

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

Part IV – Murandir Again

Where the quest for the Great Elf Treasure really begins

Steel Day 15th day of Hunting Moon 16AR

Walking to the Tavern tonight, I felt something in my shoe. I joined the lads in the Tavern, I looked in my shoe and found it was a big flat pebble, worn smooth by water. Both sides had writing on them, one side said 'Sorry, I missed you, been away on sabbatical'. The other read 'throw me through a window and ask for Ramat'. Strange...

Steel Day 29th day of Hunting Moon 16AR

Recurring dreams again, hoards of zombies stumbling down the beach, their hands grasp me and pull me below the surf, I'm drowning.

Earth Day 4th day of Leaf Fall Moon 16AR

World Window, later Murandir

Crew: 20 (later falling to 8, crew widely scattered)

Morale: Good

Supplies: Good

Weather: Fine, little wind

Our sponsor has 'engineered' a mission to Murandir for us. Last time we went, we couldn't find 'Wise old Bob' who might know more of Old Magic. Perhaps he and Ramat are related in some way. The cover this time was a further mission sponsored by Rednow Ffuts to secure trade and find a suitable staging point for further Alliance missions. A representative of the Necromancers would meet us there too. Also praying on my mind, is finding the Black Star-Ore Sword (*Later note: Dagor Starglade's sword*), the lads still want to trade it with Captain Minardil/Irontongue for the Magical Box containing the map to the 'Great Elf Treasure'. I not so sure, I just want to keep it for myself, it feels so good. We also hope to find some news of the real Philtre of Eternity.

We assembled at the World Window as instructed, just after dark. We were met by Mignot, the valley 'departures officer', His brother Gintom would meet us on the other side. We are informed it will be primed to allow us back in 60 hours. From his clipboard we found out a 7-person Valley set-up team went through to Murandir that morning - Gintom, one ranger (Brinks), two pathfinders (Lowe and Walker), a Wolfhold merchant (Yarbil), a Wolfhold Ambassador (Selena), a necromancer priest (Scold, working for Mastin) and some undead. A group of eight Kalid (possibly Earthwarp: leader named Merrick) had travelled that afternoon, followed by a Dai-Fah-Dyne merchant (Mahat-al-Mahead: travelling alone) two hours ago.

Whilst waiting for the window, Sir Vigilaine and his scribe turned up, obviously resurrected since we slew him at he Vault. They are booked to go to Murandir after us. He is interested that we are going to Murandir, as if it confirms his interest there is well placed too. We think about killing him again, but something tells me to let him live to see what he's up to.

I carry the stone in my pocket. I think about Ramat and about throwing it through the World Window, but I don't. We go through the World Window. There is a cracking sound, we think many of the group are scattered far far away. Only a few of us remain. (*Later note: the stone has shattered the World Window*)

) We regroup but find ourselves in the midst of the end of a battle. Gintom, Mignot's brother is found, dead. Wild drow attack from all around from the darkness.

Present are:

Me (First Mate, Corsair/Black Numenorean, Iron Guard Veteran)

Sutnac (Bosun, Half-Orc, Brethren Priest)

Anthrax (Surgeon, Half-Orc, Dark Path)

D'Archon (Navigator/Seaman, Corsair, Warden Priest)

Wertigo (Human, Barbarian Marauder)

Angel (Human, Journeyman Wolfhold Scout)

Silas (Sladd, Reaper High Priest)

Garret (Nyad, Journeyman Pathfinder)

We meet someone called Timeus, an educated fella, dressed in a smart brown coat, carrying scrolls, peering over spectacles. He seems to know about Old Magic, he asks to accompany us, we allow him, for we want to know more.

We find the bodies of Lowe (Pathfinder) and Scold (Necromancer) who'd had his throat cut, neither have spirit strength so we didn't resurrect them. (*Librarians note: A few lines are carefully scored out here*) A hoard of undead assaulted us, likely Scold's masterless undead.

