**The Land-lite (WIP)**

***Verse 1: Richter Meets A Cool Chaos Seed… Finally!... [Almost…]***

Deep underground in The Land, just South of the Orc city of Umuru, on the edge of a bloody battleground, Richter stands, fire backlit, glinting eyepiece and gauntlet, covered in gore, he faces five battle-hardened Orcs looking worse for the wear.

The location and source of Chaos that he’d felt earlier were still unclear but the tug toward the group was unmistakable.

With each question Richter posed in The Land, well beyond his comprehension, timelines split based on his choices made and unmade.

In the last moment, Richter asked, “Any of you fuckers know how Bond takes his Martini?”

***And time halted… And then a silent fracture in space-time; And a question hung in the air…***

***And so, in another fresh plane of unknown reality, another multiverse is born. We begin, 3 days hence…***

When he awoke in the Kist Village with Sumiko hovering over him, he thought he might have died. He quickly checked his stats. Whew! He was still a Lord and a Tier 2 badass!

There was so much to do, but first, the Bonding of Chaotic Souls has begun!

Zoctor, the newly evolved Chaotic Lord, and Zadana, his Chaotic dragonling familiar, merged, body and soul. Transforming into a Chaotic Man-Dragon.

Their combined form afforded wings of Chaos magic and physical scales that unfurred to their full width of fourteen feet.

Their bodies and souls entwined becoming one sound on the wind.

They flew swiftly to inspect the new Harbor and the Dungeon Entrance. Closine, the Kist Village professional Dungeon Keeper, had installed the alluring entrance soon after the guards reported the approaching caravan of ships.

Closine had done jaw-dropping work in the last few days following the battle and the huge influx of dungeon resources did not go wasted.

The simplified Factory Room and the Battery Room needed some polish but he had done an impressive job of improvising the Battery Room from the Mana Storage Blueprint that they couldn’t use yet.

The Fey Factory Room was going to be a surprise, but there was no chance of that since the Dungeon was constantly being harvested now by villagers and Adventurers. The secret was out and Fey magic was in.

Together with Cooter, the Sprite Master ranked engineer sent by Hisako, Leslie the village professional builder, and Bea the scholar, they created additional new blueprints. The new Library was almost complete. The tree-apartment complex foundation was being prepared. And the Marketplace was starting to take shape under Mama’s stern watch.

He could not wait to astonish his people with the Magic Core and Core Upgrades. His plans would rock the world!

After these quick inspections, he could get on with upgrading the village. It was time to give birth to a Kobold Emperor, arrange a marriage between Alora and the baby Emperor (to be commenced in 50 years hence), invite a god to ensure the Kobold societal stability, and LEVEL THIS BITCH UP!!! And so they began…

The joy Richter and Alma felt at this moment made it hard to believe that only a few days ago, he was stuck underground.

Only hours ago had he arrived back in the Village. He had left Zev with his Chamberlain to get acclimated and prepared to join Beyan in Vergut Kunig and the Sepulcher of Death. His talents would be useful there and being a Vassal had its privileges. Beyan could learn to share, right?

**3 Days Ago…**

His voice rang out in the battle cavern. “Any of you fuckers know how Bond takes his Martini?"

Richter stood in the cave, staring down the Orcs, fire and squelches of battle death in the background; grim and salty. His blood was roiling and barely holding back; his urge to kill more was powerful. As he glared about the cavern and before anyone could say another word, a sound that had not yet been heard in the Land. A prompt minimized.

It was epic BACK-QUEING! Wick-Wick-Wac! Skritch-Skritch-Skratch!

Just after the DJ note, a booming voice echoed through the cavern. Not too loud but loud enough for the 7th row in an old rocker Metallica concert.

“What?? Change it up! Goin’ Old School!”

The voice started as one and each sentence was a different voice. I thought one sounded like Bootsy Collins…. It was fucking odd.

Richter sent messages to his “party” to stay alert.

Sloth grunted to Richter’s left and a man came out of a hidden passage in the shadows.

