

RuneQuest III Campaign Log

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Dedication

To *Alice and Arthur Petersen*, whom we watched grow before our eyes;
To *Grant and Lincoln Petersen*, who were born during the game;
To *Wendy Petersen*, for whose hospitality we are indebted;
But most of all,
To *Sandy Petersen*, for the best five years of gaming.

Foreword

I cannot even remember what year it was when we started. I believe it was 1983, for I had just started college and had completed playtesting *ElfQuest* for the Chaosium with Steve Perrin. I had begun playtesting *RuneQuest III* when Sandy Petersen took over the semi-official “House Campaign” from Charlie Krank. This is the Log of that Campaign. It started out on Monday nights at the old Chaosium location in Albany, California.

Because Sandy was also running another *RuneQuest* campaign at his house in El Cerrito, he decided to merge the two together. This brings together the two largest elements in the Campaign — the Quest, and Harmast Nightblade, although he was at that time simply an NPC.

The story of Mistvale and the exigers was epic in scale. It was a repeat of The Seven Samurai with us as the samurai. We spent over a year’s worth of our Saturday nights in that set of valleys, with Paul making decisions of strategy and diplomacy as Harmast Nightblade. Harmast eventually took the Path of the Hero and earned the power to defeat the exigers.

Our journey through the plains of Pamaltela was different from anything we had ever seen before. The intriguing custom of the Meeting Contest shows how these people live, with a hospitality and innocence seldom seen in Genertela. The always-annoying Mister Man was an ever-present thorn in our side, and the inspired conversations with the hoolar were golden opportunities for Sandy to let his wicked imagination run wild.

All good things must come to an end, and the end was painful for us all. Sandy decided to leave the Chaosium for Microprose and a job designing computer games. He took his family to Baltimore and the campaign ended with Harvard becoming a Wind Lord and marrying the Hulda maiden Lulu.

I’d like to summarize what I will always remember most about the players with whom I spent the most time. In alphabetical order, Bruce was always the stalwart fighter, who never quite made it to Rune level until the campaign ended. Steve aspired to be as steadfast as Bruce, but his dice rolls were just a little bit shy of the mark. I will always remember the shock of Ben realizing, months later, that it was weak batteries that were causing his *DragonBone* to roll “00” while Norac was fighting Iul. And finally, Paul, always willing to play characters just a little different from the norm.

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Book One — The Quest

Chapter 1 Genertela

It all started back in Pavis when the sorceress wanted an egg. Not just any egg, but an “Anything Egg” which would supposedly hatch whatever the owner wished it to. After much haggling, the sorceress, Zarina, hired some bodyguards: Moloch, a Humakti initiate; Bruce, an Orlanthi initiate; Elwood, an atheist; and Jaranx, a shaman of the high llama people.

What she didn’t tell us was that the egg was to be found in the Krjalki Bog and that she wanted to get a sample of the Copper Sands to determine their suitability for smelting! So, with many misgivings, we headed into the Vulture’s Country, bound for the Copper Sands. The date was Freezeday, Stasis Week, Sea Season, 1621 ST.

Much to our surprise, we made it to the fringes of the Copper Sands on Waterday, Illusion week. But since there was only about one copper grain per million of sand, Zarina wanted to go in deeper. We said that going in for six hours was far enough. We made it in and Zarina took her sand sample, which looked like every other grain was copper. It was a good thing we made it out in time for just when we had gotten back to our starting point, a sandstorm started to blow.

While huddled against the biting sands, we were attacked by three whirlvishes, also known as dust devils. One attacked Moloch, one Jaranx’s llama, the last Zarina. Their form of attack consisted of engulfing their victim and swirling their bodies of dust and sand to abrade away the victim. This caused Zarina great distress since she wore no armor. But the valiant Moloch killed the one facing him and then the one attacking Zarina who had first tried to Tap the strength of one, which didn’t help, and then attempted to Fly away, which didn’t help either. Bruce killed the one attacking Jaranx’s llama who was frantically trying to heal his high llama the whole time....

After the attack, we didn’t have enough water to make it back to Pavis, so, perhaps foolishly, we pushed onwards. On Windsday, we found an oasis inhabited by sullen people who were constantly being raided by nomads. We traded successfully, loaded up on water and stayed the night. The next morning we discovered most of our possessions gone, stolen by the people. Jaranx got really angry and wanted to not only recover our belongings, but steal some of their things in retribution. We contented ourselves with retrieving our belongings and continuing on.

It was about this time that Jaranx told us of the last expedition to the Krjalki Bog, years ago, which had recovered an Anything Egg. He said that he had been on that expedition but had retired from it for reasons he wouldn’t tell us. He spoke of a wall of skeletons and zombies and other chaos monsters. Everyone except the sorceress was having second thoughts.

Three days later, on Godsdays, we met two sable riders who invited us to join them on a raid of the morokanths nearby. We declined, but said we would help cover their escape in return for some trading. They agreed and rode off. They never returned.

Forced by a lack of supplies, we entered the morokanth village on Waterday of Truth week. They seemed friendly enough and agreed to trade. We traded for meat and milk in return for which Zarina would stay for a while to cast Damage Boost on their claws. She was outwardly displeased but inwardly jubilant at the prospect of Tapping their herd-men. We also learned the fate of the two sable riders: they had been turned into herd-men.

On Clayday, while Zarina remained at the morokanth camp, the rest of us decided to scout out the terrain ahead. It was an unfortunate mistake. Rounding the tip of the Krjalki Bog on

Windsday, we saw on the horizon something that Jaranx told us had hundreds of points of POW¹. We immediately ran for our lives.

The thing was huge, perhaps a hundred feet tall and as many wide. It had three large legs and moved by rolling along on its three legs. Despite Jaranx's Mobility spells, it was catching up. We split up, Moloch and Bruce heading into the Bog, the other two heading directly away. The thing followed Moloch and Bruce. Moloch hid but Bruce did not. He stood there, defying the creature². Sigh. From his clutches, the brave Orlanthi called upon the King of the Gods to "Get me the hell out of here!" In a great thunderbolt and gust of wind, Bruce's soul was taken from his body and carried up to Orlanth's palace. Moloch soon rejoined the other two.

Over the next few days, we suffered mightily from thirst. We had rounded the Krjalki Bog, and were now heading southwards, hoping to find a river or another oasis. Luckily we ran into some impala riders who told us that an oasis was a day to the northeast. They lied. Finally, near death from thirst, we went back to the Krjalki Bog for water and Jaranx released a healing spirit bound to his fetch and commanded it to cleanse a portion of the tainted water. We later decided that it had worked, for none of us caught any diseases.

Remembering a rumor of human inhabitants in or near the Tunneled Hills and the Plateau of Statues, we headed in that direction, to the southeast. On Wildday, we met a dark troll wandering the wastelands. His name was Slagstone and he was an Argan Argar merchant whose caravan had been ambushed and decimated. With no other alternative but aimless wandering, he decided to join us on our excursion.

Mere words cannot describe the thirst we suffered from. Elwood was near death from lack of water. Somehow we managed to keep going. On Clayday of Disorder week of Fire season, we found a wounded Storm Kahn, his bison dead, and we brought him with us, for no man should die alone. And we finally made it later that day to the Tunneled Hills.

Seeing no water immediately in sight, we began to circle the Hills, hoping to find a stream flowing outward. We did find one, but it was guarded by Storm Bull worshipers. Our chances looked grim, but they recognized the Storm Kahn we had rescued and welcomed us to Only Safe.

¹ As a shaman, he had the natural ability of Second Sight.

² Whose name, we later learned, was Cwim.

Chapter 2

The Plateau of Statues

Only Safe is called that because that is exactly what it is: the only safe spot in the Tunneled Hills. It is inhabited by Storm Bull berserkers, Eiritha women, and an occasional Waha nomad. We stayed there for some time, resting. Moloch traded for a crude map of both the Tunneled Hills and the Plateau of Statues as we planned what to do next.

On Wildday of Death week, Zarina reappeared, riding the River Horse that the grateful morokanth had summoned for her. Following her wishes, we headed off to scout for a way up to the Plateau of Statues, where there are rumored to be statues of gods killed in the Gods War.

We never got there. One day's travel out, on Godsdays, we were ambushed by a dozen broos. Elwood fell at the start, mortally wounded in the head. Since he was an atheist, he couldn't call on Divine Intervention to save him.

It was Slagstone and Moloch who saved the day, for the former killed five and the latter three. Zarina killed two, Jaranx's high llama another after being injured (while Jaranx tried to get the beast to run away), but the last one escaped. The llama and the valiant Slagstone fell ill with a disease whereupon the shaman used another healing spirit to cure his llama! The rest of us told him in no uncertain terms to quit thinking of his llama first. We got Slagstone back to the Eiritha women at Only Safe in time to cure his illness.

On Waterday of Stasis week, Moloch and Jaranx had a duel with daggers and shields to decide where to go next. Moloch won hands down and so we headed off to scout out Mostal's Graveyard where crazed chaotic dwarfs supposedly dwell. Again we never made it. We were ambushed by an insectoid, a Thanatari priest, and two scorpion men. This time, however, we were without the sorceress but were with a dwarf named Gerfanglesnortz (Gorfang for short), who was very interested in the Graveyard. Again the mighty Slagstone saved us, with Gorfang using his crossbow to deadly effect, and the llama participating too. Unfortunately both Moloch and Slagstone fell in the battle (the former because the stupid shaman attacked the scorpion man whom Moloch had already befuddled). Moloch was given an improvised funeral, but Slagstone was resurrected back in Only Safe in return for the strange amulet the Thanatari was wearing.³

Our third expedition struck paydirt. We decided to climb up to the supposed castle atop the Plateau. We were well equipped with many water bags and animals to milk or eat as well as plenty of rations. Zarina didn't join us but a Storm Bull named Varn did. Leaving on Clayday of Truth week, we had just turned eastwards on Fireday when a swarm of furry bats came from another castle high up the cliff. They ignored us but drank up nearly all our water and then flew back to the Castle. After about a half a day of discussion, we decided to go on.

We were all very thirsty when we got to the area of the castle on Wildday. We all started to climb up, but the shaman slipped and fell to his death. We ended up strapping him to his llama, which easily negotiated the treacherous climb.

Upon reaching the top, we studied the castle. It was black and forbidding, with an open door. We went in, and followed a kind of tunnel to an open courtyard. Standing in the middle of the courtyard was a boggle.

"Water, water!" we cried.

"Here, have some gold!" was just about all it would reply.

³ The amulet, of course, would allow the wearer to be unmolested by the many spirits that inhabit a Thanatari temple.

This interplay lasted for awhile during which some other boggles dragged away Jaranx and his llama. After more meaningless dialogue we discovered where they had taken him.

Suspended over a banquet of potato chips, hardtack, and chili peppers⁴ was the llama, which was excreting on the table below. And glued to the wall was Jaranx. Also in the room was a large clear cylinder filled with a clear substance: glass. Needless to say, none of us ate anything.

One of the boggles remarked, “Gee, he sure isn’t much of a lively decoration, is he?”, referring to Jaranx. So some other boggles proceeded to tickle the life back into him, to the amazement of all of us. The problem now was to get him down. Slagstone, using the table, the glass cylinder, and his poleaxe managed to solve that.

With Slagstone punching and chewing his way through the plasterboard walls, we managed to reach a room filled with leather bags of all sizes. One gave a view down onto a huge landscape while another contained more wine than its size should have allowed. We drank deeply and filled our skins. The boggles invited us to look into a huge sack (over 20 feet high), but we declined.⁵

Jaranx then asked a boggle for a way to get out onto the Plateau. It replied, “Follow your nose!” whereupon Jaranx’s nose lengthened greatly. As we followed it as it curved through the castle, it shrank back into his face, so that when we found a tunnel leading out it was *only* a foot long. It wouldn’t grow any shorter. Slagstone offered to hack off about eleven inches, give or take an inch, but Jaranx declined. We marked the tunnel leading back (there were many other tunnels) and descended onto the Plateau of Statues.

The first thing we noticed on our descent was a giant boggle about a hundred feet tall standing outside the castle. The only visible landmark was a kind of hill so we headed for it. It turned out to be a cooled lava flow. Heading west, we saw a huge statue of the mighty Storm Bull. It had horns of iron and was wielding a steel sword. The statue was atop a building with an open door leading to darkness. Varn wanted to go in but we quickly convinced him not to.

Low on wine, we headed towards the area marked on our map with Water Runes. There we found many fountains with clear, sweet water. We indulged ourselves. Strangely, there was one fountain that was empty. We put some water in it as a token of thanks and left.

Now we headed for the Stasis Runes for that was where Gorfang wanted to go. On our way though, we came across a gigantic corral with a huge horned man (not The Horned Man, said Jaranx). He was an Eiritha herdsman and he said that these animals fed on Truth and that to pass we would have to speak one. We did and continued on.

We finally got to a large city with buildings of stone, interspersed with buildings made of the Minerals of the Octamony. Inside each of these was a statue of that kind of Mostali holding and/or wearing an object of its trade. Sometimes there were also objects lying on the ground. Slagstone took some things from the Lead Building but the rest of us took nothing. After spending the night, on Godsdays, we then traced our route back to the boggle castle.

Upon returning to the castle, we found that every single tunnel had been marked in the same way we had marked our initial exit! We chose one at random and went in. By bashing through more walls we made it to the exit. Sadly for us, it was only here we realized that we didn’t have enough water to get back to Only Safe. So, we tried to find our way back.

We were getting thirsty as we tried to find our way back to the Plateau. Still inside the castle, Slagstone saw a passing boggle that was drinking something from a skin.

“What are you drinking?”

⁴ All extremely appetizing in our dehydrated state!

⁵ This bag contained all the chaos monsters that ever fought the boggles and lost.

“Here, try it!”

So he did. And he turned bright orange.

We made it back onto the Plateau and to the Brass Building and were about to leave when we heard something inside the Iron Building. Investigating, we saw three dwarfs (Mostali?), one of whom had the chaotic features of vomiting acid, and who would drink potions every so often. One of them had a thunderstick⁶, the others had iron great swords. We defeated them, quickly stripped them of weapons, potions, and the thunderstick. Gorfang contented himself with taking enough armor to make a suit for himself. We filled up with water at the fountains and headed back to the castle. Along the way we thought we were being followed but couldn't be sure.

Back at the castle, the giant boggle didn't want to let us back in. Fortunately, we were able to dodge his clumsy attempts to stop us and made it back inside the castle. We made it through okay, but at the exit stood an armed and armored boggle. Slagstone quickly engaged it while the rest of us slipped past. It was a difficult fight for Slagstone because whenever he damaged the boggle, it would simply blow itself back up through its thumb! Eventually, he wounded the boggle in so many places that it couldn't blow itself up quickly enough before Slagstone was able to escape.

We climbed down off the Plateau and headed back to Only Safe. But we were still being followed. We faced off for the rest of the day and that night. It looked like they were the dwarfs whom we had taken the weapons from. They were canny all right. Show yourself, freeze your opponents in place, then surprise them from a different direction. Which is exactly what they did. In the morning we found the armor, the swords, and the thunderstick gone, and the mouth of a tunnel. Gorfang jumped in to retrieve his property, followed by nobody. He eventually emerged with the armor and the thunderstick after having killed, so he said, the marauding gremlins. We successfully passed the Bat Castle and made it back to Only Safe.

For our next expedition, we were without Jaranax. So Varn, a Storm Bull worshiper, Fred, another Storm Bull, Slagstone, the (orange) dark troll and Argan Argar merchant, and Gorfang, the dwarf now wearing his new iron armor, set off on Windsday of Death week to Mostal's Graveyard to scout it out. The trip there was amazingly uneventful considering what happened there last time.

Mostal's Graveyard is set in a vast natural depression. The bottom is flat with very few plants growing. There are many buildings scattered throughout the depression. It had taken us two days to get here and we had three days water left. So we decided to go six hours clockwise along the edge and then go back to Only Safe.

We were stupid. We didn't think we could be watched but we were. Suddenly, three metal bolts flew towards us. They were arbalest bolts. One hit Slagstone in the stomach, another tore Fred's left arm off and the third missed. We retreated some distance and stopped Fred's bleeding. It seems that the Mostali had set up outposts along the perimeter of the Graveyard, hidden some 50 meters down the side. We decided to head back along the rim, find the next outpost and ambush it.

On the way, we chanced upon something horrifying. There was this hill with what appeared to be a person buried in the ground up to his neck. He would not respond and we were about to come closer when the head fell over and legs sprouted out from the “neck”. We beat a hasty retreat from the horrific scene.

Ambushing the outpost was easier said than done. Leaving Fred behind, the rest of us tried to sneak down the hill. Good luck. Instead, we were ambushed ourselves. More bolts flew, hitting Slagstone again. He took off down the slope, with Gorfang in hot pursuit, or as well as a dwarf can keep up with a troll, all followed by Varn. While one dwarf leaped out of the pit to engage Slagstone, the other two finished reloading their arbalests. As Slagstone jumped into the pit, completely ignoring the first dwarf, the other two fired. One missed but the other pinned Gorfang's

⁶ A primitive firearm.

shield to his abdomen. It was a comparatively easy fight. We smashed the arbalests, took some of the bolts, and got the heck out of there.

On our way back, three scorpion men attacked us. One of them spurted fire from his tail, who stood off and fired at Slagstone who was engaged with another scorpion man as well. Gorfang was cocking his light repeating crossbow while Fred tried to mount his high llama, no easy task with only one arm. Varn threw a Berserker on himself but before he could smash the scorpion men, the third one hit his right arm and broke it. Undeterred, Varn started smashing them with his shield. He knocked two of them unconscious with blows to the head while Gorfang killed the other but was simultaneously knocked unconscious. Varn had also been knocked unconscious as well as Slagstone, who had succumbed to the scorpion man's fire. Fred, who had finally gotten smart by not trying to get on his llama but rather getting out his hatchet and beheading the unconscious scorpion men found himself the only one conscious but he had no healing magic!

With many misgivings he took one of the potions gotten from the acid-vomiting dwarfs and fed it to Slagstone. You can imagine his dilemma. What if they were acid that the vomiting dwarfs used to replenish their supply? It was a healing potion. He revived Varn and the others, we cut off the scorpion men's tails and made it safely back to Only Safe.

For our next expedition, we decided to scout out an unexplored area on our map. Surprisingly, the distance was much shorter than the map led us to believe, for we left on Waterday of Illusion week of Earth season and arrived the next day. We stayed away from the deep desert and came across a large stone building shaped like a truncated rectangular pyramid. We went inside. There were two doors. One had a skull on it. Fred stupidly touched it, and the spirit inside it attacked him and possessed him. Slagstone tried to cosh him on the head and knock him out. Instead he split him in twain, the possessing spirit returning to the skull.⁷

In the other room we found a huge hole in the ground with a spiral staircase winding downwards. Leaving the animals behind, we headed down. We wound up at an entrance to a hewn corridor. Gorfang snuck up to the nearest intersection, which had a short hallway to a room with a curtain door. We decided on a hit and run. It was a bad move. Broos, many broos. We decided to leave while the leaving was good. The rest of us ran while Slagstone and Gorfang made a fighting retreat. Gorfang fell, mortally wounded. Slagstone scooped him up and ran for the top.

Meanwhile, Varn had emerged out at the door and found that his bison had been possessed. He didn't have a chance. His own bison killed him. The troll dispatched the demon-bison and the bodies were brought back to Only Safe.

Slagstone, who had been Resurrected with Gorfang's help, tried to repay the favor. The Eiritha women demanded the iron armor. Slagstone agreed and Gorfang was alive again, sad at the loss of his iron armor, but glad to be alive. Slagstone and Gorfang were becoming good friends. Varn had no such trade goods. RIP.

⁷ "Honest, I just tried to knock him out!"

Chapter 3

The Newcomers

New people in Only Safe! Two sorcerers, Thingol and John, plus a fisherman named Smersh. In addition there was a nomad named Wahagrim who had wandered in. Thingol told us the story of how they had gotten here.

It was back in Nochet that Thingol and John, another sorcerer had heard of the Tunneled Hills. They wanted to go to them and see if the rumors about the Hills were true. But, there being nobody who wanted to chance the Genert Wastes, they had to hire those who were less informed. They hired a trollkin, Ergolin, who had escaped his dark troll master and a primitive fisherman, named Smersh, to take them in his boat.

They purchased supplies, among them water kegs, skins, rum, food, packs, etc. Their planned route was to take them past the Bleak Shore to Orali's Tongue. Landing there, they would then trek overland to the Tunneled Hills. Alas, the best-laid plans often go astray.

The party left on Freezeday of Movement week, Earth season. Two days later, while still at sea, a great white shark attacked them. Thingol cast a Damage Resist 5 on the boat, which definitely did not help for the shark's teeth crunched through the flimsy hull. Ergolin had Smersh hold him over the gunwales of the boat while he used his club to hit the shark on the head. John contemplated throwing a Smother spell but had to abort it when he realized it wouldn't work. Thingol then cast a Damage Resist 10 which still didn't help very much and then, magic points depleted, started to bail and tried to stop up the holes in the boat. Ergolin managed to hit the shark on the head a few times, which then sped off in search of easier prey. Smersh managed to repair most of the damage and they limped on.

The next day, Windsday, they landed at what they thought to be Orali's Tongue (we later found out that they had indeed) and, bringing their supplies ashore, decided to head straight north.

After a few days of walking, they made it to a small stream. They drank, filled up their skins, and decided to follow the stream upstream, to where they figured there might be an oasis. They found it after a few hours walk.

Here they rested for a day or so. There was plenty of water and fruit to supplement the dried fish that Smersh had brought with him.

On Godsdays, some bison riders happened by. John hid from them, as did Ergolin. Smersh had to talk with them (being the only one to speak Praxian) but Thingol was there to tell Smersh what to tell the bison riders.

"Fish for water", was what Smersh said.

"Oh brother", muttered Thingol under his breath.

"Sure! I'll take the fish and the water's right behind you," said a bison rider, probably the leader.

They essentially extorted Smersh into supplying the bison men with fish from the river, promising not to enslave or kill them. The rest of them thought it was a fair deal.

On Godsdays of the following week, they spotted Ergolin.

"What's that?" one of them asked.

“A troll,” replied Smersh, who had never seen a real troll.

“A troll? What’s a troll?” asked the bison rider.

“It’s kind of like an elf,” said Smersh, who was definitely less informed than most.

“Oh, we know all about elves! He’s got to come and join us in a celebration!” said the bison man.

They all agreed, not knowing at the time what Smersh had told them about Ergolin, since only Smersh could speak Praxian.

They went with the bison rider to their ceremonial ground, where there was food and drink for all. Ergolin was decked out in flowers and fed tender plants and dew. Thingol asked Smersh to ask the bison rider what kind of celebration this was.

“Oh, our shaman is going to summon the spirit of a dryad to come and possess this here elf to bring trees back to the Holy Land.⁸”

Wonderful. John tried to talk them out of it, to no avail. They told Ergolin what was happening and he tried to fight his way out. The bison riders restrained him.

The shaman did his ceremony and the spirit of the dryad came. She entered into Ergolin’s body and immediately noticed that something was wrong.

“You’re not an elf. What are you?” asked the dryad to Ergolin in his mind.

“I’m a troll”, he replied.

She, not knowing any other troll than Mistress Race trolls, was surprised to say the least.

“Are all trolls like you now?” she asked.

“Yes”, he said.

She pondered on this for a while. Looking around, she asked, “Are there any elves around here?”

“No”, Ergolin replied.

“Well, when this place was a lot better, my people and your people warred all the time. And if I’m the only elf left here and you’re what the trolls have become, maybe it’s time we ended the feud.”

“Okay with me,” said Ergolin.

The dryad turned and addressed the crowd.

“I cannot enter into this elf. He has changed too much for me to possess. But continue your celebration and do not worry!”

The celebration continued. The dryad, perhaps out of compassion, perhaps out of something else, taught Ergolin the Heal 5 spell.

The next day, Thingol wanted to go explore the Tunneled Hills area. The bison riders told

⁸ Prax.

them that parts of it were inhabited by horrible Chaos things, and that others were inhabited by Storm Bull berserkers who fought the Chaos. John said that he didn't know which was worse, the Storm Bulls or the Chaos monsters. Nevertheless, Thingol convinced them all to go.

It took then a half day to get to the Tunneled Hills. They were forbidding and large. They decided to circle the Hills and try to find an entrance into them. They happened upon a band of Storm Bulls who asked us what they were doing here. They said we had come to explore and to try to kill Chaos.

They formed a line of berserkers that they had to fight our way through to prove that they were strong enough to handle Chaos.

It was pitiful. Ergolin was hit in the back of the head by Smersh's sling bullet. He died instantly. John didn't try anything and Thingol couldn't Palsy any of the targets. Finally, they said that they were obviously no threat to them and let us enter Only Safe.

Chapter 4

The Tunneled Hills

It was about this time that we stopped exploring for awhile and enjoyed the comforts (?) of Only Safe. We did some trading and generally relaxed and enjoyed life. Together, Wahagrim and Slagstone “sold” Zarina to a Storm Kahn named Borash for seventeen bisons. Borash wanted to test her before he bought her. They shook the tent down. Borash accepted and so did Zarina, virtually selling herself into slavery. Zarina and Borash greatly enjoyed their nights together. But life is short and so we decided to head out into the wild again. Before we left, Zarina threw some spells on us, notably a 20-point Damage Resist on Thingol.

At first we decided to head southeast towards another unmarked spot on our map. Off we went on Waterday of Death week of Dark season. On Windsday, we noticed some harpies overhead. We quickly went on, but one stayed on our tail while the rest went for reinforcements. On their return, Thingol Palsied the wings of one, and we shot down some more. Then they started excreting on us. Most of us dodged the chips, but not so Jaranx. He got caught flat-footed and open-mouthed. He died in 10 minutes. We spent the night here, hoping (though not too much) that the shaman would return from the dead in the way that some shamans can. He never re-awoke.

Eventually we came across a huge lava flow blocking our way. Having no clear idea of what to do, we went back to Only Safe.

A new arrival in Only Safe was a Sage named Glorion. He had apparently asked Lhankor Mhy to take him somewhere interesting. It was here that we decided to open the lead-covered can that Slagstone had taken from the Lead Building on the Plateau. Inside, we found two blue rocks suspended in heavy oil. Using Glorion’s Analyze Magic, we discovered that these were Blue Moon rocks, which would find the nearest source of water.

On Waterday of Fertility week, we went back to the lava flow, avoiding the harpies, arriving on Windsday. We had noticed there were some tunnels in the cooled lava. We decided to head south towards the Plateau, our new goal.

With Slagstone and Gorfang in front using their special senses, we plunged into a tunnel. Not for long though. A horrendous beast began to approach, preceded by a cloud of steam. We got out, but lost our bison, which had all of our supplies.

Foolishly, we decided to continue on to the Plateau. This time we went on the lava flow with Gorfang in front to spot any weak areas. To warn us away from a weak area, he fell into it himself. But we made it at last and began climbing the flow to the Plateau.

It is terrible to be on the receiving end of an ambush. We started climbing up the easiest section of the flow, not realizing we were in a sort of funnel. Broos started dropping boulders on us, so huge that it took two broos to move one of them. Most of them bounced over our heads, but Thingol was hit twice. Both times his Damage Resist held. Zarina was not so lucky. Her stomach was crushed parchment-thin. Glorion decided to keep heading up, avoiding combat. Slagstone, Gorfang, and Wahagrim all climbed the ravine to engage the broos in combat. Thingol stayed below but cast Palsy spells at the broos. Some escaped though. Slagstone then took the two halves of Zarina while Thingol took her magic point-storing ring as his own magic points had been nearly depleted.

We made it to the top and were about to rest when we heard drums and broo yelps. We decided not to rest. We ran all through the night, with the drums not too far behind us. All through the day we ran too. Then, at dusk, the drums stopped. We continued on for a ways and then rested or should I say collapsed.

We headed towards the Storm Bull statue but night fell before we got there. We called it a day and turned in, keeping a watch. We were lucky we did because later that night, we were ambushed by the very same broos. By not beating their drums, they made us think we were safe, thus not running so fast. One of the broos appeared to be made of bronze. Through his eyes, nose and mouth we could see a fire burning inside him. Fortunately for us, he did not breathe this fire. He was tough, but eventually he was cut open across the belly, whereupon he bled out red-hot coals and died. We were handling the rest of them fairly well, when suddenly they all fled. Glorion decided to chase one of the broos. The rest of us looked around us to see why. It wasn't tough to see why.

There was this huge, ugly creature with a massive brow standing on a rock some distance away from us. He was attended by two broos with sticks trying to push up the brow. We wanted no part of this. Thingol and Slagstone ran while Gorfang and Wahagrim shot and flung missiles at the broos trying to raise Brow's brow. Then the other creature appeared.

It had a long thin tentacle topped by a huge knob of bone. It would swing this around and then hit the ground with it. Immediately a deep crack would form, heading towards us. Both Gorfang and Wahagrim fell in. Gorfang managed to climb out before the crack closed up, but not so Wahagrim. Then we all ran for it.

In a vision later we saw what happened when the broos finally got Brow's brow up. From his eye emerged a brilliant beam that sucked the POW out of anything it touched. Rocks and trees exploded and the ground was gouged and blasted.

We also saw what happened to Glorion, whom we never saw again. Chasing the broo, he had run straight into Shatter and fell in the same crack as Wahagrim and Gorfang had. He didn't make it out before it closed. Shatter moved towards us and after a bit we saw Glorion emerge from the ground. He started running away but he was far behind us. Brow's beam struck him a glancing blow. He lost much POW, called on Lhankor Mhy to get him out, and promptly disappeared with *our* Blue Moon rocks. We never saw them or him again.

We ran towards the Water Rune, both as a source of water and to see if the one fountain we had started to fill was full. We passed by a strange blue pyramid that fascinated us. Nevertheless, we continued on.

We were about to pass by the Storm Bull statue when we saw a morokanth emerge from the entry way. We were all astonished. It turned out that Grosko, which was the morokanth's name, had come to "the only true temple of Storm Bull" as the final step in his initiation. We convinced him to come with us through the boggle Castle and thus down off the Plateau. He was also interested in eating Zarina ("She looks aged enough to me!") but Slagstone refused him.

The fountain we had poured water into on our last journey on the Plateau was full and gushing.

We never made it to the boggle's castle. Heading there we encountered a river of lava, hot lava. It was about twenty feet across. We puzzled for some time as to how we were going to get across, for cross it we had to do to get to the castle. It was all academic anyway. There was an invisible barrier on the other side, which would have doomed any attempts to jump across or throw a rope.

So back we headed but we were very hungry. So we headed over to where we had seen animals that were penned. We saw no sign of the huge nomad tending them, so Gorfang shot an impala. As it died, though, the herdsman returned.

He demanded to know who had killed his impala. Gorfang told him he had. The nomad demanded that Gorfang give him the instrument of the animal's death, Gorfang's prized light repeating crossbow. Gorfang was very displeased. We asked if there was anything that we could

bring him in return for the crossbow. He said that he would give it back if Gorfang would bring back a thunderbeast. Gorfang agreed. The nomad also demanded, it being Fertility week, that we fertilize some of his animals. We were graciously allowed to take our pick. Grosko took another morokanth; Slagstone, a bison; the humans, herd-men. Gorfang had a tougher time of it. After two hours of non-success with an impala, the nomad finally called him off.

We made it back to the Storm Bull temple where we decided to rest. Grosko again brought up the subject of Zarina. Slagstone decided that even if we could resurrect Zarina she wouldn't be much good for anything.⁹ He and Grosko enjoyed a light snack of her.

But not for long. We were all watching for any nasties when we saw a strange sight around midnight. A creature suddenly appeared and brought both his arms down, as if he were pushing something into the ground. At the same height as his hands, other creatures appeared as if something had obscured them from our sight before Blind had pushed it down. Brow was there, as well as Shatter, and many more.

⁹ By now she would have lost 3D3 from each characteristic.

Chapter 5

The Beginning of the Quest

We immediately ducked into the Storm Bull temple and found ourselves traveling without moving our feet. This continued for an uncertain amount of time. Finally we stopped moving and found ourselves standing before a person. He spoke: "I hight Urrquong, Barrier of the Door to Chaos. Hearken, ye folk of the Last Age. Your doom besets you. Go home, and experience a few last seasons of fearful rest before the end. An end there will be so great that none shall remain to tell of it."

He spoke to Grosko: "Manslayer, stand forth! You serve an impotent god, whose powers weaken with every turn of the years. Strong his worshipers may yet be, but they fight that which cannot be stopped. You hate the Moon, and struggle against it, but the Moon is naught but a harbinger, and your actions are useless, as if with a man that defies the omen, rather than the doom itself."

He spoke to Thingol: "Friend, come near! Never in this Last Age have your kind hindered mine. You serve us yet. Continue in your ways, with my blessing. You think in your heart that by killing broos and scorpion folk you serve the cause of Law. Does the bird that picks fleas and lice off the lion's back hinder him from destroying his prey?"

He spoke to Slagstone: "Dark Man, I have met yours before. In ancient years your mighty kin defied us. Your race has suffered two curses. It cannot survive the third. Go home, and await the extinction of your race."

He spoke to Gorfang: "Stunted one, thing of clay. The dwarfs have ever proven most adept at slaying their own kind. You have proven no different. You think that repairing the Machine will restore and save you. Yet you do not comprehend that you are not even repairing the right Machine."

Grosko now threw a javelin at Urrquong. As it neared him, it simply disintegrated along its length as though it had run into a barrier that destroyed anything that touched it. So then he tried to kick Urrquong. He lost his right hind foot.

As we healed his stump and tried to ask questions, Urrquong vanished. We started moving again and found ourselves in front of an old man. He spoke: "Man, Dark Man, Mostal's brood, Awakened One — come and hear my rede. The end of the universe is at hand, and never was it so difficult to stop."

To Grosko: "Storm Bull and morokanth lack the same quality — Trust. Seek that to save the world. Take this tool to help. Your success shall make your name feared by the foes of Life for age to come."

And he gave him a metal glove the shape of his hand.

To Thingol: "Your kind is legendary for that sin most detested of rulers. Seek charity without self-interest or your type ends with time. This will aid you. Your success shall couple your name with the Mighty One."

And he gave him a sliver of obsidian too big for an arrow and too small for a spear.

To Slagstone: "Dark Man, for centuries your kind has perished and shrunk. You need what may be the most difficult virtue of all to obtain. Hope. Take this tool to help. Your success shall make mothers praise you till Time ends."

And he gave him a pitch-black bison calf.

To Gorfang: “Tenth Race. You need a virtue most important to all in the world, yet one your type lacks. Love. Take this. Your success shall warm the stone.”

And he gave him a key seemingly of iron.

To all: “Past the Mountains of Evil, in the land before the sun goes down, lies the End of All, the Bane of Time.

“Beware the Red Beast, beware the lair of vitriol. Seek the Gray Ones, seek your true virtues.

“One of you shall bename a star if your quest succeeds. The Web shall be shattered if your quest fails.

“Beware the Mask of Chaos and know that Life watches your acts. The Barrier of the Door is wounded and cannot lie, only threaten and warn. Heed him as me, save for his despair.”

And he too disappeared before we could ask anything further.

And before we knew it, we found ourselves on an open plain. Slagstone recognized it instantly. We were in the Big Rubble of Pavis.

Chapter 6

Pavis and the Rubble

The date was Waterday, Stasis week, Dark season. We headed at random, hoping to find a wall and follow it to one of the Rubble's gates. On our way we encountered a Lunar patrol who gouged us for adventurer's licenses. We eventually found our way to the Real City inside the Rubble. We saw the real Flintnail shrine, a geodesic dome made of the Headstones of the Faceless Statue that Pavis animated so long ago. Grosko suggested that we enter the city and stay at Rowdy Djo Lo's. Not knowing its reputation, we went there.

We passed out through Wyvern Gate and entered New Pavis through the Farmer's Gate. Asking directions, we came to Rowdy Djo Lo's.

Rowdy Djo Lo's is a real dive. Their bouncer is a great troll. He wanted a tip for his 'service'. Grosko gave him one, a literal one. He grappled the troll and threw him to the ground. "Okay, you can go in," said the troll to Grosko. Thingol gave it a Lunar.

"You get best table in house", said the troll. He led us to the best table, picked up two chairs with their occupants still on them, and shook them off. We sat down at the newly vacant table.

Grosko got into some fights, discovering in the process that his glove added damage to his fist attacks. He made some money winning bets. We spent the night in the dingy place.

Next morning, we wandered around the city, taking in the sights. We went to the Lhankor Mhy temple to try to find out what the artifacts that Old Man gave us did. The priest wanted 1000 lunars for one Analyze Magic. We went away.

As we went away, a voice called us into a nearby alley. He was a sage who was forced to leave when the Lunar Empire took over New Pavis. He knew the Lhankor Mhy priest and hated him, so offered us three Analyze Magic's. We accepted gladly.

The glove, we discovered, would function as an artificial limb. Grosko used it to replace his lost hind leg. The sliver would infallibly kill any one being once. The key is indestructible by mundane means.

Low on cash, we asked the sage, named Jho, where we could go to get some money and magic. He suggested some buildings on Ogre Island, especially a red one in a ruined city.

So off we went to Ogre Island. We went into the Rubble through Griffin Gate and went past Blind King's Hill, past the salt mines to the Zola Fel River. We crossed, the troll first, dragging a rope to help the lighter ones across. We camped near the Basher.

In the morning (Fireday) we went to look for this red building. It didn't take us long to find it. The doorway in led to a fifteen foot drop. We lowered a rope and went in. It was dark, so we relied on Slagstone's Darksense and Gorfang's Earthsense.

The first thing we came upon was two baboons sleeping in a room. We successfully snuck by and continued on.

We came upon a room with no light, but when we got close enough to a certain spot on the wall, we saw a purple-colored torch burning. We didn't like the looks of that, for it reminded us very much of the Darklight that Thanatari cultists use.

Up ahead we heard the sounds of water, so we headed for it. In the dark, Slagstone sensed

some beings. They attacked us in the dark. Thingol then cast his Light (yes, Light!) spell and we saw some newtlings and baboons. We fought them and killed them all.

Continuing on, a snarling spirit lunged towards us. But it stopped short as if restrained by a wall. Grosko then stepped across the boundary and engaged it in spirit combat. Fortunately he won, but didn't have a spell to bind it. It fled back to its place of binding, a skull, which we crushed and shuddered again with the thought that perhaps this was a Thanatari complex.

At the end of the corridor we found a door sealed over with lead. It was here that Grosko remembered that he had to go to an obscure Eiritha festival and left us.

So we scraped off the lead and Slagstone prepared to force the door open while Gorfang had his crossbow ready and Thingol was ready to cast a Palsy. The door opened and we entered a room with some tapestries, which looked ready to crumble into dust, a table, chair, and a bookcase full of skulls. There was one other door which we opened.

In it we found three bodies which had withered to near-skeletons as well as manacles on the walls. It didn't look as though the bodies had slipped through the manacles when their wrists and hands had shrunk. One more door, which we opened.

Inside there was a large stone slab covered by a mattress, which was occupied by a man. He was very pale, no doubt from not being in the sun for some time. He claimed to have been sealed inside by nomads around the time of the Dragonkill War and survived thanks to his lord, Pavis. He asked us to take him out which we did though he was so weak we had to carry him.

Though our map had been accidentally destroyed, we managed to find our way back to the entrance we had initially come in. We startled the baboons, who immediately ran and scampered up and out.

It was here that the man said, "I thank you for rescuing me. In return, I will not kill you if you do not harass me further." Then he turned to smoke.

Great, a vampire. Well, it would take him some time to regain his fatigue, but, a Thanatari vampire!

But how to get out? Gorfang climbed on top of Slagstone's shoulders carrying a rope. Upon looking over the rim, he saw two baboons with spears a-stabbing. He was hit, fell backwards, with Thingol breaking his fall. Then they started throwing big rocks at us.

In retrospect, it was funny. We tried all sorts of schemes to get rid of the two baboons. We tried shooting them with crossbows, throwing rocks at them, and using spells. One fell into the pit after being hit by a rock thrown by Slagstone. With Slagstone acting as bait with his big shield, Thingol managed to Palsy the remaining baboon.

Quickly climbing onto Slagstone's shoulders again, Gorfang was again confronted by the baboon, sitting on his rear, favoring his Palsied limb, and stabbing. He fell, wounded. Slagstone was only able to save him just in time.

After some more of this, Slagstone tried to climb out. It took him a while, during which the baboon dropped rocks on him. He fell, and lost consciousness. We managed to drag him away and heal him.

Finally Slagstone was able to quickly climb out, the baboon running away, the Palsy having long since worn off.

We made it to the river okay. Slagstone crossed the river, again carrying one end of a rope. Thingol made it across fine, but not so Gorfang. He slipped, fell under the water, and were we glad

he had tied the end of the rope around him. We pulled him across and just barely were able to revive him.

Heading back to Griffin Gate, some nomads came and told us we were trespassing and demanded payment. Gorfang gave him all the money he had, 28 Lunars, far more than they were going to ask. Sigh.

Later four gargoyles flew overhead, dropping tremendous boulders. They all missed.

We made it safely out of Griffin Gate and back to New Pavis. We were nearly broke, Thingol having all we had, 30 Lunars. We approached Jho, told him of our releasing the vampire and asked him where we else we could go to. He suggested the Puzzle Canal. We decided to think about it.

Gorfang went and worked for room and board under the Dwarf Hill, Slagstone went to his brother to borrow some money, and Thingol stayed in New Pavis, doing manual labor and trying to recruit some other adventurers. We lived like this for four weeks.

Eventually Slagstone returned from Trolltown with some of his money. Thingol had recruited Benderri Ingilli, a fisherman turned sailmaker who offered use of his boat, and Ralkin, a shoe merchant who hated shoes and wanted to adventure. Gorfang had also returned from Dwarf Town.

So on Godsdays of Disorder week of Storm Season, we went to the Lhankor Mhy temple for some information on the Puzzle Canal. Charging us exorbitantly, we got some information, namely that there were sea elves in the Canal, who could supposedly be avoided by always going to the north, and that trolls who entered in from the land side of the Canal never returned but that some trolls had returned if they had gone in by boat. We also found out that there was supposedly a magic painting somewhere inside the Canal and that they would pay many Lunars for information as to what the painting showed.

In we went. We always took the north fork. However, one time we didn't and entered into a cavern. This cavern had six entrances/exits and was completely covered over. Once we were about midway through, eight forms surfaced and began throwing sharp, Speedarted darts at the troll. Unfortunately, he had taken his heavy armor off, and was only wearing leather. He took some damage, as did the boat. Ben told us all to row for the nearest exit, which we did. However, that particular way out had a kind of lip and we grounded, most of us falling down into the boat. With Thingol pushing the boat off, Ben and Ralkin back-oaring, Slagstone started throwing rocks at them while Gorfang threw Demoralize spells at the elves.

As we turned the boat around, two of the elves grabbed hold of the boat, pulled themselves up and with long, thin lances, tried to stab Slagstone, who had ducked into the boat to Heal himself. He parried, grabbed his mace, and smashed the arm of one of them, who dropped beneath the surface, dropping his lance into the boat.

We finally managed to get the boat out of that cavern. We decided to head back into Pavis, rest and try to sell the darts and the lance that the elves had used. We got a minimal amount for them.

The next day we went back into the Canal and, heading north, we came upon a dead end. Turning around, more of the elves surfaced. Slagstone immediately dove for the bottom of the boat, expertly covering himself up with a tarp. The elves first demanded a toll, then asked if we wanted a hiding place. We declined and continued.

Aimlessly exploring some more, we entered another cavern. This one was occupied by an incredibly ugly hag. She demanded blood payment. She looked mean and tough, and there were many creatures swimming beneath the surface as well as some formless, icky things that still had a

mouth and eyes¹⁰

We asked her if more than one of us could make the payment. She said it had to be from one person. Slagstone popped up at this time, brandishing his pole axe, ready for a fight. She said she wanted human blood only. So Ralkin offered to pay. She handed him a pail, which would hold about a quart, and told him to fill it. He complied, but fell unconscious from the blood loss.¹¹ We were allowed to leave and we did so, quickly.

Exploring some more, we came upon a cavern with humans inside. They claimed they were not outlaws but we didn't believe them. They were armored but not well armed, so we contemplated attacking them. But Gorfang didn't want to, so we left them.

Backtracking, we came upon another cavern, this time with a giant waterspout in it. About 10 meters down, we saw something gleaming. Thingol threw a Skin of Life on Gorfang, who dove (or should I say sank) to the bottom and recovered the things. They turned out to be a doughnut-shaped piece of metal and 22 ceramic plaques with something written on them in a unfamiliar language. We decided to leave the Canal and take these things to Lhankor Mhy.

It turned out that nobody could read the plaques, and that the metal was actually sa-metal (aluminum). We were offered 150 Lunars from most everybody else, but 400 Lunars in dried fish from Zola Fel.

Ralkin said that in return for the plaques and sa-metal, he would forget the debts we owed him but that he might not go with us on our next trip. Thingol said that there was one way to make him come with us and that was to not pay him back yet. Slagstone convinced Thingol to lay off and so we let Ralkin have the artifacts.

¹⁰ Sort of like the face of Jabba the Hut.

¹¹ He took 3D6 general hit point damage, and rolled an 11.

Chapter 7

Jrustela

Walking through Pavis the next day, we met Dash, a sailor, and Alex, a healer whom we told of our quest. Dash figured that the reference to the “land before the sun goes down” was a referral to the island of Jrustela. But how to get to Jrustela?

Later that day, we heard that a merchant was hiring sailors and mercenaries for a voyage to Jrustela. We looked into this, since we were flat broke. Apparently he wanted the mercenaries to guard in case pirates attacked. He would pay 2 Lunars per day or 50 Lunars at the end of the voyage. The voyage would probably last from 3 to 5 weeks. We took the promise of 50 Lunars. Before we left, Gorfang traded his armor and heavy crossbow for leather and a light repeating crossbow.

The trip was remarkably uneventful. We saw myriad sea life and even a blue sea eagle, of which not many are seen. We made it safely through the Banthe current and landed at Barlinn, on the northern coast of the northernmost island of Jrustela on Waterday of Illusion week.

Barlinn is nestled inside a fjord with farms all around it. Close to the south is a mountain range, with the tallest one called Dryduster, which has a glacier on its summit. About 100 kilometers to the west lived some timinits, while to the east is where the raiding trolls come from. Just before one hits the mountain range, in a gorge, is a place called Bad Deal, where humans trade with the dwarfs. Two sorcerers live in Barlinn, one old, experienced, and crotchety, the other young, inexperienced, and crotchety.

We stayed in town for a few days, then decided to try to deal with the dwarfs. So on Fireday, all of us, except for Slagstone, went off towards Bad Deal, accompanying a merchant who was bringing animals to trade with the dwarfs. The place where he left his animals inside a Warding was on a plain, with pillars made of rocks piled one on top of another scattered about the plain. Gorfang noticed some dwarf doors up on the mountain side. He decided to stand in plain sight, while the rest of us tried to hide or otherwise conceal ourselves.

Later, around midnight, he heard a voice.

“Humans follow you!” it whispered in Mostali.

“I know! They’re my friends,” he said back.

“Since when are humans and dwarfs friends?” it asked.

“They’re my guards,” replied Gorfang.

“Tell your guards to turn around and cover their ears. What’s about to happen isn’t for them to hear.”

So Gorfang told us and we complied. Cunningly made dwarf doors were hidden in the pillars of rock. The dwarfs that emerged had beards, wore red jackets when not covered by dust and soot, carried picks and shovels, and had curled boots.¹² They knocked down the posts of the Warding, herded the animals into a larger dwarf door, and were about to leave when Gorfang asked him a question.

“Can I come in and visit?” he asked.

¹² Like those from Disney’s version of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

“Sure, but your guards will have to be blindfolded and led.” was the reply.

We agreed to the conditions and went down one of the pillars. It was a tight, twisty spiral with steps about 20 inches deep. Alex fell and broke his ankle, whereupon some dwarfs picked him up and carried him.

At last we found ourselves in a huge amphitheater. There were large pits with flame belching out, with dwarfs standing inside the pits pounding on metal implements, pits with dense yellowish fumes roiling out (sulfur by the smell), a pit with stagnant water used for quenching, and some small pits with drinking water. We were awed.

It seems that these dwarfs hadn't undergone the same hardships that the Genertelan dwarfs had. Gorfang was asked many questions about the outside world, as they called it. They asked us if we wanted to see their secret weapon, and we said yes. They made us take an oath, and drink a potion to never tell anyone about the weapon or our tongues would rot out.

In another amphitheater, thin but extremely long, stood the weapon. It was a crossbow some 10 meters long by 10 meters wide and fired a bolt with a foot-long chunk of truestone as its tip. Also in the room were piles of kegs with Disorder runes on them. We were amazed. They said that the top of the mountain could split open and the crossbow raised on a lift powered by lava so as to be able to fire at the world outside. The crossbow itself could be turned and elevated or depressed and could supposedly range to about 50 kilometers. They said they were protecting themselves against the Old Man. We had heard of him back at Barlinn. Legend said that he was a nasty giant who ate babies.

We asked about the possibility of more trade, with both ourselves and the outside world. They weren't interested in more trade with Barlinn but were interested in leather. Dash offered his stiff leather and in return they gave him 'metal cloth', chainmail.¹³ Gorfang offered his leather, but they said they already had some leather, the armor that Dash had just given them. We asked if there was something they wanted. They said they wanted to know where the raiding troll came from. The better our information, the greater our reward. We accepted.

But first we wanted to investigate the rumors about the Old Man. We got some more rations back at Barlinn and headed off into the mountains on Freezeday of Truth week. With us was a young man named Ben, who also wanted to find the Old Man. That we had to do some climbing is an understatement. At one point, while trying to climb a shallow but loose rise, Alex simply could not climb it. He tried and tried but each time fell back to the bottom. He eventually succumbed to his injuries, too stubborn to Heal himself or use his Healing salves.

As we tried to climb down to retrieve the salves, we saw a giant, some 12-15 feet tall come by, pick up Alex and stuff him in his bag, wave in response to our yells, and walk away. We set off in search of him, following his tracks.

We followed him for awhile, then lost his tracks. Just then, he sprang from behind a nearby (large) bush, brandishing a huge club. He shattered Gorfang's shield and leg, knocking him backwards some 25 feet. Fortunately he landed in a bush, which broke his fall. Dash and Thingol started running, but Ben delayed to cast a spell. It was a mistake. The giant shattered his spear, and crushed his leg. He then picked Ben up, and stuffed him headfirst into a sack, which he then tied to his waist.

The rest of us, Thingol, Gorfang, and Dash tracked him to his lair, a huge cave. There we contemplated our next move. We decided to go with a three-fold strategy. Thingol, while doing a Ceremony, would lure him out of his cave. Once he was out, Thingol would cast a Palsy spell, in hopes of getting his arm. Dash would drop a large boulder which we spent the night moving into place. Gorfang would be hidden but would fire his crossbow.

¹³ Seven points of protection.

It worked. The rock dropped perfectly, hitting him in the small of the back. The spell worked, but hit his leg, not his arm, and so failed to Palsy that limb. The bolt hit his head, wounding him slightly. Dash started throwing more, and smaller, rocks at him. Thingol started running, while Gorfang fired another bolt which hit him in the stomach, whereupon he sat down heavily and said he surrendered.

He was indeed the Old Man of the legends. Since we had beaten him fairly, he was not averse to conversation. We rescued Ben, who was still alive. He had tried to cut his way out of the bag with his dagger, but was noticed by the Old Man. His dagger was taken away and a rope was tied around his waist to prevent that from happening again. Alex was gone. The Old Man said he was delicious. We did recover his 19 healing salves.

We told him of our quest and asked him about the Mountains of Evil. He said that these mountains had never been called the Mountains of Evil. He also thought that the Mask of Chaos might be something that did not look like Chaos, but which led to or hid Chaos. Perhaps the Jrusteli, we asked. Perhaps, was his reply.

Old Man talked freely and we had a good conversation. He said that Dryduster was a supernatural being who raised avalanches and was not merely the name of the highest mountain in the range. We asked about any trolls in the area. He told us that trolls sometimes stopped by on their way to raid, bringing giant beetles for him to eat. We asked him what he wanted most. He replied that he liked music and pretty things. Thingol then sang him a beautiful song, which Old Man appreciated. He asked Gorfang if he wanted to come with him and see the Heart of the Mountain, which was named Gerianchor. Gorfang jumped at the opportunity, which would only cost two of the salves.

The rest of us didn't go, but he told us all about it when he returned the next day. They went deep inside the Mountain, through slits that Old Man had to squeeze through but that Gorfang went through with ease, and over obstacles that Old Man easily walked over, but which Gorfang had to scramble over.

At last they came to an open cavern. One wall was translucent, and deep inside, they saw the Heart. It was a bright red something which beat ever so slowly, brightening and dimming as it beat.

Old Man then asked Gorfang if he wanted an avalanche. He said that Dryduster raised avalanches and that he would release them when travelers strayed to close. It would cost the rest of the salves, but Gorfang agreed. So they crept through more cracks and finally hid behind a giant slab of rock just inside the mountain. Alone, they saw a baby avalanche. It was about the size and shape of a large puppy, made of rock. Quickly, Old Man grabbed it and ran. As they ran back through the mountain, they heard the sound of crashing boulders that seemed to form the words, "Who took my avalanche?!"

Back at his cave, Old Man told us how to care for the avalanche. He told us not to let it loose inside a cave, for then they formed avalanches known as cave-ins. He gave us a bag to carry him in, and a kind of leash. He then told us we could return for more conversation, then showed us the easiest way down the mountain. We went back to Barlinn for some rest and relaxation.

Thingol hoped to use the avalanche as a familiar, but Gorfang reminded him that avalanches are very short-lived once they do their thing. So, Thingol's hopes were dashed.

Chapter 8

The Other Questers

A few days later, on Wildday, a ship docked in Barlinn. It was the Doomquester, captained by Thorkal Doomquester. He had with him Harmast Nightblade, his executive officer and captain of mercenaries, a Sword of Humakt; Lazlo, ship's master; Tim the Encounter, his ship's sorcerer, a Brithini; Simon the Fanatic, a soon-to-be Sword of Humakt with yellow skin and solid red eyes; William Emrys, a Humakti mercenary; and other assorted mercenaries.

Thorkal originally came from Emyrs, in Pamaltela. Lately there had been many assassinations of priests and Thorkal wondered why. His ship had defeated a ship full of broos and they had found a weird chaos artifact on board which looked to be solidified water but was not ice. They threw it overboard. It was thought that this may have come from Pavis, in Genertela so Thorkal and his men set sail for Genertela. Sailing eastwards to round Magasta's Pool, they heard of a giant stone ship which came to Pamaltela with a huge chaotic tree aboard, which quickly made its way inland. It was thought that this was one of the Hellfronds from Teshnos. Upon arrival at Pavis it was also discovered that the assassins were Cacodemon initiates.

So Thorkal was left to ponder on why so many chaos creatures were coming to Pamaltela from Genertela. He thought that the end of the Third Age is nigh. But what was really going on here? So he decided to search out the causes of the end of the Second Age in the hopes that it would give a clue as to the ending of the Third.

They had many adventures, which are too long to repeat here. Just to briefly recount some of them, they met a pyrad who was actually around when the Second Age ended, and from it learned the secret of the Jrusteli God-Learners. They stole a magic javelin from a Luathan named Amprefesno and survived (Simon gave it back and was changed by the Luathan). And now they find themselves in Barlinn looking for mercenaries.

To make a long story short, we told Thorkal of our quest and he hired us on as junior partners. Thorkal decided to go back to the site of their last adventure, a small, unnamed island in the Jrustelan islands.

We reached the island in good time, on the third day of the Sacred Time. The party, led by Harmast, climbed up a hill which surrounded the whole island and came upon a bowl-shaped depression with 8 large octagonal buildings about 10 feet high. The buildings were about 400 feet across, and had a large trap door in the center with a symbol inscribed on it. The symbols were: a skull, the Fate rune, the Law rune, a modified Water rune, an 'S', a modified Air rune, a formless shape, and two circles together next to an arc.

The last time Harmast and company went into the building with the skull inscribed on the door, they had met many undead creatures. This time, though, we decided to go into the building marked with the Fate rune.

Exploring, we found in an anvil-shaped room, a large mound of dirt which, according to Gorfang's Earthsense was quivering slightly. We decided to leave it and continued exploring. Going another way, we came to a room whose entrance was covered by a curtain which looked to be made of insects. Rushing in, we saw four leucines, a four-handed insect that looked something like a gigantic stag beetle. These leucines were wielding four-handed swords.

As we rushed in, one of them threw a blue globe which burst on Slagstone's shield. It blazed in a light which sort of tingled over our bodies but had no immediate ill effects. Simon struck one of them with his sword which had a Bladesharp 6 and a Damage Boost 10 on it. The leucine didn't parry, but he didn't penetrate the chitin! Thingol and Tim both deduced (correctly) that the globe stripped us of the magic that was cast on us. Simon, William, and a mercenary named

Miles all got their left arms chopped off, but we killed the leucines. As the party healed itself, we found three more of the blue globes. Thingol took one, Tim the other two.

Eventually we entered a room occupied by a monster with four hands and four legs, wielding a discus, sword, axe and flail. Directly underneath it was a black ovoid that seemed to shimmer when one looked at it. We tried to parley, but it wouldn't or couldn't answer. Whenever we got within three meters of it, it would stir slightly, but then settle back down again as we backed away. Finally Gorfang shot at it with his crossbow. The bolt tinked and the monster attacked us.

It was a terrible fight. The monster fired a blue beam which would suck away part of your magic points if it hit. Also, the discus was razor-sharp and after throwing it, another would appear in its hand! One of the mercenaries, Zephyr, was chopped in twain by the monster's axe.

The battle continued. Slagstone was knocked unconscious, felled by the blue beam. Thingol tried to Palsy it but was hit by the blue beam before it went off, so it failed to affect the monster. Finally, the monster seemed to slump as if falling unconscious. Immediately, though, a magical glow surrounded it. Thingol immediately threw his blue globe, hoping to cancel the Healing it was undoubtedly trying to throw on itself. But, beyond imagination, it healed itself in only seconds, and Thingol's throw was too late. It did, though, cancel all the magic the party had cast on itself, which were mostly Bladesharps. Thingol dropped out of the fight with a discus in his stomach. William, though dying, called on Humakt to let him take his foe with him into Death. Humakt made his sword great and William hit and killed the monster, then died from his wounds.

In the aftermath, Simon commenced a funeral service for William, breaking his sword. Thus, he failed to notice that Tim was throwing a Tap POW spell. Slagstone was unconscious, William was dead, two other mercenaries were dead, Harmast was occupied with examining the ovoid, and Gorfang didn't know what a Tap spell was. So Thingol was stripped of 6 points of POW, a third of his soul and his magic.

When we all woke up about two hours later, Harmast told Slagstone and Miles to watch outside for monsters. Inside he was going to hold a trial.

He first asked if there was anyone who didn't think him capable and honest enough to hold the trial. If someone did, they would have an immediate Humakti duel. Nobody did. The first person accused was Gorfang, for shooting without Harmast's permission. In firing before everyone was ready, he endangered the whole party. Gorfang argued that Harmast was itching for a fight before his Truesword ran out and so he just decided to do it. Harmast agreed, but told Gorfang never to do anything like starting a combat without waiting orders to do so.

The second person accused was Thingol, for rashly losing his head, hurling the blue globe, thereby directly causing William's death. Thingol argued that William wouldn't have died if we had stopped to regain magic points after the last combat with the leucines. But since Harmast was itching for a fight before his Truesword expired, we went into combat in a non-optimal condition despite the fact that there were some party members who were unwilling to use their magic points to heal the party. He said that he hurled the blue globe in hopes that it would stop the monster from healing itself, relying on the bravery and valor of the party to defeat it even without their offensive spells. Harmast decided that Thingol should pay a weregild to William's best friend, Simon. Simon asked for 750 pennies, payable whenever Thingol had any money. Thingol agreed.

The third person accused was Tim, for Tapping Thingol with malice of forethought. Tim argued that he was angry at Thingol for causing William's death. Harmast asked if he was taking vengeance for William. Tim said no, then went on to say how Thingol was such a poor sorcerer, he didn't know any magic, he hasn't done anything in the last two combats, etc. Harmast said, "Brithini wizards speak words as sweet and firm as honey." Nevertheless, Tim would pay weregild to Thingol or both would have to take an Oath not to plot against each other. Tim decided to pay weregild, and Thingol got an amulet with a new spell in it, Neutralize Poison.

But we were still locked in. We therefore decided to try to find another entrance into the room we initially entered from.

It was a mistake. Two more of those monstrosities came at us from behind. We ran like hell, but we were at the end of a corridor, with a door and another curtain. The door opened into a room filled with webs. Pushing aside the curtain revealed another dog-leg room with an arm encased in plate mail the only thing visible. Slagstone, Gorfang and Harmast pushed their way into the web room, Simon, Tim, Thingol and Miles into the other. Inside, we saw many Wheels strewn about. Both monsters followed us into the room, ignoring Harmast and company.

At the time, we had no hope at all. Wounded, fatigued, depleted of magic points, we were on the brink of death. Miles hid behind Tim, who hid behind Simon. Thingol retreated into the farthest corner. And we all shouted, "Harmast!!!"

Meanwhile, as the monsters made their way into the room, Slagstone, Gorfang and Harmast engaged in a heated debate. Should they, or should they not throw the ovoid we found out into the corridor. They did, and nothing happened. Finally, they came out into the corridor to engage the second monster.

Noting our bedraggled condition, Harmast called on Humakt to restore everyone to full combat potential. Humakt answered, and we were all healed, rested, had full magic points restored and got back all used reusable rune magic. Harmast lost 8 points of POW.

It was another terrible combat. Thingol fell at the start, victim of the blue beam. Miles fell with a discus in his stomach. Gorfang fell, also from the blue beam. But finally, the rest of the party felled the two monsters.

When Miles was about to be healed, Simon noticed that there were wood splinters in Miles's stomach even though the discuses were metallic. How odd!

We picked up Thingol and Miles and carried them back to the door, determined to break through. With everyone pushing, we managed to break through, but suffered 10 points of general damage each. Tim would have died but for Simon's timely intervention. We finally made it back to the Doomquester.

On board, we rested for a while and regained consciousness early the next day. It was here that Harmast recalled that his Truesword which he threw in the last combat had worked automatically and that he hadn't even lost the use of it as he normally should have! Harmast thought that it may have had something to do with the ovoid. We tried it with a spirit magic spell: it automatically worked. And sorcery? Yep, automatically, even when manipulated!

We gave Thorkal all the loot and he divvied it up: of the 300 Wheels we recovered, Thorkal took 150 as leader, and the ovoid as well; he gave 70 to the crew, and the rest to us. He then gave us 135 of the 150 he took for himself and gave out bonuses: as it wound up, Harmast got 70, Simon and Slagstone 50, Tim, Thingol and Miles 15, and Gorfang 10. Thingol gave his 15 to Simon as the first part of his payment. As to the ovoid, Thorkal decided to let one of the sorcerers use it: Tim and Thingol decided it should be Tim.

Next Thorkal called a council. He wanted to capture one of the four-handed monsters. Harmast replied it would be nearly impossible. Miles suggested dressing up like a female monster. Thorkal wondered if these things were made by the Jrusteli or by those who had destroyed them. Thingol said that these monsters must be instinctive, not intelligent. The rest of us backed him up, noting that one of the monsters shot a blue beam at Thingol when he was already unconscious from loss of magic points. Tim declared that we should explore the buildings more. Harmast wondered at the intelligence of capturing one, especially if one got loose. Thingol said that we could capture one if they were unintelligent, and we had either Reflection spells or lots of Countermagic up, because it was the blue beam that did the worst damage.

In the end, Thorkal decided not to try to capture one after all. He said we were going back to Barlinn for the end of the Sacred Time ceremonies and to consult an Orlanthe priest and get Divinations. Thorkal also decided to use his Analyze Magic's to find out about this ovoid. He found out that any spell the holder cast would automatically succeed and that it was a portal into the Hero Plane, among its other powers, if any.

So back to Barlinn we went, arriving on the seventh day of the Sacred Time. We were paid for the time spent, about 144 pennies. Thingol kept enough to pay for lodging and food, and gave the rest to Simon, a mere 24 pennies. So his debt to Simon was now 426 pennies. At the Orlanthe temple, the priest charged 50 pennies per Divination, up to a maximum of 19, all that he had. We bought all 19.

Thorkal: "Are these monsters from the time of the Jrusteli? Yes." "Are they magical constructs? Yes." "Were they made by the Jrusteli or by their enemies? By their enemies." "What were they made from? Jrusteli." "What are they there for? To guard their own relics."

Harmast: "Is the ovoid all we need to open the portal to the Hero Plane? No."

Simon: "We have a jar with a monster apparently bound inside. What is it? Beats me."

Gorfang: "Where is the Mask of Chaos? Everywhere that Chaos is seen but not recognized." "Where is the lair of vitriol? One was at the Baths of Nelat." "Where are the Gray Ones? To the south." "What are the Gray Ones? Extremely dangerous and delicate to deal with." "What properties does my key have? (Here Gorfang received a vision of a dwarf hand inserting the key into a hole in a stone wall. The lines of a door magically appear and open slowly.¹⁴) (The priest believed this to be symbolic, not literal.)

Slagstone: "Where lies the Bane of Time? Beyond the Universe. (The priest believed the Bane to be Chaos. He suggested that perhaps it hasn't been summoned yet.) "What is the Red Beast? The nephew of the Bull. (Slagstone received a vision of a huge red bull-like creature. He was so large that the clouds were dwarfed by him.) "Where is the Red Beast? On the desert wind. "Where is the door that the dwarf's key will open? In the Mountains of the Gray Ones." "When we go to the south, will I need my child (the black bison that Old Man had given him) with me? Best to be safe. The future is unknown to me."

Thingol: "To succeed in our quest, will we need to go beyond the Universe? Ultimately."

Ferric: "Where is Flintnail? In Dragon Pass."

And so we spent our time helping in the ceremonies that result in the rebirth of the world.

¹⁴ Like the gates to the Mines of Moria.

Chapter 9

Rettlesch, Jrustela

The year is now 1622 ST. But now something terrible has happened. Thorkal Doomquester is ill. He is totally incoherent, and nothing seems to help.

Since none of us could do anything for him, we all decided to head to the south of this island. Lazlo, the ship's captain, didn't think it wise for Thorkal to travel, so we had to hire our own boat. We were able to buy passage on a ship carrying marble to Rettlesch. Lazlo said he'd come to Rettlesch as soon as Thorkal's illness burned itself out.

As we entered Rettlesch harbor late on Windsday of Disorder week, we noticed that there were two towers guarding the entrance to the lagoon. We also saw a huge pier in the lagoon. Some of us saw what we believed to be mer-folk ducking behind the pier. It turned out that the ship we had booked passage was on a trading mission: exchanging the marble for, of all things, iron. Slagstone was not too happy about being in such close proximity to iron.

As we disembarked, we noticed a perfectly cubical building cunningly made of marble blocks. It had to have been dwarf work. No human could have done the work so perfectly. We asked what it was. It was the Dwarf Embassy in Rettlesch. As Gorfang walked around it to examine it, a door magically opened from the stone of the building. He walked inside and it closed behind him. The door also opened for Ferric, who also went inside.

Harmast and Miles went to the harbor master. Harmast wanted to purchase some of the iron. The harbor master said the merchants buy and sell in lots of one hundred pounds. Oh well.

When they returned, we went looking for lodging. There were two inns in town, The Headless Dwarf, and The Monolith. We decided to check out The Headless Dwarf. Inside, the innkeeper was stunned. He had never seen a troll before. He asked the rest of us questions, assuming that Slagstone was a wild animal of some sort. Except for Thingol, the party made fun of Slagstone. Tim even tried to cast Dominate Troll to show the innkeeper that he could do tricks (Slagstone, not Tim).

The inn had three kinds of rooms. The common room floor, regular rooms, and one good room. Simon, of course, took the best room. It would cost the rest of us 4 pennies a night, but 12 for the wizards. Tim conned the innkeeper into thinking him a humble scribe, so he paid only 4. Slagstone's room would first be laid out with sawdust. Thingol and Harmast decided to check out The Monolith.

There was a doorman there who expected a tip. Inside the roof had a hole with an honest-to-god monolith sticking out. Again, there were three kinds of rooms. The 'Squire' room would cost 8 pennies per night. The 'King' room, 20 pennies a night. The 'Emperor' room, 60 pennies a night. Thingol decided to go back to The Headless Dwarf and tell Simon all about the rooms at The Monolith. He did, and Simon offered to trade rooms. Thingol agreed, but was still gouged by the innkeeper.

And what about Gorfang and Ferric? Well, they were met by 16 dwarfs in iron armor and armed with heavy crossbows.

Gorfang said, "Greetings from Greatway."

The dwarfs turned around, and without a word, started to walk away. Gorfang and Ferric followed them. They went through an elaborate maze and down a spiral staircase into a large room with a lava pit in it. They were met by a dwarf in robes who asked, "What message from Greatway?" Of course Gorfang didn't really have a message, but he managed to become friends

with the dwarfs here. The dwarfs, who said they were Openhandists, said that they run Rettlesch. The humans found an iron mine and they mine it for the dwarfs, who graciously allow them to keep one percent of it for themselves.

Gorfang and Ferric were taken even lower, where the halls were lined with iron. Here they met those dwarfs like those in Barlinn. Gorfang and Ferric were given cans of food and told the history of the Ironsides, what they call their home. They said they tunneled here at the end of the Second Age. They also told him that after the Red Moon rose, the White Moon of Peace would soon follow to replace the Red Moon.¹⁵ So, Gorfang and Ferric spent the night sleeping on mercury beds.

The next day, reunited, we went to the local sage in town. His name was Sir Eranthropupp, and he was 6 1/2 feet tall, weighed about 150 pounds and was totally black. He was very similar to an Agimori, the men-and-a-half. He said that he was from Pamaltela.

Simon asked about pyarads, specifically how to control them. Eranthropupp said that he would check in his library and told us to come back tomorrow. We did and were told that there was extensive pyarad summonings in Slontos in the early ages. He also said that the Lunars might have that information because of an event known as the Moonburn. He said that pyarads were known to be at Pamalt's court.

We asked him more questions and waited in Rettlesch until he had found his answers. We asked about vitriol. He said that it was an extremely poisonous acid. Hydras were known to produce it, and trolls were rumored to have used it in warfare. The Baths of Nelat were supposed to contain vitriol.

As to the Baths of Nelat, well, Nelat was the god of purification who lives at the bottom of the sea. Orlanth went through these baths and barely survived. But survive he did, and he was granted a drink from Daliath's Well of Wisdom.

The Mountains of Evil. He knew of no mountains called specifically by that name, but he told us of mountains reputed to contain great evil. In Genertela: the Tunneled Hills, the mountains around Dorastor, and the southern Rockwood Mountains. In Pamaltela: the Tarmo, Mari, and the Palarkri Mountains. He suspected that the reference was to the Mari Mountains.

The Red Beast stumped him until Thingol spoke of the vision that Slagstone had seen. Then he told us that Ragnaglar, the Mad God, was supposedly a kinsman to the Storm Bull.

Other than Lhankor Mhy sages, he knew of only three other groups that could be called the Gray Lords. One were a sect of monks in Fonrit who wore gray robes, were pacifistic but were rumors of trouble. Another was a type of tree in the Palarkri Mountains which was totally gray. The last was a group of formless beings who existed before Time and who were probably extinct.

He didn't know about the Mask of Chaos but he did say that the symbol of Bolongo, god of Disorder, was a mask.

Gorfang also paid for 3 casts of Analyze Magic on his key: 1) It is indestructible by mundane means; 2) It can open certain magically locked doors; 3) It can open the door to the Copper Kettle room, where the Copper Mostali were made. Gorfang recalled his vision, of a door that opened.

After a week's time during which some of us had financial difficulties, we received a message from Lazlo. Thorkal was dead. He told us to wait there for him and that he would be there in three days.

¹⁵ Lunar authorities claim that after they conquer the world, the Red Moon will turn white. Lunar enemies claim that the White Moon can't rise until the Red Moon goes down.

The three days passed. The Doomquester didn't show up. So we waited for four more days. She still didn't show up. We suspected an accident, but all of us wondered if it weren't something more sinister.

We decided to go to the local Magasta temple and see if the ship could be found through a Divination from Magasta. We went to the local Triolini, the mer-folk. But when we realized that there wasn't a Magasta worshiper on board who could tell Magasta where he was, we gave that up. But they said that they could send out scouts and try to find the hulk if it had sunk. We politely refused, and went to the temple of Dormal, the sailor hero-god. But Lazlo was only an initiate, not a priest, and besides, Dormal had never been to Justela.

So, on Freezeday of Fertility week, we sailed back to Barlinn on another merchant ship, arriving on Windsday. Slagstone was very worried about his son and so immediately headed towards the troll settlements to ask Kyger Litor. Thingol and Miles accompanied him. The rest of us paid for a Divination from Orlanth. We asked what was the fate of the Doomquester. Orlanth replied, "I don't know."

At the Lhankor Mhy temple we learned that Thorkal died from a chaos curse, one thrown by a single creature.

At the local hospital we were told the grim details of Thorkal's death. He had been literally been eaten from the inside by worms. We were also told that Lazlo had left something for us at the local stables. It was the black bison calf, and the avalanche. Quickly dispatching a messenger who quickly caught up with the three, they returned to Barlinn.

But we were left with a mystery. Who killed Thorkal?

Chapter 10

Pamaltela

Harmast called a meeting of us all.

