

(Celeb Theme 2002)

I had been taken by the tales of the Barbarians who liberated my home on Akari Island, and decided to visit their world, Orin Rakatha. Having spent some time visiting each of their 'Towers' and speaking with many of their number, I found that my beliefs most fitted those of the Monastery of the Middle Way, where Monks of the Balance were trained. I was honoured to be accepted for training there, and asked if I would care to join those visiting the Reader. On meeting up with the other recent trainees, I found it most interesting to discuss the confusing state of affairs within towers, and the various training methods. These discussions became more in-depth after we began to encounter creatures of the unlife. It seems that, although there are few creatures that cannot be harmed by blunt weapons such as maces and staves, we had only three of this type of weapon between the 20 of us in the group, the others preferring sharp weapons such as swords. This state of affairs caused the fight against several skeletons to be rather drawn out, and the group did not work well together for it.

We also encountered a number of what were apparently Chaos creatures, who cast magic at us, rusting weapons and causing many to trip and fall. Again, we did not work as well as we might have in this situation.

When we finally reached the waystation, a large group had already gathered. Included in these were Lord Giles and Lord Sky, who I understand are important personages upon Orin Rakatha. They were curious as to what had been occurring in the last two years, as they had been absent. Also present was Rednow Ffuts, Head of the Merchants Guild, who was expecting the Reader and Dai-fah-Dyne in order to complete the final payment for the compensation of false Gest, which I believe had been a problem for some time. He was concerned that the presence of so many high-stated people would jeopardise the meeting (it had been agreed that only an agreed few would attend), and also of the reports of our group and the other's. They had encountered Shadowsfall (the enforcers of Law upon Orin Rakatha) and Wizards Concilium - it seems the Shadowsfall had a contract on a member of the Concilium and the group happened upon the execution of this contract.

Later that evening a number of others arrived, including one called Solen-Hai (a Red Sorcerer of the Micheline), and Miriel Bladestorm (a Sorcerer of Wolfhold). I was exhausted from the trip, and retired for the night.

On rising, I was informed that there was some problem with the creatures of unlife inhabiting the Swamp - it seems that after the war with the Dymwan some years ago, several of the unlife retreated to the Maegnor Swamp. These creatures were allowed to stay in the Swamp providing they did not attempt to leave it - the Humacti Sect agreed then not to invade their territory to slay them. Apparently there was some indication (As we ourselves had seen) that these creatures of unlife were breaking that Pact, and we were sent to investigate why.

On entering the forest at the edge of the Swamp, we first encountered a totem pole. Galadriel investigated this and it transpired that it was some sort of power store for a tribe of towerless called the Ban Hulio Clan. The totem would not give up power or information to us, as we were not of its clan.

Further into the forest we encountered some of this tribe, although it seemed that they were unaware of the totem, as it was further than they had been in the forest. They were unhappy with their situation, as the unlife were invading their space, and their numbers were decreasing, partly due to the hard life in the Swamp, and partly because the Kalid were recruiting them away. These three too had finally decided that joining the Kalid was a better prospect than the life they had, and they too were off to join. These three were Gad, Dressick and Dezra.

We continued into the forest, meeting more creatures of unlife as we went. This time our group was much more organised and I was pleased to see the way we worked together to defeat the foe. Eventually we encountered a group of unlife who did not attack us on sight. We had been told that the creatures inhabiting the Swamp understood that they should not attack those bearing Valley symbols, and it appeared that at least some of them held to this still. While attempting to speak with some of these, a most imposing figure approached us, attending by what I can only assume was a bodyguard. This creature was green of face (although it was not entirely 'whole', shall I say), and spoke authoritatively to us, demanding to know why we were within his bounds. We explained our mission, and asked if he could advise us as to why some of the unlife seemed to be (perhaps inadvertently) advancing from the Swamp. He told us that the Mists had been changing, and that of late, instead of simply providing a method of re-birth for the Hordelings, as it rolled over it was raising the Unlife also, and these creatures were not like his brethren. He wished that we would destroy these 'misted' undead, and then he would tell us all of that which passed between the Swamp and the waystation. We agreed to do this, and there was some speculation on the Dark Wind, that was supposed to have been banished to the Abyss, which had caused a similar effect some years previous.

