



CHRONICLE 5

THE MIST AND THE SWORD

TAVERN
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Chronicle Five

“The Mist and The Sword”

The humidity and the soft glow of the mist gave an ethereal quality to the surroundings, making it seem like a limbo or a dream more than a part of a swamp.

The ground was covered in a layer of muck, which squished and announced to all the creatures in the environs that a party of volktoad was crossing along with their single captive, whose rambling echoed to the furthest corners of the swamp.

Crossing the swamp had been slow and tedious for the volktoad. A freak storm had made the water rise, and the sinister mist had popped up unexpectedly, making navigation challenging as vision was limited to a few feet.

“Stop.”

The frog-like humanoids halted, taking advantage of the opportunity for a breather. They had marched nonstop since their incursion into the Elven Woodlands, whose sole objectives had been to procure prisoners to use as hosts for their eggs. They had only gotten one, not because of incompetence, but because there had been just one person in the village.

The foray had been unplanned. The volktoad always kept a generous number of captives in their stronghold of the Spiked Egg to use as nests for their eggs, a gruesome process. The prisoners are opened up, followed by a bag of mucus with a dozen eggs being introduced into the orifice before they are sewn back up and kept semi-comatose until the eggs hatch three months later.

However, a mysterious disease had killed all of the volktoad’s captives, forcing them to capture more in little time.

Fiochmar (the volktoad who had stopped the party) had been ordered by Ciocan, the Mire Prince, to lead a group of warriors and return with prisoners for a new batch of eggs.

Fiochmar had assented, although he had reservations about the lack of preparation time. As a veteran and capable commander, he was amongst his generation’s most successful bone retrievers, as the dozen bone trinkets and his cerateur attested, collected from numerous killed foes.

“I think we are going around in circles,” Fiochmar told his lieutenant Dumnhar, who kneeled on the and placed her ear on the mud.

Dumnhar closed her eyes and concentrated, trying to hear the voices. She was a gloom chanter, a type of spell wielder who got their powers from mysterious voices in the mire.

Her eyes and mouth twitched as she whispered to invisible forces. Nothing.

She opened her eyes and stood up. “The voices are silent.” “Shit,” reacted Fiochmar, who by now felt a vexing presage. “There’s something else. I’m not sure, but I thought I heard weeping in the silence,” added the gloom chanter.

“Our captive?”

Dumnhar shook her head. “No, it definitely came from somewhere else.”

Fiochmar created craters of dimples as he rubbed his chin in thought. He glanced at the party, 30 volktoad and a single captive. As he pondered what to do, the captive began to chuckle and speak about how “something was alive” and that “it won’t let us leave.”

The gloom chanter and bone retriever approached the captive. Underneath the layer of mud, dried blood, and feces was a human male. His teeth were yellow, and his blue eyes flickered like a fire.

His deplorable state was not due to the volktoad; he had been like this for years and had been the village’s resident madman. “You heard the weeping, didn’t you?” he asked Dumnhar, who nodded.

“The other villagers refused to hear it. That’s why they are dead.” As the madman continued his ramblings, Fiochmar studied what the best course of action should be. Wait until the mysterious mist lifted or push through it?

His moment of concentration was interrupted by the yelling of some volktoad. He approached them and demanded to know what was happening. Their reply was that five others had decided to scout further ahead a while back, and none had returned.

Fiochmar was about to answer that they probably got lost in the mist when they showed him a dismembered arm. The painted stripes over green skin confirmed that it belonged to one of their kind.

The damage to the tissue was considerable, especially in the upper part where the arm should have met the shoulder. It had been ripped apart with great force.

In one swift motion, the bone retriever swirled back, grabbed the madman’s jaw, and lifted him as if he had weighed no more than a feather. “You and the villagers set up a trap!” “How many are there?” Fiochmar’s slender and brown fingers dug into the man’s jaw, making him squeal in pain.

Getting no reply, Fiochmar hurled the captive into the mud, hitting his head against a rock.

“It’s the swamp. You have enraged it.”

Fiochmar took out his dreaded cerateur, the serrated blade that had been drenched in the blood of numerous foes. He stomped towards the lunatic, ready to disembowel the party’s only capture but was stopped by Dumnhar, who stood between him and the human.

“Have you lost your judgment, gloom chanter?”

