

The Journal of Kyras Shakati

This journal has been authored for the Masters of The Order of Protectors to document the days of Kyras Shakati in their service.

I have lost track of the days since I left the Monastery of the Protectors. My initial journal was lost while traversing the Mountains, so I have purchased another here at the Inn at the Mountain pass and will summarise events 'til now...

It has been a number of months since I left my monastic home in the mountains where I learnt my craft. The days travelling to the City were uneventful. I was curious however to see what would be made of my appearance with the letter of introduction from my Master to his kin in the City. The Masters at the new monastery seemed a little flustered at first meeting and presentation of the letter, but quickly found me accommodation and left to me to my devices. I was not given much time to settle however as I had been there barely two days when I was requested to accompany one of the arcane brothers on a mission of dire importance.

Lorimer was a novice mage with an incredible fascination of the arcane arts. In the months that we travelled together, I had noticed that he has a wicked sense of humour that risks becoming a nasty streak (or perhaps it is a nastiness in himself that creeps out occasionally). Since I have always found it hard to interact with others, we hardly spoke during the early stages of our search, other than to discuss the direction taken by our quarry. Lorimer seems far better versed in communicating with the commoners of this land than I. My distrust of the other races runs deep. Thus we have agreed that he take the fore in seeking information pertaining to our quest. Even though my Master tried to teach me otherwise, I know that the peoples of this place are not to be trusted.

After finding no trace of our quarry in the flatlands, we took to the mountains and finally caught news that he had passed over the mountains a month hence! Alas! The mountain pass through which we must traverse was closed during the winter months. We found an Inn on the edge of the pass and planned to wait out the winter, hoping that our prey would likewise be delayed by the snows.

Normally, mention of our accommodations would not be worthy of mention, and indeed, this structure in itself was unremarkable. It is more important to note at this stage, that this premises was the meeting point of many who would wait out the winter snows.

Upon entering the inn, we immediately noticed an aged Human seated at a corner table. His companion, a rather short female warrior appeared oblivious of our arrival as she chatted inanely at him. Again in itself, unremarkable. The curiosity though was the Wisp that floated about the old man's head.

Lorimer, fascinated at the prospect of encountering a personage of the mystic arts, immediately attempted to strike up a conversation, but was rudely reprimanded by the old man. The female seated next to him, did not seem to notice to pause for breath. It is little wonder that I chose not to associate with this race.

We were forced to wait at this Inn for two days. I found that living in close proximity to humans was most uncomfortable. Their need for continual communication was most annoying, not to mention the smell. I would despair at having to spend prolonged time in their company! Fortunately, my meditations saved my sanity.



Day 1 following the opening of the Mountain Pass

Upon the opening of the pass, Lorimer and myself are warned by the old man that to travel the pass alone is to court tragedy. He is strangely emotional as he delivers this warning. The Wisp continues to float around his head, whispering strangely in his ear. I wonder at their relationship.

Against my better advice, Lorimer decides that we shall travel part of the way with some others who plan to traverse the pass. To my disgust, I note that three of them are human. I will admit that there are occasions when I regret his decisions.

Our group comprises of myself and Lorimer, an Elven sister (Regina) who seems well versed with the Long bow and light fingered (which I will discover later). I do wonder though that she chooses to associate with humans as Lorimer has done. Do they not understand what treachery this race is capable of?

The female Paladin (Lady Catherine) from the Inn appears to have abandoned her aged friend and also accompanies us. She speaks an obscure dialect of the commoner humans, but I cannot understand her. Her annoying prattle irritates me to the degree that I should cut out her tongue for some peace. She has shown herself to be reckless and unthinking and unfortunately seems to think herself our benefactor. Better that we should lose her, given the opportunity.

Two other Human warriors travel with us. The first (Gareth) is an insanelly vain man whose closest companion is his looking glass. He appears short on temper and sulks when not able to get his way, but keen on pursuing females. He seems to be on the run from a previous indiscretion. He is as shallow a personage as I have encountered to date.

The other warrior (Karbine) has not shown much of himself to date. He seems no more or less than the others, but thankfully does not engage in mindless conversation. I will watch this one closely.

