

Extracts from the Journal of Irwin, First Mate of the Black Scab Part VI – Deep Water Isle

In which we find the 'Great Elf Treasure', slay a Dragon, crack the Vault, gain revenge and become Heroes!

Sun Day 31th Day of Planting Moon, 17 AR (Approx equivalent)
Circa 100 leagues west of Tolfalas

Crew 11(+2 Hired Hands)
Morale Good
Supplies Good
Low winds, oars deployed

Dudge finds some Kalid documents hidden behind some boards in the hold. It gives some clues as to the Kalid motives in all this. One is to Merrick, High Waterweaver Cabiti from Ren Hathain Nehem-sen. It reads:

Your failure to obtain the Helm brings disgrace and shame upon us. See that you do better with your next task. You are commanded to travel to Thranduil to take a ship and sail to Archipelago in the Bay of Belfalas. Our studies and converse with the Archmage of the Way of Water indicate that there is an island there named Deepwater and that an Oracle of Water can be accessed through the deep currents which run in that place. Secure the island and the oracle. Ensure that these meddlers from the Valley Alliance are prevented from approaching and ask the questions we have agreed.

How can the Kalid Nation maintain its command of the Way of Water on Orin Rakatha? Can the Archmage of the Lizard Man People free himself of the bonds placed upon him by the Kalid Nation? How may the Waterweavers of the Kalid nation gain in power, so that their mastery of Water exceeds that of the Archmage of the Lizard Man People? Return with these answers and the Valley thwarted and you will be richly rewarded.

Your studies regarding a calling as well as communication show promise but under no circumstances is the Archmage to be placed in danger by this. Furthermore even if you are successful in the calling there is little certainty that he will assist you (Later note: he didn't). The restrictions we have negotiated through Barad Tirgul do not guarantee co-operation only our freedom to operate and expand. This is why the questions you will ask the oracle are so vital to our work.

Success brings reward and failure a terrible retribution.

Moon Day 8th Day of Green Growing Moon, 17AR
Bay of Belfalas, Thranduil

Crew 11 (+2 Hired Hands)

Morale Good

Supplies Good

Strong Easterly Wind

Dudge has now finished translating a letter and the journal from the box, - at least we can use her as crew now. It is written in the Noldor tongue, It is by Thaeros, Deep Elf, follower of Finwe. They contain much crap poetry that I ignore.

The letter is from Thaeros to a friend called Caliandor. It discusses Thaeros's first voyage to Orin Rakatha over a century ago when the death of Dagor Starglade on Orin had become known to Thaeros. He went there to seek the fate of the sword Anguriel and some other of Dagor's possessions. Thaeros recovered the blade, as a member of the Eldar race he was not subject to it's corrupting influence. He mentions it is a cursed blade, forged by the smith Eol. The letter implies Thaeros helped create the Vault and its defences on this particular visit. Anguriel was placed in the Vault so it could not be unleashed on the worlds again. At this time he did something else - It later talks about the burden to his conscience of using an unnamed artifact to make his 'Great Treasure'. This he also placed in the Vault too, where it would be safe. It says this process of creatin his 'Great Treasure' had not changed him as Caliandor feared. We can only assume his 'Great Treasure' is what we would call the 'fake' Philtre of Eternity we got from the Vault and still carry. With the letter were instructions for the return of a soul using the Philtre of Eternity, which can achieved simply with the presence of the person's

body, or in a more in a more complex manner without the body requiring many herbs etc.

The thick Journal concerns his second trip to Orin Rakatha, around one hundred years after the first one, only a few years ago as we view time. It first details a ship-voyage across the Bay of Belfalas on Thranduil, bound for Archipelago, his crew are Numenoreans (or Atani as he calls them) and he bemoans the fall of the Edain. He holds them in his will. Using a token from an earlier trip, his vessel crosses a 'gate' to Rainbow Lake, Orin Rakatha. They land, and the Atani carry a stone called the Stone of Sarndor for him. He sees Orin Rakatha, as strange, populous and 'narrow'. He talks of doing Illuvatar's work and fighting Melkor. They have trouble with what sound like Hordelings. He meets with the folk of Halmadon's Heights. An elf called Argentis shows Thaeros around the Vault, Thaeros takes amusement in not revealing his role in its construction 100 years before. That night Thaeros dines with Reef Silal Quentril of Halmadon's Heights, whom was present at the unchaining of Melkor, whom he respects and they share a fine Dorwinion wine called Pigassou. He is annoyed by the (Atani) High Priest Hadrian of the Watchers Sect (*Later note: who we later slew at the Vault*). The Stone of Sarndor is placed in the Vault, for it bears some taint of Morgoth. He ensures it is placed beside his 'Great Treasure'.

The journal comments that an accompanying map contains directions to an underground place where shards of the Stone of Sarndor may be found in the Blue Mountains (Ered Luin). (*Later note: the Shards of Sarndor provide a manner of teleport to the larger Stone of Sarndor in Vault, next to his 'Great Treasure', a way of rapidly accessing it from Thranduil now he fears the Atani of Halmadon's Heights are no longer to be trusted. He feels much guilt about this, but sees it as the only solution*).

