

### The Second Day

It was on this day that we awaited the arrival of the White Seer, Pyrion, the West Point of the Compass, and the Seer based on Murandir. He arrived and spoke more about the compass, also mentioning that the Axian ceremony this day was nothing to do with our quest.

There are 8 points to the compass. North has been vacant since the passing of Rol Soran.

North East: SeletonTar  
East: Dreams of Shadows  
South East: Madrienne  
South: Estarial  
South West: Malon Mar  
North West: Empty

During the assault on King Michel at Eostarre, a rift was formed between Orin Rakatha and another plane, caused by a burst of energy that shot through a number of other planes. The Seers were acting as beacons on each of these planes, communicating with visions and dream sendings.

South is on Cassel, which Pyrion had deduced was a place of conflict. He had not heard from Estarial for five moons. Though the places are connected, they are very far apart. The Halmadonians had tried researching a route to Cassel but the only one they were aware of was via the Dark Pass (an unpleasant place on the Plane of the Sleepless Dead – having fought a number of its inhabitants of late we had a general preference for an alternative route if possible).

Between them, Duke Hanrow, Pyrion, Dreams of Shadows and Halmadons Height had devised an alternative route for us to travel through the rift. In an empowered bag were the components of a device to traverse the planes – the “stray light cage”, a rudimentary device. The energies used to puncture the route are still visible and can be ‘seen’, but they are not magical and spiritual, hence our need to find the Seer on each plane to direct us further. Each Seer would possess a detailed drawing of the next place in the link, and with the stray light cage we could capture the image of ourselves onto this picture and so project ourselves onto the next plane.

Pyrrion also mentioned that Senator Amadeus had come here with a special unit, spending several moons in this place on Murandir. They have the ability to move between the planes, and several moons ago they entered the rift themselves.

We left the building to travel to the site where the rift could be seen. On our way we were confronted by the Empire detachment under the leadership of Tiberius. Despite our protests that we were not interested in conflict, we entered into combat. I believe the Counsel Serbitus was with them, and was slain. After this, there was some shouting between the groups. Eventually an arrangement was found whereby the Empire group could claim they had won the field if they would leave us to our business in the area (which was to leave). Tiberius was looking to prove himself to his father, and wished us to depart the place, so he was happy with this arrangement. While Pyrrion showed us how to construct the light cage, we noticed some goblins who seemed to regard the woods as their territory, and we were visited by some Axians – the same as from the night before. The ritual that they were performing was as thus:

To overthrow Apep, an effigy of the God is made, and all pray that the evil and wickedness go into the effigy. Then the priests attack the effigy with great determination, trampling, crushing and beating it with sticks.

This ritual commenced at dawn, with the rising of the sun. They informed us that the ritual had failed and that Apep had escaped. The group were unhappy to hear this but were bound to travel onto the next place as we did not have any time to spare. And so we passed onto Cassel.

## **CASSEL**

We appeared in an open wooded area. Nearby were a line of armed figures dressed uniformly who it turns out were guarding the entrance to the 1st Canton. One of their men spoke with us, telling us to go South, that their orders were to guard the entrance to their Canton and they had no intention of straying over the boundary (we were currently in a different Canton). His lord was Rio de Fearow. Those of the Cantons are aligned with particular elements. They wore green which represented their affiliation with water and steel.

As Verrick insisted that our Seer lay along this route we were obliged to step into their land and

thus engage them in conflict. Holding a steady frontline we defeated them in short order, although their were frequent calls from our side asking if they would yield. In the end we left one alive, although his body was broken, with a message that we did not seek to cause trouble for his master.

Before this fight, we had spotted a figure dressed in clothes that oddly resembled the colours of Halmaddons Height, save for the black scarf he wore across his face, the daggers and suspiciously assassin-like stance by a tree. It turns out his name was Andrei, and he worked for a man named Malius Vespero. They were called "The Vendettas" by the people. He told us we looked like those of the 2nd Canton – those who follow the Baron associated with Cloudbringer – whose people were blue. He mentioned that the land of Cassel hates everyone, something that the Vendettas would re-iterate to us on a number of occasions.

