

14 Ambyrmont

Foolish to have sailed so late in the season, despite the need. A gale from the north-west has sprung up and we must run before it, despite being so close to Minrothad. The seas are breaking over the poop and I have reduced the sails to just the main topsail, to give us some way before the storm. I am confident that the direction of the gale will not take us onto the rocks of Utter or the great reef, so we must just wait it out. The crew are manning the pumps and we are holding our own, although I suspect much of the cargo will be ruined.

15 Ambyrmont

If anything the storm blows harder. It has ripped off the main topsail and the upper spar of the main mast, but we need no sail at all now to run before it. No glimpse of sun, moon or stars for over a day now, and I have no reckoning of how far we might have travelled.

16 Ambyrmont

The storm is abated somewhat but we still run before it and I worry now that if it does not abate in another day or so, we may run into Ochalea or some other southern land. At least Ochalea is Thyatian - I have no knowledge of the other lands, but have heard tales of them as savage and wild places. The storm has sprung several planks, and we are shipping water now, but not at any great rate so long as the pump does not give out. Several casks of water have been ruined though, which is a bad deal - it may take us many days to return north if the winds are against us or if we enter the sea of weeds. I hope that this is not the dreaded Soulbiter that all sailors fear.

The masts have flashed with lightning and fire and the sailors are now much afraid, for they say that this shows that this is the Soulbiter, and we are now lost souls, doomed to sail the seas of Mystara for all the ages now. I do not hold with such superstitions though.

17 Ambyrmont

At last the storm is passed, although there is still much cloud and rain, so we are still sailing south, as much as I can make out, for there has been no glimpse of sun or stars.

18 Ambyrmont

The rain and squalls continued through the night and morning, but around the third watch, the lookout called that he had seen breakers ahead and to port. We lofted some canvas and put the helm to starboard in case it was a reef, and soon saw that it was indeed a reef, and an island or promontory beyond. We were able, with much effort, to keep our distance from the reef and followed it for several miles, until we found a break in it and entered. The sea within is calmer, and we have furled sail and dropped anchor in twenty fathoms with a sandy bottom. The anchor seems to be holding, but I shall set a good watch tonight.

19 Ambyrmont

The sky has finally cleared and I have been able to see both Redstar and the horizon. My measurements indicate that we are around 310 leagues south of Minrothad. I have no knowledge of what land we are near - let us hope it is Ochalea for we are short of good water and fresh provisions.

The lagoon within the reef is calm and clear in the sunlight. The land is heavily forested, and there is the noise of many birds. I have dispatched a boat to look for a stream entering the sea to replenish our drinking water, and also with some good archers to see if they can shoot some birds for a feast to celebrate our safe deliverance from the storm.

It seems that I have spoken too soon of deliverance. The boat is back and three of its crew are lost. According to the boatswain, they rowed south along the shore looking for a stream. The finally found one and landed on a sandy beach to unload and refill the barrels. While most of the crew were doing that, one wandered inland to see if he could shoot some birds. Apparently within a hundred yards of the shore he found a clearing with a totem in it consisting of a human skull on a post. Un-nerved he returned to the boat to announce his finding. The boatswain, nervous by the discovery, posted two men as sentries and hurried the others to finish the filling of the barrels. It was well that he did, for as they finished, both sentries dropped, felled by many arrows. Suddenly a mass of black men rushed from the edge of the forest, armed with javelins and hide shields. His men scrambled to launch the boat, but one more fell before they could get out of arrow range. The natives seemed reluctant to follow into the water, and as I look now into the clear water, I see the shapes of sharks in the water below us, which might explain this. I therefore assume that we are safe here, well offshore.

## 20 Ambymont

As sun set last night I led a party of the best fighters in the crew to see if we could espy more of these vicious natives. We rowed silently along the coast, conscious that we might be all too visible against the setting sun in the west. We came to the creek and saw that the bodies of our men were gone, but from a hill further inland we saw the light of many fires and heard the beating of drums. We landed and disembarked, and leaving a guard by the boats, proceeded inland towards the fire. The natives obviously had no fear of us, for we encountered no pickets, and were able to sneak up to the edge of a large clearing that surrounded their village. There by the light of the fires we saw a most horrid sight, for roasting on spits over the fires were the bodies our men. Obviously these were those foul cannibals of which one hears so many tales in seafarer's taverns. Realising that we were outnumbered by the wild, dancing savages, and that our men were beyond any help, we withdrew as quickly as we could, and returned to the boat. Here we had a second shock, for there was no sign of Paulo who we had left as a guard, and instead there were half a dozen natives examining the boat. Realising that this was our only hope of escape, we rushed out and assailed them. The fight was vicious, and they fought like demons in the dark. We lost Adriano and Mikail to their wicked spears, and two of them escaped into the jungle. We departed in haste, for we knew that they would raise the alarm, taking Adriano and Mikail with us so that their bodies would not suffer the same fate as Marco, Artem and Vasil. We returned to the ship and safety.