Thaeros comments about gold overcoming racial enmities to ensure the Shards' safe keeping on Thranduil. It says the Wayworn Inn is the starting place for the map and the door to their underground resting place of the shards is marked on it by a square within a square. Speak the password 'Gond' at the door, then bear left to 'The Treasury'

(*Later note: When the contents of the magic box were divided, the Captain got the map it refers to, not us, however Wertigo saw it and had made a rough copy*)

On this visit, Thaeros talks to Hadrian who confides that the treasures of the Vault are being moved to a more secure location. Thaeros is incredulous at this as his hand was involved in the making of the Vault and it contains his 'Great Treasure'. He takes an inventory of all in the Vault, most of which he regards as trifling objects of little danger to the wider world (Although his interest is piqued by the swords Anguriel and Menelvagor and an iron Rune-Stone of Gorthaur). Reef Silal Quentril has left by this point, he writes a letter to Reef, explaining the foolishness of moving the Vault and claiming he should be consulted if anything is moved. However his 'Great Treasure', what we call the fake 'Philtre of Eternity' remains in the Vault (*Later note: Only to be stolen by us later when the Vault moves location*)

On Thaeros's journey home he meets Sir Vigilaine, who is keen to learn of Dagor Starglade, who Sir Vigilaine's Grandfather, Sir Vallaine slew over 100 years before. Vigilaine is insistent that Dagor has now returned to life and stalks the Forlond Forest. Thaeros explained to Vigilaine that it is not the fate of the Firstborn to return after death, as they return to the Halls of Mandos. He notes that Dagor was tainted by Morgoth before he fell to Vallaine. Vigilaine seemed intent on repeating his Grandfather's work and slaying Dagor again, he asked if somehow releasing Dagor's sword Anguriel from the Vault would lure Dagor into open combat (*Later note: which Vigilaine later did*)

. Thaeros dismissed this as ridiculous. He comments that the Grandfather (Vallaine) must have been considerably greater than the Grandson (Vigillaine). Thaeros and his crew trek back to their ship then through the 'Sea-portal' on Rainbow Lake to the Bay of Belfalas. There is no further entry, I can only assume the next thing that happened is that our story coincides with his and The

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attacks his ship, and Thaeros is slain. At this point we recover his Magic Box and Journal for the first time, but they remain untranslated for years.

Sun Day 5th Day of High Sun, 17 AR
Near Anfalas, Western Gondor, Thranduil
Crew 11 (+1 Hired Hand)
Morale Fair
Supplies Fair
Strong Southerly Wind

Yesterday, working our way along the coast Cutthroat Jack spied a Gondorian fleet from afar, we take action to avoid them. Today Bilge and the rowing boat are gone. I suspect he has sold us out to the Gondorians. I suspect they would be interested in a Black Corsair sail so far north.

Steel Day 9th Day of Harvest Moon, 17 AR
Northern Gulf of Lune, Near Forlindon, Northern Thranduil.
Crew 11 (+1 Hired Hand)
Morale Low

Supplies Close to Nil (Bilge water and weevil biscuits)
Great Storm approaches from south

A terrible storm approaches, threatening to dash us on the rocks of Forlindon. 'The Ghost' is barely sea-worthy, we have been having to do running repairs all the way from Deepwater Isle. To have made it 800 leagues in this bucket is miraculous.

Sun Day 10th Day of Harvest Moon 17AR

Forest of Forlond, near the River Gelion, Forlindon, Northern Thranduil

Crew 15

Morale Good

Supplies Excellent (Squatting in Elven household)

Warm, Light rain

The storm hits, 'The Ghost' sinks beneath the waves. We swim for shore and slowly gather on an area of muddy marsh land on an inlet. Corky is nowhere to be seen. The storm moves on. Today was the day we had a World Window slot arranged to come to Thranduil. A lo and behold, reinforcements arrive through the Window! D'Archon was sucked back through it, for some purpose or other. Now present are:

The crew of 'The Ghost'

Me (Captain)

Sutnac (First Mate) - Half Orc, Priest, Dark Brethren

Anthrax (Ship's Surgeon) - Half Orc, Priest, Dark Path

Cutthroat Jack (Lookout) - Corsair, Journeyman Wolfhold Scout

Spingle (Ship's Lucky Goblin) - Goblin, Veteran Ranger

Dudge (Translation, Seaman) - Human, Journeyman Wolfhold Scout

Silas (Seaman) - Sladd, High Priest Reaper

Garret (Repairs, Seaman) - Nyad, Journeyman Pathfinder

Wertigo (Seaman) - Human, Barbarian Marauder

Walker (Cook, Seaman) - Human, Journeyman Pathfinder

Reinforcements

Maggot -Half-Orc Priest, Dark Brethren

Angel -Human Journeyman Wolfhold Scouts

Finn -Drow Red and Black Sorcerer

Pyre -Corsair, Veteran Iron Guard
Halve Oathtongue -Drow Black Sorceror

We gather on an old (Numenorean?) shingle road that sweeps up the inlet. We barely have our land-legs. We hardly have time to greet each other when foes dressed in blue and white are seen in formation down the path. At their head is a Gondorian Knight, beside him his retinue of men at arms, wizards and healers, perhaps they have followed us north, I imagine they would be worried by Corsairs travelling so far north. A challenge is issued, they mean only to fight. A bloody fight, they expend buckets of good power, but breathless and exhausted we batter them to the ground.

We decide to head away from the estuary up a stream towards the towering peaks of Ered Luin. Here we meet some woodsman or perhaps Ranger-folk, perhaps some distant bastard-descendants of Numenor mixed with common folk. They recognise us for the threat we are and a running skirmish ensues, they use the power of the woods well against us. A runner escapes. We meet a larger, more organised group but they are not martial men and fall easily in face to face combat.

As light begins to fail we cross a low wooden bridge, beyond is a glade with a Manor-house overlooking it. We meet human folk who claim to be descendants of Beor, they seem to be holding to a pact to watch over the place. They are strong but few, and we over-run them. The house is dark and looks deserted through the windows, we consider how to break in. A lone figure opens the door, he remarks he is the steward of the house, he will not let us enter. Then he sees Angel, who once again bears the Helm of Knowledge and welcomes him home as master of the house. We enter, the house becomes lit and slightly distant, otherworldly servant folk mill around and bring food.

We explore. Many tales of the first age adorn the walls, of Turin Turambar, of the coming of Dragons, of the Metal-clad Naugrim who would withstand them. A time only remembered in the impenetrable mind of elven-folk. We find a locked vault in the grounds but are unable to open it. Later a figure is seen, an Elf. He interacts with the steward, his name is Maylorn. This seems to be his manor and he drifts around tending to his household. He is slightly insubstantial and does not interact with us as if but a memory or a dream-like projection of himself.

Later the darkness of the forest encroaches, the steward comments that this is not normal, the woods are changing in recent days. Fell beasts with the features of bats, wolves and wargs

attack from the woods. We fend them off. The steward closes the house for the night against the darkness.