Further down the path we meet Mahat-al-Mahead, a cautious, smart DFD trader. He seems to be a Sorcerer and Master scout, he seems to specialise in locating rare items of high risk. It seems he came to Murandir with the Black Star-Ore sword, having got it from some Shadowsfall who had relieved some Towerless bandits of it after they had stolen in transit back to the safe keeping of the Watchers sect. It seems he had arranged a meeting with Amrath, Dagor Starglade's Herald, so Amrath could buy it back for Dagor. On coming through the World Window he had met Amrath along with Scold of the Necromancers who was acting as broker for the deal. As soon as Scold saw the blade, he was filled with desire and he attacked with his undead. Scold managed to get away with the sword. Mahat teleported after him but found his cooling body, the blade now taken by Wild Murandir Drow! He tracked some of the Drow towards us and found us, but the blade now seems to have moved far away. After trading information with him we parted company. We travelled further through the woods, harried by undead and hordeling-like creatures, we followed some lights finding some rough cabins to bed down in for the night (*Librarian's note: A large paragraph is carefully scored out here*)

We had a long talk with Timeus. He is a practitioner of Old Magic, he is interested in us, I suspect he sees some benefit on both sides in some working relationship. He tells us Old Magic existed long before the current understanding of magic in Schools and power in Spheres. Its far more primal and powerful. It is difficult to master and requires the user to invest more of themselves into it. There are no schools as such but each practitioner follows some kind of path through it, so as not to get 'lost'. Timeus follows a path of Earth, Captain Irontongue is aligned with water but also the closely related 'path of blood' - a dangerous route. He commented our behaviour put us at risk of following this path. He said we were all marked by Old Magic in some way, but me and the black mark in my hand, particularly.

Fire Day 5th day of Leaf Fall Moon 16AR

Murandir, near the old Village

Crew: 8 rising to 11 later

Morale: Good

Supplies: Good

Weather: Bright sun, no wind

We woke, resolved to chase to Black Star-Ore sword to the very ends of Murandir if necessary. Brinks, the Ranger who came through with the previous Alliance group found us, he is shaken after the shattering of his group. He explained that Yarbil, the Wolfhold merchant he was assigned to guard has been taken hostage by an aggressive elf. He led us to where he last saw him. We found Amrath, Dagors herald standing over the unconscious body of Yarbil. He was wary of us, after apparently being double-crossed by the Necromancer Scold when desire for the sword overcame him. He confirmed what Mahat had told us about the fight near the World Window. He does not trust us. He said he had heard we had removed the Philtre of Eternity from the vault, he desires this too. We let him examine the 'fake' Philtre we had, he confirmed what we knew, that this was not the true philtre. He confirmed that the Black Star-Ore sword was made centuries ago for his master, Dagor Starglade, He confirmed the blade drives mortals mad with desire for it, especially if taken by force, and not freely given. Only its rightful owner, Dagor is free from its curse. His master is keen to recover it. He was satisfied with our trade of information and left. We healed Yarbil, who was most grateful. He gave us the mission from Rednow Ffuts – to secure a base for a scouting mission to follow in 2 weeks, identify local leaders for trade talks and to meet the King's representatives, and set up friendly relationships with the underground races (Drow, Duegar). We listen politely, but frankly we're not too interested, worth a bit of cash if it co-incides with what we need to do, but not worth chasing.

I can feel the Star-Ore Sword is near now, it draws me. We fight some tribal types. We find Walker, the Pathfinder, who had been scattered when the World Window cracked. He said he had met a couple of Irontongue's crew earlier that day, they had offered to still trade the Star-Ore Sword for the Magical Box. We met some pine men and a wood demon. I am liking our new recruit Silas, his talent for efficient killing is only outshone by his filthy humour, he fits in seamlessly.

We met the local headman, with an Empire scout. The locals seem used to the yolk of the Empire and are anxious at their withdrawl and return of the Alliance.

We hear sounds of a fight, Mahat, the DFD merchant is beset by trolls, one of whom had recovered the Star-Ore Sword, from the Wild Drow I think. Conflict follows the sword everywhere. After a running battle, we have the sword. I hold it close, I do not wield it, but hide it beneath my coat so as not to attract envy. Dudge, who was also scattered by the World Window arrives, attracted by the noise, and the pull of the sword I think.

Cresting a great hill we see Amrath, Dagor's herald, followed by a tall, pale Sindar Lord, Dagor Starglade himself, and his entourage. (*Later note: Dagor came through via the deep woods invoking ancient elven pacts*). Up the hill came Sir Vigilaine and his scribe, the scene was set. Amrath demanded the Star-Ore sword on his silent masters behalf. I told him where to go, 'over my dead body in fact'. The group looked at me with disgust sensing a good murdering by an ancient Sindar Lord. I felt Anthrax's hands on my shoulders, the power drained from me instantly. The sword was promptly handed over.

