

Extracts from the Journal of Irwin, First Mate of the Black Scab

Part V – Deep Water Isle

In which we attempt to gain mastery of Old Magic, finally get hold of the Magic Box and the role of the Kalid in all of this is revealed.

Steel Day 16th Day of Bone Moon, 17 AR Barracks, Wolfhold, Orin Rakatha

Good old Wertigo. He has returned from a mission to the Oracle, he asked it where the Philtre of Eternity lay. The answer: "The true Philtre of Eternity is wrapped up in that which you and your crewmates seek. It is in the possession of Captain Irontongue and is currently located on Deepwater Isle, Archipelago, in the lands of Thranduil."

I make sure he is rewarded and given the money he wants to empower his sword. I vaguely remember tales of Deepwater Isle, it is reputed to lie at the tip of the largely uncharted Archipelago, South of Umbar. These islands are places of great mystery and strange happenings. Here ancient spirits of the 1st Age are rumoured still to be found, whilst on other islands there are tales of cannibals, Pukel men and even wilder creatures. The islands draw all manner of exiles and outlaws, and others who have reason to hide from the forces of Gondor, Umbar, and Harad.

Earth Day 3rd Day of Fools Moon, 17 AR Barracks, Wolfhold, Orin Rakatha

This day I wrote to Selena, of the Wolfhold Ambassadors, our contact with our Mystery Sponsor. I requested passage for the Crew to Deepwater Isle, via the World Window, the last known location of the Philtre of Eternity. If this is not possible I request passage to Umbar, from where we may find passage to the Isle.

Earth Day 24th Day of Fools Moon, 17 AR Barracks, Wolfhold, Orin Rakatha

Apparently Niamh had sent an 'edited' report of the mission to Murandir to Duke Hanrow. He replied, somehow aware that some details were not revealed to him. He noted the area of Murandir we had visited was rich in the Old Ways. He has seen that Dagor Starglade was indeed tainted in some way before being slain by Sir Vigilaine's Grandfather. That a Sindar Elf has returned from the dead is of great significance, unheard of before. He named Dagor's Black Star-Ore Sword as Anguriel, a once powerful blade forged long ago, now diminished somewhat, but still bearing a great curse. He wrote that water is now ready to repay its debt, that its current is strong, and that once we are swept off our feet there is no telling where it may take us.

Moon Day 28th Day of Fools Moon, 17 AR Barracks, Wolfhold, Orin Rakatha

A reply returns. The usual Wolfhold preamble about how useless, disloyal etc we are. Apparently Deepwater Isle does not exist on any charts they have! Instead passage is arranged to near Umbar, in a couple of moons.

Water Day 7th Day of Planting Moon, 17 AR Barracks, Wolfhold, Orin Rakatha

I meet Angel in the Tavern, he has been troubled by dreams and visions since putting the Helm of Knowledge on, he is exhausted and half mad I think, a broken man. As he slips into coma, I find the Helm on me instead!

Sun Day 11th Day of Planting Moon, 17 AR

Barracks, Wolfhold, Orin Rakatha

Troubling dreams. Never feel rested since putting the Helm on. Can't wait for the slot to travel to Umbar. Must go now instead, I gather who I can and tell them we leave tomorrow.

Present are:

Me Sutnac (Bosun) - Half Orc, Priest, Dark Brethren Anthrax (Ship's Surgeon) - Half Orc, Priest, Dark Path Cutthroat Jack
(Lookout) - Corsair, Journeyman Wolfhold Scout
D'Archon (Navigator) - Corsair, Priest Warden
Spingle (Ship's Lucky Goblin) - Goblin, Veteran Ranger
Dudge - Human, Journeyman Wolfhold Scout
Silas - Sladd, High Priest Reaper
Garret - Nyad, Journeyman Pathfinder
Wertigo - Human, Barbarian Marauder
Walker - Human, Journeyman Pathfinder

Fire Day 16th day of Planting moon 17 AR Rainbow Lake, Central Orin Rakatha

Crew 11

Morale Fair (crew a little confused)

Supplies Good

Weather Clear skies, no wind

The sun is setting. Rainbow Lake shimmers. I dive in and swim. There a brief pause, then the others follow. I put my head under, then swim down, down.

The water shifts, my feet feel smooth mud below them. I push up and suddenly I'm standing waist deep in a flowing river. The others break the water, each with an air-hungry gasp. It's night, we wade up to a steep bank and make our way up. Soaked, we regroup, groans echo from the trees, all around are Tide Zombies, every time they grasp one of us, in their unbreakable grip comes the continuing sensation of drowning. Until they are hacked to bits of course! We fight a steady retreat, trying to move away from the river. We meet Corky, a local

Buccaneer, he has heard the sound of fighting, he says there is a tavern nearby, The Doom Bar where safety may be found, so we follow. He says the zombies swarm near the river since incomers came and 'messed with the waters'.