At the end of the first day since entering the pass, we discover a dead Titan outside a cave mouth. According to Karbine, who seems to take a perverse interest in cadavers and the like, it's body is colder than one would expect. While others in our group find this interesting, I feel that we can do without these distractions. Lorimer and I have our mission, and nothing should get in the way of our success. So much depends on us capturing our quarry and his band of miscreants.

As the night comes, the general consensus is that we should camp in the nearby cave mouth. Lady Catherine volunteers to secure the cave so that we can camp safely. Surely something that could have been accomplished far more quickly and quietly by an Elf. Our success hinges on tact and subtlety, attributes these humans are severely lacking. Their presence surely magnifies the difficulty of our task.

I have also determined now that Lorimer only humours these humans. They consider him frail due to his slight frame and weak constitution, and thus they label all Elves frail. They don't know the powers he can channel. Maybe we will show them soon enough.

Later that night, I steal away from the resting group to investigate the tunnel further. In amongst the blundering footprints left by the Paladin, I find reward. Footprints that could only have been left by our quarry headed down into the tunnel. I resist the urge to pursue immediately and return to the camp as Lorimer could be a target for betrayal. Finding him safe, I tell him of the tracks. We rest soundly, confident that on the morrow we shall make up further ground.

I must have been indiscreet however when sharing my discovery with Lorimer, for now the others are aware that we track something and they feel they need to assist. Surely they can only hinder us. Perhaps we will find a use for them along the way. I admit that I am perplexed that Regina is content to associate with them.



Day 2 following the opening of the Mountain Pass

My earlier observations of the humans are confirmed. They lack direction and purpose. I wonder at how their nations have become so powerful. This group continues to blunder around blindly and shows no sense of caution. This surely will be their undoing.

The tunnel intersects with an underground complex of some sort. I have seen natural caves, but these clearly have been shaped by something else. I have heard of races who shun the light and prefer to dwell underground. I only hope that we find our quarry before the denizens of this complex do.

The Humans have already forced our hand on one occasion. It seems that this complex has a magical nature about it. Illusionary doors and flaming traps are but two of the obstacles we have faced so far. A small group of Orcs threatened the humans briefly. Regina slays two with her arrows while the humans pose threateningly. The third is eventually slain by the Paladin, surely a fluke. As much as I despise Orcs, I do think that keeping one alive for questioning might have been wise. They may have encountered our quarry and may have been encouraged to share information with us. I wonder how many opportunities we will miss to gather information due to the humans.

There is a brief moment of relief for Lorimer and myself as we manage to separate ourselves from the others. The silence is most welcome. We are also successful in re-establishing the tracks of our foe. The relief is short lived however as the others return to aid us on our quest (so they claim!).

I understand that Regina was most distressed to find herself alone with the three humans. I'll admit to feeling compassion for her, but she chose to accompany them... Perhaps she won't be so hasty in the future.

After wondering through a number of chambers, we now find that we have lost the tracks of our quarry. I am fairly certain of his path, but a haphazard search of this warren would be unwise. I wonder if the Temple he seeks is nearby, or if this is merely the dark path...



Day 4 following the opening of the Mountain Pass – mid day

Well, this is a most unusual place! The last moment I recall was the three humans blundering into the room ahead to confront a horde of rats and Lorimer sealing the door behind them... The next moment, the humans Karbine and Catherine appear to be packing up a campsite in a short corridor, with Regina and I standing opposite them! I notice immediately that my arcane companion, Lorimer, is not here.

It is apparent to me that the two humans in front of us are suffering a blindness. This condition is short lived and after they recognise us they once again start with their inane prattle. In amongst their gibberish, I am able to ascertain that Lorimer, Regina and myself had vanished shortly after the humans defeated the rats. Indeed, we have been missing for a little over a day and have just returned in a flash of blinding light! This same light now appears to have taken their friend Gareth and still holds the Mage Lorimer. In truth I had not noticed the absence of the third human! I suspect arcane intervention, and as such can understand the continuing absence of the Mage Lorimer. Perhaps those responsible for the abductions are seeking powerful wizards and with Regina and I not having the skill have returned us here? I am perplexed. Why would they take Gareth?

