

Peace Never Lasts

After the last plague pool receded, Ryn hoped there might finally be peace in the Myth Wood. He sat back in his keep, and pondered what catastrophe might befall the woods next, because peace never seemed to last. He also reflected upon his journeys through the woods that led him to where he ended up at this moment.

Werewolves, trolls, wars for power, toxic asteroids, all of these things had changed him, but if it was for better or worse, he wasn't sure. One thing was certain though, he never thought he would have risen to be a Jarl, or to have such powerful allies at his side. He thought back to when he was just a Brigand, and the shenanigans he got into, and laughed. "I was foolish back then," he mused, "but it seems that The Six still found a use for me."

He unconsciously unlocked the gold lock, the jailer's keys never leaving the peg on the wall, and strolled down the hall of the jail, empty in this peaceful time. He recalled some of the people who had visited these cells, from lowly thieves, to powerful fighters, and a Devil too, whose axe didn't quite fit in the weapons rack. Whoever thought putting him in here was a good idea was sadly mistaken, as was evident by the lingering scorch marks around that particular cell.

He made his way back out of the jail, and decided to take a stroll through the woods, believing some fresh air would be a good idea after the damp air of the jail. As he left, he waved over to Tilbury, still busy at his shop, The Rusty Cauldron. He headed off to Hammer's Hold, to visit with Jarl Faolin, and see how the Hold had fared since it hadn't been able to be accessed with the plague pool engulfing it.

Ryn heard the ringing of the blacksmith's hammer as he approached, and saw Arthur back at his old forge, thankfully unharmed by the plague. The bar of metal he was working was still rough in shape, so Ryn couldn't quite tell what the craftsman was making, but whether blade or bauble, he was sure it would be a quality piece. He waved to Arthur as he headed towards the gate. Almost to the gate, Ryn heard a friendly shout from the keep, and found Gadaren polishing Magh Swer, although the sword gleamed brightly already. Just by the way he greeted Ryn, it was apparent that Gadaren was happy to be home again. "Is Faolin around?" Ryn asked, knowing his ally would likely be inside his keep after being forced out by the vile pools of plague.

"Yeah, he's inspecting the keep, to ensure that no trace of that damned plague remains." Gadaren replied.

"I'll find him. Thanks." Ryn said, as he walked into the keep.

"And keep your hands off our locks!" Gadaren said half-jokingly, knowing the former thief's old habits.

Ryn soon found Faolin in the courtyard, training against a couple straw filled dummies. When Faolin came to a rest, Ryn called out to him. "My friend, I'm certain there's no plague left in them. And it looks like the same could be said about their stuffing."

Faolin smirked and greeted his friend warmly. "It feels good to be home."

Ryn could not agree more. He had opened Brannheim to Faolin and his companions in their time of need, but could tell everyone wanted to return to Hammer's Hold. After chatting with Faolin and Gadaren, as well as returning the daggers he "found" in a chest, Ryn decided to see how Jarl Elric was fairing, and headed off to King's Rest.

Ryn made it to the town of Kings Rest. He thought he might stop in at Mike's Tavern for a drink. The road had been a long and dusty one after all. However, etiquette dictated he stop in at the Keep and pay his respects to Jarl Elric first. He passed the government center on his way through town and took note of it being empty. Burny and his companion Morgan had left the Wood shortly after the receding of the plague pool, with Jarl Elric's blessing. This train of thought brought Ryn to the realization that currently Elric had no Chamberlin. He had a few suggestions on that topic to go over with Elric.

As Ryn arrived at the Keep in King's Rest, he heard the sounds of a fight, and ran inside. He found Elric fighting an unlucky thief who was caught trying to pick the lock on the chest to Elric's personal treasures, from adventures past. Just as he rounded the corner, Elric's spear found its mark, and the thief fell dead to the floor. Elric quickly raised the spear and turned around. Having heard Ryn's footsteps but not noticing who arrived behind him. He relaxed once realizing who it was. Ryn looked at the dead thief, and recognized the body of Sildiania, and would speak with her later about her blunder.

He and Elric spoke briefly. From what Ryn gathered from their conversation Elric, like the rest of the people of the Wood, was glad to be rid of the plague. A time of peace was long overdue. Still, there was a fire in Elric to fight. Ryn was sure that would never be diminished. He bid farewell to Elric and headed off to Mike's for a drink. Maybe when he was done Sildiania would be back from the Garden, and he could learn why she had tried something so foolish as to steal from the Jarl of King's Rest.

After a week of searching for Sildiania without any luck, Ryn started to worry. This brought him back to Mike's Tavern, looking for information. Information gathering was one of Ryn's primary skills, and no one in the Wood had more information to share than it's barkeeps. He had already quizzed Tilbury, but on the subject of Sildiania he had nothing. So Mike's was the next on the list.

Mike's seemed fairly quiet this night. Only Thane Rocky and the warrior Wild of Gray Arrow were in the building, besides Mike himself. The two did not seem to notice

Ryn. "Not sure why we even bother coming here." Wild muttered to his companion. "Since we became Void Knights booze has no effect on us."

"We came here to buy food for the prisoner. We stay because at least for a little while it is nice to pretend we are normal." Rocky sighed with misgivings. "But your right we should return to the Keep, the Jarl will not be pleased if the prisoner dies of starvation." Rocky walked up to the bar and dropped a handful of Dirks on the counter. Mike handed him a crate of food. On the way out the two nodded in Ryn's direction but besides that said nothing.