Moon Day 11th Day of Harvest Moon 17AR

Forest of Forlond, near the River Gelion, Forlindon, Northern Thranduil

Crew 15

Morale Good

Supplies Excellent (Squatting in Elven household)

Warm, Light Rain

More woodsmen come to investigate the Manor, they are surprised to see us. We do not allow them to question further, and slay them to a man. The ghostly figure of Maylorn is seen again, by following him around his house we find the key to the vault, which we open. The vault is small, but heavily trapped, Jack, Dudge and Angel spend a lot of time on this, a troublesome spider and a stone elemental are released in the process. We find some sparklies and a map. It shows the forest surrounding the Manor, including 'a graveyard of men' up on the high downs behind the manor, and the Temple of All Elements back over the bridge. More woodsmen and a druid arrive, we slay them.

We journey over the bridge to the Temple. We fight many light elementals. We near the location and strange events happen, there is the feeling we are being tested. First we meet a goblin holding a pelt, hiding up a tree from wolves. The pelt looks good so we cut him a deal, slaying the wolves for the pelt. Next we meet many Spiderlings holding a dwarf captive in a great web. If I remember right he said something about having lots of treasure in the web, so we killed the spiders, but he escaped. Next we arrived at a gate guarded by 2 cave trolls, we held back but they brought the fight to us. They were truly brutal bellowing beasts, sword, shield or bone would buckle beneath their blows, batting our broken bodies aside like rag-dolls. Finn and Halve threw almost all their mana against them before the beasts fell. As we rested and mended bones an old crone came and offered some of the scattered group a choice of her basket of apples, which they took unthinkingly as if beguiled, some were poisoned. The damage done, I chased after her and cut the cackling old crone a second smile.

We arrived at a dell with a great forge nestled in it. This seemed to be the location of the Temple of all Elements, but as with the Temple of Water, its appearance was deceptive. There were 4 men manning the 'forge' a miner (earth), a fire tender (fire), a bellows-man (air), and a quencher (water). They said they could make, or un-make, anything. This we took to be to make a connection with, or break a connection with, Old Magic. We proposed breaking Captain Irontongue's connection with water Old Magic. We thought the 4 preceding tests matched each

element. The Miner (Earth) seemed happy with the warm pelt we gave him (i.e. we passed), I think the fire tender was happy enough too, but the other two would not be swayed (we failed). After much bargaining their resolve showed itself and we left before we were kicked out.

We returned to the manor. We had dinner. We meet some idiot who thinks he's a powerful vampire, who clearly isn't. Some Lizardmen approach from the river, of the folk we met upon leaving the House Of Shadows. They were keen that we still stood against the Archmage of Water and wondered whether we had reached the temple of All Elements yet. We explained we had but had failed the tests. They explained that the true nature of the tests must be revealed by a 'spirit-guide', ideally at night. They gave us a talisman to call forth such a guide from the 'realm of the ancestors'. They explained the most suitable place for this would be the Graveyard on the High Downs, however warned that a Barrow-Wight has come to haunt the place of late.

We head up to the Downs, all manner of fell beasts were stirred up as the light begins to fail. As we near the burial place we were assaulted by, and surrounded by a mass of undead. Their leader, the Barrow-Wight is dressed in the faded finery of Old Numenor. He is defeated and fades into the earth again. The battle costs our spirit strength dearly.

After nightfall we reached the wrought iron gates of the cemetery. I held the talisman up and think of my ancestors of old, of the faithful followers of Ar-Pharazon, those they call the 'Black Numenoreans', the founding fathers of Umbar. A figure kicks open the gate, hooded, a flaming torch in each hand. And there he is Verrindur Azzurian, my father, as he looked the day he died, skin riddled by plague. He is as terrifying and magnificent as I remember him.

He sets off at rapid pace toward the temple of all Elements. He reveals the nature of its test. Air demands persuasion and we gain the pelt from the goblin as before. Earth demands bribery, the spiders have a taste for elf-flesh and Halve donates his leg to set the Dwarf free. Fire demands force and we defeat the Cave trolls again at much cost. Water demands trickery, this time, with our guide we see the poisoned apples for what they are and choose wisely. We enter the temple and request that Captain Irontongue's connection with Old Magic be un-made. The folk of the forge are in agreement that this is an appropriate thing to do and they reveal themselves as the elemental forces they are. The black mark Captain Irontongue placed on my hand instantly disappears. Our guide is gone. We return to the Manor, Maylorn is seen drifting through again. The steward is becoming unhappy at the trail of blood that follows us around. He locks the house against the darkness.

Air Day 13th Day of Harvest Moon 17AR

Forest of Forlond, near the River Gelion, Forlindon, Northern Thranduil

Crew 15 (3 sick for part of day, unable to fight)

Morale Good

Supplies Excellent (Feasting on banquet)

Driving Rain all day

Our work at the manor was complete, the steward was on the verge of throwing us out. We stuffed our pouches with food and left. We had worked out from some of the woodsmen and from Maylorn's treasure stash where we might find The Wayworn Inn - the starting point on the map to Thearos's 'Great Treasure'. The journey was some 150 miles skirting around the foot-hills of Ered Luin. However a more dangerous 30 mile trail led through one of the passes of Ered Luin itself. We resolved to follow this trail.

We soon meet more woodsmen, they warn us not to go deeper into the forest. We pay them little heed and slay them. It is implied that The Lord of the manor, Maylorn is journeying in the forest and may return soon. We meet some strange forest creature, dryads or some such beside a spring that bursts across the path. We engage them. Slowed and alone for a while I lose my first spirit strength of the day. We push on and come across a mossed-over old road, perhaps another remnant of a previous age. We meet a single wild-man who snipes at us from a ridge spitting poisonous barbs through a blowpipe. We skirmish with him up the road, but really he is leading us to a larger force. On a sharply up-sloping field we join with a large force of Wildmen led by a circle of Woses. They throw great magics at us, it's a tough physical fight too, but we win. We sat drinking and celebrating then it happened. I had been feeling rough that morning, but that was nothing new. Then my bowels gave in and I had succumbed to 'Blue Mountain Flux'. A horrible dysentery that most of the crew would eventually suffer from. Was it water? The final curse of a defeated Barrow-wight? I don't know.