“I guess you’re all wondering why I’ve called you here today. Thorkal is dead and it was Thorkal who hired me. Thus my honor and duty to him are fulfilled. I have no further obligations to you or you to me. All of us are free to pursue our own quests. I would, however, be proud if you would let me accompany you.”

We all agreed.

“What we should do then is get a leader. This leader wouldn’t be a full-time leader, but mainly would organize our combats.”

It turned out that Harmast was elected leader, with Simon as his second in command.

But what would we do? After some discussion, we decided that we should go to the Mari Mountains, in Pamaltela. But how to get there? We could either hire on to a ship, charter one, or swim. It turned out that there were five ships in harbor of which three of them were from the Jrusteli Archipelago, not suited for long-distance ocean voyaging. We eventually chartered a ship to take us to Pamaltela for 1750 Lunars.

That night, Thingol, Slagstone, Gorfang, and for all we knew, George had the same dream. We saw the Old Man who told us that the end of the world is coming in our lifetime, but not very soon. He told us not to rush too much. We saw a candle slowly burning down and we saw the Red Moon getting weaker, and then stronger. We interpreted this to mean that the end would not happen until the next Wane of the Red Moon.

On our journey down, there was some light entertainment when Ferric and Miles had a duel overseen by Simon. The loser was to be the winner’s servant for the entire journey south. Ferric won handily.

We landed in the port of Nikosdros, in Emyrs. Harmast suggested that we learn the language, since they didn’t speak too many of ours. He sequestered us in our rooms while he would look for a teacher. He told us not to leave the room because there were dangers that we couldn’t comprehend.

Over the next eighteen days we learned how to speak both Fonritian and Aldryami.

Our stay was actually quite pleasant. Nikosdros is a city teeming with people. The streets are tangled and many, and one often can’t get to certain portions of the town from others! The food was mostly fish, but they were very spicy and oily. The weather, though it was just getting into Fire season, was very hot and humid.

Asking around, we got the following information about the various portions of Pamaltela:

Vralos is an area where several city-states thrive. They are ruled by the Patriarch of Nikosdros, a merchant king.

To the west, Enkloso is a temperate land where snow sometimes comes creeping down the mountains and frost rasps inland with the Brown Sea fogs. Green elves live there, with a long history. The many humans in the lowlands and along the shores have Genertelan cultures.

Fonrit, immediately to the east is a region semitropical in climate and life. Its poor are all

blue-skinned¹⁶; as slaves, they are among the worst- treated in the world. The overlords, the Confederates of Fonrit, rule a hodgepodge of conquered duchies, satraps, principalities, and theocracies, and make a common cause only against invading elves. The northern state of Kareeshtu is a great naval power.

Directly to the south, the Tarmo is a high and rugged wilderness, with a spine of mountains whose great peaks are icy all year. Mostly nightriders, frights and gigantic man-eating trolls inhabit this land.

Laskal, to the east of Fonrit, is covered with tropical forests. Yellow elves of many tribes, with no central rule, live here. Many tribes of humans wander among the woods, paying token tribute to the elves as fellow creatures of the wild.

To the east of Laskal and on a peninsula, humans live on Kimos. They maintain an ancient war so old that no one recalls its origins. Their foes are called gorgers, and both sides worship the volcano god. "War-torn Kimos, ragged land of fire."

The Mari lands are broken by hot, harsh mountains. The northern side is humid, tangled with encroaching jungle; the southern side is dry and rutted with canyons. Only violent raiders, savages and monsters live here.

We decided to go through Laskal on our way to the Mari Mountains. We walked to the town of Ouori in Laskal as a stepping stone to the Mari. It would be about 400 miles to the Mari from Ouori. Harmast estimated it would take from six to eight weeks to get there and back. Slagstone stabled his son at an animal keeper, paying him for sixteen weeks with a promise of triple pay beyond that time. Gorfang decided to take his avalanche with him. Food wasn't a problem but transportation would be. We could either go by boat or walk. Boating would be faster but there were unsavory things said about the river as well as that we would have to portage the boats across any rapids that we would find. We took a vote. Harmast, Simon and Tim voted to go by boat. Thingol, Slagstone, Gorfang, Ferric, and Miles voted to walk. Therefore, said Harmast, we would go by boat. The rest of us objected, but Harmast told us quite bluntly that since the three who wanted to go by boat had paid for most of the trip, we would go by boat.

¹⁶ Survivors of the Artmali Empire, we conjectured.

Chapter 11

The River

The river was wide and flowed smoothly. We tended to stay in the middle of the river. We had three canoes, each with two porters, who were Veldang, one of the four races of humans in Glorantha. In the first were Harmast, Tim, and Miles. In the second were Slagstone, Gorfang, and Ferric. In the third were Simon and Thingol. On the first day, we saw many crocodiles, eels, and large snakes draped over tree branches. On the second we saw our first yellow elves. We also saw a creature about fifteen feet high with a round body, two wiry legs, black skin, and long fangs. The porters called them “nightstalkers”.

On the third day out, we were attacked by some sort of monster. It attacked the canoe with Simon and Thingol. The monster bit at the forward porter who screamed and dropped his spear. The other porters threw their spears in panic and mostly missed. Because it was difficult to move in the canoes, Simon grabbed his bow while Thingol cast a Damage Resist on himself, then grabbed the porters spear. Tim put a Damage Boost on Simon’s arrow while others threw assorted Disruptions at the creature. Simon hit it perfectly in the forebody and the monster sank beneath the waters.

About a half-hour later three hydras (!!!) attacked us. We had a chance to shoot at them before they came upon us. Gorfang shot at the lead hydra with his crossbow that he had Speedarted and Multimissiled. Slagstone took up some rocks and began hurling them. Each hydra went for a canoe. Gorfang shot again with his crossbow, hitting it many times. Slagstone missed with his rocks, but Thingol, who had first cast Damage Resist and then taken up his sling, hurled a bullet at the hydra menacing him, actually managed to hit it, whereupon the hydra retreated beneath the waters.

The other two hydras then shifted down one canoe. Simon chopped at the heads with his Damage Boosted sword, removing one. The hydra bit with all its heads but missed. Simon then removed another head as well. One of the porters was killed by the other hydra. Gorfang shot again at the hydra menacing his canoe. It too dived beneath the waters but resurfaced on the other side. Slagstone continued to throw rocks at it.

Simon again removed another head, but the remaining four hit him. He was hit in the right arm, chest, left leg, and right arm again. Not only did the monsters bite, but they exuded an acid which ate away at Simon’s armor, as well as injected a poison!! Simon impaled the monster in it’s body when a head bit clean his right arm. The dead monster sank with Simon’s sword in it, but fortunately the hydra did not swallow his arm. It fell into the boat beside Simon, whose armor was pretty much destroyed and had taken two injections of poison. He fell, in shock.

Thingol was attacked by the hydra, but his Damage Resistance held. Then, using his dagger, he impaled the monster in one of the heads. More rocks were thrown, and more bolts fired. Thingol was attacked again by the remaining hydra but again his Damage Resistance held, but just barely. Miles Disrupted the hydra. Thingol was attacked, but dodged the remaining heads. Finally, the hydra was driven off.

Thingol now had to try to revive Simon, who had been Healing himself. He had the amulet that contained the spell of Neutralize Poison, but he wasn’t very good at it. Tim had the ovoid that would guarantee the success of the spell, but he was in the lead canoe! They frantically paddled back, but Thingol decided that there just wasn’t enough time. He cast it two times, one successfully, the other unsuccessfully. It was just enough.

The guide, Zuzu, looked over Simon and said that Simon would probably be sick for seven weeks, if he survived. Simon was by now delirious. Zuzu also recalled that there was supposed to be a village upriver about one night’s journey away. We were unwilling to move Simon, but when

Zuzu told us that wherever there are little hydras, bigger ones are nearby, we decided to risk the journey. Fortunately, Simon survived the trip.

The village, Riverbend, consisted of about twelve huts in a circle. They accepted us kindly and they and the porters engaged in furious trading for about three hours. The children scampered about and pulled off the blanket that Miles had concealed his right hand in. His sword had grown onto his hand.

This is how it happened: In our fight with the hydras, after one had ducked under the water, Miles noticed a grayish slime on the surface. He stuck his hand into it and it came out coated with the sticky stuff. Then he saw glowing eyes under the water and, without first wiping the stuff off, grabbed his sword. The next morning, he noticed that his sword had grown onto his hand. We all made rather nasty jokes about hemorrhoids and scratching himself. We also noticed that the sword was throbbing at a different rate than his own heartbeat. This made us think that perhaps the sword was alive.

Eventually, the trading stopped and serious conversation began. We found a woman who offered to care for Simon until he got better. Harmast said that the rest of us, except for two of us and the guide, would press on to the Mari Mountains. When Simon got better, the four of them would head back down the river to Ouori and wait for the rest of us to return.

By drawing lots, it was decided that Tim and Ferric would stay with Simon. Tim lent Thingol the use of the ovoid. We paid the woman with all food that we had. We wanted to borrow Simon's Cornucopia for the journey ahead. We all argued about it and finally referred it to Harmast. He gave it back to Simon, saying that it wasn't community property. So we hired an Agimori hunter named Caswallon to catch us food. Our guide would be another Veldang named Mars the Merciless, who actually owned a sword and armor!

Also in the village was a Duck named Enkavar. He was born in Dragon Pass, but left when the Lunar Empire offered a year's exemption from taxes for every duck head brought in. He sailed down to Pamaltela, then crewed on a barge heading up the river to trade. But on the way he caught psittacosis, parrot fever. The crew put him ashore, paid a woman his next season's wages to take care of him, and then went on upriver. He decided to join us.

So we consisted of Harmast, Slagstone, Thingol, Gorfang, Miles, Mars, Enkavar, and Caswallon; human, troll, human, dwarf, human, Veldang, duck, and Agimori. Quite a motley crew.

We set off from the village hoping to cover the 300 miles or so to the Mari Mountains in about a season. Caswallon did the hunting for us when the food we had left ran out. Enkavar had to forage for himself. On Week 1, Day 6, Enkavar fell ill with the Shakes. Fortunately, it was only a minor attack and he was able to continue on the next day.

Three days later (Week 2, Day 2), Miles fell ill with Soul Waste. Again it was minor attack. The next day, Enkavar climbed a very tall tree, (about 200 feet) to look ahead. What he saw was a large pillar of black smoke coming from the middle of a large clearing. We thought for a while and decided that Enkavar and Caswallon would go ahead and scout it out.

The clearing was about 100 yards in diameter. In it, there were stone buildings (!) in various states of disrepair. The buildings formed a rough square and between the buildings, a wall had been put up. From the amount of lichen growing on the buildings and walls, they determined that the wall was much more recent. Inside this outer perimeter, they saw a much larger building as well as the pillar of smoke. Since that saw open holes in the sides of the buildings, they decided to enter.

What they saw was a small three-meter square room with a pit across it. At the opposite corners arches went off into darkness. Logs spanned the pit to the two arches and another connecting the two together. Caswallon, in a fit of stupidity, threw Enkavar across to the other side, towards the far wall and not towards either arch. Enkavar tried to grab the log, but missed and fell,

screaming, twenty feet into what appeared to be a water-filled pit. Unfortunately, the water was about three inches deep. The log fell in too, right next to Enkavar, nearly scaring him out of his feathers.

Caswallon was about to lower a rope to Enkavar when he saw a lizard-like creature wielding a poleaxe emerge from the left archway. He immediately ducked out of the room he was in. The lizard looked down into the pit and saw Enkavar. Caswallon waited for a few seconds and then jumped into the doorway, but not into the room. He didn't see the lizard. Enkavar, who had seen what the lizard had done while Caswallon was outside, falsely cried, "Look out behind you!" Caswallon jumped into the room and was promptly attacked by the lizard, who had jumped across the pit and into the opposite corner to ambush Caswallon.

While they fought, Enkavar took his rope and grappling hook and attempted to catch it on another of the logs. He caught the hook on it, and began to climb. But as Fate would have it, he fell back in, landed on his head, and fell unconscious. Meanwhile, the lizard had shattered Caswallon's spear. But taking out his axe, he then sliced the lizard in half across the stomach.

Eventually Caswallon got Enkavar out of the pit, who was mumbling something about "Ducka Fal" and divine intervention.

The next day (Week 2, Day 4), we decided to go back and investigate further. We went back to the same building and went across the logs to the left archway. Enkavar, who was next-to-last, kicked the log in just as Caswallon, the last person, was crossing. But Caswallon, with incredible dexterity, managed to catch on the ledge. Enkavar would have kicked him in but we told him not to.

We emerged from three smaller archways into a large room on the near right corner. It was a square room about 20 meters across. In the far right and near left corners, three sets of doors were on a kind of balcony that stairs went up to on the far and near walls. In the center, running left to right, were a series of wooden fences that appeared to have locks on them. On the center left, the fences and the balconies formed a large open area with three metal gates on the left wall. In the far left corner, a set of double doors were set on the floor, which obviously led down into the ground.

Inside, we saw a lizard who was doing something with the locks. He turned, saw us, and immediately started unlocking the gates, trying to head for the far left corner. We immediately spread out, Harmast, Mars and Slagstone heading for the large open area. The lizard opened the double doors and waited.

In a few seconds, an even larger lizard, about eight feet high, came out. Miles, who had been trying to climb over one of the fences (with only one hand, remember) dropped off. Mars prepared his crossbow. Gorfang shot at it, but tinked. Miles' sword now started humming and slightly moving on its own. Enkavar slung at it and hit. The big lizard crashed through the fence between it and Mars. Caswallon impaled the small lizard in the arm with an arrow and it fell.

And then a second big one came out. Harmast finally broke through to join combat. Slagstone threw a stone but it bounced off. Enkavar missed with his sling. Thingol successfully Palsied the big lizard in the leg, and it fell. Miles hit with his sword, wounded a small one, but nothing spectacular happened.

And then a third one came out. Caswallon's next arrow missed this big lizard but not Mars. Fortunately, it bounced off his armor. Enkavar's sling broke and criticised Caswallon in his leg, shattering the kneecap. Mars was hit by the second big lizard's club, but it too bounced. Harmast then fumbled and fell down, but Slagstone interposed himself between the big lizard and Harmast. Miles hit again, but was parried. Mars' blow was also parried.

Now four more little ones came out. Gorfang shot again, hit the second big one in the head, who promptly fell down. He in turn was hit, but his armor held. Miles hit again, but was parried.

By now, the first big lizard had crawled up the stairs to the far right corner. It opened the door, sunlight streaming in, and crawled out. Enkavar downed another small one with his short sword. Mars chopped an arm off a small lizard. Slagstone drove his poleaxe through the heart of the last big lizard. And Miles finally killed the last small lizard.

While we rested briefly, we heard a strange noise. Looking up, we saw the roof hinge up and we saw the ugliest creature any of us had seen look down on us.

She was about twelve feet high and had sallow yellow skin. Her hair was greasy and her nipples a disgusting shade of green. She had only one eye and was wearing nothing except a loincloth. She had a pot with someone inside, and wielded a ladle.

She shook the ladle at us, dipped it in her pot and threw the contents at Miles. Fortunately it missed, but some of it splashed on his left arm, where it burned like acid. We all started to back away, clogging the tunnel back to the room with the pit. She threw again, missed, but Gorfang got some on his right arm, where it again hurt very much. Meanwhile Caswallon and Thingol jumped across and wrestled the log from the right archway to the left.

Miles, who was separated from us, was again the target for her soup. He was hit on his head, where it burned off his hair. Miles fell from the shock. He started crawling towards us, his skin visibly blackening and roughening. Another ladle-full missed. Miles attempted to Disrupt her, but failed to overcome her. Gorfang and Harmast both heard hissing replies to her cackles and decided not to make a stand. Another ladle hit Miles directly, splashing all over his body.

She pointed at Slagstone and said, "You got my children. Now I'm going to curse you!" And she grabbed something glowing out of the air and threw it at Slagstone. It overcame him, and went through his armor like it wasn't there. She was about to throw a second one but we had made it into the forest. All of us, that is, except for Harmast, Gorfang, and Miles. Harmast tried a Heal Wounds divine spell on Miles with no visible effect. They stumbled across the log, kicked it in and ran for the forest.

As they ran, she threw another curse at Gorfang. Again it overcame its victim and went through Gorfang's armor just as it had gone through Slagstone's.

Soon a fair-sized stream of lizards came pouring out of the buildings. But they seemed not to be familiar with the jungle, so we gave them the slip.

The next day, we noticed that Miles appeared to be taking the form of a lizard-man, just like the ones we fought. His skin was turning scaly, his bones were reshaping, and he was growing a tail. Strangely, his sword-arm remained normal, or as normal as it could be. Where Gorfang was hit, his skin was also changing.

We held a small council. Harmast wanted to go back and force the hag to take back her curse. But common sense prevailed and we continued on our journey.

On the night of Week 2 Day 5, we camped and set watch. During the watch of Harmast, Thingol and Miles, Harmast heard a noise. We quickly woke everybody else up. And found ourselves surrounded by about twenty tall, yet not as fat, trolls, wearing armor and carrying swords and shields.

Chapter 12

Captivity

Some of them had bows ready too. Caswallon knew of these types of trolls. They were called jungle trolls. And he also recognized the particular clan. They were supposedly the meanest clan. Their leader said in West Jungle, "You're all our slaves. Come on!"

Slagstone tried to communicate with them in Darktongue but was surprised when they didn't seem to understand it. The leader then asked who spoke West Jungle. When Mars and Caswallon answered, he picked up Mars.

"What is orange thing?", pointing at Slagstone

When Mars didn't answer immediately, he picked up Caswallon and started shaking him. Mars got his wits in place and answered, "A dark troll."

"Oh yeah? Our king wants a dark troll."

Picking up Mars again, "Why with witch-spawn?", pointing to Miles.

Caswallon answered, "He was our friend and he got...."

"Was hit by witch-curse," the troll declared.

Picking up Caswallon, "What is short thing", pointing to Gorfang.

Mars replied, "He's a dwarf."

The leader sniffed Gorfang, but didn't seem to react the way a dark troll would react, which would be to kill it and eat it.

Pointing to Enkavar, picking up Mars, "Other short thing?"

"He's a duck and he's....", replied Caswallon.

"He your pet," he again declared.

Turning to Slagstone, but not picking him up, he asked, "Is duck good to eat?"

"I've never eaten a duck... yet."

"Is dwarf good to eat?"

"Sometimes yes, sometimes no."

"Is this dwarf good to eat?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Slagstone had no real answer to this question, but the leader didn't seem interested in immediate taste-testing. He ordered us to put our weapons in the center, away from the fire. This we did, though they let us keep our armor, and shorter weapons like daggers, short swords, and slings. They manacled Miles' sword-arm to his other behind his back.

They frogmarched us off about five miles to the east. Eventually, we came to another river which we crossed with some difficulty. Just across, we found ourselves in a grove of banyan trees, the biggest we had ever seen. They took us inside one, chained one of our feet into a big circle, chained the ends to the trunk of the banyan, and left us.

The next day, they let us stew for the morning. Then, in the afternoon, some of the trolls came inside. They examined Enkavar, Gorfang closer, and Slagstone the most. Then they separated Slagstone and took him elsewhere.

He was brought to another banyan tree, where an extremely old male troll began to teach him the language that they spoke, which they called Shadownspeech. It took him twenty-four days to learn the basics of grammar. Slagstone wondered why these trolls didn't speak Darktongue. The old troll told him that they received Shadownspeech from the ancient Mistress Race trolls. He said that there was even a Castle of Lead nearby. Together they decided that probably neither Darktongue nor Shadownspeech were exactly what the Mistress Race spoke. Also, during the twenty-four days it took him to learn Shadownspeech, he discovered what the hag's curse was. Slagstone was impotent.

Meanwhile, the rest of us just sat around. Counting, we estimated that there were around 300 trolls in this village, of which about 200 were adults, split fairly evenly between the sexes. The trolls fed us greens and raw meat daily. With nothing else to do, Thingol learned some West Jungle from Miles. One day, a whole bunch of female trolls came into the village, surrounded by a heavy guard of males. Harmast was beginning to show signs of stress.

Finally Slagstone had learned enough Shadownspeech for him to be able to speak to the queen. He was taken to another banyan, where he met the queen, an aged and large but again, not fat troll.

"You are from the north?"

"Yes."

"You are a dark troll?"

"Yes. I came from Fronela, crossed Genertela, have seen Jrustela, and finally have come here in search of...."

"We have waited for this day for so long!"

"You may want to know that I have been cursed with...."

"Our whole race has been cursed! You are an uzko. We call ourselves muri. We are cursed because we cannot withstand the cold. We no longer have the power over snow as we did in the past."

Slagstone told her stories of the "good old days" in Fronela, where he had raided in the winter.

"Yes! We would like to bring winter back here. But to survive it, we would have to have the power to survive winter. To do this, we would have to crossbreed. And that is the purpose for which we have brought you here for. We must have a feast! Which companion of yours is most suitable for the elders? The rest of your companions will be good enough for the rest of us."

"You don't seem to understand. I have been cursed."

"You mean... you've lost your sense of taste?"

“No. I mean that I’m impotent. But I must tell you of our...”

“Silence! Hmmm. We must break this curse. I must confer with the priestesses.”

And she called in all the priestesses. There were Kyger Litor, Zorak Zoran, Lodril, and a few that he didn’t recognize. But no Argan Argar. They conferred for a while.

Slagstone asked, “Can I speak? I must tell you of the curse of Chaos.” And he told them of Urrquong and the Old Man and the prophecy and the tools.

The queen remarked, “Well, we don’t have the Curse of Kin. Maybe we can combine and break our respective curses.”

Slagstone now tried to talk the trolls out of eating the rest of us. He was only partly successful. Due to the nature of the quests of Slagstone, Gorfang, and Thingol, she decided to spare Gorfang and Thingol. Also, Miles, now that he was a lizard man, would probably also be spared, since the lizards tended to have ashy tastes.

So until the time when they would try to break Slagstone’s curse, he was allowed to wander around the village, but not to leave it. When he entered the tree with the rest of us, he was guarded closely.

It turned out that Slagstone had gotten us the layout of the village, so that we could plan an escape. He also learned that these trolls used fire much more than they did in Genertela. They even smithed their own weapons! Gorfang offered to teach their metal-workers some of his tricks, but they were far beyond his limited knowledge.

Meanwhile, Harmast was getting more and more uncomfortable. He did not fancy getting eaten and with all the trolls around, there didn’t seem much chance to escape. He finally decided he would try to call on Humakt through Divine Intervention at the last minute to escape being eaten.

But one day some trolls came over to Harmast and said, “So you think you can use Divine Intervention to get out of here, huh? Go ahead! Do it now! We’ll put our swords down!”

Which they did. But when Harmast hesitated, they said, “I think we’ll eat your left leg!” Just as they were about to cut it off, Harmast tried to DI. It didn’t work. The trolls laughed and beat Harmast up, breaking many bones. It seemed that we were trapped inside an enemy temple or shrine and thus could not call for Divine Intervention.

After four more days, it was time for the ritual that would make Slagstone potent again. He had not been told this, but he had the uneasy feeling that if it didn’t work, he might have overstayed his welcome. The ritual would last three days and end at the midnight separating summer and rain. It would involve the summoning of a Dehore, a spirit of Dark, which Slagstone would have to defeat. If he defeated and bound it, it would bear the curse instead of Slagstone.

The first night he was not allowed to eat. They also taught him the spell to Bind Dehore. He had to forget the spells of Ironhand and Disruption to hold it. The second night he was placed in near-total sensory deprivation. And then the third night came.

Harmast decided that tonight would be the best night to try to make a break for freedom. Gorfang, who had discovered that he could open the locks that bound us quite easily, unlocked Harmast, but made some noise in the process. Two guards came in to investigate. Harmast took his dagger and buried it in the chest of the first guard. He fell, dead, and Harmast grabbed his sword. The fight was quick. Harmast chopped him in the leg, then killed him through the throat. Gorfang quickly unlocked the rest of us, and we all ran for it. None of us had our spirit magic fetishes except for Mars and Miles. The only weapons we had were two bastard swords, a long bow, and assorted short swords, slings, and daggers. Nevertheless, we headed out of the village. Fortunately,

over the howling of the trolls who were summoning the Dehore, the noise we made was not heard. We made it safely away from the vicinity of the village.

And what of Slagstone? At exactly midnight, the Dehore walked in. It was tall, black, and hooded. It cast its cloak of Darkness around Slagstone and applied its Fearshock. Despite his one-point Spirit Block, Slagstone died instantly. But, calling on Kyger Litor, he returned to life, losing 8 POW in the process. He quickly made short work of the Dehore in normal spirit combat, bound it, and the curse was lifted.

The other trolls were quite disturbed about our escape. They had to wait to send a hunting party after us until the celebration was over. So Slagstone was left behind in the village, possibly to stay there the rest of his life. The trolls would send some messengers to Ouori to bring back Slagstone's bison son. Was this the task appointed for him by Old Man? Was this the task that would make "mothers praise him until Time ends?"

Only time will tell.

Chapter 13

The Mari Mountains, Pamaltela

Since we were in troll country, we thought it best to hurry somewhat. Since they had taken us east, we decided to head southwest, to get back to the River. Since we didn't have machetes, we traveled at a lesser pace. We had remarkably few encounters.

Finally, on Week 9 Day 3, we caught our first glimpse of the Mari Mountains. We also noticed that it was starting to rain much more frequently. Our pace slowed even further.

On Week 12 Day 7, we found ourselves in hilly country. It was then that we met Tira, a female Agimori who was a member of the Azzeela tribe.

Later that day, a winged reptile swooped down towards us. It grabbed Mars and carried him off, weapons and all.

“The sacred animal of my tribe!” exclaimed somebody.

We all turned around and there stood the ugliest human we had ever seen. This person was comparable to the witch-hag we had seen earlier. It turned out that his name was Worfang. He was a recently-initiated shaman of the Azzeela tribe, the same as Tira's.

Harmast suggested that perhaps Worfang could create new fetishes for our spirit magic spells in return for proper recompense. Worfang agreed, and we set out for his village, three days away.

On the first day out, Harmast thought he heard noises coming from all around us. He told us in Fonritian to prepare for an attack. Thingol threw a Damage Resist 6 on himself and Harmast threw a Bladesharp 4 on one of his swords. But since Worfang and Tira did not speak Fonritian, they didn't understand.

Simultaneously, a spell hit Gorfang which failed to overcome him, and four arrows flew from the trees towards Caswallon. The first impaled, the rest also and Caswallon fell dead. Then a second later, they rose up out of their hiding places.

They were humanoid, short and bald, with greenish skin. Later we would learn that for some reason they were called “yellow elves” by everybody. Thingol and Enkavar pulled out their slings, threw simultaneously but missed. Harmast readied his sword, jumped forward to engage the nearest, and chopped off its leg. Miles also jumped forward and chopped off a leg of a different elf. Thingol missed with his sling cast but Enkavar hit one in the left arm. More arrows flew, hitting the duck in the abdomen, felling him.

Again arrows flew, this time towards Thingol. One impaled him in the arm, forcing him to drop his sling. One missed, and the last two were resisted. Worfang cast Protection 5 on himself, then Disrupted an elf in the chest. Miles finished off the one he had downed, splitting it in half. Tira pulled out her axe, and killed her first elf. Thingol was hit by a spell which overcame him. He felt very Demoralized. An elf ran towards Enkavar, decided not to finish him off, and instead attacked Thingol from behind. He impaled Thingol, but it bounced off his Damage Resistance. Harmast engaged two elves at once and chopped off one of the elves' legs. He was hit by the other elf but he parried. Enkavar now cast a Heal Wound divine spell, healing himself of almost all of his wounds. Again the arrows flew, penetrating right through Tira's left arm. It hung there limply.

The bowman (or bow-elf) shot again, hitting Worfang three times out of four. They all bounced off Worfang's Protection. Miles killed the elf that Harmast had downed first, then sprang to the nearest tree shouting, “One move and the tree gets it!” Harmast hit his foe and parried the

return blow. Gorfang critically hit his foe with his hammer, but the elf got his spear in the way, blocking it entirely. Tira heroically chopped another elf's arm off, despite the loss of her right arm. Enkavar snuck up behind the elf who had decided not to kill him but instead had attacked Thingol and slashed him across the kneecap. The elf fell and Thingol, who was going to try to punch the elf left-handed, tried to kick him instead but missed. Worfang brandished his spear and put it right through the elf's shield, left leg, and into the ground. Unfortunately he couldn't get it back out, so he let go of it. He was, though, hit in return in the right arm. More arrows flew, hitting Miles in the right leg only.

Again arrows flew, four of them hitting Thingol, one of them impaling. But they all bounced off his Damage Resistance. By this time, the elves had started backing away. Knowing the jungle better than we did, they all got away except for the one who had his leg pinned to the ground. Before we could stop him, Worfang finished him off.

So we had four elf corpses, one leg, and Caswallon's body. They didn't carry much loot. There was a dagger, three short swords, a spear, and a bow. Gorfang touched the bow and it promptly withered. Worfang also found some herbs in their pouches. Most of them were edible, but one of them was a kind of poison that they apparently could rub onto their arrow points.

We made it to Worfang's village with no further difficulty. The headman welcomed us, since we were with two members of their tribe. He also intimated that we should give a gift to them for their hospitality.

So now we had to regain our fetishes. The head shaman, the one who had initiated Worfang, was willing to remake a fetish for Enkavar in return for all his tail feathers. Reluctantly he agreed, and went through a painful ordeal while the shaman plucked them out one by one. Harmast, after some haggling, gave the shaman 15 Wheels. The shaman accepted it, not as payment, but to make a necklace. Gorfang turned one of his tin cans into a metal knife blade. And Thingol offered to teach Worfang Fonritian for his fetish.

We stayed in the village for about two weeks. During this time, a plains nomad from the other side of the Mari Mountains entered the village. His name was Gunnar, and he was an Agimori.

Also during this time we asked about the Mari Mountains. The shaman told us that they were horrible, with giant flying monsters and vicious bandit tribes. We also asked about the Gray Ones. He could tell us only that they were legendary and that they were said to have helped make the world. He also drew us a crude map of the Mari Mountains. There were six main mountain peaks. The first and easternmost was said to harbor large humanoids, about two men in height. The second was where the bandits were supposed to live. The third was filled with ghosts. The fourth was said to have many large snakes. The fifth and westernmost was supposed to have lots of very small trees. The sixth was set south and between the first two. It was here that traders were said to live, traders who, according to the shaman, cheated people.

So we decided to head between the first two peaks towards the traders. We would try to keep in between the two. And off we went.

The going was fairly rough. We kept away from the most treacherous routes up, but also checked very carefully the easiest routes up. We didn't want to get ambushed again like we had back at the Plateau of Statues!

It was also very cold. Tira made furs out of animal skins, but not before Thingol caught pneumonia. We camped for six days until he got better.

On the way, we also had seen giant leathery-like things flying far overhead. In addition, every so often we would come across an abandoned campsite.

One day, we saw a giant footprint. It was about five(?) feet long, with three large clawprints. These clawprints were at very strange angles in relation to the foot. Tira proclaimed that they were troll-like despite the claws. Worfang announced that this was walktapus country. Thingol noted that the trail probably followed the easiest way up the mountain. The snow was fresh, but that wasn't any indication of how long since that had been made.

We decided to follow the trail of footprints despite some misgivings from certain members of the party.

After several hours, we were ambushed by three things coming from our right over a small hillock. Two of them were what we called "mountain trolls", about twelve feet high, though they were hunched over, and extremely long arms. The third was the same size, but had three heads.¹⁷

Tira and Worfang began backing up, while Harmast and Gorfang prepared their weapons with Gunnar running away. Thingol and Miles stood stunned. The trolls still advanced so we attacked.

Tira hit the first troll, and it was here we discovered something awful. Their blood was a potent acid. Thus not only were our weapons damaged every time we penetrated, but we had to watch out for the blood that poured out of the wound! Gorfang fumbled and his helmet slid over his eyes. Harmast was parried by the three-headed troll.

The first troll clawed at Tira. Though she parried with her shield, her left arm was nearly taken off, and she flew back two meters. Thingol was also attacked by the first troll. He was hit, but he failed to dodge. He had his left arm taken off and flew backwards about two meters. The second troll missed Miles but hit Gorfang. Fortunately, it tinked off Gorfang's armor and shield. The three-headed troll tinked off Harmast's shield, and Enkavar dodged the troll and started to bury himself in the snow.

The first troll ignored the downed figures of Tira, who was Healing herself, and Thingol, who was bleeding, and ran after Gunnar. Fortunately, the troll missed. The three-headed one attacked Harmast twice but missed both times, while Harmast threw a Truesword on his weapon and chopped off one of the three-headed troll's heads. Fortunately, he was not hit by the blood. Miles hit the second troll critically in the head, knocking it unconscious and dodging the blood. His sword/hand, however, was damaged by the acid. Worfang noticed the acidic blood and immediately started throwing Disruption spells. He scored on the three-headed (now two-headed) troll in the abdomen.

Worfang scored again on the left arm of the two-headed troll with a Disruption. Gunnar shot an arrow and impaled the chest of the troll chasing him who fell over nicely. Enkavar fired his sling and hit the two-headed troll, but Harmast was unable to dodge the blood. His right leg armor started to sizzle away. Tira threw a Protection spell on herself. Harmast threw a Shield 2 and then hit the two-headed troll in the right leg, causing it to fall over, but his sword was totally dissolved when he pulled it out. Miles discovered that he could heal his sword's damage with a Heal spell. Gunnar's next arrow tinked while Worfang's next Disruption failed to overcome the troll.

Again, Worfang's Disruption didn't overcome the troll. Gunnar successfully Disrupted the first troll in the chest. Tira got up and hit the two-headed troll in the arm. Enkavar hit and the blood splashed harmlessly. Miles fumbled and hit Harmast in the left arm.¹⁸ Fortunately, it tinked off his armor and Shield. The two-headed troll stood up again while Worfang's Disruption failed and so did Gunnar's. Gorfang, his helmet finally off, responded to Gunnar's cries for help by Disrupting the troll in the abdomen. Harmast's attempt to Disrupt the two-headed troll failed. Tira hit the two-headed troll in the right leg, the blood hitting nobody. The first troll hit Gunnar and tinked, but Gunnar was knocked back a meter or so. The troll's second claw missed. Worfang's attempt to use

¹⁷ Which we players dubbed Larry, Curly, and Moe.

¹⁸ Fumble #90, maximum damage to nearest friend.

his spear on the first troll was an utter failure. He fumbled and got snow in his eyes. The two-headed troll swung at Miles but tinked, and also swung at Tira, but missed. Enkavar then slung and hit, but the blood splashed Miles in his abdomen.

Tira hit the two-headed troll, but her axe was dissolved when it came out. The first troll tinked off Gunnar, who was rolling around in the snow. Miles' hit was parried. Harmast tinked off the two-headed troll. The two-headed troll swung at Tira. Her dodge was not good enough, and she was split in two. Harmast tried to throw a Heal Wound on Tira, but his spell failed. Gorfang hit the first troll in the left leg who immediately responded by hitting Gunnar in the right leg.

Miles Healed himself, then attacked the two-headed troll. The first troll hit Gunnar and tinked, then missed him. Harmast hit the two-headed troll in the left leg. Gorfang impaled the first troll in the chest, killing it. Miles then fumbled again, hitting Harmast in the head, knocking him unconscious.¹⁹

Worfang finally cleared the snow from his eyes, then threw a Disruption at the two-headed troll. The spell overcame the troll, and it died. Miles finished off the unconscious troll, avoiding the blood. Gorfang pulled his hammer out of the troll in a sorry state. Enkavar fumbled and fell over.

The fight was over, but as it ended we heard a howling sound. We healed up as best we could, Thingol getting his arm reattached by Worfang.

Something very odd we noticed was that underneath Miles' scales was something black and charred. Whatever it was, it wasn't flesh. Thingol recognized it as wood!?

As we pondered what to do, Worfang pointed out that big carnivores don't generally live close together. Therefore this might be some sort of family group. So if we stayed here, we'd either be completely safe or be attacked by their friends/allies. We decided to track them back to their lair in hopes of finding shelter, for night was falling and it was getting cold.

After about several hours, we found their lair. Instead of a hoped-for cave, it was merely a hollow against a cliff. We found their food supply, mostly half-gnawed pieces of animal flesh. Miles wondered if there was any human flesh in their gruesome pile.

The next morning we discovered Miles was missing. After some discussion, we followed his tracks. Oddly, after a while, they went from two-footed to four-footed, heading deeper into the mountains. We thought that perhaps the transformation from Mad Meg's potion had gone a bit too far. Continuing to follow the tracks, we found that they went back to being two-footed again. Then they went into a cave. We went in. Gorfang with his special senses detected something coming around the nearest twist in the cave. Gunnar cried, "Oh, Miles!"

What came around the bend was a monstrosity. It was troll-sized, with wooden skin and four arms each bearing swords. Swords that were growing into each hand. And it had the face of Miles.

Gunnar impaled with his bow, but it tinked. Worfang Disrupted Miles in his lower right arm. Enkavar threw an Illusion Projection onto Harmast's dagger to increase the damage it would do. Miles hit Gunnar, but tinked off his armor. He also struck at Harmast, who parried and was not injured. Harmast then struck, impaling Miles in the left leg. Harmast also yelled, "Run! Run!" Gorfang hit Miles in the left leg too. Miles fell over. Worfang Disrupted Miles again in the left leg. Gunnar shot again, but tinked.

All of us started to run, except for Gunnar who stayed to shoot two more arrows.

We ran for about thirty seconds before we noticed that Enkavar and Gorfang, having shorter

¹⁹ Fumble #87, hit nearest friend for rolled damage.

legs, were behind the rest of the humans, and that Gunnar was even further behind. Worse, Miles was catching up, having Healed his leg.

So, Harmast ran back towards Enkavar and Gorfang, casting a Shield 2 on himself. Worfang began casting Coordination 3. Thingol started to cast a Palsy 10. Enkavar cast a Speedart, slung at Miles and missed. Gunnar turned and fought Miles and tinked. Miles missed Gunnar, and Gunnar dodged Miles' other blow. Miles hit again, taking Gunnar's right arm off. Worfang Disrupted Miles in the lower right arm.

Worfang's next Disruption fizzled. At the same time as Thingol's spell went off, Miles hit Gunnar twice. Gunnar parried the first but the second hit him square in the chest. Gunnar died as Miles fell unconscious from the Palsy in the head. Simultaneously, Harmast and Worfang hit, the former with the dagger, the latter with a Disruption. Miles was dead.

But we weren't out of the woods yet. Miles DI'ed and something huge and ugly appeared from nowhere. Worfang "saw" that its POW was in the range from 31 to 40. Thingol recognized it as Cacodemon.

Cacodemon grabbed Miles' body, then saw Worfang. It raised its hand and zapped something at Worfang. Fortunately, it didn't overcome Worfang. We immediately started running again. Cacodemon swallowed Miles and then zapped again, overcoming Worfang. It looked like three or more Disruptions combined into one spell.²⁰ Finally, we got to some rocks where Worfang hid himself out of the line of sight.

Cacodemon then started flying in the direction of the cave that Miles came out of. We, on the other hand, started to head down the mountains below the snow line. We camped and thought about our recent experience.

Cacodemon is the son of the Devil. He is the Chaos god of Disorder and of ogres. Because Miles summoned him through a DI, Miles must have been an ogre. That explained why he claimed to be a worshiper of Styx, since he could easily make up rituals, not expecting to have a real worshiper of Styx come up and expose him. That also explained the wood. Ogres sometimes have chaotic features. Miles must have had as his extra armor which took the form of wood beneath his skin.

Did the presence of Miles have something to do with the Mask of Chaos? Certainly ogres are chaotic beings that hide among humanity. And the Mask of Chaos could mean Chaos that is hidden from immediate sight. We brooded on thoughts like this for some time.

²⁰ The Rune spell Shatter.

Book Two — The Exigers

Chapter 1

Steal From the Rich and Give to the Poor

As we sat, brooding, along came some adventurers. We greeted them cautiously, then began talking. In fact, we talked all the next day. Their names were Norac, an Orlanthi Wind Lord who was Wereran; Borax, an Agimori herder from the plains; and Jankali, also a herder from the plains.

Our weapons status was rather grim. Norac had an iron bastard sword and a dagger. He knew Bladesharp 6, Disruption, Heal 6 and Darkwall. Borax had a stone axe and knew Heal 3. Jankali had a one-handed battle axe, a one-handed short spear and a long bow and knew Speedart, Heal 2, Disruption, and Bladesharp 2. Harmast had his dagger, and had fetishes for Disruption and Bladesharp 4 as well as his Rune spells. Thingol had a sling and knew all his sorcery spells as well as Light. Gorfang had his hammer and knew Disruption and Heal 2. Enkavar had his sling and knew Disruption, Speedart and some Rune spells. And last, but not least, Worfang had his one-handed short spear and a dagger, but knew all his spells.

The area we were in has two basic social classes. The first are the menials, who till the land. The others are the exigers, who live in strongholds and sometimes come down to demand tribute (read raid, loot, and pillage).

The menials are not allowed to have weapons, for obvious reasons, but have developed a sort of martial arts, which lets them use staves to good effect. The menials accept their fate, though they do occasionally rebel. They are usually put down very quickly.

The exigers are divided into clans. In turn each clan is separated into ‘real’ exigers, who were born in the Mari Mountains, and the others, who joined them willingly. Each of these clans has its own set of menials. If, on the way to their own menials to demand tribute, they pass a valley with an other clan’s menials, they will also demand tribute from them. Needless to say, this means that the exigers are in a constant state of feuding. Generally, though, the exigers only demand tribute from other clans menials when they seriously need to. Sometimes, an exiger clan will also demand tribute from the people in the plains or the jungles. At others, they will expand their set of menials by fighting the previous owners and defend their ‘kingdom’ until the previous owner regains the menials. Each clan also has a gimmick, which identifies each clan.

Recently, a plague in Pamaltela wiped out nearly a fourth of the people of Jolar. Perhaps to recover faster, the Arbennans, Jolar people, hired the Hookhill clan of exigers to help then slaughter some Kresh wagoners. The Hookhill clan’s gimmick is the taming of the mountain trolls. There is also a clan of exigers made up of former menials. While they call themselves democratic, it is name only. They also raid far more than the real exigers.

With this information, we decided that perhaps we could help some of these menials to fight off the exigers. At worst, we could ambush a raiding party and get weapons and armor. So we headed off towards the nearest menial valley.

The valley is roughly triangular, approximately six kilometers long and four at its widest point.²¹ A river runs through the valley, and there is a pond that is also fed by a spring. Bridges cross all three streams and the village is nestled between two streams next to the pond. The buildings were made out of turf.

We headed down towards the village, to the nearest bridge, a covered one. As we got closer,

²¹ We entered from the eastern entry to the valley. See Appendix B for a listing of the valleys.

we saw a man dressed all in furs. When he saw us, he bolted across the bridge towards the village. After a brief discussion, we crossed the bridge and headed towards the village, with no weapons drawn. We were met halfway to the next bridge by a group of villagers

Harmast tried to speak to them in all the languages he knew. The villagers didn't understand him at all. Then one of them spoke.

"Where from?" he said in a language similar to Arbennan, far from West Jungle, which we called Marit.

In response, Harmast drew a crude map in the snow. The villagers seemed confused. When Harmast tried to get across the concept of the ocean, the villagers were very confused. While they understood water, they couldn't grasp what an ocean was. But then they seemed to understand. They brought us into the village and gave us beer. So much for sign language. For some of us, it was a welcome drink, and we drank heartily. Delicious. Of course, all this time, Norac, Borax, and Jankali were silently laughing over Harmast's crude attempts to communicate. Finally they revealed to us that they could speak the language somewhat.

Gorfang asked through Norac if there were any other dwarfs around. They brought out an old, old man, named Blind-Knob. He poked and prodded Gorfang and said that 60 years ago, he saw a 'rock maggot' which is what they called dwarfs. Legend has it that they burrow all their lives through the ground and only come up to the surface to die. Seeing one is supposed to bring seven years of good luck.

The children all clustered around Enkavar. They all wanted some of his feathers. Enkavar was mildly frustrated by all this unwanted attention.

The valley they called the Valley of the Mists, for obvious reasons. The village itself was called Mistvale. It had around 200 people, 120 or so adult, the rest children. We also learned from the headman (whose name was Tiburo) that the exigers were supposed to come to Mistvale tomorrow, and that they come at approximately three week intervals. They said that they would hide us. So we hid from them in a haystack.

The sounds that we heard were not pretty. Pigs were squealing, gruff voices yelling, girls screaming. And one particularly chilling sound. After one girl's screaming, we heard a villager yelling out in protest. This was followed by a hiss of a weapon swinging, a hoarser scream of agony, and the thump of a body hitting the ground. Finally, peace returned on the valley. There was blood on the snow and the villagers were burying a man. It was the man who had first spoken to us, the man who had given us the beer. We all mourned silently, and I suspect that some of us swore to right this wrong.

But first we had to be able to communicate with the villagers. They offered to let us stay the whole winter, claiming that if one was caught outside a valley when a blizzard hit, one would die. We tentatively accepted their offer and they seemed genuinely appreciative of Gorfang's offer to help mend their farming tools. We spent the next three weeks learning Marit. Borax and Norac also taught some of the prettier girls Arbennan.

Again we laid low during the next raid. This time when we emerged, one of the girls that Borax had been teaching had been carried off by the exigers. Borax wanted to go after them, but common sense prevailed. For the next weeks, we kept learning Marit and readied ourselves. We also learned that the clan that raided this area was called the Brand clan, because their gimmick was using fire.

Three days before the expected attack, the headman asked if we were going to fight back. We responded in the affirmative, and they asked us not to make a final decision until that evening. Puzzled, we agreed. Later that day, down out of the hills, came an extremely old man, a shaman actually. He recognized Worfang as a shaman and Worfang saw that the old man's fetch had

around 50 points of POW. The villagers told us that he had no name, having lost it in a combat with an evil spirit.

“Are these the ones?” he asked the headman. The headman nodded. “I have something to say,” he said to us. He asked Gorfang if he was a rock maggot, to which Gorfang said yes.

“I must speak of a vision. A vision concerning three of the People,²² three other people,²³ a rock maggot,²⁴ and a talking bird.²⁵”

His actual speech was very complex, and none of us really understood his implications, but the gist of it was that we would either free the villagers or kill them. Meaning of course that we would either kill the exigers, or the exigers would come back and kill the villagers in retaliation.

Thingol asked if the shaman could help out magically, meaning supply Thingol with some magical support, perhaps a magic point storing crystal. The shaman replied that he was the spiritual keeper for many valleys and that he needed all his tools. In short, he refused.

So we thought for a while and Harmast came up with a plan. Since the exigers leave only a couple of men to guard their horses, we would kill them, then drive away their horses. Then we would hunt down the remaining raiders.

Blind-Knob said that 40 years earlier he had participated in an ambush of the exigers. The villagers had trapped them in a ravine by dropping trees, thus blocking the exits. Then the villagers, numbering about 130, charged the 40 exigers. Though they suffered numerous casualties, they won. He also said that if we killed the raiding party in the winter, they exigers would probably not know whether it had been destroyed by weather or by an ambush.

We opted on a modified version of their plan. We would set up trees as a deadfall to block the exits. Harmast and Norac would bar the way to Mistvale, while the rest of us would open up on them from ambush. Thingol wanted to set up some backward pointing spikes to stop the horsemen from simply jumping over. Though the idea was refused, the villagers started to build a palisade around Mistvale.

We set up a day before the expected attack, since the exigers sometimes came a day early, sometimes a day late, depending on the weather. Gorfang set up the trees to fall, and we got two kids to chop the ropes holding them up. Another kid would signal us when they came in sight, about a minutes warning. We concealed ourselves as best we could, with the villager’s help. And we waited.

But not for long. The lookout whistled and we cast our preparatory spells. Twelve horsemen rode by, each with a long, six foot pole more than half covered with a black substance. Ten of them were in cuirboilli, two of them in ringmail. One of them spotted us and shouted, “Intruders!”

The ropes were cut, and the trees fell perfectly. Harmast and Norac jumped out and stood ready. Worfang Disrupted one of the horses. Borax shot an arrow, which went through a rider’s right leg into his horse’s forequarters. Jankali also shot an arrow, but it bounced off the rider’s shield. Norac, with no weapon in hand, Disrupted a rider in the right leg. Thingol slung, but the stone bounced off a rider’s armor. Enkavar failed to overcome a rider with Disruption. Gorfang jumped out with his hammer and missed a rider. Harmast swung his dagger at a rider and hit him in the right arm. Worfang Disrupted the same rider that Harmast hit. Borax shot another arrow and impaled another horse. Then the two riders wearing ringmail spread one hand and a finger out, uttered some words, and all of a sudden, all of the riders’ poles were aflame.

²² Worfang, Borax, and Jankali, who were all Agimori.

²³ Harmast, Thingol, and Norac, all of whom were white.

²⁴ Gorfang.

²⁵ Enkavar.

Thingol started to throw a spell. Enkavar's sling-stone tinked off a shield. The riders all cast a spell. Norac pulled out his weapon and swung, only to be met with a shield. The two riders able to attack did so, but they missed. Borax's arrow bounced off a shield. Harmast hit his man again and killed him. Jankali pulled out his battle axe but was parried. Gorfang hit the rider who had been shot through his right leg in the same leg. Worfang cast a Protection 5, and then pulled out his spear.

Enkavar's stone missed. Norac swung mightily and chopped off a left arm. The rider fighting him missed his return stroke. Borax shot another arrow and hit his man in the head. His man swung his pole and hit Borax in the back of the head. His hair immediately ignited, and Borax fell unconscious. What was left on Borax's head was the tarry substance which had coated the rider's pole. It continued to burn brightly on his head. Thingol's spell failed to overcome its target, and then he scooped up some snow and started to smother the fire on Borax's head. Jankali hit his man in the left arm, but his shield was ignited in return by the man's brand. Worfang hit with his spear and killed the man who had his left arm chopped off by Norac. Harmast hit another but was parried. In return, his man swung his pole. Harmast failed to parry and his right arm armor was set aflame. Gorfang struck his man again. The rider fell off under another horse's hooves, and the horse fell too from the arrow being pulled out rather forcibly.

Thingol continued to smother the fire on Borax. Worfang thrust but his spear was parried by a shield. The return swing was expertly dodged. Norac swung at one of the riders who had done the mass Ignite spell and chopped off his head. Another rider swung at him, but Norac parried with his sword. The sword started to burn. Jankali hit his man in the right leg, but in return his shield became an inferno from the two patches of tar on it. Gorfang missed his hammer blow, and his shield was lit. Harmast hit his rider in the abdomen, but the rider swung and Harmast blew his parry again. His right arm armor was hit again, and now it was really burning. Enkavar, who had been taking careful aim, slung and hit one of the riders in the head. The Speedarted stone rendered the rider unconscious.

Enkavar then jumped towards the man he had felled and using his sling as a garrote to strangle his man. Worfang tried to Disrupt one of the 'priests', but failed to overcome him. Thingol, who had finally put out the fire on Borax, started another spell. The rider fighting Jankali hit him. Jankali parried with his shield which by now was nearly consumed. In return, he criticised his rider. The man parried, but to no avail. He died. Gorfang missed, as did the rider facing him. Norac hit his opponent in the head, killing him, but not before he had swung and hit Norac's sword again. Harmast's opponent swung and set his left arm armor aflame. Harmast then hit his man in the chest. The rider fell off his horse. But Harmast's right arm was burned into uselessness and his left was starting to hurt. He jumped into the river that flowed along the ravine and cast a Heal Wound on himself. Thingol's spell failed to overcome the 'priest'. Jankali's shield finally was consumed, and his left arm armor, next to the shield, also started to burn.

Enkavar hit a rider in the chest. Worfang's Disruption overcame one of the 'priests', and damaged his right arm. Jankali dropped to the snow, trying to put out the flames. The rider fighting him swung and hit his left arm again, setting it afire in a different place. Norac killed his man before he had a chance to swing back. Gorfang fumbled and twisted his ankle. Worfang's Disruption failed to overcome the 'priest'. Thingol successfully overcame the remaining 'priest' and the priest's chest was Palsied. The 'priest' though, stayed on back of his horse.

Enkavar's sling tinked. Jankali still tried to put out the fire, but was hit again in the abdomen, setting that armor afire. Thingol then cast a one-point Treat Wounds on Borax, reviving him. Gorfang criticised his man in the abdomen, rendering him unconscious. Harmast scrambled out of the river and grabbed a sword. Worfang hit his man with his spear, who fell badly wounded.

Now there were only two riders left alive. One was the 'priest', the other was hitting Jankali. Norac hit the latter, but was parried. He then hit Jankali in the left leg, killing Jankali. Gorfang ran over to help Jankali though his own shield was on fire, but by the time he got there, it was too late. Worfang attempted to Disrupt the 'priest', but it failed. Harmast hit the Palsied 'priest' in the left

arm.

Norac hit his foe critically, severing the rider's left arm. Harmast hit the 'priest's' horse, killing it, and tumbling its rider off and under it. Worfang Disrupted the 'priest' in the abdomen. Borax, who ran over to help in the fray, was swung at by the rider, but was missed. Borax swung and hit the man in the abdomen, killing him. Worfang Disrupted the 'priest' again, killing him.

So the battle was over. We had killed all the exigers, and killed one horse, and wounded two more. We searched the bodies and went through the pile. There were suits of cuirboilli in every size except for Gorfang and Enkavar. The 'priests' who wore ringmail were of average size.²⁶ There were eight scimitars, four broadswords, and twelve daggers. There were of course the poles, but they were rapidly burning away. We also found some magic items, but they were conditioned to be used only by exigers. We gathered the loot and the horses, disposed of the bodies, and headed back to Mistvale.

²⁶ Five-point ring for SIZ 13.

Chapter 2

Mister Exiger, I presume?

When we got back to Mistvale, we held a meeting. The villagers saw that we wanted to fight the exigers, so some of them volunteered to help. Two especially promising villagers were named Acari and Jorj. We decided to train 40 others in assorted weapons.

Blind-Knob told us that since it took some two to three days to get from the exiger stronghold to Mistvale, we probably had about five or six days in which to train before they would send out a scouting party to look for their lost raiding party.

The shaman also came back saying, "I smell blood on the wind. Whose was it?"

We told him it was theirs, except for one person. He seemed pleased that we had killed the raiding party but he also warned us that we had only killed the 'volunteer' exigers, the men-at-arms, not the real ones. Nevertheless, he declared he would stay for two days and teach spells. He taught both Jorj and Acari Disruption. He also gave a pain spirit to Worfang to attach to his fetch.

We asked him many questions. We asked how many valleys the Brand clan controlled. He said around eleven, six of them about the same size as Mistvale. Gorfang wanted to know how to find dwarfs in these mountains. The shaman replied that they might not be very helpful, for he suspected that they traded with the exigers. He said that the best place to find them would probably be in the bottom of the Brand stronghold. We asked about what their stronghold looked like. He drew us a quite good drawing of the hold. It was built onto the side of a cliff, with only one path leading to it. It looked quite impenetrable for the moment. Harmast asked if there were any Storm Bull berserkers around. The shaman told us that, though he had heard of them, he had never seen any.²⁷

We asked him if he had any suggestions. He asked if we had any more allies. We said yes, for Simon, Tim, Ferric, and Slagstone were still around. He asked us if we had any tokens that they had owned. We didn't really have any, but we described them very carefully, and he seemed satisfied. He said he would seek them out, and try to bring them here, though it would probably take two seasons or so. We accepted gratefully.

Many plans were thrown back and forth. Raiding another exiger's menials to try to start a feud was one. Going to another valley and stopping the raids on that valley and to keep on going until all the Brand valleys were united in rebellion was another. When Harmast learned from the shaman that there was a Joining of the Convergences between the fourth and fifth mountain peaks, he wanted to go, but common sense prevailed, for we would be leaving Mistvale wide open, as well as traveling in winter. We also learned that the trader mountain that we had originally set out for was where the exigers traded with the plains folk.

But while we tried to come up with a plan, we set about the defense of Mistvale. The palisade around Mistvale was finished. The women suggested that we should build areas where the animals, children, and the non-fighting villagers could hide, leaving only the fighters in Mistvale proper. It was a good idea, and Gorfang went off to oversee the construction. We also set up guards up in the mountains around Mistvale. If they saw any signs of exigers, they would signal Mistvale and we would ready ourselves for an attack.

Harmast had taken two of the broadswords for himself. Acari took one too. As to the cuirboilli, Worfang, Thingol, Borax, Acari, and Jorj each took a suit. The ringmail was kept for the time being. Norac trained eight of the villager in scimitar use, plus Acari and another villager in broadsword. Borax taught eight of the villagers in the axe. The rest of the villagers trained in scythe,

²⁷ They are more prominent in Genertela than Pamaltela.

maul, and spade use.

After the first five days, nobody had come. Norac sensed a storm in the air, a big storm. The length of the storm plus the time it would take to get to Mistvale from their stronghold seemed to indicate that we had another five days to train and prepare, which we did.

During those ten days, Worfang decided to go off onto the Spirit Plane to try to capture some spirits. He Discorporated, and his fetch guarded his body. The fourth day, he came back because we thought an attack might take place. He brought back with him a Spirit Screen 1 spirit, a Countermagic 3 spirit, and a Detect Magic spirit. When it didn't he went back onto the Spirit Plane. On the morning of the ninth, he came back. He said that he had encountered a ghoulish spirit. He said that he had thought to capture it but he realized that if the spirit successfully possessed someone, the new ghoulish would be uncontrolled. Therefore he ignored the ghoulish spirit. He said that he also encountered a ghost and a chonchon, both of which he ignored.

But on the tenth day of training, Freezeday, Stasis Week, Storm season in the Theyalan calendar, Pamalt-day, 7th week in the Rainy season (winter), tragedy struck. On the evening of that day one of the guards was going up to relieve one of his comrades when he discovered his headless body. His sword had been broken, and only the hilt half remained. We all raced up to investigate. The body showed no signs of torture nor did it bear any fire marks. Tracks were found of a single person wearing armored boots. After a quick discussion, Norac went alone to track the intruder.

He followed the tracks for about two hours until he heard the sound of metal on metal. He listened carefully, but he couldn't tell the direction.

Suddenly out of the darkness jumped a huge figure, wearing full plate and wielding a bastard sword and a hoplite shield. The design on his shield was a spider, and his helmet also bore a spider. The man swung, but Norac parried with his iron bastard sword. Norac's return swing was an utter failure. Not only did he fail to hit his man, but he hit himself in the stomach, dropped his weapon and lost his next attack and parry!²⁸ On the man's next swing, Norac died.

But not for long! Norac called on Orlanth to heal him and put his sword back in his hand. Orlanth granted his request at the cost of three points of POW. The man swung again. Norac missed his parry, and the blow landed on his unprotected body, on his head. He died again.

But again the mighty Norac called on Orlanth to heal him, and again Orlanth granted the request for three more points of POW. The man swung, but Norac parried, and the blow failed to connect. Norac stood up instead of trying to swing from the ground.

The warriors fought back and forth, Norac parrying with his sword, the man with his shield. For a minute they swung at each other until the man slipped through Norac's guard and thrust his blade into Norac's abdomen. As it withdrew, Norac felt a burning sensation, and he looked down to see a nasty green coloring starting to tinge his body. Norac swung again, but he was so distraught he lost his next attack and parry.²⁹

While Norac stumbled around, the man stepped back, resting. He said, "Do you surrender to Iul? I have the antidote to the poison!" Norac considered, and shook his head in the negative. Iul swung and despite Norac's parry, wounded his right arm. Norac's return swing bounced off Iul's shield.

Now Iul took his sword and pushed it behind his shield. When he withdrew it, Norac could see it was again coated with a nasty green coating. While he did this, Norac connected solidly, but it bounced off Iul's armor.

²⁸ Fumble #00, roll three more times on table.

²⁹ Fumble, lose next attack and parry.

Iul then swung with his newly poisoned blade, but Norac parried the blow and it failed to hit him. Norac's return swing was a dismal failure, and he lost his next attack.³⁰ But while Norac recovered, Iul stepped back and rested. Then he swung again and connected, despite Norac's parry, and hit him in the head. Norac's return hit again bounced off Iul's shield. Then Norac felt the poison hit him. He successfully resisted the poison³¹ but still felt its effect³². Iul swung again and hit Norac in the abdomen through Norac's sword. Again he died. And again he called on Orlanth to heal him completely. Orlanth replied that he would bring him back to life and remove the poison that had not taken effect, but not that poison that had already affected him. It cost Norac seven POW for this miracle.

Iul again rested, while Norac finally began a spell, Bladesharp 5. It went off while Iul was still resting. Norac then stood up. Iul swung, but Norac parried. Norac tried an aimed blow to the head, but he missed. Iul swung, and Norac blew his parry. He dropped his sword again³³ This time he didn't wait. He called on Orlanth to bring him back to Mistvale with his sword. Orlanth granted this miracle for six POW, thus leaving him with a POW of 2 after starting the combat with 21!

While this debacle was going on, the rest of us went back to Mistvale. There we found Norac, looking like something the cat dragged home. He told us his story, but he left out a lot. He told us of the spider on his shield and helmet and the villagers recognized the name and design of Iul — he was a Brand.

Harmast immediately said we should go after this guy. Thingol argued against doing so. He wanted to make sure Mistvale was safe if, when we were off chasing this guy, some other exigers, or even Iul himself came to pillage Mistvale. Harmast sent all the villagers to the hiding places, but Thingol was still not satisfied. Harmast gave Thingol a direct command to join the rest. Thingol obeyed, but under protest.

It took us about four hours to reach the place where Norac had been ambushed, and when we got there, it was midnight. Harmast cast a Detect Enemies, but got nothing. We found Iul's tracks and Harmast, Enkavar, Borax, and Worfang were all out in front to track.

From out of the darkness came Iul, swinging at Harmast. He connected, and hit Harmast in the left leg with the poison. Norac cast a Disruption which, amazingly, succeeded and overcame Iul in the left arm. Worfang let loose his pain spirit, sending it at Iul. Harmast cast a Heal Wounds, to heal his leg. Gorfang cast a Demoralize at Iul, which also overcame him. Acari started running up to melee. Thingol cast a Light spell, so that everybody could see everybody else. Iul moved and swung at Borax. He parried the blow, and it failed to penetrate. Borax's return swing was parried. Worfang Disrupted Iul in the right leg. Norac Disrupted Iul again in the abdomen. The pain spirit did not affect Iul for now.

Harmast, still engaged, swung at Iul, but tinked. Jorj's Disruption failed. Norac, also engaged, blew his Disruption also. Gorfang, also fighting, missed Iul, who had parried him. Borax swung at Iul, but tinked. Iul swung again at Borax. Borax parried the blow, but it still hit his left leg. Enkavar's Disruption failed. Worfang finished casting Protection 5 on Harmast. And the pain spirit overcame Iul, draining some magic points.

Harmast disengaged this turn, running back to Thingol, calling for a Neutralize Poison. Iul cast a spell on himself³⁴. Thingol began casting Neutralize Poison. Enkavar's Disruption failed. Worfang's though, hit the chest of Iul. Jorj's did not overcome Iul. Norac, wisely hitting Iul's sword, knocked it out of his hands. Borax tinked again. Gorfang also tinked. Worfang cast a Coordination 3 on himself.

³⁰ Another fumble!

³¹ Potency 16.

³² Taking eight points of general hit point damage.

³³ Making a total of four fumbles in one combat!

³⁴ A Spirit Block, we later surmised.

Worfang Disrupted Iul again in the chest. Enkavar tried to garrote Iul from behind, but blew it badly. He became another target for Iul to choose from. Iul picked up his sword. Gorfang tinked. Acari, who had finally gotten up to the combat, also tinked. Borax tinked again. Iul swung at Norac, but missed! Thingol finished casting Neutralize Poison, thus removing most of it³⁵. Jorj's Disruption overcame Iul and hit him in the head. Worfang's also overcame Iul, but hit him in the chest instead. Norac, who had been aiming for Iul's head, hit him.

Worfang Disrupted Iul in the abdomen. Gorfang disengaged, somewhat perturbed at his inability to penetrate Iul's armor. Enkavar failed with his Disruption. Harmast, partially cured, re-engaged Iul. Iul swung again at Norac, but missed, while Norac damaged Iul's sword. Borax tinked, as did Acari. Norac criticised his swing, but Iul's parry blocked it all. Worfang Disrupted Iul in the head. Enkavar's sling tinked.

Worfang Disrupted Iul in the right arm. Iul started casting a spell, most likely a Heal. Borax, Acari, Norac, and Harmast all tinked. Worfang Disrupted Iul in the abdomen.

Worfang's Disruption failed to overcome Iul. Acari Disrupted him in the right leg. Norac hit in the right arm. Jorj Disrupted him in the right leg, whereupon Iul fell over, motionless. Further examination proved him dead.

We discovered that Iul had been wearing chain mail underneath his full plate! His hoplite shield's poison reservoir was empty. His sword we surmised, was Truesworded with Extension stacked with it. Norac took Iul's chain mail for himself. After some searching, we found his campsite. He had two ponies and some miscellaneous supplies. The food was simple soldier's rations. And we found something that chilled us all. There were two wicker baskets that contained pigeons. One held two, the other, only one. We thought about that long and hard.

³⁵ Thingol removed 11 potency of the 16.

Chapter 3 Parley-vous?

Harmast buried Iul in full Humakti fashion. We took his equipment back with us to Mistvale. There we held a council and tried to decide what to do next. Dawn was just breaking on Witch-day of the 7th week of the Rainy season.

We talked for some hours. Gorfang and Harmast were both interested in dwarfs living nearby. The villagers knew of three citadels where 'rock maggots' lived. There had always been at least one since 1254³⁶. We were told that they never left their citadels. Sometimes the exigers would band together and attack a citadel. Though they would always suffer heavy casualties, in 1347 they destroyed the biggest dwarf citadel known then. Unfortunately, none were within 50 miles of Mistvale.

We also talked about the exigers. It was said that exiger philosophy concerned the red planet in the sky³⁷, though how much it dominated their philosophy was unknown.

Harmast was very interested in attempting to start up a temple to Humakt. He tried to recruit some of the villagers to become initiated. He got Jorj, Borax, and another villager. Norac also tried to recruit, though, being a Wind Lord, he couldn't form a temple. He got Acari to become a lay member.

We also discussed the implications of the pigeons. We were fairly sure that if Iul had sent a message, it would be about the uprising. Suggestions went from a challenge to a message saying that nothing was wrong, a false alarm. What was finally sent out was a limerick that went like this:

There once was a warrior named Iul
We thought he was really a fool
He came in the night
And we gave him a fight.
And now there's no exiger Iul.

It was signed with the Mobility and Death Runes. We tied it to another pigeon and let it fly off. It headed off in the direction of the exiger stronghold.

Since Norac told us that a big snow storm was brewing, we figured that we had about ten days before a war party could get to Mistvale. Norac and Harmast both trained the villagers some more. Gorfang was busy fixing weapons and helping to fortify the outposts. Worfang Discorporated and went onto the Spirit Plane. When he returned on the third day, he had captured a spirit that carried Wasting disease. He Discorporated again and returned on the tenth day with a Repair 3 spell spirit. Borax fought it and captured the spell. We also improved on our guarding setup. We stationed two men at each of the two entrances to the Valley of the Mists with two men to constantly circle the valley.

On the eleventh day after the death of Iul (Empress-day of week 9 in the winter), one of the entrance guards came running to us. He said that there were sixteen warriors just outside the valley and that they had given him a scroll to give to us. Fortunately, one of the villagers read Marit, which is what it had been written in. It was difficult for him to read, for it had been written in diplomatic terms. But he said that it looked like an invitation to a parley. They specifically would like to see the naked warrior and his comrades, who they assumed to be the ringleaders of the uprising.

It was eventually decided that Harmast and Norac would go along with Jorj and Acari as

³⁶ The year the Red Moon rose.

³⁷ The Red Moon.

their ‘servants’. The rest of the party would stay in Mistvale along with the 39 warriors. The rest of the villagers we sent to the outposts.

Harmast and the others climbed out to one of the entrances to the Valley of the Mists. There they saw the exiger party. There were five exigers in all. One was wearing a plate helmet and wielding a hammer and a shield that bore the visage of a horned devil, with the horn representing the boss of the shield. Another was wearing lamellar with a horned helmet. This man bore a very strange weapon. It was as long as a sword, but at the end it widened out to about one foot. Another wore chain and carried a bow and battle axe. The fourth wore mixed chain and plate and carried a naginata and a shield bristling with spikes. The last wore lamellar with a spiked helmet and carried a scimitar.

In addition to the exigers, there were ten men-at-arms, plus someone to tend the horses. Their leader, the one carrying the hammer, slowly stepped forward towards them. In Marit, he spoke to Harmast.

“We came to see if we had honorable foes, one worthy of our mettle.”

“So?” replied Harmast.

“Are you?” asked the exiger in return.

Harmast didn’t answer that.

“Who do you worship?” asked the exiger.

“Humakt,” was Harmast’s reply.

“The sword god?”

“Yes.”

“Ah, some of us, in fact, most of us worship Death.”

And then the exiger began a long, boasting speech. Harmast recognized this and knew that, generally, lies were not told.

“I have slain forty-two men in single combat. I have faced the enemy that cannot be conquered seventeen times. I slew the mountain troll alone, hand to hand, with no weapons. I have gone through the fires of Lodril. I have been to the Heart of the Mountain. I have seen a rock maggot. I have faced the war wagons of Kresh and my men didn’t run. I have killed the beast of the war wagons. I have faced the elves of the jungle. I have walked across the Mari Mountains in the dead of winter. I am the sole survivor of the attack by the Kujerung clan. My name is Amadsan. Who are you?”

Now Harmast spoke.

“I have fought thirty men in a pit, naked, with only a knife. I have fought the mountain trolls. I killed two hot trolls with only a dagger. I fought while my armor was aflame and I was burning. I fought the mad witch in the jungle. I have faced Cacodemon. I have been across the ocean. I have fought the four-handed sword wielders. I am a Sword of Humakt. I am Harmast Nightblade.”

Amadsan seemed impressed when he heard of Harmast’s exploits in the gladiator pits, and when he told how he killed the two trolls.

“Maybe this war will be worthy of our time and trouble! How much honor do you have?”

asked Amadsan.

“That is a question that a man cannot answer for himself. I feel, though, that you lack honor in your dealings with the menials. You should help them and aid...”

“Spare me,” interrupted Amadsan. “I am not here to defend my people; I am here to find out if you are ready to defend yours.”

“Yes, we are,” replied Harmast.

“Our army will be able to get here three days after the new year. Perhaps we could fight over there,” pointing off towards the plains of Mistvale.

Harmast refused the suggestion.

“Well then, where do you want to fight? You did attack us first. Are you so base that you don’t understand the niceties of war?”

“I’m going to fight you till the menials are free from your reign!”

“Then shall we have the first battle where I suggested?” asked Amadsan.

“No!” cried Harmast.

“Then where?” asked Amadsan.

“We ain’t gonna tell you!” sang Norac. Acari immediately motioned for Norac to shut up.

Harmast and Amadsan both ignored Norac. Harmast tried to communicate to Amadsan that he didn’t fight battles at set places and times. War was fought by surprise.

“We’ll gather our strength, you gather yours. We won’t attack you until the battle,” said Amadsan, after patiently listening to Harmast.

“There won’t be a battle for us,” replied Harmast.

“Do you fight like dogs or like humans?” baited Amadsan.

“The day after today is when the war starts.”

“We knew the war was on when you killed our men-at-arms,” said Amadsan. “Name the day you’re ready.”

Simultaneously Harmast said, “We’re ready” and Norac, “Seven months from now.”

Amadsan thought for a while. “You think our ways are evil?” he asked Harmast.

“Yes.”

“We think you are evil to kill our men-at-arms, our scout, and to arm the villagers.”

Harmast had no reply.

“Speaking of Iul, where is his sword?”

“We buried it with his body, in Humakti fashion.”

“You do have honor then!”

No one spoke for a while as both Amadsan and Harmast thought. Then Amadsan spoke.

“We wish to know how you fight. Could we perhaps meet to test our valor?”

Harmast agreed.

“Good! We will not fight until that day. Our men-at-arms will not take tribute from other valleys until the end of winter. It will be a small set battle. How many men shall fight?”

Harmast wanted it just him and Amadsan. Amadsan replied that he would be glad to after the big battle. He also suggested that, during the war, one day per week should be set aside for parleying, and it was decided that Empress-day, today, would be that day. He then stepped back to let Harmast discuss it with the rest of us.

There was some fierce discussion going on when Amadsan stepped forward again.

“I have something to say. Back at our stronghold we have about five men-at-arms per exigers. When we fight, we have five men-at-arms for each exigers. So when we fight, each of our exigers will have five men-at-arms”

That definitely changed the situation. Harmast decided that we would fight two exigers.

“Is that all?”

“Yes.”

“Very well. Shall we fight until death or surrender?”

“Until surrender.”

“Prisoners or ransom?”

“Ransom. What kind of magic is to be used?”

“We usually allow any except for stratagem.³⁸”

So the agreement was made. We would face two exigers and ten men-at-arms on the field of battle, which would take place on Empress-day of the first week of 1623 ST.

Amadsan motioned another of the exigers forward, the one with the strange, flanged sword.

“Sword! This is Khanda. He too is a Sword. It is our custom for us to ask questions of our enemies, which are to be answered truthfully. If you are willing, Khanda will cast an Oath spell on you (Harmast) and him, and you will exchange questions. Our usual number is three. Are you willing?”

After a brief discussion, Harmast decided to ask and answer three.

“Also, if you would, I would like to know how Iul died,” said Amadsan. “But not here and not now.”