After fighting a number of extremely poisonous beasts that among other things slowed our speed with their venom, we found his leader, Vespero, along with a small group of their bandits. Sir Clavados asked Sir Kal to initiate the talking with them. Vespero said that the magic stopped in his grandfather's time. At this time three Cantons were taken with swords and since that time the Barons have been warring, regardless of the consequence for the people or the land. There were three swords: Riversteel (held by Rio de Fearer), Cloudbearer (held by Sir Charles Tempest), and the fire sword held by Castillian Dunnock. There are twelve Cantons here, but only three that are ascendant – those that bear the swords. The people of the fen (the commoners) have a hard time with the swamp and the fen beasts (they seemed somewhat disconcerted by the appearance of High Priest Lathrodec). They wanted to see the Barons put in their places, and the swords returned to the land. They believed that the forging of the swords could have drained he land of its magic and made it angry (as there was no longer a balance in the world).

Vespero also mentioned that a year ago, one of the Barons fought against the Empire group and lost – not even the "white witch" could help. This "witch" had arrived to Cassel five years ago. She wears a symbol that they recognised on a number of us (that of the White Retreat). She went with one of the non-ascendant Cantons, using non-natural magic to this place. Castillian had her first, then she was kidnapped by Sir Charles (of the 2nd Canton), when the Empire came here.

We journeyed onwards, fighting some more men over a muddy bridge, and keeping a watch that the Vendetta did not steal our possessions during this fight as they seemed inclined to do. We then encountered some figures in red, who had with them Baron Castillian Dunnock, head of their Canton. My initial attempts at diplomacy were pointless as he quickly showed himself to

be insane. The Baron's group touched their swords to his own large fiery sword, and proceeded to fight us. Most of the Crusaders found his fiery blows to rip through their magical armour. Nevertheless we defeated him and his retinue, when an incident occurred among our own group. Erf and Lathrodec were attacking a blind enemy when Paladin Verrick rushed up and of his own accord started striking High Priest Lathrodec, before he was pulled off by Sir Paullandiss. Verrick had, in breaking Valley Law, also broken his oath upon the Sword of Law. Sir Clavados then put Verrick "on a charge", which apparently means he will be punished for his wrongdoing in due course. High Priest Lathrodec took offence at Verrick's actions, but relented when Verrick was finally prompted to give him an apology.

We resolved to proceed further, travelling over more open, scrubby land with dusk falling. In the twilight we met a group led by Sir Charles Tempest. He was initially rather scornful and treated me somewhat uncivilly, which drew some angry calls from our group. I pointed out to him that we were in fact worthy of his attention, as we had just defeated his enemy Castillian Dunnock and had the armour and sword to prove it. At this point he became a lot more interested in us, particularly the sword. We gathered that their group had briefly paused at this location because "the witch" was tired. Tempest seemed annoyed at this, adding that she was a lot more useless than he had hoped. I mentioned that we had some healers in our group who might be able to restore her, and despite some reluctance on his part I had negotiated access to the lady when all of a sudden she took to her feet and ran into the middle of our group, expressing her relief at seeing us. This was Esterial, the Southern point of the Compass of White Seers. When he realised that the sword would not be forthcoming, Sir Charles attacked me somewhat ineffectually with his magic blade, however the magical stunning effect that it delivered quickly incapacitated many of our group, and I ran out of instant wizardry dispels after removing a few such effects. Eventually we rallied and fought off his entourage, myself and Sir Clavados engaging the Baron who then tried to run away. Despite his magical sword, Sir Tempest was still vulnerable to my magic and he fell to his knees. Some of the paladinic component of our group caught up with him and offered him mercy, which he pretended to take before maiming one of them and then tried to run off once more. Again I brought him down and this time we finished him off.

While we waited for people to recover from elixirs, I spoke at length with Esterial. She said that she had been forced to pose as a witch to hide her powers, and had grown unhappy at the way that these powers had been abused by the Baron with whom she had resided for a time. Ultimately he had come to rely on her skills to pick and choose his fights so that he would always be successful, which is why she had run away. She directed us towards the rift where the straylight cage could be assembled, back in the first Canton. She could not tell us anything of the place to which we would travel, as the only senses she had received were confused. It had also been some time since she had heard from Madrienne, the South-East point, and her contact.