We fought more woodsmen and some Druids accompanied by a Dryad as the road followed the river. They were determined not to let us through. The forest here was thick and had an ancient feel and probably was significant to them. The scouts did well in this place, quickly harvesting the herbs required for the ritual of returning a soul without the body present using the Philtre of Eternity. Soon a horn was heard and a group of men boldly stood forth. They were dressed in ancient armour and garb of earthy tones, true to the faded glory of their race. They announced themselves as the heroes of the Dunedain, some sort of Rangers of the North, word had been sent them by the woodsmen that Corsairs invaded the north and they had travelled quickly to answer the call. Fine, organised warriors they were, acting as one, following commands and now and then falling back to regroup and retain their shape. A fine scrap indeed. But let's not give them too much credit, for after a great deal of blood was spilt on both sides, we were the ones with the heels of our boots stifling their last breath. We were most smug, to have defeated

the flower of Dunedain honour. We followed the trail a couple of hundred yards beyond the Dunedain to find a glade, a great Pavillion was erected there, bearing many banners, surely the resting place of the Dunedain heroes.

We entered, on a table a great banquet was laid out, the like of which I had not seen in a long time. There was wine too, both the common sort and several bottles of the fine Dorwinion wine Pigassou. The wine was great indeed, replenishing the spirit, allowing you to fight on beyond your normal strength. The banquet was a beautiful sight, yet not a morsel passed my lips. I drank deeply of a water-jug and curled up, shivering with fever and fell asleep. I think Sutnac and Angel succumbed to the flux too.

Whilst asleep, Maylorn arrived. The tent and banquet were his resting place in the forest, not the Dunedain's as we thought. We had abused the hospitality of his house and stolen much from him. He had an Elven archer with him, and summoned many elementals to him, but the boys bested him. I awoke having missed the whole thing.

Timeus graced us his presence again. As promised this was the last time he would meet with us and discuss Old Magic. I have to admit by this time the desire to master Old Magic was being overtaken by far more temporal concerns. He had consulted the star charts he had recently found. Each star represented a player in this 'game', us included. One star associated with Dagor had recently winked out of existence, we thought this might be Amrath, his herald, probably slain. Dagor now moved towards us and now nearly converged upon us – he was actively seeking us. Another represented Thaeros the Noldor, Captain Irontongue and a couple of others were unrevealed as yet. The key constellation of 3 – The Archmage of Water, The Kalid Towers and an unrevealed star held a key relationship at the centre. In some way the Archmage was under the influence of the other two and perhaps was not a willing partner in some pact. Another star represented our Mystery Sponsor who had a relationship with Captain Irontongue too, raising the possibility our sponsor was from Barad Tirgul. Timeus confirmed that the Captains link with Old Magic had been severed, which pleased us greatly. We gave Timeus the Helm of Knowledge as was our deal for his assistance in navigating the waters of Old Magic. What was the value of these gifts? Priceless on both sides I think.

Timeus said Dagor would arrive soon, the forest was slowly darkening and perverting as his influence extended, fell beasts were drawn to him. As mortals alone we were no match for a Sindar Lord. He confirmed what we had suspected, we should return Thaeros the artificer to life using the (fake?) Philtre of Eternity, and we should implore him to help us. A slim chance indeed as we were the crew that slew him, those few years ago! We took the potions we had stolen from the Halmadonian Vault and prepared them with the herbs as the recipe in Thaeros's

Journal described.

There he stood again Thaeros the Noldor, follower of Finwe, Elf returned from the Halls of Mandos. He was remarkably calm in our presence, amused by our actions. We offered him Pigassou, which warmed his mood. We explained we had used the Philtre from the Vault to return him, though we had been told this was the 'fake' Philtre of Eternity. He laughed heartily at our mortal naivety. He opened our magic box containing his journal and took out the old embroidered rag that seemed to have no purpose. 'This is the Filter of Eternity, I suspect you have made an error of translation, the 'fakes', - the bottles you hold, are the Filtrate, my Filtrate!'. The story of the Filter of Eternity is a long one. It is an artifact aligned with Morgoth and Blood Old Magic. Long ago Dagor Starglade owned it and it is rumoured he had Filtered his soul using it and hence returned to life, with a growing taint of Morgoth upon him. To filter ones self, one sacrifices blood and filters it through the Filter-cloth. Two liquids emerge though it, one light, and one dark, and should be contained separately in two potion bottles like the ones we had containing a portion of Thaeros's soul. They are a filtered portion of your soul. By being poured into the mouth they can return life even to those from Thranduil who never normally return after death. Dagor filtered himself before he was slain by Sir Vigilaine's Grandfather, Sir Vallaine, one hundred years ago. It is presumed someone of his house, perhaps his herald Amrath used his Filtrate to return him to life later. When Dagor died, and before he returned, Thaeros travelled to Orin Rakatha and recovered Dagor's sword Angurriel, and placed it in the newly created Vault. Co-incidentally he also recovered the Filter of Eternity - the old embroidered rag we found in the Magical Box we got off him when we slew him, that frankly, we thought was worthless. With some trepidation Thaeros also used it to Filter himself, so that if he was later slain, he might be returned from death and continue his work. He placed his Filtrate, his 'Great Treasure' in the Vault. One hundred years later he revisited his Vault and placed the Stone of Sarndor next to his Filtrate to provide a way of quickly accessing it, an 'Earth-Door' from the location of the stone's Shards secreted elsewhere beneath Ered Luin, near the Wayworn Inn, was created. This Filtrate was what he referred to as his 'Great Treasure', truly a great treasure to him, but worth bugger all to us! What is interesting to note is that the process of Filtering ones soul brings you closer to Morgoth, which certainly happened to Dagor. Thaeros, has done this too, but is adamant he is unchanged by the process, I guess time will tell.