Dumnhar gazed at him, the words stuck in her throat as she struggled to explain her hunch.

“We need him if we are going to get out of here.”

“No, we don’t.”

“There’s something at work here, Fiochmar.”

“A trap by the villagers, and we fell into it.”

“No, it’s something else.”



Dumhar analyzed her surroundings, trying to pierce through the mist.

As Fiochmar was about to reprimand Dumnhar, a loud whoosh thundered about the mist. All the volktoad unsheathed their weapons and searched for the source of the intimidating sound.

A deep silence descended around them as they kept quiet, trying to find the sound's source.

It took the volktoad a minute to spot another sound in the background. It could have been there since they arrived, but it wasn't until now that they had noticed it: a pitter-patter of drops.

Without uttering a word, Fiochmar lifted his arm and ordered the party to stand guard as he approached the sound. The mist became thinner with each step he took. After some seconds, he found himself before a ring of rocks. Inside the ring was water, tainted red and brown. A sharp odor bolted up his nostrils. It felt familiar. He noticed it originated from the water.

Fiochmar lowered his head and smelled the water. It smelled of blood. Confused, he dipped one of his index fingers into the liquid and then smelled it after pulling it back out.

"Definitely blood," he thought.

Moments after, he saw something beneath the water from the corner of his eye.

Using the tip of his cerateur, Fiochmar lifted whatever was underneath the water.

His reaction was instantaneous. His jaw dropped, and his eye almost popped when he discerned what he had picked up.

A green amphibian hand ripped just below the wrist. It belonged to a volktoad. Taking his surprise and horror as a trigger, more dismembered body parts sprang from the putrid water.

At the same instant as Fiochmar screamed the order for his warriors to assemble, a deep moan emanated from the mist as if it were alive, resonating throughout the entire area, nullifying his command.

The sounds of the landscape became a litany of cries, squelching, and the tearing apart of flesh. A warrior passed beside Fiochmar before he saw it being dragged away by a tentacle made of mist, her sharp nails clawing to the damp mud as she tried to escape from the mist's sinister grip.

Fiochmar hacked away at the mist, slashing and retreating away from its reach, ending up beside Dumnhar, who conjured balls of energy and blasted the mist away. The thumping of objects hitting the ground conjured terror in the volktoad's ears as it signified that one of their own had been dragged to an ominous doom.

A tentacle wrapped itself around Fiochmar's arm and squeezed with the strength of a ravenous kraken. The veins bulged, followed by the cracking of the bone as the mist began to rip it from the rest of Fiochmar's body. A sharp pain spread to every inch of Fiochmar's body as he cried in agony.

"Fágaim thú!" croaked Dumnhar as she placed her hand over the tentacle. The mist dissipated like dust being blown away by a gust of wind. Fiochmar's body relaxed as the strain faded, the pressure on the muscles, veins, and bones dropping.

The gloom chanter held on to her staff as she gasped for breath; the intense use of magic had begun to take its toll.

Fiochmar stared at his arm, noticing the black marks interred in the flesh and the section of skin lifted by the bone. A couple of seconds longer, and it struck out like a skewer.

Without a word, the bone retriever tried to pick up his weapon, which fell on the mud as Fiochmar's fingers didn't have the strength to dig in and get a proper grip on the weapon.

He picked it up with the other. He wasn't right-handed, but he felt that didn't matter under the circumstances.

Fiochmar gave a lightning sweep of the area. Everywhere he looked, he saw tiny pockets of visible space with volktoad charging the mist or battling against dozens of tentacles that tried to claim them.

Only a few minutes had passed since bedlam had erupted, but the mysterious mist had changed its colors; from a white transparent tone to a deep vermillion one, as if it had absorbed the blood of the volktoad.

Creeping through the mist, Fiochmar noticed one familiar shape making its escape. It was the madman who somehow had been spared all the pandemonium.

Sensing an opportunity, Fiochmar grabbed Dumnhar and made their way towards the madman who had just penetrated and disappeared into the thickest part of the mist.

The two advanced, dodging the tentacles and leaving behind the last remainders of the party who were being claimed one by one by the demonic force.

Fiochmar and Dumhar sensed the bitter flavor of blood each time they inhaled. The smell spread through their bodies, traveling through their lungs and reaching every corner of their beings.