Despite losing a day of my life, I do not seem to be the worse for it but have a disturbing feeling that we are now well off the trail of my foe. With Lorimer gone, and with no way for me to find him, I must continue on with our task. My fears are confirmed as the humans advise that their progress through this complex was guided by instructions from a floating ball of light (perhaps similar to that seen at the Inn). I am also dismayed to hear that they have travelled a goodly distance from the site of our vanishing and that the now vanished Gareth held their only map back to that room. My only consolation is that they are confident of having travelling East of North in their efforts to leave this place. At least I now know the path to take should I need to retrace their misguided steps.

I am content to travel with them for now. Perhaps I will find some sign of my quarry wandering this route. Perhaps too, Lorimer might find his way back to us from his prison in the light. It seems that we are all now somehow bonded together to these humans in this dark place... Could I be any more depressed?!?



Day 4 - Evening

Success! Our quarry is slain!

Longtail the Wererat is dead. Our mission now is now one of survival. We need to clear this complex and return to our Masters to share this good news! I am confident the Wererat's lackeys will flee when they hear of his sudden demise!

But, I am overlooking the road we took to get to this victory.

After continuing the humans' path to East of North for some time, I feel uneasy about this route, and that our quest would be better served by backtracking to areas previously avoided by the humans. My intuition serves me well. The chance encounter with the Hydra provides me with the opportunity to direct the party back to the West. The foolish human Karbine shows a distinct lack of self preservation as he confronts the Hydra. This Hydra is a beast that ones such as us are not well enough equipped to subjugate, especially without the arcane proficiencies of Lorimer to aid us. Perhaps another day. Fortunately, Karbine manages to escape the Hydra's clutches as he is useful in our later encounter with Longtail.

On my instruction, we continue to backtrack where we encounter numerous minor distractions such as the alchemist chambers and forge. Lorimer returns to us via a flash of bright light, also claiming no memory of his abduction. The shallow human, Gareth, is still missing. This leads me to believe that these abductions are no more than a random event limited to within the walls of these catacombs. This aside, I am confident that our quarry is close by.

Eventually, we discover a columned room with Longtail and his familiar summoning a creatures of chaos. In the ensuing battle, our group coordinates effectively, flanking our opponents where possible and making good use of arrows and the like. Unfortunately, I find myself ineffective with both fist and bow for the duration of this melee. Apparently I am affected by my earlier imprisonment in the light. Lorimer, as you would expect, does not suffer my plight and manages to catch Longtail in a powerful enchantment. Lady Catherine takes advantage of this effect and deals the Wererat a mortal blow. During our battle, Regina sustains grievous injuries but is tended to by Karbine before death can steal her final breath. Despite the heavy wounds to Regina, I am surprised at how well this group worked to slay the Wererat, and with him, his attempts to return the Old Evil to this plane.

It is interesting to note the participation of the humans in this final battle with the evil Longtail. My distrust of humans is ever present, but yet I ponder their motives. Is their participation based solely on their lust for combat, or did they identify the Wererat as the quarry of Lorimer and myself and in this, did they knowingly aid us? They confound me still!

I now find myself unsure of our next step, and our chances of survival. Our goal is realised, but yet the adventure continues! The Masters also spoke of a temple that Longtail was seeking. Perhaps we should also find this place so that it can be destroyed! If so, I pray that we need not cross the path of the Hydra...



Day 6 following the opening of the Mountain Pass

Kidnapped again! Regina, Lorimer and I are stolen from the columned chamber, seconds after the demise of Longtail. Again we are unerringly returned to the humans with no memory of our abduction. Again we are missing for just over a day.

All are in a room except Lady Catherine. The Elves are in excellent health, but Karbine and Gareth are injured, with Gareth in particularly poor shape. Apparently they have recently dispatched some Orcs who wished to parley. I feel that the humans made the right choice. The Orcs are betrayers. Gareth and Karbine are now looking to backtrack to some cells to rest and tend their wounds. Lorimer also advises that he needs medical attention. I am no healer, but it does seem to me that he is uninjured. Perhaps he carries some invisible wounds from his time in the light?

