

Return of the Dead

Harvest Moon PC08 (Aug22) by Skalgrim Skyfather

My Lord Wulfric Baneguard – party leader

Skalgrim Skyfather

Anemonia Heliopsis (aka Momo)

Caradac

Sir Verick

Tardeth

Dame Layla Mayfield

Spark

Blaze

Gravesong

Master Delta

Puke

Ringil

Air Day, Harvest Moon

We gathered to receive our initial instructions from Lord Khandis, namely to investigate the vicinity of Ward's End waystation as there were reports of the local population behaving strangely. Master Delta also informed us that a fixed point in time was approaching. He informed us that these are key points in time where all time lines converge, and that once they happen things cannot be changed.

We arrived in the vicinity of Ward's End waystation and encountered groups of damaged Hordelings who were fleeing. At the waystation we encountered a group of undead, which we destroyed.

Some local people, two members of the Wizard's Concilium (who operated the teleport network in the area), and a member of the Celestial Bureaucracy then arrived to meet with us. The Wizard's Concilium confirmed that the locals had been acting oddly, and that this had been going on for a little while but couldn't give other details.

We had a further briefing from the Baron, advising us that Lord Khandis had received information from a contact Tornado had in the Dymwan, that there was a former necromancer/researcher for Cardinaris operating in the region, who had recently broken away from the Dymwan. We were asked to investigate and deal with this necromancer.

That evening we went out to find some of the local population. Once pressed a fight broke out with them striking for strong power blows, efforts were made to subdue them, and one was successfully captured. Conversation revealed he had been kidnapped in the night by undead, and recalled a red eyed individual conducting a ritual to force undead inside him. After the ritual everything was foggy, so he couldn't give locations or tell how long it had been, however he remembered that their master had wanted them to spy on us to learn who had destroyed his creations.

We then endured several attacks by undead, culminating in a fight against a powerful group led by 3 modified and intelligent skeletal warriors who could use magic (a couple of colours each). Before the fight they asked us who we were and what we were doing, and told us to leave as we had no right to be here and in the waystation (as we were technically nationless). After a fierce fight we eventually killed all the undead except the skeletons who grouped as a trio and teleported away.

Water Day, Harvest Moon

Immediately after breakfast we were assaulted by a group of undead, which included a vampire progeny that was incredibly resistant to harmful power effects (although still took some damage) and was able to function fully in the sunlight.

We then set off to try to discover the necromancer and stop him. We encountered various undead creatures, locals with embodied spirits, and wildlife that had been imbued with undead spirits. We met one of the intelligent skeletons and defeated it. From its body we recovered a ring which when attuned to (bled on) directed us to the other 2 linked items (we therefore concluded the other 2 intelligent skeletons) and which would grant more power when all 3 were together.

During one encounter with the imbued locals, we found an individual who was partially resisting the undead embodiment, and who we assisted in removing the undead. Once removed she thanked us, couldn't give much more information than we already knew and departed.

We met her again later in the day where she told us of a group of locals who were willing to be embodied and were assisting the necromancer. We encountered this group and after some initial discussion determined them to be in league with the necromancer and slew them.

We encountered the second skeleton and slew it, gaining the second item, however one of the creatures (not an undead) with it we were unable to harm, and at the end of the fight it engaged us in conversation. Asking why we were here and what would it take for us to stop interfering with its masters work. Broadly speaking we said that as long as his work harmed and used innocents we would disrupt it.

At this point we discovered several human individuals guarding a warded area around seemingly nothing. My Lord Wulfric and Master Delta crossed the ward to slay those inside, and discovered that within the ward was hidden the researcher's laboratory. We recovered what we could from the area, namely various ritual components and body parts, however with limited time we withdrew, leaving several wards deeper inside uncrossed.