Delving deeper into the Swamp area, we encountered some Mist Zombies, who proved little trouble, the group now becoming used to working together. We continued to glimpse Kalid scouts, our own scouts being the only ones to get close enough even for a look. We also encountered more of the chaos creatures, again rusting or shattering weapons and shields, causing people to trip, or to become slowed. Interestingly, there seemed to be some humans with them, at least one of which was heard to scream for death, insisting that 'he would fall but many would rise'.

Some distance further on we encountered what was to prove a most difficult situation. An embodied Ogre Magi with several undead - there were skeletons and zombies that we were used to dealing with by now, but also a ghoul, who caused us some difficulty, but the Ogre Magi was capable of the bows of four men, and not many of our group could withstand such a blow without it snapping their bones. We were able to defeat the undead after a time, and fell to the Ogre Magi, but as we did so, he called for his host to be raised. Our hearts sank as the unlife rose again from the ground and we were forced to fight again. I saw a number of bones broken by the Ogre Magi as I battled with the unlife, and then found myself fighting him; as one of our number was paralysed, he caught my left arm with his sword and it shattered. I fell to the

ground screaming in pain, and for a moment my vision blurred. When I focused again, almost all the unlife were defeated, but many of our group were disabled, either through paralysis or broken bones. Those left finished off the unlife, but were understandably reluctant to take on the Ogre Magi. I saw that he began to back off from the group, and commence his ritual to raise the unlife again. I could not see this happen, as I believed that we would not withstand another round with the unlife. I bound my arm as best I could with my sash and jumped down into the path, facing off the Ogre Magi. As I did, others joined me and we renewed our attack upon him. He of course redoubled his efforts, and many were beaten back by his onslaught. When he again began to vocalise, I felt we would be undone, and leapt at him, attempting to beat him back with my pitiful blows. At the last, he dealt a low blow that snapped my left leg in two, and I passed out from the pain.

I was warm and content, when suddenly pain and cold began to return to my body - I had been Elixired, and healing was being administered. With my left arm and leg broken though, I was in excruciating pain. Greythorn set the leg, but we had run out of bandages with so many injured, and my arm was better left bound in the sash. We waited for the undead lord to arrive and nursed our wounds.

As we were about to send our injured back to the waystation, he arrived. We explained about the Ogre Magi, and he examined its body. He told us that the Swamp dwellers (the tribal people) had been moving away, and suggested that there was 'something here they did not like', or perhaps that they 'needed more space'. He said that the Kalid were here too, and that they 'wished the Swamp dwellers'. Test had been set for the swamp dwellers by the Kalid, so that they proved their worth. The Kalid were also seeking those of the Shadow Lodge (the name for his people), but the Shadow Lodge had 'not accepted any proposals - yet, it was early days'. We agreed that our business was concluded and he bid us leave.

While returning from the waystation we glimpsed again a Kalid scout. He was eventually captured, but then killed by the Wolfhold scout in our group. We return his body to the waystation in the hope that a dark priest would be able to get some information from him. Regrettably, it seems his body was disposed of before anything could be done.

That evening, Baron Ezekial Mourntark, High Priest of the Reapers arrived, attended by Angelus of the Reapers, and Tanis Shadowsclaw of the Assassins Guild. The Baron made a show of promoting Angelus to Priest by inflicting an invocation of Spirit Wrack upon him, although this was released within a minute or two.

Also present were Lord Giles and Sky, and High Priests Djim Daggoreth and Melkeron of the White Path. Later, Lexus of the Bonetrial, 12th Priest of House Morcaerlin, 13th in line to the Throne of Annach Moranonil, arrived, attended by a shade and a warrior. They were seeking drow of House Tumdurgle, they said, and wished to know if any were present. We informed them that the only drow who had been at the waystation recently was Tanis, who attended Baron Ezekial, but that they had just left. The drow departed shortly after this.

While I was taking tea, a pathfinder scout arrived and asked if our group would venture forth from the waystation to seek the drow. It seemed that a number of creatures were within the

forest, and an ambush was feared. We gathered ourselves together quickly and went to seek them out.