Khanda asked his first question, “How many outlanders are there?”

³⁸ Such as digging trenches throughout the battle field.

“Seven with our greatest warriors to come.³⁹”

Harmast asked, “How many exigers are there?”

“Thirty-six now that Iul’s dead. Is the old shaman of the hills on your side?”

“Yes. Do you have any great and powerful magic items that you will use against us?”

“Yes. How many and what type of magicians do you have?”

“Two priests, two shamans, one sorcerer, and another on the way. What is that great and powerful magic that you will use?”

“Our greatest magic is the Doorway.”

Now Harmast and Khanda exchanged questions that were not bound by the Oath spell. “Could you be a little more explicit?” asked Harmast. “For instance, what comes through the Doorway?”

“I’m not going to answer that,” replied Khanda.

“Well then what does the Doorway do?”

“I’m not going to answer that either.”

“Have you ever heard of the Gray Ones?”

“Yes”, replied Khanda, “We even have a dead one in our castle.”

Amadsan stepped in.

“If you would like more information, we will tell you if you will tell us how many of the villagers you have armed.”

Harmast, eager for information, agreed and told Amadsan of the thirty-nine we had trained.

“What are they and where do they come from?” asked Harmast.

“Well, they have no permanent home”, replied Amadsan. “And they’re not exactly people either. In fact, it’s kind of hard to explain.”

He thought for a moment.

“I’ll tell you what. We’ll take you to our castle, let you examine the remains, let you worship at our temple and free you unharmed if you give us back Iul’s outer armor.”

Harmast agreed.

“Fine! We’ll leave a slave here to guide you back.”

And they saddled back on their horses and rode away.

Back at Mistvale, Harmast related the account of the parley. Each of us was allowed to speak regarding the parley. In the end, Harmast decided to take Jorj and Borax with him to initiate them at the exiger’s temple. Thingol asked to go along and Harmast agreed. Gorfang, Enkavar, and

³⁹ He meant, of course, Simon the Fanatic and Slagstone.

two villagers would go to the nearest valleys to try and recruit more warriors. Norac, Acari, and Worfang would attempt to find the old shaman of the hills.

The slave who had been left behind asked about Jorj, Borax, and Thingol. Harmast said that Jorj and Borax were going to worship at the temple. When asked about Thingol, he said that he was simply going with him. The slave asked, “Would you kill me if the exigers killed him?” pointing at Thingol. He got the message, and Thingol stayed behind, sorrowed.

It took three days on mules to get to the exiger’s stronghold. At the gate, the guard refused entrance to Jorj and Borax unless Harmast gave them the mules, which Harmast did.

Jorj and Borax were both initiated at the temple. They each took a geas and received a gift from Humakt. Jorj took the geas to never lie and in return his sword became extremely strong⁴⁰. Borax decided never to drink alcohol and in return regained his strength twice as fast⁴¹.

In addition to initiating the two, Harmast also told Amadsan how Iul died. Amadsan seemed pleased to know the truth and how bravely Iul had fought.

They also saw the remains of the Gray One. It was withered and gray and seemed almost papery. It was wrapped up in a gray shawl with a monk’s hood.

“My great-grandfather killed it”, said Amadsan. “He came to get the future. He didn’t like what was offered so he killed the Gray One. He was then cursed to do three dastardly deeds before he died.”

Harmast asked what he did and Amadsan replied, “He killed a friend, killed his own slave, and then killed himself.”

After Harmast had recovered all his Rune spells, they left the stronghold. It took them longer to get back without the mules, but they made it back safely.

Meanwhile, Norac, Acari, and Worfang were having no luck in tracking down the shaman. But this didn’t mean that it was dull going. One morning Acari woke up with his mouth full of something. It was glue! But who had poured it in, and by whose request?

Gorfang, Enkavar, and the two villagers were having more luck. They were able to reach the two villages in the next valleys with no trouble. The villages were Crystal Lake and Stormwood. Crystal Lake was two days away from Mistvale because of the steep entrance into the valley. The village had forty villagers. Stormwood was only a day away from Mistvale. It had two entrances and 150 people. Each of the villages started to build their own palisade and they convinced twelve villagers from Crystal Lake and thirty-five from Stormwood to come back to Mistvale.

So we trained some more, waiting (or dreading) the day when we would fight the real exigers.

⁴⁰ Its armor points were increased by half.

⁴¹ Regain fatigue at twice normal speed.

Chapter 4

The First Battle

Two days later, a guard came running towards us again. “Monsters! Monsters! In the hills! Trolls!” We all grabbed our weapons and made for the entrance, thinking that perhaps it was the mountain trolls and the Hookhill clan had come to raid.

But it wasn't. It was twenty-six trolls with none other than Slagstone! There was a joyous greeting of him by all who knew him. After the greetings, he told us how he got here.

Divination revealed his child-to-be to be a female troll. Thus, his future was assured. So he spent his days (or rather nights) just sitting around and eating. Some trolls had gone back to Ouori and gotten his son plus all the other animals in the stable except for the avalanche after killing some of the villagers. The queen figured that the child-to-be should learn how to live in the snow. Therefore a place to live up in the hills would be needed. Slagstone was supposed to go and scout out a suitable location, then kick out all the humans in the immediate vicinity and enslave them. Before he left, however, the old shaman's spirit came to the trolls. He was captured and his spirit held. He told them of his mission, and of the need for Slagstone. He was released after swearing many oaths not to harm any trolls. The queen then said that Slagstone should go and help his friends and then take over a place to live. So they traded with the elves of the jungle for furs and he and the twenty-five trolls he persuaded to come with him set off. They encountered no difficulties in getting here.

Well, our prospects definitely looked brighter now. Twenty-six trolls, though still not a match against thirty-six exigers, would definitely help.

Harmast decided to talk with the troll leader (Slagstone was only one of the leaders) named Grokk about the upcoming fight. Grokk replied that if we wanted their help, they wanted something in return. He specifically asked about the ovoid. He thought that it was a Darkness artifact, given that it was black and cold and 'fuzzy'. He wanted it for the queen.

Harmast went and talked to Tiburo. He said that trolls would probably not make great neighbors but that they might be better than the exigers.

So Harmast went back to Grokk and talked it out. He orated magnificently, explaining the situation in detail. Grokk asked if the humans were to be their slaves. Harmast said no. Grokk thought. He said that they'd take less than the exigers did. Regarding the trolls wanting a place to live, Grokk merely said that no matter what, trolls would live in the mountains. Harmast wisely did not say anything about that. Grokk did remark that we looked like we were in a desperate situation. Again Harmast didn't say anything.

Meanwhile, the trolls settled in for their stay in Mistvale. They used a vacated barn to sleep in. Unfortunately, they were not housebroken.

Later Harmast again talked to Grokk. He said that the humans and trolls should be friends, and as a token of friendship, we would give them the ovoid. Grokk accepted the gift, joking, “We think we could do it ourselves, but every little bit helps.” Then he said seriously that the trolls would help us and that they would be especially useful at night. He said that we could keep the ovoid for the first fight. They sent six trolls back to the tribe to inform the queen. Grokk also said that he could use any number of trolls for this battle.

Harmast came back to us and told us of what transpired. Worfang wanted to Discorporate, use his Visibility spell and attack one of the two exigers in spirit combat. Harmast disagreed, because that would leave only eleven of us to fight the twelve of them. Thingol, though disappointed about the loss of the ovoid, said that he would cast Damage Resist 6 on three of our warriors. He

also asked Harmast to ask Grokk about the spell book.

It was eventually decided that besides Norac and Harmast, four trolls would fight along with Borax, Acari, and Jorj, and three trained villagers. Harmast went back to Grokk and told him of our request. Regarding the spell book, he said that we could have half now and half when they found a place to live. Whereupon he tore the book in half and gave it to Harmast. He decided on the four trolls we would use.

The Holy Week of 1622 came about and we all participated in the necessary rituals to remake the world.

On the first day of 1623, Worfang decided he would Discorporate and search for more useful spirits. He promised he would be back before the fight.

Finally the day of the battle dawned. But Worfang wasn't back yet! Each of our four trolls were armed with different weapons. One had a broadsword and shield; another had a two-handed spear; another had a greatsword; and the last had an immense hammer. Generally each had some metal armor covering their head, chest, and abdomen, though some wore metal all over their body.

We had set up on the flattest portion of the valley. Then the exiger party arrived.

Besides the twelve combatants, there were also twelve exigers who had come to watch. One of them was leading along a chain composed of six-inch links a huge, ugly creature. It was gray all over, its hair and skin both. It was stooping over, so we estimated it's height at about ten feet. It was wielding a maul with a three-foot ball. Two of the exigers started to pound a huge spike into the ground to tether the creature.

One of the combatant exigers was wielding a flanged mace and shield. His helmet had many points on it. He was wearing a mixture of plate and ring, and his name was Fevral. The other wore only leathers, but was carrying two axes. His name was Yanvar.

The ten men-at-arms were each mounted. They were all carrying those poles covered with the stuff that burned. But each pole also had a spear point on it. We started out fifty meters apart.

We waited for about two hours, making small talk, waiting for spirit spells and extended Rune spells to wear off. Then there was ten minutes of spell-casting. Harmast cast a Shield on himself, as did Borax. The trolls all cast Protection, as did Acari and Jorj, who also cast Bladesharp. Thingol had earlier cast the Damage Resist on Acari and two of the villagers.

Enkavar gave the signal to start. Norac cast a Darkwall across most of us. Each of the exiger's helmets flamed and ignited the men-at-arms' poles. As the men-at-arms charged towards us, the two exigers started running at full tilt.

Borax had time for one arrow shot, which tinked, then he picked up his weapon⁴². The ten men-at-arms hit us almost simultaneously. The first villager fumbled his parry and was downed with a wounded left arm. The second also fell, with a maimed left leg. The troll with the two-handed sword, Mull, parried the blow, but missed his return blow. The troll with the hammer, Bash, didn't dodge and was wounded in the right arm, dropping his weapon. The troll with the broadsword, Rog, was missed, and impaled his man in return. The man died, and Rog got his sword out again. The troll with the spear, Yakut, was also missed. Yakut hit the man's horse, killing it. The man-at-arm jumped off safely. Norac was missed and hit his man in return. The blow was parried, but it still wounded him. Harmast too was missed, but he didn't miss his return hit. The man fumbled, though, and fell off his horse with a wounded leg. Acari was hit but parried. The Damage Resistance on him handled what got through. His return blow tinked. Jorj parried his man, and in return, hit the man's

⁴² During this melee, and for all future melees, the convention of recording events in strike rank order has been suspended — Editor.

horse. The third villager was not attacked so he hit a rider in his abdomen. Borax's parry and Shield tinked the incoming blow as was his blow. It was then that we noticed that the spear points that had hit people had broken off, and that now the men-at-arms were using their poles to set us afire, even if they still had spear points still attached.

Yakut tried to Demoralize Fevral, but it was stopped by Countermagic. He also critically dodged the incoming blow and hit his man's horse. Mull parried, but missed the return shot. Bash dodged and continued to Heal his arm. Rog parried with his shield, which was set afire. This flustered him so much that he missed his blow. Fevral and Yanvar had by now reached us, with Fevral facing Norac and Yanvar, Harmast. Norac hit Fevral, who parried. Fevral hit⁴³ but Norac parried. The horseman hit Norac also, tinkering yet setting his left leg on fire. Yanvar, whose axes were both aflame by now, attacked Harmast twice. His first blow was parried. Harmast then hit, but Damage Resistance⁴⁴ stopped it. Acari, who was helping Harmast, hit Yanvar critically, but again the Damage Resistance stopped it. Yanvar's second blow missed. Jorj missed his parry and was hit in the left leg, setting it afire. Jorj's return blow again hit the horse, which died. The rider jumped off, facing Jorj. The third villager didn't parry, and got hit in the left leg, setting it afire too. Borax parried a blow with his shield, setting it on fire and missed his return blow. Enkavar decided to throw a snowball at the fire on Norac's leg. He missed and Gorfang started running out towards Enkavar.

Mull parried the blow aimed at him, but again missed his return shot. Bash blew his dodge and was hit in the left leg. His return blow knocked the man off his horse. Rog dropped to the snow and tried to put out the fire on his shield. Yakut's man fumbled and twisted both his ankles as he stood up in the stirrups. In return, Yakut killed his horse. The other horseman ignored Rog and hit at Yakut. The blow hit and Yakut's left arm was on fire. Norac missed his blow as did the horseman. Fevral, however, didn't, and Norac missed his parry. Norac fell down, with a large wound in his head. Harmast tried a Sever Spirit on Yanvar. Unfortunately, it failed to overcome him. Yanvar then hit twice, missing twice. But before he could hit again, Harmast's blow got through Yanvar's Damage Resistance to maim his left leg. Yanvar fell down. Acari, who went back to hitting horsemen, dodged a horseman's blow, and hit him back in the left leg, causing the rider to fall off. While Gorfang was running out towards Enkavar, one exiger stepped forward, just in case. Jorj blew his parry and was hit, setting his abdomen on fire. His return hit tinked off the horseman's parry. The third villager was hit again, and he fell over. Borax hit his man, but it tinked. The return blow set his shield afire.

Mull's parry chipped his man's pole. His blow, however, was not parried. It hit his right arm, forcing him to drop his pole. He then pulled out a scimitar with his left. Bash hit his man and injured him in the abdomen. Yakut continued to put out the fires on his armor. Rog missed his parry, but so did the man's attack. Rog's attack though was a critical hit to his horse. Scratch another horse. Acari hit the fallen rider in the abdomen. There was no parry, so he died. Harmast hit Fevral, but he parried and so the blow tinked. Harmast parried a critical hit from Fevral, but still took some damage to his left arm. Yanvar failed to cast a Heal spell. Jorj also spent time putting out the fires on him. He only managed to put out the fire on his leg, not the one on his abdomen. That left the man Jorj had been engaging to ignore him and hit Harmast from behind. Fortunately, Harmast's armor stopped the blow. Borax critically hit his man's horse, killing it. By this time, the fire on Norac's leg and his head wound managed to finish him off. He called on Orlanth to heal him. Orlanth decided to grant his request, but carried his soul off.

Mull missed again while the man he was facing healed himself. Bash had no immediate foes to engage, so he hit a man-at-arm who was trying to get up. He smashed the man's right leg, who promptly fell unconscious. With no more fires on his body, Yakut moved over behind Fevral. Acari dodged a blow then struck back. He hit in the abdomen, felling his man. Rog swung at a man-at-arm, hitting him critically. The man fell, nearly split in two. The man behind Harmast missed his blow. Fevral hit Harmast, but he parried. Harmast's return blow was parried and stopped. Yanvar

⁴³ With a Bludgeon 10 (!) on his mace.

⁴⁴ Intensity 19!

managed to heal himself and then stood up. Jorj's attempt to cast a spell failed. Borax hit another man in the abdomen, who fell over.

Harmast now cast a Heal Wound spell, nearly restoring him. Mull faced off the man with the scimitar. Mull missed his blow, but the man didn't. However, the force of Mull's parry was such that it shattered the man's scimitar. He was now weaponless. Bash, wading through the downed men was hit by a standing man, setting his left arm aflame. His blow was parried, but still managed to wound the man's right leg. Rog started to run behind Yanvar as Yakut stabbed with his spear. It impaled Fevral in the right leg, passing cleanly through it. Fevral fell in agony as Yakut regained his spear. Harmast now faced Yanvar. Harmast fumbled his parry letting Yanvar's hit tear off Harmast's right arm armor, wounding it so that he had to drop the sword in his right hand. Nevertheless, Harmast hit him in the right leg, causing Yanvar to fall over again. The man hitting Harmast from behind tinked again. Acari hit the man hitting Harmast. The blow was parried and stopped. Borax's blow tinked and he in turn was missed by his foe. Harmast, seeing Fevral and Yanvar down, called out for a halt to allow the exigers to surrender. While Harmast waited, the exiger party all started to Heal themselves.

Mull started to move to where there were more people to fight. Bash smashed another man's left leg, knocking him unconscious. Yakut plunged his spear again into Fevral's left arm, killing him. Acari dodged a man's blow and struck back. The blow was critically parried. Rog struck Yanvar, hitting him in the head, knocking him unconscious. Borax hit his man in the head, slightly wounding him through the parry. The man was flustered enough to totally miss Borax.

Just then one of the exigers cried out, "Cease fighting!" Another of the exigers stepped forward calling, "Nightblade." Harmast stumbled out to meet him, covered in blood and sweat.

"The fight is over. You have won. You can have the dead and crippled horses. Can we have the live ones?" asked the exiger.

"Yes," was Harmast's reply.

"Can we have Fevral's body?"

"Yes."

Some exigers came forward and dragged Fevral's body back over to their side of the field.

"What do you want for Yanvar? His armor?" he joked, for Yanvar wore no metal armor.

"What would you ask for him if you were in my place?" asked Harmast.

"Don't ask me," said the exiger.

Harmast came back to us as we all came on the battlefield. Thingol wanted magic items, but Harmast wanted most of all to arm the villagers with better weapons. He went back to the exiger.

"Thirty broadswords," was Harmast's reply.

"Very well. How about five more for Yanvar's axes?" asked the exiger.

"Okay."

"You can keep the men-at-arms," said the exiger as the remaining men-at-arms, shocked at this statement, cried out in protest. "What are you going to do with them, if I may ask?"

"We'll take them," was Harmast's reply.

“We’ll be here with the swords next Empress-day. Please don’t ambush our caravan.”

“We won’t,” was Harmast’s reply.

And then the exigers, taking the horses and the huge humanoid, left the valley.

If we hadn’t known better, we might have thought that Norac had died of heart failure. His body was untouched by the battle. Harmast decided that he would make a temple to Humakt of Norac’s iron bastard sword. As the trolls made short work of the dead horses, Harmast prepared to kill the surviving men-at-arms, some six in all. Two of them said that they worshipped the Sword god and asked for a Humakti duel for their lives. Harmast, though not bound to accept the challenge, did so. Both of them cheated in the duel, and both lost their lives with no injury to Harmast.

So all in all perhaps the victory might have been sweeter had not Norac died. But with his death, the victory might be called a pyrrhic one.

Chapter 5

The Thrill of Victory?

The day after the battle, Pamalt-day of Week 1, 1623 ST, Harmast called us all together. He said that we needed some way to handle the horsemen who had charged us in the previous battle. We suggested pikes to use the horses' charges against them. He agreed and we started to train some villagers in their use. Harmast also wanted to do something about making sure that the exigers would come into the valley from the direction we wanted them to. Suggestions of blocking the entrances we thrown out, but the horsemen could simply ride down the valley sides, taking some losses from the steep sides. It was pointed out that the sides of the valley housing Crystal Lake were much steeper and would induce heavier losses, but that valley was much too small to house the population of both Crystal Lake and Mistvale.

The next Empress-day, the exigers delivered the 35 swords as promised.

That day, Harmast got 35 of our trained militia to join Humakt as initiates. He initiated them at the temple that Harmast had set up. He immediately set them to learning the sword, using the ones we had gotten from the exigers. He also started the training of the villagers in the use of the pike. Since Gorfang was intensely interested in trying to get help from the dwarfs around here, Harmast decided to send an expedition to look for them. Gorfang, Borax, and nine Humakti (who had started to call themselves Harmasti) went off in search. They left on Gata-day of Week 2.

And what of Worfang? He finally returned on Ga-day of Week 3 with a friend. We learned from him why he had been gone so long.

On the Spirit Plane, he had gotten lost and found himself in the outer region. There he fought a madness spirit which attacked him, but released it. Then he captured an Ironhand 4 spirit and brought it back to us.

Making his way back to the frontier region, he met another shaman. His name was Mugumma and that he was an Agimori of the Flintspear clan. He said that he had been captured by the exigers and that he was in a caravan being taken back to the exiger stronghold along with other slaves. He said that every night he had Discorporated to look for help. He asked Worfang for help, and got a tentative agreement. Mugumma said that the caravan was accompanied by a couple of dozen of what we called men-at-arms and no exigers.

They discussed how they could free Mugumma from the caravan. Finally they decided on a plan. One night, while they were both Discorporate, they both cast Visibility and appeared before a startled guard.

"Ghosts!" he managed to call out before the two of them had reduced his magic points to zero. Worfang inhabited the guard's body.

Some more guards came over just as Mugumma tried to disappear from sight.

"Are you all right?"

"Yeah," replied Worfang in the guard's body. "I only just managed to drive off that ghost!" After more assurances that he was okay, the guard leader decided that everybody should patrol in pairs. The guard leader shouted, "Arnold! Come over here and guard with Fred!" pointing at Worfang.

Worfang/Fred tried all he could to get Arnold to go away so that he could free Mugumma's body. Finally he launched a desperation plan.

“Let’s go check the prisoners,” said Worfang/Fred.

“Okay!” replied Arnold.

So they walked over to where they kept Mugumma’s body.

“Shall we kill him? He’s big and strong. Let’s kill him, it’ll teach him a lesson,” said Arnold.

“But he’s locked up! We can’t have any fun with him first!” said Worfang/Fred.

“But you know that only the boss has the keys.”

“Well, you wait here, I’ll see if I can get them from him.”

And Worfang/Fred tried to spot which of the men could be the boss. He failed, and came back to Arnold.

“Well, that’s all right. We’ll just chop off his hand and that’ll free him,” said Arnold.

Mugumma, who by this time had re-inhabited his body, was quite startled.

“It’s either your wrist or your head,” said Arnold. Mugumma had no choice. Chop.

“Now let’s keep the hand for a few minutes so it can’t be put back on.”

Worfang/Fred volunteered to keep it. But while they marched Mugumma off, Worfang/Fred tried to Heal it surreptitiously. He managed to do it, but Arnold spotted him. Worfang immediately left Fred’s body, causing Arnold to cry out to Mugumma, “What did you do to Fred? I’m gonna kill you!” He drew out his scimitar, and hacked at Mugumma. He hit Mugumma full in the chest, and Mugumma fell over. Meanwhile Worfang cast Visibility again and attacked Arnold.

“It’s back!” Arnold managed to cry out before Worfang possessed Arnold’s body too. A quick Heal to Mugumma and off they went.

But not far. The guards that Arnold’s cry had summoned were standing around them.

“I got this thing well in hand”, said Worfang/Arnold.

“Shut up!” said the boss. Then the other guards beat up Mugumma for no particular reason. They broke many of his bones.

“Let me take him out for a while!” said Worfang/Arnold. “I want to kill him for taking out Fred!”

With this and other encouraging words, Worfang/Arnold managed to convince the boss to let him take Mugumma out and work him over.

“But only for ten minutes!”

Of course, as soon as they got out of sight of the guards, they ran for their lives. After five harrowing days, they made it back to Mistvale.

But of course Worfang was in Arnold’s body. This caused much confusion until Worfang proved himself. Then he went back to his own body, which was emaciated from lack of food and water. We later questioned Arnold after he had recovered.

Whenever he became reluctant to talk, the trolls offered a lot of persuasion. He said that he did indeed belong to the Brand clan. He had been on the plains all winter long, gathering slaves to take them back to the stronghold. When asked about the huge gray humanoid, he said that the exigers called him the 'Gray Man'. He said that he had never actually seen him, but he thought that perhaps the exigers used him for Tapping. He did know, though, that it had an excellent sense of smell. We asked him about the Doorway. He said that he had never heard of it. When threatened some more, he said that the exigers had secrets that they didn't tell their men-at-arms. Harmast ordered Arnold to draw the layout of the stronghold. He did, but Harmast figured that this was a fake. Finally, we stripped him of his armor and weapons and released him.

But around the middle of the afternoon, the scouts we had out started blowing their horns wildly. We didn't wait to see what it was, but immediately started moving all the women and children up to the outposts. The report from a breathless scout was that there was a whole bunch of men, more than a hundred, coming toward the valley. And, oh yes, the Gray Man was with them too.

Hastily we assembled our force and met them outside the valley, in a kind of ravine with a river running beside it. It turned out that there were 16 exigers, the Gray Man, plus about a hundred men-at-arms. If we expended all of our forces, we would have us, 26 Harmasti, and the twenty trolls. Not encouraging odds.

Chapter 6

The Second Battle

As they approached where we had set up, they exigers got off of their horses and started heading towards us. The exiger leading the Gray Man unlocked his chain and he immediately ran towards us. Worfang and Mugumma had both Discorporated and headed for the Gray Man, hoping to possess it and wreak havoc on the exigers. Enkavar, trying to confuse its sense of smell, cast an Illusionary Odor on its collar. It had no obvious effect.

By now Worfang and Mugumma had both reached the Gray Man. They attempted to initiate spirit combat with it, but bounced off of a Spirit Block of at least two points. Grokk cast Blindness 2 at the Gray Man, but the spell bounced off a Spell Resistance sorcery spell.

Now 20 Befuddle spells shot towards Worfang and Mugumma. Neither of them had any Countermagic up, and both were Befuddled. Slagstone and the exiger he was fighting tinked off of each other as did five of the six troll warriors present. Grokk was slightly wounded in the abdomen, but continued to fight. The Gray Man missed Harmast, who damaged the Gray Man's weapon. His return hit tinked. Acari also tinked with his exiger.

The exiger that Slagstone was fighting put a Fireblade on his weapon. Both of them tinked off each other though. Grokk was injured again in the abdomen, but tinked off his opponent. Of the six trolls, two of them fell wounded, but one managed to wound an exiger. The Gray Man criticised Harmast in the left leg. He parried, but the blow landed and he was knocked backwards five meters. Acari again traded blows with the exiger to no effect. Worfang managed to shake off the effects of the Befuddle and then cast Countermagic 3 on himself.

Harmast, on the ground, cast Heal Wound on himself. Slagstone criticised the exiger facing him. The exiger didn't parry, and the blow landed in his stomach, chopping him in two. Mugumma shook off the Befuddle, then tried to engage an exiger in spirit combat. He failed and was Befuddled again for his effort. Worfang cast Protection 5 on Harmast. Grokk was hit in the left leg and despite his parry, his leg was injured enough to make him fall over. Two more trolls were wounded and one died, but another killed an exiger. Some of the Harmasti started to take the place of felled trolls. Acari again traded blows with his exiger.

Since Slagstone had felled his man, he became the target of an exiger wielding a bow. Three Firearrows (!) sped his way. The first criticised him in his left arm. The second hit him in the abdomen. He just managed to cast Heal Wound before the third one impaled him in the abdomen, causing Slagstone to fall, wounded badly. Another troll was wounded, and another died, but again, another killed an exiger. The Harmasti fought the exigers two on one and held their own though a few fell wounded. The Gray Man approached Harmast who was fighting with a Harmasti. The Gray Man killed the Harmasti in one blow while Harmast tinked off his armor and skin. Acari again traded blows with his exiger. Worfang engaged an exiger in spirit combat and overcame him, draining the exiger's magic points.

The bowman, apparently out of magic points, pulled out an axe. Grokk began to Heal himself, while parrying his opponent. The Gray Man missed Harmast, but Harmast parried and severely damaged the Gray Man's flail. Harmast's attack hit the Gray Man on its head, wounding it. Acari continued to trade blows. Three trolls died, but one killed yet another exiger. Mugumma shook off the Befuddle that was affecting him, but since he didn't have many magic points left, decided to head off the battle field. Worfang failed to overcome the exiger's magic points. Slagstone began to crawl towards the rear, badly in need of healing.

Two valiant Harmasti managed to overcome an exiger and killed him. Grokk, now healed, traded blows with an exiger. Harmast was hit in the abdomen by the Gray Man and, despite his parry, was knocked backwards again. The exiger fighting Acari finally managed to penetrate,

slightly wounding his left arm. Acari's blow was parried. One troll was wounded, but his exiger was wounded also. Worfang, seeing Acari injured, broke off spirit combat to throw a Protection 5 on him.

Grokk missed his parry and had his right leg chopped off. While Harmast was being healed, a Harmasti criticalled the Gray Man in it's left leg. The blade penetrated deeply, and the Gray Man fell over. Acari, though he parried again, fell from a hit in the chest. More Harmasti were wounded as they joined the front line of battle.

The Gray Man pulled out the sword that had impaled it. An exiger was next to him ready to heal him, but one of the few trolls remaining wounded him before he could complete the spell. More Harmasti died, but so did an exiger.

The battle ended after Harmast returned to battle and broke the Gray Man's flail. He then retreated off the battle field, the remaining exigers following. With both sides exhausted, a temporary truce was called.

The accounting went like this. Thirteen trolls went to their deaths, along with fourteen Harmasti. In return we had killed nine exigers.

Later, as night fell on the valley, Enkavar quietly stole into the exiger's camp to see what was going on. Though he didn't sneak around, what he saw gave all of us shivers. He said that there were a lot of rituals going on, and that he noticed people whom we thought we had killed in the battle. Great, just great.

When Worfang heard the news, he immediately headed out of the valley with not a word to the rest of us.

Harmast told Tiburo that we would all retreat to the outposts, evacuating Mistvale entirely except for a small holding force. We learned that our food would last until the end of spring. So except for a small force to cover the retreat, we evacuated Mistvale. It was done orderly, quickly, and best of all, quietly. Harmast had two groups of five Harmasti head off to Crystal Lake and Stormwood to ask for any help they could give. Slagstone and Grokk sent two trolls back to the tribe to inform the queen of the new situation. We also took the sword that marked the site to Humakt.

Later that night, the covering force came back, saying that the exigers were starting to move in towards Mistvale. That morning, Gata-day of the third week, we saw a pillar of smoke rising over the ruins of Mistvale. We sat all that day, trying to get things settled down in the outposts. Harmast had separated the villagers from the rest of us, leaving the Harmasti to guard the villagers.

Our scouts noticed that the exigers sent out detachments of men at arms, about a dozen, both mounted and on foot, to patrol and search. The exigers had brought seven wagons that presumably held supplies. We had thoughts of destroying their supplies or ambushing one of their supply trains, but we didn't know how often they were resupplied.

On Empress-day, the truce day, six wagons escorted by thirty men at arms arrived in the exiger's armed camp. It was obviously their supply train. All this day we thought about what we should do, waiting for the best moment to strike.

The break we had been waiting for finally came. The very next day, a scout ran back, saying that there was something going on down in the exiger's camp. He said that about forty men at arms, six exigers, and two wagons had left the valley. We asked if the Gray Man had gone with him, but the scout didn't know. Our other scouts said that they were headed in the general direction of Crystal Lake. Harmast sent five scouts to follow them and make sure that they didn't double back to Mistvale, and asked Worfang, who had returned from his flight, to Discorporate and warn Crystal Lake. It took him five hours to get there and back.

Meanwhile, we had come up with a plan. We would attack their lessened force at night to try to retake Mistvale and kill the exigers. We had 32 militia and 11 Harmasti plus the eight of us. Harmast decided that he would use Norac's iron sword, which means that he had three swords.

It was the early morning of Witch-day as we headed back into the Valley of the Mists. On the way, we had a curious encounter. Up a tree, Harmast thought he heard the sounds of metal clashing together, like swords. Slagstone's Darksense detected nothing, but when Worfang looked up, he was temporarily blinded by his Second Sight ability. Jorj quickly climbed up the tree, but all he found when he got to the top was a scarred branch.

We quickly approached the exiger's camp. It seemed that we had taken them by surprise, for we encountered no patrols of any sort. When we got within 100 meters, we cast our defensive spells. At 50 meters, though, we were met by five exigers and the Gray Man. Harmast shouted for the militia to bypass the exigers and attack the men at arms, but for only half of the Harmasti to stay with us. The Gray Man and all the exigers except one charged towards us. The exiger that hung back fired two Firearrows, hitting Slagstone and Mull. Harmast threw one of his three swords at the closest exiger, but it tinked.

One of the exigers obviously had his bow. The other four had a two-handed spear, a sword and shield, a long, wicked scythe, and a naginata and multi-spiked shield, both of which were flaming. Enkavar cast a Speedart and fired his sling. It bounced. Two Harmasti faced the exiger with the spear together. One fell over, wounded. Jorj and a Harmasti were also fighting the exiger with a sword and shield. The exiger hit the Harmasti, but the Harmasti parried. Jorj hit the exiger, but it tinked. Harmast, facing the exiger with the scythe traded blows using the iron sword to parry with. Acari and another Harmasti were fighting the exiger whose naginata and shield were aflame. The exiger tinked off of Acari, but he landed a blow on the exiger's head, wounding him. The Harmasti tinked and was missed in return. Slagstone and Mull, the troll with the two-handed sword faced the Gray Man. The Gray Man missed Mull while Slagstone, using a mace and shield, wounded the Gray Man's right arm. The Harmasti bounced off its armor. Worfang now started to run forwards, to help in the melee. Enkavar fired his sling again, but again it tinked.

The spearman exiger now tried to hit the Harmasti who had fallen. He hit, but the downed Harmasti parried. The other one tinked. Jorj hit his man, but the exiger fumbled his parry and took a wound to his right leg. The Harmasti with him tinked. Harmast traded blows with the scythe-wielding exiger. The exiger with the naginata fumbled his attack, twisting his ankle and losing his left leg armor. Acari responded by knocking the man unconscious with a blow to the head. The Gray Man now tried to hit Slagstone. It missed, but Slagstone didn't, wounding him again in the head. Thingol had attempted a Neutralize Magic on the naginata's fire, but it failed to overcome the magic points of the fire spell.

The exiger with the bow now fired again. His two arrows hit the Harmasti who had been fighting the spear-wielding exiger. The first one felled him, the second one killed him. Worfang, who had taken the place of the two Harmasti, was stabbed at. He expertly dodged the blow then impaled his own spear in the exiger's left leg, where it stuck. The other Harmasti, who had Healed himself, tinked. Jorj fell unconscious from a blow to his right arm despite the Harmasti next to him trying to parry for Jorj. The Harmasti then tinked. Harmast again traded blows to no effect. The Gray Man hit Slagstone but despite his shield parry, took damage to his right arm and was knocked backwards three meters.

Worfang dodged the spear-wielding exiger's blow, then attempted to disengage, since he was weaponless. The Harmasti hit the exiger, wounding him slightly. The Harmasti fighting with Jorj tinked off the exiger's armor and had his left arm chopped off in return. Harmast was still trading blows with the scythe exiger. Acari, who had come over to help Harmast, hit the exiger in the abdomen, to no apparent effect. Mugumma tried to Ignite the Gray Man's hair but failed. Enkavar fired his sling at the exiger's bow, hoping to break it. Amazingly, he hit it, but failed to damage it. The Gray Man hit Mull again, but he parried and was not knocked back.

The exiger whom Worfang had impaled took the spear out of his leg while the Harmasti engaging him tinked again. Slagstone, who had come over to engage the exiger using the sword and shield, knocked the exiger back a meter. Harmast hit, but the scythe-wielding exiger caught the sword in his scythe and wrenched it out of Harmast's hands. Harmast parried the scythe's blow. Acari then critically impaled the scythe-wielding exiger in the abdomen, killing him, but his sword stuck in the body. The bowman, who had first inspected his bow for damage, then fired a Firearrow at Acari. Fortunately, it tinked. Worfang made it to the exiger whose naginata was still on fire and picked it up. The Gray Man missed Mull and Mull tinked in return.

More Firearrows flew towards Acari, critically impaling him in the right leg. Another arrow felled another Harmasti, though not killing him. Slagstone and Mugumma faced the sword and shield exiger. He impaled Slagstone in his left arm, but while he pulled out the sword, Slagstone's mace came crashing down on his head, knocking him unconscious. Mugumma ineffectually tinked. The Gray Man missed and was tinked in return by Mull. Worfang stabbed at the Gray Man with his Firespear, but was parried. A Harmasti also hit the Gray Man and impaled him in the left arm, where he left his sword. Enkavar slung at the spear-using exiger, but tinked. Harmast, with no opponents, started running towards the exiger with the bow. He was hit by another Firearrow, but it tinked.

The exiger with the spear, with nobody to stop him, started to run away. Slagstone moved to engage the Gray Man. Thingol finally managed to Palsy the bow-wielding exiger in the abdomen. The Gray Man killed the Harmasti facing him as Worfang, realizing he was overmatched, plunged his spear into the exiger he had gotten the naginata from, killing him.

The Gray Man, perhaps realizing that he was all alone, also started to run away. Harmast, who had reached the bowman exiger, started to hack on him, hitting his left leg. To everyone's surprise, the exiger then stood up. However, after a length of time, Harmast and Slagstone managed to destroy the undead exiger, by systematically smashing every bone he had.

When the militia returned, they had a story to tell us. They had caught most of the men-at-arms asleep or unprepared. They killed sixteen of them, then the rest of them broke and run. But something they noticed was that when the men at arms fled, something very big and dark rose and fled too.

In this battle, we lost four Harmasti, six militia men, and two trolls, one of them being the troll shaman. However, we had killed four exigers and forced them away from Mistvale. We of course looted the bodies. We had sixteen sets of weapons and armor from the dead men-at-arms. We also had the same from the exigers we killed. Acari took a set of chain and lamellar for his own. We found on the exigers some magical items. The scythe that the exiger had been using was found to have some iron in it. One of the exiger's helmets had an enchantment on it, and a spirit bound inside it. The undead exiger had three magic point storing crystals on him. They stored eight, six, and six magic points respectively. Harmast gave the eight point crystal to Thingol, the others to Worfang and Mugumma. We also searched the wagons left behind. One of them was filled with big barrels of different liquids. One of them was obviously oil, the rest were unrecognizable.

After we had searched through all the spoils, we spent the rest of the day bringing it all back to our outposts. That evening the two parties we had sent out to Crystal Lake and Stormwood returned with food, but no men. We were in such a happy mood that we were very grateful for just their helping out. The next day, the men at arms that the militia had driven off returned. They sat around until twenty more men at arms, perhaps long-range patrols, came back to the valley. Then they left the valley, sending ten towards Crystal Lake, the rest heading back to the fortress.

We had a large celebration with much happiness, for had we not retaken the valley even if Mistvale was in ruins? And had we not killed some of the exigers, who had oppressed the valleys for a long time?

Early the next morning, as Harmast was getting up, he heard a strange sound. To him, it

sounded like the caw of a crow if it were made of metal. He looked around and saw a raven. It's feathers were blades of iron, but otherwise it looked normal. Harmast said, "Greetings! Who are you? Are you here to help or hinder?"

The raven made no response. Harmast cast Second Sight and was blinded by the aura emanating from the raven.

"There is a grave abomination opposing you Harmast", it croaked. "They are false!"

"You mean the exigers", asked Harmast.

"They are false, they worship false gods Harmast. They are Abomination. No one was ever immortalized because of despair." And then it flew off. Harmast was left to ponder on this.

Chapter 7

The Shell Game

The same day that Harmast had his visit, Ga-day of Week 4, Worfang Discorporated to check out Crystal Lake. When he returned, he said that he saw around 80 men-at-arms and exigers plus about 40 villagers were building a palisade to defend themselves from attack.

While Worfang was gone, Thingol and Acari did some experimenting on the barrels found in the exiger's wagons. There were three kinds of substances: one was some pebbles, another was a clear liquid, and the last was an opaque liquid that Thingol recognized as oil. Mixing the two liquids together was difficult as the oil tended to quickly settle out of the mixture. Of course the oil burned, and so did the clear liquid, but not the mixture of the two. Grinding down the pebble and adding them to the mixture produced a runny, black mixture that looked superficially like the exiger's fiery substance, but it didn't burn either. Further experimentation proved useless.

Now we had a choice. We could attempt to liberate Crystal Lake or strike somewhere else. We finally decided that we would attack Crook Halt and destroy any resistance that might be there. We left on Gata-day and reached Crook Halt just as darkness fell. We consisted of Harmast, Thingol, Slagstone, Worfang, Acari, Jorj, Grokk, and the 7 Harmasti. We camped for the night.

The next day was Empress-day and Harmast refused to attack on that day, honoring the truce. So we sat all day and spied on the village. There was nothing to indicate the presence of any exigers or men-at-arms. However, later in the day, a squad of riders came into the valley. They called all the men of the village together and then they started to build something. It was a palisade. During the afternoon, about twenty more riders came in. We could see that some of them were only slaves however. Two of these twenty or so were wearing armor, but we couldn't tell if it was exiger-style armor.

Harmast refused to attack until dawn of Pamalt-day, that being his definition of when Empress-day ended. We snuck in towards the still incomplete palisade. We weren't exactly quiet, but only one man looked out at us. We just put our fingers to our lips and passed him by. Half an hour before dawn, we heard some shouting and metal clanking from inside the palisade. Then, half an hour later, we attacked only to be met by ten spear-wielding men-at-arms and nineteen unarmored but not unarmed slaves who had formed outside the palisade.

While we were 100 meters away, six of the slaves aimed their crossbows at us. They all shot simultaneously and all of the bolts were Firearrowed. One hit Grokk in the right leg, dropping him. The others hit Acari in the abdomen, Jorj in the abdomen, and Worfang in the chest.

We ran through this fire and got to within 40 meters of them. The six slaves were busy cranking their crossbows while the rest of the men were readying themselves. As we closed to within striking distance, two of the crossbowmen broke and ran, dropping their crossbows. Six of the spearmen, however, engaged us, except for Thingol and Worfang, who stayed back voluntarily, and Grokk, who was Healing himself. The rest of the men split off into three groups.

Harmast threw one of his swords at one of the crossbowmen. It hit the man's arm and he dropped his crossbow. Worfang attempted a Disruption at one of the engaged spearmen, but it bounced off a Countermagic.

The three crossbowmen who had finished reloading then fired again. They all missed, then they backed away with their crossbows. Acari hit his man in the head. Harmast chopped a leg off. Slagstone hit twice, both times chopping off limbs, but was hit by a pole-carrying man-at-arm, and his left leg armor was set afire. The other two groups were now attempting to outflank our force.

In response, three Harmasti engaged one of the groups, Slagstone and three more Harmasti

towards the other. Harmast broke through the ranks and headed for the crossbowmen. A Harmasti killed one of the spearmen after the man had hit himself in the right arm. Another Harmasti was wounded in the leg and fell. Jorj tinked off his man and had his left arm armor set afire in return. Worfang, who had run up to engage, knocked a man down with a spear to his left leg. He dodged the return blow. Acari damaged his foe's spear. Harmast felled a slave with a sword slash across the abdomen. Slagstone felled a spear-wielder with his mace. Thingol's spell failed to go off. The other Harmasti group knocked a man unconscious.

Of the four crossbowmen left, two shot at Harmast, both missing. Harmast shouted at them to surrender, then withheld his attack to let the slaves decide.

Our victory became a rout. They all broke and ran. Of the initial 29 men we faced, 16 escaped. They all headed off in the direction of Orange Fire. We captured four men, a crossbowman slave, two pole-using men-at-arms and a shovel-wielding slave. More importantly, we recovered six bags of the tarry substance that the men-at-arms covered their poles with. We interrogated the prisoners, asking about the recipe for the substance. The slave shrugged his shoulders, the men-at-arms said that they didn't know. We decided that instead of killing them, we stripped them of their armor and weapons and let them go. They headed back towards the exiger stronghold.

We found the village headman and asked him about Orange Fire. He said that several hands of warriors went through Crook Halt to go to Orange Fire.

We thought it wise not to go to Orange Fire. We decided to head to Silvereye going back through Mistvale. Harmast persuaded twelve of the men to join our cause. And so off we went.

On the way back, on Six-day, we heard a column of men coming towards us down the gorge. We quickly hid, but two of the new volunteers failed to hide. From around a bend came five exigers and thirty men-at-arms. They quickly noticed the two men and took them along for questioning. We thought it was the force from Crystal Lake going back home.

We made it back to Mistvale on Ga-day of the fifth week of spring. The villagers figured that from the people going through Mistvale that there were about twenty men-at-arms still at Crystal Lake. We decided that Crystal Lake was still too tough to assault and that we would continue on our plan to scout out Silvereye. However, on Gata-day, Harmast initiated the ten volunteers we had gotten from Crook Halt.

So on Empress-day, we left for Silvereye. In a rainstorm, we arrived there on Ga-day of the sixth week. In the fading light, we could see a completed palisade set away from the village capable of holding anywhere from thirty to fifty men. We noticed some three different patrols who scouted out the immediate area. Once night fell, Harmast decided to send Jorj and Acari into the village to scout.

Without weapons or armor, they snuck into the village. They managed to evade the patrols and softly clapped outside a door, which is the way one signals one's presence outside another's house. The door opened and a man poked his head out.

"It's past curfew," he said.

"We need help," said Jorj.

"Come in quickly," said the man.

So Acari and Jorj went inside. Once inside, the man asked, "Who are you? What's going on? Are you from Mistvale?"

Jorj and Acari both told the man what had happened since the revolution started and told

him that they were here to scout. The man told them that the general belief was that there were four exigers, thirty men-at-arms and something that they kept under wraps. It was supposed to be able to burrow and dig quite well.

After a while, they left to come back to us. On the way out, though, Jorj sneezed. Both of them immediately took off, attempting to use sheer speed to escape the patrols. They were unsuccessful. The patrols caught them, beat them for being out past curfew, and then watched while they “went back home.” Since neither of them knew who lived where, and since they couldn’t find the house where they had met the old man, they essentially chose at random.

Jorj lucked out. He was thrown into a large house with many occupants. They also recognized the name of his aunt, who had lived in Silvereye. They asked about the white man Harmast and he told them all about Harmast’s exploits. They offered to let him stay the night, but he said that he had to get back. So the occupants created a diversion with a chicken and he managed to make it back to the rest of us.

And what of Acari? Well, the house he was thrown in was one with a newlywed couple. Fortunately the men-at-arms didn’t notice the obvious discrepancy. Acari managed to calm the couple down and he hid there until morning. The next day he went out into the fields with everybody else and made it back to us.

Seeing that it would be very difficult to take Silvereye with exigers there, we decided to head back to Mistvale. We returned there on Empress-day of week 6.

After a conversation with Slagstone, Grokk left Mistvale.

The rest of us decided to try to make it to Halfwing and recruit more Harmasti, for our numbers were small, only some seventeen Harmasti. We left on Pamalt-day.

On Witch-day we arrived in Stormwood. Asking about Halfwing, the headman told us that the men-at-arms in the fort haven’t been down for a long time. When asked, the headman said that there are about twenty men-at-arms in the fort. He said that there probably wouldn’t be any exigers there but that there were some 80 slaves.

Not wanting to encounter the fort, Harmast decided to take us over the mountains to Halfwing. We didn’t make it to Halfwing until Six-day of week 7. Halfwing is a large valley some thirteen by seven kilometers. Looking in, we saw no palisade anywhere in the village. Harmast decided to send in Jorj and Acari again, plus two other Harmasti, one of whom was named Moi.

So the four of them headed down into the valley. They approached a man who asked, “Who are you?”

“My name is Moi,” said Moi. “We are from Mistvale here visiting relatives.”

“And they let you pass?” asked the man, referring to the men-at-arms in the fort.

Jorj mumbled to Moi, “Tell them everything.”

“Well, no they didn’t exactly let us pass,” said Moi.

“You men you came the other way?” asked the old man as he pointed to the other exit from Halfwing.

“What is in the other direction?” asked Moi.

“Why, the Wall — and then the Viter clan,” said the man.

Finally Moi started to tell the man about how we were working against the men-at-arms.

“We are Harmasti,” said Acari proudly.

“What are they?” asked the man.

“It’s a religious order and this is our holiday,” lied Moi, thus breaking his geas as a Humakti.

Jorj now shut up Moi and told the man how we intended to defeat the exigers and free the valleys.

“You’re fighting the exigers?” asked the man, astonished. “But only exigers fight exigers. What clan are you from?”

“We are not exigers,” said Jorj.

“Most of us are from the other valleys. Some of us are from far to the north,” said Acari.

“Yes, and one of our party is a white man,” said Jorj.

The man, who looked slightly confused, said, “You’d better come and talk to our headman.”

So they went into the village proper and housed them in a house while they got the headman. While they waited, the four of them talked and decided to tell them everything that had happened. Meanwhile the villagers were building a large bonfire.

When the headman arrived, they all gathered around the fire.

“No one but men-at-arms have been here for eleven weeks. And they’re always the same men-at-arms. What’s been going on outside?” asked the headman.

“Revolution,” pronounced Acari.

“Tell us about the white man,” said the headman. “Is it the one the prophecy spoke of?”

“Yes, and we’ve come to recruit warriors,” said Jorj.

They conversed for some time while around them a celebration was going on. They told them all about our adventures and the headman seemed pleased. He said to bring the rest of the party on down into the village. Acari came back to us and we went down to the village.

So the rest of us went down into the village and were welcomed. Harmast did most of the talking to the headman. He wanted to set up Halfwing as a training camp for our Harmasti and any of the villagers who wanted to join us.

We stayed in Halfwing that night. The headman also told us that the men-at-arms in the fort did not let any villagers out through the gorge; they killed those who tried. Moi told Harmast of his troubles. Harmast merely told him not to draw his sword until the next battle, when it would be all right.

The next morning (Ga-day of week 8 of spring), we left for Mistvale. Our intention was to bring back to Halfwing all of the swords that we had and use Halfwing as a training ground. We arrived at Mistvale and, taking all of the Harmasti and ten militia (plus the swords), we left again for Halfwing.

We arrived at Stormwood on Empress-day of week 9. Harmast left the ten militia plus one Harmasti there to try to ambush any men-at-arms who tried to leave the fort and pass through Stormwood. He also said that we should try to go through the pass and see this fort.

On Pamalt-day we trekked down the gorge towards Halfwing. Towards noon, we saw the fort. It was perfectly placed. The gorge walls were about 100 meters high. On one side the wall was undercut by a swift river flowing towards Halfwing. The other side was where the fort was. Set in the cliff-side, it was about twenty to thirty feet in from a vertical line dropped from the top of the gorge wall. Immediately below the fort, the gorge wall had been shaped so as to let objects roll down towards the gorge floor. The fort was placed in such a way that it commanded a view of the gorge for a kilometer in both directions. There was no vegetation to provide cover and we could think of no plausible way to pass unnoticed. We therefore went back to Stormwood to go over the mountains to Halfwing.

This time, though, we went on the side of the gorge that would place us above the fort in time. From above, we could see no way to lower anyone or anything into the fort because of the way the wall was shaped. Anyone lowered to the level of the fort would still be about twenty to thirty feet horizontally away from the fort, and in an unenviable position.

We finally made it to Halfwing on Pamalt-day of week 11. Just as we arrived, at around mid-morning, we saw about a dozen people leaving Halfwing with about seven pack animals towards the fort. Harmast shouted, "Surrender, stop, wait!"

Five of them then pulled out weapons, killed the animals and ran off towards the fort. Harmast said, "I'm going alone," and started to remove his armor. Jorj, who had his armor off before Harmast did, said he was going to go with Harmast. Harmast accepted. Before they ran off, Thingol cast a Damage Resist 5 on Jorj that would last for six hours.

Harmast and Jorj chased them for about fifteen minutes, with Harmast steadily pulling out in front. But when he got within a hundred meters or so, the five slaves turned around and fired crossbows at Harmast! One bolt hit his right leg and his cry of pain could be heard by the rest of us, who had disobeyed his order and followed as soon as armor could be removed.

Harmast threw one of his swords at the slave who had hit him. The sword caught the slave in the abdomen and he fell just as Jorj reached Harmast. The slaves' next shots flew towards the two. One hit Harmast in his other leg, another hit Jorj in the right leg.

As the slave's cranked their crossbows (except for the one who was Healing himself), Harmast cast a Heal Wounds spell and Jorj failed a Heal spell. Harmast then got up and charged the slaves.

Before he could make it, the slaves fired again. One hit Harmast squarely in the chest, but he kept on charging. He swung and maimed that slave's left arm. The slaves then dropped their crossbows and pulled out their swords. Harmast hit again, but was parried. In return, he was missed by two of them, with another one fumbling.

Jorj finally cast his Heal spell, then got up and headed towards Harmast. Harmast hit another slave in the right leg, who fell down. Harmast was hit twice and attempted to parry them both. He didn't parry. He was hit in the left leg and the abdomen and fell, wounded.

But not for long! He called on Humakt to heal him completely and for him to have his armor on. Humakt granted this request for 7 POW, leaving Harmast with 4 POW. Jorj, who had made it to the battle, hit a slave in the abdomen, who fell down.

By now, the rest of us, with Thingol in the lead, had reached the scene of the battle. Thingol slowed to cast a Palsy spell at one of the slaves, which succeeded, but only in the left arm. The slave started to run away. Until Harmast threw another sword at him, hitting him in the abdomen, felling

him. Harmast shouted, "Surrender!" They surrendered.

Of the five slaves who ran off, only three survived. Harmast summarily killed two of the three survivors and then questioned the remaining one, whose name turned out to be Baanan. Harmast asked him how many men-at-arms were in the fort. Baanan said that there were five and twenty-five slaves. Jorj, who knew this to be false, hit Baanan. After a little more, Baanan confirmed that there were about twenty men-at-arms and 75 slaves. Harmast asked about a back entrance into the fort. Baanan replied that he knew of none and that if there were, it would probably be an exiger secret. We asked him how often they came to Halfwing for food. He said about every two to three days. We asked about food storage. He said that there was about a year's supply of food in the fort.

Then Harmast tried a different tactic. He asked Baanan how he felt about the exigers. Baanan replied that the exigers had given him everything he had. Harmast then tried to convert him to our side. Baanan said that everybody is a slave and that he would rather have his masters to ours. He also said that he didn't think that many of the slaves would want to change the situation. "I've seen a man-at-arm become an exiger twice and I've seen a slave become an exiger four times!"

Since the attempt to convert him had failed, we went back to asking him questions about the exigers. We asked him who his masters worshipped. Baanan replied, "The Sword God."

"All the exigers?"

"Only some."

"Who else do they worship?"

"The 'Old Man' — an old man with three eyes, a club in one hand, and the other in a magical gesture."

Slagstone spoke up and said that he recognized the description. He said that representations of Zorak Zoran, also called the Lord God of the Legion of Death, had those attributes.

"Whom else?"

"The fixed star: the red one in the north."

Harmast, Slagstone and Thingol were all silent as they absorbed the implications. Finally Harmast asked, "What are the exiger's views about Chaos?"

"What's that?"

Thingol asked, "How many sorcerers do the exigers have?"

Baanan replied, "Every fifth or sixth man-at-arm knows some sorcery."

With no more questions, we decided to imprison Baanan.

For about a week we rested and began to think about how we could defeat the fort and defend Halfwing. Around Ga-day of the twelfth week, we had the idea of building a palisade across the pass into Halfwing. We immediately began construction.

Harmast however, was in no mood to assist or supervise construction. He was obsessed with trying to find a back door into the fortress. Therefore he left on Witch-day with some others to search for a secret way into the fort. He returned on Ga-day of the first week of summer with nothing to show.

By Empress-day, however, the palisade was finished. From the gorge, it was about twenty feet high. On the valley side it gently sloped up to the top where archers could pick off riders heading down the gorge.

An argument that was going on between us was where to make our headquarters. Harmast preferred Mistvale as did others, but the rest of us argued that since the palisade was built, Halfwing might be more easily defensible. The argument ended when Harmast declared that we would return to Mistvale. So on Pamalt-day we left. On Empress-day of week two we entered Stormwood and picked up the ten militia and the one Harmasti.

We arrived back at Mistvale the next day to be met by an unhappy sight. There was a palisade inside Mistvale. A palisade that was manned by men-at-arms.

Chapter 8

Return of the Mostali

Intelligently bypassing the valley, we went straight towards our cave-outposts. The bad news was that the palisade was manned by about 40 men-at-arms and 100 slaves. The good news was that Gorfang was back! He had been here since Pamalt-day of the last week of spring. And he brought with him ten dwarfs from the dwarf citadel. But, only two of the ten Harmasti survived the trip: Borax and one named Efger.

Harmast had mixed emotions about the news but his happiness won. We all went over to the cave where the dwarfs had stayed to greet them. But just as we were about to enter, Harmast had a feeling he hadn't had in a long time. He sensed assassins inside the cave. Inside, Gorfang watched aghast as eight of the ten dwarfs he had brought back from the citadel suddenly got up, formed a column of two dwarfs each and ran towards the cave entrance with their crossbows ready. Suddenly the first two shot then stepped aside, dropping their crossbows and pulling out hammers to let the next two dwarfs shoot.

Outside, Harmast had just told the rest of us of his sense as two crossbow bolts flew and hit him in the chest and right arm. The rest of the dwarfs shot at random targets, then engaged in melee. All of us tinked back and forth except for Slagstone, who hit a dwarf already engaged on the head and Thingol, who Palsied the dwarf engaged with Harmast. Gorfang pulled out his own crossbow and tried to shoot one of the attacking dwarfs in the back. The shot bounced off and the last two of the eight dwarfs turned back to Gorfang.

Moi now pulled out his sword which promptly shattered. Harmast's Sense Assassin now only registered the eight dwarfs attacking us as assassins. He hit another dwarf, not the one which Thingol had Palsied, and hit his left leg. Jorj tinked off his dwarf, but the dwarf buried his hammer in Jorj's stomach. His DI cast failed and Jorj died. Slagstone felled another dwarf with his mace. The two dwarfs inside the cave shot at Gorfang. One hit him in the left arm, the other missed.

Moi now pulled out his axe and meleed with that. Harmast cast a Light spell in the cave with the intent of heading on in. The dwarf whom Thingol had Palsied now rose and hit Acari who was already engaged two on one with Slagstone. Fortunately, the dwarf missed. Another dwarf fumbled his attack and hit himself in the left leg. Gorfang was hit twice but he only parried once. The other blow landed on his right arm.

By now most of the dwarfs who had fallen were drinking potions and rising again. Moi took a shot to his left arm and fell over. Harmast fumbled his attack and twisted his ankle. In return he took two hits, only one of which penetrated to his right arm. Slagstone clove the head of one of the dwarfs. Gorfang impaled one of the dwarfs fighting him, but was Demoralized by the other.

Harmast parried both of his attackers. The dwarf that Gorfang impaled pulled out another weapon. Slagstone tinked off his attackers.

Harmast's hit was critically parried. In return he was impaled once and hit once. Both of his parries failed and he fell over, unconscious. Slagstone knocked over one of his foes in order to head over towards Harmast. He was missed once and hit once in the right arm. Acari, who had Healed himself, hit a dwarf in the chest. Thingol now started to run towards the battle, seeing a potion fall unused from a dwarf's hand.

By now, five Harmasti had shown up to investigate the commotion. Slagstone now jumped over Harmast's body to land on top of the dwarf who was about to hit Harmast's unconscious body. Acari impaled a dwarf in the abdomen, killing it, but losing his weapon. One of the Harmasti killed another dwarf. Gorfang continued to tink back and forth, while Thingol managed to grab the potion amidst the confusion.

Slagstone continued to guard Harmast's body. He took a shot to his abdomen which he didn't parry but remained standing. Thingol, having reached Harmast's body, decided to cast Treat Wounds first before administering the potion. Slagstone now started to back slowly into the cave, for there were three dwarfs menacing him. Acari criticalled a dwarf in the right arm. Gorfang had his right arm incapacitated. The Harmasti finished off another dwarf.

Slagstone cried out to the dwarfs to surrender. They did not and so we had to kill them all. For the time being, we did not kill the two dwarfs who did not attack us. However, we did notice something strange. The dwarfs who had attacked us were all hollow!

While we decided what to do with the two dwarfs, Gorfang told us of their adventures in getting to the dwarf citadel.

They had left on Gata-day of week 2 of spring with Borax in command of the other nine Harmasti, Gorfang being in overall command. They had all carried as much supplies as they could carry. For eleven days they had headed towards the east, the supposed direction of the dwarf citadel. On the evening of Six-day of week 3, a creature sprang out from the brush and pinned one of the Harmasti down. The creature had four legs and was colored blue with what looked to be hard chitin covering him. Many spines protruded from his body and his claws were long.

"I can kill him before you can hurt me. We shall play a riddle game. If you win, I shall leave. If I win, I shall eat this man and then leave."

They had no choice but to agree. Their first riddle to the creature was: "What has foliage and is also part of a family?"

The creature thought about it and correctly answered, "A family tree." Then it asked: "If a cat and a half can kill a rat and a half in a minute and a half, how long does it take one cat to kill 60 rats?"

Now they almost fell for the trap, but correctly answered, "90 minutes." They asked: "When is the dead on top of the living?"

The creature answered wrongly, but argued his answer. The correct answer is, if one knows their Glorantha Lore, "The World." Then it asked: "⁴⁵"

They answered incorrectly. A tie. The creature said that they would ask one more question to break the tie. So they asked: "Golden nails in the ground."

The creature answered, "Corn stalks," but the answer was, "Carrots." The creature left them unharmed.

But not for long. The next morning, it came back and demanded to be fed. Perhaps unwisely, they decided to oblige it. They fed it six days worth of food and it demanded more. They fed it another five days worth of food and still it demanded more. Then they told it to shove off and it did, seemingly satisfied.

They were fairly hungry as they traveled all that day and the next. Finally on Empress-day they hunted for food. While Gorfang was out hunting, the blue thing came up from behind him and grappled him helpless. It came back to the main camp with Gorfang in hand. It demanded food or it would eat Gorfang. They tried to promise it more food if it would just let go of Gorfang, but it replied, "A meal in hand is worth ten in the bushes."

Finally Borax came back with a whole mountain goat which he had surprised and killed. The creature's eyes lit up and agreed to spare Gorfang's life for the whole mountain goat. After it

⁴⁵ The question has been lost to posterity.

left, they went out hunting again. They were less successful, but managed to catch enough to hold off starvation.

All Pamalt-day they traveled and on Witch-day they hunted. They spent Six-day traveling too. But that night, the creature returned. Borax notched his bow but before he could shoot, the creature spoke.

“Before you commit suicide, I would like to ask you something. I have tracked you all this way and I wonder why you are wandering through the countryside.”

Gorfang responded, “We are going to the dwarf citadel.”

“Ah, I know that place. They are good and tasty, but I only go there when I am very hungry for it is dangerous there. But that aside, why are you lying to me?”

“I am not lying.”

“But you are going the wrong way.”

There were looks of amazement on everybody’s faces.

“I make you a proposition. If you will hunt for me and let me eat half of your catch, I will guide you to the citadel and back to this spot.”

Gorfang asked, “How far away is the citadel?”

“If we don’t make many stops, fourteen days.”

The offer sounded good, since they didn’t know exactly where they were, so they took it up on the offer. The next four days they would hunt for one day and travel the next. On Witch-day of the fifth week of spring, the creature said to them, “I know where you can get eggs. Dragon eggs. They can feed us all for many days. They can be found just up there.”

They all looked up and saw a dragon sail off from atop a sheer cliff some hundreds of feet high. Remaining on the cliff-top we could see a part of what must be a huge nest. After a lengthy discussion, they decided to make the attempt.

Bringing up with them all the rope they had, some 600 feet in all, Gorfang, Borax and two others managed to climb up to the top. There they found five copper-colored eggs. They were extremely large, some three feet long and extremely massive. Gorfang attempted to make a kind of sling to try to lower the eggs safely to the ground below. One of the eggs slipped out of the sling and broke. One of the Harmasti then decided to take an egg down all by himself. Despite the extra burden, he was able to make it down. Gorfang’s sling worked on another egg and it made it down safely.

Then they had to get down and out of sight before the dragon came back. All made it down safely except for Borax who fell. Fortunately he fell into a tree which broke his fall somewhat. Just as the dragon came back, they all attempted to hide or conceal themselves. It didn’t work for the dragon spotted them.

It began to plummet down towards them. Borax threw a Shield 3 on himself while Gorfang shot and missed. One of the Harmasti decided to try something different. He grabbed the egg and hoisted it above his head, daring the dragon to do something. It did. It blasted out a jet of flame which killed the Harmasti and another to boot. The egg survived the flame and fell to the ground unharmed.

The dragon turned around and swooped down on them again. This time the flame missed.

Borax shouted, "Scatter!" However, the dragon didn't fly around for another pass. It landed on top of a Harmasti and began to melee. It flamed again, but Borax and another Harmasti were able to jump out of the flame's path. Gorfang shot again and actually damaged its hind left leg, but its tail sweep and jaws took their toll. Finally Gorfang yelled, "Run!!" and they did.

When they found everybody it turned out that five of the Harmasti had died. All that were left were Gorfang, Borax, and four other Harmasti. The creature said nothing.

They traveled all night and all day to escape the dragon's vigilance. Finally on Ga-day of week 6, the creature said that we were very close and that someone should climb a mountain and look for the citadel. One of the Harmasti did so and spied off in the distance a mountain that looked somehow different. Perhaps it was the windows in the side that did it. Also perhaps it was the gleam that came from the very top every so often.

After a week's more travel, they came within a few miles of the citadel. One of the Harmasti noticed from a nearby bush that there were two eyes staring out at him. They quickly resolved themselves into a dwarf. He asked what their business was. Gorfang answered that he and his bodyguard wished to speak with the masters of the citadel. The scout, whose name was Wolingafartel (Woling for short) told them to stay there and wait for him to get new orders. They did and Woling returned in the late afternoon. He said for them to follow him and they did. He led them for about an hour until they reached the citadel⁴⁶.

As they approached the citadel/mountain, they could see that it was ringed with a huge chasm. They headed towards a kind of gate house flanked by two huge towers. Each of these towers had many eyes that intently watched them. Passing through the gate house they came to the edge of the chasm itself. Crossing it was a two-foot wide bridge. In addition, a strong, chill breeze could be felt.

"Here you must cross," said Woling.

As the first Harmasti started to cross, on the other side of the chasm, two statues some thirteen feet high with large flails started to twirl them, alternately pounding the landing of the bridge. Then one of the towers spoke.

"Abandon your weapons, take off your armor and walk ahead, standing erect."

This they all did, except for Woling. Borax, who was extremely awed, removed every stitch. And then they crossed.

The strong wind proved too much for most of the people. The only ones to make it across were Gorfang, Borax, Efer, and of course Woling. The other three were swept off the bridge. As the first one across neared the flailing statues, the flails stopped whirling. And as the last one crossed the threshold, they started up again.

Inside the citadel it was cold and dark, with only a few torches set in iron brackets to dispel the darkness. They walked for a long time in the gloom. Strangely enough, they only saw one dwarf during their whole journey. But finally they entered a chamber with a single dwarf in it.

Gorfang said, "Hello."

"Get to the point," said the dwarf.

"I've come from Mistvale, and we are trying to get rid of a band of oppressive exigers and we want your help."

⁴⁶ The guards to the castle are very similar to the castle of Oberon.

“To do what?”

“There is a band of exigers that...”

“What do you want us to do?” interrupted the dwarf.

“Well, 300 dwarf archers and about 50 Disorder kegs would come in very handy,” quipped Gorfang.

“Sorry, can’t provide that,” said the dwarf.

Gorfang now attempted to persuade the dwarf to give them help. Finally the dwarfs said, “What are your requirements?”

“Say, ten crossbowmen, some engineers, and about ten fighters all with the best weapons and armor.”

The dwarf thought about this. Finally he said, “Replacing one band of humans with another isn’t good enough. What’s in it for us?”

“Well, I can promise that no humans will ever come back to here.”

“But for how long?” asked the dwarf. “In thirty years their children will have no reason to be grateful to us.”

Gorfang had no answer to this, so he told the dwarf all about the Quest he was on and of how Urrquong had said that the dwarfs were not fixing the right machine.

The dwarf merely said that they were fixing what they believed to be the World Machine and that if they stopped, it may hurt his Quest.

Gorfang now showed the dwarf his key and explained all that he knew about it. The dwarf looked at it with interest. “Can we have it?”

“Permanently?”

“No.”

“Well, OK. But be careful with it.”

And the dwarf handed it to a nilmerg, who scampered off. Gorfang attempted to return to the subject of dwarf aid, but the dwarf interrupted him.

“Humans and dwarfs live together like oil and water. The exigers are a hundred miles away from us, and we do not feel threatened at the moment.”

Gorfang changed the subject and asked about the Gray Ones. The dwarf didn’t know about them. Then he pondered deep in thought for some time. He said, “Our citadel needs all the warriors we can get. It’s also much too small for inner dissension - which we have. You can take the broken dwarfs back with you.”

Gorfang was happy about this and he thanked the dwarf. They retired to their chambers and stayed the night.

The next day, (Pamalt-day), the dwarf returned the key to Gorfang. “It’s unbreakable and it’s purpose is greatly to be desired — it does indeed open the door to the Copper Kettle — but for only one person. We have tunnels to the Copper Kettle, but the way is only for Diamond dwarfs.

But you are welcome to come back and try the path when you feel you are ready. But now you must speak to the Decamony.” And he led Gorfang away from the rest of the group.

While Gorfang was away, the dwarfs that were going to return with them assembled. There were seventeen in all, Woling being among them, each with a crossbow and a hand weapon plus a shield and rock-cloth armor⁴⁷.

Finally Gorfang returned on Witch-day. The dwarf said that he would let them take a tunnel part of the way back in return for magic points. And if one person sacrificed some POW, they would all be allowed to come back. Since no one wanted to dare the bridge again, they took the offer, with Efger sacrificing the POW.

They made it safely out of the tunnel and started back home. On the way they met the blue creature again. After many trials and tribulations in which seven of the original seventeen dwarfs that came back with them died they made it back to Mistvale on Pamalt-day of the last week of spring.

⁴⁷ The equivalent of 4-point armor.

Chapter 9

The Retaking of Mistvale

A new person was seen in the outposts of Mistvale. His name was Tortho and he originally came from Kimos. He was captured by elves while fighting slarges and sold as a slave to the Viter clan. His cooking skills were put to good use by the exigers but his hatred of the exigers showed up in his cooking. Before he was killed, he escaped from the Viters and made his way here arriving on Gata-day, week 2 of summer.

The day after the battle with the dwarfs, the two remaining dwarfs, Woling and another named Broken Flint were examined to be sure that they were not constructs too. This involved chopping off a limb, examining it, and then re-attaching it using Regrow Limb. They were imprisoned all day.

The next day, Ga-day of week 3, they were questioned by Harmast. He demanded to know why he was attacked, who had sent the assassins, and other questions of that nature. Woling and Broken Flint said that they had no knowledge of why the party was attacked or from whom the orders were given. They remained in their prison cave all that day too.

But the next morning, they were gone! A frantic search showed no signs of them until they came sauntering back in around 10 am. Back in their cave, Harmast subjected them to severe interrogation.

“Where did you go?” demanded Harmast.

“Out,” was Broken Flint’s short answer.

“I really want to know!” shouted Harmast.

“We went to a religious ceremony,” said Woling.

Gorfang whispered to Harmast that many dwarfs tend to over-simplify things. Thus if a dwarf said that he went to a religious ceremony, it might not be the same kind of religious ceremony that humans are used to.

Slagstone now noticed something strange. His nostrils told him that there was iron in the air. He told Harmast of this, who asked, “What’s all this about iron?”

Broken Flint replied, “We do not, never have, and probably never will have or use iron.”

Harmast now checked again to see if the two were constructs. Then he asked why they had come.

“We came to help you,” said Woling.

Harmast distrusted the dwarfs, but he could see the value of good fighters. Consequently, he told the two dwarfs to fight each other until one of them surrendered. Woling and Broken Flint both thought the idea silly, but did it anyway. After a minute and a half of swords clashing, Woling landed a blow in Broken Flint’s abdomen, who then surrendered.

Harmast then tentatively decided to use the two as front line fighters. But there was still the matter of how they had escaped. Woling told Harmast that they couldn’t tell him or they would die. However, he said that they could tell Gorfang, but only while alone. Gorfang definitely did not want to be alone with the two and refused. Harmast asked if they met other dwarfs while they were escapees. Broken Flint said that they had neither met nor sought other dwarfs. Harmast wanted to

know what kind of worship ceremony they had attended. Woling said that they could not reveal their worship secrets.

Finally Harmast asked the rest of the party what their opinions were. Slagstone said that he was biased, Thingol said that as long as they were kept under constant watch, they shouldn't be any trouble. The rest of the party agreed with Thingol as did Harmast.

That week, Worfang again Discorporated to try to find a useful spell. He returned with a Glamour spell spirit, which Harmast decided to try to bind to gain back some of his POW. Unfortunately for Harmast, the spirit possessed him until Worfang drove the spirit out. Harmast was, to say the least, extremely embarrassed.

The rest of the week was uneventful until Witch-day. That morning, Harmast heard a familiar sound outside his cave. He went outside and saw again the raven.

“Thine enemy approaches Harmast. Stretch forth your hand.”

This Harmast did and the raven slashed its wing across Harmast's hand, slicing a dreadful wound. Despite the pain, he could feel that all of his Rune magic had returned.

“Prepare thyself,” was the last thing the raven said before it flew away.

The very next day, Six-day, a big meeting occurred with the headmen of Halfwing, Stormwood, and Mistvale there. And, to everyone's surprise, the old shaman of the hills was there too. Tiburo spoke to Harmast.

“If this revolution fails we (meaning us village leaders) are all dead. Thus we have privately held a council and decided to help you to help save our skins. We have scraped together all of the fighting men of the three villages, 92 men, to give to you. Happy birthday.”

Harmast was touched beyond what mere words could say. Nevertheless, he managed to make a fine speech.

“With these new fighting Harmasti, I feel we can win the crucial battle against our oppressors, the exigers. I make you an oath not to leave until the menace is wiped out, and not to surrender to the exigers. If I am not successful, I hope that Humakt will not take me to Heaven.”

To the rest of us, he said, “I know that some of you (indicating Slagstone, Thingol, and Gorfang) have other quests to fulfill. However, I hope that you will have me as you leader and fight by my side to rid the valleys of the exiger menace.”

The shaman said to us, “With great difficulty I sent spirits to find the persons you described to me. On my way back here, though, I was captured by trolls and was imprisoned for a time.”

As the shaman said this, Slagstone silently smirked.