Vigilaine then laid down a challenge to Dagor. It seems his Grandfather, Sir Valaine had slain Dagor long ago, he had come to do it again, for he was tainted with evil. (*Later note: Dagor had returned to life, almost unheard of for a Thranduil elf, Vigilaine had engineered the release of the Star-Ore sword from the Vault to draw him to this duel*). Blows were traded, Dagor held the Star-Ore sword aloft, invoked a word of power, and plunged it deep in Vigilaine, the life drained from him within a heartbeat. Vigilaine was far from the equal of his grandfather. Dagor retired. The crew saw the opportunity to slay Vigilaine's scribe which they did. Dagor's entourage looked to rejoin the fray and all looked lost. Timeus gathered the group close, a mighty earthquake ensued and we were sucked through the earth far away.

We arrive in thick woods, Timeus tells us we are now far away, near the deep woods. We find a man dressed in Axian garb. He explains his Kinsmen have an Inn nearby, he invites us in for free beer, we don't refuse. We arrive at the Inn, it is a little shabby and run down, but the first round is free and they have offer food from a barbeque. The Axians are strange, they only want payment in silver and are not interested in gold or any other sparklies. They claim to worship Geb, they said they are attracted to the area as it is a centre of earth power, they let slip that there is an old earth temple down towards the river. Their skin glistens with a strange oil. Viosh, the Drow Green Wizard arrives having been scattered nearby by the World Window.

Ogres appear outside, keen to get into the Inn, the Axians see them off. We help them a bit but the Ogres don't seem interested in us. Some of the Axians seem a bit 'jerky' now. We find a

silver statue in the upper room of the Inn, we suspect it has moved whilst we have been out of the room. As I am investigating on my own, an Axian pounces and I am paralysed by a blade venom, they seem to want to take us alive. A fight kicks off. We kill a few of the Axians, a couple just seize up mid-fight and turn to statues. We find bottles of an ointment called 'Medure', it seems the Axians just seize up and turn to statues if it not regularly applied. We suspect they need silver to make it.

Ogres arrive, they are wary, they are pleased the Axians are dead. We meet their Ogre Mage. He explains the Axians once worshipped Geb, but turned to Aker, an evil Axian deity. They have corrupted the temple of earth near the river, which they want cleaned out. The ogres seem to know something of Wise Old Bob, so we agree to do it. We agree to cleanse it.

An important visitor arrives. It is Selena of the Wolfhold Ambassadors. There's the usual stuff about how useless we are and how generous our Mystery Sponsor is. She reiterates the terms of the deal - find and hand over the real Philtre of Eternity within a year, plus another item of our sponsor's choice. A strange shadow faced figure looms behind her. She tells us our sponsor will offer support, in the form of some help with healing, but it comes at a price. It will cost us another item of our sponsor's choice, and something more. We agreed. The shadowy figure strode forward and laid a bolt of black cloth on the table and asked those that would shed blood and utter an oath upon it. I led, others followed, though some did not. Each of us felt weakened in our soul as some portion of it bled into the fabric. The figure then unfurled the fabric to reveal it to be a great banner bearing the Red Eye of Morgoth. The shadowy figure laughed, they left (*Later note: It is the Banner of the Aflame, a great artifact of Morgoth, previously carried by the Ulthar. When carried by an evil priest sworn to the banner, his evil power effects become beneficial to others sworn to the banner. It must be carried high and proud*). We call it The Black Sail.

We head down to the temple, rows of statues line the avenue up to it. There are a series of tests and riddles to open the gate, designed to be only opened by the true believer. Several times we trigger the statues to animate and snake men to be summoned before we get it right. We enter and find a low inner chamber, a hooded, robed figure kneels, facing the far wall, its voice beckons us in, wishing to talk, most of us enter. It turns, lowering its hood, we all see the snakes of the Medusa's head (the incarnation of Aker) too late, most of the group are petrified immediately. Only a few remain up, Wertigo, D'Archon and Anthrax I think, Medure is applied to a few of us and we move, if only for a while, blinding ourselves by whatever means possible, the beast is harmed and beaten to the ground. We haul a temple full of loot out! We fight much better now with the sustaining healing evil power of The Black Sail.

Many of us who are petrified are rubbed with Medure and make our way back to the Inn. The ogres offer to guard us in our sleep.

Steel Day 6th day of Leaf Fall Moon 16AR

Murandir, near the Deep Woods.

