

Excerpts From The Personal Journal of Speaks With Wind

Flower Moon ~ 12th Day

Our group was joined today by Grognar and his pet bird, Scratch. Grognar is one of the Stone People¹ who live to the west of the Thunder Mountain. He is a little shorter than is average for their kind and seems more wiry than stout. From what I can understand, he worships the spirit of the mountain, as opposed to their god Moradin. He said something about being exiled for attempted to convert the Stone People to worship of the the mountain spirit and away from their ancestral god.

Scratch is a bird the size of a pony. While I have never seen such myself, I am under the impression that this is a baby roc. Grognar seems to have it well trained, unlike Apple Thief.

Apparently Grognar has also been sent to the Great Tribe by one of the priests of his people, an elder named Harsk. He also has papers providing him safe passage, although he has not taken much care with them. He has the annoying habit of calling me a "pig-man". I have some small tusks, but look nothing like a pig.

One note: instead of going through the swamp, he went around it. From his description, it is nearly a perfect circle with a radius of about 5 miles. Clearly, going through it was a mistake, as we could have probably gone around it in far less time.

Late in the day, we spoke with a guard we encountered in order to make sure that we were still headed to Palnu. The guard confirmed that we were, and made sure to emphasize several times (mostly to Grognar) that we were "not to cause trouble" while we were there. In addition, he asked me if I was of the Hsiphem Khanate. I mentioned that I was not familiar with this term and asked him to clarify. He said that it was a nation that the Great Tribe had gone to war with a little over a century before and that I "had the look of them" about me.

Flower Moon ~ 15th day

Late Evening

Grognar and I are now "special agents" of the Empire of Sempra. I am not sure entirely what that means or exactly how it came to pass. It was a most eventful day.

We passed through the outskirts of Palnu in the morning. Traffic on the road was very heavy.

¹ Dwarf

One of the passerbys said that the city might have a million people in it. While there were buildings and people everywhere, I figured this might be an exaggeration.

There was a long line at the main gate to the inner city – well over a hundred people were waiting for entrance. The gate was guarded by several thugs, who seemed to spend a great deal of time investigating old women and children. To pass the time, we struck up a conversation with the man ahead of us in line and asked if he would explain a few of the things we saw.

The man said that he would be delighted to do so, and introduced himself as Cassius the Merchant, a page to Senator Tiberius. A page is apparently something of a servant.

The thugs searching people were part of the "Thaumaturgic Security Agency" and were apparently looking for witches, witches being defined as people who can cast magic that is not approved by the Church of Tarim, the official religion of the empire. Their primary methods of determining if someone is a witch is if they wear a pointy hat or if they answer yes when asked if they are a witch. Groping people also had something to do with it. They also looked for drugs and other contraband. Cassius advised us to answer "no" if we were asked if we are carrying anything illegal or were witches.

As we were having this discussion, an wagon passed by us. On top, was a cage with about a dozen people in it. Cassius said these were prisoners headed for "The Pit", and area a few miles to the east of Palnu. His description was rather vague, but the impression I got was that people who go to The Pit do not return. We learned later what the pit was.

When we mentioned that we had papers to see Senator Belarius, Cassius suggested that we use the express gate, a little to the west of the main gate. He led us there and we showed our papers to the guard. The guard asked us a few questions while he examined our papers: did we have contraband, etc. Grognar was rather vigorous in answering "No" to everything.

The guard then called over another man (Cassius identified him as an inquisitor) who examined our papers and then cast a spell², which I recognized as one designed to discovering magical dweomers. Strangely, he did not look at us when he cast it. We were then let through the gate.

Cassius led us to a building that he said was the Senate and wished us luck. He said that he had some business to do before meeting with Senator Tiberius and departed.

2 Detect Magic

We showed our papers again to the guards at the Senate (this city has guards everywhere). The guard seemed to expect us, or someone like us and admitted us to small room where a youngish man sat behind an unusual looking table³. Grogmar asked the man if he was Senator Belarius. The man laughed and said that he was Baskin, a page to Senator Belarius.

