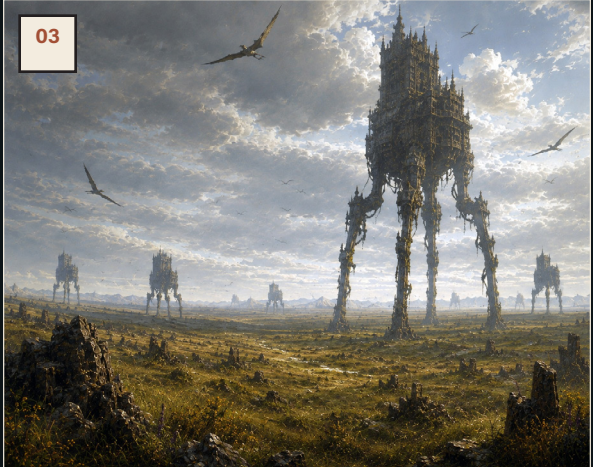


RENDEL'S VENGEANCE

SALT MYSTIC
BOOK OF LOTS



01 That's me. Cain Blackwick. I wear a big floppy hat and I'm always dirty for some reason. I say inappropriate things and offend people a lot, so no friends of any good repute. Because of something that happened to me in my past, I'm followed at a distance by a voiceless Fog Man who will probably kill me one day. For now, he just follows me and watches.

I heard a rumor in a market that the pilgrim train that leads to the Augur has left its rails and taken flight, and that it would be stopping at a tower in this little town into which I'd stumbled. Not having the money to buy a ticket, I snuck onto the train. I'm pretty good at that kind of thing. It's called the Tangle-souls Express and it's kind of a big deal. My Fog Man just sort of drifted up in his poisonous cloud and kept me in sight the whole time. The creep!

Unfortunately, the train drifted off its course in a thunderstorm. When the announcement warned of a lay-over for the night in a floating debris field, I was one of the only people who climbed outside the train to take a look around in the middle of the night. What I saw was crazy.

02 It was a derelict flying ship, seemingly built around an oriel gate. Oriels are artificial pocket dimensions, and gates like these are littered all over the place – usually forgotten. Sometimes there is treasure and wonder inside. Sometimes there are beasts that would eat you as soon as sniff you. Always a good time though! This one was just sitting there sparkling, so I jumped down off the train onto some floating debris, hopped from one piece of flotsam to another until I could grab the weathered hull.

A metallic plaque named its inner world, the world inside that gate, as Rendel's Vengeance. I could just make out some plains and misty gray-brown blurs inside past the dimensional warping. It wouldn't have mattered what I saw because I was going to go inside no matter what. That's what oriels are for!

03 The grasslands extended to the horizon. That, I could understand. I just hadn't expected Pteranodons in the skies. I filed that away in case I could figure out how to tame and ride one. But it was the giant walking buildings that surprised me the most. I named them "spirewalkers" since I didn't know what they were. It looked like there were cities here once, saturated with computronium, and bits of them must have just grown legs and decided to wander off in a herd.

"Have you ever seen something like that?" I asked my Fog Man, but he only glared at me like he always does.

Anyway, I followed one of the spirewalkers to understand better what I was looking at, how they thought, and where such a thing might want to go, and eventually I came across a scrap of old parchment with a handwritten phrase on it:

"Everything is new today. And will

be again tomorrow."

That's what it said. It seemed sappy and unhelpful but at least it meant there was likely somebody around here writing things like that. While I was looking for tracks or footprints, any kind of sign of where the person who had written that might have gone, I was attacked (if that's the right word) by a malfunctioning golem who seemed to think he was repairing himself but needed parts from me to do it.

04 While I dealt with him, my Fog Man just hovered from his distance. I always wondered what that ghostly jackass would do if I was getting killed and cheating him of the pleasure of doing the deed himself. I'm still not sure because I did manage to get the golem stepped on by one of those walking buildings. And that's when I met this fellow.

05 Boston Hember was his name. He was a fairly nice guy: exiled diplomat who apparently failed at averting a cataclysmic war back home. Or something. I guess he just wanders oriels and leaves behind these poems and sunshine nonsense to make up for his failure. It would have been great had Boston showed up a little earlier than he did to help with the kooky golem who wanted to pry out my ribcage but it was still good to see another human.

He told me he'd only ever seen one other person inside this oriel and the fellow was dying when they met. Of course, this dying fellow had said something mysterious right before his last breath. They always say something mysterious with that last breath. In this case, it seemed pregnant with story potential:

"Traps all in the woods, leading to the cavern – they don't do that for nothing."

He felt like he'd located all the traps leading to this supposed cavern and had them mapped pretty cleanly. Said he'd been hesitating to go alone but it was eating him up to learn what was in that cavern. Said it was fate that I'd showed up just on the day he was thinking he'd go find out.

"Yeah, screw it. Let's go." That's me. And going to mysterious places was why I was here anyway.

Cutting that part short, we eventually got inside that trapped cavern and found an opening to another grassland plain, or maybe a part of this world we couldn't access otherwise. And you wouldn't believe what we found over there!

06 Another oriel gate! Inside the first pocket dimension we were wandering around in was a second gate leading to who knows where! The only trouble was it was locked and chained up, with dimensional energy leaking out in blinding blue-green light. Something in Boston's voice, in his eyes maybe, told me he had actually been this far already and knew exactly what we were going to find there. I couldn't have explained how I knew that other than it was just a feeling (and appendix 7).

"Nope," I said. "Things that are

chained are chained for a reason." With that, I was planning on leaving Boston to his misadventure of releasing some hell-beast or cult or whatever was on the other side of that gate when the guy pulled a knife on me!

07 I didn't kill him. I'm not that kind of adventurer. I did take his knife, though. It was a pretty sweet braided blade with some shape-changing morphium impregnating the steel. I liked the way it rippled when you held it out in front of you. When I left Boston there, he'd probably had much better days and might still be scheming to come after me one day.

"He can stand in line, right, Foggie?" I said that to my Fog Man but the creep just glared at me.

So, anyway, I thought better of the chained gate thing and of chasing supposed enigmatic comments from hypothetical dying men and took a whole different approach altogether.

08 *You wouldn't believe all the loot still lying around in the drawers and closets of these old walking buildings!*