Alas the safety of the ship is all too illusory. At the third watch we heard the drums start again along the shore nearest us, and then saw a number of narrow boats come around the headland where we had passed the night before. Each held a score of natives, many paddling but others with spears and darts. I ordered the best bowmen to the gunwales, and sent the others up aloft to unfurl sail, for when they reach us I have no doubt that they can swarm up the sides of the ship and overwhelm us. The men moved with great speed, and the archers started shooting at the most extreme range, and yet still hit men, but did not check the mad onrush of the natives. They overhauled the ship as we started to make way towards the gap in the reef, for the wind was but light, and showered us with a hail of spears and darts, which killed poor Stefan upon the helm and Riccardo on the main yard. Our men returned the fire with arrows and the darts of the enemy that they had seized from the decks, and gave a good account. As

natives tried to swarm the sides we waited upon the deck for them to shelter from the rain of darts and then struck them from the gunwales as they crossed. All this time we were gaining way and as we passed the bar, many of their boats fell away, for they were of two sorts - one a simple hollowed tree trunk that was suitable for the calm waters of the lagoon, and another that was more complex with a second smaller boat bound at a distance by spars alongside the main boat and serving to provide stability in the waves. We were fortunate that there were few of these boats, which were the only ones that followed us beyond the reef, and we soon left them behind. We dealt with all those that came aboard, but by then there were only eight of us that drew breath, which is few enough for this ship. Turning away from that accursed shore, we set our course to the west, for we could see on the far horizon another and smaller island that we hoped might be more hospitable.

### 21 Ambyrmont

The island is a tangle of jungle, and the reef around it has several gaps, but we are nervous to enter now with the ship. The boat is lost to us, but we have a small gig that we will have to use to look for water. I will lead the party or 3 for none other than me dare set foot upon the island. Even I am loathe but our need for water is great.

The island has proved to have no standing water that we can find, although we have taken a great stock of coconuts and are refreshing ourselves with their sweet water. There were no signs of any inhabitants, and the lack of water argues that it cannot be settled. The lack of water is still acute though. To the south we can see more of the accursed cannibal coast, but have no desire to venture south again. We will continue to the west.

### 22 Ambyrmont

We have sighted another island to the west.

We have reached the small isle and it is but a sandy eyot surrounded by a reef, with a tangle of palms and mangroves upon it. We have scant hope that it holds fresh water. There appears to be some sort of ruined building at the centre, but we shall not investigate.

We have sighted another island to the west, or maybe a vast northward curve of the cannibal coast. This must be the southern land that traders in Thyatia talk of. We must investigate the land to the west and see if we can find an uninhabited section in which to replenish our water supply.

### 23 Ambyrmont

We have reached the western land and found a sheer rocky seaboard totally unsuitable for landing. There is no complete reef as we had encountered elsewhere, but the scattered sections of reef are if anything more dangerous. We are following the coastline north-eastwards to see if there is a good landing place.

The mountains continue northeastwards, but a lowlying area of land stretches to the northwest, forming a great bay. The low land is heavily forested. The scattered offshore reefs and islands continue to prove a hazard to navigation.

We have found the mouth of a river. I shall lead a small party to see if we can find fresh water.

What accursed land is this, and what gods have we offended. We rowed to the mouth of the river, and up it a short way until it was pure. We then landed on the sandy bank and started to refill the barrels we had brought. Niccolo, who I had told to watch for hostile tribesmen, then called and showed us a great claw-mark in the wet sand some thirty yards up the beach. I

ordered Marcus to finish the barrel as quickly as possible for the mark affrighted me greatly, but before we could depart there was a rustling in the undergrowth and a roar and a great bipedal lizard emerged from the forest. In two strides it was upon poor Niccolo, who was rooted to the spot in fright, and had started to rip him asunder. Marco and I dropped the barrel and leapt into the boat and pulled as hard as we could for the ship and safety.