The humans have been mobile in our absence. My maps are again useless, although now there is an opportunity to update them using the scribbles Gareth has made in their wanderings. I wonder how accurate his records are!

Before we depart for the cells I feel it is important to finish searching our immediate vicinity. While the others catch up on events, I find an adjacent room containing one very large Orc in some kind of meditative condition. This is a potential conflict that I feel we are not prepared for. With Catherine gone and Lorimer, Karbine and Gareth already injured I elect to retreat. Strangely, the large fellow does not pursue. I am sure that he is aware of me and that his companions lie slain in the next room! The others in the party eventually investigate the source of my retreat and ascertain that the Orc lives, but seems content to ignore us! I find it strange that Gareth would even approach the huge Orc while our group is in such bad shape, let alone actually take it's axe! Fortune smiles on Gareth as the orc does not react. It would certainly make a fine mess of our group while we are in such a weakened condition!

This dungeon certainly has some restless spirits. As we continue our path back to the cells, we encounter a room filled with skeletons. Many bodies manacled to the walls and floor. The humans become very sombre when I suggest that we investigate this room further. They advise that they have been here yesterday, but following the effect Catherine suffered when she cast her eye around the chamber, they now refuse to enter or even glance beyond it's portal. Apparently Catherine became paralysed with fear as she looked in?? I find this hard to believe, so naturally I investigate. As I gaze upon the contents of the room, I am filled with feelings of cruelty, dread and torture. Many have died a grim death in this chamber! This grisly visage overwhelms my senses for some time, to the exclusion of all else. I am told by the others that I froze in the doorway as I gaze into the room. The overwhelming feelings eventually pass, leaving me feeling weakened from the experience. I investigate the room, but leave with nothing but the wailing of dead souls to haunt my dreams.

This part of the dungeon is certainly in poor repair. Many rooms are very unstable and falling debris has injured each of us on more than one occasion. While the party rests and recovers from their injuries, I explore some more of our immediate surrounds. What bad luck! Despite my careful treading, I am badly injured during my investigation of a seemingly stable room. This brings a swift end to my roaming. I shall join the party in their recuperations.



Day 7 following the opening of the Mountain Pass

Our explorations this day amount to very little other than more treacherous ceilings and two ancient traps. The first trap guards a storeroom containing nothing but ruined and rotting foodstuffs. Gareth bears the full brunt of it's force. The discovery of these wasted provisions draws my attention to our own depleting supplies. Before too long we will be rationing what remains of our own food and water.

Unfortunately, we are forced to trigger the trap again when leaving the room. As the others in the party bicker upon who should risk setting off the trap on our departure, I volunteer. Unfortunately the trap is faster than I. I am told that the searing beam scorches my body as soon as I enter the corridor. The rest of the party is able drag my unconscious body clear as they make good our escape. Once again, Karbine is able to heal my wounds quickly so that we may continue.

The second trap releases a ball of fire upon our group as we traverse a corridor. All bar Regina and myself are badly injured as a result. Karbine remains conscious, but barely so. Gareth and Lorimer are in dire straits, with Lorimer coming close to death. I am able to use one of my Master's potions to save his life. Regina and I carry the wounded humans back to our resting place at the cells where Karbine can once again tend to the wounded.

It seems to me that the owners of this place have a fancy for fire. Earlier traps that the humans have suffered are fire based, as are the two we discover today. As perilous as this place is becoming, I do not think we can afford the time to test every yard we travel for more traps. With no opportunity to replenish our supplies, we will starve here unless we can find an exit within a week.



Day 8 following the opening of the Mountain Pass

Without Lady Catherine in our ranks, the amount of inane gibberish that the humans spout is dramatically reduced. Karbine is more vocal these days, often debating matters with Lorimer. I expect that I am more aware of him now that Catherine is gone. Her absence seems far longer than that of the Elves, and I enjoy the peace, despite the loss of her martial proficiencies. I find that I cannot participate in their verbal jousting. Part of me is driven to ensure that our surrounds hold no threat. It will be a moment such as this, when our guard is down, that the denizens will turn their eyes and teeth to us.

