

Log: One Last Riddle

9/12/04

The gang returned from Crossroads triumphant, having made new friends and, in all likelihood, antagonized old enemies. Corey and Dimdar completed their sailing lessons while the returning players rested and healed.

The next day dawned warm and bright. Corey and Dimdar proposed that they go out on the boat so the rest of the team can learn the rudiments of operating the ship. Realizing that the Dark One would find new henchmen once he learned of the Midnight Crew's fate, the group decided to leave two members behind to guard Marcellus's armor and the castle. Phyro and Bullseye drew the short straws and remained on watch duty.

Everyone else took the secret stairway down to the hidden cove, where Groop has made Baylor's former home his own. Stowing their gear below, they pushed off and headed south on a simple practice run. At about midday, a sudden chill swept over the ship. A massive figure appeared before them: an androsphinx, in ghostly form. "Now dare you the last riddle of Ujaset," it moaned.

What is half of dragon, but has now a wyrmling's strength?

What is half of canine, but has not a mongrel's length?

What is it that is of two halves, but has but half to stand on?

Dimdar's bardic knowledge gave her the answer: a kobold. When the sphinx returned he was pleased at the players' cleverness. In reward, Ujaset offered to give them his most prized possessions. All the players had to do was avenge his murder by killing the kobolds who had slain him the night before. Ujaset would not be specific as to what the treasure was, only that one of the items was of great magical power and had been given to him by the Archcleric Bainard. He also told the players how to find his lair, and that the kobold party had been led by a sorcerer.

The group sailed south into the upper reaches of the Southern Republic. There they dropped anchor and waded ashore at the edges of the Jungle of Fear. They proceeded to the sphinx's lair.

Along the way they were attacked by a wandering party of lizardfolk led by a mage and a seasoned fighter. The players spotted the enemies in the bush and fired arrows, wounding the lizardfolk and forcing them into the open. Groop charged the mage only to find himself entangled in a net thrown by the creature. While Groop struggled, the rest of the party fought the lizardmen with sword and missile and spell. Gilead used Magic Missile on the mage and the fighter, then followed that with his Flaming Sphere. Perdue pounded the toughened hides of the attackers with his deadly hands. Perdue's blows felled two of the savage folk while a series of arrow hits from Dimdar and others took down another. Gilead's sphere of fire claimed the life of the captain, and Groop escaped the net in time to sunder the mage's head with a mighty blow of his axe.

In Ujaset's lair the party found a lone kobold still in residence and the charred remains of the sphinx's earthly body atop a burned-out fire outside. The kobold started out cheeky but quickly wilted under the intimidating gaze of Groop. He gave his name as Jaalask, a member of the Blackspear Tribe, and admitted that the tribe had killed the sphinx and raided his lair of all valuables. The group searched and found no treasure in the cave. Under more pressure Jaalask

gave up the location of the Blackspear camp and the number of remaining kobolds in the tribe. He said the leader was Oppol, a powerful sorcerer, and that there were about a dozen fighting members of the tribe at the encampment. After some discussion, the party knocked Jaalask unconscious and left him tied up in Ujaset's former home. They rested long enough to recover first-level spells and then proceeded to the camp.

As the group approached the camp they spied a lone sentry shirking in his duty. An arrow each from Corey and Elayna silenced him.

Beyond the sentry's post in a clearing, the group found a dozen kobolds gathered around a bonfire celebrating their victory. Two armored kobolds stood by a large tent talking. After much discussion, the party made and executed a plan. Perdue crept around the encampment to the rear of the large tent and set it on fire. The kobolds were distracted by the fire and ran to the tent where they stood together in a tight group. Dimdar, with a pleasure derived entirely from the ancient hatred of gnomes for kobolds, used her Grease spell to coat the kobolds with the flammable, slippery goo. Perdue shot flaming crossbow bolts into the crowd to ignite the grease.

As the majority of the kobolds burned, Corey and Elayna and Groop and Dimdar took turns firing arrows at any kobold still standing. Their shots came from all directions, confusing the enemy as to which way to fight back. The kobolds scored some minor hits but never really stood a chance, as the flaming grease claimed more of their number each round. Perdue stepped into the fray between the two leaders and dealt backbreaking blows to them both. One tried to flee and was cut down by an arrow from Corey; the other Perdue rendered unconscious and bound for questioning. Only that kobold, and another who surrendered, survived the battle.

The captives confirmed what the group already realized: Oppol had not been among them that night. The sergeant revealed under questioning that Oppol had left camp and gone to the nearby town of Miel, a settlement on the outskirts of the major city Tagun Yin. There Oppol planned to convert the loot from Ujaset's lair into cash, and that cash into better weapons for the tribe. He left disguised as a gnome and had a house in town that he used as a hideout.

The party tied up their captives and bedded down for the night. When Oppol did not return in the morning, the party set out for Miel in pursuit.