As we travelled into the forest, we discovered the drow and the Baron's group. There was some sort of fracas going on but at first we were told it was Wolfhold business. However after hearing one of the McBeast brothers calling for aid, we advanced. There was much scuffling as we fought creatures in the dark, and I am afraid that some blows were taken and given by friends rather than foes. At the end, there was a drow warrior with his throat cut on the ground, who Molly, our Hospitaller, had found and was healing. The Baron and his group seemed unhurt for the most part. The shade had disappeared and there was no sign of the Priest. The Baron and his group left, taking with him Wolf McFeast, who needed more healing than we could provide.

The warrior, Drannach Ghoulbreath, 32nd Warrior of House Morcaerlin, informed us that Lexus had been killed by a pale-faced figure in green robes, and demanded that his body be returned. It could not be found, and there was some speculation by the drow that the Baron had removed it. Wolfram Guntherhausen, a Wolfhold Assassin who had arrived late from the waystation, insisted that the Priest was fine, and that in fact he walked off on his own accord. Ghoulbreath left unsatisfied. We continued to try to locate the creatures we had been told were in the forest, although we could not find them. We heard some commotion from the waystation, but as we were returning, we met the pathfinder again, who told us that an attack had been made on the group guarding the waystation, and that the creatures were headed this way. We lay in wait for them, but to no avail, and eventually had to seek them out. They were chaos creatures, and they proved a match for us. We were drawn into the forest, and I was felled. When I once more was dragged from my warm contentment into cold, hard, reality, I was informed that one of the creatures had picked up my inert body and used it as a shield so that it could more effectively fight our group. I was dismayed. The group had defeated the chaos creatures after the intervention of two newcomers, a Seeker scout called Connor Kane, and a warrior called Owajawar, who said that he had 'unleashed his badger' upon them. Connor provided healing enough for me to be returned to full health, and we discussed my home on Akari Island as we journeyed back to the waystation.

On returning, we found the aftermath of the attack by the chaos creatures. A number of the group had had limbs severed, and Djim was casting Regenerations to restore them. It seemed that Solen-Hai had returned, and for some reason had attacked the group, calling chaos creatures against them.

A number of dignitaries began to arrive:

- * High Priest Magellan al-rasheed Mohamed Iban Sullam Roc;
- * Rachek Drummond, Assistant Guildleader of the Crusaders;
- * Sorcerer Quicksilver and High Priest Shard;
- * Sir Leonidas, Assistant head of the Micheline Sect
- * Sir Onyx, of the Order of King Michel;
- * Mentor Helmscall, ambassador to Halmaddons Heights;
- * Sir Vanderloss, Guildleader of the Crusaders;
- * Raucus, head of the Grey Path Sect;

- * Ambassador Subertai of the Azard-An;
- * Ti'ak Teardrinker, 4th Sorcerer of House Morfaeglin;
- * Detra Kottla of the Circle Prime of the 3rd tower of the Kalid Legion;
- * Galnin, Assistant Guildleader of the Seekers;
- * Orlon Tenquil, leader of the Blue School of Magic;
- * Lord Sebastian, Marshal of the Order of King Michel.

We were informed that we were expecting a most honoured guest, and to prepare the room accordingly. I was intrigued to know who would be described as a most honoured guest, after receiving so many already. It was not long before my curiosity was satisfied - King Micel Rol-Dantigh himself, attended by a White Seer!

Lord Sebastian made the astounding announcement that the White Retreat had decided to abolish the Fellowship of Twelve and declared a Monarchy under King Michel. The King himself made a speech that we were no longer three towers but one people, and that all those willing to work together and lay down their lives for each other would be welcome within the White Retreat. He asked for those present who would wish to join the White Retreat to swear fealty. These came forward:

Sir Vanderloss; Sir Leonidas; Sir Onyx; Orlon Tenquil; Caradoc; Rachek Drummond; Molly; Cirith Undeadbane; Owajawar; Ansell; Shy; Beran; Verrick; Zephyr; Galnin; Cad; Melkeron; Asmark; Galadriel; Zap; and Dorric.