And so to Dagor. Thaeros would help us fight him, as it was only fitting that he should help defeat a corrupted first-born. He summoned forth a great magic, a tiny memory of the light of Aman that would banish the shadows for an hour only. We gathered in a circle in the glade, the light of Aman in our midst. He made us imbibe herbs that would sharpen our senses, allowing us to see the unseen, including Dagor's Mantle, some kind of protection. Suddenly the banner, the Black Sail, was gone, but another wraith-like creature stood in our midst, the dark creature bearing the eye of Morgoth who had accompanied Ambassador Serena the day we pledged to the banner. It was the embodiment of the Aflame, the banner itself. It would use its evil power to sustain our forms for the coming conflict. Fell creatures stirred in the forest and approached, but they would pull up short of our circle of light, wounded by the light of Aman. We would be forced

to break out of the circle to sortie and slay the beasts in the dark. Then the tall, pale form of Dagor Starglade came, Longsword in right hand, Anguriel in left. Battle was joined, during that hour we broke out again and again to fight the fell beasts, always to be beaten back when Dagon moved round the circle in the darkness to force us back. The beasts we could take, Dagon we could not. So I did what I never do, offered single combat. The two of us stood aside from the rest, hopefully giving the others time to crush the fell beasts. We fenced in the dark, his longsword causing great spiritual injury. He held Anguriel aloft and uttered some word of power, somehow I parried it. Soon again he called on some dark power this time it struck.

I felt darkness as my spirit strength was wrenched away, then darkness and peace again. Then the true curse of the blade, more of my spirit strength was wrenched away again – slain twice over with a single blow. Then I saw the form of the Aflame above me, ‘do you wish to fight anew?’ it whispered, ‘yes’ I replied foolishly. With that it grabbed me, wrenched me from spheres-know-where and threw me, all resurrected-like, back in the thick of it.

The light of Aman faded, we could no longer hold them at distance, we fought the last couple of fell beasts around the periphery of the woods whilst trying to avoid Dagon roaming the battlefield. I think Finn also fell to Anguriel. Some of our number were taken up tending the fallen on the ground, The Aflame asked them why they did not fight, they explained they were trying to save their crewmates. So he made their decision for them and killed the dying shipmates where they lay, to free up all that could fight. Dagon had some strange spirit, his ‘Mantle’ with him, some shadow of himself that followed him that we slew first, then finally we gathered round and hacked our way through Dagon himself, a truly mighty foe. And so we were victorious. I placed Anguriel in my scabbard, I did not carry it openly to avoid jealous eyes. It felt good.

Driving rain, slain three times over in a day and shitting through the eye of a needle, never have I felt quite so exhausted, yet strangely never have I felt quite so satisfied in all my career.

Water Day 14th day of Harvest Moon 17AR

Ered Luin Pass, Forlindon, Northern Thranduil

Crew 15 (6 sick for part of day, but all able to fight)

Morale Excellent falling to Good (Buoyed by yesterdays successes, worsening due to illness and rain)

Supplies Good

Steady Rain

We breakfasted at the Elven pavilion. Even more of the crew had contracted the Flux – it was spreading rapidly. The woodsmen were less keen to engage us now, but were making sure we moved on. We force-marched up the pass, making good progress despite crew members often running off into the bushes, and not to invoke neither. The mountains were bleak and the weather poor. We crossed the high-point around midday and began to descend into a long valley. The landscape changed from green to grey, far off we could see great mounds of earth and slag. We met a group of Angmarian Auxillaries, probably Hillmen. We claimed to be Auxillaries too. We found out the forces of the Witch-King delved in this place for 'The Maw'. Many Uruks were drawn to this place, heeding some call or other. The Witch King and the Savage Chieftan made constant war over this place. We slew them to ensure no messengers were sent forth.

We met a Morgothian Priest called Saul, he had recently travelled out from the Wayworn Inn, our destination. He carried message that an envoy of the Witch King was in residence there and would meet us. Who could this be, we wondered?

We approached the mines themselves. A great cleft had been ripped in the far side of the Valley. For as far as the eye could see there were great shards of shattered slate and remnant of mine workings, the place had been ripped apart in their search. First we met a group of armoured perimeter Uruk guards who we dealt with easily as we were well prepared. We skirmished with more worker-Uruks as we moved forward to a building – likely the head of a mine-shaft. As we neared the alarm was raised, many workers were being brought up from below to defend the works, they weren't too difficult to kill but came up in almost limitless numbers. Then two cave trolls were brought up, like the ones we had met before, smashing and shattering all they struck. These we had to skirmish with, withdrawing each time they lashed out. On top of this a small detachment of Easterling raiders made a rapid attack up the hill, striking at both us and the workers, creating a vast, confused melee. We made a concerted assault on the Easterlings and slew them then turned back on the mine works. A sortie of the scouts on the Mine shaft reaped rewards finding and killing a Priestess of Morgoth working the chains bringing up more Uruks from below, cutting their reinforcements. We dealt with the Uruks and trolls and left. Our party has many scouts, I am starting to see that a couple of determined scouts, the type willing to risk their neck, perhaps with an Evil Priest, can do to turn a fight. Indeed most of our party can cut a man's throat or near-as-dammit kill him with a touch so its something we rely on more and more.

We had no business venturing into the mine so made quick pace down from the pass. We encountered a few straggler Uruks but made short business of them. Finally down on the Eastern Foothills of Ered Luin we spied a holmly home. The Wayworn Inn. We rang the bell and were ushered in by a maid of the house. We were shuffled into a cramped dining room. Only Captains were allowed to keep their weapons I heard. We dined on simple, hearty fare. Spirits

had fallen through the day but soared with the uncorking of bottles. We were shown to our quarters and tried to dry our clothes, there was a rush for the latrines. At seven bells it was announced the next-door bar was open and, en masse we entered.