On our way we came across some more men who followed Miguel Riu del Fearow. On this occasion the Baron himself was there and rather than the fight we had prepared for, dialogue ensued. Now that two swords had been taken from his rival factions, there was only one ascendant Canton, so we had effectively acted as king-maker unless we chose to slay the third Baron and claim his sword as The Vendetta sought for us to do. However, upon speaking with him, the group determined him to be an apparently goodly and reasonable man, and that the plans he expressed did not conflict with their ideals. This Baron had not before met a drow, which the others assured him was not a problem. However upon taking a step towards me, the undergrowth sprang up, ensnaring my feet which he said was unusual. To allay any hostilities I then moved away from the conversation. The party decided that one strong, and apparently just leader would bring order to the land and that the magical sword was best off with its present owner.

As we neared the rift location, we were tracked by members of The Vendetta, who were angry that we had not slain the Baron as they had expected us to. They claimed that commoners would suffer for our actions and that we should reconsider. However we would not be swayed from our course at which point they threatened violence. In the face of our superior numbers, not to mention extremely magical swords, they relented.

Spotting the White Seer, they made some untoward comments about “the witch”, before being shooed off.

We constructed the stray light cage. Before Brother John could take his place inside the device to focus the image, Sir Clavados declared that he now understood his calling to join upon the Crusade, and that he would be remaining on the plane to protect Estariel (who must reside here to mark the passage of the rift) while we concluded the quest.

## **BILLINGHAM**

Our first glimpse of the next plane was the sparse edge of a forest. Most of the group collapsed to the floor, finding the weight of their armour and weaponry too great to bear. I then noticed the magical spells bound to me disappear one by one, and the priests were similarly affected. Eventually, and with much effort, all metal armour was removed and metallic weapons detached from belts. We also noticed that the Barons’ swords and armour from Cassel had not been transported with us to the plane. We dragged our abandoned effects to a nearby tree and covered them with earth. Sir Ruff with his mighty strength thought he may be able to drag a number of swords with the group, and so we selected a couple to take with us.

We headed out of the woods, where we encountered a man running past urging us to hasten

towards the local tavern. His name was Will, and he was in service to the tavern proprietor, Master Oak. He was afraid of the local “mooks”, giant hairy creatures that he assured us could rip our limbs out of our sockets. One such creature did appear nearby, giving some credence to his story.

We were ushered into the inn, where we were served some excellent food and drink by some unusually hospitable locals. Quite a number of people packed the inn, including one story-teller named Johan who I spent much of the evening conversing with. He told me that faiths were considered unnatural on Billingham. Two centuries before, two sects argued over what made the sun rise and set every day. Then the first “Protector” brought order to the land, by banning the worship of faiths. The Protector organises the “regulators” – these are monoliths, devices that cause the metal to be heavy and so help to keep the peace. They are supplied by the Academy. At the time we arrived, the twelfth Protector had come to power. Other local occupations included “wranglers”, who get the mooks to move heavy objects around. A Constable was in Erdelbury (Stark Woods) to settle a dispute fought over a cow. Two hours away was a place named Idlebrook, and two days journey would take us to Faversham, where I was told that a dark elf jeweller dwelt. The hosts assumed we were from Cathradun, the lands of the South. The folk there rarely journey to this place, and they still hold to their faiths.

The locals believed that some of our number were “imps”, and were as such regarded with some disfavour. It transpired that an “ooni imp” had been summoned to the tavern five years ago and had wreaked much destruction, killing those who were in the building at the time. Thus there was no open talk of such creatures, associated as they were with recent bad memories. We also gathered that perhaps thirty years ago, a group had passed through this way, and had caused the existing regulator to temporarily lose its function. In response to this, another regulator had been erected next to the ‘faulty’ one, thus eradicating the elements and spheres once more. We suspected that this group would be the Empire group who preceded us.

Members of our party started to notice some familiar things around the tavern. For example, there were small Order of King Michel symbols adorning the fireplace. The storyteller Johan mentioned that the fireplace indicated it was an old building, as with the regulators in place, fire did not work on this plane. He also wanted a new and valiant tale to tell, so I briefly related for him some of the heroic deeds of The Vanguard, most of which he seemed to find incredulous. After the bar closed and the locals departed, the inn-keeper began ranting at us, asking us what we thought we were playing at, with our outspoken talk of ooni imps and so forth. He feared that the Constable would return the next day, and that he would be held responsible for any transgressions that were attributed to us. I was ordered at this point to get some sleep, but I gather the matter was smoothed over in due course.