We meet, strange tattooed tribal figures, bearing clubs. Pukel-men, Corky calls 'em. They are quite mad, a strange running fight ensues, they are tough, with strange powers of the elements.

We arrive at the Doom Bar. It is a fine place. The owner is Flotsam, a thickset dwarf, the type you don't mess with. We meet Wyatt and Howarth - keen on gambling, 'The Guv'nor' - an old Green Wizard who came to Deepwater years ago to do something, but seems to have failed and is now a washed-up old soak. He vomits on the floor. Bilge - a local Buccaneer and mate of Corky. Lantus - a marooned mariner (*Later note: Kalid spy*). There are two Easterlings who annoy us, so we cut ones throat and Harm the other one, Flotsam takes a bit of calming down. What are Easterlings doing here? The Buccaneers talked of a Ghost Ship that had arrived a few weeks ago and has troubled the waters around the Isle.

We meet a few of Captain Irontongue's crew, confirming that he must still be here. One, a woman, massages D'Archons shoulders for him, rendering him paralysed! While this is going on I find one of them standing alone outside, I cut him from ear to ear, stab him in the guts a few times then kick him into the bushes. They don't even notice! Then the Captains new First Mate arrives. He is a real bruiser, plenty of Mordor-Orc ancestry in him, carries a great two-hander cleaver. He throws his weight around, the way that gets you respect in Mordor and probably keeps him ahead of his crew. For a while it looks like a fight, but it seems there more to him. A business conversation is struck up. He is the First Mate of 'The Red Wound', Irontongue's new ship. He tells us Irontongue has tasked him with killing us all and taking the Key to open The Magic Box from our broken corpses. However he would prefer to do it the easy way, the captain isn't really interested in the maps, paper etc in the box (i.e. the stuff we want), just the sparkly, valuable things. A deal is struck, we will meet the next night, they will bring the box, us the key, it will be opened and each side will take it in turn to take an item. They leave, I don't know whether it's a stitch up or not, but it I decide to run with it anyway.

Flotsam closes up, he tells us his ale is enchanted, if trouble approaches we will be woken by a full bladder. Flotsam knows much of what occurs on the Isle, he tells us a group of outsiders have claimed the river as their own, they are trying to bend it to their own will with their strange magics. We assume he means the Kalid and their Tide Zombies. As if to warn us, he says they are misguided, as water always finds its own path, and there is much 'Deep Water' here that they could never control. We make camp nearby.

Steel Day 17th Day of Planting Moon, 17 AR (Approximate equivalent) Deepwater Isle, Archipelago, Thranduil

Crew 11

Morale Excellent (plenty ale and fighting)

Supplies Excellent (well stocked Inn)

Weather Rain threatens, but never comes

I wake up with a full bladder. Judging by the fact that most of the group emerge at the same time to have a slash, trouble must be coming. We gather at the Inn. A group of a dozen or so Pukel-Men approach and charge, waving their clubs. A shaman watches his braves but doesn't really get involved, as we win he stops all who would pursue him by sinking them into the mud.

We decide to follow the river to the sea, to find 'Deep Water', and possibly wisdom. We fight 'Mooks' great hairy beasts that the Pukel-Men seem to be able to drive. We arrive at a great expanse of sand-dunes. We see a single elf in black being chased at a distance by a Black Troll and Uruks. Seeing us they come to investigate, they appear to covet the banner – The Black Sail. We fight. We unleash a full range of prepared ritual evil invocations on them and they fall easily. Jack tries to talk with the elf, she is evasive but agrees to find our camp and talk later.

We see a Kalid scout. We fight sand creatures. We are limited by a lack of mages, a strange fight occurs where we all take it in turns with a couple of ensorcelled blades to fight the sand creatures. After this, the Pukel-Man Shaman comes from the direction of the woods, he wishes to talk, but his language is strange. By concentrating, the Helm helps me understand a little, he talks of 'Old Magics' and 'The Way of Water' and something about us being tested before being allowed more knowledge.

We catch sight of a great dune, the last before the sea. A pagoda is erected there, occupied by figures in red - clearly an Easterling encampment. We prepare, they come to meet us on the flood-plain by the river. They are strong and are bolstered by Uruks, a tough fight that pushes us to the limit. The Black Sail is now indispensable, we fight around the Banner of Morgoth, accepting its sustaining, healing evil power. Silas often holds it, we mock the Reaper for giving out so much healing, Anthrax calls him 'Matron' in honour. It really pisses him off, so it sticks.

A lizard man, one from the group we met following breaking into 'The House of Shadows' reveals its hiding place. It beckons us towards the sea. This place is what we would call the Temple of Water Old Magic. In the Deep Waters, The Water Oracle is sometimes revealed. It seems the Easterlings were unable to access it so were stopping others getting to it. As we have the Helm of Knowledge, we hold water in our debt so may enter.

