

The Third Day

Having no currency with which to make purchases on this plane, Sky entered negotiations to sell some of Brother John's jewellery, which had been given him by grateful patients.

The sun was high in the sky when we set forth to talk with a man who had been recommended to us. The air elves had taken to covering their appearance with glittering headscarves, as the blue skin and pointed ears were too reminiscent of imps and hence disturbing for the locals. High Priest Lathrodec was also sporting some sort of disguise. The regulars had previously mentioned that orc-like creatures were used on the plane for load-bearing work, and that dark elves existed, although they were considered a rare sight. Nevertheless those who were obviously not human were ordered to stay away from the discussions with this man.

We later learned that his deceased grandmother, whom he called "Maddy", had had some powers that were considered somewhat unnatural to this place. His father had also inherited this gift/curse, but this man had not. As the White Seer we sought was named Madrienne, and the passage of time in this place even more warped than on Cassel, we suspected that his grandmother was the one we sought. He was able to provide us with some clues which he had been bound to remember to the right people, including a scroll that contained a prophecy of sorts, mentioning three as the mystic number. He told of the inn being called the "King's Arms", passed down from his grandfather Maddy, to his parents and then to him, the Empire party that came through and the murder of his parents. His information was later to prove critical to decipher everything that was going on.

One thing that the grandson directed us towards were a number of gravestones around the area, which we found had runic markings on them. While investigating these, we were attacked by some villagers. Although they could not cast spells nor invocations themselves, they had some transparent crystals with them which apparently granted them the powers to do so, and so began a hard fight, with Balthazar maimed, and Sir Ruff blinded upon the floor. We believe they were local villagers, but also summoners who could call upon forbidden powers, and that they were angered that we were attracting too much attention to the area, and thus hoping to dispose of us before others were drawn here to investigate us.

We returned to the building where a number of people started to unravel the clues provided by the grandson – Wolf, Zilvan and Djimm in particular. While they were doing this, myself, Lathrodec, Erf, Verrick and Sir Paullandiss went off to take a look at the Regulators. Our

approach was cautious due to the presence of a mook that was sleeping close by. Erf scouted close to one Regulator – a tall, metallic, hollow, towering object, however as he did he felt his health adversely affected and returned swiftly to us. Back at the building, Wolf had worked out the names of some herbs that we needed: borage, lunot, gall oak. Brother John went off into the local garden to harvest these ingredients.

Madrienne had left some information concerning the position of the rift with a “nightfolk familiar”, a being not native to this place. Once we had the name of the familiar I summoned him with great ceremony, calling on the fire, the weave and the dance between them. The being – which looked similar to how one might imagine a fearsome hepath – appeared behind me, demanding to know who had done so. I told him it was me and ordered him not to harm anybody within the room. He commented that he was surprised I had called him forth in public, as most summoners apparently tend to carry out their acts in private darkened rooms. Reminding him of his name seemed to help with his compliance throughout our conversation. We told him that he had made a pact with the Seer and asked for the information she had left with him. Once he had established that he was on Billingham and that we were from Orin Rakatha, he imparted that the passage could only be seen with “the eyes of the dead”. He would guide us to the rift but only once we had the requisite material (picture of the next plane). Having no further demands of him at that time, I told him he could go, at which point the familiar headed into the woods, swiftly pursued by a group of paladins fearful of what harm he would wreak upon the local population. They returned once they had established that this would not come to pass.

Our next visitor was an herbalist who started to brew the components we had collected, that would allow us to see “with the eyes of the dead”. While he was creating the mixture, the policeman arrived with an armed group wearing wooden armour. It is worth remembering that most of our group were unarmoured, unarmed, and still injured from our earlier skirmish with the villagers, despite Brother John’s skills with field medicine. A fierce battle ensued, which killed Wolf and brought Sir Ruff close to death. I gave him one of my herbal curing potions to help restore his health. Alchemical potions were useless here. Eventually most of the police force were wiped out, and another argument engulfed our group as Erf had apparently – upon Lathrodec’s orders – slain a man who had given his surrender. With dusk starting to fall, Sir Paullandiss hurriedly ordered Lathrodec to apply the potion that would allow him to see “with the eyes of the dead”. Despite a burning pain and near-blindness from the mixture, on top of his severe injuries, Lathrodec investigated the building but found nothing of interest.