The final skeleton approached us and we slew it, gaining the third item. Once all 3 were attuned to, the wearers were able to see the research lab we had found and were able to cross

all the wards. Full examination and clearing of the lab recovered further ritual and potion components, some papers, and the recovery of a living vampire spawn baby – which did not register as evil. There was much discussion at the site regarding whether to keep the child or destroy it, but we opted for more time and to be able to read through the recovered documents before making that decision. Suffice it to say that Vampire Baby continued to feature in our discussions and actions for some time

On returning to the Waystation, we were met by a representative of the Dymwan who had two major questions. What was the state of relations between the Dymwan and the Valley, and what were we doing in the region. For the first question, tensions had flared inside the Dymwan following our instructions to the Lara Tin We to assault the Dymwan forces arrayed against the Halmadens Heights and Sir Ruff, during the Time of Reckoning (a decision taken to ensure the Ascension of the Good Sphere). We said that no harm was meant, that we wanted to continue in good standing with them, and that the Ascension had been our first priority.

For the second question we asked why he wanted to know, and were told that the information we had received supposedly from the Dymwan had in fact not come from them. They had first heard of this matter when Lord Khandis had asked them for further information regarding the necromancer, and so wanted to know how we had got the information. We told him about the necromancer/researcher, that we were stopping his efforts to embody undead into the living, and that we were examining his notes. The representative asked us to return the researcher to them alive, but if not then for his brain to be returned intact. We asked him what the creature that we couldn't destroy earlier might have been and he told us that it was likely a humonculi formed from the blood of the necromancer. If destroyed the humonculi would reform as long as his master lived.

Examination of the papers revealed them to be the Necromancer's diary. From this we learnt that he had been employed by the Labyrinth of Xenos, although he did not know initially, to

conduct research into methods for mind control in the pursuit of their hivemind. He discussed his research regarding the undead, revealing that the vampire baby was the product of a natural birth between himself and a vampire (from a nearby coven) who had undergone various experiments. The baby would be immune to any negative effects from any power invocation, and not suffer ill effects from sunlight.

The necromancer talked about recovering material from a hidden cache that was on the plane of the sleepless dead. He talked about how he had learnt the research was funded by the Labyrinth of Xenos, when an enchanter came to collect his findings, and how he was being observed from a distance by Labyrinth drones. He also mentioned that he had learnt there were other research efforts going on, and that there was one nearby who was coming into his area.

We then had a long discussion about what should be done with Vampire Baby. We had identified that it was not currently evil and that it was alive/not undead, but that it had the potential to grow up to be a powerful entity. A group vote found in favour of keeping the child alive, and that it would be kept under safe watch by the neutral camp of the Valley (our suspicion is that it would not survive long if sent to the good camp, and would be turned to evil otherwise).

We attempted to send the baby away from us (and therefore away from its parent's) by using the teleport functionality of the 3 attuned items from the skeletons, however this failed. At this point we were assaulted by the necromancer and the vampire mother. After a fierce fight, while those who had connections to the evil sphere could cast no other sphere and could vocal length ritual power, we were victorious. I have to say that during this fight I was overtaken by Freya, my evil aspect, and taunted the vampires by smashing their child's head into the wall – this did attract their attention though I was sadly bolted to the ground as a consequence – fortunately I still had the nation's guardian spirit to protect me. The necromancer and

homunculi were slain, and the vampire mother withdrew in gaseous form. Before dying the necromancer asked that we burn his body. “Sadly” during the confusion of the fight the necromancer’s brain and skull were crushed and destroyed entirely.

During the fight a Labyrinth of Xenos drone appeared and observed the battle, before being struck down by Blaze. Caradac intercepted a psychic message warning that all drones were to leave the area immediately before it was purged. We were then knocked to the ground and deafened as, we presumed, the necromancer’s laboratory was destroyed. At this time the 3 attuned items exploded in an unpleasant and painful fashion for the wearers, including me.

The Baron and Lady Kassandra arrived to get the rundown of the day. We passed on the information and tasked the Baron with transporting Vampire Baby (who now detected as evil, possibly following my practice of power draining it to keep it quiet, rather than feeding it blood or milk) to the neutral Camp of the Valley, currently located within the Horde.