The mist became thicker as the two advanced; becoming moving silhouettes to one another, hardly capable of telling how far they were from each other.

"Fiochmar?"

"I'm here."

"Have you noticed?"

"What?"

"Listen."

A sense of dread gripped Fiochmar, who could not feel his chest. Silence.

Utter and total silence. No screams of agony, no thumping of objects falling, and no cries for help. The cacophony of terror had vanished.

Years of battle and training had taught them the pains of conflict, including the noise of yells. Even the sound of defeat was a lullaby compared to this sudden silence. It was abnormal.

The mist lifted as they approached an opening. As the mist vanished from their eyes, they noticed a faint blue gleam enthralling the opening, followed by the sound of rubbery munching.

"Do you hear that, Dumnhar?" Asked Fiochmar as he searched for the munching's origin.

The bone retriever bumped into the gloom chanter.

"Watch it."

Getting no reply from her, he turned to her.

The gloom chanter's face was shocked, and the muscles around her eyes and mouth tensed. Fiochmar followed her stare and saw a hooded figure in blue standing next to a sword driven through the mud.

A blue light emanated from the weapon, lighting most of the opening.

Before he could ask the blue figure a question, he heard a thud beside him. He looked down and saw the head of one of his warriors, followed by the munching coming from the opposite direction.

The first thing both Dumnhar and Fiochmar spotted was a vast bulking shape kneeling over another. Its arms were thick as a log, as were its legs.

The torso was built like a breastplate, sturdy and solid. Everything about it looked massive except the head. It was small.

For the first time, both realized the full horror of the form facing them and what it was doing. The figure was made up of parts of different volktoad. The right arm was brown and muscular, no doubt belonging to an atxe raider, while the left was green, slimmer, but sinewy. Both hands were digging into the carcass of another volktoad, an albino one.

As for the tiny head, it didn't belong to a volktoad. It belonged to the madman. His expressionless eyes fixed on them as the mouth chewed on white flesh.

At that moment, they noticed that the monstrous mishmash before them was held together by tiny misty strings, which controlled the aberration like a puppet master.

The madman's head spit chewed bits of flesh and gazed at them before jumping between the two of them.

Fiochmar was pushed back five feet. Having been able to parry the blow with his weapon in the last second.

Meanwhile, Dumnhar had conjured a magical barrier against the hail of blows the monster unleashed. Through the vibration, the gloom chanter could tell that each blow had the strength of an ogre and could have easily bashed her head in.

Taking advantage of the situation, Fiochmar sprinted towards the monster, sliding beside it and slashing the feet from the rest of the body.

The monster collapsed like a falling tree. Fiochmar sighed.

"Watch out!" screamed Dumnhar.

More strings had sprung from the mist, some holding the monster, but others picking up two other deformed corpses from inside the mist and placing them in the opening.

Dumnhar and Fiochmar now faced three monsters and the mist.

The two recent corpses descended on Dumhar, who dispelled her barrier, placed the palm of her hand into the mud, and by whimpering a power word, made the ground even wetter, turning it into a quagmire that trapped the two corpses.

For a puppet, the monster was swift, throwing six blows for every one Fiochmar could. The volktoad had switched to defense, dodging the attacks instead of blocking or parrying them.

Strength-wise, the monster was far more potent than any other opponent he had faced before.

As the fighting continued, it dawned on both volktoad that the mist played with them. It could have used its tentacles to crush them as it had done with the party, but it had focused on using the bodies of their comrades. A dark sensation pressed their hearts as a sinister thought built in their minds; the mist had deliberately decided to use puppets to create despair and anguish.

Cruelty is a characteristic of rational beings, meaning the mist was alive. The gloom chanter was bleeding profusely from a spear wound.

The blood trickled like a brook on her side as she battled to remain conscious. She had used up her healing magic and was close to collapsing.

Fiochmar turned to his ally in a moment of distraction, leaving an opening for the monster, which struck him with its full might, shattering his cerateur in two and thrusting him back. Fiochmar crashed on the ground, feeling a sharp pain in his back.

He tried to stand up but couldn't. His muscles tightened, but no strength flowed through them.

He looked down at his weapon, broken halfway through the blade.

The ground vibrated around him as he noticed the monster trashing towards him. Fiochmar's head thumped to the ground, the bone retriever accepting his fate as the enemy closed in to finish him.