In Miel they split up and asked about a gnome who may have come to town seeking to sell property. Through an exotic good merchant they learned that a gnome had been by, but that the shopkeeper had been put off by the gnome's coldness to a fellow gnome and did not buy his goods. Saul, the moneychanger, told of having exchanged a variety of silver and copper coins and various gems for gold pieces the previous day for a gnome with an odd manner. Potter Holm, a skilled blacksmith, had the best lead: he had taken an order, paid in advance, for a cachet of masterwork weapons made in small size for gnome-sized warriors. He provided the group with the address to which he was to deliver ten days hence.

The party approached the house with caution. When nobody answered a knock on the door, Groop climbed up to the second story and entered through the open window. He saw nobody and so went down to open the door for everyone else. Nobody remembered that kobolds are known for their skill at trapsetting. Groop, Corey and Perdue paid for that oversight when a cold blast struck them in the doorway, dealing heavy damage. Elayna hurried up to heal them and the mission continued.

Only one room in the house seemed in use, a bedroom on the upper floor. Suspecting that the sorcerer was hiding, Gilead used his Detect Magic spell to seek out magical auras. As he expected, a humanoid aura huddled in the corner of the room. As soon as he realized he had been spotted, the sorcerer let loose with a Cone of Cold, doing massive damage to Gilead, Groop

and Corey. The rest of the party rushed in to help as Groop and Corey charged the now-visible kobold and delivered powerful blows. Another Cone of Cold staggered the players as Gilead sent magic missiles streaking at the kobold. Several in the party knew they would not survive another Cone of Cold. Groop took a desperate swing at the tiny figure with his axe and connected, separating the creature's head from his body.

Shaken and gravely wounded, the party rested long enough to loot the house for what it held of value. Most of the valueables were on Oppol's body: a magical cloak, three vials of magic-radiating liquid, and a pouch with 250 gold pieces. Most of the money from Ujaset's things had gone to Potter Holm to buy weapons, it seemed.

The party made their way back to Ujaset's lair, leaving the two kobolds bound and helpless in the camp. Jaalask had escaped, they noted with little interest. At the lair, Ujaset reappeared and congratulated the team on a job well done. He then kept his final promise by teaching them the command word to open the secret compartment in the cave floor. Inside the players found a suit of +2 Elven Chain mail and a beautifully crafted staff made of white aspen wood. It bore a sparkling clear gem and the holy mark of Pelor. "This staff," Ujaset explained, "is my most prized possession. I came upon it 50 years ago. At the time I was living in the hills of the Northern Alliance territory, before the dwarven city was built. One day I was investigating a great tremor in the ground when I came upon a group of five people clawing their way up through a narrow crevice in the ground. They were wounded and exhausted almost to the point of death. They had enough strength to tell me they had been trapped underground for seven years and had nearly been destroyed by a great evil, which was now dead. I found them food, water, and shelter and stood guard over them while they rested and recovered their strength. I was happy to do it, and more so when I learned who they were: the group that the flatlanders like to call the Five Heroes. When they had recovered enough, Bainard took a thick branch off a fallen ash tree and made this enchanted staff for me. It is a Staff of Life, capable of healing great wounds and raising the dead. I have used its healing ability only twice; the rest of its power I commend to you." The sphinx faded away into the night.

There was talk of trying to raise Ujaset from the dead, but Elayna knew that even the Staff of Life could not do that because the kobolds had eaten most of the sphinx's body. The group interred the rest of Ujaset's remains in the secret compartment and Elayna swore to herself that when she becomes capable, she will return and resurrect Ujaset.

Okay, some minor housekeeping issues:

1) I am under the impression that Corey has been awarded the +2 Elven Chain. Elayna is okay with that, and Groop doesn't have any interest in magical armor, so unless Kevin says otherwise I'll assume that Corey is now wearing the +2 chain. Treat it like leather for purposes of weight and dexterity limits but like +2 chain for armor bonus.

2) How a Staff of Life works: a new one has 50 charges (yours has 48). A cleric or magic user must wield it. It has the following abilities:

- Heal: Restores up to 150hp of damage to a single person. Also removes the effects of ability damage, disease, insanity, feeblemindedness, daze, confusion, blindness, deafness, fatigue, nausea, stunning, poisoning -- pretty much any temporary physical or mental damage a being can sustain. The main limit is that it won't reattach lost body parts or restore drained levels/ability scores. Cures all of the above in one casting, which takes one charge.

- Raise Dead: as the spell. A willing subject with the body pretty much intact can be brought back from the dead. They come back with 1hp per hit die and any poison removed from their system (a Heal will then restore them to full hit points, of course) and a 50% chance of having lost

their spells for the day. The raised person permanently loses one experience level and all benefits thereof. They can gain it back by earning experience points but not through magical means. Cost is 5 charges.

3) Since most of the Blackspear Tribe's money went to Potter Holm, you might want to have someone -- preferably a gnome -- on site at Oppol's house in ten days to receive those already-paid-for masterwork weapons. Bullseye will be interested in any masterwork daggers (Oppol ordered 4). The rest you can easily sell to bring in about 3000gp. Your new friend Dodger can recommend a good fence.