He wasn’t shambling exactly, but he was meandering and holding his hands in front of him like a god-named Zombie. His fingertips hung lazily and occasionally you could see a finger twitch.

The voice rang out again -this time sounding a bit like Rob Bass?

“Ddd Dddd Drop the beat!”

DMX, “X Gon…” blares and all the Orcs start doing fortnight dances???

What the fuck is going on!! Richter’s head was on a swivel looking for the source. All the while looking at the man that was creeping closer. He stopped about 15 feet away and smiled. His teeth shone in the firelight.

The Orcs didn’t advance but continued to do flips and tea-bag each other. It was pretty funny as long as they stayed in their triage area.

Regardless, it was clear this man had some interesting abilities to be able to puppeteer 5 Orcs at once… yup, he’s a Chaos seed, Richter convinced himself.

The music began to recede and the man spoke.

“My name is Zev and I know what you are. To answer your question, it’s shaken not stirred.”

Richter looked at the man and the “feel of chaos” sang in his body. A ping rang out and a quick prompt told him what he needed to know.

This Zev was a Chaos seed and had only 3 lives left.

So this was the chaos that he sensed? Or was it…

“Zev, I appreciate the candor. I’ve had trouble with our kind in the past.”, Richter’s grim disgust was evident.

“I know what you mean. I’ve already died 32 times in the last 8 years. Most of those times were at the hands of others like us.”, Zev said in a calm and unassuming manner.

“You’ve been here 8 years? What year was it when you left Earth?”, Richter’s curiosity got the better of him while his blood magic still coursed through his veins.

“That was a long time ago. The Land messes with time. You probably don’t know the half of it.”, Zev continued.

Richter nodded knowing full well that Nexus could manipulate time.

“I left Earth in 2084. The Labyrinth had already fed on the weak and about 15% of Earth’s population was still standing their ground against the Labyrinth monsters that wandered in and out of the portals that were littered about the world.

A few of the most resilient human factions have taken control of Portals on Earth and have begun to make bases off-world.

I came voluntarily. I walked right into the Portal and was transported to a void space where I met an Alien that said I would have to hurry and I would have a hard time.

It said that I would have to seek out help once I was in a town. Then I appeared at the entrance to that Dungeon.”

Richter took all this in and breathed slowly to calm his blood. At least this guy seemed upfront and honest.

He used Analyse and found he couldn’t see much.

Zev looked at his feet, obviously pensive. He looked up and made eye contact with the Blood soaked Chaos Lord and smiled.

“So, I just gave you a lot of information that might make me seem vulnerable but I want to assure you that I am not. Now that we have spoken more than 5 words together I have an Ability that gives me the option to set a curse on you that harms you 4x as much as you hurt me”, Zev explained.

Richter quickly checked his logs. Sure enough, there was a curse. It was simple and clear.

“Now that’s out of the way, I want to share with you my desires and intents.”

Zev walked a bit closer and landed in front of the Orcs who were still performing.

Zev put his arms down and the Orcs relaxed and continued their triage; most of their previous work having been undone by the antics.

“I think I might have been the first one.” Zev began.

When I got here it was 8 cycles ago including that last massive Age change in the global announcement.

I only recently figured out what happened. You see, when I left Earth it was 2089. The Labyrinth monsters had taken most of the planet but in the last 10 years, small factions of humans 1000 people or less started to fight back. A few of the more assertive camps took a portal after slaughtering the monster invasion exiting The Labyrinth.

It was said that one popped into the portal and found a node; ran back and everyone followed. They control that portal and node now.

I was part of the 4th wave to find them and in the 1st wave to enter The Labyrinth.

But, you probably know, that place is wicked and soon I was lost and running for my life from monsters unheard of.

I got lucky and found a new node. This one took me to a Dungeon. I was only on level 1 and so I just left.

I’ve been running and learning ever since… I just got level 10 in Lore.

I deduced you’re a chaos seed. You have talents to prove I am one too. I have a Talent that informs me. It’s called Deep Analysis.

