

Forge Of Virtue

A GUIDE TO THE ISLE OF FIRE

Greetings, gentle scholar. I have yet to believe my senses fully, for it seems but yesterday that I was within the Lycaean walls investigating the rumors of this strange and wondrous isle. And now I sit here in my new home, surrounded by history itself.

Indeed, consider what significant history it is! The very isle from which the fearsome Exodus began its assault upon Britannia. The very isle that later housed the Three Principle Shrines of Virtue. The very isle that sank beneath the waves several centuries ago...

It is upon that island, the Isle of Fire, that I compose this document. Here, at the very floor of the sea, encased in a time-tested breathing enchantment of a mage I have never met, I am privy to all that was spawned by the Age of Darkness. I write this now as completely as I am able, for I know full well that, following much more exploration, I will be too engrossed in the many archaic splendors to keep detailed records. Read on, fellow student of life, and be amazed.

— *Erethian*

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HISTORY OF THE ISLE OF FIRE

My readers will forgive the sparse and vague details of my retelling, for all this is simply memories gleaned from weeks, nay months, spent buried in the depths of the Lycaean: Shortly after Exodus' fall at the hands of the Stranger (who would later become known as the Avatar), Lord British created the eight Shrines of the Virtues. In addition, he established three shrines dedicated to the Principles of Truth, Love and Courage, which he had placed on Exodus' home island, known as the Isle of Fire. While all of these shrines were crafted to benefit every citizen of Britannia, Lord British's primary concern was to locate a protector, an Avatar, to assist Britannia in times of need. Indeed, Lord British was planning the successor to the Age of Darkness — the Age of Enlightenment.

In this dawn of the new era, Lord British began his plans not only to locate the Avatar, but to insure his agent could protect the Virtues as well as exemplify them. Thus, he chose to guard the three Shrines of the Principles with creatures and traps, for only the Avatar should be able to benefit directly from their powers. Commissioning a slew of mages and engineers, Lord British oversaw the implementation of these foils, along with the construction of the actual Shrines. In addition, he instilled within the Shrines the ability to adapt to the dynamic nature of the environment, thus insuring the tests would survive the trials of time. Many months later, the island was ready. The call for the Avatar was sent out.

However, while the search was still in its infancy, the island disappeared. Well, sank really, but for reasons that are still mysterious. (Actually, I suspect there is a correlation between this event and the Gargoyles' use of Exodus as a physical manifestation for Diligence.) When word of the island's misfortune reached Lord British, he thought both the isle and the Shrines lost forever.

That is all I know, save for the location of the island. However, lest thou consider the legends false, consider first that thou art reading a document written from within the walls of the ancient Castle of Fire!

TRAVELER'S GUIDE

At the moment, there is little hope of another ever laying eyes upon this watery land. Although one could survive here, thanks to the envelope of air that Astelleron created to permit breathing, it is doubtful someone else could travel here without possessing my vast knowledge in summoning and controlling giant sea creatures. Doubtful that is, until I find the way to make this island rise again. When it is in its proper place, atop the sea, then wilt thou share mine opportunity.

Calling the Isle of Fire an island is a partial misnomer, for, thou dost see, there are actually three such islands. The main land, upon which sits the Castle of Fire, is by far the largest of the three. The castle is surrounded by mountains that contain several tunnels. Judging by what I have seen, these dungeons were excavated to hold the various tests designed to challenge the Avatar, for all three of them can be reached from within the castle walls. In addition to these entrances, the castle houses the Shrine of Principles, in which can be found the actual three Shrines of Truth, Love, and Courage.

The smallest island hold nothing of interest, but the middle seems to possess as much of historical importance as its larger sister. The eastern side is almost devoid of plant life, and the sand and rocks indicate this was once a small quarry. Perhaps this is where Astelleron fabricated the legendary stone guardians of the Shrines. Nearby is his shack, also preserved by the air bubble. My exploration has been cursory thus far, but the books I saw in the house indicate an educated individual. More confirmation for my hypothesis? There are two caves in the area, as well as a Moongate leading to and from the main island. The east cave exits into the open air; but this area is enchanted, and teleports me to a tunnel leading to a secluded glade. I cannot yet place the recollection, but I am sure the grouping of stones with the tree taking root in the center one, is familiar to me. Perhaps when I have seen more detail I will record my observations, but for now, this sums up my knowledge of the geographical aspects of the island.