Everyone had hoped with the passing of the plague pools the warriors of Gray Arrow would return to normal. That had not been the case. This talk of prisoners was news to Ryn however. The Wood was Ryn's home, he knew them like the back of his hand, and everyone that was in them. The only person unaccounted for was Sildiania. It occurred to Ryn then that he would need to visit Gray Arrow's dungeons this night.

Void knights were scary and powerful foes, but if they didn't know you were there it was not much of a problem. Ryn let himself through the gate and into the dungeons of Gray Arrow with little difficulty. It was not Gray Arrow's fault, it was just that they had not designed a place Ryn could not sneak into.

He avoided any of the branches in the corridors that were dust covered. Gray Arrow was the oldest standing Keep in the Myth Wood. Any corridor covered in dust had not been traveled for a long time. In this way he had no trouble finding Sildiania's cell. He picked the lock easy enough and opened the door.

Sildiania tied and gagged, sat up from her pallet. Her face sagged in relief when she saw him, then her eyes opened wide and she started screaming into her gag. Her reaction puzzled him. Ryn knew she was no novice thief, and the look in her eyes was one of fear. It then dawned on Ryn to turn around.

In the darkness of the corridor stood Jarl Rokai. The shining silver helm on his head masked his face, but Ryn knew it was him. "So you finally took the bait. I have been sending those two to King's Rest for almost a week now." Ryn felt dread fill him. Why would Rokai set a trap for him?

"I have been searching the Wood for the Revenant. Today I found him." Rokai held out a silver chain Ryn knew far too well. Four of those chains existed. One Jarl Elric wore. One was worn by Burny and one by his friend Morgan. The last one had been around the neck of the Revenant. It was common belief that the chains kept the Four Devils from returning to the Myth Wood. Ryn however knew it was far more than that. Those chains had been forged from the Mystic's crystal. Each chain held a part of the very magic that made up the Myth Wood.

Rokai moved the chain towards his shield, the Aegis of the Six. Ryn knew a thing or two about the shield as well. Forged from the remains of the Daemon Lord's black sword and the Hammer of Agamemnon, it was one of the Six holy relics of the Myth

Wood. On the surface of the shield were six settings for crystals arranged in a hexagonal pattern. Four of the settings had crystals in them. One red, one blue, one orange and the fourth one yellow. As the chain touched the shield it shimmered. It now looked like a semi-transparent version of the Mystic's crystal. Then it became a purple crystal and adhered itself to the shield in the fifth setting.

Power flowed from the shield into Rokai. "One left to get" The Void Knight's eyes focused on Ryn. "I hired your thief friend there to steal from Elric. Knowing full well she would die. Funny how enough dirks will make people do the dumbest things. Then I had her brought here, so you would come looking." Rokai began moving towards Ryn. "We both know you have it. Hand it over and you will feel no pain when I end you." Ryn took an involuntary step backwards, hand going to his pouch.

How could he know, Ryn thought. No one knew, it was his most closely guarded secret. Three years ago in 15 F.K. he had tried to travel to the Lady's tree. However at that time the Blighted had taken control of the area. By the Mage's Tower he met an old man calling himself Lewis Morningstar. Which was preposterous, as that was the name of the man who had become the Green Man of the Woods over three hundred years ago. And who many believed was now a member of the Six Higher Powers known as the Recarnit. How could this old man claim to be Lewis Morningstar?

The man gave Ryn a transparent crystal with a gold figure trapped inside it. "Here now, take this. Let no one know you have it. They will come looking for it in time, but I doubt any will think it would be in your hands." With that the man vanished. Ryn did not figure out that it was the Crystal of the Recarnit until he had seen the Mystic's Crystal get forged into chains. He had kept it hidden this entire time and spoke to no one of it.

Ryn came out of his thoughts with a start. He met Rokai's eyes through the helm. Rokai hadn't known, but Ryn's reaction to the accusation proved it true. Ryn turned to the doorway into Sildiania's cell, with a flick of his wrist a dagger plunged into her heart. Her body quickly vanished back to the garden. Ryn then turned the opposite direction of the Void Knight and began running.

Ryn knew Elric could beat Rokai in a fight, but was not as confident in his own chances. Normally he wouldn't care but he was not sure if the Recarnit's Crystal was one of the strange items in the Wood that did not travel with you when you died. If it was, then his death would be giving the crystal to Rokai.

"Running just prolongs the inevitable. I will bring peace to the Wood. A permanent peace that no one can dispute. The peace of the grave." Rokai's words did not come from behind him, but from all around him. Ryn then remembered another power of the Void Knight. Mist form. How was he to get away from mist? He turned the corner and almost tripped on the manhole cover for a sewer drain. He could hear the sounds of running water from below the drain, and saw the remains of a ladder leading

down to the sewer runoff below Gray Arrow. Ryn had the lock off and the manhole lifted out of the way in a matter of moments.

In those moments Rokai began taking physical form again. "Hand over the crystal. NOW!" The Void Knight bellowed.

Ryn shrugged. "Well this is not how I planned my night to end. Tell me, how does your mist form work under water." With that Ryn jumped down the manhole. An audible splash was heard a few seconds later.

Ryn pulled himself out of the drainage pond that was far behind Gray Arrow. He was overjoyed that the population of Gray Arrow was as small as it was. There had been floating things in that water he had had to avoid but not as many as there could have been. He got his bearings and headed east to Brannheim.

The Jarls would need to hold a meeting and decide how to face this new threat. Ryn shook his head, peace never seemed to last in the Myth Wood.