We walk onto the beach – the Temple itself, it doesn't look like a temple but I guess that's the point. The day is starting to fade. I discard my boots and weapons, save for a knife and walk straight into the surf. I don't feel the cold. Before I know it I'm up to my ears, I have to jump to keep my head above the waves. My chain-mail weighs me down. Vertigo, D'Archon and Silas aren't far behind, the rest stand in the shallows. Then we see it, a dark shape swimming below the waters, after a couple of minutes, it comes closer, the small group gathers. It breaks the surface, a creature as ancient as the seas themselves, a strange creature of the dark, lightless trenches of the ocean. It touches each of us in turn and whispers timeless secrets of the deep in our ears, that I will not record even here. And with that, it simply sinks back below the waves.

We rest in the Easterling camp, they have left bottles of wine, dates and other delicacies. We eat and drink heartily. We find a big bag of Rock-Salt. Dudge thinks the Easterlings may use it to hurt the tide zombies (*Later note: true*). Although, not from Thranduil, I find I like Dudge more and more, and regard her as a true Corsair. She is smart and seems to make up for some of my short-comings, working things out, thinking calmly when I am angry.

On the dunes, just short of the woods we meet the Kalid, walking up from the river. They are a strange group led by a 'Tidemaster' dressed similar to Merrick who we met on Murandir, he has waves painted on his face. They seek the Helm of Knowledge I wear, which they covet. Again they use magics strange to us. We are victorious.

The group fought well today. Our group is changing, the surviving core of crew, me, Anthrax, Sutnac and Jack remains. We have lost some of our original crew to the humdrum of Valley life. But new recruits like Dudge, Garret, Silas, Angel and Wertigo have all taken to Corsair life well and they are trusted as if they had sailed on *The Black Scab* themselves. I am pleased.

We return to the Doom Bar, Flotsam, the Guv'nor and Wyatt are in. A large detachment of Gondorian soldiers arrive. They are led by a finely armoured Knight. It is unheard of for them to travel this far from Gondor. They are looking for 2 fugitives, I note Wyatt has hidden from them. They are arrogant these 'true' descendants of Numenor, those that would call my kin 'Black Numenoreans'. I anger and provoke a fight. Two great lines clash across the Tavern. The knight is strong indeed, his line is supported by Wizards using light magic and healers. But we are fierce too, one of them falls and their resources are low, it looks like it might turn in our favour. The Knight invokes a mighty word of power of the first age (Turin Turambar!) all of us are flattened and stunned. The Gondor-men gather our weapons, we are defeated, humiliated even. We have to suffer the indignity of so-called Gondorian mercy, they allow us to live. They leave to seek Wyatt and Howarth.

Some of the locals start up an ancient Thranduil card game called Tontine. The locals advise us not to play it as it only played by desperate men. It needs to be played with a special deck, that Wyatt and Howarth seem to have on them (is this why the Gondorians seek them?). It can also only be played at an auspicious location. Deepwater Isle is steeped in Old Magic, so fits the bill, Flotsam, who is wise in the ways of such things, also announces this is an auspicious time. Each player stakes something of value, and takes a major arcane card - the nature of that card gives some clue as to their fate should they win or lose. It goes in rounds, each round someone is eliminated until there is a victor, whose life is literally changed.

Gelias the elf is seen, I head away from the camp to talk with her as she sees the Tavern as dangerous. Gelias is of the House of Dagor Starglade. It is cordial, I even shake her hand – I've touched a real Thranduil elf, and lived! Dagor wants the Philtre of Eternity. I try to strike a deal, I say I know where it is (the Captain has it), if they agree to slay its owner, I get to keep anything else they have (i.e. the Magic Box). She says she can't agree to that. There seems to be an undercurrent that Dagor is tainted, perhaps intolerably so to other elves, including his own house. I get angry with her, I get away with this too, somehow. The meeting is finished.

Arriving back at the camp I see the new First Mate and the rest of Irontongue's crew disappearing off. The box opening has occurred as arranged last night. We took a the journal, some papers and finally some old rag with runes crudely stitched upon it. They took some amulets and a ring and unfortunately the map! Wertigo had a good look at it first, memorised it

and drew it for us later. Dudge oversaw proceedings and I am disappointed that the boys didn't start on them (*Later note: not disappointed in hindsight, we couldn't have done better!*).

The Pukel-man shaman arrives, he leads us out to beside the nearby stockade and bids us take a few breaths of fumes from a heavily herb-laced fire. We see visions that tell us more of Old Magic. We get the impression that the knowledge we have received from the Oracle today must be unlocked in some way, that its going to be painful, as if the land itself is going to raise up and beat it out of us. At the end Timeus, the knowledgeable practitioner of Old Magic we met on Murandir is summoned, looking rather surprised, the Pukel-man seems pissed off by this, as if it was unlooked for.