“I do know, however, that a whole tribe of trolls is marching on the mountains, some 300 strong.”

Tiburo then said, “When 300 trolls come here, we humans are in deep trouble. We must be in a firm position, ready to defend ourselves against them.”

Slagstone agreed. “Harmast, you must be strong. Trolls understand only strength.”

Harmast asked the shaman how long ago he had sent the spirits off. The shaman replied that he sent them off around the third week of spring. Harmast then said that he would worry about

the trolls when they got here. It would take them time to cross the Mari Mountains, and by then he hoped to be in a much better bargaining position. Therefore, he was going to put his attention onto the palisade in Mistvale.

There were supposed to be around 40 men-at-arms and 100 slaves guarding the palisade. It was about 100 feet long by 60 feet wide. There was a deep ditch surrounding it and projections from the four corners to set up a crossfire on anyone assaulting the walls. The main gate did not have a ditch in front of it, but looked heavily fortified. The walls were about ten feet tall.

Many plans flew back and forth to take the palisade. Tunneling a kilometer to directly underneath it was one, as was forcing the two dwarfs to surrender to the palisade and then dig out of it, leaving a tunnel behind. Woling and Broken Flint had many plans, but Harmast refused all of theirs, because they would not tell how they would do what they claimed they could do.

The final plan was to turn two of the wagons into a housing for a battering ram and the other three as ramps to the top of the walls. Mobile planes of wood would serve as protection against arrows and fascines would facilitate the wagons' attempt to push up against the walls. Many scaling ladders were built for the final climb up the walls.

So the housing was built and covered with whatever we could find to protect it against the fire that the Brands so dearly loved. The attack was scheduled for Witch-day of week 4. On that evening, our entire force slipped down onto the valley floor and prepared for the assault.

Harmast's group had the battering ram. With him were Gorfang, Thingol, Acari, Efger (Harmast's appointed second-in-command) plus twenty veteran Harmasti, thirty new Harmasti, and ten militia. Their job was to batter down the main gate.

Slagstone's group included all of the non-humans (including Woling and Broken Flint) plus one wagon and ten veterans, ten rookies, and twenty militia. His job was to attack one of the projecting towers.

Borax's group had ten veterans, thirty rookies, ten militia and one wagon. He was to assault one of the walls.

Finally, Tortho's group had ten veterans, twenty rookies, ten militia, and one wagon⁴⁸. His assignment was another of the walls.

Worfang was to initially scout out the palisade while Discorporated. As he glided over the palisade, a black spirit came out after him. It quickly overcame Worfang and pulled him back down into the palisade.

Harmast was able to achieve relative surprise. As all of the groups reached a distance of 100 meters, the crossbowmen fired their Firearrowed bolts. All of the bolts missed except for ten of the bolts which hit the housing of the ram. The housing started to burn and they stopped moving to fight the fire.

At sixty meters, the crossbows fired more Firearrowed bolts. Slagstone's wagon was hit as well as one of his veteran groups. He stopped his wagon to fight the fire. Harmast's wagon was hit again, as Thingol, Gorfang, and Acari all fired their crossbows. Only Gorfang made his shot tell.

When Tortho's and Borax's group were at twenty meters, the crossbowmen fired regular bolts, but not at Borax's group. Some of Tortho's rookies were hit as were some of Slagstone's. The bolts hitting Harmast's group penetrated more, and some of his rookies fell dead or wounded. By now Slagstone had put out the fire, and he started his wagon moving again.

⁴⁸ These numbers are all approximate due to the necessity of reducing the scale factor by ten.

Tortho's group and Borax's group had now reached the wall. The veteran Harmasti placed the ladders in position and began to storm up the walls. Slagstone's wagon was still moving towards the wall. Harmast abandoned the ram except for leaving behind the militia to try to halt the fire, and charged.

Tortho's group was initially repelled by the flaming poles as was Borax's as Slagstone's wagon rumbled on and Harmast's men charged. The crossbows fired again and some of Tortho's men fell off the ladders. Slagstone's group had reached the wall and began to storm as the bolts flew down, putting some of the rookies out of the combat. Borax's group on the ladder did some damage to the defenders before their burning armor and shields forced them off the ladders. Harmast's wagon continued to burn.

In a second charge, Tortho's men managed to gain a foothold as Tortho's Fireblade rallied them. Slagstone's group battered their defenders, forcing them back as Slagstone, Woling and Broken Flint all hit. The rookies who had taken to the ladders of Borax's group were repelled by the fire-wielding defenders. Harmast's group reached the walls and began scaling the ladders.

Tortho's group was missed by two groups of crossbowmen as their second charge began to bear fruit. The defenders fighting Slagstone broke and fled, and his group gained the tower. Borax's rookies fought valiantly, but were forced off the ladders as the fire burned them. Harmast gained the top and began spreading death with his swords as the crossbowmen missed.

Tortho's group began to show signs of fatigue as they fought atop the walls. Reinforcements arrived where Slagstone was fighting just as the first of the militia climbed over the walls. Their crossbows felled both Woling and Broken Flint and wounded Slagstone and some of the militia. Borax's militia now began scaling the ladders and were hit by the flaming poles. Many of Harmast's group were still unable to gain the wall as Harmast continued his grim reaping.

Some of Tortho's rookies were killed by the crossbowmen as his men again rallied and killed more defenders. The group of crossbowmen broke and ran as the last of Slagstone's men had topped the walls. Engaged in melee with more reinforcements, some of the militia were cut down in a fairly equal trade. Borax's men began to fight better as they fought on the ladders. As Harmast cut down another, Thingol Palsied the leader of a group of defenders and some of the veterans gained the wall. In addition, our crossbowmen finally managed to wound some of the crossbowmen shooting at us.

Tortho's group continued to battle for the wall. The crossbowmen that had fled suddenly turned and rallied themselves to face Slagstone as he realized that he had very few men left. As more of Harmast's group gained the wall, the defenders suddenly struck at a group of veterans and wounded them.

More crossbow bolts flew, missing Tortho's group, who was again showing signs of fatigue. The remnants of Slagstone's militia cut down one group of crossbowmen as the other fired and wounded Slagstone and Broken Flint, who had Healed himself. Crossbow bolts took their toll on Harmast's rookies as the battle raged on.

The group Tortho was fighting suddenly lost heart and broke. As the last militia died, and as Slagstone began to kill the crossbowmen, they surrendered. Borax's group finally made some progress against the defenders. Harmast's group finished off the defenders on his portion of the wall and began to charge over it.

Tortho now took his group over towards Slagstone's group, seeing many defenders massed over there, ignoring the crossbowmen who had been firing on them since the assault began. Slagstone now had many prisoners to handle and he began disarming them. Borax lost the last of his fighting men, and had to retreat with the remnants of his men. As Harmast was finally able to take a look around him, he suddenly disappeared from our sight. Acari headed towards the crossbowmen who had been harrying Harmast's group, not realizing that he was all alone.

In the center of the palisade, Tortho engaged the group who were over where Slagstone had been. Noticing how bare his back was, he sent five rookies to deal with the crossbowmen who had been shooting at them. Slagstone continued to be depressed. Efger led the remaining Harmasti down into the palisade to help Tortho's group.

The five rookies that Tortho had sent were eliminated by the crossbowmen. Slagstone was still depressed, not knowing that Borax was taking the rest of his men over to help him. Acari, still alone, started to reap death among the crossbowmen. Tortho's and Efger's group started to massacre the group fighting them.

Slagstone continued to hold his prisoners as Borax and his men joined him. Acari, who finally received the reinforcements he wanted, killed the remainder of the crossbowmen he had attacked. The defenders fighting Tortho and Efger rallied and launched a last attack on the veterans, setting them afire.

Efger's group and Tortho's group made short work of the defenders. Most of Slagstone's prisoners made a break for freedom and, undermanned, Slagstone could do nothing about it. The crossbowmen who had harried Tortho's group also escaped. Many of the wounded men-at-arms managed to heal themselves and sneak away in the confusion of the battle. But we managed to take the palisade.

When all was counted, it turned out that we had lost only nine militia, fifteen veterans, and twenty-five rookies. In return, we believe we killed all the men-at-arms and 75 slaves. Twenty-five slaves had escaped the palisade.

Searching the palisade from top to bottom, we discovered another barrel of each of the three substances. We also recovered forty packets of the tarry substance that the Brands used, plus about 270 pennies worth of silver⁴⁹. We found about a dozen pigeons, which Tortho confiscated. There was a week's supply of food for 140 men for a week. And, best of all, there were four crystals found.

But where was Harmast?

⁴⁹ There had actually been 300 pennies, but Tortho had taken 30 of them for himself.

Chapter 10

A HeroQuest and a Tower

What Harmast saw when he looked around him was the form of Khanda standing in the middle of the palisade. Then everything around him except for Khanda faded slowly out of existence and he found himself standing on a featureless blue plain.

Behind him stood what he recognized as an Arkati warrior guarding the raven which was now clutching a large golden globe. Khanda slowly advanced on Harmast.

When he was a certain distance away from Harmast, a glowing silver circle formed on the ground around them both. It was the exact diameter of a Humakti dueling circle. Harmast found out that when he wished for a Truesword and a Bladesharp 4 on his weapon, it was there. Somehow, he was being magically supported.

Khanda attempted to cast a Truesword, which succeeded. The time he spent enabled Harmast to get the first blow in. The blow tinked. Khanda tinked in return and he seemed not amused.

Again they traded blows to no effect. Then Harmast got a good blow in and nicked Khanda in the left leg. Though it bled, he seemed more mad than hurt.

Khanda swung again and tinked. Harmast now tried to break Khanda's sword and it snapped nicely. Khanda looked aghast and then pulled out a kukri and attempted a Truesword on it. The Truesword failed and then Harmast criticised Khanda. Khanda fumbled his parry. Harmast chopped Khanda's left arm off and it and his kukri went flying.

Well, almost went flying. As they started to fly away, his arm suddenly was re-attached and his kukri was in it⁵⁰. Khanda then attempted to Heal himself but as he was casting the spell, Harmast hit him again in the same arm. The arm came off again.

Again Khanda tried to Heal and again Harmast hit him before it finished. Harmast chopped into Khanda's left leg, knocking him down. As Khanda again tried to Heal himself, Harmast plunged his sword into Khanda's stomach. He stayed down, unconscious⁵¹.

Then Khanda's body started to turn abstract, and Harmast could see various glowing gems over Khanda's body. They varied in shape, size, brightness, and color. The bird croaked to him, "Take your reward. Those gems are his Power and spells."

Harmast was tempted to take POW from Khanda to replace his own depleted store, but chose instead to take from him his knowledge of Bladesharp 10. As he took the gem, the blue plain started to take on the shape of the palisade and the bird, warrior, and Khanda faded away to be replaced by the palisade of Mistvale⁵².

Harmast told the rest of us about his escapade. Some of us were critical in his choosing a spell that he can't even cast⁵³, but he defended his decision in that now Khanda no longer had the spell.

⁵⁰ He had spent a point of Will to re-roll his parry.

⁵¹ Actually he was at -3 HP, but one can only kill someone else on the Hero Plane in certain places; this location wasn't one of those places.

⁵² What had happened is that Khanda had set a HeroQuest trap for Harmast. He is to be the Knight of the Globe and must protect the bird from being killed. Every time that Khanda and Harmast are doing the correct things, Harmast is forced to the Hero Plane to fight Khanda.

⁵³ Remember, the chance to cast is POW * 5 - ENC.

Harmast held a victory worship service on Gata-day of the 5th week of summer. Then we decided what we were going to do. The next day, a small expedition went out to look at the fort between Stormwood and Halfwing again. They returned on Ga-day of week 6, when the last remnants of the palisade were being torn down.

It was decided that tomorrow we would send a messenger to Stormwood to tell them to start to block off the valley to the fort with a palisade similar to the one at Halfwing. The messenger returned on Ga-day of week 7 saying that the construction was nearly finished.

It was on this day that Thingol finally managed to do the required research into a spell from the book that the trolls had brought. He called on his patron saint, Valkaro, and spent the whole night studying. With Valkaro's aid, he managed to learn the spell Neutralize Damage, a type of Healing spell.

It was good that he finished, for the next day we left for Silvereye to take their palisade as well. We had three wagons remaining after the assault on Mistvale and we brought them along. We had to leave behind the militia in case there was more trouble at Mistvale, but we did bring all one hundred or so Harmasti. We arrived at Silvereye on Pamalt-day.

The palisade at Silvereye had about 20 men-at-arms and about 40 slaves. It was thus much smaller than the one at Mistvale. However, it did have a stone tower on one of the corners.

We split up into three groups. Harmast had the main force, consisting of himself, Gorfang, Efger, Thingol, 40 Harmasti and one wagon. Slagstone had another wagon plus Borax, Woling, Broken Flint, and 30 Harmasti. Finally, Tortho had the last group with Acari and 30 Harmasti, plus the last wagon.

In preparation, Thingol used the crystals that the others had to put up Damage Resist on the invaders. Harmast, who had taken Worfang's crystal away from him, got a ten point Damage Resist. Efger got seven points, Slagstone got nine points and Tortho got five points.

As we approached the walls, Firearrowed crossbow bolts flew our way. Fortunately for us, they all missed. We reached the walls and began to climb.

Harmast's group was initially held off of the top. Slagstone's Harmasti were set afire by the pole-wielding men-at-arms. Tortho's group, which had to travel more distance, now reached the walls.

Thingol Palsied the obvious leader of the resistance around Harmast. Nevertheless, they hit and Efger jumped off the ramp to put out the fire that was on him. Slagstone's group again took damage from the poles. Tortho's group began to storm up the walls and was met by fierce resistance from the slaves.

The battle for the walls continued. Tortho fell off the ladders after being hit by a slave. Slagstone's weapon flared and burned after the Protection 4 on it was breached. Woling's shield burned through and began to burn Woling himself. Finally, one group of Harmasti in Harmast's group gained the walls. Then some of Slagstone's group also gained the walls. From then, it became a rout. The defender's morale broke, and they surrendered to us.

In capturing the palisade, twelve Harmasti died. In return, we killed nine men-at-arms and thirteen slaves, capturing eleven men-at-arms and twenty-seven slaves. After many suggestions, Harmast had the men-at-arms' right thumbs cut off and then set them free. Then we set the slaves to work demolishing the palisade.

The villagers of Silvereye came to us and asked us what we were going to do. They suggested that we could get recruits from Turn's Drop, where there was no palisade. Harmast, Borax, Acari, and three Harmasti set out for Turn's Drop on Six-day of week 7. We expected him

back on the next day.

But there was still the stone tower to be considered. It was about six meters in diameter, and some ten meters high, made out of piled stone.

Harmast, fearing another HeroQuest trap, left the matter to Efger. The villagers said that they had built the tower with a door, but that they had later been told to seal it up. There were, however, narrow arrow slits that we could peer into. Though it was dark, Gorfang's Earthsense detected no motion and only ambient temperature. Slagstone using his Darksense thought he detected wall hangings. The villagers said that when they built it, it was bare.

Our curiosity aroused, we made plans to get inside. Finally, we all went to the top and with Slagstone using his mace to bash a hole, and Broken Flint using his Form/Set Granite, they managed to make a hole two feet wide into the tower.

Efger, Gorfang, Thingol, Tortho, Woling, and Broken Flint all lowered themselves in through the hole. The floor was made of stone, and there were indeed hangings. They were velvet black with no detail on them, nor anything behind them. There were also stone stairs leading down which we took. The next floor was almost exactly like the one we just left. Again we took the stairs downward.

This floor was apparently the bottom floor of the tower. There were no tapestries, but there was a door with neither hinges nor handle on our side. Discussion ran rampant as to whether to touch the door or not. Finally Broken Flint touched it. It was warm: in fact, warmer than it should have been. Thingol realized that the level of this door roughly corresponded to the level of the ground outside. Everyone was puzzled. Gorfang said that since he was the senior, we should all go up. Efger hotly retorted that he was Harmast's second in command, but that we should all go up.

All except for Thingol, Woling, and Broken Flint, who then pushed the door open. As his hand broke the plane of the door frame, there was a loud keening noise and Broken Flint's left hand, the hand that pushed the door, took damage.

The door opened onto something exceedingly strange. The three saw a large hall with a fireplace. There were five people inside this hall. Four were obviously men-at-arms, the other was sitting in a chair in front of the fire. But as the sound of the Warding reached him, he got up, grabbed a sword off a bracket above the fireplace and headed towards the three, as did two of the four men-at-arms whose spears sprouted Fireblades.

Thingol reacted instantly by casting a Palsy spell at the presumed exigor. He overcame the man and he fell, his chest Palsied. However, the two men-at-arms engaged Broken Flint, who had barely enough time to get his weapon out. He parried one, but not the other. He fell from wounds in the head and right leg.

As Woling took his place, Thingol started to run up the stairs. Woling, however, fumbled his parry and fell down, where he surrendered.

Just as we were about to leave, Gorfang stopped. He said, "Even though they are treacherous and vile, they are our comrades." We were about to try to make a kind of stand when we just decided to leave the tower.

But what in Glorantha was this tower? Thingol was sure that this was the Doorway that Khanda told us was their greatest magic. So we surrounded it with Harmasti, and put five Harmasti on top of the tower to guard the hole that Slagstone had made.

One good thing that happened was that Mugumma came into Silvereve that evening.

But later that evening, we heard sounds from inside the tower. Suddenly, new arrow slits

appeared in the tower and sounds of fighting could be heard from the top. But before we could go to investigate, Firearrowed crossbow bolts flew from the new windows.

In face of this fire, we retreated out of range of the crossbows, but kept the circle around the tower intact. We kept up our vigil all night. Nothing happened.

The next day, Ga-day of week 8, Harmast returned with the six recruits from Turn's Drop. He was not pleased to hear the news we told him. He did ask about the other exiger fort, which supposedly held the pass against the Kujerungs. It was supposedly as bad as the one between Stormwood and Halfwing.

Harmast was also worried about his current condition. He was low on POW, and he had no healing magic other than Heal Wounds. So he asked Mugumma if he could help. Mugumma said that he had two spell spirits which he could order to attack Harmast. Harmast could then not only get a new spell, but hopefully increase his POW. In return for a six-point magic point storing crystal and armed with a Spirit Screen 4, he faced the first spirit, a Befuddle spell. Unfortunately for him, it possessed him. Mugumma Discorporated, exorcised the spirit, exercised Harmast's body a little⁵⁴, then returned to his own body. Embarrassed, Harmast tried again against an Ironhand 1 spirit. This time, he was successful.

On Empress-day, Harmast decided to try a little trick. We would march out of Silvereye and then backtrack until we could see what happened. If we were lucky, the defenders would leave the tower, in which case we would attack them unless they were far too big. If they were far too big, we could still retreat.

First however, we had to evacuate Silvereye. Harmast sent the entire population along and all the food that the populace had with ten Harmasti who would distribute the refugees.

We left Silvereye on Empress-day. We returned to it early Pamalt-day. They were still inside the tower. We then decided to ignore the tower and take a look at Orange Fire. The best way to get there was to go to Turn's Drop and from there cross the mountains into Orange Fire.

We got to Turn's Drop on Six-day of the end of week 8. When we got there, however, we could see a large pillar of smoke coming from the general direction of Crook Halt.

So we crossed the mountains to the trail leading to Crook Halt. We got there late on Ga-day. Crook Halt looked fine and the villagers said that the smoke came from the exiger stronghold.

Harmast decided to send all the Harmasti back to Mistvale except for Acari, and Borax. With them and Harmast would go Thingol, Tortho, and Mugumma to scout out the exiger stronghold.

Before noon on Gata-day, we made it to the area where the stronghold was. We were on the cliff-side opposite the fort, so that we could see it clearly. Approaching from the rear of the fort, what part of the stronghold that we could see looked okay. There were lots of men-at-arms carrying something, and there were many slaves down by the river that ran through the ravine.

Moving around so that we could see the front of the stronghold, we hid while we watched. In front, there were many burned trees. And we could see that the things the men-at-arms were carrying were in fact, burned corpses.

We returned to Mistvale with many questions. What was going on at the exiger fort? Were the Kujerungs attacking? We asked the villagers what they knew about the Kujerungs. They said that the Kujerungs supposedly specialized in thrown weapons. In fact, it was said that one of their weapons could take off a man's leg at twenty meters distance. Though they outnumbered the

⁵⁴ A couple hundred push-ups while in full armor.

Brands by about five to one, and though they were more regimented than the Brands, the general opinion was that the Brands were better than the Kujerungs.

Plans about what to do ran rife. One suggestion was to try to coordinate an attack on the tower with a Kujerung attack on the exiger fort. Then if the tower really did contain a gate to the exiger fort, we might be able to take the Brands from behind. This plan was quickly shot down when it was pointed out that if the men in the tower found themselves under attack, they would probably just shut down the gate rather than let the exigers in the fort be attacked from two sides.

For the next few days, we stayed around Mistvale and trained in various things. Thingol trained in his sorcery skills, Mugumma went out onto the Spirit Plane to find spirits, and most of the rest trained in their weapons skills.

On Empress-day of week 10, Harmast led the Harmasti in worshipping Humakt on this, one of his Holy Days. Later that day, the old shaman came back. Harmast asked him for advice, for Harmast seemed to have lost some vital spark.

The shaman said to him that he could see that Harmast was weak magically speaking. He asked Harmast if he wanted some help spiritually. Harmast said yes, that he would especially like a Heal spell. The shaman replied that he did indeed have a Heal spell spirit attached to his fetch. He asked if Harmast would like to fight it. Harmast replied in the affirmative.

This time, Harmast successfully beat the spirit, and his POW went up too! Tortho fought a Slow 1 spell spirit that the shaman had and defeated it. Acari got a Protection 6 spell from the shaman too. Borax attempted to fight a spell spirit, but was possessed until Mugumma drove the spirit away.

The next day the shaman announced that he would be staying until the end of summer at Stormwood. But before he left, he asked what we would want to insure our attack on Orange Fire. Thingol replied that a gnome⁵⁵ would be most helpful. The shaman said that he didn't have a gnome but that he did have a sylph⁵⁶. It was bound into a bag that he had, and he had a spirit which knew the spell Control Sylph. After a brief discussion, Mugumma's fetch fought the spirit and learned the spell. Thingol made Mugumma promise that he would later create a spell matrix for the spell.

So on Witch-day, we all marched off to Orange Fire with the three wagons that remained.

⁵⁵ An earth elemental.

⁵⁶ An air elemental.

Chapter 11

The Assault on Orange Fire

Late that day, we arrived in Crook Halt. We spent the night there, then continued the next morning. That day, Six-day, on our way, one of the wagons fell into the river that ran through the ravine. It was destroyed. Another wagon broke a wheel, but despite all our efforts, it turned out to be irreparable.

Around noon, we saw some men-at-arms as scouts, but they ran away. Finally on Ga-day of the eleventh week of summer, we arrived in Orange Fire. There was of course a palisade there. The villagers estimated their numbers at around fifty men-at-arms and one hundred slaves.

Harmast decided to try to use his reputation to avoid a fight. He shouted to the men-at-arms to surrender. In reply, a crossbow bolt landed some distance away from Harmast. Around it was tied a papyrus. Unrolling it, we could see a message written in some language that none of us could read⁵⁷. Harmast shouted that we couldn't read it, so they said to send someone over. Harmast got a volunteer and he went to the palisade. He came back some minutes later with the message from the men-at-arms.

They said that if Harmast would personally promise safe passage back to the exiger stronghold then they would surrender. After a quick discussion, Harmast shouted back that only the men-at-arms could come out with their weapons and armor — the slaves would have to be unarmed. Harmast said that they had until sundown to think it over.

A few minutes later, about a dozen pigeons flew out of the palisade. Thinking quickly, Tortho shot one of them down. The rest split up into two groups: one group headed towards the exiger stronghold, the other towards the nearer fort.

Sundown came and there was no reply from the palisade. Calling out to them, they said that they wanted more time to think it over. Harmast replied that their time was up. We readied ourselves for the assault.

Since we only had one wagon, we would only assault the palisade from two sides. Assaulting the gate of the palisade were Harmast, Gorfang, Borax, Enkavar, Efger, 50 Harmasti and the wagon. Assaulting the rear of the palisade were Thingol, Slagstone, Worfang, Mugumma, Acari, Tortho, 50 Harmasti, and the sylph. The plan was for Harmast and company to use the wagon to scale the walls from the front while the sylph would distract the defenders of the rear to enable us to climb up ladders. The sylph was protected by a Damage Resist 11 cast by Thingol, a Countermagic 3 from Worfang, and a Protection 6 from Acari. Mugumma would be the controller of the sylph.

We started 120 meters away, just out of crossbow range. The attackers of the rear started to run as the front assaulters started to push the wagon. The crossbows shot while the party at the front was 100 meters away and the rear party was 90 meters. 30 bolts flew towards Harmast's party and 20 towards Slagstone's. 10 of Harmast's Harmasti were heavily wounded while 20 were hurt in Slagstone's, 10 of them badly. Tortho was hit and fell injured. Slagstone stopped to Heal him.

As we continued on, the slaves began to reload. They were ready to fire when Harmast's party was 60 meters away and Slagstone's 30 meters. Slagstone's party was missed but 10 more of Harmast's were wounded. Worfang had begun to move up behind Slagstone's party and he completed the Healing of Tortho that Slagstone had started. Mugumma now commanded the sylph to knock over the defenders on the walls.

As the slaves again reloaded, the defenders showed themselves. About 40 massed at the

⁵⁷ It was written in Marit.

walls in front, and some 50 at the rear. By now Slagstone's group had reached the walls while Harmast's was still some 40 meters away, burdened by the wagon.

Crossbow bolts flew again, killing 10 each of Harmast's and Slagstone's groups. The sylph had reached the walls and was attacked by 10 of the defenders. One group of Harmasti successfully made it up the walls while the rest of them, some 20 or so, failed to scale the walls.

Now the slaves who had been shooting at Slagstone's group dropped their crossbows and pulled out swords. The ones shooting at Harmast's again reloaded. Harmast's group had just reached the walls as the other defenders struck at Slagstone's group. Many of them were set on fire as the 10 on the walls made no progress. The sylph continued to throw defenders off the wall.

Harmast's group shoved the wagon against the walls and began to swarm up it as the slaves fired their crossbows again. More Harmasti fell injured as Harmast gained the wall. More of Slagstone's group had gained the wall while those on top still could make no progress. Those still at the bottom were set on fire again by the poles. Slagstone had not gained the walls and the sylph, now half-destroyed still threw defenders off the walls.

The Harmasti on the walls in Slagstone's group who had been set aflame earlier now succumbed to the flames. The other Harmasti finally made progress as they killed some of the defenders. Thingol started the process of Palsying defenders. Harmast's group however, was in serious trouble. Efgar was knocked off the wall. Gorfang was hit twice and injured. Harmast noticed that he had only a handful of men to fight the many defenders and so called a retreat on his side.

Slagstone heard the call to retreat that Harmast gave, but decided to keep his group on the wall. The Harmasti who hadn't made it onto the wall now succumbed to the flames inflicted on them. The Harmasti with him made no more progress and when Slagstone's leg armor was set afire, he too called for a retreat.

We retreated out of crossbow range and took account. We had lost the remaining wagon and all the ladders that we had built. More importantly, we had lost 25 Harmasti. We estimated that we had perhaps killed seven of them.

The next morning, the villagers of Orange Fire did some recruiting within the village and came up with 73 more people who were willing to become Harmasti. Harmast accepted them gratefully. He then decided to begin training of a crossbow regiment with the crossbows we had. He therefore sent Acari, Gorfang, and Tortho along with ten Harmasti to begin training. In addition, he sent the 73 new Harmasti back to get them armed and armored. He also sent five veteran Harmasti to scout out the exiger stronghold.

Seeing as the men-at-arms would not leave their palisade, we stayed here and trained until the scouts returned on Gata-day of week 12. They said that they had seen in the valley below the stronghold a line of camps which headed towards Kujerung land. And from what they could tell, the stronghold was filled with people.

Harmast thought that perhaps now was the time to talk to the Kujerungs. consequently, he, Slagstone, Thingol, Gorfang, Worfang, Mugumma, Acari, Borax, Tortho, and ten Harmasti headed towards the exiger stronghold. We arrived at the encampment on the first day of autumn.

Harmast said that he was going to go down into the encampment alone. He told us not to worry unless he hadn't come back by nightfall.

He climbed down the side of the valley and walked towards the camp. A dozen men on horseback then rode towards him. He stopped and stood his ground. About ten paces from him, they stopped and with weapons drawn told him to take off his helm. They were visibly shocked when they saw that he was white. They then told him to hold onto his helmet with both hands and to

follow them. He did so and they took him to a tent. It was then that Harmast noticed that the twelve who were escorting him were in fact exigers! What had fooled him was the fact that they were all armored similarly. Then he remembered that the Kujerungs were supposedly more regimental than the Brands.

Inside the tent were five more exigers. Behind a table there was another exiger who had extremely ornamented armor.

“So tell me why we shouldn’t kill you,” said the exiger.

“I’m Harmast Nightblade. I have come to inquire about your intentions for the Brands.”

“Are you a Brand?”

“No.”

“Then what business is it of yours?”

“I am in command of a force trying to defeat the Brands.”

“Are you a Viter?”

“No.”

“A bandit then?”

“I represent the people of the Brand valleys. We are trying to throw off the yoke of the Brands.” And Harmast told the exiger of our exploits.

“I see. That explains certain things. But tell me why we shouldn’t kill you?”

“I am hoping that we could ally together and defeat the Brands.”

“Ah, so you would attack from the rear while we attacked the front?” said the exiger, referring to the Brand stronghold.

“I was hoping that we could both attack the front.”

“As you can see, only a limited number can attack from either side.”

“If I may ask, are you trying to take over all the Brand lands?” asked Harmast.

“We wish to turn it into a satellite state.”

“Do you think you will succeed?”

“Well, thanks to you they are definitely weaker now. Tell me, just what are you proposing? Would you be willing to control the conquered lands?”

“What would that entail?”

“You would have to give us tribute of course. And allow us free passage through the pass. And,” and here he paused slightly, “you would never be attacked by us.”

“Is that all you want?”

“It would greatly improve our standard of living if we controlled these lands. It is a strategic

pass through the Qualyorni Pass. And since the Hookhill's are moving and it seems war is coming, it is always nice to have a buffer zone."

"Do you have excess population that you want to move in? Or do you just want to control the lands?"

"Some of our population might want to move. Of course you can tax them all you please. And of course as our vassals, you would have to fight with us."

"Are you in danger of losing much of your force?"

"No. We didn't expect to take them in the first assault."

"How can we assist?"

"Take them from behind. We want to make them surrender. I assume you wish to kill them all?"

"Yes."

"I suppose that would be all right. Do you know how many Brands there are left?"

"Twenty-six or so. I will be back."

"We are not going to assault them until Empress-day. Can you help us fight then?"

"No. But I will try to be back within seven days."

"Okay. I'll see you within the week."

Later that day, Harmast returned to us. As we headed back to Orange Fire he told us of his encounter. Some of us favored the idea, some of us didn't.

We made it back to Orange Fire on Six-day of that week. We then sent out messengers to all the major valleys calling for a meeting. Then we sat back and waited.

On Empress-day of the second week, our guards reported that eight Brand exigers were riding into the valley. At the head of the delegation was Amadsan. He said that they wished to speak to Harmast. Harmast called the rest of us and we sat down to speak to them.

"I guess you know about the Kujerungs."

"Yes," answered Harmast.

"Have you talked to them?"

"Yes."

"What did they offer you?"

"Nothing that I want to explain to you," retorted Harmast.

"It is obvious that you and I cannot come to terms. I have come to point out that the Kujerungs are not your friends. They probably said that they want free passage through the mountains. Our greatest income was from charging them for passage. And they want tribute, correct? How much? You are going to have to take as much from the menials as we do. You will certainly never see the inside of our stronghold and the two forts — the Kujerungs will take them.

In short, you will be their slaves. I therefore propose a cessation of hostilities until the Kujerungs are gone. I promise that we will not attack you. And," he spoke less confidently, "we could use food too."

Harmast asked, "What would you give us for food?"

"We would fight the Kujerungs. You must admit that we fight better than you do." As Harmast looked skeptical, Amadsan added, "And there are 300 Kujerung exigers."

The rest of us looked shocked. We conferred briefly and then Harmast told Amadsan that we would need time to make our decision.

Amadsan replied, "That is no problem. We will extend the truce and stay here until you reach one."

And so they did. They set up their own camp away from Mistvale.

The next day the headmen of the villages all arrived. At the meeting, Harmast asked them what they thought of the Kujerung's offer. The headmen agreed that the taxes would be higher, but that we would not collect them in such a bloodthirsty manner. Tiburo remarked that the exigers never lie, but that they never treat anyone fairly.

We went back to the Brands. Harmast asked how long the cessation of hostilities would be. Amadsan replied that the Kujerungs would not stay long into the winter. He said that they would come and tell us when they were ready to fight us again. Harmast was uneasy at giving aid to the exigers. Amadsan told Harmast that we should probably do it — the worst case for us would be if the Brands surrendered and then joined the Kujerungs to wipe us out.

Given the true situation, Harmast relented. We started to discuss terms. Harmast asked if they would take all their men out of the forts and palisades. Amadsan replied that they probably would not take their men out of the forts unless we promised to leave them when we started fighting again.

After some dickering, the terms were hammered out: There would be a cessation of hostilities, the ending of it to be notified by the Brands. The Brands would take all their men out of the palisades and we would be allowed to do what we want with them. In return for helping them take all the food out of their forts, they would vacate them and let us occupy them until the restarting of hostilities, when we would vacate them.

So now we had an unwritten alliance with those whose rule we had sought to overthrow.

Chapter 12

HeroQuesting

By Empress-day of the third week of autumn, we had finished helping the Brands move all the food out of their forts. We then took possession of them. Strangely enough, the forts were literally carved out of the rock surrounding them. We didn't think that the Brands had the technology to do this. The obvious solution was that the Gray Ones had made these. But for what purpose?

A week later, Humakt had a Holy Day. Harmast officiated at the ceremony back at Mistvale and all was well until the very end. Harmast noticed that the pommel of the sword was beginning to grow larger and turn golden-colored. Then the congregation turned misty and he could see a man walking towards him. A man with a flanged sword. Khanda. Looking behind him, he could see the raven, the globe, and the dark warrior there too. Harmast grabbed the temple sword with his right hand and drew one of his own in his left.

As Khanda approached Harmast, he cast a Truesword on himself, as did Khanda. Then they both cast Shield, Harmast successfully casting one point, Khanda failing to. Then they fought.

Harmast, recalling his last encounter with Khanda, struck at his sword. He successfully damaged it. In return, Khanda struck but Harmast fumbled his parry⁵⁸. Khanda's strike hit Harmast's abdomen and he fell, injured. But before Khanda could strike again, Harmast cast Heal Wound on himself and rose, healed. Khanda swung again and hit Harmast's right arm. The arm was injured enough that Harmast had to drop the iron sword. Quickly, he dropped the sword in his left and picked up the iron sword.

Harmast swung at Khanda's sword and it snapped in two. Khanda then dropped to the ground to pick up the fallen piece. He then quickly cast a Repair spell and the sword was mended. While Khanda did this, Harmast swung again and hit Khanda in the right leg, injuring him slightly.

Harmast now took to trying to shatter Khanda's sword again. Khanda, still trying to hit Harmast, was parried and the blow tinked. As Harmast swung again at Khanda's sword, he again tinked because of Harmast's parry. Finally Harmast was able to snap Khanda's sword again. And again Khanda stooped to pick up the pieces. While he did this, Harmast hit Khanda in the right leg, injuring it enough so that Khanda couldn't stand on it.

Khanda, having failed to Repair his sword, now pulled out his kukri and cast a Heal Wound on his leg. Harmast hit again, but the blow was parried and thus tinked. Again Harmast hit while Khanda again tried to Repair his sword. He hit Khanda in the right leg, again injuring his leg. Khanda failed to cast his Repair spell.

Harmast hit, but Khanda parried and so the blow tinked. And again Khanda failed to Repair his sword. Now Harmast hit and Khanda's kukri snapped too. But Khanda had managed to Repair his sword and brandished it.

Harmast hit Khanda's sword again and snapped it in one blow. Khanda now tried to cast a Sever Spirit, but he failed to cast it. Harmast's blow at Khanda tinked. Again Khanda tried to cast his Sever Spirit and he did. His chances were not good⁵⁹, but the spell overcame Harmast.

But it didn't kill him! The spell merely paralyzed Harmast, rendering him incapable of any action, including spell casting. Khanda, crawling because of his injured leg, took the golden globe from the raven, crawled off, then disappeared. Then Harmast's paralysis left him, and the people

⁵⁸ Lose next attack and parry.

⁵⁹ Khanda's magic points were 1, while Harmast's were 4.

around him became solid again. To his surprise, all of the Harmasti had seen his fight, but no non-Humakti had seen it. They had simply seen Harmast disappear again, then re-appear.

Greatly disturbed, Harmast talked to the old shaman and asked him about the globe and told him of his encounters with the raven. He said that he didn't know what significance the golden globe had, but he thought that he might be able to bring the bird to Harmast. He told Harmast to wait outside the valley all night and that the bird should come to him.

Harmast did this, and around midnight, the raven arrived. The only things he could sense were the sounds it made and its eyes, which glowed.

“What can I do to get the globe back?” asked Harmast.

“The globe is called the Globe to be Greatly Desired. Your opponent is now the Knight of the Globe. The only way to retrieve it is to beat him the way he beat you.”

“How can I do that?”

“You must be in the right place at the right time. Get him in a situation where he is either attacking or being attacked by his enemies. Then you must be one of the force he is attacking or being attacked by. Then you and he will be drawn to the circle. The best way to achieve this is when he is fighting the Kujerungs.”

And then the raven disappeared.

The next morning, Harmast left with Slagstone and ten Harmasti to go to the exiger stronghold.

While Harmast was on his way to the stronghold, the Kujerungs attacked the Brand stronghold again on Six-day. The scouts there came back to Mistvale on Empress-day of the next week. They said that the attack had been beaten off and, more significantly, there were trolls helping the Kujerungs.

Harmast reached the stronghold on Ga-day of week 5. He and the rest of them settled down for a long wait. Finally, the Empress-day of week 6, the Kujerungs attacked again. Harmast prepared himself.

Soon, Khanda appeared to help the defenders. Harmast began a small Ceremony to help boost his chance of casting Bladesharp 10. He failed that attempt, but managed to succeed without using Ceremony for Harmast had no idea how long Khanda would remain visible. He then cast Truesword.

After he had finished, the scenery around him began to fade out again. He saw a bridge connecting his side of the canyon to where Khanda was. He crossed the bridge over the canyon. Khanda, surprised, looked around him and saw the raven, the Globe, and the warrior behind him. And he saw Harmast coming towards him.

Harmast hit as Khanda parried, injuring his right arm. Khanda hit back, but without a Truesword and with Harmast parrying, got nowhere. Harmast hit again, critically, and despite Khanda's parry, severed Khanda's right arm.

Just after Khanda had managed to cast Heal Wound on himself, Harmast swung again, this time tinking. He swung again and injured Khanda's right leg. Then Khanda fumbled his attack and Harmast broke Khanda's sword. Khanda immediately pulled out his kukri. Harmast swung again and severed Khanda's right arm again. Khanda's Heal Wound failed and then Harmast buried his sword in Khanda's stomach. Harmast had won.

Untouched, Harmast went over to the Globe and took it. As he did so, he felt his Rune spells come back to him and in addition, he realized what he was supposed to do with the Globe to be Greatly Desired. If he were to throw it up into the air and while it is in the air, cut down as many people in battle as possible, and then catch the Globe, it would be very good for Harmast. To help him, he could expend points of Will⁶⁰ to keep the Globe up in the air longer.

Harmast decided to expend enough Will to keep the Globe up in the air for two minutes.

As soon as he threw the Globe up into the air, he found himself back in the 'real world'. He was in the exiger stronghold. There was an exiger in front of him and a troll climbing up behind him. He struck the exiger, wounding his right arm despite the parry. Then he hit the troll in the right arm, who fell to his death.

Two men-at-arms came towards Harmast as the exiger Healed himself. Harmast cast Truesword on his other sword as well, then swung at the exiger again, killing him. One of the men-at-arms hit Harmast, setting his left leg armor afire. In return, Harmast sliced the man's abdomen open, killing him. The other man-at-arms hit Harmast's right leg, again setting the armor afire. Harmast then hit the man in the left leg, downing him.

With no immediate foes around him, Harmast put out one of the fires on him. Then another exiger with two men-at-arms came at him. Harmast swung at the exiger twice, injuring his left leg. The two men-at-arms missed, and Harmast's right leg took some damage from the heat.

With one minute remaining, Harmast cast Heal Wound on himself, then put out the last fire, while the men-at-arms Healed the exiger. Then Harmast and the exiger traded blows. Both the men-at-arms hit, and both of Harmast's arm armor was set afire. Harmast first hit the exiger again in the left leg, then cast Shield 2 on himself.

Harmast hit the exiger again, who didn't parry. The exiger went down and the men-at-arms tried to Heal him. They didn't, so the exiger died. Then Harmast hit one of the men-at-arms, severing the left leg of one. The other man-at-arms tinked and then had his right leg chopped off by Harmast.

Harmast had only a few seconds left. He was burning in three separate locations and there was time to either put out those fires, or kill the three helpless men-at-arms. He chose to put out the fires and managed to do so. Then he caught the Globe.

As he did so, he felt a surge of energy go through him. Then the raven from the HeroQuest flew down and grabbed the Globe from him.

Harmast was still on the stronghold. To get down, he started to climb down the assault ladder that he had knocked the troll off of. Climbing down, his way was obstructed by two trolls coming up. The first he hit in the head. The troll fell off, hit in the head, due to the inimical nature of iron on trolls. The second, hit in the right arm, also fell.

Harmast was now at the bottom of the ladder. There were four ways he could go. He could go back up the ladder, head towards where the main armies were massed, up the cliff he had just climbed down, or down towards the river level. He wisely chose the latter. But before he made it, four Kujerungs threw what looked like swastikas at him. Two of them hit, but they both tinked.

Harmast made it safely to the bottom, then headed back towards Crook Halt. On the way, he

⁶⁰ In Glorantha, there are two kinds of people: those who can generate Will, and those who can use it. These categories are mutually exclusive. The number of points of Will one has depends on the abilities of the person. Thus, if Harmast were to use Will by throwing up the Globe, he would be forever unable to generate more Will. This does not mean that he could never gain Will, but rather that he could never get any more Will from himself. Harmast, by the calculations, had 142 points of Will. By contrast, the average person has a Will of around 15.

was met by the ten Harmasti who said that Slagstone had gone down to talk to the troll king. They headed back towards Mistvale.

And what of Slagstone? He made it past the armies and asked to see the queen. It seemed that the Kujerungs had made a very good offer to them: in return for their help, they would receive the valley of Halfwing, plus control over all the valleys that the Brands controlled. In fact, the deal sounded very much like what the Kujerungs offered Harmast.

Slagstone quickly caught up with Harmast and they made it back to Mistvale on Pamalt-day of week 6.

There they were in for a surprise. For Simon the Fanatic, Tim the Encounter, and Ferric had returned! Plus they brought with them three wagons, the second of which had Slagstone's son, the bison, and Gorfang's avalanche, which was some twelve feet long. The first contained their belongings, and the third contained Tim's Anything Egg, some three meters across!

What had happened is that on Ga-day of week 6, a messenger from the fort near Many Gorges had said that a wagon train was there claiming friendship with Harmast Nightblade. With Harmast gone, the rest of us went there and discovered who it really was. They made it to Mistvale early Empress-day, the same day as the Kujerung assault on the Brand stronghold.

We explained the situation to them. Tim was annoyed that the black ovoid was gone, but there was nothing he could do about it. It was safely in the hands of the trolls.

For the next week, we sat around training. Tim and Thingol seemed to have made up for the past. During all the free time, Worfang had gone onto the Spirit Plane and had brought back many spell spirits for us to defeat. Gorfang asked the old shaman to try to find out what the avalanche did. He said that he would try.

Harmast also discovered what power he had gained from the Globe. By expending points of Will, he could strike five blows in the space of time an ordinary person could strike two⁶¹!

On Empress-day of the seventh week, the shaman returned. He said that he had discovered the powers of the avalanche but that he would be gone for a while, to fulfill the promises he had made in determining its powers. He said that wherever Gorfang was to release it, that's where it would make its home. Then he would be able to call upon it to make an avalanche, but only in the place where he had released it. Gorfang pondered on the powers of the avalanche.

⁶¹ Since he had killed four persons, Harmast can now strike, in addition to his normal blows, on strike ranks 8, 9, and 10 at his normal percentage to hit

Chapter 13

The Final Battle

Harmast now wanted to try to do something about the tower in Silvereye. So we headed there and got there on Witch-day of week 8. We discovered that the floor that had the door to the exiger stronghold was missing! Harmast started to demolish the tower, but stopped when he realized that there was something more pressing.

He wanted to set loose the avalanche so as to do his part in the war. So off we went. We arrived on Ga-day of the ninth week. There were heaps of bodies in the valley floor. The Kujerungs were in their camps with men-at-arms on patrols. Set apart from them, and with nobody around them, were black tents. We assumed this was the troll encampment. There also seemed to be a temple of some sort set up in the camp as a whole, undoubtedly to let the Kujerungs get their Rune spells back.

The big question was, where should the avalanche be set loose? Should it block the back, thus sealing in the Brands, unless they had another, secret, exit? Or should it seal the front, allowing the Brands to escape but denying the Kujerungs the stronghold? After a fierce discussion, Harmast decided to wait for an attack by the Kujerungs, and then release the avalanche on the front.

The scouts which had been staying here had told us that the Kujerungs attacked on Gata-day and Witch-day, always at the same time, just after sunrise⁶². As we marveled at the use of psychological warfare, we spent the night in anticipation.

The next morning, just after sunrise, the Kujerungs attacked. The first wave of men numbered 60, two rows of thirty. One in four was carrying an assault ladder. Fifty feet behind the first wave was another group of 60. There were no trolls in this attack, nor were there any exigers.

When they got within 100 meters, the defenders fired their crossbows. First the ladder-carrying men went down, followed by the rest. Worfang noticed, with his Farsee, that the men looked strangely. Perhaps they were under the influence of Fanaticism or drugs?

The fourth wave had finally managed to place their ladders against the side of the fort. Now a group of exigers was put in the line leading to the stronghold by the leaders. Harmast now decided the time was right to set the avalanche loose. Just as the first exigers approached the stronghold, Gorfang urged the avalanche down the hill.

The avalanche hesitated for a moment, then ran down the hill. We could hear its voice roaring its noise, and we could see its head at the front of the avalanche. When it finally ended, we could see that the avalanche had covered about 100 feet of the trail, and had dropped a lot of stone and dirt even on the stronghold itself, smashing open the door. The group of exigers who had been directing the assault stood there, seemingly in disbelief.

Gorfang, who had been the closest to the avalanche, fortunately jumped back away from the edge in time. The exiger group was now casting magic, probably to determine if there was any life inside.

The Kujerungs started to clear away some of the debris while the Brands frantically tried to repair the door. We sat the rest of the day in fascination.

Towards the end of the day, Gorfang went towards the edge of the cliff. There he found a hollow and, as he approached, he saw the avalanche fade in. It recognized Gorfang and gave a

⁶² The reader may wonder about a seeming incongruity. There is none. The attack that Harmast got the Globe back was a special attack.

contented growling.

While we watched, an arrow suddenly flew towards us. It landed, and we could see that there was a scroll tied around it. Harmast picked up the arrow, which quivered as though someone had put Telekinesis on it, then unwrapped the scroll. On it, in Western, was written, “Et tu, Harmast?”⁶³ Harmast wrote, “Yes” on it, retied it around the arrow, then let it go. It flew back towards the stronghold.

Finally, we decided to head back to Mistvale. As we reached the trail, some of our Harmasti were waiting there. They were scouts from the stronghold and they told us that about two hours after we had left, the Brands stopped repairing the gate. Then, about an hour later, a whole horde of men-at-arms and slaves came out of the fort, trying to get away from the Kujerungs. “The slaughter was great.” Some of them had gone out the back way and had escaped the wrath of the Kujerungs, some two or three hundred, heading towards Orange Fire.

Some of us were extremely concerned with what a horde that size might do, but Harmast ignored them for the moment and returned to Mistvale. We arrived there on Gata-day of week 10. Here Harmast asked about the possibility of accepting Brand refugees. What they basically said was that they would not at all accept any men-at-arms, and were indifferent to the slaves.

Harmast now sent out a small force in hopes of occupying the Brand stronghold. Acari, Mugumma, Enkavar and two Harmasti were sent out later that day. As soon as we collected our force of Harmasti, we marched to Orange Fire. We arrived there on Witch-day to see a grisly sight. Fifty gallows had been set up and dangling from them were fifty men-at-arms. A distance away, many new graves had been used.

Asking the obvious slave leader what happened, we learned the whole story. After the Brands had stopped trying to repair the gate to the stronghold, the remaining exigers, sixteen in all, went downstairs. They never came back up. Investigating, they found one exiger dead and the rest missing. Obviously, they had made their escape. The men-at-arms and slaves panicked and tried to escape the Kujerungs. Of those that reached Orange Fire, differing opinions had risen between the men-at-arms and the slaves. The men-at-arms then tried to kill the slaves, who then took them captive. When they had heard that Harmast himself was coming, the slaves hung the men-at-arms as a sign of good faith.

So now we had an additional 350 people to feed. They said that they would like to return to their own small valleys, to the north of the major valleys, in the mountains. Harmast said that would probably not be possible, but that until he could figure out what to do, they could stay in Orange Fire. We then left for Crook Halt, leaving ten Harmasti behind.

We arrived there on Six-day to learn from the scouts that the Kujerungs had occupied the Brand stronghold, and that they were working to clear away the rubble. In addition to beginning construction of a wall across the entrance to Crook Halt from the exiger stronghold, Harmast decided to try to use the avalanche again. So Gorfang, Ferric, Slagstone, Mugumma, Enkavar, Torthol, Thingol, and eight Harmasti went to the exiger stronghold, arriving there on Pamalt-day of week 11.

Gorfang went to the avalanche. He urged it to do its thing. It appeared willing, and Gorfang nudged it down the correct route. As luck would have it, a Kujerung supply train was approaching the stronghold. Gorfang released the avalanche at the correct moment. When the dust cleared, three of the eight wagons were demolished, and the path to the stronghold was blocked again. They returned to Crook Halt on Gata-day of the 12th week.

There had been no word from Silvereye. Some of us were concerned that the Brand exigers had used the Doorway to escape to the tower in Silvereye. Harmast did not believe they had done

⁶³Of course it wasn't really written in Latin, but it was appropriate at the time.

so.

On Pamalt-day of this week, 15 trolls approached us during the day. They first asked if we had control of the avalanche. Harmast said that we did. The troll spokesman then said that meant the Kujerungs can't get any reinforcements, and that they can't invade Brand land any farther. He also said that the trolls might be able to help Harmast take the exiger stronghold. Harmast asked what the trolls wanted in return. He said Halfwing. When Harmast seemed reticent, he was reminded that there were 120 trolls warriors available for service.

Harmast voiced his suspicions about treachery. The troll said that they were only on their own side, but that as long as it was in their best interest to support Harmast, they would do so and that the trolls could be counted on to always do what would be in their best interest. As further argument, he also said that there were approximately 100 Kujerung exigers in the stronghold.

Perhaps this information changed Harmast's mind. He accepted the offer and told the trolls to come when they had more information. The troll said that he and the rest of his entourage were supposedly here to scout out our defenses. Harmast told them to tell the Kujerungs that we only had a ditch and around 100 men. Of course we actually had around 150 men, and much more than just a ditch, but it was a half-truth rather than a lie.

After the trolls left, we went back to Mistvale to talk to the headmen of all the villages. The conference took place on Six-day of week 12. Harmast told them of the trolls' offer. Though the headman of Halfwing was reluctant to give his valley away, he saw the need for the trolls' help. Two questions that the headmen asked that neither Harmast nor the rest of us had answers to was where the Brands were and what had happened to the Gray Man.

Harmast and Simon got into an argument about Harmast's final plans for the trolls. Harmast wanted to use the trolls for their help, and then dispose of them after the fight. Simon said that it was not right and reminded Harmast of his geas to never participate in an ambush.

Shortly thereafter, we assembled all our men and marched to Crook Halt. On Ga-day, the first day of winter, two trolls came to Crook Halt. Harmast told them that he had accepted their offer. The trolls told Harmast that the Kujerungs were going to attack Crook Halt with 400 men, plus the trolls! He said that the 120 trolls should be able to kill about 100 of them before they catch on. In addition, the rest of the trolls, 100 of them, would attempt to take the stronghold, which would be nearly empty. He asked for help in the form of the avalanche. Harmast agreed and Gorfang and Ferric were dispatched.

On Empress-day, the Kujerungs attacked. They were in five rows of 100 men or trolls, plus 20 behind them. We were on top of our wall with 100 men plus 60 reinforcements. Leading the wall groups were Efger in one, Borax and Acari in another, Harmast, Slagstone, and Simon in the middle one, Tortho in another, and Mugumma in the last. Thingol, Worfang, Enkavar, and Tim led the reinforcements.

The front row of 100 crossed the ditch, laid ladders and began to swarm up the wall. We waited until they reached the top. Efger's group managed to push their attackers back as had Borax's group. Harmast's group pushed back some, but not all of their attackers. Tortho's group failed to knock their attackers back; the attackers gained the wall. Mugumma's group also just managed to hold them off.

Now their crossbowmen fired at our exposed groups. They hit, and reinforcements were sent to help them. Our crossbowmen fired, injuring a group of their crossbowmen. Efger's attackers gained the wall as did Mugumma's. Tortho's group held their attackers to their position as Harmast's group destroyed their attackers. Borax's group too managed to defeat their attackers. The trolls now attacked from their positions. Attacking, they managed to put about 40 men out of action, and injuring another 20.

Harmast, perhaps not noticing what was going on around, or perhaps to come to the aid of the trolls, yelled, "Over the walls!" He and the rest of his group started down the wall as did Borax's group. Meanwhile, Efger's group was killed by the men-at-arms fighting them. Tortho's group too was put out of action. Mugumma's group tinked back and forth. The trolls managed to badly wound 40 more Kujerungs but at a cost of losing 20 of their own.

The reinforcements sent to Efger's aid were promptly cut down by the men-at-arms, but not before injuring many of them. Tortho's reinforcements tinked as did Mugumma's group. Borax's group had just made it down when the crossbowmen fired again, hitting his group and Acari too. Harmast's group headed to help the trolls, who had eliminated some of the crossbowmen, but also losing 40 of their own due to being fought three on one.

Borax's group and 20 of the remaining trolls finished off the remaining crossbowmen. Efger now headed towards the others, yelling that there were more men-at-arms on the wall. Tortho's group was injured while on the wall as Thingol and Tim and Worfang assisted them. Mugumma and the attackers he was fighting injured each other. Harmast's group attacked a group attacking the trolls from behind, putting it out of action. One group of trolls tinked back and forth as the other, facing three to one odds fell.

Borax's and the trolls who had eliminated the crossbowmen now put another group out of action. Harmast's group attacked an exiger group, wounding it slightly. Tortho's group was killed by the men-at-arms facing it as Mugumma's continued to tink. Another group of trolls was cut down, but 40 still remained.

Borax and the trolls he was fighting with cut down men-at-arms as Harmast put some of the exigers out of action, though losing most of his group in the process. Another troll group was eliminated but Mugumma managed to kill the attackers facing him.

A group of exigers had managed to separate themselves from the melee and threw their weapons. Efger fell dead on the wall as did some of Borax's men on the field. One of the last remaining troll groups was injured, though the last one fought on valiantly. Acari, for Borax had been hit and felled, ordered his group to attack the exigers who had thrown the weapons and managed to hold his own. On the wall, Mugumma's group, the remnants of the other groups, plus the magicians also held their own on the wall.

The troll group which had just been injured succumbed to their wounds but not before eliminating some exigers. The other troll group fought the exigers to a standstill. Acari's and Harmast's groups eliminated the weapon-throwing exigers. Tortho, Mugumma, and the magicians successfully attacked the attackers still on the walls. There remained now only 40 exigers on the field and some 10 men-at-arms on the walls. On our side, there was a troll group plus Acari's and Harmast's group as well as Mugumma's, Tortho's and the magicians on the wall.

The exigers fought valiantly, but they could not stand up to Harmast. One by one they fell, dead or wounded.

When the bodies were counted, out of a total of 155 Harmasti, 84 of them survived. And of 120 trolls, 66 of them survived. All of the exigers were either already dead or were killed. The surviving men-at-arms, some 150, were stripped of their armor and weapons and released.

We had won.

Book Three — The Plains

Chapter 1

Tradespot and Beyond

We learned that the trolls had been successful in taking the exiger stronghold with the help of Gorfang, who returned safely. It turned out that during the Kujerungs' stay, though, that they had taken all magical items and books and scrolls. However, they had not had the time to remove all of the money and they had hardly removed any of the food, weapons, and armor that the Brands had stored.

It was understood by most of us that of all the people who had fought for the menials, only some of us would continue on with their travels. Slagstone, Thingol, and Gorfang had their own quest to go on, and Ferric, Mugumma, Tortho, Tim, Enkavar, and a Harmasti named Gai would accompany them. Though we wished to leave before the snows came, we also wished Simon to come with us. Thus, we waited until Humakt's High Holy Day, Six-day of the 4th week of winter when Simon was made a Sword of Humakt.

It was then that Tim declared that he would stay with Harmast. The egg was extremely large, and would almost certainly get larger. So, somewhat sadly, he decided to remain. Worfang declared that he would stay in the valleys and try to take the old shaman's place until he returned.

Harmast had been in contact with the Viter clan. They promised us safe passage through their valleys. In return, they hoped that Harmast would be benevolent towards them.

As leader of the ex-Brand valleys, Harmast took on a title. From now on, he would be known as Harmast Nightblade, Lord Protector of the Qualyorni Pass.

It was a week before we left that we heard bad news. The queen troll, carrying Slagstone's second child, had miscarried. Thus, Slagstone was kept fairly busy for the last week before we departed Mistvale for the last time.

During the weeks we spent waiting, Mugumma took this time to explain to us the culture of the plains. The gods that the plains people worshipped were as follows: Pamalt is the king of the gods. Keraun is the goddess of rain. Aleshmara is a goddess that only women could join. Sikkanos is the desert wind. Vangono the Spear is the god of war. Cronisper "The Wise" and his wife Yanmorla are also called the Gray Ones. Of course there is Bolongo, also called "The Mask". Noruma is the god of shamans, but was not the same as the Horned Man. Nyanka is the goddess of oases. Jmijie is the god of wandering. Rasout is the god of hunters. And there were gods and goddesses recognizable such as Lodril, Voria, Babeester Gor, and Maran Gor. And then there is the Chaos god Vovisibor, also called "Filth who Walks".

The men rule on the plains, but the women have the right to choose who rule. Thus, the old women of the tribe are feared politically. There are three sizes of groups: families, lineages, and tribes.

The plains themselves actually had many rolling hillocks. The rivers on the plains, of course, flowed to the south. In the land of Zamokil is found the last remnants of the Artmali Empire. Jolar is fairly flat with some oases dotting the plains. The remnants of ancient forests can also be found. In Doraddi, walking nomads roamed. And in Kresh could be found the people who rode the war wagons. In Tarien can be found the slarges of old. Far to the south is the Nargan Desert. South of that, legend tells of the Enmal Mountains, where the gods live.

The Arbennan Confederation had been formed by the people of Jolar and Doraddi to fight

against the Kresh. They also included the Zephyrists, who, though they rode in wagons like the Kresh, used sails to propel them.

Little chaos was found of the plains, except the ever-present broos. There were no scorpion men, no walktapi, no jack-o-bears, nor vampires.

In general, the people were friendly towards strangers, not knowing if they might be somehow related. But, they thought bad of sorcerers because of the depredations of the Ill Empire in the Second Age.

And so the fateful day arrived. We were laden down with weapons, armor, and provisions. We were going to bring with us the three wagons that Simon and Tim had brought from Ouori. Harmast had gifted Slagstone with 10% of the wealth found in the Brand's stronghold. This amounted, in total weight, to 3 kilograms of gold, 20 kilograms of silver, and a metric ton (1000 kilograms) of copper.

Of course this was not in one lump, but rather in small tablets of 20 grams each, which we learned were used in trading. Thus, we had 150 tablets of gold, 1000 of silver, and 50000 of copper. Each gold tablet was worth 12 pennies, a silver tablet one penny, and a copper tablet a tenth of a penny. The gift from Harmast was thus worth a total of 7800 pennies.

Thus the party was as follows: Slagstone the dark troll, Thingol the wizard, Simon the Fanatic, Sword of Humakt, Gorfang the dwarf, Mugumma the shaman, Enkavar the duck, Ferric the dwarf, Tortho the cook, and Gai the Harmasti. We went through the valley that the exiger stronghold commanded and headed into Viter territory.

We passed through the Viter valleys safely and made our long arduous way down the Qualyorni Pass. The journey down was as easy as our path up was difficult.

On Witch-day of the sixth week, our food ran out. By then however, we had sighted the trading post that the exigers used. It was a collection of both buildings and extremely large tents. There were shrines to Argan Argar, Lodril, and Trickster. We set up the tent which we had taken from the exiger stronghold.

As we finished, a big fat man wearing only a loincloth came up to us. He said, "It's customary here in Tradespot to pay for benefits received — such as the privilege of pitching your fine tent here on my land."

Though we did not like the man, we acquiesced to his rent, one penny a day, because we didn't want to go through the hassle of taking down and then pitching the tent all over again.

The first thing we did was to go to the temple to Cronisper and Yanmorla. When asked who the Gray Ones were, the priest replied that they are the fathers of the gods. When asked where the biggest temple to Cronisper and Yanmorla were, he replied that the biggest one was in Kresh territory, but that there was a smaller one at the Three Pines Oasis in Jolar which was about 320 kilometers to the southwest.

The next thing we did was to learn the language, which was called Arbennan. So we went to the only language teacher, a man called Ribí Tortran. He was a Malkioni, of the Rokari sect and a member of the warrior caste. He wanted to charge one penny per hour per person. Thingol attempted to bargain with him. In return for a matrix for Treat Wounds, Ribí would teach us all for four weeks for free. While everyone else learned, Mugumma taught Thingol about the intricacies in Enchanting.

During this time, Enkavar had made friends with the local Trickster priest, called Mister Man. All through the four weeks, Enkavar and Mister Man tricked, stole, and cheated their way through the trading post, even thieving successfully from Slagstone. Enkavar, though, declined to

sacrifice for Mister Man's shrine's single Rune spell, Become Dirty Shirt.

Finally the four weeks came to an end. Thingol successfully created the matrix for Ribí, and we looked for a way to go to Three Pines Oasis.

So we went to buy pack animals for the journey. They had one especially interesting animal, which they called a thunderbeast. It was a huge beast, with two bony projections from its nose which made it look like it had a slingshot on its nose. The dealer's price was too high, so we ignored it. He also had some dinosaurs, which we considered. The dealer said that they were herbivores, but should also be fed fruits and that it was especially fond of river plants. There were also dogs that, though they could carry very little, were cheap enough that we could buy many. We finally decided to buy two of the dinosaurs. It cost us the 2 mules that we had brought with us and 800 pennies. Mugumma said that the animals would probably be good for about 320 kilometers.

So, on Witch-day of the tenth week of the rainy season, we marched for Three Pines Oasis. Before we left, Slagstone succumbed to peer pressure and distributed the money evenly. Gorfang put all of his money in buying a ruby. Simon declared that he would stay at Tradespot to try to set up a temple to Humakt. Thingol was unable to repay his debt before we headed off.

After three days of seeing nothing but prairie dogs and assorted lizards, we arrived at a flooded riverbed. The dinosaurs grazed in the river while we headed over to a copse of trees in which there was a hut. Inside lived an 80-year old Trickster priest. The spell that this shrine taught was Detach Legs.

We stayed here for the rest of Gata-day and all of Empress-day while Mister Man got his Rune spells back. Gorfang asked about Bolongo and where there was a shrine to him. He offered a can of food to the priest. After some bargaining, he agreed, but Gorfang had to come inside his hut before the priest would tell him. Inside, Gorfang was told to hold onto a stick with rattlesnake rattles and promise not to hurt the Bolongo priest. Gorfang agreed, and was told that the shrine was to the west and slightly north.

When the priest asked if anyone wanted to become a Trickster initiate, Mugumma replied that he would. Mister Man did the initiation. He told Mugumma that the more money he paid, the easier the initiation would be. Mugumma gave him 100 pennies.

Mister Man took Mugumma to the widest part of the river. He told Mugumma that there was a big lizard at the river bottom that was slowly rotting away. Mister Man pulled out a dead fish and tossed it into the river. Mugumma's task would be to get the fish and bring it out with his mouth. With his hands tied behind his back, and a Skin of Life cast on him, Slagstone tossed him into the river. Mugumma landed in water some 2 feet deep. Finally, Mugumma took the plunge. After about a minute of floundering around, he came up with the fish.

When Mugumma asked Mister Man what he had to do to become an initiate, Mister Man told him that he had been told to find a needle in a thirty-foot diameter pile of dung.

On Pamalt-day, we headed off again. Again we spent a week seeing nothing interesting until Gata-day of week 12. On that day, we saw a platform house supported some 20 feet in the air. The occupant was another Trickster priest, a kid some 17 years old. The spell taught here was Turn Clothes Invisible. Mister Man regained his uses, while Mugumma sacrificed for two uses.

We left the shrine on Empress-day. After some hours, Mugumma saw something bright to the south. After another half-hour, he declared it was definitely getting brighter. An hour later, we could see that it was a series of things that looked like waterspouts made of fire. The bottom of them was some 2 meters off the ground, but we could see them turning the land brown underneath them and, when they touched the ground, small fires starting. Accompanying them were blasts of hot air.

Looking quickly around, we spotted a large puddle some 200 feet across. Immediately we ran towards it. Now some of the flames spotted us, for four of them split off from the main group and headed directly towards us.

We only just made it to the puddle, some six inches deep, in time. The flames came to the edge of the puddle, then stopped. Mugumma cast an Extinguish 5 at the smallest flame. It didn't seem to affect it. Then the flames communicated with each other in blasts of hot air. Then they started towards us across the water.

The dinosaurs panicked and ran away from them. Three of the flames chased them, caught them, killed them, then moved quickly off the water. Gorfang cast Demoralize at the remaining one. It worked, and the flame hesitated, then went off to rejoin the big group.

Examining the animals, they were definitely dead. Gone were our supplies except for those we had carried with us. Tortho butchered and cooked portions of the beast that were edible as a final meal for us.

The next day we came across a large pool of water fed by three streams. A small marsh surrounded the pool and there seemed to be something under the marsh. Hungry as we were, we decided not to kill it for food because we didn't know what it was. That evening, off in the distance, we could see lights shining in a copse of trees that Slagstone said was some two miles away. We waited until the next morning to investigate.

Once we arrived there we could see that this village was built along a river basin. There were many stone buildings and lots of tents pitched. The river had flooded and partially flooded some of the stone buildings. Many people were in the village, mostly women. And off in the distance we could see three huge pine trees along with many little ones. We had made it to Three Pines Oasis.

Everyone in the oasis was human with one exception. There was a humanoid sitting on a stone building with his knees to his ears. His feet were a foot long, and his toes about the same. One elbow reached to the stone he sat on, and with the other he scratched himself. His fingers were a foot long and he had big eyes and ears with a tiny nose and mouth. His coloring was gray, with a mottling of beige. When he saw Mugumma, he started to point at him.

Standing before us, however, were a bunch of people with stone axes. They seemed more wary than angry. Mister Man cried, "Hail!" and received a return "Morning."

"We have come to visit the great temple to Cronisper"

"What is your business there?"

"We are pilgrims."

The men seemed unconvinced. They sent a kid back to the buildings and he came back with an old woman who said, "Well, so many imposing armed strangers It's time for the Ritual of Meeting contest."

Asking what the Ritual was, the men told us that it was a custom when two tribes met. Each tribe's champion would engage the other's in two contests, one chosen by the one, the other by the other. If a champion won both contests, he was entitled to demand anything from the loser's tribe. It was obvious that the contest was set up so that each champion would win his or her own contest, thus creating a tie.

We picked Slagstone as our champion and the men produced their own, a small wiry fellow. For our contest, Slagstone suggested an eating contest: whoever could eat the most in one hour would win. The people brought out the food for the contest. At first their champion tried to keep pace with Slagstone, but he was clearly out-classed. When he realized this, he stopped eating and

waited for the rest of the hour while Slagstone stuffed himself.

For their contest, each champion would simultaneously throw staves at the other as though they were spears. The object was to catch the spears thrown at oneself. Three spears was the usual number. Three times the villager's champion caught the staves, and three times Slagstone was hit by the staves.

The contest was declared a tie and we were welcomed into Three Pines Oasis.

Chapter 2

Three Pines Oasis

Three Pines Oasis has a population of about 500 people. The size of the oasis is about a square kilometer. There were quite a few temples there for the considering the population. The biggest was to Aleshmara and had a Babeester Gor shrine inside. Thus the temple was guarded by her warriors. There were also temples to Cronisper, Yanmorla, Pamalt, Vangono, Nyanka, Lodril, Keraun, and Faranar, one of Pamalt's wives. There was a structure for Noruma and for Jmijie as well as one for the local grain goddess, Nomiyama. There was no temple to Trickster, though there was one to Bolongo.

Asking about the creature, we learned that his name was Zuzu. He had been here for about eighteen years and lived here. It was still pointing at Mugumma. Mugumma waved at Zuzu, who promptly thumbed it's nose at him. He asked why he was pointing at him. Zuzu responded, "To bug you!" Zuzu, who was a jelmre, was to point at Mugumma for the rest of our stay here.

We went to the temple of Cronisper. We clapped outside the curtain, signaling our presence. An old man hobbled out smoking a long, ornate pipe. Mugumma promptly yelled out, "Fire!" and Extinguished it. The old man growled, "I don't want to talk to you," and went back inside.

We all chastised Mugumma rather severely. He and Enkavar went off to make some stone soup while the rest of us went to the temple of Yanmorla. The priestess was the oldest woman we had ever seen. She was blind, toothless and hobbled with two canes.

We told the priestess that we wished to speak to the Gray Ones. She seemed to not be interested in helping us. We persisted by offering to do things for here and she finally relented. She said that she, as priestess to Yanmorla needed nothing, but that her great-grandchildren might be helped. They lived in the only green tent in the oasis. Or was it the only maroon tent? She did tell us that we could go back to the Cronisper temple in a few days, "after he forgets about you."

It turned out that there was only one maroon tent, some forty feet in diameter. We went there and saw an old woman sunning herself, a younger woman grinding grain and some children playing outside. We asked the young woman if she was the great-granddaughter of the priestess. The older woman replied that she was. We all stood amazed⁶⁴.

Gorfang told her why we had come and asked what we could do for her and her family. She asked if we could weave or fish. Gorfang replied that we couldn't. She asked if we had anything nice or pretty. Gorfang brought out the gem he had bought in Tradespot and offered it to her. When she only said that it was pretty, Gorfang offered to make a clasp for it.

Gorfang spent the rest of the day making the clasp for the gem. He used some of his silver to make a small cage for it.

The next day, Six-day of the last week of winter, he brought the completed jewelry to the old woman. She seemed very happy and asked what he wanted her to do. Gorfang asked her to tell her great-grandmother that we had done her a favor. She agreed and we went back to the priestess.

The priestess offered us two Divinations in return for the favor. We tried to bargain for more and she agreed to add another but only if the three Tricksters did not play any tricks on any of her relatives for the rest of their lives. We agreed to her terms. Mister Man asked who wasn't her relative. The priestess said that she couldn't remember any of the villagers that weren't her relatives. But she said that Zuzu and the Babeester Gor axe women definitely weren't.

⁶⁴ Six generations all living at the same time!

For the Divinations, we came inside the temple. We all sat down on cushions inside. There were still some empty cushions. The priestess seemed to go into a trance and as she did, forms that were human occupied the empty cushions. One of them, a young woman, asked us to ask our questions.

Our first question was, “Where should we go next in our Quest to save the Third Age?” The answer we received was, “Blaze your own paths. Don’t ask me.”

Next we asked: “We have been told to seek the Gray Ones. How can you help us?” “I’m at your service.”

Finally, we asked “Where is the land before the sun goes down?” The answer we received was a vision. We saw a large land which zoomed in on a port city. In the city were blue-skinned people, all of them handsome or beautiful. The animals helped them without being forced to. The countryside looked like savanna. We could see the sun directly overhead. Then, the sun fell from the sky and landed with predictable results. The last thing we saw was the sea boiling.

After we had talked to the priestess and had dinner, Mister Man beckoned us out of the camp. We went and he took us some distance from the oasis. There he lit a fire and proceeded to make a speech⁶⁵.

After his speech, Gorfang explained the Quest to Mister Man. He declared that every Quest needed a Trickster and would join ours.

We asked Mister man to teach us some of the things we would need to know while we stayed here. He told us about how marriages worked. When a man marries a woman, he becomes a part of the woman’s family. Their children, however, belong solely to the woman’s. Thus, the chief of a tribe must be the son of a woman of the chieftain’s family and his children can not become chief after him.

He also told us about some of the chaos monsters that inhabit the plains of Pamaltela. There was one called a watchwhere, so named because it can see through anything. It is intelligent and often cooperates with other chaos monsters. Then there is the grue, which looks something like a snake corpse. It injects venom and if a person dies from it, he or she becomes a ghoul. Another monster is called the chovin. It has the shape of the last thing it ate, plus tentacles. But, said Mister Man, it only comes out in the summer.

