

THE RIDDLEMASTER OF ANRIST POINT

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Anrist Point is a hilly prominence on Hârn's northeast coast, jutting into the Sea of Ivae. Somewhere in the vicinity there is said to be a pool of hot springs (possibly subterranean) of miraculous healing virtue.

Unfortunately for those who would avail themselves, the springs have a self-appointed guardian known only as the *Riddlemaster*. It is the wont of this mysterious entity to challenge intruders with the words "riddle thee thrice". Those who can solve any (or perhaps all three) conundrums which the Riddlemaster will pose are permitted to bathe, but depart under a geas never to reveal the Riddlemaster's secrets, including that of his appearance. The fate of those whom the master finds fault is unknown.

The Riddlemaster is a *Pradeyalkri*, one of the semi-divine creatures that lived in Ivinia before the arrival of Sarajin some uncertain but considerable time ago. Pradeyalkri were giants, ogres, demons and other monsters, most of whom battled Sarajin for dominion of Ivinia, who were eventually defeated. Many were slain or imprisoned, others went into exile. It is unknown whether the Riddlemaster arrived in Hârn before or after the wars with Sarajin. Because of the geas which is placed upon all visitors to Anrist Point, almost nothing is known about him.

Stories vary about the *riddles* posed by the guardian of the Pool of Healing, but most suggest that only one of the three puzzles must be answered correctly. No one has ever reported the content of one of the Riddlemaster's conundrums; most have said that some seemed impossibly enigmatic and at least one was brilliant in its simplicity. No one has ever reported failing to answer all three riddles; this may indicate that no one has ever failed, or that a darker fate exists for those who have.

Tales of the powers of the *Pool of Healing* vary greatly as well, ranging from merely hastening one's own healing to fantastically re-growing lost body parts, restoring youth and even raising the dead.

Seek ye the Riddlemaster!

There are only two viable ways that adventurers can journey to Anrist Point, barring magical travel. The first method is to approach from the north, skirting the formidable Sorkin Mountains. Adventurers will probably be marching from the Anoth Delta or Noron's Keep, which are both fraught with their own dangers. Along the way, the characters will need to contend with the fierce Gargu-Khanu and Gargu-Hyeka from Zhakom complex.

The second method is to approach from the south, once again skirting the Sorkin Mountains. This journey is potentially more dangerous, as the characters will be entering the tribal ranges of the nomadic Ruthuba Gargu-Arak, the Gargu-Hyeka from Felgoth and Pazel complexes, and the dreaded Gargu-Khanu and their Hyeka slaves from Pyxyn. Furthermore, the mountain range extends to the ocean, slowing progress.

There are two more methods of reaching Anrist Point, but both are virtually impossible. One is to approach from Azadmere to the west, which entails climbing through stormy Gargu-infested mountains. The other is to approach from the rough Sea of Ivae, but Anrist Point has no good beaches, making landing difficult.

Anrist Point is a windy, unfriendly place, with only a scattering of low trees. Limestone rocks protrude from the grass everywhere, and the numerous hills hide treacherously deep gulleys. In a relatively deep, curved valley with a rocky bottom, the steep-walled concave side is riddled with cave entrances. At the top of this side of the valley is a narrow sinkhole, from which white steam drifts upwards, only to be blown away by the winds.

Near the cave openings, and strewn here and there at the bottom of the rocky valley, are several skeletons. Many of them are human, although the bones of animals and orcs can also be found. The humanoid skeletons still bear their equipment, although most of this is badly weather-damaged and deteriorated. Anyone who enters the valley will feel a sense of forbidding and dread, and any animals (except seagulls, which are used to the place) will try to stay away.

Behold the Riddlemaster!

If the adventurers enter the valley of bones, they will eventually see a man of indeterminate age crouching over one of the skeletons, apparently rummaging through his equipment. The man is dirty and his hair unkempt, and he babbles to himself. He is dressed in an odd assortment of clothes, and even wears a rusty, blackened mail hauberk, doubtless looted from the dead. He even has spurs on his boots. At his side are three scabbarded swords, and atop his head is a dented, rusty halfhelm. He carries a weathered backpack crammed full of looted equipment, and is armed with a rusty, pitted battleaxe.

If the characters approach or call out to the madman, he will look up suddenly with a look of shock, and scamper away, screaming and babbling, until he reaches the safety of a large rock. From there he will peer over, staring at the intruders.