There's nothing poetic about dying, he thought as he awaited the inevitable. He had heard a hundred stories of memories flashing or a parade of laments through one's mind during the final moments. "Bullshit!" The only thoughts Fiochmar had were about the pain running through his body, and how to rip the monster's head from its body and quench his thirst with its blood as he held it for all to see.

As his eyes started to close, he noticed a thin layer of blue light engulfing him. He tilted his head right and noticed the sword driven through the mud. He had forgotten about it during the fight.

A blue aura surrounded the handle, calling him to grab it. Without his intention, his crippled arm reached out and seized the sword.

The instant the fingers wrapped around the handle, a surge of energy flowed through his veins, reinvigorating his body and blocking out all signs of pain. His muscles tightened like a rope, and his blood flooded his body as he stood up and met the horrendous puppet.

The air around the fist rippled as the monster threw a devastating punch against Fiochmar, who braced himself for the impact, placing the blue sword in front of his face to parry the blow.

The fist was sliced like a ham as it went through the blade before splitting into two.

"Impossible," thought Fiochmar.

He knew the blow should have shoved him back or at least moved the sword. But that didn't occur. The magical weapon had cut through the flesh with ease.

The ruthless monster attacked with another punch, only to have its fist in one swift swipe.

The other two corpses quickly joined the fight and attacked. After less than a minute, Fiochmar stood on top of the corpses, blade in hand. The mist closed in on the volktoad, tentacles sprouting from it and striking. A strange acute shriek reverberated around the area; it was the mist, frustrated at the turn of the tide, and trying to reclaim victory.

However, the mist was no match for the blade. While it had managed to regenerate tentacles each time one had been cut, it couldn't do so when it was injured by the blue blade.

In a matter of minutes, the great blob of mist that claimed the swamp as its home was decreasing, retreating from the onslaught of attacks.

Fiochmar's mouth curved into a grin, his eyes glinting with pleasure as his face transformed into a mask of pure revelry with every tentacle he cut.

The air cleared as the mist was pushed back, revealing the swamp's various odors. From the stench of the corpses to the moisture of the ground, mosses, and mushrooms, the place was a festival of scents that had remained concealed because of the mist.

A loud shriek resonated throughout the landscape when Fiochmar finished the last remaining piece of the mist. Had it been destroyed?

Fiochmar scrutinized his surroundings. He saw Dumnhar getting on her feet, the blood still pouring from her as she struggled to remain upright.

The bone retriever raised his weapons to the heavens, celebrating his victory and salivating at the many to come. Whatever the weapon was, it was his. The first to feel his wrath would be Jättilän Giants and the Dragonseekers.

"No."

He knew they couldn't be the first. Ciocan, Mire Prince and leader of the volktoad, would have the honor of being the first.

Before he could enjoy this thought, his arm began to tremble, and his vision blurred, the glowing sword being the last focused thing he saw. The low sound of ice creaking penetrated Fiochmar's ears as he felt a terrible cold, followed by a burning pain, as his crippled arm began to freeze.

Beginning at his hand, a blanket of ice spread from the weapon, making its way across his arm like vines wrapping around a tree.

Fiochmar tried to scream but felt his tongue and chords paralyzed. The weapon which had saved him now claimed him.

As he felt a sharp pain in his right eyeball as it froze. He felt the pain in his arm stop, and vision returned to his left eye.

He noticed Dumnhar standing next to him and holding one-half of his cerateur. On the ground, he spotted his arm, almost entirely frozen. He gazed at his shoulder, realizing what the gloom chanter had done to save him.

Fiochmar tried to speak, but no sound emanated from him. Dumnhar sighed, dropping the weapon to the ground and fainting.

Fiochmar grabbed her before she hit the ground. He had lost an arm, an eye, and the ability to speak, but he felt no pain.

He looked down at the ground, his glands stiffening as a cold unease circulated through his body at the discovery that the blue sword was not there.

The chirping of cicadas returned to the terrain as the two silent and exhausted figures made their way through the swamp, not exchanging a single glare as they battled with their own internal fears. Whatever it had been, the weapon was out there, and it would appear again to someone. The real question, and what disturbed both volktoad, was, "is there someone with the power to claim that cursed sword?"