However, there was still the problem of a leader. Slagstone declared that he would accept not being leader. After much debate, it was decided that Tortho would become the leader. After this declaration was made, Mister Man suggested to Tortho that all the party’s money should be put in his hand. Tortho refused Mister Man’s suggestion.

As we headed back to the oasis, we could see that there was a commotion going on. All the priests and priestesses were talking to a young man who had evidently run for a good time. He said that the Promalti had been seen, during the rainy season. We asked what the Promalti were and they said that they were men made from fire. We then realized that they were the firespouts we had seen and we told them of our encounter. They told us that they come from the Nargan Desert. We asked how one dealt with them. They said that it was difficult to do so. Supposedly the Promalti were immortal, but not invulnerable. As to their motivation, as one of the Promalti said to a human, “I am a child of the Sun, an enemy of the city. We shall seize the land and burn it until we are stopped by our old enemy, the sea.” The villagers spent the night uneasily, disturbed more by the fact that their coming was so unnatural than by the Promalti themselves.

The next week was the Holy Week at the end of the year. The whole oasis was filled with celebrations and ceremonies to remake the world. Mister Man had to play the part of Trickster and

⁶⁵ See Appendix C.

so we hardly saw him. However, Mugumma and Enkavar more than made up for him, playing many tricks on all of us. Slagstone was repeatedly dumped with dye from a bucket suspended on the top of a door. Thingol discovered that his book had been glued shut. Tortho's meals were suddenly tainted by an extra amount of spices. And Ferric and Gorfang kept seeing the shadow of monstrously huge broos.

The first day of 1624 dawned bright and sunny. We all headed over to the temple of Cronisper to talk to the priest. We clapped outside the temple and a figure emerged.

"I suppose you're all wondering why I've called you here today. I need to talk to each of you, for I can see the future."

To Gorfang he said, "You will have a sex change operation." To Tortho, "You will meet a tall, dark stranger who will mug you." To Thingol, "You will learn the wisdom of the Tap INT spell. Apply it to yourself." To Slagstone, "Your bison will father trollkin." As he was about to speak to Ferric, he stopped for a second as he saw some of us looking at him in mockery. "Wait a minute," he said. Mugumma then asked the priest what his future was. The priest said, "I can see many welts, bruises, and maybe even broken bones in store for you." And Mister Man threw off his disguise and started to beat Mugumma with his cane, chasing him all the way out of the oasis.

Going inside, we saw the real priest of Cronisper bound and gagged. Removing the gag, he said, "You filthy foreigners! Go back to where you came from!"

Gorfang said, "We'll go away when you answer our questions."

"Go away or I'll call the wrath of ... Cronisper on you!"

We attempted to pacify the old man, but he was adamant until Gai made a very respectful speech asking the old man for both his help and for Cronisper's help.

The speech moved the old man. "That's the way to show respect. Everybody else out while I talk to this respectful young man."

When Gai came back out, he said that the old man had not known much himself about certain details of our Quest. But, the old man had said that we could have four Divinations and that he would tell us the payment for it afterwards.

Our first question was, "Is the finding of our true virtues necessary for the completion of our Quest?" The answer: "You're not fit for the quest without them, but they are not absolutely necessary." Our second question: "Where is the Red Beast?" "South. But don't go there yet." "Then where should we go?" "East." "What is the End of All, the Bane of Time?" "Chaos."

The priest told us to come back the next day when he would tell us his payment. When we came back, he told us. He wanted us to find out what was going wrong in Kothar and Tarien. He said that strange things were going on here in Jolar, such as the Promalti being seen. He said that in all probability similar things were going on in Kresh and Tarien and we were to find out.

He then pulled out a small statuette. Giving it to Gorfang as the most trustworthy, he told us that it was his soulstone. Gorfang was to deliver it to the palace atop the Enmal Mountains. He told us that it was no hurry. Asking what a soulstone was, he told us that it conveyed a request. He refused to tell us what his request was.

Since we were now going to be involved with the Kresh, we asked the villagers about them. They told us that 200 years ago, there had been no Kresh. They had all come from Doraddi and thus their customs were not too different from the Arbennans. Because of the war, they were viewed as enemies, but were definitely not Chaos.

To make the long journey, we had to provision ourselves. Gorfang made an ornate necklace using four gold tablets, rimming them with silver and working more silver into additions. We took this to the temple of the local grain goddess, Nomiyama. Inside, there were many bushels of a red-colored bean. We asked the priestess if we could barter for food. She told us that everyday, one could take a double handful of bloodbeans.

Using the necklace, we were able to trade for one bushel of bloodbeans, which were so called because the inside of the bean was blood-red. The bushel, which contained about 40 kilograms of dried beans would last us about two weeks (12 days). The priestess told us that eating just bloodbeans alone was not good. She was willing to let us have a half-bushel of bloodbeans, a quarter-bushel of squaa, a local grain⁶⁶, and two kilograms of sweetgrass, a plant which collected sugar crystals on the inside. We accepted the offer.

Leaving the temple, a man came up to us. He said he liked the necklace, and wanted one for himself. He would pay, he said, with the carcass of a river rat he had caught made into jerky. Again, we accepted and on Witch-day, we gave him the necklace and he gave us a huge sack full of jerky which weighed 35 kilograms.

The food was divided up among the party except for Mister Man, Mugumma, and Enkavar, who carried bottles of beer. We began walking on Six-day and saw nothing interesting. The next day, off in the distance, we could see a campsite. We headed towards it.

There were about 200 people and 30 tents. There was an elephant off grazing, wearing implements that identified it as a beast of burden. Some little children saw us and started to throw rocks at us. Slagstone walked towards them and they ran away.

Then 8 warriors with spears came towards us. They all wore orange feathers. We stopped, and one of them said, "Who speaks to prove you are not Chaos?" Of course all of us talked at once. The man told us to stay here and he called to another man back at the campsite. He brought an old woman out to us on piggy-back. She hobbled around, inspecting all of us, grabbing the tongue of the duck, and asking the dwarfs to hop and show her their feet. Finally she told the warriors that she thought that we weren't Chaos.

As was the custom, we then had a Meeting Contest. Again, Slagstone was our champion. They brought out their champion, a man named Gornolog. We chose our contest first. It was rock-throwing, purely for distance. Slagstone, with his troll strength, won easily. Their contest was a game of standoff. The contestants stand an arm's length apart and attempt to make the other person lose their balance. Again, Slagstone won.

They asked what we wanted. We asked for a meal and friendly conversation. They said fine and invited us to a feast.

⁶⁶ Squaa and lagniappe are the two local grains.

Chapter 3

The Dolmanyeyi

The chief of the Dolmanyeyi is named Sumigar. He is a fairly small, but rotund man. At the feast, which featured elephant in a large stew, Sumigar gave the eyeballs to Slagstone as the victor of the Contest. Slagstone gave one back to Sumigar as a gift. Mugumma, as a shaman, got the tail, uncooked.

We talked for a while about our adventures and they told us of the history of their tribe. We also talked about the plague, called the White Frothing, which had devastated the land.

Eventually the subject of Tricksters came up. The three in the Dolmanyeyi were all Bolongo worshippers. When we were asked about Tricksters, Enkavar and Mugumma each attempted a trick. They failed. Mister Man said, "Amateurs! Stand up Mugumma, before all the tribe!" Mugumma did, whereupon Mister Man cast Turn Clothes Invisible on him! Everyone had a good laugh until Thingol made a snide remark. Then Mugumma cast Turn Clothes Invisible on Thingol! Mister Man yelled, "Enough!" and cast his remaining uses on a nearby 16-year old girl and two of Sumigar's wives, all of whom fled screaming.. As some of Sumigar's warriors dragged him away to beat him, Mister Man called out, "It was worth it!" Finally, the chaos died away. Mister Man came back with many bruises. Mugumma then cast his last use of Turn Clothes Invisible on Mister Man, who ran away until the spell wore off.

The next morning, we took our leave from the Dolmanyeyi in friendship and continued to the east. For four days, we saw nothing but assorted animals. On the fifth day, Mugumma was nearly bitten by a snake called "The Hundred Steps". It has that name because after one takes one Hundred Steps after being bitten the victim falls dead. On Six-day of the second week of spring, we made it to the next oasis.

To our surprise, the Dolmanyeyi were there too. The reason that they had doubled back to the oasis, which was called Gully Rock because of the large rock in the sinkhole that provided water, was because of a band of mercenaries from the mountains which the Arbennan Confederation had hired to fight the Kresh decided to stay in Jolar.

We stayed at Gully Rock for some time. The Dolmanyeyi tribe, though small⁶⁷ were friendly. They welcomed us to stay with them for as long as we wanted, though we would have to hunt for our own food. Sumigar declared that they would stay at the oasis for one week. We decided to stay with them and rest from adventuring. This was Ga-day of the third week.

The very next day, three women came running back into Gully Rock. They had been severely beaten. Some of the warriors went out and came back with Songamma. She had been beaten and raped by some people, we weren't able to quite figure out who. Four of Gornolog's best warriors gave chase, as did Gorfang, Tortho, Thingol, and Enkavar. After about an hour, we spotted the villains, four of them. The four warriors plus Enkavar then snuck around behind them and then jumped out, shouting to surrender. Though the villains made for their weapons, we quickly overpowered them and brought them back to Gully Rock.

That night, exactly at midnight, Songamma verified that they were her assailants. They were tied up and warriors held spears to their necks. Sumigar handed the four a torch and said to them, "You know what to do." Only one of them was able to withstand the pain of the charred member. The rest of them were killed. The other one had the bleeding stopped and then was released.

The next day Sumigar said that the tribe would stay at Gully Rock to raise sweetgrass. Again, we were invited to stay, and we accepted. It took until the end of the ninth week before the

⁶⁷ See Appendix D.

sweetgrass was ready to be harvested. The harvesting itself took four days and it took another two days to weave baskets to hold all the sugar. It was on the last day before we left that Thingol managed to learn the spell Transform Water to Beer. Mister Man was there to try out the first use of the spell.

Also during the time we spent with the Dolmanyai, Tortho and Gai attempted to garner interest in themselves from the local women. Though Tortho was not too handsome, he managed to woo Sumigar's oldest daughter, Igana.

On Ga-day of week 11, the Dolmanyai tribe and us left Gully Rock to attend a meeting of most of the tribes of the Arbennan Confederation. We arrived that on the first day of summer. There were some 1300 people there. Also there were the Zephyrists, people who rode in wagons propelled by the wind. In addition, there was Simon the Fanatic! He had stayed in Tradespot for about 12 weeks, then had come with the rest of the people of Tradespot to the meeting. Thingol was able to repay his debt to Simon.

Sumigar went to the meeting of the chiefs. He came back shortly with word that a single Kresh wagon train was approaching. Immediately a wave of fear and apprehension swept the meeting area. All the warriors got up their weapons and made ready to fight the Kresh.

The Kresh wagon train was composed of 60 wagons, each pulled by many slaves. The wagons were about 50 feet long by 20 feet wide by 15 feet high. Their wheels were 12 feet in diameter. The wagon was so big that it had two levels. There were a few warriors on the tops of the wagons.

As the warriors formed a line to defend the rest, the column stopped about a kilometer away. Then the slaves unhooked themselves and got weapons out. What we had thought were slaves were actually the Kresh! Then one of the men who had been riding the lead wagon walked forward. He wore clothes similar to what the Arbennans wear, but the material was much finer and more colorful.

He talked to the chiefs and then went back to his wagon. Asking, we found out that he had asked for a talk with the leader of the meeting.

That night, all the old women of the tribes conferred to choose who would be their representative. The wagons were drawn up in a big circle with a roaring bonfire in the middle of them.

The next morning, the appointed chieftain (which was not Sumigar), had a talk with the Kresh leader. It turned out that the Kresh had a lot of prisoners which they had taken in the last year which they wished to return. There were no strings attached. We, but not the Arbennans, were astonished.

All that day, the Arbennans and the Kresh mingled. The prisoners who were returned showed no signs of having been maltreated, though they complained that they were not allowed to have their weapons while imprisoned.

We talked to some of the Kresh and learned that they were heading for Zamokil next. Since that was where we wished to head, we began to ask if we could join their wagon train. The head wagonmaster, Noyama, said that if we wanted to go with them, we would essentially have to earn our way by helping to pull their wagon. In addition, we would have to either pay or hunt for food. He said that a kilogram and a half of metal should pay for one meal for all of us. Since that amounted to 7.5 pennies of copper, we didn't think we'd starve.

The work schedule, said Noyama, was that the wagons were pulled for four hours, then a rest period of four hours was called. Then there was another pull for four hours and then they all slept during the night.

We decided to think on it. Noyama said that they would remain at the meeting place for three weeks, then they would leave. Meanwhile, Tortho was talking to Igana, asking her to come along with him. However, right in the middle of his speech, his clothes turned invisible from Mugumma's spell. Tortho immediately fled.

That night, Tortho found Mister Man building a framework over Mugumma's sleeping form. He decided to come back in the morning to see what Mister Man had perpetrated.

When Mugumma woke up, he found himself in a copper pot. Or at least the upper half of himself. As he peered over the rim, he saw, besides all of us and Mister Man, another pot which held his legs. Both of the pots were suspended over many porcupine skins. Apparently, Mister Man had put himself in Mindlink with Mugumma and then cast Detach Legs on himself/Mugumma.

Mister Man declared, "This is his rightful punishment for not giving me money." When we evinced interest in letting Mugumma out, Mister Man stopped us. "There are two reasons why he should not be let out. One: He will be able to take much pride and accomplishment in getting out all by himself."

Mugumma then cried out, "No! No! Let me out!" Mister Man continued. "Secondly, this is all my property."

Seeing no immediate solution, Mugumma then took to chanting for an hour or so. Then his Discorporate form flew out of the pot and attacked Thingol. Thingol beat Mugumma unconscious⁶⁸ then released his spirit. Two hours later, after Mugumma re-awoke, Mister Man declared that he was going to find a weasel or two to toss in with his legs.

As Mister Man returned, Mugumma cast Protection 6 on his legs. The weasels did no harm to his legs. Then he got smart and Ignited the ropes suspending the pot with his legs. The pot fell and the legs fell out unharmed by the quills. His legs then kicked away the skins and then he jumped out of the pot. With his arms holding onto his legs, his legs dragged his torso after Mister Man, who quickly climbed a tree. Mugumma tried everything he could to convince Mister Man to reattach his legs to his body. Even an offer of 200 pennies did not change his mind.

Finally Thingol interceded. Transforming water into beer, he got Mister Man to drink himself out of the tree. The next morning, Mister Man reattached Mugumma's legs. Mugumma then renounced the cult of the Trickster. Mister Man, though disappointed, said that he knew of a ritual that would remove him from the cult. Mugumma would have to do the initiation ritual in reverse, putting a dead fish back into a river with his teeth. This he did, and then asked if that was it.

"What? Just because you put a dead fish back in a river?!" cried Mister Man as he burst into laughter.

⁶⁸ Down to zero magic points.

Chapter 4

The Kresh

While we waited for the Kresh wagon train to leave, a happy occurrence took place. On Pamalt-day of the third week of summer, another Kresh wagon train arrived at the meet. One of its passengers was a morokanth. In fact, it was a morokanth that some of us had known quite well. It was Grosko. Though we were happy to see him, he declined to explain just how he had gotten to Pamaltela.

During the last week before the Kresh left, we learned why most of the nomads had generally not domesticated any animals to ride. The reason was because the animals were either too small to ride, or too large to handle.

The day finally came when the Kresh train left. In all, there were 40 wagons under the leadership of Udowa, a wagonmaster himself. We all decided to pull on the morning shift, since the heat of summer would be less oppressive.

All of us, that is, except Thingol. Every morning he would bribe one of the Kresh to pull for him by turning water into beer. Then he had the whole day to study his spell book.

The first day out, Udowa had a meeting of all the wagonmasters. Noyama attended and when he came back, he separated all the non-Kresh from the Kresh, us included. He asked us to promise not to tell any Doraddi what he was going to tell us now. We agreed. Noyama then told us of how in recent years, wagon trains similar to the one we were now in had vanished without a trace. He said that this wagon train was going to find out why. All the wagons in this train were volunteers. The only clue they had was that they had all disappeared near the Nargan Desert.

After two weeks of travel, on Pamalt-day of the sixth week, we encountered a large patch of lagniappe and sweetgrass. We stayed there for the rest of the day and all the next harvesting the food.

After another two weeks, we met a tribe of Doraddi who gave us many bushels of food. When we evinced interest as to why they didn't fear the wagon train, we were told that "they're our Doraddi."

Another week passed until the head wagon suddenly shifted direction. After another hour, we came upon a large cairn of rocks. Inside this cairn were more supplies.

Two days later, we came upon a large, wide gully running east and west. At the bottom of the gully were a few scraggly plants which indicated to us that the gully once had water in it. Udowa told us that one of the wagon trains was last seen going into this gully. He told us that all the warriors would go into the gully to search for the train. The rest of the train would celebrate a Holy Day to Aleshmara.

All of us volunteered to go except for Gai, who decided to stay behind and party. We split up into groups and explored the gully.

After about a half-day's journey down the gully, Grosko suddenly smelled burnt wood and sensed Chaos ahead. Cautiously we crept forward, but nothing attacked us. Slagstone then noticed that the ground beneath us had been disturbed, some time ago. Reasoning that perhaps something was buried beneath the surface, we began to dig.

Grosko was actually the one best suited for digging and he went to it. After a few minutes, he struck wood. After some more digging, it turned out to be a wagon wheel. The wheel had been partially burned, so that some of it was charcoal.

Once we found this, we hurried back to tell the others of our find. We came across a wagon master and three of his Spears. We told him what we found and he told us to go back with two of his Spears and guard the area while he went back to tell the other wagonmasters.

This we did and when we returned we thought we might dig some more. Neither of the two Spears helped and indeed they seemed amused that we were continuing to dig.

Night fell, and we posted a guard just in case. The next morning, six wagonmasters showed up with their guards. One of them brought out a rock and placed it in the hole we had dug. Then he cast a spell and the gnome bound into the rock began to dig, much faster than we could ever have done.

The only other remnants we found were a broken human thigh bone, a corroded spear point, and a bent gold ring.

It was then that Grosko realized that the area that he knew to be Chaos was only some 200 meters in both directions from the hole. By lowering him into the hole, he also found out that the Chaos taint went only six feet underground.

Thinking that the spirits of the Kresh might still be around, Mugumma Discorporated, but he found nothing out of the ordinary.

Back at the wagon train, Udowa declared that the train would follow this gully towards the west, to see if anything else showed up. But first, he said, they would stay here for a week to hunt and celebrate.

The week we spent at the gully passed uneventfully and we then began to travel alongside the gully. A week passed and then, off in the distance, we could see somebody holding up a thirty-foot high pole with a flag on it. It was a man, and he was blue. Noyama told us that he was a Veldang.

As soon as he saw us, he put down the pole, took 298 steps directly towards the setting sun, pointed at the ground beneath his feet, then returned to his pole, picked it up, and walked away. Gnomes from our train dug at the indicated spot, and found a trove of food.

The next day, the first day of autumn, clouds were seen in the sky. We participated in a two-day celebration welcoming the clouds. This ceremony included the pouring of a water cask onto the sand, no doubt to entice the clouds to do the same.

After a little more than two weeks of travel, on Pamalt-day of the third week, the sun was obscured by clouds. Everybody seemed happy. But suddenly, a blue ghost materialized in front of our wagon. Somehow, it seemed as if it had been wounded. It gibbered in Arbennan, "Help... Death... The wagon train." At the same time, Grosko sensed Chaos. Then, as the ghost finished the last word, something else materialized. They were mouths and they began to attack the ghost, who hysterically tried to fight them off. Despite our attempts to help, the ghost was eaten away.

Through Mindspeech, we discovered that all the other wagons had seen spirits as we had. Noyama then turned the wagons away from the desert, in the direction that one of the spirits had indicated.

After a few hours travel, we stopped and formed a circle of wagons. Most of the warriors, along with us, left the train to investigate a pillar of smoke that was just ahead. The warriors split up into groups with us being one of the groups.

After about a half hour, we were ambushed. Rising out of the ground came four broos. One looked like a mountain troll but had green skin, wore metal armor and carried a crossbow. Another was naked, but his skin appeared wet. A third had claws for hands but nevertheless carried a

greatsword. The last was very small and naked.

The one with the crossbow fired 3 shots at Simon. Two bounced, but one of them buried deep in his chest. Unfazed, Simon drew his bow and cast Speedart on it. Ferric, who had his crossbow ready, fired at the broo and hit it in the chest. Enkavar slung at the wet broo and hit its left leg. Gorfang also fired his crossbow and hit the chest of the crab-clawed broo. Finally, Mugumma Demoralized the crossbow-armed broo.

At the same time Simon fired his bow and critically impaled the green broo in the abdomen, the clawed broo spat at Grosko. The saliva hit his chest and it turned out that the saliva was actually acid! Grosko's chest was set on fire. From the ground, the green broo breathed fire on Simon. The flames engulfed his chest, abdomen, and left leg. Near death, Simon called on Humakt to heal him so that he could continue the battle. Humakt granted the miracle. Slagstone chopped at the small broo and took off its left arm. The clawed broo swung at Grosko, hitting his abdomen. Grosko fell, miraculously putting out the fire on his chest as well. Grosko noticed that this broo was beginning to regenerate from the wound it had taken. Enkavar then cast a Hot Foot on the clawed broo, succeeding. Gorfang tried a Demoralize on the clawed broo, but failed. The green broo stayed on the ground. Gai then hit the green broo in the left leg. The wet broo missed. Thingol, looking around, noticed that all the other groups of warriors were fighting as well.

The clawed broo spat again, this time at Gorfang. Fortunately, Gorfang managed to get his shield in the way. The acid burned the shield, but none got through. The green broo again breathed fire on Simon, engulfing Simon's right arm, chest, and left leg. Slagstone buried his poleaxe in the shot broo's chest, killing it. The clawed broo swung at Gorfang, but he parried. The green broo clawed at Gai and hit his left arm. Mugumma came to Grosko's side to Heal him. Ferric hit the wet broo in the leg, causing it to fall over, but his weapon took damage from the acid that covered it. Thingol then Palsied the green broo in the head, knocking it unconscious.

Suddenly, from the corpse of the small broo came a ghost which wrapped itself around Slagstone, engaging him in spirit combat. The clawed broo spat at Grosko, but it missed. Then it tried to swing at Grosko, but he dodged the blow. Grosko then clawed back at the broo, but it parried. Simon continued to Heal himself. Tortho hit the wet broo's right leg, damaging both it and his weapon. Enkavar slung again and hit the clawed broo's abdomen.

Again the clawed broo spat at Grosko and again it missed. The spirit continued its attack on Slagstone. Grosko again dodged the clawed broo's swings at him. Tortho impaled the wet broo in the leg, but his spear disintegrated as he struck. Ferric fired his crossbow and hit the wet broo in the head. Simon, using his bow, hit the clawed broo in the arm. Grosko hit the same broo in the same arm. Enkavar slung at the broo and hit it in the other arm. Thingol's spell failed.

Relentlessly the spirit continued its attack. The clawed broo now spat at Gorfang and hit him in the left leg. Ferric fired at the wet broo, but he hit Gorfang by mistake. Grosko hit the clawed broo's arm. Simon shot at the wet broo and hit its head. The broo, still on its side, took the damage we were giving it. Thingol's spell failed and seeing that matters were fairly well in hand, looked around. Above the wagon train, he could see a huge ghostly face over it.

Again, the spirit gnawed at Slagstone's soul. Ferric noticed that the wet broo wasn't making any kind of movement, including breathing. The clawed broo spat at but missed Gorfang. Suddenly, the green broo leapt up and breathed fire at Ferric. Fortunately, the flames missed. In return, Ferric shot it in the leg. the green broo clawed at Gai, but missed. Thingol tried to Palsy the clawed broo, but failed to overcome its magic points.

The green broo fell over again, victim of the Palsy. The clawed broo again missed Gorfang. Tortho and Grosko then finished off the clawed broo. Once the green broo fell over again, Simon went over to it and beheaded it.

Then there was only the spirit attacking Slagstone. Since it was obvious that Slagstone was

about to be possessed, Mugumma had been stripping him of all his possessions. Then we hog-tied him just before the spirit possessed him. But unlike an ordinary possession, this spirit changed his body into the shape that it had been before, though it was still the same size as Slagstone.

Mindful of its obvious chaotic feature, Grosko tortured the broo, chopping off a hand and foot as well as blinding it. Meanwhile, the rest of us looked around us. Though there were still some groups of warriors fighting, most of the creatures on the plains were broos of all assorted kinds.

We then decided to leave the broo behind and try to make it back to the wagon train. Taking Slagstone's possessions with us, we left the ambush site. Once we had to hide ourselves from a large band of broos, but we were mostly left alone, possibly because, from a distance, we looked like a bunch of broos.

When we got in sight of the wagon train, we saw something horrible. The wagon train was being assaulted by things as big as houses. There were broos, grues, ghouls, and even a Tyrannosaurus with tentacles. And over it all, was a face that was sending out spirits to attack the defenders.

From the wagon train, we could see Slagstone's son, the bison, running our way. We calmed it and then, deciding discretion was the better part of valor, found a crack in the ground in which we hid.

We stayed in that crack for four days, until Grosko's Sense Chaos told him there was no chaos around us. We emerged from our hiding place on Gata-day of the fourth week and then began walking directly away from the way we had come.

Chapter 5

On the Plains Again

Grosko decided that he needed to commune with the Bull. He left us for the moment, heading east.

The rest of us continued walking away from the train. Or rather where the train used to be. Where the wagons once stood, there was nothing.

The next day, Empress-day, we spied a line of smoke to the east. Warily we approached but it turned out to be an encampment of humans. Spying us, some men came out to investigate. When we told them we came in peace, we had a Meeting Contest. Choosing Mugumma as our champion, he engaged the other champion in first javelin throwing, and then hopping on one leg the longest. Mugumma lost them both.

Since we had lost, we expected to lose something of value. However, they didn't ask us for anything. There were about a hundred people in the camp, of which fifty or so were children. Their clothing was similar to the Doraddi we had seen in Jolar, but it was of much better quality. We surmised that these were Doraddi that lived with the Kresh. It turned out to be true.

We asked them where the nearest Kresh wagon train was, but the leader said that we should all eat first, then talk. Hungry as we were, from four days underground, we accepted. The feast was similar to those we had received from other Doraddi, but there was more grasses, less meat, and some new fruits.

At the feast, many young girls clustered around Mugumma, and middle-aged women around Thingol and Tortho. This confused us until the leader explained.

The leader first told us that it was not surprising that we had misunderstood some of the customs. After all, he said, who was our guide but Mister Man, a Trickster. The custom went like this. When a man reaches marriageable age, he finds a middle-aged woman to marry. She, with her experience, can care for the man quite well. He in turn is taught by the woman. Eventually, the woman dies and the man is free to marry a young girl, whom he can care for and teach her. The cycle continues as the man dies and the woman approaches middle age. Thus, marriages between people of nearly the same age were few. This too explained why all the young girls had flocked around Mugumma, who was nearly forty, and the older women around Thingol and Tortho, both in their twenties.

Gorfang was quite amazed that the Doraddi here had no central ruling council the way they had the Decamony. The Doraddi leader explained their system: when they need to send a message to the Kresh, they go to a meeting place and leave a man there to give the Kresh the message. The Kresh meet among themselves to pass the message to other wagon trains. When Gorfang told them of the apparent threat by Chaos, the man replied that there hadn't been any broos seen for a hundred years.

Meanwhile, Tortho with the help of Thingol and a few liters of beer had managed to get a new spear for himself. Mugumma was interviewing a possible assistant, a Doraddi named Boo-boo. And Cimex, another Doraddi, was asking to join us.

Finally, the tribe left their camp to go to a meeting place. We asked if we could go with them and they said yes. On Witch-day of the fourth week, we came upon a big field of bloodbeans. We spent the remainder of the day harvesting. The next day, we came upon an old Veldang camp. It was a filthy mess. Tortho, combing through the debris, found a silk scarf.

On Gata-day of the fifth week, we came upon a sight. It was a single tree, some hundred feet

tall. It turned out that the tree was the meeting place. At the base of the tree was a huge wooden chest. Opening it found a trove of goods: cloth, pots, fruit, and soap. The Doraddi replaced the goods with food, then prepared to depart. We asked them how long it might be until a Kresh wagon train came by. We were told it should be soon. Asking about water, they told us of a river bed that we could dig into and find mud. Then they left.

Fortunately for us, a train came to the tree on Six-day of that week. We were going to tell the leader, Radamacue, our story, but he said we should all eat first, then talk.

We told Radamacue of our adventures with the last wagon train. He asked us about how large the army that had attacked us was. We estimated that it was some three to four thousand strong. Radamacue told us that the biggest train that had previously disappeared was 32 wagons big.

He was puzzled at how such a large army could feed itself. He called for the Chaos expert, a small, wizened old man. From our story, he said that he didn't think it was an invasion from outside. He did think that someone or something might be breeding them, but for what reason he couldn't begin to guess. He wondered whether or not they might live underground, since our assailants had literally risen from the earth.

Putting his questions aside for the moment, he asked us why we had come to Pamaltela. We told him of our quest to try to save the Third Age. He listened attentively.

Radamacue then placed us under an obligation. "May Vovisbor rot your soul if you tell anyone not a Kresh that it's Chaos monsters that are ambushing our wagons." He then told us that he was going to meet with other wagonmasters during the Holy Week.

After this, we debated what we were going to do. Some of us wanted to go west to Tarien. Others wanted to visit the Veldang to ask them about their ancient city. Finally, we decided that we would try to visit the Veldang.

The next day, Ga-day of the sixth week, Radamacue told us that the wagon train was splitting up to better deliver the message about the meet. One of the sub-trains was in fact going to see the Veldang. We asked if we could go with them and they agreed. We left the following day.

The third day out, a group of carnivorous dinosaurs forced the wagons into a protective circle. After some hours, we were able to resume our journey. The next day we encountered a huge termite mound. This one had dye painted on it, and the wagonmaster left 10 Kresh to wait for another train to spread the word even further.

On Ga-day of the seventh week, we saw another mound, but this time left an entire wagon to pass the word. Finally on Pamalt-day of that week, we saw a Veldang camp. It was filled with many brightly colored tents. We estimated the population at 200. One wagon was left here, and we stayed with it.

The Veldang women wore only full, loose skirts but adorned themselves with lots of jewelry. The men wore only britches and again, lots of jewelry. Some of the men had a kind of decoration on their skin which was a pattern of white skin.

After the wagon left, we realized that we had a slight problem. None of us knew how to speak Veldang! We thus spent some time trying to find someone who spoke Arbennan. Mostly when we said the word "Arbennan", the person would point at Mugumma, the only Arbennan in the group.

After about a half-hour, a gong sounded. The children playing all around us left and went into their tents. The adults finished what they were doing, then went outside the camp, and formed a circle around a fire. Most of them were talking, but some took out instruments and began to play

them. Some of them started to sing along.

In vain, Gorfang went around the circle trying to find someone who spoke Arbennan. Finally, one of the singers, an old man caught Gorfang's eye. Gorfang then waited patiently for them to finish.

The song went on for another hour and a half, then some of the people started to dance. Then Tortho stepped into the circle and in front of the old man cast Firespear on his spear. Immediately, eight men jumped up with their knives ready. Those of us still there noticed that the knives were made of iron! Tortho immediately quenched his Firespear.

The old man said to Gorfang and Tortho, "You're a really rude person. What are you?" Gorfang replied that he was a dwarf from the north and that he had come from a great distance to ask some questions. When the old man showed no immediate signs of answering, Tortho asked him about the knives.

The old man left the circle and talked to them apart from the circle. He showed them his knife, a large one made of jade. He told them that it had taken two generations to rub from a block of jade with bare hands. He explained how important and valued knives are to Veldang.

When Gorfang began to ask his questions, the old man, whose name was Vimdar, replied, "My time requires payment." Tortho offered Vimdar the scarf he had found at an old campsite and two liters of beer. Tortho gave Vimdar the scarf, Thingol the beer, and Vimdar told us to come back tomorrow.

The next day, Witch-day, most of the women were baking patties made of lagniappe. We sought out Vimdar and asked him our questions. Yes, we had at one time had a city in what is now the center of Pamaltela. Yes, the sun did indeed fall on it after Artmal had been killed. The only reason we had survived is that some of us were not in the city at that time. Who killed Artmal? Why, Worlath⁶⁹, Ehilm⁷⁰, and Humkt⁷¹. Why did they kill Artmal? Because Artmal was going to drive them back into the ocean. Who do we worship now? Why, Artmal, of course, and Annila too.

Now that we had our answers, we had to decide where we were going to go. Some of us argued that we should immediately strike out for the Enmal Mountains, while others said that we should head towards Tarien. We decided to go the Tarien, but then had to decide how to get there. We could either walk nearly the entire length of Pamaltela, or perhaps try to take a boat for most of the distance. Vimdar told us that some of the Kresh were going to try to reach the Enmal Mountains, but we declined to try to get there.

Finally we decided to head northeast, towards the eastern coast of Pamaltela to try to find a boat that would eventually get to the western side of Pamaltela. It was tacitly agreed that we should avoid the huge swamps that covered most of the east coast.

So we spent the remainder of the day purchasing supplies for the long trek to the northeast. What we ended up with was some 40 kilograms of dried meat, 20 kilograms of a meaty drink called lassi, and 30 kilograms of assorted grains. We estimated that the food should last us for about 10 days.

That night, we heard Vimdar's wife screaming. Simon, Tortho, Thingol, Mugumma, Gorfang, and Boo-boo went to investigate. Outside, they found Vimdar dead with five Veldang standing off over his body, three on one side, two on the other. The two carried knives, and of the three, two also had knives, the last a spear. Except for us and the five men, everybody else was looking from the safety of their tents.

⁶⁹ Orlanth.

⁷⁰ Yelm.

⁷¹ Humakt.

Behind us, Mugumma, Gorfang, and Simon noticed five more men, two with knives, the rest with spears. Before the rest of us could turn around, those five attacked us.

One of the spearmen attacked Boo-boo from behind. The spear impaled his chest and Boo-boo fell. Simon was attacked by the two knife-wielders. He parried one but the knife still hit him in the right arm. Simon then attacked the other man, but missed. The other man hit him in the chest. Simon then struck at the first man, but he dodged the blow. Gorfang threw a Demoralize on one of the two spearmen attacking him. The one not Demoralized hit Gorfang for minimal damage in his abdomen. The one who was Demoralized hit him in the left leg, causing him to fall over.

Simon parried the man with the speedy knife. Mugumma hit the head of the man who hit Boo-boo. Tortho hit one of the men attacking Simon and damaged his left leg. Simon parried the man that Tortho just hit, but his return blow missed.. The other spearman tried to hit Gorfang but missed.

Then our assailants stepped back, and then ran away. We healed ourselves and then took stock of the situation. We got the distinct impression that we should leave, so we did.

We walked the rest of the night and then discovered in the morning that two of the Veldang who we had met had followed us. Their names were Eugene and Maac and they said that they wished to travel with us. We were suspicious, but allowed them to come with us under probation.

For five days we walked. On Witch-day of the eighth week, we spotted a termite mound. This one was not painted however. The next day, two fortuitous things happened. Simon spotted the first river we would have to cross to reach the coast. And we spotted a rhinoceros with a broken leg. We thus had fresh food and water. We killed the rhino and spent the next day drying and cooking the rhino, which yielded about 20 kilograms of food.

The next day, we spotted a whole herd of jackrabbits. We gave chase and caught some for dinner that night. After another six days, nearly out of food, we hunted for food. It was here that Tortho was nearly killed. Out hunting, he nearly fell prey to a pack of hunting spiders. Each of the spiders was the size of a medium-sized dog. Though he was attacked, thanks to his spear and Thingol, he survived.

After that we were more careful where we walked. The next day we came upon a camp of both Veldang and non-Veldang. Unlike the last camp, this one seemed more friendly. We were welcomed into the camp.

Chapter 6

Encampment

The camp was divided up into two major sections: one for Veldang, the other for non-Veldang. There was also one tent set alone.

Hungry as we were, we were given food in exchange for information and stories. We mingled all that day and the rest.

It was on that next day, Pamalt-day that many things happened. First of all, the owner of the one tent was revealed. It was a sorcerer, a magus by the look of him. He invited Thingol to join him and Thingol agreed. We didn't see him for a few days. The other thing that happened was that Simon the Fanatic killed himself. As he fell on his sword, we all saw his spirit leave his body and begin walking towards the northwest. Ferric told us that he was heading towards Seshnela to keep his word to the Luathan Amprefesno.

Also in the camp were two men who said that they had come from the swamps near the camp. They said that they lived on an island in the swamp⁷² which, it is said, was the only the dry land in the world. The two of them disbelieved it and started to walk. They were startled to find more dry land. They were dubious as to our claims that they were on a continent of which their swamp was only a small part.

The next day, the two swamp men, Tortho, Boo-boo, Ferric, and Maac decided to take a little expedition into the swamps. They left on Witch-day, and didn't return until the same day next week. Then they had a tale to tell.

On the third day out(Ga-day), they were attacked by six skeletons. They were destroyed but not before all were sorely injured. Early on the fourth day out, they saw the top of a tower off in the distance. Going closer, they found that the tower, besides being surrounded on all sides by hills was actually set in a kind of sheath, with the bottom of the tower being down in the pit. The pit itself was filled with a kind of smoke or steam. They spent the rest of the day debating what to do.

Early the next morning, they decided to try to enter the tower. Spying a high window on the tower, one of the swamp men pulled out a grappling hook and, with some difficulty, caught the window ledge with it. However, only Tortho and the swamp man climbed in.

Inside they found a room that contained a large throne, many books, a glass scepter and some blocks of chalk in addition to a flight of stairs heading down. The scepter was a simple rod and ball with a red spiral running the length of the rod to touch the ball. In the center of the room there was a pentagram drawn on the floor. Inside the pentagram was a fire burning.

As soon as Tortho's feet touched the floor, the flame jumped up and attacked Tortho. Hurt, Tortho called on Lodril to take the fire away. Lodril responded at a loss of 7 POW from Tortho. As soon as the flame was gone, another appeared in the pentagram. This one, however, did not attack them. The swamp man, however, attacked and dispersed the salamander at grievous damage to his weapon. Still another elemental appeared and both of them left it alone.

Outside, the other swamp man tried to climb up and into the room. However, he fell off the rope and into the fog. Not seriously injured, he discovered a door into the tower. After communicating this to Tortho, the rest of the people outside descended into the fog and through the door.

They were shocked to discover a huge heap of corpses in various states of decomposition.

⁷² About the size of the big island of Hawaii.

As they attempted to climb up the stairs to the next level, they heard a howling that sounded like no known animal. Frightened, they all left the tower, Tortho taking the glass scepter with him.

Heading back towards the camp, low on food, they began hunting frogs to eat. One of them, slightly larger than what they were hunting, hunted them. During the combat, Ferric was swallowed by the giant frog. Though they managed to kill it and save Ferric, his armor was badly corroded by the frog's stomach acid⁷³. The next day, they arrived back at the camp.

When Mugumma inspected the scepter, his Second Sight told him that there was a source of POW in the top of it. The POW was about the size of Mugumma's fetch, 25. Tortho and Ferric had tried putting magic points into it, but even after 26 had been put into it, nothing seemed to happen.

While the party had been out, Gorfang had been talking to many of the people in the camp. When he had asked about the seas to the north-east, they called it the Hot Seas, because the water there was very hot. As to people, Doraddi lived all along the coast. They didn't know whether there were any boats to be found there.

Thingol now emerged from the wizard's tent. When told about the heap of corpses in the tower, he remarked that perhaps a necromancer lived there. We all thought that it might be so, and that he might be very disturbed by the theft of his scepter.

Thingol told us that the wizard had at one time been the ruler of a land inside the swamp. He had been deposed and forced to flee to this camp. He now makes his living casting spells in return for food. In return for his servitude, the wizard was willing to allow Thingol a use of Create Familiar INT, a necessary spell for Thingol to be able to create a familiar.

But what animal was to become his familiar? A dog would perhaps been best, or a cat, but there were no cats at the camp, and all the dogs, perhaps sensing what Thingol was planning to do, all growled at him. A rabbit or rat also might do, but rabbits were slightly less intelligent than dogs or cats, and rats had a fairly short life span.

The wizard pointed out that if the animals characteristics could be enhanced, then death would be postponed. So Thingol asked his friends to capture a rabbit or rat for him. Gorfang devised a trap, and after a week had caught a giant rat. Thingol spent the next four days befriending it, and the next seven days going through the ritual to turn it into his familiar. The spell worked, and Thingol was now an adept.

As soon as Thingol had finished, we set off again after purchasing supplies for the journey. That is, all except for Maac, who decided to stay at the camp.

On the first day out, some 60 kilometers away, we could see a wagon coming our way, though it was not from the swamp. It was definitely not a Kresh wagon and it was glowing. When Mugumma looked at it, his Second Sight was blinded by the passengers of the wagon.

Realizing its possible passenger, we waited for it to reach us. It was pulled by a wheel, whose axle was connected to the wagon, which was filled with many things unidentifiable to us, and on top of the heap was a chair whose occupant Thingol and Gorfang recognized as the Old Man! The other occupant they also recognized: a boggle.

Old Man pointed at Mugumma and turned off his Second Sight ability. He told Mugumma that he would turn it back on before he left. He asked Gorfang and Thingol if they still had the items he gave them. They both replied in the affirmative. He then invited the bison to go with him. The bison agreed and was hitched behind the wagon.

⁷³ From 7 points of protection to 2!

Old Man said, “I have no speeches to make. I came to pick up the bison, find out if you still have the items and see if you need anything.” Tortho asked about the scepter. Old Man replied that it was a tool enchanted so that only one type of person could use it and that Tortho wasn’t that kind of person.

Then he said, “I am going to the Enmal Mountains. Do you have anything that I should take?” We replied yes, and Gorfang brought out the old Cronisper priest’s soulstone.

Then Old Man said, “I have with me a shard of the Mirror of Truth. It shows only the Truth, though you must decipher the meaning yourselves. Does anyone want to look?” Of course we all did.

Ferric saw a wheel spinning slowly. Mugumma saw two of himself; one had a grim expression, the other a happy smile. The bison saw a troll. Tortho saw a horrible thing — an earthworm. Cimex saw his own face. Boo-boo saw a huge dark shadow behind his own form in the mirror. Gorfang saw himself but his face had no features at all. Thingol saw himself made out of metal; he could see the rivets but inside it was hollow⁷⁴.

Before Old Man left, Tortho asked the boggle what the scepter did. The boggle told him that it was a conversion device. He said that you put in a total of 100 magic points whereupon it put in the remaining 74 (26 already having been put in it) then stuck it in the sand. Then, he said, the next person to touch it loses a point of POW but then that point of POW can be used to make magic items. He said that of us, only the shaman could use it and that he should Discorporate before finishing the Enchanting ritual. Then they both left.

After some discussion, Cimex picked up the scepter. As he lost a point of POW, a glow followed the red striping until it reached the ball whereupon it started to glow green. Mugumma then used the point of POW and created a magic point matrix for Cimex, Discorporating as the boggle had told him.

The implications were grim. This scepter used another person’s POW to make magic items. This was absolutely priceless to any creature who didn’t have natural POW — like a vampire. That would tie in with the howling, the corpses, everything. We then had an immense debate regarding what to do with this thing. Tortho was adamant at keeping it and Thingol was adamant at us not getting attacked by vampires at night. Finally, agreeing that the last thing we wanted to happen was for the vampire to get it back, we decided to just keep moving as fast as possible and then decide later. So we did.

The next day nearly proved fatal to us all. Without realizing where we were, we blundered into a massive snake migration. The snakes were Hundred Steps⁷⁵. We all froze, but nevertheless Tortho, Mugumma and Boo-boo were struck at. Tortho’s armor saved him, but not so Mugumma and Boo-boo. Thingol gingerly picked his way among the snakes over to Boo-boo. Then he cast a Neutralize Poison and purged it from Boo-boo.

Again the snakes struck at Tortho and Mugumma, but also Cimex. Again Tortho’s armor save him as did Cimex’s. Thingol then cast Neutralize Poison on Mugumma. Cimex was hit twice, Tortho again, and so was Boo-boo. This time Cimex was poisoned as well as Boo-boo. Then, Boo-boo was hit again and poisoned. Thingol then cast Neutralize Poison again on Boo-boo. Finally, Tortho was hit and poisoned. Out of magic points, Tortho only took minimal damage.

Continuing on, we encountered nothing until Empress-day of the third week of winter. Then

⁷⁴ Here is what the rest of our party would have seen: Simon would have seen himself as a corpse. Gai would have seen a sword. Enkavar would have seen a pleased king blessing him. Grosko would have seen a path going on forever.

⁷⁵ Their poison is deadly. CON is matched versus the potency. If you win, you take half damage to general hit points. If you lose, you die.

we spotted a huge monster walking across the plains.

Chapter 7

The Hoolar

It had three faces, three legs, and four arms. It was also laughing with a loud, low voice. We recognized it as a hoolar. Hoolars are supposed to be the first intelligent beings that Lodril and Eurmial tried to create. Now they are extremely rare. Immortal but not Chaotic, they are known for their skills at the forge.

We decided to try to catch it's attention by shouting. Nothing happened. Then we tried again. This time it seemed to hear us. It pulled out four immense sledgehammers and came running towards us. As we frantically tried to bring out weapons, it stopped 10 meters from us and banged the hammers together. The shower of sparks started some small fires which Mugumma Extinguished.

The hoolar bent over Tortho, scrutinizing him. Then it smiled, drooling, then stood up and clanged its hammers again. We all jumped back from the impact and the sparks. Then Ferric yelled, "Rocks into liquid?" The hoolar thought about it. Then it dropped one of the sledgehammers and drove its arm into the ground. After a few seconds it came back out with a boulder some two meters in diameter. It tossed the boulder towards Ferric who managed to dodge the huge missile. Then it stopped.

"Metal!" it yelled, looking at Gorfang. Again it yelled, "Metal!" then started to shake its hammers. Gorfang yelled back, "Mine!"

It seemed to understand that. Then it pointed at Ferric's sack of money.

"Metal!" it yelled. Ferric gave the bag to the hoolar who dumped its contents out, some 30 kilograms of silver.

"What?" it asked Ferric.

"Axe!" yelled Ferric in reply.

Then Ferric pointed at the huge boulder and asked, "Rock?" meaning would he be able to use it as an anvil. The hoolar looked at it, then picked it up and handed it to Gorfang saying, "Hold." Gorfang of course fell under the huge weight of the boulder. The hoolar picked the rock back up, put it back where it had been and said to Gorfang, "Thank you."

The hoolar then began to build up a building out of rocks taken from the ground. Inside the building was a forge. We were kept busy finding fuel for the fire, which was fierce indeed.

All night it worked inside the building. Then, the next morning, it came out of the building with two objects. One was a lump of silver some 4.5 kilograms which the hoolar pocketed. The other was an axe made entirely of tempered silver. Its weight: 25.5 kilograms. Its size: as big as Ferric himself.

Then Tortho gave the hoolar his spear and asked, "Axe?" The hoolar then went back into its building and, after an hour, came out with the spear head transformed into an axe head. Of course, the axe head was extremely small.

Then the hoolar said to us, "Hungry!" As we stood looking at each other, the hoolar reached out with two of its hands for Boo-boo and Thingol. Boo-boo immediately ran away, while Thingol dodged the hoolar's grasp and also ran away, as did Cimex.

Ferric then hefted his axe, showed it to the hoolar and said, "Five axes!" The hoolar picked

up the axe and ate it.

“Yum!” it said as it then banged its hammers together. “Yum!” it said again as it poked at Gorfang’s armor. It was now Gorfang’s turn to run away.

But the hoolar sat down and immediately went to sleep. Those of us who had run returned and Mugumma and Ferric picked the hoolar’s pocket for the 4.5 kilograms of silver it had taken as a fee. We then thought it wise to leave the area.

But as we walked through the night, we heard banging noises behind us. The hoolar was coming towards us. With nothing else to do, we yelled our greetings. The hoolar looked at us, then smiled, saying, “I know you! Friends!”

Relieved by the greeting, Ferric then held up the lump of silver and asked, “Axe?” The hoolar said, “Wood!” Some of us went out to look for wood as the hoolar again built a lean-to for its forge. Anticipating its hunger, some of us also went hunting.

By the time the hoolar gave the axe to Ferric and exclaimed that it was hungry, we had brought back some animals and edible plants. The hoolar gulped them down, but said, “Not much substance.” Mugumma asked it, “What about your house?” The hoolar picked a rock from it, said “Yuck”, then tossed it at Mugumma. The rock struck his left arm, shattering it.

Thingol then asked it “What do you like to eat?” The hoolar picked up a rock, sniffed it, then tossed it harmlessly away.

Ferric suggested, “Your hammer?”

The hoolar then said, “Marble.”

Ferric, with a gleam in his eye asked, “Where marble?”

The hoolar replied, “Where marble?”

Ferric repeated, “Where marble?”

“Where marble,” the hoolar laughed and then banged its hammers⁷⁶.

Gorfang now yelled, “Hey hoolar!”

The hoolar asked, “Where?”

Gorfang responded, “You!”

The hoolar asked, “What?”

Gorfang now pointed at the hoolar. The hoolar then picked Gorfang up and sighted in the direction pointed by his arm. It put him down and looked confused.

Mugumma now said, “Eats that way!”

The hoolar asked, “Where?” as it headed towards Mugumma. Surprised, Mugumma pointed towards Gorfang! The hoolar then picked up Gorfang and started to eat him! Gorfang began kicking and shouting whereupon the hoolar put him back down.

Disgusted, Cimex threw his spear at the hoolar. It caught the spear, inspected it, said

⁷⁶ Obviously the hoolar thought Ferric was correcting the name.

“Flint!”, and ate it. Ferric then threw his axe at it, but the hoolar dexterously caught it in his mouth, then swallowed it.

Then it picked up Gorfang again. It inspected him closely and then began to peel away his armor. Gorfang threw a Demoralize spell, but it failed to affect the hoolar. Stripped of his cuirass, Gorfang was put back down. The hoolar asked him, “What now?”

Gorfang said, “Give it back!”

The hoolar asked, “Make good armor?”

Gorfang, realizing the possibilities, gave the rest of his armor to the hoolar.

It asked him, “Hard or light?”

Gorfang asked, “Can you explain the difference?”

The hoolar looked confused for a minute, then asked, “Hard or light?”

Gorfang responded, “Hard!”

All day the hoolar worked on Gorfang’s armor. We hunted some more for us and for the hoolar. Finally the hoolar emerged. The armor looked badly made, with hammer marks and rivets all over it. But it protected him even better than before⁷⁷.

Tortho now gave the hoolar his ringmail and replied “Hard” as well. The hoolar put the armor in his mouth and began to chew. After it had chewed away the leather backing and spit out the metal, it said to him, “Not enough.” Tortho said to the hoolar to make armor only for his head and body.

After another day, the hoolar came back with armor for Tortho. It was a helmet and a cuirass and the helmet was bolted to the cuirass! But it protected him very well⁷⁸. Then Tortho gave the hoolar all his money, some 5.7 kilograms and asked the hoolar to make armor for his limbs that flexed. After only a few hours, the hoolar came back with the armor⁷⁹.

We now thought of where we would go. We wanted to keep heading towards the coast, but the hoolar followed us constantly. Then we thought that if the hoolar would follow us, it would be the perfect time to go into the dangerous swamps. So on Empress-day of the fourth week we headed in towards the swamp with the hoolar who now had a name. The day before, we had discovered what it was. Mugumma had asked it its name. The hoolar responded, “What yours?” Mugumma had answered, “Mugumma,” and the hoolar then said, “Me Hoolar Mugumma-friend.”

As we headed towards the swamp, Hoolar Mugumma-friend noticed in Tortho’s pack the Cornucopia of Simon’s that we had taken. It picked Tortho up, took the Cornucopia and used it twice: once to make salt, once to make marbles. Then it pulled out five different small slabs of metals and said, “Make!” Two of the slabs were yellowish, one reddish, one silvery, and the last purple.

We asked what metals they were and it replied, “Bone metal, sky metal, yellow metal, float metal and Hoolar Mugumma-friend metal: slarges use it.⁸⁰” We asked about the purple metal and managed to convince Hoolar Mugumma-friend that it was called “What?”

⁷⁷ Ten armor points, but only 17 ENC!

⁷⁸ Seven armor points and 6 ENC.

⁷⁹ Six armor points and 5 ENC.

⁸⁰ Respectively bronze, gold, copper, aluminum (also called sa-metal) and slarge metal.

Tortho began to bargain with the hoolar. He wanted all five.

They continued to bargain, but when Hoolar Mugumma-friend found out that “four” followed “three” and, banging its hammers and narrowly missing Tortho, Tortho decided to halt the bargaining. But it was realized that if we just asked the hoolar to make things then when we were done we would give Hoolar Mugumma-friend the Cornucopia.

The first things we wanted to make were items out of the slarge-metal. The hoolar advised us to wear gloves when touching it. Gorfang touched it bare-handed and his hand was irritated for a few hours. First an axe-head was made out of it for Cimex. Then a spear-point for Tortho. Then 2 daggers, one for Thingol, one for Mugumma. Then Gorfang wanted crossbow bolts made, half of the slarge-metal, half from stone. The hoolar spent three days and came back with a beautifully made crossbow⁸¹.

Most of us were clamoring to be on our way, but Tortho, with some advice from Thingol, knew that the slarge-metal items would be nearly worthless here in the east. So Hoolar Mugumma-friend made a gold dagger and a gold helmet.

While the hoolar was making these items, the rest of us were either finding fuel or catching food. Though not expecting trouble, it was Mugumma and Boo-boo who found it over the next two weeks. At first they were menaced by a Hundred Steps, but managed to run away. Then Mugumma was charged by a brontathere. Boo-boo diverted it on himself and Mugumma Slowed the brontathere just enough to let Boo-boo climb a tree. Then Mugumma fell into a pit with a spike at the bottom.

The next disaster was Cimex's. He was surprised by a trapdoor spider and bitten, but not fatally. Then Mugumma, Boo-boo, and Tortho were surprised. They had heard the hissing of 7 snakes. Investigating, they found a hydra! They all ran away. Mugumma escaped first, then Boo-boo. Tortho was bitten, poisoned, and his armor was eaten away by acid, but he too managed to escape.

Finally, on Ga-day of the sixth week, matters came to a head. When we returned to our campsite, we found the hoolar gone, as well as Mugumma. Tracking the hoolar was easy and we soon caught up to them. Asking him where he was going, he replied that he was leaving. His reason was that there was too much bickering among the party and that he was disgusted. After a big discussion about who was right about what, Tortho decided that he would resign. He nominated Mugumma as his successor. There was no disagreement, and so Mugumma became our leader.

All discussion ended as Hoolar Mugumma-friend said, “Hungry!” So some of us went out hunting food. Mugumma, as leader, decided to go out onto the Spirit Plane. He returned with an intellect spirit. He then had Boo-boo attempt to enchant an item to hold the spirit. The ritual would take 35 hours.

Meanwhile, Gorfang was having an interesting hunt. He had spied a small brontathere and decided to try to kill it. He shot it twice before it noticed anything. Then it looked around and saw nothing. Gorfang shot again and it started to charge him. As it charged him, he shot again, and then desperately parried as it crashed into him, knocking him back 2 meters. He quickly scrambled to his feet, but the animal lost interest in him. Gorfang looked for game elsewhere.

Gata-day had come and Boo-boo's attempt ended in failure. Boo-boo seemed distressed at Mugumma's non-concern. Thingol asked if he would like to become his student, but Boo-boo did not reply.

As we headed towards the swamp, Hoolar Mugumma-friend said, “Hungry.” Facetiously, Mugumma said, “Eat everybody.” Hoolar Mugumma-friend said, “Eat Mugumma”, then picked

⁸¹ The equivalent of an arbalest.

him up. Picking up a horse's leg from yesterday's hunt, he stuffed Mugumma's mouth. Or rather his face.

Mugumma cried, "Not hungry! Not hungry!" whereupon Hoolar Mugumma-friend started to eat Mugumma.

"No!" cried Mugumma. The hoolar said, "Oh" and then ate the horse leg. Then he started walking with us, still carrying Mugumma.

"Put me down!" cried Mugumma. So Hoolar Mugumma-friend dropped Mugumma. He was not hurt too much.

Later that day, we saw a group walking along the plains. When they saw us, they stopped and one man came towards us. When he was about 200 meters away, all of sudden he ran towards us at a tremendous speed. "Hi!" he said.

"How'd you run that fast?" asked Gorfang.

"I just can", replied the man.

"Can you teach me?" asked Gorfang.

"It's a side effect of my affliction. My king is Jmijie." He paused as if expecting a response. When there was none, he continued. "I also wanted to see the hoolar!"

After a token Meeting Contest in which the man chose a foot race and Gorfang chose to guess how many hands were being held up behind one's own back, he brought the group over and we had a meal.

The man asked us where we had gotten both the hoolar and the two children with beards. Gorfang replied that the hoolar had found us and that nobody would now dare to attack us. The man was confused: why would anyone want to attack us in the first place? Gorfang said that we seemed to attack trouble, like huge faces in the sky and brontatheres and such. The man said that brontatheres were easy to hunt and kill. He said that the bigger ones are the better ones. One sneaks underneath it and then thrusts one's spear into the belly. Then one runs and hides and then follows it until it dies. Of course, he said, if the animal dies immediately and falls, one could easily be crushed. Gorfang said he would stick to his method of hunting.

We asked him what the coast was like. He replied that it lay upon poison waters. We asked if it was salty. He said yes, but that some of the water in the swamp was fit to drink.

Speaking of the swamp, we asked what it was like in there. He said that it was dark and smelly with lots of plants and lots of frogs. We asked about any people who might live there. He said that there were some people who lived there. Some of them, he said, traded, but some of them raided others. We asked if they used metal. He said yes, but didn't know what it was called. Mugumma pulled out the dagger made by Hoolar Mugumma-friend. The man said that they didn't use that metal, that was found far to the west.

The next day we bid farewell to the man and headed towards the swamp.

Chapter 8

The Mansion

We walked for a day until we saw the swamp. By noon of Pamalt-day, we could also smell it. Words cannot describe the stench. All of a sudden, Hoolar Mugumma-friend stopped.

“Smell bad. Too wet. Bye-bye.” And he started walking away. After a bit, he started laughing and banging his hammers.

Nevertheless, we pushed into the swamp. Inside were animals we had never seen the like. Big black birds, huge swarms of insects, and in one pool, leeches as long as one’s arm. The noises were deafening at times. The ever-present croaking of frogs, the harsh cry of birds, the buzz of the insects.

That night, we found a small hillock and camped. All night long, we were beset by mosquitoes and other insects. And we heard a peculiar bellowing noise that we could not identify.

The next morning, we turned roughly north-east to try to parallel the edge of the swamp. This we did for the next two days. But that night, while Tortho was on watch, he could see a light off in the distance. Wisely, Tortho noted the direction and continued to watch.

The next morning, Ga-day of the seventh week, we headed in the direction of the light, deeper into the swamp. After a few hours, we could see what the light might have come from. It was a ruined mansion on a hill.

Large it was, and also dark. Circling it, the mansion had many doors into it. The main entrance seemed to be on the west side. There was a huge overgrown garden filled with many strange plants and fungi.

We went to the main door. Mugumma clapped outside, as was his custom. Ferric, with a look of both disgust and resignation, knocked. There was no response to either. Opening the door, we were in an entrance hallway. The floor was tiled and overhead there was the remains of a chandelier. The floor was covered with dust and we raised up small clouds as we walked about. It was also quite dark in places. There were stairs leading up, stairs leading down, two doors, and two corridors leading away.

We took one of the corridors. Gorfang’s Earthsense told him the corridor went on for a distance and then turned. There were some doors which presumably led to rooms. Opening the first, we were in what was a bathroom. There was a large tub, a basin on a stand, and an empty lantern holder. Using the wooden stand, some rope, and some animal fat that Tortho had saved, we made a crude torch.

The next door we opened turned out to be a corridor which paralleled the one we were currently in. We could see that the walls had two lantern holders which were empty. Going down the corridor to the end, there was an ajar door. The room it opened on to seemed to be a sitting room. There was a table and chair, some shelves which were empty, another empty lantern holder and a painting. It was of a handsome, shining, golden face floating in the air. The face had its eyes closed. Kneeling around the face was a ring of people in robes. The robes had a strange symbol on the backs.

Leaving the room and heading back along the corridor, we opened a door that we had passed over. It opened on a large room, presumably living quarters for someone. There was a bed, a table with the remains of a meal on it, a few burned-down candles and a wardrobe. Inside it were some robes. Most were nondescript except for one which was solid black and had a symbol on its chest. It was not the same symbol as we had seen in the painting. Also in the room were a kind of

book made from wood and covered with wax pressed upon to write. It resembled an accordion when opened. The wood was heavily lacquered. Although none of us could read the language, Tortho decided to take one.

The next door down we had also passed over. It was apparently a kind of closet. Inside it was a padlocked trunk and another wardrobe. Picking the lock with ease, Gorfang opened the trunk. Inside it was long things covered in fur. They were slender rods of pure silver. In addition there was a gilt sword. In the wardrobe there were 8 black robes, 2 dull red robes, 2 pairs of leather gloves, and 2 robes of extremely fine quality: one black, one red. These two had symbols on the back, different from the ones we had seen. We decided not to take anything just yet.

The last two doors in the corridor turned out to be another bathroom and a water closet. Going back into the main corridor, we followed it as it turned. It led to a set of stairs going up and a door as well as turning again. Following the corridor, we came to what looked to be a kind of chapel. There were benches for the members to sit and an altar of some kind. There were also two statues of armored warriors, each of which also had a real sword. Behind the chapel were two doors.

The first opened into a triangular room. There was a helmet stand with a felt helmet upon it, a stand with 2 crossed daggers made of silver but with bronze hilts, some blackened food, and another wardrobe made of solid bronze. There was a symbol on the wardrobe, again different. There was also a door which led to the overgrown garden. Mugumma could tell that inside the wardrobe was a source of POW. Ferric touched the symbol on the wardrobe but drew it back quickly. His hand looked like the hand of a corpse. Gorfang tried to touch the symbol with his key, but it was repelled by a force⁸².

The other door behind the chapel led to a trapezoidal room. There was another helmet stand, another stand with crossed daggers and a wooden wardrobe. Inside were two robes, one black, one red, each of which had thin yellow pinstripes. One of the two doors in the room led to the garden, the other to a bedroom.

Investigating the rest of the immediate area, we found what were apparently guard rooms, which yielded a helmet, a sword and a spear.

Now we went up the stairs we were nearest. We found a section of corridor that apparently opened into living quarters of some kind. The room the door opened onto was a bedroom. One door led to a water closet, the other to a sitting room. But inside three of them, the sitting room was stripped down to the bare stone. There was also a skeleton that had a long iron stake driven through the rib cage area. Fearing the worst, we left the iron alone.

Also on this floor was a large viewing room to the garden with a set of stairs that led to the same. There was an L-shaped room that was a portrait gallery. Among the many paintings was another of the floating golden face. There was also an audience room that had two doors and a set of stairs leading up.

We took the stairs up to a room that had three doors, one of them a set of double doors. There were many windows and in the center, the remains of a fire. The coals were still warm. The double doors had a glyph on them, and Mugumma sensed POW in it. Touching a spear to the glyph had no effect. So Mugumma opened to doors. They opened into a library. Inside it, Mugumma could sense two sources of POW. As Gorfang crossed the threshold, a sudden loud whistling started and Gorfang took two points to his abdomen, undoubtedly from a Warding spell.

From behind us, one of the other doors opened. From it stepped a person wearing lacquered armor of some kind. The person had a flanged sword, a shield, and wore a mask which covered all of the face except the eyes.

⁸² Like trying to push the same two poles of a magnet together.

“Greetings,” said Gorfang in Arbennan. The person stepped forward slightly.

Thingol then greeted the person in all of the 12 languages he knew. There was no response. With its sword, it waved us away from the door. We decided not to resist. The person, always facing us, went to the door, closed it, then opened it. The whistling stopped. Then a male voice spoke to us in Veldang.

“Put your weapons down and your hands over your heads.” We asked why and got no response. After a brief discussion, we did so and the man relaxed slightly. We asked if he was responsible for the fire. He said he was. We asked who he was and he asked/told us not to go into the library. When we agreed, he asked us why we were here. We told him we were looking for a city in the swamp and he seemed to grow more interested.

“You’re looking for Panar? You’re not from the swamp?” When we confirmed that, he said, “I used to live there. Where’d you get the bleached guy?” looking at Thingol. He told him where he had come from then asked the man what he was doing here. He said that he had been here 15 years doing research.

It turned out that the face in the portraits was of a god called Zetroit. This place was apparently a place where some of the priests stayed. Though he didn’t know much about the symbols, he knew from his research that Zetroit was some sort of a fire god. He was considered benevolent and only sacrificed animals. In Engure, which was what the nation was called, he was a minority cult.

When we evinced interest in Panar, he gave us directions to get there: “Go directly south. If you haven’t reached it in a week, turn east. If you reach the coast, turn around and head west. You can’t miss it.” The ruler of the land is called the High Wizard. Most of them, said the man, were mainly concerned about maintaining their power. We asked about the availability of iron there. He said that only the soldiers wore iron. They comprised about 2 percent of the population, which at the time before he left was around 100,000. Asking what the inhabitants prized (as trade goods), he said, “Luxury foods, skins, leather, bone goods. All the kind of junk the savages make. And of course, magic items are always useful.”

We asked if there was any danger in us staying here, at least for the night. He told us that the two towers in the north wing of the manor were probably not safe. And, he said, the servants wing on the first floor is full of ghouls. He suggested that we stay in the deacon’s room just behind the chapel. When we asked about the brass wardrobe, he said yes, he could open it and that it held sacred items too valuable to leave lying around. And when we asked if it would be safe to remove the iron spikes, he said that he hadn’t studied it yet, but that he probably wouldn’t.

Then he escorted us to the deacon’s room, down a different route that took us through the garden.

That evening, we had a large discussion as to what we were going to do. If our ultimate goal was to go to Panar to get iron, were we going to buy it, steal it, or trade for it? Stealing was definitely out, so would we trade or pay? In either case, we needed items of value. We thought about returning the sacred items to the temple in Panar, but decided that they wouldn’t be grateful enough to give us iron. A question was asked about the art, but the paintings were done on wood, not canvas and would thus be nearly impossible to transport. There was of course, the silver daggers plus the items we already had. Those should be sufficient to trade for a small amount of iron.

But why did we need to go to Panar? There were the perfectly good iron stakes just one floor down. But we didn’t know what the consequences would be if we removed them.

We had just about decided that we would take the items of value that we could find, except the iron stakes, and go when a question about the man was brought up. Perhaps he had a message or messages that he wanted delivered to Panar. Perhaps we should ask if he needed any help. After

all, he had been here 15 years, and it was sure that he didn't get many visitors. So, we decided that we would ask him if he needed any help or wanted anything done for him back in Panar.

When we put the question to him in the morning, he seemed dubious. He asked us what we could do to help him? Actually, he said, he could use some help. But only of a certain kind. He would have to test us to see if we were the kind he needed. When asked if the test was dangerous, he replied that it was, but so was life. In the end, Tortho, Gorfang, Mugumma, Cimex, and Maac decided to take the test. Thingol had grave doubts and asked Gorfang about the Quest. Gorfang replied that he would give the key to Thingol if he decided to quit the Quest.

Gorfang went with him first. A short while later, he came back minus two crossbow bolts. He told us that he was not supposed to tell the rest of us what the test was. Cimex went next. He came back as white as a sheet. Then Maac. Then Tortho. Then Mugumma, who came back as though he were running for his life.

The man told us that of those who had taken the test, Gorfang and Mugumma passed with flying colors, and that Tortho and Maac might fit his need.

The test? The man took the person back down to the first floor and down the set of stairs in the entranceway. Then he attempted to Demoralize the person. If it worked, he immediately Dispelled it. Then he let loose the basilisk. The test was one of bravery and common sense in the face of adversity. Gorfang had shot at it twice, and when he had seen them both bounce, had left. Mugumma, not realizing what it was, tried to throw his javelin at it. When the basilisk gazed at him, but didn't kill him, he ran. Cimex had run at the first sight of the ugly creature.

Since some of us had at least tentatively decided to help him, they asked him first his name, and then what he was trying to do. He said to just call him the Philosopher. What he was trying to do was to summon and control Sreng of the Seven Swords. He had hopes that he could control Sreng, but that he was not sure. The sacrifice to him was ghouls, so we would have to capture some. Then, said he, we would go to Engure and take over. If he succeeded, then he would reward us with iron, magic, whatever. We would gain much personal power, said the Philosopher.

The Philosopher knew where a bunch of ghouls lived on the first floor. His plan was for himself and Gorfang to go into the room where they lived, incapacitate them and then pass them back to Mugumma, who would bind them with strong chains.

We thought it over for some time. ghouls were not fun to face. Their bite was poisonous and their howl Demoralizing. In the end, Gorfang and Mugumma went to fight, Thingol to cast a Palsy, and Cimex to guard Thingol until he cast the spell. In preparation, Thingol had cast Damage Resistance on both Gorfang and Mugumma, Intensity 8, Duration 6.

So those four and the Philosopher went down to the first floor. As the Philosopher and Gorfang burst open the doors and jumped in, the 8 ghouls in the room began to howl. But the Philosopher had forgotten one thing. A ghoul's howling is matched against the victim's INT, not POW. Gorfang and Mugumma were Demoralized. The Philosopher raised his shield and a bright glow waxed and waned.

The ghouls howled again, Demoralizing Cimex, who immediately ran to escape. Thingol's Palsy spell went off, overcoming four of the six ghouls he had hoped to immobilize. Two went down, Palsied in the head and abdomen. Another went down, immobilized in the leg, and so was another's arm. The Philosopher's shield glowed again, then a ghoul collapsed with steam rising from it. Gorfang parried a bite, and let another's scrape over his armor. One clawed the Philosopher but bounced off his Damage Resistance. Mugumma began walking forward to help, trusting to the Damage Resistance and the Protection 6 he had put up. Gorfang smashed the leg of one, the Philosopher clubbed down another and Mugumma broke the arm of another.

In short order, we had six unconscious, gagged, and bound ghouls. The other two were

dead. As they dragged them back to the library, the Philosopher hoped they would be enough, seeing as how Sreng had seven swords.

The rest of the day we rested until an hour before midnight. But as we rested, there was a large argument over who would help summon Sreng. The Philosopher had said that anybody who went with him would have to be willing to die for the party. "Anyone who runs will escape, but the rest of us would die." Finally the decision was given to Mugumma. Does each individual have the right to decide whether to go or not to go, or doesn't he? Mugumma said that each person could choose and that he would trust anyone with doubts about their potential for self-sacrifice would not willingly endanger the rest of us.

The time for the ceremony came. The Philosopher, Gorfang, Tortho, Mugumma, Cimex, and Maac left the room and went back to the first floor via the nearest stairs. Then they descended into the darkness below.

Chapter 9

The Summoning of Sreng

The party made their way to the bottom floor. From there they came to a large room. The room had in it only a table bent into a quarter circle. The Philosopher went over to a section of the wall. He tapped a certain spot and quickly cast a magic spell. A door then opened that led to a square room. This room was filled with magical items. Mugumma could see all the POW in the items, though they were all less than his.

“This room was made by the original inhabitant,” said the Philosopher. “But it’s really an intent to deceive. The items here are powerful, but not all that powerful. It took me three years to realize that this was so.”

Then he went over to a large case holding assorted crystals and matrices. He removed the legs of the case, tapped the wall above it and cast another spell. A section of the wall, connected to the case, swung inward to darkness. The darkness was such that none of the light in the room shown through the threshold. The Philosopher snapped his fingers and a light formed a foot above his head.

Inside, we could see that the room was the exact size as the previous room. This room, however, had two doors leading out. Also inside were more magic items, some with a POW about that of Mugumma’s, but some with much more.

The Philosopher opened one of the doors. It opened onto a perfectly circular room with a large pentagram on the floor.

“Leave the ghouls and come in here. I want each of you to stand in one of the outer sections of the pentagram. We’re not going to summon Sreng yet. We’re going to cast an Oath spell. The oath will be for you not to attempt to harm or kill me unless I attempt to harm or kill you first.”

Then the Philosopher went back into the other room and shortly came back with a huge crystal. It looked to weigh about 35 kilograms.

“I’m going to put 100 magic points into the Oath spell. That will leave us a couple of hundred points to summon Sreng with.”

Each Oath spell took about an hour to complete. When it was all finished, we went back into the other room and picked up the ghouls. Then the Philosopher picked up a belt of crystals and, with the huge one still in hand, opened the other door. This one opened onto a hallway. As we walked along it, the Philosopher explained, “That room back there can’t summon the likes of Sreng.”

We came to another huge, dark room. The Philosopher went around the room, Igniting brackets on the wall. In the ensuing light, we could see a large casket close to the opposite wall.

“That’s the lord of the mansion. Or rather, where he lies. Now wait while I open the door.”

Then he went behind the casket and began casting a spell. It took three minutes to cast⁸³. Then, bright lines outlined a section of the wall which seemed to dissolve before our eyes. A hallway that immediately split in two was now visible.

“Check the ghoul’s gags. Down one of them is a huge nest of ghouls.”

⁸³ A 150-point spell!