Timeus is rather annoyed we have unwittingly summoned him. He seemed to be in the middle of something, making a deal for some astral maps which he has in his hands. Our summoning removed him from the midst of the deal, taking the maps without paying for them. He said this would therefore be the second of our three meetings and he would discuss three subjects with us. Timeus is smart and useful but also annoying and baffling, I wish he would speak plainly, and that he did not make my head hurt every time he talks of Old Magic. Seeing my annoyance, Spingle takes up some of the questioning. His choice of questions is inspired and gets us some very useful information. I award him the honorary position of the crew's 'Lucky Goblin'. We now rub him vigorously before each fight, to gain luck.

We discussed Merrick and the Kalid Waterweavers. He said they had arrived on the 'Ghost Ship', they were using it to keep others away from the Temple of Water. However they were unable to access it or the Water Oracle, without the Helm of Knowledge. They also held the river, where they used the waters to create Tide Zombies. Their actions are directed by the Archmage of Water, who is elsewhere. We discussed Old Magic as we have found the Temple of Water Old Magic. Another place exists on Thranduil, the Temple of All Elements, only here can the mark of Old Magic be removed from those touched by it. It struck us that this could mean me (the black mark on my hand), or the powers of Captain Irontongue or The Archmage of Water. It lies in the north, near the headwaters of the river Gelion. I remember from old maps that this is in the land of Lindon. Timeus is annoyed we have made a criminal of him (how ironic!). We make a deal, the star charts can be used to discern individuals futures, he will do this for us next time we meet. In return we agree to give him the Helm of Knowledge when its wearer (me currently) is slain.

The locals say the Pukel-Men are massing. Flotsam says they do this from time to time. He says the nearby stockade is the best place to defend against them. We hold the stockade against wave after wave of Pukel-Men. Flotsam is one of the finest warriors I have ever seen.

We hear drums everywhere. Finally the Shaman arrives. He invokes a great effect of magnetism, all of our weapons and armour are attracted to each other, causing us to be stuck together in a great tangle. Somehow the Shaman judges we have suffered enough, and have sacrificed enough blood and that the point has been made. Perhaps this is punishment for summoning the Water Oracle.

We return to the Doom Bar for some 'refreshment' then crawl to bed.

Sun Day 18th Day of Planting Moon, 17 AR Deepwater Isle, Archipelago, Thranduil

Crew 11 (+2 hired hands)

Morale Good (back on the ocean wave)

Supplies Excellent (fully stocked hold)

Tacking against fresh northerly wind

The winner from the Tontine game, a local Buccaneer, came past the bar this morning, alone. I think he had chosen the Wheel of Fortune from the major Arcana. His pouches were almost bursting with gold and jewellery. He casually mentioned he had just met the most beautiful woman on Deepwater Isle, who's father had consented to let him marry her. He carried on walking away from the bar. I tried to follow him and cut his throat and rob him, but I tripped on a tree stump. I tried to get up quickly but I slipped in some mud I hadn't seen, even though it hadn't rained for days. Jack and Anthrax charged after him but both smacked their head on overhanging trees. He just ambled off, whistling a happy tune.

Corky, the local Buccaneer returned, he said that Captain Irontongue and 'The Red Wound' sailed away at dawn. We walked towards the river to deal with the Kalid. We soon meet some sentries along with Merrick and Lantus, the Buccaneer from the Inn, now revealed as a Kalid

spy. The two of them run off, whilst we fight the sentries. We continue, we meet a pack of Tide Zombies, throwing salt over them weakens them, stopping them 'drowning' us. They still need a good beating though. Finally we get sight of the river. Merrick has a large group of troops with diverse skills. Whilst insults are traded, one of the group performs a ritual over an open fire, he throws a vessel of water across it, the steam rises and coalesces into a vision of a lithe, wiry Thissessin in a shimmering black robe. It is the Archmage of Water, he berates Merrick for summoning him. Battle is joined, they use strange water magic, including 'drenching' us, making us far more susceptible to lightning magic. I think the Archmage is only partly there, he defends effectively when attacked, but is more interested in observing the winner. Finally Merrick and his crew finally fall. The Archmage-vision fades.

We rest for a time in the Inn. We gather as many supplies as possible and engage the services of Corky and Bilge as crew for a voyage. We scour the shores of Deepwater Isle and eventually find the Kalid's 'Ghost Ship'. It is quite an average vessel in truth, 'ghostly' in the sense that, the bodies of the previous crew still litter the deck. We clean her out and stock her. She is not a great vessel, a little shallow of draught, and broad of beam for the open ocean, but she'll do. We rename her 'the Ghost', I suppose that makes me Captain of sorts. We set sail for the Lindon coast, in search of the Temple of all Elements.