

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF PUZZLE(S)

PUZZLE #1: HOW TO ENTER THE TOWER WITHOUT SETTING OFF THE ALARM SPELL

DESCRIPTION

Grimsby has set up an alarm spell on both the doors of his tower, which will alert him if any living being should enter. If the PCs pick the lock of the back door to attempt a stealthy entrance, they may perceive and be able to decipher this spell, at which point they will face the challenge of figuring out a way around it.

SOLUTION

The spell will only alert Grimsby when a new living being enters the tower. Sir Pendleton's head has already entered the tower, and so the remainder of him can enter without being considered a new living being. Robert and Yorick can thwart the alarm by either (1) touching the front door and losing a body part before they enter through the back, or else (2) by tossing pieces of hair or fingernail (i.e. non-living body parts) through the door before they enter.

EFFECTIVENESS

I was uncertain whether I had given the PCs enough information to solve this puzzle, so I was premature in aiding them with hints and roll-based information. I should have given them a chance to pause and consider the problem, but the possibility of silence made me nervous. If I could do it again, I would have slowed down and given the players more of a chance to talk and think—even if there were some moments of silence, I could have probably figured out whether it was a good, thinking silence, or a stalled, frustrated silence based on the duration and people's body language and expressions.

As it played out, though, the players were intrigued by the obstacle, and wanted the chance to think about and explore solutions. They actually elaborated and improved upon solution #2 by having Robert and Yorick throw the bits of hair and fingernail at the front door rather than tossing them through the back door and simply trusting that non-living body parts would not trigger the alarm.

PUZZLE #2: THE THREE RIDDLES IN THE GARDEN

DESCRIPTION

In the garden on the second floor of Grimsby's tower are three living things—a gold fish, a sapling, and a dove—that each have a riddle on a plaque located near them.

Fish riddle:

*A pouch am I, always growing emptier,
And what I hold few look to see again
yet filling me fills many with delight.*

Sapling riddle:

*I am less than nothing in weight,
but will fell the strongest of you if held.
I am free for the taking through all of your life,
though given but once at birth.*

Dove riddle:

*If you break me, I'll not stop working.
If you can touch me, my work is done.
If you lose me, you must find me with a ring soon after.*

SOLUTION

Fish riddle: The stomach

Sapling riddle: The breath

Dove riddle: The human heart

The answers to these riddles indicate the true form of the fish, the sapling, and the dove—they are Grimsby's transformed stomach, lungs, and heart, respectively. Realizing the answer to any one of the riddles allows a person to glimpse the living thing associated with it for what it truly is. Getting any of these momentary visions—seeing the gold fish as a stomach floating in the pool, for instance—raises a series of other questions. Whose organs are these and what are they doing here? I allowed these realizations to come fairly easily, however, based on rolls of characters' lore and magic-based knowledge.

EFFECTIVENESS

This puzzle seemed to be a good difficulty level, maybe a touch on the easy side. The players solved the riddles completely independently and without any long, drawn-out pauses or frustration. The payoff for solving each riddle—glimpsing the fish, tree, and dove in their actual forms—seemed to have a decent effect as feedback/reward but did not give the PCs a clear sense of what direction to pursue next. It was hard to tell if this detracted or not. Once the characters had made the connection between the removed organs and Grimsby, there was a good pick-up in energy as they went about obtaining them—particularly the dove, which was by far the most challenging to catch.