As we went down the other hallway, the Philosopher seemed nervous. “Part of the danger is that I don’t know how the old lord sacrificed the ghouls to Sreng. So you have to be ready to kill them in any way that Sreng wants to. Even if it means tearing out their hearts with your own hands.”

At the end of the hallway was a room with only three stone walls. The fourth was a slightly vibrating whitish-colored mass.

“I’ll bet none of you have seen anything like this before!” he exclaimed as we gaped in awe. But of course Gorfang had seen something like it before. It was what he, Thingol, Slagstone, and Grosko had seen behind Urrquong, the Barrier of the Door to Chaos. Gorfang mentioned this unique experience.

“Well actually this isn’t really Chaos itself. That’s behind the barrier. This stuff is just the part of our universe that’s been affected by Chaos. But, as they say, Chaos is just another source of power!”

Tortho asked about the possibility of the participants becoming tainted by Chaos.

“I understand that there is some prejudice in the outside world about Chaos. But I don’t think you need to worry too much.”

And so the summoning began.

After about ninety minutes, from out of the barrier to Chaos groped a large hand. It was grotesque, covered with open sores and scabs, with gnarled fingers and sporadic growths of hair all over it. Then all fifty feet of it stepped out.

The shape was humanoid, but there all resemblance ended. The face had no nose and the eyes were in the wrong places. The mouth was tilted, and the tongue and teeth were rotten. The arms were of differing length and one had an extra joint. Its legs were relatively normal except for one knee which bent the other way. Overall, the body was covered like the hand was, a mass of flesh that looked ready to collapse on itself. At its waist was a belt that held seven swords, all different, all some 10 to 15 feet long, all seemingly made of iron, and all magical.

The Philosopher, as scared and revolted as we were, began casting a spell as Sreng looked about. “Sreng!” yelled the Philosopher.

“Sreng!” it slurred. Its breath was the stench of unimaginable death and decay.

“Any ideas?” asked the Philosopher as Sreng started shifting from one foot to the other.

Gorfang took one of the ghouls and pushed it forwards towards Sreng. Sreng picked it up, looked at it, bit its head off, and then threw the body on the ground. Gorfang then killed a ghoul with a spike through the eye and pushed the body towards Sreng. Sreng examined the corpse, then placed a finger on the wound and pressed. The crushed skull and brains began to stain the floor.

The Sreng looked at Gorfang. It then started to reach for one of its swords, but stopped. Mugumma then slit the belly of the of the ghouls and heaved it at Sreng. The body bounced off his leg and fell. Sreng did not notice.

“Food! Food!” bellowed Sreng as it pulled out one of its swords. The head of the ghoul he had bitten off now fell to his feet, but Sreng took no notice. It then looked at Tortho and began to reach for him. As Sreng stumbled towards Tortho, Gorfang pushed a ghoul out in front of Sreng. Sreng stepped on it and continued towards Tortho, who began backing.

“Should I shoot it?” asked Gorfang.

“No, he’s not attacking,” said the Philosopher. “If he were, he’d have both swords out.”

Tortho then threw his shortsword at Sreng, hoping to discourage it. It didn’t. Sreng grabbed Tortho in one filthy hand, then began to orient the sword on him. Dumbfounded, we watched as Sreng sliced at Tortho’s chest and abdomen. His armor stopped most of the damage. Tortho then cast Firespear 3 and stabbed at Sreng’s hand, slightly hurting Sreng. Sreng responded by bellowing and slicing Tortho down from the neck to the crotch. Tortho’s call to Lodril for Divine Intervention failed, and so Tortho died. Sreng then smeared and rubbed Tortho’s body all over itself.

The Philosopher seemed to have a brainstorm. He cast his spell again and said, “Sreng! I offer you death!” Then he took the three remaining ghouls and pushed them towards Sreng. Sreng grabbed them, and smashed them over its body, just like Tortho had been. Sreng then put the remains in its mouth and echoed, “Death!”

The Philosopher looked around him. “Any ideas?”

Gorfang said, “Send it back!”

“I can’t! It goes back only when it wants to!”

“The ghoul’s nest! how about the ghoul’s nest?”

“It probably wouldn’t understand.”

The Philosopher then cast his spell again and said, “Sreng! We’ll help! We can help!”

“Help!” echoed Sreng as it oriented on Cimex. “Help!” it repeated as it reached towards him.

Gorfang screamed, “Control it!” to which the Philosopher replied, “I’m trying to!”

Cimex, as he saw the hand stretching to embrace him, held out the dagger that had been made for him. Sreng ignored it and grabbed Cimex. Slice went the blade and Cimex died, his Divine Intervention failing. His remains decorated Sreng’s body.

The Philosopher mused, “He wants help. I wonder what kind of help?”

Perhaps driven mad by the sight of his compatriots being slaughtered before his eyes by a Chaos thing, Maac charged towards Sreng with his spear leveled.

“What are you doing? Get back here!” yelled the Philosopher. When he received no reply, he closed his eyes and put his fingers in his ears.

Mugumma began running towards Tortho’s still-flaming spear just as Maac hit Sreng in the leg, burying the head deeply. As Sreng bellowed, Maac let go of his spear and ran for Tortho’s spear, reaching it well before Mugumma. Sreng turned to watch Maac.

The Philosopher cast his spell and yelled, “If you harm him, we’ll kill you!”

Sreng bellowed, “Kill!”, pulled out another sword, and chopped at Maac. But Sreng fumbled and fell, nearly crushing Mugumma who dodged just in time.

The Philosopher began to dance and shout. “I’ve got it! I know the secret! Mugumma get back here!”

As Mugumma did so, Maac charged towards Sreng. With Tortho’s flaming spear, Maac

plunged it deep into one of Sreng's eyes. In an unbelievable bellow of pain, Sreng swung one sword at Maac. The blade sliced him in two. Maac called for Divine Intervention, but nothing seemed to happen⁸⁴. Sreng then picked up the two halves of Maac and threw them through the barrier, presumably out into the void. Then he said to the Philosopher, "Help!"

The Philosopher cast his spell and said to Sreng, "Serve us and we'll kill you!"

Sreng then said, "Death!" and put away his swords.

The Philosopher cast his spell, said, "Sreng! Follow!" and began to leave the room. When Sreng did nothing, he repeated the spell and command. This time Sreng obeyed.

Heading back to the others, Sreng had to go on all fours to make it through the corridors. The Philosopher seemed euphoric.

"It all makes sense now! What more would a Chaos creature want than its own death? Anyway, it looks as though Sreng can be hurt, but not killed. That'll make him near-invincible in my takeover. After I do, Sreng will probably get impatient and want me to kill him. Maybe by then I'll have found out a way to do that. But for now, he's mine!"

Sreng was left in the room with the table. Upstairs, the three remaining noticed that of the six who went down, only three returned. The Philosopher removed his veil, revealing a handsome man appearing to be in his late fifties.

"Only lost three!" were his first words to the waiting people. "Good thing they came along! Glad they didn't run. Hope their souls weren't eaten by Chaos. But I've got him! And I'll teach anyone who wants the spell to control Sreng. You won't need to Intensify it, just use some magic points."

As Gorfang and Mugumma told the tale of the summoning, those who had not participated were shocked at the description of Sreng and the manner of the deaths of Tortho, Cimex, and Maac. Only Mugumma and Gorfang wanted to learn the spell, but they had no free intelligence in which to hold the spell. Thingol vehemently denied wanting to learn it.

Thingol asked sarcastically, "So what's next?"

The Philosopher seemed not to notice the sarcasm. "Why now we can go to the Tower of Chaos and get more power! It won't be the likes of Sreng..."

"Good!" interrupted Gorfang.

The Philosopher continued, "... but it'll come in handy for the takeover."

By now, all of us were starting to have doubts about going to Engure and attempting a *coup d'etat*. We asked about how difficult it would be to wrest control from the High Wizard.

The Philosopher began describing the High Wizard at the time he had still been in Engure. It was a sorcerer named Goniax. As he continued, we began to think that we had met him before. It sounded like the wizard we had met and Thingol had studied under back at the Veldang encampment.

After some questioning by the Philosopher, our belief was confirmed. "It's a good thing you didn't anger him," he told us. "His special power was to Tap at a distance!"

We all uneasily thought of what our fate would be in the weeks ahead.

⁸⁴ Actually, he had made his cast, but his plea was to take his soul to heaven

Chapter 10

Welcome to Engure

The Philosopher came to us ten days later and told us that the next step was for us to go on a scouting party to Engure. Since he didn't know what the current ruler's defenses were like, it was logical. It was also logical that he shouldn't go for someone might recognize him, plus the fact that he had to stay close to Sreng.

What he wanted to know mostly was the current ruler's defenses were, how prepared the police force was, and how the ruler enforced his rule. We asked whether we should determine how much the peasants could help, but the Philosopher shrugged them off as scum who obeyed whoever was in charge.

The directions to Engure, he said, were simple. Head south for four or five days, and then turn east. If you've gone for two days without making it, turn back west and you can't miss it.

We asked about any denizens in the swamp to be careful of, for instance, giant frogs. He said they were not dangerous, though Ferric disagreed greatly. Besides the frogs, there were some large reptiles, the goblins, the gulpers, and the hydras.

The biggest topic of discussion was how to get back to the Philosopher once we had completed our scouting mission. He rummaged through some stuff and came out with a brass pot with two handles and covered with a clay lid. When we got near where we thought the mansion was, one of us would hold the pot down, break the lid, cast the Ignite spell and hold on no matter what. The pot would put out a brilliant beam of light which, when the Philosopher saw, he would do the same with one here at the mansion, which we would see and home in on. The drawback was that the person holding the pot would probably lose both hands. We asked if we could brace the pot. He said that the pot needed a supply of magic points from the user. As if guessing our next question, he said that it would probably melt a magic point-storing crystal because of its immense heat. He, of course, had special gloves that resisted heat, yet conducted magic points.

Then we thought perhaps Telepathy would work. But Thingol's lack of enough free intelligence, plus the spell's vulnerability to being dispelled, dismissed, or neutralized killed that idea.

Finally, what we came up with was this. Thingol learned the Homing Circle spell and created one in the mansion. Then, with the help of a Teleport matrix, when we headed back, he would try to Teleport a small rock back to the Homing Circle. When the Philosopher saw the rock, he would wait some days and then light his pot to guide us back.

Learning the spell took another 50 days, not counting the Holy Week. On the tenth day, Witch-day of the 10th week of winter, another person came to the mansion. His name was Martlet, and he came from the land called Pabraid. He had been a guard for a caravan to Zamokil which had been ambushed. As far as he knew, only he escaped. He decided to come with us on our journey.

During the 50-day period, the Philosopher put Sreng back through the wall, claiming that he could now control Sreng enough to not need his presence. Once this happened, Mugumma and Gorfang began to think of assassinating the Philosopher. But the Oath that they had sworn prevented them from carrying out this plan.

Once Thingol had learned the spell, he then created the Homing Circle. At the same time, Mugumma, with the help of one of his ancestors, summoned and bound a salamander, or fire elemental.

Finally, on Ga-day of the 6th week of spring, 1625, we all left. The Philosopher said that he

would wait a maximum of 36 days before assuming we were dead.

But eight hours out, Martlet, who was towards the front, saw movement. From out of the plants came 10 small, short green beings, some of whom wore armor.

“Goblins!” shouted Martlet as he began to move away from them. An arrow flew but missed as eight of the ten charged forwards to engage. Of the two that stayed behind, one wielded a bow, another a standard. Gorfang, Ferric, and finally Martlet moved to melee with them. Another arrow hit Martlet but bounced off his lacquered, lamellar armor.

Boo-boo then threw a spear at one of the goblins but was blocked by its shield. Another arrow hit Martlet and bounced. The goblin engaging Ferric had its helmet fall over its face. In return, he hit the goblin in the right arm. Both Gorfang and his opponent missed. Martlet chopped at the leg of a goblin and it fell over. Mugumma cast Protection 6 on himself and then moved forwards. Another arrow flew and would have caught Martlet square in the heart if he had not had his shield in the way.

Again an arrow flew and hit Martlet in the chest, who was advancing towards the bow-wielding goblin. Boo-boo impaled a goblin in the abdomen, who promptly died. Mugumma hit a goblin with his large-metal dagger in the abdomen. The goblin fell over, wounded. Ferric now fought two goblins. One hit, but was parried. He hit the larger of the two and wounded it in the head. The other goblin stabbed Ferric in the chest, and he fell. Gorfang cast Demoralize at one of the two fighting him, and both of them missed their attack. Thingol Palsied the standard bearer in the chest, then unlimbered his crossbow and began to crank it.

Another arrow flew at Martlet, hitting his shield. Boo-boo now stabbed at the goblin Mugumma had felled. He hit the abdomen, but didn't kill the goblin. Mugumma now slashed at one of the two fighting Ferric, cutting its right leg off. The goblin who had fumbled now managed to get its helmet off. Gorfang parried a blow as the other one missed him. He then buried his hammer in the goblin who was not Demoralized, killing it. Martlet healed himself, and continued moving forward as another arrow missed him.

Another arrow bounced off Martlet's right arm as the standard bearer got to its feet. Boo-boo stabbed again, and killed the goblin. Mugumma then moved and began to heal Ferric. As the goblins began to heal themselves, Gorfang hit the left arm of the other goblin which had been fighting Ferric. The Demoralized goblin missed Gorfang. Again an arrow bounced off Martlet's armor, who was within five meters of the goblins.

Boo-boo moved to the next downed goblin and stabbed it into unconsciousness. The three remaining goblins then simply vanished, disappearing into the brush, as one of the others began to run. Thingol shot at the one running and hit it in the chest, felling it.

Examining the bodies, we noticed that their 'armor' was simply toughened leaves cunningly wrapped around their bodies with vines.

The next day, again Martlet scanned something ahead. It was a gorp. Crying out, he jumped back. Mugumma cast Disruption at it, but it was Reflected back at him, injuring his head. The gorp began oozing towards Gorfang who shot it twice with his crossbow to no apparent effect. Then Ferric chopped at it with his axe. Too late, he remembered as his blow struck. Now where there was one gorp, there was now two!

One oozed towards Ferric who dodged its embrace, and the other at Gorfang who jumped out of its way. And then we all began to run. Fortunately for us, we outran them, even Ferric and Gorfang.

For three more days we traveled, and then turned to the east. After two complete days we had seen nothing but swamp. We decided to go for one more day to the east. The next day, Gata-

day of the seventh week, we saw some dry land.

Slowly the swamp turned to a marsh. And in the distance, we could see a house sitting upon dry land. But Mugumma saw one thing more. Between us and the house, he could see a huge shimmering curtain of Power.

We realized that in a nation of sorcerers, they probably thought that no one could see the Power in the curtain, or even the curtain. We hoped this would be an advantage for us.

After ascertaining that the curtain also went into the ground, we decided to go through it. Mugumma went first. But as he stepped through the curtain, an outline of him suddenly became visible in the plane of the curtain. This outline glowed a dark pink. Realizing that this curtain was probably a means to indicate the number of people trying to enter, Boo-boo and Ferric each stepped through the outline left by Mugumma. But as each of them went through, the outline of Mugumma became more and more reddish. Martlet decided to go through the curtain somewhere else, but he too left an outline. Gorfang and Thingol each went through Martlet's outline, darkening the outline.

An interesting observation that was made was that the change in the color of the outline was directly proportional to the Power of the person going through the curtain. Thus, Mugumma made the curtain change color the most, and so on.

So we continued towards the house on the hill. There were a few animals grazing in a pasture. They looked like rabbits but they were the size of sheep.

Reaching the house, we clapped and knocked on the side, but there was no answer. Suddenly we noticed a flash coming from the direction of the curtain. Thinking we had nothing to fear, we waited for it. It was a bad mistake.

It was a large disk, some six meters in diameter, perhaps made of iron. It was rolling along the ground with its razor-sharp edge leaving a furrow in the ground. And it was heading straight towards us.

Mugumma and Boo-boo jumped into the house, which held six people, as the rest of us ran around behind it. The disk plowed straight through the house and came out the other side. Everybody dodged the disk as it went some distance past us all, then spun in place and headed back towards us. As it did so, we could see another disk heading towards us, though it was some distance away.

Gorfang and Martlet began running back towards the curtain despite the fact that it was about 2 kilometers away. As the rest of us watched, the disk followed the two, aiming at Gorfang. He jumped out of the way and the disk spun and headed towards Martlet. He too dodged, and the disk then aimed at Gorfang, who didn't dodge. The disk neatly sliced off his right arm.

The disk then headed towards Thingol and Ferric who ran to put the house between the disk and themselves. Again the disk plowed through the house, but as it passed through, Mugumma attempted to knock it over by hitting it with his spear. Though he was successful at the latter, he was not at the former. The disk was aiming at Thingol, but he jumped out of the way, yelling that they surrendered.

By now the second disk had reached us and it headed towards Gorfang, who had healed himself, as the first headed towards Martlet. As Martlet jumped out of the way, Gorfang again failed to dodge. The disk sliced off his left arm.

Both of them now headed towards Thingol and Ferric, one to each. Both of them managed to dodge. Again they attempted to strike down the two and again they managed to avoid near-certain death.

Now the two disks began to whirl a deadly circle around Thingol, Ferric, and the demolished house. They did this for a few minutes and then one broke off and headed towards where Gorfang and Martlet had been. Gorfang had managed to heal himself, and they had both hidden in some brush. The disk circled the area as though searching, and then went back to circle with its twin. Mugumma threw his spear, again to try to knock over a disk. It barely noticed.

Looking up, we could see a balloon floating towards us, with a basket hung from the balloon. Inside we could see a person, carrying a long, wicked lance. Strangely, the balloon seemed much too small to lift the person. It motioned the four encircled by the disks to move. They did so and as they did, the disks kept their circling around the four.

They walked along a large paved road towards their goal. They saw a few people, tending their crops. The one thing that they all had in common was that they were all naked. Off in the distance, perhaps 15 kilometers away, they could see a city.

Finally, the four reached their goal, a large stone ring some 20 meters tall and 4 meters in diameter. Around the ring for about a hundred meters was just plain dirt. They were herded into the ring, and then the balloonist Form/Set the ring, enclosing the four.

The balloonist then floated away, leaving the four all alone.

Chapter 11

The Gong Show

Inside the circle, Mugumma could see that the place we had entered through had a POW which was higher than his, but less than his fetch's. He could also see another enchantment in the walls, with a POW about equal to his. Above us, covering the top, was a mesh of wire, presumably to stop anyone from climbing out. Not that we intended to as the walls were slick with water.

Mugumma then Discorporated to scout out the area around us. He could see the same things we had seen as we had walked here. Fields of crops, with an occasional farmer working them. Strangely, none of them seemed to use animals to help them. He also discovered what the smaller source of POW was. It was an undine bound into the stone circle.

While Mugumma was Discorporate, Gorfang and Martlet emerged from their hiding to try to help us. Using one of Martlet's daggers, Gorfang tried to make a grappling hook with which to attach his 30 meters of rope which he had carried since we had left Harmast over a year ago. But the hook failed as Gorfang tested it.

Also, it had rained for about an hour, filling the circle to a level of about six inches. We hoped that we could leave the circle before the water got too high.

By now it was the early afternoon and the balloon was floating back towards the circle. Quickly, Gorfang and Martlet hid themselves as the balloonist got out on top of the wall of the circle, then sent his balloon some distance away. The man was, of course naked, but he was smaller than even Ferric! He addressed us in first an unknown language, then switched tongues until we understood him in Arbennan.

He asked us why we had come to Engure. We told him that we had come to trade for iron. After a few more questions, he confided in us.

He told us that he was a part-Brithini sorcerer. Like all the other sorcerers, he was controlled by the ruler of the land, who was called the Master.

The way the Master got control of a sorcerer was to have the sorcerer make a small gong. Then, by means of a spell, the sorcerer's welfare became tied to the gong. Whenever the Master rang it, the sorcerer's face appeared in the gong and the two could communicate. The catch was that if the Master were to break the gong, the sorcerer would die.

What he wanted was for us to steal his gong. It seemed that as the Master created more and more automatons, more and more sorcerers were 'phased out'. He wanted to get his gong and leave before he was phased out.

Gorfang and Martlet had overheard everything and they then revealed themselves. The man, who was named Ir, seemed pleased that there were more of us to attempt the theft.

Gorfang asked where the Master lived and how well it was defended. Ir then described the central fortress. It was laid out somewhat like a cross, with a central tower. But no part of it was open to the sky. Surrounding the area was a 2 meter moat of potent acid.

Seeing no alternative, we told Ir of our true purpose, to scout out the area for the Philosopher's planned invasion. Ir then asked us what we thought the Philosopher's chances. After all, the Master did have 80 sorcerers who would all help him defend his land. We told him about Sreng and the basilisks the Philosopher had. But before he could invade, he had to be notified somehow.

Eventually, an agreement was worked out. Ir and Thingol would go in the balloon to head towards the Philosopher's manor. Then, at midnight, Thingol would Teleport a pebble to the Homing Circle he had enchanted there. Then the Philosopher would fire off one of the dwarf flares to navigate by. All this time, the rest of those inside the circle would remain, despite Gorfang's insistence to the contrary. Before he left, Ir commanded the undine to continuously drain the water from inside the circle.

To circumvent the curtain was impossible, so they stripped themselves of as much POW as possible. For Thingol this meant leaving his familiar behind. However, this was impossible for Ir, since his familiar was the balloon!

So that night, Ir and Thingol left Engure in Ir's balloon. After an hours flight at a speed of about 40 kilometers per hour, Thingol Teleported a pebble. About 10 minutes later, a massive green bolt of flame lit up the night sky. Heading towards the bolt, they quickly found the Philosopher.

Explaining the situation to him, the Philosopher then said that he would invade in four days. He would fire off another flare when he was near the curtain. He also said that it would be helpful if we were to attempt the theft while the Master was fighting since the Master would probably not be inside his palace.

Floating back to Engure, the rest of us were still waiting for us. But there was a large rip in the wire mesh covering the tower and Mugumma was now outside the circle. Gorfang explained. After the balloon had left, Gorfang successfully made another grappling hook. With it, he had climbed up to the top of the circle and lowered the rope for the others to climb up. Mugumma had made it up and over with no problem, but Boo-boo had fallen and would have died but for Gorfang's Healing. Afterwards, he decided to wait until he was let out.

Thingol explained the situation to the others. We then moved to the shed where Ir kept his balloon. There we would stay for the moment.

The next day we spent trying to come up with a plan to assault the Master's palace. But they all depended on more accurate information of the layout of the place. We decided that someone should go and check out the place the next day. It had to be someone resourceful, since none of us spoke the language. He would also have to look like a native.

During that day, the Master rang Ir's gong and demanded to know what happened to the prisoners he had reported. Ir said that he had drowned them. The Master asked if any of them were sorcerers, non-humans, or shamans. Ir replied that there weren't. The Master said that he was lying and that at the end of the month should report to the Grand Palace for a Tap. Then he left.

The next day, Mugumma and Boo-boo walked the 24 kilometers to the city of Hugaba, where the Grand Palace was located. Fortunately, they met no one. Approaching the acid moat, Mugumma could see with his Second Sight that there was some kind of shimmering void about where the moat was. It was difficult to tell since there was no POW, only this void.

There were three automatons standing on the other side of the moat, but they seemed to take no notice of them.

The moat itself was only about 2 meters across and looked to be only about 50 centimeters deep. The moat itself was glass-lined. Boo-boo tossed a pebble into the acid. From the spot where it landed, a green gas puffed out as the pebble was dissolved. Both of them got a whiff of the gas and were staggered for a moment. They then avoided all further contact with the gas.

Boo-boo then tried to toss a pebble across the moat. The stone landed in the moat. He threw harder. It landed in the moat. Then he threw with all his strength. The rock landed in the moat.

The trajectories taken by the rocks were all the same. They would be normal until they got

to the area over the moat. Then they arced sharply down into the acid.

Thinking that perhaps gravity was much higher than normal over the moat, Boo-boo perhaps foolishly, tried to Disrupt one of the automatons. His spell worked and a beam of light streaked across the moat. But the light quickly red-shifted and disappeared before it crossed the moat.

When they returned and told the rest of us what had happened, we quickly figured out that this void was somehow warping distance, turning 2 meters into at least 50 meters, possibly more. Gorfang figured that a simple bridge would make it across, but the rest of us were unsure. The rest of us began to think of how we could cross.

One thing we had to know was exactly how far this void warped distance. So Mugumma Discorporated and went in search of a spirit. He returned a couple of hours later with an undine spirit. So that night while Gorfang was busily making a bridge, the rest of us snuck over to the moat. Forming the undine in a spring near the moat, Mugumma commanded the undine to cross the moat. When it hit the void, it disappeared, but, some seconds later, it reappeared and made it to the other side! Crude calculations put the distance to the other side of the moat at between 150 and 180 meters.

But we still didn't know how we could get across. Then we realized that we might be able to use a gnome to travel under the acid. But besides not having a gnome, we would have no air while traveling inside the gnome.

Another idea that was tossed around was for us to wade through the acid while protected by a large Damage Resist. However, once the Damage Resist wore off, all the acid had better have been removed from the person. We figured that we could use an undine to wash off with. Unfortunately, we didn't know if the depth of the acid was not also warped to huge depths.

Seeing no immediately useful plan, Mugumma began calling his ancestors for help in summoning and binding a gnome. This took the rest of the day. At this time, Gorfang realized that his bridge was faulty and began constructing another.

On Six-day with morale very low, Ir went among the other sorcerers, trying to find another sorcerer who would be least likely to turn Ir in to help us. He found one named Thorazon, who was apparently the head of what could be called the secret police. Ir let him in on the planned *coup d'etat*.

Thorazon told us that if we did manage to get inside, then if the gongs were destroyed, but not with the special hammer, it would hurt the sorcerer, but not kill them. Thus, he suggested that if we found them, we should destroy them all.

He had some spells that he thought could be of use. One of them was Haste. He could either haste the gnome or, perhaps haste us as we waded through the acid. He cautioned against high intensity as we would want to neutralize it once across so that we would not tire excessively. Similarly, he cautioned against using too much on the gnome, for it might confuse it.

Inside the palace, he told us, there was no air. The Master used Skin of Life so as not to suffocate. Also, he told us of the many familiars the Master had, including ghosts and wraiths. The odds against us seemed to be growing by the second.

He told us straight out that he didn't think the Philosopher would be a match for the Master, even with Sreng and his basilisks. But, if the Master were to leave his palace, and we were to get inside and break all the gongs, then all the sorcerers working for the Master would instantly scatter, leaving the Master to, after defeating the Philosopher the immense task of regaining control.

Another thing that the Master had done was to order his familiars to kill all the sorcerers by

destroying their gongs with the special hammer if the Master ever died. He didn't know if this order also applied if the palace was invaded.

After hearing all this, some of us were thinking that discretion would be the better part of valor. But Thorazon said that he had too much at stake. He would have his shades kill us before he would let us leave.

So, with no alternative, a tentative plan came out. We would use the Hasted gnome to get us across the moat. Once there, we would dispatch the automatons with Thorazon's help, who would cast Hinder on the automatons. Then Gorfang would use the flare to (hopefully) break into the palace. Though he would have lost at least one hand, Gorfang would stay with us to help as much as he could. Then Thingol would throw Skin of Life on everyone who went in. Once inside we would dispatch all the guardians and break all the gongs, thus freeing the sorcerers.

But the best laid plans of mice and men often go astray. For Mugumma, with the aid of his ancestors, was unable to bind a gnome. Thus, to get across, we would have to traverse the acid.

Chapter 12

The Master

The night before the Philosopher said he would begin his invasion, we all made our way to a hut closer to the Grand Palace. Before we had done so, though, Ir had cast Intensity 14, Damage Resists on Gorfang, Boo-boo, Ferric, and Martlet, Durationed to last 640 minutes. On our way there, Mugumma saw a child looking at him. He merely continued on his way. Finally we hid ourselves inside a storehouse.

Early the next morning, a creature crawled inside. It was unrecognizable to any of us, but it looked very bony.

“Thorazon says your cover is blown,” it croaked. “If your friend doesn’t come today, the Master will know of your presence tomorrow. I can only conceal you for the rest of the day.” It took a quick look around, then continued. “I’m here to Haste you. I can stay here for as long as you need. I’ll get hungry though. For blood.” Pointing at Mugumma, it said, “He’s big and strong and he won’t be spilling any. And I’m hungry now.”

Essentially blackmailed into providing blood for services rendered (i.e., its casting spells for us), Mugumma reluctantly allowed the creature to drink his blood. Before he could kick it off, it had drained about a quart⁸⁵! Claiming that it was still hungry, Gorfang grudgingly gave it a sip of his own blood⁸⁶.

We waited through the chill morning for a sign of the Philosopher’s. Then, midway through the morning, Martlet, who was outside watching, saw a large green bolt flare in the distance. The Philosopher had come.

Two minutes later, the creature said, “My master has been ordered to investigate a disturbance at the curtain.” Mugumma immediately began the lengthy ceremony to Discorporate.

Over the next hour, Martlet could see more and more sorcerers heading northwards toward what we presumed was a major battle. But there was no sign of the Master.

About a half-hour after Mugumma had finished Discorporating, a huge hole opened in the roof of the building. Out of the Palace flew many flying creatures, none of which we could identify. In their midst was a beautiful woman in a long gown that trailed magnificently behind her. The creature excitedly said, “That’s him! The Master!” Then from the Palace flew what can only be described as a 60 meter length of huge chain that had a head.

After 20 minutes, all were out of sight. We then rushed for the acid moat around the Palace. Fortunately, we could see only one automaton guard. This automaton looked like most of the others except that in one hand it held a rather large rock.

Reaching the acid moat, Thingol went to a nearby pool to summon the undine while the creature asked how much Haste each of us wanted. Gorfang went first, with an Intensity 3 Haste, Durationed for 20 minutes. Hampered by the acid, Gorfang could only splash at 25 meters per melee round. After Gorfang began, Ferric followed him, also with a Haste 3. Then Martlet, who was able to splash at 30 meters per round with a Haste 3. Then Boo-boo, after Martlet. But the Damage Resist failed Boo-boo, who was able to jump back to shore with both his legs severely burned. Last came Thingol after he had ordered the undine to cross the moat.

By now, Gorfang had reached the other side unharmed. He spent some time splashing

⁸⁵ Six general hit points of damage.

⁸⁶ One general hit point, which was not enough to alter his hit points per location.

through the undine, washing off the acid while the automaton decided what to do.

Ferric and Martlet reached the bank side by side. Ferric began washing while Gorfang ran to one side, hoping to draw the automaton away. In this he was successful. The automaton began chasing him. But as it did, it threw its rock at Gorfang. He failed to parry and it smashed his left arm. Then the automaton reeled the rock back in by means of a chain.

Martlet now began to rinse as Ferric cast a Damage Boost on himself. Gorfang healed himself and then switched his shield to his right hand as the automaton kicked at him. Gorfang parried, but the force of the blow knocked him into the acid. Fortunately, the Damage Resist held.

As Gorfang climbed out of the acid and again washed the acid off, Mugumma attacked the automaton in spirit combat, after casting a Spirit Screen 6. Ferric and Martlet split up, Martlet away from Gorfang, Ferric straight towards the automaton. It threw its rock at Ferric, but amazingly, he dodged. Ferric swung at it, but his blow bounced off a Damage Resist. The automaton then kicked at Ferric, but again he dodged it.

Now Gorfang and Martlet came to help Ferric. The automaton threw at Ferric. This time he failed to dodge, and the rock smashed his left leg. Gorfang successfully Disrupted it, but Martlet's blow was Resisted. It then kicked at Martlet, but he parried the blow.

Gorfang cast Protection 2 on himself as the automaton threw its rock at Ferric. It hit him in the chest, killing him. Martlet hit the automaton and dented the right leg. It then kicked at Gorfang, who parried, but again he was knocked back some four meters.

By now, Thingol had reached the bank. Gorfang now came towards him for Thingol to throw Neutralize Magic on him⁸⁷. As Thingol cast the spell, Martlet failed to parry the automaton's rock. Fortunately, his heavy armor somewhat negated the blow to his left arm.

Now the automaton threw at Gorfang. The combination of his parry and the Damage Resist negated the blow. Thingol cast Neutralize Magic on Martlet as Gorfang then Healed himself. Mugumma had by now knocked the automaton's magic points to zero. He took over the body of the automaton but, unable to control it, it fell down on top of Martlet, slightly injuring him.

As we all rested, we waited for Boo-boo to re-attempt the crossing. He had Healed his legs as best he could, but would not survive if the Damage Resist were to fail again. The creature then offered a bargain. For a pint of blood⁸⁸, it would cast Damage Resist 15 for 10 minutes along with a Haste 5 which would give him a speed of 40 meters per melee round. Boo-boo accepted the bargain, and in short order, was safely across.

Mugumma now faded through the walls of the Palace in order to scout. Inside, he saw a lighted corridor with torches that had POW. He surmised that they were bound salamanders. If so, then there had to be breathable air inside. He determined where the door was, and came back out.

With the aid of a magic point storing crystal, Boo-boo would cast the spell necessary to ignite the flare. Bracing it against the ground, with a shield propped up against the ground and everyone well away, he recited the words to the spell. Slowly the pot warmed. Red-hot, orange-hot, finally white-hot and as Boo-boo screams grew, there was a searing blast of light and heat that temporarily blinded us all. When the tears cleared, we could see three things that stood out from all else: the large gaping hole in the Palace; Boo-boo sprawled on the ground moaning in pain many meters back from where he had originally been; and almost all of his left arm attached to the smoldering remnants of the pot. We Healed the stump as best we could, then plunged in.

Mugumma scouted ahead with a Mindspeech cast on Boo-boo to relay any information he

⁸⁷ By now, Gorfang was down to -39 Fatigue!

⁸⁸ Two general hit points.

might find. The corridor we were in went straight ahead as far as we could see. There were rooms off of the corridor but we paid them no mind. After a total distance of about 30 meters had been traveled, Mugumma told us that there was a magical wall in front of us. Seeing no way to go around it, he passed through it. He was apparently was unharmed.

Gorfang cast Countermagic 2 on himself and went through. Or rather tried to go through. It looked like he was trying to push through a wall. But he broke through and fell, unhurt, on the other side. Martlet now tried to go through and made it. But both Thingol and Boo-boo could not make it through.⁸⁹ So Gorfang and Martlet and Mugumma continued on. Mugumma recast his Mindspeech on Gorfang.

They went for about another 20 meters before the corridor ended up in a 'T'. To the left was a set of stairs going up, to the right a room. Investigating the rooms, they found it had seven huge helmets made of a strange metal which Gorfang recognized as aluminum or sa-metal. Each of these helmets was bigger than the automaton we had fought.

Going up the stairs, which curved as though to follow some curve deeper within the Palace, they came to a landing which had 2 corridors branching from it. Taking the one that led towards the center, they came upon a huge room that had a huge fire inside it. The room was about 30 meters tall and about 30 meters in diameter. Along the outside wall were balconies with 15 people wearing robes. Mugumma noticed that the fire had a huge amount of POW, much more than his fetch. Unnoticed, they retreated and continued up the stairs.

At the top, there was another landing with yet 2 more corridors going from the landing. The stairs that continued on was topped by an arch. An arch that had a skull with eyes.

"A dwarf," it spoke. "I haven't seen a dwarf in years. Where do you come from?"

"I'm from Greatway," responded Gorfang.

"Is that in the Mari Mountains?"

"No, its on the other continent."

"On Jrustela?"

"No, on the bigger continent to the north."

"Ah, the land of Gbaji," concluded the skull.

"What are you?" asked Martlet. "Are you alive?"

"I'm as dead as a doornail," replied the skull. "Hey, you have a ghost with you!" it exclaimed as it spotted Mugumma.

"Can we go up the stairs?" asked Gorfang.

"If you do, I'm supposed to give the alarm."

"What's up there?"

"Her private things."

Gorfang and Martlet conferred on what they should do. They decided to try to negotiate further.

⁸⁹To get through, one had to overcome a STR of 20.

“Is there anything we can do for you so that we may pass?” asked Martlet.

“What can you do for a skull?” it asked. “You know, I should really give the alarm to Sikkos.”

“Who’s Sikkos?” asked Gorfang.

“He’s the maitre’d for the Master. He has no sense of humor at all. When he gets mad at me, he doesn’t let the gremlins dust me off.”

“Do you know where she keeps the gongs?” asked Martlet.

“Gongs? She doesn’t really confide in me,” replied the skull. “Say! Are you guys hungry? Why don’t you sit and eat your lunch? You did bring your lunch, didn’t you?”

Gorfang and Martlet sat and began to eat their lunch. Quietly, they discussed their options. After a bit, Gorfang surreptitiously brought out his crossbow and began to cast Speedart. The skull noticed and said, “I wouldn’t do that if I were you. I’d have to give the alarm.” So Gorfang put away his crossbow.

While they ate, the skull told its story. When alive, he had been the Captain of the Guard. But when he died, the Master imprisoned him inside his skull. And there he must remain.

While Gorfang and Martlet finished their food and began to drink, the skull made some sniffing noises.

“Is that beer? Boy, I haven’t tasted beer in ages. Could I have some?”

Somewhat startled, Martlet poured some of his water into the skull’s mouth. Of course, the water dripped out the base of the skull. But the skull seemed to think that he was drinking fine beer.

“That sure was great beer! I think I’ll go to sleep now. Of course, if I’m asleep, I can’t give the alarm. Good night.”

Being a skull, it had no eyelids. But it made no more sounds. After about 5 minutes, Gorfang and Martlet looked at each other, then started up the stairs. Mugumma floated up past them. But as he did so, the skull said, “Hey, you’re not a ghost, you’re a shaman! I may be disloyal, but I’m not that disloyal! Robbers! Robbers! Help!”

Now all three made haste to the top of the stairs. At the top, they found themselves in a room that had five exits, each curtained.

Down below, Thingol and Boo-boo had systematically explored the rooms that were open to them. One had huge plates of iron that weighed about 150 kilograms. Two others were armories. There was a multitude of bronze weapons and armor. One had a table and chair, but nothing else. The last had a large locked chest.

About the time the skull shouted its alarm, they heard a gibbering voice and then a clanking sound. Wanting no part of it, they both ducked into a room and hid themselves as best they could.

Examining the five curtains, Mugumma could see that they all had POW, one of them higher than the rest. He started to go through that one but was attacked by a spell. A Tap INT spell. Mugumma was overcome by the spell and Gorfang noticed that Mugumma’s comments were now totally incoherent⁹⁰.

⁹⁰ Mugumma had lost 9 points of INT, from 12 to 3.

Martlet then tried to use his sword to brush aside the curtain to see what was inside it. He too was attacked by the spell and overcome⁹¹. But he realized that he could now go through, so he did. Inside he found many gongs. With what remained of his intelligence, he started smashing them with his sword.

Outside, Gorfang heard and saw a large creature coming up the stairs. It looked like a bison broo, but he couldn't be sure. Gorfang cast Multimissile 2 and fired his crossbow. Two of them bounced off of Damage Resist, but one got through and the creature fell over and down the stairs, out of his sight.

After yelling at Martlet to hurry up, Gorfang saw a man in robes standing at the bottom of the stairs. He was wearing the same robe as the people they had seen in the central fire room. Simultaneously with Gorfang's shot was the man's spell. His shot wounded the man, but the spell Diminished Gorfang's strength⁹². Gorfang began to cast a spell, then was about to shoot again when the man cast another spell. Gorfang now felt very weak, very sick, and very slow⁹³. He was now barely able to hold onto the bow, much less shoot with any accuracy.

Then suddenly, the man left. Just after that, Martlet came out from the room. Saying "All broke", he and Gorfang began to go back down.

At the bottom of the stairs was an extremely small bison broo, with a wound. It took one look at the two, then fled. They surmised that the sorcerer had left Gorfang after he realized that his gong had been broken and then taken revenge on the broo.

Back at the curtain, Martlet was able to pass through, but Gorfang, still weakened, was unable to pass. Speed was now of the essence, for by now the Master would be all alone in her battle with the Philosopher.

Coming down the corridor towards the curtain was the sorcerer who had fought Gorfang. He was carrying a large sack over his shoulder and was wearing a necklace of fingers. On his back was a sleeping bag. He cast a quick spell, and then passed through the curtain.

We asked him what the broo was and he replied that it was Sikkos. "I've paid him back for his insults. Oh, by the way, your STR will be back in 10 minutes or so."

Thingol gave the sorcerer a magic point storing crystal in return for re-casting the spell to allow Gorfang to pass through the curtain. Then, at the entrance, the sorcerer cast a spell and flew away.

The five of us, with the exception of Mugumma now had to get back across the acid. We hoped that Ir was still alive and in control of his balloon.

⁹¹ Martlet lost 10 points of INT, from 15 to 5.

⁹² Intensity 10.

⁹³ Diminish STR, CON, and DEX at Intensity 6, Multispell 3.

Book Four — The City

Chapter 1 Escape

While other sorcerers were flying away with their belongings, the creature flew across to us. With something of a groan, we asked it if it could fly us back across the moat. It said yes, but it could only lift at most ?? kilograms⁹⁴. With that restriction, only Gorfang could cross. The toll, said the creature, was 3 pints of blood⁹⁵. We decided to decline its offer.

After a brief discussion, Gorfang decided to teleport to Ir's balloon and hope that Ir was in safe territory. He chanted the spell and disappeared.

One more sorcerer now flew out, perhaps the last one. We yelled at him and he descended towards us. We asked him if he could fly us across to the other side. He said yes, but asked what we would give him. Boo-boo gave him a magic-point storing crystal, and Thingol gave him a page out of his book, with the spell of Animate Dead on it. We all made it safely to the other side.

Boo-boo now cached all of his equipment, the better to be inconspicuous. Then we all ran back to Ir's house. He was not there. We then began waiting, with Boo-boo outside watching.

After ten minutes, he received a telepathic message from Ir. He said that Gorfang was safe and that we should all meet at the largest coastal city north of the swamp.

We then made our way towards the west, to escape from the swamp. On the way to the swamp, we saw a few metal disks, but managed to hide before they spotted us. Overhead, we could occasionally see a sorcerous fight between two or more sorcerers. Fortunately, they took no notice of us.

The next day, while pushing through the swamp, Martlet was bitten by a poisonous snake. Thingol was unable to cast Neutralize Poison quickly enough, but the poison was not very venomous⁹⁶.

That night, while we were setting up our camp, the whole swamp suddenly began taking on a whitish color. After about 15 minutes, the entire swamp as far as we could see was entirely white. Uneasy, we settled into our camp, but nothing happened to us that night. Just before morning, the swamp resumed its normal dreary green.

The next day, Empress-day, we traveled for a few hours then came upon an interesting sight. We saw two metal pillars some 15 meters tall and 2 in diameter. They were about 10 meters apart. The metal was unfamiliar, but looked like iron.

As we investigated, Mugumma stepped between the pillars and disappeared. Shortly thereafter, he reappeared and described what he had seen. He had found himself on a kind of road made out of unfamiliar stone. Behind him he could see the swamp, but everywhere else the view was gray and sparkling, but totally devoid of color. He then stepped back towards the swamp and found himself back with the rest of us.

Upon relating his description to the rest of us, we believed that this was a magical road, a road that leads through the Gray Zone, also known as the Hero Plane.

⁹⁴ SIZ 12.

⁹⁵ He would lose 3D6 general hit points.

⁹⁶ A number of general hit points, the amount of which we do not remember.

Mugumma and Boo-boo were very keen on traveling along the magical road, but Thingol had some very severe doubts about HeroQuesting. Finally, he decided to traverse it.

The road rose over the swamp as it went westward. The further we rose, the more of the blue glow on the northern horizon we could see.

After an unknown amount of time, we came to a branch in the road. One continued on to the west, the other went straight north. Along this northern road lay a small house almost totally blocking the road. Intrigued, Mugumma started down the northern path. But not for long. From out of the house came a creature that looked like a vulture. But it wielded a wicked-looking gutting knife.

“You must pay the toll”, it croaked.

“What is it?” asked Mugumma.

“A life!” said the creature.

“Is there anything else that would pay the toll?” asked Mugumma.

“What else is truly valuable?” asked the creature in reply.

With a small sigh, he asked the creature what lay to the west. It replied, “The land of the Gods!”

Not wanting to pay the toll, and perhaps not wanting to visit the gods, we continued westwards. Finally, the road dipped back towards the swamp. It ended in a pool of water. Mugumma dipped his javelin in the pool and was surprised to see the part of it in the pool resume its normal color. We surmised that this was the other end of the magic road.

Of course we emerged from an actual pool of water, but we were right in that it was the other end. But though on the Hero Plane we should still be in the swamp, on the mundane plane we were back in familiar territory, the plains.

Around us we could see a campsite for a few Kresh wagoneers. Six of the wagons were joined together, three long and two wide, to make one massive wagon.

But the biggest surprise of all was the person standing at the edge of the pool. It was Mister Man! And who should he have with him but 12 jelmres, all of whom instantly pointed straight at Mugumma!

“I knew it! I knew it! I knew you’d eventually come out of that pool! But enough of this, let’s have a drink.” So we had a drink with Mister Man and questions began to fly.

It turned out that we were at an oasis called Othneal in Kothar. Verification proved that it was still the same day as when we had started down the magic road. This was quite interesting since the oasis that we were at was some two days away from the edge of the swamp.

Mister Man told his story of how he had managed to escape the horrible attack on the Kresh wagons. First however, he called a jelmre over that was carrying a large bag. It turned out to be a skin full of brandy. He began passing out drinks, then got on to the story.

When the attack first began, he became and dirty shirt and hid underground. When the main force of the attack was over, he began to make his escape. On the way, he as attacked by two chaos creatures. One of them he Swallowed⁹⁷ (“I was sick for weeks afterwards”), but how he managed

⁹⁷ A very useful, if somewhat disgusting, Trickster Rune spell.

to escape the other he refused to tell us.

He then made his way to the northwest and finally, after about 800 kilometers, found a tribe of Arbennans. He told them exactly what had happened⁹⁸. Later, he found out that Mugumma was still alive and so he made his way first to the Palarkri Mountains to get his jelmre and then went scouting the places where the magical roads emerged. And that's how he found us.

Perhaps foolishly, Boo-boo showed Mister Man the scepter they had found inside the castle in the swamp. Mister Man showed some interest in it, then, to the amazement of us all, proceeded to separate the ball from the scepter and then put it back on! When asked how he had done it, he merely replied that one could do anything if one was in the proper state of mind.

Mugumma now became deeply interested in Mister Man's showing the rest of us some of the neat Trickster things he could do. Mister Man, to impress us, turned himself into an old shoe. Mugumma then took the shoe and buried it in a deep hole. After a few minutes, a mole crawled out of the hole and successfully evaded Mugumma. Soon after, Mister Man came back all covered in damp earth. Mugumma explained that this was his revenge for Mister Man's trick of separating his body in two.

Having told Mister Man of how we had to get to the coast, he decided that he would accompany us. "After all, every great Quest needs a Trickster." Of course, his 12 jelmres accompanied him.

Also accompanying us was a young swamp man named Lutro. He was an initiate of Grandfather Turtle, but became bored and so left the swamp in search of adventure.

And so, bright and early on Pamalt-day of the 8th week of spring, we set out. We had with us about 10 days of food and water. Most of it was carried by the jelmres.

Later that day, we were ambushed by a pack of hunting spiders. The jelmres quickly formed a pyramid with Mister Man at the top. He looked around and then pointed, yelling for us to go that way. For a moment we hesitated, then ran.

The way hunting spiders attack is to form a crescent of themselves with the intended victim at the center. Thus, by the time the victim sees the center spiders, the ones on the flank have usually by then completely encircled their prey. With Mister Man's unique vantage point, he saw where the crescent was and gave us a route to safety if we could outrun the spiders. Our hesitation due to distrust perhaps was fatal.

As we ran, we could see the spiders attempting to complete the circle. There were 9 spiders in the immediate vicinity. If we could get past them, we would be safe. Boo-boo and Lutro immediately tried to cross their paths. The rest of us angled out to try to cross ahead of them.

Boo-boo and Lutro were now attacked by some of the spiders. Two bit Boo-boo, and though none of them penetrated, one of them managed to crawl into Boo-boo's armor! Lutro managed to parry one of the spiders with his spear, but it hung on as he tried to shake it off.

Meanwhile, Thingol, who was leading Martlet, cast a Damage Resist on himself, then crossed the spider's path, in front of them. Some of the spiders jumped to the attack, but they were stopped either by Martlet's armor, or Thingol's Damage Resistance. Mugumma, on the other hand, crept back towards Mister Man. There he could see spiders trying to crawl up the pyramid and the jelmres ripping them off and hurling them away. Mugumma maliciously aimed a Disruption at one of the jelmres and succeeded, but the jelmre did not fall. Then, realizing that he was still inside the circle, ran.

⁹⁸ Recall that we had promised not to tell any Doraddi about the Kresh wagons disappearing....

When we all made our way back to Mister Man after the spiders had left, we found that two of the jelmres had died from the poison.

The next day nothing happened to us. But Lutro, who had been heavily encouraged by Thingol, decided to forswear Grandfather Turtle and became Thingol's student.

The next day was a Holy day for Mugumma and Boo-boo. So we stopped while they held a worship ceremony honoring their ancestors. Of course, Black Bart was there, demanding his payment for his help. And, of course, they didn't have it for him then. Black Bart was not amused. Some of the other ancestors made it clear that both Mugumma and Boo-boo should get married and made descendants who would continue to worship their ancestors.

But the most chilling news was that over the next rise, which was about 1 kilometer away, was a bunch of rascullu. Their description matched Thingol's memory of a castakar, which was a bad-tempered rhino centaur.

Chapter 2

The Great Camp Robbery

We all began hasty preparations to leave quietly. But as we were in the process of packing, a near-naked man came crawling into our camp from the general direction of the rascullu camp. He said that his name was Asmoufr and that he had escaped from the rascullus. He also said that the rascullu had captured a Kresh wagon and, since it carried some kegs of wine, the rascullu had celebrated by getting drunk.

Mister Man now began to grin. He declared that he was going to go and steal some stuff from them. After a little persuasion, he also got Boo-boo and Asmoufr to go along. Thingol sent his familiar with Boo-boo in case they got into trouble.

The three of them crawled off while the rest of us made ready for a quick escape. As they got closer, Asmoufr got scared and returned to us. So Mister Man and Boo-boo continued onwards. Boo-boo made a noise while crawling, but none of the rascullu seemed to notice.

Again Boo-boo made a noise while crawling, but this time, one of them got up and, drunkenly, began looking about for the cause of the noise. Boo-boo successfully hid, and soon the rascullu settled down again to sleep. Mister Man, using Mindspeech, said to Boo-boo that they should wait for a half-hour for it to go back to sleep.

After a half-hour, they started towards the camp. Inside it was a large handcart, containing various items. Mister Man suggested, via Mindspeech, that Boo-boo inspect the cart while he went searching among the rascullu.

But just as Boo-boo got close to the cart, he stumbled and fell over some barrel staves, creating quite a racket. All of the rascullu but one woke up, and where would Mister Man be? Right in their midst. Quickly, he disappeared⁹⁹.

Boo-boo failed to hide, and the rascullu had him. They placed him in the same cage as Asmoufr had been in, perhaps mistaking him for Asmoufr, despite Boo-boo's lacking two arms.

After fifteen minutes, the carrot turned back into Mister Man, who promptly hid himself. After two hours, when the rascullu had again fallen asleep, Mister Man crawled to Boo-boo. There was a brief discussion as to how to get Boo-boo out of the cage. Finally, after Mister Man had robbed the rascullu, he cast Become Dirty Shirt on both himself and Boo-boo (using Mindlink), and Thingol's familiar dragged them both to safety.

So, after about 4 hours time, Mister Man and Boo-boo snuck back into our camp with 2 boomerangs, an axe, a tattooing kit, 5 waterskins, a flint and 4 obsidian knives, and a left arm band. What a fantastic amount of treasure. We quickly got out of there, hoping to be well away when the rascullu awoke.

Later that day, Ga-day of the ninth week, Mister Man said that there were now two choices we could make. We could go to Gujelmre, because his jelmre wished to go there, or we could wander the plains, looking for some Doraddi or Kresh who might be able to restore Boo-boo's arm and Martlet's intelligence. We decided to go to Gujelmre, but to keep a sharp lookout for any Doraddi or Kresh.

But our food supply was getting low. So we spent the next day hunting for food. Thingol managed to shoot a boar, so we spent the next day cooking and preserving it as best we could.

⁹⁹ He had become a carrot.

The next day, while walking, we came across an oasis. But this oasis was different, for there was absolutely no sign of human habitation. There were no crops growing for a person to harvest, no sign that there had ever been humans here. Mister Man said that this oasis was either sacred, tabu, or very dangerous. We decided to camp for the night, but away from the oasis itself.

This, in retrospect, was a very bad move. Mugumma was on watch, aided by his fetch. At the same time as he heard something, and then saw it, it was upon him. The creature was humanoid, with a tail, and shiny skin, perhaps an exoskeleton or chitin. It grabbed him by both legs, doing 15 points total, and lifted him high in the air. At this noise, Asmoufr, Boo-boo, and Martlet woke up. The creature threw Mugumma at Asmoufr, but it missed. Then, quick as light, it ran over to Asmoufr and picked him up too. Boo-boo, who had an atlatl ready, threw at the creature. The spear lodged in the creature's tail. Mugumma was lying on the ground, making no movement at all.

Lutro and Thingol now woke up as Asmoufr missed it while he was held. The creature then, using Asmoufr as a weapon, struck at Martlet, who had moved up to engage the creature. Martlet didn't parry and so took damage to his right arm. Asmoufr also took damage. Martlet now struck at the creature and hit it squarely in the chest. As Martlet withdrew his sword, he could see that it was slowly dissolving in the creature's blood.

Boo-boo had now gotten another spear ready to throw, but it tinked. The creature now threw Asmoufr at Boo-boo, hitting him and knocking him over, with Asmoufr on top. Martlet missed the creature. Thingol readied a spell as Lutro got out his bow. Mister Man had by now crawled over to where Asmoufr and Boo-boo lay and began Healing them.

Martlet hit the creature in the right arm, damaging his sword some more. The creature hit Martlet, but he parried the blow with his shield. Asmoufr fired an arrow, but it shattered on the creature's skin. Thingol finished his spell, but it failed to go off.

Boo-boo continued to heal as Asmoufr got up and moved to engage the creature. He got there just in time to be hit by one of Lutro's arrows. The creature struck again at Martlet, but again he parried. Martlet himself missed his blow. The creature again struck at Martlet, but fortunately it missed.

Thingol's spell now manifested itself and he managed to Palsy the creature's right arm. Martlet, who decided to parry twice, had no opportunity to take advantage of this opening. Asmoufr missed with his axe as the creature now brought its tail into use, wrapping it around Martlet's left leg.

Thingol failed another spell as the creature struck again at Martlet, who again parried. Asmoufr missed as well as the creature tried, but failed, to pull Martlet off his feet with his tail.

Thingol now managed to cast Damage Resistance on Martlet. Boo-boo, who had healed himself and gotten another missile ready, threw, but missed. Martlet again parried the creature's blow. His own blow tinked. The creature again tried to pull Martlet off his feet, but failed.

Nearly simultaneously, Martlet and Asmoufr connected, hitting it in the chest and the right arm. These blows knocked the creature over, and on closer inspection, the creature was dead.

While Healing everybody, Mister Man came out of his hiding place to tell us what the creature was. It was, he said, a grue.

Mugumma was dead too. Mister Man was very sorrowful, but he said that a shaman only stayed dead if he wanted to, or he didn't have the power to bring himself back to life. We held a brief ceremony, then left the cursed oasis far behind.

The next day we encountered nothing. The day after that we hunted again to replenish our food supply. The next day, we spotted a herd of titanotheres, but not being stupid, circled around

them.

On the next morning, Gata-day of the 10th week of spring, we saw a bunch of tents set up. Since there were no wagons, we presumed them to be Doraddi. We now had a small problem. Who was to be our champion? After much thought, we decided Mister Man should be our champion. He engaged the other champion in a fire-making contest and beat the other's Ignite spell by pouring one out of his bag. The other champion proposed a contest to see who could hop on one leg the longest. Of course he won.

Asmoufr was intrigued by the bags Mister Man had. Questioning him incessantly, he found out what was in the other bags. One had a 100 foot tall tree inside. Another had wind inside. The last he said was a secret, but later told us that it contained a complete turkey dinner.

We asked these Doraddi if they had the spells to Regrow Limb or Restore Intelligence. They had the former, but not the latter. In return for some metal, Boo-boo received the spell on his arm. The entire process would take about eight weeks, but the woman who cast the spell suggested that he not travel for at least two weeks.

So we spent the two weeks with the Doraddi. Thingol began teaching Lutro the rudiments of sorcery. We all wondered where Gorfang was and if he was safe.

After the two weeks, Boo-boo's arm was beginning to grow out again. We continued on, towards Gujelmre. Out of the bag containing the tree, there was now a tiny twig pushing out of it. Who had tampered with it?

For eight days we walked the plains. Mister Man now showed us another of his Trickster spells. By casting it, he was able to redistribute his body mass, thus, for instance, stretching one arm by pushing the other one into his body. Or, by pressing down on his shoulders, one could cause his neck to elongate.

On the next day, Witch-day of the first week of summer, we spotted three Kresh wagons heading to the north. With Martlet engaging in an archery contest, and the other champion in an adding contest, we offered to help pull their wagon for safety and transportation, a standard transaction.

It turned out that they were going to Gujelmre to trade. After another two weeks, on Six-day of the third week, we reached Gujelmre. Floating the wagons across the river, we entered into the town.

Chapter 3

Gujelmre

The whole town of Gujelmre was filled with buildings made of paper. As we took in the sights, the Kresh began trading with the jelmres. They traded spices for small crystals that the jelmres produced from their mouths.

We asked around and found out that the jelmres' magic was based on emotions. All they had to do was put themselves in the correct emotion and the effect would occur. If they wished, they could produce the crystals that contained the essence of that emotion. Of course, the jelmre that did so could never again experience that emotion.

Some of the emotions that the Kresh were trading for included hate, anger, and compassion (some 50 or more variants of this were in the jelmre vocabulary).

We wondered if they had any emotion that could cure Martlet's loss of intelligence. With Mister Man acting as middleman, he said that they had an emotion that would cure Martlet, but their conditions were this. The chosen person would be placed in Mindlink, and then that person would, in order to get the item, have to do whatever the jelmre said to do. If he refused, then all we would have to do was to repay the cost of the Mindlink.

Mister Man said that he could not reveal what they were going to do, but he said that it would hurt, both physically and mentally, but that the damage done would not be serious. Boo-boo was excluded from being the person chosen.

After a few minutes, Thingol volunteered to be the victim. The Mindlink was established, and he was told to put his little fingers in his mouth, spread his mouth wide, then bite them off, chew, and swallow them. He was given fifteen minutes to decide whether or not to do it.

As Thingol experienced the mental agony, the jelmre he was Mindlinked to was sweating and shaking. Thingol was weighing the gain of Martlet's intelligence versus the skills he might lose if he was maimed.

After 10 minutes, he made his choice.

After it was over, the jelmre fell on the ground, writhing, and finally spat out a huge, ugly, angular green and black crystal the size of a human fist.

Then he produced a smaller, rose colored crystal and said that the one who felt the most compassion for Martlet should use it. Thingol, his hands bandaged, did so. Martlet regained half his former intelligence¹⁰⁰.

To regrow his fingers, the jelmres said that another of us would have to undergo the same kind of deal. Lutro volunteered and was seated at a table with a plate. A live rabbit was brought to him and he was told to grab it in both hands, and then to eat it. The whole thing. And he was only allowed to use his mouth.

Lutro did not later eat dinner with us.

The crystal that the jelmre produced to regrow Thingol's fingers was given to Boo-boo. Thingol's little fingers were regrown, halfway. It seemed that the magic of the jelmres only restored things halfway.

¹⁰⁰From 5 back to 10.

Despite what deals the jelmres had done, Boo-boo decided that he wanted to get a group compassion crystal, hoping that could be used to Heal us all should we get in a jam.

The jelmres took him and put him inside one of their buildings. Inside, he was given everything he desired: food, drink, music, a cool breeze, piles of gold and magic crystals, and women. He was left in there for four and a half days.

After Boo-boo was let out and given his crystal, we left. Deciding that Gujelmre was slightly safer than traversing the wilderness, we headed east through Gujelmre. On Ga-day of the 5th week, we saw a whole line of jelmres walking with their arms on the shoulders of the jelmre in front of it. It took half a day to travel around them.

The next evening we reached a river, which Mister Man declared marked the border of Gujelmre. We decided to wait until the next day to cross it.

The river was about 20 meters wide. Mister Man crossed on Martlet's shoulders while the rest of us held hands while crossing. Despite our precautions, Lutro and Asmoufr were washed downstream by the current. Asmoufr was able to drag himself to the far shore. Lutro was never seen again though Martlet dove back in to try to find him. We could not believe that a worshiper of Grandfather Turtle could not swim worth a clack¹⁰¹.

Three days later, we met a Doraddi hunting party. With them was Tudor, Lutro's brother, also a worshiper of Grandfather Turtle. He was looking for his brother. We told him the sad tale of his death. Saddened, Tudor decided to travel with us.

For the next seven days, we mixed hunting with traveling, for we had very little supplies. We had shot and cooked a small rhinoceros, and later a horse(?).

On Ga-day of the seventh week, off in the distance what looked like horsemen. A closer look revealed them to be centaurs. Mister Man said that centaurs had been made by evil sorcerers of the evil empire that had ruled here long ago. Not wishing to meet them, we all concealed or hid ourselves. Amazingly, we were all successful, and they all galloped by us.

Two days later, we came upon an encampment of Kresh. They won both contests and we were forced to squander our last reserves of supplies for a feast. We did find out from the wagonmaster that we were about four days travel away from the coast. One interesting thing about the wagonmaster was that he wore a necklace that contained six jelmre crystals.

We purchased supplies and continued onwards. After another three days, while hunting Thingol and Martlet saw a titanothere tending her calf. The calf fell to Thingol's crossbow, but the mother spotted us and began to charge. Thingol cast Damage Resistance on Martlet as he shot his bow and impaled the titanothere in the left front leg. The titanothere hit Martlet, but the Damage Resistance and his parry saved him. As the cow wheeled around, Martlet Disrupted it, and then Thingol cast Palsy. It affected the cow's left hind leg, felling it. Then they ran back to tell the rest of us.

The next day the cow was still tending her wounds, staying in the same area as her calf. Mister Man then took the situation in hand. He became a frog, hopped over to the cow, Healed it, then hopped away. The titanothere got up and went away. We spent the next day cooking it.

The next day, Empress-day of the 8th week, we saw six Kresh wagons rolling by. One of them, the lead wagon, was huge. Its wheels were some 50 feet in diameter, and the wagon appeared to be made of gold. We learned from its wagonmaster that it was merely gold plate. But, said he, he had seen only two wagons richer than his.

¹⁰¹ And what about Thingol and his Skin of Life spell? He forgot!

On Pamalt-day, we were ambushed by 10 broos. Four of them had heads like lions. They wielded whips and had scimitars as well. One had the head of a jack-o-bear, another like a minotaur. Another was man-shaped and looked to be wearing plate armor, the eighth was shaped somewhat like a walktapus. The last two were like snakes or slugs.

Upon seeing them, we immediately began to run. But they were faster. So, we turned and prepared to fight.

We had left the two snake-like creatures somewhat behind, their method of movement slower than ours. But the rest were just behind us. Just as we turned, Mister Man was Disrupted and fell down. Both Boo-boo and Asmoufr were Slowed, but since we were in melee, it didn't matter too much.

As they charged us, Martlet Disrupted the minotaur broo. Tudor fired an arrow at the man, but tinked. Now they engaged us in melee: the jack-o-bear on Asmoufr, the walktapus on Boo-boo, the minotaur on Martlet, and the man on Tudor.

Thingol now shot a Firearrowed crossbow bolt at the walktapus, but it hit a tentacle, shriveling it. Tudor Disrupted the man, damaging it in the right leg. Boo-boo missed his throw with his atlatl. Martlet chopped at the minotaur and hit it in the right leg, causing it to fall. Asmoufr missed the jack-o-bear broo.

Two tentacles from the broo grabbed onto Boo-boo's arm, immobilizing it and stopping the effects of his Regrow Limb. The jack-o-bear hit Asmoufr, damaging his left leg and felling him. The man missed his blow at the same time as the lion-head broos reached us.

The lions now whipped their whips. The first hit Thingol in his left leg. Another wrapped itself around Boo-boo's atlatl and yanked it out of his hand. Two of them hit Martlet but tinked. Tudor tried to Disrupt the man, but failed the spell. In return, the man missed. Boo-boo failed to Disrupt the walktapus. The walktapus then wrapped another tentacle around Boo-boo's right leg. Martlet swung at the downed minotaur, hitting its left leg. While Asmoufr lay on the ground, unable to fight for the moment, the jack-o-bear would have hit him with devastating effect had not Mister Man Extended his arm and poked it in the eyes.

The lions cracked their whips, but they all missed their targets. The man missed, but Tudor did not. Unfortunately for him, he tinked. The walktapus now grappled Boo-boo and began to advance towards the rear. Martlet plunged his sword into the minotaur's abdomen, killing it. Mister Man again forked his fingers at the jack-o-bear, but his hand was parried and grabbed. Asmoufr then struck at it, wounding it in the left arm.

By now the two snake/slug broos had reached the scene. Asmoufr threw his boomerang from the ground, attempting to hit the walktapus broo. He missed. Two of the whips scored, one on Tudor, one on Martlet, but they both tinked. Yet again Tudor failed to Disrupt his opponent. Thingol shot his crossbow at the walktapus, hitting its right arm. The man missed again. One of the snake broos slithered towards Martlet. Martlet himself moved towards the walktapus broo and managed to hit its head, to no seeming effect. In its clutches, Boo-boo pulled out a dart and tried to cast Firearrow on it. It failed, so he struck at it, but tinked. The jack-o-bear broo now tried to bite Mister Man's hand, but he managed to slither out of its grasp and tried to hit its eyes again. But the broo was too fast and grabbed his hand again. The one snake now attacked Martlet, but he parried. The other snake-like broo brought forth one of its tentacles. From it opened a mouth which shot forth a tongue which wrapped itself around Tudor's abdomen.

Boo-boo now tried to invoke the power of his crystal. He was unable to get into the proper emotion for the crystal to activate. All of the whips missed as the walktapus accelerated away from the battle. The tongue-spitting broo now tried to pull Tudor off his feet, but failed. The man again missed Tudor, but Tudor managed to penetrate the man's armor in his right arm. Martlet hit the snake in its body. The jack-o-bear again tried to bite Mister Man's hand, but he was able to bend it

away from its teeth. Asmoufr now struck at the jack-o-bear, hitting it in the right arm.

Again Boo-boo was unable to get into the proper emotional mood for the crystal to activate. One of the whips hit, but failed to entangle the target's weapon. The one tongue failed to pull Tudor towards it, but it raised another tentacle from which opened another mouth from which shot forth another tentacle which wrapped itself around Tudor's left leg. The man missed again. Tudor tinked. Martlet now chopped the snake creature in two. Mister Man squirmed his hand free and poked at the jack-o-bear's eyes. Asmoufr missed his blow. Thingol now cast a Palsy with Multispell 3 on it. He managed to Palsy 3 of the lion-headed broos in the leg.

Boo-boo now managed to activate the crystal. We all felt much better, more magical, and less tired¹⁰². The last lion broo missed with its whip. Tudor now tried to call on Divine Intervention to take him back home. Grandfather Turtle declined to do this. In return, the two tongues pulled Tudor towards the broo. But Martlet came running over and chopped one of the tentacles of the slug-like broo. He struck the arm in two and one of the tentacles around Tudor went limp.

The slug broo now called out to stop fighting. In return, it said, for us letting them go, they would return Boo-boo to us. We accepted the deal. Boo-boo was returned to us, and the remaining broos left.

One day after that horrendous encounter, we reached the coast. Tudor was able to lead us towards the largest city. Or rather the largest village.

The village was comprised of some 80 huts. They were built on the bones of a large sea creature, and they had roofs of turf. The largest of all was about 5 by 7 meters. But behind them all we could see a balloon. And coming to greet us were Gorfang and Ir.

¹⁰² The effect of the crystal was to add 2D6 to our hit points, 1D6 to our personal magic points, and 1D6 fatigue if our fatigue was less than zero.

Chapter 4

The Turtle People

The name of the city was Kor-sofal. The inhabitants were turtle people, Tudor's people. And this was his home village.

But all eyes and ears were on Gorfang and Ir. We asked for a description of the battle between the Philosopher and the Master. Ir related the battle.

The Philosopher crossed through the barrier riding on Sreng. The basilisks were in front of Sreng. The Master's sorcerers began to fly in, though they were occasionally killed by the basilisks. Finally, the living chain flew in at Sreng. While Sreng chopped it into pieces, the Master was able to entangle both Sreng and the Philosopher in a kind of energy web. The basilisks seemed to lose interest in the battle, and began to wander off. Perhaps the web interfered with the Philosopher's control over them. The parts of the chain then wrapped itself around the web and carried both Sreng and the Philosopher off to the south. But just as they were being carried off, all of the Master's sorcerers split.

While they had waited there for us, they had nothing else to do but learn how to fish.

Besides Gorfang and Ir, there were two other non-turtle people here. They were Joseph and Fenric. Joseph was a scholar from Onlaks who had come to Kor-sofal to try to teach the people a written language. Fenric was a Harmasti from the Mari Mountains. He had left when Tim's egg had gotten to be 10 feet in diameter. Both of them seemed interested in accompanying us.

The first thing we wished to do was to speak to the city's leader. But all the people we asked said that we should go to the lagoon. So we went to the lagoon, except for Boo-boo. He went off by himself and didn't return for a week.

The lagoon was about 200 yards wide and circular, with clear water. At its deepest, it looked to be about 20 feet. Swimming in the lagoon were a few fish and a small shark. We wondered where the leader was, but could see no one in sight. Tudor finally informed us. The leader of the village was a giant turtle who lived underneath the sand for most of the year.

According to the legends of the turtle people, they did not descend from humans, but were rather turtles who acquired the power of speech and became human in shape. The leader of the people, a turtle, comes to the surface only once a year. The people themselves dispense justice by not talking to the offender if the offense is minor, or driving him away if it is major.

Some two weeks journey (about 1200 kilometers) to the north is the Tortugax Archipelago, a major center of civilization of the turtle people.

We now had to make a decision as to where we were to go. Our eventual destination was Tarien, on the western side of Pamaltela. We did not wish to walk the length of Pamaltela. We had hoped that we could find a ship large enough to take us there here at the coast, but the largest boats they had here were small coracles, about 8 feet in diameter, made of turtle shells.

So what we decided to do was to either hire or purchase enough boats to get us to the Tortugax Archipelago, and then from there to Onlaks, where Joseph assured us there were ships. The decision was made to boat there because, if we were to walk directly towards either the Archipelago or Onlaks, we would have to travel through a dense jungle which, according to Joseph, no one who had gone in had ever come out.

The question before us now was how we would get to the Archipelago. We could either hire or purchase boats. Hiring was preferable, since none of us except Tudor knew how to handle a boat,

but each person hired could only carry one person, the boats being only large enough to carry two people plus supplies.

We asked the people what they valued. They said that when the Kresh came to trade with them, the Kresh gave them copper cooking vessels. Metal knives would also be useful, they said, since they used only those made from turtle shells, which quickly dulled.

When we asked how much it would take to transport one of us up to the Archipelago, the average price was about 18 metal knives. Since this was far beyond our means, we decided to purchase our own boats and sail them.

Boo-boo by now had returned, a full shaman. The general price to buy a coracle was about 4 knives or so. But when we offered spell spirits instead, they all wanted them. For four boats, we would have to supply the owners with a silver cooking pot and 3 spell spirits.

Tudor now set out to train us in handling the boats. All of us, that is, except for Boo-boo, who was kept busy capturing spell spirits. Fortunately for him, he had encountered the spirit of Mugumma, who exorcised the spell spirits when they possessed Boo-boo.

For the next 9 weeks, we trained. However, since we were practicing in weather that could quickly turn nasty (we were training in the middle of the hurricane season), we got less time to train than might be expected. During that time, we subsisted on the food that Tudor had and occasionally paid some of the children of the village to collect some turtle eggs for us.

Finally, after the 9 weeks, we were ready to leave. We were provisioned with the food that Tudor and his family had saved and preserved. In the first boat, the only one propelled by sea turtle, were Tudor the only one who could control the turtle, Boo-boo, and Mister Man. In the second were Thingol and Fenric. In the third were Martlet and Asmoufr. And finally in the fourth were Joseph and Gorfang. Ir decided that he would go off on his own.

We left on Ga-day of the seventh week of autumn. For the next week we saw only a few killer whales, and assorted birds. It was now that we reached the edge of the jungle. Tudor's boat was propelled by the sea turtle which Tudor's mother had summoned. The rest of us paddled.

On Ga-day of the eighth week, while rowing close to shore, Thingol's boat began to leak. They rowed to the scanty shore but were unable to repair the boat. Joseph brought his boat in to pick up first Thingol and Fenric. He had transferred the two into Tudor's boat and was heading back to shore to pick up the provisions. But when he reached shore, Martlet's boat ripped its bottom out on a hidden reef. Martlet grabbed for all of his gear, but was only able to recover his weapons and his helmet, breastplate, and greaves. Asmoufr lost all except for one boomerang.

Thingol then cast Skin of Life on Martlet so that he could try to recover more of his equipment. He was unable to find it, but on the bottom, weighted down he found a 4 meter long trident. He brought it to the surface to show the rest of us. It appeared to be made of some kind of silvery metal¹⁰³. But we insisted that he put it back, since it was obviously placed there and weighted so that the current would not sweep it away.