Additionally, we talked about the potential future that others had experienced, most recently on the mission that slew Talon Stormherald, where the Labyrinth of Xenos had taken control of Orin Rakatha by using implants to bring everyone into the hivemind. We presumed that the events that would lead to this future was what the fixed point would be about. It was made clear that preventing this timeline was our highest priority.

Earth Day, Harvest Moon

Aristifus from the Celestial Bureaucracy told us that there was another of his nation nearby who had been acting in an unusual manner, and asked if we could find and free him. To help us he gave us a star map that could be used to target a teleport (a most useful device for portents that I now have in my possession). Whilst this was prepared we were assaulted by forces of the Labyrinth.

After we teleported, we found a group of varied nationed individuals (including a member of the Valley), who were very much not of their right minds. We pushed through this group, subduing the valley member, and noticed that the air was thick with herbal effects (inducing Susceptibility), and that the individuals had been greatly affected by it, both mentally but also in improving their combat abilities.

Progressing through several of these groups led us to the Celestial Bureaucracy individual we were looking for, who was under the influence of a drug crazed alchemist. A fight broke out, with many of us getting controlled by the alchemist to fight amongst ourselves. The alchemist was able to produce many effects by drinking from his potions but was eventually slain, however we couldn't save the member of the Celestial Bureaucracy who fell in the combat.

From here we recovered many potions and some documents in an unknown rune set. Some of documents described the alchemists work, which included a temporarily successful attempt to capture and hold a Labyrinth enchanter. The other gave a recipe for brewing a herbal potion of beguilement.

Following the report of the Labyrinth enchanter in vicinity, we then went to investigate. The enchanter was guarded by a powerful Fey, opposed to the mind control of the Labyrinth. We met and convinced the Fey that we were friendly, and she allowed us to meet the Enchanter.

We learned that the Enchanter had left the Labyrinth as he wanted to retain his emotions and individuality. We invited him to join the Valley but he declined. But he did offer us backdoor access to the psionic library of high enchantress Ptah within the hive mind.

After some debate we agreed to break into the hive mind to try to take information from the library.

We made our way through security and accessed the information deposit, where we grabbed both items and documents before High enchantress Ptah returned and forced us out.

We found ourselves transferred to a location called the “Waste station”, an area where emotions and other waste items are discarded from the hive mind. This proved to be both an interesting and hazardous place – more anon.

When translated the documents described a project to bring Xenos' dead wife Akila Makyr back to life using the Vale of Memories and an item to recover her memories to implant into a drone.

The documents also described a Xenos mind control project to take over Orin Rakatha, highlighting that resistance to this was inevitable, and therefore the Labyrinth would establish this resistance under a leader they controlled.

Potential candidates for this included Sir Bors of the knights of chastity, and Lord Khandis of the Valley. The documents advised that the candidate would be snatched and either replaced with drone or mind controlled.

At the waste station we met negative emotion creatures, to defeat them we had to present the opposite emotion, so fight confusion with certainty, fear with confidence, etc

We also met Xenos' son Finneas who used the place as a retreat and place to learn of emotions.

It transpired that the waste station would be emptied soon and that if we were there at that time then we would die. We also learnt that if there was too strong a concentration of emotion then it would be emptied, and that emotion attracts emotion, so to give us time to escape we destroyed pockets of emotion as we found them.

Fire Day - escape from the waste station

Discussions with Finneas revealed that only way to escape the waste station was how he had originally done so, namely by facing our greatest fears (he had to accept that he was not his father's biological child). Suffice it so say that this proved to be a deeply personal experience for all of us, and we learned much of both ourselves and each other.

In the interest of privacy I will share only my own fear in any detail, namely that Freya cast me out, banishing me from Caliban and her Aspect, as I had sworn to the Savage Chieftain in a previous mission – albeit to save many members of our party at that time.