I’m tired of running. I haven’t found the good guys yet. Have you?

And while we are being honest, I have a talent that tells me when you are not telling the truth.

The way he phrased it sounded peculiar…hmmm…

In any case, I was sent on a quest, to find you or someone like you. See here.

His eyes strayed for a moment and then a prompt showed up.

A prompt has been shared with you.

Quest: A Time For Zev – Will your long journey reach a new platitude?

Task: Swear loyalty to a deserving Lord

Reward: 15 chaos points, a liege lord, 3,800 experience points

Optional: Convince the Lord you are a worthy vassal.

Optional Reward: Vassal title, Land, Liege Lord Loyalty, Fame, ???

Penalty for failure: 8 more years of suffering and running; always at death’s door. A punch in the nose from the Universe.

You see, it took me two years to plan and make it here.

His voice and expression started getting strange. And suddenly he reminded me of that old comedian Bobcat Gothewait or something like that… it was … unpredictable.

He went on, “…besides, I don’t anyone else with a Chaos alignment of +5. Do you? Most of those other chaos jerks are only Chaos +1 or +2 but I did run across a +4 and a -2. That last one didn’t make sense except that that girl was just not going to do anything unless she decided to.

Besides, who am I to judge? When I entered The Labyrinth I was only 17. Now I’m 28 in The Land and by the age of your log, I’ve been here about 8 years before you.

All I can tell you is that my talents and abilities merged in The Land and made me a unique profession, or maybe it was just me. I’m a Puppeteer. It’s a bit like a necromancer without all the dead bodies. My ability works on any physical object. On Earth, I was a data junky but my biggest thrill was efficient automation and strategic hub hopper – that’s like a bounty hunter for bad actors online… or it was…”

His voice trailed off as if remembering something troublesome.

“You have all kinds of questions now, so, here, it’s part of my quest after all.

A prompt popped.

Your Analyze skill, while powerful, is not always perfect. A potential vassal (HINT HINT) has shared previously hidden and secret information about himself.

Name: Zev Skot

Race: Human, Chaos Seed

Level: 13

Profession: Puppeteer

Specialty: Strategist

Alignment: Chaos +5, Good +1

Age: 28

Skills: Survival, Stealth, Pickpocket, Brewmaster, Weaver, Military Strategy, Sewing

Abilities:

Fast hands: Snap your finger and break the sonic barrier. Control multiple targets.

Gesticulation: Unlike the Fast Hands Ability, this improves Dexterity exponentially while using your Profession for an extended period. Dexterity +1/Puppet/MinuteControlled. With enough training, you will be able to control Armies with a wave of your finger or a flick of your hair.

Backdrop: Stand in the slightest shadow and become virtually part of the background. Great for spy craft or getting out of sticky situations.

Rope Control: Control and rope, string, fiber, or wire like it was part of your own body… better even.

Deep Analysis: Allows for a complete deep view of any animal, vegetable, and mineral down to the molecular and mana level. No aspect of a physical object can be hidden from you.

Bad Breath: Sometimes speaking with people sucks. When you converse more than 5 words with anyone, you can set a curse on them with a payload of 4x any harm to you or your “party”. The curse you set must be Learned. Passive.

Talents:

Your Mine: Physical touch and eye contact create an unspoken contract. You gain a puppet. Duration 8 hours. Unlike a Charm spell, the puppet becomes an inanimate object that only the Puppeteer can manipulate.

Distraction: Allows you to broadcast any sounds you can think of or recall. You must have heard the sound previously to use it. No cool down. Macros Enabled.

Puppet Gears: You can control an Army of puppets… almost.

Level 3: Control 7 Puppets

Leveling this Talent allows you to control more puppets. Exceeding this number can cause severe brain melting.

Walk-It-Back: You can fade to nearly invisible with a thought and a motion. Related to Backdrop this Talent allows you to “disappear” for 3 minutes. Only the sharpest eyes will see it happen. Cooldown 1 hour.