Karbine and Gareth seem comfortable with their roles in the group and seem to take instruction well enough. Lorimer still insists that he is injured and claims that Karbine is ignoring his plight. I cannot see any signs of injury on him, but he is never one to complain of harm before we entered this place. Regina, as usual, is quietly efficient as she sets herself to her tasks.

As much as I disdain the company of the others, I am confident that our chances of survival are improving as we continue this adventure as a group. My earlier comments regarding the effectiveness of these humans is perhaps too hasty. With the leadership of Lorimer and myself, the party is performing effectively. I am sure that my martial abilities are improving and I am learning other important skills to complement my role in this group. Experience is a good teacher.

A further observation on this dungeon is that it houses trophy rooms of sorts. Days ago, I recover an ornately runed staff from under a focussed beam of light. Most of the party fear a trap. What harm can a shaft of light cause? Alongside it stands a suit of plated armour which now adorns Gareth. Then, today we find an intricately carved ivory tusk engineered to appear as a bladed weapon, a dagger crafted from ivory, set alone atop a crystal stand! A most unusual looking weapon. Lorimer and Karbine both agree that, as with the staff, this item has a magical aura. The others in the group are not keen to hold this item. These are trophies that I am content to hold until a time when they should be useful. The runed staff is metal shod and well balanced. Surely a superior weapon to my old wooden staff.



Day 9 following the opening of the Mountain Pass

Despite the absence of Lady Catherine for another day, our group is competing well against the denizens of this hole. I tire of the repetitive nature of this place and long for the feel of the sun and wind on my skin. That I am trapped in this dank place is so depressing.

Our combat tactics and skills improve with each monstrous encounter we face. Today we face a swarm of foot long mosquitoes and are victorious! The plans that Lorimer and I craft are very successful. Only Karbine is seriously injured during the conflict. He is not able to heal his wounds immediately.

Despite being unharmed during the battle, Lorimer demands that Karbine heal the injuries that continue to hinder him. This is a daily occurrence that results in an argument and a rejection. Today, however, Karbine yields and offers Lorimer the attention he desires. Most strange...

I am more certain now that many of these chambers are display rooms. For whose benefit however, I am not certain. Our prize from the bloodsucker encounter is a gold ring enshrouded in a humming green glow. Karbine insists that the item is evil and rants that it must be destroyed. Lorimer ignores his raving and removes the ring from the glow with a cloth. Suddenly Karbine turns his gaze to me and declares that the ivory dagger I carry to be evil and must be destroyed. Surely he is losing his mind! Aren't all weapons made with evil design? I ignore his ranting and attribute his unusual behaviour to his weakened state.

Our curiosity is a dangerous thing. The group agrees to examine the chamber guarded by the fireball trap we encountered days ago. Regina is almost slain as she tries to disarm it. Lorimer and myself brave the scorched corridor only to find a smoke filled chamber and nothing else! I should have suspected that...



Day 10 following the opening of the Mountain Pass

This morning I wake to find I am suffering from some affliction. My limbs ache and I am nauseous. Gareth and Regina suffer the same symptoms. I suspect that wading through rooms filled with refuse led to this illness. This is an unhealthy place. Gareth struggles with his illness poorly and complains endlessly that he is not able to go on and must have bed rest.

I insist that we can not afford to lie in our cell to recover. Karbine claims he can do nothing to aid us, so we must continue. Supplies are dwindling. Gareth eventually agrees to accompany us, but lags behind and when confronted, complains that he is unwell and is in no condition to fight. This forces me to lead the party through this maze.

My illness is affecting my judgement. I am overconfident and ignore an obvious threat by attempting to open a chest, lying next to which is a dead Orc. I am scorched by another heat ray and am seriously injured. To my annoyance, yet again, there is no reward for taking this risk.

Following that painful experience, I remind myself that Regina must check obvious trap situations and attempt to disarm any threat to us.

While my judgement is slightly impaired, my intuition is honed to a razor's edge. Regina is successful in identifying and disabling a swinging blade trap positioned over a door. I am immediately wary as it seems too easily disarmed. Regina, however, rejoices in her success. I mention to the group that there is another, undiscovered trap here. Indeed I am correct! As I step through the portal, a sheet of lightning fills the doorway. My life is saved as I am able to fling myself past the electricity unharmed. Following the activation of the trap, Regina examines the portal for some time but is not able to locate the trigger or the source of the electrical discharge.