Indeed it was this that had brought me in contact with Freya, the evil aspect of The Triad.

It was an emotional experience that I will never forget, and I am deeply grateful to the entire party who stood before me and saved my life in the battle that ensued.

Other party members confronted their own fears, namely:

Puke had to stand up to his abusive mother

Tarndeth and Sir Verick were confronted by senior members of the order of St Michael

My Lord Wulfric faced the death of his mother, Queen Eleanor, and the overrun of Caliban by the Bane

Dame Layla confronted by a thrall who had killed innocents from a time when she had contracted vampirism

Spark confronted an elemental lord of fire

Momo was forced to take a Mist Walk

Gravesong had to fight companions from his past who had died

And finally we were attacked by Morgoth and Ring Wraiths, being Ringils greatest fear

Finally we escaped and emerged back in Orin Rakatha, where we learned of an Easterling presence in the area. We soon found them conducting a ritual around an evil node of some form with an artifact that drained all nearby guardian spirits. After our assault the ritualists teleported away, leaving behind a map (on human skin) and a compass.

We teleported back to the original waystation where we were met by Lady Cassandra and the Baron. We updated them and sent messages to Michael and Lord Khandis. Wayland Wycan then teleported into the Waystation. He told us he was the one who had given Lord Khandis the information about the necromancer, not the Dymwan contact. He told us that he could put Xenos to sleep if we could get him an audience with him, stopping his attempt to control all people in one hive mind. He knew of the project to bring back Xenos' wife, Akila Makyr.

Wayland advised us that if we successfully created the implant of her memories that would get us an audience with Xenos. He told us that his wife was the one who came up with the mind

control project and that she was awful, had been cruel to him and stifled him when he was Xenos' apprentice. He gave us that memory as way to find her in Vale of Memories. It transpired that Wayland was seeking to use us to gain control of the Labyrinth, but at that point nothing was clear.

But first we needed to acquire an item to allow us to travel to the deep vale where the memories would be located, and that evening we killed a nightmare creature to acquire it.

Steel day, harvest Moon

Following an assault on us by the Fortress of Pentar we entered the Vale of Memories to find Xenos' wife's memories. We began by following events that members of the group had experienced to travel backwards through time. In order, with the most recent first, we saw: Wycan demonstrating a mind control project using a rune that would compel creatures; Wycan cause the death of Xenos' biological son by pushing him to experiment too fast and dangerously and not supporting him when it went wrong; Wycan being rejected from creator society by Xenos' wife, as he lacked imagination and could only copy - Wycan got aggressive but was brought to his knees by Akila; a meeting where Xenos and wife presented their plan to create Orin Rakatha as a void prison to other creators (Akila was visibly ill)

We then met with Akila while she still working in the deep memories. We talked of the present

and what had happened. She was aware of the death of her son, our suspicion was that she had created this area just before death so she could keep working forever, had worked herself too hard and had ignored her failing health until her death.

We gathered an implant of Akila and returned to our bodies. We awoke to find all of us branded with a rune that we had seen Wycan use in the Vale of Memory to control creatures.

We were summoned to audience with Xenos. We gave him Akila's implant but he showed no care, and told us to leave. But when the implant was embedded in the drone it awoke with the consciousness of his wife.

Akila persuaded Xenos to abandon his mind control project and work with us. Xenos stood from his throne, cast off many of the wires and tubes that connected him to it, and regained some humanity and emotion.

He then asked us to tell his son to visit.

Akila removed Wycan's rune from us, calling it a primitive copy. She told us that she could prevent Wycan from fleeing if we wanted to kill him, which we certainly did. We teleported near Wycan and a most challenging fight ensued.

I fell to Wycan's relentless bolts but know that Akila appeared

to sever Wycan from the hive mind, he could no longer flee and was struck down.

We returned to the waystation for a meeting and debrief with Lady Kevralyn.

A most challenging, fascinating and enlightening quest was completed.