Confidential: You can bind your word and keep the secrets of others. Breaking your word will have equal consequences to genocide

Marks:

Unacceptable: You committed suicide to see if you would get the Chaos points. Well, you did. You got 2. Happy?? You have 41 lives remaining.

Richter stopped reading for a second. “You killed yourself for Chaos points?”

“Yeah. It was a dark day. I was lucky the Ents found me when I respawned. I stayed with them for a while and they helped me see The Land as a dangerous lover. That made it all click for me.

I’ve been working to get here for over a year. It took me a week to gather these Orcs and then suddenly the Chief ordered all of the Warriors to find the source of Chaos.”

Richter contemplated the information and then spoke. “If the Chief ordered his full martial force to gather the Chaos he didn’t know it was you?”

“No way! I stay hidden and hide a lot. Look at my stealth.”

Stealth: Level 54. Can hide in an empty white room.

Backstab: Level 39. You’re a sneaky bastard. Your enemies never see you coming.

“Besides, I’m not the source of Chaos they were drawn to. Look.” Zev pointed behind him. Now that the battle fire had died down a little the shimmer was clear.

A faint light blue glow illuminated the small gap in the wall where Zev had come out of the shadows.

“Did you try to get it yet? You were just over there…”, Richter blurted excitedly.

“It has some sort of shielding. These Werms keep trying to get to it. There are parts all over the floor but more keep coming. Come look, they are swarming.

Richter continued to read Zev’s status page.

Mitigated Friction: You’re “slippery”. No one can pin you down if you don’t want it. You have Escaped over 100 confrontations without damage and still earned XP from the engagement.

Peeper: You have performed Deep Analysis over 1000 times. This is a scalable Mark. Deep Analysis now yields Secret Traits and Lineage or Lore.

Adventurer: You have traversed The Labyrinth. There is no stronger calling.

Known Curses:

Shut Up: Prevents a person from talking. Magically removes the cursed party’s mouth. Duration 1 hour.

Sit Down: Forces the cured party to sit immediately. If sitting is not an option, one leg will be removed. Duration 4 hours.

Listen Now: Ears will sprout from random locations on the cursed party. May be easily deafened. Duration 1 hour.

The Chaos Lord examined the sheet and was impressed.

Zev continued, “Ok, so when I found the node out of The Labyrinth I landed just south of the Tower of Hate in a quaint but tightly run town called Hathorga. An awful name. It just slithers out of your mouth, doesn’t it? Gross…

Anyway, the people were nice enough and the Dungeon entrance there was easy to leave and so I just walked into town.

Then I got my first surprise. I couldn’t read my screens anymore. They were all fine before but now all I got was “Error – See Quests”. But when I tried the Quests icon I got the same thing. Finally, after talking to the town administrator he suggested I speak with the Evaluator.

It was late so I got a room for cheap and waited until morning. As soon as was reasonable I made my way to the Evaluator’s house which was on the outskirts of town closer to the tower.

Long story short, the Evaluator was willing to help if I completed a few tasks for him. It felt like the Trails of Hercules but I finally finished.

He did help to fix some of the problems with my screens but then gave me a Quest that would help us both.

I was finally able to see the basics of my screens again, but there was still far too many “Error – Unable to Retrieve” messages littered all over my screens.

Quest: Meet The Seer Anriq

Task: Get to the top of the Tower of Death for a chance to meet with Anriq the oldest Seer in The Land.

Convince Anriq to help you unlock the rest of your screens. Bring back a promise or a token for the Evaluator to request a convenient visit and tea.

I had to get to the top of the tower to seek an audience with the oldest Seer in The Land, according to the Evaluator who looked to be in his early 1000s. She is said to have lived through 4 separate Ages and no one really knows how old she really is.

As so, I went to find the Seer Anriq to help me reveal more of my status screen.

The tower is no joke and it took me two years to climb halfway up only to discover a hidden entrance.

It still wasn’t easy. The place was haunted, filled with bats, and covered in slime. It was sick and I considered reclimbing from the outside many days.

But after toiling for years, I made it to the top and I was still only level 6.