THE BESTIARY

There is little remarkably different about most of the animals on the Isle of Fire. I have seen the rodents and the deer and a few members of the avian species. And, in fact, the castle walls are scorched in places – the aftermath of a dragon's assault upon the castle. The dragon has taken up residence here in one of the tunnels of the main cave. During her raid, she stole from me the Ether Gem, a possession of reasonable importance. As soon as I can find a way to retrieve it, her head shall be mine.

However, I digress. By far the most intriguing creatures I have come across are the stone golems. I had heard nothing more than mere rumors prior to my arrival here, but seeing the mobile masses of rock have convinced me of their existence. Astelleron was quite a master, indeed, for his workmanship is beautiful. I know nothing of their sentience, for they have never spoken to me. To be honest, I am not even sure they are aware of my intrusion, for I have yet to venture near one of the Shrines. I hope soon to journey back to what I have assumed is Astelleron's hovel and learn more about their creation, but that will come after my other research. Regardless of how the golems were constructed, I am confident more than an ordinary sword would be necessary to stop them.

HELPFUL OBSERVATIONS

I have had a bit more time to view the island now. There is too much to see and record, but I will put down what I can before something else reclaims my fancy. Having noticed that the silent stone guardians had left the Shrine room unattended after the dragon's attack, I decided to inspect the three statues.

I first spoke with the haggard old man, presuming he, or rather it, would represent Truth. I was not disappointed. I was, however, surprised, for upon initiating conversation (after all, what else should one do with a Shrine of the Principles?), I found myself magically teleported inside one of the dungeons. I chose not to explore, for I hastily remembered a tome to which I was in a hurry to get back. However, I was reminded of an ancient piece of wisdom: never trust the obvious; always look for that which is not there. Afterwards I stepped back into a Moongate and returned to the Shrine room.

I learned little from the Shrine of Love, so I set out through one of the Moongates south of the Shrine room, found behind a secret door. I arrived back on the smaller isle. Entering the western cave, I passed by several barrels and some supplies, obviously left over from Astelleron's days there. Passing his shack, I noticed a golem standing near the quarry remains. He was staring at one of "his" fellows, who had taken a very bad fall, it seemed. I stole by them and entered the other cave. Passing into a small outside opening, I was teleported into the passage leading to the little glade I had seen earlier.

As I spied the rocks and the tree again, I was able to place both. The rocks were denoting the legendary Stone of Castambre, and the tree was none other than its accompanying Tree of Life. Beyond a doubt this was one of Astelleron's sources for powering his awesome golems. I must locate his journals and tomes to read more, but — if my memory serves — the Tree of Life likely supplied not only the blood for his magicks, but the “hearts” as well.

Later I investigated the other Moongate within the Castle of Fire. This one led to another labyrinth. I saw more golems here than in either of the two dungeons, and remember seeing at least one man. However, he seemed no more interested in me than I was in him, so we both ignored each other. Peering around a corner, I caught sight of a huge and magnificent dragon — doubtless the one I encountered earlier. Behind her was a door. I cannot guess what lay beyond, but her protective nature was probably indicative of its importance. Though I am too busy to waste time testing my idea, I expect the dragon would be quite difficult to conquer.

Now, before I continue I must pause to jot down a new idea. I believe this will permit me to lengthen the time of most movement-based spells. All I need to do is increase the proportion of spider silk in relation to the amount of blood moss I have and...

I have discovered something of terrible interest. The dark cylinder I found on the second floor is more magical than I first detected. I have touched it, symbolically speaking, for it lives. Well, not as a man or a plant, but as an embodiment of powerful energy. I have not fully determined this, but I suspect this is the remains of the infamous core of Exodus. When I have completed my studies and returned to the surface world, I must seek out the great lenses to the void and view the book of Infinite Wisdom. There I will be able to confirm my suspicions.

...Another flash! Perhaps, were I to combine the lenses in the alternate manner, I could amplify the effects and bring other objects from the void into being. Then I could...

CONCLUSION

I expect that if thou art perusing these pages then I have already bade the island arise. I hope my guides and warnings are of use to thee. As I plan to be around for a long time, or at least expect my enchantments to, I request that thou dost locate me soon, for there is no doubt this journal will be lacking. At such a time, I will do my best to break from my studies and be civil enough to provide further assistance. Until then, gentle reader, I wish good will and good luck in finding and sharing this history with me.

— **Erethian**

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