If the characters attempt to show that they mean him no harm, the madman will cautiously approach from behind the rock. His eyes dart about and he crouches low, and he greedily looks at the adventurers' equipment. He tries to act aggressively, but given his appearance he may seem rather comical rather than menacing.

In reality, the madman hides a dark secret; either he *is* the Riddlemaster, or the Riddlemaster has possessed him. This is not meant to be apparent to visitors.

The Riddlemaster is bound by some mysterious geas to challenge all visitors who would seek to bathe in the Pool of Healing. He must also warn them that to fail his challenge means certain death. The visitors cannot be challenged with a riddle unless they willingly seek it, and they fail the riddle if they utter the incorrect answer or give up and request an answer from the Riddlemaster.

It is unknown whether the Riddlemaster actually wants to prevent people from entering the Pool of Healing. Certainly, he does not make it any easier for visitors; his riddles are always quite difficult, and he never volunteers to assist them in any way. It is a complete mystery how he benefits from challenging visitors.

The following is an example of the kind of dialogue that might occur:

PC: Who are you?

MADMAN: Who are you?

PC: We have come to seek the Pool of Healing, which is said to be somewhere in Anrist Point.

MADMAN: [Looks suspiciously at the PCs] No you haven't! You've come to take the loot! Well you'll get none of this, do you hear me? It's mine! All mine! [He clumsily wields his axe in defiance]

PC: We're not interested in your treasure. Do you know the whereabouts of the Riddlemaster?

MADMAN: [His eyes widen and he starts shrieking in terror, cowering away and covering his ears with his hands] No! No! No! Not Him! Not Him! Turn back! Away! Begone!

PC: What's your problem?

MADMAN: [Calms down and speaks in a fearful voice] Do you know that the sacred Pool of Healing is guarded by the one that calls Himself the Riddlemaster?

PC: Yes. Where is he?

MADMAN: [Incredulous look] You would seek Him, despite the danger?

PC: What danger?

MADMAN: Look around you! Are you blind? What do you see? Here, there, lie the failures! He will *riddle thee thrice*, and for every riddle that you fail to solve, one third of you will die!

PC: How did the others die?

MADMAN: [Waves his arms] Away! Begone from this cursed place! Foolish ones, do you not understand that most who have approached Him have perished! Or worse...

PC: Then why do you still live?

MADMAN: [Grins a madman's grin and points to his head] I have outwitted Him.

PC: How?

MADMAN: [Throws back his head and screams with an insane cackle. He becomes increasingly hysterical, but eventually calms down] How! How!

PC: I will not ask you again.

MADMAN: Then this is my answer! *I have not been challenged!* For years have I hid in these parts, waiting for others to face Him and succeed. From my hiding place I could hear Him ask His riddles, and I could see their puzzled looks, yet I refused to think of the answer! I knew that if the others solved His riddles for me, I could follow them to the Pool. And if they failed, I would simply sneak away as He tore them from limb to limb! [Menacingly shakes his axe at the characters]

PC: Just what sort of creature is this Riddlemaster?

MADMAN: [Serious again] Once, a group of scholars had failed His challenge, and He set upon them, slaughtering them. As before, I began to withdraw quietly. But then He saw me! [A look of supreme terror crosses his face, as if the Riddlemaster were before him]

PC: And?

MADMAN: [In a cold sweat, looking dreadfully pale] He angrily threw aside a severed head and chased me! Oh, He was so quick! I was sure that I was a dead man, but I was saved when a ball of flame erupted on His back! One of scholars must have been a witch, for the fire spewed from his hands. But it was in vain. He turned to wreak vengeance on the witch, and I ran and ran and ran away as fast as I could, and all I could hear was the agonised screaming of the witch! [In anguish, he buries his head in his hands, moaning and swaying from side to side]

PC: Why do you remain here? Why not leave?

MADMAN: Why? Why? Where can I go? When I first came here there were seven of us. Now I am alone. If I try to leave, I would be slain for sure!

PC: Then help us. You want to reach the Pool of Healing as much as we do, so help us solve the riddles.

MADMAN: I am but a simple man. What good would I be?

PC: Can you tell us where the Pool of Healing is?

MADMAN: Some of the caves lead to a great underground cavern filled with boiling water. Only those that pass His challenge can bathe without being scalded.

PC: Then where is the Riddlemaster?