Now then, skipping the drama, I met with Anriq and she helped.

After a few round trips and even more dates between the Evaluator and the Seer, they both helped me unlock the rest of my screens.

I was very glad they couldn’t see my information plus I got 2 new Quests.

Quest/Lore: Expected Twist

Task: Timing is everything. Meet with the first Chaos Lord in the Dank Caverns below the Underground Orc City of Amaru during the period of quiet fire.

Agents of Chaos need you and you need them. The symbiosis between you is a match made in heaven. IT HAS BEEN FORETOLD

Pledge your Loyalty. Professionals are highly valued. Be offered a place in Court.

Secret Quest: Convince the Chaos Lord to make you a Prime Vassal.

Penalty for failure: This is a one-time quest and has been foreseen by the Ancient Seer Anriq. You will never have another opportunity to unlock your screens and will be hobbled for the rest of your days in The Land if you fail to meet with the Chaos Lord.

Quest: Unlock your Power

Task: Earn your Profession. See the Town Administrator for further information.

Reward: Spoilers

Penalty: Automatic failure of Expected Twist Quest

Optional: Earn your Specialty.

Secret:

Secret Reward:

And so I did. Once you learn a few things you can pretty much level by doing anything. If it’s new The Land.

Ok

The Chaos Lord and Zev agree to work together to help Richter achieve the Quest that Xetrix awarded him.

Before they talk further Richter asks Zev to make the Orcs lie on their backs on the ground.

He did so and they complied. Blank stares all. It was convincing.

“How do they fight?”, Richter couldn’t help himself.

“Oh, that wasn’t too hard to figure out. As I said, I was a Macro Master and so once I figured out how to use Deep Analysis to see skills, I was able to string them together based on their combat logs.

Oh yeah, Deep Analysis allows me to see everyone’s logs. Even the NPCs are typically pretty boring.

The real problem with my Profession is that it’s not like a Charm spell. I can’t interrogate a puppet.”

Zev releases one of the Orcs and Richter double casts charm. The Orc tells them of a secret entrance to the back of the Palace.

Richter has received a map. Your map has been updated but is too far away to examine.

Zev and Richter examined the map all the while watching as more and more Werms tried to reach the Chaos seed.

Then Richter had an amazing idea. What if he could take advantage of all the carnage?

Richter quickly gathered handfuls of pebbles. With handfuls at a time, his Creative Spark hit like a flash. If he was involved at all in the battle he could get points for the death even if he didn’t cause it.

It was a trick but who knows maybe, even more, was possible.

You have created a Blood Trap. Using pebbles covered in blood and viscera, these improvised Catropes will slow enemies and damage those with sensitivity to Blood.

Richter threw a handful in the path of the hole in the wall where the Werms entered the Chaos bubble.

Three Werms pushed into the smaller cavern and over Richters trap.

Notifications started rolling in.

You have inflicted 1 point/minute of sustained damage on Level 43 Werm.

You have inflicted 1 point/minute of sustained damage on Level 58 Raider Werm.

You have inflicted 1 point/minute of sustained damage on Level 18 Werm.

Shortly after, more notifications.

You have received 4897 points for contributing to the death of a level 58 Ravenger Werm.

You have received 1754 points for contributing to the death of a level 43 Raider Werm.

You have received 97 points for contributing to the death of a level 18 Ravenger Werm.

Zev and Richter looked at each other and both started to giggle. This was going to be so easy.

They started collecting loose stones and Richter would turn them into Blood Traps.

They would both take turns tossing the stones in front of this Werm hole.

While they did this, notifications flashed for both of them. Both ignored the prompts until Zev declared.

“I leveled! Yes! It’s been so long; nearly 3 months since I had enough experience.” Thank you, my Lord.

It just slipped out. It seemed natural. Zev smiled. Richter smiled back.

Richter looked at his status. Sadly, he still needed about a million points to level.

After 4 hours, everyone was rested.

Sloth stood in the corner. The summoned creature returned long ago. And the tamed Werms had been useful in cleaning up the last of the Orcs.

