

DUNGEON CRAWLER - JOURNEY

CHAPTER 7: THE BAZAAR

“I’m running out of time,” Ulrik was confiding in his companions where no one could obviously overhear. “When nightfalls, I’ll lose the barter.”

“Well, until the end of the lunar cycle, actually,” put in Hela with a smile.

Ulrik, nodded, “Either way, that’s tonight and I only have a name to work with ‘Ombra-dool’.”

Hela furrowed a brow, “Oombra-duhl.”

“Oombra-dool.” Ulrik practiced the name.

Soola ignored them, “Okay, so we’ve got until the full moon ends, and we can’t see a moon at night, great.”

Hela responded, “What do you mean? The moon was out last night, clear as... day?” she giggled when she found the word.

They didn’t know whether or not to believe her.

The watchman in the crows nest shouted, “There’s the bazaar! Dead ahead!”

“Well, at least something is going right,” muttered Grimble.

They surveyed the bazaar as it came in to view over the canopy, beyond it there was a great black river and wastelands, but it simply kept unfolding before them.

Acre after acre of golden stony structure unfolded before their eyes. Like a honeycomb in stone.

The buildings were covered in colourful striped tapestries, boards ran across their roofs like a maze and the buildings seemed to be built on top of one another. Narrow streets gave way in to causeways of flowing traffic.

Large structures that appeared to be auditoriums or palaces broke up the patterns like giant mounds that either pushed the others away or gathered the smaller buildings to them.

“Well now, that is a sight,” uttered Soola.

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Captain Eldor found a suitable place to dock and immediately sent a team lead by Mr Hemm to find a way out of this world, he didn't care what the four passengers wanted to do, they asked Eldor to wait one night for them. He wouldn't give them even that.

Jollunn didn't want to leave the ship, lest he be left in this cursed world.

The companions disembarked and started searching the streets for information. There were such strange creatures around every corner.

Tall slender robed beings with great steel shoulder guards, from each dangled chains which ended in brazier plates.

Small fish men that slithered around on their tails, it was hard to know how they did so on such dry dusty terrain.

There were strange human-like beings as well, each with strange clothing, a wide range of skin, hair and languages.

They listened for languages they understood, looked for signs they could identify until they found a smoky shop simply entitled "Directions".

Upon entering they were greeted at the door by a tall goat headed creature covered in tethered jewelry, the room had a dirt floor covered in pillows and rugs. At the center sat several goat headed creatures smoking various pipes.

They waited a few moments, and one of the creatures waved them over, "Come."

Simple enough. They entered and sat down on a pillow as indicated, "You are lost?"

"Our friend is lost," answered Soola.

"Ah. He is missing?"

"Yes, with someone named Ombra-dool," he was passed a pipe and hesitantly took a puff. His body and face relaxed.

"Ombra-dool," repeated the creature in an old man's voice.

"Umbra-duhl," interjected Hela, she was facing the intricate weavings along the walls in the darkness, touching the beads they were stitched with.

Ulrik was passed the pipe, he passed on it. Surprisingly Grimble took a deep puff, he didn't relax much.

"What you seek is not Ombra-dool, but another."

Ulrik nodded, "Yes. His name is Kazgen, a cleric from my homeland." He wavered slightly.

There was a brazier on the ground giving off smoke, it glowed with the embers of coals and billowed smoke.

“I feel funny,” he slurred.

“It will all come to pass,” said his host. “My name is Kaarezek.”

“Hmm,” Ulrik chuckled, “My master’s name is Kezeraak. Sounds like your name backwards, wonder what made me think of that?”

“Perhaps, that is what brought you here?”

“But, I couldn’t have known your name,” Ulrik postulated.

“You believe in coincidence?”

“You even sound like him,” he smiled, “and kind of look like him – a little.” Ulrik tried to stand, but teetered and blinked. Hushed he said, “I know what you are.”

The creature Kaarezek, only cocked his head in Ulrik’s direction, “Did I offend you son?”

“No. No, not at all, just want to be on my feet,” he moved over to the door and saw Hela. She had a cloth held over her mouth and was only watching. His breathing cleared up as the smoke thinned by the door. “We’re seeking Kezgan or Umbraduhl, is there any chance you know how we could find either of them quickly, I’m woefully short on time.”

“A donation then,” he indicated an open sack on the floor by a burly looking creature.

Ulrik took his coin purse and emptied it in to the sack. The creature nodded approval, “Indeed. What you seek is in the sky. It moves towards the village of Hollowbrook...” Ulrik’s expression changed, “Ah, you’ve been there then. Then you know of its dangers.

The fortress you will face is heavily guarded and surrounded by a barrier which will not permit magic. You will need steel to get to its gates and once inside you will need nerves of steel.

Your donation was generous I will gift you some potions which will help you through your journey, and send some of my people with you, for you see we have also lost many to that fortress.

There is something more that I can help you with son, Eldor made an oath...”

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Ulrik left the building, the glass bead door swayed behind him, several creatures waited outside, there were three types.