#### 24 Ambyrmont

We have continued to follow the coast, looking for a safer landing spot. The low lying land continued northwest for 20 leagues or more, and then turned back eastwards. At the tip were several islands, one of which had a mountain that smoked upon it. Marco swore that we saw a dragon or other flying lizard circling the smoking mountain, so we piled on sail and continued, oblivious of the risks of the reef, until nightfall.

#### 25 Ambyrmont

The low coast has given way again to a rocky shore with many cliffs and reefs, which we dare not approach. The coast continues north-east.

#### 26 Ambyrmont

The coast has turned southwards and so we have followed it. There are other outlying islands, but they are rocky and desolate. The coast is increasingly rocky and broken.

#### 27 Ambyrmont

We have entered a great westward bay, at the head of which a great river enters the sea. Beyond we can see high mountains rearing in the centre of this island or peninsular. We approached the river mouth, but can see that it enters the sea through wide marshes, which do not look like a source of good water. In addition, we can see that there are great lizards that lumber amongst the reeds, and we have no wish to tangle with such again.

#### 28 Ambyrmont

The water is now running very short. We have continued to sail south and then southwest - it appears to be an island and not connected to the southern land. We have seen islands on the low coast which we have passed and on some outlying islands. Like before, there is no continuous reef and lagoon here for some reason.

#### 29 Ambyrmont

Some of the sea-going boats of the natives are approaching from a village on the north shore. We are standing ready with bows, but they appear unarmed and exhibit none of the aggression that we encountered earlier.

The natives have proved friendly although communication with them is difficult as we have no common language. They seem to regard us with awe, possibly because of the size of the ship. We have indicated to them our need for water and they have indicated that we are to follow them. We have brought the ship in as close to the shore as we dare.

#### 30 Ambyrmont

The natives have given us a feast to welcome us and provided fresh water for us. They seem peaceable, if primitive. It is difficult to communicate however as we have no common language, so must communicate by pointing and gestures. Some words in their language do seem familiar however.

#### 1 Swiftmont

We have met the village priest or shaman. He seems very old, but we have made a breakthrough. He speaks a simple and debased form of Thyatian. He calls it the language of the gods, and that I speak it as well he takes as evidence that I am one of the gods. It seems that the gods dwelt on the main island long ago. They call the main island the Isle of Dread, and say that it is now full of many monsters. The children of the gods - his people - live on a few islands and a part of the main isle called Home, protected by a wall built by the gods. The gods used to live on top of a mountain in the centre of the isle where they had a great city or palace. Apparently they possessed a great black pearl that gave them magical powers. Certainly there are many pearls in these waters.

3 Swiftmont

I long to journey to the centre of the isle to find this city of the ancients, for they continue to tell tales of the treasure that the gods owned, but we are too few to make the journey given what we have seen of the monsters of this isle. The natives utterly refuse to cross the wall, saying it is taboo to them.

6 Swiftmont

We have travelled to the village on Rongua, which is by this wall that they speak of, and I am astounded. I expected a log palisade, but this is a great stone wall across the entire neck of the peninsular and even into the sea at each end. It is certainly beyond the capabilities of the current inhabitants. There are also stone statues around that were apparently created by the gods as well, and again I think that they must have been for they are very ancient and the current natives have no such skill or art.

15 Swiftmont

The ship is now fully repaired and restocked, and the natives continue to entertain us in many and varied ways. I worry that they might grow tired of us however, and feel that we should not outstay our welcome. I long to return to Specularum and recruit a new crew in order to penetrate the centre of the island and find the city of the gods. However I am nervous about making such a long voyage so late in the season. I am also concerned that the remaining crewmen will no longer wish to leave if we tarry here much longer - the local maidens seem to find them most exotic and interesting and they are enjoying their attentions too much.

16 Swiftmont

I have decided that we must leave for the return voyage no matter the risk, for the risk of staying is greater. Even after this short period the men are most reluctant to follow me, and I must promise them that we shall return as soon as we have more men, and once we have found the city of the gods then they will be able to live here like kings, or even gods. The ship is fully stocked and we shall depart tomorrow at daybreak if the winds are good.

17 Swiftmont

We have made good progress and the weather holds well. We are sailing due north, as much as we can, and are favoured by southerly wind.

18 Swiftmont

We sighted an isle to the east today, and sailed close to investigate. No fringing reef such as we found on the more southern isles, and the sea is deeper than we can plumb even close in. The isle has a sinister aspect, being thickly wooded, but in all the trees we can see great webs.

19 Swiftmont

More good progress although the wind has slackened somewhat. Another island sighted to the east, although this time bare and rocky. We did not tarry for we have all the provisions we need and I am keen to make Specularum and outfit for a return.