Djim went forward to explain that although he stood by the principles stated by the King, he could not swear fealty. I believe he has a prior honour-debt to his Lady of Light.

Sorcerer Quicksilver also regretted that he could not swear fealty, although I did not hear his reasons.

The King stated that a Fellowship would be formed who would act as his advisors, and that these would be similar to the original Fellowship of Twelve. The Guildleaders would not change, but ultimate rule would pass to the Monarch. Petitions may be brought to the King and judgement would be passed according to his will. He then called for any petitions to be brought forth, and it seems that Quicksilver was prepared for such an opportunity, for he had a bag full of scrolls that he then proceeded to read from, after seeking permission from the King. The petition was long and convoluted, involving his disappearance and apparent madness, and the activities of certain Seeker scouts. The King decided that these actions would be looked into, and the scouts recalled for questioning. Quicksilver seemed satisfied with the result.

Following this, Lord Sebastian announced that there would be some changes in the White Retreat government - there would be the formation of a Royal Court, and an invitation was extended to the towers of Orin Rakatha to send Ambassadors to live within its halls to see the workings of this Royal Court. The Ambassador to the Azad-An accepted, as did Halmaddon's Heights. House Morfaeglin had instruction from the Beleg Aratar to accept on behalf of Annach Moranonil. The Kalid ambassador then made a speech, saying that the state of Orin Rakatha was unbalanced, and that there was turbulence between the undead and the mist creatures. It

was time Orin Rakatha was take by an iron grip to protect its people. The Kalid felt that they were best placed to provide such protection, and offered the Valley people 2 legions within the Kalid host so that they could continue to follow their own doctrines and beliefs, if we joined with them.

The King thanks the ambassador for his invitation and said that he would speak with his advisors and issue a statement on the morrow.

Lord Sebastian concluded the audience and the King left with his attendant.

I questioned Sir Vanderloss on the White Seer, as I had seen him repeatedly touch the King during the proceedings, but had not seen him speak. Sir Vanderloss confirmed that he was a White Seer and that the King required constant attention due to his long 'absence'. The king was 'not well', Sir Vanderloss said, and I can understand this if the reports of the 1000 years are to be believed

Many of the dignitaries remained for some time, discussing matters with the adventurers. One issue that was raised was the connection of the Azad-An and the Kalid. I am not sure if a conclusion was reached but there was some consternation over potential contracts, I believe, perhaps to do with the Azad-An's propensity to take mercenary contracts of protection, as they had done for both Reader and Dai-fah-dyne over the years.

In the morning I was asked to lead the other group to the totem we had discovered the day before; our group would be going to the lake where we had encountered the Ogre Magi which was apparently also a power store for the tribal people. One of the tasks set the tribe by the Kalid was to attack our waystation, and they would seek to withdraw the power form these totems before making the attack. We were to prevent them from drawing on the totems power, and attacking the waystation.

I led Cad and the others along the route we had followed to the totem, explaining what we had discovered along the way. It was deserted when we arrived, so the group formulated a plan while Cad and I scouted the area. I was far out from the group when I spotted a magical creature making it's way to the totem. I headed back, only to see many more humans and creatures also headed for the totem, from different directions. We all formed a wall around the totem with our shields, trying to prevent them from touching it to draw on its power. It was a hard fight, and not one I would care to repeat, although I was most grateful for the magical skin and endurance given me, and also the good healing. We were successful, and fearing that the other group would be set upon by a similar force, Cad and I headed for the lake. Our fears were unfounded, as they had dealt with their attackers and emerged triumphant. We all headed back to the waystation for rest before returning to our Towers.

The Reader and Dai-fah-Dyne had met up with each other in the forest, each trying to avoid the creatures lurking, and the final payment had been made in time. New lists of potions and their prices were expected to be announced in short order.

More investigation was to be made of the Azad-An and their connection with the Kalid, as was

the effect of the mist on the undead, and the actions of the Shadow Lodge.

I will be honoured to adventure again with any of those I met on this mission.

Peace, but not at the expense of honour

Honour, but not to the detriment of duty

Duty, but not if family comes to harm

Harm, but only to maintain peace.

Jade

Monk of the Balance