So Martlet went back down to put the trident back. But as he reached the bottom, he saw, swimming towards him, a shape in the water. As it got closer, he could see more details; it was about 9 feet long, with green scales, fins, and claws.

Martlet threw the trident as best he could at the creature, then began to swim desperately for the surface. The creature grabbed the trident, then began to swim towards Martlet.

Seeing this from above, Gorfang successfully Demoralized it. Tudor managed to Disrupt it

¹⁰³ It was, of course, sa-metal, or aluminum.

in the abdomen, but Boo-boo failed his spell cast. The creature now threw the trident at Martlet. Fortunately, it missed. The creature again started after Martlet, claws outstretched.

Martlet broke the surface and was quickly hauled into the boat. As the creature surfaced, Boo-boo threw his javelin, wounding the creature in the left arm. Thingol then cast a Palsy spell and paralyzed the creature's chest. It sank slowly back under water. We hurriedly redistributed ourselves, then sailed off as fast as we could.

Exactly one week later, a flock of big blue birds that we saw on the surface of the water flew up, then dived down on us. Their apparent target was our dried fish. We were able to decoy the birds by throwing some of it overboard, but it cost us much food.

But we managed to reach the archipelago in another five days, and we landed on one of the islands on Six-day of the ninth week.

The next morning we examined our surroundings better. The island, if island you call it, we were on was about 100 feet square. Since there was no one in sight, we headed for another island, larger, and with trees.

We left our boats on the beach. The trees were not trees as such, but were rather like scrub oak. There were some small bushes that sprouted red berries. Since the island was about 4 square miles in area, we explored the island.

As soon as we had started, we noticed a small pillar of smoke perhaps coming from the other side of the island. Quickly crossing the island, we saw that we were not alone.

About 40 yards from shore, an old man and two younger ones were busily cooking crabs. The old man looked to be about 50 years old, the other two around 30. There was a boat on the beach, made of wood. All of them were silent.

Tudor stepped forwards and greeted the man in his language, Tortugax. The old man replied in the same language, with a strange accent. Once communication was established, we asked a string of questions.

The largest population center was a place called Kingtown. The nearest population center, though, was called Gartoch. He gave us a string of directions to Gartoch, but Tudor could not understand them. He said that Gartoch would be about 8 hours for him, but for us a lot longer. We asked the man to draw us a map, but he seemed confused as to why he should draw a map. We convinced him to do so, and he pulled out a large board, covered with strange symbols and began to copy from it.

The map he produced was utterly incomprehensible. There was no scale, and no absolute directions. All directions were relative, generally parallel to the spine of an island. Landmarks abounded, some only visible at low tide.

We then asked if we could hire him to take us to Gartoch, since none of us could possibly understand the map. After an initial surprise that we could not understand the map, he said that he might. An offer of a metal dagger finally convinced him. He said that he would leave one of his sons here, and pick him up later.

So we left the island for Gartoch. The old man did not use a turtle to drive his boat. Rather, he used oars or a sail. After about 6 hours, the old man said that we should sleep first otherwise we might miss the smoke pillar which was a landmark for Gartoch.

That night, while we were asleep, some of us heard a large bellowing noise coming from the water. But the darkness defeated our eyes and we could not tell what it was. In the morning we asked the man what could have made a noise like that. He said that it could have been a sea elephant,

a kraken, a grandfather turtle, but that it was probably either a margump or a dying whale. A margump, he said, was very large and very dangerous. A close description might be that it was all eyes and mouth.

The next morning we could see the smoke pillar only a short distance away. We reached it in a quick half hour.

The city of Gartoch consisted of about 20 ramshackle buildings. There were some trees on the island. On the beach was the half-gone carcass of some creature. We estimated that we had come a distance of about 20 or 30 miles.

Seeing the lack of civilization, we asked the old man about Kingtown and Sofli. He told us that Kingtown was the largest population center, but that Sofli was where the ships from Charth landed and traded. But, it was further from here than Kingtown.

We now asked the old man if he would take us to Sofli. He seemed unwilling until we offered him the remaining silver pot. Then he said that he would take us. But first we would need new boats. The old man said that we would leave at noon.

Tudor, Joseph and Fenric all went into the town to try to buy more boats. After an initial rebuff, they found a woman who asked Joseph how badly we wanted them. Joseph said that we were fairly desperate. The woman then asked if he was from Charth. He replied in the affirmative. The woman then said that he could have the boats if he married her daughter, Melia. Melia was an average looking girl of about 20 years or so. Joseph said, after a minutes thought, that he would return soon with his answer.

Joseph returned to us and asked our opinion. The old man explained the marriage customs of the turtle people. When married, the woman owns all the property of her spouse. Divorce is made under mutual agreement, mostly with one spouse offering the other enough money for the other's consent.

While this was going on, Tudor and Fenric went back out to find more boats. All of the people said that they were afraid of crossing Melia's mother by offering us boats.

Finally, Joseph went back to talk to Melia. He wanted to know how she would feel about him traveling while she lived in Charth. Melia's mother replied that she, Melia, would not mind.

Melia's mother made Joseph lay out objects that represented all of his belongings. But in the middle of this, Joseph's clothes turned invisible! Mister Man had played a devastating joke. Joseph chased Mister Man to no avail. Finally he returned to Melia and asked her to marry him. Melia's mother critically examined all of his belongings, then accepted.

Once the marriage was known, it was declared that there would be a great feast. All of us attended the new bride and groom. There was all manner of sea food, crab, fish, and blubber. To drink there was water, berry-juice, and blubber-wine.

The next day the old man said that he would return to the island and pick up his son, then we would begin our journey to Sofli. Thus, on Witch-day of the tenth week of autumn, we set out.

The boats that Melia's mother had were two two-man boats and two one-man boats. Into the latter we placed most of our supplies for the journey. The old man, his two sons, Tudor, and Joseph were controlled the boats. With us went Joseph's new wife Melia.

After 11 days, the old man said that we were traveling through a portion of the archipelago that no one lived in. Because of this, many dangerous sea creatures lived here. But, he said, it cut time off of our journey. We accepted the risk.

But late on the first day in, on Pamalt-day of the twelfth week, in the distance a creature surfaced. The old man yelled out that it was a grandfather turtle, a kind of turtle that is carnivorous. He also said that he and his sons, plus Melia and Tudor could not attack it lest they go to hell when they died. The turtle began to head straight for us.

Boo-boo threw a Disruption, hitting it in a flipper. Thingol prepared a Palsy spell. Martlet readied his sword. Fenric began to string his bow. Gorfang cast a spell on his crossbow.

The turtle was getting closer as Boo-boo again threw a Disruption, but the spell failed. Thingol cast his Palsy spell, but it was not intense enough. Martlet cast a Disruption and hit it in the head. Fenric missed with his arrow. Gorfang aimed a shot to the turtle's head and his bolt managed to penetrate the thick skin.

Boo-boo again failed a Disrupt, but Martlet did not, slightly damaging the turtle in the body. The turtle now was fairly close to Tudor's turtle. It opened its mouth and swallowed Tudor's turtle in one gulp. Fenric and Gorfang had both aimed shots at the head, but only Fenric hit.

Boo-boo yet again failed a Disruption. Tudor cast Protection on himself. Martlet cast Disruption, hitting it in the head. The turtle had by now come up against Tudor's boat, which also held Gorfang and Martlet. Fenric missed his shot, but Gorfang scored against its head. The turtle, perhaps thinking twice about the encounter, now submerged.

With none of us injured, we continued on, though Tudor's boat now had to be rowed. The very next day we reached the town of Sofli.

Chapter 5

Sofli and Charth

The town of Sofli looked like it could house about 1000 people. There was about 200 buildings and one large one that seemed to be made out of whale bones.

There was a long good beach that we could land at. Docked at a pier was a large galley that had 30 sets of oars. Surely we could get passage on this ship.

The old man bade us farewell and left with his two sons. We went in search of the captain of the vessel.

The large building turned out to be a trading hall. There were no walls, only pillars. There were about a dozen men selling things with many more walking up and down looking. While we went in search of the captain, Boo-boo got separated from us.

Finally we met the captain of the vessel. He told us to meet him at his ship later that evening.

As we left, we met Boo-boo. He had traded some of his stuff for some jars of fermented berries. Mister Man was later able to con Boo-boo out of about a quarter of them.

That evening, we went aboard the ship. We were met by the captain who was named Garth. In his cabin, we attempted to come to an arrangement.

From Sofli, Charth was about 600 kilometers away. The journey would take about ten days, depending on the current. In coin, we had a total of about 1500 pennies.

To take us all, the captain wanted 100 pennies per day for all of us. Since we did not think we could afford this, we attempted to bargain. Finally, we reached an agreement. For a matrix to Transform Water to Beer, a scroll that had the sorcery spell of Telepathy, and Gorfang's slarge-metal and stone arbalest, plus 160 pennies, he would take us to Charth.

The next day, the last day of autumn, we left. It took us only eight days to reach Charth, arriving on Ga-day of the second week of winter.

Charth looked like a city that some of us were familiar with. It was walled, yet straddled a river that went through it. Its population was around 2000 according to Joseph. There was a little farming outside the walls, but mostly the people fished.

Economically, guilds ran most of the industries. There was a sorcerer's guild, a forester's, a healer's, a ship's captain's and so on. The government was a type of oligarchy. The guild leaders were elected to the office, each guild having a different length of office. Though the religion was influenced by Pamaltelan deities, there were temples to Issaries and Lhankor Mhy, Chalana Arroy and Dormal, as well as Humakt. The local language was a dialect of Fonritian.

The elves in the Dadar Jungle, of which Charth was the easternmost city, were generally neutral to humans. Further north in the Onlaks Jungle, for which the area of land is known, the elves are hostile to humans.

We first went to Joseph's parents' house. His father seemed slightly distressed at his marriage, but accepted Melia as his new daughter-in-law. He offered all of us shelter at his house until the end of the week. We accepted gratefully.

A quick stop at the local Chalana Arroy temple proved fruitless. They did not have the spell of Restore Intelligence. The priestess there said that the temples in Westel or Yanchi might have it.

As we reviewed our situation, things looked grave. We didn't have enough money to hire a boat to take us to Fonrit, nor did we have enough to get to any local ruins and then have enough to survive. At the time, our only recourse seemed to be to chance walking through the jungle.

Then we remembered the scepter. We had wanted to get rid of it, and if we could get a good enough price for it, our monetary problems were solved. So the next day we went to the Issaries market. We found a merchant, named Fusial, who seemed willing to deal.

He had items that he would be willing to trade for, but he gave us some advice. The scepter was extremely powerful and extremely dangerous for anyone who did not have morals to possess. For that person would use it to drain other people's POW for his or her own benefit. What we wanted to do was to ultimately give it someone who could defend it against the former owner. There was such power in the elf forests, in the hands of a powerful elf leader.

Since we seemed reticent to undertake the dangerous journey through the jungle just to give away our most powerful magic item, he offered us a proposal. If we were to use the scepter with Boo-boo creating magic items, he would pay us for them. We wanted some time to think about it, so we went back to Joseph's parent's place.

There followed a fierce debate. Gorfang was the main proponent of us trading the scepter away. His eye was on shield with a dragon head on it that breathed fire. But most of the rest of us liked the idea of using the scepter to make money. In the end, we decided to accept Fusial's proposal.

So, for the next eight weeks, while we placed magic points into the scepter, Thingol taught Boo-boo all he knew of Enchanting and of the art of Ceremony. Tudor got a job helping a fisherman, and was not always available to contribute his magic points. Gorfang took up helping a local blacksmith, while Martlet became a manual laborer helping the forester's guild. Mister Man took Asmoufr under his wing and they quickly gained a reputation as vagabonds.

With Tudor, Melia, Joseph, Thingol, and Martlet twice sacrificing a point of POW, we filled the scepter with six points of POW. Now Boo-boo began his Enchanting. His first was a success, creating a matrix for Bind Sylph. The second, also a Bind Sylph, failed. So, for our efforts, we gained 700 pennies at a cost of 496 pennies in living expenses, for a profit of 204 pennies.

The next day, Six-day of the twelfth week of winter, Fusial came back to us. He told us that he might be interested as hiring us. If we were hired, we would be his 'troubleshooters'. But for him to hire us, we would have to prove that we were competent, by going through the jungle and meeting him at Neuteboom. He would carry the scepter, so that if we were killed it would not be lost. We could choose one item out of his hoard to take along with us. We would have until the end of Spring to reach Neuteboom.

Seeing no better offer, we accepted. His items, besides the dragon shield were: a branch from a tree made of stone; a living animated hand; a glass vial containing hydra acid; some shrunken head; a quiver of eight arrows that, when shot, turned into Firearrows; a blue and a green furstone, a stone covered with fur.

After much argument, it was decided that we would take the stone branch. If necessary, we could use it to bribe or gift our way out of trouble, if we should run into elves.

During the Sacred Time, some of us engaged in other activities besides the normal ceremonies.. For instance, Boo-boo called upon all of his ancestors to ask their permission for him to join the cult of Pamalt. They agreed if he would double his obligations to his ancestors, to show that he valued his ancestors above all.

Boo-boo also tried to get married. He went to a local tribe of ancestor worshipers, who happened to be cannibals, to find a bride. Needless to say, he found no one who would marry him.

Thingol managed to find a Malkioni sorcerer who was willing to perform the ceremony of Worship Invisible God. The sorcerer, though Malkioni, was of the Sedalpist belief. This heresy believes that it is a sin for a man to kill another man. Thus, when they need to fight other men, they hire mercenaries.

We found a guide from the foresters guild who was willing to take us to Neuteboom. His name was Ancellus. We told him that we wanted to get to Neuteboom through the jungle. His fee, he told us, was to be 170 pennies. We accepted and offered him a bonus of 30 pennies if we got there within nine weeks.

Despite our low financial resources, we bought as many supplies as possible. Mister Man pulled a rather nice trick, selling one of his bags that contained a turkey dinner and money which we had given him for almost twice as much.

We left on the first day of 1626 with 102 person-days of food and water.

Chapter 6

The Jungle

As we walked out of Charth and along a trail to the jungle, we passed by the same village that Boo-boo had visited. Here he decided to try one more time to get married. He would have failed miserably had not Mister Man helped him by telling everybody that he was Boo-boo's student and also opening just a little bit one of his bags that was filled with the wind. A woman named Gulblomst, aged 41, decided to marry Boo-boo.

So Boo-boo was dragged away and taught the tribal secrets and initiated into the tribe. Meanwhile, the village prepared for the wedding.

The ceremony was performed on Pamalt-day by the village leader. The honeymoon lasted all of the next day. Finally, with Gulblomst as a backup guide, we continued on our journey on Six-day.

Three days later, on Gata-day, Ancellus and Martlet were out in front. Ancellus heard something approaching and no sooner said when from out of the jungle came a long, thin creature, perhaps some twenty feet long with a very long, very thin snout. Ancellus recognized it as what he called a sucker bunny.

Fenric fired an arrow and hit it in the left hind leg. Tudor also shot, but missed. Martlet moved in and chopped at the creature, hitting it in the abdomen. Ancellus also swung, but missed. Boo-boo failed to Disrupt the creature. The creature now attached its snout to Ancellus's right arm and lifted him up in the air. Fenric fired another arrow but it tinked. Gulblomst had cast Firearrow on one of Tudor's arrows. Tudor shot it and hit it in the head. The creature now clawed at Gorfang, who was moving towards it to hit it. He was hit in the abdomen and flung back 3 meters, crashing into Boo-boo.

Thingol now put a Damage Resist 10 around Martlet. Tudor fired again, but the arrow tinked. Boo-boo again failed to cast Disruption. The creature now did something to Ancellus, for he suddenly fell limp. whereupon the creature dropped Ancellus. Martlet hit the creature's left hind leg. Tudor shot another Firearrow, hitting it in the abdomen. The creature tried to claw Martlet, but missed. Fenric tried to hit the snout of the creature, but missed.

Boo-boo finally cast Disruption, but it failed to overcome the creature. Martlet hit the creature in the chest. The creature then clawed at Fenric and hit him in the left arm, knocking him back a meter. Fenric moved up and hit the creature in the left fore leg. Gorfang cast Disruption and got it in the head. Gulblomst also cast Disruption, but it failed to overcome the creature. The creature's snout then attached itself to Fenric, who was lifted up into the air. Tudor's Disruption failed to overcome the creature.

Thingol now Palsied the creature in the chest. Tudor fired another arrow but it tinked. The creature now drained Fenric, but he was still alive and kicking. Martlet hit the creature in the chest. Gorfang shot a Multimissiled crossbow bolt, but all three shots tinked. Fenric then chopped at the tentacle, hit it, was dropped by the creature which also dropped. It was dead.

Ancellus had all of his blood drained out. Fenric had some of his sucked out as well. Gulblomst and Boo-boo then cooked Ancellus for their dinner.

Another week passed by without mishap. Then, on the evening of Gata-day of the third week, we could hear a distant howling or moaning or shrieking noise which started just as the sun went down. It was a cacophonous chorus of voices that were not like a human's.

About an hour later, both Tudor and Asmoufr noticed a man standing out in the woods. He

was holding up a dead rabbit and, in Fonritian, saying “Food.”

The man’s name was Tor. He was black, of course, short, wearing green clothes with a long bow, axe, and spear. We invited him to eat with us.

It turned out that Tor’s entire tribe, except for him, had been wiped out by what he called ‘The Tree of Evil.’ Apparently, this tree had sprung up overnight near his village. Its fruit were pods from which emerged a strange creature. The description of it and the wounds it inflicted on his people sounded very familiar. The fruits of the tree were sucker bunnies. Additionally, added Tor, the sounds we were hearing were the tree.

Most of us wanted no part in a Chaotic tree that could produce so many sucker bunnies. But Mister Man told us that Chaos never gets weaker for ignoring it. Shamed, we decided that we would at least take a look.

It was only about an hour after we started walking the next morning to find the remnants of Tor’s village. It was destroyed. Along the way, we had collected as much dry wood as we could carry. And, the howling was getting louder.

After a few more hours, we could see the tree. It looked to be about 500 feet tall. As we got closer, we could see more detail. The tree had branches, but no leaves. Its fruit were pods of a purplish color and there looked to be hundreds. The trunk was about 40 to 45 feet in diameter, and its bark looked to be soft. And at its top was a huge tangle of what looked to be thatch. Its POW was higher than Boo-boo’s, and it swayed back and forth despite the absence of any wind. To provide a comparison of POW, Boo-boo began to summon Mugumma.

As we examined the tree, an elf suddenly stepped forth. Speaking in Aldryami, Thingol told the elf that we only wanted to kill the Chaos tree, none of the others.

To this goal the elf seemed pleased. His name was Alfaron, and his tribe’s dryads and sacred plants were all destroyed by the tree’s sucker bunny spawn.

When Mugumma appeared, he could see that the tree’s POW was higher than his own. But Mugumma also saw something else. As the tree budded pods, its POW decreased. But as it captured wayward spirits, its POW increased.

The logical thing to do seemed to try to destroy all the pods. But the lowest pod was about 100 feet up from the ground. And since there were so many of them, it would be a difficult task especially since we did not know how sentient the tree was. We therefore had to plan as if we had only one chance.

The plan we adopted was this. Alfaron had with him some Tanglethicket seeds. Tanglethicket is an immense bracken of incredible density. It is extremely tough and when burned, emits a poisonous gas. So, we would rush up to the tree, dump wood as far around the base of the trunk as we could. Then Alfaron would plant the Tanglethicket and begin its growth. Once it had reached full maturity (some 15 minutes), we would Ignite the thicket. Of course we would remain upwind from the gas.

So this is what we did. The wood was dumped, the Tanglethicket grown and the whole lot Ignited. The tree itself did not catch on fire, but its branches began to thrash about, causing some of the pods to fall off. Their contents were some bones and a reddish pulp. The howling too increased to a crescendo of dissonance, then slowly died away as the fire too died. After an hour or so the fire had burned down. For about a third of the circumference of the tree, the trunk was burned inwards for about 8 feet over a height of about 5 feet. Alfaron took this opportunity to shoot one of the pods. It slowly bled a deep purple juice.

We spent the night camped and on watch. The howling did not return, nor were we attacked.

The next morning we found that about half of the pods had dropped off, making a huge pile of stinking refuse. During the day, half of us went hunting while the other half stayed to watch the tree.

When morning dawned on the next day, some more fruit had fallen. These fruit had bones inside them. The rest of the pods, maybe 200 or so, all looked withered and shrunken. We took this as a sign that the tree had been severely weakened and continued to march. Tor and Alfarson both accompanied us. For the next five days we marched and hunted, preserving our reserve of two days of food.

At about noon of Pamalt-day of the fourth week of spring, a small four foot high skinny humanoid wearing leaves for garments stepped forward and spoke something in Aldryami to Alfarson. The creature, of course, was a runner. It demanded tribute from Alfarson in the name of the High Lady Summer. Alfarson gave it a Tanglethicket seed. It then requested tribute from us outsiders. Gulblomst gave it nine tusks from some creature¹⁰⁴ and a longbow arrow.

We thought that this might be a good opportunity to trade away the stone branch. We communicated this request through Alfarson. The runner said that it would show the Lady Summer the branch but that we would have to give it up. And, of course, none but Alfarson could come. After some argument, the runner said that Tor could come part way. So, with nothing else to do, we gave the branch to Alfarson with a list of possible items, and Tor went with Alfarson.

When Tor had gone as far as he could go, he could see a perfect circle of trees. Alfarson went inside and, to Tor, it looked as if Alfarson was talking to a tree. He was, in actuality, talking to Lady Summer, a dryad.

She had told Alfarson, referring to our list, that humans have a strange custom to ask for more than they want. But she gave Alfarson her list of possible trade goods.

After all of the bargaining was done, the deal was made. We would each receive two packets of healing herbs. Five of them were conventional healing herbs¹⁰⁵. Sixteen of them, however, were herbs that would heal, say, poison damage¹⁰⁶. In addition, we received four packets of leaves that would help to cure Soul Waste¹⁰⁷. We were also give eighteen humanbane seeds. If a single seed is fed to a human, that human becomes sterile. There were also four packets of powdered blindweed leaves. If thrown into a creature's eyes, they become blinded for a small amount of time¹⁰⁸. There was also a gallon of dark bounty berries and a single Love Fruit. If the Love Fruit is eaten, then that person falls in love with the person who gave the Love Fruit to them. The Love Fruit was kept far away from Mister Man.

We then continued onwards, hunting and walking. On Empress-day of the next week, we came to a slow, muddy, wide river. It was about 100 feet across and there were many crocodiles swimming in it.

We despaired on how to cross without ending up inside a crocodile until Boo-boo decided he would attack one of them in spirit combat, possess it, and then ferry the rest of us across the river. This he did and soon Boo-boo swam unsteadily to the bank.

Gorfang and Mister Man were ferried across with no trouble, although Boo-boo had some trouble handling his new body. Then Asmoufr and Boo-boo's body were taken across. His body fell into the river, though, and Boo-boo was forced to grab his own body in his mouth. Another crocodile, interested in the morsel which Boo-boo had, followed him up out of the river. But

¹⁰⁴ Her tribe uses tusks as we use money.

¹⁰⁵ They would heal 1D6 damage.

¹⁰⁶ They would heal 1D6 general hit point damage!

¹⁰⁷ They allow an additional CON roll to resist the disease.

¹⁰⁸ One melee round.

Gorfang was able to drive it off after Mister Man had dragged Boo-boo's body to safety.

Alfarson and Martlet made it across with no incidents. But when Thingol and Gulblomst rode across, a crocodile charged Boo-boo and bit at his riders. Fortunately, Thingol had cast a large Damage Resist, and the crocodile was unable to penetrate. After some fire by Gorfang and Alfarson, the crocodile left.

Then Tudor and Tor crossed. Another crocodile swam up towards the two. Gorfang fired from shore, but only managed to hit Tor in the abdomen. Martlet missed, but Alfarson didn't and the crocodile backed off. Finally, Fenric made the journey alone and crossed without any trouble.

Three more days passed without any unusual events. But on Ga-day of the sixth week, we came across a hedge some ten feet tall, blocking our path and extending for as far as we could see, (some 30 to 40 feet). The hedge was very familiar. It was a Tanglethicket. From beyond the thicket, Tor thought he could hear a large fire burning and could smell smoke.

Not wishing to immediately break our way through, we decided to go around it. So, keeping the thicket on our left, we walked around the thicket. It took four hours to reach the other side. But now curiosity reared its head and so both Tor and Alfarson climbed up a tree to look over the top.

Both said that the thicket was about 10 feet deep. And in the center of the shape formed by the thicket was a pillar of smoke and flames. This was extremely interesting. Elves hate fire, so why would they allow a fire to go unchecked? Perhaps this was another Chaos tree? But if not, then why the Tanglethicket? Was it to keep something inside, keep humans from going in, or as a warning to other elves to keep clear?

It was here that we discussed who would be leader. There were only three logical choices: Boo-boo, Tudor, and Gulblomst. Based on experience and time with the group, Boo-boo was elected leader. As leader, he wanted to investigate this phenomenon. So he Discorporated and his spirit floated inwards. There were small sources of POW scattered through the trees. Then he came to the tree.

It was about 200 feet tall, and where it should have leaves, it had tiny flames. Its bark was very granular, and Boo-boo could detect only minimal POW in it. The heat that the tree produced had cleared a small circle around the tree where nothing else grew.

Boo-boo returned and told us what he had seen. By his description, it did not seem that the tree was Chaotic. But the Tanglethicket implied that either there were elves nearby or that there was a spirit bound to the thicket to provide it with the magic points it needs to survive. There followed a fierce debate on whether to try to take some of the wood or leave it alone. Finally, Boo-boo declared that we would try to get some.

Fortunately, there were some branches overhead that would get one across the Thicket without having to break through it. Tudor and Alfarson climbed past the thicket and proceeded towards the tree. They made it without any undue difficulty. They chopped off two branches of the tree. Then they extinguished one of the branches and then tried to light it again. The attempt failed, the wood apparently fire-proof. So, with Tudor carrying the lit branch, they returned. Hauling the branches over and then themselves, they crossed the thicket.

Since Boo-boo declared the branches as belonging to the party, Tudor then recrossed the thicket, for he wanted a staff made from the wood. Alfarson again went with him. They got two more branches, with many twigs on it. They saw no seeds or any sign of fruit.

They quickly returned and we continued onwards. For the rest of that week, there were no encounters.

But during the early part of the night of Six-day, Martlet and Alfarson were on watch.

Alfarson heard a plant whisper to him, “Back off so we can have a clear line of fire.”

He whispered back, “Not now!”

The plant responded, “You’re not in control. Now back off so we can shoot.”

To this, Alfarson yelled as loud as he could, “Ambush!” and then dropped flat on the ground.

As he did this, Martlet turned and saw six elves all bending their bows. He just had time to raise his hoplite shield before the arrows flew. Gorfang was hit twice, in the chest and in the leg. These two shots killed him. Mister Man was pinned to the ground as a dirty shirt, the arrow going through it. Martlet was also hit, though in the leg.

Only Alfarson had time to fire before the elves could shoot again. He managed to hit one in the chest, the elf falling over. More arrows flew, but only Gulblomst was hit. However, the arrow went completely through her left leg. Alfarson shot again, his arrow going completely through another elf’s head. Martlet too fired, wounding another elf in the left arm. Asmoufr missed with his boomerang as Boo-boo failed to overcome an elf’s magic points. For his pains, Boo-boo was hit in the chest by an arrow. Alfarson was hit too, in the left arm. Martlet shot again, hitting the same elf in the right arm.

Alfarson, his bow useless with his wound, charged the elves. Arrows flew, tinkling off Martlet. But Asmoufr, Tor, and Alfarson were all hit. Alfarson then swung at an elf with his sword, but the elf dodged. Tudor and Martlet fired simultaneously, both hitting the same elf, who fell over. Thingol’s Multispelled Palsy then went off. He overcame the five elves he had targeted, but only Palsied their limbs. Three of them fell, their legs paralyzed. Martlet and Tudor again fired, hitting different elves in the legs.

Alfarson again swung, but the elf dodged. Boo-boo, Martlet, and Tudor all charged the downed elves as they presumably cast Healing spells.

One of the elves now stood up, as three of them began to shimmer. Boo-boo tried to grab his opponent’s bow, but failed. Martlet and Tudor both killed an elf with body blows. Alfarson managed to fell an elf in the right leg.

Suddenly, a pit opened up beneath Martlet’s feet, and his legs were engulfed. Martlet cried out, “A gnome!” As Tor killed an elf, Asmoufr and Boo-boo were both hit. Gulblomst had now gotten the arrow out of her leg and Healed it. She now crawled over to Mister Man and, removing the arrow from him, tried to Heal him. To her surprise, the rent in the shirt did close up somewhat. Tudor now stabbed at the gnome, hitting it. Martlet managed to drag himself out of the gnome’s grasp.

But the pit followed him and he was engulfed again. The one remaining elf now stood up as Asmoufr crawled away, wounded. The elf then ran away, but no one followed him! Tudor again hit the gnome as Martlet again dragged himself out.

But again the pit followed him. First Tor, then Tudor hit the gnome. They managed to the structure of the gnome enough, forcing the spirit to return from where it had come.

Alfarson and then Tor left to track the elf. They returned a few minutes later. Alfarson had a minor wound, but they had killed the elf. They had also found the rock that had bound the gnome.

We healed up the party, and Gorfang’s body too. When Thingol went to take Gorfang’s key, he could see that it was glowing where it had never done so before. Thingol surmised that it was in some way storing Gorfang’s soul. Perhaps, he reckoned, if the key key" could be taken to the Copper Kettle, his body could be remade, and his soul rejoined to it.

The Quest now numbered one.

Chapter 7

River-Ride

After burying Gorfang, we pondered on what to do next. We destroyed the elves' bows and left Gorfang's armor on his grave. His equipment went to the party.

The next three days were uneventful. We camped that night near a river. But as we woke up on the fourth day, Pamalt-day of the seventh week, we noticed that we were surrounded by about 20 to 30 men with long spears and large shields made out of hide.

Tor went towards the man with the most feathers and said, "Welcome to our camp. Will you have breakfast with us?"

The man considered and then replied, "We will not eat with you yet. This is our river and we require a toll. You have until the sun is there (as he pointed to a location in the sky — about a half-hour) to decide." And then they withdrew into the jungle.

When they returned, we had our toll ready. We gave them 18 ivory tusks, a bronze knife, a bronze hatchet, a fire-maker, and a pot of fermented berries. The man asked if any of the toll was from the elf. He replied no. The man then opened the pot, inspected the contents, and gave it to someone to drink. This man would have drunk it to the bottom had not the first taken it back with the admonishment, "I said a taste, only!"

He then said, "Anyone who wishes may come with us." And with that, they all turned and began to walk away. With nothing better to do, we went with them.

It was only a short walk to the west until we came to a village. All of the huts were on top of stilts. A large longhouse was perched atop many stilts.

From the hut on top of the highest stilts (about 20 feet), came a person wearing more feathers than we had ever seen. He was painted with dots of white and Boo-boo noticed that his teeth had POW. The people called themselves the Aichee.

The chief and the man we had given the toll to conferred briefly over the toll. Then the chief turned to us and said, "This is a generous tribute. All those that you (pointing at Tor) choose can join us in the longhouse."

Tor chose all except Thingol, Asmoufr, Gulblomst, and Alfarson. The rest, Martlet, Tor, Fenric, Tudor, Boo-boo, and Mister Man, plus a few more village men, climbed up into the longhouse. There were no women except for an old woman, cackling mirthlessly, pouring a fire between her hands. Boo-boo could see that she was a shaman, for Boo-boo's fetch could see her fetch. Her POW was, of course, much higher than Boo-boo's. All of the villagers acted as if she didn't exist.

All in all, they had a boring party. It was more ceremonial than entertaining, and the noise from the feast below carried up to them.

We did ask questions about the poison water (the sea), and how to get there. They mentioned a route that follows the river, then encounters a lake, then continues on to the poison water. But, they said, one should not sleep on the shores of the lake, for on an island in the middle lived evil ones, whose singing would drive one mad.

Down below, a huge feast was going on. Both Alfarson and Thingol tended to be ignored. Thingol managed to Transform a quantity of water into beer which pleased some of the villagers greatly.

As the party wound down, and people started retiring for the night, Tudor resolved to speak with the shamaness. As he did, the shamaness looked up, cackled, then pointed a finger at him. Tudor now found himself unable to utter a sound. We waited for five minutes, but he was still mute. We waited for another ten minutes, and he was still mute. Then, Thingol cast a large Neutralize Magic, but he was still mute. With nothing else to try, we waited until the next morning.

Talking to the chief the next morning, he explained that she can only do that kind of thing to a person if that person talks to her. He said that she had turned another person's hair green. But, he said, he would have someone ask her to remove it.

That person and Tudor went up to the longhouse. There, the man said to no one, "If one were to restore one's speech, one would be grateful." The shamaness cackled and then held up three bony fingers. Conferring briefly with the rest of us, we decided to give her three twigs from the fire tree. But as Tudor approached to give her the twigs, she seized his arm, nicked his wrist, and let three drops of blood drop into her hand. Then she released his wrist and kicked away the twigs. Tudor could now speak again.

We then had to consider how we would get to the sea. The men had said, last night, that it was a three days hard walk and five days of easy walking to reach the other side of the lake. We then noticed that the village had some long canoes. We asked the chief if we could either rent or buy them plus guides. He said that any canoes bargained for would be made for us in two days.

After some bargaining, the agreed bargain was as follows. For us giving the chief one regular healing packet (he made us show him first), one special healing packet, and three straight sticks from the tree¹⁰⁹, we would get two 20-foot long canoes and two boys of the village to guide us to the lake.

On Gata-day of the eighth week, we left the village. The river journey was not very perilous, seeing no extremely dangerous animals. Late that evening, we reached the shores of the lake and the boys left us to return to their village.

Heeding the villager's warning, we walked inland for about one and a half hours to avoid the evil spirits. In the morning, Fenric found a deadly companion in his sleeping roll. It was a snake that Tor called a 'fer-de-lance.' Thingol cast a Damage Resist 10 on Fenric. Tudor added a Protection 2. Fenric then scrambled out of the roll. The snake bit at him, but did not penetrate. The snake slithered off, hotly chased by Asmoufr.

We walked back to the lake, then launched the canoes to try to find the river on the other side of the lake. Since the lake was quite convoluted, it was difficult to tell where this river might start.

By the day's end, we had traveled a distance down what we thought was the correct river. That night, the noise level from the birds was added to by what Tor called howler monkeys. Wondering what might have upset them, we watched more closely that night.

The next morning, Pamalt-day, we came across a braided vine stretching across the 100-foot wide river. It was Alfaron's opinion that unless it was an extremely rare natural circumstance, then it was artificial, perhaps made to stop persons from going down the river.

Fenric cut the vine and we continued onwards. But at the next bend, there was a clearing cut into the jungle and one very beautiful tree growing there. There were no elves, but no one doubted that there could be.

We floated to the shore where only Alfaron disembarked. He went up to the tree and elaborately bowed. The rest of us, back at the canoes, could see a figure detach itself from the tree, a

¹⁰⁹ We had discovered that these made excellent Firearrows, since they were not consumed in the flames.

dryad.

Alfarson asked the dryad if he could Worship Aldrya and perhaps sacrifice for Tanglethicket. She replied in the affirmative, but said, “Those animals in the canoes cannot watch. Have them come ashore.”

This we did. Some runners came and told us to sit down where they would put baskets woven from leaves onto our heads, so that we would be unable to see. With some misgivings, we did.

The rest of us did not see the Worship ceremony. But Alfarson went up to the tree and touched it. The ceremony suddenly stopped as the dryad noticed that Alfarson’s hands were green. He had shed the blood of elves. He was not allowed to continue the ceremony.

So it was a tight-lipped elf that returned to us after the baskets were taken from our heads. He would not speak to us of the ceremony as we pushed off and continued down the river.

We went a ways down-stream then stopped to hunt, for we were dangerously low on supplies. Boo-boo had now come down with a case of what we believed to be malaria. He became delirious during the night. That night, we could hear a panther hunting a deer.

The next day, Witch-day of the eighth week of Spring, the river water had a distinct salt taste. We rejoiced in the knowledge that, at long last, we were near the ocean. As we reached the ocean, we could see a small village, some twenty huts on stilts. There were people farming in the distance. There was one hut that was set lower than the rest. At the top was a ten foot statue of a young man. Fenric immediately recognized it as a statue of Issaries. Could this be Neuteboom?

We landed the boats among other small boats and disembarked. From the women and children who crowded around us, we learned that this was not Neuteboom but rather a village called Garrath. One of the men who had come towards us pointed towards Thingol and asked if he was a sorcerer. We replied in the negative, lying. Somewhat unsteadily, he asked us if we were hungry or thirsty. We replied that we were both, whereupon the man looked around for a moment, then whispered to us to come to a hut.

Inside we were treated to fruit and crab. He asked us when we planned to leave, a strange question to be asking. We said that we would when we knew which way our destination lied. We asked about any traders that came to Garrath, especially which way they came, where they went, and if any of them were named Fusial. He replied, very nervous now, that he knew no such information.

At that very moment, the curtain that was hung in the doorway was thrown open. The man talking to us uttered a short cry, then retreated to the farthest corner.

The man that had done this was a short man, perhaps 50 years old. But he was not black. Rather, his skin had a distinct yellowish color. A Kralori. He wore only robes. At his waist a belt of darts. They were all iron. His skin was overlaid with tattoos as well. Behind him were 4 burly men in bezaunted armor

In perfect Fonritian, he said to the man, “Ah! You should have told me that we had traders here.” Then, turning to Thingol, he asked if he was a Rokari. Impressed at meeting a Kralori, he replied that he was.

“You are of Zzabur’s caste?¹¹⁰”

“Yes.”

¹¹⁰ A sorcerer.

“Who would be your leader?”

Since Boo-boo was incapacitated by malaria, we had no real answer.

“We’d like to keep your sorcerer,” said the man, whose name was Mik. “And before you get any ideas, do you see these darts? I vow that before you,” pointing at Thingol, “can cast a spell, I can put three darts in your heart.”

We were, to say the least, surprised at this declaration. In Arbennan, which Mik claimed that he did not speak, and apparently did not, we discussed our options. We asked Mik how far it was to Neuteboom. He said that in a proper boat, it was less than three days away.

Thingol had heard of sorcery slavery. The unfortunate victim is forced to create enchantments, draining his POW. Sometimes the slave is released after his POW reaches 1, sometimes he is kept for life.

So he told everyone present the story of his quest. He told them of the original four, himself, Gorfang, Slagstone, and Grosko. He told them of Urrquong and his dark prophecies. He told them of Old Man and his gifts, and his final message. He told them that Grosko was now fulfilling his mission, by killing the Chaos that he hated. Slagstone had fulfilled his mission, by being the father of a new race of trolls. His son, the bison, was now with Old Man in the Nargan Mountains. Gorfang’s soul was now in the key, where perhaps he could be reborn as a Mostali. He told them that if he was captured, then the rest of us must continue the quest. There were no obligations, no compulsions, just the persons word to continue to the best of their abilities. The rest of them swore to this.

Then Martlet echoed the sentiments of everybody else by saying, “I think that there will be blood shed.”

“That is too bad,” said Mik. “Very well, we shall duel to your surrender. I never surrender.”

Then he pulled out a strange stone and juggled it in his hand. Some of us recognized what it was. It was a jelmre emotion crystal.

“We shall go outside and count to 30. At that time, if you are still inside, I shall Form/Set the wood of the hut and crush you all.”

With that, he and his four henchmen left the hut. We could hear Mik’s voice slowly, but surely counting.

Chapter 8

Duel

As he counted up to thirty, we hastily arranged for battle. Thingol cast a Multispelled Damage Resistance 11 on Martlet, Fenric, and Alfaron. Mister Man cast a Fireblade on Martlet's sword as Tudor and Tor both cast Protection on themselves. Fenric also cast a Bladesharp 4 on his sword. Then we poured out of the building.

Thingol began cranking his crossbow as Alfaron cast Arrow Trance on himself. The four goons were spread out in a line. In the middle was Mik, and beyond him was another sorcerer, whose name we learned was Sorc.

Martlet engaged first, tinkering off of his man. Gulblomst Disrupted the goon facing Asmoufr, damaging his chest. The goon retaliated by hitting Asmoufr in the leg, causing him to fall. Asmoufr's return blow missed. Mik threw a dart at Fenric and it would have criticalled, had not Fenric interposed his shield. Alfaron fired his bow and impaled Mik in the left leg, but he did not fall. Did he have a Strengthening Enchantment? The extra missile tinkered off of a Damage Resistance field. Alfaron fired again, but tinkered. Fenric swung at Mik, but he dodged the blow. Alfaron fired again, but tinkered again. Mik kicked at Fenric, who was unable to parry it. He took damage to his left leg and fell over. A goon hit Tor in his spear arm, wounding it heavily. The last goon missed Tudor and his return blow was parried. Gulblomst again tried to Disrupt Asmoufr's goon, but failed.

Alfaron would have impaled Mik in the chest had not his Damage Resist saved him. Sorc then cast Stupefaction at the five people in the line: Martlet, Fenric, Asmoufr, Tudor, and Tor. But they all had ample Free INT, so the spell failed. Martlet hit his goon, but it tinkered off of a Damage Resistance. His return blow was hampered by his abdomen armor falling off. Asmoufr threw a dagger at his goon, but he missed. In return, he was hit in the left arm. The blow was too much for him, and he died. Fenric tried a blow at Mik from the ground, but the Damage Resistance worked again. Mik tried to jump over Fenric to get at Thingol, Alfaron, and Gulblomst, but he fell as he landed. Alfaron's two shots at Mik bounced off the Damage Resistance. Gulblomst managed to twice Disrupt Asmoufr's killer, once in the abdomen, once in the right arm. Tor's goon fumbled as Tor managed to hit him in the right leg. Tudor managed to impale his goon, but the blow was parried.

As Mik stood up, Alfaron fired at point blank range. But again the blow was stopped. Thingol also fired his crossbow, but it too was stopped. Martlet swung at his goon, and landed a blow on his right leg. Asmoufr's goon shifted to engage Fenric. Gulblomst again Disrupted the man, this time in the chest. Fenric hit him, but the blow tinkered. Tor missed, as did both Tudor and his goon. Gulblomst failed to get another Disruption off. Alfaron fired twice, but both blows bounced again. Mik now kicked Alfaron, who could neither parry nor dodge. He fell, damaged in the left leg.

Gulblomst now threw her blindweed at Mik, hoping to blind him so that he could not use his martial arts skills. But her throw missed. Martlet aimed a blow at his goon's abdomen, but it was parried. Fenric tinkered a blow off his opponent. Tor hit his man in the leg as did Tudor, though in the left arm. Mik, incredibly, missed his blow. Thingol's spell now went off. Three of the goons were Palsied in the head, left arm, and chest. Sorc now cast a Venom spell at six of us: Martlet, Fenric, Tor, Tudor, Alfaron, and Gulblomst. Only Martlet resisted. Fenric and Gulblomst were both killed by the Venom. They both failed a Divine Intervention to their appropriate deities.

Martlet and Tudor converged on Mik. Martlet managed to critical Mik in the chest. The Damage Resistance failed, but Martlet noticed that the blow did not seem to bite. Mik fell, nevertheless. Tudor hit him as he fell, but it bounced off the Damage Resistance. Fenric's goon dropped his spear and pulled out his kukri. Tor missed his man, as Thingol cast Neutralize Damage

on Alfarson. The wound in Mik's chest Healed over, the spell cast by a spirit undoubtedly bound to one of his tattoos.

One of the goons now came over to Mik to protect him. Martlet responded by hitting Mik in the abdomen. The Damage Resistance failed, but again the blow seemed to lose momentum. Alfarson, now up again, fired at Sorc. Both arrows, while in flight, changed course and hit the wooden pectoral he wore over his chest. Neither arrow penetrated. Again he fired, with the same results. The spirit again healed Mik and he was able to stand up.

Tor now threw his blindweed at Mik and managed to hit Mik's eyes, blinding him. Alfarson switched to firing at Mik, but both arrows bounced. Martlet missed as did the goon swinging at him. Mik punched wildly, and managed to hit Martlet. The blow bounced off his armor, though. Alfarson fired again, with predictable results. Thingol tried to cast Neutralize Magic on Mik's Damage Resistance, but failed.

Alfarson fired again, critically, then impaling Mik in the chest. Neither were affected by the Damage Resistance, and Mik fell. Martlet hit Mik, but bounced. The goon missed Martlet as well. Tor missed him man as did his goon. Tudor stabbed at Mik and penetrated the Damage Resistance to damage Mik's left leg. Alfarson missed Mik, but no one else was hit. Sorc now turned and fled.

Alfarson fired twice, but bounced. Martlet hit, but he too bounced. The goon hit Martlet and both his parry and the Damage Resistance failed, letting the blow land on his right leg. The goon then noticed something and turned away. Martlet noticed it too, and he said, "Dead." Tor hit his goon in the right leg. Tudor hit the fleeing goon in the left leg.

The goon broke through the group surrounding Mik as Martlet, trying to hit him, fumbled and lost his chest armor. The remaining goon shifted to Martlet, but the blow was stopped by the Damage Resistance. Tudor hit the goon, wounding him in the left leg.

The other goon, who was now crawling away, fell unconscious from loss of blood. Alfarson was able to get three shots off at Sorc. All three bounced. The last goon was assaulted by Martlet, Tudor, and Tor. Tudor's blow tinked, but not Martlet's nor Tor's. The goon fell dead.

Alfarson fired once more at Sorc. The blow penetrated the Damage Resistance, but was slowed as it hit. He ducked behind a hut and was out of sight. Alfarson, still under the influence of the Arrow Trance, fired at one of the unconscious goons, but the blow tinked. Far in the distance, out of sight, Sorc and his familiar elephant were hastily leaving the village.

The combat was over. After calming Alfarson, the people came out. General hit point healing packets were given to Tudor, Tor, and Alfarson. Regular healing was given to us by the villagers. The goons were tossed into the river.

Looting the bodies proved somewhat fruitful. Mik, it turned out, had a jelmre stone. The emotion it responded to was anger¹¹¹. In addition, there was the ring armor from the goons, plus 309 pennies, and 24 gold coins, somewhat lighter than a Wheel. The only other magical item as a matrix containing Befuddle. It was given to Gulblomst.

It turned out that one of the elder women of the village had use of Resurrect. Fenric, being a Humakti, could not be Resurrected. But both Gulblomst and Asmoufr could. After some discussion, Gulblomst was Resurrected. Three days, later, Asmoufr was also Resurrected, though he was but a pale shadow of his former self¹¹².

In the mean time, the villagers began construction of a large outrigger canoe that could take

¹¹¹ If invoked, it would double all physical characteristics.

¹¹² Having lost 9 STR, 5 CON, 5 DEX, and 3 APP.

us to Neuteboom. The villagers estimated that it would take a week to complete.

On Pamalt-day of the ninth week, an elephant was spotted in the jungle. It was obvious that this was Sorc. After a small discussion of whether or not we should attempt to kill him, a small strike team went out to attempt to assassinate him. The team consisted of Tor, Alfarson, Martlet and Gulblomst.

The tracks were easy to follow, and Tor led them through the jungle. Finally, in a large clearing, Tor pointed out a large gray object that had to be the elephant¹¹³.

As Alfarson cast a Silence Sphere around him, Gulblomst cast Befuddle at the elephant, overcoming it. Alfarson snuck up on the elephant and fired an arrow at it, which of course bounced off it.

All of a sudden, from out of the jungle came the real elephant. It grabbed Alfarson, who could not hear either it or their cries to watch out. Tor fired his bow, hitting the forequarters, but the elephant had a Damage Resistance around it. Martlet also fired, but tinked. Gulblomst then cast a boosted Befuddle, but the spell failed to penetrate the elephant's Spell Resistance.

Tor began to examine the surroundings, looking for signs of Sorc. Martlet fired twice, but the arrows bounced. The elephant then kneeled on Alfarson, utterly crushing his left leg. Gulblomst tried another, higher boosted Befuddle, but this too failed to reach the elephant. Tor then spotted Sorc in the underbrush almost directly behind the elephant.

He fired at Sorc, but the arrow was attracted to the wood and tinked. The elephant threw Alfarson into the nearby river, then looked around. Tor and Martlet both fired, but both tinked. Sorc had by now finished casting a spell, but it failed to go off.

Tor now brandished his spear and began to charge towards Sorc and the elephant. Martlet fired once more, saw it tink, then charged as well. Gulblomst now cast an extremely boosted Befuddle¹¹⁴ at the elephant. The spell punched through the Spell Resistance, but her magic points were so low that the spell did not affect the elephant. The elephant now began to head towards Gulblomst, and thus towards Tor and Martlet. Tor tried to dodge around the elephant and reach Sorc. The elephant tried to grab him as he went past, but failed. Martlet ducked into the underbrush to try to sneak around it.

Just as Tor reached Sorc, the elephant reached Tor. The elephant missed Tor, but not Tor. However, his blow tinked. It may have affected Sorc anyway, for he failed to cast his spell.

Gulblomst had by now pulled out her blowgun, being down to one magic point. She fired and hit Sorc, but the Damage Resistance around him stopped the dart. The elephant again failed to grab Tor as Tor again hit Sorc. But his blow tinked. Sorc now cast a smaller spell, Stupefaction, at Tor, but Tor had more Free INT than the Intensity of the spell. Martlet now charged out of the underbrush and hit Sorc in the head. The blow landed, and Sorc fell.

He swung at Sorc again, but the blow failed to penetrate. The elephant now picked up Sorc, either to Heal him, or to run away with him. But before the elephant could do anything more, Tor stabbed Sorc with his spear. The point went through Sorc's abdomen, killing him.

The elephant, now freed from Sorc's control, went berserk. As it threw Sorc's body into the jungle, both Tor and Martlet ran for their lives. The elephant began to chase Martlet into the jungle. Martlet tried to climb a tree, but the elephant pulled him off of the trunk. As the elephant began to kneel on him, he swung his sword, hitting the elephant's head. But it continued the process, and shattered his shield and right arm. In great pain, Martlet attempted to play dead.

¹¹³ Unbeknownst to him, Tor had fumbled his Scan roll and had pointed out a large rock.

¹¹⁴ Ten magic points!

Tor, observing what had transpired from his perch in a tree, fired on the elephant. The elephant now went over to the tree where Tor was sitting and began trying to push down the tree. Tor began to fire on the elephant, and after impaling it twice, the elephant, still fully sentient, left to heal itself.

Returning to the clearing, Gulblomst had stripped Sorc's body of his magic items. He had only the plank of wood and a 17 point magic point storing crystal. In addition, he was carrying 17 gold coins.

We never saw Alfarson again. Presumably he had drowned in the river after the elephant had thrown him in¹¹⁵. Returning to the village, we told them how they now no longer had to fear from someone taking them over. They still said that they wanted a protector, though. Since Alfarson had a total of 1900 pennies in his pack, it was decided that we would give the villagers 700 pennies if they would take us to Neuteboom, where they could hire a protector. This they agreed to.

The promised catamaran was done the next evening. We left the following morning.

¹¹⁵ This in fact, is what had happened.

Chapter 9

Neuteboom

The first two days on the ocean went relatively uneventfully. There were the usual sea creatures such as sharks and others, but none bothered us for very long.

Occasionally we would land on shore, either to refill our water supply or simply to stretch our legs. The sea was relatively calm, and we were happy.

But on the third day, Gata-day of the tenth week, disaster struck. While we were on shore, from out of the woods, a hail of arrows flew our way. One native was killed outright, others were injured. We managed to crawl back to the boat, and, while still under fire, pushed away from shore. Other than the one native, no one was killed, though we were all injured.

The very next day, we sailed within sight of an island. On it were tall gleaming spires made out of a translucent material. At the docks were ships made out of a black glass. Nevertheless, they too were translucent, though to a lesser degree. One of the ships had one of its sails being furled around the boom. But nowhere was there to be seen any people, not even on any of the ships.

Gulblomst told us of tales that she had heard, of an immortal and invisible people that lived on this island. Intrigued, we sailed slightly closer, ready to run if necessary. As we did so, we could see a crystalline bridge connecting the island to the nearby headland. Going even closer, Boo-boo could now distinguish sources of POW. They were all higher than his plus his fetch's.

We decided to leave this alone, since there was no telling what unknown dangers there might be. So we continued onwards for the day. And that evening, we could see the lights of a city ahead. The boats docked there looked normal.

We landed on the beach and hired someone to guard our boat. The two natives left us, presumably to try to hire someone to be their people's protector. The rest of us went into the city, Neuteboom. We found an inn and slept.

The next morning, we went to the local Issaries market and found Fusial. He was pleased to see us, and he still had the scepter. His offer was still valid, and for all those who accompanied us¹¹⁶. He said that he would leave in two days.

We showed Fusial all the stuff we had collected, but he seemed somewhat indifferent to them. He still had the shield that breathed fire, but he wanted an exorbitant price for it. We decided to hold off on trading for now.

The two days passed quickly. On Six-day of the tenth week of spring, we boarded the Liberty, a large cog.

Fusial was thinking of taking the ship up-river to the ruins that were nearby. The city had been destroyed long ago by elves, and they had planted guardians there. Fusial said that we should take the path of most resistance. Presumably, he said, there we would find the most potent anti-elf magic there. We declined the offer.

So instead, we set off towards the city of Wendo, two days away. We got to know Fusial's crew. One of them was a Hrestoli aspiring knight named Uller. He and Thingol got into some interesting theological arguments.

¹¹⁶ Room, board, 30% of what we get back, no working as a sailor, our decision on whether a job is too dangerous, unless we have done this too much.

After a small storm, we berthed in the port at Wendo. Fusial told us that there was an ancient agreement with the elves. The first time one went in, the elves would chop off one limb. A priestess would then cast Regrow Limb. Fortunately, Fusial had already gone through this initiation. He then picked up a huge sack and went inside the city. He said that he would be back tomorrow.

He came back late the next night, but we waited until morning before casting off.

Shortly after rounding the main tip of Elamle, on Pamalt-day, Fusial called us to his cabin.

“There is a giant Chaos monster called ‘The Mother of Monsters’, which walks along the coast nearby, with one set of legs in the water, the other on land. Every night it breeds some chaos monsters, depending on the tide. It takes the monster 70 to 80 days to complete its cycle all around the peninsula. Most of the cities on the coast are built far inland, for obvious reasons.

“I want you to kill one of the monsters that it breeds to get the stone in its head. I have heard that the stone has magical properties. One could turn a person invisible when placed in the mouth. Another could let a person fly.”

We asked how big these monsters were. Were they, say, bigger than the ship? “Not usually.” We also asked how many monsters it spawned at night. “Usually not more than a dozen.”

“Look, there it is in the distance!” shouted Fusial. We all followed his gaze. The beast was huge, towering over the eucalyptus trees that stood on the shore. It had four legs, but each leg was in the shape of a four-legged creature. On its back, many pairs of wings sprouted, too small to lift it.

“I only want you to kill the monsters that are shaped liked a toad. Only these have useful stones in their heads.”

We asked what kind of attacks this creature did. “Well, they can swallow everything in their path, which is, oh, say ten to twenty yards. Their skin is thick, with pustules on it. Oh, and watch out for the tentacle.”

Marvelous, we were thinking. We were supposed to kill what it took entire city militias to drive away! Could we perhaps use the shield that breathes fire? Sure, he said.

So that night we sailed out to sea to avoid the swimming monsters that were bred (“But it’s rare to meet a swimming one”). The next morning, we held a meeting. For this little bit of troubleshooting, we would be without our best fighter, Martlet, who was sick.

But Thingol had a good idea. He would invoke Hrestol’s blessing on himself, thus doubling his POW. Then, after twelve hours, his magic points would have regenerated to that level, whereupon we might be able to Palsy this creature in a vital spot. In addition, we would use the two packets of poison that Boo-boo had brewed long ago to coat crossbow bolts, arrows, and spear tips. Thingol’s crossbow would also have Speedart cast upon it, to help the bolt penetrate the skin of the beast.

So Thingol called upon Hrestol late that night. The next morning, Ga-day of the twelfth week, he was at full magic points¹¹⁷.

The Liberty sailed back towards shore with its ballista loaded and ready to fire. All of a sudden, a lookout spotted a monster in the sea, coming towards us. The sailors fired their ballista and hit it, whereupon the beast sank beneath the waves. They quickly reloaded the ballista.

¹¹⁷ Thirty-two to be precise.

Soon, another lookout spotted a monster on shore. “How big is it?” cried Fusial. “Two or three spans tall!”¹¹⁸ was the response. He turned to us and said, “You’re in luck. Its a midget.”

We landed in the ship’s boat. We could see the top of its head in the tall weeds growing on shore. The ship again fired its ballista, scoring on the monster. It ducked into the undergrowth.

We coated our arrows and slowly stalked the creature. Tudor carried the fire-breathing shield. We heard a great croak, and all of us felt chilled¹¹⁹. We then started to rush towards the sound.

It croaked twice more before we could see it. All we could see of it was a blue-colored back. On it were beach-ball sized bubbles. Boo-boo could see that its POW was higher than himself and his fetch combined. Each of the bubbles had a POW less than Boo-boo’s. Uller and Tor both fired and hit. Tudor got his bow string caught up in his helmet.

The monster croaked again, then it stood up and jumped the final twenty yards to engage us in melee. Tor fired a Firearrow that hit the creature’s chest. Thingol cast a Palsy, but even with his higher magic points, he failed to overcome the creature. The monster now swung its tentacle towards Thingol. He managed to dodge the blow, which left a foot-deep depression in the ground, then cracked back like a whip. Tor tinked his blow, but Uller critically hit it in the head. Despite this, it continued to fight.

Again it croaked. Uller managed to dodge the creature’s tentacle. Thingol, taking his crossbow from Gulblomst, fired and impaled the monster in the left claw. Its right claw grabbed Tudor around his right leg and lifted him into the air. Its mouth opened in a circle, then dropped towards Uller. Again he managed to Dodge the creature.

After the monster croaked yet again, Uller again criticised the monster in the abdomen. Tor shot a Firearrow and hit the creature. From his awkward vantage point, Tudor invoked the shield. A sheet of flame enveloped the monster’s right claw, chest, and left claw. It did not, however, drop Tudor. It did, though, pinch Tudor’s leg. It severed neatly, and Tudor fell to the ground, sorely injured. It bit at Gulblomst, but she dodged the blow. Uller and Tor both tinked as Thingol cast a Damage Resistance Intensity 8 on himself, Uller, Tor, and Boo-boo. The creature swung its tail, but missed entirely.

Again the monster croaked. Gulblomst began the process of healing Tudor. Two claws grabbed at Thingol. He Dodged the first, but not the second. Fortunately, the Damage Resistance saved his leg. Boo-boo grabbed the fire-breathing shield from the ground. Tor criticised the creature’s chest with another arrow. Why hadn’t the creature died yet¹²⁰?

After the croak, Uller impaled it in the chest again. The shield sputtered fire from Boo-boo’s command, and the flames licked over the abdomen and right leg of the creature. The claw closed around Thingol’s leg, but his Damage Resistance saved him. Tudor, healed somewhat, stood up just in time for the other claw to grab him around his left arm. Tor now criticised the creature, whereupon it fell over. Quickly, we made sure of it.

Before our eyes, the monster began a slow process of decomposition. We chopped through the skull, through the brain, and found the stone. It was a crystal about three inches long. As Tor picked it up, he instantly felt revived. But as soon as he wrapped it up, he was as tired as he was before.

While this was going on, Boo-boo and the others tried to deal with the bubbles on the creature’s back. Weapons simply passed through with no harm done to them. He then tried a

¹¹⁸ A span was the reach of a man’s arms, some six feet or so.

¹¹⁹ The croak of the creature causes anyone hearing it to lose 1D6 fatigue.

¹²⁰ We had done a total of 136 points of damage to it!

Disruption. It succeeded, and the bubble simply disappeared. He did this to nine of the remaining eleven. Tudor collected these two to take back to the ship.

Back on board, we discovered what the gem's properties were. Placed in one's mouth, one is immune to fatigue loss. Fusial tested this by having a seaman place it in his mouth, then run up and down the mast several times. He thought that this was a weak property, but then again, it was a weak monster, in his opinion. He was intrigued by the bubbles though.

Later that day, Fusial came to us all. He asked us to decide whether or not we wished to be rid of the scepter. He would give us a fair price now, so that we could use it in Sil-Pallo. He would sell the scepter to a trustworthy trader in Kimos who would, in turn, sell it to a trader who would sell it to the Doraddi, who would sell it to the Kresh. With them, it should be safe. He offered 7000 pennies. After a short discussion, we accepted.

Two days later, we arrived in Sil-Pallo. Two weeks from now, the monster would arrive. Thus, the houses were cheap tents. The carpenters here had the reputations of being the best and fastest. We would stay here until Fusial found out what the bubbles did.

On Six-day, Fusial came back to the ship angry. He had found out what the bubbles did. Their property was to absorb one offensive spell that overcomes the holder's magic points. Of course, he had to use one to determine its function. And we had destroyed ten of them on the creature's back. Live and learn.

Fusial said that we would stay here in Sil-Pallo for at least two weeks. So we enjoyed the dubious pleasures of Sil-Pallo.

Chapter 10

Kimos and Resurrection

On Empress-day of the third week of summer, we left for Kimos. The journey took three days and we arrived on Ga-day.

The mountains on the horizon were gray and uninviting. Storm clouds hovered ominously over the land. As we got closer, we could get a feeling that the coastline rocks and hills were not naturally formed.

This feeling was confirmed by the sight of a mountain some ten kilometers tall. It was in the shape of a spiral, and it angled over the city some 500 meters. It also contained POW. Boo-boo did not like to look at it for too long. There was a fort carved into the mountain itself.

Fusial called us around. This included a new member of our group, a man named Bevisric.

“We are going to be in Kimos for several weeks. I will be using the boat to conduct my trading. You can come with me if you wish, or you can stay ashore. If any of you do come, you will all keep a sharp lookout for small boats, about the size of a rowboat. If you see one, tell me immediately so that we can steer away from it because there will be gorgers in it. You will receive one gold piece for doing this. If any of you feel ill or such, also tell me. That’s a sure sign that gorgers are near.”

We asked about the mountain, recalling the phrase, “War-torn Kimos.”

“Well, humans made it, but I don’t know what for exactly. I’m sure it helps with their war with the gorgers. See, from what I can figure out, the humans have a certain pattern that they are trying to make and so do the gorgers. Unfortunately, the patterns are mutually exclusive. So the people of Kimos use volcanoes and earthquakes to disrupt the gorgers’ pattern, and they use tidal waves and wind storms to do the same to the human’s pattern. One of their more impressive feats was to cause the clouds to fill the sky for a whole year. A lot of plants died that year.”

All of us decided that Fusial’s plan to sail out to sea 100 kilometers before heading to the next port, though it was safe, was going to be boring. Thus, we disembarked and looked for a place to stay while Fusial made his deals here.

The harbor was artificial and had a war tower on the end of the one long pier. The city itself consisted of seven long, wooden barracks. We were shown the way to the barracks especially for housing foreigners.

After a few hours, Fusial came to us. He would no longer go on his long sea voyages. Instead, he would have a magic stone keel put onto the ship. This keel could propel the ship by itself if there was no wind. The process of installing the keel would take several weeks. We were on our own until then.

We looked around the city, and decided to try our hand at trading for items. So we went to the barracks that contained items that the people here traded away.

The items that we wanted to acquire most were spell matrices. However, most of the matrices and items were in large stone blocks. The smallest of these weighed about 20 kilograms.

They, however, were very keen to acquire matrices for themselves. Though none of them were sorcerers, those were the kind that they most wanted. We asked about this seeming anomaly and the man there showed us the smallest of the spell stones. This was a stone column about ten feet tall. Matrices were put into a hollow in the column, whereupon the stone itself cast the spell!

One of the more unique items he had for sale was a long stone spear or lance. The tip was truncated, but where it would have been was a point that was extremely hot. It started fires easily, and he told us of using it against a creature to burn its insides despite the spear not penetrating into the creature itself.

However, we decided that perhaps the most useful things we could get here would be iron. So we struck a deal with the trader. For the making of two Neutralize Magic matrices by Thingol, plus three regular healing packets, he would trade us an iron bastard sword. In addition, for another five general healing packets, he would give us a scabbard that automatically repaired one point of damage, no matter how repaired it had already been. Uller used his own money to buy an iron short sword.

So for the next two weeks, Thingol was engaged in Enchanting rituals to make the matrices.

Boo-boo tried only once to go onto the Spirit Plane. The only time he did he was attacked by a wraith. He managed to defeat it, but it was a close call. When he mentioned this, the trader told him that it was the gorgers that sent the wraiths and other things to kill off the human shamans.

Finally, on Gata-day of the sixth week, the matrices were finished. We gave them the matrices and other material and received the sword and scabbard in return.

In addition, the trader made another offer. He told us that it was possible that Gorfang, his soul still residing in the key, could be remade! The possibility was intriguing. But the price was high.

Mister Man cast Mindlink on the key and was able to establish communication with Gorfang. We asked him whether he wanted to take the chance. He said yes. So for a nine point magic point storing crystal, the four Soul Waste healing packets, two more general hit point healing packets, enough fire-proof wood for 45 arrows, and 2000 pennies, they would do it.

That night, we descended into the corkscrew mountain. Deep down in the roots of the mountain, we came upon a huge chamber. In the middle of it was a huge beam of energy. After a short ceremony, the priest tossed the key high into the beam.

As the key struck the beam, a brilliant ball of light took its place. Slowly, the ball descended towards the ground. When it finally touched the ground, it dimmed, then extinguished. And from out of the beam walked Gorfang!

Or rather, what Gorfang thought he looked like. Apparently, the mind of the person reconstructed his or her own body from their memories and impressions. Gorfang had drawn on his impressions about himself and his body and this had influenced his reconstruction.

He was now much shorter than he used to be, perhaps a meter tall. He was hugely muscled though slightly clumsy, perhaps due to the different musculature. He was also more handsome¹²¹.

And what of the key? It never came out of the beam. But Gorfang now looked slightly ruddier, as if some of the key's color or perhaps substance had gone into making his new body. But that was a small price to pay for having him alive again.

The last thing he remembered was the elf ambush, almost exactly a season ago. He wanted to know what happened to his weapons and armor. Well, we said, we had buried you in your armor, since it would fit no one else, and since nobody could really handle your crossbow, we sort of buried it too.

Early the next morning, we left Kimos bound for Banamba, a province of Fonrit. We got

¹²¹ The following changes had been made to his statistics: STR +3, CON +2, SIZ -4, DEX -2, APP +3.

there one week later, on Empress-day. Along the waterfront was a whole row of houses. One of them was noteworthy: "Sorcerers for hire: Statistics enhanced long-term". To make a long story short, Boo-boo made a Bind Power Spirit Enchantment in return for Gorfang's SIZ being enhanced by four points for four years.

It was here that Fusial sold the scepter. He got a good deal and he gave us our share of the excess profit: 3000 pennies. With the trader that had the scepter went Mister Man. He declared that he would accompany the scepter until it reached its final destination. None of us were exactly sorry to see him go, but life would be much duller without him around. And we all had a sinking feeling that perhaps we would see him again.

On Ga-day, we left for Fonrit proper. On the following Ga-day, we arrived at the walled city of Tondiji in the province of Kareeshtu.

We walked off the ship with Fusial and three sailors and headed towards the harbormaster. Tor had declined to come with us for he went with some of the other sailors.

As we walked along a dirt road, we had just noticed that the street was remarkably quiet for such an obviously large city.

Just as this observation was made, the thrum of bowstrings and crossbows split the air.

Chapter 11

Ambush and Plight

From our left came two Firearrows that hit Fusial in the chest and abdomen. From the right came two crossbow bolts. One hit Thingol in his right arm, the other Gorfang in his right leg. A Venom spell targeted itself on Martlet from the right. The intensity was 14, but he resisted the effects. Then, another Firearrow hit one of the sailors in the abdomen. Still another hit Boo-boo in the abdomen. Finally, eight people, some of them half-naked, came out of the small fort-like building on our left. They wielded a mixture of weapons.

Two arrows hit Bevisric, both in the left leg, felling him. The sailor that had fallen had his throat slit by one of the men. As Gulblomst began Healing Boo-boo, Martlet parried a blow from an axe-wielding woman. Just after that, he parried a blow intended for Gorfang, who was Healing himself, and damaged the man's spear. Uller dodged a rapier-wielding woman (who was fully clothed) as the other sailors and swordsmen missed each other. Asmoufr and his opponent also missed each other. Another spell flew through the air, hitting Thingol and Palsying his head, chest, and left leg. Two more arrows flew, but missed.

Tudor now began to head over towards the crossbowmen, his shield held high. One crossbow bolt slammed into his shield, but a bowman did manage to hit Tudor's right arm. The other crossbowman missed Bevisric, but an arrow did hit Bevisric in the chest as he tried to Heal himself and crawl away from the melee. Gorfang tried to Demoralize his opponent, but failed to cast the spell. The man attacking him missed. Martlet swung at the axe-woman and sliced her left leg off. Another man engaged Martlet, but was parried. Uller swung at his opponent, who was obviously a leader of some sort, but she dodged the blow. Her riposte punctured his abdomen. Asmoufr and his opponent again missed each other as did the sailors and swordsmen, one of which had his helmet slide over his eyes. Just as Bevisric had Healed his leg, another arrow penetrated his abdomen. The final arrow hit Boo-boo, who had stood up after Gulblomst had Healed him again, but it only hit his leg.

Another spell ripped through the air and killed a sailor as he fought¹²². More arrows flew, killing a sailor in the abdomen. Gorfang parried as he stood up, and in return his mangled his opponent's right leg. Martlet now engaged his other foe and landed a blow on his abdomen. On the ground, Uller was hit again by his enemy, but he still survived. Gulblomst now found herself engaged in melee by one of the enemy, but her foe missed as she nimbly Dodged. Asmoufr and his opponent continued to slice air. Tudor, who had worked his way to an entrance to the paddock where the crossbowmen were stationed found himself facing a man wielding a sword and wearing an eye patch. The two of them traded blows to no effect. Arrows flew towards Tudor, but bounced off the wall next to him. Boo-boo failed to cast a Disruption.

Three missiles flew towards Boo-boo. One crossbow bolt and one arrow missed, but the last crossbow bolt went straight through his right arm. The last arrow missed Bevisric. As Thingol shook free of the Palsy spell, his first sight was of the enemy sorcerer standing over him, ready to use his scimitar should Thingol try to cast a spell. One of the men headed in Bevisric's direction. Martlet engaged another opponent and laid open the man's chest, killing him. Gorfang parried a blow, but his return was a miss. Gulblomst, who was now engaged two on one managed to dodge one and parried the blow of the other with her blowgun. Asmoufr finally managed to land a blow just as his opponent managed to parry it. The final arrows missed.

Unbeknownst to the rest of us, the enemy sorcerer had forced Thingol to his feet and, scimitar at his neck, began leading Thingol away. One of the men tried to jump over Uller's prone body to engage Gorfang, but he wound up falling over Uller, whereupon Gorfang snapped his left arm. Martlet managed to land a blow despite the woman's dodge and sliced off her left leg. She fell

¹²² Venom 16.

on the man Gorfang had wounded and killed him. Gulblomst tried a Disruption on her opponent and was rewarded when the man fell over as his right leg crumpled beneath him. Asmoufr finally managed to land a blow to his opponent's right arm. Tudor was hit by the man and his right leg was severed. The man over by Bevisric began robbing him.

By now the bowmen had jumped down off of their high perch and tried to get away. Gorfang, noticing Thingol's disappearance began to head over to where he had been. As he did so, one of the crossbowmen fired at him. The blow hit his head and he fell, dazed. The last man still on his feet surrendered. The rest, including the last crossbowmen and the two bowmen, escaped.

Fusial was dead, victim of two Firearrows to vital locations. We healed the party, reattaching Tudor's leg, and began interrogating the survivors. The girl was the only person who had a special mark on her. This we inferred, was to mark her a free person, since there were so many slaves! She told us only that they all worked for the owner of the tannery, whose name was Narusa. Narusa had made everybody else besides the ambushing party clear the street.

Thingol's disappearance was now noticed, especially after Gorfang had been revived. After a quick discussion, he along with Uller, Gulblomst, and Bevisric, who was minus his weapons, shoes and belt, would try to track the kidnapper. The rest, Martlet, Boo-boo, Asmoufr, and Tudor would bring the prisoners and Fusial's body back to the ship. We would all meet back aboard ship.

As they returned to the ship, they noticed that all over the ship were men wearing black livery. Asking, we learned that they were city militia. Whatever they were, they were crawling over the ship, as well as removing items from the hold.

Martlet was dead set against going back on board, but Boo-boo insisted and got his way. As they tried to board, two soldiers on the gangplank asked if they were with the ship. They replied in the affirmative and were told to come on board. They were interviewed by the captain of the guard who asked if they were all outlanders. They said yes, and tried to tell the story of the ambush. He cut them off, asking if they had any unregistered shamans, sorcerers, or priests. Again, they said yes. He told them all to come with him, which they did.

They disembarked and went to a tower of one of the walls. They were told that they would be questioned upstairs and told to leave all their weapons and metal armor downstairs. This they did. They were escorted upstairs, but the two natives, the girl and the one who had surrendered were taken into a different room. They were asked basic questions and Boo-boo was registered as a Class 1 shaman — no threat.

They were also asked who their owner was. Since they did not wear the mark of a free person, this was a logical question for them to be asked. They replied that they were employed, but that sadly, he had died.