MADMAN: You would seek Him without knowing what riddles he has in store for you? You are fools! I have heard His riddles, and you are no match for them!

PC: Try us! What riddles have you heard?

MADMAN: Why should I tell you?

PC: Do you not wish to bathe in the Pool of Healing? If you help us, and we solve the Riddlemaster's puzzles, then we will let you come with us to the Pool. Besides, if you do not help, I will tell the Riddlemaster about you, and he will surely come after you!

MADMAN: [Bristling] Very well. Know ye that some seem impossibly enigmatic, and others are brilliant in their simplicity. But all can be solved given enough patience and thought!

PC: Such as?

MADMAN: There was one that I had heard not too long ago. It was one of His favourites, for I had heard Him ask this many times before. It went as such:

*Pull with all your might,
Only a whistle will you gain,
Yet almost out of sight,
Someone may shrink in pain.*

PC: [Thinking hard] Er... A bow and arrow?

MADMAN: A simple barbarian had solved that riddle.

PC: And?

MADMAN: He was correct!

PC: Well that's a relief! Do you know of any more?

MADMAN: There was another riddle He had asked on several occasions...

PC: What was it?

MADMAN: I remember it as being:

*What is not enough for one,
Just right for two,
Too much for three?*

PC: Er... Marriage? Love?

MADMAN: You can love more than one other, and there are cultures where having several wives is normal.

PC: Then what is the answer?

MADMAN: A secret!

PC: Ah! It's so obvious when you know.

MADMAN: But you have not heard His finest riddle!

PC: And it was?

MADMAN: I remember this one very well:

There is a strange and faraway island to the west known as Phrenia. It is strange for only two types of Men live there: "Knights", who are always truthful, and "Knaves", who always lie. There is no physical distinction between Knights and Knaves, hence the only way to tell them apart is to determine who is lying and who is not.

In days gone by a foreigner visited this island, and came across two Phrenians resting in the shade under a great tree. The visitor asked one of them, "is either of you a Knight?" The Phrenian responded, and the visitor immediately knew the answer to his question.

Which Phrenian was which?

PC: That's it? There's no answer! [Pause] They are both Knights.

MADMAN: No.

PC: One is a Knight, the other is a Knave.

MADMAN: Which is which?

PC: Er... The one the visitor spoke to is the Knight.

MADMAN: You are guessing. No.

PC: Then what is the answer?

MADMAN: The questioned Phrenian was a Knave and the other was a Knight. If the first Phrenian was a Knight, he could not have replied "no", because then he would have lied. If the first Phrenian replied "yes", it would have been impossible to tell whether he was lying or telling the truth. However, the visitor knew the exact answer to his question, so the first Phrenian must have said "no", meaning that he was a Knave and the other was a Knight.

PC: By Larani that was difficult! I just assumed that the Phrenian said "yes"!

MADMAN: [Quiet voice] You're not very clever, are you?

PC: What?

MADMAN: I asked you three riddles and you failed two. Had I been the Riddlemaster, then two-thirds of you would be suffering the consequences now.

PC: [Cautiously backs away, suspecting something is wrong] Are you saying that you are the Riddlemaster?

MADMAN: How do you know that I am not?

PC: [Draws his weapon] What are you talking about?

MADMAN: Appearances can be deceiving, stranger; all may not be as they seem. Now, which of you will die for your mistakes? I can permit only one third of you to pass.

PC: We're all going in, Riddlemaster! Try and stop us.

MADMAN: So be it; I shall choose for you. [Begins to transform...]

PC: [In complete surprise and horror] **NO...!**

[Screams of terror and pain echo throughout Anrist Point.]

The Riddlemaster is able to transform into his true self to fight those that fail his riddles. No one knows what his true form looks like, but he is utterly terrifying. In HårnMaster combat terms, all who see the Riddlemaster's transformation must make a Will×3 roll: *CS/MS* - the character may act normally; *MF* - the character freezes in panic (roll against Will×3 each round thereafter to recover); *CF* - as for MF, but the character must also make a K4 roll or die from fright! The Riddlemaster has a Claw ML of 120 (15t Impact), and his attacks are always Criticals. In addition, so frightening is his true form that those fighting him act with a (25-Will)×3 EML special penalty to all attacks and defences (×1 if the character achieved CS). He has a Dodge of 110 ML and a base Mobility of 100 feet per round. Any attacks that actually strike the Riddlemaster inflict only half Impact. The Riddlemaster's overall Physique rating is 16, and he regenerates at a rate of 2 Injury Points per wound per round.