The bar was a big fine old place, the perfect sort for drinking, singing, wenching and gambling. Many folk were there already, many of Captain Irontongue's crew I noted grimly. We talked with them and kept it all light, trying not to give too much away. Then the Captain enters, there was a fair bit of tension, he introduces himself as the Envoy of the Witch King, we exchange a few words, he asks why my men call me Captain now, I tell him of 'The Ghost', he asks where it is, 'at the bottom of the ocean' I regretfully admit. His crew laugh, I'm pissed off, too sober for wit. Then Jack pitches in, referring to how we removed his connection with Water Old Magic 'We heard you were pregnant Captain – cos we heard your waters were broken!' Genius, wish I'd thought of that.

The band strike up – 'The Golden Apple'. Fine minstrels. Amongst other stuff they sing a song about slaying a Dragon. There's a break, some travelling players perform a play about Turin and the slaying of the Dragon Glaurung, but played for comedy. Everyone is getting drunk and all are in fine form. The Captain has set his stage well, he offers to set old grievance aside. As part of a new accord and to win favour with the Witch King, he proposes a new venture, one that will win glory and great treasure. Before all he asks us to travel forth and slay the Dragon Arfang on the morrow. I know it's a trap, he will be manipulating us some how, but after all the songs, all the stories, in front of so many, how could I refuse such a challenge, whatever deception it involves. I agree and agree with gusto. There is much drunken cheering. The band strike up again, there is much dancing, even Halve is seen dancing. Toward the end of the night the Captain explains where the Dragon might be summoned from its resting place. He tears the map from Theros's Magic Box in half, keeping the second half with the location of the Stone of Sarndor on it for himself, on our half, he points to a location from where the Dragon may be summoned. For this we need a key. He leads me into the gardens behind the Inn. There is a rock garden containing many metal and stone statuettes and icons. He asks me to choose a key, I choose a pewter Dragon statue, the correct answer he says, no doubt an exercise to further gain our trust, but inside I'm still not buying it. More comes out - It seems the Arch Mage of Water is in the Dragon's glamour, in some way this causes him to side with and help the Kalid. By slaying Arfang we might prevent this, if this is true it is beneficial to both of us. We seem to be entering some uneasy partnership to remove the Kalid from all this.

The Captain leaves. I'm troubled but throw myself into the game of Tontine that develops – the game for desperate men, where each of us chooses a card to be rewarded or punished by. We are all roaring drunk, so Spingle, Wertigo and I join in with some locals and Irontongue's crew, which is madness as there can be only one winner. The game drags on, but none of us are knocked out, perhaps the auspicious time for Tontine passes as the game collapses into the

table. I have the 'Death' card stuck to me at the end, and it won't come off.

The bar closes and we all drift off to bed.

Earth Day 15th Day of Harvest Moon 17AR

Eastern Ered Luin, Forlindon, Northern Thranduil

Crew 14 (1 lost, 5 sick for part of day, all able to fight)

Morale Good rising to Best Ever by end of the day (Buoyed by successes)

Supplies Good

Sporadic Rain

The flux continues to work its way through the crew, some of the first to catch, myself included, seem to be getting better, so at least its not fatal. It is a source of great humour for most of use now. We head along following the map. Tide Zombies are seen ahead. We prepare for a fight. We meet with the Arch Mage of Water (this time not a steam-apparition), accompanied by many undead of the deep. He stands against us, for to slay the Dragon will cause harm to the Kalid. Battle is joined, he invokes a great dehydration upon us all and we all join battle injured as if we had just finished a great battle. These undead are stronger than the tide zombies we had met before and fall less easily to salt. We hack our way through the undead, fighting the Arch-Mage is gruelling, he is fast and the bite of his blade saps you of all swiftness too. Standing with his last creature, the battle halts, its almost as if he is reaching into our minds to seek empathy with us. Only now he senses our resolve and that the he may be the one who is deceived in all this. Confused, he dives into the woods and is gone in a flash.

Further on we meet Snake-men who we slay easily. We then meet perhaps 3 waves of folk each led by a priest-like figure. Each of these Dragon-Priests wore shed dragon scales for armour and embodied some feat of a Dragon, be it the dismembering blow, or beguiling gaze. Each held together a rag-tag bunch enamoured by the Dragon's glamour. We cut through them, but its clear Arfang holds many in his thrall. During one of these fights Spingle disappeared into thin air (*Later note: gravely injured, I think his Tontine card returned him to a place of safety back in the Towers*) .

Finally we came to a house. It was guarded by four Dragon-Priests, each capable of a dragon-feat. One could summon Dragons breath, another negated all magic, another had a near-impenetrable hide, another summoned a cloud of noxious vapour much like a greater curse. Each returned again and again from death until we found a candle they were bound to,

hidden somewhere in the house. We found a warded room and used the Dragon-key to enter. Inside was a chime, upon which we played the tune that we had been taught.

We waited and waited. Nothing happen. The sun came out, we lazed in it. It didn't feel very heroic. No dragon came. Was this the Captain's trick?

Then we saw the Captain's Quarter Master come up the hill. He looked as if he has seen battle that day. He asked after our progress. He offered us food, we checked it for poisons then heartily dived in. We followed his tracks downhill, heading into the area where the 'square within a square' on the Captain's half of the map was to be found. Here the Shards of the Stone of Sarndor may be found and hence the secret 'back door' to the Halmadonian Vault. We searched for the place where the square within a square lay on our scribbled-down version of the Captain's map, and sure enough we find a square hewn tunnel entrance there, shored up by slate, crafted by a confident hand. Finn looked fit to collapse from the Flux, but carried on all the same.

We went forth into the tunnel, which was lit by torches, as if inhabited. We reached a solid door. We knocked and spoke the password 'Gond'. The gate opened and a cowed figure beckoned us in. He welcomed us to the Dwarven kingdom under the mountain of Belegost. He explained that all entrances were now guarded by water for Belegost had long been besieged by Dragons and Uruks, seeking their hoarded wealth. It seems they had retreated from the world above, revelling in past glories. He led us down to where the tunnel dived below a placid underground lake. An iron dock lay there. We filed onto an iron long-boat. The robed figure shut the rear gate of the ferry and it effortlessly cut through the water. We journeyed perhaps a quarter or half mile through narrow caves, occasionally opening up to reveal great caverns above. Water dripped or flowed from crags above echoing the length of Belegost.