As with all other devices that we have encountered to date, I am certain that this trap is reset and again am proved correct. Fortunately, I am able to avoid injury as I leave the room and the curtain of lightning covers the doorway. At least we are rewarded for our troubles. Many suits of armour and weapons line the walls of this chamber, but of all the items on offer, we take only a small, finely crafted crossbow for Regina.

The Paladin, Lady Catherine, is returned to us shortly after with a blinding flash of light. Her impact on the group is immediate. No longer do the humans follow the wisdom of the Elves but relapse into their chaotic babbling and laughter. I cannot abide by their lack of subtlety and clear disregard for stealth and caution. Since the return of the Paladin, the other humans blindly follow her into battle with no thought of a plan. I had thought the other humans convinced of the benefits of Elvish wisdoms, but I see that they are all weak-willed fools and easily led into chaos.

Here I make an observation that leads me to believe that one in our group is not all that he seems. The human warrior, Gareth, displays an unusual ability to disrupt the magical darkness generated by some of the denizens we encounter in recent days. I had thought their power unstable, and gave it no thought. Today, following a handful of battles with the fiends, I am more certain. During one battle in particular, the clearing of the darkness seems to centre on Gareth as we fight. I am certain he activated no item, nor did he perform any arcane actions. There is possibly more to this human than meets the eye. I will discuss my observations with Lorimer as I am sure he will share a curiosity in this discovery.

Another event that I note today. The ivory dagger has been lifted from my person. During one of our encounters with the black tentacled fiends, a small, horned jackal-like creature took advantage of my distraction and steals the knife from my belt. I manage to capture the jackal in a hold, and crush the life from it's body, sustaining a poisoned bite in the process. The others in the pack make themselves visible and flee the room, snatching an item from the floor in the process. They are fleet of foot and outdistance me, laughing as they flee. I wonder why they take only the blade from my belt. At any rate, I expect that the zealot will be torn regarding the loss of the dagger. In the first instance I expect that Karbine will be happy it is away from the party, on the other though, it remains intact and likely it's existence taunts him from afar. I can not escape the feeling that this item may have been useful to us in our efforts to escape this dungeon.



Day 11 following the opening of the Mountain Pass

This morning, Karbine is able to rid my body of the sickness. The poisoned bite I suffer from the jackal seeps a vile black ichor as the zealot works his craft. Following his tending, my limbs still ache and the nausea wracks my body. I am not completely healed of the poison's curse, but feel able to continue on through this maze.

More displays of aggression and violent distrust are shown by the humans in an encounter with two lizard-men. After hearing voices behind a portal, I advise our group that the area beyond the door is populated. Upon opening the door, a trap triggers, engulfing the Paladin in a fiery blast. Standing ready in the doorway are two lizard-men, well prepared for our arrival. What is seen by the Paladin as an attack on our group looks more likely to be posturing and shield banging in my eyes. Unfortunately, the humans remove any doubt and force the combat to its end, resulting in the two lizard-men dead at our feet. Lady Catherine appears surprised to find that the two lizard-men are not creatures of evil, despite their hostile appearance. My heart is not in this battle as we surely could have subdued these men and sought to communicate with them. If not for the trapped door, perhaps this encounter may have been resolved differently. I claim one of their illuminating amulets to light my way and perhaps to remind my companions that not all who traverse these corridors suffer the taint of evil.



Day 12 following the opening of the Mountain Pass

I notice that Lorimer is not his usual self these days. He is withdrawn and does not interact with others in the group. He stands silent in the background while I am forced to look to our best interests. He certainly offers no opinion on any matters affecting the party and seems content to follow along quietly. Even his demands for attention from our healers have diminished. I wonder if he truly suffers some ailment beyond the reach of Karbine and Catherine. Interestingly though, his participation in battles we have with the beasts of this pit have improved. His efforts with the arcane magics are more effective as ever and have often turned the tide to our favour. This place seems to affect us all in subtle ways.