Giles and Sky had also found the means to unlock a message, this time from the Seer herself. A mixture was placed into a special bowl, and we heard Madrienne’s long-dead voice. She apologised for the ways she had hidden the clues, but she had to be sure that they would only be found by the right people. She also said it had been hard to do the right thing, but that she had held true to the King until the end of her life. She left with us a riddle which she uttered

twice, such was its importance:

Play and win the game

Avoid and use the snow and rain

Call Apep and his might extol

Give Ptep temple to reach your goal

The night was upon us and it became apparent we would be waking the next morning on Billingham once more. We dined on some more excellent food served by the inn-keeper and then a small group volunteered to brave the dark woods to locate the hidden passage. Myself, Lathrodec, Erf, Sky, Giles and Brother John stepped out into the rain and located the particular pair of gravestones that we thought might hold the clue. Lathrodec once again applied the unguent to his eyes and peered through a hole on the broken gravestone. Through this, he started to see a trail of lights in the distance. When touching Lathrodec we found we could also see these lights. Heading towards them as swiftly as we could, we came across an open, thatched building deep in the woods. Within it were a number of creatures of deathly, lizard- and snake-like appearance, and a lifesize gameboard set out. Lathrodec introduced himself and the creature in the middle said that he must select a controller and two challengers. As Lathrodec was the only one amongst us with knowledge of this game, having learned it from the Axians two nights before, he took the position of the controller. Erf volunteered to be a challenger, and despite his injuries, Sky took up the other position. The rest of us took seats and watched as Lathrodec skilfully manoeuvred first Erf then Sky around the board, avoiding “Priest Cobra” and “Priest Python” who were the opposition’s challengers, Cobra having killed a standard piece on the board with one strike. Having played the game and won, Lathrodec then moved Sky – now the “devourer” piece – to return back around the board to gain a large bonus.

Towards the end of the game, the rest of the party arrived. Wolf was back with them alive, and he kindly fetched some of my notes as I was bound within the warded building. With the game complete, we felt some ill effects from remaining in the building and sought its only exit. This was apparently guarded by two snake-like creatures but they remained motionless as we passed. The exit skewed into a narrow tunnel, which Erf crawled down first. It appears that he did not manage to “avoid the snow and rain”, and a number of us were showered with an acidic liquid, and suffered other toxic effects within the tunnel. At the end of the tunnel were two spiders, which Lathrodec dispatched with great ease. The rest of us were stuck behind Erf while he recovered from an elixir.

Emerging from the tunnel, we found a small clearing in which a temple was located. This must have been the temple about which only rumour spoke. Within were two motionless figures, one

of whom I recognised as Ptep, due to it wearing white and having skeletal face and hands. In front of the temple was a large triangle which throbbed with Evil power. Lathrodec pointed out that this was a ritual set up to summon an Evil aspect, and which when called, was likely to be angry. While examining the area we were set upon by two dark shapes who struck us with spiritual blows and re-appeared periodically over the course of the evening. High Priest Lathrodec then agreed to summon Apep as required by the Seer's prophecy, and requested that all those with a connection to the Good Sphere made themselves scarce while he did so. I also did not partake in this ceremony as I regarded it as an affront to the Spider Queen. Lathrodec set about learning my notes on Apep, and then his voice rang out clearly, echoing down the tunnel, calling on this Axian 'God'. The summoning was successful and a powerful voice answered, demanding that High Priest Blackwidow abase himself. This was, I believe, considered satisfactory, and Apep disappeared to a chamber within the temple. However Lathrodec came under assault from the two figures within the temple, and so we extracted ourselves from the tunnel to lend him some assistance.

We then spent the next hour or so trying to work out how we "give Ptep the temple". During this time, those with Good Spirits seem repeatedly drawn to the Evil triangle, which promptly removed them from their bodies. Any attempt to step over the threshold was greeted with a number of evil invocations delivered from both Axian figures, which then returned to their positions when the disturbance was removed. We examined a number of cat figurines positioned around the entrance of the temple, but these were not what the figures sought. Eventually Erf gained a spark of inspiration, and dived past them to recover some boards pinned to the back of the temple wall. With my notes, I translated the glyphs upon them. They could possibly be construed as words from the common tongue, saved they seemed to lack some vowels. I suggested that the one reading something like "TMPL" may be the "temple" to hand to Ptep, which we tried and it worked. Lathrodec and I marked down more nonsensical runic phrases adorning the temple walls, and we claimed our prize in the image of our next location.

Apep stood within the closed chamber of the temple, large and blue-faced, motionless behind a table littered with gleaming jewels, magical and spiritual items. After Erf removed a large beetle poised perilously above the entrance to this chamber, Giles identified one of the items upon the table. It revealed itself as an item that would allow you to absorb infinite damage for a spell duration, remaining uninjured until that time had elapsed, whereupon you would suffer it all simultaneously. This item, and the many others on the table, held much temptation for the group, and eventually a vote was taken to leave Apep's part of the temple intact. We returned along the route, losing once again our magical and spiritual powers that we had regained temporarily when entering this place. Although the sun's hours closer, many of the group stayed up to debate the behaviour of Lathrodec and Erf from earlier in the day.