Crew: 11

Morale: Good

Supplies: Excellent having taken an Inn

Weather: Bright sun, no wind

The ogres warn us some Demons of Apep approach, we are slow to mobilise as many of us have petrified again in our sleep and need Medure to move. Following our cleansing of the Earth Temple they reveal that Wise Old Bob might be found in a place beyond the Temple by the river. We fight some Rat-men. We encounter a couple of Kalid scouts, likely from the Earthwarp group who came through the World Window ahead of us. Angel actually finds one sleeping in the sun and slits his throat – genius! We fight hard earth elementals. We find some goblins and Trolls, they seem to want to annoy us rather than fight. They say we should talk to Ramat rather than Wise Old Bob. We pass an ancient pool, a water portal. It turns out when the Hordelings refer to RAMAT, it stands for Reasonably Astute Middle Aged Tim, and hilarious for them I'm sure. So we find Timeus (Ramat) in a hut near the waters edge.

He seems to be testing us to ensure we are suitable for something or other, to make sure we are the right people to work with, able to cope with Old Magic. He said we would meet three times, each time we could discuss three subjects. This time we asked about Captain Iron tongue, we learnt he is a strong practitioner of Old Magic, following the paths of Water and

Blood which often intermingle. We are heavily connected with him, by the mark he has placed on me and possibly by the blood pact we all made together on Thranduil years ago. We asked about the Kalid and what their interest in this is, he said they were being driven by another – the Archmage of Water. Finally we talked about Old Magic in general, he said for us to get understanding of Water Old Magic we must first get it in our debt, this would allow us to access some of its mysteries, and visit the temple of Water Old Magic which lies on Thranduil. One way to get water 'in our debt' is to defeat it in some way. He suggested by claiming the 'Helm of Knowledge' a relic aligned with water we might achieve this and learn great lore too. He said it lay in a safe resting place, the 'House of Shadows', we could journey through the nearby water portal to it and try to steal it. A house-break – we look forward to it!

Returning from Ramat, the Kalid bar our way. They are led by Merrick, a powerful water wizard, they have warriors and a tide zombie too. The zombie grasps with its hands, once grasped a continuous feeling of drowning occurs until someone beats it off you. The Kalid cast strange drowning magic and levitate us so we can only push each other forward to move. We win but Merrick flees, stopping our pursuit with slowing magics.

After resting at the Inn, we head forth in the dark. We encounter some Warlugs and head through the water portal. We see a wood entirely lit up with torches. We investigate a water filled ditch with many poisonous snakes within. We see the outline of the House of Shadows deep in the wood. Webs arch between the trees. Spiders scurry around in the dark. We work our way through the wood, traps lie everywhere, each trap or blow from the spiders causes a strange effect upon us, as memories leach from us. Some of us forget how to cast spells, even forget expertise with some weapons. We break into a room of the house, Minotaurs assail us, they fall. A figure strides out from the dark, a heavily armoured hero in ancient bronze greaves and cuirass, holding a great spear in one hand and a flaming torch in another. He wore an ancient full helm. We fought, one against many to claim his helm, he held us off, his spear biting deep and leaching our skills, many of us no longer having the wit or skill to fight further. But this was the final deception of the House of Shadows, for the real Helm of Knowledge lay in another room in the dark ruined house. Whilst we fought on, Angel found it and placed it upon his head, it immediately bonded with his very skin. With this we left, fighting a rearguard action.

Beyond the water portal we encountered a group of Thissessin. They seemed to know what we had done. They recognised our achievement but wished to see if we were worthy of the helm. They tested us in a series of duels that we won. We won their respect and they bid us continue. We returned to the Inn.

Sun Day 7th day of Leaf Fall Moon 16AR

Murandir, near the Deep Woods.

Crew: 11

Morale: Good

Supplies: Excellent having taken an Inn

Weather: Fine, no wind

Morning arrived. The ogres returned. They told us that the Earth temple changed and was cleansed after we had broken in and slain the Medusa. But the nature of Aker is to be renewed each morning and by the next day the temple was corrupted again and the gate sealed. We resolved to finish the task. We returned, unlocked the gates in the same way, and broke in. Within there were many animated statues and Snake-men. The medusa strode forth and we all covered our eyes with shields, hoods and so on. We put a mirror we found in the tavern before the medusa and it became petrified. We slew the rest and were victorious.

We trek to the World Window to arrive for our time slot to return, hoping it works again.