Our first effort to close the portal in Longtail's temple result in abject failure. We have the upper hand in our battle with the two Owl-bears who guard the chamber until a third arrives via the portal. Despite injuring all three, we are forced to flee to recover from our serious injuries. I find that my skills alone are not enough to protect me from these beasts. Standing over an unconscious Gareth, I face one of the Owl-bears. I am impaled on its foul claws before being thrown to the floor. If not for the quick actions of Karbine and Lady Catherine, both Gareth and myself are certainly slain in this skirmish.

Following our retreat, Lorimer tries once more to receive succour from Karbine but is unsuccessful. I find it strange that he would attempt this request as he certainly sustained no injury from this latest melee. The healers ignore his requests to focus on the more critically injured in our group.



Day 13 following the opening of the Mountain Pass

A very interesting and surprising development within our group this morning. With Lorimer withdrawn and myself thrust into a leadership role, Gareth has offered me a gift to reinforce the ties between Elf and Human within our group. His actions are most unexpected, but appreciated. Not only for the usefulness of the Bracers, but also his efforts at diplomacy and to lessen the rifts between the two factions. My earlier observations seem to ring true; there is more to him than the shallow human he pretends to be.

After almost two weeks living and fighting by these humans, I find that I begin to trust these three. Regina certainly bears them no distrust and continues to be quite happy in the company of all.

I am still mildly suspicious of Karbine's motives, but when needed, he has provided aid selflessly and honourably to all who require it. He is surely cast differently from those zealots who betrayed and slew my Grandparents. Perhaps there is hope for this race after all.

I continue to struggle with Lady Catherine's dialect and loud manner, but she too has proved to be an effective warrior when the need arises. It seems that even her human friends struggle with her instruction at times, which frustrates everybody further. She has threatened to learn the Elven tongue, but with her butchering her own language, I will not aid her in this. Her tactics and judgement still waver at best and she requires further guidance in this area. While I acknowledge her bravery, there is always a point where discretion must prevail.

We return to the Wererat's temple for what is our final effort to close the portal. We are successful this attempt. The portal has a new guardian, one whom we assumed had fled days ago when it's master died, Longtail's Imp familiar. Upon slaying the Imp and closing the portal, a Wisp appears. This incites greetings of "Alphus!" and "Mickey!" from the humans. Until this moment, the ravings from the humans pertaining to the existence of the Wisp were discredited as insanity. It identifies itself as "Alphus" which in my mind suggests it is the "First" of it's kind.

It seems that the humans, while the Elves were absent, struck a deal with this Wisp that, should they close the portal, Alphus would reward them somehow. The Wisp denies any knowledge of this bargain, but does thank the humans for improving it's ability to "manage the dungeon". This is a disturbing revelation. That there are caretakers in place to oversee the operation of this maze is upsetting news indeed. My imagination runs wild. Are we now pawns in some game, our lives at risk for the amusement of others?

Alphus, on it's part however, does seem capable of assisting us. For a hefty price, it provides food and some information on the runed staff that I carry. The item is known as a "Ward Staff" and it's power maintains the many traps scattered throughout this complex. It enables the bearer, if they are of Celestial blood, to instantly move to any threatened ward in this maze to recharge it (allowing their game to continue I think!). Alphus also explains that the value of the staff is immeasurable and that it's destruction would result in the death of us all.

After Alphus seeks advice from "the Council", another bargain is eventually struck with the Wisp. The Celestial owners of the Ward Staff insist on it's return to them in the North. Alphus claims that we will be suitably rewarded upon completion of this task. My instincts suggest that this staff should not be returned and that perhaps there is more to it than Alphus suggests. What fools would we be to provide them with the tool that may assist with our undoing?

More confusion is raised when we question Alphus on the identities of "the Council". Alphus refuses to name them, but states that we have already met them! How can this be? All those we have met in this dungeon we have ultimately slain, barring the Hydra...

To further complicate our choice of direction, Gareth is told by the Wisp that answers he seeks regarding his ancestry can be found to the East. Interesting that at least one more amongst us has a personal goal tied to this pit.