Alternatively, the Riddlemaster can control the access to the Pool of Healing. He can selectively lower the defences of the Pool for certain people and cause the others to boil to death, as long as at least one of his riddles was solved.

The Pool of Healing

The Pool of Healing is a complete mystery. It is in fact a seep, a spring with no apparent current, and is fed by rain waters that have soaked into the eastern face of the Sorkin Mountains, and emerged at this lower level in Anrist Point. The Pool is subterranean, forming in a cavern created by solvent action. Outside this chamber is a steep-walled valley that is riddled with caves, which were partly caused by river action, and partly from solution as water cascaded down through a sinkhole further up. None of this is particularly extraordinary, but the spring logically should be cold; however, the Pool is boiling hot and arsenical.

The Pool is greenish in colour and very murky. Anyone finding it before being challenged by the Riddlemaster will be unable to bathe in the water without scalding oneself. It is approximately 60 feet wide at its widest point, and 40 feet wide at its narrowest. Because the surface of the Pool is about 10 feet below the floor of the chamber, and because the walls of the pit containing the Pool is generally at an obtuse angle, it is much easier to jump into the water than climb in.

The Pool of Healing is imbued with incredible magic. All who manage to bathe in it unharmed will have all their injuries removed; even scarring and calluses disappear. Lost blood is replenished, lost limbs regenerate, and fatigue, hunger and thirst vanish. Those that are unconscious or comatose are brought back to full consciousness, diseases and poisons are washed out of the body, and even the skin seems to rejuvenate as wrinkles and sagging skin disappear. No one can die while within the Pool of Healing; drowning is impossible. Finally, even the dead are brought back to life, although the soul may already have departed (a soulless body can become an indefinite host for any astral entity). Truly, the Pool of Healing is the bath of the gods.

In HårnMaster terms, all Injury Points, Fatigue Points and Bloodloss Points disappear. All impairments not caused by old age are removed, and the characters become physically younger by approximately 10-20% of actual age (this may help to negate any impairments caused by ageing). Lost body parts grow back and become fully functional. A corpse will be physically revived, although a long-dead person's soul would already have departed for Yashain; a soulless, living body cannot survive outside the Pool of Healing for more than one day.

In addition, those that leave the Pool of Healing are forever immune to any form of illness or disease! Even infections will not occur. This benefit cannot be passed on to others, however.

Unfortunately, there are side-effects. The healing process is very much like a dream, and bathers will lose track of time. What may seem like hours in the Pool will actually be months; when the bathers finally leave, it may well be that over a year has passed without their knowing.

Another side-effect is the Pool's effect on memory. Characters begin to lose their memory, starting with superficial memories, but eventually they will be unable to remember their names, their family, who they are, and so on.

The final side-effect is that bathing in the Pool is highly addictive. Few will ever wish to leave the Pool (Will×3 on 1d100 for the first hour of apparent time spent in the Pool, Will×2 in the second hour, and Will×1 per hour thereafter), for bathing in the hot spring is probably the best feeling they have ever experienced. Those that remain too long in the Pool will literally cease to be; they gradually become more ghostly, and eventually disappear into the steam that constantly rises from the water. Where these persons go is unknown, but if they had died, they have at least died happy. It is likely that visitors to the Pool of Healing will notice others bathing with them, in various states of etherealness.

The water of the Pool loses much of its healing magic once taken from the spring, but there will still be a residual power. Drinking a pint of this elixir has the same effect as the spell, Succor of Blezil (Fyvria/V) at ML81+, except that it automatically halves all disease effects and injuries, unless there is only one disease or injury, in which case that affliction is entirely eliminated without impairment. As with the Fyvrian spell, the elixir is dangerous to imbibe more than once in a 24 hour period (refer to the spell description). After 3 months away from the Pool, one must consume 2 pints (one quart) to reach the same effect, after 6 months one must consume 4 pints (half a gallon) for the same effect, and after 12 months a full gallon must be consumed. The elixir loses all its potency after two years.

Those that leave the Pool of Healing gradually forget about Anrist Point. They will certainly be unable to recall anything about the Riddlemaster or the Pool, nor will they remember any comrades who died at Anrist Point. This is the geas that the Riddlemaster places on all who depart.