After the interrogation, Richter told Zev that they needed to die.

Simple as that, Zev released the Orcs and before they came out of the stupor, Richter grabbed the best sword he could see and without hesitation chopped each of their heads off. The charmed Orc sat with Sloth standing over him.

They talked for a few more hours and Richter told Zev about the Quest from Xitrix.

Richter released his Charm and Zev re-puppeted the Orc General.

After a bit, it was decided. They would sneak in the back passage, puppet, charm, or kill any guards or interlopers.

Getting to the vault would be tricky and getting into it would be even harder.

So they puppet an Orc that cries an alarm about the vault being broken into and ransacked.

This would lead them to the vault and with any lu, CK we would have a chance to kill the Chief as a bonus. Orcs are assholes.

The plan was working great until we got the Wand.

A part of the plan was to get a little back from the little Imp.

Examining the wand it was magnificent. A black gem sat at the head of the shaft. The handhold was encrusted with gems that looked to give the user some grip.

Wand of Ratush

This wand cast the spell reveal. This is an Ancient Achane Level 300 spell and will expose the deepest truth of anything it is cast upon. Casting this upon objects will expose molecular-level details, components, schematics, blueprints, and any other hidden or otherwise exposed properties. If cast on a living being, the same can be said with the addition of the exposure of all truths and secrets of said being.

Using this wand will turn Evil aligned beings into sand unless they take possession as instructed. This sand can be used in many potions. See an Alchemist for more information.

Charges: 1 of 358

Warning: Use of this wand Curses the user permanently with the Chronic Itchy Toe. This infuriating curse can distract you at the most inconvenient of times.

Recommendation: Make your enemy use this Wand.

Richter and Zev talked about this next part of the plan at length because of the risk.

While Zev was confident his power would work on a demon the likelihood of Xitrix allowing Zev to touch him was just unlikely.

So they came up with another more subtle plan.

After a few hundred Werms in the Chaos cave had been destroyed, they stopped coming.

After a bit, Richter stood and said, “I’m going in there to get this Chaos. You don’t have to come but I recommend it. If you haven’t noticed, we are practically invisible when it comes to Chaos magic.

Without hesitation, Richter turned and started walking towards the barrier that was easily delineated by the ring of blood on the floor around the nugget of Chaos.

Zev quickly popped up and followed excited to gain some Chaos points.

A few steps later and they both stood in front of the Chaos.

Richter used Analyse.

Chaos Nugget

This ultra-rare and unique item is similar to its more refined counterpart, the Chaos crystal, which imparts purified Chaos.

While a Nugget is raw.

This Nugget contains unstable energy.

This Nugget will self-destruct in 14 minutes and 39 seconds.

They had a minute, so, Richter modified the plan.

“Zev, the last time I gathered a Chaos particle, it was bracing, to say the least. My suggestion is that we try to take this together. We can hold hands and both touch at the same time.

Given your powers, I need two oaths from you now. One, you won’t puppet me ever unless I ask you to. I need this now.

Zev seemed to understand and stated, “I promise to never puppet Lord Richter unless he asks me to. I promise. Yes, I promise indeed.”

Thrice Witnessed.

Second, I need to keep our relationship a secret for now. Will you swear loyalty now?

“Yes, Lord Richter. It is my quest after all. I’m just not pushy. I want you to trust me because I earn it and I’m a good guy too. You know?”

Richter nodded. He did know. He needed this too. “Let’s do this. Say the words.”

When Zev had finished the ritual words that seemed to come unbidden, Rickter got a notification.

A Good Aligned Chaos seed has sworn loyalty to you. Would you like to make them a Vassal?

You presently have 2 slots available. Prime Vassale: <none>, Vassal: <empty>.

Prime Vassals have many two-way benefits but one of the biggest is all rewards start as doubled. This is scalable with time, trust, and adventure.

Not seeing a downside, he made Zev his Prime Vassal.

Congratulations! You have chosen wisely. Your Prime Vassel is a +5 Chaos alignment. Weekly Chaos point yield: 20. See the War Leader screen for additional benefits.