Then, from another room came four guards with shackles. "You're going to jail", was the explanation. "Hold out your hands."

Meanwhile, the other four had mixed luck trying to track down Thingol's kidnappers. They had successfully tracked the criminal until his tracks joined a cobbled road with many people traveling it. So, sadly, they abandoned their search and went back to the ship.

Just as they got there, they saw the other four being led off of the ship. Suspicious, they followed them, trying to attract no attention to themselves. Though slowed by Uller having to get a sword knot (to keep it tied into his scabbard), and Gorfang's shield being confiscated (though getting a receipt for recompense), Gulblomst managed to trail behind them and watched as they went into the tower.

Horrified, the four watched as the others, including the rapier-wielding woman were led out in shackles. They quickly fell in behind the guards escorting them. The four followed them as they

went through the city, down a long row of temples to various deities, crossed a bridge and went through a gate house, and finally in through a gate with very tall walls — the jail.

Since they knew next to nothing about the city, they decided to split up and try to find out more about the town. They would meet near sundown.

When they met back up again, they had found out very little. Some of the more interesting things were: that there three dwarfs who lived in the city; that outside the city was a place called the City of the Dead, a necropolis; and that we should try to find the judge who sentenced the others at the Citadel of Law. But since it was near sundown and all the city gates closed then, they decided to try to find the judge tomorrow.

The next day, they waited for Judge Eks, who was on duty at the time the others had been arrested. While they waited, they learned something about the politics of the city.

The person in charge of the city was called the Bey. The Bey is himself the slave of the high ruler of Kareeshtu. All of the police heads in Tondiji are the Bey's slaves. The men under these police chiefs are their slaves and so on down the chain of command. This leads to all sorts of political intrigues.

Of course there are some people in the city who are owned by nobody. Narusa, the owner of all the leather works in the city, for instance, was not a slave.

All sentencing takes place at the Citadel of Law. Since the others had not been taken to the Citadel of Law, they wondered whether they had actually been sentenced or not. Their source remarked that if the Bey had hired Narusa to set the ambush, then they would have gone to a judge. It sounded like it was someone with less power than the Bey.

Finally we got to see Judge Eks. We told him our story, beginning with the ambush, and ending with the others landing in jail. He asked who had done the sentencing. We told him that as far as we knew, they had never seen a judge. He asked where we were from, whether we had ever been here before, and whether anybody with us was rich.

After we had answered the questions, he sat and thought for a while. Since we wanted to know under what charge they had been imprisoned, he told us to go with a guard so that we could find out.

We went with the guard, whose name was Denalma, to the jail. We learned that Boo-boo and the others were being housed in the level for magicians. The sentence was for life, there was no charge. And, the sentencing judge was listed as Judge Eks!

The turnkey mentioned that it was interesting that they hadn't been sold as slaves instead, since that was usually what happened to those who would receive life sentences.

We asked Denalma if it was possible to see Judge Eks again today. He said that sentencing was finished for today, but that sometimes he might meet petitioners outside the Citadel when the day was over. And since he was one of the guards who kept the petitioners at bay, we might not find his pike in the way for some inducement. This we gave him.

Gorfang was more interested in meeting one of the dwarfs in the city, so he left to find Ironhand Thorin-owned.

The other three went back to the Citadel to try to meet Judge Eks again. When he came out of the Citadel, Gulblomst was not blocked by Denalma. She went to Judge Eks and, acting slightly hysterical and pleading, begged him to help. Judge Eks said that he would give her five minutes of his time at the Hall of Justice.

They went there and Gulblomst retold what the turnkey had said. Judge Eks thought for a moment.

“It sounds like there has been some private enterprise going on here.” He explained that when citizens are arrested, the gate soldiers take the prisoner to a judge, who passes sentence. The guards then take the prisoner to the jail, where the turnkey carries out the sentence. It sounded, to him, as though the turnkey and the soldiers themselves were blameless, merely following orders. Perhaps it was the guard captain who perpetrated the deed?

He told us to meet him tomorrow morning at the Hall of Justice where they would all go together and confront the guard captain.

That night, we met up with Tor, who had not come with us when we had disembarked, but had rather gone with some of the other sailors. They had returned to see the ship being searched and its cargo confiscated and so melted into the city for the time being. We brought Tor up to date on the situation.

The next morning, as we waited in front of the Hall of Justice, we suddenly saw a group of guards come running towards the Hall, all out of breath. We suspected bad news.

It was even worse. Judge Eks was dead. He had been assassinated as he had crossed one of the bridges by a figure that flew up to the bridge and fired a crossbow bolt at him, killing him. A guard captain, not the same one as before, came to us and asked us what part we had played in this.

In the captain’s office, we related the whole story. He asked in particular when we related the ambush, whether any of us was obviously a sorcerer. Since Thingol was, we said yes.

When we finished, he sat back and thought. Finally, he said, “Until the judge has been Resurrected, there is no way we can verify your story. He should be Resurrected by tomorrow morning. Perhaps you should stay here tonight as guests, not prisoners. This we accepted.

Late that night, or perhaps early in the morning, the guard Denalma came to us, furtively.

“I’ve got really bad news. The resurrecting priestess is dead. She was found dead floating in on the tide. Her acolytes and initiates are all dead too. So who was it then who went inside the temple supposedly to resurrect Judge Eks? His body was scattered and his head taken; there’s no hope that it could be resurrected.

“Now I’m not a rich man, and this is none of my business. But it seems to me that someone who can impersonate a Chalana Arroy priestess is bad news. The Captain of the Guard will want to keep you around. I think you’ll be killed if you stay where you’re officially known.”

We asked him if he could help us ‘escape’, since we were not officially imprisoned. He remarked, “That’s where my being a poor man come in.” We gave him 5 pennies. He took us to our weapons, where we armed and cloaked ourselves in black cloaks. Then he took us to the main gate and we left.

Later that morning, we debated what to do. If a Chalana Arroy priestess was killed by our mysterious opponent, could he or she or it also get to our comrades inside the jail? And what about Thingol? If we spent time trying to find him, would that give our opponent time to kill Boo-boo and company? Or if we broke them out of jail, how could we hope to search for Thingol, since we would have to hide out until the furor over the jailbreak died down?

Good sense prevailed, and we laid plans to break our friends out of jail.

Chapter 12

The Great Escape

The rest of the day Gulblomst, Bevisric, Uller, Gorfang, and Tor plotted how they would break their friends out of prison. After a long discussion, they decided that Bevisric would attempt to scale the walls by himself some time before midnight. The rest of them would wait at the inn until midnight, when they would make fresh plans depending on how much trouble Bevisric was able to cause.

During this discussion, Tor tried to find his first wife. He asked the serving girl to marry him, but that he would have to buy her from the innkeeper, she being a slave. The innkeeper named a price of 500 pennies, which Tor did not have. A younger girl was offered at a price of 300 pennies, but again he did not have that much. Oh well.

Before midnight, Bevisric crept up to the prison walls and began to climb. He managed to gain the top, but just as he looked over the top to see if it was clear, he heard voices nearby. He crouched against the wall as best he could, but a guard spotted him anyway. Vaulting over the top of the wall, he dodged the guard's halberd, drew his dagger and engaged the guard. The other guard jammed his halberd in the stone wall, but Bevisric's strike failed to penetrate his armor.

He then noticed that four more guards were coming his way. He quickly ran away, readying his bow at the same time. Suddenly he turned and let loose arrows. He managed to hit two of them before the rest overpowered him.

At midnight, the others were at the base of the prison walls. Gorfang would scale the prison walls, then drop a rope to the others. This he did. When he reached the top, he could sense that there were no guards nearby. He anchored the rope and signaled for the others to start climbing.

When the guards got too close, Gorfang Befuddled them. He had to Befuddle one of the two when that guard shook it off. Finally, all had made it to the top.

They dispatched the two guards, one by slitting his throat, the other by throwing him off the wall. Uller put on one of the guards' armor, which just fitted him. Another guard approached, but saw through the deception. Gorfang Befuddled him, then knocked him unconscious, but not before the guard had cried a warning. Three more guards came, and Uller, Gorfang, and Tor engaged them. Gulblomst blew a Firearrow, but hit Uller in the leg, knocking him down.

Gorfang was staggered by a blow to the head. Uller, who had healed himself, mangled both his opponent's arms, whereupon he ran away. Tor impaled his spear through another guard's arm, knocking him out of the combat for the moment. Gulblomst blew another Firearrow at the remaining guard, but missed. He attempted to run away through Gulblomst. She blew another Firearrow, but missed again. The guard then hit her with the flat of his blade, knocking her out.

Two more guards had arrived, and Tor and Uller engaged them. Uller fumbled once, slashing his leg, but he killed one of them with a critical to the head. Then the guard that Tor had previously put out of action came back into the fray. He ran right into Uller's blow, killing him. Tor then planted his spear through his guard, putting him out of action.

Since Gorfang had been hurt badly, it was decided that he and Gulblomst, who was no fighter, would return to the inn. Uller, still wearing his guard uniform, went towards the guard room at the top of the wall. Tor followed behind in the shadows.

As Uller entered the guard room, he was attacked by a guard. The blow missed, and Uller quickly silenced him with a blow to the chest. Tor noticed more guards on the walls armed with crossbows. They conferred briefly, then started a fire in the guard room to cause confusion. Then

they descended inside the tower and Tor set out stealthily to cross the courtyard.

Just as he did, a spell ripped through the air and hit Tor. He was Palsied in the chest, head, and twice in the left arm. A voice, presumably the caster, called for Uller to haul the new prisoner into another tower.

Uller dragged Tor into the tower, where a sorcerer and two guards were waiting. Suddenly Uller attacked the sorcerer, smashing the sorcerer's chest. The two guards then engaged him.

Tor valiantly tried to shake off the Palsies and managed to shake off three of the four. As he did, Uller managed to put the two guards out of action, killing one, just as two more guards entered. Both he and Tor engaged the two, whereupon they quickly put them out of action.

Now they decided on a different approach. Uller and Tor would pretend that they were guard and prisoner. They descended into the prison. Encountering ten unarmed guards, Uller told them that he was taking his prisoner to the magic detention level, and also told them of some kind of disturbance going on at the surface. Five of them went upstairs to investigate, the others first bound Tor, picked up wicked-looking halberds, then accompanied Tor and Uller to the cells.

After going down some stairs, and along a hallway with rooms off of the hallway, they reached the cell room, a large circular room with cells along the perimeter. The cells were barred and locked. Inside one of them were Boo-boo, Martlet, Asmoufr, and Tudor!

Also inside a cell was Bevisric, sullen. He had been brought here by the guards. Apparently he had been irritating to the guards, for they had beaten him, then liberally doused him with offal.

The five other guards left Tor in the care of the cell keeper, who had a chair and a strange pile of lead balls next to it. He was a hulk of a man, two meters of solid muscle. Tor was placed in a cell, but just as the jailer closed the cell door, Uller attacked him. He missed. The jailer yelled for help, then ran towards his chair, with Uller close behind.

Tor quickly extricated himself with the key, then threw it towards Boo-boo's cell. They freed themselves at the same time as the five guards came back down into the room. They didn't, however, free Bevisric! The jailer had reached his pile of balls and threw one at Uller. It scored with devastating force, but Uller parried the blow.

The five guards had formed a line as the four piled out and moved to engage. Boo-boo threw the key towards another cell, but it fell short and he had to go retrieve it.

Meanwhile, the jailer threw another ball, but Uller dodged it and missed his return blow. Asmoufr quickly stepped inside his opponent's reach as did Martlet. Tor was missed, then was able to pick up the spear that Uller had quickly rolled towards him. Tudor failed to dodge and the halberd penetrated his right leg. The guard dropped it and pulled out his kukri. The jailer now used his fists. They did far more damage than they should have, but Uller fought the two guards. He put one out of action with a blow to the head, but was also hit in return.

Asmoufr was hit in the head and fell. Tudor pulled the halberd out and started to heal. Uller again dodged the jailer's punch, but his return blow bounced off the jailer's armor. A sorcerer had been released from his cell and he immediately began casting a spell. Apparently the cells had some kind of magic-inhibiting material, preventing any spells from passing through the cell door. Boo-boo went on to the next cell.

Martlet was knocked unconscious as he moved to grapple his opponent. Tor, fighting two on one, was missed. The guard who had knocked Asmoufr out headed towards the freed sorcerers. One of them Teleported away. The other yelled, "Everyone drop your weapons!" Uller and Tor, thinking that the sorcerer would help, did so. The spell Stupefied all the guards except the jailer, who continued to pound at Uller, who kept dodging.

Uller now picked up his weapon, causing the sorcerer to cry, "Don't cut him!" Another sorcerer had been released, who began a spell. The first sorcerer told Boo-boo not to release any more sorcerers, for one of the remaining two was a vampire, and he was not telling Boo-boo which was which. Uller again dodged the jailer's blows, who was then Stupefied. The other sorcerer changed into a bird and flew out of the cell room.

The sorcerer then told us, "Let's go. I have a plan." After releasing Bevisric, they all left the cell room and down the hall. Except, that is, for Tudor. He had died from his wound. The sorcerer told them that there would be guards waiting at the top of the stairs leading out of the lower level. When he asked who the worst fighter was, Asmoufr raised his hand. The sorcerer told him not to resist the coming spell.

Suddenly, Asmoufr was about 30 centimeters tall¹²³. Placing him on Uller's back, he told Asmoufr to Heal Uller when he got in trouble.

Replenishing his magic points by Tapping a guard's POW, he said that we should try to make our escape up the stairs. "Ordinarily, I'd Teleport out of here, but they've strung fine poisoned wires all through my Homing Circle."

Armed with the guard's halberds, and wearing their armor, if it fit, they made their charge up the stairs. And ran right into some arbalest bolts.

Martlet was hit in the abdomen and died. His body over-balanced Boo-boo and he pulled his leg as he fell. Reaching the top, there were three guards with halberds besides the two arbalest-wielding guards. Uller engaged two of them. The first he dodged, the second he didn't. He was gutted, and died.

Bevisric managed to slip inside a guard's reach at the same time as the sorcerer cast a spell, warping all of the guard's halberds. Then, when Bevisric tinked, the sorcerer shouted to retreat. This they did, and they were not followed.

They appeared to be truly stuck now. After locking the guards into the cells, the sorcerer verified that his Homing Circle was trapped.

They set up in a defensive posture in case the guards tried an attack. There they sat, waiting for inspiration. If Boo-boo had enough magic points to be able to Disincorporate, he might be able to find Gorfang and Gulblomst and they might be able to clear out the Homing Circle.

Morbidly, the sorcerer noted that since slaves aren't put in jail, if Boo-boo and company claimed to be the sorcerer's slaves, then when they were recaptured they wouldn't be put back in the magical detention area. Boo-boo pointed out that since they weren't even guilty of a crime that his reasoning was flawed.

Then the sorcerer had an idea. There was a tub in one of the rooms in the hall. It had to have a drain, and people small enough could negotiate that drain. But the amount of magic points it would take to Diminish everyone!

By Tapping the remaining guard's POW, plus Asmoufr volunteering part of his own soul, the sorcerer was able to get enough magic points to do the job.

But someone had to stay behind to put the tub back in place and to stall any pursuit for as long as possible. It was decided that Bevisric would do so.

First Tor, then Asmoufr, then Boo-boo, then finally the sorcerer himself shrunk and disappeared down the drain. Boo-boo had taken with him a wood splinter that hefted much like a

¹²³ His SIZ had been Diminished to 1!

spear. The sorcerer's last words to Bevisric were, "Tell them that we Teleported out. And you'll know when they come when you hear the chains."

Tor quickly went as fast as possible, and he was soon separated from the other three. Asmoufr, in front, heard the squeak of a rat. Boo-boo gave his splinter to Asmoufr, who readied it. Boo-boo, by virtue of his Second Sight ability, saw the rat. He cast Disruption at it, and it died. A few centuries later, he did it again. And again, from behind.

They took the first crack in the drainpipe, but it led to a dead end, where there was a rat's nest. Finally, they met a beetle near another crack. Boo-boo failed to Disrupt it, and the beetle's mandible snapped off Asmoufr's splinter. Then Boo-boo Disrupted and killed it.

Realizing that beetles lived near the surface, they took the crack where the beetle had come from. Finally, they came to a solid wood obstruction. But to get to it, they would have to cross a trail of ants.

The sorcerer cast Form/Set Wood and made a hole in it. Then they ran through the ant trail and climbed through the wood. They found themselves atop a plank of wood. Above them was the night sky. They had escaped.

Book Five— The Exploration

Chapter 1 The City of the Dead

The three of them now went back towards the inn where they had stayed and where hopefully Gorfang and Gulblomst would be. Along the way, they found Tor, who had managed to gain his way to the surface.

They did indeed find them at the inn. The first thing they did was find clothes for when the spell wore off, they would be naked. Second thing was to think about Bevisric. The sorcerer said that now would not be the best time to try to rescue him, for the guards would be looking for the four of them.

Finally, the spell wore off, and the sorcerer said good-bye. He said that he was going to find a safe place to rest and regenerate magic points. He left us with a thought: “You should realize that a guard captain was paid a lot of money to grossly miscarry justice in a way that would get him killed if it were discovered.”

The day dawned, Witch-day of the ninth week of summer, and the group laid plans to escape the city. For Gorfang and Gulblomst, it would be easy, For Asmoufr, Boo-boo, and Tor, since they were escaped fugitives, it would be harder. They decided that they would try to climb over the walls as soon as darkness fell.

In the mid-morning, someone knocked on the door. It was a man that Gorfang recognized as an initiate at the Orlanth temple. His name, the man said, was Harvard. (“The first ‘r’ is silent”) He had observed Gorfang when he had gone through the different temples, trying to get help to fight the miscarriage of justice. He was here to help us.

We explained the situation from the time we landed. He seemed reluctant to help us find Thingol, but he did say that he would help us try to right the wrong done to us.

At dusk, they went to the walls. Gorfang climbed up first, then he pulled Boo-boo up. When Harvard was climbing, a small crowd of children began throwing stones at him. Distracting them with money, the rest managed to get over the wall.

Going to a slum district, we reached the outer walls. As we were about to climb up, Asmoufr noticed the sorcerer a distance away, ready to Fly over the walls. We attracted his attention and asked him if he could help us yet again.

He asked if they were willing to become his slaves. No, they said. Then he asked if they would be willing to undertake an expedition to the City of the Dead. They might, was the reply.

The sorcerer agreed. He said he was low on magic points, so he would Fly himself to his tower, then he would come back to get them. So, he flew over the walls and disappeared. Some ten minutes later, what should come over the walls and land near us but a wyvern!

Ferrying them one at a time, they found themselves at the sorcerer’s tower. The door, if it could be called that, was a black block of stone that dilated as the sorcerer approached it, then closed up again when they had passed through.

He led them to a table, where they all sat. “Now tell me why you broke into the prison.” This they did.

The sorcerer went over to a trunk, pulled out a crystal ball and went into a trance, his lips mumbling. When he came out of it, he told them that he had been talking to the warden of the prison.

“It seems that he has some problems of his own. His watch sorcerer was found dead not an hour after you escaped. Someone was impersonating him. From what you’ve told me about your adventure, this would seem to be the deed of either a well-organized band of lesser sorcerers, or that of one very competent sorcerer. But why would anyone want you this badly? Why not just kill you and be done with it?”

They were reluctantly forced to admit that it could have been the owner of the scepter that Boo-boo and friends had stolen long ago in the swamps. This they told to the sorcerer.

“If I was this person, I would definitely want it back. And it is obvious that it would come to Fonrit, where the money is. This person must have a contact. I would lay good odds that this person is working in alliance with the King of the Dead.”

Asking who the King of the Dead is and what the City of the Dead is, the sorcerer told us the story. Back in the Second Age, when the Six-Legged Empire ruled, there was a city. It was very magical and very famous. The builders had placed it atop a hill. They didn’t know it was a volcano. At the end of the Age, the volcano erupted. Lava poured through the city, covering it completely, but leaving the subterranean areas intact, though buried even more. Now, people go to the city to, shall we say, mine it. The people who live there claim to be the descendants of the original inhabitants. The King of the Dead is some kind of being. Nobody knows what he or she really is. There are also ordinary robbers who live there too. If you pay them, they will let you go in. If you come out with treasure, they will try to kill you.

The sorcerer’s deal was this. They would go into the City to try to find magical items. It would be split in half upon their return. This they agreed to.

He asked Boo-boo if he was the leader. He replied that he was. The sorcerer then went to a glass jar and pulled out a creature that looked something like a giant centipede and tape worm. It also had claws. “This is Zuzu. You’ll like him.” And he threw the creature at Boo-boo. It landed on Boo-boo’s abdomen, where it burrowed into his flesh like lightning. Then the wound sealed up.

“Zuzu won’t harm you unless you get too far away from me. Then he uses those claws you saw.” Boo-boo was enraged at the sorcerer, but he was adamant. “All you have to do is come back with the treasure, and I’ll remove him.”

With a monetary advance of 700 pennies, he told them to purchase whatever supplies they needed. They spent the next three days shopping and resting. Boo-boo managed to convince the sorcerer to give him something in exchange for having Zuzu inside him. The sorcerer gave him a Binding Enchantment containing a pain spirit.

On Gata-day of the tenth week, the sorcerer appeared with Bevisric! He then told us his tale. About ten minutes after the others had left, he heard a noise of chains rattling. With his halberd in hand, hiding to ambush the first person who came within reach, he was shocked to see a manacle and chain rattling along the floor, making sniffing noises!

As another one came in sight, he swung at the first chain and made a dent in it. Then it jumped up and wrapped around his neck. Another five came into the room just as the second one wrapped around his left arm. Though Bevisric managed to get one of them off, the rest hopelessly entangled him.

Into the room came the warden. The other ends of the chains were at his belt. “Where are the rest?” he demanded of Bevisric.

“My master Teleported out,” was his response. The warden cast two spells at him and asked again. “They went down the drain,” was his response¹²⁴.

With the chains still entangling him, he was put back into his cell. Later, a sorcerer came down to question him. “What have you got to say for yourself?” Bevisric blew him a raspberry.

“Who’s your master?”

“Fred.”

“How long has he been your master?”

“For about a year.”

“Why didn’t you tell us you were his slave?”

“So that I could be with him and help him escape.”

The questions continued and Bevisric got more and more facetious. Finally the sorcerer said to the guards, “Heal him, then hit him.” Then they took him to another cell not on the magic level.

For the next three days, he had worked on a chain gang. Then, on Gata-day, a sudden cloud of darkness engulfed him and a few of the slaves chained next to him. The next thing he knew, he was freed of the chain and placed in a pocket. The sorcerer had Diminished his SIZ, then substituted a mandrake in his place.

Later that day, Boo-boo captured a shade while wandering on the Spirit Plane. On that day too, they convinced a Humakti mercenary to join with them. His name was Geraldon.

The next evening, they prepared themselves for the descent into the City of the Dead. The sorcerer said that he would cast one spell for each of them. Boo-boo, Harvard, and Gulblomst took Damage Resistance, Geraldon, Tor, and Gorfang Damage Boost, and Asmoufr an Enhance Strength and Enhance Dexterity. Asmoufr got two because Bevisric didn’t want a spell cast on him. When night fell, they started off.

They walked along the ground until they got close to the City. Then the ground changed to cold lava. As they walked, they could see some scattered camp fires. Suddenly, Gulblomst could hear someone approaching. She signaled for silence, then they all tried to sneak away. A voice called out, “Stop! We’re friends!”

Geraldon, with a geas against ambushing people, called out, “If you’re friends, let us pass!” Arrows flew towards his voice, but they all bounced. Bevisric, Boo-boo, Gulblomst, and Tor stayed behind while the rest charged. Boo-boo thought he could see about eight sources of POW. Bevisric, despite the bad light, managed to hit an opponent in the chest.

Gulblomst gave Bevisric a Firearrow and he promptly put it to good use, hitting a brigand in the abdomen. Geraldon and Harvard hit, felling their opponents. Asmoufr took a wound in his right arm. Then Bevisric fired more arrows, wreaking havoc. Geraldon scored again, as did Bevisric. Then the brigands ran away.

After about a half-hour more, they reached a cave. Gorfang could tell that beyond the natural cave, there was cut stone. They went inside and found a stone corridor about 2 meters wide.

They formed a single file, Gorfang in front, then Harvard, Bevisric with a torch, Asmoufr, Geraldon, Boo-boo, Gulblomst with another light, then Tor. After about 10 meters, Gorfang could

¹²⁴ A combination of Mind-Read and Truthspeak.

see a light coming from around a corner to the right. Bevisric tried to sneak up and see, but he made a sound. Suddenly the light went out and then the sound of a loud bell began ringing.

Then a man came from the corridor wielding a spear. Boo-boo cast Disruption and Harvard a Demoralize. Both worked, but he still was stabbed Bevisric in the left arm.

Then he turned and ran down the corridor. Harvard turned and headed towards the sound of the bell. He found himself in a room with another man inside, ringing a bell. As soon as he saw Harvard, he dropped the bell and picked up a spear and shield. They fought briefly until Asmoufr and Gorfang came into the room, whereupon the man surrendered.

They took his bell and then left him. Just around the next corner, the corridor went forward, then turned to the left. Before that, it also turned right. Gorfang heard people quietly lurking around the corner to the left. Then a man jumped out from around the corner and fired his bow. It hit Harvard's shield. Gorfang and Asmoufr sprang forward and hid behind the corner to the right. This corridor went for about 2 meters until a portcullis blocked the way. Bevisric and Harvard readied their bows to fire.

A head quickly popped out, then drew back. Both Bevisric and Harvard held their fire. Then he jumped out and fired. All the shots missed.

A voice called out, "Back off!"

"Why should we?" questioned Gorfang.

"Are you going towards the left? Through the portcullis?"

"We might," replied Gorfang. An arm tossed a rotten fruit out into the corridor. It landed about a meter from its starting point. "If you don't come past the fruit, it's okay with us."

The portcullis was made of wood and bronze. Gorfang and Harvard tried to lift it, but failed as did Geraldon and Tor. Finally, Asmoufr chopped a way through it. Gorfang and Tor squeezed through and found a way to raise and lock the portcullis. This they did, then relocked it when everyone had come through.

The corridors led to many different rooms¹²⁵. They found rooms with empty weapon racks, and rooms with empty trunks that may have held armor. They found broken arrows, empty crossbow quarrel cases, and rusted weapons.

Through another portcullis, they found a room whose door had no handles or knobs, but rather two silver plates whose touch caused the doors to open and close. Inside this room, they found an open chest that contained six cheap rings. In another room, they found stacks of parchment and rolls of papyrus, written in what appeared to be Fonritian. Each sheet or roll had what looked like a proper name at the top, but then it became unreadable.

Finally, they came to a set of double rooms each with an ornate door on the same side. The one on the left was smiling, the other, frowning.

Opening the one on the right, they entered a large room. Apparently, both of the doors entered into this room. It was about 25 meters by 15 meters, with 2 meter pillars placed evenly through the room. At the far end was a throne upon a dais, with what looked like a corpse sitting upon it.

As they spread out to examine the room, Bevisric noticed movement from behind one of the pillars. They approached cautiously, then from behind some pillars came six creatures. They were

¹²⁵ Doesn't every dungeon?

all very ugly, very vicious, and looked very chaotic.

Chapter 2

Dungeon

Four of them were snake-like or worm-like creatures. They had wicked-looking teeth. On their mid-bodies were riders who were also worm-like but bore long spears.

One of the other two was a bird-like creature with two heads. The last one was a large, hulking creature that we called a demon.

Bevisric whipped out his bow and fired at the nearest worm but the arrow bounced off a Damage Resistance. Then he was engaged in melee by a worm as were Geraldon, and Gorfang. Harvard was engaged by the demon.

Boo-boo released the pain spirit at the demon. Asmoufr was bitten in the leg and fell. Geraldon managed to keep his feet despite a stomach wound.

Boo-boo then called up his shade. Bevisric, who had refused combat and instead run towards the corpse in the throne and chopped at it, whereupon it disintegrated. On the ground, Asmoufr was speared by the worm's rider in the right arm. He fell unconscious, and the worm moved towards Boo-boo. Harvard critcilled the demon in the leg and it fell. He was attacked by a worm and rider, but his Damage Resistance kept him safe. Geraldon speared a worm and it fell, but the rider jumped off. Gorfang smashed at the same worm. Tor finally impaled it in the mid-body, killing it.

The shade now engulfed one of the worms and its rider. Boo-boo was knocked over by a spear in his right leg. Gulblomst tried a Firearrow dart, but missed. Bevisric, who had still not joined the fight, was speared in his right arm by a rider. Then, with his left hand, he punched the wall with all his might. His hand came back bloody. Harvard chopped at the demon again, but his stroke bounced. The demon then stood up again. The bird now flew towards Gorfang. He smashed at it and clipped a wing.

Gulblomst tried another dart with Firearrow, but missed again. The shade was dispelled and the worm and rider looked for opponents. Geraldon joined Harvard in fighting the demon, and he ht it in the left arm. Gorfang hit the bird again, knocking it over. Bevisric was speared in the chest, and died.

Gulblomst, fighting over Boo-boo, who was still Healing himself and others, took a spear in the abdomen, and died. The demon bit Geraldon, who had taken time to cast Truesword. Though he didn't know it at the time, the bite was poisoned. Gorfang hit the bird again, and it stayed down. He shifted to the demon.

Geraldon cast Heal Wound and stood up just as Harvard scored on the demon's chest. Then Geraldon plunged his sword into the demon's stomach. It died.

Tor, fighting a worm and rider, was bitten in the leg. His wounds were too much for him, so he died. Gorfang felled another worm in the mid-body, then fell himself as his wounds took their toll.

Gorfang and Geraldon accumulated wounds as they continued to fight. Then Geraldon killed another worm. Boo-boo, with his dagger, entered the melee, but his blow tinked. Geraldon scored on another worm, then killed it with another blow. Harvard scored as well. Geraldon then swung at one of the riders, but his swing was blocked, so he shifted targets, allowing the rider to escape.

Eventually, Geraldon killed the remaining worms. Then the poison hit him. He resisted, but

was still weakened heavily.

Bevisric's hand was found to be covered in someone else's blood! There was also a peephole next to the throne. Apparently, someone had been watching us from behind it. Bevisric then had punched at him or her, causing him or her to flee.

The only thing of value that the creatures had was on the demon. A patch of its skin held what looked to be some kind of spirit binding Enchantment. We left it there.

After testing the two doors in the room and finding them locked, we checked along the rear wall for a secret door. We found one and went through. It went down three stairs, then became a corridor. Along the floor was a trail of blood droplets. This we followed.

Turning a corner, with Gorfang in front, and Harvard behind him, they sprung a trap. Crossbow bolts shot out from the wall. Gorfang caught one in the right arm, Harvard one in the abdomen, one in the right leg. After Healing them as best we could, we continued. The corridor dead-ended in a small room. Heading back, we went around a corner in a mirror image to the previous one where the trap had been. Laying a shield against the lowest crossbow hole, Gorfang triggered the trap. The bolts shot out, but no one was hit. Then we continued on.

The corridor zig-zagged around corners. Finally, around a corner, Gorfang detected someone. He and Asmoufr charged around the corner. Immediately, the person began a spell. He finished it before either of the two could attack. Flame burst from his outstretched fingers, catching the two of them, burning them.

Gorfang smashed the sorcerer's right arm. Asmoufr bounced off a Damage Resistance. Gorfang demanded his surrender, but the sorcerer refused and began casting another spell. Gorfang then smashed in his stomach, killing him.

We opened the door that was behind the sorcerer, and gasped. Inside were two humanoids, gagged and hung upside down. Two were human females, the other looked like a duck! But also in this room were objects that Boo-boo could tell were magical.

The two women were named Ilaire, and Minx. Ilaire was an herbalist slave who had run away from her master. Minx was a free thief. The duck was named Tommy Flanagan. They had all been captured by the sorcerer and had nothing to look forward to but being Tapped, then fed to the monsters.

The total amount of loot gathered was as follows: a stiletto and rock that the sorcerer carried; a vellum scroll; a small enameled box which was so black inside, the bottom could not be seen; a black blindfold which the three said not only was a regular blindfold, but that even after it had been removed, still kept the former wearer from seeing for about 24 hours afterwards; a right arm, artificial; a box with eight glass bottles filled with different colored powders; a large box containing ten amulets, all magical; a large device of many wires, tubes, and cages; a scroll; a small wand; a glowing shield; a sack full of gravel which was magical — each pebble would hold exactly one magic point; an eight-foot roll of silvery wire; a bottle of clear liquid whose cork had hair growing out of it; a bottle with a round base that was lighter than it should have been; two metal skewers that were so cold ice had formed on them; two crystal balls; a scroll with a partial map of the dungeon on it; and a chest containing about 7000 pennies.

Quick examinations proved that the gravel would store magic points. At a rate of one magic point per pebble!

Packing all of this loot plus the stacks of parchment and papyrus into some empty trunks, except for the device which had to be carried separately, we headed for the exit.

Back at the first portcullis, there was a guard lounging there. As soon as he saw us, he fled

back around the corner yelling, “They’re here!”

As we had brought the heads of the monsters we had fought, we then tossed them in the general direction of the robbers. After a brief parley, we left 2000 pennies in a pile in the room we were in. Then we left the dungeon.

With Gorfang in front, and Boo-boo watching the rear for any pursuit, we again traversed the lava flows. As we walked, a small person stepped out of a lava hole. “Hey buddies, do you need a guide?”

Our initial response was no, but logic prevailed. His fee was a handful of magic. We, of course, would let him have a handful of the gravel. His only instruction to us was, “Do exactly what I say when we meet people.”

As we continued, Gorfang heard some noise to our left. His dwarf sense told him there might be more than a dozen. The guide quickly said, “Everyone smile a really big, goofy grin and keep your hands away from your weapons.” This we did, as he cast a quick spell.

Suddenly, a line of men wielding crossbows showed themselves. Our skins then began to glow a soft greenish-yellow. The guide, in a strange buzzing voice said, “Come visit us!” The men then turned and ran.

Asking why they had run, the guide told us tales of the wazeen, who imitate the shape of humans for unspeakable reasons.

Finally, we were in sight of the sorcerer’s tower. We let the guide take a handful of the gravel, then asked him how he could be reached in case we wished to use his services. He told us to just drop a note in a lava hole that he pointed out. Or he could be reached at his house in the city. His name, he said when we asked, was Thren.

Since he seemed friendly enough, we asked him if he could identify any of the objects we had recovered. Specifically, we showed him the scroll that went with the device. For another handful, he agreed.

After about a half hour of reading, he told us what the device did. Apparently, it was a matrix of some kind that allowed one to create living things by drawing certain characteristics from other beings, combining them, and then using a person’s blood to make the essential essence of the creature. It seemed to us that this was something that the sorcerer should not have.

The rest of the equipment he identified as follows: The rock was some kind of magic, similar to the stone we had acquired for Fusial. The vellum scroll held some kind of spell. The small enameled box seemed to have no bottom. The right arm was obviously to replace another right arm. The colored bottles would change the color of a person’s skin. The colors were bright green, pink, turquoise, black, violet, orange, transparent, and a bottle which removed the color. The identical amulets all stored magic points. The small wand would lessen the magic points needed to cast Heal by one point, to a minimum of one point. The glowing shield, he said, was just that. The silvery wire, he said, was a magic conductor. The bottle was what floated, not what was inside. The metal skewers were probably used to keep things cold. After he had examined the crystal balls, he then threw one of them to the ground. It broke into two fragments. But the fragments were still spheres! And when he put a magic point into one, it grew! The rest he didn’t know about, although the three new members did know about the blindfold. Besides acting as a blindfold, when it was removed, the person would still be unable to see for about a day after it was removed!

He now said that he wanted a skewer for his service as well. We let him have it.

We wanted to safely store the device, since none of us thought that the sorcerer should have it. We camouflaged it down in a lava hole, then returned to the sorcerer’s tower.

We showed him everything except the scroll containing the instructions for the device. He said that it would take about two days to analyze everything and that we should come back then.

On Witch-day, we did. Then he told us who would get what. He would take the small black box, the blindfold, the right arm, the large box, the small wand, 87 of the pebbles (half of what remained), the silvery wire, and two of the three crystal balls. Plus the parchment and papyrus scrolls. The rest we could have, including all of the money. For a fee, he told us what our stuff did. The stiletto wouldn't come out of a wound except by the hand of the person who had inserted it. The rock, or demon-stone, kept wounds from bleeding. The scroll contained a spell that stopped a Mystic Vision from registering. The glowing shield did just that. The clear liquid would grow hair, but only on certain inanimate objects. The bottle was what floated, he said, but object placed inside would weigh it down.

For the next few days we shopped for items that we needed. Our expressed purpose was to again enter the dungeon to find more magic items.

In the meantime, the duck had proved to be an intolerable being to live with, so we drove him away. In his place came another thief, Jihad by name.

So on Pamalt-day of the eleventh week of summer, we returned to the sorcerer's tower.

Chapter 3

Thieves

The sorcerer's offer was this: he would apply the spells to us in return for one-half of the magic items with a minimum of four. We agreed. Asmoufr took his Enhanced Strength and Dexterity. Minx and Harvard took a Damage Resist 10 while Geraldon and Gorfang took Damage Boost 10. As collateral for the amulet, the sorcerer took 20 gravel but put another pain spirit in it.

Our plan was to get rid of the robbers. Then we could finish exploring the dungeon with no further interference from them. The map we had found seemed to indicate a second way into the robbers' hide-away. It might be that they had not discovered it and be vulnerable to an attack from the rear.

We managed to make it to the caves with no incident. Jihad went in the scout out the first room. He came back with word that there were two men inside, wearing a mixture of cuirboilli and leather. One had an axe and shield; the other had two shortswords. The room itself had a table and shelves of assorted junk.

After casting Speedart on his own shuriken and Minx's dagger, the two of them crept to the corner. Then they threw. Minx's dagger went true to the man with two shortswords. He fell with a dagger in his throat. Jihad's throw was less accurate, nicking the man in his left arm. Jihad charged in, hoping to finish the man off. But just as he threw again, hitting the man's abdomen, he had toppled the shelves with a resounding crash.

The others now ran towards the noise. Jihad jumped onto the table since the toppled shelf now separated them. The man connected his axe and Jihad's abdomen, felling him. Asmoufr now came charging in and, leaping over the table chopped the man's left arm off.

After he healed himself, Jihad finished his opponent off. The other had died from blood loss.

Despite the loss of secrecy, we decided to continue with our plan. Thus, we followed the map to the area indicated. Minx was able to slip underneath the one portcullis that we found and opened it. A long corridor stretched ahead, with doors on the left and right. The map said to open the first one on the left and, after first pulling the handle out, Gorfang lifted the hinges and shoved his way through.

The room looked like living quarters. There was a cot, a desk and chair, and a chest. A tapestry covered the far wall and two rusted, crossed scimitars decorated another. An oil lamp hung over the desk. A thorough search revealed 5 silver pieces in the lamp, moth-eaten clothes in the trunk, and some bronze lock-picking tools found in a case in the desk. A gilt-inlaid dagger with a jewel at the end was also discovered.

Behind the tapestry (of course!) was the narrow passage indicated. It went on for a long way to the right, but we went left then turned right. We entered a room that contained 15 saddles hung on one wall, saddle blankets on another, and pegs for holding other riding equipment. Crossed riding crops hung over the far archway. Filling the archway and part of the room was a huge pile of straw. Gorfang though he heard voices on the far side of the heap.

After going back and conferring with Geraldon, who had stayed at the first portcullis, we decided on a two-pronged attack. Asmoufr, Gorfang, Minx, Jihad and Harvard would first attack through the pile of straw. When they were engaged in melee, Geraldon would come from the other side.

The five moved straw off of the pile, hoping that their work would be unnoticed by the

bandits. When they thought the time was right, they burst through. What met them was eleven men and two elves all with their weapons ready.

The fight was ferocious. Both Minx and Asmoufr were put out of the fight temporarily, the first by a Firedagger, the second by an arrow to the chest. Gorfang led the assault, killing five, including the two elves. Harvard killed one outright, as did Geraldon. Unfortunately, Geraldon died due to blood loss after sustaining many wounds. He was buried, as his will stated, "in my armor."

The three survivors (the rest died of blood loss) bargained their gear for their lives and were let go. We equipped ourselves with their gear, Asmoufr the one most able to use it, and looked for their loot. Besides the gear, we found 460 pennies, a crude map, a crystal of some kind, two bound scrolls, a very nice bracelet with jewels, and three amulets.

Our return to the sorcerer's tower was uneventful. There he divided the loot. The two scrolls were a Glow spell and an treatise on the Doraddi language. He took the crystal, which he told us would hold eleven magic points, two of the amulets, one of which was a Bludgeon 4 matrix and the other would confine a power spirit. He also took the Glow scroll. We were left with one amulet, which would also confine a power spirit, the Doraddi language scroll, the bracelet, and the rest of the loot. We traded some more of the pebbles and the amulet for the Bludgeon 4 matrix, which we thought could be very useful. He then told us not to come back, since we were not cost-effective.

Selling the weapons and armor turned out to be tricky. We ended up selling the entire lot to the local army for 3500 pennies. The bracelet we sold for 228 pennies.

The map was a crude drawing of the lava flows around the City of the Dead. The only writing on it was the words "Assim", "Erlík", and two spots marked "X" and "D".

For about a week, we did nothing but enjoy ourselves, as much as we could in a city like Tondiji. But there was always bar-hopping and watching more innocent people turned into slaves. We met a son on a noble named Tathar. His family had given him the boot, and so he was now adventuring. He decided to accompany us for a while.

It was at one slave auction that we saw something completely different. It was a dark troll for sale. He was certainly in a foul mood, for he bit off the auctioneer's fingers while he was demonstrating how tame the troll was. No one bought him.

Later that night, Tathar had an unexpected visitor in his room. It was the troll. Fearing the worst, Tathar was surprised when the troll asked him for help! He needed money so that he could get back to his people in the Mari Mountains.

Tathar brought the troll, whose name was Hooter, to the rest of us. We decided to help him by taking him with us back into the dungeon. We would evenly split any loot found. So back into the dungeon we went.

We continued our exploration of the area of the dungeon that contained the room that we had attacked from and the corridor next to it. The rooms appeared to be quarters, perhaps for a group of thieves. After exploring six of them, we had amassed a number of weapons, shields, pieces of armor, a small amount of money, and twenty feet of very fine gold chain.

Abandoning the rooms for the more mundane corridors, we went down an unexplored way.

The corridor forked, and both forks were blocked by portcullises. Fortunately, the mechanism was on our side, so we opened on and went through to the room beyond. Inside this room was a large wheel, set horizontally about four feet above the ground. A very large chain was wrapped around it, and one end went through a hole in the wall. Hooter, with his troll senses, could detect living flesh at the other end of the hole.

Leaving the wheel alone, we went into the other room. Luckily for us, we had left the wheel alone. For attached to the other end of the chain was the collar of a huge, chaotic creature. It had two heads, four tentacles, and a tail. It stood on its hind legs and hissed at it.

Hooter slung a stone at it, but it bounced. Jihad threw a shuriken and hit the creature, but the shuriken slowly came out of the wound and dropped to the ground. The wound continued to heal.

Since the monster could not reach us while the chain was mostly around the wheel, and since we could not hope to kill it, we left it alone. We were inside a large cavern with a stream running through the middle. On the other side was another corridor hidden by a false panel. The corridor ended at a metal door, but before that was a fine wire mesh, and a drain. When a spear was poked through the mesh, a loud ‘zap!’ was heard, and the spear slowly melted from the tip.

Behind another false panel was another corridor. Down this corridor was a store room. It held cloaks, belts, some old food, lanterns, beaten and battered swords and spears, and two crossbows which had been left cocked (which were of course now useless). At the rear of the room was what appeared to be a small closet. But when Hooter tried to enter it, he set off a Warding.

Since nothing responded to the alarm, Hooter went into the room. Inside he found seventeen small bags on a large wooden table, plus some other choice items.

Taking these items, we left the dungeon and went back to the city. Inside each of the seventeen bags were 25 guilders. There were 30 small gems, 20 better gems, and 20 pieces of gold. The three goblets were silver-plated and chased with jewels. Altogether, each of us came out with 315 pennies.¹²⁶ Hooter thanked us, then left the city.

¹²⁶ Unbeknownst to us, Hooter had filched some of the items for himself. This included four bracelets and five rings. Hooter came out ahead 345 pennies more than the rest of us.

Chapter 4

Vampires

The next day, we decided to try the Lhankor Mhy temple as a source of information. We paid an acolyte to try to find any old maps of the City of the Dead. The acolyte told us to come back tomorrow, which we did. The acolyte had found two maps of a dungeon which an adventurer had mapped. The dungeon was supposedly the home of someone called Erlik. The acolyte said that Erlik was the name of the being who was the King of the Dead. He also said that the City of the Dead was where sorcerers would come and see different creatures held in cases and cages. In short, a zoo. But this zoo also held chaotic creatures as well.

Since on one of our maps was the word “Erlik”, we thought that perhaps the map we had just purchased would be the same. And if Erlik was indeed the King of the Dead, perhaps that was where Thingol would be found.

So we paid some of the local sorcerers to cast spells on us (Either Damage Resistance and Spell Resistance or Damage Boost) and we set out to Erlik’s place. With us went Dohza, a Humakti who wished to go with us and gain experience.

On the way, we saw a fire up ahead. Jihad and Minx tried to sneak up to it, but failed. There were three people, two of them were in robes. They saw the two, then in a buzzing voice said, “Greetings.” Jihad and Minx immediately fled, yelling “Wazeen!” at the top of their voices.

As they ran towards the others, they could see one wazeen jumping after them, with 20 foot leaps. Their hands were stretching outwards towards the two. Jihad stopped and threw a Firearrowed shuriken which hit the wazeen dead in the chest, but it kept coming. It tried to grab Jihad in a ten foot long arm that came from its mouth, but Jihad dodged it and ran away, Mobilized.

The rest of us had by now heard the two and began running also. But on top of the two sides of the lava canyon we were running in were the other two wazeen. They suddenly began to sort of open up, like a flower does from a bud. Tentacles began to cross our path, blocking us. Jihad, then Minx, Harvard, and Dohza jumped through. Tathar was a bit too slow and was attacked by a tentacle. Though he parried it, the attack ate away part of his shield. Then he was through.

We ran almost back to Tondiji. But on the way, we ran into a little man. He was glowing greenish, but when he recognized us, he stopped glowing. It was the same person we had met earlier.

For a small sum, he agreed to guide us to Erlik’s place. We learned from him that the wazeen aren’t the greatest trackers in the world.

We made it to the place indicated on our map. The entrance was a long paved path with stone pillars lining it. Jihad snuck inside to see what was there.

Minutes later he snuck back out, saying that there was a niche on the left side just a few feet inside. He had seen a big nasty troll-looking something.

Harvard and Dohza went in and killed the monster. It looked something like a cave troll. But as they finished off the monster, from a door up ahead came two people, hissing at them. One moved forward, wielding a scimitar.

Tathar quickly fell to the scimitar. A Stupefaction spell washed over us all, but affected none. Tathar then managed to get up again. He thrust with his sword and penetrated the man’s Damage Resistance. His sword passed through the man’s abdomen. Then his armor fell to the ground as smoke replaced the man. He was a vampire.

The rest quickly tried to dispatch the other with a blow to the head or the chest. But before we could do this, the second vampire had turned into smoke as well.

Inside the room where they had come from was a table and some chairs. From the other accouterments, we deduced that this was a sitting room. In the room next to it, towards the entrance, was two piles of dirt about the area of a man lying down. The piles were six inches high. They also had bodily impressions in them.

Jihad, who had run from the battle to try to get behind the vampires, had found himself in a chapel done entirely in black. He had seen a number of coffins, at least a dozen, but he wasn't sure exactly how many.

Since some of us were injured and we were low on magic points, we decided to return to the city. This we did without incident.

We spent the next day recruiting for more people. Lured by the map of Erlik's place, which had many symbols for money, we managed to get four more people to come with us. They were Libra, Lem, Ishmael, and Agrian. Only Agrian had professional warrior's experience.

That night, after getting more spells cast upon us, we went back to Erlik's dungeon. Jihad and Minx crept into the dungeon. They found the same two vampires in the same room. A furious melee erupted. At the end Tathar managed to force them both to dissolve. But we knew that they would reform in only a few minutes. We decided to wait for them to do this.

In the meantime, some of us explored the chapel further. In a small storeroom we found different light sources: candles, torches, lamps, and oil. The chapel itself contained a number of coffins.

But back where the others were, the vampires had reformed and were attacking Lem, Ishmael, and Agrian. Agrian immediately hit one and forced it to turn into smoke. The other turned into a bat and flew away deeper into the dungeon.

Continuing through the chapel and down a side corridor that Jihad had not taken, we discovered rooms that seemed to serve as washrooms or store rooms.

Further exploration on this level seemed pointless for the present, so we went down one of a paired set of stairs. They both ended up in the same landing. So we explored on this level.

At one point we came across two corridors that branched off to the left. Each of them contained many alcoves, and each alcove that we could see contained a human skeleton. Jihad went down the first alcove and thought he heard a hissing noise but could not be sure. Then as he went down the second, all hell broke loose.

From out the of the first corridor came a huge and terrible creature with large teeth, claws, and tentacle on its back. Minx, who was closest, managed to dodge the tentacle. The impact gouged out some stone of the walls. She then ran for it.

We were mostly strung out along the corridor, so trying to retreat produced only a mess. A tentacle hit Dohza in the abdomen and would have killed him had not Ishmael saved him. One of its claws then tore at Ishmael's right leg, laying it open. Jihad, who had been caught behind the creature, courageously jumped onto the creature's back and began stabbing it.

Finally, the creature lay dead. It then began to dissolve into a pink, gooey mess. Examining the creature's lair, we found that there were 26 alcoves in all. Each had either a skeleton or a badly decomposed and mutilated corpse. At the other end of the two corridors was a crossing corridor and a door with glyphs of some kind inscribed on them. In one direction the corridor turned back alongside the other two corridors, but quickly dead-ended. The other sloped upwards, but there

were slits on the floor. Suspicious, we threw a corpse onto the floor. From out of the slits near and presumably under it, things whipped out and began to slice the corpse into tiny bits.

Concentrating on the door, which was sealed around the edges with lead, we got the lead out and picked the lock. The room inside was lavishly furnished with a carpet and tapestries for the floor and walls. Tables and chairs, books and papers, and on the wall above the door, two iron scimitars in jewel-encrusted scabbards stapled to the wall. With some effort, we removed the scabbards and discovered that the scimitars were iron.

Since we had hit the jackpot for now, we quickly left and made our way back to the city.

We estimated that the jewels on the scabbard were worth about 7000 pennies. We divided the jewels up amongst us as best as we could.

Next week, on Empress-day, it dawned on us that we could use some extra magic against vampires. We asked Dohza, the Humakti, to bargain for us. The price asked was 1500 pennies and the two iron scimitars. We paid it.

The next day, we picked up the matrix and set out on an expedition back into Erlik's dungeon. After checking the first two rooms where the two vampires had been previously, we went into the chapel. And were ambushed. A Palsy spell caught all of us. Jihad was paralyzed in the left leg; Gorfang in the abdomen; Dohza in the right arm; Minx in the left leg; and Lem in the right leg. Neither Harvard nor Tathar were affected.

After a quick combat, Lem managed to kill one of the vampires. The other one faded just before Gorfang could administer a fatal blow.

We decided to see what lay down some unexplored corridors. In one side corridor lay a set of stairs going down. But in two alcoves flanking the stairs were two statues of lion-like creatures. As we tried to pass between them, the one on the right said, "Speak." Jihad replied, "Hello." "That is wrong", replied the one of the left.

Stepping back and then through and trying different words always elicited the same response. But when the word "Erlik" was spoken, there was no response. Taking that as an assent, we tried to go through. Then the one on the left said, "Wait — finish." Neat.

Deciding to explore further, we ignored the statues for now. In a nearby room, we found a rack of spears, some old torches, an alarm gong, and hanging upside down from the ceiling, four corpses with their throats slit.

Watching and listening down the corridor, Lem heard something coming. We kept quiet and let Lem tell us what he saw. What he saw were 16 men coming down the corridor from the entrance. One was in plate armor, five were in livery, and the other ten looked like hired men. One of them was an elf, and some of them were blue-skinned.

They went to the stairs with the statues. Each of them then recited, "Erlik, drink my blood", then went through and down the stairs.

Quickly but quietly we followed them. Using the phrase we had heard, we went down the stairs. To be confronted with two more statues, this time of griffins. And the phrase, "Erlik, drink my blood" didn't work!

We tried many different variations on the same sort of theme. None worked. Finally, we went up and back onto the level we had been on. A few minutes later, we could hear the sounds of fighting going on down the stairs. We all hid except for Lem, Jihad, and Gorfang. Lem used Wind Words to hear what the men said to pass the griffins. The phrase used was, "Erlik, crack my bones."

Except for Jihad and Gorfang, the rest of us hid in the room again. What the two of them saw was one man come up the stairs, yell “Erlík, drink my blood” and suddenly stop when he saw the two of them. Then he turned and ran out. Three more did the same, then the two heard a noise that was not like a man. It was a large clanking noise. They too hid.

The clanking noise sounded like it had left the dungeon. There then followed a fierce debate on what to do next. Now that the creature was gone, some of us wanted to explore what was down there. The rest argued that doing so would make it real easy to get trapped down there when the creature returned.

Finally,

Here the text of the Campaign Log ends.

Appendix A

Map of the Tunneled Hills and the Plateau of Statues

The Hills and Plateau combined are some 200 kilometers in the north-south direction and 80 kilometers at the widest in the east-west direction. The Plateau itself is only some 50 kilometers north to south.

Only Safe is on the western side of the Tunneled Hills. It is a rough circle with a diameter of about 25 kilometers.

Directly to the east and some 20 kilometers away was the area called Mostal's Graveyard. It is about 20 kilometers in diameter. East of that is a chain of taller mountains that run almost directly north to south. They extend some kilometers north of Mostal's Graveyard where they end for about 20 kilometers before continuing north again and about 30 kilometers south of the Graveyard, where it reaches the lava flow that extends from the volcano on the Plateau.

East of the mountains is a kind of fjord in the Hills that extends some 60 kilometers in from the eastern side. In this cul-de-sac is an extinct volcano that houses a city called Than-ulbar, supposedly for the Thanatari that dwell there. South of Than-ulbar some 50 kilometers, back in the Hills, is a valley that is unlabeled. We never discovered its name.

North of Only Safe, about 100 kilometers away is the valley called Bagogix, where scorpion men are said to dwell. East of that, across the mountain chain, is the valley called Weeping Vale. South of there, some 25 kilometers, is a valley labeled Water Here. We never discovered why.

10 kilometers south of Only Safe is a valley where there stands a building made of stone. Inside it and down a hole, there are some number of broos.

The lava flow from the Plateau is long-cooled. There are many tunnels through it and it extends some 40 kilometers from the Plateau. The border between the Hills and the Plateau is marked by mountains on the western side, which cluster around the lava flow. The eastern side had no such border mountains on our map.

The Plateau of Statues is a rough oval in shape. There is a small indentation almost in the middle of the southern side. At the apex of this indentation is the castle of the boggles.

Once on the Plateau, following the edge of the Plateau to the west, one first comes to a small lava flow and then to an area marked with Water Runes. This place contains many fountains with clear, drinkable water. Continuing west, one comes to a castle that is inhabited by water-drinking bats.

North of the Water Runes area, one comes to a huge statue of Storm Bull with horns of iron. To the northwest, there is a large grazing area with many different types of animals. Close to that is an area marked with Stasis Runes. The place contains many buildings, some of which were made of the minerals of the Decamony. Northeast of that is a strange blue pyramid that we had no time to investigate. Continuing to the northeast is an area marked with Death Runes. East of that, at the corner of the Hills and the Plateau is a castle marked with Chaos Runes.

South of that is an area marked with Plant Runes. Then heading west from there, one returns to the boggle castle.

Appendix B

Map of the Menial Valleys of the Brand Clan

The whole of the area we spent much time in is about 70 by 70 kilometers. Mistvale, the place where we first met the menials is nearly in the center of the inhabited valleys. Mistvale, a rough oval some 6 kilometers long by 4 kilometers wide, has a population of 200 or so, has two entrances, heading generally east and west.

The eastern exit stays in a deep gorge for some 4 kilometers until a fork is reached. If one continues to the east, then the trail slowly curves to the north, heading out of the gorge until about 13 kilometers later, one reaches Crook Halt, a triangular plain some 7 by 4 kilometers. Crook Halt has a population of around 70 and has two other exits, one heading east, the other west.

The eastern exit curves north for a total of 13 kilometers until the exigers fortress is reached. Continuing north, the trail forks off to the west until the 'borders' of the Kujerung clan is hit. If the northern fork is taken, one will eventually hit the jungle on the northern side of the Mari Mountains.

The western exit from Crook Halt goes for some 12 kilometers until a fork to the south is reached. Heading south for 5 kilometers, the valley of Orange Fire, a triangular valley 12 kilometers by 6 with a population of about 350 is reached.

This valley has no other exit, so continuing west from the fork for about 27 kilometers will take on to another fork. This fork is guarded by a small fort manned mainly by men-at-arms. The fort appears to mainly guard one from leaving to the northwest. However, if one turns to the southeast, the next 12 kilometers or so is called Many Gorges, for there are many small gorges that house a total population of around 100.

Once past Many Gorges, it is only 2 kilometers to Silvereye, a valley 6 by 5 kilometers supporting a population of 120. A trail north leads for 12 kilometers until the small circular valley of Turn's Drop was reached, which had around 20 people living there.

Heading east out of Silvereye, the trail winds through a gorge for 15 kilometers until another trail joins it; then it is only another 6 kilometers until one enters the western entrance of Mistvale.

If however, one heads to the south after leaving Mistvale towards the east, then you stay in the gorge for 11 kilometers until the village of Stormwood, a valley about the same size as Mistvale's is reached. Stormwood has a population of 150 and two other exits.

Heading west for 16 kilometers, a fork is reached. If the northern one is taken, then after some 6 kilometers, one joins the trail heading from Silvereye towards the western entrance of Mistvale. If the southern one is taken, after 17 kilometers and a curve towards the southwest, the village of Crystal Lake, with a population of 40 is reached.

Taking the southern exit out of Stormwood, one stays in the gorge for 8 kilometers until one reaches another fort placed halfway up the side of the cliff that forms the gorge. Its placement is absolutely perfect for hindering traffic through the gorge. If however, one can get past, it is another 6 kilometers to the biggest valley in this area, Halfwing. It is about 14 kilometers by 8, and has a population of around 500. The other exit from Halfwing heads south and to the Viter clan of exigers.

Appendix C

Mister Man's Speech

“Everyone sit down. I am going to speak and you must all listen. I am 65 years old and you must have respect for the elderly. This is going to be a long speech so everyone sit down.

“My name is Mister Man. I have lived 15 years in Tradespot. I have lived many, many years, and I have one motto by which I live: ‘Anything can be stolen.’ I do not have to explain my motto to you.

“I am not an idiot. I may be a Trickster, but I do not worship Bolongo. I do not know why I have joined you. Maybe I shall never know. You say chaos is leaving my land to invade yours. At first I say, ‘Good! If more chaos leaves my land, fewer chaos remains.’ Then, I think, and I say, ‘If there is now so much chaos in my land that we can afford to export it, I must look into this.’

“You come from far away. You have traveled to many, many lands. You think you are civilized people, knowing many wonderful things — sorcery, metalworking, cities. But you do not know that all the lands you have been to are the same. You think, ‘No, we do not think so. We know that the land of the Doraddi is different.. All the places we have been are different. We are used to different places. This land is different too, so it is the same.’ You are wrong. This land is very, very different from the others you have been to. It is as if you had eaten many, many different kinds of fruit in your life, but only fruit. And then a man gives you a piece of good roast meat. That is how different my land is from the others you have been to.

“You call me a Trickster. You despise me in your hearts. You think, ‘What a shallow fellow, only thinking of his stomach.’ What else is there for an old man like me to think of? I say, Trickster sits on the council of the gods. I say Trickster is the only reason the sun is now in the sky. I say *my* god is important.

“Of your country, so wonderful and civilized, I know much. I know more about your country than you do of mine. I know of your custom of blood feuds. When a man is killed, you do not mourn. You celebrate his death by killing more. And then more of your family is killed. And so on until everyone is dead. What a fine custom!

“If your king is old and senile or only five years old, you keep him on your throne. He is the King. So you have bad kings.

“What if you decide your king is bad? You kill him and replace him with another king. Or if your king has friends, they try to kill you. Maybe everyone is killed. What if you kill your king and put his murderer on your throne. Then you have a criminal for a king. The criminals do not rule in my land.

“What if your king wants you to give him money? And you do not want to? You call this taxes, and you pay it. Or else the king kills you or puts you in chains. I say that this sounds to me much like robbery. So your kings are robbers and killers. What fine kings! What a fine land!

“Your civilized land is overrun with chaos monsters and trolls. No? Tell me I am wrong and look me in the eyeballs.

“If you gave me much, much beer and told me to imagine a land as bizarre and foolish as possible, I could not imagine a land as foolish as yours. And you do not even realize how foolish it is! We will all be quiet now and think about it for a minute. Think!”

And he sat, thinking, for about five minutes.

“In my land we do not have cities. So you think in your hearts, ‘What a savage land. What poor benighted people. I am glad I come from a land where we have cities, and metal, and sorcery, and Tap spells, and assassins, and taxes, and robbers and murderers to be king.’ Maybe you say it differently than I do. But you do not know anything about my land. Do you know that my land once had many, many cities? Big cities. Cities on the seashore. Cities with big roads, and sorcerers, and taxes. Better cities even than yours are now. We called that land the Artmali Empire. And did you know that in the last age we had another civilization. With many, many cities and with sorcerers, and taxes, and big roads. We called that civilization the Ill Empire, but its founders called it differently. Why do you think we do not have cities now? Because we have forgotten how to make them? Because we never knew how to make them? NO! Because we do remember how to make cities. That is why we do not have them. We had cities. We know that cities did not make us happy. We were not healthier. We did not have better clothing. We did not have more food and goods. What you do not understand is that we had cities, and we decided we were better off without them. So do not despise me for being an ignorant savage.

“You come to our land arrogant. You do not even bother to learn our language well. One of you does not bother to learn our language at all. You do not bother to find the least thing about our land. You have never heard of the Meeting Contest. I saw your faces when the oasis women said we must have a Meeting Contest. Every time two bands of our people meet for the first time, we have a Meeting Contest. And other times, too. And you had not even heard of it. If I went to your land and had never heard of cities, would you not think me ignorant?”

“So. Here you are. Knowing little, and that little is false. Who will help you? How will you find your way around? How will you find your goal? Let me tell you. You will have to rely on the despised Tricksters. Me... and Mugumma. If you kill one Trickster, you lose all of us. Could you trust us after such a deed? So no more talk about killing. Another proof of your superior civilization — I heard you talk seriously about killing one of your comrades because he played an annoying trick on a person you wished to speak to. Do you really think that murdering one of your own friends will earn you more respect than Mugumma’s and the duck’s juvenile tricks? No one in the oasis would even speak to you after such a foul deed.

“Now. To business. I trust you are all suitably humbled. I saw how you divided up the money when the troll had much metal and you all desired it. I thought, ‘At last, the foreigners show sense! If someone else had metal to which he was not entitled, I, too, would desire it.’ But then, you divided the metal up evenly! Are you all equal? What a foolish notion.

“You need a leader. I suspect that even outsiders are not as foolish as you. I think that until recently, you had a leader, and something happened to him. Now you need a new leader. Pick one. In our land, leaders must belong to the proper family, that way they are trained from birth to be good leaders. So. Are any of you trained to be a good leader? I am not. Mugumma is not. The sorcerer is not, I know, because I know much about sorcerers. The dwarfs are not, because only dwarfs that are not leaders can come above ground. Who is left? The duck? The troll? I think not. Let us think about it in a minute.

“But we have something else to speak about. What is your goal? You must have a plan. You say, ‘We want to talk to the gray ones.’ Well, you did. And you received remarkably unsatisfactory answers, no? So now what? Do you lack a plan? Yes? Let us make one. And while we make one, let me explain why I think the duck and the troll would make poor leader, though possibly good advisors. I am prejudiced. I think that non-humans do not think in the same way as humans do. Have you not found it so? So a non-human leader will often lead you in illogical ways, for a human. And this will lead you to more problems. Such as the money. I say you need a human for the leader. I say, even a bad leader is better than no leader. So. Pick a bad leader.”

Appendix D

The Dolmanyeyi Tribe

The Dolmanyeyi tribe is composed of 460 people: 200 men, 160 women, and 100 children. Of these, 105 are sworn members: 35 men, 55 women, and 15 children. The Manyeyi family itself consists of 41 members: 7 men, 11 women, and 23 children.

TRIBAL POTENTATES (age in parentheses)

Chieftain Sumigar (41) His wives, the twins Palalla (32) and Soroma (46). The old woman, Hamako (67) Her six hags, including Ranga. His war chief, Gornolog (36) His Eight Warriors, including Yapatan.

Priest of Pamalt: Sumigar Priestess of Aleshmara: Hamako Priest of Rasout: Abmarong (69) Priest of the Spear (Vangono): Yapatan (44) Priestess of Nomiamia: Ramparo (30) Priestess of Yanmorla: Ranga (77) Shamans: Than (32), Opantsar (50), and Greeno (51)

MEMBERS OF THE MANYEYI FAMILY

Chieftain Sumigar His six daughters (3, 7, 9, 12, 15, 20) and two sons (2, 12) His two grandchildren, both girls (1, 3) Sumigar's three sisters, Amalya (37), Songamma (36), and Iula (32) Amalya's four daughters (5, 12, 21, 23) and three sons (3, 15, 17) Songamma's five daughters (3, 5, 9, 14, 20) Iula's four daughters (4, 8, 12, 16) and three sons (2, 3, 11) Sumigar's aunt Sambaba (48) Sambaba's daughter Ahala (30) still living at the tribe Ahala's two sons (3, 14)

Note: The following are not in line for the chieftaincy, but still belong to the Manyeyi family.

Sumigar's father, Amalayo (57) Sumigar's brothers-in-law, Hamasigno (23) Amalya's husband, Ordodandro (49) Songamma's husband, and Kralako (32) Iula's husband.

Appendix E

Secrets in the Campaign

What Slagstone told Grokk: Grokk told Slagstone that he was thinking of talking to the exigers about back-stabbing the humans. Slagstone didn't like it, but told Grokk to go ahead and try.

What Slagstone told Thingol and Gorfang: He told them what he had told Grokk. He also said that he thought Harmast was fighting a losing battle against the exigers. Thingol agreed in principle, but Gorfang wanted to stay with Harmast. Slagstone also told them that he knew that the exigers were pure Death worshipers.

What happened to the two dwarfs that night: At precisely midnight, a nilmerg, wearing an iron breastplate and cap, crept into the cave and repeated: "It is probable that our elimination of the human threat was not a success. If we are mistaken, return to the Fortress at once. If the threat remains, join the group of humans you are nearest to and assist them in any way possible. At intervals, nilmergs will attend for messages about the human activity.

"To solve mysteries: you were not requested to join in the elimination so that you could survive and become spies, if necessary. You were not told about the attempted elimination so that when questioned, you would know nothing and thus be trusted by the humans. We are aware of the existence of Truth spells.

"The humans must not find out about your purpose in spying on them. You will not, at any point, be called upon to perform what the humans term 'treachery'.

"It is imperative that the humans not treat the Fortress as just another human group, to be warred on, allied with, and dealt with.

"You must remain alive at all costs. Only if absolutely necessary switch your allegiance to an opposing human group. Thus will your loyalty be unquestioned.

"Assist this unit to escape the human area and return to the Fortress to the best of your ability."

With that, the nilmerg awaited their instructions.

They helped the nilmerg to get away and accompanied it to a mountain area some distance away. There they found a band of nilmergs and no gremlins. The nilmergs carried 4 large brass cylinders, approximately 1 meter long, and 20 cm in diameter. One of the nilmergs explained.

"When instructed, apply fire to the blunt end of the cylinder, which must point to the open sky. Brace the cylinder soundly so that it will not fall over. Retreat to at least 4 meters distance. Do not permit the humans to discover these devices. These units will assist you to hide them as desired before they return."

With that, they hid the devices and returned to Mistvale.

Afterword

Jeff Okamoto

As I come back to this Campaign Log after many years and re-read what I wrote so many years ago, I am simultaneously amazed at some of the things we did, appalled at my occasional poor writing, and disappointed that I did not have the discipline to continue writing the Log. I can only blame my own prejudice on disliking dungeon crawls and not wanting to write about them.

In hindsight I wished I'd done so, since the campaign continued for another three years (of Glorantha time). By then, it was too late. I was unwilling to go back and write about all the dungeon crawls that had taken place, and had to content myself with keeping the Campaign Chronology.

I am pleased that I did so, since that came in handy some years later when Sandy returned to the Bay Area (for a computer gaming conference), and we spent two more weekends back in Mistvale with Harmast.

But that's another story, and this one is done.

Afterword

John Monroe

“Perforated corpses and broos with gross pustules,
Hoolars with eggs, struggling with new rules,
Tying my stumps off with small bits of string,
these were a few of my favorite things...”

Geez, it seems so long ago that I was introduced to Sandy Petersen and his gaggle of gamers. I was 13 or so when I started playing in this campaign, and trying to remember specific bits of it will no doubt be difficult.

So what was my first impression of Sandy? Well, Sandy's just this guy, you know? When I first came to Sandy's game, I didn't really know what to do. I mean here was this guy who had written (actually written!) one of my favorite games (Call of Cthulhu) and really worked at Chaosium! Wow! What more did a 13-year old kid who had been playing RQ for 3 years need to impress him? (Shut up...) Anyway, so here was this guy, and all his cronies, the youngest of which (Steve Leary) was like a junior in high school. I was in 7th grade fer cryin' out loud! Well, as nervous as I was going into this situation, it seems the rest of "the guys" were equally thrilled at having me there. Sandy told me years later that after I had been around for a few weeks, some of the other guys asked him to get rid of me, but he kept me around because I amused him.

Well, I can hardly blame them, I mean, here I am, this gangly, inarticulate kid imposing myself on their little clique. So, as I'm sure you've guessed by now, I stuck around and (I hope) became one of the most influential players in the group.

For those who haven't checked the registry of players at the beginning of this tome, I played any number of characters in the game, most of which I can't remember (sorry). To my memory, I played: Toran Windblade, Norac of the North, Miles Letum, Mugumma, Tommy Flanagan, and Jihad. I guess the best way to go over my experience in the game is to go in order of the characters I played. And so we begin at the beginning...

TORAN WINDBLADE: well, I remember almost nothing about this guy I know that he ended up dying, and tried to DI to Orlanth to let him live to continue the battle he was in. Unfortunately, he rolled exactly his POW, and so while Orlanth healed Toran, he was not returned to life and went to Orlanth's hall. After the battle, Toran's companions found him, unscarred, and so assumed he had died of a heart attack.

NORAC OF THE NORTH: Another wind lord of Orlanth, I remember nothing about what he did other than to die in battle, DI to Orlanth, roll exactly his POW and fall victim to the "curse of the Orlanthi" and become the second Orlanthi in a row to die of a heart attack in battle.

MILES LETUM: Ah, Miles, here was a character I could really sink my teeth into... Miles was an Ogre with the chaos feature of 9pt skin armor. I discussed this with Sandy before the game began, and we decided that Miles had a layer of fibrous wood just under his skin, affording him the armor. Over time, Miles generated other chaos features, none of which aroused the suspicion of the other players. Miles' greatest accomplishment was when he went into battle alongside Harmast against the exigers. Before the battle began, I wrote down all the HIT NEAREST FRIEND fumbles on the side of my character sheet, and as the battle went on, I kept rolling to hit Harmast, and pretending to fumble by calling out the numbers I had marked earlier. Over time, I began to get bored of this character (it was becoming hard for me to keep deceiving my friends week after week) and so Sandy and I engineered the "Final Metamorphosis." Miles was discovered missing after his turn at watch one night and when the other characters went out looking for him, they found a horrible, half man, half insect thing with gruesome swords terminating each arm (one of Miles' chaos features was a sword growing from his right hand). As the battle went on, Miles was critically injured and DI'd to Cacodemon, who promptly came down and ate him. After the battle the players figured out that Miles had been an ogre whose mission had been to disrupt the other character's plot against the chaos monsters. When they figured out that he had been an ogre, they decided that his name, Miles Letum, really described his hoped plan of action (Miles 'l eat 'em). Actually, the name was pidgin latin for Warrior of Death, or Warrior of Darkness or something (I can't remember, it's been a while).

TOMMY FLANAGAN: Well, Tommy was this pathological liar duck thief, see... Anyway, if you can come up with a more annoying character, my hat's off to you. He lasted for one evening, at the end of which, the other characters in the group ran the poor duck up a tree and set fire to it, killing him slowly.

MUGUMMA: Mugumma was one of my most favorite characters. He was a Pamaltelan shaman. Friend of hoolars, trickster cultist (though he dropped the cult after about a month, but the cult wouldn't drop him), and all-around nice guy. Mugumma's exploits were extensive, and, sadly, mostly forgotten by myself. One of the things I do remember about him, was when his INT was tapped down to 4 by a warding and his fetch swapped places with him. I don't even remember what happened to him in the end. I suppose he was either killed off, or ended up wandering the continent of Pamaltela.

JIHAD: Jihad was my last character in "The Game" and the one which was truly my own character. I was 17 when I started playing Jihad.

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