We arrived at another iron dock. The boatman bid us disembark. We made our way forward down the carefully shored-up mine tunnel. We heard gruff voices beyond. Here we met a group of Dwarf miners. The sight of Corsairs underground in their home was enough for combat to be joined quickly. We moved forward. We arrived at a left hand junction – Thaeros's Journal said the Shards of Sarndor lay this way. Like much of Belegost it was protected by a spring that created a ward blocking it. Instead we headed straight ahead. Here we met a guard-post of armoured dwarves. They were experienced tunnel-fighters, they bunched up tightly, some of the stunties would drop even lower and use short weapons and shields at your knees whilst the others would use long weapons above. When pressed, the tightly-knit unit would push forward as one. We found the key for the ward amongst their treasure. With the key the spring dried up and the ward disappeared and we were through. The sound of Finn vomiting (or was it more?)

into the underground stream echoed the length of the great halls of Belegost.

We saw more dwarven warriors, this time they hung back and unleashed a captive cave troll that we faced on an iron bridge over the edge of the lake. It was time to bring out Angurriel for its unbreakable Galvorn was the only thing that could parry its crushing blows. Between the warriors we took it in turn to fight it as each of us fell with shattered bones.

We entered a great slate hall. Here we met a host of Dwarf warriors, two wide lines of shields formed, and met as a great tangle of weapons both low, and high above from the second rank. The dwarves rallied as a healer or two arrived, but the shape of the tunnel prevented our usual tactic of targeting them. The melee was long and gruelling, then they broke and a finely armoured dwarf strode through. Prince Zackalar announced himself. He asked our intention. It transpired we were the second Corsair group through today. The first group (Captain Irontongue's crew) had left with a Shard of the Stone of Sarndor, though it wasn't clear whether this was by guile, bribery or might. It seems the dwarves were the appointed guardians of the Shards of the Stone of Sarndor, as Thaeros said in his journal 'gold overcomes racial enmity to secure its safe keeping'. The dwarves continued to resist us, their numbers thinned, we killed their healers, we followed the last couple of warriors into some narrow crawl-tunnels where a desperate close range knife-and-shield fight occurred. Jack proved to be a natural tunnel-fighter. We emerged into a still greater hall. Here we fought Prince Zackalar and his elite, our resources were low, but the crew didn't show it. As a couple of Dwarves fell, Zackalar ceased fighting and negotiations began. He offered to give us a Shard of Sarndor as we requested for a tribute of treasure. We were exhausted, hacking yard by yard through Belegost for 4 constant hours, and I was expecting treachery to meet us outside too. I handed round a helm and we put the dwarven treasure we had found and most of what we had robbed from Maylorn's Manor in it. It was a fortune, gold and jewels filled the helm. Perhaps he would have taken half as much, or even a token offering to save face and avoid death – I'll never know. Our lack of resources and the fact I suspected the Captain lay in wait outside meant a quick deal was needed. He didn't haggle with our offer (a bad sign!) and sent a dwarf to take the Shard of Sarndor from the treasure hoard. He disappeared into a dark hollow, we heard him sift through what sounded like a fortune (dammit!) to return with the stone shard, which he handed over. With this Zackalar invoked ancient pacts with the other Princes of Belegost. Drums echoed in the deep and we heard the sound of the running feet of reinforcements through unseen stairwells. We retreated back through the perhaps quarter or half mile of tunnels to the ferry. We constantly skirmished with them all the way, their limitless numbers nipping at our heels. We reached the boat, the ferryman shut the iron gate on the hoard and soon there was just the eary dank silence of the underground lake. We drank the last of the Pigassou to allow us to cast a few more invocations more than we might otherwise on emerging.

We emerged into the dark, the gates of Belegost swung shut behind us. Gathered all around

were the Dragon-followers and their Priests. A small group entered the scene, Captain Irontongue, and his Quartermaster beside Arfang the Dragon. He was a great red beast, all teeth and spiky scales, his tail dragging behind him. His enamoured Dragon-Kin followers looked on in awe. I ordered Dudge to flee the field and hide the Shard of Sarndor. The Captain thanked us for summoning Arfang, explaining that as his lair lay far away, it had taken many hours for him to arrive. With this, he invoked the power of the other Shard of Sarndor he had gained from Belegost earlier and disappeared off to the Halmadonian Vault, laughing.

Battle was joined, we were funnelled up in the gateway, skirmishing at the sides with Dragon-Kin. Arfang breathed noxious fumes to curse our luck and fire again and again at our bunched forms. We broke out a little, all blows were easily turned aside by Arfangs hide, I struck Arfang with Anguriel, it sunk deep, but nothing strange happened. Numbers were falling rapidly on both sides, we could not tend the fallen. Suddenly there was perhaps four of us left standing, me, Wertigo, Anthrax and Angel I think, though I might be wrong. We were on our last legs, facing the Dragon and 3 of his Priests. Do or die stuff. We cried 'for Umbar' and made a final full-on charge. Figures dived out of unseen positions, waiting for this moment, Dudge, Garret and Jack I think, the distracted priests throats were deftly slit, I plunged Anguriel twice more into Arfang and his form slumped. Its destiny fulfilled, Anguriel melted to the Star-Ore it was born of. We were victorious, perhaps our greatest, most hopeless charge was blessed by the spheres.

We gathered up the dead. Silas, who we saw hacked to pieces on the floor, bizarrely lay alive with the 'Death' Tontine card stuck to him. We had work to do, the Captain was getting away, we needed to follow. We hacked the teeth out of the Dragons maw, one was given to each of the crew in memory of the battle at Belegost's Gate. We invoked the power of the Sarndor Stone and we travelled through the earth to Orin Rakatha

Fire Day 16th Day of Harvest Moon 17AR
The Halmadonian Vault, Orin Rakatha
Crew 14 (4 sick for part of day, all able to fight)
Morale Excellent
Supplies Good
No Rain Today!