Baskin left for a moment and then came back and led us to a elderly gentleman who introduced himself as Senator Belarius. The elder looked at me and said that Three Feathers must have sent me and then with a glance said that Harsk must have sent Grogmar. A very intelligent man.

Senator Belarius explained why he had asked for people like us. About 20 years ago, there were a series of large meteor showers all over the empire (and outside). The meteors that fell to earth disrupted the native magical field. Natural life would be distorted and pieces of other worlds would be overlaid onto our own. The empire had been trying to deal with the problems with has caused ever since.

The Pit, to which Cassius had referred, was an early attempt to deal with the problem. They gathered meteors and magical objects and sequestered them underground. However, the meteor concentration made the place very dangerous and they abandoned that attempt, using it instead as a dumping ground for prisoners.

Their most recent attempt was the formation of a special agency. The agency, which has been in place for a few years now unofficially, received official sanction a few months ago. The idea was to gather people from all over who could handle magic or at least deal with its consequences. These agents would deal with the disruptions cause by the meteors and in some circumstances, gather the meteors themselves.

I told the Senator of the swamp to the north. He seemed very interested and called in a middle-aged man, Archimendes, who was supposed to be an expert on the manifestations of the meteor rocks. Based upon my description of the swamp and some samples of the mud, conveniently obtained from my clothing, Archimendes said that the swamp was "Canthian." Apparently they have seen enough manifestations in order to categorize them. Senator Belarius was somewhat surprised, as Canthian areas are not normally inhabited by creatures of Death World. When I described the glowing green jewel that we saw in the last world, they were very excited, saying that it was almost certainly a meteor rock.

Grogmar did have a sample of water from the swamp.

When Alcimendes left, Senator Belarius asked us if we would be interested in joining his

3 A desk

agency. After some discussion, Grognar and I replied in the affirmative, whereupon the Senator sent Baskin out to create another set of papers for us, listing us as "special agents" of the Empire.

There were many other things we discussed. Just a few highlights here:

- The inquisitor didn't cast his spell upon us directly, because the papers provided us with "diplomatic immunity".
- The Senator thinks that Cassius was actually a smuggler and was just using us to get into the city. He didn't seem to think that it was important.
- The position of special agent provides access to fairly extensive library, a stipend, and lodging for ourselves and our companions.
- They are going to send an expedition to the blood swamp to recover the meteor stone we found there.
- The meteor rocks are deadly. The larger they are, the more powerful the radiations they emanate. The only way to safely transport them is in a gold-lined box. The stones normally are about the size of a small berry (like a blueberry) but some have been found to be the size of a man's head.
- The way they dispose of them now is to cast them in to another world via a magical portal. This gives me a bad feeling – what if the other world is inhabited? And chooses to take offense?
- When a meteor stone is removed from an area, any effects or changes it has already wrought remain.
- We have been provided with a couple of gold-lined boxes in case we come across any stones. In addition, we have been provided with some magical books that have been charmed so that anything that is written in one is immediately duplicated in a master book kept at the agency headquarters. The converse is not true, unfortunately. Upon my request, we were also provided with a couple of lead-lined boxes in which to keep the books in order to mask their emanations from "inquisitorial" eyes.

For our first mission, Senator Belarius wishes us to check out Castle Valley, some 30 miles east of here. The stone has been removed and the necromancer who had it was killed. However, there are still a fair number of goblins, hobgoblins and lesser undead (creatures empowered by the Death World). There are also some creatures of animated stone, which I would like to see. There is an army unit there attempting to deal with the problem, but according to the Senator, they are having "difficulties."

Flower Moon - 16th day

We spent most of the day going over the facilities available to us. There is an armory which seems to have versions of any sort of weapon or armor. All of them are of ordinary quality but I acquired a greatsword for use.

They have areas for our animals as well. I have Apple Thief in some stables. There is an extensive roof garden where Scratch is roosting.

The library is extensive. Of course, considering the availability of books in Black Rock village, anything more than a dozen books I would consider extensive. Indeed, most of my clan lack the ability to read or write. They had maps of Castle Valley, which I have copied, although I am no scribe.