“Kick-Ass Man!”, Ricter exclaimed.

Zev excitedly shared the completion of the secret quest and Richter got a notification.

Your Prime Vassal has completed a Quest. Shared reward 1500 XP

Richter and Zev took the others hand and on the count of 3, they both placed their other hands on the Nugget completing a Chaos circuit.

Chaos bliss surged through both of them. The energy was rough and raw. They both screamed in pain for a moment. And then the cavern was quiet for the next few hours with only the occasional giddy laugh or euphoric sigh.

You have claimed a Chaos Nugget. Raw Chaos has been converted. You have 1286 Chaos points.

Zev got a little less but was over the moon nonetheless.

Per the plan, Richter bought the “Change Description” Talent.

A complex spell would be easy to detect but his “Change Description” talent gave him a fun option. He could “blur” the description information making it impossible to tell if the wand had 1 charge or 10.

Richter made three small changes. First, he changed the description of the charges to 3. Next, he placed a warning to the user. Finally, he inserted a user recommendation.

The warning: “This wand can not be recharged. This wand will self-destruct upon depletion.”

And the strong recommendation, “Holders of this Wand must use one Charge to take possession for more than 3 seconds. Not filling this need will cause the Wand to explode fabulously. You best not be there when that happens or just duck.”

All of the slight changes were blurred just enough to make it look required and there were 3 charges.

Once done Richter called out. “Xitrix! I have your wand! Let’s go! Where are you?!”

Zev and Richter looked around for any sign of the Imp and suddenly a powerful cloud of sulfur and ask poofed into existence. In the middle of the little death cloud was Xitrix covered in soot and flames.

He turn on them both and stated, “You better have the fucking Wand human! You should not have been able to forcibly summon me like that!!”

Xitrix proceeded to grumble in Demon-ese and curse the make as well as his employers. Richter picked up a few choice words and phrases over the next minute or so.

“The Wand is right here Xitrix.”

Once the Imp was close enough Richter picked up the wand and handed it to Xitrix, thereby completing his infuriating Quest.

But as Richter made lemonade out of lemons, Xitrix’s expression changed in succession. As he tried to read the description, he got to the warning and recommendation. First, he looked confused, then frustrated, and then smirked a little. He turned to face the back wall of the vault and blew. A billow of dust and ask few away from the wall exposed a runic crest. Richter tried to catch it in his mind but wasn’t fast enough.

Xitrix pointed the Wand at the wall and fired. The wall lit up like Christmas and the wand turned to dust. A very confused Xitrix began to crumble and was suddenly absconded through a rip in space but not before a handful of sand fell to the ground.

As the light show dimmed, in front of Zev and Richter stood a Portal.

Quest Update:

The quest giver has failed to keep his promise. All rewards doubled.

Additional rewards:

Quest: Get Home Now!

Task: Traverse the Ancient Portal system through The Land to find the Village in the Mist.

Reward: A way home. Portal Multi-Key. A time-release map. A boon. Imp Sand.

Due to the negligence of the Quest giver, you have been given a time-bound solution. You will be given 3 hours from the time of the first Portal activation to make it through the 5 portals on the path to bring you home. Not all portals are hidden but their unbidden use may have consequences. All penalties were reduced by 90%.

An updated map appeared in my HUD. It wasn’t huge, but it was detailed and had smart routing for quick passage between portals. It was evident that it would reveal the right parts of the map when needed. It even had an arrow pointing directly at the portal in front of us. Right above the arrow was a symbol… it looked like the others he had seen.

Excited, he took the Portal Multi-Key and found he could use the map overlay to examine the key and push the symbol onto the key. It was impressive magic.

The Multi-Key glowed for a moment and then looked just like the symbol on the map.

Zev watched in anticipation, his puppet standing guard.

Richter gently placed the key into the indent on the side of the giant black ring. Both the key and portal glowed and then the portal opened in a whoosh of fresh air.

They could see a meadow and a small dirt road leading into a forest.