We travelled through earth, it was day on Orin Rakatha, but we had no rest during our strange journey, and our resources were not replenished by sleep. We arrived near the Stone of Sarndor within the new, improved Halmdonian Vault. It was a sparse entry-chamber, artefacts were not left in the main chamber as before, there were now many heavily warded doors and hatches in the wall, no doubt containing the artefacts. Alarms rang and elementals sprang from

the walls. We fought and won. A construct or drone, a kind of curator appeared, he politely asked what item we had come to collect. We only knew from Thaeros's journal that a sword called Menelvagor, and an Iron Rune-stone of Gauthor lay in the Vault. I asked for Menelvagor. He went through a door to find it. The elementals struck again. The curator returned with a great, keen blade, which we took. I thought about taking more, but there was the risk that the Captain had already taken the Rune-Stone, and with every second, he and his crew were getting away, the alarms had rung and Halmadonians would soon arrive. Despite achieving our dream of robbing the Vault, there was no choice but to get out fast. We ran out of the door, knowing we could never return and went out into the light and followed the trail out along a river-side. Here we met Barad Tirgul sentries, they forbade us to go further so we slew them.

We moved on. Rounding the corner we saw the Captain and his whole crew. Overlooking them was a great rock, standing upon it was a Morgothian High-Priest and his Knight-Bodyguard. At first we did not recognise him for who he was, until his Bodyguard (called Blood I think) announced him as Baron Ulthar of Barad Tirgul. He commanded the silence of all. And so he was revealed as our 'mystery sponsor' who had pulled the strings all along. He said he would claim the Filter of Eternity from us, according to the deal we had arranged through the Wolfhold ambassadors a year and a half ago. He would also take two choice items as arranged too. We had no choice but to agree. He revealed the enormity of our actions. Years ago Irontongue had brokered an arrangement between Barad Tirgul and the Kalid. Arfang, like all his species, was a pawn of Morgoth, the Captain had used Arfang to place a glamour on The Thissessin Arch Mage of Water. The Arch Mage had been coerced to serve the Kalid and alter the flow of the waters of Orin Rakatha. In some way the whispers in the waters were changed and they no longer told the Mystics that the Kalid held 5 towers. This should not be, either because no one should be allowed to hold 5 towers or perhaps they did not hold enough status to hold the last 2. The arrangement with the Kalid no longer suited Barad Tirgul, so it was to be terminated. With the fall of Arfang, the glamour would be removed and the duplicity revealed. The Arch Mage would cease to help the Kalid towers to exist. I suspect it would be more politically convenient for a bunch of Valley renegades to break this deal rather than Morgothians. He revealed both us and the Captain had, in our own way, been his servants these past years, but there was no room for both of us in his favour. He announced combat to the death must be the decider, crew versus crew. Irontongue agreed but requested parity in the contest to come, and that we should not carry the Banner of The Aflame, and have access to evil power curing. It was taken from us.

Battle was joined. His crew were strong and diverse. It became apparent they were not living creatures, they merely bled sea-water over the soil. Perhaps us human and half-orc crew were too much trouble for him, so he had found more predictable crew. With the Black Sail gone, the battle was tough with no evil power to heal our wounds. I mostly fought the Captain, who is almost unparalleled with a blade. Fortunately I had Menelvagor in hand, a blade ensorcelled to a degree I thought impossible. A few of his crew began to fall. The Captain withdrew to the river. He stood knee deep in the river, his vigour improved and strength increased. Finally he stepped up onto an island in the river, there Wertigo and I finally bested him. He fell and revenge was

ours after all these years.

Ulthar departed but said he would return for his rewards. We made for a near by shack where we rested. After an hour a delegation of dignitaries arrived, Lord Arakis, Steward of Wolfhold, Sir Faldor Steel of The Primus and the Knights Martial and Verrick, the King's Seneschal. Baron Ulthar accompanied them. The effects of our actions were made clear, with the pact between the Kalid and Barad Tirgul dissolved and Arfang's glamour on the Arch-Mage removed, the forth and fifth Kalid towers may soon fall. There seems to have been collusion between Wolfhold and Barad Tirgul in achieving this all along.

Arakis spoke to us, he made it clear to those present that although Wolfhold never truly trusted us, but they saw our worth. He named us Heroes of Wolfhold, there was a great hurrah! Ulthar claimed the Filter of Eternity and Menelvagor as part of his deal, this left us with pitifully little to show for our work. With Lord Arakis's blessing, Ulthar offered those of the crew that wished to, to return to Thranduil and enter service under the Witch King. To this end, Ulthar offered the position of Envoy of the Witch King, and that of a Captain of Umbar with Irontongues 2 ships to command. I, Sutnac, Anthrax, Cut-throat Jack, Pyre, Dudge, Garret and Walker agreed to travel to Thranduil two months hence to this end. If so I will name them '*The Dragon*' and '*The Revenge*'.

Or perhaps, for a reason I will not even write here, we will enter the service of the Witch King and take a different path. Perhaps north to Arnor.

Here ends our tale as I remember it, one of which we are most proud. And so when we return to the Inns of Umbar and someone asks us where we have been and to spin a tale, we will say:

We travelled 3 worlds
We sailed 800 leagues in a barely seaworthy vessel
We both won, and gave away a fortune
We nearly drowned in the Deep Waters of Old Magic
We found the 'Great Elf Treasure' and found it to be not so 'Great'
We slew the pride of both Gondor and Arnor
We returned a high Noldor Lord from the Halls of Mandos
We slew a mighty Sindar Lord
We were slain twice over with a single blow
We filtered our very souls in the name of Morgoth and held his banner high
We won two ships
We cracked the Halmadonian Vault, twice
We invaded the halls of Belegost

We caused the downfall of 2 Kalid Towers
We slew a Dragon

But most of all we slew the Captain and felt the sweet taste of revenge.

Irwindur Azzurian
Soon to be Envoy of the Witch King
Barad Tirgul
Hero of Wolfhold