There is also a tavern of sorts in the facilities. Grognar spent a fair amount of time there talking with another special agent called Tírel. Tírel mentioned that (barring meteor rocks) we are allowed to keep any unusual items we find on our adventures. It was rather impressive when he drew his longsword and it burst into flame.

A side note: Grognar tends end conversations with "smell you later". As he is somewhat odoriferous himself, I am wondering if the Stone People use scent as a means of identification. Perhaps they greet each other by sniffing the other, in the manner of dogs?

Flower Moon - 17th day

Traveling again, on the way to Castle Valley. We passed the Pit after a few hours. The fools dug the place within 10 miles of their city.

Flower Moon - 19th day

Entry written in barn surrounded by Empire soldiers who have been infected by a zombie plague.

I definitely wouldn't have had this sort of excitement back home.

We arrived in Castle Valley today. There is a small village called "Castle Village" where the army is encamped. We checked in with the Captain to ascertain the situation in the valley. He said that they have had a problem with the monsters in the valley. He has lost over one hundred men and has only about three hundred men left.

One of his groups of soldiers encountered a type of infectious Death World creature that he

called a plague zombie. Dawn Flower told me that regular zombies are just dead humanoids animated by the power of the Death World. Plague zombies are the same, but when they hit a person they expose that person to a disease that kills the victim. The victim then rises as a zombie. Also, when such a zombie is killed they tend to explode, infecting those next to them.

Currently twenty of his soldiers have been exposed and have been quarantined in a barn, without a healer. As both Groggar and Dawn Flower are skilled healers we have locked ourselves in the barn to assess the situation first hand.

When inside we met Lieutenant Braddock, the leader of the group. Two of his men had already succumbed to the undead plague. The remaining were holed up in a loft with the bodies of the ones who succumbed on the floor below. All of them appeared infected, although the Lieutenant and one other didn't look that ill.

We destroyed the two bodies. One had already been changed but it did not seem to be infectious and did not fight well. Groggar and Dawn Flower treated the survivors for disease while she did some surreptitious healing of their wounds. Groggar and I discussed that locking all of the infected people together without treatment was certain to kill all of them.

I came up with the idea of quarantining each victim separately, each in their own pit. We discussed that with the Captain, who then immediately set his men to digging pits. Imperial soldiers might not be that bright, but they excel at digging.

Evening the same day

We are staying in the barn, isolated from the main army group until it is clear we haven't been infected. The men have been isolated in each pit. Dawn Flower and Groggar will treat them daily.

Flower Moon - 21st day

Three men died and rose. They were killed in their pits. Four look deathly ill. The rest appear to be recovering.

Flower Moon - 25th day

The last four have died and dealt with. It looks like the remaining ten will recover. Lieutenant Braddock looks totally well. Everyone will be released from quarantine tomorrow. I spoke to the Captain and he directed his army "healers" to add this sort of treatment as a "sop"⁴. I didn't ask

4 SOP = Standard Operating Procedure. Not a term Speaks With Wind would know.

him what a sop is. The Imperial army may be great warriors but they do not seem that bright.

Flower Moon ~ 26th day

Castle Village

We actually entered Castle Valley today. While it is clear that many of the imperial soldiers have a great respect for us now, I don't think any of them expected us to return.

The buildings are strange. I have seen a couple of the stone houses that southerners call castles in the past. This valley is filled with remnants of many such houses. It looks like parts of them were transported here piecemeal with no rhyme or reason.

We didn't encounter any Death World creatures today. We did encounter half-a-dozen goblins. Grognar entangled most with an enchantment that caused the tall grass in the ruins to seize hold of them. Most of them we killed with missile fire but a couple we killed personally.

Slightly later we came across six hobgoblins. They were far more organized than the goblins and were skilled fighters. We killed one and took five prisoner.

Grognar seemed to receive a great deal of enjoyment from throwing javelins and daggers. He keeps rhapsodizing about getting more javelins, or perhaps some darts.

The Imperial army has much better at interrogators than healers. The hobgoblins didn't know much but they said the necromancer has returned. Or perhaps there is a new one – they didn't know for sure.

I have reported this via the enchanted book.

This and my other game recaps may be found at www.launchpadzero.net .