Several of the goat men stood at the ready with spears, bows and swords. There were seven in total, each gave their name, which Ulrik tried respectfully to remember; Kezek, Rezzik, Ardo, Shallo, Balto, Azzothaffat & Grimly. Although it was a blur, they were each very different in appearance and in personality. They were seeking family trapped in the fortress.

The old goat had a cane, but accompanied them as well.

A man bull creature with all four legs of a bull and where the neck should be instead was a human torso and a man-bull hybrid of a head on its second set of shoulders. He wore strange armour which appeared like woven steel, bands of cloth were wrapped around his body, more was draped overtop, black leather patches protected various areas. Krullig was his name, his weapon of choice was a huge hammer and its name was Thinker. Krullig had some kind of score to settle with this Umbraduhl.

Lastly there was a pair of creatures, blond twins. One male and one female. The female wore green and the male wore blue, they wore no visible armour, only flowing robes and its detailing was mirrored. Hydi and Eydi were their names. The twins seemed to be paid help.

They made their way through the winding streets back to the ship. The four of them climbed aboard while the others waited down below and found the Captain.

“Captain Eldor, you’re not leaving yet.”

“Watch me son, been given the coordinates for the nearest gateway, and I’m heading that way soon as I’m able.”

“Captain Volund is alive.”

That stopped Eldor in his tracks.

“Yah, and she won’t be dying any time soon,” he added.

“What?” Eldor seemed a little panicked.

Grimble spoke up, “What’s the matter Eldor, not interested in walking the worlds as an Oathbreaker?”

Eldor slunk down where he was standing in to the captain’s chair, “How do you know this?”

“The creature down below, the figment, he’s a seer. He knows what we have to do, and if you leave without trying to save Volund, you’ll walk away worse than a dead man. Pretty risky price to be named the first mate, pretty good thinking for a pirate captain. Too easy for someone to run off with your ship and all that.”

Eldor coughed, “Fine enough, where’s the captain at?”

“We’ll need the seer for that. The figments want to come with us.”

“Alright, it’s their doom.” He then shouted, “Mr Hemm! Gather the men on the deck!” he stormed out on to the deck, the men scrambled to attention.

“They don’t like being called that,” said Hela.

Ulrik looked confused, “What? Who?”

Hela looked out the glass wall down in to the streets, “The Aresen, you can see it in their faces.”

Ulrik moved to the window to their entourage waiting below, “Ah, I see.”

“They don’t like to be reminded.”

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Ulrik’s familiar flew back to him at a very quick pace, it was obvious why. The seer’s directions were perfect, the wriggling ballooned frog-like creatures were moving up at them.

They quickly dropped on to the deck and latched on to the hull.

The crew were ready, but instead of sharpened weapons they dropped nets, used clubs, gaff sticks, tridents and mancatchers to pin the creatures as best they could.

There were only five creatures, and despite being greatly outnumbered, they put up a fierce struggle. The last unpinned creature attached to the hull, decided to escape in to the sky. It re-inflated and started to wriggle through the air towards the canopy below, Ulrik pointed it out and casting a spell several of the Aresen took to the sky with a net and dropped on it. Ulrik and a few others descended a rope ladder as quickly as they could, the four creatures on deck were not happy with their current lot.

This one had fiery red eyes, unlike the others. “This one,” was all that Ulrik had to say.

Captain Eldor moved in with Volund’s blade and skewered the creature through the throat up in to the skull. It twitched, trembled and died.

Resounding gooey explosions erupted up on the deck and the crewman groaned with displeasure at being covered in slimy goop.

Even Grimly, whom was down below got a large serving dropped on his head, “Lovely,” was all he could muster.

The Aresen flew the others back up to the deck to see four bodies crawling forth from the corpses of the fallen monsters. Amongst them was Captain Volund, “Well now, what are the odds of that?” she laughed.

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“We need your help Captain. And frankly, you kind of owe us,” smiled Soola.

“Ooo, you are the charmer aren’t you,” she sighed. “No.”

“It’s true Captain, and I kind of owe them too,” spoke up Eldor.

“Why is that Mr Eldor?”

“Had they not stopped me, I would’ve left you behind and broken my oath.”

This sunk in, “Lucky us.”

She looked at the room of people in front of her, “Your plan is unprofitable, dangerous and suicidal. I’ll not put my ship and crew in that kind of danger, especially for nothing. And where is the rest of the crew? Did they die in the rescue?”

“No Captain, I gave them the option of staying in the Bazaar.”

“The what now?”

“It’s a big city not far from here, where we found the new passengers.”

“Ah, right. Of course. So, let me get this straight, you want me to sidle up to a flying fortress, known for attacking armed caravans all by my lonesome, drop the lot of you on to a butcher’s block and sail off before either being ensnared by these living chains, blasted by the guardians of the place or being dropped out of the sky by this invisible barrier?”

They all looked back and forth, and nodded, “Yeh, pretty much.”

“You’re all cracked.”

“We don’t have long Captain and we have to try,” tried Ulrik one more time.

“Ok, we’re going to need to see this thing and make a better plan.”

Eldor got the summary pretty quickly and turned the ship towards the direction of the Hollowbrook, he wanted out of here as quickly as possible.