands were returned to Zellara in a box as a gift and a threat. Zellara went to the Korvosan Guard, but they had little additional time or resources to devote to Lamm. The Guard told her, "We know he's trouble, and we're doing the best we can to find him—sorry for your loss, but that's all we can do for you now."

Frustrated, desperate, and harboring a growing need for revenge, Zellara took it upon herself to track down Lamm, drawing upon the Harrow's divinations for aid. Her latent magical skill, combined with her persistence and obsession, unfortunately gave her results. She discovered the location of Gaedren's current hideout, but was herself seen. Gaedren's thugs grabbed her and brought her below the old fishery to stand tall before the master. Old Lamm was impressed that she went through so much trouble, but when she spat on



Handout 1



Handout 2

him and cursed him, his anger got the better of him and he ordered her killed. Her body he fed to his alligator, but he saved her head. Now, he keeps it in a box in his lair alongside her stolen cards. These cards, bloodstained and discarded, became the focus for Zellara's anguish and despair. Her spirit infused them, haunted them, and now she intends to use her newfound supernatural power to bring down Gaedren Lamm.

Unlike a true ghost, Zellara's influence doesn't extend far beyond her cards and her home—they are her links to the living world. She can sense the anguish and despair of all those in Korvosa whom Gaedren's evil has touched and hurt. She casts her mind outward, and before long narrows down her search to a small group of those in whom she senses the greatest honor, the greatest strength, the greatest potential, and the greatest anger. She senses the PCs.

Through this shared anguish, Zellara can manifest phantasms in the minds of the PCs, using them as a focus for her to create visual and tactile illusions. Using this power, she manifests a short message for the PCs on the backs of Harrow cards that match the characters' personalities and strengths. Each card appears somewhere in some place only that PC is sure to notice it. A wizard might reach for his