“Well Zev, I guess this is it. You ready?”

A large flashing timer hit the screen. 10…9…8…

They jumped through and started to run. Richter shared the map and they both followed the arrow into the forest where the next portal was hidden in the middle of a pond on a little island.

As soon as they both had a visual on the portal the map updated with a new symbol over the arrow. Repeating the procedure, Ricter created the next key.

The pond didn’t look particularly dangerous or deep.

The map flashed with the countdown of 2 hours and 32 minutes remaining.

As Ricter started forward, Zev reached out and stopped him.

“Hang on. I’ve seen something like this before. Stand back.”

Curious yet anxious, Richter took a small step back.

Zev looked at the hulking man and shrugged. He walked to the edge of the pond and gazed hard at the water and then he touched the water with one outstretched glowing finger.

The water ripped where he touched as one would expect and then the ripples grew into waves crashing on the shores of the island and surrounding land.

Then the water started to rise to the height of Zev as he stood hand outstretched, fingers twitching.

“Gotcha!” Looking over his shoulder Zev grins. “I saw one of these eats a whole party one time. I wasn’t sure my power would work but it felt like the right time to try. And what do you know? Success!”

“What is it? Oh, fuck! Is that a Water Mimic?

Richter used Analyze.

Water Mimic

Level 83

Has the ability to disguise itself as water in many shapes, sizes, forms, and enticements.

Young Water Mimics are said to seek out lost coins and form puddles over them making sure to make the coin shine hard. When the prey reaches for the coin and touches the water, the Mimic attacks.

These are among the most dangerous of the Mimic because this one can get under your skin.

A favorite technique that has been observed is entering a victim’s body through any hole or even bare skin. Once inside, they begin to feed.

Mimics are dumb but deadly and single-minded. They can be easy to distract.

Water Mimics are particularly fond of disguising their trap with beauty; Often found with flowers and other calming aquatic plants.

Zev manipulated his water monster puppet out of the pond bed and with it came the illusory portal on the island. On the pond bed sat a portal. It was askew and covered in slimy algae but started to glow as soon as they both saw it.

Setting the key in place, the portal hummed, clicked, sparked, then a blast of hot dry air shot out knocking them both back slightly.

…8…7…6…

The map counted down. Zev and Ricter ran the last 20 feet and both dove into the portal as the countdown reached one.

“Fucking sand. I hate sand. It gets everywhere and I can never get it out of my hair.”, Richter cursed as Zev spit sand out of his mouth.

Quickly looking at the map, It appeared they had about ¾ of a mile to the portal. It was in the middle of a dusty Oasis town.

Even though they were strangers they curiously not drawing attention.

As they rounded the corner to see the Portal sitting in the middle of the square. There was a line of about 15 people waiting.

“We don’t have time for this. We will piss someone off here and now.”

Richter cupped the newly transformed portal key and ran to the front of the line and slammed the key into the destination groove. The Portal popped and a seascape could be seen on the other side; a harbor in the distance.

Zev ripped by the line and they both ran through the Portal to the ocean village.

3 hops later and the map showed an arrow that led to a Dungeon entrance.

The symbol on the map changed to the same one Richter had taken an etching of before. His suspicions were confirmed when the map indicated the destination key to the Mist Village.

But now they were in a Dungeon with no way home.

Starting to get frustrated, Richter swore.

“If we could find a node, then maybe we can finish this…”

Zev spoke up. “There’s usually a node at the beginning of every dungeon. We should check.”

Zev was right and when Richter put his hand on the node his world exploded with information.

Dungeon Master, you have returned. Please choose your destination. A long list of interesting and odd names spooled down. Scanning the list he quickly found Eve and the Hall of Elementals but no Mist Village… odd but not wholly unexpected. The Burrow of the Chaos Serpent was only a few days old and just reached level 10 days ago.

Richter decided to risk it.

“Let’s go to the Hall of Elementals. I don’t know any of these other places but with any luck, there will be a new node to my Dungeon when we get there. I’m hoping proximity has something to do with how these things work.